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Laylá Baʿalbakī and Feminism throughout her Fiction

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Thesis submitted
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Edinburgh
College of Humanities and Social Science
School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures
Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

2013
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, which is submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of doctor of philosophy and entitled "Laylâ Ba‘albaki and Feminism throughout her Fiction", represents my own work and has not been previously submitted to any other institution for any degree or professional qualification.

Khaled Igbaria

Date: June 25, 2013.
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Abstract

A number of Lebanese women writers of the period of 1950s and 1960s have received considerable attention by scholars. This is not the case, however, for Laylā Ba‘albakī, whom the field has failed to address in any substantive manner. In not paying sufficient attention to Laylā Ba‘albakī, the field has failed to appreciate the distinctly feminist dimension of her work. To date, most scholars have only repeated commonly held views about her and her fiction.

By addressing Ba‘albakī’s biography and fiction, this thesis hopes to contribute to a fuller understanding of Lebanese women writers of 1950s and 1960s. It shows that Ba‘albakī joined the group Shi‘r, but none of the Lebanese or Syrian political parties; and that she faced conflict not only with her parents, community and the state, but also, unexpectedly, with the Lebanese women’s groups. This study discusses the reasons why Ba‘albakī was brought before the courts, supporting the view that the underlying reason was political, not moral; and it further explores the reasons why the writer ceased publishing. It now seems probable that she will soon release a new work, after a long hiatus, which may be controversial within Muslim and Arab society. Moreover, this thesis shows that throughout her novels and short stories there is diversity in styles and techniques, and the use of poetic and figurative language which displays the influence of several Arab and Western poets (including her father’s own zajal poetry). Furthermore, the study focuses in particular on feminist themes in her work, and the various literary devices she employs for advancing her feminist agenda. The study of these devices further supports the claim that the court case against her was
motivated by politics, not ethics. This thesis opens the doors for new discussions such as the impacts of her being Shiite as and when sources become available.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation could never have been written without the help and support of my supervisors Professor Marilyn Booth and Dr Andrew Newman. I am deeply grateful to them for their guidance throughout this process. This dissertation was shaped by their thoughtful comments, insightful critiques and careful readings.

I would like to thank Dr Omar Mizel for being a great mentor, always ready with sound advice and enthusiastic encouragement. I am indebted to my colleagues at Kaye Academic College for their support, encouragement, and – best of all – for much-needed fun.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my wife Dalal, to my daughters and sons for their belief in me, and for their patience during my absences from home due to my study at the University of Edinburgh.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Significance and the Aims of the Thesis

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.¹ 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.²

Ba’albakī is a major Arab female novelist of the mid-twentieth century, who has achieved renown beyond her native Lebanon. Her works have been translated 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, Nahnu bi-lā aqnī’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).³ Roger Allen suggests that Ba’albakī contributed significantly to the creative writing at the time. He says:

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² Laylá Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā [I live], (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi’r, 1958); Laylá Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah [The disfigured gods], (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Tijārī li-Ṭībā’ah wa-al-Tawzī’ wa-al-Nashr, 1960). In this dissertation I used other editions of Ba’albakī’s two novels: These are the recent editions, Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2010.

³ Laylá Ba’albakī, Nahnu bi-lā aqnī’ah [We are without masks], (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Nadwah al-Lubnānīyah, 1959); Laylá Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar [A spaceship of tenderness to the moon], (Beirut: al-
It seems reasonable to suggest that the writers such as Ba‘albakī, Ghāda al-Sammān [b. 1942] and [Nawal] al-Sa‘dīwī [b. 1931], whatever one’s verdict may be about the literary merits of their fiction, have considerably expanded the creative space within which contemporary writers of both sexes may portray their worlds.4

Interestingly, Allen places the writer alongside the other Arab women writers he assesses, whose fictions and biographies, unlike those of Ba‘albakī, have received much attention and have been thoroughly studied by scholars.5 He adds:

The fictions that they [Ba‘albakī, Ghāda al-Sammān and al-Sa‘dīwī] create and the narrative strategies that they employ to bring them into existence are to be regarded as contributions to the technical repertoire of Arabic fiction.6

Thus, Allen indicates Ba‘albakī’s considerable literary contributions not just to Lebanese women’s writing but to Arabic fiction in general, but without providing any further discussion, probably because that is beyond his scope. However, he indicates the legitimacy of further studying Ba‘albakī’s writing.

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. Ba‘albakī is a significant and fascinating figure within modern feminist Lebanese writing and strongly deserves to be studied more closely.

I argue Ba‘albakī’s works reflect her engagement in social critique and in the struggle for women’s sexual, political and economic emancipation. Her works offer unique insights into the period in which they were written, and add to our understanding of the evolution of Arab Lebanese women’s writing.

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5 Two examples of studies (as books), which were published on Ghada al-Samman, are: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Shabil, Al-Fann al-rwā‘ī ‘inda Ghada al-Samman [The narrative art of Ghada al-Samman], (Tunis: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1987); ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Arnūt, Ghada al-Samman fi a‘mālihā ghayrī al-kāmilah [Ghada al-Samman within her uncompleted works], (Damascus, 1993).
Through a focus on Laylá Ba‘albākī’s (b. 1934) biography and fiction, this thesis aims to contribute to a holistic understanding of Lebanese women writers of 1950s and 1960s. Analysing her writing, in addition to her life, aims to explore feminism in her life and writing, and situating her within the wider social and political context of Lebanon in the 1950s and 1960s, and, albeit to a lesser extent, the present day. The thesis analyses Ba‘albākī’s life in order to discover how she not only faced social cultural and economic challenges, but also coped with several conflicts as a result of her feminist views and attitudes, particularly her trial in 1964.

An examination of Ba‘albākī’s works aims also 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 dissertation 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.

This dissertation addresses Ba‘albākī’s feminist writing in the 1950s and 1960s. My point is not to advocate a conventional model of writing nor to compare Ba‘albākī with other Lebanese women writers, but rather that we need to give Ba‘albākī specific attention, like the other Lebanese women writers of 1960s and 1970s. So, like dissertations on Emily Nasrallah (b. 1931) and Hanan al-Shaykh (b. 1945), the present study is motivated by an interest in the formation of Lebanese feminist women writers’ subjectivities in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ba‘albākī’s frank, unequivocally libertarian feminist writing rebels against a patriarchal society, and against the nuclear family as the only legitimate social institution for intimate human relationships and families between the two sexes; and against other social phenomena founded on affiliation to gender. Her work is not just a rejection of the Arab

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7 Two samples of dissertations on Emily Nasrallah are: Joseph Shreim, “Ṯuyūr aylūl [Birds of September],” (France: University Aix-en-Provence, 1979); Nadīm Da‘akūr, “Taqaniyyāt al-riwāyah ‘inda Emily Nasrallah [The technical construction of the novel of Emily Nasrallah],” (Beirut: Saint Joseph University, 1986).
women’s situation, as di Paola di Capua has claimed; rather, Ba’albakī opposes the patriarchal Arab society and calls for wholesale change in social, cultural and political systems. Moreover, she not only explains why she is claiming such changes, but also articulates the ways in which they could be achieved and their advantages.

Her literary works express not only feminist visions, aspirations, and outlooks, but also criticize the political, economic and social realities of twentieth-century Lebanon. Interestingly, several political, socioeconomic and feminist views of the writer, within her works, are sounded in the Arab Spring (2011-), and consequently are still relevant.

The intensity of the feminism in Ba’albakī’s work is unprecedented in the Lebanese women’s movement, and subsequently—and perhaps also as a consequence—she was prosecuted for her writing. Ba’albakī was traumatized by her lifelong conflict with patriarchal society and by the trial that epitomized that conflict, and afterwards disappeared from public life.

This dissertation therefore explores several theoretical and philosophical questions: Did Ba’albakī participate in the Lebanese women’s liberation movement like other Lebanese women writers, at the time? How unique are the form and style of her writing? Was this literary presence and philosophy a deliberate part of the women’s agenda in Lebanon, or did it arise from Ba’albakī’s own initiative and courageous resourcefulness? Finally, what are the implications of these questions in relation to the writer herself and to the Lebanese women’s movement?

This dissertation consequently carries out an examination of Ba’albakī’s life and literary work through focusing on both her feminist writing and views about sex, society, culture, economics, politics and religion.

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This thesis consists of five chapters. Following this introduction which is chapter one, chapter two investigates the writer’s biography, examining her early conflicts with patriarchal society, and the strategies she used for gaining her independence and publishing her works. Moreover, this chapter sketches the history of the Lebanese women’s movement, since this contributes to the social, cultural and political conditions which allowed Ba‘albakī to emerge as a writer.

While chapter three is dedicated to analysing the novels, chapter four studies her short stories, comparing them with her novels. Chapters three and four together thus comprise a literary study of Ba‘albakī’s writing, investigating its contents as well as exploring the styles and techniques the writer employs. Moreover, these two chapters examine the use of poetic and figurative language, and display the influence of several Arab and Western poets on her.

Chapter five examines feminism within the writer's fiction (‘feminism’, as a term employed in this work, is defined later in this introduction), focusing in particular on issues of sex, marriage, mothering and child bearing and other feminist issues.

Because of the limitations, as will be noted later, of primary and secondary sources regarding the question of the role of the writer’s being Shiite, this question is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Before proceeding to the thesis and the questions addressed in it, I will present a review of the biographical and critical literature on Ba‘albakī. Such a review must begin by identifying, synthesizing, and evaluating the relevant research. Further, this review will identify the gaps in, and the limitations of, previous research. Thus, this literature review will not only provide a rationale for the proposed research and indicate its significance, but will create a framework for the research questions.

1.2 Literature Review
This section reviews biographical sources on Ba‘albakī. It then discusses sources which are valuable for examining Ba‘albakī’s views of society, culture and sex, politics, economics and religion. It concludes by looking at the studies of her literary works, analysis, and criticism.

Bouthaina Shaaban comments that Arab women’s fiction has not yet become a popular research subject, writing: “Arab women’s writings have been recorded for fourteen centuries, but these writings have not been a popular subject for literary criticism by either men or women.” Although Shaaban’s indication is accurate with regards to studies on individual Arab women writers like Ba‘albakī, it is not accurate regarding general studies on Arab women writers, which are numerous. In this context, there exists no definitive biography of Ba‘albakī and no overall or thorough critical treatment of her body of work as a whole.

For the purposes of discussion, I have divided my resources into three sections: biographical, scholarly critical, and press and website sources.

1.2.1 Biographical Sources

This section will discuss and assess biographical sources on Ba‘albakī. Some of these works, including those by Joseph Zeidan and Shaaban, combine brief biographies with analyses of her novels and short stories.

Biographical works on contemporary Arab women and anthologies do offer readers brief chronological accounts of Ba‘albakī’s life, focusing on her education, writing, career, travels, trial, and her early cessation of writing. Even if such works can be said to contain

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10 Such studies are mentioned here within this literature review.
biographical information on Ba’albakî, they do not analyse or discuss that information. For example, when Roseanne Khalaf discusses the trial of Ba’albakî, she says:

In fact, the publication of her [Ba’albakî’s] collection in 1964, Safinat hanan ila al-qamar ([A] Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon), led to her being unsuccessfully persecuted by the Lebanese authorities who deemed her writing too sexually explicit and therefore capable of corrupting public morality, particularly among the young.  

Khalaf does not discuss or analyse the causes of the mentioned trial, beyond what had been announced by Lebanese authorities. Moreover, she does not address the impact of that trial. This limitation is a result of the fact that these texts aim not so much to be faithful to Ba’albakî’s biography as to present Arab women’s voices or representations in general; thus such issues are beyond their scope. My project differs in its approach, taking the construction of an analytic biography of Ba’albakî as one of its central aims.

A further example: like Zeidan, Shaaban argues that Ba’albakî has been strongly affected by her readers’ responses, writing: “Al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah (The Disfigured Gods) reveals that the negative response of the public weighed heavily upon her mind.”  

Similarly, this dissertation will discuss this issue by addressing specific questions which neither Shaaban nor anyone else have addressed before, such as: What were those responses and why? To what extent did they affect Ba’albakî? Which impacts were produced consequently?

Several biographical texts present Ba’albakî as a socially rebellious woman writer who addresses sexuality and women’s liberation within her fiction, and calls for advancing women’s status.  

However, this is not the focus of these texts, which do not treat the subject

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13 Khalaf, Hikayat: Short Stories, 11.
14 Shaaban, Voices Revealed, 67.
with the same sort of depth demonstrated in other studies, such as Anīsah al-Amīn’s article, and for which I shall aim in this dissertation.\(^{16}\)

We can identify recent biographical texts which have not used much of the available related material, such as one autobiographical article by the writer and interviews with her.\(^{17}\)

Furthermore, they do not reference Robert Campbell’s work, which includes Ba’albakī’s own words.\(^{18}\) There are several biographical sources on Ba’albakī which have not been given any attention.

Among the biographical studies that have dealt with Ba’albakī’s life, Raffīf Sidawi’s *al-Kātibah wa-khiṭāb al-dhāt: Ḥiwārāt ma’a riwāʾiyyāt ’arabiyyāt* [The woman writer and the discourse of the self: Interviews with Arab women novelists] is an excellent source.\(^{19}\) A major focus of this text is to examine the relationships of three Lebanese women writers of the 1960s with Ba’albakī, and to assess their attitudes towards her. This text offers significant insights not only about Ba’albakī’s relationship to the Lebanese women’s movement, but also about the influence of Ba’albakī on Lebanese women writers.

To conclude this section, we can say in summary that the issues regarding Ba’albakī’s life and their relation to her literary work have been not the specific subject of previous biographical texts; thus this dissertation brings new insights to the debate surrounding

http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=22222 (Accessed August 15, 2011). It should be noted that the later source is from the Internet, but it is significant and relevant to the discussion above. Page numbers are mostly not relevant for mentioned sources of Internet sites.


\(^{17}\) Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 68; Zeidan, *Maṣādir al-adab al-nisā‘i*, 130-33; Abū Niḍāl, *Tamarrud al-unthā*, 76-81; Campbell, *A’lām al-adab al-’arabī*, 336; Shaaban, *Voices Revealed*, 63-67; Khalīl, *Mawsū‘at a’lām al-’arab*, 243; Khalaf, *Hikayat: Short Stories*, 11; Kramarae and Spender, *Routledge International Encyclopaedia*, 446. It should be noted that although some of the sources are drawn from newspapers and magazines, as opposed to academic texts, they are very significant for this dissertation’s biographical context, and one would expect them to be dealt with by previous researchers: Laylá Ba’albakī, “Kuntu anẓuru ilá al-jālīsāna fī al-maqaḥī wa-aqīl: yajhalūna man anā wa-man sa-akūn [I was looking at people sitting in cafes and saying: “They do not know who I am and who I will be’”],” *Al-Muḥarrir* (March 25 1975): 6; Ḍantūn Ḥaydar, “Liqā’ ma’a Laylá Ba’albakī [An interview with Laylá Ba’albakī],” *al-Ḥawādith* (May 18, 1979), 74-75. These texts will be treated in the newspapers and websites section.


Ba‘albākī’s life by examining different analyses of her fiction, interviews with her, and qualitative data in an attempt to construct as definite a biography of her as possible.

Despite the numerous recent publications of Arab women’s anthologies and biographies, which aim mostly at general representations, there remains a pressing need for more systematic and specific analysis of Ba‘albākī’s biography. Clearly, there is more to Ba‘albākī’s biography and the challenges she faced than these representations would have us believe. Consequently, one of the approaches I take in this dissertation can be termed “constructing.”

1.2.2 Scholarly Sources

Surveys of modern Arabic literature offer readers short and general literary analyses or comments on the first and second novels of Ba‘albākī, including representations of characters, plots and brief indications of techniques and narrative styles. These texts argue that Anā aḥyā is a realistic novel which highlights notions of rebellion against society.

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21 By ‘constructing’ in this context, I mean to build a complete and comprehensive biography of Ba‘albākī. It is also implies that any biography is ‘constructed’ in the sense that it is a particular understanding of a life rather than ‘the life itself’ - as any narrative is constructed.

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 lecture published as a book *Naḥnu bi-lā aqi‘ah* and 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 hanān ilā al-qamar* briefly, she does not reference *Naḥnu bi-lā aqi‘ah* at all. 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 works.

While Shaaban argues that *Anā aḥyā* is a political novel rather than one focused on sexual issues, several modern surveys point out that Ba‘albakī focuses on sexuality, women’s liberation and writing which challenges social norms and ideas. For example, Allen indicates that a French commentator noted: “What particularly shocked some Arab readers is the frankness with which this young woman tackles the problems involved in family and sexual relationships”. We see Allen asserting that Ba‘albakī focuses on sexual relationships, but this is not followed by any discussion on why and how Ba‘albakī focuses on sexuality. These surveys, including Allen’s and Shaaban’s, generally approach the topic

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23 There are two short stories of Ba‘albakī which are not included in her collection of short stories: *Safīnat hanān ilā al-qamar*. Instead, they were published in newspapers, as Bramson points out: these are “al-Baṭal” [The heroine] and “Kufr” [Unbelief].


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.

Nazīh Abū Niḍāl and Sayyid al-Nassāj examine in terms of characters a conceptualized notion of the “rebellious” Arab women in the twentieth century.28 Similarly, this dissertation 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 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 and Malā’ Kaḥīl seem to be more specific than the texts previously mentioned.29 They aim to examine three Lebanese women writers as feminist novelists. 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 other works of Ba‘albakī’s fiction. They argue that Ba‘albakī was influenced by Western culture and existentialist philosophy, but stop short of investigating those influences. As will be discussed later, another limitation of these two studies is that they do not reference certain newspaper texts which offer insights into the literary analysis of Anā aḥyā, such as the newspaper article of Salīm Bāsīlā.30

Evelyne Accad does explore the views of the writer and comments on why she stopped publishing, but again only very briefly and without providing any further discussion. For example, without any in-depth investigation Accad suggests that she [Ba‘albakī] has not published any recent work, although she continues to write. This could be a result of the demoralized effect that the long war has had on its population. The fact that her prophetic warnings in her speech to Lebanese youth remained unheard, together with fear of censorship and repression, have perhaps prevented her from continuing her struggle in the open. It could also be due to the demands of raising a family.\footnote{Accad, “Rebellion, maturity, and the social context,” 230.}

Accad here mentions several possible reasons for the writer’s stopping publishing, but she does not examine which reason is likely to have been most important. While Accad mentions the war as significant, we know that Ba‘albakī stopped writing in 1963, twelve years before the civil war in Lebanon (1975). Furthermore, Accad asserts that the reason could be the writer’s marriage, while ignoring that this reason was totally rejected by the writer herself, as will be discussed in the next chapter;\footnote{Ba‘albakī, “Kuntu anzuru ilá al-jālisīna,” 6.} Ba‘albakī said that having a family could give a writer like her better conditions, especially more material and psychological stability, for writing.\footnote{Ibid.}

Accad contributes important initial points for raising the issue of Ba‘albakī’s stopping writing/publishing, but this needs a thorough investigation which is beyond Accad’s scope.

Among the literary studies that have dealt with Ba‘albakī’s fiction, Olga Bramson’s thesis is the most specific study yet.\footnote{Bramson, “Revolutionary Attitudes,” 87.} This thesis offers an investigation of gender relationships in Arab society, pointing out Arab women’s struggles for equality and freedom. 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 ilá al-qamar`; her project focuses more on sociology rather than literature. These two short stories, the text demonstrates, have largely not only been ignored but are also probably largely unknown. Despite these two main contributions of Bramson’s work, it is limited in
not providing any literary analysis of any of the writer’s works. Another limitation is that it
does not explore the biography of Ba‘albakī. That is to say that Bramson does not provide
any discussion relating to Ba‘albakī’s court case, stopping publishing, joining the Shi‘r
group, being influenced by Arab and Western poets and other issues connected with her
biography. Although my dissertation shares some similarities with Bramson’s thesis, instead I
focus on both literary approaches and biographical analytic investigation.

1.2.3 Newspapers and Websites

Different newspapers articles offer significant insights to Ba‘albakī’s biography, including
revealing some of her attitudes and opinions regarding society, religion and culture.35 These
texts could contribute to the debate regarding not only Ba‘albakī’s ceasing to write or publish
fiction, but also her recent return to the Arab cultural scene in December 2009, republishing
her work with the exception of Naḥmu bi-lā aqni‘ah. Unexpectedly, and despite their
significance, these sources are not used by any recent biographical studies. For example,
while Zeidan treats the issue of Ba‘albakī’s cessation of writing, he does not refer to any of
the relevant and available newspaper sources.36

On the other hand, several newspaper articles have dealt briefly with the fiction of
Ba‘albakī, in particular her two novels.37 Although they are brief, these texts offer insights

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35 Laylá Ba‘albakī, “Kuntu ’anṣuru ilá al-jālisīna,” 6; Ḥaydar, “Liqā’ ma’a Ba‘albakī,” 74-75; Ḥayāt Sirtāḥ,
sanah, min haqqī al-yawm an aqūl li-al-qārī’i ’: ’Anā aḥyā’[The first Arab woman novelist brought to court due to
writing is Laylá Ba‘albakī": “After an absence of more than thirty years, one of my rights today is to say to my
Laylá Ba‘albakī ta‘ūd ‘abra “al-Fajr al-jazā‘īriyah [The ambiguous woman novelist Laylá Ba‘albakī returns
Ba‘albakī: It is forbidden to fabricate facts],” al-Hawādith, June 15, 1979, 59; Shukr Ḥusayn, “Risālah ilá al-
36 Zeidan, Arab Women Novelists, 98.
into the literary analysis of the mentioned novels. One would expect Āghā and Kaḥīl, in their academic and seminar works, to refer to the above newspaper articles due to their significance and relevance to Baʿalbakī’s works.38 However, neither Āghā nor Kaḥīl, nor any other writer has referenced the above articles.

There exist website articles relevant to the study of Baʿalbakī and her writing. Muḥammad Barādah addresses on the website al-Ḥiwar al-mutamaddin the task of analysing creative writing by several Arab women writers including Baʿalbakī.39 Other websites include responses to the writer which could be referenced within a discussion of the social opposition Baʿalbakī faced in addition to her trial in 1964, such as the website Muntadayāt Ruwāʾ [Ruwāʾ’s Forums] which discuss how ordinary people see women’s writing that focus on sex, including Baʿalbakī.40 Where these newspaper and website sources have not been referenced in the past, this thesis will take them into account.

In summary, it should be stressed there are many lacunae in the existing literature: not only is there no definitive biography of Baʿalbakī but also no critical analysis of her body of work. The existing literature does not answer the questions raised in this dissertation, so it does not address issues such as: Why was Baʿalbakī prosecuted? Why did she stop writing so early? Why did she move to live in London? What connection did she have with the Lebanese women’s movement? Whom has she read or who influenced her? Whom has she influenced? Which challenges and conflicts did she face and how did she cope with them? What are her views on society and culture, economics, politics and religion?

Instead, the existing literature provides general presentations of Arab women writers which have included Baʿalbakī’s biography, focusing on her birth and family, her education and travels to Paris and London, listing her works, her rebelliousness, and her early cessation

of writing. Yet, the existing literature does not venture an examination or analysis of the above issues, beyond brief mention of them.

While surveys of the existing literature are sometimes directly engaged with such central concerns as the literary analysis of certain works by Ba‘albakī, they also often depart from that specific focus on her writing, since a really thorough coverage and overall literary comprehension of Ba‘albakī’s fiction is beyond their scope. I argue that a literary analysis should be thorough enough to let readers get a sense of what happens, and so fully understand not only the impact of fiction but also the context of the commentary which the fiction represents. One advantage of such analysis is that it represents the dynamic tension between the work and society, while maintaining a focus on the artistic qualities of the fiction for the benefit of the reader.

1.3 Methodology

This dissertation will be based on a literary analysis of Ba‘albakī’s works. I have opted for this approach in an effort not only to examine the literary initiatives of Ba‘albakī and to document her remarks on rebellion for women, but also to point out to what extent she has been influenced by Western feminism, which therefore will be focused upon in this study. This dissertation is not a comparative study of Ba‘albakī and other writers, but at certain points I make comparisons to highlight certain aspects of society, politics and the Lebanese women’s movement.

The method of literary analysis employed draws upon Mieke Bal’s approach to narratology. 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. These compositional procedures, Bal notes, generate the features of the literary work, and she offers a number of examples which will guide the analysis here:

1 The events are arranged in a sequence which can differ from the chronological sequence.

2 The amount of time which is allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time which these elements take up in the fabula.

3 The actors are provided with distinct traits. In this manner, they are individualized and transformed into characters.

4 The locations where events occur are also given distinct characteristics and are thus transformed into specific places.

5 In addition to the necessary relationships among actors, events, locations and time, all of which were already described in the layer of the fabula, other relationships (symbolic, allusive, etc.) may exist among the various elements.

6 A choice is made from among the various ‘points of view’ from which the elements can be presented. 41

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]. In a recent review of the latter’s literary study, ‘Abd Allah Hīf affirms:

The writer criticized the dominance of literary studies which focus mainly on contents due to their ignoring the structure; instead he summarized the content of the novel attempting to highlight the advantage of representing the content only briefly.

‘Azzām observed the narrative text structure through deep reading, treating points of view, narrative manner, the narrative space (place in the narrative text[…]), time in the narrative text, and he classified the characters and analysed them.

In addition, he treated the techniques of the narrative style. 42

Some scholars have employed the latter method in their literary analysis of novels, such as Rafīʿah al-Ṭāliʿī in her study, *Al-Ḥub wa-al-jasad wa-al-ḥurrīyah fī al-naṣṣ al-riwāʾī fī al-Khalīj* [The love, the body and the freedom within the feminist narrative text in the Gulf] (2005). In describing her method, she says: “My study addresses the narrative works of several Arab women writers. I employed a structural analysis which enabled me to examine the narrative mood, characters, language and contents.”

Significantly, we see that, by ‘the narrative mood’, she means: structure, plot, time and place, narrative techniques and styles, narrator and narrative voices.

Taking the flexible approach of Bal into account, and similarly to ‘Azzām and al-Ṭāliʿī, I will consider a textual analysis, focusing on several technical aspects such as structure, narrative manner, style and mood. Therefore, the thesis includes chapters dedicated particularly to the formal aspects of the novels and short stories. I found that the most notable aspects of the novels and short stories of the writer are: (i) Narrative manner: narrator, characters, narrative techniques and styles employed by the writer, and the mood which is drawn here within the setting, and conflict and tension. (ii) Polyphony: voices of narration. (iii) The language used. I found these aspects useful in carrying out a formal literary analysis of the texts and discussing their contents. In the following chapters I make reference to the use of particular styles, techniques and devices used by other writers, aiming at showing their points of origin in the field.

While this study challenges the limitations of secondary resources regarding the writer’s biography and therefore, in some discussions of biographical aspects, I mostly rely

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44 Ibid., 25-78.
45 I depend for explanations of literary terms, and especially for terms of literary styles, on the following main useful sources for terminology and concepts regarding literature in English and Arabic: *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (English-French-Arabic), with French and Arabic Indexes of Magdi Wahbi; *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopaedia of Literature*; *Literary Terms: A Dictionary of Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz*; *Dictionary of Literary Terms* of Harry Shaw; and *Muʿjam al-muṣṭalahāt al-balāghīyah wa-taṭawwurihā* [Dictionary of rhetorical terms and their development] of Aḥmad Maṭlūb. Note, though, that I have not defined every single term: in some cases, meanings are clear and well known, and such definition would be unnecessary.
on the words of the writer, the study also challenges limitations in both the primary and secondary resources regarding the possible impact of the writer’s being a Shiite and related questions such as her attitude towards Shiism, as well as Shiites’ own attitudes and reactions to her and to her views. However, other scholars have pointed out this limitation, such as for example Sabrina Mervin in her study Ḥarakat al-īslāḥ al-shīʿī [The movement of Shiite reform] (2003). She says:

It is very difficult, even impossible, to find further and detailed information regarding sectarian dynamics in a mixed district of Shiites and Sunnis [relevantly for this study: such as Rustom Basha Street in Beirut, as will be discussed in the next chapter] and regarding the schools which are there. The school managers refuse to talk about sectarian aspects in their schools and even in Great Syria research on sectarian aspects is extremely sensitive.⁴⁷

All sources written in Arabic, including by Baʿalbakī, have been translated by myself, except where there exists a prior translation. Where I have been able to find an available English translation I have depended on that.

In transliterating the names, book titles, and other Arabic words that appear in this dissertation, I have applied the rules of transliteration according to the system of ALA-LC Romanization Arabic/Table of the U. S. Library of Congress. However, when writers have chosen to transliterate their names in a different way, I have respected their choice.

After setting out the methodology of the study, I turn to define the main terms which I use in the thesis, and explain what I mean by them in the context of this work.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Here I will define some important terms I use in this dissertation: Al-Nahdah, patriarchy and feminism. Arabic literature and culture went through a crucial period between the Arab

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⁴⁷ Mervin, Ḥarakat al-īslāḥ al-shīʿī, 201.
Renaissance (al-Nahdah) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The change from the past was a subtle and gradual process. Due to the meeting of indigenous Arabic tradition and Western forms, political developments were crucial in this encounter. Arab intellectuals and writers began not just sticking closely to the classic forms, but also addressed modern issues, themes, and the challenges Arab societies faced in the modern era.

Scholars, such as Hisham Sharabi, claim that al-Nahdah includes the period from the mid or late nineteenth century as the beginning of significant Western influence upon social, political and Arab cultural life.

Deniz Kandiyoti specifically indicates that the arrays of Western feminist movements were not strongly represented in the Middle East as one influence of Western culture on Middle Eastern cultures. However, gradually local social conditions facilitated the adoption of liberal feminism’s emphasis on gender equality for women and fighting sexist attitudes through changes in legislation, access to education, and fair wages. In the late nineteenth century, Arab intellectuals began discussing feminism and feminist issues, such as the veil, polygamous marriage, women’s education etc.

Feminism cannot be defined without addressing the term “patriarchy.” Suad Joseph declares that patriarchy affects all spheres of life: human rights, education, labour and other fields and that it is an obstacle not just for women, but also for states and families.

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51 Deniz Kandiyoti, “Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies,” in Gendering the Middle East, Emerging Perspectives, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London- New York: Tauris, 1996), 13. Here it is worth indicating the thesis that, in the Arab world, feminist consciousness has developed hand in hand with national consciousness since the early 19th century; see Nawar al-Hassan Golley, “Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?,” Third World Quarterly Vol. 25, No. 3 (2004): 521.
According to Joseph, the term “patriarchy” has a special definition in the Arab world: “prioritizing the rights of males and elders and justifying those rights within kinship values, often supported by religion. Such a definition differs from Western feminists who do not place value on age or kinship.”

Joseph stresses that patriarchies have more than one hue, including economic, social, political and religious varieties.

Sharabi expands on this point, arguing that Arab societies have suffered from stagnation, from the very fact of being based on a patriarchal structure that constitutes a system of social organisation perpetuated from one generation to the next and accepted by many as being as inevitable as death. The fate of society, according to Sharabi, depends on the ability to overcome the patriarchal system, replacing it with a modern social system.

Even if Arab societies underwent transformation due to encounters with Western culture, as Sharabi and others point out, he emphasizes the strength of patriarchy and states that in patriarchal societies, women suffer a great deal, being oppressed and treated as virtually non-human. More specifically, Valentine Moghadam explains that in the Middle East the family structure is described as patriarchal where patriarchy is “characterized by male domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue.” As a result, women in the Middle East, including in Lebanon, have faced patriarchal challenges to their aspirations such as getting access to higher education, economic power and social freedom, and participating in social and political activities. As Catherine K. Kikoski argues, “patriarchal tradition and the conservation of prevailing religion in the region have meant that women’s struggle for emancipation and equality has had to be

55 Ibid., 14-16.
56 By “modern social system” Sharabi means a social system that would avoid and move beyond the system of patriarchy in such a way that would assure equality for women with men in all fields of life. But actually he does not propose any way to do this.
fought on many different levels.” However, Sharabi argues, the transformation of Arab societies through the period of encounter did not replace the old system with a new one; it merely led to “neopatriarchy.” His argument suggests that modern Arab societies claim to have modernized while preserving “heritage”, but that in fact they are neither modernized in a way that would erase previous patriarchal structures nor have they achieved a critical appreciation of heritage. It is well to remember, however, that patriarchy is not absent from the modernized societies of Europe, either, or of “postcolonial” societies in general. Paul Kingston reminds us that patterns of inequality between men and women not only can be described in various ways, not always with the term “patriarchy”, but that, perhaps more importantly, “patriarchy is not a static concept, rather, it changes over time and space/context. It does not manifest itself in the same way in all places.” For Kandiyoti, “neopatriarchy” is a developed form of patriarchy that evolved in order to address wider aspects of modernity including micro and macro social political and economic structures in the Middle East:

Sharabi introduced the concept of neo-patriarchy to designate post-colonial state formation in the Middle East in a manner which modifies and inflects the designations commonly associated with it in Western feminist theory. He develops the term to characterize both the macro structures of economy and polity, also of community and families. Although it may be a questionable category from the vantage point of political economy and political theory, it nonetheless emerges as a provocative item of cultural criticism and an attempt to formulate a language about forms of authoritarianism at all levels of society.

Sharabi argues that there will be no real change without putting an end to the notion of the “father” as representing dominance and power, and thus engendering real women’s

59 ‘Neopatriarchy’ is a term suggested by Sharabi, describing the new patriarchal Arab family image as such which tries to combine Western modernization and the classic social heritage. According to Sharabi, neopatriarchy was constructed as a result of al-Nahdah. See Sharabi, Neopatriarchy, 16-17.
60 Sharabi, Neopatriarchy, 14-15.
liberation. In this context, Joseph adds: “Patriarchy is powerful in the Arab world because age-based kinship values and relationships are crucial socially, economically, politically, ideologically, and psychologically.”

Lebanon’s patriarchal system shows similarities to other Arab countries in spite of being often described as a site of cultural openness. Danielle Hoyek argues: “The remnants of the patriarchal system still dominate the legislation of a country like Lebanon, that considered itself the first advanced country in the Middle East in culture and respect for the human rights.” Hoyek’s argument depends on the fact that Lebanese women are abused by men and then are sometimes killed by men as punishment for the abuse that the men have perpetrated. Kingston argues that the Lebanese court systems were strongly influenced by the patriarchal concept of male dominance over the household. He explains: “All court systems [of Lebanon] base their legal decisions on the dicate that the male is the head of the household. From this flows the patriarchal rulings that characterize personal status court rulings in all of the religious court systems.” By pointing to multiple religious court systems, Hoyek does remind us that Lebanon is a particularly complex case, where the various religiously-defined communities historically maintained control over their members spiritually and legally – yet all contributed to an overarching patriarchal ethos and system. Furthermore, the European ties of some Christian communities meant that European patriarchies – specifically, French legal and social structures that were themselves deeply patriarchal – may have contributed to or at least supported local understandings of masculine privilege. In sum, the author studied here was embedded in, recognized, and responded to, a

63 Sharabi, Neopatriarchy, 16-17.
66 Ibid.
deep-rooted patriarchal social system where women and girls, whatever their communal belonging, were disprivileged on the basis of their gender, while younger men also held a subordinate place in a system based on hierarchies of gender and age.

Indeed, the conjunction of patriarchal social-political systems with nationalism and with the “promises” of modernity meant that some women and men in Lebanon as elsewhere in the region developed local-regional feminisms. It is not easy to define feminism either in terms of ideas or of actions and agendas, because, historically, feminism, like patriarchy, appears in different and changing forms.68 Feminism is a general term applicable to many contexts and purposes, both theoretical and political, referring to the recognition of women’s oppression on the basis of gender, and to the search for solutions to this oppression.69 Historically, and in a very broad sense, there were three waves of feminism: the first arose in the United States and Europe and elsewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (although scholars of European feminism have found much earlier expressions of feminist awareness). This “wave” was basically concerned with liberal women's rights and also saw the early manifestations of what has been called socialist feminism. The second emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and saw engagement with more radical ideas about women's empowerment and rights, though liberal feminism continued to maintain a strong presence. The third wave arose in the mid-1990s, engaged in focusing on the postcolonial and postsocialist world order.70 In this period, Western feminism had to face challenges what was criticized as a dominant white and middle-class perspective. I will be discussing, in more detail in the next chapters, how feminism was reflected both in the agenda and activities of the Lebanese women’s movement and in the biography and work of Ba'albakī.

In my own core definition, feminism is the search for equality for women with men, promoting women’s advancement and status in all fields: society, economics and politics, culture and education. Moreover, like women, men can be involved in feminism, which could be reflected in their actions or/and attitudes and beliefs.

1.5 Summary

In summary, although some scholars have noted Ba‘albaki’s contribution to the genre of Lebanese women writers of the 1950s and 1960s, the field failed to address her biography and fiction in any substantive manner and consequently it failed to examine significantly feminism both in her life and works. Therefore, the study aims to fill a gap, in the genre of the Lebanese women writers of 1950s and 1960s, in so far as the field has failed to study Ba‘albaki’s biography and work thoroughly in order to explore feminism both in her life and writing. Following this introduction, the biography of the writer will be investigated and her works will be analysed, discussing their connections to the developments known as the “Arab Spring,” the series of revolutions that are now taking place across the Arab world.
Chapter 2. Ba‘albakī’s Biography in the light of the Lebanese Women’s Movement

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the Lebanese women’s movement in the twentieth century, identifying the factors and motives that contributed to the birth and growth of the movement and the diverse forms in which it manifested itself. A descriptive and analytic approach will be adopted in order to provide a historical account and a factual record of the Lebanese women’s movement. This historical presentation will form the social and intellectual background to my construction of Ba‘albakī’s biography.

This chapter also aims to construct the most definitive biography of Ba‘albakī to date, analyzing her lifelong conflict with the Lebanese patriarchal society including the challenges she faced and how she coped with her trial (1964); and thus to explore feminism in her life. Examining the Lebanese women’s groups will enable us to answer key questions by providing the necessary background information to contextualize and interpret Ba‘albakī’s activities. It is to be expected that Ba‘albakī would have had some degree of engagement with the Lebanese political scene. What is required is a comparative assessment of the extent to which her activities might have set her apart from her peers.

This chapter provides the necessary information to make this comparison. It is accordingly divided into two sections, the first on the Lebanese women’s movement and the second on the biography of Ba‘albakī.
2.2 The Lebanese Women’s Movement

2.2.1 Introduction

While scholars disagree on exactly when the Arab “women’s movement” emerged, most regard the nineteenth century as the real starting point of Arab women’s movements in general, even though they would disagree on what actually sparked this. However, the Women’s Union in Syria and Lebanon was founded in 1924. Some of its prominent founders were Labībah Thābit, Salmā Ṣāyigh, and Ibtihāj Qaddūrah. It was a non-sectarian union representing Muslim and Christian women. Elizabeth Thompson says:

The union [Women’s Union in Syria and Lebanon] aspired to represent all women. It was adamantly Arab nationalist, uniting both Syrians and Lebanese. It coordinated the activities of its member groups and represented women’s voices in public affairs through, visits to government officials, and street demonstrations. It held its first public conference in 1928 Beirut.

Al-Id sees the Women’s Union in Syria and Lebanon as a significant Christian-Muslim meeting. Salmá Ṣāyigh (1889-1953) remarked, “I am a Muslim and [Wardah] al-Yāzījī [1838-1924] is a Christian. We both are members of the same union. Working for knowledge and literature is as worthy as working for religion.”

Thompson notes that Jūlyā Dimashqīyah (1882-1954) founded Jam‘iyyat al-Sayyidāt [The ladies’ society] (1917) in Beirut particularly in order “to unite Syrian women despite differences in religion through literary exchanges.” In other words, the Lebanese women’s movement’s leaders were aware of their need to be united and to rise above religious and sectarian differences. Such awareness of being united allowed the movement to focus on the

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73 Al-Id, “‘An al-kāṭibah fi Lubnān,” 31.
74 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 95.
women’s campaign for achieving a level of equality with men in social, educational and political spheres.

In addition to educational and cultural activities within several societies, the movement published various women’s magazines, and Lebanese women took to journalism and to writing in these papers, thereby creating new opportunities for achieving the aims and goals of the Lebanese women’s movement. Furthermore, the Lebanese women’s movement became active politically. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will devote separate subsections to their discussion—journalism, education and culture, and politics.

First, I note chronologically how several scholars and particularly female trailblazers contributed to the social and educational background for the emergence of the Lebanese women’s movement.

### 2.2.2 Trailblazers

Scholars are unanimous on the substantial contribution made by Arab intellectuals in support of the cause of Arab women, including Lebanese women. Muna Abu al-Fadl is among the scholars who have discussed this important support. From before the turn of the twentieth century several male Arab intellectuals such as Rashīd Riḍā, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Qāsim Amīn, Aḥmad Luṭfī Salāmah and Buṭrus al-Bustānī considerably contributed to Arab women’s campaigns. They called for advancing women’s social status, and many focused especially on education. Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819-1883) was a towering

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figure in this movement, being one of the first staunch advocates of women’s education. To neglect the schooling and education of women, he warned, posed a peril to the contemporary and succeeding generations. For, with the father at work, the daily care and education of the children fell on the woman’s shoulders. In modern Lebanon, it was al-Bustānī who founded the first girls’ school side by side with the al-Bustānī’s boys’ school (1863). Jurjī Niqūlā Bāz (1881-1955) earned the sobriquets ‘Supporter of Women’ and the ‘Mobile Feminist Encyclopedia’. He acquired this reputation because of the stances he took and the effective part he played in the Lebanese women’s movement, harnessing its capacity and fostering the potentialities of female emancipation. He founded a magazine, al-Ḥasnā’ [Belle] which flourished 1909-1912. He turned it into a platform for articulating women’s work in society and for revealing and highlighting women’s intellectual abilities. In Tunisia, Tahir Haddad (1899-1935) not only called for women’s rights, but also opposed polygamy as well as calling for giving women the right to divorce like men. This was radical for the times.

Muḥammad Bayhum (1887-1978) faced challenges due to his supporting women and he was the first Muslim intellectual to publicly advocate women’s emancipation in Lebanon. Bayhum wrote al-Mar’ah fī al-tārīkh wa al-sharā‘i’ [Women in history and legal systems] (1921), al-Mar’ah fī al-tamaddun al-ḥadīth [Women in modern civilization] and Fatā‘ al-sharq fī ḥadārāt al-gharb [Young woman of the East in Western culture and society] (1952). He lectured and spoke frequently in support of advancing the cause of the Lebanese women’s movement. More especially, he encouraged and played a vital role in convening the first congress of the Lebanese Women’s Union in Beirut 1922, as he was the first to respond positively to the request of Princess Najlā Abī al-Lam’ah, owner of al-Fajr [Dawn] magazine.

80 Zeidan, Arab Women Novelists, 24.
which had been calling for such a conference since 1919. Bayhum, in the ten years that followed the First World War, was the target of many threats and calumnies, all because of his championing the cause of women and their emancipation.83

In the same light, the philosopher and writer Amīn al-Rayḥānī (1876-1940) is recognized as having advocated for women’s rights.84 His support for women was emphatic. A theme which pervades most of his writings is that he found no justification whatsoever for discrimination among human beings, whether on grounds of faith, class, or gender. His book Khārīj al-Harīm [Outside the Harem] (1917), occupies a status of distinction, owing to the reactions it stimulated and the impact it made. This book gave strong impetus to the call for women’s liberation from outmoded understandings and restrictions. In it al-Rayḥānī gives vent to his repugnance and indignation at the humiliation and iniquity inflicted on the Arab woman, but he does not put forth any sort of programme for change.

Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908) is among the most well-known Arab men who took part in fostering the rise of the Arab woman in the period of al-nahdah; based in Egypt, his role in the debate resounded across the entire Arab world though at different times in different places. He wrote Tahrīr al-mar‘ah [The Emancipation of woman] (1899), one of the first books in Arab history to treat and boldly outline what he saw as the reasons behind women’s “backwardness” (as he and other men called it) and ways that Muslim and Arab women could achieve emancipation (although many early Arab female feminists disagreed with his views).85 Amīn strongly criticized Egyptian religious conservatives’ ideas. Amīn opposed certain manifestations of patriarchal oppression, although he remained within a “neopatriarchal” perspective. He called for ending abuses of divorce and polygamy. He recommended ending facial veiling and seclusion. It is worth noting that aspects of his call for women’s liberation were rejected – especially unveiling - both by conservatives and some

83 Ibid., 26.
85 Zeidan, Arab Women Novelists, 16.
female advocates of women’s rights. The latter felt that other issues were more important and that his proposals were divisive.  

Perhaps it was because of his fame or his bold tone and his call for unveiling that his work became so much more widely known and discussed than were a variety of other important and original works regarding women that were written, often by women, at about the same time or even earlier, in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. Thus, for many he became an icon of Arab women’s liberation.

Furthermore, Amīn called for women’s economic independence, meaning that women would be emancipated to some extent from the economic dependency on husband or father. On the contrary, he believed, this would give women sufficient economic power to enable her to acquire a better image and a higher social status. Amīn’s second book, *al-Mar‘ah al-Jadīdah* [The new woman] (1901), he forthrightly advocated Western ways, as he focused on and delineated the rights of the Arab woman, defending those rights and advocating the need to ameliorate the lot of the woman by means of emancipating her and ensuring her equality with the man.

The men who contributed to the early progress of the women’s movement were writing alongside Arab female intellectuals and writers. Here I discuss only a few major female intellectuals, presenting their roles and contributions.

Wardah al-Yāzījī (1838-1924) was one of the famous women writers and intellectuals to contribute to the Lebanese women’s movement. In addition to a volume of poems, *Ḥadīqat al-ward* [The rose garden] (1867), she was a regular contributor to Lebanese newspapers and magazines. For example, in 1872 she wrote essays in *al-Jinān* [The orchards] magazine.

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87 Ibid.
calling for advancing women’s status and emancipating women from social norms which limit them in respect of free mobility and education.\textsuperscript{90}

Zaynab Fawwāz (1850-1914) was born in Jabal ‘Āmil, a poor region in the southern Lebanon, to a Shiite family. Marilyn Booth verifies that Fawwāz “had immigrated to Egypt around 1870, possibly as a domestic employee of a wealthy family.”\textsuperscript{91} She wrote her essays on women’s issues, focusing on formal education for women, in Egyptian newspapers in the 1890s. In 1894, Fawwāz published a biographical dictionary of women \textit{al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-khudūr} [Pearls scattered throughout women’s quarters]. Assessing this biographical dictionary, Booth comments:

Writing within the Arabic biographical tradition, Fawwāz appropriated a long-lived, male-authored genre for a new discourse of experience and aspiration that was laying the groundwork for early articulations of Arab women’s feminisms. This discourse was a part of intense and ongoing public debate over the significance of changing gender roles to the struggle for a new, independent society […].\textsuperscript{92}

Thus, Fawwāz contributed considerably to the women’s movement not only by raising women’s issues, but also by documenting women’s history. In addition to her biographical dictionary, her writings include \textit{al-Malik Kūrush} [King Cyrus] (a novel), \textit{al-Rasā’il al-zaynabīyah} [Zaynab’s letters], a play entitled \textit{al-Hawā wa-al-wafā’} [Love and fidelity]. Her novel \textit{Ḥusn al-’awāqib} [Good consequences] was published in 1899,\textsuperscript{93} fifteen years before Haykal published his novel \textit{Zaynab} (1914), which has generally been considered as the first ‘true’ Arabic novel.\textsuperscript{94}

In the same period, Naẓīrah Zayn al-Dīn (1908-1976) initiated very dramatic and intense intellectual feminist debates. Miriam Cooke writes that she was “The first woman to write an entire book on Muslim women’s rights and absolute equality… At a time when

\textsuperscript{90} Zeidan, \textit{Arab Women Novelists}, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 120-21.
\textsuperscript{93} Zeidan, \textit{Arab Women Novelists}, 66-67; Shaaban, \textit{Voices Revealed}, 14.
\textsuperscript{94} Shaaban, \textit{Voices Revealed}, 14-15.
women were expected to be quiet and invisible Nazira had spoken without fear.”


Having set out these pioneering contributions to the emergence of the movement, I turn to discuss the different spheres of activity in which the movement engaged to see how and for what reason the movement was engaged in such activities. In addition, this chapter will enable us, in the following section on Ba‘lbalī’s biography, to identify and interpret the positions, activities and institutions in which the writer found herself engaged and which could be regarded as opportunities for her to contribute to feminist activities and agenda.

### 2.2.3 Journalism’s Contribution

Jurj Klās explores the main objectives of women’s newspapers and magazines, arguing they not only helped Arab women achieve progress and liberation, but also gave them moral and financial encouragement to get greater levels of education. Women’s papers and periodicals in Lebanon are a decisive indication of the pioneering role of the Lebanese woman in contributing to the Arab female renaissance. It was the Lebanese women who began Arab female journalism. This took place outside Lebanon because of the constraints imposed by the Ottoman authorities. An example is the Lebanese journalist Hind Nawfal (1875-1957) who established *al-Fatāḥ* [The young woman] magazine in Alexandria in 1892.

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magazine focused on women’s emancipation from the veil as well as other Arab women’s issues and rights, without engaging in political discussions.98

‘Affah Karam (1883-1924), the Lebanese journalist and novelist who immigrated to the United States in 1897, published two women’s magazines in New York: al-Mar’ah al-Sūrīyah [The Syrian woman] (1911) which stopped in 1912, and al-‘Ālam al-Nisā‘ī al-Jadīd [The new women’s world] (1912) which continued until the First World War. Significantly, the content of the latter magazine focused mainly on comparisons between Arab women’s conditions in the Middle East and those of women in the United States and Europe. This magazine gave both female and male Arab intellectuals the possibility to write and express feminist ideas and articles freely.99 Salmā Abū Rāshid (1889-1919) published in Beirut Fatāt Lubnān [Girl of Lebanon] in 1914 but this was discontinued because of the First World War. Later magazines tended to last longer, with the monthly Lebanese magazine Sawt al-Mar’ah [The woman’s voice] running from 1945 until 1958, edited by Advīk Shaybūb (1919-2002). This magazine was typically about feminist awareness, focusing bravely and directly on Arab women’s issues, such as the veil, employment and the fight against patriarchal norms limiting women’s freedom and mobility.100 After the Lebanese civil war in 1975, Lebanese women’s journalism was significantly promoted and as a result several women’s magazines were published; however, this period is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

To sum up, several Lebanese women’s magazines were published in Lebanon in the period after 1909. These magazines were a significant means through which women’s voices could be heard strongly. Having explored women’s engagement with journalism for the

100 Al-Taqī, “Ṣaḥāfiyyat Lubnāniyyat,” 20.
purpose of making their voices heard, I now turn to discuss women’s engagement in the educational and cultural field.

2.2.4 Education and Culture

Lebanese women’s groups and societies can all, however, be described as being dedicated to social work and social activity. To understand this, we must take into account the social crisis of the Lebanese woman, and the on-going acute social stress stemming from the fact that she herself was deprived of such justice. Indeed, these Lebanese women’s societies were in general humanitarian, charitable institutions, providing human assistance and aiming to uphold human dignity.\(^{101}\) It seems, then, that women’s activities sometimes were not only for feminist aims, but were also directed at humanitarian goals in general.

To promote the spirit of co-operation among women and girls and to extend their awareness of social justice, Lebanese women’s foundations had societies that set themselves to achieve worthy goals of social justice: education for females, charity for the poor, cooperation, kindling the spirit of social collaboration, voluntarism and generosity. The Lebanese women’s movement caused a considerable increase not only in the levels of women’s education and culture, but also in women’s participation in the workforce and in all spheres of modern life: economic, political and intellectual. Indeed, the government began to co-operate with those societies in carrying out community functions and tasks, especially since these tasks were a heavy burden in the first half of twentieth century in the aftermath of cultural stagnation, foreign occupation, political and social depression and other factors that impeded progress in Lebanon and other Arab countries.\(^{102}\) That is to say, the government saw women’s groups as providing community services which the government was obliged to

\(^{101}\) Ḥanīfah, Ṭārīkh ṭafawwūr alḥarakah al-nisāʾiyyah, 96.
\(^{102}\) Ibid., 25.
offer, but was incapable of doing under these difficult conditions. This is in line with the women’s movement strategy which is considered by al-Qādirī as an “ideal strategy”: “women’s groups did not seek power by competing for being in government as a campaign’s strategy.”

Since the 1880s Beirut was the major centre of women’s societies. An instance of women’s society focusing on education is Jamʿiyat al-Banafsajah [Violet society] (1880), founded in Beirut by Imīlī Sursuq, who began by inviting a large number of women to a meeting held at her home, where she drew attention to the pressing need to help and educate poor girls.

In Beirut in 1909, Jamʿiyat Tahdhīb al-Fatāh [The society for edifying girls] was founded to combine helping needy girls with educational support. It helped educate hundreds of girls at its expense at several schools, in Beirut and villages around. At a later stage (the precise date is apparently not known), this society began to provide only partial assistance in covering school expenses, and began to focus on caring for younger children, founding in Ras Beirut district a nursery for children between three to four months old in order to enable their mothers to work. Work not only gave women economic independence but also gave them a greater power than before in their relations with their husbands and families.

Other societies which emerged and were active in Beirut addressed both educational and suffrage concerns. An example of these societies is al-Jamʿiyah al-Masīḥiyah li-al-Shābbāt [Society for Christian young women] that was founded in 1920. The major achievements of this society included: founding the first vocational school for girls, starting

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104 Qāṭirjī, al-Ḥarakah al-niswīyah, 48.

the first summer youth camp, setting up the first evening literacy schools taught by university students, and founding nurseries and employment offices.\textsuperscript{106} Hind al-Ṣūfī affirms: “Some women’s societies [such as the latter] were of sectarian aspect, but these societies had not conflicts among them; instead they had cooperation and the sectarian aspect was just employed for getting funds.”\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, the sectarian groups as well as educational, political, national or humanitarian groups all knew to act together by sharing and addressing the same core targets to seek equality for women.\textsuperscript{108}

Some societies combined education with politics, such as Jamʿīyat Yaqaẓat al-Fatāh al-‘Arabīyah [The Arab girls’ awakening society], founded in 1914. This society helped girls to get an education and called for opposition to Ottoman authorities. It arranged demonstrations and other actions.\textsuperscript{109}

Side by side with those women’s societies whose activities took the form of building projects, social work and educational and welfare assistance, new women’s societies and institutions were emerging in Lebanon. These were distinguished by their focus on awareness-raising campaigns. Their principal aim was clear and unequivocal: striving for equality between women and men. The work of these societies was centred on writing, public speaking, publishing articles in newspapers, and convening meetings, seminars and special exhibitions. For instance, The Society for the Renaissance of Women (1924) convened women conferences, submitted petitions to state officials and organized speeches, forums and public meetings for women. Similarly, Jamʿīyat al-Lubnāniyāt al-Jāmiʿiyyāt [The society of Lebanese women graduates] (1952) addressed making close ties among Lebanese women graduates and promoting educational and cultural development in Lebanese society.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. Also see Thompson, who as mentioned affirms the non-sectarian construction of the Lebanese women’s movement. Thompson, \textit{Colonial Citizens}, 98.
\textsuperscript{109} Ḥanīfah, \textit{Tārīkh taṭawwur al-ḥarakah al-nisāʾīyah}, 76.
\textsuperscript{110} Qāṭirjī, \textit{al-Ḥarakah al-niswīyah}, 59.
In summary, then, women’s groups and societies at this time were engaged with social, educational and cultural activities which aimed to help girls and women to become educated and have the opportunity to participate in higher education, and including in such subjects as medicine and law. They also promoted the idea that girls and women should work outside of the house. Having discussed education and culture, I turn now to explore the political engagement of Lebanese women’s groups.

2.2.5 Politics

Politically, the French contributed to modernising Lebanon in the period of the 1920s when it was called Greater Lebanon, which included Syria. In this context, Mona Fawaz and Isabelle Peillen say: “The French Mandate continued with the modernising policies already begun by the Ottomans. In 1920, Beirut became the capital city of Greater Lebanon, headquarters of the central administration of the Levant States by the French Mandate, and confirmed its future political and economic roles.”

Further, the French mandate contributed to the establishing of the Lebanese political system at the time. Regards this issue,, as Fawaz and Peillen describe: “The Lebanese political system was established under the French Mandate rule (1920-1942) and many of the existing institutional structures were organised at the time and followed the French model. The first republic was declared in 1926, with the first constitution.”

Significantly, the sectarian social and religious component affected the political Lebanese system, Fawaz and Peillen say: “One unusual characteristic of the Lebanese political system is the establishment of a quota system that dictates the political representation of various religious groups and the religious affiliation of important ruling

112 Ibid.
members (eg the President has to be Christian- Maronite, the Prime Minister Muslim-Sunni, etc).” 113 Beirut, as the capital, housed not only low-income Lebanese migrants, but also Palestinian refugees as a result of the 1948 War between Zionist Jews and Palestinians, a war which led to the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948.114 But there had been a series of events leading up to this, including increasing immigration of European Jews to Palestine, the formation of fledgling political and military institutions, and much resistance on the part of Palestinian Arabs, who objected also to the European powers’ intervention on behalf of the Zionists. For example, and famously, in 1917, British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour made a declaration announcing his government’s support for the establishment of “a Jewish national home in Palestine.” Whilst the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to mention as part of the political context in which our author flourished. The establishment of Israel meant continuing Arab-Israeli conflicts notably in wars in 1956, 1967 and 1973, and more recent violence in territories that Israel occupied in 1967 – the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza – as well as in the south of Lebanon. As a result of the establishment of Israel, for the first time, the name Palestine was erased from some international maps.115 Many Palestinians were displaced by Jewish forces and military groups. As a result, they became refugees in several countries, including Lebanon. Palestinians who stayed in their cities and villages became Arab Israeli citizens, establishing the Arab minority in Israel. Since 1967 there have existed three entities that had comprised historic Palestine: Jordan, the Gaza strip and the West Bank.116 Within negotiations Palestinians have requested the right of return for the refugee mass of millions to Israel/ Palestine. These negotiations began in 1993 but still have not achieved the main goal which is two states for two nations. The conflict and its regional impacts have deeply affected

114 Ibid., 4.
116 Ibid.
writers across the region, including Ba‘albakī. Moreover, the fact that Palestinian rights have been so central to political agendas has made it harder for women to focus on gender issues, as they can be accused of placing national-regional issues second to “their own.” This study will examine how Ba‘albakī combine within her writing between solidarity with Palestinian rights and her feminist agenda.

Feminists demanded women’s emancipation at the time of the country’s independence. Mona Chemali Khalaf says: “Because of the campaign for independence from the French mandate, women’s suffrage lost its importance. Instead, women joined with men in organizing demonstrations for independence across the country.” That is to say, the Lebanese women’s movement acted with strategic approaches, such as by giving the national target priority in order to facilitate later support for the community and their issues. Despite that the Lebanese women’s movement gave considerable support to social and educational aims, it faced opposition to women’s entry into the public sphere, mostly stemming from conservatives and religious males. An example of a specific challenge was the campaign to override the Islamic law of governance in Syria and Lebanon. A decree in 1938 allowed civil marriage and so caused huge demonstrations. Muslims in Syria and Lebanon rejected civil marriage because it allowed Muslim women to marry non-Muslims. As a consequence, the law was changed such that civil marriage was not provided for in Lebanon, but civil marriages contracted abroad were recognized. In contrast, Gihane Tabet affirms that, in 1951, “There has also been the strike of Beirut Association of Lawyers against the privileges granted to the religious authorities concerning personal status.” Although the mentioned association supported and contributed to the campaign for civil marriages, the Lebanese

117 Shaaban, Voices Revealed, 17.
119 Keddie, Women in the Middle East, 97.
120 Its members were probably secular and from different sects in Beirut.
women’s movement preferred not to share in that campaign, whose discussions lasted decades in Lebanon, as a political strategy so as not to be in conflict with either Lebanese communities opposing civil marriage or Lebanese authorities of the time. I highlight this point because it is relevant to comparing attitudes relating to civil marriage in the women’s movement versus Ba‘albakī’s views, in the next section.

Consequently, the Lebanese women’s movement’s most considerable political aim was women’s suffrage and the possibility for standing for public office in the Parliament and local councils. In this context, Qaddūrah led a continuing and difficult campaign for Lebanese women’s political rights from 1936 onwards. The women’s movement, together with its societies and federation, persisted in pressing demands on the government, the parliament and the president of the republic. Side by side with these demands there was a flurry of demonstrations, letters, exhibitions and press conferences to which were invited various representatives of Lebanese political parties and national parties. They responded positively to these invitations. Speeches were delivered in support of the cause of women, calling for equality with men. In addition, the movement also resorted to leaflets, posters, slogans, meetings, sit-ins, threats of public protests in the streets and so on. This all culminated in the success of women, in 1953, obtaining their political rights: the rights of election and nomination for parliament, municipal councils and other posts.

The Lebanese political system is a democratic parliamentary one based on the right of people to vote for the government and 128 deputies of the parliament every four years. The state is headed by a president elected by the parliament. But to what extent did the Lebanese women’s groups or Ba‘albakī employ that political opportunity by joining political parties in order to work towards achieving a feminist agenda? Yolla Sharara argues: “The majority [of feminist women in Lebanon at the time] thought that the conditions of women would change
if they joined political parties.”122 While this statement is based on the concept that political parties generally have power more than individuals do for achieving social, political and economic change, only a few Lebanese women joined Lebanese parties at the time. During the French mandate, indeed, several Lebanese parties such as the Najjada and the Phalanges did not allow women to join. While the Nationalist Party of Saada called women to join, indeed it had just a few women members.123 Kingston mentions several factors that in the post-independence and pre-war phase of Lebanese politics would increase the number of Lebanese women involved in Lebanese political parties such as the emergence of women’s associations, the social activities of those associations as well as the emergence of communications between the Lebanese women’s movement and those of the West. Such activities gave women both experience and confidence in political organizing. Despite all these factors, the number of women members of Lebanese political parties showed no truly significant increase.124 Kikoski suggests why the Lebanese women’s movement did not participate significantly in national politics.125 In any case, Kingston adds that in Lebanon “leftist and secular-based political parties were illegal until 1970.” 126

After that the French mandate authorities were ignoring and excluding Lebanese Shiite community, they gave it an autonomy of laws system as a recognized religious community.127 The discrimination against the Shiite community continued after the Lebanese independence for several decades. This discrimination was reflected in the underrepresentation of Shiites in the Lebanese government.128 Shiites suffered from not only political marginalisation, but also being the most Lebanese underprivileged community. Most

124 Ibid.
125 Kikoski, “Feminism in the Middle East,” 138.
127 Yusri Hazran, “The Shiite Community in Lebanon: From Marginalization to Ascendary,” (Brandies University: Crown Center for Middle East, 2009), 37:2
128 Ibid.
of Lebanese Shiites in the time belonged to the lowest socio-economic classes such as the peasants and the working class, and mostly they lived in undeveloped places such as rural and poor suburbs. In this context, this study will investigate the socio-economic class to which Ba‘albakī’s family belonged and where this family lived.

Discrimination against Shiites motivated them to emigrate both outside and inside Lebanon in order to move to a better life where is a higher and better quality of life. Specifically, the internal emigration of Shiites to Beirut led significantly to demographic changes which emerged the “radical politicization of Shiite collective consciousness that has placed them at the centre of the political game in Lebanon.” The study will examine to what extent Ba‘albakī and her family were engaged in politics. Not only the emigration that puts Shiites in the political and economic centre, but also that the Shiites became the largest Lebanese religious community. Eitan Azani argues several factors played a role in the demographic change in Beirut in the time: Shiite emigration to Beirut, the higher Shiite birth rate, and the massive emigration of Christians from Lebanon, including Beirut. However, Imam Musa al-Sadr (1928-1978), who is one of the most charismatic Shiite leaders and who found the Amal movement, significantly employed the Shiites' demographic advantage in achieving their political rights. Al-Sadr campaigned against the calling for secularization of the Lebanese state by the leftist Lebanese parties within the 1970s. In short, al-Sadr made significant efforts in order to increase Shiite participation in decision-making in Lebanon. Thus, the Shiite emigration to Beirut, which concentrated huge Shiite mass enabled the Shiite

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129 Hazran, “The Shiite Community in Lebanon,” 2.
131 Hazran, “The Shiite Community in Lebanon,” 2.
133 Ibid., 3.
community to not only get rid of marginalisation and discrimination, but also affect centrally both the Lebanese politics and economics.

The Lebanese political system became increasingly under strain due to many factors of economic, demographic and social change, and civil war broke out in 1975. This civil war increased sectarian divisions and identities, challenging broader forms of social identity developed especially after the 1967 war. Krayem argues: “Indeed social identity patterns were developing along horizontal class lines, but this development was aborted by the outbreak of the civil war and quick reaffirmation of rigid sectarian divisions and identity patterns.” However, Lebanese women’s groups seemed to prioritize their feminist agenda, preferring to avoid sectarian identities in order to be united in their feminist agenda and campaign. The study will investigate the opinion of Ba‘albākī on social and sectarian identities.

During Lebanon’s Civil War, Lebanese women participated in fighting “on the front lines side-by-side with men.” Yet, they faced obstacles that had also been true of other kinds of political participation. For example, Kingston concludes: “Political parties have not been hospitable institution for women in Lebanon. Not only have the number of women involved in politics historically been extremely low, but women have also been excluded from positions of influence within the decision-making apparatus.” Consequently, only a very few Lebanese women have in fact succeeded in gaining political positions such as parliament membership or being a principal of a local council. In 1975, Najla’ Nasir Bashur said, “now we find the woman far away from political life taking in account that politics’ fields are parliament, government, local councils [...]” The situation has not changed much, despite Lebanese women’s many roles during the Civil War. On 16 June 2009 the Lebanese

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134 Hassan Krayem, “The Lebanese Civil War and The TAIF Agreement,”
135 Kikoski, “Feminism in the Middle East,” 133.
journalist Dalila Mahdawi said: “While Lebanese women today enjoy senior positions in the private sector; political appointments have all but eluded them.”\textsuperscript{138} This is to say that, despite the fact that Lebanese women gained suffrage in 1953, and “[a]lthough Lebanon is known in the Middle East for its relative political openness and for the degree of freedom Lebanese women enjoy, it paradoxically has one of the lowest rates of women’s engagement in the region.”\textsuperscript{139}

Although explaining the continuation of gender inequality – including in the political system – in Lebanon is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is difficult to ignore the patriarchal social system as the core reason—a reason that Ba‘albaki recognised. Maya W. Mansour and Sarah G. Abouaad affirm, “The initiatives of civil society, activists and politicians alone will not be effective unless the patriarchal system of values, based on gender stereotyping and traditional norms, is also challenged and redefined.”\textsuperscript{140} This is not to say that the Lebanese women’s movement did not challenge these norms and gender stereotyping, but changing social norms and stereotypes is a very slow process, and this is also shaped by economic factors.

In general economically, Lebanon has few natural resources to give it sustained economic power, but in the 1960s and 1970s it “enjoyed a strong comparative advantage in the services sector particularly in banking and finance, insurance and trade-related services. Beirut was the financial centre for the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{141} This financial status led to not only low inflation but also high rates of growth as well as stability at the time. Morever, Charles Harvie argues that “prior to 1975 Lebanon possessed one of the most dynamic economies in

the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{142} He adds that the Lebanese economy played a role of intermediary between Europe and Arab countries. The standard of living seemed to be the highest in the Middle East. The level of per-person income in Lebanon seemed to be similar to those in Europe. We saw how the Lebanese women’s movement took advantage of that dynamic and liberal economy for developing its associations and institutions as well as for achieving its goals and agenda. As a result, Kikoski argues that “the economic status of women in Lebanon was significantly improved in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Women comprised 37 percent of the Lebanese labor force including physicians, dentists, lawyers and pharmacists.”\textsuperscript{143} This data suggests the success of the Lebanese women’s groups in achieving some gains for women on the economic front, while their activism on behalf of improving female education also led to women’s greater participation in the work force.

Indeed, after the 1967 war, social, sectoral internal and regional changes affected the rapid economic growth in Lebanon. One internal significance of these changes is socio-political polarization, which increased. Hassan Krayem explains: “there was a growing migration of the rural population to Beirut, moving into poverty belts around the city, and suffering from rising inflation and cost of living. Socio-political tensions fuelled rural uprising and workers strikes.”\textsuperscript{144} These uprising and strikes may have strengthened the class solidarity and identity. The internal migration of Lebanese was a factor that Baʿalbakī and her family experienced as we shall see.

After 1975 the Lebanese economy faced difficulties and crises such as declining output and investment, emigration of professional labour etc. Most of these outcomes were due to the civil war, as a traumatic event in Lebanese history which affected Baʿalbaki as it did all Lebanese.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Kikoski, Kikoski, “Feminism in the Middle East,” 138.
Thus, many factors, positive and negative, played a role in the development and emergence of the Lebanese women’s groups. The contribution of Arab writers and intellectuals, the rise in women’s journalism, activities of women’s groups and societies for education and culture, and political goals for improving women’s status were all significant. We have seen that women’s magazines were a considerable vehicle for women’s voices, and those women’s groups and societies took specific practical steps to help girls and women gain higher education, and to enter into professions traditionally reserved for men, such as medicine and law. Despite getting the right to vote, they failed to attain a significant level of engagement in politics for women. This suggests, amongst other things, the strength of the patriarchal society that the Lebanese women’s movement challenged. And the broader political and economic context sketched briefly above shaped both the changes in society and in some ways made change more difficult.

Precisely because of the diversity of religions and sects which compose it, the Lebanese women’s groups cannot be taken for granted or generalized over. Their influence varies from district to district and may depend to a large extent on the degree of education and awareness of the particular grouping. Lebanese women have shown their awareness that women’s groups will assist the Lebanese woman, whatever her background is, and will help her improve her lot and assert her rights. Consequently, these women’s groups cooperated and tried participate in shared activities in order to contribute to the same core goals which are mainly to improve women’s status in different living spheres.

Finally, beyond their social, economic and political activities, most of the Lebanese women’s groups addressed equality, women’s advancement, and the upgrading of women’s status in all spheres: society, economics, culture, education and politics. That is to say the Lebanese women’s groups had feminist conceptions, goals and actions.
Within the analysis of Ba‘albaki’s biography, I will discuss Lebanese women’s groups’ attitudes regarding Ba‘albaki’s trial, with special reference to these groups’ goals and approaches.

2.3 Ba‘albaki’s Biography

2.3.1 Introduction

Having investigated how the Lebanese women’s movement contributed to feminist goals and which strategies it used to drive its feminist agenda, the movement will now serve as a social background for this section, specifically examining the biographical aspects of the writer in order to construct a full biography for the writer, focusing on her feminist views, attitudes and struggle. I divide the following discussion into sub-discussions arranged in chronological order, focusing on prominent issues and stages which are relevant to her lifelong feminist conflict with Arab patriarchal society.

I begin with a discussion of childhood and education, and then turn to the publication of her novels, exploring and analyzing the difficulties she faced. Then I turn to examine her views on politics, religion and society in general, which she set out in a lecture delivered when she was twenty-five years old (1959). After this I move on to the publication of her short stories collection (1963), discussing her court case (1964), and the reasons for it, and its impacts on her. Regarding another prominent stage in her life, I dedicate a sub-section to her cessation of publishing in 1963, discussing the reasons and the background which led to her stopping writing. Then I turn to her recent return to the cultural scene (in December 2009). At the end, and before a conclusion, I set out the fictional works of the writer to date.

Before continuing, it is relevant to set out a note concerning sources: as was demonstrated in the introduction to this dissertation, there are only a few sources which deal
with the biography of Ba'albakī. In addition to my appeal to these sources and with my awareness that autobiographical writing does not always indicate facts, especially if the writing comes years later or is due to a lack of sources—not my desire to over-rely on the writer or ignore any other existing source—I owe much to the writer’s own accounts of her biography, and to a few others which discuss her trial.

2.3.2 Childhood and Education

Here, I will explore what is known about Ba'albakī’s childhood and education in an effort to point out the choices she made, and the difficulties she faced in her sustaining those choices, analyzing the reasons for those difficulties and so focusing on where she succeeded, where she failed, and why.

The following quote from Campbell’s Arabic-language interview with Ba'albakī exemplifies how she represents herself:

I was born to a Shiite family, which migrated from Baalbek to the south of Lebanon. The family then moved on to live and work in Beirut. In addition to farming, my parental grandfather taught the children and young people of the village in the shade of the olive trees. He was a poor man and well-versed in religion. My father wrote zajal, folk-verse, but my mother was illiterate and her position roused my indignation. I began writing at the early age of fourteen.145

The writer Laylá ‘Alī al-Ḥāj Ba’albakī was born in Dar El Mreisse in Beirut in 1934 to a Shiite family.146 In the quotation above we see that the writer intimates that she is Shiite not through choice but because her family is Shiite. Joseph says:

Religious identity is important in the Arab world. Children and women take the religion of their fathers and husbands … Religion is sometimes regarded as a civil status in Arab countries … In Lebanon; citizens have their religion indicated on their national ID cards.147

145 Campbell, A’lām al-adab al-‘arabī, 336.
146 Campbell does not date his interview with the writer, but it was after 1975, when Ba'albakī moved to live with her husband and children in London, and before 1996 when he published his book.
147 Joseph, “Patriarchy and development,” 17.
Although the issue or the role of the writer being Shiite is beyond the scope of this study, I cannot ignore this statement as this is the only time —thus far— that the writer mentions anywhere within her novels, short stories, and lectures that her family is Shiite. There could be two possibilities for understanding her mentioning her family as Shiite. First, in Lebanon, religion is “regarded as a civil status” according to Joseph. Second, this comment could be meant to explain her family’s immigration in that her family not only immigrated, but immigrated like other Shiite families, as will be discussed later. However, the discussion will later verify that her mother is not religious, which leaves no possibility for the writer to mean that her family is a religious Shiite family.

Her family moved from Hrebta, Ra’s Baalbek in the district of the Bekaa Valley, to Houmin el Tahta in the district of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon, and then to Beirut. These emigrations by her family happened before the writer was born. Although there is no available indication as to the date of her family’s emigration, Rodger Shanahan points out that this, in general and relating Shiite families emigration, fits into a wider historical process in this period: “This kind of family-based immigration was evident in the influx of Shi’a from the 1930s onwards.”148 This emigration aimed moving to better life and seeking opportunities of employment. Soon I will examine which employment her father got. Interestingly, the mobility and migration her family experienced comprise Ba’albakī’s first observations in her description of her life. It is possible that this early instability influenced Ba’albakī’s outlook. The instability was caused by her family’s pursuit of employment and a better life. Perhaps this led her to see moving and emigration as a completely justified action in seeking a better life. The writer says, “Why must I live in this country but not in another place in the world?”149 This desire to emigrate to another country in search of a better life is consonant with the writer’s own move to live in London, as will be discussed later. In the next chapter,

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we shall assess the extent to which Ba’albaki’s writing reflects a concern with migration and mobility.

Although the writer discovers that her grandfather was a poor man, she does not mention anything regarding her father’s reasonable socio-economic status. It is not clear why she chooses to hide this information. Perhaps she was embarrassed and did not want to say that her father worked for French authorities, who were at the time foreigner occupiers of Lebanon. As such, we can say that the writer degrades her objectivity when talking about her biography. Specifically, Ruah Rabeeh affirms that Ba’albaki’s father was employed by the French forces in Beirut in the time, but later, as Muḥammad Farḥāt indicates, he worked for the Kāt company (trading company for imported and exported goods), owned by the Lebanese businessman Imīl al-Bustānī. As a result, her family maintained a reasonable socio-economic status. This study will further examine the role that this status played in the coming biographical aspects.

The writer verifies in her latter biographical statement the wide gap between the education of her father and grandfather and between the education of her mother: her father’s father was a teacher for the village children, while her father was a folk-verse Zajal poet. In contrast, her mother was illiterate. The writer demonstrates not only her anger over her mother’s status, but also her agony over the fact that her family, like other families in Lebanon, belonged to a patriarchal society. Ba’albaki’s struggle to complete her education reflects her suffering due to her family being conservative. She says, “I came from a conservative family which considered women’s education a crime. When I finished my primary studies I had to go on a hunger strike for three months, so my father would let me go.

152 I use the term ‘zajal’ to refer to a form of poetry which often uses dialect words and expressions, which in the case of Lebanese zajal are of Levantine origin. Adnan F. Haydar says that the Lebanese zajal is declaimed or sung. Adnan F. Haydar, “Al-Ḥida’, Al-Nadb, Al-Hawrabah and Al-Nawh in Lebanese Zajal Poetry: A Study of Meter and Rhythm”, Edebiyat: Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures 13, no. 2 (2003):159.
on with my education.” By ‘conservative’, the writer here means that her family is patriarchal, protects social norms and thoughts, and thus limits women’s education, does not support women’s education, and even goes as far as to prevent women from trying to seek education. However, the context in which the writer used ‘conservative family’ (i.e., religious or social) will be discussed later in this study.

Thus, Ba’albakī felt strongly about completing her education, so that she would not have the same fate as her mother, that of an illiterate and uneducated housewife. So in Beirut, to where her family emigrated, her perhaps already-established interests were reinforced, especially by the opportunities around her, and came into conflict with the old, patriarchal tendencies of her father that did not value women's advancement. Ba’albakī’s upgrowth in Beirut made her predisposed to reject all the faith traditions in which her family was brought up in her previously relatively more rural environment. Despite difficulties she faced, after her completing elementary school at Madrasat al-Ma’ārif al-Ibtidā’iyah [school of primary learning] in Dar El Mreisse, Ba’albakī was able to go on with her education, after facing down her father by means of that hunger strike. She thus gives the example of employing the hunger strike in an individual conflict against parents and families. She completed secondary school, as well as joining the Saint Joseph University in Beirut, in Kulliyat al-Ādāb al-Sharqīyah [The faculty of Eastern arts].

She interrupted her studies in 1957, moving to a job in the Lebanese Parliament, as will be discussed later. In 1960, Ba’albakī obtained a one-year French scholarship to continue her undergraduate studies, and travelled to Paris to study for the academic year 1960-1961. In addition, the writer knew French at a level which enabled her to study at university in French, which is indicated by her having studied at the francophone Saint Joseph University.

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153 Zeidan, Arab Women Novelists, 96.
154 A private Catholic higher institute of education founded by the Jesuits in 1875 in Beirut.
Consequently, several scholars argue that Ba‘albakī was influenced by French education and philosophy, particularly feminist demands and feminist philosophy. Fātīmah al-Muhsin argues that Ba‘albakī was influenced by French lifestyle and society of her era, which gave women freedom of movement, action and choice.155 George N. Sfeir considered Ba‘albakī as the Arab Françoise Sagan (1935-2004) who was a French novelist and playwright. He puts this comparison in the context specifically of culture: “Ba‘albakī might be described as the Françoise Sagan of Arabic letters.”156 Sagan was a figure who may have influenced Lebanese intellectual women more broadly. Following Sfeir, Nabīh al-Qāsim argues that Françoise Sagan was, for several Arab women writers including Ba‘albakī, a model of the creative and brave woman writer, and thus she contributed to the emergence of Arab women writers and novelists. She may have had an influence on the content and style of writings such as Anā Aḥyā, but there is no any study which sheds light on that assertion.157 ‘Abd Allah Shabānah also claims that several Arab women were influenced by Sagan, in their revolution against society and its norms, mentioning Ba‘albakī in Lebanon, Colette Khuri in Syria, and the male feminist poet Nizar Qabbani.158 Marie-Claude Thomas has gone further, considering Ba‘albakī the Sagan of Lebanon, on biographical grounds: “The existentialist movement of the time and the French cafes attracted her [Ba‘albakī] more than university life, and she earned herself the nickname of Françoise Sagan of Lebanon.”159 That does not mean that she was actually called this when she was at university, but later scholars labeled her in this way.

These arguments’ assertion that the writer was influenced by Sagan depend on some similarities in feminist outlook, and perhaps more on her biography and her observed behaviour, particularly in rebelling against society and patriarchy, than on the actual content of her writing. There is no any hard or direct evidence that she was specifically influenced by Sagan or other French feminist thinkers in her writing, although this does appear highly likely from their feminist content.\textsuperscript{160}

Ba‘albakī verifies that her suffering because of her patriarchal family was not limited to the difficulties faced during her education, but that she also expressed her unhappiness at home, waging a lasting campaign against her family due to the patriarchal social customs which limit women’s mobility, prevent them from working outside the house, and stop them expressing opinions in public. Her family always tried to push her to maintain their view of the women’s role as limited to be housewife or house keeper, but she totally rejected this. For instance, her family asked her to wear a veil, but Ba‘albakī flatly refused to do so.\textsuperscript{161} Interestingly, the writer presents a personal story of her search for freedom, in order to reveal her conflict with her parents and to show their mentality. She wanted to change the colour of her room, which was white. Her parents refused, claiming that the house was theirs and that they liked the colour white.\textsuperscript{162} The writer says that her mother did not let her go out of house to enjoy nights out with her friends and colleagues, and would not buy a car for her because she did not want her daughter to drive a car and travel alone. This was despite the fact that her family was rich. Notably, her mother did not mind if Ba‘albakī drank (wine) with her friends, but did want her daughter to seek her permission to go outside the house.\textsuperscript{163} That is to say, her mother was not religious, but at the same time she maintained social customs, especially those that limited women in mobility. Therefore, when the writer said “she came

\textsuperscript{160} I have not found any source which compares her writing to that of French writers.

\textsuperscript{161} Ḥaydar, “Liqā‘ ma‘a Laylā Ba‘albakī,” 74. This interview took place before May 18, 1979, but again the writer talks on her childhood and beyond.

\textsuperscript{162} Ba‘albakī, \textit{Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah}, 14-16.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
from a conservative family”, conservative here had a social context meaning, not a religious one. The writer employs the context of her personal anecdote about her parents to give a memorable description of herself: “No, I do not think that I am careless, young, and crazy or without abilities. Mothers of all my colleagues witness that they consider me as an example for rationality, quietness and education.”\textsuperscript{164} The writer here indicates that she has a strong ego and expresses pride in her abilities. However, this strong ego is consistent with the writer engaging in conflict with her parents and her surrounding community.

Ba’albakī reveals that she also faced pressures exerted by most of the community, the village, the street and the street’s female residents. The community in Dar El Mreisse was (still-) mixed, including Shiites and Sunnis, Christians and Jews.\textsuperscript{165} Here, we are discussing the case of a female writer whose family is patriarchal and socially conservative, as mentioned, and has a clearly expressed attitude of refusing religious laws and social conceptions. For example, she rejects the veil which is a significant symbol of religion and social habits for Muslims. This attitude might perhaps had led some Muslims to accuse her of promoting unveiling in Beirut.

It seems that the entire sub-district’s populace had tried to impose their traditions and customs upon her. Ba’albakī explains:

\begin{quote}
Since the beginning, I rejected the veil. I confronted with stubbornness and misery not only the family, but also traditions, on which my father was keen, and which stated that it was required that our women be veiled. They said: “The girl has gone insane”. They mocked and pointed at me in Houmin el Tahta, as well as trying to keep the girls from interacting with me, because I refused to follow their inherited traditions. They all refused to allow me to have a voice, to say that I am free to do what I want with my body, my life and my emotions. Thus I lived and thus was my environment.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

Consequently, Ba’albakī not only suffered a great deal, but also experienced social conflict with her family and her surrounding social environment. This conflict grew sharper because of her rejection of the veil. The community in Houmin el Tahta tried hard to prevent their

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid. Note that the writer delivered this lecture in 1959, but uses it to talk about her experiences of childhood.
\textsuperscript{165} Farḥāt, “Shārī’ Rustum Bāshā wa-Laylā Ba’albakī,”
\textsuperscript{166} Ḥaydar, “Liqā’ ma’a Laylā Ba’albakī,” 74.
daughters from communicating with her, a kind of social deprivation. This suggests that Ba‘albakī’s community rejected her especially because she denied traditions and religious laws such as the veil. It seems as though most people in her community chose to join those opposing Ba‘albakī’s revolution, views and writing. Her experiences highlight how deeply she was aware of the fact that her society suppressed women, their voice and their freedom, and also what a striking figure she is given the social background of her times.

In contrast, there were also elements of the socio-economic and close cultural environment which helped the writer to make different choices. Ba‘albakī grew up during the 1950s in Dar El Mreisse, in Rustom Pasha Street, which is famous for the cultural diversity of its people. For instance, intellectuals such as Ghassān Jaḍīd (b. 1946), Anīs al-Ṣāyigh (1931-2009) and Nāṣīf al-Majdalānī (1914-1988) lived in that street. Rustom Basha Street was home to publishing companies such as Dār Majallat Shi‘r [Shi‘r publishing house], the poetry review which published Ba‘albakī’s first novel Anā aḥyā (1958). Ruah Rabeeh makes reference to the status of Ba‘albakī’s father, ‘Alī al-Ḥāj, pointing out that he worked for the French forces and organized unofficial sessions for reciting folk-verse poetry hosting senior Lebanese poets and leaders in his home. This cultural environment allowed her to be familiar with intellectuals and poets, teaching Ba‘albakī to act freely, intelligently and with courage. This cultural environment was a significant factor which prepared Ba‘albakī to get a job as a secretary at the Lebanese Parliament from 1957 to 1960. The writer preferred to work rather than continue studying based on the situation and context at that time. Keeping in mind that her father has the ability to support her studies, her choice to work means that the writer sought independence; since working would give her power and avoid her having to be in financial need of her parents.

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168 Ibid.
To sum up thus far, the writer was born and grew up in Dar El Mreisse in Beirut, in which Shiites, Sunnis, Christians and Jews all live. From a young age, she had an agenda for individual independence and freedom from those social customs and religious conceptions which could limit her participating in diverse spheres of life or prevent her enjoying her time and abilities in the way she wished. As a result, she came into conflict with her parents and her surrounding communities, a conflict which caused her difficulties. Despite those difficulties, she succeeded in getting a higher education, found a job in the Lebanese Parliament, and did not wear a veil. Thus even a cursory view of Ba’albakī’s early life reveals her to be a unique, interesting and strong character who is committed to her individual choices, does not hesitate in pursuit of the things she knows she wants, and perseveres in her efforts to get what she chooses. Thus her early biography singles her out as a fascinating figure, and must come as little surprise that her later literary work is so valuable and controversial.

Having explored the difficulties Ba’albakī faced before beginning her job, and pointing out her success in pursuing education, the next section will explore those challenges the writer faced after 1957, when she began her job in the Lebanese Parliament as a secretary, until 1963, focusing on her job’s biographical significance as well as the difficulties she faced in publishing her novels.

2.3.3 Publishing Novels

The writer’s work in the parliament was important because it gave her experience and pushed her further to claim her independence and have the courage to speak and write. But her completing her studies later, in Paris, suggests that she gave priority to studies. At that time –
and indeed as very similar to the present – the Lebanese Parliament seats were divided according to sect, 54 for Christian sects and 55 for Muslim sects.\textsuperscript{169}

As a secretary of the parliament she was expected to be familiar with the Lebanese constitution, which was much influenced by French law, due to the recently ended French presence in Lebanon, except as regards religious laws and family issues. Regarding Muslim family law, the parliament generally referred to the books of Muḥammad Jawād Mughnīyah for Shiites and Subḥī Mahmasānī for Sunnis. The constitution guarantees basic individual rights and freedoms, including rights to education and work for both sexes.\textsuperscript{170} Despite the fact that the writer had embarked on her feminist agenda before working in the Parliament, it is still relevant to consider that this constitution could have strengthened her views and pushed her further in her opinions on seeking freedom for women from social traditions and all things which limit fulfilment of their rights to mobility, education, work and so on. Thus her choice of work helped and influenced her. Accad says, “According to Rose Ghurayyib, it should be noted that Baʿalbakī’s works are at least in part a reflection of the positions of the Syrian Socialist Party with which she has been connected.”\textsuperscript{171} She adds that there is an influence of the principles of al-Ḥizb al-Sūrī al-Ijtimā`ī [Syrian Socialist Party] (1936) on her. In addition, Accad assumes – though wrongly, as I believe – that the writer had contact with this party and that this is what led to its influence on her; however, there is no evidence of this. The fact that there is similarity between the writer’s political views and the principles of the above party does not show that she was influenced by that party in having those views, not least since there were other Lebanese secularist parties active at the time with similar principles – such as Ḥizb al-Taḥarrur al-ʿArabī [Arabic Liberation Party] (1952) and Ḥizb al-


\textsuperscript{170} The two books are: Muḥammad Jawād Mughnīyah, Al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhsīyah [Personal situations law] (Beirut, 1964), and Subḥī Mahmasānī, Al-Mubādiʿ al-sharʿīyah [Islamic laws’ principles], 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Beirut, 1959), http://www.mallat.com/articles/T/The%20Lebanese%20Legal%20System.pdf (Accessed March 4, 2012).

Waṭaniyyīn al-Aḥrār (1958). Moreover, at that time Arab intellectuals were often influenced by principles of Arab Nationalism and Nāṣirīsm [of Jamāl Ṭābi` al-Nāṣir] (1952), principles which included anti-Zionism, social justice, independence for Arab countries and calling for Arab countries’ unity. In addition to her political neutrality, the writer had an official position in the Parliament. Yet it is clear that her being a member of any Lebanese or Syrian party would be contrary to her interests as a neutral civil servant; thus, her having this civil service post required her to maintain her politically neutrality. Furthermore, there is no evidence of the writer being a member of any political party, neither Syrian nor Lebanese.

In all it seems that, in working at the Parliament, the writer was influenced by several factors: the Lebanese constitution, political parties’ principles, Arabic nationalism in general, and the atmosphere of political discussion in the parliament and outside it as well. In relation to the Shiite nationalism of today, during the period in question this was essentially non-existent – although there were political parties with a Shiite majority, this did not mean they were Shiite nationalists. The writer was also against religious and sectarian political parties, being a secularist who believed in separation between religion and state as will be discussed later.

Ba’albakī reveals that she wrote the first version of Anā aḥyā in her office, in the Lebanese Parliament. She says, “There, in that room [using her hand to point at the Lebanese Parliament] I wrote my novel ‘Anā aḥyā’.”

Ba’albakī initially combined being a secretary in the Parliament with being a student at the Institute of Arts at the Jesuit University. Anṭwān Ḥaydar explains, “Ba’albakī was a secretary by day and a student by night, studying and preparing the lectures and materials.”

173 In this time, there was strong cooperation and connections among Syrian and Lebanese political parties.
174 I asked Ruah Rabeeh, a Syrian journalist and a member in the mentioned party, to check if Ba’albakī is or was a member or connected with that party, and she told me that there is no any indication of Ba’albakī having been connected with the Syrian Socialist party.
175 Ba’albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni’ ah, 25.
177 Ibid.
As mentioned, she started writing early, at the age of fourteen, and she initially wrote in *al-Nahār* [The Day] newspaper under a pseudonym. This way of writing demonstrates the difficulties the author experienced. It seems as though she wrote under a pseudonym so as not to be pursued by anyone in the community for her views or for rejecting social customs and traditions. For instance, she wrote against the veil in a way that might have angered people in her community, as well as her conservative family. Furthermore, she wrote in the magazine *Ṣawt al-mar’ah* [Woman's voice] under the title “Liberated Ideas” once a month during the period 1957-1958. Shaybūb the editor of *Ṣawt al-Mar’ah* influenced Ba’albakī. She always encouraged Ba’albakī to write, and in fact considered her a budding writer from the start. However, her insistence and continued writing demonstrated that writing and publishing were significant for her. In this context, Muḥammad Mu’taṣim, within his comments on writing in general, says: “Writing is a refuge which protects the self from facing a real socially bad situation and is a level of human realization and an attitude regarding different things throughout history.” It appears that the writer used writing for self-fulfilment. Later, I will examine the extent to which she insisted on writing and/or publishing.

Shaybūb was the first to read the manuscript of *Anā aḥyā*, and she encouraged Ba’albakī to publish it. When Shaybūb saw that the publishing companies in Beirut refused to publish the novel, she published a statement to support “an emerging writer” to publish her debut effort. The need for this statement pained Ba’albakī, who asked sadly, “Is it possible to refuse an emerging writer to such a degree, to the point of begging?” She adds, “If I were an emerging male writer, this would not have happened to me, and I would not have arrived to the point of begging I have reached for no reason other than that I am a woman.”

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178 Advīk Shaybūb was born into broadcasting and poetry. She did her undergraduate studies (1951) and master’s (1969) in Arabic literature at the American University in Beirut.


writer is thus indicating the surrounding presence of the patriarchal society, pointing out the differences in the way men and women are treated by way of suggesting an explanation of the difficulties she faced in publishing.

The publisher Shi’r responded to Shaybūb’s statement, and contacted Shaybūb to publish Anā aḥyā, although they were unable to put up the amount of money needed to print it. Ba’albakī complains, “There was only one solution: to work. So I worked until I got the amount needed for the printing of the book, and that was in 1958.” This suggests that the writer was facing financial difficulty, but she did not ask her father for support despite the fact that her father had the financial capabilities to support her and her publishing. She likely wanted to maintain her autonomy and not give her father more power or control over her later. Ba’albakī began to communicate with the group of Shi’r, which allowed her to socialize with and be introduced to famous writers and poets. She got to know not only the Lebanese poet Yūsuf al-Khāl (1917-1987), who founded Shi’r in 1957 and was its prominent editor, but also the Syrian Ali Ahmad Said, who wrote under the pen-name Adonis (b. 1930), the Lebanese Unsī al-Ḥāj (b. 1937) and other Arab poets from outside Lebanon. Wāzin affirms: “The Shi’r magazine constructed a rebellious approach of not continuing with standard traditional Arabic poetry, calling for modern poetry both in structure and in contents, with opening the doors for becoming intimate not only with Western modern poetry’s styles, but also Western thoughts, norms and culture in general. Therefore, the Shi’r magazine contributed much within its translation of Western English and American thoughts and poetry.” Thus, this magazine motivated the writer to read Western and American critical thought and poetry.

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181 Ibid.
Ba‘albakī indicates how the latter group influenced her: “They gave me real openness in all meanings of the word.”\textsuperscript{184} The Shi‘r group thus not only influenced and encouraged the writer to write freely and boldly, but also helped her to continue writing. The next chapter will investigate the extent to which Ba‘albakī’s work reflects the general influence of poets and poetry, with a particular look at the possible influence of her father’s own poetic style. As regards the present context, we may note that the novelist herself acknowledges the influence poetry had on her, not only that of Arab poets, but also through her reading of work by foreign poets such as André Breton (1896-1966) and T. S. Eliot (1988-1965). She proudly admits, “By joining the Shi‘r group, I was introduced to the poetry of André Breton and Eliot … They turned my eyes and my senses to poetry and to its creative climate. I share with [the Shi‘r group] their anticipation of change, and their refusal of crass ‘canned’ forms of literature, poetry and art.”\textsuperscript{185}

The challenges Ba‘albakī faced did not stop with the release of Anā aḥyā. Rather, with the release of the novel, the communities surrounded Ba‘albakī criticized her even more roughly than before. This pained her deeply, but she did not forget those who praised and encouraged her. Hence, Ba‘albakī proudly said in 25 March, 1975, “Some complimented me, admired my style and regarded it as new. Otherwise, many attacked me. Perhaps I am the most attacked writer in this country [Lebanon].”\textsuperscript{186} Thus, Ba‘albakī received insults because of her first novel, and the criticism of her was reflected in other incidents which she recounts:

I released Anā aḥyā, and Laylá Ba‘albakī was stoned. Beirut of 1958 did not accept it; they feared its courage and its resistance. They said: what does this twenty-year-old girl know of

\textsuperscript{183}To be clear, the discussion of modern Arabic or Western poetry styles and comparing them to classical Arabic poetry is beyond the scope of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{184} Ḥaydar, “Liqā‘ ma‘a Laylá Ba‘albakī,” 74.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{186} Ba‘albakī, “Kuntu anzuru ilá al-jālisīna,” 6.
what women go through? What experience she already has in her life to write what she wrote? They said and pointed their fingers at her face. In describing her indignation and pain at the difficult reception of *Anā aḥyā* in Beirut, she indirectly reveals the reactions towards that novel. She believed that the reason for the negative attitude was the refusal of the community to change, and she argued that the community was being pushed by traditions and social concepts of male dominance which limits women’s individual rights and freedoms such as education, mobility, and work. She stressed that Beirut not only did not believe in her ability due to her young age, but also that it did not believe that her novel reflected her reality. Here, the writer asks which community’s reality was being challenged – Shiite? Sunni? In fact, neither Sunni nor Shiite were prepared to admit that she was describing reality, because this would raise problematic and complicated social issues, especially given that the writer describes sexual scenes which are forbidden for both Sunnis and Shiites. Sunni readers, though, might have considered that what the writer described was reality in Shiite communities, because Shiite communities practice Mut’ah (fixed-time) marriage, which is forbidden for Sunnis, and which some Sunni thinkers argue could lead to anarchy in sexual relationships. However, Ba’albakī never indicates which community she is referring to in her novels and short stories, and she employs real places which are mixed Sunnis and Shiites as settings, in order not to reveal which community is involved. Her avoiding specificities, however, simply led to her receiving generalized criticism from both communities: “When I wrote ‘Anā aḥyā’, I would be banned from life and would not be allowed to breathe as I like. They wanted to suffocate me with tradition and to keep the direction of my life to their whims as they inherited their life paths.”

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Similarly, Ba‘albakī has narrated the suffering and pain she endured before writing *Anā aḥyā*, suggesting that she wrote it as a scream of anger not only at society and traditions, but also the suppression of females. The novelist said:

*Anā aḥyā* was a scream that hurt and gave me not only sleepless nights, but also something fiery driving me to shout. I would like to say to my father, my mother, my neighbours in our small neighbourhood, and all I see or who pass by me: I live. I am a human being, and my problem was the problem of hundreds of thousands of women who wanted to say that they are alive. All I did was to combine and collect their voices in the pages of a book.\(^{190}\)

Thus, the writer believed she represented a group of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese or Arab women who would like to cry “*Anā aḥyā*” [I live] like the writer; she said that her novel was speaking on behalf Lebanese women – perhaps from all sects and religions in the country.\(^{191}\)

In 1960, Ba‘albakī published her second novel, *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah*. Unlike her first novel, when the writer shared details about the difficulties she faced when publishing it and afterwards, she shared no such information regarding her second novel. In fact, there is no indication by any scholar that she encountered difficulties when publishing her second novel or after its publication. Therefore, it appears that publishing her first work might have paved the way for her future literary publications. However, this does not mean that she did not have to overcome the challenges of her patriarchal society, as I will discuss later, while examining the difficulties she faced as a result of publishing her collection of short stories.

To sum up, the writer faced difficulties in publishing her first novel, both in finding a publisher and supporting its publication. After mastering those difficulties and achieving success in publishing and in pursuing her career, she continued to suffer pain as a result of the communities’ attitudes and responses to her novel. She said that she wrote the novel to express her pain and suffering which she experienced from her parents and communities, but

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\(^{190}\) Ḥaydar, “Liqā’ ma’a Laylá Ba‘albakī,” 74-75.

\(^{191}\) In 1960, Ba‘albakī published her second novel, *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah*. However, it appears that she did not face difficulties in publishing it in the way she had with publishing her first novel.
then found that her suffering was continuing – that is to say, that although she wrote it to release herself from pain, it had the opposite effect. In the meantime, she experienced her career as a secretary of the Lebanese parliament which seemed to give her courage to continue seeking her individual freedom and rights and to continue to express her opinions. As the challenges facing her during the publication of her literary works diminished after her initial publication, in this study I will examine any difficulties she faced as a result of publishing her collection of short stories. Having thus discussed her childhood, education, the publication of her first novel and her early career, it is time to turn to discuss her views which she revealed in print when she was twenty-five years old in 1959.

2.3.4 An Insight into Baʿalbākī’s Views

In May 11, 1959, after having written for a while under an alias and then under her real name, Baʿalbākī presented a lecture entitled “We Are without Masks”. The lecture was organized by the Lebanese Symposium al-Nadwah al-Lubnānīyah, which was founded in 1946 by Mishāl Asmar (1914-1984) who was, as he admits in his books, influenced by French writers and culture. He was a secularist intellectual who called for unity of Lebanon and non-sectarianism. The Lebanese Symposium was not affiliated with the Lebanese feminist movement at all. Therefore, on one hand, Baʿalbākī – as a journalist, novelist and lecturer — had several opportunities to contribute to the societies or institutions of Lebanese feminist groups; but on the other hand, Baʿalbākī did not engage in any activity by Lebanese women’s groups and was not a member of any of those societies. Thus, Baʿalbākī preferred to contribute to feminist issues and to women’s concerns by writing. Furthermore, it appears that she was not able to find any women’s society or any Lebanese feminist institution that

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192 Mishāl Asmar is a Lebanese writer who published two books: *Yawmiyyāt Mishal Srūr* [Diary of Mishal Srūr] (Beirut: Dār al-Makshūf, 1938), and *Baʿda al-Mīnah wa-qablahā* [After the shock and before it], (Beirut, 1959).
matched her views or she was not accepted by women’s groups because, as previously mentioned, she joined the Shi’r poetry review group, which—as will soon be discussed—was opposed by proponents of Arabism at the time. However, this suggests that Ba‘albakī opted to contribute to feminist goals individually but not within Lebanese women’s groups.

There was an ideological conflict between two cultural currents in Lebanon: the Arabism movement and the isolationist movement. The Arabism movement hung on to Arabism, its history and heritage, rejecting everything Western or foreign. It considered Western culture and philosophy as a cultural invasion.\textsuperscript{193} However, while the journal \textit{al-Ādāb} and other magazines represented the Arabism movement, \textit{Shi’r} poetry review and \textit{al-Ḥiwār} [The dialogue] magazine represented the Isolationist movement.\textsuperscript{194} Taking into account the writer’s relationship to the \textit{Shi’r} group, Ba‘albakī belonged to the isolationist movement in Lebanon. In this context, the relationship between \textit{Shi’r} and the latter movement is that \textit{Shi’r} constructed the main and core institution of the latter movement. Sa‘dīyah Mifriḥ affirms, \textit{Shi’r} was not just a magazine; it was more a developed cultural continuous movement.\textsuperscript{195}

‘Abduh Wāzin further explicates:

\textit{Shi’r} magazine which reconsidered Arabic poetry and education was not just a poetry review which attracted modern poets who differ from each other; rather, it was a movement of destruction and construction, a movement of rebellion and establishment.\textsuperscript{196}

Wāzin here indicates that the isolation movement was mostly engaged in the destruction of traditions and the construction of alternative Western norms and thoughts— not only in Arabic poetry, but also in all Arabic cultural and educational concepts. Consequently, the latter movement was strongly opposed by Arabism’s scholars and audience. The isolationist movement was influenced by Western culture and civilization. However, that is not to say

\textsuperscript{193} In this context, a photo is attached showing Ba‘albakī meeting with some poets and leaders of the poetry review magazine belonging to the \textit{Shi’r} group and isolationist movement. That is not to say, of course, that Ba‘albakī’s joining the isolationist movement was the sole cause of her isolation from the Lebanese feminist movement.

\textsuperscript{194} Khalīl, \textit{Mawsū‘at a’lām al-‘arab}, 164.


\textsuperscript{196} Wāzin et.al., “Majallat Shi’r wa-ḥadāthah,”
that the isolationist movement did not oppose occupation by French and British forces in the Middle East. In the context of the Shi’r group’s differences which Wāzin indicates above, Unsī al-Hāj said in 1963, “We are not a movement; it means we are not a party.” Sīf al-Rājī alluded to the variety of the Shi’r group’s views: “Yūsuf al-Khāl could lead the Shi’r group, despite the contrasting views of its members, to a significant status which still exists now.” Consequently, the writer’s membership in the Shi’r group does not mean that all her ideas and attitudes are the same as of all the other members of the group.

Anīsah al-Amīn has explored Ba’albakī’s isolationist stance, comparing her actions and views to those of women who belonged to the Lebanese women’s movement. She reveals differences and similarities:

I found that we were both obsessed with the same thing: freedom, yet with a substantial difference in our point of view. She [Ba’albakī] wrote about women / individuals, only from the existential philosophy perspective founded by Sartre.

I was preoccupied by a failed conspiracy and was unaware of the individual project of Lebanese woman towards freedom, with its total community engagement.

Accordingly, on one hand, al-Amīn explains how she agrees with Ba’albakī in aiming for woman’s freedom and advancing women’s socio-economic status. On the other hand, she discovers they differed from each other in their approaches and actions. Al-Amīn thus affirms that while she was engaged in the Lebanese feminist societies and their projects, Ba’albakī opted to be occupied by feminist writing but not by joining the Lebanese feminist societies.

Here Al-Amīn does not discuss or even assert that the writer joined the Shi’r group. Ba’albakī worked individually, yet she did not isolate herself from everything around her. Indeed, she joined the Shi’r group which was strongly opposed, as previously mentioned, due to its educational and cultural Western approach and modernity, particularly modern Arabic poetry.

197 Wāzin et.al., “Majallat Shi’r wa-dars al-ḥadhāthah,”
198 Al-Amīn, “Laylā Ba’albakī,” 188.
199 Al-Amīn notes that Jean-Paul Sartre influenced Ba’albakī with his existential philosophy, a matter that is beyond the scope of this dissertation (See Al-Amīn, “Laylā Ba’albakī,” 188).
Turning, then, to her lecture, we see that Ba’albakī addresses removing the necessity for the masks of the veil, gender and social traditions. She highlights this goal in the title of the lecture: “We are without Masks.” She presents a core question in the beginning of her lecture to suggest the goal of her speech: “Who are we? […] Who are we? We will say: We are today’s generation. Who are we?” Ultimately, through her lecture, she sought to reproduce her overall conceptions and revolution. Ba’albakī tried lecturing as a way to release herself and her generation of women and men alike, considering society to be patriarchal, calling for freedom and equality, and revealing her views on society, politics and religion. The writer positions herself as one member of a new generation/group of human beings which she describes as follows:

We are human beings. We are people. We are people who think, sense, realize, appetite for, hate, surrender […] and fight. We are the human here, and experience our life inside our narrow country. And we are similar to the brothers of the human beings of the wide world, by our experiencing this life.

The writer describes herself indirectly by describing the generation/group she belongs to. She indeed talks about experiencing life freely, as women as well as men all have the right to think, to express opinions and attitudes, and to contact other/foreign cultures and education systems. In this context, Accad says: “In this speech she [Ba’albakī] urged others of her generation to oppose hypocrisy and help Lebanon to achieve its potential through honest efforts at social reform.” Accad adds that she [Ba’albakī] explains how she understands freedom and what the rebellion of her generation consists of: “We are crueller, more violent, and more miserable than the youth of America and Europe because we are still enduring a battle to gain our freedom as individuals, as a state, and as a people, whereas they are practicing freedom.”

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200 Ba’albakī, Nahnu bi-lā aqni‘ah, 6-7.
201 Ibid., 7.
203 Ibid.
Thus, the writer calls upon Lebanese people to look at other/Western cultures which support freedom and independence for their sons and daughters. Baʿalbakī seeks independence by separating from parents and families. She talks about fighting every custom or religious limitation which limits this generation or prevents it attaining its choices or goals. In this context, the writer explained her rebellious conception in her speech: “Not everything on this earth represents us and satisfies us because it was created by others rather than us.”

At the same time, she called for cooperation among all people, classes, and generations in order to practice social reform as all of society was suffering in general: “When we talk about today’s generation, we mean youth, old people, and children. The problem affects all of them and shows the relationship of each with the other.”

Socio-economically, Baʿalbakī criticized differences between socio-economic classes, calling for social justice and equality. She said:

Why do my parents buy old books for me while the books of my colleague are new? Why must I work all day to get money to buy bread while the son of my boss gets a new car every year? Why does my mother prevent me from spending nights with friends in a warm bar while another mother seeks better bars and places for her daughter to spend time and have fun? Why is my father illiterate while the grandmother of my friend is educated?

We see the writer’s calling on the need to bridge gaps between social classes not only economically, but also in other spheres of life—in particular, education. Although Baʿalbakī pointed out socio-economic differences between social classes, she did not provide any way to bridge these differences. Still, her raising these questions contributed to making people aware of the issue.

Religiously, the writer calls for unity between Islam and Christianity, on the grounds that the fundamental role of religion is to promote progress in human life in this world. In this context she said, “Christianity and Islam are one religion; they are two tools for making this

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205 Baʿalbakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqniʻah, 8.
206 Ibid.
207 Ibid., 14.
life alive and improving and for ensuring God’s existence.”²⁰⁸ Ba‘albakī points to parallels between the major principles in both religions; for example, she draws a link between Zakāh in Islam and the emphasis on charity in Christianity. She explained this link: “God in Islam is in Zakāh and in Christianity is in charity.”²⁰⁹ The writer presents some similarities, but the question is still how to unite these two religions as she failed to discuss inherent differences and answer the question in light of such differences. Instead, Ba‘albakī retreated from calling for the uniting of the two mentioned religions and moved to a more practical, real idea. She said:

We are responsible in Lebanon. In this little and fine country, which embraces Muslims and Christians, they all believe in one God despite worship differences. We are called to create harmony between these two religions, focusing on human interest here [Lebanon] and all over the world too.²¹⁰

The writer claims that a path of harmony between the two religions could offer principles for a better life all over the world. Such a proposal is of particular relevance to Lebanon, which she describes as a sectarian society while also calling for people to ignore others’ religious belongings. Religion, Ba‘albakī thinks, is not for stoking conflict, but for building cultures and shaping the history of nations. She lays stress on this need for harmony, saying that all believe in the same unitary God and that in a similar way the people of Lebanon should realize that they too are all the same, since they are all Lebanese.²¹¹ Ba‘albakī appears to be motivated by her marriage to a Christian male, as well as by other possible motives, to serve as an ideal example for the harmony she was suggesting. Islamic law prohibits the marriage of a Muslim female to a Christian male; thus, the writer gave priority to serving as an ideal example for the mentioned harmony rather than adhering to religious laws.

Ba‘albakī shows herself to be deeply concerned with religious questions, although resistant to committing herself to established religion. She questions certain prominent

²⁰⁸ Ba‘albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah, 32.
²⁰⁹ Ibid., 31.
²¹⁰ Ibid., 33.
²¹¹ Ibid., 30-33.
religious Islamic principles, asking: “Who is God? Why do I worship him in this way like my family? Why do I not worship him in the fine way of our neighbours?” The notion of a life lived solely with the aim of praising God appears to her to be a neglect of human potential: “How does God accept me to be his servant but at the same time to have no job except to worship him?” There is a question here about whether she seeks complete freedom from worship, or wishes only to balance it with other activities. Clearly she wishes that people would have jobs and other goals in their lives than worship, but this raises the question of whether worship should go alongside these goals, or be completely dropped.

Ba’albakī’s concept of what God is helps to answer this question. Her view of God is not as a patriarchal dominating figure, but as a spirit which enhances human life and makes it meaningful. Thus, she says, “God is in everything that enlarges human life, and lets him be happy and with freedom. God is in the effort of exploring the wealth of humanity and nature.” We see then that her feminist views are expressed through the way she views religion, in that they both reject patriarchy, and also that religion becomes relevant to her views about progress in society and culture. In her view, religion “was founded for the development and expansion of the world and life.” Thus, we see that the writer thinks religion should motivate people to live effective and progressive lives, participating in cultural life and human needs, but should not be an oppressive force which holds back progress and the pursuit of freedom.

Politically, the writer deals first with issues external to the Arab world, and then turns to talk about how she sees the ideal modern state. Ba’albakī said in her speech: “If there is anyone, in this hall, who disagrees with us, then this one will strengthen the right of Israel—the heroine in colonialists’ view—justify Israelis’ assault against our countries, and clean its

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212 Ba’albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni’ah, 30.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid., 31.
215 Ibid., 33.
hands of our martyrs’ blood.”

Thus, the writer opposes the Western attitude which generally saw Israel as the heroine within the Arab–Israeli conflict. She pays her respects to those Arab and Palestinian martyrs who have been killed in the course of that conflict. In addition, she expresses solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle.

Ba’albakī required two condition for youth’s cooperation with their states. In her speech, she said:

Today, the youth, in every country in the world, requires two conditions to be ready to cooperate with the states. The first condition is whether the state is too small to fight for freedom from occupation or being a follower. The second condition is whether the state is too big not to intervene in the affairs of others and not to try to occupy small states.

In the context of Arab countries’ independence, the writer calls for a complete end to colonialism, including the overthrow of those local rulers who cooperate with colonialists. Further, she opposes the intervention of big states, principally the USSR and the USA, in the internal affairs of small, weak, and poor states, among which she includes the Arab countries. Interestingly, Ba’albakī pointed out some characteristics of the youth in all countries in the world, including the Arab and Lebanese youth. She said:

The state, whatever its regime, the nations, and the youth of these nations seek to achieve global brotherhood which depends on making peace in this world; respecting humanity and the sanctification of life. Therefore, it will be not another world war. The only exception is fighting as a defence but not fighting for attacking others.

Thus, the writer affirms the value of life and opposes world wars; on the other hand, however, she agrees with the need to recruit youth into the military forces in order to end colonialism and the Israeli occupation.

She disagrees with the principle of cultural relativism, and also with the idea that progress can only proceed to a certain level before it must collapse back on itself. She argues

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216 Ba’albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni’āh, 25.
217 Ibid.
that cultures should reach their pinnacles and then sustain themselves at that level, without collapsing.  

In addition, the writer sets out how she sees the ideal modern Arab state. In her speech, she described how she sees the relationship between the state and the nation:

We here [Lebanon], and in every Arab country, are ready to cooperate with the state to achieve the independence and welfare of the people. We cannot cooperate with the state without discussing the laws and orders it makes for us [...]. The state for us is exactly like the piece of bread which is will be insignificant if it will not serve and let humanity survive.

She added: “We want the state to give every citizen equally the right to choose his/her representative.” Thus, Ba’albakī calls for secular democratic regimes based on fair elections to enable the nations to choose their rulers. Moreover, she opposes those regimes which are based on the inheritance of power, on the grounds that they are unfair.

Her call for independence is grounded in part on her view that there are enough Arab intellectuals to secure the future progress of Arab countries. Therefore, she calls for investment in Arab intellectuals who can make a significant contribution to progress their countries. In this context, she said:

The state is a nuclear laboratory which addresses serving human beings as Dr Salwá Nassār said to us: “Every Lebanese or other Arab nuclear professional is without a homeland, without relatives, without freedom and without independence if there is not in Lebanon and in every Arab country a centre for nuclear studies.” This is our concept of the modern state.

Thus, the writer calls on Lebanon and other Arab countries to establish centres for nuclear studies as a way to attract Arab nuclear experts employed abroad to return to their homelands. The writer sees one of the state’s duties as providing relevant posts for its citizens. Furthermore, one could assess Ba’albakī’s calling for the establishment of such centres and nuclear studies in Arab countries as delivering a political recommendation to Arab leaders regarding the Arab–Israeli conflict. Although nuclear knowledge could be used for peaceful

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219 Ba’albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni’ah, 26.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid., 28.
222 Ibid., 27.
223 Ibid., 26–27.
targets, this latter view of the writer could have provided further cause to motivate Israeli authorities to confiscate Anā aḥyā in 1960s.

In the context of setting out the ideal modern state, Ba‘albakī significantly added: “While we return God to his throne in order to face our political problems ourselves, our weapon is our belief in our freedom; we are announcing that we are making efforts to build a new state which represents us.”224 The writer again affirms her secularism and justifies the separation of religion and the state to ensure freedom and the opportunity to create a modern state. This apparent view comes in line with the fact that—unlike the Lebanese women’s groups which did not declare any opposition to the Iranian Revolution (1979) —Ba‘albakī did in fact declare, in a May 1979 interview, that: “The Iranian Revolution [1979] will lead to a non-democratic regime. It will limit women’s freedom and decrease in particular their social and political participation.” 225 This clear opposition by the writer against the Iranian Revolution regime (1979) provides further evidence that she was/ (is?) a secular Lebanese female writer in conflict with Muslims and Arabs who support the Iranian Revolution. This is the first time the writer declares her opposition to a specific (and named) regime, and this could be because she is now in London, thus far away, and in a secure country which lets her talk freely. As a result of her latter attitude, Iranian journalists such as Ḥusayn Shukr and Muhammad Khaliq called on her to retreat from her oppositional attitude against the Iranian Revolution, considering her revealed view to be “a forgery of the real characteristics of the Iranian Revolution because it brings for Iranian citizens human rights, women’s freedom and democracy.” 226

In summary, the writer sees herself as belonging to a Lebanese generation of human beings who, like people in the West, seeks freedom from every custom, tradition and

224Ba‘albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqmā‘ah, 27.
religious law which limits them, seeking progress and cooperation with other cultures and societies for attaining their targets. Politically, the writer calls for independence, democracy, secular regime and progress in the Arab countries, including Lebanon. She opposed the Iranian Revolution (1979) as a regime, saying that religion could not be a relevant framework for freedom and equality between the sexes.

Regarding religion, she raises questions about major religious Islamic traditions relating to God. She asks: Who is He? Where is He? … However, at the same time as she questions tradition, we see that she uses religion to point to the need for progress and the development of culture and human life around the world. In addition, she calls for unity between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon. In my view, she uses religion to attract people to her views, and in order to drive forward progress in the whole orientation of society and culture.

Thus, we see Ba‘albakī expressed not only feminist visions, but also she criticized cultural, economic, political and social realities of twentieth-century Lebanon.

Having discussed her main views, as they can be discerned in the available sources, I now turn to analyze the complications of the publication of her collection of short stories in 1963, particularly with respect to the considerations that brought her before the Beirut Lebanese Court in June, 1964.

2.3.5 Safīnat Ḥanān ilá al-Qamar, and Ba‘albakī’s Court Case
In Paris, during academic year 1960-61, Baʿalbakī took advantage of her time to write the first version of her collection of short stories, *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*, published for the first time in 1963.\(^{227}\)

The collection provoked the Lebanese authorities to bring the writer to the Lebanese Court in June, 1964. The defence Muḥsin Ṣaḥīm commented on that trial in 1964: “This is the first time in the history of Lebanese court proceedings and in the history of Lebanese literature that an author, well known not only in Lebanon and in the Arab world but also in Europe, has been tried in a Lebanese court.”\(^{228}\) The Ministry of Media had licensed the book, *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*, and eight months had passed since it was published. In addition, more than eight months had passed since several stories from the collection had been published in different magazines such as *Ṣawt al-Marʿah*, *al-Ḥiwār* and others. After coming back from Paris, Baʿalbakī returned to work as a journalist in several newspapers and magazines, in Beirut, such as *al-Nahār*, *al-Usbūʿ al-ʿArabī* [The Arabic week], *al-Ḥawādith* [The events] magazine and *al-Dustūr* [The constitution] magazine.\(^{229}\) However, in June 1964, the Lebanese authorities not only began confiscating the book from the publisher and various public libraries, but also detained the writer for questioning for three-and-a-half hours, and then brought her to trial.\(^{230}\)

The immediate reason for this was a comment in the Cairene magazine *Ṣabāḥ al-Khayr* [Good morning], in May/June 1964, by a commentator called Nādyā who had quoted in her commentary two passages from Baʿalbakī’s collection of short stories. The two quotations are from the story “‘Indamā yatasāqaṭu al-thalj” [When snow falls]. Nādyā asserts, “I felt a chill and felt disgust. I said to myself uncomfortably Oh, Lady Laylá Baʿalbakī.

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\(^{228}\) Fernea and Bezirgan, *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, 281.

\(^{229}\) Shaaban, *Voices Revealed*, 182.

\(^{230}\) Fernea and Bezirgan, *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, 280-281.
What is licking and what is Arabic tongue? What is soft, what is smooth and what is literature? To hell with this literature, O Shaykhah!”

The two quotations, from Ba‘albakī’s story, are:

He lay on his back, his hand went deep under the sheet, pulling my hand and putting it on his chest, and then his hand travelled over my stomach …

He licked my ears, then my lips, and he roamed over me. He lay on top of me and whispered that he was in ecstasy and that I was fresh, soft, dangerous, and that he missed me a lot.

Ba‘albakī showed her surprise, pain and grief as caused by the Lebanese police interrogating her. She comments on the questions the police asked her in June, 1964:

I was unable to hide my surprise when he asked me: Why do you write in this way? I asked myself, does anyone have the right to ask a writer: Why do you write the way you do? I answered in a loud voice: I did because I consider myself to enjoy the freedom of opinion, thought and action granted to every person in Lebanon.

Are adolescents not turned on after reading your books, and thus they need to be confiscated?

So I answered him the book speaks about human beings, people, and characters in this country. My book portrays reality in a literary and artistic manner. If you must confiscate it, then it is more correct to confiscate human being here because this is their substance.

Question: Why did you use this word specifically [licking]?

I did not answer.

These questions indicate clearly the lack of expressive and artistic writing freedom for Lebanese writers at that time.

The writer explains why she did not answer the latter question:

What would I say? Do I have to explain why I used this word, in a moment of artistic inspiration? Who is the guardian of talent we have here in Lebanon? Are the Ethics Policing the Judge? Who is the Punisher? They take one word for charging me, ignoring all other words in that text.

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233 Fernea and Bezirgan, Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, 280.
234 Ibid.
Soon after her questioning in June 1964, Ba‘albakī comments on her reaction to the general interrogation: “The questioning ended, and heavy minutes crawled in my eyes. The silence increased my anger and silent repudiation. The Police intended to make me feel ashamed and guilty for my writing. I felt I was not only alone in a forest, but also filled with sadness.”

Despite the pain and sadness Ba‘albakī suffered, she did not dissociate herself from what she wrote. Rather, she was proud of her stories, revealing before the trial, in June 1964:

I wish to say that I do not consider myself guilty of the accusations or at fault in any way. I had not the slightest intention of offending or harming the public morality. It is true that I write in a realistic manner and I try to delineate the bare facts of life with as much honesty as possible.

This suggests Ba‘albakī’s ability to remain strong and resolute; she was not hesitant. Nevertheless, she seemed sad and pained about the cruelty inflicted upon her. Furthermore, it seems as though Ba‘albakī was highly aware that she was addressing the intelligentsia and intellectuals who believe in the freedom of the written word.

Different attitudes surfaced between intellectuals and administrators regarding Ba‘albakī’s trial. Scholars divide Lebanon’s intelligentsia into two factions. In this context, Michel Barbot argued in 1959, when introducing his translation of Naḥnu bi-lā aqnī ‘ah, that Ba‘albakī’s first novel divided readers around the world into two groups: the first includes not only Arab intellectuals who were influenced by Western civilization, but also other intellectuals who believed in freedom regardless of whether they were in the West or the East. This entire group supported Ba‘albakī and the way she wrote. The second group opposed the writer and the way she wrote, and they fiercely opposed the ideas and opinions addressed in her stories. It appears that Barbot did not mention the different attitudes of the two factions regarding her trial because it was not relevant as the trial came later in 1964. The

235 Ibid.
236 Fernea and Bezirgan, Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, 284. To be clear, I use this source often, but not the direct source because it provides a translation of the writer’s words revealed by the direct source; I use my translation into English only when there is no available previous translation.
238 Ibid.
division of scholars into two factions related to the writer actually emerged with her first novel, but her trial further highlighted the dichotomy.

Here, I will discuss several reactions from the two factions, depending primarily on the mentioned source of Salīm.\textsuperscript{239} Two documents by Lebanese scholars were published. The first was as follows:

Regarding the right of a writer to dignity, we consider all abuses against free thinking or a writer’s dignity as an affront to the sanctity of innovation. Therefore, we repudiate the seizure of Laylá Ba‘albaki’s book as we repudiate her arrest and questioning by the vice division of the police. We perceive that consequences of these actions do not merely affect just a single author. Such consequences establish freedom, which we declare our commitment to, is exemplified by literature. Further, thinking freedom is not only the right outlet for expressing, but also a main contributor to the emergence of spiritual values and creativity of individuals and groups.\textsuperscript{240}

The second document ran as follows:

The concept of freedom with all its connotations particularly those of writing freedom is an inseparable part of Lebanon’s existence. We consider the seizing of Laylá Ba‘albaki's book and questioning her as an assault against writing freedom. This unacceptable action leads to the question: Who does have the right to censor works of art in Lebanon? Is it the vice police or the censors, at the Ministry of Media and Information, who evaluate every work of art based on its merits and what is best for the public?\textsuperscript{241}

Both documents, in addition to their denunciation of the seizure of Ba‘albaki's book and her interrogation, focus on two salient points. Firstly, they focus the importance and necessity of giving the book a chance in terms of freedom of expression. They argue that freedom prompts the author to expand her horizons as much as possible, and as a result it supports creativity. Furthermore, freedom of speech is an essential component of Lebanon’s existence. Secondly, both documents affirm that it is unacceptable that the vice police be deputized as the upholders of morality. Moreover, the second document recommends giving rights of censorship to an administrative body within the Ministry of Media.

\textsuperscript{239} This source did not mention the specific pages or dates of publication, but it was clearly published soon after the beginning of the trial.
\textsuperscript{240} Salīm, “Difā’ ‘an al-ḥurrīyah,” 2.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
Several actions in June 1964, after the beginning of the trial, are considerable. The Lebanese Ambassador in London at the time, Khalīl Taqīy al-Dīn (1906-1987), sent a letter of deep reproach and rejection regarding the trial to the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign affairs. The journalist Ibrāhīm Salāmah criticized in al-Muharrir [The editor] Lebanese magazine the Lebanese government for ignoring bribery. He presented a comparison:

Why does our government only focus on sexual morality? Why does not attempt it to counter bribery, which is daylight robbery? What is more moral, the sentence written by the writer or impeding people’s business affairs until they pay the requisite bribe? Where is the immorality more blatant and obvious, in Safīnat hanān ilá al-qamar or in the three Russian ships loaded with refined sugar, which sold their contents for prices well known to the population?

Salāmah was deeply opposed to the confiscation of Ba‘albakī’s book. Al-Khāl, in Shi’r, considered Ba‘albakī’s trial to be “positive publicity for Lebanon” – since it raised international awareness that many Lebanese were actively engaged in defending freedom of expression, even in the face of suppression by the authorities. Jamīl Jabr wrote on the subject for the prominent Lebanese newspaper al-Jarīdah [The newspaper]: “It is a case concerning the dignity of an author and respect for a certain viewpoint. It is a case concerning freedom and Lebanon’s pride.” Rafiq Khuri (b. 1936), the editor of al-Nahār, was of the opinion that “Is it not enough that they eliminate our political rights, without eliminating our rights of literary expression too?” His comment is notable, because of the implicit connection he draws between political and literary freedom. In addition to the opposition to Ba‘albakī’s trial and the objection to the confiscation of her book, these public attitudes demonstrate that critics and intellectuals not only called for the freedom of speech, but also championed the author’s right to such freedoms. They argue that these kinds of freedom are the cornerstones of Lebanon’s existence.

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242 Khalīl Taqīy al-Dīn is a Lebanese novelist too.
244 Ibid., 3.
The second faction opposed Ba’albakī and supported her being tried. They justified their opposition to her on the grounds that she was writing explicitly on sexual relationships. They argued that writing on sexual relationships is not suitable given the conservative nature of Lebanese society. They opposed Ba’albakī’s resistance against social customs and beliefs. For example, after the beginning of the trial in 1964, Frīḥah Sa’īd wrote in Al-Ṣayyād [The fisher] Lebanese magazine, “How can Laylā Ba’albakī write sexual literature, while sexual literature deals with the sum of experience? Laylā is a young woman of a certain age. Is it possible for a girl, at her age and position, to have lived as Iḥsan Abdul Quddus did or as I have lived in order to deal with sexual issues?”

Frīḥah did not note that when Ba’albakī published her short story collection Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar she was twenty eight-years old. Notably, there is no consensus among this faction that Ba’albakī was indeed too young to be knowledgeable about such things, as Frīḥah had claimed. Meanwhile, Jarīdat al-Sha’b [The people’s newspaper] Lebanese newspaper published inflammatory comments about Ba’albakī, “If Ba’albakī wants to live amongst the filth and the dogs, she must do so alone without exposing other people to it … She is not realistic and not an artist writer at all.”

Considering the division of Lebanese intellectuals into two factions, it is important to assess the position of the Lebanese feminist or women’s groups as regards Ba’albakī’s book and trial. The Lebanese women’s groups not only mostly opposed Ba’albakī’s book and views, but also called on the Lebanese authorities to try her. For instance, the Lebanese poet and writer Thurayyā Milḥis (b. 1925) wrote an article after the beginning of the trial in 1964 in al-Hasnā’ Lebanese magazine, calling for the writer to be “disciplined by a group of

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246 Ibid., 2. The editor (who wrote the article) does not indicate the date of the mentioned article but he notes that the article was unsigned (meaning that the writer was not named). In addition, a search for the article in Jarīdat al-Sha’b showed that it was not available for that time.
thinkers and taskmasters. If this group will fail, then there is no scope for blaming the police for interrogation."^{247}

Milḥis, who belonged to the Lebanese women’s groups, called on the Lebanese authorities to censure Ba‘albakī. Al-Sayyid highlights the Lebanese feminist groups’ attitudes: “The surprising thing is that the Lebanese feminist women’s groups rejected the book [by Ba‘albakī] and called for its burning. Moreover, they considered that the writer had deviated from the norm, and committed an abnormal act that is impermissible to young women.”^{248}

Thus, al-Sayyid contributed to the identification of the Lebanese women’s groups’ attitude towards the writer. That is to say, there was a conflict between the writer and Lebanese women’s groups. No doubt that the Lebanese feminist groups’ strategy was to improve women’s social status gradually, without entering into conflict or confrontation. That is to say, there is a disparity between Ba‘albakī’s perception of feminism and that of the Lebanese women’s groups. Additional reasons include the fact that the Lebanese women’s groups did not support the writer because she did not join any group of them and simply did not support their programmes either. Thus, there were several reasons why the Lebanese women’s groups did not support the writer.

In the end, the Court of Appeals issued a ruling on the 23rd of July 1964, which was different from that of the first court decision. The Court dismissed the prosecution’s request for detention and fining of Ba‘albakī. Instead, it judged her innocent and ruled that all copies of the book should be returned to their rightful owners. The Court explained and justified its decision as follows:

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^{247} Salīm, “Difā‘ ‘an al-ḥurrīyah,” 3. The editor (who wrote the article) does not indicate the date of the mentioned article. In addition, searching for the article in al-Ḥasnā‘ showed that it was not available for that time.

The Court views the defendant, Layla Ba’albakī and her book Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar as follows: Her intention was to portray, realistically and truthfully, her characters as she saw them moving on the bare stage of life. She gave to acts and emotions their accurate names in order to dramatize the idea which she was presenting. Just as a human being exposes his real self in front of a mirror in order to see clearly, and hopefully improve, its faults and its uglinesses, so does the book in question use realism to help the reader see life more clearly. The stories in question do not arouse sexual instincts or harm public morality … And therefore, the court finds that, since such efforts do not constitute a crime which is subject to punishment, the court’s judgment is that all procedures against the defendant should cease immediately.249

Ba’albakī welcomed this decision, describing it as deliverance not only for her, but also for all artists, writers, and people in Lebanon. She said in July 1964:

The day of our deliverance has come, yes our deliverance. I am honoured to have been the reason behind this historical event. I consider today’s ruling as being a medal earned in the battlefield. In addition, I account what happened to me as being the most incredible story despite its painful moments. Now, I can continue walking in the light.250

On one hand, even though Ba’albakī suffered pain and sorrow, she seemed proud to sacrifice herself for the cause of freedom and free speech. On the other hand, the writer considered the court’s ruling to be a green light for her to continue creating and writing. Despite this ‘green light’, Ba’albakī in fact stopped writing for several decades. That is to say, the writer failed to assess/appreciate the court’s impact on her. However, one aim of this thesis is to analyze why Ba’albakī stopped writing.

Not only did Ba’albakī welcome the Court’s ruling, but also several Lebanese newspapers and intellectuals, especially those who championed her cause. In July 1964, soon after announcing the court’s decision, the defence lawyer Salīm said:

The acquittal of the writer by the Lebanese judicial system means a victory of justice over those who wanted to violate freedom in Lebanon. It also means that intellectuals continue to enjoy their full rights of writing and speech. Laylá Ba’albakī had the honour of sacrificing as well as paying tribute to this cause. The Lebanese judiciary system has the pride to prove that it is the grand guarantor of freedom.251

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249 Fernea and Bezirgan, Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, 289.
250 “Mādhā baqiya mina al-riwā’iyah Laylá Ba’albakī?”
251 Ibid.
Salīm expressed high appreciation for Ba‘albakhī’s position, as well as her resilience and persistence in the battle of her trial. He argues that her strong position had a strong impact on the final decision of the court.

What were the real reasons behind the trial? The Lebanese poet Unsī Al-Ḥāj believed the real reason behind Ba‘albakhī’s trial was political, not moral, and did not relate to the language of sex as many believed. In July 1964, he said: “Ba‘albakhī’s trial stemmed from the conflict between the state and writers. Authorities are aware that writing is always working towards social or political change or both. Therefore, the State and literature are always in conflict.”

Like al-Ḥāj, Shaaban rejects the idea that the real reason for the trial was moral, and also claims that it was political. She points to certain indications of political positions that emerged in Ba‘albakhī’s first novel, which had bothered the ruling authority. Shaaban argues:

The reason behind bringing a writer such as Laylā Ba‘albakhī to court for publishing her novel, Ana ahya [Anā aḥyā, 1958] was not at all sexual, as it was claimed, but political. Ana Ahya is a sophisticated political novel that links men’s negative stance towards women’s equality to their negative political attitude towards their country.

We see, though, that Shaaban was confused on the issue of the trial, as Ba‘albakhī’s trial was in the wake of Safīnat hanān ilā al-qamar, not the novel Anā aḥyā. Shaaban’s view may be reconstructed, however, as suggesting that the authorities took advantage of the controversy over Safīnat hanān ilā al-qamar to punish the writer because of Anā aḥyā.

Like al-Ḥāj and Shaaban, Al-Ra’y Nyūz [The opinion news], on 26 April 2011, argued that the reason was indeed political, and refers to the dominance of political ideologies in Lebanon, such as Ba‘th Party principles which did (and does) not accept any deviation from its doctrine. While al-Ḥāj and Shaaban have definite explanations for the writer’s trial, Ba‘albakhī has never offered a single or stable view. Therefore, I turn to examine her different

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252 “Mādhā baqiya mina al-riwā‘iyah Laylā Ba‘albakhī?”
253 Saeed, “Documenting Arab Women Novelists,”
254 “Mādhā baqiya mina al-riwā‘iyah Laylā Ba‘albakhī?”
explanations. In a 1979 magazine interview by Anṭwān Ḥaydar, she considered the reason to be a response to her support for and demand for legalizing civil marriage. In a television interview with Unsī al-Ḥāj, Ba‘albakī suggested, “My surprise was increased, when the real reason behind my trial was revealed. It was my opinion on civil marriage. I called for civil marriage within a television program that ‘some’ did not like. I exempt myself from naming them.”

Thus it appears that Ba‘albakī is here proposing a political reason, since punishing people for their opinions by authorities is a political action and decision. Accordingly, it seems as though Ba‘albakī does not differ from al-Ḥāj and Shaaban in their interpretation of the real unrevealed causes of her trial. In a 1996 interview by Campbell, she said, “I was tired because of them [short stories], levelling charges of insulting public morals against me.” In other words, she retreated from her previous explanation to argue that her trial was because of her writing on sexuality in *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*. This suggests that the writer was not consistent in her explanations to the court, although this could be because she was constantly updating her information and becoming more aware of different aspects in addition to possibly being influenced by other scholars.

She indicated that it was the Egyptian papers’ comments as well as public opinion which led the Lebanese authorities to accuse her of immoral writing. She asserted, “The Lebanese authorities not only monitor creative people and writers, but also suppress their opinions as well as their abilities.” Given the suggestions about the close connection between artistic and political freedom made above, this explanation can also be read as a political one. Thus, she seems to have returned to her explanation from 1979 despite the fact that the core challenge she faced had already become evident: She not only does not seem to know precisely why she was brought to court, but she also failed to assess the impact of that

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258 Ibid.
challenge on her. Yet we can see that all of her explanations are connected to the political approach of the patriarchal system. In this context, Muḥammad Barādah argued that the real undeclared reason of Baʿalbakī’s trial was the irritation of patriarchal society with the voices of women.259 He suggests, “that society and the authorities together wanted Baʿalbakī to give up her views and her criticisms of patriarchal norms.”260 Thus, Barādah brings us back to the conflict experienced by Baʿalbakī with the community, which confirms Baʿalbakī’s continuing suffering.

In summary, then, we may note that publishing Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar brought the writer to court, and that this trial in turn brings us back to the conflict between Baʿalbakī and the community. In this context, Baʿalbakī seems to lean towards Barādah’s view of the matter. He highlights not only the conflict between authorities and writers, but also the shackles on publishing. Baʿalbakī believes all these challenges are a result of the Lebanese authority as well as the patriarchal society in their opposition to her writing style and content. Thus, the real reason is the political attitudes of the Lebanese authorities, which were motivated by communities’ and individuals’ attitudes within a patriarchal society.

Having discussed the difficulties and conflicts the writer faced and coped with, including her court case, I now turn to investigate interpretations of why she ceased writing or publishing.

2.3.6 Baʿalbakī’s Cessation of Writing/Publishing

In 1965, Baʿalbakī married Anṭwān Tiqillā in a civil ceremony in London, and went on to give birth to a boy and two girls. In Beirut, after her trial in 1964, the writer continued her journalistic writing, contributing to several newspapers and magazines including al-Dustūr,

259 Barādah, “Al-Marʿah wa-al-ibdā’”
260 Ibid.

In 1975, Ba‘albakī immigrated to London with her family and stopped journalistic writing. That is to say, she withdrew altogether from the cultural scene. Ba‘albakī explains this withdrawal and her emigration as being a part of her desire for life and peace. In a 1979 interview by Ḥaydar, she criticized the war:

I am here in London because I chose not to die in a terrible war, which I neither condone nor believe in. When the war hit home, I was overwhelmed by a desire to be with my husband and my children, and not to allow anyone armed to kill us. I reject the Lebanese rulers and leaders, and hope that they all rot for what they have done.261

Thus, Ba‘albakī immigrated to London seeking security for herself as well as her family. She aimed to be away from death, destruction and war, which she rejected. She attacked the leaders, rulers and all involved in the war, describing them as corrupt and uncivilized. She goes on to describe the war as a grave shock not only to her, but also to all people of Lebanon. Consequently, Ba‘albakī strongly opposed the Lebanese civil war (1975). Instead, she called for peace and stability, and a non-sectarian life. Furthermore, in a recent interview with Sirtāḥ in April 2010, she still suffers from the shock of that war, saying, “Believe me, I am about 75 years old, and I still feel like I did that day [when the civil war began] which hurt and caused sadness to me and to my family, the day on which we escaped from here [Beirut] so as not to be killed by others in that war.”262

Psychologically, one could consider this situation the writer faced as a shock. On one hand, she suffered from the aforementioned stresses of belonging to a patriarchal society. On the other hand, and contrary to Lebanese women writers such as Ghadah Al-Samman and Hanan al-Shaykh, the Lebanese civil war (1975) led to her withdrawal and disappearance from the cultural scene altogether. Thus, starting from 1975, Ba‘albakī vanished from cultural and

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journalistic spheres except for rare interviews. Roseanne Khalaf comments: “After she [Ba‘albakî] had told her stories, instead to fight for women's rights’, she disappeared.” Khalaf here affirms that the writer not only ceased writing, but also stopped any feminist activity – although in saying this, it seems as though Khalaf betrays that she is not aware that there is no indication of any such feminist activity on Ba‘albakî’s part, except writing fiction and delivering one lecture.

Ba‘albakî’s trial not only caused her pain and sorrow, but also formed a prominent as well as an influential juncture in her life. It appears that the impact of this trial was significant for her personally, as well as being influential more widely. This trial brought Ba‘albakî suffering which did not end with her acquittal. Ba‘albakî said:

They persecuted me even in their prayers to their Gods. I was often hurt … For the initiative writing, a voice is sadder than even death. My acquittal did not compensate me for the deeper inner pain that prevented me from writing and publishing for a long time. The writer describes her trial as a deep wound. It seems as though the trial caused her ongoing tragedy and permanent pain, which had a negative effect on her psychology as well as her creativity. As for the psychological effect, the trial could have caused her frustration or shock that prevented her from continuing her writing or publishing, as she herself suggests. The above quotation, then, is a clear instance of the writer explaining why she stopped writing and/or publishing after 1964. Likewise, it appears that her broken promises verify her continuing suffering. For example, in 1975, in an interview in al-Muḥarrir, Ba‘albakî said that she would publish a new novel possibly within two months. She promised that her new novel would reflect not only her feelings, but also her experience of the last ten years. Furthermore, in an interview with al-Hawādith in July 1979, she assured readers she was about to publish a new novel. This time she revealed her future novel’s title, “Aḥbalu bi-
Masīḥ wa-akhjalu” [Pregnant with the Christ, I am bashful]. In this interview, Ba‘albakī said her coming novel would be the summary of her experiences over the last twenty years.\textsuperscript{266} However, her experience, then, had not detracted from her ability to write fiction, but had made her hesitant or unable to reveal what she wrote. Strictly speaking, then, it would be proper to speak of her ceasing to publish, not ceasing to write. In a third instance, narrating her biography in 1996, she said, “Now, I am writing a new attempt in linking Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar with the reality of the destruction I have lived, the horror and fire, and erasing memories.”\textsuperscript{267} Here, the writer talks of a new fiction that seems to be the same one she mentioned in 1979, although she did not mention the previous title revealed in 1979. However, the writer provides less clear biographical data this time. In a recent interview with Sirtāḥ, on April 19, 2010, Ba‘albakī made a new promise to publish an autobiography in addition to a collection of short stories, she stressed that such a works would reflect all those long years.\textsuperscript{268} We see that she now specifies her text and gives clearer information regarding her new text. This could be additional evidence that she is still talking about the same text that she began to write in 1964, but she seems to be revising, adding to, and omitting information.

While the writer talked about a new novel in 1975 that would reflect her experiences and life over the previous ten years, in 1979 she said that she would publish an autobiographical novel based on her experiences over twenty years. She revealed its title, verifying that it would be an autobiographical text, and indicated the core aspect of her biography to be an unrevealed experience since 1965. In 1996, she talked about an autobiographical novel but did not repeat her suggested title (from 1979). In 2010, she said she had written her autobiography and a collection of short stories. Thus, it seems that the writer is telling us about the same text which she began and is continually revising to include

\textsuperscript{266} Ḥaydar, “Liqā‘ ma‘a Laylā Ba‘albakī,” 75.
\textsuperscript{267} Campbell, A‘lām al-adab al-‘arabī, 336.
additional experiences, without yet publishing it. This suggests that she was not facing difficulties in writing, but rather in finishing and then releasing it. She has not explained why she did not publish what she had already written. She does not reveal certain details, either. The writer seems to be afraid of the responses of the patriarchal Arab and Muslim communities because her new autobiographical text could reveal her experience—in particular, her civil marriage as a Muslim woman with a Christian husband and their life in London.269

Although the writer has continued to make promises about revealing a new text, she has not kept any of those promises to date. In this context, the writer seems to be maintaining a deliberate ambiguity, and gives indefinite answers to questions by journalists such as Sirtāḥ.

However, it also appears that Ba‘albakī is referring – albeit sometimes indirectly – to the impact of her trial every time journalists ask her about her cessation of writing. At root, then, it seems as though her trial was the main factor that has led her to adopt silence and to stop publishing, although not to stop writing. Or at least, this is the impression she wishes to give.

Ba‘albakī talks about fire and destruction in describing her experiences, which she says she will reveal more about in her new text. Thus it seems we can surmise that Ba‘albakī’s suffering did not end with her civil marriage to a Christian, nor with her immigration to London with her husband and children. And in particular, her suffering did not end with her cessation of publishing.

In her interviews, Ba‘albakī always demonstrates that she is conscious of the fact that she has ceased publishing, and tries to explain it. For instance, while making some autobiographical comments she narrated her memories by way of trying to justify her stopping writing:

269 As we have seen, both civil marriage and a woman marrying a Christian are forbidden according to Islamic rules generally.
They said: “Laylá Ba’albakī married ten years ago, so she is no longer producing. She stopped writing, the marital foundation consumed her. Marriage stops female writers. I say that marriage does not stop female writers from producing. Nor does a man, on the contrary stability is necessary for production. Before my marriage, I looked for personal stability to protect me from the defects that surrounded me. Any production or effort requires a minimum level of stability, and marriage provides the minimum. What delays production are children. Pregnancy, birth and upbringing are a difficult experience that was not valued except by those that have experienced it. Children come into the world with an open mouth awaiting food… to take… and it is the role of the mother to provide. It does not matter what is the cost. If she were forced to stop moving in the outside world, she would do so.”

Accordingly, Ba’albakī accounts pregnancy and childbirth as the reason of her cessation of writing. One could see this as not so different than the view that it was her marriage which caused her to cease writing, since marriage is what led her to pregnancy, and thus to have children who need care.

As well as this, Ba’albakī considers her desire to escape from the media to be a reason for her ceasing to write as well as for her disappearance from the cultural scene. The writer argues that she seeks silence, and denies that she stopped writing, saying rather that she only stopped publishing. Interestingly, after thirty years, the writer repeats this reason about the media and her desire for silence in an interview with Sirtāḥ in April 2010. She affirms, “I was made to withdraw from the media’s chatter, which attacked me with the worst character and considered my writing bawdiness.” Shaaban affirms that not only is Ba’albakī sensitive to the attitude of her audience, but also that she is unsure of how best to present her work to readers. Shaaban refers to Ba’albakī’s own words in the foreword of al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah (1960) to verify this claim: “The introduction to her [Ba’albakī’s] second novel reveals that the negative response of the public weighed heavily upon her mind.” Shaaban adds:

Ba’albakī’s bewilderment ran deep after she was made aware of the public response to ‘Ana Ahya’, and it worsened in the aftermath of her trial… After Laylá Ba’albakī had been accused of indecency and immorality, she was perplexed and confused and did not know how to continue.

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272 Shaaban, Voices Revealed, 67.
273 Ibid.
Likewise, her refusal to make any public appearance suggests her fear of the response of her audience. It appears that she avoids situations where readers or journalists could ask her to give further explanations of why she has ceased publishing. Evidence for this includes her refusing to give a talk at the Beirut Book Fair in December, 2009, despite her attending that Book Fair. This refusal is consistent with her mentioned desire to withdraw from the media.

Further, the writer appears to fear the official censorship of the state. In this context, she said in the 2010 interview with Sirtāḥ, “Today religious censorship is more important for the state than writing on sexuality which is so widespread nowadays within narrative works.” Here the writer could still be demonstrating some lingering suffering from her trial as today women novelists write about sexuality freely, although they often suffer for it- at least in Egypt, the Gulf, etc. She also indirectly indicates that her autobiography will likely be problematic due to her marriage as Muslim to a Christian. As she believes that giving her opinion about supporting civil marriage, combined with her own marriage and life abroad, led in part to her being brought to court, publishing her autobiography could generate new pain and sorrow for her to endure.

To sum up, then, it appears reasonably clear that the real reason behind the writer’s absence from the cultural scene since 1975 and her cessation of publishing fiction since 1963 is the surrounding social and political and patriarchal environment of her communities in Lebanon particularly and in Arab countries generally. Consequently, regardless of the reasons suggested by the writer and others, it is her fear of Lebanese Muslim and Arab patriarchal society in general that is the key factor in her reclusion. The Arab patriarchal society in general and the Lebanese in particular wanted to stop the writer’s questioning of social and religious rules and calls to free oneself from religious and social norms. The Arab patriarchal society also aimed to suppress Ba’albaki’s feminist voice, getting rid of her not only as a

writer, but also as a rebellious feminist directing a comprehensive campaign against the society of male dominance. When the writer speaks of marriage, she indicates that she would enter into it only for protection and safety within a patriarchal society.

Having investigated and interpreted the writer’s cessation of publishing and her absence from the public eye, I now turn to look at her return to the cultural scene.

2.3.7 Ba‘albakî Returns

After thirty-four years of absence, Ba‘albakî returned to the cultural scene with a prominent appearance at the 35th Beirut Book Fair, held in Beirut on the 18th of December, 2009. One might ask, then: Why did she decide to return to cultural scene? What pushed her to do so? In this context, we note that in various Internet forums Arab intellectuals not only expressed their admiration for her books, but also complained that they could not get hold of any of those books. For example, Yasmin, who lives in London and has a master’s degree in Literature said in 2006, within a website forum, “Laylā Ba‘albakî wrote in the sixties what other writers did not dare to write in the nineties […] Her writing indicates creativity […] and an interesting representation of the inner world of a woman and her conflict against everything outside her.” Yasmin expressed her desire to read those of Ba‘albakî’s books which were on sale, but said that she could not find any of them.275 In this sense, given that Ba‘albakî was returning to the cultural scene not with a new fiction but just with the old ones republished, it is clear that she was reacting to readers’ needs.

In this Book Fair, she allowed Dar al-Ādāb, in Beirut, to republish her books, including Anā aḥyā, and al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah. It is unclear why she has not also republished Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah. However, one might expect that it was because the latter

book expressed her views regarding society and culture clearly and directly, and set out that she was seeking freedom and rebellion against patriarchal society. This is additional evidence proving her fear of the response of her main audience which belongs to the patriarchal Arab and Muslim society.

Sirtāḥ ascertains that this was Ba‘albakī’s first reappearance on the cultural scene since her trial. In a December 2009 interview with Sirtāḥ, Ba‘albakī herself reveals the aspects that motivated her to reappear:

I came today to tell all the journalists like you, all the attendees of the exhibition, and everyone, that I am still alive. In addition, I want to tell you that all that my works are still in existence despite the fact that your generation maybe unacquainted with many of them since they went out of print many years ago. As a result, when I was asked to reprint them, I was extremely hesitant at first, but then I decided it is time to return. It is my reader’s right to know my works as well as to judge them as I was judged before.\textsuperscript{276}

We see Ba‘albakī still feels that she needs to express her pain in order to prove that she is still alive, as are her works. Moreover, it is clear that she is still distraught over what occurred during her trial in 1964. It seems as though she is asking readers to win victory for her.

Sirtāḥ reveals that Ba‘albakī confided in her about her fear before taking this step back into the limelight of the Arab and Lebanese literary world. Sirtāḥ reveals that the writer’s appearance in the Book Fair was designed to evaluate the reactions of Lebanese and Arab readers prior to perhaps publishing a new work. Sirtāḥ says that the writer refuses to reveal her proposed title.\textsuperscript{277} Moreover, Ba‘albakī emphasized that she did not expect anyone in the audience to come and buy her books, and that she was pleased and surprised that youth readers regarded her with admiration. Ba‘albakī said that if she had known she would be greeted so warmly by Arab readers, she would have returned to Arab cultural scene earlier.\textsuperscript{278}

Thus, the writer indirectly acknowledged that the main reason behind her absence was her concerns about patriarchal society.

\textsuperscript{277}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{278}Ibid.
Ba’albakī was an admirer of the Algerian poet and novelist Kātib Yāsīn (1929-1989), describing him as one of the giants of literature. It appears that she read Yāsīn and that he influenced her. Like Yāsīn, Ba’albakī had friendly relationships with other prominent Arab poets and writers. For instance, Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998), dubbed “the women’s poet,” was a greater admirer of her personality, her boldness and her rebelliousness as well as her fiction. Qabbani said, “I knew Laylā Ba’albakī and admired her bold nature. She is incapable of double standards and literary pretentiousness. In addition, she not only is a writer without masks, but also she writes as she lives and lives as she writes.”

Thus, Ba’albakī influenced Qabbani who not only admires her personality, but also describes her writing as bold and frank. Alongside Qabbani and Yāsīn, several other Arab literary giants befriended and defended Ba’albakī. For instance, the Sudanese poet al-Ṭayyīb Muḥammad Saʿīd Al-ʿAbbasī (1923-2007) defended Ba’albakī during the trial (1964) and published a remarkable poem entitled “Ilā Laylā Ba’albakī” [To Laylā Ba’albakī]. In this poem he presents Ba’albakī as an influential Lebanese female writer, defends her and argues that she is innocent, and calls on the Lebanese authorities to let her live and write freely.

Al-ʿAbbasī praises Ba’albakī by asserting that she has a confident personality and is an educated, enlightening and well-mannered intellectual. Moreover, in few lines he even flirts with her, saying such things as, “Ba’albakī is a pretty lady. She has fresh fingers and lips.”

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279 Kātib Yāsīn published his fiction in French.
283 Similarly, I have discovered a book whose title indicates that it concerns the relationship between Ba’albakī and the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish; however, apart from the title, I was not able to get access to this book for the purposes of this dissertation. The title is “Rasā’il Mahmoud Darwish ilā Laylā Ba’albakī [Letters of Mahmoud Darwish to Laylā Ba’albakī]”.

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Thus, we see that several Arab literary giants defended Ba‘albakī, that she in turn influenced writers such as Qabbani and al-‘Abbasī, and we note that republishing her stories and her attendance in the Beirut Book Fair in December 2009 formed a crucial step in her return to the cultural scene. In contrast, Ba‘albakī still breaks her all promises to publish a new autobiographical text and/or collection of short stories. Having investigated the writer’s childhood and education, the period in which she published her novels and the difficulties she faced as a consequence, the impact these had on her writing, and her recent return to the cultural scene, I now turn to set out the works of the writer.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the context of Ba‘albakī’s life and work, including the development of the Lebanese women’s movement and the associated rise of women’s literature, and how Ba‘albakī’s own biography relates to this. It has been shown that, despite the gains of the women’s suffrage groups, they failed to achieve a considerable women’s engagement in Lebanese politics until now. Further, we have seen that although Ba‘albakī exemplified the women’s search for freedom and equality which the Lebanese women’s movement was promoting, and although her own development as a writer was closely connected with the development of women’s journalism – which was a significant route for women to gain greater equality with men – the Lebanese women’s movements in general did not support her when she was brought to trial, mostly because Ba‘albakī’s rebellion against her patriarchal society. Nor did Ba‘albakī herself join any of these groups, nor the progressive or socialist political parties which were most associated with them or any other party. In contrast, the writer did join the Shi‘r poetry review group which addressed contributions to modern Arabic poetry and openness regarding Western culture and education in general.
Ba’albakī thus stands out as a unique and fascinating figure within the context of Lebanese women’s literature and the women’s movement in general, since not only did she rebel against her patriarchal society, but also she succeeded to do this without any support of a political party. Although she stopped publishing after the trauma of her trial, she has recently come back into the public eye.
Chapter 3. Literary Analysis of Baʿalbaki’s Novels

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out a literary analysis of Baʿalbaki’s two novels and offers a comparison between them, examining the engagement of these works in the political, economical and social realities of twentieth-century Lebanon. Further, this literary analysis focuses on how the writer employs narrative manners, styles and techniques for her feminist agenda. However, I reference the use of literary styles, techniques and devices by other writers to show their points of origin in the field.

As mentioned in Chapter One, I rely on the flexible approach of Bal, utilizing narrative analysis to focus on structure, narrative manner, style and mood. The discussion focuses in particular on the formal aspects of the novels—namely, narrative manner, polyphony (i.e., voices of narration) and the language used. I begin by examining the narrative manner, pointing out the features of the narrator and the general narration style. I then turn to the setting – that is, the aspects of time and place in which the actions narrated occur.

Describing the narrative manner and setting leads to analysis of how the conflict is dramatized via this narration. Then follows analysis of the characters, investigating their behaviour and psychology and how this contributes to the above conflict and the whole sweep of narration. Plot is “‘the dynamic, sequential element in narrative structure’, ‘the only indispensable skeleton’, and the ‘most essential’ but ‘least variable’ element of narrative.”284

Taking this significance of plot into account, finally, I turn to the plot, which is composed of the setting, the characters’ attitudes, the debates that arise, and the general tenor of the novels.

As a whole, by constructing a thorough literary analysis, this chapter not only explores to what extent the feminist perspective of the writer affects her literary work, but also examines the ways in which the writer has been influenced by poets, colloquial Levantine Arabic as well as the Lebanese public zajal.

3.2 Literary Analysis of Anā Aḥyā

The narrative of Anā aḥyā is set in Beirut between 1945 and 1958. In structure, it falls into three sections: the first section consists of eleven chapters, the second of twelve, and the third of only eight. The events of the novel revolve around Līnā Fayyād, the protagonist and heroine, who simultaneously plays the role of narrator. Līnā belongs to a wealthy bourgeoisie family and lives in a luxurious house located on one of Beirut’s beaches. She has one brother, Bassām, and two sisters, one older and the other younger than her. Līnā’s mother is uneducated housewife, her father a businessman who works in import and export as well as in general trade. He has strong relations with the forces of French colonialism. Her father and mother are major antagonists in relation to Līnā, so they can both be considered principal characters as well.

From the beginning of the novel, we see that Līnā has chosen to struggle to be free from the traditions, social concepts, and patriarchal dominance prevalent in the society around her. This struggle leads her into conflict, mainly with her family. This conflict revolves around the multiple feminist desires that the narrator struggles to achieve. The first of these is bodily ownership, which for Līnā is symbolized by the act of cutting her hair—a theme which will be discussed in depth in the fifth chapter. Alongside this, working outside the house is another symbol, this time of her desire to achieve financial independence and to achieve freedom from reliance on her father. Added to this are her desires to attend movie theatres on her own, to frequent restaurants or coffee shops; to see a physician other than the
family’s, and to purchase medication from the pharmacy – always, alone. Most of these desires fall within Līnā’s overarching desire to achieve freedom of movement, as reflected in her outings from the house, returning when she chooses, and without chaperoning or supervision by her father or mother. Furthermore, she wants to smoke cigarettes, and she has a firm desire to choose her marriage partner without the interference of her parents. While these latter two desires are revealed in the second section of the novel, all the other desires are made manifest in the first.

In the second section of the novel, Līnā meets Bahā’ Shawqī, a young Iraqi man studying at university in Beirut. Līnā becomes attached to Bahā’ and falls in love with him; he takes over her heart and mind, occupying her thoughts to the point that she waits long hours for him at al-‘Amm [Uncle] Sām’s Coffee Shop. Līnā begins skipping university, eventually dropping out completely. During one of Līnā’s father’s trading trips to London, she suffers from anaemia, which confines her to bed for a month; the illness elicits sympathy from her parents. During her work at a firm, a commercial enterprise in Beirut, Līnā receives a love letter from Walīd, a colleague; but she ignores it, since she is already attached to and in love with Bahā’. Līnā later quits the firm, citing ideological reasons: that the firm was colonial powers. But there might also be a personal reason behind her resignation, perhaps her desire to devote time to Bahā’ whom she has become preoccupied with consolidating a long-term relationship via marriage.

In the third section of the novel, the relationship between Līnā and Bahā’ becomes the major driver of events. In this section, Līnā’s father rewards her for leaving her job with two hundred Lebanese Liras. Meanwhile, for several days Bahā’ does not show up at the coffee shop to meet Līnā. This annoys her, and despite the mixed feelings she has had about her workplace, she begins to regret leaving her job – perhaps because Bahā’ has fallen short in filling the void within her, as is mentioned later on in the novel. When Bahā’ finally meets
Līnā, he tells her that he has spent his absent nights in a night club with foreign women, and that he did this as compensation for the suffering he had undergone in previous years.

In the end, Bahā’ refuses to get engaged to Līnā, for she does not match his social views. Bahā’ considers himself conservative, while Līnā is more a liberated person who believes in male–female relationships based on equality and cooperation. As a result, Līnā attempts suicide by throwing herself between a car and a train, but a passing man rescues her. Līnā cries continuously, viewing tears as a natural need; and finally she returns to her ultimate destiny, which is to be at home.

While this introduction is intended to give a general impression of the novel, the following subsections set out an analysis of the major aspects of the way the novel is narrated.

3.2.1 Narrative Manner

In this section, I analyze the three principal aspects of the narration. Ismihān al-‘Aqīl affirms the prominence and role of the narrator in general: “The narrator’s issue is quite significant due to its existence in every story. Every narration needs a narrator who provides the information about the story. The narrator is the one who carries out the role of narration and determines its order.”285 I will examine whether the role of the narrator is simply to narrate, as al-‘Aqīl says, or it goes beyond this. First, I identify and examine the features of the narrator, and investigate how the author makes these features pertain to the novel’s underlying theme and idea. Then I will point out the different narrative styles that are in use, to investigate the purposes the narrator may be serving in adopting these styles, and to try to

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point out the weaknesses and strengths in these choices of style and narration. Third, I
address the language the narrator uses in her narration, again examining its weaknesses and
strengths, and pointing out the linguistic motives which underlie her choices.

3.2.1.1 Narrator

The author has chosen that the novel Anā ḥyā be narrated in the first person. Allen
highlights that narrating in the first person is not only dominant in the novel, but also gives
importance for its title: “The very title presents a forceful statement, a challenge. The account
of family relationships and feelings is no longer given within the framework of a distant,
ominiscient third-person narrative, but shifts to a direct first-person experiential montage.”287
While Allen affirms that the title Anā ḥyā expresses “a challenge”, the title Ayyām ma’ahu
(1959) presents a romantic experience. However, in the context of narration in the first
person, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Kurdī says:

When the author of a novel uses the first person in speech, he or she intends to bring forth the
class of the narrator, and also intends to amplify it and make it the centre of the novel’s
world that he or she is narrating, and thus everything is either near or far in regards to this
class, either large or small, pleasant or unpleasant. Therefore, it becomes the standard
against which everything is measured. This makes the narrated world a relative world that is
autonomous and viewed from one individual perspective.288

Mari-Ann Berg affirms: “The I-narrator’s point of view can be employed to render a situation
or event in a certain light. For example, he or she may have a unique type of experience or
access to special knowledge in a way the other characters do not.”289 How much of what al-
Kurdī and Berg suggest applies to the novel in question? With regards the amplification of

286 “The first person narrator allows us to inhabit a fictional character more fully than it possible in any other
point of view, or even in any other form or storytelling. …
From an artistic perspective, the third person offers some fascinating storytelling possibilities not
287 Allen, “Arabic Short Story,” 86.
288 ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Kurdī, Al-Rāwī wa-al-naṣṣ al-qaṣaṣī [The narrator and narration texts], 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār
the narrator and making her the centre of the narrated world, we note that the novel is entirely narrated from the perspective of the single female protagonist. When we take into account Līnā’s desires, we see that the author has made the narrator a female protagonist who is struggling to achieve feminist desires.

Turning to the narrator’s own description of the characters, we observe clearly that she allows herself extensive space to describe and introduce herself. For instance, she says:

I am a fancy castle, just like the magnificent castles of the Empires of Rome. This castle has its slaves, markets, and animals. In it is everything that is needed to produce life, and it does not require help from outside, as it is surrounded by high walls and a multitude of ditches overflowing with water that never goes dry and never allows anyone to enter into the great kingdom. Thus am I, an independent world that cannot be affected by the flow of life or any external event that does not come from me.290

Thus, the narrator amplifies herself, and uses the fact that she is the narrator in order to expand on her identity. Further, her role as a narrator, whose job it is to tell and inform, corresponds with the way her description deploys poetic imagery and literary rhetoric. If we look at the nuances of that amplification, we sense a feminist dimension. This appears where she asserts that she considers herself independent, one who does not need others—as represented by her father, a husband, or a young man to be attached to or to fall in love with. Līnā’s approach to self-realization is dissimilar to the approach of female heroines of the female Lebanese writer Laylá ‘Usayrān (1934-2007). Sidawi says: “The female heroines of Laylá ‘Usayrān (b. 1934) achieved their selves’ fulfilments by love with the other sex (males).”291 This explains why the writer concealed the male companion in the first section of the novel: she was letting the female heroine point out her independence and not need a man—a feminist issue which will be discussed later. The first-person narration not only gives the narrator greater space to describe herself, but also helps transfer that description into a motif that is repeated frequently throughout the novel, wherein we see that Līnā keeps going

290 Ba‘albakī, Anā ahyā, 43.
back and forth, describing herself and her character in a direct way. To verify this, let us look at the following examples: “My thoughts are deep and my personality is firm,”; \(^{292}\) “I struggle with stubbornness to gather up my strength to confront the whole world”; \(^{293}\) We thus see that her statements in description of herself match her actions as she narrates them. We see, for example, that she confronts all the people who surround her: her father, mother, her boss, sisters, neighbours, etc. Of course, she exerts herself in different ways against the different sides in her conflicts. That is to say, the writer uses the first person in order to centre her protagonist and give her the chance not only to describe her surroundings from her perspective, but also to criticize it. This supports Berg’s conclusion: “An author’s reason for using a first-person narrator in a short story or a novel may be to give an insight into a particular character and how that self conceptualizes the world.”\(^{294}\)

As for the rest of the characters, the narrator does not give them a chance to introduce themselves, but rather she herself is the one who describes them, revealing them to the reader in the way that she wants. For instance, she mentions her father’s past in the manner in which he has related it to her; however, she expresses doubt as regards his narration of his own biography. This appears in her comments about how he introduces himself – she says that her father lies as completely as she lies, except for one thing: she lies in the context of her conversation with her father because he scolds her about her search for a job, while her father, according to her, lies about his past – that is, Līnā lies in order to make it possible for her to be the person she thinks she really is, while her father lies to hide this. We can see, then, why Līnā would despise her father, since his approach to life is entirely opposite to her own. Additionally, whenever Līnā, as narrator, tells the reader about her father’s lies, she is aiming to convince us using her own narration of her father’s past. Thus, Līnā the narrator takes advantage of her role as heroine and first-person narrator in order to maintain her image

\(^{292}\) Ba‘albākī, Anā aḥyā, 27.
\(^{293}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{294}\) Berg, “The monologic Sel as first-person narrator,” 39.
as the most truthful. She says: “My father, like myself, lies: does he think I don’t know his past […]” Thus, not only is the narrator not satisfied with minimizing the voices of the other characters in their descriptions of themselves, but she also comments on them – indeed, disparagingly – whenever she gets the chance to describe herself in contrast to them. For instance, here she describes her father as a liar when he tells his biography, and uses this opportunity to describe herself too. The narrator’s confession that she lies, regardless of the motive behind her lying, should perhaps decrease the reader’s trust in her narration and her voice. Furthermore, the narrator uses the present tense, which in Arabic, unless overridden by other considerations, indicates the expression of the habitual aspects of one’s character; and this in turn increases the possibility of challenging the credibility of her narration.

As regards Bahā’, he appears as an exceptional character. It should be taken in consideration that Līnā loves him and has become attached to him. This is perhaps what makes her give him a chance to introduce himself, to describe his own character and how he views himself. Fātiḥ ‘Abd al-Salām says: “The narrator could abandon his traditional role of narration, giving a character to do that without indicating his/her aim.” Yet this might, indeed, not show the narrator retreating from her narration, but is more likely a way to convince the reader of the distinctiveness of the one she hopes to marry. An example of this can be seen in what Bahā’ says about his personality:

I am a communist, and I hate communism. I am homeless in the world, chased by the fake authorities of my own country. I hate the individualist system, and most of the principles of that party contradict my own beliefs. I hate murder, but I am forced into it. I hate myself.

In another place, Bahā’ says: “As for saying that I am old, its meaning is obvious: I feel in the depths of my soul, that I have grown so much.” The narrator makes sure she gives Bahā’, her beloved, a chance to express his pains and the problems he has suffered, now or in the

295 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 28.
297 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 244.
298 Ibid., 148.
past. Thus, we see that the narrator not only gives Bahā’ a chance to describe his character, but also gives him the chance to express his past and his pain, and perhaps through this she comes to feel that he loves her – since a human being usually reveals his pain, his true feelings, and his past deprivations to those whom he loves and trusts. On one hand, Bahā’’s voice is employed to focus the protagonist, an idea that comes in line with what Muḥammad Najm says: “The characters play a significant role in clarifying the story […] they considerably highlight the main characters.” Līnā uses Bahā’ to reveal his past and pain because, as a first person narrator, her knowledge is limited. Indeed, Berg argues: “What is usually most characteristic of first-person narrators is that their perspective, and thus their knowledge, is limited, and that there is a great deal of information to which they do not have access.” Thus, Bahā’’s voice is employed to provide information where the narrator’s knowledge is limited, so his voice could increase the liability of the first-person narrator as well. But despite this, Līnā’s description and analysis of Bahā’ and his character runs deeper than Bahā’’s own description of himself. This indicates that the narrator is making sure that her voice sounds louder than any other in the novel. Let us look at what Līnā says about Bahā’: “He’s a coward! He’s a liar! He’s arrogant, proud!”; “You – Bahā’ – would like to commit suicide. You are a criminal. You are a rusted tool in the hands of the party.” We notice that the narrator comments directly on what Bahā’ says about himself or replies to him directly, and contradicts his own romantic and angst-ridden description of himself. Far from being a dramatic character, tortured by contradiction, for her he comes to seem just a “rusted tool.”

All this shows clearly that the narrator’s voice is the most dominant. Thus, one may say that the novel reflects many voices but that the narrator’s is the strongest, and that this is because

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299 Muḥammad Najm, *Fann al-qiṣṣah* [The art of the story], (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1979), 46.
300 Berg, “The monologic Self as first-person narrator,” 40.
302 Ibid., 184.
of the extensive space that she takes up and with which she describes the other characters who participate in the novel, and also through her comments on the characters’ descriptions of themselves – when, that is, she gives them a chance to do so. The manner in which the narrator describes the other characters also helps the reader to discern the character of the narrator herself. This manifests the role of feminism in this book, since Līnā, as narrator, and through the desires that were indicated earlier, is a feminist character. Al-‘Aqīl argues:

The dominant narrator is expected to be biased for its identity and symbol which the narrator supports. From this perspective the dominant narrator applies an artistic role which is always an ideological one. Thus, narrator dominance means the dominance of an ideological identity in the novel.303

However, I argue that the ideological identity of the narrator is a feminist agenda. Further, the ideological identity of Līnā’s dominant voice shows that an ego-centric style is employed in the novel. Lourdes Albuixech, pointing out the consequences of first-person narration, says: “Another consequence is the temporal superposition inevitably derived from an ego-centric style.”304 We will see later on how Līnā, as a woman with feminist views, views others. Thus, the role of the narrator here is not just simply to tell the story, but also to support an agenda.

Whereas Berg argues that it can “be difficult for a reader to determine whether the first-person narrator can be trusted or not”,305 the narrator Līnā also gives other characters a chance to describe her, which no doubt increases the objectivity of the narration and boosts the reader’s trust in it. For example, the firm’s owner says to Līnā: “You are arrogant, and your task here is to kill the arrogance in your soul with your own hands!”306, while a colleague says: “You are like me, you do not care where the money comes from. The most important thing is to have the money to achieve the greatness of your freedom.”307 We notice

303 Al-‘Aqīl, Al-Rāwī fī al-riwāyah al-urdunīyah bayna jīlayn, 143.
305 Berg, “The monologic Self as first-person narrator,” 40.
306 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 56.
307 Ibid., 178.
that the firm’s owner and her colleague accuse her of pride and of favouring money, meaning that she lives according to the principle that the end justifies the means. She does not deny it and she cannot do so because she previously criticized the firm’s owner for working for colonialist authorities. Thus, the narrator gives some of the characters a chance to express their point of view as regards her character, allowing them to participate in the drawing of her features. This in turn serves the liability of the narrator, despite, as previously indicated, being rather limited in comparison to the extent to which she allows herself to describe herself.

On the one hand, the narrator not only comments on the characters’ self-descriptions, but also comments or whispers to the reader about what the other characters say in their conversations with her – for instance, in her conversation with her father he says: “Didn’t you register your name at the American University? Haven’t I paid for your tuition?”, and then Līnā says to the reader in what seems like a whisper, as if her father should not hear her ridiculing him to the reader: “I was refreshed by the thought that I should lie to him.”

Similarly, al-ʻAqīl gives the example of the narrator of *Fatāh min Falasṭīn* [A young girl from Palestine] (without date) by ’Abbās ’Abd al-Ḥalīm (1913-1979), arguing that “the narrator’s whispering to the reader is cancelling the distance between the narrator and the reader.” Accordingly, the narrator Līnā addresses being closer to the reader in order to motivate him/her to trust her, thereby increasing her liability as a narrator. Ibrāhīm Khalīl says:

> There are several possible roles of the narrator: First is the narrating role because the narrator narrates a plot. Second is the managing role because the narrator manages the events in a certain order. Third is the affective role through talking to the reader. Fourth is the witnessing role by documenting what he/she narrates. Fifth is the ideological role.

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308 Ibid., 27.
Interestingly, we see how Līnā the narrator plays all these roles. On the other hand, the narrator not only presents the conversation but indicates her role in it, and explains and elucidates what is going on. Another example: with an air of ridicule, the narrator comments to the reader regarding her father’s narration of his biography, saying: “and my father is satisfied with giving out shallow details about his family and in his conversation about his past, so that he remains the main axis of his own glory and our glory.”311 This proves that the narrator of the novel is as an editor as well, who is sifting and selecting from among the testimonies of the other character she reports upon.

The narrator assists us, in identifying the features of the novel’s narrator, by repeatedly specifying the sources of her knowledge. For instance, Līnā says of the firm’s owner: “I don’t think he smokes, as he does not carry a cigarette box with him.”312 Here the narrator is guessing; not certain, but assuming. Līnā indicates the source of the conclusion she has drawn, which is thereby revealed to be only an assumption: her conclusion was based on what she saw with her naked eye. Elsewhere in the novel, she identifies her mother’s own confession as the source of the knowledge that she has in regards her father’s hoarding of onions and garlic in the markets of Lebanon through his trade business.

My mother’s confession shook my sluggish mind: We are the ones who have bought a large amount of garlic and great share of the onion crops, and my father will buy Egyptian onions and will send it to Beirut’s harbour and then to France and England’s harbours.313

Thus, the narrator repeatedly points out and documents the sources of her knowledge in the novel:314 these sources being her senses, thoughts and assumptions, as well as the other characters and their confessions. This highlighting of the sources of her knowledge increases the liability of the first-person narrator. To these limits to her knowledge, it can be added that

311 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 31.
312 Ibid., 26.
313 Ibid., 46.
314 Al-Kurdī points out that this type of narrator, one who specifies their sources of knowledge, follows the traditional style of narration in the Arabic novel, and that this is rooted in the interest in narrators and their sources of knowledge of religious teachings that stems from the narration of the Prophetic Hadeeth (Prophet’s Sayings) (Al-Kurdī, al-Rāwī wa-al-nāṣṣ, 137).
the narrator also harbours doubts about her own purpose and direction, which she confesses in saying: “I wish I could leave this firm. I wish … But, how will I spend my time?” She thus admits that at times she cannot rid herself of her loneliness, even after meeting Bahā’; and so we see her later regret at resigning her job. This regret is based on the knowledge that comes as a result of experience: she could not have known Bahā’’s true nature right from the start, and in fact it took her a long time to uncover his real character, and she paid for that knowledge by dropping out of college and resigning from work.

In summary, the narrator is an internal anticipating narrator, who also plays the role of the heroine. She is an editorial narrator, who often reveals her sources of knowledge, many of them being based on thoughts, conclusions, different characters, or on her memory; and sometimes she refers to her failure to know things. This on the one hand enhances the objectivity of the narration, but on the other it reveals that the narrator does not know everything. She also narrates using the first person, which in turn gives her dominance in the narration, which she uses to extensively describe herself. This does not, however, negate the other voices in the novel, despite their weakness.

Next, I examine how the above features of the narrator influence the narration styles as well as the conflict and the tension in the novel, and then I turn to look at how it affects the representation of the characters. While I have, here, discussed the features of the figure who narrates the story, I now turn to look at the styles in which the story itself is narrated.

### 3.2.1.2 Narration Styles

315 Ba‘albakī, *Anā əhyā, 56.*
Several styles of narration are used in the novel: monologue, dialogue, remembering technique, irony,\textsuperscript{316} comparison, as well as the description of apparently insignificant details. This means that the author has intentionally allowed first-person narration to predominate, while at the same time pursuing a range of novelistic styles, all of which together promote diversity in the unfolding of the drama, which helps grip the reader’s interest.

‘Abd al-Salām affirms: “Monologue shows several remembered emotions and thoughts narrated by the first person and thus enables characters to reveal their concerns, hopes and orientations on society and life.”\textsuperscript{317} Here, I examine how monologue is employed to enlarge the focus on the female heroine in \textit{Anā aḥyā}. The narrator begins the novel in the monologue style, with Līnā saying: “While crossing the sidewalk between our house and the train station, I was thinking: For who is this warm hair that is loose on my shoulders? Isn’t it mine?”\textsuperscript{318} This monologue technique is employed by other female Lebanese writers at the time, such as Kulit Khuri (b. 1931) in \textit{Ayyam ma’ahu}. For instance, Rīm says: “Am I not a woman because I did not accept his request? I am not a woman, because I am not honest! But... Am I honest? I am who talks to men, and who likes joining men.”\textsuperscript{319}

Līnā’s and Rīm’s use of monologue enables them as narrators to reveal to the reader their own hidden thoughts and emotions. The monologue style, then, enables the reader to evaluate the characters psychologically. Meanwhile, the monologue in \textit{Anā aḥyā} is also a tool for the narrator to express her pain and other deep emotions to the reader, especially given that Līnā cannot find anyone around her who is in accord with her, and to whom she can express her emotions. Thus, in this particular style of narration, the narrator perhaps finds a way both to vent her emotions and derive companionship through her conversation with the reader. The narrator’s use of this style allows for artistic diversity in the

\textsuperscript{316} “Irony is the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning. Also, this mode of expression as a literary style or form.” \textit{Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature}, 589.

\textsuperscript{317} ‘Abd al-Salām, \textit{Al-Ḥiwār al-qaṣaṣī}, 119.

\textsuperscript{318} Ba‘albākī, \textit{Anā aḥyā}, 7.

\textsuperscript{319} Khuri, \textit{Ayyam ma’ahu}, 116.
very act of narration, which helps maintain the interest of the reader and, equally, the narrator. And, beyond this, the monologue style corresponds with the fact that the narrator’s own knowledge is limited: through that monologue, we see the narrator thinking and wondering, and we become aware of her vulnerability to new information and her dependence on tentative conclusions. This is seen clearly in the following example:

> What act of heroism will I perform? Shall I sneak in the dark, and hide an explosive under the seat of the firm’s owner; an explosive that would tear down the firm and squander the pieces of the two countries … and this criminal act would occupy the minds of the people for a while. Then I will be executed! Executed! No, no I do not desire to die, for fear that I would be forgotten forever.  

Elsewhere in the novel, the narrator uses monologue to recall information from memory, such as when she remembers her father’s past, as mentioned earlier. The narrator is the only one who monologues in the novel, and she does not give any of the other characters the space to do so. Thus, the monologue here is employed to support the dominance of Līnā, which falls in line with Muḥammad Najm’s argument: “The character could be focused and could control the events due to his/her being strong and attractive, but in addition, when we deeply look at the story we find that the writer employs other literary techniques for supporting that dominance.”

With respect to the dialogue, it falls into two patterns. The first pattern is a form of dialogue that minimizes the voices of those to whom the narrator is speaking; decreasing the space that their voices are allowed to occupy, while also commenting on those voices and at times ridiculing them or challenging their credibility. When we look, for instance, at the narrator’s first dialogue with the firm’s owner, we see that she speaks before he says anything at all, saying: “And the desk began to talk. But after I saw its sarcastic eyes, I was not influenced by its warm voice. It said […]” Thus, the narrator gives the reader a specific

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320 Baʿalbākī, Anā ʾahyāʾ, 175.
322 Baʿalbākī, Anā ʾahyāʾ, 175.
impression regarding the person to whom she is speaking. Further, the narrator’s comment precedes the reader’s encounter with the speaker himself (i.e., the owner of the firm), as if warning us of the marginality of the voice that will follow. As well as this, she also comments on what the voice has said immediately afterwards, telling the reader: “and he was silent, searching through my face for the truth […]” Then, she tells us, he whispered: “Your father is my friend,” and she follows this with a statement revealing her own thoughts to the reader: “I thought: My father is a friend to everyone who takes advantage […]”323; thus we can fairly say that the narrator has both minimized the voice of her interlocutor and also challenged it. In contrast, we find her expanding on her own thoughts and on her comments to the reader in regards to these voices.

Briefly looking at Ayyam ma’ahu, we can note what Mājidah Ḥammūd comments:

In Ayyam ma’ahu the dialogue is the dominant rather than the novelist narration; therefore, the writer offered several women’s voices: In addition to the voice of revolutionary woman (Rīm), there are other women such as the educated woman (Nādyah) and the conservative woman (Laylā).324

In contrast, this style of dialogue in Anā aḥyā can be considered marginal, because the voice of the narrator is still dominant. In view of this, this style is not so far from narration in the first person, differing principally with respect to artistic technique. Such a dialogue style does not allow the reader to judge the other characters in the novel, since the narrator herself constantly intervenes – commenting, explaining, interpreting, and ridiculing, and trying to convince the readers of the validity of her own judgments about the other characters. Thus, the narrator dramatically shatters the dialogue before the reader has the chance to study and evaluate the characters for themselves, and take their own stance in regards to them.

There is another style that appears in parallel to the appearance of Bahā’’s character and the budding of the relationship between him and Līnā. In her conversation with Bahā’ on

323 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 175.
pages 163–73, we notice first just how much volume or space this dialogue occupies in the novel. In the first section of the novel the dialogue was extremely limited both in quantity and in what it revealed about other characters; but in the second and third sections of the novel – in other words, after the appearance of Bahā’ – the dialogue begins to increase both in volume, artistic credibility, and objectivity. In this style of dialogue, Līnā gives whomever she speaks to, most often Bahā’; a chance to speak at length and often without interruption. An example of this is where Bahā’ tells Līnā:

The people in my country need a comprehensive community revolution that comes from its alleys, its huts and its tents …. It is sold and bought in the domes of the castles, and in the air on board the airplanes that continuously travel between our capital and the capital of the old kingdom.\[325\]

Līnā passes only one comment of explanation before allowing him to continue: “What’s the worth of your body, you, if it was burnt, when it is measured against the million bodies that become ashes in blood at every moment […]”\[326\] and the dialogue continues for several pages. This indicates the introduction of a new narration technique with respect to dialogue. Perhaps this new technique is introduced specifically because of Bahā’, whom she loves and later desires to be engaged to; and she is thus giving him a chance to express himself, to speak loudly and freely with his own voice. On the one hand, she does not artistically shatter the dialogue when she speaks with him and does not challenge the credibility of his views, nor does she comment much on what he says, as she does with the other characters, especially in the first section of the novel.

Before she falls in love with Baha’, in her role as narrator, Līnā constantly interrupts her mother and does not give significant space for her voice (see, for example, Anā aḥyā, 21-22). After she falls in love, however, we notice that the narrator allows her mother a more extensive role in conversation; this is not only because she is trying to achieve some balance

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325 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 164.
326 Ibid., 165.
in her dialogue, especially having given Bahā’ such space, but also because of the content of what her mother is saying. For example, her mother tells Līnā:

You excite all the men: Your femininity is a tyrant. You are like me; your only task is to sleep with men and to rock the bed of a child! As for he who asked you who I was [meaning Bahā’], he knows before everything that you are a female, he draws pleasure from you.327

Līnā the narrator does not interrupt her mother, and instead gives her ample space to speak. This could be because Līnā is pleased with what her mother is telling her, and favours the image of herself as it appears in the eyes of her mother. On the one hand, this artistic change in the nature of the dialogue between the narrator and her mother clearly indicates the dynamic role that the narrator plays throughout the novel. But on the other hand, it is obvious that this change has happened after Līnā has become attached to Bahā’, and after she has become interested in marrying him, and this might be the reason that causes her to correct her relationship with her mother, especially now that she has decided, or at least desires, to become a mother herself.

In addition, there is clear use of an ironic style of narration in the novel, with the narrator often resorting to irony to ridicule the others around her. For example:

He [Līnā’s father] has taught us to be grateful to him, because he is the reason we exist and the reason for our prosperity. He is the builder of our future. If he had only known that he evokes my ridicule, and that my mother evokes my pity and disgust!328

Here, the narrator becomes sarcastic when she speaks of her father and his gracious support for her family. The reader may at first think that the narrator is minimizing the importance of her father, because she says openly that she ridicules him; but this would not be a safe conclusion. When we look more deeply at the dramatic context, we see that this is not a minimization but rather a result of the dualism of the roles, with Līnā taking the role of narrator and heroine of the novel’s events. Thus, in addition to her direct ridicule, she indicates through her actions as a character that she ridicules her father.

327 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 131.
328 Ibid., 19.
The technique of comparison, meanwhile, appears frequently in the novel. While the narrator uses dialogue, to engender variation in voice and artistry, and while she uses irony in different ways to express her positions, she uses the technique of comparison to bring forth certain philosophical and intellectual views. Let us look at the following patterns:

I am scared of emptiness, of loneliness, and of routine. As for fear of the boss [the owner of the firm], it is boring to see such an important financial resource which supports his position and guarantees him food and prepares the future of his children.329

Here, the narrator employs the technique of comparison to criticize socio-economic class differences, indirectly calling out for social justice and for a decrease in the gap between the social classes.

Although the novel is narrated in a linear form, the narrator uses the remembering technique to discover the past time. In 2005, al-Ṭāliʿī examined the remembering technique through feminist works published in the 1970s through the 1990s by women writers from the Gulf. She argues: “We could not consider the remembering technique as a flashback [...] the remembering technique does not change the linear form, but it supports further details.”330 In addition, Mahmud Ghanayim says: “Frequently, the narrator could lead the character to return backwards, or it could return 'alone' by remembering technique.” 331

Significantly, within her analysis of Ḥubbī al-awwal [My first love] (2010) by Sahar Khalifeh (b. 1941), Razān Ibrāhīm says: “To make the life of the characters meaningful, we should understand their past because their current orientations are indeed connected with their past experiences; therefore, the past of characters could not be isolated from their present.”332 In other words, the remembering technique contributes to representing characters in depth.

Thus, this technique in Anā aḥyā is employed for revealing Līnā’s childhood world:

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329 Al-Ṭāliʿī, Al-Ḥubb wa-al-jasad wa-al-hurrīyah, 56.
She [Līnā’s mother] washed my hair well and styled it in an artistic way. Moreover, she sang about my hair naive stories that I have memorized: Līnā’s hair is star lights, Līnā’s hair spreading out fragrance, like white Jasmine spread on the branches of our tree that is extending over the garden fence.  

Here, Līnā talks about her past to bring up a folkloric world represented by her mother’s singing to her hair, where this folklore, relating as it does to the girl’s hair, points towards strong feminine symbolism in Arab society of Christians and Muslims like in Lebanon. It seems this folkloric symbolism is what also causes her mother to give such an unpleasant description of Līnā’s head after she cuts her hair, as if she had lost her femininity. Additionally, Līnā uses the remembering technique to reveal her father’s past: “I was thrown off by my father’s excursions into his past: a young man in a middle class family.” Thus, on the one hand the narrator uses this technique to search for knowledge and to pinpoint some of the knowledge resources that she possesses, while on the other hand she uses it to criticize her father for his attachment to obtaining wealth, for taking advantage of the poor, and for his support the forces of colonialism in Lebanon at that time. Furthermore, Līnā uses the technique to evidence and explain her point of view regarding her parents. The various objectives for which the technique is employed here come in line with what Razān Ibrāhīm argues regarding Ḥubbī al-awwal: “Remembering action is not a short telling of the past, but it is an explanation of the events in the past with considerable tone of emotions.”

While the previous examples of the remembering technique were narrated by the narrator herself, the following example shows the latter technique narrated by Bahā’: 

The world of my childhood was perfect; a leather belt surrounding my waist, dancing up above the belt is a smart gun, skilful like the lion in its den, awaiting every man competing for authority … every thief of truth … shooting them to fall like a piece of meat, deformed …

It seems that the narrator has given Bahā’ a chance to present the remembering technique in order to reveal his childhood to her, so that she can come know him more fully. Interestingly,

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333 Ba’albakī, Anā ʻahyā, 29.
334 Ibid., 31–32.
336 Ba’albakī, Anā ʻahyā, 273.
while the remembering technique here is employed for the mentioned objectives, Nasrallah—during the time when Ba‘albakī stopped publishing—utilized the technique within her in-depth description of the Lebanese civil war (1975). Fadia Suyoufie describes:

> the diverse modes in which memory is inscribed in Emily Nasrallah’s *A House Not Her own: Stories from Beirut* [1985] against the backdrop of dismembering which prevails in Beirut of the civil war period (1975-1991). The traumatic experiences of war had tremendous impact on the personal as well as the collective archive of memory of Lebanese people.

Thus, whereas Ba‘albakī employs the remembering technique used by characters individually, Nasrallah employs it to describe a collective memory.

Aside from the above styles, though, there are some rare scenes of description of seemingly insignificant detail scattered throughout the novel. For example, Līnā narrates:

> I took my books from my little library. I put two books on the first desk and a notebook and a pen on the second desk. I coloured the two eyes of the primate that appears on the calendar picture with my red pen. I moved the telephone to the left. Then I opened one glass of the window.

The extract conveys no significant insight and provides no support to the narrative context. Scenes like this could be boring for the reader and might seem unnecessary; but on the other hand, they also remind us of the texture of the life of the young woman in her moments of listlessness. This suggests a certain amount of weariness with her life.

Further, the writer is selective about which characters she names. Ḥasan Baḥrāwī says:

> Most of the textual analyzers of narrative speech insist on the importance of giving names to characters by which others will be able to distinguish and give them their semantic perspective. The name of a character gives it the possibility of being known and individuality.

Yet, Ba‘albakī does not name all the characters in the novel, not even main characters such as Līnā’s father and mother, as a device employed for her feminist agenda. Since the unnamed

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characters all represent patriarchy, it seems that the writer aims to underrate all those characters who represent patriarchal society. This impression may indeed be strengthened when we consider the scathing comments the protagonist makes on other characters, and the other ways in which she edits her reports of their speech so as to justify her views. In contrast, the writer names her protagonist, Līnā, as well as Bahā’, Walīd, and Bassām. Furthermore, the names that the writer gives her characters support their function and meaning, perhaps helping the reader to visualize and empathize with them. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan comments regarding names' semantic connections: “Non-allegorical texts often have recourse to a semantic parallelism between name and trait.”340 Interestingly, this technique of parallel names is clearly evident in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961).341 For example, while the protagonist Sa‘īd Mahrān challenges social opposition and being in prison for some years, failing to get a job or any source of financial help as well as failing in his revenge, his first name means 'happy' and his last name means 'skilful'. Thus, Mahfuz employs a naming analogy to emphasize the contrast between the name and the character’s trait. In *Anā aḥyā* the writer uses names to stress similarity. She gives her protagonist the name ‘Līnā,’ which means kind and gentle. ‘Bahā’’ means loveliness or handsomeness, indicating, perhaps, an intent to legitimize Līnā’s love for him. ‘Walīd’ means kid or young boy, and thus the writer is perhaps aiming to tell her reader that the letter Walīd sends to Līnā is probably not considerable. ‘Bassām’ means smiling, and the writer thereby suggests that Bassām is young and innocent, and maybe even something of a spoilt child. Thus, both the naming and the not-naming of characters are related to literary function and meaning.

In sum, the styles the writer applies in her first novel coalesce around first-person narration. She uses the remembering technique and irony, monologue and dialogue, selective and functional naming of characters, and the technique of comparison. While these styles add diversity at the artistic level, there are also some scenes of description of insignificant detail. Furthermore, the writer employs these narration styles to underpin the feminist themes which run throughout the novel.  

Having discussed the narrative styles, I now turn to discuss the language the narrator uses, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the aspects of that language and exploring what these aspects could reflect.

### 3.2.1.3 Language

We note the extensive use of poetic language focused on intense metaphor and imagery. For instance:

> The sea, which lies down some metres from our house, taught me about weaving hopes and creating thoughts. Sometimes, I hoped that the earth would be flat in order to see the countries on the other side of the world, and sometimes I asked why I do not walk on the water’s surface.

A further example:

> The darkness was accumulating in quietness on the ground, and among the trunks of the trees. In addition, the light made an extravagant escape through the window of the university library, supporting the extension of the darkness. I was upset because my vision is incapable of seeing things through thick bodies.

These themes will be discussed in more details in the chapter on feminism.


*Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 60.*

*Ibid., 176.*
The reader could see these scenes of poetic description as one of the components of the dominant narrative language used throughout the novel. This does seem to be evidence of the considerable influence of poets on Ba‘albakī’s writing, as discussed in the section on her biography. Interestingly, such poetic language is used by Kulit Khuri as well. For example, in *Ayyam ma‘ahu* Rīm complains: “The despair was a despot against me, it was hitting me all the time; and then myself rebelled against itself.”346 She further says: “His critical looks at me were extensive, examining me […]. His looks focused on my escaping hair from the head cover. My face became red and confused, trying covering those looks in the darkness.”347 These examples suggest that poets influenced not only Ba‘albakī, but also other female Lebanese writers of the time, like Kulit Khuri. Furthermore, Razān Ibrāhīm comments within her analysis of a novel by the male Syrian novelist Halim Barakat (b. 1936): “There are in the novel poetic pieces which offer extensive semantics.”348 Consequently, poetic language seems to be characteristic not only of female Lebanese writers, but also other male and female Arab writers of the time. Razān Ibrāhīm points out the aim which poetic language addresses within narrative text: “When the novel collides with a realistic scene, it resorts to the imaginary and poetry in order to go out and to get rid of the realistic scene.”349 In addition, the poetic narrative language could offer diversity by taking the reader to imaginary and rhetoric figurative pieces rather than narrating events. It enables the narrator(s) to express emotions and thoughts in thorough and indirect ways, as seen in the previous examples from both the writer and Kulit Khuri.

In contrast to Modern Standard Arabic as used in the previous quotations, Levantine colloquial Arabic words are frequently used within *Anā aḥyā*, as evident with *karsūn* instead of *nādil* [waiter], or *al-trām* instead of *al-qitār* [the train]. (Although ‘*al-trām*’ is in origin a

347 Ibid., 31.
349 Ibid., 63.
French word, I deal with it as Levantine, not French.) Another example is *kamash* instead of *masaqa* [to catch]. In this context, Najm comments:

Colloquial Arabic could not be used as narrative technique except in the dialogue text where the writer addresses realism and activism. Otherwise, the writer does not need to talk to his/her readers in colloquial Arabic or to represent a story or its events in colloquial Arabic.\(^{350}\)

It appears the writer was not aware of her use of colloquial words, because these words are not, for example, used in a context of the characterization of different classes of characters through the use of dialogue. In addition, the colloquial words do not appear within quotation marks. That is to say, colloquial Levantine Arabic is used without any apparent literary or semantic function.

However, it appears that Baʿalbakī was influenced by Levantine colloquialisms; thus, we can suggest that she was also possibly influenced by Lebanese *zajal* poetry because the Lebanese *zajal* included Levantine colloquialism and her father was, as mentioned, a *zajal* poet. Adnan Haydar defines *zajal*:

> In the Lebanese tradition, *zajal* means primarily oral vernacular poetry in general, a discourse in many forms, composed in or for performance, declaimed or sung to the accompaniment of music. It is also used to characterize a written tradition which attains high literary value and high formal virtuosity in the compositions of famous Lebanese poets.\(^{351}\)

Adnan Haydar clarifies what he means by “vernacular”: “Lebanese vernacular shares many characteristics with the dialects spoken in Syria, Jordan, and Palestine.”\(^{352}\) However, I instead use the term “Levantine” to indicate the shared dialect of this region mentioned by Adnan Haydar. Adnan Haydar’s definition is harmonious with that of Baʿalbakī’s father declaiming *zajal* to his guests in his house, as previously mentioned. Ed Emery describes *zajal* from the previous century: “[Zajal in Lebanon] As a popular performance its heyday was in the 1960-70s, when audiences of up to 40,000 were recorded, and nowadays *zajal* has become staple

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352 Ibid., 189.
fare on television.” This is further evidence to support Baʿalbakhī’s father declaiming zajal too.

Adnan Haydar also points out: “Zajal mixes fuṣḥā with colloquialism.” In this context, significantly, Adnan Haydar adds: “Critics have only recently begun to assess the influence of zajal poetics on major modern Lebanese poets.” In addition to the influence of Lebanese zajal on modern Lebanese poets, I suggest that it influenced the female Lebanese novelist Baʿalbakhī specifically on the point of using colloquial Arabic Levantine. Whereas colloquialism in zajal is used functionally to be closer to the audience, we do not see any function in using colloquial Levantine in Anā aḥyā.

Moreover, we also see several linguistic mistakes: for example, the writer uses ‘ī instead of untying the doubled letter, such as istaqarrīt instead of istaqrartu. It appears that using Levantine Arabic words led the writer to make linguistic mistakes. Mājidah Ḥammūd indicates that linguistic mistakes are a common language characteristic of several Arab contemporary writers: “While we see recently enlarging of linguistic mistakes by [Arab] writers, I cannot ignore the standard language by Ḥanān Asad (b. 1978) in her novel Bāriqat amal [A glimmer of hope] (1999).” ᴬḥmad Darwīsh criticises the author for the linguistic mistakes found in the collection of short stories by female Sudanese writer Zaynab al-Kurdi ʿUyūnī al-laylah lā tuʿṭī damʾan [My eyes tonight do not give tears] (1985): “A dangerous thing characterises her collection of stories is the appearance of many linguistic mistakes. We could not decrease the importance of that because fiction is linguistic action too.” Yet neither Ḥammūd nor ᴬḥmad Darwīsh explains the appearance of such linguistic mistakes within Modern Standard Arabic fiction.

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355 Ibid., 190.
356 Ḥammūd, Al-khīṭāḥ al-qaṣaṣī al-niswī, 142-43.
357 ᴬḥmad Darwīsh, Taqanīyat al-fann al-qaṣṣī’ ʿabra al-rāwī wa-al-ḥākī [Techniques of the narrative art through the narrator and storyteller], (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1998), 319.
In summary, poetic language is used frequently throughout the novel, and Levantine words and linguistic mistakes often appear without any semantic function. I shall later examine the language of narration in the author’s second novel and her short stories in order to see whether the language develops in a certain way. While above I have discussed the features of the narrator and the narration styles in which the actions are expressed, I now move to analyse the place and time in which the actions occur.

3.2.2 Setting

Although the novel spans two particular years of the protagonist’s early adulthood, the period of time referred to in the narrative falls somewhere between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and 1958. The narrator indicates that the novel starts at the time her family became wealthy, which was as a result of the war. Līnā narrates: “The earth was on fire with the Second World War and life was changing and moving very fast, suddenly we are rich: we are the wealthy people of the war.”\(^\text{358}\) Thus the novel does not encompass the period preceding their transformation into a wealthy family. The family’s wealth is on display from the very beginning of the novel, thus on the second page Līnā says: “I will take this tram, despite the fact that our new red car is parked at the entrance of our building.”\(^\text{359}\) Līnā says: “Do I not have a right to work when it is my father, but not myself, who is a millionaire?”\(^\text{360}\) Since the family became rich after the Second World War, the beginning of the novel must take place after that point. As for the extension of the drama until 1958, this can be inferred from the novel’s mentioning of significant historical events, such as the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez Canal (1956). Līnā says: “But this mystery that is surrounding the house after the armed attack on Egypt which followed the

\(^{358}\) Ba‘albakī, \textit{Anā aḥyā}, 32.

\(^{359}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{360}\) Ibid.
Then there are the narrator’s comments on the Egyptian–Syrian Union, which was declared in 1958 – which was also the year in which the novel was published. Līnā says: “I was searching newspapers as soon as they came out to look at the outcomes of the political developments that had occurred during my illness, and there I found dual and triple alliances in our Arab world, and I read of the continuing Zionist violations on the borders.”

In relation to how much time passes during the unfolding of the plot, the novel starts when Līnā is nineteen years old. This is shown in the first narration scene, relating Līnā travelling in a taxi through the early morning hours for a job interview: “Does he consider me a child, while I am nineteen years of age?”

The novel ends when Līnā is twenty: “I am twenty years old, isn’t it time? If I told my mother or Bahā’ [about her idea of getting married and having a baby]...” Līnā says this at an advanced stage of her meetings with Bahā’, when she is meeting him every day. After this scene in which Līnā indicates her age, and after few other meetings with Bahā’, the novel ends. It can therefore be confirmed that the duration of the novel is between one and two years.

Līnā uses the element of time to increase the intensity of the events. For instance, she says:

I watched it [the clock] and I forgot to wait for Bahā’ while I was waiting for him. Therefore, I am the one who has given this clock its importance. All of my senses have become attached to the black hands of the clock, enjoying listening to its ticking sounds while awaiting the ticking of Bahā’’s steps.

Thus, we notice the extent of the tension that Līnā is experiencing as she waits for Bahā’ in Maqḥā al-‘Am Sām (Uncle Sam’s Coffee Shop). Līnā claims that it is she who has given the

361 Ba’albakī, Anā ḥiyā, 44.
362 Ibid., 129.
363 Ibid., 15.
364 Ibid., 304.
365 Ibid., 149.
clock importance, but this indicates how much Līnā is attached to Bahā’ and how much she longs for him to come soon, as every minute is of great importance for her. It also indicates her weariness with life, the idea that time just goes on and on.

The narrator frequently uses the element of time in order to expand upon description, imagination, and expectations. For instance, Līnā describes her wait for Bahā’ at Uncle Sam’s Coffee Shop by saying: “Bahā’ will come … For whom then have I decorated and perfumed these hopes ….” She adds:

He will not come, but why do I keep repeating these thoughts? He will come … And if he does not come how will I overcome the shivering repulsion of my hands, and in the fingertips of my right hand, whom a young man had once squeezed with his right hand? Thus, Līnā as narrator is taking advantage of Bahā’’s delay to go on describing, thinking, and narrating until he arrives. But this could enlarge the time of narration. Baḥrāwī says: “There are two techniques which could slow down narrating action: technique of dramatic scene and the technique of stop for description. This stop slows down and enlarges the time of narration; therefore, that time will stop.” Whereas Baḥrāwī criticizes stopping narration for description, Līnā succeeded to find a device which could justify her stopping: she is waiting for the man whom she loves, and she employs her waiting time. In terms of drama, this dramatic scene can be seen as an example of using the element of time to increase tension, as the reader will start doubting or at least questioning whether Bahā’ will come. This may propel the reader’s own imagination and expectations; for instance, they may ask: “how will Līnā react if Bahā’ does not show up?”

Further, we observe a harmony between the extensive description of the seasons of the year and the descriptions of the ongoing events in the novel. For instance, we see the narrator describing the summer season, where this harmonizes entirely with the following events:

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366 Baʿalbakī, Anā ḥyā, 291.
367 Ibid., 292.
368 Baḥrāwī, Bunyat al-shakl al-rīwāʾī, 92.
He [Līnā’s father] was pecking at our fat older female neighbour who lives in a building with windows that are opposite our windows. In the beginning of this year’s summer, he was standing, near the wall in the balcony, without any trousers but with his knickers and short shirt, smoking a cigarette.369

I then saw a woman, immersed in the lights in her room, taking her clothes off her body one piece at a time. She was taking them off securely and with complete freedom, as if she was certain that the neighbours were asleep at that late hour of the night. Or as if she was certain that my father was looking at her to swallow her with his eyes.370

We note here the harmony between the summer season and Līnā’s talk about burning and fire. We also see harmony in her father’s going out on the balcony or standing against the wall in his underwear, on one the hand, and the hot temperatures of the summer on the other. Additionally, we observe harmony between the summer and the process of the woman slowly and sluggishly undressing. In addition, the windows were open, that is to say it was probably summer.

Elsewhere in the novel we see Līnā taking a different approach when it comes to time, wishing to destroy it to avenge herself, due to her futile wait for a train:

I wait, and time was creeping and creeping. I wish, if time were tangible, I would have ignored the people around me, and jumped on it and destroyed it with my nails, and chewed on it with my teeth, then spit it on the ground so that it would fall between my feet afraid and lowly. 371

Here, the narrator uses the element of time to evoke her criticism of the government and the management of the railway and public transportation system in Lebanon: “I will take the tram, but how will I get on it when the sidewalk of the station is almost shaking with those tens of people waiting?”372 Thus, the waiting time lengthens, as does the number of passengers waiting in long lines.

As for the location of the events of the novel, these take place in Beirut, since the story is that of “Līnā Fayyad” of Beirut. Baḥrāwī says: “For narration, streets and districts are ideal locations for motion because those will witness the moving of characters, including the

369 Baʿalbakī, Anā aḥyā, 18.
370 Ibid., 19.
371 Ibid., 8–9.
372 Ibid., 8.
heroine.” Given this importance of streets and district locations, it appears that the narrator is aware of and therefore focuses on those locations in her descriptions and comments throughout the novel. However, Līnā says in regards to that: “I remember here, in this street, I live in a gigantic building, fancy yellow, abiding on a calm beach among the beaches of Beirut.” Thus, Līnā the narrator describes the location in detail, and through her description she indirectly indicates the wealth and socio-economic status of her family. The narrator also uses the location creatively when she points out the fancy markets in the street where she lives, saying: “I am here in the street, distracted by the perfume bottles in the façade of ‘Amatory’ and the wool dresses in the façade of A. B. C.” Thus, the narrator indicates that there are wealthy streets in Beirut for the consumption of luxury goods. Later, the narrator not only describes the street that she lives in, but shows interest in describing other streets and thereby extends the scope of her social and cultural criticism. Baḥrāwī says: “There is a polarization between the popular district and the upscale district. There are two topographic poles which are social too. These two poles are usually dealt with in the narrative spaces.”

For example, Līnā says regarding those streets on her way to her work:

The square tiles of the sidewalk have extended before me, and have multiplied, and then it was followed with a thousand corners that were swallowed by slopes. I met up with the husk of a lemon that had playfully caused me slightly to slip, then I smashed the cigarettes discarded by another pedestrian.

Here, there is a failure to maintain the cleanliness of the streets, and that the description suggests that these streets are unsafe. Thus, these comments on the litter in the street in Lebanon, like other countries, have a social meaning, related to fear of crime and social disorder. However, as a space, the streets play a prominent role in the novel.

373 Baḥrāwī, Bunyat al-shakl al-riwā’ī, 79.
374 Ibid., 16.
375 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 16.
376 Baḥrāwī, Bunyat al-shakl al-riwā’ī, 79.
377 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 87.
Līnā not only describes the sidewalks and the markets of Beirut, and the various geographical distinctions, but also gives prominence to the human beings who populate them:

The rain is falling and the cold is becoming crueller, and I am a gray pillar moving with exhaustion on the sidewalk … then here people are pushing me with frustration out of their way. They are afraid of the rain that comes in the day. They are afraid of the mud messing up their clothes and from the water ruining the fabrics […] I hurried to the back door of the restaurant and I stood with two men and a woman whom I did not know waiting for the rain to subside …

Thus, the narrator assigns importance to describing the movement of humans in the streets of Beirut, and continues by describing their feelings, movements, etc. In these scenes, we have seen Līnā giving a description of Beirut and its streets in extensive detail; but now let us look at an example of a general description of Beirut as a setting:

In the city [Beirut] the kingdom protects the lands, the great kingdom! In the capital city, the people eat until satisfaction! In the city the children sleep on beds with luxurious feathers! In the city, the young man is allowed to attach himself to a woman and sleep with her behind the stages of night clubs!

The narrator employs her description of the considerable economic situation and luxury of living in Beirut to focus on the sexual aspect—namely; Beirut’s young men are allowed to have sexual relationships with women outside of marriage.

The description of her place of work also takes up considerable space in the novel, in particular because it is this that gives Līnā the economic independence that helps in her struggle against her family, and in her struggle to escape the house and escape the empty space and the loneliness that she feels. Līnā also uses her description of her workplace to express her resentment of the bourgeois and their outward appearances of extreme wealth:

The warmth in the corners of the office was exciting. The leather seats with shiny wood were exciting. The white flowers, the white flowers in a business firm and in winter time were also exciting. Then I crept on the carpet, slowly heading towards the owner of the firm.

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378 Baʿalbakī, Anā aḥyā, 17–18.
379 Ibid., 231.
380 Most likely she means married women, because she speaks of women and not girls.
381 Baʿalbakī, Anā aḥyā, 12–13.
Thus, we observe Līnā describing the firm in order to show the wealth of the owner, pointing to possible corruption in attaining such wealth. Elsewhere in the novel, Līnā uses a description of the workplace as a means to express ideological or political views: “On this chair [in the firm] as I have figured out, two important countries are seated, taking over the politics of the world, or rather trying to take over international politics from here: Middle East, from the heart of the Arab countries.”382 Here Līnā is indicating an intellectual political view that is opposed to the domination of international politics by certain countries, and most likely she has in mind America and Russia, in accordance with the mood of that era.

Līnā’s relationship with Bahā’ occupies a prominent part of the description of locations in the novel: “I am ready to creep slowly, following him [Bahā’] to a lonely room, at the top of a building in Beirut, smashing the alarm in my complete dry isolation, as we sleep in one bed, drink the coffee in one cup, and read in one book.”383 Līnā uses a detailed scene description to express her imaginary ideal location to meet her companion and have sex with him far away from people’s eyes. However, here she uses present simple verbs throughout her description as a narrative device to let the reader feel the narrating as it is happening.

Uncle Sām’s Coffee Shop also plays a prominent role in the novel. Baḥrāwī says: “Coffee shops are one of the private locations which are prominently dealt with in narrative works because usually they can reveal the social and economic situation in which characters exist.”384 However, the coffee shop is the place where Līnā and Bahā’ meet and talk. The following scene gives us a sense of this coffee shop:

Each one of the coffee shop customers will have a task to complete. This young man reads the morning newspaper and right in front of him is a coffee cup and in his mouth a cigarette. He leans his head on his hand, stares at the pedestrians, and sighs each time a girl passes by. As

382 Ibid., 13–14.
383 Ibid., 290.
384 Baḥrāwī, Bunyat al-shakl al-riwā’il, 91.
for our triangular red table, I will make sure to ask the young boy to polish it and to have the ashtray in the middle.  

Thus, Līnā describes the coffee shop in precise detail, even as far as the location of the ashtray, while also describing the clientele and trying to classify them. And she uses her description of the coffee shop to indicate how different she is from all the others. In the next extract, Līnā describes the location of the coffee shop while she is waiting on Bahā’:

I held the magazine with one hand, and I leaned with my other hand on the ashtray to feel some amiability and receive support to help me ignore those that are around me. I leaned my head near the white glass ashtray, and then I saw a red stain right beneath it. It is here; in front of me […] I rested the tips of my annoyance on it. She is a part of Bahā’. It is, like me, waiting for him.

The scene shows Līnā seeking amiable companionship with the inanimate elements of the coffee shop that surround her. She indicates that the whole coffee shop is waiting for Bahā’ to come, while meanwhile seeking comfort in her exchange with the ashtray and the chair to get rid of her loneliness and to fill the emptiness until Bahā’ comes. Here, we see how artistically Līnā uses location and its tools in the narration of events, which in turn adds drama to the scene while also decreasing the extent of the tension that she as narrator feels.

The house is also a prominent space in the novel. Baḥrāwī says: “Houses are a significant narrative space because they mirror how characters feel towards and how their dynamic relationship with other people living there. Therefore, it is wrong to look at houses just at their shape or wideness, but living actions and dynamics should also be taken into account.” Līnā describes the house:

I am no more than a guest in this room taking shelter in it for a while … I sat on the edge of the bed, and moistened my wrist with my lips to ease away the burning pain under the silver bracelet. Then … I went to the street to smell a more delightful light, a deeper quietness, and a wider freedom. I hate our house. I long to leave it forever. In this house, I have no taste for the wealth here, and I do not like it, I hate them. My comfort is that I am in love.

Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 283.

Ibid., 256.

Baḥrāwī, Bunyat al-shakl al-rīwā’ī, 43.

Līnā uses her description of the house to reveal her relationship with it and with those that own it and dwell in it. She feels as if in a prison, not free, and unable to feel wealth or prosperity while she lives there. Thus, she indicates that she does not belong to that house, nor to those who dwell in it, but rather finds freedom only in her love for Bahā’. The previously described scene shows the considerable social relationships and living dynamics which Baḥrāwī mentioned. Līnā goes further: she uses the description of this location to justify her struggles against her family and their tradition. This becomes more obvious when Līnā says: “He [the young man] returns home and no one asks him: Where were you? What did you do? And I, if I return back home at eight in the evening, I am faced with signs of condemnation carved in their eyes: where were you? What did you do?”389 Thus Līnā indicates the house rules related to how a young man and a young woman can come and go from the house, which she thinks are unjust. Līnā rebukes herself each time she returns home: “Why I do have to return back to the house each time? Why do I have to wait for a man to marry to open up a house for me? Why do I have to live each time with another person to protect me?” Thus, the house is considered a location of pain or crisis in the novel, and Līnā explains that her desire is to be free of it. However, at the end of the novel, Līnā fails in achieving this desire. She returns home, having failed to find another shelter.

Although the events of the novel take place in Beirut, recall that Bahā’ represents a youth who emigrates for a better life, making and getting better chances and possibilities for studies and work. This may suggest that the writer was influenced by her parents’ immigration to seek a better life in Beirut. But emigration and immigration are motifs that can convey many meanings; this motif has been used since classic Arabic literature as Rīm Al-Īsāwī says:

389 Ibid., 104–5.
“Immigration has several meanings in classic Arabic literature such as expressing suffering.” Bahā’ s movement may suggest a restlessness that is not just socioeconomic.

Thus, the protagonist uses her role as the narrator not only to point out the aspects of time and place in which the story occurs, but also she uses her descriptions of place and time as a means to criticize society and government; we could, therefore, say that the writer succeeds in giving time and place a double function in her writing.

Having discussed the uses the narrator makes of setting, I shall now move on to discuss conflict not only to point out to what extent it is dramatic and complicated, but also to examine how the narrator affects this conflict.

### 3.2.3 Conflict and Tension

The multitude of Līnā’s desires, and her struggles to achieve one desire after another, makes her conflict with her family both progressive and successive. It causes the tension to augment at some times and to fade at others, depending on how her desires are provoked and how they play out against the background of events. Therefore, these desires are what dramatize the events, in particular during in the early stages in which Līnā announces the desire, or whenever she is infuriated by resistance from her father or mother. Moreover, these desires cause successive dramatic crises, which eventually subside once Līnā succeeds in achieving them. Līnā’s success comes about because she faces down her mother’s and father’s reactions towards her, at times with indolence and neglect, and at other times with dogmatism, anger, confrontation, and sarcasm, or by crying and self-isolation in her room to avoid confrontation or to delay it until the confrontation has cooled off. At the same time, her parents are not tough with her; rather, they are often content with scolding, or sarcastically dismissing her

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desire. But it is not long before they give up and accept reality, perhaps for the sake of avoiding continuous clashes with Līnā, perhaps because of the weakness of their position, their own indecisiveness, the weakness of the family hierarchy, or perhaps even out of compassion and kindness.

The novel begins, as mentioned previously, with Līnā asserting her first desire, which is ownership over her body and in particular her right to do whatever she wants with her hair, an ownership which will be discussed in depth in chapter five:

For whom is this warm hair that is loose on my shoulders? Is not it mine? Just as each being has his own hair and does whatever he desires to it, am I not free to rage over this hair, which catches the eyes to a point that has made my existence caused by my hair’s own existence? In contrast, Līnā’s mother’s point of view as regards this desire appears dim and delayed. This could be because Līnā herself plays the role of narrator, and may have intentionally minimized and marginalized the counterparty to the conflict, or at least have weakened them by diminishing their voice. Further, the delay in showing her mother or father’s reaction to that particular desire may simply be for dramatic effect, augmenting the reader’s motivation to continue reading in order to discover those reactions. Regarding the haircut, Līnā’s mother says to her: “When? When did you cut off your beautiful hair? Why did you wipe away your tender innocent features and turn into the likeness of a fierce boy’s head?” Līnā reacts sarcastically, commenting that her mother’s objection is an impressive piece of lamenting poetical rhetoric. This comment is commensurate with the fact that Līnā herself is the narrator, capable of evaluating text and classifying it. Līnā comments:

I kept my eyes on her lips as the lamenting poetic rhetorical words were departing them: impressive. For she is lamenting the silky locks of hair that she allowed to grow and lengthen, and allowed to descend on my shoulders. For she, my mother, has looked after those locks of hair, taken care of their cleanliness and style…

391 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 7.
392 Ibid., 29.
393 Ibid.
Līnā uses the conflict and her mother’s objection as an indicator of how she has been influenced by her mother and father. This appears in the following comment: “When she took care of my hair, my mother gave me lessons on the art of vanity and arrogance, and thereafter pride was with me wherever I went.” Thus it is as if Līnā is saying that her mother has taught her and brought her up in pride and arrogance. Meanwhile, her father responds to the haircut with punishment, represented in him asking her not to show him her face until her hair grows back again: “Go away, get out of my face. Do not let me see you until your hair grow long.” While the father sees this as a punishment, Līnā on the other hand considers it a reward. Līnā says to the reader: “My father is an idiot. He should have realized my own boredom of seeing him every day... He should have punished me by forcing me to accompany him from the rising of the sun until the middle of the night.” Līnā’s sarcastic responses to her parents reveal how, in this particular conflict, the parents have failed to identify significant punishments. In addition, her responses show not only her as a somewhat typically rebellious young woman, but also her extreme alienation from her world. Moreover, all of Līnā’s comments verify that the narrator is not neutral; rather, she is biased, not only narrating the story but also expressing her point of view as she comments on, ridicules, evaluates, and classifies the words and deeds of the different characters. Norman Friedman called this kind of narrator a 'selective omniscience', describing it as a narrator who is not neutral, but active and participating in constructing the novel. Yet al-Ṭāliʿī sees the latter kind of narrator as narration failure. Within her analysis of Wa-Sumayyah takhirju mina al-bahr [And Sumayyah comes out of the sea] (1985) al-Ṭāliʿī comments: “This narrator does not describe and observe but also intervenes, analyses and comments; therefore, he fails in his

394 Ibid.
395 Ibid., 31.
396 Ibid.
role as narrator.” Indeed, the selective omniscience in Anā aḥyā, complicates the narrator's function(s). However, this bias may weaken the reader’s trust in the narrator and also may cast doubt on the narrator’s credibility and objectivity in narrating the story. By the same token, though, this lack of trust in the narrator makes the narrator herself seem more realistic, since she is, like any human being, biased and not entirely reliable.

Subsequently, we see the mother's character even more weakened, as she states that she will turn to her husband to punish Līnā: "‘Where were you gone like a snail on the roads? Where did you waste the hours before noon?’ Then she said in anger: ‘Beware! If you insist on your freedom, and your pugnacity, I will leave your punishment to your father, and he will force you to do your duties!’” Such is the threat that Līnā receives in response to her frequent outings and late night returns. We see the mother is in a weak position, as she does not explain why she is asking her daughter such questions and does not confer legitimacy on them, nor is she clear in explaining what she wants from her daughter and why. Once all her means of confrontation are played out, she threatens Līnā with the last card that she has left, which is the father. Meanwhile, if we look from a different perspective at Līnā and her behaviour, we find her sarcastic about her mother: she begins to laugh, and this laughter strongly indicates Līnā’s self-confidence and how much she belittles her mother. As narrator, Līnā explains for the reader the reason for her sarcasm and contempt for her mother: “She is a coward. Why wouldn’t she dare to pursue her own goals? Isn’t she aware of the capacities of a person’s tyranny once one begins to taste the extent of their individuality and freedom?”

And when her mother becomes annoyed by Līnā’s laughter, she says: “Don’t you care about your father? Say that you do not fear him … Come on, say it!” Here Līnā’s comments reveal her thoughts to the reader:

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398 Al-Ṭāli‘i, Al-Ḥabb wa-al-jasad wa-al-hurrīyah, 57.
399 Ibid., 20.
400 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 21.
Why does she interfere in my life? Why should I tremble from fear of her or of my father? Why doesn’t she take care of her own problems, that she should spend the night cautious and vigilant, looking after her husband next to her instead of giving up to sleep, while he takes advantage of that to steal away on a date in the dark.\footnote{Ibid.} In comparison to the naïve mother, we here see Līnā’s strength: she is aware of her goals, and she has set for herself a road to freedom that she is determined to stick to and which she believes in.

The tension augments when the mother raises her hand against her daughter, but soon then fades away. Līnā says: “She touched my shoulder and shook me with force, then suddenly her hand reached the pond of deep water on my clothes, and she mumbled a mother’s kind words, saying ‘hurry up, and take these wet clothes off your body!’”\footnote{Ibid., 22.} Thus the tension faded in the first scene of conflict and confrontation between Līnā and her mother. As narrator, Līnā now says to the reader: “I took advantage of her weakness and asked: ‘Can you lend me fifty Liras? I will return them to you by the end of the month.’” Then Līnā continues the narration by saying: “She [her mother] stood nailed in her place, and her hands were heavier on my shoulders as if she intended to smash them, and she did not answer, but rather she pushed me sarcastically back to my room, and I fled.” (After Līnā is refused the loan, she asks her eldest sister to give her the money and gets a loan until the end of the month (see \textit{Anā aḥyā}, 24.).)

The rain that has caused Līnā’s clothes to get wet is the reason why she flees from her mother, and is also the reason for the decrease in tension between the two of them. In terms of artistic drama, this corresponds to the way the narrator has previously described rain scenes, as if she loves the rain precisely because it has the power to save her, and perhaps she desires to prompt the reader to expect that the rain will have a role later on in the events, as in this scene. In describing the rain, Līnā says: “Then I drifted away watching the rain showers that have attacked those who had just closed their umbrellas, and I was overwhelmed with

\footnote{Ibid.}
fervent pleasure … then that pleasure leaked into my mind and tickled it.”

Moreover, in a different place she says (a quotation we have looked at in part already):

They [the people] are afraid of the rain that comes in the day. While I fear it at night, and this fear paralyzes me! They are afraid of the mud messing up their clothes and from the water ruining the fabrics. While I am afraid of the thunder, the wind, the darkness, and the lightning!

Līnā, the narrator, is not afraid of getting her clothes wet or returning home wet through, and thus it is as if we see here a narrative or dramatic device wherein having rain-soaked clothes prior to returning home is the very thing which cools the tension between Līnā and her mother, as mentioned earlier. Thus, we see that the narrator uses nature in her story, and involves nature in her own conflict against traditions and social concepts, turning it into a docile tool which stands in solidarity with her. While Līnā cannot find anyone around her to stand by her side in these conflicts, she does find nature coming to her defence, rescuing her from her mother’s anger.

This brings us to the aspect of violence in the conflict in question, which in turn artistically augments the tension and the drama of the events. This aspect of violence can be seen in Līnā’s mother’s tendency to slap Līnā. The first time that her mother slaps her is when she discovers that she is smoking:

You! When did a young woman in our family ever wander the streets like a prostitute? When did one ever sit with men and stick her nose in their problems? When did a girl ever smoke and dared to do so while her mother is nearby? Tell me when? Tell me? What are the reason behind this rebellion and the reason behind this eccentricity? What do you need that you do not have? A dress? A car? Money? A house?

The second time she slaps her is when Līnā expresses her refusal to marry according to her mother and father’s wishes. Her parents reject her attachment to Bahā’ and her desire to marry him, considering him a young man who does not believe in her and does not have any intention to marry her. Here Līnā as narrator reports that her mother, again, raised her hand

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403 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 16.
404 Ibid., 17.
405 Ibid., 174.
against her daughter and shook her violently, as if she wanted to break her shoulder. But it seems that the violence comes not only from the mother, but also from Līnā herself. This happens when her mother slaps her for the second time; at this point Līnā says “I turned back to run into my room, withholding a criminal desire in me to return the slap and cause her face to bleed.” What helps Līnā in this particular situation is that she is able to speak of her desire to execute violence and does not actually carry it out. However, Līnā does commit acts of verbal violence, such as when she tells her blonde sister: “I will cut your hand off if you touch my neck one more time!” Līnā was protesting that she would resort to violence as a response to the violence that was committed against her by her sister. Līnā says: “Then the blonde attacked me by touching my shoulders and my neck with her stiff fingers, as if she had encountered a dangerous creature.” However, the fact that one commits a violent act in retaliation to another violent act does not negate the fact that the retaliation is, nevertheless, violent, which is expected to be rejected by international human rights organizations.

Furthermore, Līnā’s attempt to commit suicide is also a case in which she is seen resorting to violence. This suicidal attempt occurs at the end of the novel and fails due to her being rescued by a man. Verbal violence also appears in Līnā’s father speech to her, for instance when he says: “You are rude! For this young man named Bahā’, you have dropped out of the college.” However, this violent aspect shows how the context of social customs could lead people, especially parents, to violence as a way for forcing their daughters to follow social customs.

If we look at the party to the conflict that is represented by the parents, we find it rather frail, weak, disorganized, and uncoordinated, as well as unaware of what Līnā is doing

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406 Ibid., 311.
407 Ibid., 23.
409 Ibid., 94.
and planning. This can be observed, for instance, in the conversation where the mother tells the father: “We have to keep an eye on Līnā,” with the father whispering: “Did she cut off her hair again?” The mother then replies, in part with anger but also in part more equivocally: “The short hair or the long hair does not do harm to our reputation, it is rather Līnā’s late night returns to the house that challenge us and cause great harm to her sisters!” “We shall look into that tomorrow,” the father replies.410 This conversation shows that equivocation is one of the characteristics of this party to the conflict. We also observe that the father is almost completely absent from the scene, except for the rare moments when his wife imparts new information to him, when she thinks the time is right. Thus, as previously mentioned, the mother has turned the father into a ‘last card,’ to which she refers in confronting Līnā’s rebellion. We also see that Līnā succeeds in her rebellion by making her desires successive and progressive – that is, by not introducing them all at once. For instance, after Līnā has cut her hair, she moves on to achieving another desire. At this point her mother has given up on further confrontation as regards the hair and is now faced with a new rebellion that requires a new confrontation – the new rebellion being Līnā’s late night returns to the house, which in turn reflect a further desire, as mentioned previously, to be able to leave and return to the house whenever she wants. It is as if Līnā’s parents’ side of the conflict is characterized by a list or ranking of things that they think are right and proper, and which they go through progressively in confronting Līnā’s rebellion. The most important issue for the mother now becomes not the haircut, but rather stopping Līnā’s late returns. Meanwhile, in regards to her going out alone, Līnā declares this desire through saying the following: “I will visit a physician tomorrow other than the family’s own physician, and I will go alone to the physician’s clinic. I will receive the results of the medical exam alone, and I will purchase the medicine from the pharmacy on my own.”411 Although Līnā has not suffered from any illness

410 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 159.
411 Ibid., 82.
before she makes this statement, nor is she apparently ill as she says it, she as narrator increases the tension and the desire of the reader to continue with the novel until they uncover the hidden issues related to the visit to the physician and the results of the medical exam. Thus, Līnā as narrator shows creativity, delaying giving out the medical exam results until the second section of the novel, where she learns that she is suffering from anaemia. “A month has passed and I have been lying in bed … The fact that I am suffering from anaemia has made my father furious.”

Each time Līnā reveals a new desire and initiates a new rebellion, her family gives up confronting the desires that were expressed earlier. Nor is this the only thing that causes their surrender to her; as narrator, Līnā reveals that her father is weak in the face of her tears, and that she takes advantage of that weakness, resorting to crying in her confrontations with him. Līnā says: “The anger on his forehead disappeared into the corners of his face: this idiot [her father] is weakened by tears. Then he turned away and left me, while saying repetitively the words: we’ll see … we’ll see.” Thus, Līnā uses tears as a means to achieve her goals, where the crying is cynical and intentional, and does not express real pain or sorrow. As well as false tears, Līnā also resorts to lies. In regards to this, she says:

I was refreshed with the thought that I should lie to him, and I explained gently: I accidentally ran into the owner of the firm in al-Nusūr club, and at the first glance he introduced me as the daughter of an important friend, and he has shown interest in my way of deep thinking and my strong personality.

Līnā adopts this lie as a means to rid herself of her father’s anger regarding her search for a job and her desire to work. In her narration of this lie, she shifts the focus of the conversation away from the original issue, which is her search for a job, and they turn to speaking about her father’s friend and how he delights in her personality. Thus, her father’s anger fades away as he begins to think of the times he spent with that friend. On the one hand her imaginary

412 Ibid., 123.
413 Ibid., 194–95.
414 Ibid., 27.
story corresponds to her role in the narration of the events, and is consistent with her identity as a university-educated person and the narrator of the novel. But on the other hand, reader might be offended and might lose trust in the narrator because she uses lies in her struggle with her father – indicating, once again, that reader could challenge the credibility of the narrator and the objectivity of the narration of Anā ḥyā in general. Having an internal narrator raises doubts and challenges the credibility and objectivity of the narration, particularly where the character played by the narrator is characterized by lying, forgetfulness, or intentional ignorance throughout the narration.

Thus, Līnā is the person who is stirring the conflict, while her parents, the counterparties, do not contribute to it except by reacting to Līnā’s actions. We see Līnā performing the actions: she rebels, declares her principles, and openly challenges traditions and social precepts; while the parents only respond, and do not initiate anything that is related to the conflict. Consequently, Līnā is narrator both of the events and of the conflict, and at the same time is the internal participating narrator who represents one side of the conflict: and so she is capable of choosing which side will win. Therefore, again, she can be characterized as biased, rather than objective and transparent.

One may conclude that the external struggle is the main conflict of the novel, but that it overlaps with an internal psychological dilemma that affects Līnā. This is manifested in her declaration of her desire to be alone, but it may be that deep inside she is not searching for loneliness, but rather desires to be free from domination by others. She wants to be able to go out of the house on her own, go to restaurants on her own, watch movies on her own, and do everything entirely on her own – as if she were a man. And indeed she does achieve success in going alone to the cinema, to restaurants, and to coffee shops. But this solitude leads her into an internal dilemma. Let us look at what Līnā says in regard to her experience of entering the cinema alone, as one of the expressions of her freedom to leave the house and travel alone.
around Beirut: “If she [her mother] had known that I will be alone … alone, without her and without my sisters and my father in the cinema, she should have slapped her cheeks, torn her clothes just to stop me from performing this great scandal.”

Although this dilemma is only an imaginary one, not an actual case of confrontation caused by her rebellion, Līnā is nevertheless making a number of presumptions as regards how her mother would have reacted if she known about Līnā’s intended visit to the cinema. This means that Līnā is challenging her family, as she is travelling and committing an act that both her mother and father do not know about. This is a great rebellion, and the narrator succeeds dramatically in indicating its greatness when she says that her mother would have slapped her cheeks and torn her clothes had she known – for in the Levant area (Bilād al-Shām) the women do this when someone dear to them dies, such as a husband, a brother, or a father. However, Līnā decides to go to the cinema, saying: “I waited with dispersed strength at the door until the moment that the lights were turned off so I would get to my seat in the dark. No, I do not dare to stand in the light, and see fingers pointed at me: alone … alone …”

Here the tension is greater than in the previous rebellious act, because this time she needs to get to cinema late so that none of the audience would notice her entering alone. And her sense of dilemma and psychological distress increases even more in the following scene: “I was terrified when a young man approached I frowned and was very angry and embarrassed …” While Līnā faces a dilemma in going to the cinema alone, Rīm in Ayyam ma‘ahu challenges the dilemma of going to the cinema with her male companion. Rīm says: “I am facing a problem! A very easy and a very simple problem… but it is still a problem! Can I join Ziyād to cinema? But… Why not join him?” A female going to the cinema is thus a feminist motive drawn within several female Lebanese writers at the time in addition

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415 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 59.
416 Ibid., 65.
417 Ibid., 61.
418 Khuri, Ayyam Ma‘ahu, 87.
to Baʿalbakī. Furthermore, it was a feminist motive which was developing: In 1958 in *Anā aḥyā* the heroine faces going to the cinema alone; in 1959 in *Ayyam Maʿahu* the heroine challenges the idea of going to the cinema with a male friend—an action strongly opposed by Lebanese Arab and Muslim patriarchal norms as such an action is a 'double' rebellion (i.e., going to the cinema as a single female and joining a male friend at the cinema). In this context, she says: “I will join Ziyād at the cinema… They will say: ‘This young girl is an immoral… and a slut. How dare she join a young male?’” Therefore, in *Ayyam Maʿahu* the discussed dilemma is more complicated than the one in *Anā aḥyā*.

Thus, Līnā’s loneliness has become a psychological nightmare that is stalking her and bringing her anger and embarrassment, although she attempts to hide her loneliness from those around her. The nightmare stalks her not only in the cinema, but pursues her to the restaurant, as seen in the following scene:

I was looking around at the chairs in the restaurant and at the attendees, then I felt how trivial I was, and I realized that I need a companion: a man who will occupy my thoughts with new things that I never knew before … Then why would I not invite, for instance, that young man who is setting alone to join me for a meal? I will invite him. Doesn’t he himself feel that he needs a young lady to sit right across the table from him? Doesn’t his life feel dry and require kindness and care? Līnā takes a decision based on her internal dilemma between her need to experience solitude, without terror of loneliness, and thereby affirm her freedom; and her growing need for the other – the man. She confesses her need for a man who will cover her with compassion, kindness, and care, so that she would return the same to him.

This presentation of Līnā’s views on her need for a man does not indicate that she has had a sexual experience with Bahā’, as Āghā claims. However, there is no other indication in the novel that Līnā has had a sexual experience. On the other hand, Līnā’s later views show a change in her character. This change is not sudden: rather the narrator introduces it

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419 Ibid., 91.
gradually, one step at a time, as it appears above. This change can be considered as the introduction of a new dimension of artistic drama that suits Līnā’s meeting with Bahā’ and her falling in love with him in the second section of the novel. In regards to the context of the conflict, Līnā gives up on some of what she declared earlier, and this is all on account of the new desire that she has developed, which is to get together with a man. But when the reader sees this, he may conclude that this change will also cause other changes in Līnā, in other aspects of her struggle and rebellion, causing an increase in the tension and so also prompting the reader to continue reading the novel. For Līnā, loneliness has two meanings: before meeting Bahā’, loneliness meant an obscure void; while after meeting him, loneliness meant Bahā’’s absence from her.422

Līnā’s internal dilemmas do not end here, but go on to take different forms. While her internal dilemma before meeting and falling in love with Bahā’ was caused by loneliness, her next one is due to other reasons. Līnā has doubts about the goals, intentions, and actions of the firm from the minute she starts working there. We see her saying to herself: “The owner of the firm said: ‘Your father is my friend.’” She then reveals her thoughts in regards to this: “My father is a friend to everyone who is takes advantage of political mishaps.”423 The owner of the firm tells Līnā: “Our firm is a firm against communism. This firm works for peace and for spreading it in the world.”424 Līnā becomes angry and has a discussion with the owner – who is also her boss – in which she doubts the validity of the actions of the firm in regards to peace; I will return to this later. What matters in this context as regards Līnā’s internal dilemma is that Līnā is dissatisfied with the firm she is working in, as its political views do not coincide with her own opinions. This alone could be a cause for her to resign. However, a colleague tells her: “You are like me, you do not care where the money comes from! The most important thing for you is to have the money to achieve the greatness of your freedom”;

422 See, for example, Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 157.
423 Ibid., 14.
424 Ibid., 162.
Līnā mumbles something in response, asking herself “Am I like him?” Līnā’s hesitation in determining the precise nature of the work that the firm does, stands in good stead for her both in her role as narrator and in her role as a worker in the firm, where she does not want to show ambivalence in her character. Thus, Līnā has used her role as narrator to make herself look better in the novel. Also, here the reader can challenge the credibility of the narrator, because she is biased in favour of herself, and because she is hiding or at least trying to delay the exposure of information in order to serve that bias.

On the other hand, however, it seems that Līnā has decided from the beginning to stay in that firm for the sake of the money and her financial independence, and so attain her freedom, even if this is at the expense of her college education. We hear her say: “I will not return to my education and I do not care about whatever the professor babbles about. The most important thing for me is: the rusting key in the corner, and the freezing job above the rust, and the amount of twenty-five thousand Liras.” This is only one side of the story, however, for on the other hand Līnā still indicates that she is caught in a dilemma because of the discrepancy between the nature of the goals of the firm and her own political views. Līnā says: “I wish I was able to leave the firm … I wish … But, how will I spend my time?” Here, Līnā reveals that she desires to leave the firm, but that she cannot because – at that point at least – she would suffer from loneliness and the fear of the void, even as she used to skip college classes for the sake of work. Thus, where college conflicts with work, she prefers work to study. However, when she meets Bahā’ and falls in love with him, she resigns from the firm. This means that she does not stay in the job because of finances alone, but also because of her fear of the void she would face if she left. It is Bahā’ who now has occupied her time, since she does not suffer loneliness and emptiness after she resigns. Yet later she regrets leaving, and this happens when she finds out that Bahā’ does not in fact fill the

425 Ibid., 78.
426 Ibid., 50.
427 Ibid., 56.
emptiness in her. She says: “As for me, I have left my job. Why did I leave my job? Why did I leave my job? Then I curse myself.” She also left college because of her attachment to Bahā’, who took over her heart, her time, and her thoughts. She left college, before leaving her job, so that she would have time to meet Bahā’ at the coffee shop. When she should have been taking her midterm exams, she preferred to devote the time to Bahā’, who at the beginning was a mysterious and indistinct figure to her, albeit one whom she loved and to whom she was increasingly becoming attached.

In summary, then, in the context of the external struggle that unfolds in the novel, we see Līnā giving up on all the desires which originally caused her to rebel against her family, including work and college, and that this has happened because of her attachment to Bahā’. This in itself has increased the tension and conflict, with her father, as we have seen, declaring: “You are rude! For this young man named Bahā’, you have dropped out of college, you are skipping work at the firm, for him you are staying up late ruminating about him!” Consequently, Līnā’s internal and external struggles come to overlap and serve each other. Līnā’s decision to leave college means that she becomes free of the internal dilemma she suffered because of the conflict between, on the one hand, going to college and taking midterm exams, and, on the other, spending time on her relationship with Bahā’ so that she could try to understand him and propel him into getting engaged. When she decides to resign from the firm, she is relieved of this other dilemma, but getting rid of these internal dilemmas leads her back to the old external struggle which had earlier faded away. Thus, Līnā shifts between these struggles, and once she is relieved of the internal struggle is propelled back to the external one, which at times intensifies and strengthens, at other times weakens and fades, throughout the novel. At times when the external struggle fades, Līnā moves toward the internal one: this means that the external and the internal struggles in the novel are likely

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428 Ba’albakî, Anā aḥyā 265.
429 Ibid., 194.
successive and not parallel. In terms of artistic drama, the reader may perhaps ask how Līnā would react if she faced both internal and external struggles continuously and in parallel, rather than successively.

While the above analysis has examined the conflicts which Līnā faces as protagonist, and the way the drama plays out through the action and atmosphere in the novel, I now turn to analyse the novel’s characters and the ways in which they contribute to the above conflict. Furthermore, while I argue that Līnā as protagonist uses her role as narrator to control the conflicts she faces, I am also going to examine to what extent Līnā uses her role as narrator to deprecate and minimize the patriarchal characters who are her antagonists in the conflict.

3.2.4 Characters

3.2.4.1 Introduction

Characters are one of the main elements of narrative works. Al-Ṭāliʿī argues that “narrative works are characterized by characters’ element which adds to the narration vitality and a closer world to reality.” Al-Ṭāliʿī, Al-Ḥabb wa-al-jasad wa-al-hurrīyah, 79. She adds: “The novel or the story could not be studied without taking the characters into account because characters let events take place and describe the world.” Therefore, al-Ṭāliʿī dedicates a prominent chapter to studying characters in several feminist novels, focusing, classifying and examining relationships among them. Although the discussion above has already shed light on the characters as narrative elements, I highlight this aspect below.

Anā aḥyā involves just four main characters, although the novel has plenty of space for more. By limiting the number of characters, Baʿalbakī avoids cluttering the story with needless detail. In addition, limiting the number of characters may enable the reader to

430 Al-Ṭāliʿī, Al-Ḥabb wa-al-jasad wa-al-hurrīyah, 79.
431 Ibid., 97.
432 Ibid., 79-122.
understand and identify with the issues that concern the protagonist and the other main characters. Furthermore, it seems as though the writer aims to avoid sub-plots, in order to keep her novel tight. I will begin my analysis with Līnā because she is the protagonist; then I will turn to Bahā’, as the dominant antagonist; and finally I will analyse characters of Līnā’s parents.

3.2.4.2 Līnā

Līnā is a round and complex character that grows and changes throughout the novel, as will be shown later. She is nineteen years old, intelligent, a university student, and unmarried. She lives in a large house with her rich family on a beach in Beirut in the 1950s. Līnā describes herself as a slim and attractive person, with full lips and wide eyes, and her skin colour is gray.

However, Līnā also has a strong ego, which leads her to consider herself a unique woman, fundamentally different from the others around her. She considers herself a free and independent woman who does not need anyone else, and who has a powerful love of life. She acknowledges that she is arrogant and confrontational. Līnā is confident not only of herself and her abilities, but also of her ability not to fail in anything at which she aims. Līnā says: “I could not previously have thought of anything in which I could not have guaranteed my success.” Furthermore, she believes that nobody can affect her: crucially, she denies that the social environment can have any effect on her, and in particular she denies that her mother can affect her psychologically. I argue, however, that it is of foremost importance to discuss her mother’s effect on her, because it relates to the main tenets which structure Līnā’s ego. Līnā’s mother has been socialized to abide by the patriarchal system and to live within

433 Ba‘albākī, Anā aḥyā, 100.
the rules of a male-dominated society, and that she is passing on this submission to her daughters. Jane Flax observes that

because her [the mother’s] own psychological development occurred under patriarchy, it would have left an imprint upon her feelings about herself, about being a woman and being a mother. These feelings would in turn affect the type of mothering she would provide a child. 434

This observation is relevant to Līnā’s mother too. Therefore, I argue that Līnā’s mother’s patriarchal role is what motivates Līnā to think and to act in a way that confronts the patriarchal social system. While her two sisters are integrated into the patriarchal system, Līnā constructs a different ego and rebels. Thus, the characters of her two sisters are flat – mere foils which provide contrast to Līnā the protagonist, and which emphasize Līnā’s anti-patriarchal perceptions.

When we link Līnā’s mother’s possible psychological effects to the place in which she plays her role, it becomes clear that the home, for Līnā, is fundamentally a space of oppression. It is in the home that her mother censures and beats her daughter in an effort to stop her rebellion against social customs and thoughts. Consequently, freedom from the home and its patriarchal rules becomes the dominant factor in Līnā’s choices – choices which will be discussed later.

Līnā sometimes draws back from some elements of her ego. For example, she says, “I am low-down. I am low-down even in this institution.” 435 Here, we see Līnā diminishing the sense of prestige which stems from her strong ego, because she is no longer satisfied by her job.

Despite her strong ego, she has feelings of weakness: she fears not only being bored or having excessive free time, but also being alone in her rebellion against her family, and thus being alone in the restaurants, coffee shops, and cinemas to which she flees. This feeling

435 Ba‘albaki, Anā aḥyā, 87.
of being alone and of listless free time was one of the prominent reasons for her working, and then for searching for a man and a long-term relationship. Moreover, she feels lost: “I am, in our home, lost: I am not Eastern, and not Western. I am not free and not enslaved.”\textsuperscript{436} Manṣūr Qaysūmah argues that the motif of being lost is widespread throughout the modern Arabic novel, proposing that being ‘lost’ means not only dispersion and being in disharmony with society, but also represents a revolution against custom. Qaysūmah theorizes that feeling lost pushes the person to turn inwards, to look into his or her self for rescue.\textsuperscript{437}

Accordingly, Līnā’s feeling of being lost pushes her to construct a strong ego, both as a reaction and as a means of rescuing herself. Having discussed Līnā’s ego and her feelings, it is now time to turn to her ethics and her choices, in order to examine to what extent they are in harmony.

Regarding her ethic, Līnā believes that she owns her own body and that she is free to do what she wants with it. On the other hand, she refuses to consider herself as a sex object. She believes that she is free and that she should be financially independent. She feels she does not need to give her obedience to any man, not to her father nor to a husband, because she considers both to be agents of patriarchal dominance. While Līnā’s ethic is a product of her ego, her choices are motivated by her ethic. Her most dominant choice is to go in and out of the home at any time, unquestioned. In addition, she desires to go alone to restaurants, cafes, and the cinema. All of these choices are in line with her ethic. In contrast, she later comes to want to marry Bahā’, whom she loves. This choice pushes her to negotiate with her ego and her ethic, and to seek to change them in line with her need for a husband. She realises she needs a man to be with, so that she can play a mothering role in society. This, then, is another point at which the influence of her mother may perhaps be discerned. Līnā

\textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 74.
says: “I realised I needed a friend: a man.”; 438 “In my life with Bahā’: I will take and I will give … Life with Bahā’ will enable me to be creative.” 439 Līnā has acknowledged Bahā’’s influence on her, but this acknowledgement conflicts with her ego. Līnā explains, “I know I am attaining maturity … I will go into this man’s [Bahā’’s] world to get new facts.” 440 Thus, we can point to ways in which Līnā’s character is very dynamic, both with respect to her ego and her ethic. I suggest that Līnā’s being a dynamic and complex character is strongly in line with the circular process of development which characterizes her in many places throughout the novel. This circular process begins with Līnā’s ego driving her to choose to enter a new situation, and her ethic then adapting to the new circumstances and the insights it affords. Subsequently, though, she returns to her old situation in order to act and react to it in the light of what she has learned and how she has changed.

Līnā’s consciousness of her ego and ethic leads her for the most part to make her decisions consciously. She is generally strict and unyielding about the decisions she makes: for instance, she realizes that her choices are in tension with social customs, and so will lead to conflict with her parents. While Līnā fully succeeds in accomplishing her choices to go out alone, to have job, and to go to restaurants and cafes alone, she only partly succeeds in going alone to the cinema. She is conscious of her parents’ reaction to that choice. This consciousness leads her into a new dilemma, but she nevertheless decides once more to go alone to the cinema. Līnā sometimes makes a decision that she later consciously regrets; that is to say, she acknowledges that her decisions are sometimes wrong. For example, she regrets her decision to leave both her studies and her job in order to be with Bahā’. This regret contrasts with her strong ego and is a symptom of weakness and confusion.

While Līnā succeeds, for the most part fully although sometimes only partially, in attaining her goals, she fails to marry Bahā’, for whom she sacrificed her job and her

439 Ibid., 285.
440 Ibid., 141.
education. I suggest that her failure here is rooted in the fact that her choice to marry Bahā’ is motivated not only by ethic, but also by genuine emotions of love. Thus, Līnā does not take due care of Bahā’’s own ethic, despite the fact that she knows Bahā’ thoughts are not similar to hers. Nor has Bahā’ ever indicated that he loves her. Remarkng on the sacrifices Līnā makes for Bahā’, Kaḥīl claims that she reveals herself to be similar to her mother, against whom she is rebelling.\footnote{Kaḥīl, “Namādhij min ḥarakiyyat ṣūrat al-mar’ah,” 27.} In my view, this assessment is incorrect: Kaḥīl does not take into account the broader character of the exchanges between Līnā and her mother. Although Līnā makes sacrifices for Bahā’, she retains her strict attitude towards patriarchal dominance, and Kaḥīl passes over the fact that Līnā’s failure to attain her desired marriage is principally because of her rebellion against patriarchal dominance. Nevertheless, the failure of her marriage plans does indeed prove that her stopping studying and working was a wrong decision. Thus, Līnā’s failures accumulate: “No Bahā’, no child, no job, and no university: farces, farces ….”\footnote{Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 307.} Līnā not only acknowledges she has failed, but also reassesses her prior choices – indicating that one of the results of such failure is precisely to cause a reappraisal of her past actions. Līnā is turning in on herself, dwelling on her choices and her ethic, because of her loss of hope and love; but at the same time, this turning in on herself also represents a shift from living in dreams and imaginary worlds to living in reality.

Consequently, Līnā’s failure is double: it is a failure both externally and internally. Her internal failure is reflected in her suicide attempt, which represents a further effort to escape from reality, and to avoid confronting the challenges it now presents. Furthermore, this attempt to escape from reality indicates not only that Līnā has no abilities or resources left upon which she can call, but also that her ego – hitherto so strong – is breaking down. This is Līnā’s character at its weakest point. Confronted with the failure of her decisions, Līnā chooses suicide but fails in the attempt: thus she fails again to fulfil a decision. Now there is
nothing left except to return to the home from which she had for so long desired to be free. Commenting on Līnā’s failed suicide, Ba'ālbatī says that she makes a point of preventing her characters from killing themselves: “This rescue from death is the reason why my novels are open-ended.” On his point I agree with her, because we see that this returns as a motif in both her novels. It suggests that the writer controls her characters, wants them to continue in their struggles and not to give up on these struggles through suicide.

The preceding discussion has concerned how Līnā’s ego affects her ethic, and how her ego and ethic affect her choices and decisions; in contrast, I now turn to examine how Līnā sees others, and in particular to investigate whether her ego and ethic influence the way she looks at the other characters.

The way Līnā sees others is influenced by her arrogance, and it is clear that she does not respect the other members of her family, or anyone else. Līnā says: “My body rebels and rises up to touch the sky … and people draw together and sink down to touch the black surface of the street.” Here, Līnā compares herself to other people, focusing on her superiority while undervaluing others: “I am not like others [women in the office]. I do not want to be like anyone else.” Her teacher she considers trivial. While Līnā’s general views of others are constructed around arrogance, supremacy, and ignorance, Līnā considers the colonial rulers and the Jews to be enemies, and so hates them. Līnā’s attitude towards Jews refers to her consciousness of the Arab–Israeli conflict and her sense of solidarity with the Palestinians. Here, Līnā is being motivated by her political vision, which is a part of her ethic.

On an individual level, Līnā hates and deprecates her father, not only because of his patriarchal dominance, but also because of his lies and illegal riches, attained by monopolizing goods during the Second World War. She considers him materialistic. Līnā

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443 Ba’ālbatī, Al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 9.
444 Ba’ālbatī, Anā aḥyā, 195.
445 Ibid., 113.
says, “my father considers people to be trading deals in which he never loses.”

Further, Līnā disparages her father due to his seeking a sexual relationship with an older female neighbour.

Similarly, Līnā hates her mother, mostly because her mother plays a patriarchal role and cooperates with her father against her. In addition, she considers her ignorant, illiterate, and a simpleton. Unexpectedly, however, Līnā expresses appreciation of her mother’s educational role when she reflects on how her mother took care of her when she was a child. As well as this, Līnā later begins to listen to her mother without interruption, especially when her mother is talking about Līnā’s own sexual attractiveness.

Līnā sees Bahā’ in two distinct ways. While the first is motivated by her love for him, the second is rooted in her ethic and her ego. In the beginning, she thinks or hopes that he loves her. Līnā acknowledges that she loves Bahā’ – “I began loving him first by loving his eyes …” – and she considers him a serious student and an active politician who suffered much in his past and in his childhood. She says of him, “He is courageous, shy, and ambiguous. I fear him.” But despite fearing his ambiguity, she continues loving him and sacrificing for him, as mentioned above. That is to say, Līnā is motivated by her first having looked at Bahā’ in a manner coloured by her emotion. Kaḥīl’s claim that Līnā considers Bahā’ to be a typical character is not accurate, because Līnā is aware of Bahā’’s atypical traits, such as shyness and ambiguity. When Bahā’ refuses to marry Līnā, she changes her view of him, saying: “Bahā’ is a project of my future lost … lost ….” Līnā considers him as her lost hope.

Interestingly, Līnā as narrator not only does not call all people by their names, but also explains why she does not do so:

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446 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 29.
447 Ibid., 146.
448 Ibid., 131.
449 Kaḥīl, “Namādhij min ḥarakiyyat ṣūrat al-mar’ah,” 27.
450 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 323.
Līnā believes that the names of people mostly do not reflect their real traits: conversely, however, she does opt to name Bahā’ whom she loves, Walīd who loves her, and her youngest brother Bassām. One may well come to wonder whether these in fact are not their real names, but names she has invented which reflect the characters she – erroneously, in the case of Bahā’ – attributes to them. This may, then, be further evidence in favour of the untrustworthiness of the narrator.

3.2.4.3 Other Characters

I turn now to examine how the other characters judge Līnā. Firstly, her parents consider her as their daughter, who rebels against them and their customs and generates a continuous state of conflict. Secondly, while her boss considers her arrogant and un-socialized, her colleague Walīd loves her and sees Līnā behaving according the principle of ‘the end justifies the means.’ Lastly, Bahā’ considers Līnā an anarchist and a rebel against social customs. As a result, as a man who maintains social customs, Bahā’ thinks Līnā is not a suitable girl for him to marry; but on the other hand, Bahā’ also considers Līnā to be someone who is intimate with him, to whom he opted to reveal his sad past, and with whom he felt relaxed and comfortable sharing their free time in cafes. Thus, I suggest that Bahā’ considers Līnā to be a friend, suitable for a short-term release of suffering, and from whom he can obtain kindness and sympathy. In addition, Bahā’ might be both attracted to Līnā and repelled by some of her ideas.

Regarding to Bahā’, I class him as the dominant antagonist because he is the one whom the protagonist fails to overcome, represented by her failure to marry him. Bahā’ is a young Iraqi student, with wide eyes, who is twenty-five years old. He grew up in a poor

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451 Ibid., 13.
province of Iraq. He has experienced the absence of sympathy from his parents and his inability to meet women. He moved to Beirut to study at the university, and is a serious student and a shy but active politician. But, he is an intellectual who respects social norms, especially those as regards women and the relationship between the sexes. Thus, Bahā’ believes in social and political revolution, except in so far as it concerns patriarchal dominance. In this context, Imān al-Qāḍī indicates that Bahā’’s belonging to the Communist party contrasts with his view on women. While al-Qāḍī does not examine the reasons for the contrast she indicates, Muḥammad al-Bāridī explains that Arab intellectuals generally experience a dilemma between maintaining social norms and supporting modernization. As a result, al-Bāridī says, Arab intellectuals cannot free themselves of the mind-set of patriarchy. Some examples from the novel support al-Bāridī’s reading here. Bahā’, who considers himself a keeper of social norms, has dated women in night clubs, which is in conflict with those norms; furthermore, Bahā’ is a sadist who expresses pleasure after hearing his uncle talking about beating and punishing his wife. All of the above components demonstrate that Bahā’’s character is round and complex.

Līnā’s father grew up within an economically middle-class family. His own father was a merchant, and he left off studying in order to help his father at work, later becoming a successful businessman and materialist. When his father died, he helped his brother to complete his study of medicine, helped his other brother to find a job, and supported his sisters so that they could marry. Thus, he seems to be generous, especially with those close to him. He became a rich man during the Second World War through monopolizing several goods in collaboration with the colonial authorities. Subsequently, he was able to move with

454 See Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 245.
his family to a huge house on one of Beirut’s beaches, where he pushed his daughters towards studying. On the one hand, both as a father and a husband, he is patriarchal, and he cooperates with his wife in an effort to stop Līnā’s rebellion; on the other hand, he is maintaining a discreet sexual relationship with corpulent older woman (imra’ah musinna samina) who is their neighbour. In the main, his character as an antagonist is complex and rounded. Unlike the character of the father, however, Līnā’s mother is a rather straightforward antagonist: she is honest, simple, and a loyal housewife. Both as a wife and as a mother, she represents the patriarchal system. However, these two characters can be considered less dominant antagonists than the character of Bahā’, since although they cooperate as parents to stop their daughter’s rebellion, they fail.

3.2.5 Themes

Having analysed the narrative manner, setting, conflict, and characters, I turn now to point out the major themes of the novel. Examining Ba’albakī themes leads to the conclusion that the dominant one is that of feminism, because the novel primarily represents the continuous struggle for women’s freedom from patriarchal social customs. Due to the significance of this theme, it is appropriate to devote significant space to it, and thus I address it in chapter five.

Hishām al-‘Alawī differentiates between Moroccan social novels in the sixties and seventies and the feminist narrative approach employed for the feminist “I”. He argues that the latter approach mainly focuses on the female self, ignoring public and social issues. However, in addition to her prominent feminist agenda, Ba’albakī addresses other issues of concern, including social, political, economic and religious factors. Therefore, three

456 The feminist agenda, in Anā aḥyā as well as in her other stories, will be discussed later.
additional major thematic foci in the novel will be discussed briefly: politics, religion, and finance.

3.2.5.1 Politics

The reader may observe political motives permeating the setting, conflict, and characters. I have already noted that the time period of the novel encompasses several significant political situations and events: French and British colonialism in Middle East, including Lebanon where the story occurs; the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956 and the 1948–49 war between Israel and Palestinian forces, which led to the on-going Arab–Israeli conflict. One group of people opted to cooperate with French colonial rulers in order to gain wealth and to upgrade their socio-economic status; both Līnā’s father and her boss are members of this group. In contrast, another group of people refused to cooperate with colonialism but instead formed an opposition, and Līnā and Bahā’ fall into this group. Furthermore, students used to be engaged in the discussion of Middle Eastern political issues, such as American intervention at the time in Middle Eastern issues and especially the Arab–Israeli conflict. For example, Līnā says:

They [her students’ colleagues] discussed the American project for Middle Eastern issue solutions. One student said: Newspapers here are employed for foreigner targets. These newspapers are criminals because they are killing the Arabic nationalism notion in Arab countries, particularly in Lebanon.457

Līnā further tells us that, when she tried to express her views on some of the discussed issues, students did not let her do so; instead, they looked at her as a female in terms of a sexual entity. She says: “They [students] are not concerned with the notion of Arab countries’ unification, or the solution of Palestinian issues… Instead they are hungry to look at women’s bodies.”458

457 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 96.
458 Ibid., 97.
Moreover, while students, including Bahā’, discuss how to revolt against colonialism, Līnā does justice to her own political concerns: she believes that people should begin with their own individual revolutions, and so she pursues her agenda of rebellion against patriarchal society. She says: “Our need for the best … means: we are in need of the emergence of the individual…” Here, I argue, the writer uses the political sphere as a backdrop for her feminist campaign. In addition, the novel raises the ideological conflict at the time between capitalism and communism. For instance, Līnā’s boss tells her: “Our office is aiming to fight the communist activities” He adds: “This institution works to achieve peace in the world…. Līnā then challenged him with rhetorical questions: “Where have you and your ilk succeeded in achieving peace? In Algeria? In Cyprus? In Palestine?” Here, there is the sound of seeking peace, but only peace with justice and the rights of freedom as well as independence for countries and nations.

Given the salience of the Arab–Israeli conflict, hatred for Jews and a sense of solidarity with the Palestinians are clearly represented in the novel, and the protagonist heroine indirectly calls for moral and military preparedness to fight the Jews. An example of hatred for the Jews is Līnā’s comment: “I looked outside of the house and saw a Jewish woman walking in the street dragging her wide buttocks. She is like a dirty old duck. I spit towards her […]”. The protagonist ridicules the despised Jewish people. In addition, she rhetorically questioned Bahā’: “Have you killed many Zionists?” It is clear now that the Israeli authorities banned the novel in the 1960s due to the repeated anti-Semitism in it. However, that is not to say that the Palestinian issue is the core theme in the novel, as Razān Ibrāhīm comments: “The Palestinian issue was treated in the Arabic novel as an example of

459 Ibid., 164.
460 Ibid., 162.
461 Ba‘albaki, Anā ahyā, 303-4.
462 Ibid., 268.
the shared Arab concerns but not as a main theme except the Palestinian novel.” ʿUsayrān is an exception as she devoted her novel ʿAsāfīr al-fajr [Birds of the early morning] (1968) to the Palestinian issue, specifically treating the Palestinian refugee situations.

3.2.5.2 Finance

The novel is set at a time when capitalism and industrialism are changing the economies, social structures, and class relationships both in Western countries and also in Arab countries including Lebanon. An indication of the latter change is the appearance of new wealthy capitalists in Beirut, such as Līnāʾs father and Līnāʾs boss. For example, Līnā says: “This man is working: he is collecting liras and liras, to be then hundreds…then thousands…then hundreds of thousands…later this money will let him have a huge building, a skyscraper.”

A further example concerns her father. She says: “The safe-deposit treasury of my father was full, to see us [his daughters] poor considerably hurts him, so he enlarged his gift to me, and it became fifty thousand liras.”

This appearance of new capitalists provoked the opposition of Lebanese intellectuals, mainly those within the Communist party. An example of such objectionable capitalist phenomena which appears in the novel is the monopolization of goods and the consequent increase in the prices of essential items. Here is an example: Līnā read in a Lebanese morning newspaper: “Garlic has disappeared from markets, and the price of onions has risen.” Her mother told her then: “We bought all the garlic from the markets and many of the onions. Your father will send all these goods to Beirut and then to France and England.” This monopolization is considered an injustice. Indeed, Līnā responds: “I almost suffocated from the smell of injustice and oppression, the smell of millions of francs and dollars, the stinky

463 Razān Ibrāhīm, Khīṭāb al-nahdah wa-al-taqaddum, 52.
464 Baʿalbākī, Anā aḥyā, 262.
465 Ibid., 123.
466 Ibid., 46.
garlic smell, the smell of onions.” It is an obvious critical opposition to monopolization
made by capitalists and an indirect call for stopping monopolizations and asserting social and
economic justice.

The novel further calls for bridging classes’ socio-economic gaps. This links the novel
to Arabic fiction more broadly, and Lebanese fiction specifically. Sidawi says: “Tawfiq
Yusuf Awwad [1911-1989] treated in his novel Al-Raghīf [The loaf] (1939) poverty and the
class gaps between rich people, who are the minority, and poor people, who are the
majority.” Al-Samman also dealt with socio-economic gaps in her novel Beirut 75
(1975). Indeed, socio-economic gaps have remained a prominent issue in Lebanese

The most dominant socioeconomic issue in the novel, however, is the search for
individual financial independence for women. This campaign for women’s financial
independence aims not only to ensure women’s freedom from patriarchal financial
dominance, but also to allow women to be productive and creative individuals in the social
and economic spheres. For this reason, the protagonist Līnā refuses money from her father to
buy new clothes; instead, she weaves a sweater by herself in her free time. She tells us: “I
walked like a drunk to buy a quantity of wool and two aluminium wires in order to sew a
sweater for me, a sweater which costs just thirty liras.” She goes on to explain why she
does so: “I feel that I am a human who gives, who does something and earns the profit from
her effort.” She looks for a job and tries to hold on to it, despite the dilemmas she faces
because of it. In this context, Līnā says: “Is not my right to work even if my father has
millions? I despise my father, I despise his millions, and I despise this boss who is surprised

467 Ibid., 47.
468 Sidawi, Al-Nazrah al-riwā īyah ilā al-ḥarb al-Lubnāniyah, 52.
469 Ibid.
470 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 83-4.
471 Ibid., 84.
because of my seeking a job.”\textsuperscript{472} This evidence highlights her priority for economic independence rather than just easy money.

Therefore, the novel’s feminist campaign also makes use of the financial motive. That is to say, seeking the financial independence of women is motivated by the feminist choice to get the power needed to fulfil their freedom from patriarchal economic dominance.

\subsection*{3.2.5.3 Religion}

The novel briefly addresses several religious issues. The prominent issue is that it manifests strong irony: ridiculing saints, the concept of resurrection (belief in the next life), heaven, the Straight Path to God, etc. For example, Līnā says: “A great man supported these carpets as a vow to the Temple when doctors failed to treat his patient son who suffered from cancer.”\textsuperscript{473} Here Līnā ridicules asking saints for help. In another example, Līnā says: “The upper lip is in the sky and the lower lip is on the ground. The first is on the Straight Path and in heaven … the second is here in the coffee shop […]”\textsuperscript{474} Thus, we see the adoption of an ironic attitude towards religious beliefs. In particular, the novel displays irony and ridicule towards the principles of Islam. For instance: “The religious person who just does and act according religion: he does not kill, does not lie … does not envy rich people because God made us in classes … classes.”\textsuperscript{475} We note the tone of disbelief of or opposition to the religious concept, mentioned in the Qur’an (\textit{al-Anām}, verse 165), that God has determined people to be in different socio-economic classes – that is, that God has made people different with respect to their wealth, intelligence, beauty, life span, etc. Opposition to this religious concept is in line (or in harmony) with the financial motive of opposition to capitalism and to major socio-economic inequality, as mentioned before. A further example is the opposition to the “al-
"ḥijāb" face covering, which was also relevant in the fifties and sixties. In this context, Līnā says: “My God, you are Lord there. And I am a lord here. I will take from you all that I need. And I will give you what I want to. I will rip the black silk which covers the faces of every woman.” This is a clear oppositional attitude against a particular Islamic religious perspective, particularly on gender relations.

On the other hand, the writer uses the religious terms and concept of the reincarnation of souls to describe the relationship of her protagonist with her love Bahā’ and thereby legitimate the heroine’s love for him. The idea is to describe them (Līnā and Bahā’) as if they had known each other in a previous life. Bahā’ says to Līnā: “No, do not complain about me to God, because I am the only god of you.” Here the writer employs religious terms to describe how men see women in the Arab patriarchal society.

3.3 Literary Analysis of al-Ālihah al-Mamsūkhah

Having examined the novel Anā aḥyā, in what follows I will examine another of Ba‘albakī’s novels with the purpose of conducting a comprehensive comparison between the two. One of the main goals of the comparison is to determine whether there is a development in a certain way in the manner of narrative, narrative style, and the narrator’s language, as seen from a variety of points of view.

While there is a great difference in scholars’ points of view as regards to the issue of progression and regression, the author herself confirms that the novel al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah reflects “progress” in her own style. To resolve this diversity in points of view about her "progress" requires an in-depth examination of the novel and a comparison with the earlier work. Therefore, for the purposes of comparison, I will analyze al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah using the same categories that I used with the novel Anā aḥyā, and I will base my

477 Ibid., 289.
478 Ba‘albakī, Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah, 5.
overall comparative analysis on a comparison of the subcategories. Therefore, by way of proceeding with my analysis of al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, I will first conduct a general survey, setting out the structure of the novel and the exposition, progression, and denouement of the sequence of actions. Then I will turn to particular sub-discussions, which together will provide a thorough analysis of the novel.

In terms of structure, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah comprises eighteen chapters and has an overlapping plot and subplot. Both plot and subplot are set out in a non-linear fashion, and each serves the other in terms of objectivity and drama. As the subplot precedes the plot chronologically, although not in terms of the narration, I will present it first.

While the subplot took place in London and the plot happened in Beirut, the events of the entire novel began at the end of 1946 and lasted about twenty years. The subplot concerns the story of ‘Āydah, the daughter of a wealthy family, who is a university student in London. One morning, ‘Āydah is shocked to receive a telegram informing her of the death of her mother. She begins screaming and loses her balance, calling out for help from pedestrians as she falls to the ground. Her colleague, an Indian student, lifts her up, thus saving her from the act of suicide that she intended to attempt. She spends the night at his place and they have sex. ‘Āydah confesses that she lost her virginity on the night that her colleague saved her from suicide. However, she says, she committed a different type of suicide instead: “I committed suicide on his chest.” Furthermore, ‘Āydah seems to indicate that she was unconscious at the time. This raises a series of questions which we will address later in this chapter: How does her being unconscious correspond with her affirmation that she committed suicide through consenting to have sex with him? And how in turn does this correspond with her indication that she considers him a god and herself as a worshiper of this god? Does his being a god correspond to her indication that he took advantage of her while she was

479 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 31.
480 Ibid., 40.
unconscious? Returning to the subplot, however, we see that the next morning she refuses to marry him, and her colleague rushes to classes while she decides to drop out of university and return to Beirut, her hometown.

The main plot concerns the story of the wealthy and by now older ‘Āydhah, and her husband Nadīm, who has married her for her wealth. Both live in Beirut. Nadīm finds out on their wedding night that ‘Āydhah had lost her virginity prior to marriage, and, in a rage, decides not to be sexually intimate with her, and in fact to punish her by never sleeping in the same room as her; he does not, however, decide to divorce her, because if he did he would lose her wealth and their expensive flat. Nadīm stays out late, drinking in bars and sleeping with female singers and dancers, and foreign women.

‘Āydhah then places a little child’s doll in her bedroom, calls it “Nana” and strikes up an imaginary friendship with it. Nana plays a major role in alleviating the pain and deprivation that ‘Āydhah lives through. The doll symbolizes ‘Āydhah’s intense need to have a baby. Thus, the doll is a symbol of ‘Āydhah’s being deprived of pregnancy and childbearing. Nadīm also wishes to have a family, provided that it is ‘Āydhah who would serve and take care of them; however, since his religion permits polygamy, he is hoping to marry another woman and have the children with her. Nadīm meets a German woman with whom he has a sexual relationship over a long period.

Nadīm subsequently meets Mīrā Nādir, a young lady in her twenties who lives in the same building as Nadīm and ‘Āydhah. Mīrā takes refuge in Nadīm, finding in him shelter from a “purple cloud” which haunts her. Each time Mīrā remembers that cloud, she becomes witheringly afraid of death. The cloud itself is a spectre of the death of her father, who passed away before her eyes on the side of the road, due to a sudden heart attack and the lack of anyone to save him. Since then, Mīrā has been terrified of dying the same way that her father did, and from the same cause. Nadīm was planning to entrap Mīrā so that she would have sex
with him; however, she flees from him each time the moment arises, and escapes with relative ease especially because he is a heavy drinker. Each time Mīrā and Nadīm meet the narrative tension increases, because each has a different purpose in the encounter. Perhaps the reader seeks to continue reading to find out what will happen between Mīrā and Nadīm, and in particular whether Nadīm will be successful in entrapping Mīrā— an entrapment, we note, that bears a similarity to the incident involving his own wife, ‘Āydah, and the Indian man. It is as if Nadīm is taking his revenge, but that this revenge is not directed towards the person who was actually involved in his wife’s loss of virginity.

Mīrā then meets Rajā and the two of them fall in love. She decides to break completely with Nadīm. At first, Rajā suspects that Mīrā has had sex with Nadīm, but she assures him that this is untrue and that she took refuge in him only to escape the purple cloud. Their relationship leads to marriage, but the marriage also faces difficulties, especially because Rajā’s family objects to it. The marriage represents Rajā’s successful rebellion against his family, since he has married the girl he loves and not the one his parents chose for him. Mīrā was fatherless, and her mother makes no strong objection to her choice of husband.

One night, Nadīm returns to his home at two-thirty in the morning, falls into ‘Āydah’s arms and asks her to take care of him. For the very first time, he calls her ḥabībatī [my beloved]. ‘Āydah holds him so eagerly and with such lustful madness that they have sex there and then. But it becomes apparent to her that Nadīm was drunk and had come home looking for a woman, and that on the night they had sex he was barely conscious, and that if he had been properly conscious he would not have done it. Nevertheless, Nadīm has had sex with ‘Āydah after twenty years of marriage, which makes her happy—and her feelings of delight are redoubled when she discovers that she is pregnant. However, Nadīm is not pleased when she tells him of this. We could see in this the victory of the woman over a husband who abstained from having sex with her, punished her, and did not desire her to carry his child.
The novel ends with ‘Āydah having the baby prematurely, in the seventh month of pregnancy. ‘Āydah dies during the caesarean delivery and the baby is placed in a glass incubator. Thus, the story ends in precisely the situation Nadīm had hoped to avoid: in his sixties, with no wife, and with a child who will be a burden on him. The child, longed-for by ‘Āydah for twenty years, is now here, but motherless and with a drunkard father who wastes his time in vain pursuits. The child can be considered the victim of the social concept of the holiness of virginity prior to marriage. Thus, we can consider the end of this novel to be tragic; however, there are other sides to the ending which we must also consider. First, we may consider that the author’s choice to end the novel with ‘Āydah’s death in childbirth is intended to provide a sense of realism. This is because ‘Āydah was fifty-five when she conceived her child: most women do not conceive after the age of fifty, and when they do their pregnancy usually faces difficulties throughout its term and in delivery. It can be said that the author is using ‘Āydah’s death to amplify the oppression that is being brought to bear by male-dominated society through the social concepts which apply to women. Second, and importantly, we should observe that the heroine’s death signifies more than just the result of oppression: for, in dying, ‘Āydah gives her life for her child’s. Thus she combines both her desire to revenge herself on Nadīm and her desire to express her love of her child, the child for whom she had wished during her entire married life. At the end of the novel, then, the author makes her heroine perform an act of great humanity and sacrifice; but this sacrifice is also tainted with the thought that it may in fact have been an act of revenge. In considering the heroine’s sacrifice we are reminded of the author’s willingness to intrude on her narratives, particularly in the endings, in order to establish a point of moral principle. We have seen, for instance, that Ba‘albaki did not desire that the heroine should die at the end of

the narrative in *Anā aḥyā*, and thus did not allow her to succeed in her suicide attempt, in order to preserve the open-ended nature of the narrative. ‘Āydah’s sacrifice similarly establishes her moral character, and although the ending of *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah* is not open-ended as regards ‘Āydah’s own narrative, that open-ended character is transferred to the new implied narrative involving her premature child and drunken husband. Such comparison between the two novels will be picked up again in the conclusion.

### 3.3.1 Narrative Manner

In this section on narrative manner, I will analyze the three principal aspects of the narration. As in the previous analysis, I will first identify and examine the features of the narrator, and investigate how the author makes these features pertain to the novel’s underlying theme and ideas. Alongside this, I will examine the extent to which the form of narration intrudes into the novel, and the extent of the trust the reader can place in the truth of this narration. I will also look at the predominance of the voice of the narrator: is the narrator pre-eminent, or are there other voices that participate in the narration and influence the description of the characters and the representation of the theme?

Second, I will point out the different narrative styles that are in use, and investigate the purposes that the narrator may be serving in adopting these styles, and will try to point out the weaknesses and strengths in these choices of style and narration. Third, I will address the language the narrator uses in the course of narration, again examining its weaknesses and strengths and pointing to the linguistic motives which may underlie her choices. Overall, I will be comparing all the above narrative aspects with those of *Anā aḥyā*.

### 3.3.1.1 Narrator
The narrative position predominant in the novel is the third person. This technique enables the narration of events and the presentation of characters from an external point of view which maintains distance from the events of the novel. Therefore, in this novel the narrator is external, and the narration overlooks and reflects on the events and characters. Furthermore, the narrator is omniscient, as is denoted by deep pronouncements on the characters’ thoughts and emotions. For instance, the narrator says:

A sluggish crippled emotion crept to her head, and then delved into her chin, then to her neck and into her breasts, and she thought: and she ['Āyda] searched with her eyes for a glass to break and to stick a sharp piece of it in the rubber skin of the palms of her hands.  

Here, we see the narrator divulging ‘Āyda’s feelings and thoughts when her husband requests a bottle of whisky from her. Additionally, the narrator repeatedly shows the reader what the characters are thinking, planning, or feeling. Here, for example, the narrator reveals Mīrā’s thoughts, “If I fall in the middle of the street, I will be kneaded by the wheels of the cars and the shoes of the pedestrians”. Here, Nadīm’s thoughts as regards Mīrā are revealed: “He walked one step and thought: ‘She is tender. If I touched her shoulder, she will groan, but I only want to brush that pile of ice off her shoulders’”. In these examples, the narrator is not only omniscient, but knows even more about the characters than they know about themselves. Further, the narrator knows what each character thinks, plans, and feels in regards to other characters and in regards to the ongoing events of the novel. Moreover, the narrator views the entire scenario of the novel from an external angle, which provides an insight that any one character who is participating in the events cannot achieve. Thus, each character’s viewpoint, unlike the narrator’s, is partial. For instance, the narrator knows how ‘Āyda lost her virginity, while Nadīm does not; the narrator knows that Nadīm is having sex with foreign women in the bars of Beirut, and that for years he has had a German girlfriend,

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482 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah, 14.
483 Ibid., 18.
484 Ibid, 35.
while ‘Āydah is ignorant of this. All of the above confirms that the narrator is omniscient, while the other characters only have limited knowledge.

Reading the novel reveals that the narrator is not neutral in all situations. The narrator shows bias towards one party and not others, and towards certain characters and against others with whom they are struggling. The following examples indicate the narrator’s bias: “Nadīm asked [‘Āydah] with brokenness and with his face buried in the carpet: ‘‘Āydah, I want a bottle of whisky’.” In this example, the narrator comments on the characters as if taking a specific stance in regards to them, since the narrator not only narrates what Nadīm has told ‘Āydah, but also adds a comment that precedes what Nadīm says. This suggests we may describe the narrator as an editorial narrator: sometimes the narrator aims to provide the reader with more information than the reader can see in the scenes that the narrator is depicting, certain features of the characters’ faces in particular. See, for instance, the narration of this dialogue between Nadīm and ‘Āydah: “She muttered with anger: ‘Bottle? He thinks he’s in a bar and I am the bar attendant’.” Thus, the narrator is an editorial omniscient third-person narrator.

However, the narrator’s voice completely disappears in six chapters of the novel, to be replaced by another voice, that of the heroine, ‘Āydah. As well as the chapters in which the narrator’s voice disappears, there are multiple voices which engage with the narrator in the narration of the events, in presenting the characters, and in reference to different themes; these include the voices of ‘Āydah, Mīrā, Nadīm, and Rajā. The narrator also even allows the maid – a secondary character – to participate in the narration in her own voice and to express her feelings and thoughts. It is evident that the narrator tends to be biased towards female voices. In the first chapter, for example, the narrator presents the reader with an extensive account of ‘Āydah’s thoughts and feelings, and the maid’s as well. Meanwhile, Nadīm’s

485 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah, 14.
486 Ibid., 14.
thoughts are neglected, and he is not given the space to express his views or justify his feelings or behaviour in the same manner as ‘Āydhah and the maid.\textsuperscript{487} In the second chapter, the narrator allows Mīrā’s textual voice to be loud and prominent. While in the first chapter the narrator presents the thoughts and feelings of ‘Āydhah and the maid using the third person, we now hear Mīrā speaking loudly and in the first person, giving an extensive presentation of her feelings and state of mind. For instance, Mīrā says:

\begin{quote}
Work is annoying me: Organizing the files of the customers in the insurance company, then answering phones. I am bored of napping after lunch every day … and my mother gets on my nerves when she stays at home and does not leave unless she needs to do groceries.\textsuperscript{488}
\end{quote}

Mīrā’s voice becomes loud in order for her to express her thoughts and emotions, and state her objections to her mother’s staying at home and not going out to work like she does. The bias towards the female voice is therefore prevalent not only in those chapters that are dominated by ‘Āydhah’s voice, where the narrator disappears completely, but also in those chapters in which the narration is predominantly by the narrator. While the author is the person who determines that the narrator’s voice should disappear entirely in those six chapters, the positioning of the narrator in the other chapters is consistent with the author’s own interests in the female experience.

For most of the characters who are allowed first-person narration, their first-person voices coexist with that of the otherwise dominant third-person narrator; in contrast, in the chapters in which the narrator’s voice disappears, the third-person narration is entirely replaced with ‘Āydhah’s voice. Thus, the novel is diverse in its use of narrative techniques, and in general can be said to be characterized by polyphonic narration.\textsuperscript{489} As one example of contemporary polyphonic Syrian novels, ‘Ādil Frīḥāt says:
The novel “Law lam yakun ismuhā Fāṭimah” [2008] by Khayrī al-Dhahabī [b. 1946] is a novel narrated by several voices significantly. It is a novel in which several voices contribute to its progressing of events and characters. It enables every character to express views and reactions. Thus, the technique of polyphonic narration is able to reveal how the same character or action is viewed from different points of view, and then to explain the relevance of and connections between each of these points of view. This increases the objectivity of the narration, and provides the reader with tools to judge the credibility of the narrator and the veracity of the narration of events and descriptions of the characters. All of this increases the reader’s independent ability to make their own judgments about the events and develop their own viewpoints in regards to the novel. Further, this technique is associated with the author’s choice to increase the neutrality of the omniscient narrator’s voice.

In sum, then, the narrator is an external, editorial and omniscient, third-person narrator, who is not neutral, and who seems to favour female voices. In the novel, there are multiple narrative voices which add first-person perspectives. This polyphonic narration could be seen as increasing the objectivity and credibility of the narrator. Having sketched the features of the narrator and the types of narration, I now turn to discuss the styles of narration.

3.3.1.2 Narrative Styles

Given the polyphony and diversity in the narration techniques, we may also expect to detect diversity in narrative styles. I look first at dialogue, which can be considered as receding in importance at the beginning of the novel, while becoming prominent in the final chapters. The dialogue between ‘Āydhah and Nadīm in the beginning of the novel is beset by intrusions by the narrator, tending to explain and comment at greater length even than the dialogue.

490 ‘Ādil Frīḥāt, Alkhīṭāb wa-taqaṇīyyāt al-sārd fī al-naṣṣ al-rīwā’ī al-Sūrī al-Muʿāṣir [The speech and techniques of the narration in the contemporary Syrian narrative text], (Damascus: Arab Writers Union, 2009), 123.
itself. Perhaps this is consistent with the narrator’s bias towards the female voice, on the one hand not wanting Nadīm’s voice to be loud, and, on the other, wanting to achieve balance and so not wanting ‘Āydah’s voice to be loud in that dialogue either. Thus, the narrator is aiming to augment the textual voice of ‘Āydah through third-person comments and references to her thoughts and feelings. In chapter thirteen and those that follow the dialogue is free, and the parties to the dialogue participate at length and with clear voices. Furthermore, the participants in the dialogue in those final chapters are Mīrā, Rajā, Mīrā’s mother, and her brother Hani: once again the narrator is biased towards the female voice. The reader may ask, though, why the narrator’s voice intrudes on Nadīm’s voice in the early dialogue, but allows Rajā’s voice to be loud at the end of the novel. The answer to this question could be that Rajā’s is a male voice that is in solidarity with the female, since he stands on the side of the woman against customs and traditions, as seen in his rebellion against his father and his family who object his marriage to Mīrā.

Two styles of question are also used in the narration. The first is the rhetorical question such as ‘Āydah’s questions: “My mother died, how? How will I stay all alone?”491 Here, ‘Āydah expresses her pain and her unwillingness to accept the death of her mother, as well as her shock and her doubts that she can continue to live on her own. The second consists of a question followed by the presentation of an answer. For instance, ‘Āydah says: “Dear friend, why does he prevent me from having a child?”492 This style of question presents opportunities for the narrator to build up tension and interest in the development of the narrative: the narrator can use such questions to further motivate the reader to continue reading through delaying answering the question that is being asked. In this case, however, the opportunity is not made use of, since the answer comes quickly, after only three lines – her husband, we learn, is punishing her for her lost virginity. This second style of questioning

491 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsākhah, 30.
492 Ibid., 26.
was employed by Kulit Khuri as well. In *Ayyam ma’ahu*, Rīm asks questions to explain her rebellion against some social norms: “How could I accept living an insignificant life? How could I be satisfied living among four walls?”493

An examination of the names of the characters shows that these names have moral implications, meaning that they play a dramatic role in revealing major features of their respective characters. For instance, the meaning of the name of the heroine, ‘Āydhā [returner], relates to the great incident that she faced, namely the death of her mother, which caused her to return from London to Beirut, leaving her education and her Indian friend to whom she lost her virginity. As for Nadīm [drinking companion], this indicates excessive indulgence in alcohol and the company of women. Rajā’s name [meaning hope] refers to Mīrā’s own hopes for healing and transcending the spectre of the “purple cloud.” Meanwhile, ‘Mīrā’ is a foreign name which is consistent with the fact that she is liberated and goes out to work, and also prefigures her independent decision to marry Rajā without consulting her mother, her father being already dead. As for Hani, his name is indicative of the life of luxury and pampering that he has lived.

We also see the style of “ta’miyah” [misleading]494 used at the beginning of the novel, an artistic style that aims momentarily to mislead the reader in the interpretation of some specific point. On the first page of the novel we find the use of the word “doll,” the context being the narrator’s reference to ‘Āydhā’s interest in this doll. Here, the reader may think that the doll is one of ‘Āydhā’s children’s, as there is no indication to the contrary. The reader also knows, however, that ‘Āydhā is childless: the doll therefore motivates the reader to continue reading to learn more about what lies behind the mention of the doll; but the novel does not provide any further information about it until the third chapter, where the reader

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494 “Ta’miyah” is “to mislead the reader regards the meaning.” See Āḥmad Maṭlūb, *Mu’jam al-muṣṭalahāt al-balāğhiyyah wa-tātawwurihā* [Dictionary of rhetorical terms and their development], first edition (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1996), 392.
discovers that it is totally different than might have been expected. This artistic style increases the tension in the narration.

There is also intensive use of symbols, the novel containing multiple symbols that require an interpretation based on understanding the characters, the events, and the style of the novel. One of these symbols is the “purple cloud,” which symbolizes Mīrā’s fear of dying, caused by the manner of death of her father. Mīrā feels the presence of this cloud in the dark or at night, or when it rains and there are black clouds in the sky. Another symbol is the doll. As mentioned, this doll represents how Naḍīm deprives ‘Āydah of the opportunity to bear children. When ‘Āydah describes her home as tightly and constantly closed, this symbolizes her isolation: she is suffering boredom from being constantly at home, cut off by the community around her. However, the most prominent symbol is the title of the novel, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, which symbolizes the loss of virginity before marriage, which prominently constructs the core of events in the novel. Darwīsh says: “The significant and accurate symbol sometimes became the main core of a whole story. An example is the story title Raghibah akhīrah [A last desire] (1985) [by the female Sudanese writer Zaynab al-Kurđī] in which the desire is to have the same dress that a female European cinema actor wore.”495 A title which is a symbol motivates the reader to read the novel to understand that symbol and its context.

The novel draws on the genre and style of personal letters. This style is consistent with the desire to strike a balance between third- and first-person narrations. Najm says: “The style of letters enable the writer to express internal emotions and thoughts of characters.”496 Furthermore, this style reflects a desire to grant the female voice, specifically that of the heroine ‘Āydah, a chance to reveal the depths of her soul, and communicate her feelings and emotions explicitly and directly. Thus, the style of these letters say to an addressee who

495 Aḥmad Darwīsh, Taqānīyāt al-fann al-qaṣṣāf, 318.
496 Najm, Fann al-qisṣah, 84.
cannot read them and certainly cannot respond to them or tell anyone else about them, so here there is a failure of communication which makes these letters an opportunity for ‘Āydah to disclose her innermost secrets. Thus, ‘Āydah, through these letters, reveals her hope to have a baby, reveals the reason for her inability to conceive one, and explains what her husband thinks of her. ‘Āydah thereby expresses her point of view on aspects of society, and reveals the hidden secrets both of her character and the character of her husband Nadīm. These letters are characterized by a style of direct narration that is explicit both in terms of linguistics and narration. The following is an example: “After two weeks of our acquaintance, we got married. He is forty-two, and I am thirty-five.”497 We also observe the use of poetic rhetoric description in these letters, as in the following extract:

On Nadīm’s face, there seemed to be shadows of past wild years, and violent foul fantasies. He did not seem to observe any eyelids on my face. While they were shaking my hand congratulating me, no human has noticed the traces of destruction in my narrow eyes.498

In addition, the style of personal letters allows the heroine ‘Āydah to use the style of flashback in her narration, a style which does not appear in the first novel of the writer. This is seen, for instance, in her story about her Indian colleague at the university in London, this subplot overlapping with the main plot as mentioned earlier.

Another style is the prominent use of religious Christian terms in the narrative lexicon. The heroine ‘Āydah indicating her virginity to be a holy wall, and seeking refuge in God saying: “My God, my God, your forgiveness my God.” She describes her Indian colleague as a god and herself as his worshiper, saying that she should kneel before him because he saved her from death.499 Additionally, there is liberal use in the novel of terms such as Christ, the Virgin, the Saviour, and Our Lady the Virgin and Her Holy Child. Use is also made of Qur’ānic imagery, such as in this reference to Mary: “O Mary, from where is

497 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 27.
498 Ibid.
499 Ibid., 29-30.
this [coming] to you?” Here, the writer employs Christian and religious terms to express the heroine’s feelings and views to show how important the issue is for the heroine and her community.

Thus, in this novel the writer uses diverse narrative styles, such as misleading, personal letters, questioning, symbols, dialogue, remembering technique, a religious lexicon, and so forth. Further, like in her first novel, in al-Âlihah al-mamsūkhah the writer employs narrative manners, styles and techniques for her feminist agenda. Having discussed the styles, it is relevant to turn to examine the language used in the novel.

3.3.1.3 Language

The language of the novel has two dimensions. The first dimension is a poetic form of narrative language based on rhetoric and metaphors: “She [‘Âydah] froze for a while, holding tight to the wooden edge, then on her lips grew a greedy smile, and she returned to him and he, in brokenness and with his sight buried in the carpet, requested.” Elsewhere, Nadîm says:

This bewildered butterfly [Mîrâ] does not know that I was waiting for her. And that I have been trying to see her since I have met her and she disappeared. So I sat with crossed legs next to the phone with my hands paralyzed and for long hours with my feet nailed before the door of her house.

This use of rhetorical narrative language thus indicates the influence of poetry and poets on the author. The other dimension is the prevalence of Levantine dialect words, for example: futbul instead of kurat qadam [football,] yikhush instead of yadkhul meaning [enter,] yiwa’wi’ instead of yabkî meaning [a child is crying,] narfaznî instead of aghdabanî meaning [got on my nerves,] utîl instead of funduq meaning [hotel,] mkarsaḥ instead of kâsiḥ [crippled,] and others. As in Ana ahyâ, the writer does not seem to be aware of the colloquial

500 Āli-‘Imrân, 37.
502 Ibid., 43.
words used as they are not, for example, used to characterize classes of characters through dialogue. Nor do the colloquial words appear in quotation marks. As such, the colloquialisms have no apparent literary or semantic function here.

Thus, it has been shown that the language has two major aspects: a poetic style, and at the same time the appearance of Levantine dialect words. This could reflect the influence on the writer of the Levantine dialect and of her father, who was popular poet of zajal. Although there are dialect words and a poetic style, the style yet is not that of zajal. Having analyzed these aspects of language, I turn to look at the places and times in which the action of the novel takes place.

3.3.2 Setting

The spatial locations that are prominent in the novel are two capital cities: London and Beirut. While the subplot occurs in London, the plot takes place in Beirut. Moreover, while the description of the subplot location is restricted to only one place, the description of Beirut has many branches, since the main events occur in multiple locations. In regards to London, ‘Āydah was studying in one of its universities, and this in itself indicates the wealth of her family. However, ‘Āydah considered her life in that place to be cruel and torturous, and says in regards to London: “I was miserable in this true exile [London], the tidy and calm.”

Meaning that she considered London to be a place where people enjoyed order and led stable, noiseless lives. Additionally, as mentioned, she lost her virginity in London, and this led her to return to Beirut over twenty years ago. This is in accordance with the end of the novel, as it ends when ‘Āydah turns fifty-five, twenty years after marrying Nadīm. Furthermore, the novel mentions that ‘Āydah married Nadīm after only a few weeks of her return from London, and that she married him when she was thirty-five years of age.

503 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 29.
On one hand, this moving from one location to another may represent escaping from coping with problematic and traumatic situations. This escaping from reality characterizes several works of Mahfouz. According to Aḥmad Darwīsh, “Escaping from location is a way to indicate opposing the real situation, such as the moving from Cairo to Alexandria by his heroine after losing his hopes.”

On the other hand, this functional moving from city to city within the novel shows the writer being influenced by her family’s immigrations in search of a better life. Indeed, the writer justifies moving to find better living conditions.

One of the locations in Beirut is the hotel at which Naḍīm discovers that ‘Āydah is not a virgin on their wedding night. The importance of that hotel is rooted in the importance of the incident that occurs there. This incident fundamentally changes ‘Āydah’s life with Naḍīm, as we have seen. Chronologically, the incident occurs in that location around twenty years prior to the sequence of the main plot.

Another dominant location in the novel is the building where ‘Āydah and Naḍīm live. The narrator uses the description of that building to describe the social boycott that ‘Āydah suffers from her neighbours. ‘Āydah says:

How bizarre is this building that I live in! It has twenty-three flats and twenty-three doors that remain closed, and from time to time if any of these doors open, then it is only for a head to jump out of it and disappear into the elevator and run down the road. As for my flat, even the windows and the doors of the rooms remain always closed.

This building remains the centre of events: it is where Naḍīm comes and goes, and where Mīrā – with whom Naḍīm has a relationship – lives. The narrator’s descriptions of their flat indicate its wealth and size. It is full of luxury furniture: carpets, chairs, sofa, a permanent maid, a wide living room, a bar, and other furniture and supplies that indicate the wealth and riches of the owners. ‘Āydah likens her flat to a hotel, in which she is the owner and Naḍīm only a guest. Commenting on this, ‘Āydah says: “It scares me, I am an owner of a hotel since

\[504\] Aḥmad Darwīsh, Taqanīyāt al-fann al-qaṣaṣī, 186.
\[505\] Baʿalbakī, al-ʿĀlihah al-mamsūkhah, 25.
Nadīm lived here, I have a feeling that this man will leave me one day.” Thus, ‘Āydah as narrator uses her description of the flat as a means to reveal her socio-economic status. This status is a source of her power in her relationship with Nadīm. If ‘Āydah had not had such economic power and her ownership of the flat, perhaps Nadīm would have divorced her. On the other hand, ‘Āydah expresses feelings of being an expatriate in her own home: “I cannot stand this house anymore, I have become a stranger in his house – and she? [Her husband’s lover] She is in the plate, in the ashtray, in the water cup, and in the bed sheets.” This sense of expatriation here means that she is a wife effectively without a husband: despite the fact that he lives in the same flat, he scorns her and will not have sex with her or even sleep in the same room. She also feels expatriation because of the way the neighbours have boycotted her. Aside from this, we should not forget the narrator’s clear interest in describing Beirut, setting out its distinctive streets, buildings, trade markets, etc., all of which serve as a background to the events of the main plot. For example:

Beirut was embellished, boiling with life, and she [Mīrā] realized that she was now at the mountains in a picnic with Nadīm, and that she lived in the capital, and that she adored the small streets of the city, and the huge erect buildings near the old one-floor houses.

She also refers specifically to the boisterous Burj [Tower] Square and the roads that lead to it. Such statements, which refer to real places and locations in Beirut, confer a sense of realism on the novel. Meanwhile, the bar is the place where Nadīm spends most of his time, fooling around and getting drunk. He considers it the place where he is happiest: “This is the nest of my happiness with the German [woman].” Here, he is referring to his German girlfriend, whom he met in that bar and who for many years replaced his wife as the object of sexual intimacy.

506 Ibid., 38.
507 Ibid., 61.
508 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 9.
509 Ibid., 66.
The time period of the events in the novel covers twenty years or more, with ‘Āydhah conceiving her child after twenty years of marriage, before being pregnant for seven months, having a caesarean section for the delivery of the baby, and then passing away. These events take place after the late French Mandate ended which was by the end of 1946. This can be seen because the novel mentions the mandate army and refers to the military region near the entrance of the city of Tyre.

We have seen, then, that the action in the novel unfolds in two places, London and Beirut, although London only plays a role in the subplot. In Beirut, the actions take place in ‘Āydhah’s flat, as well as bars, public parks, cars, and the building in which ‘Āydhah’s flat is located. Regarding time, the novel happens in the nineteen-fifties, after the end of the Second World War, and it covers a period of twenty to twenty-one years. Having discussed the setting, we now move on to an analysis of the conflict that dramatizes the actions of the novel.

3.3.3 Conflict and Tension

The conflict and the tension in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah are characterized by diversity. There is diversity in the parties who participate in those conflicts, as well as in the factors that affect the events and characters. However, these factors of conflict and tension are interrelated, and serve each other artistically. This will be discussed in detail in what follows.

The news of her mother’s death while ‘Āydhah is in London is a major factor which causes tension in the subplot. The end result of the tension in the subplot then forms the major cause of the conflict and tension between ‘Āydhah and her husband in the main plot as it unfolds in Beirut. At the moment at which Nadīm discovers that ‘Āydhah is not a virgin, he is shocked and cries: “‘O my God, your forgiveness O God. The wall is collapsed. You are an
infidel. You are criminal.”

From this point on, Nadīm sees his wife differently: he sees her as a girl who unlawfully and immorally had sex before her marriage. Furthermore, Nadīm is not satisfied with merely expressing his view verbally: he also violently abuses her, and this augments the tension in the events as they progress. Thus, the conflict between Nadīm and ‘Āydah is caused by ‘Āydah’s loss of virginity, and that this conflict begins on the first night of their marriage.

The conflict has shown that one party, Nadīm, is willing to resort to verbal and physical violence. ‘Āydah remains silent and appears to abandon hope, seemingly in part because she feels guilt. As we have seen, she has previously confessed that when her Indian colleague had sex with her, she was escaping her actual suicide into what she called social suicide. This atmosphere of tension increases the reader’s motivation to continue reading in order to find out ‘Āydah’s fate. The reader might be led to ask questions like: Will Nadīm divorce ‘Āydah? And if he does not divorce her because of her money, how will he treat her later on? And will he forget about the issue of her virginity?

The novel gradually reveals that this conflict has cooled down, and this is because Nadīm has taken a decision not to have sex with his wife, nor even to sleep with her or kiss her (except on her forehead, on festive occasions). Nadīm compensates himself by going to the bar and sleeping with women he meets there. Meanwhile, ‘Āydah feels deprived and boycotted both by her husband and her neighbours, as mentioned earlier. Mu’tašīm says:

In the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, generally and individually, the Arabic self (al-dhāt) developed and collided with her surrounding reality. It faced a tragedy because of its past and its present. The Arab woman needed a help and sympathy to strengthen her willing and seek freedom. But thoughts are not enough without actions and huge changes in order to make those feminist views real.

‘Āydah is one clear example of the self Mu’tašīm describes. As a result of her collision with her community, ‘Āydah creates a friendship with the child’s doll, Nana. It is a masterstroke

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510 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 28.
511 Mu’tašīm, Al-Ru’yah al-fujā’i’īyah, 18.
by the author to have the heroine write letters to this ‘friend,’ and so reveal her innermost emotions and her point of view on what is occurring around her. This means that the doll plays a role in mitigating the extent of the conflict between Nadīm and ‘Āydah.

The sexual deprivation Nadīm inflicts on ‘Āydah is also the reason why Nadīm attempts to meet women whenever he gets the chance. He seeks a relationship with Mīrā who is younger than him by four decades. This relationship is characterized by tension, since Nadīm is trying to entrap Mīrā sexually, while she considers him a refuge from her purple cloud. Each time Mīrā imagines the purple cloud she seeks out Nadīm, or accepts his request to meet her. Thus the purple cloud plays a crucial role in charging the flow of events with tension. Each time Nadīm attempts to entrap Mīrā the tension increases and the reader is spurred to read on and find out what comes of it. For instance, the tension increases when Nadīm meets Mīrā in the elevator of their building at a moment when a sudden loss of electrical power occurs. Mīrā’s fear of the purple cloud occurs in storms and in darkness. Nadīm takes advantage of this coincidence, bringing Mīrā into his flat and flirting with and fondling her. This increases both Mīrā’s tension and the reader’s, who would want to know whether Nadīm will succeed in performing a sexual act with Mīrā in his flat. Here, we see a relationship between the tension in the plot and in the subplot, since we already know what consequences such a moment of vulnerability has had for ‘Āydah, Nadīm’s wife. The reader may think that Mīrā, trapped in her grief for her father, could also be led to commit ‘social suicide,’ as ‘Āydah did with her Indian colleague in London. However, in this case the power comes back on and the tension recedes, and Mīrā returns to her house. Throughout the novel Mīrā succeeds in escaping Nadīm every time, and they are never sexually intimate.

However, Mīrā’s relationship with Nadīm creates tension between her and Rajā. This is seen when Rajā asks questions and expresses doubts regarding Mīrā’s relationship with Nadīm. This tension also recedes once Rajā is persuaded that Mīrā has not had any sexual
contact with Naḍīm; but then a new tension emerges, since Rajā and Mīrā’s desire to get
married pits Rajā against his family and Mīrā against her mother. Rajā’s father does not
consent to the marriage, nor does Mīrā’s mother express happiness about it. The tension
between Rajā and his father comes about because Rajā is rebelling against him and his
tyranny, and rejecting his father’s attempt to intrude into his life, to decide with whom he
should travel or with whom he should be friends, etc. Rajā says:

I carried my head between my wrists, and I tore my lips with my teeth, and my arms raged
with a rigor to press against my father’s neck and diminish his voice forever. And I shouted:
‘No, I don’t hate you. Yes I hate you. Move away from me otherwise I will kill you. Kill you.’

This demonstrates the great tension between Rajā and his father, and this is not just because
his father attempts to control Rajā alone: in fact, the father seeks control of both the young
and old in the family – of his wife, his sons, and his daughters. Rajā is furious because his
father assigns his mother menial duties at a time in which she desires to dine with the family.
The father’s behaviour is that of a dominating male, and Rajā’s attitude in standing on his
mother’s side against his father’s dominance shows Rajā to be an educated enlightened young
man rebelling against a male-dominated society. This in turn corresponds to his attempts to
liberate himself by living freely away from his family, and specifically away from his father,
and it also corresponds with his desire to marry Mīrā, the educated liberated working girl,
who also believes that the new generation, both males and females, should be free from male-
dominated society and its traditions and concepts. Mīrā supports and encourages Rajā in his
conflict with his father, and encourages him to live on his own. Mīrā says: “Because you are
a man, you are allowed to turn your back on all that may bother you. But because I am a
woman, I am required to swallow my voice and shut up despite that I am knowledgeable just
like you are, I get bored, I suffer.”

512 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 92-93.
513 Ibid., 94.
This shows Mīrā confirming her support for Rajā on the one hand, while on the other showing that his rebellion against his father corresponds with her own views on life and society. In contrast, Mīrā’s confrontation with her mother in regards to her decision to marry Rajā is not so intense. Mīrā sits with her mother and tells her about the marriage. Her mother objects at first, and then begins to talk to a picture of her husband, as if she is disappointed at her inability to discharge the male role in the family. Let us look at what Mīrā’s mother, a widow, says while speaking to her husband’s picture on the wall in the presence of Mīrā and Hānī, Mīrā says, “I wish to begin a life with Rajā’s kisses. Me too, I wish I could spend all the moments of my days … I decided to achieve these changes with Rajā.’ And then the mother screamed to the picture: ‘Do you hear? She decides on her own to marry?’ Also the mother speaks to her husband’s picture elsewhere in the novel: ‘Do you hear my beloved? I have spent twenty-five years imprisoned in a room to protect them. To share their sickness, their cries, their laughter, their hunger, their fullness. And they decide to leave me now. What do I do?’ It is as if the mother is referring to the struggle of the generations, where the sons want to live their own lives and be independent, while the parents desire their children to stay close to them. Thus, it seems that the mother is afraid of loneliness after the marriage of her son and her daughter. This also corresponds with Rajā’s conflict with his father, where the father represents the older male-dominated generation, and Rajā represents the rebellious youth. Thus, Rajā, Mīrā, and ‘Āydah all come together in their struggle against male-dominated society.

In the end, Rajā and Mīrā achieve a victory, as they get married away from their parents and their domination. ‘Āydah’s conflict with Nadīm ends with her death in childbirth, leaving him to take care of the premature baby: thus, ‘Āydah, who always wished to conceive and bear a child, achieves a posthumous victory of sorts. But this ending is also tragic, since

514 Ibid., 127.
515 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 128.
it is due to her husband depriving her of sex and so preventing her from conceiving and bearing a child.

In this novel, then, there are multiple conflicts, but all of them revolve around feminist demands and desires which are oriented towards the woman’s pursuit of freedom. Thus, although it is a conflict between two males, Rajā’s conflict with his father is feminist or at least anti patriarchal too, because he not only seeks autonomy and separation from his parents but also wishes to end the violent dominance of his father over the whole family, especially his mother. Thus, the writer employs narrative manners to intense feminist dimension in her work. While Rajā and Mīrā succeed in their struggles with their parents, ‘Āydah fails to overcome her husband’s abuse. Accordingly, a significant part of the conflict and tension in the novel is caused by the characters, their inner strengths and weaknesses, and the conflicting goals that they pursue. Therefore, having examined the aspect of conflict and tension, I now turn to look at the characters themselves.

3.3.4 Characters

Despite the fact that the novel’s structure, with its main plot in Beirut and subplot in London, would seem to provide plenty of space to introduce a wide range of characters, the writer limits the number of characters to four. Whether or not this is her explicit intent, by limiting the number of characters Ba‘albakī succeeds in avoiding cluttering the story with extraneous detail, which in turn enables the reader to keep a focus on the issues that concern the protagonist and the other main characters, and so to understand and identify with them more fully.

I now turn to an analysis of the individual characters, setting out their principal attributes and their goals within the overarching narrative. I begin with ‘Āydah because she is
the dominant protagonist, and then turn to Nadīm, the dominant antagonist; after this I look at the secondary antagonists, Mīrā, and Rajā, the person whom she loves.

‘Āydah, the novel’s heroine, like Līnā, is a complex character who grows and changes throughout the novel, as will be shown later. Physically, she is dark-skinned with slender neck and legs, her eyes are narrow, her nose is prominent and her lips are thin. We learn that the neighbours do not consider her beautiful. However, ‘Āydah is rich, and it is this wealth that enables her to travel to London to study. Although the novel does not reveal what ‘Āydah is studying, it does explain that she is thirty-four, or perhaps a little older, when she returns to Beirut. Before she returns to Beirut, ‘Āydah is single. Alongside her lack of beauty, her wealth has also played a role in her refusal to get married early: we may well imagine that rich girls most often have cause to doubt the intentions of those who propose to them. As well as keeping silent about her course of study, the novel does not tell us what level of university education ‘Āydah is receiving: the reader may perhaps wonder, though, whether another reason why she has not married is her devotion to education. Her future husband, Nadīm, is a university lecturer, which might indicate that her level of educational achievement is relatively high – especially since it is hard to identify another bond between them. It is natural for the reader to ask these questions of the text, since ‘Āydah’s being single at the age of thirty-five has great social significance, and is relevant both for the main plot as well as the subplot. It is her being her single that makes her suffer from loneliness, and her being fatherless which leaves her particularly vulnerable to the shock of the death of her mother. She has not had any sexual or romantic relationships prior to her encounter with her Indian colleague. It appears that ‘Āydah has lacked sexual freedom until the death of her mother, and thus that even though her wealth has given her freedom of movement; she has not escaped the restrictions of the male-dominated society to which she belongs. On the eve of the death of her mother, then, ‘Āydah is trapped by multiple forms of loneliness, and her
wealth plays a significant role in all of them: the wealth has allowed her to travel, which has exposed her to the loneliness of the overseas student separated from her culture. Yet she has carried with her enough of her culture to prevent her from pursuing casual romantic relationships which might reduce her isolation. Meanwhile, her wealth makes her suspicious of any proposals of marriage, and with no lover to whom to turn, her mother was the only person who could reduce her loneliness. With her mother’s death she loses her last source of protection. She is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the tragedy, the severity of her loneliness, and the difficulty of the situation that she is now in without the support of her mother. Overwhelmed with fear and loneliness, and unable to face reality, she collapses and attempts suicide.

This suggests that the meaning and purpose of her life are bound up in her relationship with her mother, and without her life has no meaning. Her reaction to the news also suggests that it is her mother who plays the patriarchal role for ‘Āydah, and that it becomes easier for ‘Āydah to have sex out of marriage once her mother is gone and the patriarchal rules relaxed.

‘Āydah’s mistrust of those who surround her now turns inward: she no longer even trusts herself, and this in turn destroys her ego and leads her to attempt suicide. Thus, we can view this crisis in ‘Āydah’s character in linear terms as follows: Her emotional feeling of loneliness leads to a psychological destruction of her ego which pushes her ethically to the physical act of committing suicide. The suicide attempt reveals a crucial point of weakness in ‘Āydah’s character, and it is both the consequences of that suicide attempt, as well as the long-term consequences of that weakness in her character, which go on to shape the events of the main plot. Her suicide attempt is similar to Yāsīn’s suicide in Halwasāt Tarshīsh [Hallucinations of Tarshīsh] (1995) by the Tunisian writer Ḥassūnāh Miṣbāḥī. Mu’taṣim affirms:
We note that, throughout the novel *Halwasāt Tarshīsh*, escaping from tragedy causes disaster that is the ‘tragedy perspective’ in a closed perspective. It is stifling and comprehensive and does not let in hope. Therefore, the narrative character Yāsīn committed suicide as a result of defeat and disintegration.516

Yet, ‘Āydah and Yāsīn are dissimilar because, as we have seen, ‘Āydah fails in her suicide attempt. Given that ‘Āydah is the protagonist heroine, this failure could be a narrative device enabling the continuation of the novel or the possibility of the writer morally intervening to prevent suicide, which could be a feminist call to women not to commit suicide but to continue to challenge the situations they face. Thus, instead, she commits a different type of suicide. ‘Āydah’s confession suggests on the one hand that she herself decided or at least accepted to have sex with her Indian friend. But on the other hand, she also rebukes her colleague for daring to perform a sexual act with her that leads to the loss of her virginity. “‘how? How did you dare?’”517 Her accusation suggests that she thinks her colleague forced himself upon her, although it seems that this is not what actually happened. In fact it seems that the enormity of ‘Āydah’s shock upon losing her mother leads her against her better judgment to consent to intercourse. The full context of her describing herself as having committed social suicide is as follows: “I saw on his broad forehead the rising of our burning sun, and I delighted in the pulse of comfort diffusing into my tired arms, he approached me and wiped my tears away with his palms, and I was lost … and I committed suicide on his chest.”518 Here we see ‘Āydah trying to explain her consent to intercourse, while at the same time indicating awareness of the magnitude of the consequences of that sexual act. While in general suicide means death, the type of suicide that ‘Āydah refers to is social suicide, indicating that even in her confusion and desperation, she is conscious of the oppressive and judgmental nature of the society to which she belongs.

518 Ibid., 31.
‘Āydah also explains her consent to the sexual act by suggesting that in doing so she was trying to return to her Indian colleague the favour of giving life: he saved her from death, and she gives him her virginity in return. This suggests she was guided by a simple ethic based on the equation that one gives something back in return for what has been received. But ‘Āydah indicates that she was unjustly treated in this exchange, meaning that her being prevented from suicide did not equal the loss of her virginity before marriage. She says:

I discovered that when I paid back what I should have paid for my dark-skinned colleague who saved my life, I paid a high price. The truth is that I was completely unconscious. Fog was misleading me and the howling of the river, and the screams of my dead mother, and I know, I know that I exaggerated in the giving, but men, my friend, men always take more than what they give, then what do you give if a man gave you a chance to live again? 519

The heroine was not aware of the inequality in the exchange before she slept with her colleague. Rather, she reaches this conclusion later on, once the effect of the enormous shock that she faced in the moments and the hours that followed the news of her mother’s death has subsided. As for her claim that she was unconscious, this does not correspond with what she has described earlier regarding rejoicing and delighting in her dark-skinned colleague and his tenderness towards her. 520 It also does not correspond with her comment on how she felt immediately afterwards: “I did not accept to marry that Indian, because in the next morning I felt that he was a god. And I am a worshiper that he has kissed with his charming hands.” 521 How then can she be both unconscious and at the same time feel the charm of the hands of the Indian having sex with her? How can she consider someone who has “raped” her as a god? How can she claim that she was a “worshiper” of her rapist while also being unconscious? As readers we might interpret ‘Āydah as resorting to these justifications in order to decrease her own role in having had sex that night.

519 Ibid., 40.
520 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 31.
521 Ibid., 40.
However, this is to pass over another question about how ‘Āydah represents the events of that night. How can we reconcile ‘Āydah’s accusation that her Indian colleague took advantage of her with her attempts to justify what she did as either a return of a favour or as a search for comfort after the loss of her mother? We might wonder here whether the author deliberately does not want us to reconcile these views. Human beings can be ambivalent, meaning that they hold contrary views on the same thing at once. ‘Āydah’s conflicted statements reflect a real psychological conflict as to whether what she did was justifiable. Her accusations against the Indian colleague might also suggest that she hoped that this man, having become an object of her worship, would be insightful and self-controlled enough to know that ‘Āydah was not in a fit state to take such decisions about her virginity. The bitterness of her reflection upon it – “but men, my friend, men always take more than what they give” – suggests that in the end she comes to think that her justifications were completely naive. This means that her character has grown and developed in the time between the events of the subplot and the events of the plot.

She tries to convince the reader that she was right to refuse to marry her dark-skinned Indian colleague. As an aside, ‘Āydah indicates indirectly what her society usually does in cases such as this, which is to have the girl marry the person who has caused her to lose her virginity prior to marriage. However, ‘Āydah rejects that choice. ‘Āydah justifies this rejection by the fact that she viewed him as a god because he granted her life, and that therefore in his eyes she has now become a worshiper. In refusing to marry him, then, she is really refusing to allow him to have control over her for the rest of her life. What she is really rejecting, then, is the control of man and his dominance over woman. But we might also wonder whether ‘Āydah perhaps uses that justification to escape what she might be faced with by her home society if she married a dark-skinned Indian. Additionally, perhaps a sense of pride in being rich plays a role in her decision, as the question society will pose for her
would be: How did that rich woman come to marry a black Indian stranger who does not have any socio-economic status? All this together confirms that ʻĀydah is very aware of her society, and its concepts and traditions in regards to marriage and all that is related to it.

After ʻĀydah turns to her Indian colleague to escape the devastation of the death of her mother, she returns from London to Beirut. On the one hand, she wishes to conceive a child to play with and delight in, and who will replace her sense of loneliness with the happiness of family; but on the other hand she knows this will lead to a confrontation with whichever man she marries, who will discover her loss of virginity. Thus, ʻĀydah’s way of thinking and of making decisions is influenced primarily by her desire to rid herself of loneliness. She says:

After my return from London, I waited for months for the consequences of the collapse of the holy wall. While desperation was tearing my guts, I wished that God would give me a child who would spare me of having to know another man. But the ruins my dear friend does not prosper. And I became sad, depressed and felt lowly. 522

ʻĀydah’s wish is not granted, and that she continues to struggle with the feelings of depression and sadness which she had after her mother’s death. All of this leads her to feel lost: “I am lost and the hammer of the construction worker is starting to tear my nerves up, I am lost.”523

Her unending feelings of loss and loneliness, in addition to her inability to conceive and bear a child, lead her to agree to marry a university lecturer, Nadīm. While her purpose in getting married was to escape loneliness and to pursue bearing a child, in fact she goes through a new experience of loss and loneliness: the sexual abandonment by her husband coupled with social boycott. That is to say, she has a new failure which could be seen as having been caused by social traditions which punish women for losing their virginity before marriage. Although the female protagonist fails here because other people around her are following social traditions dealing with ʻĀydah, Rānyah the female protagonist of Nasrallah

522 Ba‘albakī, al-ʻĀlihah al-mamsūkhah, 39.
523 Ibid., 63.
in her novel *Rahīnah* (1974) fails because she intimates social tradition and cannot behave contrary to them. However, ‘Āydaḥ faces these struggles with strength and searches for alternatives, eventually turning to her imaginary friendship with Nana the doll, which becomes her most important alternative form of support. In talking to the doll ‘Āydaḥ is able to alleviate the pain of twenty years of loneliness and feelings of being lost in a loveless marriage. However, the fact that she experiences this prolonged suffering also raises deep and serious questions about her motivations in her final act. ‘Āydaḥ conceives a child from Nadīm, who has sex with her while drunk, having fled the bar in search of a woman after being abandoned by his mistress. ‘Āydaḥ goes into labour early, after seven months of pregnancy, and prefers to give her own life in exchange for her child, choosing to have a caesarean delivery rather than let the baby die. As mentioned, though, there is a question as to whether this should been seen as an act of sacrifice. As well as enabling her finally to achieve her wishes, by choosing to die she is punishing her husband by making him take care of a child in his old age. We may interpret her decision as bringing humanity back into her life in her final moments, through a mother’s willingness to give her life for her child. In addition, we may interpret it as a moment in which she achieves all she has wished for in life, showing that her ethical choices are based on the importance of achieving the goals that humans set for themselves in their lives. On the other hand, her attitude also indicates a desire to revenge herself on her husband who has deprived her of sex, compassion, and a child, for most of her adult life.

The character of Nadīm, as the dominant antagonist, seems less rounded or complex than ‘Āydaḥ’s; Nadīm seems to be driven by vanity, weakness, and greed. He is intelligent, educated, and conservative. By profession he is a university history lecturer, but he is not satisfied with his career. He says: “Who am I? I am a lecturer in history who chews the news
of the past events." Most significantly for the plot, Nadīm believes in the holiness of the woman’s virginity prior to marriage, and this is why he lashes out verbally and physically when he discovers on the night of their wedding that ‘Āydah is not a virgin. His acts in this moment show not only his commitment to conservative social values, but also his willingness to inflict violence on women. Subsequently, he takes a decision to deprive his wife of sexual intercourse and of the compassion and kindness a husband should show towards his wife. He only kisses her on festive occasions, and even then he only kisses her on the forehead, which means that it is not a husband’s kiss for his wife, but more like the father’s kiss to his daughter or the brother to his sister.

Furthermore, he is materialistic: he marries ‘Āydah for her money, and not because he loves her or because of her beauty or status. Perhaps his own poverty is what leads him to do this, especially given that he marries ‘Āydah when he is forty-five and she thirty-five. Taking into consideration his financial status, we may conclude that the reason why he never attempts to divorce ‘Āydah is due to her money and her house: in other words, he is enjoying her money. So on the one hand, he does not divorce her, and on the other he will not touch her, the latter being influenced by his conservative ethic.

Having made these decisions, he now seeks sex with women he meets at the bar, and these friendships include sexual relations with a German woman. Nadīm becomes an alcoholic: however, this does not prevent him from continuing to work in academia. He claims to be able to strike a balance between his work during the day and his drunkenness and sex at night. Nadīm comes to consider drinking as an aid to help him face life’s issues: "Drinking alone grants me now the strength to continue crawling." Thus, Nadīm is an example for what Mu’taṣīm says:

Escaping is a tendency that refuses reality as a daily result and practice. While the Mahjari romantic poet generally escapes to the forest where there is total freedom […], tragedy

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524 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 33.
525 Ibid., 44.
writings let their characters escape to drink wine, join women and so on. But does that escaping lead them to salvation?\(^{526}\)

While ‘Āydah was wishing she could conceive and give birth to a child, Nadīm is wanting to marry another woman and to start a family and have children – while still remaining married to ‘Āydah. He wants to bring another wife into the house that is owned by ‘Āydah, thereby taking advantage of the practice of polygamy which is permitted in the Islamic community, by both Sunni and Shiite alike. However, ‘Āydah firmly rejects this proposal. ‘Āydah describes him as a tourist, who lodges at a hotel that she owns, and that what attracts him to that hotel is that it does not have any other guests in it.

Later, Nadīm becomes attracted to Mīrā Nādir and tries in vain to entrap her sexually. We may interpret Nadīm’s actions here as motivated by a desire to take revenge on society. Having married someone who was not a virgin, he wants others to have the same experience on their wedding night. But he is also motivated by lustful instinct, since Mīrā is a young woman. He says of her: “‘She’ is a bird, homeless, and it’s raining and the leaves of the trees are gathering up in the sewers, and the chimneys of the houses are hell, and the sky is covered with snow.”\(^{527}\)

By the end of the novel, with all of his schemes failed, Nadīm declares that he wishes to die. He says: “Why did ‘Āydah die? I wish to die too.”\(^{528}\) His remorse does not seem completely honest, but is still based on his ego. Even though he is supposed to be grieving for his dead wife, it seems he is looking more at himself: “Why did Mira leave me? Why am I a failure? A failure? Why did ‘Āydah die? For whom was the child born?”\(^{529}\) It does not seem that Nadīm’s character has changed in the course of the novel. He still seems selfish and obsessed with himself, and the sentiment he expresses is just the same as what he expressed early on, when he reflected on himself as chewing the news of the dead.

\(^{526}\) Mu’taṣim, Al-Ru’yah al-fujā’i’yyah, 24.
\(^{527}\) Ba‘albaki, al-Ālihah al-mamsīkhah, 35.
\(^{528}\) Ibid., 140.
\(^{529}\) Ibid., 138.
We turn, then, to look at Mīrā’s character. She is a young woman in her twenties, blonde and beautiful. Fatherless, she is an employee in an insurance company. She was witness to her father’s death, and this has left her morbidly afraid of death, symbolized by a purple cloud. Her fear and the purple cloud drive her into Nadīm’s company, because she feels the cloud disappearing when she meets him. Thus, he helps her forget about death and drives away her fear. In time, a relationship evolves between them, which for Nadīm is motivated by a desire for sexual conquest, but Mīrā always succeeds in escaping without losing her virginity. This means victory for Mīrā, because she achieves her purposes in being with Nadīm; but it means failure for Nadīm, who cannot achieve his desires for the relationship.

Mīrā has a liberated personality. She leaves the house whenever she desires, she works outside the home, and she pursues a relationship with Nadīm. Additionally, she goes out to bars and drinks alcohol, here being influenced by Nadīm and his exploits around Beirut. Sometimes Mīrā wishes for death and thinks of committing suicide. Driven by her fear of encountering the purple cloud, she often wishes to die when it appears before her. She says: “I am not a coward. I do not dare to throw myself out of the third floor and shatter on the face of the street. I need someone who can surprise me with one bullet from the back just under my shoulder.”

She attempts to convince herself into suicide through the following reasoning:

Thus if I become forever unconscious, no one will lose a thing, and if any human around me died, I wouldn’t lose anything but his shoes … She [Mīrā] looked no more at the faces, not even the faces of her mother or her brother, and people around her became the shoes that she observed: the clients at the insurance company, the pedestrians in the street, the movie theatre audience …

Mīrā tells herself that the death of one human would not affect any of the others, and that therefore her death will be of little consequence. She wants to “shatter in the street” and die.

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530 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 42.
531 Ibid., 24.
there, much as happened to her father. Being fatherless has left her deprived of compassion and kindness, and I propose that the purple cloud seemed to disappear when she met Nadīm because he was of the same generation as her father, which might have made her feel a sense of daughterhood when she met him.

While Mīrā does not actually attempt suicide, she is thinking about it. Thus, we notice a tendency for the female characters to gravitate towards suicide and to see death as their last resort in the personal and psychological struggles that they face.

Mīrā meets Rajā, the young man who complements her and her thoughts, and they decide to marry. Rajā is twenty-eight years of age, and has left his father’s home to live on his own in the city in order to escape from an antagonistic relationship: Rajā announces that he hates his father and disputes his authority. All of this is by way of the search for freedom and independence from family and the old generation. Once he and Mīrā have fallen in love, he attempts to entice her to his home: she, however, refuses to have sex before marriage, and even refuses to allow him to kiss her. Thus, the character of Mīrā serves as a foil to the character of ‘Āydah, bringing out ‘Āydah’s tragedy in having lost her virginity before marriage. Rajā desires to marry Mīrā, but his father objects; however, Rajā rides over these objections and marries her anyway. Thus, Rajā is a rebellious character who rejects his father’s control, and is critical of his father’s cruelty towards his mother and the rest of the family. Thus, Rajā reflects the image of the educated young man who rebels against the concepts and traditions of the older generation, especially those to do with relationships between the sexes.

Having discussed the main features of the characters, including their ego, ethic, choices, and successes and failures in achieving their narrative goals, I now turn to the themes to which those characters contribute.
3.3.5 Themes

Although the most dominant theme in the novel is feminism, to which I devote a separate chapter, the themes of social control and religion run through the novel briefly; therefore, their discussions here are brief as well. The writer addresses these themes through the characters’ attitudes and behaviour, as well as through the conflicts in which they engage.

3.3.5.1 Social Control

The novel makes particular reference to the phenomenon of the gap between socio-economic classes. This gap is reflected in the tendency of the rich to send their sons and daughters to be educated abroad, such as in London; the children of poor or middle class families cannot be sent to study abroad in this manner. ‘Āydah says: “I was studying in London because rich people in my community will be embarrassed if their sons and daughters study in a university close to their villas. However, I was unhappy in this very cold exile.”532 Here, her studying in London is not her own free choice, but rather that of her family who made the decision for her. The gap is also reflected in the social hypocrisy manifest in those who attend the weddings of the wealthy – weddings which they attend despite not being acquainted with the bride and groom. Thus, ‘Āydah says: “I do not know how people surrounded us in that reception? Where did they come from? Where did they disappear? I have not met them again, not even by chance down the road.”533 The theme of class difference can also be observed in reference to the extreme poverty experienced in India, a poverty which people bear with patience and determination: “Millions of people suffering poverty in India, toiling until their

532 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 29.
533 Ibid., 27.
eyes are bleary, while disease ruins their lips and ailments escape from their ways – despite that they keep going.”

Another social aspect is the conflict between generations, the youth’s revolt against the old generation which is conservative in its customs, traditions, and social concepts, particularly those governing relationships between the sexes. The young, educated, liberated generation rejects patriarchal dominance, which is based on tyranny, oppression, and power. The conflict of the generations is reflected in the novel in multiple ways, one of them being the separation of the young man from his family in the search for freedom and independence, while escaping cruelty, violence, and patriarchal tyranny. The conflict of the generations is also reflected in the marriage of sons and daughters and their departure from the family home; their departure is difficult for the parents, and especially hard for Mīrā’s mother, a widow who forbade herself from remarrying after the death of her husband, and who prefers to care for her sons and daughter. Thus we see her talking to her husband’s picture hanging on the wall:

They will leave me. Answer me. And you have left me; do you like it that they are leaving me? Don’t you? I should have known that your children would follow in your steps. You left me after three years of our prosperous life. I should have married your friend Munir, who offered love, his youth, and his money right under my feet, but I rejected. How stupid was I when I rejected.

In this moment we see Mīrā’s mother regretting not remarrying, for she is now suffering a crisis of loneliness. This is an indication of the conflict of interest between the parents and their children, where the resolution of this conflict will dictate their mutual destinies.

However, the discussed conflicts sometimes led to violence. An example is ‘Āydhah’s description of the violent reaction of her husband when he discovered that she had premarital sex: “He stepped on my back, on my face, and on my abdomen, and so I laughed, and the blood was flowing from my nose drawing stains with no form and no colour on the silk bed

534 Ibid., 31.
535 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 129-130.
sheet, and he left me alone in the hotel, and I fainted.” In contrast, ‘Āydah had nothing to do except sit in silence. She had nobody to complain to about her husband and did not call the police. Thus, we see the female protagonist had no means of coping with violence against her in her patriarchal community.

3.3.5.2 Religion

The novel uses stylistic forms influenced by Christian outlooks and the Qur’an in reference to the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary: “O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?”; “And whose child are you bearing Mary, God’s, of the Holy Spirit”; “When did you give birth Mary? Birth of the Child of God, the King of Kings.” These passages occur in the context of ‘Āydah’s reflection that she is a wife, but one with no sexual experience. Conscious that she cannot get pregnant, she begins to hope to conceive without the aid of a husband or sex, in the manner of the Virgin Mary. Later, ‘Āydah declares: “I hope a child to be born in this house which does not bring children yet, from this bad body [her body], and from God’s spirit or an evil one [...]” Thus, the writer employs Christian features to enlarge the tragedy of her protagonist female heroine; that is to say, she uses religion as a narrative device for focusing her feminist agenda. Furthermore, the novel promotes the Christian perspective on issues related to Jesus and his birth, through the imagery to which it appeals.

The novel also attempts to set out certain features of the Christian religion that are related to Jesus and also related to attendance at mass in church. Through this novel, the author is trying to persuade Christian Arabs to lay greater emphasis on the closeness of religions, and thus is saying that religions should not be a cause of disunity within the Lebanese nation.

536 Ibid., 29.
537 Ibid., 50, 51.
538 Ba’albaki, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah, 51.
In addition, the novel refers to the drinking of alcohol, which is prohibited in Islam. The novel employs drinking alcohol as an escape from facing social reality. Indeed, life at the bar plays a central role in the novel as it is considered to be a refuge for those who suffer from marital problems. Thus, the writer uses bars and alcohol as a refuge while religions not only forbid that refuge, but also suggest another refuge for those who suffer: be closer to religion and religious practices (a suggestion beyond the scope of this thesis).

Thus, for the writer, religion is both a target of her criticism, and also a source of legitimacy for her own political opinions.

3.3.6 Comparative Analysis between the Two Novels

In terms of structure, *Anā aḥyā* contains a single linear story, while *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* contains two non-linear stories – a plot and a subplot – which serve each other artistically and in terms of content.

While *Anā aḥyā* was set in a single city, Beirut, the events of the later novel are divided between Beirut and London. It seems as though the writer has made the protagonist’s loss of virginity take place in London in order to indicate that in the West it is easier for women to practice their freedom, including in sexual relations, than it is in Beirut. Furthermore, while what ṬĀydah did was acceptable in London, in Beirut it is the cause of a crisis which has severe consequences for her life with her husband. Thus, while in *Anā aḥyā* the female protagonist Līnā struggles to be able to move freely in and out of the home, in *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* ṬĀydah spends most of her time at home and is not engaged in a struggle to leave it. Rather, she struggles for her rights as a wife inside the house, and in particular to have sexual relations with her husband. Consequently, it seems as though the writer seeks for women in Beirut the freedom they would have in London, including the
ability to have sexual relations outside of marriage. Thus, the writer uses even the setting of her novel as a way of addressing the idea of Lebanese/Arab women’s freedom.

Another difference in the narrative setting between the two novels concerns the element of time, for while the action in *Anā aḥyā* occurs over the course of two years or so, in *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* it takes place over roughly twenty-one years. This greater complexity in the temporal and geographical elements of the novel’s structure also reflects progress in the writer’s command of narrative and stylistic form.

Turning to a comparison of the forms of narration, while *Anā aḥyā* is narrated solely in the first person, the present novel is narrated in both the third and the first person, although the third person is dominant. The narrators in both novels are editorial rather than neutral, and that they give female characters, and feminist males like Rajā, greater space in the description and dialogue. However, while *Anā aḥyā* has a single, internal, and anticipating narrator, we see that the narrator of *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* is external and omniscient, but is sometimes displaced by other voices, creating a polyphony which enables the female protagonist to speak out in her own voice and so contribute to the narration herself. The polyphonic narration also allows the characters and actions to be viewed from different points of view. This contributes to the objectivity of the narration and gives the reader the capacity to judge the credibility of the primary narrator. This combination of two kinds of narration as well as the use of polyphony indicates significant diversity in the manner of narrative. Thus, in both novels the writer is concerned to let her heroines participate in the narration of the story, and the writer’s use of narrative devices in her two novels is closely linked to her desire to explore and focus her feminist agenda.

Aside from this, while the two novels show the use of such narrative styles as dialogue, monologue, the functional naming of characters, and use of poetic language, the
second novel does not use padding\textsuperscript{539} in the same way as in Anā aḥyā. That is to say, the writer seems to have discarded a narrative style which negatively affected the artistic quality of the first novel. Meanwhile, Levantine dialect words also appear in the later novel as in the earlier, and we may be led to conclude that these are not so much a deliberate artistic device and that the writer was influenced by colloquial Levantine dialect Arabic and by Lebanese zajal. However, this is something which I will follow up in my review of her short stories.

The writer not only discards elements which could decrease the level of narrative style, but also she shows an adoption of new methods. One of these methods is the use of personal letters, which enable the protagonist to express and narrate her deepest emotions, thoughts, and attitudes towards what goes on around her. Other styles are also used which do not appear in Anā aḥyā, such as flashback; “misleading” which increases the tension by posing subtle puzzles for the reader; the use of symbols, which pushes the reader to reflect more deeply as they read on; and the use of a Christian religious lexicon to attract the reader to a novel which otherwise would be rooted in an Islamic milieu.

While in Anā aḥyā there is only one major conflict, that between Līnā and those who are close to her, in the second novel we see several major conflicts, the dominant one being between ‘Āydah and her husband and the subsidiary ones being between Rajā and his parents, between Nadīm and Mīrā, and Mīrā and her mother. This is progress in narrative style, and it also indicates that all the conflicts in this novel are feminist conflicts, because all revolve around women’s rights and their search for freedom from custom and social constraints, both inside and outside of marriage.

The reader may expect to find a harmony between themes the writer points out in her lecture and those running throughout her novels, and I note that there are both parallels and contrasts between the two novels related to the theme of socioeconomic class differences. In

\textsuperscript{539} ‘Padding’ is an aspect of criticism which means insignificant details that the writer throws in the work but which are not intended to fundamentally enhance the work. While we see padding in Anā aḥyā, we do not in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah the second novel of the writer.
Anā aḥyā the search for financial independence and personal independence run together, as expressed in Līnā’s search for a job. There are similar themes in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, with Mīrā being the character who is closest to Līnā in this respect, but here the author also dwells on the ways in which wealth can constrain freedom. This is shown through the wealthy ʿĀydah’s patriarchal relationship with her mother, her marriage to the abusive Nadīm, and the suffocating boycott she experiences in her upper-class block of flats.

There are also parallels and contrasts between the ways in which religion is dealt with. We know from her lecture that the author has optimistic views of the role religion can play for society and social progress, and does not accept traditional points of view. In Anā aḥyā there is strong irony in the way religion is treated, and the narrator, Līnā, ridicules religious concepts where they conflict with her own social and political ideas. There is a similar criticism of religion implied in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah in Nadīm’s outrageous demand that he should be able to bring a second wife into the home while he is boycotting ʿĀydah sexually, and in his violent response to finding that she is not a virgin. Through Nadīm’s actions, the author expresses her own critique of traditional aspects of religion.

In Anā aḥyā we also see the free use of religious imagery to express the relationship between Līnā and Bahā’, where Līnā suggests they must have known each other in a previous life. This is a free use of religious imagery since the concept of reincarnation of souls is not included in Islam or in Christianity. It is a fanciful use of religious concepts. In the same way, ʿĀydah’s hope that she would have a baby in the manner of the Virgin Mary could also be thought to express a fanciful use of religious imagery, although the context is more serious. So we see the author’s willingness to be free with her religious beliefs also leads to a fanciful use of religious ideas, which is not directly in contradiction to traditional religious ideas, but shows a willingness to use traditions for her own purposes.
Although both Līnā and ‘Āydah fail in their suicide attempts, ‘Āydah later opts to exchange her life for her baby’s. Indeed, she had two possibilities: abort her child and stay alive or die while giving birth and saving her child. What does this mean within the context of the novel? We have already noted that the act is ambiguous: on the one hand, it is an act of genuine humanity after two decades of abuse, while on the other it may be tainted by a desire to revenge herself on Nadīm. But is it only Nadīm whom she has in mind in this moment? The fact that she exchanges her life for her child’s recalls the earlier exchange which she saw herself as making with her Indian colleague. There, in her distress, she thought that her virginity was an equal exchange for her life; later, though, she bitterly reflected that what she gave the Indian was of greater value than what she received in return. She also came to see her Indian colleague as a god who had granted her life. Does this reveal anything about how we should read her final exchange of her life for her child’s? We might think that ‘Āydah, in sacrificing herself, achieves in her own eyes a more godlike status than the Indian did, who took her future happiness in exchange for the accident of having saved her life. The possibility that ‘Āydah would be seeing this exchange in such religious terms might indicate that we should read her motive as positive and humane, rather than being motivated by a desire for revenge. Whereas men always take back more than what they gave, as ‘Āydah said, a woman does the opposite. However, if her sacrifice is tainted by revenge, then it may not just be Nadīm, but also her Indian former colleague whom she has had in mind. The reader may be left, then, with the question of whether she is avenging herself on her husband or on the Indian. Perhaps we cannot resolve this question given the information within the novel, but it may stay in our mind long after we finish reading.

540 On suicide in Arab and Muslim countries, Joseph and Najmabadi say: “Muslims traditionally condemn suicide for various reasons. The issue confronts Islamic notions of human responsibility, the value of human life, and human being’s relationship with God. The question of suicide focuses on the right of an individual to violate the sanctity of life…Muslims denounce suicide based on several Quranic passages (Qur’an 2:195, 4:29, 17:31) that unequivocally condemn suicide stressing that a true believer witnesses the value of life and never infringes on its without sacredness divine sanction. Life is a gift its intended function being the worship of God,” Encyclopaedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Body, Sexuality and Health, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 450.
Thus, the writer dedicated both her two novels and not only by their themes, but also their narrative manners, styles, techniques and devices for her feminist agenda. Meanwhile, the two novels, in addition to centring feminist issues, address socioeconomic, cultural, religious and political aspects.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Ba‘albaki’s Short Stories

This chapter will discuss selectively Ba‘albaki’s short stories—the twelve collected in Safinat ḥanān ilā al-qamar (1963), as well as “The Heroine” (1966), employing the same methodological approach as in the previous chapter. Like the previous chapter, this discussion aims to explore the feminist writings of the writer. 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. Because these short stories revolve around the axis of women–men, both inside and outside of marriage, and in both romantic and sexual relationships, I will treat female and male characters and the conflict between them mainly in the next chapter, on feminism. Since it was the short stories that were cited 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‘albaki’s defence was that she was simply describing real life as experienced by women. This chapter provides the groundwork for our later discussion of this issue.

4.1 Narrative Manner

In this section I explore the features of the short stories’ various narrators, and the styles of narration which 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. In all, I am seeking to examine whether the writer uses the same narrative style and language which she used in her novels or opted new narrative style and language, and in particular to determine whether the writer continues
to make linguistic mistakes and uses Levantine colloquial\textsuperscript{541} words, as we saw her doing in her novels. This is relevant as it will allow us to make a more objective judgment regarding her linguistic abilities, and so in turn to determine whether she is indeed influenced by zajal poetry, which mixes Modern Standard Arabic and dialect. It is also relevant in that it will allow us to see whether Baʿalbakī is learning from her previous mistakes – if, that is, the writer has in fact been making mistakes, as opposed to deliberately adopting a colloquial and poetic style.

**4.1.1 Narrator**

Also here, 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 \textit{Lā baḥra fī Beirut} [No sea in Beirut] (1963) to focus on women’s suffering and fulfilment.”\textsuperscript{542} Bādīs Fūghālī says: “The first person is the most proper pronoun to narrate events which prominently sound like reality, because the narrator narrates about his/herself just what he/she knows about.”\textsuperscript{543} However, I suggest that Baʿalbakī is committed to this first-person narrator in order to let her heroine narrators be most dominant, and to give their voices the most space (as in \textit{Anā aḥyā}). While the reader might expect to see continuing use of polyphonic narration as used in \textit{al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah}, the voice of the female narrator is in general the only voice which is heard in these short stories. Moreover, in the “The Silvery

\textsuperscript{541} I deleted the term 'slang' because it is not relevant here. While colloquial means 'ammīyya' [spoken language], 'slang' refers to special vocabularies within 'ammīyya'. Indeed, in my dissertation I am talking about here is her use of colloquial forms and grammar.

\textsuperscript{542} Ḥammūd, \textit{Al-khilāb al-qāṣāṣ al-niswī}, 173.

\textsuperscript{543} Bādīs Fūghālī, \textit{Dirāsāt fī al-qīṣṣah wa-al-riwāyah} [Studies on the story and the novel], (Irbid: Modern Book World, 2010), 83.
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 which is in harmony with the voice of the female narrator, however, it is fair to conclude that the short stories are committed to and uphold the dominance of the female voice.

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. For example, the narrator says, “When my mother was pregnant with me, she loved a man other than my father.” “I know what I want … I know that I struggle to be free.” In the other stories, however, the narrators are non-omniscient: they do not know everything, even things that regard themselves. For example, the narrator of “Your Chest is No Longer My City,” says: “I did not know any way except the way to the university and coffee shop,” “the only sentence which I remember you said to me that night is: You are a fish, you are a rare fish that I hunted.”

While the reader might expect that the use of the non-omniscient narrator might increase objectivity in the narration, we see in fact that making the narrators non-omniscient is mostly employed 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

544 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 42-43.
545 Ibid., 20.
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 which 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.” Here, the narrator is analyzing another character, passing comment relating to his ability to make decisions. Similarly, the narrator is also not neutral in that she comments on and analyzes 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 heroine, is also the most dominant. This identification of the features of the narrator leads us on to an examination of the styles which the narrators employ within their narration.

4.1.2 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,

546 Ba’albaki, “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon” Denys Johnson-Davies trans. in Elizabeth Fernea and Basima Bezirgan, eds. Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1992), 274.
“The Silvery Shoes of the Queen” treats a relationship both between a wife and her husband and 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. She says:

The short stories from one another angle [represent] twelve places—twelve voices—twelve women—twelve men—twelve mouths crying ‘no’—twelve players in one play, everyone of them goes up to the theatre to say ‘no’ within his/her experiences and past dreams and hopes and looking forward the future.\textsuperscript{547}

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. In the next chapter, I will investigate how these voices, in different contexts, play much the same role in supporting the writer’s agenda of promoting feminist perspectives and themes.

Another prominent narrative style is the flashback, which is employed to enable a comparison between the female narrator’s past and current relationships. In “Your Chest is No Longer My City,” for example, the narrator describes her sexual and romantic relations with her past boyfriend, which lasted three years, and the current one. Interestingly, the narrator’s flashbacks are not linear, but switch between past and present; these shifts caused a shattered time in the narration. This comparison expands upon the narrator’s loss of her love and sexual partner, and this focus is deliberately adopted in order to legitimize the narrator’s thoughts of suicide. Thus, this style of flashback, together with that of comparison, is cleverly deployed in the lead-up to the climax of the story.

Interestingly, the writer also employs the technique of personification to legitimate her female heroine’s theorizing as regards loneliness. She says: “loneliness? It is killing me, and places where there are no other people terrify me. Therefore, I will marry and give birth

\textsuperscript{547}Ba‘albākī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar,7.
to many children.” Cats are known for 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. Ṣalāḥ Ṣāliḥ says:

Likening the woman to a cat has been done within several modern or specifically contemporary art works. One example is an Italian film (“The woman and the cat”) […] Likening is carried out by focusing the contrast between the character of the woman and the cat, the paradox between the external beauty and the severe ferocity. Ṣāliḥ also discusses the cat figure in the novel Al-Mar’ah wa-al-qīṭṭah [The woman and the cat] (1985) by Laylá 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.” 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 heroine says, “I am a wild cat which disappears within the city streets which lead to the sea, when rain is falling.” 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” and “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.

548 Ibid., 43.
550 Ibid., 81.
551 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-ṭāmar, 52.
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. This combination is employed to provide a focus for her short stories and novels, which are, though, not autobiographical but fictions.552 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 lives in al-Jabal … But despite that I too was injured by a dog bite, so the two events are different.”553 Here on one hand, the writer reveals that what happened to her is different than what happened to her friend, while on the other she indicates that she also was bitten by “a dog.” 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 is revealed 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,” by talking about the small fires which a child makes: “Did not you, when you were a child, collect papers in the house … and make a fire on the balcony or in the house or outside on the side of the street?”554 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.

552 Ba‘albaki, Safinat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 75-84.
553 Ibid., 75.
554 Ibid., 107.
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, and 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].”

Repetition is another style we can observe in certain stories, such as “When Snow Falls” where the female heroine narrator repeats six times a statement about the death of the man: “No. No. He is dead!” This repetition is used to raise the intensity of the story, pushing the reader to read on quickly in order to understand the cause of the antagonist’s death. Further, this style ensures that the narrator occupies the whole narrative space, with no room for any other voice, especially of males/men. While in “When Snow Falls” the repetition concerns a dying man, in the following story, “Sinnīn and Another Mountain,” repetition is a device used to narrate new information by flashing-back to the man, where the repeated sentence is “Let the man come in, come in.” This contrast could again be seen as a link between the above two stories, and thus we note the writer makes connections between the stories that follow each other, in different ways and using different devices. On the other hand, though, these connections are just indicative – that is to say, not structural or related to the fundamental characteristics of the stories.

Rhetorical questions are a repeated narrative style used in the short stories. For example, in “Your Chest Is No Longer My City” the narrator asks rhetorical questions such as:

Do not you think, like me, that leaders who misshape war are the newest people in the world? And in this building there is a show of weapons; do not you think, like me, that weapons are newer than any human in this world and more important than any human?

555 Ba‘albaki, Safinaat hanān ilā al-qamar, 10.
556 Ibid., 51-60.
557 Ibid., 63-68.
558 Ibid., 14.
On the other hand, the narrator sometimes asks non-rhetorical questions, such as in “Your Chest is No Longer my City”: “How do I commit suicide? Do I cut my arteries? No. Do I drink a glass of iodine? No. Do I throw myself on the rocks?” Here, the narrator uses the style of questioning in order to detail the ways in which she might commit suicide. The author is indicating that her female character knows how to commit suicide, but that she (the author) will not let her fulfil the act. We may fairly read these indications into the story, because in her two novels we have seen her female heroines fail in the act of suicide without any indication they knew how to commit the act.

Regarding titles, Muhammad Ubayd says:

There are no rules to determine the ways of choosing a title. Rather, it is the chance of the novelist letting him/her freely choose any possible proper or essential title for his/her work. Giving a title is a significant challenge for many novelists due to the semantic and semiotic importance of titles.

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. It is the diction of poetry rather than prose that characterizes the language of her titles, as can be seen also in the title of the volume itself – Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar. The language of poetry similarly appears in the titles of her novels Anā aḥyā 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: both the title and the text need to be approached with sensitivity to their poetry. She does not allow the recipient to be content with the title at first sight, since its meaning is wrapped up in poetic symbolism. Rather, the title is calculated to attract the reader towards the actual text where its symbolic and literal

559 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 21-22.
implications can be explored 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.”561 The writer tends towards the lyrical, poetic narrative not only in her titles but 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.562 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. The elements of the title are calculated to 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-tale title, displaying its contents which are normally supposed to be hidden. The title, moreover, puts the reader immediately in the midst of the critical moment of the character’s life. This is the moment that marks the negative turning point in the story, thus making 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 heroine 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 Faʿrah, feminine) and “filly” (Arabic Muhrah, 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 is as if the author has taken linguistic measures in the title in order to impress the image she has in her mind onto the mind of the reader. 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. The title, by virtue of the said linguistic measure, together with the grammatical structure (verbs: kuntu; sirtu: literally: I was, I became), clearly implies the stance of the writer-narrator vis-à-vis the events of the narrative, the upshot of which is that the title may be seen as a combination of two discourses: the narrative discourse, which consists of the theme of the story, and the discourse of the narrator, wherein is indicated the general stance and attitude to the narrative discourse. Muḥammad Al-Jazzār makes similar points in his discussion of similar ideas regarding stories of writers other than Baʿalbaḵī.563 In the same title, “mouse” (faʿrah), with its feminine gender, balances and parallels “filly” (muhrah), just as the verb “I was” (kuntu) balances and parallels the verb “I became” (sirtu), which is suggestive of the narrator’s stance towards the theme of narration. There is an overlap between the two discourses, and that each serves the other. The narrative discourse is bound to serve the intellectual and social discourses, because it magnifies the image of the “I” or the feminized self expressed in “I became” and “I was.” Thus, it forms the centre or the focal point of the social and political themes in the story.

The title of this story can be viewed as the narrative focus of the story, as the central point that encapsulates the total theme of the story and the meeting point in which all the

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strands and scattered elements of the narrative converge. Further, the title of this story places the focus on the actions of the story and the crisis that the heroine 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 to be identified. 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.

On the other hand, the title does not hint that the turning point or transformation is caused by coercion, which means that the title fails to convey the full significance that the narrative text yields. The title is more of an artistic pointer towards the full statement represented by the story itself. Rapid transition from one stage to another is an index of such dynamism and mobility. But these two qualities in the style of Ba‘albakī are not confined to her titles; they also permeate the narrative text itself.

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. But 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. Ibrāhīm Khalīl says: “Shattered time is a narrative time that is not linear beginning from a point and going straight to another point, but


565 See also al-Jazzār, Al-‘Unwān wa-sīmyāfiqā al-ittiṣāl al-adabī, 45-46.
includes returning to the past, then reversing to the present.” Khalīl explores shattered time, yet we will note the circular movement of time in the studied short story of Baʿalbakī. 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 she went through and which 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-ʿĪsāwī and other researchers explored in general, but not regarding the stories of Baʿalbakī.

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

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present and the current reality which 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-Nābilṣī in his analysis of some modern Arabic stories to describe the analysis of the narrating time and place movement.\textsuperscript{568} 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 ilā 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 is so deeply inscribed in her memory, could be equally considered as the womb, giving warmth, protection, repose, and freedom. Ba'ālbakī 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 far and wide. Accurate and detailed as her description of this productive womb place is, she does not designate it with the name of a specific village, city, or country. But at the end of her description and on her return to the station-place, she makes a metaphorical comment: “I’ve returned from regions where snow falls.”

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: “When I found the man, the room turned into a dusty hole of no depth, inhabited by rats. I’m a mouse and the man is the owner of the 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.\(^5\)

This exploration and investigation of the narrative styles now lead us to examine the narrative language used in the short stories.

**4.1.3 Narrative Language**

This section discusses the fictional language and lexis of the writer. It is relevant both to 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, therefore, try to map out the fictional lexicon and its implications.

The figurative and poetic language that Ba‘albakī uses in her novels continues to be dominant in her short stories. Here are some examples:

He asked me to ask him to give her something. I said: your white hair, as a result his eyes became vexed and his colour dimmed. He enchanted me and washed me with kisses … and when he kisses me I feel as if I am having a shower under a coconut tree. 570

When I met your eyes, and you are the fiancé of my friend and my husband’s friend, I wished I were a little black and white cat with violet eyes sleeping with all the cats of the district. 571

On the other hand, as in her novels, 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 masaktuḥā [to catch, to snatch a handful];572 examples from “‘Indamā yatasāqātu al-thalj”: lambah instead of misbāḥ [lamp, light];573 t‘arbash instead of tasallaq [to climb];574 examples from “Al-Infijār”: utīl instead of funduq [hotel];575 fāsāt instead of Aw‘iyah [utensils];576 examples from “Ṣafīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar”: narvaz instead of aghḍaba [to be annoyed, be irritated];577 al-kākī instead of Azraq ghāmiq [strong blue].578 Two examples of linguistic mistakes are: jawāriban579 (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

570 Ba‘albakī, Ṣafīnāt ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 44.
571 Ibid., 103.
572 Ibid., 46. All translations in this paragraph taken from J. Elihay, The Olive Tree Dictionary: A Transliterated Dictionary of Conversational Eastern Arabic (Palestinian) (Jerusalem: Minerva Instruction & Consultation, n.d.).
573 Ibid., 56.
574 Ibid., 57.
575 Ibid., 122.
576 Ibid., 121.
577 Ibid., 183.
578 Ibid., 189.
579 Ibid., 188.
not editing issues because they are repeated in the novels and short stories, and moreover they are not changed in the re-printed editions of short stories and novels 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. For example, this passage from “Your Chest is no Longer my City”: “And I am a mad woman, my dear. Before I knew you I would spit in any plate of food I didn’t like. I would break any glass I didn’t choose. I would slap anyone that made me angry.”

The terms that stand out here are: “a mad woman,” “I spit,” “I break,” and “I slap.” 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 is then 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 the actors be characterized by antithetical qualities and opinions. Below I discuss some illustrative specimens of this antithesis. For example, the female heroine narrator says:

580 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 53.
I know what I want. While my feet are dug deep in the soil, my face embracing the sun as I await the landing of someone on the moon, I know that I won’t struggle to be free, heroic and immortal. No, I am not one of those legendary women who can live alone. Loneliness? It kills me.581

Here, balance and antithesis are used to throw light on certain details that set the heroine apart from other women in society. One such distinguishing feature is that she wants to compete with men in various walks of life, in progress, education, culture, work, and in political and economic life. 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 heroine and the author alike.

The frequent mention of the body and its various parts is another feature of the short stories, and could perhaps be described 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 are frequently interpreted in the light of bodily parts.582

The short story “When Snow Falls,” begins with a fleeting moment in the life of a man and a woman 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.583 This is an example: “Love me more, love me. Then he turned my neck and pressed me towards him, so that my face sank in the hair of his chest. Love me. Her breath flows in my veins.” The body in this story represents a medium of communication. It expresses the

583 Ba‘albakī, Safīnat hanān ilā al-qamar, 68.
584 Ibid., 76.
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.  
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.

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. But 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.

The question for the reader is then whether the reality Ba’albakī was claiming was an actual reality, or a reality that she only imagined or believed could be true of her society. If these two narrative scenes are seen as fictional portraits rather than presentations of a factual situation, we discover that the second significance enables us to read these two statements from another angle, revealing that the writer seeks to establish a dissident discourse, one that elevates the value of personal identity and restores to the body the respect and integrity which it has been robbed of by the traditional binary conception of body/soul within Arab societies.

585 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 72.
586 Ibid., 74.
and also within the Christian tradition of the West. Accordingly, the semiotic function of writing with the body vocabulary in the story is totally remote from the charge of provocative sexual incitement that the court accepted as a basis for convicting the author.

On the contrary, 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, inviting 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 writes: “Your chest [of a man, her beloved], your chest is for me, my chest for you” (A Spaceship of Tenderness, 11-12). But readers in this period were not well suited to appreciate the aesthetics of Ba’albakī’s work, which meant that the approach she adopted, of writing with the vocabulary of the body, became an exercise in alienation, and expressed her stubborn willingness to be a lone pioneer.

In summary, then, the writer continues to use Levantine colloquial words which could indicate the influence of her father’s zajal or by the dialect itself, or both. She also continues to use poetic and figurative narrative language in her short stories. This leads to her being influenced by several Arab and no-Arab poets. 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‘albaki’s work. She employs this device with several aims in mind, including to present the centrality of the struggle; to improve the portrayal of women; to reveal the author’s fascination for life in the Western city or cities in general in comparison with that in Lebanese villages; to draw the reader’s or audience’s attention to the views of the author and the contents of her principal works; and to highlight the importance of women being in control of their own bodies and having sexual freedom.\(^{587}\)

The vocabulary employed in Ba‘albaki’s works are words associated with strength, power, and tension. These words clearly emphasize the centrality of the struggle and the critical extent of the confrontation in her novels and stories. One can also see the proliferation of the vocabulary of contrast in these works, all of which serve to emphasize that the central point of the struggle is the “Other.”

### 4.2 Themes

This section explores and discusses the themes which run throughout Ba‘albaki’s short stories. Aside from feminism, the themes she addresses are mainly political, religious, and social.\(^{588}\) 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 great detail about these themes. This is to be expected, 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

\(^{587}\) A topic which will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.

\(^{588}\) We are setting aside, however, the theme of feminism, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
will limit my discussion to level of detail that is given in her fiction. This means that the discussions are at times brief, but this reflects the depth of treatment of the theme in the novel.\footnote{589}

4.2.1 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. Let us see what the female narrator says in the story “al-Infijār” regarding the relationship between politics and power:

\begin{quote}
I dream to be a queen. My husband the king is absent because he is checking situations of his people … He has a golden car which is led by white horses. When he returns in the evening we will have a celebration inviting all kings of the world. Then, I will appear with my violet and sheer clothes, while my hands will be full of gold and jewellery. I am putting on my hand’s ten fingers rings of emerald, agates … On my head, I will put a crown of diamonds … and I will join my love the king to begin a dancing celebration.\footnote{590}
\end{quote}

Here, the use of an imaginary and ironic dream is employed 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 which 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.

In addition, the short stories explore issues of poverty and hunger after and as a result of the Second World War. An evident example is what the female protagonist of “Your Chest Is No

\footnote{589} A similar point holds for the previous discussion of themes in her novels.

\footnote{590} Ba‘albakī, Safīnat ḥanān îlā al-qamar, 118-119.
Longer My City,” says: “I sleep several days without having any dinar just to be able to buy postal stamps and a box of cigarettes.”591

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 again suggest 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. For example, the female protagonist says: “In the building there is a particular space for weapons show. Do not you think like me that weapons are more important than anything else in this world? They are more important, more important!”592

This theme was not present in her 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, and these political and financial issues are in harmony with those in her two novels.

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

591 Ba'albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 14.
592 Ibid., 14.
4.2.2 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 Baʿalbakī 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. He says to an Arab woman, “For four years, I have had a sexual relationship with a woman without marrying her. I am a British and she is a German. I leave her in one country and travel to another country, then I ask her to follow me and she does so.”

In “No, the Anger will not Cease,” the author calls for the younger generation to escape to the West, which are countries of freedom, particularly so that they can register a civil marriage which in Lebanon is forbidden. This calling comes in line with the writer conception of mobility to get a better life. Men and women could marry each other according 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. This latter limitation is a Muslim institution which the writer seems in particular to oppose.

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 is reflected in the

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593 Baʿalbakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 169.
594 I mention this point only in passing since a wider discussion of the link between the writer’s fiction and her biography is not part of my agenda in this thesis.
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, saying: “the heads of this man’s children are like a yellow oblong melon and they love much ice cream and hamburgers.” 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.”

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 which was 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.

Another theme which we do not see in the writer’s novels is an admiration of heritage. The narrator in the story “The Experience,” for example, tells the reader about a subplot concerning an:

Eastern man from our country, he was born in the village, he drank from wellsprings. He climbed up trees’ branches and ate green za‘tar and raw kibbih [a Lebanese heritage food] and when he grew up his family sent him to study in the capital Beirut in a foreign school, then he travelled to the USA in order to specialize, and there he married an American woman, lived there, got a visa and has children.

Here, for the first time in the writer’s fiction, there is a sense of her calling for the preservation of the heritage of Arabs in general and the Lebanese in particular. I argue that the writer employs this as a way of supporting her call for Lebanese and Arab women to

595 Ba‘albakhī, Safīnāt ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 76.
596 Ibid., 76.
597 Ibid., 76.
marry only Arab men. The writer sacrifices her objectivity in bringing in Western culture to serve her agenda of supporting Lebanese and Arab women in this issue of marriage. She seems to be selective; she takes from Western culture the freedom of sexual relationships outside and inside marriage, and wants to use the West in order to conclude civil marriages. But, on the other hand, she rejects mixed marriage. I think she dwells on this issue because she is aware of the importance of marriage for Arab women, it being very important for Arab women to get married in their twenties or thereabouts.

Violence against the defenceless is also a theme in the story “Small Fire,” but now the focus is on violence towards children. It is reflected in the treatment of two children by their father. 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. His new wife says, “you hate them [your sons] do not you? … You were lost, you hoped to kill them.” 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 heroine indicates that she knows how to commit suicide by mentioning several specific ways, as we have seen. This could also be a reference to the two novels, where her heroines do not know how to commit suicide and fail in their attempts, as well as an indication that the writer has specific literary purposes in mind in allowing or disallowing the characters to put an end to themselves. In the story “Sinnīn and another Mountain,” the heroine also thinks of suicide when she reflects on the prospects of losing her lover.

Thus, the issue of violence is woven into several of the short stories, and that this echoes the theme of suicide as violence which runs through the novels as well. These are also

598 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 109-110.
other indications that the short stories are connected together by unifying themes: several of the short stories also contribute to supporting and weaving in the perspectives and opinions of the heroines.

To sum up, a number of social issues which run through the short stories are also in line with the themes in the two novels. There is less of a connection with the content of the lecture, however, which, although it is very concerned with matters of oppression and social reform in general, does not deal so directly with the ways in which that oppression is expressed through forms of violence. Several short stories weave in the perspectives of the heroines, which is to say that connections can be seen 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.

4.2.3 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. The male lover says: “let us immigrate to a country in which we could join in civil marriage and forget our sects.”

The female protagonist responds:

I loved you in secret. Despite that you are from another religion, and from another city. Your rich family refused our marriage. And my family is so religious, if my family's members will know our plan to marry; they will kill me in front of the house.

Here, 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 within the romantic relationship between the female heroine Rīm, who is Christian, and Ziyād, who is a Muslim. However, this call falls in line with the Lebanese laws, which permit

599 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 136.
600 Ibid.
Lebanese citizens to practice civil marriage abroad, but not in Lebanon. Yet it can also be seen as a call for rapprochement between Christians and Muslims. Similarly, Mu’taṣim says: “Salālim al-sharq (1996) [by Amin Maalouf] focuses on the ideas of coexistence and tolerance between the different races in the era of Arabic East and on tolerance among the three religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism.” While Maalouf (b. 1949) calls for tolerance among the three religions, Ba’albakī called for tolerance and harmony between only two religions: Islam and Christianity—likely because of the Arab–Israeli conflict at the time.

In addition, civil marriage and immigration to a foreign country are means for finding safety away from violent fanatics. Her lover says: “I will protect you. I will prevent those fanatic killers from disturbing you. Escape with me not because of fear, but to not give them a chance to look at us.” 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 which is described as common to all sects and religions in Lebanon. This is an indication that Lebanese society is sectarian in its structure, and the narrator responds by saying: “Let fanaticism carry their bodies instead of love.” However, this seems a generalization as the writer has no any evidence for such fanaticism that she points out in her short stories, particularly since Lebanon and Beirut have tended to offer openness toward Western cultures and nations.

The treatment of religious issues in the short stories is not in harmony with the wider approach in the writer’s fiction and in her lecture. As we have seen, the writer was positive about religion in the lecture, seeing it as an uplifting and transformative social force, provided that it was not used to sow division. Here, though, she seems to express a more pessimistic view, and seems more willing to say that religion must be totally abandoned if people are to

601 This novel was translated into English: Ports of Call. Amin Maalouf is a Lebanese writer who writes in French.
602 Mu’taṣim, Al-Ru’yah al-fujā’i’iyah, 31.
603 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qlamar, 136.
604 Ibid., 136.
be properly free. It is not clear whether she would still allow that religion can have a positive role, even if it is dealt with in the right way. The author’s rejection of cross-cultural relationships is something else that is common between the short stories and the novels, as we saw in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah that the protagonist rejected out of hand the idea that she would marry her Indian colleague, to whom she had lost her virginity.

4.3 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, most of which also appeared in her novels, but some of which are novel, such as the interweaving of dreams into the narrative, the combination of autobiographical aspects with fiction and the complex temporal structures in the narrative; suggesting a progression in the writer’s command of complex narrative forms from the novels to the short stories. 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 continued use of Levantine colloquial words, which could indicate the influence of her father’s zajal poetry and her being influenced by Levantine dialect too. As well as this, Ba’albakī continues to use poetic and figurative narrative language, just as she did in her novels. The narrative language also manifests dynamism and vitality, 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, and 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; though, as we have seen, it also brought the author into controversy and ultimately led to the court judgment against her.

Leaving aside the theme of feminism, which will be addressed in the next chapter, the short stories address themes of economic and social justice, and contain calls for democracy and the fair distribution of wealth in Arab countries. This is a continuation of the way political themes are treated in her novels and in her lecture. The treatment of social and cultural issues in the short stories is more ambiguous than in the novels, 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. This “selective dealing” in cultural matters is not obvious in her novels or lecture. Her views on religion have also changed, since there is now a clearer opposition to religions and sects in general, because of the limits they place on marriage and sexual relationships.

Thus, although some themes in the short stories are new, some expand on issues that appear in novels and/or lectures and so build up the interconnections and interweaving of themes throughout the author’s work, creating a sense of unity. There is also a sense of unity among the short stories in Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qaṭar, since there are 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, Bādī Fūghālī points out the homogeneity within his analysis of the
collection of short stories *Ahlām azminat al-dam* [The dreams of times of blood] (1997) by the Algerian writer Jamāl Fūghālī:

The collection is constructed of eight short stories, and throughout them the self is being focused and all the titles indicate the self’s concerns and suffering. All the voices are connected to construct one strong voice which opposes the surrounding reality such as corruption and marginalization of national abilities of educated youth.

A similar sense of homogeneity, employed for a social critical agenda is, in *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*, employed for a feminist agenda by Baʿalbakī.

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605 Fūghālī, *Dirāsāt fī al-qīssah wa-al-riwāyah*, 35.
606 Ibid., 39.
Chapter 5. Feminism throughout Ba‘albakī’s Fiction

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the ways in which Ba‘albakī’s writings engage with feminist issues. Since this is a major issue in the present study, the concept of feminism was defined in the introduction to this dissertation, and this definition forms the background for the argument here. In addition, this chapter will explore the different ways in which feminist issues are addressed in Ba‘albakī’s work, in order to determine the nature of the writer’s feminist agenda. Because several of the feminist social and economic desires of Ba‘albakī’s protagonists have been analyzed in the previous chapter, this chapter gives only a general discussion and summary of those desires, and instead focuses on the issues of sex, marriage, and mothering or child bearing. I will begin by discussing the women’s need for the other/the man, before turning to woman’s ownership of her body, and then to women–men sexual relationships inside and outside of marriage and by single and married males and females. I argue that these feminist issues are connected to each other across the author’s different stories and novels, in such a way as to weave together different aspects of her feminist perspective and so provide a complete engagement with the issue, divided between the different works.

The need to lay emphasis on the feminist aspects of Ba‘albakī’s work is all the more significant given that some Arab women writers, such as Ghada Al Samman, refuse to use literature to serve the cause of feminism or women’s issues. Di Capua has argued that the genre of literature in which Ba‘albakī’s writings are located is a vigorous, liberal, and outspoken style of literature which covers a significant period of time in the Arab literary feminist movement, but does not itself contain significant engagement with feminist

themes.\textsuperscript{608} It amounts only to a protest against the conditions faced by the Arab woman, and does not offer any coherent alternative social proposals.

In contrast, the argument of this chapter is that the writings of Ba’albakī do in fact reveal a sustained effort to raise the banner of feminism, and a strong desire to liberate Arab women from the domination of patriarchy. This stance also implies a commitment to free women from social and religious constraints, and to this end Ba’albakī sometimes portrays women as independent and free, and sometimes represents them as victims of the social traditions of Arab societies – that is, as people needing help, support, protection, and liberation. The short story “I Was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse”\textsuperscript{609} illustrates both of these aspects, showing the protagonist both as suffocated in her life under her Arab husband (that is, as a victim), and also as having liberated herself from this situation by leaving the husband (that is, as an active agent). Here, I argue that the writer employs her stories, novels, and lecture to focus upon and explore feminist campaign against male domination.

I employ certain translated sources because they were more easily accessible to me (they form part of my own library). In addition, I also refer to several sources in English. This chapter is not about feminist theory in general, but specifically about how feminism is reflected within the fiction of the writer, and thus for some of the discussions there are few relevant sources available. As mentioned, there is no specific and thorough study on the writer which discusses feminism in her fiction. Thus, I refer mainly to the primary sources of the writer, in addition to several sources in Arabic and English.\textsuperscript{610}

Having presented this introduction, then, I turn to an analysis of the feminist issues which are focused upon and which run throughout Ba’albakī’s novels and short stories.

\textsuperscript{608} Di Capua, \textit{al-Tamarrud wa-al-iltizām}, 62-63.
\textsuperscript{609} Ba’albakī, \textit{Ṣafīnat ḥanān ilā al-ḥamār}, 149-60.
\textsuperscript{610} I rely mainly the primary sources of the writer because of the limitation of secondary sources which points out the issues discussed here. For example, I did not found any sources which comment the above claim of Di Capua I am trying to refute in this chapter.
5.2 Feminist Issues

Ba‘albakī’s novels, short stories, and her lecture focus on several feminist issues in particular. I will begin with the issue of the woman’s need for others/for men, because Līnā, the protagonist in *Anā aḥyā*, denies her need for a man at first but later retreats and admits indeed she does need a man. Having made her first character admit this, Ba‘albakī makes her later heroines turn to focus more upon the issue of their right to control their bodies, which was also one of Līnā’s main concerns before she realized her need for a man. This theme of the realization of a need for a man is so prominent in *Anā aḥyā* that it is reasonable to take it as a basis of Ba‘albakī’s thinking about feminist issues and experiences. Alongside this, the second novel as well as the short stories explores desire, and the experience of several kinds of female–male relationships. So, to proceed logically, we must first begin with an analysis of what leads to the heroine denying that need for a man, then discuss how she comes to acknowledge that need, and then turn to the woman’s right to control her body. Finally, we will turn to a discussion of the search for a relationship that can satisfy these needs. In particular, the question will be posed: Which relationships are most relevant here? Finally, we will investigate whether the female protagonists succeed in attaining the relationships they seek, and especially whether they enter into marriages which meet their views of how marriage ought to be. The relationships to be explored are romantic, with a focus on the sexual dimension, and take place both inside and outside marriage and among single.married females and single.married males. I begin with marriage because the protagonist in Ba‘albakī’s first novel seeks a marriage relationship with a single male. Then, I will turn to the issue of giving birth, since this is one of marriage’s aims.

5.2.1 The Woman’s Need for the other/the Man
Within the author’s writing, a prominent role is given to the issue of the need of women for the other/the man. In *Anā aḥyā*, Līnā initially denies this need. She says:

I do not care about men. No educational attainment has any attraction for me. I try in vain to look for any relationship with these persons. I am in touch with them but I don’t sense them. I look at them but I don’t see them. For me they are just like trees, rivers, stars, stones. 611

This passage shows how resentful Līnā is of the woman’s need for the man/the other. Thus, she does not seek to join with a man for any aim, whether entertainment, romance or sex. This passage thus represents a rebellion against the concept of the “family” as a coherent unit in Arab societies.

This is the place to draw attention to the views of other Arab feminist writers on this issue. Bazzah al-Bāṭinī, for instance, within her collection of short stories *Al- Sayyidah kānat* [Mrs Was] (1998), portrays in striking terms the woman’s innate need for the man/the other. Her short story “When the Cold Comes?” is about a woman who loses all sense of ease and security after her lover’s departure, despite the abundance and leisure which surrounds her. 612 She says: “Where are you my love? Who now will give me tenderness? Who will give me protection?” Here, the female heroine clearly expresses her need for her male companion. Ba’alba’ki’s characters tend to reject this sort of relationship. For example, the female protagonist of “The Cat” refuses to be a victim of madness or obsession with lust. Here is how the heroine portrays the relationship with her lover in assertive, uncompromising words: “I made him understand from the start that I knew what I wanted. I told him that I did not fall madly in love with him, leaving my world and flying behind him on the back of a horse heading to an unknown destination.” 613

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613 Ibid.
The heroine does need the other/the man, but it is a circumscribed, well-defined, and limited need. She refuses to make sacrifices for this need. She will not take risks and is too sober to allow herself to fall into the snares of mad love or obsessive lust. And yet there are instances where Līnā retreats from this position, perhaps unconsciously, in a reluctant admission of a woman’s instinctive need, or perhaps for other reasons. The novel Anā ahīyā abounds with passages that testify to this retreat. Līnā reveals feelings of loneliness and barrenness, saying “and I realized that I needed a companion, a man to interest my mind in matters unfamiliar to it. Why do I not then invite this single young man sitting in front of me to share the meal with me? I’ll invite him!” And she also says: “The eyes were fixed on my rebellious daring bosom. I examined the eyes cautiously. They were all hungry. These men are quite ready to drink each other’s blood for the sake of kissing an eager lip or touching a breast.”

There is a significant indication of Līnā’s recognition of her instinctive desire for a man where she, reflecting on her perhaps unconscious retraction of her previous position, says,

I will change the place where I sleep. I will steal my way in the dark to the highest floor of the highest building and slip into bed and sleep on Bahā’’s chest. No, he will not hurt me; he will not exploit my conscious decision: he understands my awareness, understands my freedom.

She does not want a particular person whom she has fallen in love with; she is neither a captive of love nor of lust. All she wants is a man who can allow her to sense her own freedom; someone through whom she can feel that her existence has an importance of its own, and that she is an individual existing for her own sake, not an object of domination or possession. The kind of relationship she wants with such a man would be one of openness and freedom. She does not want a man who dominates or controls her, imposing limits to her being, her movements, and her thoughts. There is also her attitude to Bahā’. With him she wanted to build a distinctive relationship, but not one of marriage.

615 Ba’albakī, Anā ahīyā, 176.
616 Ibid., 196.
One more reason for retreating from the view that the woman does not need the man could lie in psychological factors and motives, in the sense that Līnā might want to remain free, living with whomever she wants, whenever she wants, and enjoying love and sex on her own terms. Notably, after the writer retreats from her view that the woman does not need the man, she does not return to this issue in her following works, and she does not mention this issue again after her first novel. Līnā denied her need for the man, although she later retreated, whereas Rīm not only does not deny that need at all, but also recognizes her need for a man, a companion. She says: “I recognized in him that I am afraid of loneliness… I was saying to him that I need to love a male person who stays a man and who could end my loss and my fears.”

Thus, it appears that the discussed need was a feminist issue throughout the fiction of other female Lebanese writers, including Kulit Khuri, and not just the work of Baʿalbakī. However, Kulit Khuri could have been influenced by the writer. Kulit Khuri employs this issue to call on readers to take advantage of other cultures. Rīm says: “Why do people in Germany and the U.S.A. see that females must have a male friend? And why...Why in my country do people strongly criticise a female if she meets and shakes the hand of a man in the street?”

Thus, female Lebanese writers at the time, such as Kulit Khuri and Baʿalbakī, were mostly influenced by the foreign cultures of Europe and the United States of America.

5.2.2 Body Ownership

The novel Anā aḥyā again provides a good starting point for discussion of the theme of owning the body. The physical integrity of the woman’s body, her sense of being the undisputed proprietor of her own body, is a question which this novel boldly addresses. The heroine, as a young Arab woman who is rebelling against the dominant ideology sanctioned

617 Khuri, Ayyam Maʿahu, 157.
618 Ibid., 116.
by traditional modes of thought, cries out in anger against the way her hair comes to define her: “Am I not free to be furious with this hair which attracts so much attention that my existence has become bound up with its existence?”619 This is a view with deep roots in the evolution of feminist thought. Margaret Sanger, for example, long ago asserted: “No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body.”620

In Līnā the writer has portrayed a woman who desires to build an independent character, a woman sustained by her will and her insistence on self-assertion. Līnā wants everyone to see that she is free, unhampered by conventions and the traditional demands of family and society. She expresses her commitment to the cause of personal freedom wherever she has a chance. She decides, for example, to be examined and treated by a doctor other than the family doctor. Interestingly, Munā Fayyādh, who generally deals with this action, says: “Going to a doctor rather than the family is the beginning of the rebellious individual against one of the prevalent standards of measuring femininity.”621

Līnā cuts off her hair because she refuses to conform to the stereotypical image of the attractive woman who earns attention by means of the hair that distinguishes her from men and by which her femininity is defined. She adopts a defiant stance: she, and only she, owns her body and she is entitled to do with it what she wants. Accordingly, she wants to remove the socially recognized mark of femininity, to defy the convention which attaches more significance to appearance than to reality, and so challenge the inferiority of women. By cutting and scattering her hair she directs a blow against the symbols which hold a woman in bondage to the tyranny of traditions which rob her of her humanity: “I insist on removing the barrier that smothers my human value.”622

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619 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 7.
622 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 32.
These barriers are the patriarchal view by virtue of which she is regarded by society as nothing more than a doll or a source of sensuous pleasure, and not as a partner or someone who can share in the determination of her own destiny. The ideas and the views she has now embraced are alien to her social environment, and yet she is determined to give no heed to all that surrounds her, having bent her will on gaining her ends by following the growing consciousness that had in the first place led her to discover her identity. And now it is time to fulfil those needs necessary for satisfying her identity – an identity which is thirsting for freedom. Fayyādh has this to say:

It is the consciousness of the individual who rebels against the traditions shackling the woman or putting limits to her steps and direction, circumscribing the boundaries of her body and framing it within an area as narrow as those very same customs and traditions.  

Līnā, as can be seen from her comments above, sees in her body a symbol of her freedom. Society has decreed a single, narrow road for that body, denying its owner the right to use it as she sees fit, for no reason except that she happens to be a female. If she deviates from this decree she will become anathema, a social outlaw, a symbol of disgrace, and a stain on her family’s name. Notwithstanding all this, and despite her awareness of all the risks, she has dared to exercise her right to determine what to do with her body. Līnā says, “Standing before the mirror, I would hear news of far more seriousness and significance, news broadcast by my freedom-seeking body.” This, especially within the context of Arab societies, is a rare example of rebellion, a feminist declaration of individuality. By cutting off her hair, she hoped to make others pay attention to her thoughts and conduct, to invite their attention to her human essence and not her feminine appearance. Society banned her from doing with her body what she wanted, and she defied that ban by cutting off her hair. This was a symbolic rebellion against patriarchal traditions and the domination of male society.

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624 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 185.
Ownership of one’s own body is therefore a very prominent theme which Baʿalbakī raises in her first novel. However, the woman’s desire to own her own body comes into conflict with the woman’s role as playing host, inside her own body, to the children who make up the next generation. The woman’s role as child-bearer leads society to make conflicting claims for ownership of her body, and since it is through marriage that these conflicts are worked out, we now turn to a discussion of marriage within Baʿalbakī’s works.

5.2.3 Marriage

Marriage is the only relationship between the two sexes in which sexual relationships or sexual activity is legal in Arab Muslim societies. According to the laws of Sunni Islam, permanent marriage is the only legal relationship in which sex can take place, and anyone practicing sex outside marriage is by definition committing adultery, which is said to be punishable by the Muslim Caliph and by God in the coming life. However, while according to Sunni tradition fixed-time marriages are forbidden, these are allowed according to Shiite Islam. In the Shiite tradition of Mutʿah (fixed-time marriage) the period of matrimony is fixed: for example, the matrimonial relation is contracted with a woman for an hour, a day, a month, a year, or more. We might wonder whether Baʿalbakī, being a Shiite woman, may have been influenced by this comparatively more flexible stance. However, there is no indication that this is the case in any of her novels and short stories, nor in the available interviews with her.

As already mentioned, Līnā in Anā aḥyā admits that she needs a man in order to escape from her loneliness. By this emphasis on the protagonist’s own interests in seeking

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626 For further reading on marriage in Muslim world according Shiite tradition, I suggest the source: Sachiko Murata, Muta' Temporary Marriage in Islamic Law (Qum: Ansariyan Publishers, 1986).
marriage, the novel indicates a break with established social practice. Judith E. Tucker, for example, comments that “Marriages [in Arab families in Arab countries] are arranged to suit the interests or needs of the couple’s respective families and the young people, particularly the young woman, may be forced to marry their families’ choice of mate.” By asserting her own agenda for marriage, Līnā here may represent not only Arab women who struggle to choose their husbands without their parents interfering, but may also represent a more general criticism of society’s viewing the woman as fundamentally nothing more than a wife. Līnā says, “if I am a woman it means I am a feminine … I am a wife … So, it means: I am a servant and he is the master who I must obey. He requires and I must apply his requirement …” Līnā not only criticizes how society views women, but she explains her view by saying,

woman wants participation: to participate with her husband in the life which he lives, in listening to news, in reading a book, in going to cinema, in smoking cigarettes, in preparing food … and in everything regards their living together … and then it does not matter to me if they sleep at the side of the street or if their marriage is illegal …

Thus, Līnā seeks a marriage in which she would be equal to her husband in all life’s spheres: education, entertainment, going out of the house, working outside the house, housekeeping, etc. She seeks equality of power, and to have the same economic status and enjoyment of life as do men: in other words, she wants to be a subject not an object in her husband’s eyes. In seeking such a marriage, Līnā does not mind if the marriage is illegal, and would accept a civil marriage even though this is not accepted by Muslims.

Similarly, in the second novel, Mīrā views marriage as a means of bringing a man and woman very close to each other, so that they can be two equal participants in everything in their life together. In this context, when her lover Raja asks her to marry him, she says, “have

628 Ba’albakî, Anā aḥyā, 186.
629 Ibid., 187.
you enough ability and bravery to bear that another person should join you night and day: to eat with you, to sleep, dance, and to go to park with? Here, we see Mīrā being very careful in the way she approaches marriage, posing questions to the person who will be her husband, who she seems afraid will fail her ideals. She says directly, “how can I guarantee we will not fail in this step? How?” That is to say that while Līnā in Anā ahyā fails to convince Bahā’ to marry her, and while ‘Āydah in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkahah has a failed marriage, here Ba‘albakī presents a significant female character who is more careful and makes efforts and asks questions with the aim of investigating her future marriage’s prospects of success.

The end of al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah is left open, and readers do not know the future of the marriage between Mīrā and Raja, beyond the fact that Raja loves her and she loves him. However, we may expect that it will be a success, because there is harmony between them: both of them are anti-patriarchal characters, meaning that both of them seek freedom from patriarchal traditions which limit their freedom. This expected success of marriage balances the failed and tragic marriage of ‘Āydah in the same novel. We may be led to conclude that Ba‘albakī is drawing a link between the success or failure of marriage and the level of equality and participation between wife and husband, and the degree of agency the woman has in initiating the marriage. Although it would probably be too much to think that Ba‘albakī is saying that all marriages characterized by equality, participation, and female agency will be successful, it does seem reasonable to say that this is the sort of marriage that has the best chance of success, on her view. Several of the short stories support this view, because they show the dramatic and traumatic endings of marriages which were not contracted in the same careful and cautious way as Mīrā’s. Thus, the female protagonist in “I Was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse,” who separates from her husband with her daughter because

630 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkah, 115.
631 Ibid., 116.
her husband does not grant her freedom, equality, and participation, indicates this metaphorically when she says to him, “I was in the far past a filly, but you changed me to a mouse.”

While ‘Āydah in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah challenges the punishment being inflicted by her husband, who has stopped having sex with her because she lost her virginity before their marriage, the female heroine in the story “The Hero” receives the same punishment from her husband, but for a different reason. In “The Hero” the woman is being punished because her husband accuses her of disloyalty, meaning that she has had a sexual relationship with a person other than him. While Nādīm, ‘Āydah’s husband, does not divorce his wife because of her wealth and her house, the husband in the “The Hero” does divorce her, after accusing her of disloyalty. In this context, she says, “he did not return home, and asked for divorce. Since … I became alone, I am seeking a male hero.”

Here, the heroine testifies that she is seeking marriage in order to escape loneliness: she has experienced marriage, and when she lost her husband she immediately felt loneliness and so quickly began to seek to get married again. But at the same time she uses the term “hero” ironically, and so decreases the status of men. In contrast, in the story “The Explosion,” the heroine succeeds in marrying the person she loves and who loves her, and they live together for years. Her experiences of love and sex with him come mostly at nights because he is busy during the day with his business; meanwhile, during the daytime she experiences sex and love with her boyfriend who was also a friend of her husband. While the heroine fails in the story “The Hero,” because her husband discovers her secret sexual relationship outside marriage and accuses her, in “The Explosion” the sexual relationship between the wife and her boyfriend is not discovered. Furthermore, it seems as though she is the one who decides to separate, but that the husband is the reason for the decision: that is,

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632 Ba’albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 160.
she leaves because her husband did not welcome her in his office during the daytime. Interestingly, she goes to him there only when her boyfriend dies. She says to him, “I fall down among the shoes, when your secretary told me that you refuse to meet me because you have important business and you do not want to talk to anyone, then my sixth soul died.”

Thus, in novels and short stories, it is mostly the case that the narrators blame their husbands for their failing marriages. The stories’ actions and conclusions indicate that the husbands are generally the cause of the separation and divorce. In contrast, however, in the situation of romantic and sexual relationships outside marriage, there are in general no accusations levelled against males (here, as boyfriends) in the ending of relationships. For example, in the story “The Explosion” the relationship between the married female protagonist with her boyfriend ends because the boyfriend dies: that is to say, it is for a reason beyond their control, and so there is no accusation implied against the male. In this context, it is significant to explore how the males in Ba‘albakī’s fiction view marriage, to see if their views are what push them to end their relationships with their wives. Bahā’, whom Līnā loves, sees marriage in a different way than Līnā’s view as set out above. Revealing his view on marriage, he says, “For me, marriage is gambling! And I am like every educated youth who if he does not find the woman who understands him, his tragedy will begin when he will be forced to buy a wife to participate with him in bed as a female!”

Moreover, when Līnā comments on his view by saying, “the tragedy of woman begins when the man believes that the woman accepted him as husband because he will give her a bracelet and let her live in a house … ;” he says, “what does woman want more than this?”

Thus, we see an educated man who sees his wife as an object for sex and housekeeping, but not as an equal participant. We see very strong contradictions in the way Līnā and Bahā’ view marriage, contradictions which lead to breaking off their relationship.

634 Ba‘albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 126-27. The protagonist claims she has seven souls.
635 Ba‘albakī, Anā aḥyā, 186.
636 Ibid., 187.
While Līnā fails to convince Bahā’ to marry her, ‘Āydah quickly gets married (within some months) when she returns to Beirut, and indeed marries an educated man. However, while Līnā fails to marry, ‘Āydah fails to have a successful marriage, as she has no sexual or romantic relationship with her husband. I have already shown that her husband Nadīm is patriarchal, because he is applying social customs and orientations regarding the virginity of woman, and he represents the patriarchal dominant husband who punishes his wife and oppresses her. Thus, in Anā aḥyā the female protagonist is defeated by her male educated lover before they conclude marriage, but in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah the female protagonist is defeated by her educated husband within the context of their marriage. While it is not clear that the educated husband in the second novel promised ‘Āydah her freedom, equality, and participation, in the short story “I Was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse,” the defeat of the female heroine by her husband and his betrayal of promises to her is evident. He promised her to give her freedom, equality, and the opportunity to practice a Western style of dancing – as a representative of Western life – but after marriage he retracts these promises, asking her instead to be a wife for whom housekeeping is the first and most pressing duty. He shouts at her violently, indicating that she must know first how to be a mother and a housekeeper: “he says that I must be a mother before having a massage … and to be a wife who takes care of housekeeping …”\textsuperscript{637} Here, we see an educated husband who cannot fulfil the view of marriage he told his lover that he had before marriage. This may be an indication first of progress in representing educated husbands’ views of marriage, but also may be an indication of the difficulty which men find in adapting to a new style of family life, and marital relationships with their wives, which could be contrary to the rest of society. Moreover, this could be an indication of the difficulty of practicing social change, especially when this change runs up against the traditions of patriarchal dominance. By contrast, however, in the

\textsuperscript{637} Ba‘albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar, 158.
story “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon” there is a fulfilling of a marriage which succeeds without ending divorce or tragedy, despite differences of opinion especially as regards having children. They love each other, and have had a sexual and romantic relationship before their marriage. So, in this story we see a romantic and sexual relationship that continues or progresses to marriage, which does not have children, and in the end is a happy love, which represents a close, warm, romantic, sexual and intellectual harmony. Allen says the latter story “is about a couple with no children, but the sexual allusions in the story are controversial enough.” This is a story which represents a successful model marriage which is in line with the heroines’ view of marriage as focused on equal participation with the husband in life, and in which the woman experiences harmony, equality, and freedom. Whereas here there is a sense of justifying a sexual relationship prior to marriage, in Ayyam Ma’ahu Rīm strongly refuses to accept having sex with Ziyād before marriage. She says that one night when Ziyād came in her house: “I refused to kiss him when he asked me to, then he tried to catch me but I insurrectionally pushed him. –Ziyād…You are wrong…Very wrong… Get away from me […] He said: okay, as you want… I will leave…. ” This evidence indicates that, despite her social rebellion, Rīm still maintains some social norms, such as considering marriage the only social acceptable framework for a sexual relationship between the two sexes. Rīm is aware of this, as she says: “I accept some social norms, moreover I maintain them. For example, I must respect older people... I like also the tradition of generosity in my country and other good norms.” Here, we see a selective perspective of social norms and, therefore, a sense of pride in these norms that does not appear in any of Ba’albaki’s stories.

To sum up, then, the female protagonists in the novels and short stories mostly seek marriage to escape loneliness and to have romantic and sexual relationships. These

638 Allen, “Arabic Short Story,” 82.
639 Khuri, Ayyam Ma’ahu, 113-14.
640 Ibid., 88.
protagonists have a feminist view of marriage, the core of which is equality with the husband, and participation with him in all decisions relating to power and in all the spheres of daily life. The husbands are mostly blamed for the failure of marriages. This is because the females/wives’ feminist marriage concept is contrary to the patriarchal view of marriage espoused by their husbands, who are mostly educated, which at its core is that the wife’s role is mainly to take care of the house and to bear and care for children. On the other hand, there is also a representation of a successful marriage which is based on equality and freedom for the woman, who lives in harmony with her husband and participates in all spheres of life. However, the protagonists in Ba‘albākī’s fiction also seek marriage in order to have children. Consequently, I turn to the issue of child bearing in order to discuss and investigate its implications.

5.2.4 Child Bearing

Maternity and child-bearing both occupy a great deal of space in Ba‘albākī’s fiction. She explicitly rejects and rebels against the limited function of maternity and child-bearing. The material rationalization has had the effect of evaluating human action in financial terms which are subject to the laws of supply and demand, an equation which excludes the function of motherhood and child care and similar domestic chores. Līnā illustrates this view,

I need a man to get a child, within marriage with a man rather than Bahā’ as a price for getting a child. And if this dream will be fulfilled and the child became of mine and of Bahā’, will Bahā’ accept to educate the child and prepare him for fighting against Jewish people for example …?641

Līnā seeks a child even outside of marriage by practicing sex with a man other than Bahā’.

This is a rebellious desire which seems to be a symbol of her constant challenge to social and patriarchal norms, where pregnancy and birth before marriage are a stain on the honour of the

641 Ba‘albākī, Anā ʿahyā, 303-4.
woman and her family. Furthermore, Līnā wishes to have a child for political purposes. That is to say, for her it does not matter whether she has a child within or outside marriage; the priority for her is simply having a child. Interestingly, this priority is precisely in line with a comment by Sanger: “No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.”642 However, Līnā is aware that her dream is not acceptable to her lover Bahā’ or to her parents.643

Similarly in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, the heroine ‘Āydah is obsessed with motherhood. While in Anā aḥyā the desire to have a child outside of marriage is expressed by a dream, ‘Āydah in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah talks openly and clearly about her desire, showing that it is a real wish and not a dream. She says: “After my return to Beirut, I waited a few months for the examination result after I lost my virginity. I wished … that God will give me the chance to bear a child that would let me free from knowing a new man.”644 Here, the protagonist has waited a few months in accord with Islamic laws, which say that a woman should wait in order to know if she is pregnant or not. This religious law is designed to avoid problems over identifying the father of the child, for if the woman does not wait for three months before learning she is pregnant, and then marries in the meantime, questions could be raised about whether the child’s father is the husband or someone else. It seems as though ‘Āydah wants to avoid marriage because she is aware of social norms as regards lost virginity outside marriage. The writer says,

‘Āydah in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah is a continuation of the lifeline of Līnā in Anā aḥyā. She extends this line to new experiences, to a new way of life, in order to achieve self-fulfilment, to seek another freedom, another kind of freedom, if you want: it is a return to the whole self, to love, to motherhood. 645

642 Sanger, Woman and the New Race, 94.
643 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 304.
644 Ba’albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 39.
645 Ḥaydar, ‘Liqā’ ma’ Laylā Ba’albakī,” 75.
On the other hand, Ba‘albakī is also sceptical about having children inside marriage, since the mother in the story “The Cat” is portrayed by the writer as a cat in order to belittle her. A cat too practises love and sex with the male of her kind, and it too gives birth to kittens. “He gave her, this one who now roams around the barrel – he gave her more than love: he gave her the little ones; and for the sake of the little ones she will go on responding to him, to follow him, to dream of him.”

Limitation of the number of children seems to be a theme in the story “I was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse,” in which the family still has one child even after five years of marriage. While in stories like “The Cat” and “I Was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse,” the female protagonist seems to place a limit number of children, in the story “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon,” she totally refuses to give birth to a child despite her husband’s wish to the contrary. He says to her, “I want to understand here and now why you refuse to have children,” and she answers later, “only the woman who is un-fulfilled with her man eagerly demands a child so that she can withdraw, enjoy being with her child and so be freed.” Here, the woman refuses to have children in order to be with her husband all the time, because she loves him and does not want to let anything else take her away from him. And here there is also a combination between romance and sex. In this story, the female heroine succeeds in participating in making a crucial decision not to have children.

Thus, there is a strong sense of rejecting raising many children, in addition to another voice which refuses to have children at all. This is based on the grounds that the children can become a factor of coercion, subjugating the mother to the husband/man, forcing her to follow him and to obey him for fear that the little ones, her children, would be lost. Children could thus reinforce in the woman’s mind the habits of submissiveness, servility, and subservience. Children as a factor of coercion are also mentioned in Al-Samman’s short story

646 Ba‘albakī, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 49.
648 Ibid., 278.
“Nidāʾ al-safīnah” [The call of the ship] (1963), about which Ḥammūd says: “Here [in Nidāʾ al-safīnah] the writer [Al-Samman] rebels against her feminine nature through her cancelling a significant characteristic of her as a woman, which is sympathy for children, even if they are of the other wife of her companion.” Munirāh Fakhrū argues that childbearing reduces the possibility of mothers going out to work, especially at a time when nurseries and kindergartens were unknown in the Arab countries, and makes them economically powerless. In addition, refusing to have children could, for the woman, be a way to enjoy being with her husband and not also be too busy with her children. Yet Ḥammūd points out a different scene, in which the female heroine sees power in bearing a child, in the short story “Aṣṣiyyu al-dam” [Not tearing] (1976) by Ulfah al-Idlibī (1912-2007): “Child bearing gives the woman power; she sees it as her hope, she talks about it confidently and tells her husband she is pregnant.”

To sum up, the female protagonists in the novels and short stories mostly seek and desire childbearing and motherhood, but on the other hand there is a sense of criticism of the idea of giving birth to many children, and a call for a limit of the number of children in order to let mothers work outside the home and so gain financial power in the same way as their husbands. It was shown how the protagonists often wish to have a child outside of marriage, which is in part a response to the oppressive role that children can play within traditional marriages, but is also an affirmation of the woman’s desire for sexual freedom. This leads me to turn to discuss and investigate the different sexual relationships running throughout the novels and short stories.

649 Ḥammūd, Al-Khiṭāb al-qaṣaṣī al-niswī, 175.
651 Ḥammūd, Al-Khiṭāb al-qaṣaṣī al-niswī, 184.
5.2.5 Sexual Relationships

Ba‘albakī clearly focused on sexual issues and scenes in her narratives (1958-1964). In 2007, Būshūshah Bin Jum‘ah said: “In Libyan novels, talking about sex still happens through quick scenes of casual experiences which quickly changed to be a part of memory.” In this context of sex in recent Arabic novels, Joshua Finnell comments on the female narrator in Syrian novelist Salwa Al Neimi’s novel The Proof of Honey (2009): “She [The female narrator] unlocks her own hidden sensuality through purely sexual relationships.” Amīrah Salām further says: “Salwa Al Neimi succeeded in her novel Burhān al-‘asal [The proof of honey] (2007) to focus sex in the context of pleasure and satisfaction and to represent fairly desires and imaginaries of the woman without any shyness.” Although Al Neimi exemplifies Ba‘albakī in focusing on sexual desires and experiences, they have different targets. Ba‘albakī employs her focus on sexual desires and issues on her feminist agenda, mirrored in her calls for women’s complete freedom, including sexual liberty and body ownership as well as the ability to break social taboos regarding sex; meanwhile, Al Neimi’s purpose is “to show the subtle tension that exists between today’s conservatives Arab and Middle Eastern cultures and their lascivious literary past.” This purpose is beyond the scope of this study, but it provides evidence that focusing on sexual desires and experiences in novels could be employed for different aims.

The discussion herein demonstrates that Ba‘albakī’s works are still relevant after fifty years. Thus, it is still significant to investigate sexual issues and relationships throughout

Baʿalbākī’s narratives. In *Anā aḥyā*, an example of an extra-marital sexual relationship between a married male and a married female is given by the relationship between Līnā’s father and their older female, married neighbour. Līnā, as narrator, comments: “I hoped, while playing back in my mind a scene in which my father was furtively ogling our older female neighbour, who lived in a building with windows overlooking ours.”

Noting the striking contrast between her parents, she says this of her mother: “Why doesn’t she look after herself? She sits up all night, sleeplessly standing guard lest he should steal away to plot in the dark a tryst in some bed in daylight.” It seems as though Līnā’s mother is sexually cold, so his father looks to his neighbour for someone to have sex with. Thus, the writer focuses on describing sexual issues and the fact that a husband can seek sex outside of his family (i.e., wife).

Later in the author’s writings, the protagonist of the story “Your Chest is no Longer My City” says:

In the end you [married men] steal each other’s women – and all the ends in your future are the same – and you have clandestine encounters with each other’s women in some bathroom, car, and alleyway: how petty you are – petty like the future, like the past, like death.

The female protagonist above is thus dedicated to making manifest a reality which, if left “unexposed,” is petty. She strives to divulge the concealed, to make hidden things manifest. The following sexual scene is a further example of a sexual relationship among married males and females. Naḍīm indicates,

for months I have not drunk whiskey with a woman. The last one was a pretty married woman whom I joined for one night; she invited me to visit her the next day. Then, she opened the door for me; she covered her hungry body with a towel… She invited me because her husband spends all his time in his clinic as a doctor…

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657 Ibid., 21.
Here, the doctor’s wife, despite the fact that she is married, still needs sex – that is to say, her husband does not satisfy her sexual needs, because he spends his time in his clinic, meaning that his priority is business and money. Thus, the doctor neglects his wife who needs sex and passion, and she needs someone to be with during the daytime. Perhaps Ba‘albakī here means to point out that one problem with their relationship is that the doctor’s wife has no job. Having no job leads to loneliness which contributes to seeking sex and romance outside of marriage.

Another type of relationship which Ba‘albakī explores in her fiction is that between married males and single females. While in Anā aḥyā Līnā seeks to marry Bahā’ as means to get rid of loneliness, in the story “The Cat” the heroine, with the same aim, seeks a man who will love her even outside of his marriage. She says, “I am not like mythical women who could live alone. Loneliness? It kills me and places which are empty of people terrify me. Consequently, I will marry … I am not able to breathe if there is not near me a man who loves me …”660 She goes on: “And now, I have a man who loves me. This love alone satisfies me.”661 Here, the female heroine assigns great significance to romance which could be an alternative to marriage in destroying loneliness. Furthermore, while Līnā does not succeed in marrying Bahā’, the heroine of “The Cat” succeeds in having a relationship with a married man who is older than she by nineteen years. She says,

he’s kissed every bit of my body, and when he kisses me I feel like bathing under a coconut tree ... So we have never talked about his wife or home or work and I haven’t told him anything about my life. We have dinner together, we dance and swim and climb mountains and get bored together. I am his spring and he is my summer. We are having fun.662

The above quotation represents an example of a single female who is proud of having love and sex outside of marriage with a married male. On the other hand, however, this situation is also one of disloyalty by the husband to his wife, since he is having sex with another woman.

660 Ba‘albakī, Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar, 43.
661 Ibid.
662 Ibid., 44-45.
A further example of a sexual relationship between a single female and a married male is the relationship between Nadīm and his German girlfriend. Nadīm says:

This blond German woman was volcano of passion which is burning, and in the beginning I was trying to decrease the burning of that volcano … but the volcano increases its burning and crying, so I left my job and began to spend all my time with her in her room, then the volcano calmed down for a while and I weakened too. Then I carried her to the mountain. 663

Here, we have a representation of a cross-cultural sexual relationship: Nadīm, who is punishing his wife by ignoring her, is also exploring a sexual relationship with his German girlfriend. I suggest that this may be an indication by the writer that meeting people from different cultures could lead to having increasing degrees of freedom; but whether this is the case or not, there is certainly an indication of the role of the influence of Western culture in altering Arab gender relationships.

In the story “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon” there is explicit evidence that the protagonists have had a premarital sexual experience. Although this does eventually lead to marriage, it is nonetheless, at the outset, a sexual relationship between a single male and a single female which is pursued outside marriage, and so is forbidden according to both social customs and Islam’s religious laws. The evidence that they have had this relationship outside marriage comes during an exchange between the protagonist and her husband, of whom she says: “I shouted that he too at one time refused to have them [children]. He was silent for a while, and then he said: ‘I refused before we were married, when it would have been foolish to have had one.’”664 Her husband then says to her, “you were crazy about children before we married; and you were dying for them.”665

Here, the ability to practice sex before marriage is represented as a model of the experience of sexual freedom, and we can describe friends’ romantic and sexual relationships

663 Ba‘albaki, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, 46-47.
665 Ibid., 275.
as being premarital in this manner. There is also a sense that Ba'albakī is accepting of such premarital romantic and sexual relationships, as such relationships can lead to more successful marriages, but indeed, these relationships could end with separation prior any marriage too. In particular, in providing a model of a successful marriage, this story stands out among Ba'albakī’s stories and novels: and we also notice that Ba'albakī chooses its title as the title for the volume of stories overall, suggesting that she assigns it particular importance.

While the previous scene was concerned with sex between males and females where single, but who then go on to get married; there are scenes which call for sexual relations between single males and single females completely independently of marriage. One example comes where Līnā says, “my blond sister is in front of main doors of the girls’ American college, her earrings call libertine young men who will invite her to go with to them to the beach in a hurry and in his nice car.” Here, males are calling females to have fun and sex outside marriage. On the other hand, the following is an example of females calling males to have fun and sex. Līnā says,

Why does he not [Bahā’] have mercy on me and mercy on himself? Why not practice my right in life, and he practice his right too? Why does he not close his head to adhere to my face? Why does he not kiss my hot ear and decreasing hotness of my lips and to play with my fingers […] then invite me to his room and I will follow him to practice our freedom.

The writer strikes a balance between males and females in showing their calling each other to have sex and fun outside of marriage, and so to practice sexual freedom, explore their individuality, and assert their autonomy over their bodies.

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666 Note that by “sexual freedom” I do not mean to say that Ba’albakī imagines women having sex with many partners at once, as is sometimes associated with the permissive society that was prominent in the West in the 1960s. I mean only that the woman has the freedom to choose a boyfriend herself, and to explore a relationship with him without intrusion from her family or being judged by society.

667 Ba’albakī, Anā aḥyā, 92.

668 Ibid., 196.
While the above scenes concern singles, there are also married sexual scenes. In “When Snow Falls” – which concerns married couples cheating on their partners with lovers – the female protagonist says,

I whispered that I was a wild cat, wandering in the city through streets leading to the sea, in the mud, under the rain, in the heart of the frost, shivering on her way to him, wet and hungry, seeking warmth. So why don’t I try to be calm – calm, calm. 669

The previous sexual scenes concern sex between males and females inside and outside marriage, but all are consenting and cognizant of what they are doing. However, there is a crucial scene in al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah in which the male antagonist Nadīm has sex with his wife, but, being drunk, thinks that he is having sex with his girlfriend. His girlfriend, we know, is a long-time sexual partner from Beirut’s bars, and who has left him on the night in question. Coming home, drunk, he looks for his girlfriend but, being in his house, has sex with his wife instead, breaking the decades-long boycott that he has been inflictiong on her. ‘Āydah says,

Nadīm came home two hours after midnight saying to me: “my love, do not leave me. I was surprised. I kissed his ear, his hair, his forehead, his chin.” He said: “do not leave me, do not leave me,” and then he slackened in my arms breathing slowly like a sick child, and I was lifting for the first time my big child, the dearest child in the world, and I take him to my room, putting him on my chest then his hands went to touch my back … on my bed, in my body, I lived the most strange sex play which Nadīm initiated in performing sex. 670

The writer describes a situation in which a man has sex, but with no consciousness of what he, as a male, is doing. Within the context of the plot, this situation contributes to give a victory of sorts for the main protagonist, ‘Āydah, who desires above all else to have a child. Since ‘Āydah has not sought sex with any person outside of marriage, in this narrative the writer is exploring the predicament of a loyal woman who remains faithful to her marriage, despite the fact that she needs sex in order to fulfil her desire to have a child. This victory is achieved because ‘Āydah conceives as a result of that sexual act with her husband. While the

669 Ba‘albākī, Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qa‘āmar, 52.
writer grants the heroine both grace and good manners, her husband is represented as a drunken man who spends most of his time in nightclubs, drinking with women. Interestingly and similarly, the non-named female narrator in The Proof of Honey says: “He [her male lover] used to pull her to his chest and to kiss her eyes and lips. I used to suck him; he was putting his hands on my stomach. I opened my legs and asked him to open deeply.”

While we have just looked at an example of a relatively consensual sex scene between husband and his wife (insofar as the husband is able to consent), the writer is also aware that sex within marriage can turn into abuse in cases where a husband rapes his wife. Līnā says:

No, you will not believe that my Syrian colleague who got married three years ago at the age of seventeen told me how her husband used to rape her every night without asking her to take part, without uttering a single word, without giving a kiss. Just like that: he would rape her, swoop on her as if she were a corpse, toy with her and then throw her away on the bed and leave the room.

Here, the narrator expresses clear criticism of those who consider the woman simply as a sexual object, implying that in all cases the husband and the wife should participate equally in the act of sex. The further point here, which is openly stated by the narrator, is that where sex is not mutually agreed upon, it constitutes rape even if it takes place inside marriage. Thus, in the short stories and novels of the writer there is a sense of the need for mutual knowledge and mutual agreement in having sex, and there is also an implicit call for better ways of practicing of sex within marriage.

While in these scenes the writer exploring the sex which takes place inside marriage and which seems to amount to rape, in the following scene she is describing a married man’s attempt to rape a single girl,

Mīrā hurried to the lift, turning her back to the man and hiding her face from him in the mirror. Nadīm looked at her neck, and then to the prominent bone in that thin neck, and then he thought to touch her and to kiss her shoulders … he went closer to her, touched her hair

672 Ba’albakt, Anā aḥyā, 107.
carefully and began to play with it, and then Nadīm took her outside the lift to his house, when the lift failed to work because of the power cut … Mīrā says, “what lack of grace has stopped the electricity in this building? What foul thing? What evil?" 673

While the previous sexual encounters have generally been shown to take place in the context of consent between the male and female, here there is an attempt by a married man, Nadīm, to force himself sexually on a girl who is much younger than him (he in his late fifties, she in her early twenties). Here there is clear criticism of such forced sex (i.e., raping), especially because it is in the strongest possible contrast with the sexual freedom that Baʿalbakī and her narrators seek for women. That freedom not only includes the right to choose one’s own sexual partner, but also the freedom not to have sex, with one’s husband or anyone else. In addition, in this scene there is a sense that Nadīm is revenging himself on society because he married a woman who had lost her virginity before marriage, and so he wants to make Mīrā lose her virginity before marriage as well. Mīrā is being used as an object in two senses: first as a sex object, and second as a tool of revenge.

To sum up, the writer’s fiction represents a consistent intellectual or ideological stance in favour of sexual freedom. It inveighs against the objectification of women whereby the female body is turned into a commodity for consumption by the rich or leisurely class: “No, I will not reduce my body to this level of vulgarity. I will not bare it to all eyes. I will take it away from the circle of the rich, decadent class of our society.” 674

Sometimes the stories concern unhappy married males and females who seek discreet sex and romance outside marriage. There is sense of calling for, and practicing of, sexual freedom between singles, and between married males and single females and between married males and married females, and other combinations. All these sexual relationships reflect the concept of sexual freedom, meaning the freedom to have boy- or girlfriends for both single and married males and females. Furthermore, the writer is aware of the need to let

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673 Baʿalbakī, al-ʿĀlihah al-mansūkhah, 33-35.
674 Baʿalbakī, Anā aḥyā, 228.
her fiction represent a model of the successful sexual and romantic relationship between a single male and single female which leads to lasting marriage.

Throughout Baʿalbakiʿs novels and short stories there is a clear focus on the importance of sexual freedom, which the writer maintains is reflective of reality, as she asserted in the context of her response to the charges of the public prosecutor during her trial. We might, on the other hand, view these passages not as descriptions of an actual reality but of a hoped-for reality which she envisaged as possible at the time of writing. The novels and short stories of the writer could be seen as a mirror for society, but if so, they are a mirror which shows not just what is the case but also what might become the case, and in particular what the writer wishes might become the case. Throughout those stories and novels, several concerns of societies are reflected, and the characters in these narratives embody social problems and crises. They passionately encourage greater social consciousness on the part of the reader. On the other hand, the stories also criticize husbands who practice sex in a way that treats their wife as an object, without her equal participation and without romance. In addition, there is opposition to raping females because it is against both sexual and individual freedom, as well as being an act of violence.

5.2.6 Summary of Feminist Desires

Reviewing this discussion of feminist issues, and also referring back to the previous chapter on literary analysis in which I explored the feminist desires of the protagonists in the stories and how they struggle to accomplish them, we could then summarize the main desires of the heroines in Anā aḥyā, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, and the short stories as combining to constitute an integrated equation with this general structure: Sender—Desire—Recipient. This equation gives the general structure of the different ways in which the stories aim to assert the identity of the woman and achieve her freedom:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Desire</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity and challenge</td>
<td>Wanting to go outside the home, for example to the cinema</td>
<td>Self and challenge to parents’ will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuality</td>
<td>Going alone to a doctor other than the family doctor</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for freedom as an individual and ending father’s authority</td>
<td>Building her future by herself, such as to choose her male partner (for marriage)</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asserting the significance of her existence and ending her father’s authority</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self and principles and the significance of her existence</td>
<td>Search for the essence of work and confrontation with her employer</td>
<td>Search for freedom and right to work, as well as the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity with Palestinian issue</td>
<td>having a child to make him a soldier</td>
<td>self and Palestinians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost identity, her loneliness</td>
<td>Having a male partner</td>
<td>Self, building a stable family or keeping romantic and sexual relationship (a boyfriend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s love</td>
<td>to be a lover and a tender mother</td>
<td>Self, because the child would complete her existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s love</td>
<td>the need for a child</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influence of others</td>
<td>Her need for child</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having time to enjoy with her husband and/or for work</td>
<td>having no children or limiting their number</td>
<td>self and her husband/partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for sex</td>
<td>Having a boyfriend outside marriage- being like other married women who have sex with their husbands</td>
<td>self and a male friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure in love and marriage, losing hope, failure of principles</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It emerges clearly, then, that the writer has presented in her novels and short stories a living model of young Arab women as rebels, who, conscious as they are of their problems within
given societies, painfully realize that their efforts to bring about a change are the single, isolated efforts of the individual who is making them. These efforts are rejected, and laughed at or scorned as alien by everyone – by friends, husbands, colleagues, and families, indeed even by the entire community. Mu’taşim argues: “In every feminist writing there is the desire to be free and to seek for the woman fields in which she will not be just a means without the willingness and right to decide and participate with others.”\textsuperscript{675} He gives a critical and relevant example:

\begin{quote}
The woman does not see in front of her in the novel \textit{Jasad wamadi\={n}ah} [Body and city], except inventory and the prevention of those constructing her tragic perspective, as several contemporary feminist writings indicate, because the woman cannot meet her desires freely in her society.\textsuperscript{676} 
\end{quote}

Indeed, Ba’albakī’s narratives mirror both desires and challenges simultaneously. Furthermore, the writer deals with these desires clearly in her lecture, by presenting several rhetorical questions. The following are examples of these questions:

\begin{quote}
Why does my mother prevent me spending and enjoying evenings with friends in a warm bar while other mothers seek every chance of fun for her daughter? Why must I live in this country and not in another country in the world? Why must I accept all these matters which we are forced to accept? Why do I work all day to bring bread while the son of my boss changes his car every year? Why do my parents buy old books for me while neighbour students have new books? \textsuperscript{677}
\end{quote}

Here, the writer gives evidence that there is harmony between the themes and issues represented in her fiction and her actual social and political orientations. In the above questions, the writer reflects the desires and choices represented in her fiction. Her questions indicate not only a search for freedom of mobility and individuality for women, but also for social and economic justice.

To sum up, the desires explored throughout the author’s fiction represent her feminist orientation, which seeks freedom and equality for women, and desires to end patriarchal

\textsuperscript{675} Mu’taşim, \textit{Al-Ru’yah al-fujā‘īyyah}, 78.
\textsuperscript{676} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{677} Ba’albakī, \textit{Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah}, 14. These questions were previously discussed in the context of looking at the author’s use of rhetorical questions as part of the narrative style in \textit{Naḥnu bi-lā aqni‘ah}. I cite this passage now in order to look at its semantic issues.
dominance, instead giving women power and the opportunity to participate in life just as men do, to enjoy sex and love, and make decisions in all spheres of life.

5.3 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has shown that although the female protagonists throughout the novels and short stories have a range of specific desires, they can all be traced back to one single, dominant desire: that is, self-fulfilment, which is synonymous with freedom and independence. In pursuit of their desires, they are repeatedly confronted with and rebel against patriarchal customs. Wanting to go to the movies on their own represents a rebellion against the authority of the father or husband who is supposed to escort them, or at the very least give his permission for them to go. Their actual fulfilment of that desire is a definite way in which they exercise their freedom, the freedom of mobility, of going to the cinema or the theatre on their own. It would have been more natural, for instance, if they were to go with a male companion: a husband, a fiancé, a friend, someone who could provide a sense of security and assurance.

In summary, Ba‘albaki’s novels and short stories are filled with female protagonists who desire marriage, but not because of traditional social pressures. Rather, they desire marriage for personal reasons, such as to escape feelings of loneliness, or to find the right milieu for romantic and sexual relationships. These protagonists have a feminist view of marriage which is closely linked to their personal reasons for wanting to enter into it: at the core of their desires for marriage is that they should achieve equality with their husband and participate with him in all the decisions that affect their lives together. Alongside this, where marriages fail, Ba‘albaki’s characters mostly lay the blame on the husband. This is because the marriages fail because the females/wives’ feminist concept of marriage has run into conflict with the patriarchal view. Since these husbands are mostly educated, but still see the
wife’s role as mainly to take care of the house and care for children, Ba‘albakī seems to feel she is justified in assigning them the blame for not respecting their wife’s legitimate desires for freedom and equality: their education may make them especially blameworthy, since ignorance or lack of awareness cannot be pointed to as an excuse. On the other hand, Ba‘albakī also provides a representation of a successful marriage which is based on equality and freedom for the woman.

Childbearing is another feminist issue which is prominent in the novels and short stories. Since the woman’s inescapable biological role in giving birth to the next generation is one of the ways in which society takes away a woman’s control over her own body, Ba‘albakī is especially concerned to find ways in which women can meet the deep need to have children without giving up their rights over their own body. In this context, we have seen that the heroines often wish to have child outside marriage. As regards the act of sex itself, Ba‘albakī wants it to be an act in which men and women participate consciously and as equals, and she sets out through her different scenarios, various ways in which the act of sex can go wrong and women’s equal participation can be undermined.

An ongoing theme in the author’s writings, then, is that women are to be treated as agents in themselves, and as subjects, not objects. The importance of this appears most urgently with respect to the act of sex itself, but Ba‘albakī also criticises other ways in which society objectifies women and turns the female body into a commodity.

Although Ba‘albakī is very concerned to show the violent and oppressive practices through which women’s freedom is taken away from them, she is also aware of the need to let her fiction represent a model of a successful sexual and romantic relationship between a single male and single female which can be a route to a successful marriage. Throughout the novels and short stories there is clear evidence of the sexual freedom which the writer maintains is reflective of reality, as she asserted in direct terms in her response to
the public prosecutor during her trial. Thus, Ba'albakī’s feminist writing raised the taboo topic of female sexuality, and constructed a revolutionary approach and vision against the patriarchal culture and social systems. This intensity of feminism in Ba'albakī’s work was unprecedented in the Lebanese women’s movement at the time. We might, on the other hand, view the passage as a description of a hoped-for reality envisaged to be possible at the time of writing. In other words, her creative power transmutes the “imaginary” into the “real” before it becomes historical fact, a mark of outstanding originality, as imagination is the stage which precedes reality and forms a communicative link with it.

Abū Niḍāl gives a perceptive description of the writer’s oeuvre in this context,

Ba'albakī has used the shock technique to batter the taboos and conventions that have reigned for long and dominated the way that man viewed woman and, similarly, it put forward the question of how the woman views herself and the man, in an attempt to remedy the distortions bequeathed by the time of backwardness.

In the light of the foregoing, it is reasonable to conclude that the writer has turned her writing into a project of reformation and revelation, an endeavour to transform gender relations, to change the equation of power, influence, activeness, decision-making, and being. It is a project to end the patriarchal monopoly of authority, just as it is a project of revealing that man and woman can enter freely into relationships which resist not only the authority of the father, husband, brother, or the male in general, but also religious rules. These envisaged relations, giving no weight to old customs and social conventions, grant the woman the power and freedom of self-determination: her opinions, her desires, her body, her thoughts, her work, her writing are hers, and she is fully entitled to do with them what she wants. Thus, we can conclude that the writer is greatly committed to feminist issues and that she employs her novels and short stories, and her lecture, as a way of promoting a feminist agenda. That is to say, di Capua’s suggestion that the writer should be counted only as protesting against the

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678 See how the writer responded to her trial in Fernea and Bezirgan, *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, 280.
conditions of Arab women, without offering a vision of what could replace those conditions, is not accurate.

Interestingly, Niḍāl al-Sāliḥ says: “Except for a few works, focusing on women’s issues is the prominent characteristic of the Syrian narrative in the nineties of the twentieth century, including criticizing the social patriarchal system that prevents women’s freedom from following their fathers, husbands or brothers.” Thus, Ba‘albāki’s feminist issues, views and writing are still relevant, although Arab (at least here Syrian and Lebanese) social patriarchal norms and systems remain considerably rooted and strong. As such, this situation still motivates women writers to oppose and criticize the system within their narrative writing.

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Conclusion

The primary goal of this thesis has been to explore feminism both in Ba‘albakī’s life and writings, a topic that no previous study has treated in depth. The thesis does so first by constructing the social, cultural and biographical context in which this important writer has lived and worked, in light of the Lebanese women’s movement’s development; and second, through literary analysis of her two novels and short stories. Particularly, due to the limitations of relevant secondary sources, this study relies on Ba‘albakī’s own biographical accounts in addition to a few other sources. It also relies on the writer’s novels, short stories and published lecture.

The methodology used in this thesis is a textual analysis of the writer’s novels and short stories, focusing on prominent narrative aspects such as structure, narrative manner and mood, followed by discussions on the themes of those works. This methodology employed Bal’s flexible approach to narratology in addition to ‘Azzām’s textual analysis perspective and application.

This study provides an examination of the challenges and conflicts the writer faced as a result of her being a feminist. Ba‘albakī had an impulse to liberate herself from the control of her father and to avoid ending up uneducated like her mother. The structures for the advancement of women that had been created through the efforts of the Lebanese women’s groups were important in making it possible for her to achieve literary fame, particularly with respect to her work in parliament and her later journalism. Ba‘albakī’s Shiite family was of a considerable socio-economic status, as suggested by the fact that she was able to get a job in the Lebanese Parliament; this job influenced her by entailing her feminist views and motivating her to continue in her writing.

This study has endeavoured to show specifically how the writer, as a feminist, coped with several conflicts caused by her patriarchal society not only in publishing her first novel
Anā aḥyā (1958), but also after its publication. The writer joined the Shiʿr group, in 1958, which gave her the motivation and courage to go on in her feminist writings and struggle and whose poet-members, such as al-Khāl, al-Ḥāj, Shaybūb and other Arab and non-Arab poets from outside Lebanon, influenced her. Joining the Shiʿr group also contributed to her probable influence by Western and American cultures and thought. Baʿalbakī published her lecture as a book, Naḥnu bi-lā aqniʿah, in 1959 and her second novel Al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah in 1960.

We have seen that although Baʿalbakī exemplified the women’s search for freedom and equality in Lebanon; she is also an individualistic and somewhat isolated figure. The Lebanese women’s groups in general did not support her and Baʿalbakī herself was never a member of any of these groups, nor of the progressive or socialist political parties which were most associated with them. However, Baʿalbakī’s feminist approach to achieving freedom and equality for women with men is firmly rooted in literary and artistic activity, and not in political activism.

Furthermore, the writer dedicates all of her works to a presentation of her feminist agenda, employing narrative manners, techniques, styles and devices for focusing her feminist vision. In her work, she calls Arabs to support freedom and independence for their daughters as in other (i.e., in her outlook, Western) societies and cultures. The writer calls upon younger Arab generations to rebel against all social and religious laws which limit their freedom to choose and apply their goals as well as design their futures and prevent inequality between males and females in all social, economic and political spheres. Thus, the writer is much committed to feminism within her works, and that is to say her writing is not just a rejection of Arab women’s situation. Rather, Baʿalbakī calls to holistic change searching for equality for women with men and prompting women’s advancement and status in all spheres: society, culture, economics and politics.
This study contributes to understanding modern Arabic literature in examining the feminist writing of Ba‘albakī through textual analysis of her two novels and her short stories. We see Anā Aḥyā is a novel which focuses on the notion of the affirmation of, and the return to, the self. In the closing phases of the novel, that ‘return’ has to be undertaken as a result of the failure of the protagonist’s rebellion against the patriarchal dominant reality. The novel centres on an Arab feminist woman in the 1950s who expresses herself and asserts her social opinions and her right to seek freedom, looking at others from her feminist perspective. The protagonist thereby comes to seem like a historian who narrates history, culture, and reality from a feminist point of view. However, her search for freedom eventually leads to failure. We talk of the ‘return to the self’ in order to find a new self, one that is stronger than before, in the face of a great shock or disappointment, and this dissertation has argued that Līnā’s suicide attempt is an artistic device employed to show how dramatic is the protagonist’s shock at Bahā’’s refusal to get engaged with her. This signifies in turn the total failure of her designs and the emptiness of the sacrifice of her employment and education. Bahā’ refuses, we recall, precisely because of her feminism; thus the suicide attempt also dramatizes the indirect oppression of females by males, rooted in their reaction to the failure of their aspirations for a fulfilled life.

The suicide attempt which closes Anā Aḥyā thus stands as an early statement of the worst face of patriarchal society, and to remind us that rebellion against this patriarchal society is not easy, can be expected to face huge challenges, and to take a long time. Our review of the arc of Ba‘albakī’s life corroborates this. She began her rebellion in the 1950s and 60s, and only now do we see signs that she may be ready to take the next public step in her critique of patriarchal society.

Ba‘albakī’s second novel, al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah, deals with general social issues such as the conflict of generations, inequality, and poverty; however, it is also a continuation
of the theme of the long-term nature of the struggle against patriarchy. A comparison of the characters of Mīrā and ‘Āydah highlights the fact that the younger woman, Mīrā, unlike ‘Āydah, does not have sex outside marriage despite her vulnerability and the efforts of ‘Āydah’s husband to persuade or force her. As I suggested, this age difference could be seen as the author optimistically suggesting that the younger generation of liberated women are more confident about asserting their goals. In contrast, for older women the experience of freedom is simply one of the lacks of structuring constraints. This is an implicit criticism of a society which places too much emphasis on conforming to social standards, and not enough on the development of individual conscience. This might indicate that the author is hopeful about the new generation, and might be further indication that Ba’albakī will shortly be willing to engage with the younger generation through a new work, in order to find out whether her optimism about the youth was well founded.

Both novels use various narrative styles (e.g., dialogue, monologue, the functional naming of characters, and use of poetic language). However, the second novel does not use padding in the same way as in Anā aḥyā. The writer apparently discarded this narrative style, which negatively affected the first novel’s artistic quality. In addition, she adopted new methods, including the use of personal letters, to enable the protagonist to express her deepest emotions, thoughts, and attitudes about the world around her. Other styles in the second novel but not in Anā aḥyā are flashback, “misleading” (increasing tension by posing subtle puzzles for the reader), symbols, and Christian religious lexicon to attract readers to a novel otherwise rooted in an Islamic milieu.

While Anā aḥyā features only one major conflict, the second novel includes several major conflicts, most predominantly the one between ‘Āydah and her husband. However, all these are feminist conflicts because they revolve around women’s seeking their rights and freedom from all forms of patriarchal dominance, both inside and outside of marriage.
In her short stories, the writer uses complex temporal structures. She also establishes overlapping connections among the stories, which suggests that her volume of short stories is in some senses like a novel. The writer demonstrates a stronger command of complex narrative forms. In addition, she draws on feminist lexicon concerned with terms related to the body. In fact, this use of imagery and her narrative focused on the real experiences of a woman ultimately lead to her trial. Ba‘albakī employs words associated with strength, power, and tension in her short stories, clearly emphasizing the centrality of the struggle and the critical extent of the confrontation in her narratives. Vocabulary of contrast proliferates in these works, underscoring that the central point of the struggle is the “Other.”

This study has further endeavoured to show, within her two novels and short stories, in addition to the dominant first person narrator, that Ba‘albakī uses poetic and figurative narrative language. She also uses Levantine colloquial words, suggesting the influence of the Levantine dialect and her father’s zajal, which included colloquial Arabic Levantine words as well.

Starting in the 1960s, in addition to feminism as the major theme, Ba‘albakī calls upon Arabs to not only bridge socioeconomic gaps between social classes and to oppose links between politics and wealth, but also to construct secular and modern democratic regimes which ensure free and just elections. She argues that religious regimes do not support freedom and equality between the two sexes, which is why she opposed the Iranian Revolution in 1979. She also calls for separation between religion and politics. In this context, she opposed the Lebanese civil war (1975), calling for peace, cooperation and harmony among sects and religions in Lebanon. The writer left Lebanon to immigrate to London because of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 and still lives there with her husband and family. She also supports solidarity with Palestinians in their Arab–Israeli conflict, seeing
Jews as the enemies of all Arabs. Accordingly, anti-Semitic scenes within *Anā aḥyā* motivated Israeli authorities to confiscate the novel in the 1960s.

However, her writing eventually led her into conflict with the Lebanese authorities, who brought her, in June 1964, before the Lebanese courts based on the claim that her collection of short stories *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar* (1964) was immoral. This thesis has argued, however, that there may have been underlying political reasons for her trial, since she represented a challenge to patriarchal society. Thus, the writer was the first Lebanese novelist to be brought to court for her writing. This court ruling caused a media storm in the summer of 1964, which included contrasting and disparate reactions by Lebanese and non-Lebanese intellectuals supporting either Ba‘albakī or the Lebanese authorities. We have also noted that the Lebanese women’s groups opposed Ba‘albakī during her trial, possibly because they wanted to distance themselves from her direct challenge to patriarchal power in favour of their longer-term negotiated approach. Although the Lebanese women’s groups succeeded in generating significant social and cultural engagement, and despite the suffrage they achieved, they failed to get significant political engagement until now. That is not to say that these groups have not made considerable efforts; rather, the society is extremely rooted in its patriarchal beliefs. For the same reason, we could conclude that Ba‘albakī’s feminist issues, views and writing are still relevant because patriarchal norms and systems remain deep-rooted and strong. As such, this situation still motivates women writers to oppose and criticize the system within their narrative writing.

This thesis has endeavoured to investigate why the writer ceased publishing. Although she was acquitted of all charges in her trial, Ba‘albakī subsequently retired from public life altogether. The reason for this was probably because she was afraid of undergoing further suffering due to the public reception of her work. However, we have also noted that when she recently returned to the public eye she seemed to be surprised by her positive reception.
Ba‘albakī has said that in the intervening years she had not ceased writing, but only ceased to publish. Thus, it may be that soon one of her promised new works will appear. Ba‘albakī has indicated that this new work will reflect on her biographical experiences in the period since her trial. It could highlight her experiences marrying a Lebanese Christian in a civil ceremony, having a family and children and living in London since 1975. Such experiences with their vivid literary possibilities are likely to spark reactions among Arabs and Muslims because it is forbidden for a Muslim female to marry a Christian male according to Muslim religious laws.

Ba‘albakī thus is a fascinating and notable figure within the context of the 1950s and 60s, not only rebelling against authority and making a literary name for herself, but doing so without organized support of a political structure. The support she did receive in the publication of her first novel came from semi-organized structures of poets and writers linked to her publishers.

Yet, as we have noted, it may have been fear of the reaction of Muslim communities that led Ba‘albakī to withdraw from publishing for so many years. It may well be that the author would judge the present day as no more suitable a time to break her silence than in the past, given the strong polarization of views concerning gender and marriage practices that continues across the Arab world.

Ba‘albakī’s assessment of the state of the Arab world in this period, as expressed in whatever she does next, will therefore provide an insight into developments in the region as seen through the eyes of a striking and courageous author, whose literary work was a landmark in the development of Lebanese women’s fiction. Interestingly, Some sounds of her novels and short stories, such as calling for democracy, bridging socioeconomic gabs between classes and social justice are voiced nowadays within the Arab Spring (which is on-going). Salman Rushdie says: “The Arab Spring is a demand for desires and rights that are common to all
human beings.” Furthermore, Toby Dodge comments on the reasons that led to the Arab Spring:

The demands for full citizenship, for the recognition of individual political rights, were a powerful unifying theme across the Arab revolutions. However, now that four autocrats have been driven from power, the crucial questions at the centre of these transitions are as much economic as they are political. Whereas Rushdie talks about human beings’ desires and rights in general, Dodge specifically points out equality and social justice as well as economic and political rights, which probably means democratic regimes and equal economic wealth delivery, including bridging gaps between socioeconomic classes. We saw that Ba’albakhī points out within her novels and short stories these issues of calling for democracy, equality and social as well as economic justice.

Thus, her stories such as Anā aḥyā are still relevant and, like the works of other female and male Arab and non-Arab writers and poets, contributed to the constructing of those demands within the collective consciousness of several Arab societies. Razān Ibrāhīm argues: “Narrative works are the ablest fictional works to describe the Arab situation, including its various changes, because there is a considerable connection between cultural shifts and Arab narrative writing.” Anā aḥyā and the published lecture of Ba’albakī are some of these works and thus remains relevant. In despite of some similarities between principles Ba’albakī called for in her stories and the demands of the Arab Spring, we could not say the writer called directly and clearly Arabs in the Middle East for revolutionary Arab Spring because there is no hard and direct evidence for such link.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the knowledge base for the future study both of Arab women writers in general and Lebanese women writers of 1950s and 1960s in particular, and of modern Arabic feminist writing overall. Therefore, it opens the door for future researches

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such as comparative studies between Ba‘albakī and other Lebanese women writers of 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, this dissertation offers an opportunity for further research on specifically the issue of the impact of the writer’s being Shiite, an issue which this thesis could not explore due to the current lack of both primary and secondary resources.
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