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Creating a Man, a Mouse or a Monster?

– Masculinity as Formulated by Syrian Female Novelists through the Second Half of the 20th Century

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Doctor of Philosophy

Edinburgh University

2016
Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Lovisa Berg
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Doctor Nacim Pak-Shiraz for the guidance she has given me and the time she has spent on my thesis. I am also thankful to my second supervisor, Doctor Thomas Pierret, for his help.

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Special thanks should be given to those who knowingly or un-knowingly have helped me to get access to the novels used in this thesis. Without their help, I would not have been able to complete the project.

I would also like to deeply thank my parents, Lis and Nils Gustav, for their constant, invaluable support in all aspects, and last, but not least, my sister Clara who always believed there would be “a book”.

5
Abstract

This literary study examines the formulation of masculinity in Syrian novels authored by women. The thesis covers the period between 1959 and 2000, corresponding to both the development of the female-authored novel in Syria and the creation of the modern Syrian state. This research engages with studies of masculinity in general and literary masculinity studies in particular. Drawing on the seminal work of Raewyn Connell as well as engaging with studies on masculinity and feminine narratology in Swedish, English and Arabic, the thesis analyses the formulation of literary masculinity through the fictional societies’ ideal masculinity on the one hand, and the female characters’ views and reactions to masculinity on the other. From a general survey of the field, 34 novels undertaking the formulation of gendered relations were identified and chosen for this study. From this selection, five themes emerged, forming the foundation of this thesis’ main chapters.

The five themes explore, in turn, how stereotypes are utilised to critique gender roles, ways in which male and female characters collaborate to formulate gender norms, how female characters capitalise on patriarchy in order to enhance their lives, male characters as symbols for social and political change and finally, the difficulties included in the performance of masculinity. Each theme is exemplified through one novel, which is analysed in detail. Throughout the five chapters, the main novel chosen for analysis is put into conversation with other novels with similar themes but from different decades. This allows for an examination of changing ideals of masculinity in addition to the theme itself.

The first theme, how stereotypes are utilised to critique gender roles, is studied through a close reading of al-Zahr al-‘ārī (The Naked back) by Hanrīyīt ‘Abbūdī. The analysis illustrates how the expected normative behaviour of men and women is utilised in order to comment on the formulation of gender roles. The chapter further demonstrates ways in which what is seen as gender specific behaviour can be appropriated by the opposite gender. This is further developed through the examination of female writers taking over the male voice through a first person male narrator. The second theme, ways in which male and female characters collaborate to formulate gender norms, is discussed through a close reading of the novel Khaṭawāt fī al-ḏābāb (Steps in the fog) by Malāḥa al-Khānī. This chapter illustrates the similar expectations
that both male and female characters have on their sons and fellow male characters. This includes taking on the role of provider and protector, even in the cases where the female characters are able to look after themselves.

The third theme, how female characters capitalise on patriarchy in order to enhance their lives, is elaborated through a close reading of *Ayyām ma’ahu* (Days with him) by Kūlīt Khūrī. This theme demonstrates how the female character constructs herself and her world around the idea of a perfect male, whom she thinks will save her. The analysis examines what is seen as ideal traits in a man. It further discusses the change of the female character and how her initial utilisation of patriarchal structure transforms into a critique of the same structure.

The fourth theme, male characters as symbols for social and political change, is seen through a close reading of *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn* (Damascus, o smile of sadness) by Ulfat al-Idlibī. The chapter connects between changing social ideals and ideal masculinity. Through *Bayrūt 75* (Beirut 75) by Ghāda al-Sammān, the fifth theme, the difficulties included in the performance of masculinity, is studied. The problematic masculinity presented is then put in contrast with what appears to be a suggestion that a performance of femininity could be an alternative to unsuccessful masculinity.

Whereas the novels differ in their presentation of masculinity and the utilisation of ideal masculinity, they agree on a set of core traits summarised in a hegemonic ideal of masculinity as an ability to provide and protect. The ways in which this should be performed is however closely connected to the female characters’ ideas of emancipation and women’s rights. The female writers’ formulation of masculinity can hence be said to mirror the development of the female characters and their awareness of women’s rights.

The thesis hopes that its original contribution to knowledge is the identification and examination of constructed masculinities in Syrian female-authored fiction. Moreover, this thesis studies a body of Syrian fiction previously largely unstudied in Western academia, and in a framework of Swedish, English and Arabic secondary sources.
Lay Summary

This thesis sets out to identify ways in which female Syrian authors have formulated masculinity in their published work between 1959 and 2000. The research covers a total of 34 novels and examines through them how masculinity is created in relation to the male and female characters and the fictional societies in which they exist. The novels are furthermore compared in order to demonstrate how masculinity has been created throughout the period studied as well as how masculinity has been used as a way of promoting and demoting certain ideas.

The study commences with a discussion of literary masculinity and states that the concept of masculinity will be used as the ways a (fictional) society expects a grown male to behave in order to gain respect. It then discusses women writers’ different usages of male characters as ways of obtaining a wider possibility of scenarios, a political stand or higher credibility in their fiction. The study further discusses the, often negative, reactions Syrian women writers have met by critics discussing both their fiction and their male characters. Despite the negative voices, the thesis demonstrates the importance of Syrian women writers’ contribution to the development of the literary climate in Syria during the second half of the 20th century. This research further establishes the connection between the literary circles and the political arena and the role of the social realism most writers committed to during the period studied. This is a topic of particular interest since masculinity formation is closely connected to gendered behaviour and, in a wider perspective, the social structures of a society. In order to examine the use and creation of masculinity, tools formulated by female narratology are used, particularly in relation to character formation.

Having laid out the foundations for the study, the thesis focuses on five different themes derived from ways that masculinity has been formulated and used in the novels. The five themes explore, in turn, how stereotypes are utilised to critique gender roles, ways in which male and female characters collaborate to formulate gender norms, how female characters capitalise on patriarchy in order to enhance their lives, male characters as symbols for social and political change and finally, the difficulties included in the performance of masculinity. Each theme is developed in a
chapter where a main novel is analysed in detail and then compared with other novels engaging with the same theme.

The first theme, how stereotypes are utilised to critique gender roles, is discussed in chapter two. The chapter demonstrates female writers’ appropriation of the male voice and argues that the appropriation of the male voice gives weight to the discussion of masculininity, both as a critique of gender roles and as a discussion of society’s expectations on masculinity. The chapter further illustrates how women’s construction of men through first person narrators destabilises the preconception of gender by introducing concepts such as male femininity and female masculinity.

The second theme, ways in which male and female characters collaborate to formulate gender norms, is examined in chapter three. The chapter discusses how male and female characters collaborate to encourage specific gendered behaviour in sons and brothers. The novels analysed in this chapter demonstrate how the female characters actively shape their male children and relatives to perform a masculinity that conforms to the role set out by society. Their fulfilment of this role means that women can live according to society’s expectations, including being protected and cared for and the novels thus propose that this ‘traditional’ masculinity is what is truly desirable in the fictional societies described.

The third theme, how female characters capitalise on patriarchy in order to enhance their lives, is discussed in chapter four. The chapter examines how the main female character uses masculinity as a way of dealing with the patriarchal society within which she lives. The protagonist’s internal negotiations and reformulations of dream masculinity illustrate how the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional society is reformulated through her dreams. They further show how time, place, class and education change the expectations placed on gendered performances.

The fourth theme, male characters as symbols for social and political change, is explored in chapter five. The chapter discusses the female characters’ perception of how masculinity should be performed and how they make the young male characters into models of a better society. It goes on to explore the connection between changing social ideals and masculinity. As representatives for political trends, the men are idealised and idolised by the women. The masculinities created appear to construct a new ideology rather than simply a new gender role.
The fifth theme, the difficulties included in the performance of masculinity, is discussed in chapter six. The chapter illustrates how the hegemonic norm of the novels governs all the characters and that even those considered performing subordinate masculinity actively work to reinforce the hegemonic standard. The chapter shows how components of hegemonic masculinity, which usually are seen as granting power and respect, can be used to diminish a male character that is not able to perform the actions in a socially accepted way.

Through the analyses of the themes and the comparisons between novels from different periods, the five chapters show that the core components of masculinity have stayed very similar during the time period studied. Masculinity includes ways of being able to provide and protect in various forms in all the novels. What changes throughout the novels is however how the provision and protection should be carried out, a topic closely connected to women’s position in society. The masculinities created in the novels examined are thus relative to the female characters’ positions and ideas as described through their social values and views on women’s role in society.
**Table of Contents**

Declaration 3  
Acknowledgments 5  
Abstract 7  
Lay Summary 9  
Table of Contents 13  
A Note on Transliteration and Translations 17  
A List of Novels Discussed 19  

1. Introduction 21  
1.1 Literary Masculinity 24  
1.2 Masculinity Studies in an Arabic Context 34  
1.2.1 Arab Masculinity – Syrian Masculinity 38  
1.3 A brief Overview of the Syrian Female-Authored Novel 41  
1.4 Women Writers 47  
1.5 Choice of Authors 51  
1.6 Chapter Division 58  
1.7 An Overview of Methodology 60  

2. Reversed Images – Female Masculinity and Male Femininity 69  
2.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure 71  
2.1.2 A Female Perspective 74  
2.2 Male Gaze – Female Author: Cross-writing 78  
2.3 Female Masculinity and Male Femininity 85
2.4 Gender Based Expectations
2.5 Marginalisation
2.6 Men on Men
2.7 Social Critique through the Performance of Masculinity
2.8 Conclusion
3. Becoming a Man – Developing Masculinity
3.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure
3.1.2 A Female Perspective
3.2 Shaping Masculinity
3.3 Building up the Performance of Masculinity
3.4 Bringing Up Boys and Girls
3.5 Changing Demands
3.6 Conclusion
4. Dream Masculinity - Or the Male as a Vehicle for Self-Realisation
4.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure
4.1.2 A Female Perspective
4.2 Dream Masculinity
4.3 Hegemonic Femininity
4.4 The Protector
4.5 The Provider
4.6 Hegemonic Masculinity versus Dream Masculinity
4.7 Developed Dreams
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.8</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>177</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Real or Ideal Masculinity?</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The Novel’s Narrative Structure</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2</td>
<td>A Female Perspective</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Changing Hegemony</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>The Father – Paternal Ideal</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Exaggerated versus Underdone Masculinity</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Ideal Masculinity – the Revolutionary Man</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>The Revolutionary Man through Time</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Masculinity – a Demanding Role to Play</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>The Novel’s Narrative Structure</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2</td>
<td>A Female Perspective</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Subordinate Masculinity</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Varying Social Backgrounds</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Virility</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Providing</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Farah’s Changing Masculinity</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Masculinity through the Years</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Bibliography 263

Appendix: Authors’ Biographies 287
A Note on Transliteration and Translation

I have followed the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) for the transliteration of Arabic, including the omission of the initial hamza’, hence *ukht* (أَخْت) instead of ‘*ukht*. Contrary to IJMES, I have transliterated titles of books and articles and names of organisations. In the case of place names, the common English spelling is used, unless the name is part of a book title. For writers and critics who publish in English I have used their preferred way of writing their names. All quotes from the novels are given in the original Arabic together with translations into English. For theoretical works, quotes are given in translation only. All translations from Arabic and Swedish into English are my own, unless otherwise stated.
A List of Novels Discussed

1959, *Ayyām ma‘ahu* (Days with him) by Kūlīt Khūrī.


1961, ‘*Aynān min ishbīliya* (Sevillian eyes) by Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī.


1975, *Bayrūt 75* (Beirut 75) by Ghāda al-Sammān.


1979, *al-Waṭan fī al-‘aynayn* (The Homeland in a pair of eyes) by Ḥamīda Na‘na‘.


1989, *Man yajru‘ alā al-shawq* (Who dares to long) by Ḥamīda Na‘na‘.

1990, *Ḥiḥāyāt jaddī* (My grandafther’s tale) by Ulfat al-Idlibī.

1993, *Harwala fawqa šaqī‘ tālīdū* (Hurrying over the frost of Toledo) by Mārī Rashū.

1994, *Yawmiyyāt muṭalliqa* (Diaries of a divorcing woman) by Haifa’ Bītar.


A short biographical note on each author can be found in the appendix.
1. Introduction

المرأة يا بناتي، هي التي تصنع الرجال.1

Woman, my girls, is the one who makes men.

The quote introducing the thesis is part of a lecture given to the female students in Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn (Damascus, o smile of sadness, 1980). In the context of the novel, discussed in detail in chapter five, the teacher’s statement can be read as a reflection on his students’ future roles as mothers and teachers. In a wider context, the comment can be taken to emphasise the collective formulation of gender roles. On yet another level, it is an example of how fictional characters are used as ways of engaging with society, both through the authority of the male teacher and the message he delivers to his students. The quote is further exactly what the authors examined in this thesis have done, they have “made men”. Although fictional, they have created men who are loved, hated, looked up to, despised, respected, feared and humiliated. Men that are presented as lifebuoys for the female characters and men that are seen as their biggest obstacles in the search for a happy life. The various men appearing in the novels do not at first sight present a unified performance of masculinity, their attempts at carrying out masculinity are also evaluated differently in different settings. This is part of what this thesis sets out to examine, namely the creation and usage of literary masculinities in Syrian female authors’ work during the second half of the 20th century. The thesis attempts to answer how literary masculinities are formulated in relation to, firstly, the masculine ideals and secondly, the female characters of each fictional society. The thesis further investigates if, and if so how, the literary masculinities presented in the novels have changed throughout the time-period studied. The thesis moreover analyses the function of masculinity creation in women’s texts. Is masculinity defined as the monstrous side of man hindering women from developing themselves? Or, is it rather a necessity for a functional society as described by the novels? Or, is there no such thing as a unified idea of what and how masculinity appears and is used in the novels examined?

1 Ulfat al-Idlibi, Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn (Damascus: Manshūrat wizārat al-thaqāfa wa al-irshād al-qawmi, 1980), 162. My translation; all translations in the thesis are my own unless otherwise stated.
The thesis is based on an analysis of 34 novels, written between 1959 and 2000 by 21 Syrian female novelists. In the initial selection of 34 novels, certain themes reoccur. These themes form the basis for the thesis’ five main chapters. The five themes explore, in turn, how stereotypes are utilised to critique gender roles, ways in which male and female characters collaborate to formulate gender norms, how female characters capitalise on patriarchy in order to enhance their lives, male characters as symbols for social and political change and finally, the difficulties included in the performance of masculinity. For each theme, one novel has been chosen as a case study and analysed in detail. The remaining 29 novels are used in the analyses to provide different perspectives or strengthen a particular argument and to provide a broader base for a discussion of the development of masculinity during the period as a whole. A more detailed discussion of the underlying reasoning around the choice of authors and novels is found under section 1.5.

The analysis of masculinities in the novels will rest on the following assumptions; a) male and female characters jointly construct masculinity in the (fictional) societies discussed, b) the perception of masculinity varies according to, among other things, context and place, and c) others’ approval, rather than the individual’s actions, determines the value of a performance of masculinity. The content of the novels and the literary masculinities are examined using an elaborated version of R.W Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, outlined in detail under section 1.1. The theory acknowledges a multiplicity of masculinities in addition to highlighting a hierarchy among them. Connell further stresses the binary opposition between femininity and masculinity. This is of particular interest to this thesis, since, in a majority of the novels, the voices of female characters filter the understanding of the masculinities presented. It is through the female characters’ perception that masculinity is understood, and to some extent, evaluated. The changing representation of masculinity in the novels is therefore not only created by female authors, it is moreover reflected through, and shaped by, female characters.

The literary analyses draw from both narrative theory and a study of the content. The analyses are based on close examinations of the narrative structures of the novels, as well as the fictional societies created by the authors. The thesis uses feminist narratology, specifically the concepts of focalization, characterisation and
time, in order to examine how the structure of the text supports or diverts the perception of masculinity from a female perspective. Through a comparison of the individual analyses of the novels, certain trends, or lack thereof, are detected. This is then used to demonstrate the development of literary masculinity created by Syrian female writers during the period studied.

Though literary, and hence already ‘created’, the thesis focuses on how the characters, male and female, together create and/or undermine the novels’ hegemonic masculinity. The complexity of gender construction, and how class, education and regional background, among other factors, play a part in how certain masculinities are received and formulated, is shown by analysing the novels as units. This leads to a deeper understanding of the fictional narratives, as relational unities or whole entities – depicting fictional worlds from certain perspectives crafted through language and structure - rather than as portraits or stories of individual characters. Though not claiming that the literary masculinities found and discussed can be interpreted as a reflection of reality, they are constructed and formulated in a specific time and place. The masculinities presented are a result of the Syrian tradition of literary realism and politically engaged literature, which makes it illuminating to situate the novels in relation to studies of masculinity in the area.

The thesis is a contribution to the field of literary Arab masculinity, but it moreover adds new aspects to the studies of Arab women writers, whose work has often been analysed with focus on female characters. This characterisation of the academic literature is not intended as a critique of the discussions or analyses presented, but rather suggests that there is a gap in the research - that of how these novels depict the male characters’ development and their negotiations with patriarchy and gender roles. A gap, which if addressed, not only informs about the treatment and formation of male characters but also expands the knowledge of the female characters as participants in a gender matrix, rather than seen as separate and independent. Through an examination of the formulation of masculinity, the thesis highlights gender relations within the novels and shows the relativity between masculinity and femininity. The thesis further accentuates the way female and male characters together are used by the authors to create the novels’ gender regimes. Through the choice of Syrian literature as primary material, the thesis also contributes to a deeper
understanding of a literature largely un-studied in Western academia. The thesis’ examination of the period between 1959 and 2000 lays the foundations for a deeper study of the multiplicity of voices, viewpoints and masculinities that appear in Syrian fiction of the 21st century.

1.1 Literary Masculinity and an Outline of Masculinity Studies

As stated in the introduction, the analysis of masculinity in this thesis is based on literary characters. This section will give a brief outline of masculinity studies and discuss how it can be applied to literature. The thesis’ focus on literature as a basis for research on gender formation is not a new topic to the studies of Arab fiction. It has however been, as noted by Samira Aghacy, a topic almost synonymous with women’s studies and female characters. Arab women writers, especially Egyptian and Lebanese, form a group whose literary work has been examined in numerous books and articles, both in the Arab world and in the West. Regardless of the place of production, these studies have until lately most often adopted either a feminist point of view in analysing literary works, or a women-centred approach. In other words, the female characters and their construction and development have been the centre of attention, whilst the male characters by and large are seen as ‘walk-ons’ or extras. They are necessary for the plot but not interesting for analytical purposes or as part of a theoretically informed discussion. Even in books and articles where the titles promise a study of ‘gender’ or ‘masculinity’, the analysis is often limited to the topic of women’s reactions to forms of patriarchy. In an article on literature and masculinity,

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Alex Hobbs identify this phenomenon of male exclusion from the analysis of gender as a ‘partial blindness’ where “[m]en become invisible due to being overly visible”.\textsuperscript{5}

However, masculinity studies is not a way of rectifying this ‘partial blindness’ by excluding females or femininity from the analyses as a reaction to feminism. Nor is it a way of retaining the patriarchal domination by linking masculinity to power and thereby, as a result, negating any chances of women ever gaining power, as some critics have suggested.\textsuperscript{6} Other concerns voiced around studies of masculinities are that it includes an acceptance of what is seen as negative performances of masculinity.\textsuperscript{7} Rather than evaluate performances of masculinity, masculinity studies are an investigation into how masculinities are formulated, how they relate to male and female characters and how they change. In \textit{Women Constructing Men} the editors write in their introduction that “[i]n fact, the male characters of female novelists represent the authors’ negotiations with the ideologies of gender, class, and sexuality as much as their female characters.”\textsuperscript{8} Taking this further, and especially if one chooses to see gender as constructed through interaction with others, it becomes important to acknowledge that all characters are vital to the understanding of the novel’s dynamics.

Literary masculinity studies have their origins in men’s studies, which in turn build on, and owe many of the theoretical models used, to feminist research.\textsuperscript{9} In the same way as feminist theory has been applied to literature in diverse ways, literary masculinity studies use different approaches derived from the field of men’s studies. This has led to multiple ways of approaching masculinity in literature. In a simplified fashion, men’s studies can be said to have two features.\textsuperscript{10} It can, on one

\textsuperscript{10} For a detailed summary of the history and development of Men’s Studies/Studies of Men and Masculinity, see the introduction to \textit{Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities}, ed. Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R.W Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication 2005), 1-12.
hand, be a reaction to a perceived ‘feminisation’ of the world and a desire to return to an ‘original’ male role, as put forward by among others Robert Bly. This view is based on a biologically essentialist worldview and proposes archetypal traits specific to masculinity and femininity, often in relation to Carl Gustav Jung’s work.\(^\text{11}\) Whereas this worldview appears in the novels analysed through characters and plots, the way literary masculinity studies is used in this thesis is not with the aim to strengthen a certain ‘original’ view of masculinity but rather to engage with the formulation of gender. Hence, what can be said to be the other feature of masculinity studies, outlined below, is what the thesis takes as its point of departure.

The other feature argues that men’s studies can be an engagement with the theory of patriarchy and its impact on males and their relations with each other, as put forward by for example R. W. Connell, Michael Kimmel and Keith Pringle. The initial motivator for the second group of researchers was to negate the singularity of masculinity and instead, as Henry Brod and Michael Kaufman state: “[e]mphasize the plurality and diversity of men’s experiences, attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices and institutions […]\(^\text{12}\) This strand of masculinity studies is closely connected to Judith Butler’s work on the performativity of gender.\(^\text{13}\) Connell,\(^\text{14}\) for example, states that gender is: “[t]he structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes.”\(^\text{15}\) As such, masculinity is considered a socially constructed phenomena and a role that can be performed more or less well. At the same time, Connell means that gender performance is connected to the biological sex of the person.\(^\text{16}\) This is in agreement with Candace West and Dan Zimmerman who propose that “[g]ender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category.”\(^\text{17}\) In the matrix of everyday relations, certain expectations are put on bodies due to their biological sex; these expectations then influence the individual’s behaviour. In this

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\(^{11}\) Ekenstam, Rådd, 11.


\(^{14}\) Since Robert became Raewyn in 2006 I will refer to R W Connell in the feminine throughout the text.


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 10.

understanding, which is the one used in this thesis, gender appears as a reaction to outer stimuli in the form of a social context’s expectations on the individual. These expectations are often founded on an assumed knowledge of the individual’s biological sex. This is further seen in Bo Nilsson’s interpretation of the goal of men’s studies as a way to “[a]nalys[e] and describe how male gender comes to be shown in daily life.” Hence, the focus of masculinity studies, as used in this thesis, is not to find one specific form of masculinity but to tease out how multiple ways of performing masculinity can be summarised in an idea of male gender. To bring these concepts to the analysis of novels mean that the novels are seen as separate spheres that present an idea of male, and female, gender. It further means that the thesis uses textual evidence, in conversation with the theory of masculinity studies, in order to discuss the formulation of gender and the practice of masculinity.

The apparent variations in the performance of masculinity has led to an examination of hierarchal relations between men. This discussion was initiated by Connell in 1987, and further developed in her seminal book *Masculinities*. The theory of hegemonic masculinity presents a model where emphasis is put on the plurality of masculinities and their internal negotiations for power, in addition to relations between men and women. Connell modelled her theory on Gramsci’s explanation of hegemony, arguing that the power certain performances of masculinity engender are shaped through others’ acceptance and acknowledgment of it, rather than out of fear. She also drew on empirical research done in various (Western) settings on gender relations. As a starting point, Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is:

> [t]he configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

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22 Connell, *Masculinities*.
23 Ibid., 77.
Hegemonic masculinity can thus be seen as the foundation for patriarchal, social structures whether they help to form complete societies or informal groups. The performer of hegemonic masculinity is made out to be the leader, the father figure and the only one who can guarantee the group’s security and prosperity.24 Both males and females are seen to support and uphold the patriarchal structure through their reliance on, and acceptance of, the role of a superior male.

The subordination of women means that all men automatically receive privileges denied women, simply by being born male, a part of hegemonic masculinity termed ‘the patriarchal dividend’.25 A critical point raised regarding the term ‘patriarchal dividend’ is that the existence of multiple masculinities on a hierarchical scale makes it difficult to understand the role of the patriarchal dividend that supposedly all men gain from.26 Studies of masculinity in homosocial circumstances, for example boys’ schools, might not find patriarchal dividend a useful factor, since their focus will be on the relations between males. The hierarchical levels between the boys in such a study will be more evident than their social privileges compared to girls of the same age. In the context of the novels analysed in this thesis it is however of great importance since it is one of the factors that distinguishes men from women in the patriarchal systems described. That men and boys have a better position than girls and women do, is something that is clear in all the novels examined. The characters, male and female, have to position themselves in relation to this knowledge and the patriarchal dividend is hence immensely important for the understanding of the masculinities constructed in the novels. Especially since the patriarchal dividend can be used by male characters to the benefit of the family and those dependent on the man at the same time as it can be used as a reason to exert power over wife and children in all areas of life.

Even if all men can be said to benefit from the patriarchal dividend in relation to women, they do so in varying degrees. To be fully understandable masculinity studies need an intersectional approach since factors such as class, race,

24 Cf. Lisa Wedeen for a discussion on the same rhetoric on a national level, positioning al-Asad as the father of the country.
25 For a discussion on patriarchal dividend see Jack Khan, An Introduction to Masculinities (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 27; 32.
religion and education might in certain circumstances place a woman in a more powerful position than a man. This will however only be true for this particular circumstance, not as a general rule. The same factors are at work between groups or individuals of men too. Some men are more privileged, and participate in setting the norm for what can be seen as hegemonic masculinity, whereas other men might only receive their privilege by accepting and upholding the norms dictated by others.

Because of the internal relations, Connell divides masculinity into three groups: dominant, complicit and subordinate. Some scholars have later introduced a fourth category, marginalised masculinity, based on Connell’s discussion of authorisation and marginalisation. Unless a distinct categorisation is made between marginalised and subordinate masculinity, the two concepts often overlap as elaborated on by Marcia Inhorn in her study of fertility and masculinity. In this thesis the three categories dominant (hegemonic), complicit and subordinate, as outlined below, are used to examine performances of masculinity, and marginalisation and authorisation are used as external factors influencing the acceptance or rejection of a specific performance.

‘Dominant masculinity’ is often used interchangeably with hegemonic masculinity. It can be said to embody a way of behaving and acting that gives and maintains power for men in a certain society. Scholars of masculinity have criticised this not always strict usage of the concept hegemonic/dominant masculinity. The fact that it at times means an ideal masculinity and at times the men who uphold it is seen as a confusing part of Connell’s theory. The confusion stems in part from Connell’s own writing, and in part from the multiple interpretations and usages of the theory that exist in various fields. In this thesis, hegemonic masculinity will be used rather than dominant, and it will be used to refer to a particular performance of masculinity rather than the actual performers of it.

In Masculinities, Connell argues that despite the plethora of masculinities existing in a society there is always a ‘hegemonic masculinity’. This is an ideal, which the masculinities performed by members of that particular society are measured

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27 Connell, Masculinities, 76.
The hegemonic masculinity is most often not achievable, at least not completely, but remains a sort of blueprint for how a (successful) man should behave. It does not necessarily mean that the most powerful men in a society are the performers of hegemonic masculinity. It is more likely that it is film stars or even fantasy figures that hold these characteristics and are thought of as “ideal men”. The hegemonic masculinity is thus almost impossible for a ‘real’ man to embody in his daily life. Nonetheless, it becomes a model against which he and others judge his behaviour. In a later revision of her theory, Connell writes:

“[h]egemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative.”

The references to film stars and specific characteristics seemingly encourage readings of hegemonic masculinity as a standard formula ready for application in order to judge a person’s masculinity. Connell has admitted that, unwillingly, she has created a theory that easily lends itself to those who would like to look for A-type characteristics and traits in people. This, she says, was never the idea of the theory, which on the contrary argues that hegemonic masculinity is a fluid notion changing over time. Whereas specific traits might make up the hegemonic masculinity of a specific time and place they cannot be treated as eternal characteristics true for all times and places.

At the same time, as a cultural creation, the notion of what is understood to be masculine and feminine relates to the cultural environment and certain core traits re-appear. They might however, as will be seen in the analyses, be reinvented and re-interpreted in correlation with social changes. In a Syrian setting, there seems to be a consensus of what is seen as an accepted performance of masculinity. In her study of masculinity in the Syrian novel Maysūn al-Jurf has made a list including generosity, chivalry and strength. In a study of Arabic masculinity, Ruth Roded traces masculinity back to pre-Islamic poetry and lists traits like virility, martial ability and

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32 Ibid., 833.
dignity as vital parts of masculinity. Similarly, Samira Aghacy connects between the pre-Islamic use of Fuḥūla, which she translates as potency, virility and fertility, and a strong and sought-after masculinity traceable in the novels she analyses. In other studies provision, protection and procreation are often listed as essential to masculinity. However, as elaborated on in the section on methodology, it is not the traits themselves that are interesting but rather the struggle between the articulated expectations and individual men’s way of meeting the expectations depending on their position and background. Whereas the same words might be repeated as signifiers of masculinity, their meaning will differ from time to time and place to place.

Even though certain traits are seen as vital to the performance of masculinity at a certain time and place not all men stand actively in the frontline, defending the hegemonic norms. At the same time, as Connell notes, these men do not work against the hegemonic norm but instead silently support the existing structures. In Connell’s division this group is called ‘complicit masculinity’; most men, according to Connell, can be seen to fit into this category. The performers of complicit masculinity are the quiet supporters of hegemonic masculinity and the reason it stays strong. The groups that differ from the hegemonic norm, and therefore are excluded from the patriarchal structures or circles of legitimacy, are called ‘subordinated masculinities’ by Connell. She mentions homosexual men as an example of subordinated masculinities in a Western/European setting in the 1990s. Subordinate masculinity, together with femininity, functions as the binary opposition to the currently acceptable hegemonic masculinity and as such, it too changes with time.

Thus, what can be understood as grounds for subordination in one place and culture might not be interpreted in the same way in another place or time. Joseph Massad’s study of desire in the Arab world is one such example when he shows how the view on male homosexuality has changed from being normal to abnormal. Whereas men’s sexual interest in boys at one time was seen as a sign of virility, it is in the 21st century interpreted as an illness. Subordination can also come from other

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35 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 19.
factors, such as being unable to perform certain parts of what is considered hegemonic masculinity. Marcia Inhorn gives an example of how the inability to have children severely changes a man’s perception of his own masculinity, as well as others’ views on him, in her studies from Palestine and Lebanon.38

Connell sees dominant, complicit and subordinate masculinity as internal to the gender order.39 Since gender relations are always contestable and formed in cooperation with others, she adds two more concepts: marginalisation and authorisation. Whereas the three initial categories are more or less connected to actions performed, the latter two are outer frameworks that are difficult or impossible to change for the individual man. Authorisation consists of the factors that help a group of men to keep power through asserting their close relations to hegemonic masculinity. It can be explained as positive stereotyping. By being part of a specific group or holding a certain position a man is automatically assumed to behave in a certain, approved, way.

In the Syrian context, this could for example be religious men, or men from specific families who are respected on grounds disconnected from their behaviour. In a hierarchal society age is also a factor of authorisation where the eldest son is singled out as being special. The men who benefit from authorisation have a certain leeway in their performance of masculinity; due to their already powerful position in society they can compensate for ‘shortcomings’ in their performance and still preserve their elevated position in relation to women and other men.

In the same way as authorisation asserts power, marginalisation comprises the factors that prevent a certain group of men to gain power. In an American setting again, Connell quotes race as one such factor and says:

[...] thus, in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally.40

Individuals from the marginalised group might be successful, but their individual success does not mean that all men from this group are accepted. In a hierarchical

38 Inhorn, New Arab Man.
39 Connell, Masculinities, 80.
40 Ibid., 79.
society, occupying an unfashionable job might be one factor that keeps a man marginalised. Political ideas and activities can be other factors. By not being seen as equal participants by the majority group of men that make up society, the marginalised do not enjoy the same privileges and are, as a group, looked down upon without any further investigation into what the individuals from the group actually do. Marginalisation hence works as negative stereotyping. It keeps certain groups of men subordinated in relation to the hegemonic masculinity in that society, but it does not mean that individual men of this group cannot perform hegemonic masculinity.\footnote{For a further discussion of the two axes of Connell’s matrix for hegemonic masculinity see Thorbjörn Forslid, Varför män: Om manlighet i litteraturen (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 2006),18.}

The theory of hegemonic masculinity has been used in various ways since it first appeared in 1995, and, as with all theories, the usefulness of it has been debated and critiqued. Connell herself, together with James Messerschmidt, modified the theory in 2005 in response to some of the critique.\footnote{Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 829-859.} In their response, Connell and Messerschmidt attempt to adapt the theory to a more globalised world and suggest that masculinities should be understood on three levels; local, regional and global. The local level is constructed through face-to-face interaction with family and immediate community. The regional level is constructed at the level of the nation’s culture and the global level is constructed through world politics and transnational media.\footnote{Ibid., 846.} The three levels are according to Connell linked together and likely to influence one another. A locally constructed hegemonic masculinity might change through influences of TV or state intervention. It might correspondingly be that it is the locally constructed masculinity that is spread and given credence through different media and thus affects the national or global view on masculinity.

In the revision, Connell went back to the concept of ‘emphasised femininity’ or ‘hegemonic femininity’ that she had brought up as a tandem concept with hegemonic masculinity in the 1980s but which never received the same attention as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Her reason to re-focus on women was the argument that: “[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity.”\footnote{Ibid., 848.} Therefore, a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy in connection to gender
dynamics and social dynamics needs to be adopted according to Connell. This point will be further elaborated on in this research where male and female gender roles are clearly formulated as binary oppositions.

1.2 Masculinity Studies in an Arabic Context

As noted in the previous section, masculinity studies have been applied to several research fields with different approaches as a result. This section will give a brief overview of previous research done on masculinities in an Arabic context. Narrowing the field down to Arabic literature, Maysūn al-Jurf adopts the biological essentialist worldview in Bināʾṣūrat al-shakhšiyya al-dhukūriyya fī al-riwāya al-ʿarabīyya al-sūriyya45 (Building the image of the masculine character in the Arabic Syrian Novel) from 2014. She examines the image of the male in the fiction of the 1990s in Syria. Both in her views on writers and characters she assumes a pre-existing set of characteristics, on which writers and characters alike are judged. She refers to an original, true masculinity that very few of the authors she examines seem to describe. Through her analysis, al-Jurf emphatically states what she believes to be the hegemonic masculinity of the Syrian fiction of the 1990s. The hegemonic masculinity al-Jurf describes is often very close to the traits and characteristics that appear as ideal in the novels analysed in this thesis. Her ideal masculinity will therefore be used as a sort of reference point in the discussion of hegemonic masculinity and its importance in society, even when it is non-existent as will be demonstrated in chapter six.

A similar approach of everlasting ideals can be seen in Jūrj Ṭarābīšīʾs Sharq gharb rujūla unūtha46 (East west masculinity femininity) from 1977, where he analyses how Arab (male) writers relate to Western cities and countries in their novels. Ṭarābīšī divides between male aggressiveness, which he connects to colonising powers, and female passivity, which in turn is linked to the colonised individual. Ṭarābīšīʾs theory builds on the idea that the male characters analysed take revenge on their former colonisers through acts of sexual aggression against their women. Through this action, the male character regains his masculinity and proves himself a man again. Ṭarābīšīʾs usage of sexual aggressiveness as a way of regaining masculinity can be seen in the novels analysed in this thesis, though not as a reaction

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45 al-Jurf, Bināʾ ṣūrat al-shakhšiyya.
46 Jūrj Ṭarābīšīʾ, Sharq gharb rujūla unūtha (Beirut, Dār al-Ṭallʾa, 1977).
to colonial powers. On the contrary, the encounters between East and West that are discussed in chapter two unfold very differently from the theoretical model outlined by Ṭarābīshī. His theory regarding gender and power relations is turned upside down and his claim on essentialist behaviour is seemingly negated. On another level, it is simultaneously reinforced since it is the underlying assumption on which the characters form their actions and formulate their preconceptions of gendered conduct.

In *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*\(^{47}\) from 2009, Samira Aghacy instead adopts the constructionist approach and discusses changing masculinity. She brings in both political and social changes, such as the Lebanese civil war and women’s emancipation, and their effect on masculinity in her analysis. However, she does repeatedly contrast these changes with a traditional male figure that is never clearly outlined. Although demonstrating a variety in fictional masculinity formation, this variety appears to be a new phenomenon in comparison with a static, traditional male figure. This approach, a comparison between a stagnant past and a vibrant present, somewhat negates the foundation for her own analysis of plural masculinities and constant change. Whereas many novels, as will be seen in this thesis too, formulate masculinity in contrast to what is portrayed as traditional masculinity, it is not necessarily true that the ‘traditional masculinities’ are similar. This thesis will thus make use of Aghacy’s thorough analyses of how masculinities are used as tools by the authors to express among other things social critique as will be seen in chapter six.

Līndā ‘Abdu al-Raḥmān has also concentrated on changes in masculinity, but only in the characterisation of the father figure. Her *Tamthīlāt al-ab fī al-riwāya al-niswiyya al-‘arabiyya al-mu‘āṣira*\(^{48}\) (The Portrayal of the father in the contemporary Arabic female authored novel) from 2007 demonstrates the changing perception of the father figure in Arab women’s writing. She too founds her work on an ideal father that is assumed but not articulated. She then puts the father figures she detects in her analyses in conversation with the un-mentioned ideal. The close link between masculinity and fatherhood makes her analyses informative and her analyses are discussed in chapter five.

\(^{47}\) Aghacy, *Masculine Identity.*

Manṣūr al-Mahūs has examined women’s portrayal of male characters and has completed a PhD thesis on the image of men in Saudi Arabian female-authored fiction.49 ‘Abdu al-Raḥman’s and al-Mahūs’ studies, individually and together, add new dimensions to the understanding of gender and patriarchy in women’s fiction. Both studies agree that there is a multitude of ways in which masculinity is formulated. Whereas ‘Abdu al-Raḥman’s study is more general, al-Mahūs connects between the masculinities he finds and the development of women’s rights and education in Saudi Arabia.

Two other researchers who engage with the way social changes affect fictional gender, and in particular masculinity, are Hoda Elsadda and Joseph Massad. In *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel: Egypt 1892-2008*,50 Hoda Elsadda focuses on Egyptian novels and, as the title suggests, the connection between the project of nation formation and gender. Elsadda works on the concept of the ‘new man’ as a counterpart to the ‘new woman’, in the first half of the 20th century in Egypt. Whereas the ‘new woman’ was created as a concept by the intellectuals of the time, Elsadda shows how the ‘new man’ similarly appeared but how he was never typified in the same way as the woman. The concept of the ‘new man’ is used in chapter five as a way of re-creating society and masculinity together. Joseph Massad’s *Desiring Arabs*51 deals in detail with the topic of the homosexual man in contrast to the heterosexual man, and examines and contrasts different forms of masculinity and their power relations. Massad argues in brief that the concept of homosexual masculinity is an imported concept from Western society, which leads to a manufactured understanding of gender roles, not internal to Arab society. In addition to his book, there are a number of articles on homosexuality as a variant masculinity in Arabic literature.52

51 Massad, *Desiring*.
The interest in masculinity studies in the Middle East has not limited itself to literature only. On the contrary, the focus of most studies has been sociological or ethnographical. In *Imagined Masculinities, Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, 14 writers with varying perspectives engage with masculinity. The contributions range from analyses of films to examinations of traditional rituals and the effect of military training and show how masculinity is formulated through diverse cultural practices. Another approach to masculinity studies is that of Marcia Inhorn who has written on infertility problems and masculinity in the Middle East in articles and books. Her work emphasises the traditional values embodied in masculinity; at the same time it illustrates a connection between money, position, knowledge and religion and the performance of masculinity. Through interviews with families in a district of Cairo, Farah Ghannam has collected thoughts and fears about the performance of masculinity in her book *Live and Die Like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt*. Especially instructive for this thesis is her part on women’s participation in the formation of masculinity through child raising, but also their reactions to older boys and men’s behaviour. The state’s involvement in the formation of masculinity, with Egypt as a special case, has been studied by Wilson Chacko Jacob in *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity 1870-1940*. Jacob demonstrates how the performance of a particular type of masculinity became a way of signifying a political and social point of view during the period studied. Another dimension of masculinity is the religious aspect and among studies with this approach are *Islamic Masculinities*, edited by Lahoucine Ouzgane, and *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinity* by Amanulla De Sondy. *Islamic Masculinities* consists of 12 articles locating themselves within a mixture of anthropology and sociology dealing with case studies from the Middle Eastern countries. De Sondy instead resists the Arabo-Islamic

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focus and includes discussions of prominent non-Arab Muslim thinkers in addition to analyses of five of the prophets.

1.2.1 Arab Masculinity – Syrian Masculinity

The above-mentioned research using masculinity studies in an Arabic context has made different choices regarding their selection of material. Some have chosen to concentrate on the whole Middle East whereas others have chosen one country or area as the focus for their research. Limiting the discussion to literature, there are valid arguments for both choices. Arabic literature is often treated as one whole entity, both in Western and Arab literary studies, due to the many shared characteristics in the development of the genre. It impossible to overlook that literary magazines, collective movements (such as pan-Arabism), and major political events (like the war in 1967) have influenced the general trends of literature in the Arab world. At the same time, it is as difficult to disregard that political and cultural internal affairs such as the Lebanese civil war, the Algerian war for independence, the oil wealth in the Gulf countries, the different religious establishments, views on women’s rights and state socialism have distinctly shaped the national literatures of the different Arab countries. In a discussion on the relation between fictional texts and their origins, the critic Yumnā al-ʻĪd argues that after the Sykes-Picot agreement, the ‘new’ countries’ literatures started to take shape and individual factors became more important than the shared literary heritage. Since this thesis is concerned with the performance of masculinity, which is closely connected to customs, traditions and social changes, the choice of one country rather than many has been made. The choice of one country, though not necessarily representing a homogenous masculinity, still presents masculinities constructed within a national framework. This choice finds support in a study by Hartmut Fähndrich, where he shows variations between the Arab East and the Arab West in men’s autobiographical work and their approaches to family issues.

56 For example: Mawāqif, Ādāb and Fusūl.
58 Connell, Masculinities. See also: Butler, Gender Trouble.
He means that the outer political and regional changes affect how internal family relations are perceived, and described in fiction. A similar trend is noted by al-Khāṭīb, who demonstrates that in the novels produced before 1976, when his article was published, Syrian female writers were less open in their description of sexual encounters and less outspoken in their social critique in comparison with their Lebanese and Egyptian colleagues.\(^{60}\) The thesis’ focus on a longer period within one country further enables an examination of changing masculinities, disregarding regional differences between countries. Whereas the primary material is country specific, the similarities between the Arab countries are acknowledged through the secondary material dealing with the Arab world at large.

The specific regional aspects can be used as arguments for each of the Arab countries. The choice of Syria for this study has several reasons. One of them is that very little has been written in Western academic circles on Syrian literature in general and on Syrian women’s literature in particular. Within Syria and the Arab world, the interest is greater but still not on the level of that for, for example, Lebanese and Egyptian writers. Though relatively unknown outside the borders of Syria, with the exception of a few writers, the literary milieu inside the country has seen a growing number of novelists, short story writers, dramatists and poets, in addition to literary critics, during the last half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Both literary journals and the literary supplements of the daily newspapers bear witness to a vivid and active literary scene, well in tune with contemporary international literary issues whilst at the same time engaged in the national literary production. Another reason is that since Syria’s independence in 1946, literature has played an important part in the project of nation formation, both through state governed initiatives\(^ {61}\) and on an individual level. The state, which recognises the power of literature, runs journals, pays stipends to writers and publishes literary works. However, this involvement also results in a strict control of what is published and where.\(^ {62}\) Despite the state’s involvement, or maybe because

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\(^{60}\) Husām al-Khāṭīb, “al-Riwiya al-tāliya fī sūriyā:3” [The Coming novel in Syria:3], al-Ma‘rifa 168 (1976), 86.


of it, individual writers and poets have seen and used literature as a way of engaging with social and political issues, with varying degrees of openness. This trend is not specific to Syria but can be seen in the whole of the Levant, as noted by Samira Aghacy. She further states that writers and critics engage with their societies through written texts and thus in a subversive way challenge or support their different social establishments. Thus, the general literary atmosphere in Syria since the 1950s and through the final part of the 20th century can be summarised as ‘writing for a cause’ whether political or social.

A third reason is that the Syrian literary scene has to some extent been its own closed universe. ‘Adnān bin Dhurayl describes how, at an early stage, Syrian writers made a point of using the local environment in their novels, making cultural and political references national rather than international and hence contributing to the idea of a nationally committed literature. This has in turn led to, as the critic Faysal Summāq concludes, that it is difficult to use the term ‘realism’ to describe Syrian writing, since it is so formed by its own cultural and political life that it bears no resemblance to ‘realism’ in other countries. An analysis of Syrian literature might therefore offer new insights into the cultural and literary scene.

The above-mentioned reasons are valid for male as well as female writers. With regard to female writers, the case of Syria is connected to the Ba’th party which, since it came into power in 1963, has engaged in a rhetoric of equality and women’s participation in society. This has led to a large number of women participating in the cultural and literary sphere in Syria. However, the existing studies of Syrian female authored literature often focus on the female perspective or the female voice in relation to women’s rights and emancipation, whereas, as discussed above, male characters are left out of the analysis. This gap, in addition to the literary milieu

63 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 97.
64 Ibid.
and the concept of engaged literature discussed above, makes it of particular interest to see how Syrian women writers have formulated masculinity.

1.3 A Brief Overview of the Syrian Female-Authored Novel

The previous section pointed out how Syrian literature has been perceived as committed and realistic. This section will give an overview of the development of the novel, in particular the female-authored novel, in Syria in the period between 1959 and 2000. In the 1950s, Syria saw the formation of the Syrian Writers’ Collective, later to be transformed into the Arab Writers’ Union, and literature began to be treated as an important foundation for cultural and political change. The novel, though previously attempted by male and female writers, became increasingly popular during this period. Concentrating on women’s novels only, the Syrian Ministry of Culture states that the number of novels published by women writers between 1959 and 2000 was 95, with an increase from two novels in the 1950s to 42 in the 1990s. These figures have to be considered estimates since not all novels seem to be counted in this statistical overview. Regardless of whether some novels have been left out or not, the numbers give evidence of the growing popularity of the novel among women writers in Syria after a somewhat hesitant beginning.

As discussed in the previous section, many of these novels were of a political and social nature. In a study on the development of the Syrian novel from 1985, Samar al-Fayṣal states that:

“The traditional Arabic novel has […] taken on a social and political function in Arab life. Because of that, Arab writers have been attached to, and stay attached to, this form, since they see it as useful for their societies and nations.”

This does not mean that the Syrian novel has not changed or developed during the 20th century. On the contrary, in his study al-Fayṣal points at new ways of character composition and other technical changes, but he means that the core of the novels stays political and educational, despite structural changes. Among the writers included in this thesis, examples of this political and educational desire can be seen for example

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in *Thulūj tahta al-shams* (Snow under the sun, 1961) by Laylā al-Yāfī. The heroine of the novel, who is on holiday in Cairo with her adoptive parents, suddenly finds herself in the midst of the Suez crisis, takes up arms and fights side by side with the Egyptians. Another political event with great impact on Syria is the Lebanese civil war, which has most famously been dealt with by Ghāda al-Sammān. Other writers, such as Qamar Kilānī, have also produced fiction on the subject. In *Bustān al-karaz* (The Cherry orchard, 1977), the Syrian army, though not at the centre of the narration, is portrayed as liberators by the main character in a plain political stand. Ḥamīda Na’na’ has instead dealt with the question of Palestine and freedom fighters in her two novels *al-Watān fī al-‘aynayn* (The Homeland in a pair of eyes, 1979) and *Man yajru ‘alā al-shawq* (Who dares to long, 1989). These examples show that women are engaged with both the national and the regional political history. Later examples of engagement with political and social issues include Nādya Khūst’s trilogy about Syria at the beginning of the 20th century. The trilogy was published at the turn of the 21st century with the double aim of explaining the area’s history, and working for the preservation of the older parts of Damascus.72 Social inequalities and women’s rights are other topics that many have written on, for example Kūlīt Khūrī, Haifa’ Biṭār and Ulfat al-Idlibī. The writers’ engagement appears from the topics of their novels but is strengthened through interviews and other writings, where they state that writing is their way of making women’s voices heard in society.73 Gender relations, a fundamental part of the construction of a society, shown in division of labour, opportunities for education and religious obligations, are naturally reflected in the texts.

The Syrian novel’s close connection to the political movement in the country is further asserted in *The Experimental Arabic Novel*, something the critic Nabīl Sulaymān has also shown together with co-author Bū ‘Alī Yāsīn in the study *al-Adab wa al-idiūlūjiyya fī sūriyā* (Literature and ideology in Syria).75 In their study,

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72 See the introduction to *Hubb fī bilād al-shām* (Damascus: Ittiḥād al-kuttāb al-‘arab, 1995).
Sulaymān and Yāsīn categorise novelists into different political constituents depending on the topics and styles of their novels. The authors seem to be strongly in favour of Marxist and socialist ideas, and novels that they deem to be in this category are praised above others. This categorisation is not unique for their study nor is their bias towards this type of novel, which for most of the second half of the 20th century has been seen as the model style in Syria, by critics and writers alike. Marxist, and later Ba’athist socialist ideas, have favoured social realism as a genre and made it the dominant literary style in Syria from the 1950s up until the late 1990s. Novels by male writers Ḣanānī Mīna and Hānī al-Rāhib, masters of social realism, were, and still are, seen as the ideal style of writing. However, it was realism that dealt with the broader aspects of social change that was preferred. The critic Kamal Abu Deeb argues in Jamāliyyāt al-tajāwur aw tashābuk al-faḍā’āt al-ibdā’īyya (The Aesthetics of contiguity or the interlacing of creative spaces) that until the end of the 20th century, the prevailing themes in Arabic fiction in general were those of a general, political matter, and that the private sphere and the individual voice were shunned. This idea is developed by Alexa Firat who demonstrates how literature was seen to be a field for political engagement and should hence concern itself with the ‘problems of the masses’ over individual development. To diverge from this type of writing could mean a political stand against nationalism and socialism. Samira Aghacy maintains for example that towards the end of the 1960s it was seen as unpatriotic and unmanly not to engage in politics in literary works. Abu Deeb further states that personal reflections and individual development were considered topics of the ‘bourgeoisie’

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78 Kamal Abu Deeb, Jamāliyyāt al-tajāwur aw tashābuk al-faḍā’āt al-ibdā’īyya (Beirut: Dār al-‘ilm lil-malāyīn, 1997), 231.


80 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 56.
during the second half of the 20th century, a group that authors concerned with social realism did not want to be associated with.

To be ‘bourgeoisie’ is exactly what Nabīl Sulaymān labels the novels by the female writers Kūlīt Khūrī, Hiyām Nuwaylātī and Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī in his book Hiwāriyyat al-wāqi‘ wa al-khiṭāb al-riwā‘ī (The Conversational nature of reality and the discourse of the novel) from 1978. Though women writers themselves, as pointed out above, often see their work as socially committed, and grounded in questions of equality and distribution of power, their plots were (and are) often read as individual life stories of the main female character. This in turn leads to the interpretation of the novels as descriptions of the personal development of a single character, rather than offering a view on, for example, poverty in general. This might to some extent explain the secondary position of much of women’s fiction within the literary circles in Syria. Their works are not deemed to fit what is seen as the standard of a novel and are therefore excluded from many critical works on Syrian literature.

This view is verified for example by the Syrian critics Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb and Ahmad Jamīl al-Ḥasan, who see Syrian women’s fiction as largely self-biographical and self-centred and far from the ideological debates. al-Khaṭīb argues in three articles published in the 1970s that it is difficult to distinguish the author’s own voice from the fiction she is producing, which in turn leads to what he sees as a lack of quality. 36 years later, al-Ḥasan makes the same claim about women’s literature and states that it is very rare that a female writer’s main character does not borrow traits from her own personal life.

Through comparisons between plots and the writers’ personal lives, it is indisputable that some of the female-authored novels indeed borrow a lot from reality. With that said, the usage of the personal does not need to be interpreted as a wish to ignore the greater political landscape. Critics such as Buthaina Shaaban and ‘Āṭifa Fayṣal argue instead that it is precisely through the personal stories, rather than

81 Abu Deeb, Jamāliyyāt al-tajāwur (1997), 231.
84 For example Kūlīt Khūrī, Ghāda al-Sammān, Ḥamīda Na’na’ and Ma‘ī Rashū.
the general movements, that Syrian women’s fiction deals with the political. They assert that female writers analyse relations both between men and women and between society and individuals in their fiction, an argument that this thesis further develops in the analyses of the individual novels. Iman al-Qadhi moreover demonstrates how major events such as the October war in 1967 and the Lebanese civil war have influenced a number of Syrian female writers. The personal and intimate narratives, which have been interpreted as a lack of skill and ability in women’s writing, can instead be seen as a way of contesting the hegemony of male writing. In an article on ideology and literature, Abu Deeb concludes that the connection between dominant political thought and central trends in literature is clear. At the same time, he demonstrates how it is the fiction which does not conform, and which offers the literary scene new voices, that stands for the force of change. In this light, the female-authored novels can be read as alternative voices, both stylistically and based on the content. The amalgamation between personal and general, private and political, in addition to the wish of provoking a change, makes the creation of masculinity in these female writers’ novels a reflection of society through the looking glass of their characters.

Even though one genre, that of realism, has been the dominant influence since the 1950s, this does not mean that other styles and genres have been non-existent. On her article on Syrian writers, Firat shows that although the hegemony of social realism was strong during the 20th century, other voices with different interpretations were not stifled. She further gives examples of critical debates within the genre and about its foundations, in addition to comparisons with other styles and genres. Despite not conforming to the prevalent form, women writers were thus not excluded from the literary scene and female critics and writers were active in the debate. This is demonstrated by the critic and writer Widad Sakakin, herself a pioneering novelist and short story writer, who disputed the first of the three articles

86 Iman al-Qadhi, “al-Ishām al-niswi fī al-riwāya al-‘arabiyaa” [Female participation in the Arabic novel], al-Ma‘rifa 324-325 (1990), 120.
mentioned above on women’s writing by al-Khaṭīb in a later issue of the same journal. She argued that he, as other critics, overlooked the literary aspects of the female-authored novel and treated it as a personal diary. Her reply illustrates both a different view on women’s writing and the participation of women in the literary debate.

As noted above, many of the writers have been active within more than one field of literature. In particular, the short story is a popular genre for women writers in Syria. Despite this, this thesis only examines the creation of masculinity in novels. The choice to focus on novels is based partly on the already existing scholarship on Syrian female writers’ short stories and partly on the fact that many of the writers state that they change between genres depending on the topic on which they are writing. In a study of the status of women in relation to the short story, Roger Allen notes that the short story, from its beginning, has explored the particular while alluding to the wider implications often developed in the novel. Whereas the performance of masculinity indeed can be personal and particular the thesis aims to look at the effects of particular masculinities as established and engaged with over a longer time. Two Syrian writers, who have written both short stories and novels, say the following on the difference between the genres. Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī:

“There is a huge difference between the two. While the first [the short story] pictures a specific happening or a specific psychological state in a limited artistic frame the second [the novel] comprises a wide phase, like a phase in life.”

Kūlīt Khūrī makes a similar comment when she says that the short story is equivalent to a snapshot, whereas the novel is equivalent to life. These two comments agree not only with the two writers’ own literary production, but also with women’s writing in general in Syria and Allen’s comment quoted above. Since the focus of this thesis is

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93 Ibid.
on the formation of masculinity, concentrating on novels permits the characters to
develop, change and interact.

The engagement with political and social developments exemplified
above, though evident in other literary forms, is also especially prominent in the novel.
This is demonstrated in detail by Jābir ‘Usfūr in his book Zaman al-riwāya (The Time
of the novel),94 where he argues that the novel has taken over as the most significant
literary form in the Arab world. ‘Āṭifa Fayṣal further claims that in Syria, women’s
engagement for equal rights and women’s emancipation were particularly evident in
the genre of the novel,95 which makes this genre particularly interesting with regards
to masculinity creation.

1.4 Women Writers

The terms ‘women writers’ and ‘women’s literature’ that are used frequently in this
thesis are not unproblematic. Several Syrian female writers, among them Kūlīt Khūrī
and Ghāda al-Sammān, have rejected the division between male and female
literature.96 Other Arab female authors, most notably Latifa al-Zayyat in her early
writings,97 have taken the same stance and argued fiercely for the removal of the term
‘women writers’. This rejection had its ground in the different response the authors
felt they received in comparisons to their male colleagues, as seen in the previous
section, and a refusal to perceive fictional works as gender specific. This stern stand
against a division of literature has changed slightly in later years. Whereas the earlier
generations of female writers had to fight to be taken seriously, and saw a need not to
be singled out as different, or less worth reading, because of their sex, younger
generations of female authors seem to acknowledge the different experiences Arab
women have in comparison with Arab men.98 This is also the reasoning behind
choosing, and using, the term “women’s novels” in this thesis.

95 Fayṣal, “Taḥawwulāt al-khiṭāb,” 32.
al-nisāʾiyya fī sūriyā,” al-Maʾrifa 166 (1975), 80.
97 Latifa al-Zayyat, “Testimonial of a Creative Woman,” in Opening the Gates: an Anthology of Arab
Feminist Writing, ed. Margot Badran and miriam cooke, 411-416. 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 2004).
98 cooke, Dissident Syria, 45.
Even so, choosing novels written by women is a wide category. Except for being born into the same sex there might not be many similarities between the authors. Class, education, religion, and political views, among other things, will play a part in how these women see the world and choose to present it in their novels. However, apart from these diversities, the authors discussed all live and write (or lived and wrote) in a patriarchal society and they are/were active in a region where religion plays a formative part in society and where it is possible to talk about a ‘gender regime’. This term is used by Chris Haywood and Martin Mac an Ghaill to refer to the institutionally dominant arrangement of gender relations where laws and social structures enforce a difference in gender roles.\(^9\) A gender regime does not necessarily favour men over women or women over men, it merely outlines differences in obligations and rights between the sexes. However, when the gender regime is built on patriarchal value systems it solidifies men’s dominant position over women. The ‘patriarchal gender regime’ thus creates a subordinated position for women, and the viewpoint their novels are studied from is hence the subordinate’s view of the subordinator. Alternatively, as Naomi Schor has put it, they will to some extent portray how the ‘other’s other’ is constructed.\(^10\)

This initial positioning in relation to power makes it interesting to see how women construct masculinity. Whether the female characters feel hindered or supported by the patriarchal gender regime, they have to work either within it or around it. The different masculinities formulated by the female writers reflect how certain types of gendered behaviour are promoted or demoted. They further function as an engagement with varieties of masculinities and their impact on female characters’ lives. The analysis of masculinities, and their usage in the novels, demonstrate women writers’ roles in the maintenance, or possibly undermining, of certain ways of performing masculinity. In their book *Kvinnorna gör mannen*\(^11\) (Women make the

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man) on female construction of masculinity in literature, art and film, Kristina Fjelkestam, Helena Hill and David Tjeder argue that:

[w]omen’s views on and constructions of men and masculinity have had an impact on many different fields. In a considerable way they enlighten how patriarchal structures have been reproduced, reformulated and undermined. They contribute to research on women’s active re-creation of their own subordination and, at the same time, the research on how women have challenged patriarchal structures, and through that challenge contributed, with sharp critique on men and masculinity, to re-shape the existing power structures in society in the long run.\(^\text{102}\)

In their novels, women writers have the possibility to form and promote masculinities they appreciate, but they also have the power to “punish” masculinities they do not champion. The fact that hegemonic masculinity works like a role model for how men could (and should) act makes literary attempts at formulating and engaging with masculinity an invaluable platform for experimental and alternative masculinities. As Stefan Horlacher points out, the fictional masculinities of films and literature are normative and influence what a certain culture sees as masculine behaviour.\(^\text{103}\) Although, as outlined above in Connell’s words, this often means a reinforcement of already accepted ideals and norms, it potentially gives literature and visual media an enormous power to introduce versatility of masculinities. In an article on female literary criticism in Syria, Samar al-Duyūb argues that the novel is one place where women can overthrow the power of the virile man and re-organise society.\(^\text{104}\) A possibility less likely in other, non-fictional situations. Shaaban further argues that women’s fiction illustrates how the construction of gender roles in the Arab world “erases women from the social arena and denies them their basic human rights.” In literary accounts, this issue can be addressed through the proxy of a fictional society. Similarly, Peter F. Murphy maintains that literature can both reinforce assumptions about masculinity and, at the same time, offer “other images, other roles, other options for men and masculinity”.\(^\text{105}\) The novel can hence be an arena for women writers to

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{103}\) Horlacher, ed., *Constructions of Masculinity*, 4.


explore concepts of masculinity and the impacts they could have on women, children, and society.

Women’s construction of masculinity is however not unproblematic. In her groundbreaking study on British female writers, Elaine Showalter shows how pioneering women writers were often critiqued for their unrealistic heroes who were either considered too good or too bad to be true.\(^\text{106}\) Showalter reports that this was explained by male critics, and in some cases by the writers themselves, as a result of their lack of experience in addition to an inability to understand the male psyche.\(^\text{107}\) Correspondingly, al-Khaṭīb argues in relation to Syrian writers that whereas women [only] can be understood in men’s fiction, women are unable to construct realistic male protagonists.\(^\text{108}\) Maysūn al-Jurf voices similar criticism in a study of masculinity in Syrian fiction of the 1990s, where she argues that women produce either brutes or feminised male characters and cannot formulate deep psychological portraits of men.\(^\text{109}\) Muḥammad Qarānayā raises the same point in a critical essay on Nādyā Khūst’s characters where he means that the main male character is a fantasy rather than a real man.\(^\text{110}\) For the purpose of this thesis, it is not interesting to examine the level of truthfulness, or closeness to reality, regarding the male characters presented. On the contrary, even though literature is a reflection on the society it is written in, it is not necessarily a reflection of it.\(^\text{111}\) Regardless of whether the male characters presented in the novels have ‘real’ counterparts or not, they still represent the masculinities hoped for, critiqued by, and created by Syrian female writers, and as such offer their perspectives on both gender relations and society. The fact that critics disagree with the formulations of masculinity found in the novels strengthens the argument that some of the masculinities created transgress the expected gendered behaviour and as such provide ideas on new ways of performing masculinity.

\(^\text{106}\) Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Writers from Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago, 2009), 110.
\(^\text{107}\) Ibid., 111.
\(^\text{108}\) al-Khaṭīb “Ḥawl al-riwāya -1,” 80; 81.
Whereas the male fictional characters cannot be taken as a statement of truth about masculinity, it is at the same time not possible to argue that there is a firm division between literature and the society it is written in. As Evelyn Accad points out, the author offers an image of his or her society, which builds on a tension between individual and collective imagination that adds complexities and subtleties not found in documents that are more scientific.\textsuperscript{112} Like media stories and films, novels both represent and at the same time participate in the shaping of ideas and reactions to various phenomena. Stefan Horlacher elaborates on this and states that fictional masculinities have a “[p]erformative function, allowing for new subject positions, since novels function as machines of cultural reproduction.”\textsuperscript{113} In his book on masculinities in American film, Brian Baker tackles the same question but through an analysis of the relationship between American movies and American society. His conclusion is that:

[These popular fictions and films negotiate, or more properly renegotiate, forms of masculinity that express something about the cultural, social and political formations of their period of production and taken together form a kind of loose history of both representations of masculinity in Anglo-American texts and in the postwar period as a whole.\textsuperscript{114}]

Correspondingly, the masculinities constructed in the selection of novels discussed in this thesis can be seen as the individual views of the specific writers. At the same time, when read together, they give an idea of values and ideals during specific periods. They further show, without claiming to be the exact truth about a certain time and place, how these values are shaped and negotiated.

1.5 Choice of Authors

The choice of individual authors and primary material is closely connected to the period chosen for examination in this thesis. The time line, from what is seen as the first attempts of fiction writing by women in Syria until the present, is often divided into three sections. Rūla Ḥasan divides the period with focus on the

\textsuperscript{112} Evelyn Accad, \textit{Sexuality and War, Literary Masks of the Middle East} (New York University Press, 1990), 5.

\textsuperscript{113} Stefan Horlacher, ed., \textit{Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

writers and calls them ‘the Pioneers’ (1940-1960) ‘the Second Wave’ (1960-1980) and ‘the Third Wave’ (1980-1910).\footnote{Rūla Ḥasan, “al-Mashhad al-rīwā‘ī al-niswā‘ī fī suriyā‘” [The Female novelistic sene in Syria], Tishrīn (2011).} This division is then adapted to serve various purposes. With focus on the female voice, the critic ‘Āṭifa Fayṣal renames the periods as ‘Traditional Female Discourse’, ‘Romantic and Rebellious Female Discourse’ and ‘New Female Discourse.’\footnote{Fayṣal, “Taḥawwulāt al-khiṭāb al-unthawī”.} This thesis begins in the middle of the era named ‘the Pioneers’ and ends in the middle of the era called ‘the Third Wave’, for reasons which will be elaborated on shortly.

The first female authored novel in the Arab world is said to be Ḥusn al-‘awāqib: Ghāda al-zahrā’ (Good consequences: Ghada the radiant) by Zaynab al-Fawwāz, published in 1899.\footnote{Shaaban, Voices Revealed, 14.} At the time, Lebanon and Syria were combined in Greater Syria and this could therefore be seen as the first Syrian female-authored novel. With that said, as stated above, it was only after the formation of the Syrian state in 1946 that literature and culture became an integral part in the formation of national identity. Therefore, only works produced after this date have been considered for inclusion in the thesis. After 1946, the first female-authored novels were written by Widād Sakākīnī and Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī. Different sources date the publication differently. It is unclear whether Sakākīnī’s novel al-Ḥubb al-muḥarram (Forbidden love) was published as early as 1947, as stated by Radwa Ashour\footnote{Ashour et al. eds., Arab Women Writers, 478.} or if, as stated by Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb,\footnote{al-Khaṭīb, “Ḥawl al-rīwā‘a -1,” 82.} the publication dates were 1949 for al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī’s Yawmiyyāt Hāla (Hala’s diary) and 1952 for Sakākīnī’s al-Ḥubb al-muḥarram and 1950 for her other novel Arwā bint al-khuṭūb (Arwa, daughter of upheavals).\footnote{Also dated to 1949.} After these initial novels, published in a short timespan, it took eight years until the next female-authored novel was published. It is this novel, Kūlīt Khūrī’s Ayyām ma’ahu (Days with him) from 1959, that begins the period studied in this thesis.

The choice to start with Ayyām ma’ahu is based on several reasons. According to Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb, it was received very differently and much more favourably than previous female-authored novels.\footnote{al-Khaṭīb, “Ḥawl al-rīwā‘a -1,” 79-94.} This might be due to the fact that
Sakākīnī’s and al-Kuzbari’s novels were to some extent seen as didactic and preaching in their tone. Khūrī’s novel can instead be seen as an exploration of a personal relationship. For Bouthaina Shaaban, the publication of Khūrī’s novel, in addition to Laylā Ba’labakkī’s Ana aḥyā′ (I live) published in 1958, meant a new style of writing and the beginning of a strong ‘I’ formulation in Arab women’s writing.122 Correspondingly, Khalīl al-Mūsā argues that in contrast to the few women writing novels before her, Khūrī was the first Syrian woman writer to “free herself from the male language”123 and formulate a new, female voice in her fiction. A voice which does not only describe, but clearly states, what it wants with regard to life in general and relations in particular. Subhi Hadidi further defines the late 1950s as the time when women’s literary production began to seriously take shape in Syria, and he states that this period includes a ‘qualitative leap’ in women’s writing.124 Without taking a stand on the question of quality, the choice to start with Khūrī means that the first novel included in this thesis was to some extent considered and treated by its contemporaries as a novel in its own right.

The analysis ends at year 2000 with Shajarat al-ḥubb – ghābat al-ahzān (Tree of love - forest of sadness, 2000) by Usayma Darwīsh. Like many other female-authored novels from this period, Darwīsh’s novel shows the initial signs of what later emerge as the trends of the 21st century with the appearance of marginalised voices and very violent masculinities. ‘Āṭifa Fayṣal indicates that this period, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, is the time when awareness of women’s position in society was brought into female-authored fiction in a more distinct fashion.125 During these years, Syrian women became more daring in their writing, a trend not exclusive to female writers. In the year 2000, when Ḥāfīẓ al-Asad died and his son Bašār came to power, a period named the Damascus Spring begun. This included promises of change, political prisoners set free and censorship loosened.126 Even though most of the changes were short-lived or never materialised,
it seems like the hope for change found its way into the novel. Max Weiss asserts in an article on recent Syrian fiction that “[i]ndeed something very interesting has been happening in Syrian fiction writing over the past decade, which coincides with the first ten years since Bashar al-Asad acceded to power in the wake of his father’s death in June 2000”.127

When it comes to female writers, the development after year 2000, though enhanced by the political changes, can also be connected to the educational system. The opportunities created for women’s participation in higher education during the 1960s128 resulted in an increase in literacy with the result that more women, and women from diverse backgrounds, were able to contribute to the literary life of the country. The increasing numbers of young female poets, novelists and short story writers bear witness to this change. New opportunities for publication that appeared around this time, both abroad and online, made it easier for writers without connections to distribute their work.

The beginning of the 21st century is further the time when the definition ‘the New Syrian Novel’ appeared as a term used by Syrian critics. Among its characteristics was its preoccupation with the contemporary political situation, but in an open fashion that had not been seen before.129 In an article on women’s writing in Syria, Buthaina al-Balkhī argues that the contemporary female novel has been able to break what she calls ‘the typical style of female writing’ and instead become concerned with political, religious and philosophical thoughts.130 Defining events in Syrian history, like the incidents in Homs and Hama in the 1980s were suddenly incorporated in novels, as were new readings of historical happenings, no longer strictly according to the official state history.

Whereas social realism as a genre remained in fashion, socialism was no longer the governing ideology and only solution. The 21st century also opened up for

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130 Buthayna al-Balkhī, “al-Riwāʾiyya al-sūriyya istaṭāʿat an tafūkk qu’yūd al-namātiyya wa tulānis al-wāqi’ bi-jiddiyya” [The Syrian female novelist has managed to break the restraints of form and touch reality with seriousness], 21/6-2014, al-Watan.
a greater variety of voices in the female-authored novel as both the number of writers and the possibilities of being published increased. The main characters changed from well-to-do city dwellers to inhabitants of the slum areas of the same cities, the countryside, or minor towns. The perspective also changed from educated journalists, doctors and upper class women to servants, peasant women and the lower classes, groups that previously only played minor roles in novels. Specific groups in society were put under the spotlight like the Bedouins in Līnā Hawyān al-Ḥaṣan’s novels and the Alawites in Samar Yazbik’s novels, something that had not been common in female-authored fiction previously. The final proof of the new awareness and political literature can be seen in the number of novels already published dealing openly with the ongoing conflict in Syria. The number of novels published, and the multitude of voices, viewpoints and perspectives presented, make the 21st century distinctly different from previous decades. It moreover points at the need for a deeper study of this period alone. The origins for these changes can be traced in the novels published in the years leading up to the 21st century and the foundations for some of the changes are visible in the literature of the 1990s.

Having defined the beginning and the end of the period, the selection of novels and novelists between 1959 and 2000 is based on several criteria. One condition has been appearance in the Syrian press and in Arab literary publications. The three literary journals al-Mawqif al-adabī, Fuṣūl and al-Ma’rīfā have been examined in order to see which writers have made an impact on Syrian and Arab literary life during the period studied. Through reviews, interviews, articles and the participation of authors in critical debates, these journals have offered a good view of the female authors considered influential during the second half of the 20th century. They have

133 Kamal Abu Deeb, “al-Thaqāfā bayn al-tashqāţī wa al-ta’addud: al-madīna unnūdḥajān” [Culture between fragmentation and diversity: the city as an example], paper presented at the conference City and Culture: Damascus as an Example, Damascus, Syria, 11-12 May 2008.
134 al-Mawqif al-adabī is the monthly journal of the Arab Writers’ Union in Syria. It was founded in 1971 and is primarily focused on Syrian literature.
135 Fuṣūl is a literary journal published in Egypt; it discusses Arabic literature from the Arab world.
136 al-Ma’rīfā is published by the Syrian Ministry of Culture and was first established in 1962. It writes on world literature and culture but with a focus on Syria and the Arab world.
moreover shown the reception of female authors in the literary world, inside and outside of Syria.

In addition to the journals, Rūlā Ḥasan’s series of 38 articles on Syrian women writers, published in the newspaper Tishrīn and later turned into a book, have given information on the literary development as well as prominent female writers in Syria.\textsuperscript{137} Arab and Western bibliographies over Syrian writers and Arab female writers\textsuperscript{138} have been consulted together with literary studies and critical work concerned with the period covered.\textsuperscript{139} However, as Bouthaina Shaaban notes in her historical and critical study of Arab women novelists, many male critics have chosen not to include female writers in their work, or included only a select few.\textsuperscript{140} This means that many critical works on the Syrian novel have been of use solely to give a better understanding of the time period studied and the general themes, but have not provided any information on specific female writers.

The number of novels published by each writer has not been considered a marker of their importance. Some of the writers, like Ulfat al- Ḥamīda Na’na’, made their names in other genres before publishing novels, and are prominent figures in Syrian cultural life despite only publishing two novels each. Imān al-Qāḍī further notes that many Syrian female writers do not publish more than one or two novels,\textsuperscript{141} and writers like Qamar Kilānī and Haifā’ Bīṭār, who have both published an extensive number of novels, are the exception rather than the rule.

In a few cases, most importantly the case of Jūjīt Hanūsh and Bint Barrada, novels have been excluded, despite the author’s position within Syrian literary circles and the novels’ suitable theme, since they have been impossible to obtain. During the writing of this thesis (2013-2016), the civil war in Syria has escalated and I have not been able to travel to the country to make use of libraries and visit bookshops. Many of the earlier novels from the 1960s and 1970s were published inside Syria and I have not been able to get hold of copies of these novels in the

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\textsuperscript{140} Shaaban, Voices Revealed, 9.
\textsuperscript{141} al-Qāḍī, “al-Ishām al-niswī,” 98.
\end{flushleft}
bookshops of Beirut and Amman, nor in Morocco. They have further been unavailable through interlibrary services. Through what I have been able to read about these novels in critical works and articles, I do not think that their themes and plots contradict the general findings of this thesis, though a closer examination of them would have enriched the analysis.

In the case of writers like Ghāda al-Sammān, who have published continuously during the whole period covered, several novels have been chosen since they are seen to represent different eras, or a specific theme, rather than the individual author. Similarly not all novels from a single writer have been included in the thesis in the case where they revolve around a similar theme and style and are published during a short timeframe. From the initial group of novelists, a selection of novels from their collective literary output was made and 34 novels chosen for inclusion in the thesis. Although gender formation as a social practice can be said to appear in all novels, some novels forefront gender or masculinity formation more than others and these novels have naturally been chosen for the analysis.

The number of novels that form the base of the analysis can at first seem large, and to analyse 34 novels in detail is not the purpose of the thesis. However, since the thesis sets out to find how masculinity has been formulated in female-authored Syrian fiction, a small number of novels might show the individual ideas of the authors rather than the general trends of society. A larger number of novels instead allows trends to emerge and be detected. One of the aims of this thesis is to see if there is a change in the usage and formulation of masculinity over time, which also demands a larger number of novels. After an initial reading of the 34 novels, five specific themes stood out as reoccurring trends within masculinity formation. For each theme, a key novel was chosen for detailed analysis and one or more novels were used as supporting materials for each chapter. The five novels that were chosen as representative for the themes were further considered characteristic for the different decades they were produced in, each chapter thus represents both a theme and to some extent a period.

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1.6 Chapter Division

This section outlines the five themes that forms the core of the analysis. The first chapter of the analysis, called ‘Reversed Images – Female Masculinity and Male Femininity’ will examine the female construction of masculinity through a discussion of the first person male narrator in Hanrīyit ‘Abbūdī’s al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī (The Naked back, 1998). The chapter discusses the female author’s appropriation of the male voice and the way this technique is used to critique and discuss masculinity in different ways. The use of a male first person narrator, partly or completely, is seen in thirteen of the novels examined in this thesis. However, the reason for choosing al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī as the main novel for the analysis is not solely the male narrator. The novel’s focus is the construction, and deconstruction, of gender roles. The discussion of its content hence functions as a foundation for further investigation into women writers’ formulation of masculinity in literary texts. The two main characters in the novel, a man and a woman, are concerned both with their own and the others’ performance of gender. Through their perception of each other, an evident dichotomy between male and female behaviour appears. At the same time, their actions show that the gender roles they adhere to are more versatile than they admit.

The second chapter of the analysis, called ‘Becoming a Man – Developing Masculinity’, examines how children, and particularly boys, are socialised into specific gender roles as seen in Malāḥa al-Khānī’s Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb (Steps in the fog, 1984). The chapter discusses the relational character of masculinity and the young male character’s dependence on others’ approval in order to feel secure in his performance of masculinity. The chapter moreover demonstrates the transition from boyhood to manhood and pinpoints what actions the novel sees as part of performing masculinity, and thus leading to the status of a man. The theme of bringing up children, or accounts of growing up, form parts of the narrative of eleven of the novels examined in the thesis. Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb is chosen for a closer examination because of its detailed focus on the young man’s development, in addition to how social interaction affects his view on masculinity.

The third chapter of the analysis, called ‘Dream Masculinity or the Male as a Vehicle for Self-Realisation’, examines how the fantasy of a specific performance of masculinity is seen by the female characters as a possibility to create their own lives.
The chapter is based on a close reading of Kūlīt Khūrī’s novel *Ayyām ma’ahu* (Days with him, 1959). It discusses the position of women in a patriarchal society where at times the only possibility for a change in one’s personal life, is through marriage. The expectations the female characters express around future partners are therefore closely connected to their hopes for their own future. The masculinities described can be seen as the women’s negotiation around the patriarchal structure and, without breaking it, reformulating it in order to reach their own goals. These negotiations around masculinity can be seen in eight of the novels examined. *Ayyām ma’ahu* is chosen as a case study as the first Syrian novel clearly stating how the female character would like her husband or boyfriend to be in order to facilitate her life.

The fourth chapter of the analysis, called ‘Real or Ideal Masculinity?’, examines the use of masculinity performance as ideological change. The chapter is based on a close reading of Ulfat al-Idlibī’s *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn* (Damascus—a smile of sadness, 1980). The novels discussed here are of a political nature and the ‘Ideal Masculinity’ discussed is closely associated to social changes. Some overlaps with the previous chapter occur since both chapters engage with the female characters’ dreams and imaginations of masculinity. The ideologically coloured masculinity appears in a specific period between approximately 1970 and the early years of the 1980s. Because of the short period, examples of this masculinity can only be seen in four of the novels examined; it is however an important theme in Syrian literature in general during this period. Women’s engagement for social and ideological change and the use of masculinity as a signifier for this demonstrates both a new understanding of society and further contrasts what is seen as modern masculinity with what is presented as a reactionary or old-fashioned masculinity.

The fifth chapter of the analysis, called ‘Masculinity - a Demanding Role to Play’, examines how the different aspects of masculinity, as seen in the previous chapters, rather than being empowering for a man can become a burden. This happens if he is unable to fulfil them, or performs them in ways that are seen as unacceptable. The chapter is based on a close reading of Ghāda al-Sammān’s *Bayrūt 75* (Beirut 75, 1975). The chapter further shows how similar actions can be interpreted and valued differently depending on when and where they are performed, further accentuating the fluidity and intricacy of the concept of masculinity. Moreover, the
novels discussed seem to suggest that an acceptance of femininity is a possible way out from the burden of hegemonic masculinity. The theme of problematic masculinity can be seen in seven of the novels examined for this thesis. The novel chosen for close examination is particularly evident in its critique of the imposed demands of masculinity.

1.7 An Overview of Methodology
To use masculinity studies and Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity as a framework for analysis of Syrian novels includes a need for adaption. The theory is initially a theory of social science, which in this study will be applied to literature. Because of its origins in sociology and gender studies, the ways masculinity studies have been applied to literature have varied greatly and there does not seem to be one dominant way of approaching the subject. Different scholars use different parts of the theory and apply it to literary work.\textsuperscript{143} Whereas this at times leads to difficulties in comparisons between analyses of masculinity, it opens up possibilities for new approaches since the theory is adjustable.

The theory was further developed in the West, more precisely in Australia, and will here be used in an Eastern setting. To impose theories developed in one part of the world on other parts, with different cultural ideas, can be seen as problematic and might lead to imprecise results, especially in studies where cultural understanding is a major part, as has been shown by among others Lila Abu-Lughod in connection with feminism and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{144} Since Connell’s structure rests on the assumption that hegemonic masculinity differs from time to time and place to place I believe that the framework of masculinity studies is adaptable enough to allow for the cultural differences. The theoretical framework in itself does not suppose any particular characteristics in hegemonic masculinity. On the contrary, Connell states that:

\begin{quote}
[h]egemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is rather the masculinity that occupies the
\end{quote}


hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.\textsuperscript{145}

The hegemonic masculinity that was dominant in the 1950s in a specific society might very well be seen and treated as a subordinate masculinity in the same society of 2016. It further means that in a country where the segregation between city and countryside is substantial, there are varying hegemonies of masculinity depending on where one lives. Thus, even though the outer structure of the theory, and the dynamic relations between the levels of masculinity, can be applied to various ages, places and cultures, what defines each masculinity and distinguishes it, is unique to the individual setting. The theory can therefore not be accused of imposing cultural values on the material studied. Connell’s theory is modelled on a patriarchal society where male relations uphold and create power, a scenario that is seen in analytical work on the Middle East. As discussed previously, this is also the case in Syrian society as described in the novels, and does not form a problem in the application of the theory.

In order to avoid adding external values to the novels analysed, with the exception of masculinity studies from the area, I argue that the fictional societies’ rules and norms must be the scaffolding the characters are built, and discussed, around. The term ‘fictional societies’ is borrowed from al-Fayşal.\textsuperscript{146} He uses the term in order to separate between the political ideas of real life and the political ideas that appear in the novels he analyses. Fictional societies can thus be situated within real cities and, through the social realism used, seem as images of reality. Nevertheless, in order not to claim that truth is fiction and fiction is truth, they are dealt with separately. By considering the novels as fictional societies, the analyses can be concentrated on how masculinity is constructed within a specific novel. At the same time, the novels’ shared connection to Syrian society can be used for comparisons throughout the analysis. This division is furthermore in line with Connell’s division between, local, national and global masculinities as discussed under section 1.2. The fictional society is considered the local level, able to influence and be influenced but a separate unity whereas the national level is the surrounding Syrian society and the global level is the general theoretical framework. A comparative analysis within each chapter will moreover

\textsuperscript{145} Connell, \textit{Masculinities}, 76.  
\textsuperscript{146} al-Fayşal, \textit{Malāmih fī al-riwāya}.  

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allow the possibility to see if Syrian literary masculinity, as articulated in the novels examined, has changed during the period studied.

Connell’s outline of the relational nature of masculinities provides the necessary tools to examine the internal relations between characters and their acceptance, or rejection, of the various performances of masculinity. The concept of patriarchal dividend will be used to approach the different position men and women are given in society already from childhood. In the novels analysed, the idea of hegemonic masculinity is based on the characters’ understanding of what normative masculinity is in their fictional societies. It is sometimes the masculinity they are striving to reach, as in chapter two, and sometimes a masculinity they try to reformulate, as in chapters four and five. In chapters five and six, the fluctuant nature of hegemonic masculinity becomes visible since different generations of men strive towards diverse masculinities.

In this thesis, hegemonic masculinity is taken to mean what the characters present as the accepted, valued and normative behaviour of a grown male in each fictional society. The masculinities the male characters perform are sometimes in line with hegemonic masculinity and sometimes not. This can be seen through their own actions and reactions and through the other characters’ views on them. The hegemony changes from novel to novel, and sometimes within a novel, depending on the circumstances. Whereas the hegemonic masculinity is of importance as a reference point, the focus of the analysis is on the masculinities performed by the various characters and the female characters’ involvement in shaping them.

In the analyses of the novels, complicit masculinity will be brought in as a reference to hegemonic and subordinate masculinity. The reason for this is the novels’ preoccupation with the performance of either hegemonic or subordinate masculinity in the main male characters. Complicit masculinity can be seen in secondary characters, or in comments about society in general. Complicit masculinity further appears in chapter three, through the main character’s group of friends or in chapter five, through one of the characters’ disinterest in performing masculinity according to the expectations whilst he simultaneously harbours a wish to enjoy the privileges granted men performing hegemonic masculinity.
In some of the novels studied, subordinate masculinity appears as a contrast to the hegemonic masculinity or as a ‘negative version’ of hegemonic masculinity, overusing the privileges granted the male characters or enforcing their power in a violent fashion. The subordinate masculinities in the novels are rarely seen as positive by the female characters. They are seen either as weak and unable or brutal, depending on how they deviate from the hegemonic norm. As with hegemonic masculinity, the concept of subordinate masculinity in the analysis is based on how the characters react to the normative masculinity in their fictional society.

The internal duality—fluidity and fixation—embodied in the concept is what makes hegemonic masculinity useful in the discussion of male characters. In relation to the novels, a common reference point that functions as the basis for further discussions represents the fixation. Without a consensus on what masculinity was/is in a novel or a society the research on changing, failing, dislocated and ambiguous masculinities would not be possible. On the other hand, to look rigidly for a presupposed pattern or to interpret hegemonic masculinity as a specific type of character overlooks both the multiple ways masculinity can be performed and the power dynamics between characters. The fluidity hence appears in the development of individual characters’ views on, and performance of, masculinity as well as in different characters’ understanding of masculinity. One reason for the constant reworking of hegemonic masculinity is that it is connected to power. Masculinity is thus not just a way of behaving but also a way of forming a position for oneself within one’s family, social group or society. In the analyses, the performance of hegemonic masculinity can be seen as ways of gaining and keeping respect and power rather than as a label for a specific masculinity. By using hegemonic masculinity in this way, the characters’ agreement or disagreement of what hegemonic masculinity is will be foregrounded, which in turn will accentuate the fluidity (or lack of fluidity) in the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity as a source for power will further be analysed in connection to how masculinity functions within female authors’ texts and how they use types of masculinity to convey specific messages.

Lastly, the focus on the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity will be included in the analysis since many of the novels circle around this relationship. Women’s creation of fictional masculinity adds the dimension of their acceptance or refusal of the masculinity they formulate. Whereas masculinity, if used as an exclusive power tool for men, might cement gender roles, in fiction, the expected power grid can be subverted and changed and thus used to show that even though the patriarchal dividend grants men privileges, it does not necessarily negate women power.

Since Laura Mulvey’s 1975 article on ‘The Male Gaze’, originally written about film, but then also influential in analyses of visual art and literature, the idea of man as the viewer and woman as the other, the object, has been engaged with and also criticised in various studies. In her original article, Mulvey demonstrates how the camera, the main male actor and the audience together transform into ‘the viewer’ and that the main female character only serves as the object and a symbol of ‘the other’. ‘The Male Gaze’ can therefore be seen as a reification of male dominance over females. In a later reworking of the theory, Mulvey elaborates on how female viewers become incorporated into ‘The Male Gaze’. In novels, Mulvey’s outline can be applied to the narrative in a similar fashion, to observe the relation between subject and object and how power positions and gender are presented. In this thesis, focalization, outlined further on will be used to analyse who ‘owns the gaze’. The fact that the novels analysed are written by women does not mean that they cannot be seen as examples of ‘The Male Gaze’. The ability to produce a narrative that identifies with, and supports, the patriarchal order does not correspond with the writer’s own biological sex. The novels will further show how female authors assume the male gaze through some of their characters and through a double exposure present the world, and its women, through an imagined male perspective.

The above-mentioned points will be used to approach masculinities as they appear in the content of the novels. The novels will further be analysed through a narrative analysis with the focus on feminist narratology. The theory of Narrative,\(^\text{151}\) and in particular the tools of analysis which Robyn Warhol, Mieke Bal, Ruth Page and Nancy Miller have developed in the name of feminist narratology,\(^\text{152}\) will be used to analyse the structure of the novels, its influence on the masculinities formed and the way(s) they can be interpreted and function in the female authored texts. The focus on how gender is presented will build up to a discussion of hegemonic masculinity in the novels as seen through the characters’ actions. This will in turn lead to an analysis of the usage of gender and how masculinities can be interpreted, for examples as role models or possibly critiques of existing forms of masculinity. The combination of feminism and narratology, as explained by Warhol, means to read “[t]exts closely in relation to particular contexts, rather than making broad generalisations intended to cover any and all cases of narrative utterance.”\(^\text{153}\) Each chapter therefore focuses on one novel, analysed in depth, where the narrative of the novel is brought into the analysis, whereas the theme of the novel and its content is compared to other, similar novels. Warhol goes on to say that rather than concerning itself with the author of the text, contemporary feminist narratology tries to answer the question of: “[h]ow does this text construct masculinity or femininity in and for its reader?”\(^\text{154}\) A similar theme is brought out by Sally Robinson, who argues that she is concerned with “[h]ow gender is produced through narrative processes, not prior to them.”\(^\text{155}\) In an attempt to answer Robinson’s question of how gender is produced through the narrative process, the thesis will focus mainly on three aspects of narrative: focalization, characterisation, and time, developed further on.

In contrast to classical narratology, which does not concern itself with how gender, sex and sexuality play a role in the construction and interpretation of


\(^{153}\) Warhol, “Guilty Cravings,” 342.

\(^{154}\) Ibid.

narrative texts, feminist narratology argues that these three aspects are central to the understanding of a narrative. Feminist narratology has been used with different purposes in literary analysis. One of them has been to tease out a feminine (or masculine) voice in various texts, another theme for feminist narratology has been to locate the position and function of female characters in texts. Neither of these two lines of analysis is the primary focus of this thesis. Instead, the thesis employs later applications of the theory that have moved towards a discussion of how gender is presented and used within texts. The term ‘Focalization’ is used to draw attention to the relation between that which is focalized (characters, objects, actions) and the focalizer, the agent who determines how the focalized person or item is perceived of in the text. The thesis makes use of Mieke Bal’s development of Gerard Genette’s original term of focalization, which includes the relation between the focalized and the focalizer.

The connection between the focalized and the focalizer is particularly telling in the case of masculinities, since it forefronts how masculinity is a constantly changing concept, depending on others actions and reactions to it. Bal points out that in the discussion of focalization there are three questions that are important: what is the focalization aimed at, with what attitude is the focalization done, and whose focalized object is it. The answers to the three questions are informative about not only the focalized item or person, but about the viewpoint from which events are presented. In the case of the novels analysed in this thesis, the analysis of the focalizer offers clues to the understanding of the masculinities presented and the characters’ acceptance or rejection of them. A novel can have a fixed focalizer who is the only viewpoint presented, it can also have variable or multiple focalization, when more than one focalizer appears in the text. Variable and multiple focalization often highlight the instability of masculinity and the struggle between different ways of performing it. Most of the novels have female focalizers but in the novels analysed in chapters two,

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159 Bal, *Narratology*, 150.
three and six the focalization is done through male characters. The usage of this narrative tool, as will be discussed in the chapters, has implications for the understanding and formation of masculinity since the focalizer has power over the text’s interpretation.\(^{161}\) Through the male focalizer, the text forefronts the experience of the male character and his way of handling expectations on masculinity, which in turn is situated in contrast to femininity.

The term ‘Characterisation’ is used to refer to the way a character is represented in narrative.\(^ {162}\) Through different ways of characterisation, information about the characters, but also their internal relations, disseminates. Through direct characterisation, statements about individual characters are made, by either an external narrator or the characters themselves. Whereas direct characterisation seems reliable, it does not necessarily reflect more than one character’s views. Indirect characterisation instead focuses on actions, speech and style. This type of characterisation is affected by both the fictional environment and the background information of the reader. The third type of characterisation is description through analogy. With regard to masculinity and the novels analysed, characterisation in its different forms sheds light on what a certain environment and context see as expected characteristics in masculinity. The analysis of characterisation falls close to the content of the text and will be used as a basis for the discussion of types of masculinities and their hierarchical connections. Bal further points out the way characterisation can indicate ideological positions for characters and suggests a model of opposing characteristics as a way of analysing themes in the character composition in novels.\(^ {163}\) The reoccurring trend of opposing masculinity and femininity in the novels analysed will to some extent function as a way of analysing the characteristics promoted, or demoted, in male characters.

The term ‘Time’ refers to the relation between the narrative and the story. The narrative here refers to what appears in the text and the story to the actual time certain events would have taken.\(^ {164}\) A majority of the novels analysed deal with a longer time period, or a process of change for the main characters, the analysis will

\[\text{Bal, Narratology, 146.}\]
\[\text{Herman, Handbook, 67.}\]
\[\text{Bal, Narratology, 127.}\]
\[\text{Herman, Handbook, 60.}\]
therefore bring out the contrast between what is fore fronted in the narrative and what is left out or touched on briefly concerning the formulation of masculinity. When time is looked upon as the amount of space a specific event takes up in the text it signifies the importance attached to these happenings in the narrative. ‘Time’ is significant in some of the novels, particularly in chapter four, it is however not used as much as the other two aspects of feminist narratology. The usage of feminist narratology further includes a contextualisation of the result of the close reading,165 which in this thesis is done through a connection between the narratives discussed and research on masculinities in the Middle East.

165 Ibid., 132.
2. Reversed Images – Female Masculinity and Male Femininity

I laughed at myself, at the manners that made me behave as if I was the woman and she was the man.

al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī, (The Naked back, 1998) by Hanrīyit ‘Abbūdī (b.nd), tells the story of Adham Mālik and his love affair with the French woman Klīr. Sitting in the bar in one of Paris’ many restaurants Adham is suddenly taken in by the naked back of one of the female customers. He comments on the woman’s beauty to a new acquaintance he has just made, and wonders if her face is as attractive as her back. The man, called Alikṣī, does not seem interested in the beautiful woman, instead he insists on inviting Adham to his house the following day. When Adham turns up at the address he has been given, his new friend is not there and the door is instead opened by a pretty, but angry woman. Adham is told that Alikṣī has left the house never to come back. Unable to believe that his friend would invite him without being at home, Adham decides to enter and to wait for Alikṣī to come back. He soon realises that the beautiful woman opening the door is the same woman whose back he admired in the restaurant, and that Alikṣī is her husband who has walked out on her. Rather than leaving the house, Adham sees it as a message from Alikṣī to look after his wife and he moves in. Klīr, the beautiful woman, does not have anything against his company and they soon embark on a relationship. Adham is completely under Klīr’s spell and does whatever she wants. At the same time, Alikṣī is constantly on his mind, both as a threat to his happiness –if he suddenly returns to claim Klīr - and as a thorn in Adham’s conscience; how can he be with someone else’s wife?

al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī is one of a number of Syrian women’s novels where the narrative, or part of the narrative, is focalized through a male character. It is moreover one of a few novels where the male voice is the first person narrator throughout the whole novel. In this chapter, the female writer’s appropriation of a male voice through her narrator, and how masculinity is seen through (fe)male eyes, will be discussed. The theme of ‘women constructing men’ is thus examined in detail.

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findings create the foundation for the following chapters and the analysis of masculinity formation in women’s fiction. The adoption of the first person male voice and character is further examined as a way of creating a wider creative scope for the female writers.

The other apparent theme in al-Zahr al-‘ārī is what the characters themselves see as a reversal of gender roles. Adham describes himself as the obedient housewife and depicts Klīr as the husband. Through this internal categorisation of gender in the novel, the chapter studies how the characters relate to gender expectations as presented in the novel. As shown by the initial quote from the novel, Adham finds the position he is in funny and awkward. Despite this, he goes on behaving ‘as if he was the woman’. This dichotomy, described and lived by Adham, offers clues to what the characters see as hegemonic masculinity. Through an examination of Adham, the chapter investigates how masculinity is shaped in relation to the idea of ideal masculinity as it clashes with the everyday events in the characters’ lives. Adham’s inability to perform hegemonic masculinity and the affect this has on his life exemplifies the hierarchical levels of masculinity performance. The relational nature of masculinity, how it changes through time and place, is illustrated through Adham’s experience in France. Due to cultural differences, the expectations he has on himself do not correspond with what others expect of him.

The analysis focuses on al-Zahr al-‘ārī since it lends itself to an analysis of all the above mentioned themes. In addition to this novel, examples from al-Hubb wa al-wahl (Love and mud, 1963) by In’ām al-Musālima (b.1938) and Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid (A One-winged eagle, 1999) by Haifā’ Bīṭār (b.1958) will be included in the discussion. These two novels have first person male narrators and, like in al-Zahr al-‘ārī, the main male characters are not comfortable in their performance of masculinity. In al-Hubb wa al-wahl the main character decides to perform and advocate a new masculinity, more appreciative of women. His negotiations with himself and others about his new masculinity shows what the novel presents as new and old male ideals. In Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid, Karīm is caught between poverty and the demands he feels society and family place on him as the man of the household. His negotiations are not between new and old, but rather between what he should do, and what he can do. All three novels thus present troubled masculinities which enable a discussion of how
female writers interrogate the formation of masculinity and furthermore how the first person perspective is used to develop the characters.

The chapter begins by mapping out the narrative structure of *al-Zahr al-ʿārī* and relating that to the formulation of masculinity. It then discusses the concept of cross writing and how female writers construct, and use, male characters. Next, the idea of female masculinity and male femininity as a way of undermining or deconstructing gender boundaries will be examined and linked to the novels. In addition to Adham’s gender based expectations on his fellow characters, the analysis of the novel elaborates on the above-mentioned points in relation to the marginalised position of Adham. The chapter ends with an examination of changes in masculinity formation during the period studied.

### 2.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure

The narrative structure in different ways regulates the information given to the reader,\(^\text{168}\) this section will outline the narrative structure of *al-Zahr al-ʿārī* and link it to the formulation of masculinity in the text. The novel begins with an ‘I’ without an external narrator setting the scene or introducing the character, which makes the text ambiguous with regard to the gender of the character. The ambiguity continues until the first descriptive words appear in the text and through their grammatical form show that the character is a man. This ambiguity can be taken to introduce the theme for the whole novel, which deals with the expectations on gendered behaviour and how to position oneself towards these demands. As noted by Candace West and Don Zimmerman, not to know for certain the biological sex of another person creates anxiety. In order to avoid this anxiety, gendered behaviour becomes the code used to both send out own signals and read others’ signals.\(^\text{169}\) Through the signals, one’s own gender is established and it is clear how others should be dealt with according to the gendered norms of society. By not immediately positioning the “I” of the novel in one of the binary gendered positions available, the actions performed by the character are the only possible keys offered by the text. Once the text has revealed that the “I” is a

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\(^{169}\) West and Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” 134.
man, the actions he performs are no longer evaluated on the basis on being feminine or masculine, instead they are compared to an imaginary ideal masculinity.

The novel is narrated in the first person singular form through the perspective of Adham Mālik, a Syrian judge on holiday in Paris. By use of dialogue, various voices are inserted into the narrative, but Adham remains the focalizer through whom events are reported. It is through him that others’ opinions are filtered and interpreted. Through his focalization, and the way he perceives certain actions, it is apparent that his background and (lack of) previous experiences influence the way he understands the relationship. The way Adham presents objects and actions is influenced by his underlying attitude of the male as the decision-maker in a relation, an attitude that affects his relationship and in the end is one of the reasons Klīr finds a new lover. The focalization through Adham is done from an external position. He is a foreigner in Paris, trying to understand the city and he further presents himself in opposition to women. Despite being a tourist and foreigner in Paris, Adham is not engaged in the culture in general. His topic for focalization is Klīr and her perception of him. This limited scope of focalization strengthens the theme of gender performance in the novel. Through Adham’s reasoning, his own behaviour and what he expects from Klīr appear perfectly normal, however other characters do not agree. Through the single focalization Adham’s confusion around gender roles and expectations become vivid and the relational nature of gender is apparent. By appropriating the male voice and gaze through a male focalizer, the author formulates masculinity through the character’s internal reactions in addition to his engagement with the surrounding characters. The focalizer further carries with him/her an authority to the text, in this case the focalization through Adham rather than Klīr makes his struggle to perform masculinity more intense. Through Adham as the focalizer the text further produces a male centred understanding of masculinity, the understanding is however corrupted through Adham’s position in a foreign culture.

The characterisation in the novel is both direct and indirect. Both forms of characterisations are centred on what is seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ gendered behaviour from the viewpoint of the characters. The direct characterisation is presented through Adham’s internal monologues where he goes through his own and others’ behaviour, but also in dialogues between Adham and other characters. The indirect
characterisation appears in Adham’s meetings with Klīr, her friends and ‘Azmī, his colleague’s brother who lives in Paris. That the characterisation is shared between many voices adds to the gender ambiguity depicted in the novel. What Adham in his direct characterisation of himself finds as very manly behaviour is in the next sentences denounced by another character. This further shows that gender identity is not what is done but how the actions are perceived. In al-Zahr al-ʿārī, the cultural differences, elaborated further on, are utilised to highlight the subtleties of gender formation and the precise nature of interpretations. All types of traits that are stereotypically connected to either femininity or masculinity in either culture are scrutinised by Adham in particular, but also by Klīr and the other characters. As will be expanded on in section 2.4, ‘Gender Based Expectations,’ this strict division that the characters work around illustrates the discrepancy between what the characters expect and what they actually do.

When it comes to appearance, it is stressed several times that Adham looks foreign whereas, as discussed below, he looks at Klīr as a model, blond woman. The repeated discussion of looks and the foreignization of Adham add a further dimension to his struggle of finding an acceptable performance of masculinity. It moreover highlights that Adham’s position is that of ‘the other’. He has to adjust his values, ideas and behaviour to fit into the new society he wants to live in. The other option is to not change and stand out as different. The othering of Adham leads to a marginalisation of his masculinity, as will be discussed further on. The othering furthermore creates an opposition between East and West and male and female, which, according to Mieke Bal, can be used to promote or demote ideological positions. This is elaborated on in the analysis by use of Jūrj Ṭarābīshī’s research where the novel’s references to the past colonial relation between the two countries is discussed.

The beginning of the novel, and of Adham’s love story, is retold through detailed descriptions of his days, what he does, feels, thinks and says. As the time goes on, the narrative describes only the defining moments of the relationship, and the daily routine is left aside. Adham’s previous life, before his trip to Paris, is only briefly mentioned as a contrast to his current position. For example, his status as a judge is brought out and that he has not been married, but very little other information

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170 Bal, Narratology, 127.
is given. That the text presents very limited information on Adham’s background makes his problems of inventing himself as a man for Klīr more credible. He has no previous experiences to return to and the cultural information he has is of no value in the new circumstances. The text’s focus on the relationship moves the intensity of the relation to the narrative, which, by the time Klīr decides to break up, is as worn out by the events as Adham appears to be. Outer time references, such as Adham’s expiring visa, locate the love story and its duration in time, but mainly seem to serve the purpose of showing Adham’s dependency on Klīr. The use of time in the novel hence accentuates Adham’s infatuation and need to be accepted. This in turn highlights the necessity of performing his role of masculinity to perfection to be allowed to stay with Klīr.

2.1.2 A Female Perspective

The focus on the male first person narrator does not mean that the female perspective has disappeared. On the contrary, it appears both through the female author, as will be discussed later, and through the female characters, as this section will demonstrate. Even though Adham is the main focalizer, his goal in the novel is to meet Klīr’s approval. Her view on gender roles is therefore, despite being presented through Adham’s interpretation, important for the creation of masculinity in the novel. The fictional society in al-Zahr al-ʿārī builds on an acceptance of a male/female gender dichotomy without exceptions. What the characters do not agree on is exactly what it is that signifies the two gendered positions available. This means that the characters refer to different ways of performing masculinity (and femininity) as the ideal way. Through the variation of perspective between male and female, East and West the text both replicates and contests what is seen as conventional masculine behaviour. Klīr is the only female voice in the novel and she seems to represent French culture as much as she represents femininity. Like Adham, she stands for a double dichotomy, what is French and what is feminine, in contrast to what is presented as foreign and masculine. The female perspective is therefore the stronger perspective since Adham is adamant to fit in. At the same time, Klīr’s behaviour is described as contradictory. Though seemingly demanding a specific behaviour of Adham, she does not support him, but instead constantly picks at the points in his conduct that she sees as weaknesses.
In Adham’s view, it seems that Klīr is oblivious that her own behaviour is far from what he expects of an ideal woman. However, she is not forgiving when it comes to his performance of masculinity. She teases him about being a coward when he does not come to her bedroom as she had expected. When they have sex and she is pleasantly surprised at his stamina in bed, she comments that he is both a child and a super-man and that she does not really know what to expect from him. In her stereotyping of the Arab man, virility plays an important part and both she and Adham are happy that he can live up to this part of her ideals. However, this seems to be the only part that Klīr enjoys in Adham. His stereotypical categorising of her as a ‘beautiful blonde’ whom he wants to own, is thus matched by her objectification of him. Both of them fall for what they think are traditional gender roles and then find a different reality underneath the surface.

Whereas Adham slowly adapts to Klīr’s behaviour even though she is far from what he thinks is an ideal woman, she is instead described to utilise Adham’s uncertainty of gender roles to accumulate power over him. When she comes home and sees him in her dressing gown, she laughs at him and concludes that he is too afraid to be alone and thus has to wear her clothes to feel safe.\(^{171}\) Unlike a ‘real man’, whom she assumes to be courageous, Adham is again made out to be childlike and scared. She further uses the fact that Adham does not know her culture well. When he is worried about booking a hotel room together since they are not married, she makes fun of him in front of the receptionist by saying that “her brother does not want to sleep alone.”\(^{172}\) She later confesses that she does not know why she enjoys making fun of him as much as she does. However, the damage is already done. Adham has yet another time appeared as worried, unable and un-knowing, a complete contradiction to the masculinity he wants to perform.

The female perspective as it appears in the novel accentuates the relational side of gender formation. Adham is teased, mocked and ignored for not behaving in a way Klīr finds masculine. He finds his own worth in her judgment, and as long as she is not satisfied, he is discontented too. As a woman’s view on a man, the novel can be read both as a comment on changing gender roles and as changing

\(^{171}\) ‘Abbūdī, al-Zahr, 53.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 100.
power relations between men and women. Klīr’s view on Adham is as an exchangeable toy and as such she makes a fuss when he does not behave as she likes. However, when she is bored of him she picks up a new man. Her ideal masculinity has therefore more to do with her immediate pleasure than the traditional division of gender, even though she uses that as a pretext for gaining power over Adham.

In the other novels discussed in this chapter, there are also female voices with opinions on the masculinity performed. In al-Ḫubb wa al-‛āḥl Aḥmad is considered the ideal man by the main female character Inās’ mother, who cannot understand why her daughter does not marry him. Inās agrees with her, but has other reasons for not wanting to marry. It is not just Inās and her mother who find Aḥmad attractive and ideal. The wife of Aḥmad’s friend is so enchanted by him that she tries to marry him off to her sister. The ideal masculinity Aḥmad performs is exaggerated by the positive reactions from the female characters and the character fulfils a somewhat didactic role. Whilst not abandoning the idea of himself as the provider for, and protector of, the female, he advocates her right to work and study and proposes that she is an equal rather than a servant. What he sees as a ‘modern’ performance of masculinity does not entail any major changes in his own performance, but has a distinctly different attitude towards femininity from what other male characters in the novel are described as having. The female perspective in this novel functions as a blessing for a specific performance of masculinity. Through his new performance, Aḥmad gains popularity and influence over women. In contrast to Adham, he is never mocked or laughed at, but instead respected and looked after by the female characters.

If Aḥmad is seen as the ideal man by the female characters, Karīm in Nasr bi-‘anāḥ wāḥid is seen as struggling with his role. His mother understands his problems and tries to help him by offering the little money she has, and does not ask him for anything more than what he manages to make available. She seems to realise the strains put on him and does not want to make his problems bigger by demanding more than he can offer. Other female characters, like his sister, are not as understanding. When he cannot give her what she wants, she is disappointed and shows no consideration for his circumstances. He in turn feels her disappointment and works hard not to fail her again, since he too shares the idea that he should always be there for her support. The novel describes the female characters as active agents in the
shaping of masculinity and part of Karīm’s frustration stems from the obligations he knows that he has towards his mother and sister. That his mother does not actively remind him makes him only feel worse, since he does not want her to pity him. Neither does he want to feel that he has failed her so much that she cannot ask him for what she needs. The female evaluation of him, as seen by Karīm, is thus another burden for him to carry.

In all three novels, the female perspective influences the performance and representation of masculinity, as a supporting force, as in al-Ḥubb wa al-wāḥl, or as a complication, as in the other two novels. The female perspective further highlights what the female characters see as acceptable or intolerable behaviour. They function as spokespersons for the fictional societies the characters live in. In Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid, the female characters represent to some extent the increasing demands that Karīm finally crumbles under. In al-Zahr al-ʿārī, Klīr symbolises the changing cultural expectations. The female perspective is thus, in these novels more than just a woman’s view. It is the counterpart against which masculinity is created. If it is unclear then masculinity is unclear, if its supportive masculinity becomes strong and if it is too demanding masculinity is not able to cope. Consciously or unconsciously the writers have created masculinities that are not solely influenced by homo-social settings. On the contrary the masculinities presented are calculated around female reactions to their way of behaving. The male-female interaction and power play in the novels support Connell’s claim that masculinities do not first exist and then encounter femininities173, but they are rather developed together.

What is striking in both al-Zahr al-ʿārī and in al-Ḥubb wa al-wāḥl is that despite trying their best to perform a masculinity they think should be suitable for the women they love, neither of the two men are successful. Aḥmad describes himself as an ideal, thoughtful, patient and caring candidate for a husband. This is also how the novel’s women see him. Despite this, Inās does not trust him to actually love her and be able to forget her past with another man and consequently leaves him. His change into a ‘woman’s man’ does not help him to get the love of his life, even though the novel positions him as a new and modern man and contrasts him with other male

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characters who are not working for women’s rights for example. In Adham’s case, his behaviour does not make him Klīr’s model man, even though he is allowed to live with her. On the contrary, she pokes fun at him, and ridicules what she sees as his soft sides, expecting him to treat her differently. Whereas al-Musālima seems to have made a point about creating an alternative masculinity for her male character in al-Ḥubb wa al-waḥl, ‘Abbūdi’i’s reflection on masculinity in al-Ẓahr al-‘ārī appears as a man lost between conflicting expectations and unable to make up his mind. As noted in the introduction, the texts hence do not have a single agenda, instead, the female perspective can lead to both a recreation of subordination and a contribution to the re-shiping of existing power structures as Fjelkestam and her co-authors argue.174

2.2 Male Gaze – Female Author: Cross-writing

As discussed in the introduction, Laura Mulvey’s concept of the ‘Male Gaze’ will be used in the analysis. In all three novels discussed in this chapter, the narrative is presented through a male gaze. However, it does not necessarily mean that the narrative, as Mulvey has interpreted the films she analysed, reinforces a patriarchal structure. On the contrary, it is possible to read the narratives as a critique of a gender system that can be interpreted as restrictive and demanding. At the same time, the narrators in the novels are described in a way that corresponds with what is often described as stereotypically male, possibly in an attempt to authenticate their masculinity. Especially Adham in al-Ẓahr al-‘ārī is depicted as concerned with women’s looks and bodies in what is presented as a conventional male way. At the beginning of the novel, Adham is mesmerised by Klīr’s naked back to the extent that he spills the whisky he is drinking.175 He cannot focus on anything else and Aliksī, who tries to get his attention, has difficulties breaking the spell Adham is under. He comes across as a stereotypical, heterosexual male, lost in front of female beauty. The following day when Adham visits Aliksī’s house and finds Klīr, he describes how he looks at her.

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174 Fjelkestam et. al.s., Kvinnorna, 10.
175 Ibid., 11.
I ravish her with my gaze, unable to remove it from her even for a second.

He sees her golden legs under her kimono and begins to imagine her body. The language he uses enhances the image of him as the predator, and of Klīr as the prey he is getting ready to devour. Later, when they embark on their relation, he watches her showering, dressing and undressing, always with admiration for her tall, slim figure and always with desire. Several times, he says to her that since she is so pretty it is impossible to refuse her wishes, and because of her beauty, he means that she will always get what she wants.

For Adham, Klīr symbolises visual and bodily pleasure, he shows no interest in her thoughts, work or hobbies. Even when it dawns on him that they have a ‘bed relation’, as he calls it, he does not try to change it by taking a bigger interest in Klīr’s life. He does not ask her where she works and until the end of the novel he does not have her work telephone number. He meets her friends briefly in different settings but he does not use the opportunities to get to know Klīr better. The way his view of Klīr is described, he seems only interested in owning her, showing her off and keeping her to himself, all of which is negated by his actual actions. The duality in his character appears through the incoherence between what he sees and what he does. Through the way his gaze is directed, he lives up to the external views expressed in the novel of a masculinity built on strength, virility and ability, but his actions, according to himself, do not measure up to the same level. Hence the male gaze is shown to be empty whereas what actually happens bear witness of his inability to take decisions and assert power in his relation. The male gaze can here be seen as a trope to create a masculine text through its narrative structure and perspective but the actual plot negates the importance, and consequently value of this outlook.

In al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl a similar incoherence can be detected. Ahmād is at first visually interested in Inās. Rather than being attracted by her beauty, he sees her looking sad and upset and feels a need to comfort and look after her. His initial

176 Ibid., 33.
177 Ibid., 25.
178 Ibid., 76.
179 Ibid., 88.
gaze is not like Adham’s one of desire but expresses a wish to protect her from further sorrows. Ahmad looks at Inās as an object and tries to see and understand how he can help her. The fact that she has worked her whole life on being the subject of her life story rather than the object, escapes Ahmad completely. He, like Adham, verbally expresses a view that his actions then betrays while claiming that men and women should be treated equally, his actions towards Inās are coherent with the hegemonic masculinity of the novel, which states that men look after and support women. Hence, his actions are in line with what the fictional society asks for, even though his thoughts and ideas refer to a different behaviour. In this sense, al-Ḥubb wa al-waḥl is the opposite of al-Zahr al-ʿārī, even though it too exhibits a dichotomy between the levels of actions and words.

Whereas the previous two novels are focused on male/female relations and therefore allocate time and place to the beloved and how she is perceived, Karīm in Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥīd is not primarily interested in love relations but is focused on surviving. He views the world based on his own chances of bettering himself or avoiding problems. Through his views on others and, more importantly, his interpretations of their views on him, a worried and unstable character appears, one that would prefer to be another person, somewhere else.

The female authors’ creation of these characters, especially in the two first novels, can be read as comments on masculinity and how society’s expectations are influential on individual behaviour. The characters, even though they act and speak differently, express their inner desires, in alignment with society’s expectations, through their views on the world. This opposition within the characters illustrates various layers of masculinity formation, and at the same time, it breaks the illusion of a hegemonic, formative masculinity of the hero type. The dynamics of gender seen in the novels further problematize and make visible the position of men who are removed from power and authority. Women writers’ grappling with this issue through their male characters demonstrates an act of cross writing, as Berthold Schoene-Harwood has labelled the action of women writing with male narrators and men writing with female narrators.180

Cross writing, as discussed in the introduction, and as both Diana Wallace and Sara Pearson have pointed out, often causes critical comments on female-authored texts, since the male characters are found not to be masculine enough.\(^{181}\)

Criticism of this type is interesting – not because it is necessarily true, but because it demonstrates how not even fictional characters can escape the expectations of normative masculine behaviour. The characters are lifted from their context and treated as living persons in the time and age of the critic, and subsequently judged on very different criteria from what they find in their own fictional societies. If the external criticism is left aside and the characters are analysed within their fictional society and through their thoughts and feelings, the result might however be different. Ahmad in \textit{al-Ḥubb wa al-waḥl} is by critics considered a ‘woman’s male character’\(^{182}\) in the sense that he, according to the critic, behaves and thinks like a woman. Within the fictional society he is situated in, though aware that he sports different views from other men, he is not treated as strange. On the contrary, he is the model for a new type of masculinity.

The treatment of gender relations in novels is connected to the fact that the writer has an opportunity to create not only a character, but also the surrounding society’s reactions to this version of masculinity and more importantly, the character’s own reflections on the demands and expectations put on him. The hegemonic masculinity governing the society at the time and place of publication can therefore be subverted or, if similar, reacted to differently. In her book \textit{Sexuality and War - Literary Masks of the Middle East}, Evelyn Accad addresses the question of the novel’s link to reality. Her opinion is that:

\begin{quote}
[...] they [novels] give us the ‘total’ picture because they not only include all the various fields – social, political, anthropological, religious and cultural – but they also allow us to enter into the imaginary and unconscious world of the author. In expressing his or
\end{quote}


\(^{182}\) Shaaban, \textit{Voices Revealed}, 52.
her own individual vision, an author also suggests links to the collective ‘imaginary’.  

The novel, though fictional, provides shifting sites for the performance of masculinity and hence the appearance of multiple masculinities is more probable. Cross writing can therefore be seen as an act of engaging with the collective imaginary of the other gender through the personal unconscious world of the author. The internal monologues and the characters’ reactions show what it is that affects the various characters’ behaviour in the fictional society. In al-Zahr al-‘ārī, Adham disregards his male friends’ comments but repeatedly balances his own feelings of pride and masculinity with his wish to please Klīr. His self-construction is dependent on her approval, and even when he feels insulted, he weighs the possibility of losing her into his decision of replying or not replying.

That the female characters decide what is considered acceptable or not might be interpreted as an overly direct way of changing society. In a study of ideal masculinity in English novels from the 18th century, Shawn Lisa Maurer finds the masculinities created by the female authors in her study unrealistic in their over-positive form. She finds that the fictional masculinities are too far from reality to be credible even as fantasies, which make them a humoristic rather than a serious contribution to the discussion of gender roles. Simultaneously, humour can function as a spotlight on particular types of behaviour. In al-Zahr al-‘ārī, many of the conversations between Klīr and Adham are humoristic and play on the general notions and stereotypes of male and female behaviour, in addition to the opposition between local and foreign. The reversed stereotypes are however never stretched to the extent that the novel loses credibility and the characters transform into mock characters in the way Maurer indicates; instead they lead to questions on what male and female really mean for the characters involved.

Another example of cross writing is the beginning of al-Riwāya al-mustahīla: fusayfusā’ dimashqīyya (The Impossible novel: A Damascene mosaic,

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The novel starts by a confession by Amjad, the main male character, who insists that he has killed his wife. It soon emerges that his wife has died during childbirth, but that it was his insistence on having a son, despite her first difficult pregnancy, which forced her to have another child. In addition to confessing that he sacrificed his wife for a son, he admits to himself that in order to marry her, he pretended to be a different man, whereas all the time he was hiding his ‘true Eastern self’, deep inside him’. Although the novel is set only in Syria, Amjad uses geographical stereotypes to explain his own behavior. He, like many in his generation, has studied in France and seems to advocate a different, as he sees Westernised, model for gender relations. Like Aḥmad in al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl, he confesses his previous mistakes and vows to become a different man. He then goes on to live a life in the service of his daughter in order to make sure that she is brought up with the same rights and possibilities as her male cousins. This usage of the male voice in a confession breaks the mode of accusation that a female account of the same events would have rendered whilst it, at the same time, draws attention to the agency of the individual man to break the structures he disagrees with. This type of cross writing, showing the male characters’ awareness of the female perspective, can be interpreted both as a result of the female appropriation of the male voice and as showing the intricate and informative relation between feminism and masculinity that Simon Gikandi brings out as one of the reasons for looking at female authored masculinities.

Cross writing, as discussed by Showalter, has at times also been a chance for women writers to expand the possible settings for their fictional characters at a time and place when women for example did not travel or work. Through their fictional male characters, they create a chance for themselves to explore arenas of life not open to them or to female characters. In the three novels discussed here, the case is rather a possibility to offer a different perspective by adopting a male voice than to

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186 Compare with a description of the same scenario but from the female point of view in Haifā’ Bīṭār’s Afrāḥ saḡhīra, afrāḥ akhīra, 1998.
188 Showalter, Literature of their Own, 112.
introduce new settings. al-Musālima’s novel, published in 1963, can be seen as an example of a time when masculinity in women’s novel was often seen as educational.189 Her main male character offers an alternative masculinity, appreciative of women’s problems, supporting and understanding and at the same time ready to look after and protect his beloved. Ahmad describes himself in a letter to a friend as having woken up and become able to see women as they really are.190 Having woken up from his previous, as he now sees them, misogynist ideas, he no longer has any problems in knowing how to perform masculinity.

The two later novels, published during the 1990s, offer masculinities that are caught in a constant struggle between inner and outer demands on how they should behave. They speculate on what other characters, especially females, expect from them and try to behave accordingly, which does not always lead to the success they were predicting. Whereas al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl seems very sure in its depiction of both women’s problems and how men should behave to solve them, the later novels show an awareness of the variety of expectations on gender roles and how that confuses the male characters. Despite their differences, all three of the male, main characters are developed, rounded characters with a rich inner life contrary to what Maysūn al-Jurf sees as the general norm in Syrian women writers’ male characters, whom she describes as flat and one-dimensional.191 Through the internal monologues, in addition to their own negotiations with ways of performing masculinity, the characters also offer their views on women in a sort of double exposure, where Woman is seen through the eyes of Man, but a man created by a female writer.

As discussed above, no one of the male characters is successful in his quest for a lover. They all have casual relations for longer or shorter periods, but are never able to have sustainable relations with the women in whom they are interested. The relative failure of these male characters can be read as a comment on the wider fictional society within which they function. In al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl, Aḥmad’s beloved has been hurt emotionally by a previous boyfriend who did not appreciate her wit and education. Now she is both unable to trust Aḥmad and sure that as an Eastern male he will not accept a woman ‘with a past’; she therefore decides to not have a relationship

189 Shaaban, *Voices Revealed*, 54.
with him. The implicit rules of society and other men’s insensitive behaviour ruin Ahmad’s chances of happiness with his beloved, even though he assures her that he is not interested in her past and that it is exactly her wit and education that attracts him.

In the other two novels discussed in this chapter, it is also society that causes the main characters to fail. Their different ways of doing masculinity do not derive support from the other characters, whether male or female. On the contrary, they are told to ‘become men’, ‘toughen up’ and change. Karim heeds the advice, which only makes him more miserable and further confused about how to behave. Adham does not, and as a result, he loses his beloved. Whereas the female writers create masculine characters deviating from the norm of their fictional society, they are not able to make them successful, which further reinforces the hegemonic norm of the fictional society. The accusations, and acknowledgments, of the male characters being feminine offer an alternative reading: that of othering the male in order to forefront women’s marginalisation through a hybrid character performing male femininity, a concept further developed in the next section.

2.3 Female Masculinity and Male Femininity

Even though there is a connection between the biological sex of a person and the gendered expectations placed on him/her as a set of actions, masculinity is not necessarily performed by biological males only. In her book, Female Masculinity Judith Halberstam argues that throughout history women have been involved in formulating, but also performing, versions of masculinity. Through the discussions, court protocols and accounts she produces, it becomes clear that reactions to women’s female masculinity have not always been welcoming. The gap between the expected female behaviour and the actual action of the woman has been too wide for the societies studied to accept. As a result, it can be said that the making of gender roles is not only the individual person’s actions, but also others’ reactions to them.

In research on male nursery school teachers in Sweden and their formulation of what she calls male femininity, Marie Nordberg has reached similar results. The two concepts by Halberstam and Nordberg capture the difference

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between biological sex and gender by referring to a biologically sexed male performing actions conventionally coded as feminine, and vice-versa. The two concepts highlight the expectations put on a body, and the individual’s struggle to live up to these expectations, whether as a male or a female. In the novels discussed, male and female characters perform what is perceived as masculinity and femininity with varying degrees of success. Their level of success is not connected to their own perception but to others’ reactions to their behaviour. In a different study, Nordberg argues that the discussion of female masculinity and male femininity is no longer useful in a modern debate, since it conserves gender stereotypes rather than breaks them.\textsuperscript{194} She discusses that in order to talk about male femininity, a set of traits considered feminine has to be agreed upon and then looked for as alien in a man’s behaviour so that he can be seen as performing male femininity.\textsuperscript{195} She proposes a different approach, which would be to free characteristics from their connection to a specific gender and then only talk of different humans. This would further remove the pre-defined value attached to male and female actions respectively.

Whereas Nordberg’s later study is an addition to the work on gender equality, the concepts of male femininity and female masculinity lend themselves as suitable tools for the analysis in this chapter. The characters in \textit{al-Zahr al-‘ārī} are very concerned with the performance of gender. Especially Adham is engaged in what he understands as the relation between biological sex and gender roles. The emphasis put on various actions, for the reason that they are not normally expected from a man or a woman, serves to highlight the gender norm in the novel. Whilst stressing the expected norm, the novel does not safeguard the gender roles as much as it displays how the rules are socially constructed and hence can be broken. Both Adham and Klīr perform the opposite of the behaviour expected from their respective biological sex. The writer has created male femininity, through which both the hegemonic masculinity and a subversion of it can be traced. In the contrast between what Adham articulates as an accepted performance of masculinity and the actions he performs a multi-layered

\textsuperscript{194} Marie Nordberg, ”Kvinnlig maskulinitet och manlig femininitet: en möjlighet att överskrida könsdikotomin?” [Female masculinity and male femininity: a possibility to bridge the gender dichotomy?], \textit{Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift} 1-2 (2004), 47-65.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
character evolves, which exemplifies the fluidity of the notion of masculinity and its detachment from biological gender.

In *al-Hubb wa al-wahl* the main female character’s father makes a point of bringing her up in the same way he would have brought up a boy, in order to give her the same possibilities as a boy would have had. This results in Inās becoming a doctor, excelling both at university and in her job. She is described as self-reliant, intelligent and logical. By this description, the novel shows that women are a result of their upbringing, whilst at the same time it confirms the stereotypical picture of the male mind, which Inās, through her father’s kindness, now can enjoy. She is depicted in the novel as performing female masculinity, which creates problems for her in her contact with the male characters. Whereas both Inās in *al-Hubb wa al-wahl* and Adham in *al-Zahr al-ʿārī* participate in their fictional societies, they are judged for not conforming to the expected gender roles. Klīr in *al-Zahr al-ʿārī* is not aware of performing female masculinity, but in the clash between her values and behaviour and Adham’s expectations on what a woman should do, her idea of everyday life is feminised. For him working in advertising, traveling, eating out, taking decisions and being the main earner are all things men, but not women, do. Whereas Halberstam’s aim with *Female Masculinity* was partly to seek an end to gender binarism and replace it with more flexible forms for gender preference, the female masculinity (and male femininity) that appear in the novels are anchored in the binarism Halberstam wants to distort, as seen above. However, the variations within the two accepted gender categories still deconstruct some of the biological and cultural expectations the characters are working in and around.

On one hand, the novels seem to advocate that women can, and should be able to transgress the borders created by the gender regime. On the other hand, the male characters that do the same are described as having a difficult time knowing themselves and they are not depicted as successful participants in society. The solution presented is hybrid characters that do not fit the hegemonic norms of masculinity or femininity in the fictional societies. As social experiments and a way of expressing new possibilities of performing gender the characters are very successful. However, no one of the characters are described as happy and content with the performance they

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196 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 27.
put on. The reflections on society offered through the novels thus deconstruct what they portray as hegemonic masculinity but do not offer a replacement. If, as female narratology suggests, the texts are put in conversation with the gender regime they are created within, this can be assumed to show the complicity of the matter and a wish to not stray too far from the reality in which the texts are grounded. In this fashion, the texts produce gender through the narrative and create femininity and masculinity for its readers as Warhol and Robinson argue, but they do not deliver solutions.

2.4 Gender Based Expectations
The previous section discussed male femininity and female masculinity, concepts that build on the breach of conventionally expected gendered behaviour. This section will discuss how the characters make use of these expectations in their dealings with each other. Some critics have pointed to the fact that the theory of hegemonic masculinity builds on a heteronormative concept of male/female dichotomy and does not clearly account for differences within the gender categories. This is interesting, since this was one of Connell’s critiques of the sex role theory and one of the factors as to why she constructed the theory of hegemonic masculinity in the first place. In the novels analysed in this thesis, many of the narratives present a blurred version of the male/female dichotomy. In words and thoughts, most of the characters describe the difference between male and female gender roles as very important. However, in their reported actions they repeatedly transgress the gender roles, as will be elaborated on in the analysis.

The male characters in the novels analysed express strict views on what they see as masculine and feminine behaviour. Through their expectations on women it becomes clear, by contrast, what they view as masculine behaviour. By defining the ‘other’ they also define themselves. This is done even if they, as Adham admits about himself, have no experience or knowledge about women.

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197 See the discussion on female narratology in the introduction of the thesis.
199 Connell, Masculinities, 27.
I am a levelheaded lawyer, not a womaniser or an expert on their affairs, quickly reaching their hearts.

Adham builds his expectations on his upbringing in a different culture from Klīr’s. He has had a few passing relationships, other than that it seems from the novel that he is still living with his mother. His view on what it means to be a man and a woman is therefore built on conceptions far from those held by Klīr. This further means that his expectations on himself as a man do not correspond entirely with those of Klīr.

Adham’s first impression of Klīr is that of a desirable woman. When he gets to know her further, he realises that as a woman she does not fit what he assumes to be the female gender role. He is shocked when she, on their first night together, shows him the guest room. The room is full of boxes, clothes and books and Klīr simply points at the bed without apologising for the mess; something he is sure a woman from his country would have done.201 When he is later left to roam the house on his own, he is again appalled that, as a woman, Klīr does not tidy her house. He again compares between this new situation and what he is used to from home.

I was used to the order in my mother’s home, and the presence of a woman in the house is, for me, synonymous with cleanliness, lustre and brightness.

He does not generalise about French people as untidy; he criticises Klīr. Neither does he take into account that her husband, Aliksī, lived in the house until the previous day, and thus could have participated in the cleaning and tidying. His association between gender and activities illustrates that in his world it is not part of a male person’s actions to clean and tidy. Consequently, it is not an action that can be seen as part of

201 Ibid., 43.
202 Ibid., 72.
performing masculinity. On the contrary, Adham admits that he sees it diminishing to his masculinity to perform household chores. When he later asks Klīr about the untidiness, she does not seem to care. Whereas Adham enjoys a clean and tidy house, he does not see it as his job to perform the task of organising the scattered things. He sees the lack in Klīr’s behaviour but cannot, at this stage, see that he could perform a woman’s chores. As the narrative continues and he begins to change, he cleans and tidies to the extent that Klīr can no longer find her things.

In addition to cleaning, a woman, in Adham’s mind, is meant to be interested in cooking, something that Klīr could not be less concerned about; she prefers to eat out in different restaurants. Adham’s logic behind the idea of cooking follows that behind cleaning. As a woman, and in charge of the house, cooking food should be a natural part of a woman’s life. However, whereas Adham does not take care of the cleaning, he does prepare dinner for Klīr, but with the added excuse that she is working and tired and hence he should help her with the cooking. The fact that Adham does not work adds to the confusion he expresses about the different activities he does. He codes cooking as a female activity, and then still performs it, only to meet with Klīr’s disapproval since he did not take her out to a restaurant. By acting against his own coding of actions, he subverts the gender roles he has set up for himself. This subversion of gender roles that he takes part in is not condoned, neither by himself nor by Klīr. It is as if the circumstances force him to take up actions that he does not feel comfortable with, but that he cannot resist in his quest of impressing Klīr. His appropriation of what he sees as feminine behaviour can be read as the external influences on gendered behaviour, which the individual cannot withstand. Since Klīr, as the female voice in the novel, disapproves of the behaviour, the novel lends itself to be read as a critique of male femininity.

In addition to cooking and cleaning, Adham expects that women in general have marriage as their primary goal in life, and when Klīr does not accept his proposal, he is surprised.

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203 Ibid., 117.
Had you been a woman from my country you would have welcomed the idea of marriage!

Adham’s views on marriage reflect his views on gender relations as including an active, providing male. He supposes that for a woman marriage means security since he, as the man, would then look after her and protect her. As with his ideas on cooking and cleaning, he has divided the world into outer and inner space and marriage would be a way for Klīr, in his eyes, to leave the outer world of work and instead be cared for by him. However, Klīr is not a woman from Adham’s country, which she makes obvious to him. Every time he tries to apply any type of pressure on her, she tells him that she will not accept to live in a prison and that if he wants to have a relationship with her he has to make himself agreeable. For Adham, who seems to see women as belonging to men, this is difficult to grasp even after being with Klīr for several weeks. When she makes up an excuse not to go to a dinner, he tells her that she should have simply said that the man she loves forbade her to go. He thinks it is a perfectly reasonable thing to say, whereas Klīr’s reaction is literally to kick him out of bed.

In the views Adham expresses, he sees the male as having certain privileges over women, which in turn means that performing masculinity means an ability to assert these privileges but also to look after a wife. His complete lack of belief in women’s agency appears when he marvels, in front of Klīr, at how Aliksī just gave him his wife, to which Klīr pointedly adds that, she too, had a role in the events. She assures him that she could have refused him and thrown him out. This possibility does not seem to have crossed Adham’s mind, despite his sometimes not very high thoughts about himself. It is clear that he thinks that men are higher in the gender hierarchy than women are, even though he tries to persuade himself of men’s and women’s equality.

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204 Ibid., 136.
205 Ibid., 123.
206 Ibid., 161.
But my enthusiasm for the work faded for no reason, and feelings of embarrassment begun to take power over me. I tried to scold myself for these wicked feelings invoking for support my firm belief in the equality between men and women. I tried to drive them away by repeating: Is the housework women do humiliating in order for it to decrease the worth of a man if he performs it? [...] And if it was humiliating why is woman appointed to perform it?

By expecting certain things from Klīr based on her sex, Adham, as a male, positions himself as the opposite. In his ideal performance of masculinity, he has the agency to act and decide and the female has the role of serving and pampering him. However, whereas Adham seems convinced that this is how things should be, he is aware that he himself is not performing accordingly.

As shown above, Adham thinks that as a man he should be the one in charge in a relationship. After an initial, short period, of issuing orders to Klīr, he finds himself at a loss on how to assert any authority over her. He feels powerless and unable when he cannot hinder her from going out to dinner with other men or stopping her from talking to other men at parties. His feelings about his own masculinity are not connected to what he does but rather to the effect, or in this case lack of effect, his actions have on Klīr. In order not to upset Klīr, he hides his feelings and instead begins to await Klīr’s orders about what to do. He is unable to perform what he, and she, think is correct masculinity; instead he turns to the opposite role and rather than issuing orders, he waits for them.

In order to be the protective, caring husband he thinks women want he believes that a man should be strong. This is in contradiction to his own abilities; while trying to carry his suitcase up the stairs he exhausts himself in front of Klīr.

207 Ibid., 192.
208 Ibid., 53.
209 Ibid., 43.
He is troubled both by his own weakness and by the fact that Klīr so openly disapproves. They both expect him to be strong, and when he is not, Klīr makes her disappointment visible and Adham feels ashamed. Actions such as cooking and cleaning are things that can be learnt. Strength on the other hand, though possible to enhance through physical exercise, is seen as something one either has or not. The fact that gender roles are made up both from physical ability and socially coded actions makes it even more complicated for Adham to fit in. That Adham is not strong enough to carry his own bag, exaggerates his emasculation in front of Klīr.

Having carried the bag upstairs, Klīr gives Adham the choice of the guestroom or her own bedroom. He chooses the guestroom, which he soon regrets. Rethinking his choice, he realises that once again he has not performed according to his own ideals of masculinity.

I should have followed her, faced her open challenge by going to her immediately. Despite that I remained, standing like a fool in the middle of the books and magazines [...].

Klīr is yet again disappointed and suggests that he can always go downstairs and make himself some hot milk if he finds it difficult to fall asleep, insinuating that he is only a child. Further on in the novel, Klīr expresses a view on Eastern men as extremely virile and her disappointment with Adham’s choice of bed can be understood through that comment. Not only is he weak, he also appears disinterested in sexual activities and as such he means no more to her than a child. Through his failure of asserting himself as a man and performing masculinity according to her standards, he has lost the privilege of manhood and is returned to the stage of childhood. When Klīr has left, Adham wonders whether she will give him a second chance or if his choice of bed has for ever spoiled his possibilities of having a relation with her. He sees Klīr as someone who only accepts the best and in his own judgment, he has not performed masculinity at its best during his first day with her. Adham is torn between what he expects from himself

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210 Ibid., 45.
211 Ibid.
in order to perform an approved version of masculinity, while at the same time he is aware that Klīr has both high standards and different standards from himself.

The gender based expectations that Adham and Klīr place on themselves and each other position men and women in two different groups. Men are, as traditionally described, strong, virile and in charge of providing for the family, whilst women are caring and soft. Although these values seem to govern the characters, as outlined above, they constantly break them. Klīr expects a man to order her around, but when Adham tries to do this, she does not listen. He expects women to look after the home, but when Klīr does not, he cooks and cleans instead. By simultaneously enforcing and deflating the gendered performance expected, the novel reflects how masculinity is relational and depending on others evaluation of it. At the same time, through the characters’ appropriation of behaviour coded for the other sex, it demonstrates the emptiness of the gender roles. The hegemonic masculinity sketched by Adham and Klīr therefore stands out as something that is impossible to integrate in the life described in the novel but at the same time governing it in detail. Governing it in the sense that actions performed in contradiction to it leads to the enactment of female masculinity and male femininity. The hegemonic norm further governs the value of different actions and the inability to adhere to the hegemonic norm leads to marginalisation, as will be discussed in the following section.

2.5 Marginalisation

In the introduction, the concept of marginalisation is discussed in connection to the performance of masculinity. It is possible to base marginalisation on a number of factors and it can be formulated as the reason why some men’s performance of masculinity is not accepted and valued by mainstream society. Connell quotes race as one such factor.212 In *al-Zahr al-‘ārī*, it is the fact that Adham is foreign that initially makes him marginalised in Paris. Klīr at first pretends that they are having an equal relationship but Adham is aware that as a foreigner and a guest in Klīr’s house he is at a disadvantage. Despite speaking French well, Adham stands out in Paris.213 A move from one area to another, or one country to another, can thus change the framework for masculinity performance. In a study of immigrants in Sweden, Mehrdad

212 *Abbūdī, al-Zahr, 79.*
213 Ibid., 13.
Davishpour has demonstrated that the understanding, and consequently the performance of, masculinity in Iran is very different compared to Sweden, which makes it difficult for immigrated men and women to relate to new gender roles.\(^{214}\) A man, who in his home country upheld a position of respect, might in the new country be counted as a subordinate masculinity, due to his incorporation in the marginalised group of immigrants.

A similar conclusion is reached in Jari Kuosmanen’s studies on male immigrants from Finland to Sweden. He concludes that the immigrated men feel that they, despite their education and previous position, have to re-start their lives from a marginalised position in their new homeland.\(^{215}\) He goes on to say that there seems to be a gap between personal time i.e. what the person feels and does, and historical time, i.e. how [the new] society functions.\(^{216}\) This discrepancy in personal feelings and public expectations can be seen in Adham’s behaviour. The fact that he does not belong to society makes him unaware of the hegemonic norms, which in turn affect both his expectations on Klīr and his own behaviour. He tries to apply his own norms on Klīr’s behaviour only to realise that this is not how she conducts herself. In order to be accepted by her he then changes his expectations, and as a result, his own behaviour, which means that he turns into a man Klīr sees as feminine.

To be an outsider or foreigner does not automatically lead to marginalisation, on the contrary, to have experience from another country or culture can function as authorisation, the opposite force. This is usually because it signifies financial ability and a supposed will of embracing modernity, as seen in some of the novels. In the case of Adham, the fact that he is an Arab man in a Western country seems to signify the reverse, regardless of who he actually is and the values he has. That Adham is the object of stereotyping does not simplify his task of performing an accepted masculinity. When Klīr and Adham have just met, she asks him if he is Arab.


\(^{216}\) Ibid., 242.
When he affirms this and says that he is from the Levant, she announces strong views on Arab men.

She immediately commented: Levantine or Maghrebi does not make a difference. The inclination to consider woman an object of ownership is the same for both.

Adham is surprised, but Klīr ignores his attempt to defend himself. When Adham later in their relationship expresses a wish that she stays at home with him, she immediately tells him that she is not his to own. At the same time, when he does not show an interest in what she does, she sees it as a lack of masculinity. In Klīr’s eyes, Adham is reduced to a representative of his people and as such, his interest cannot be out of care for her, but must be seen as a sign of ownership. Because of this view, he then becomes disqualified from performing the assertive behaviour she really finds attractive in men, and welcomes in her French boyfriends. Her stereotyping of him effectively marginalises him and hinders his possibilities of doing masculinity in a way other men could have done.

Another view Klīr holds is that as an Arab Adham must be uneducated. When she shows him the guestroom, she assumes that he has no idea about the artwork on the walls and the books that are scattered around the room. She bluntly tells him this and she is not interested in finding out if she is correct or not. Her assumption that he has no education further places him below her on an imaginary hierarchical scale. Adham not only has to assert himself but he has to prove her wrong. At a later point when they go out, she tells him that she will decide the restaurant because they cannot ‘go around like Arabs in the desert with no goal’. Adham’s, and her own assumption, that performance of masculinity includes being assertive and knowing, is in this case not even applicable to Adham. He is found wanting even before he is given a chance to prove himself. When they go out together, she spends time talking to her other friends, without including Adham in the conversation, as if he is not on equal footing with the rest of the members of her group. In one of the restaurants they visit,

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217 ‘Abbūdi, al-Zahr, 27.
218 Ibid., 36.
they order wine. Adham lets Klīr taste it to decide if it is good or not, but instead of appreciating the gesture she says that it is ‘such a simple wine that anyone can taste it’. Yet again Klīr implies that Adham has no knowledge and that she is far superior to him when it comes to wine tasting as with many other things. It is not only Klīr who behaves like this towards Adham, most of her friends have the same attitude. At one of Klīr’s friends’ houses the hostess keeps talking above his head and asks Klīr whether Adham wants a drink or not, only to be surprised when he replies and speaks French.

The stereotyping, and the marginalisation it leads to, denies Adham a possibility to participate in the social life. This, in turn means that he cannot form a position for himself within Klīr’s group of friends, or in society. He is left as an outsider, and not even considered a participant in the social game. His way of performing masculinity is judged beforehand as a member of a group, not as his personal performance, and hence he has a very small chance of changing others’ perception of him. Adham’s marginalisation, due to being a foreigner, hinders him from participating as an equal in the matrix of masculinities. Despite being a successful lawyer, respected by his friends and colleagues at home, in the French context he is not able, or allowed, to assert himself. His new behaviour moreover alienates him from his countrymen, as will be discussed further on. Giving up oneself and one’s life for a woman is not accepted in their view and their initial respect for the Adham they used to know, or thought they knew, changes towards ridicule.

Adham himself seems inclined to accept the judgment of him as a person less worth than others. Paris and its inhabitants dazzle him and he wants nothing more than to be accepted. He thinks that Klīr will only agree to be with him by magic intervention and he wonders how he will ever be able to gain power over her. His awareness of his marginalised position in relation to Klīr affects his performance of masculinity. Since she openly rejects what she deems ‘Arab masculinity’, he reinvents himself with the result that Klīr, and himself, find him performing male femininity instead. The way Adham adjusts his behaviour affects the supposed power balance in the relation.

219 Ibid., 108.
220 Ibid., 31.
221 Ibid., 53.
Adham’s reaction to his situation in Paris is the opposite of what Jūrj Ṭarābīshī found in his study of this type of fiction, where an Arab man finds himself in a Western setting. In Ṭarābīshī’s study on male Arab writers’ depiction of cross-cultural meetings between Eastern men and Western women in the West, hatred drives the male characters to take revenge on the coloniser through a sexual relation with a Western woman. A similarity between the study and Adham is that he, like the male characters discussed by Ṭarābīshī, is caught by his admiration for the French culture. Rather than seeing a relation with a French woman as a way of conquering the culture, he sees and treats Klīr as an incarnation of it and wants to be part of it through her. The relationship between coloniser and colonised is however brought up between the two. At one point, he mentions to Klīr that his father fought the French. He continues to say that he wonders what his father would have said had he known that Adham would be with a French woman. Klīr’s reply to this question is another question:

لماذا لا تعكس السؤال؟ فهل كان سيدور في خلد أبيك أنه سيأتي يومًا تختار فيه فرنسية أن تعيش مع أحد أبنائه؟

Why do you not reverse the question? Would it ever have occurred to your father that a day would come, when a French woman would choose to live with one of his sons?

By reversing the question, Klīr puts herself in the role of the subject, and reverses Adham back to the role of object that he has had throughout their relationship. She displays the masculinity of the coloniser and the oppressor, as Ṭarābīshī analyses in his study, and does not leave Adham a chance to change the roles. Even though he, like Ṭarābīshī’s characters, is very virile and able to win Klīr over through his sexual ability, even the sex is under her command. When she does not want sex, she sleeps

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222 Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Sharq gharb rujūla unūtha* (Beirut, Dār al-Ṭal‘ī’a, 1977). Hanrīyīt ‘Abbūdī was married to Ṭarābīshī and it is unlikely that she was unaware of his study of masculinity. Through its narrative and characters, ‘Abbūdī’s novel can be read as a reply from a different time period to Ṭarābīshī’s study. Though building on the difference between East and West, as the original study, ‘Abbūdī places the woman in a more powerful position. It is possible to read the novel as a comment on the powerplay between coloniser and colonised and as a continuation of Ṭarābīshī’s study. Such a reading would suggest the colonised’s infatuation with the coloniser and a will to adjust and adopt in order to be accepted in the new country. The coloniser is instead described as continuously using the colonised subject for (her) own benefit.

and Adham waits, contrary to Ṭarābīshī’s characters, who use rape as a way of revenging themselves and their countries.

Ṭarābīshī’s analysis rests on the assumption that masculinity is signified by activity and femininity by passivity. This is also the foundation on which Adham and Klīr seem to build their framework for gendered performance. Whereas the characters Ṭarābīshī analysed attempted to break their marginalisation by conquering women and taking up an active position, Adham chooses the opposite. The masculinity formulated in the novel is therefore rather a way of problematizing the hegemonic masculinity than a reinforcement of it. The way the characters believe in, but contradict, the foundations they themselves have formulated for gendered performances further suggests that masculinity and femininity in the novel can be seen as criticism of a strict gender dichotomy that classifies actions as either female or male. *al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī* thus uses marginalisation as a way of commenting on reality.

Another novel that uses marginalisation as a way of commenting on reality is *Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid* through its main male character Karīm. Both Adham and Karīm are aware of the expectations placed on the performance of successful masculinity. Whereas Adham’s confusion and inability are connected to him being a foreigner, Karīm is hindered by poverty in a commercialised society. Both characters confess to performing actions they are not convinced of in order to maintain the respect they have. They are further aware that, because of the marginalising forces in their lives, their actions are not valued in the same way as if other characters with more authoritative positions had performed them. In both cases, the characters have high status jobs, a lawyer and a doctor. Their struggle to perform masculinity and their marginalisation are telling of how masculinity, contrary to being seen as a source of power, can be turned into the opposite if one is hindered in different ways from performing the expected role.

In the two novels discussed, the main characters vent their frustration in internal monologues where they try to find a balance between what behaviour they can justify and what they cannot. In both cases, others’ opinions play important roles in the masculinity formation of the two male characters. Adham is in need of Klīr’s approval whereas Karīm is concerned with society in general. Therefore, it also
becomes important for the two, to have external signs of their ability to live up to their roles, such as paying and providing.

Karīm, in *Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid*, is troubled by his poverty, not so much because it puts restraints on what he can buy for himself but because he cannot support his mother. Money is an important question for Adham in *al-Ẓahr al-‘ārī* too. As discussed above, he has very little influence over Klīr in other matters but when it comes to paying for things, he insists that he is the one responsible for the financial arrangements. Klīr has a fulltime job and seems to earn well but despite this Adham cannot accept that she pays for him when they are eating out. Instead, he spends all of his money on their dinners at different restaurants. When his initial savings have run out, he turns to his friend ‘Azmī to borrow more. He then tries to sell his office in Syria so that he can afford to take Klīr out. Towards the end of the relationship, he agrees to take a job as a tutor of Arabic in order to have at least a small income so that he can pay for the dinners. For him, the symbolism of him paying and providing for his beloved is much more important than the troubles he has to go through in order to arrange his finances.

The point of who pays for whom is also raised by Adham’s Syrian friend at the beginning of his relationship with Klīr. The way his friend formulates the question makes it sound like being paid for by a woman is something damaging for a man and something that should be avoided at all costs. The feeling that Adham and his friend share is echoed in Karīm’s reactions in *Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid*. But whereas Klīr does not seem to care much if she or Adham pays the bills, Karīm’s sister takes for granted that she is to be looked after, first by her brother and then by her husband. She abandons her university sweetheart in order to marry a rich man, something she explains to Karīm as every girl’s dream, a statement that makes Karīm’s despair over his own poverty even greater. When he witnesses a scene in a café where a man tips a shoe polisher with the equivalent of Karīm’s daily income he solidifies his view that had he only been rich he would have been a perfect man.

Moving back to Adham, even with his job as a tutor he cannot afford to take Klīr out every day, and in the end he is forced to start cooking at home instead of accepting that Klīr pays for his dinner at a restaurant. It is less damaging for his masculinity to cook inside the house, despite having coded cooking as a feminine
activity, than being seen outside with Klīr paying the bill. Having spent some time in Klīr’s home, Adham suddenly asks her who owns the house. When he is told that the house is rented he immediately offers to take care of the rent.\textsuperscript{224} He has no real possibility of paying the rent but he still thinks that the division between them should be in this fashion. When Klīr objects, he just brushes off her concerns with the fact that as a woman, she should accept being paid for.\textsuperscript{225} As with his previously discussed views on gender, the question of money and paying signifies his view on femininity and masculinity. Unable to affect Klīr’s behaviour, he holds on to the only way he has of demonstrating agency. More importantly, paying in restaurants is done in front of others who do not know how the relation between Adham and Klīr usually works and he therefore appears to be in control.

The masculinity created in the two novels seem to function as a way of showing the cumbersome and difficult way of performing masculinity. Neither of the novels deals with the patriarchal dividend and the privileges of masculinity. Their sole focus is how the benefits of masculinity are instead out of reach for the characters due to marginalisation. As such, the novels’ formation of masculinity is not as role models or new examples of hegemony but a critique of the hegemonic masculinity present in the fictional societies.

\textbf{2.6 Men on Men}

Thus far, the chapter has discussed the characters’ perception of their own masculinity and how they think others perceive them, in addition to the female view on masculinity. In this section, other men’s views on masculinity, and how that shapes the characters, will be discussed. By introducing men’s views on men, the female authors distance themselves from the narrative. The main male characters are shown to formulate their identities, and masculinities, in cooperation with other male characters and not as individual projects of the author.

‘Azmī is Adham’s colleague’s brother who has lived in Paris for some time. When Adham first tells him that he is going to stay in Paris to be with a woman he has met, ‘Azmī approves of the idea. He thinks that a short relationship with a French woman will do Adham good. His reaction condones the practice that

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
masculinity embodies sexual ability, which in his mind is the obvious attraction in a relation with a Frenchwoman. A relationship in France will prove Adham’s virility without carrying with it any complications for his further life at home. ‘Azmī appears impressed with Adham and the fact that he has found a French girlfriend. However, when Adham insists that he is serious about Klīr, and that he wants to change his life and marry her, ‘Azmī becomes worried. In his world, it is one thing to have a casual relation and something very different to be married. Especially when a longer period in France means that Adham will become dependent on Klīr, not the opposite, which is what ‘Azmī thinks is to be expected in a relation between a man and a woman.

To stop the relation ‘Azmī begins to bring up characteristics of their shared views on masculinity that he believes that Adham is now ignoring. He starts with the financial aspect and says that he cannot sustain Adham for a long period, and then he asks whether Adham really wants to be dependent on a woman after that? Adham’s wish to be in charge financially is hence not his individual wish but a tradition he and ‘Azmī share. To be dependent on someone else, and especially a woman, is in ‘Azmī’s eyes emasculating. He then goes on to ask about Adham’s loss of autonomy, how he can allow a woman to decide over his life, what he does, where he goes and what he should do. He implies that the opposite is the norm that Adham should strive to adhere to. He then brings out the responsibilities Adham has towards his friends and family, the fact that he has a life and a reputation at home that he cannot let go of in exchange for a relationship with a foreign woman. His arguments are similar to the opinions Adham himself holds about masculinity and femininity, which his expectations on Klīr’s and his own behaviour have revealed.

Masculinity entails being the stable provider, in charge of decisions and with carefully thought through reasons for his choices. To leave everything behind with no consideration for others, because of feelings or lust, is not what ‘Azmī thinks of as a good performance of masculinity. Adham acknowledges that all that ‘Azmī says is correct and that he is not performing what would be seen as acceptable masculinity in their shared culture. He then means that he is no longer the same man as he used to be. He is sure that he does not want to change back – at least not as long as he is under Klīr’s spell.
In his encounters with ‘Azmī, Adham takes an active stand against the masculinity he used to perform in favour of the way he now conducts himself. He is aware that it is not the traditional way of performing masculinity, but as long as it leads to him staying with Klīr he is happy to perform this version of masculinity. By this behaviour, he contradicts his own openly declared views on masculinity and femininity. It is as if ‘Azmī, as a remote friend, is assigned the role of opponent and it is easier for Adham to justify his behaviour in front of ‘Azmī’s opinions than it is to convince himself of what he is doing. When Adham finally decides to go home, after having realised that Klīr is no longer interested in him, ‘Azmī is relieved. By going home, and standing up for himself instead of staying and hoping that Klīr will come back to him, Adham has retrieved some of the masculinity he has lost during the relationship, in the eyes of ‘Azmī. A fling to prove one’s sexuality is acceptable, but to give up oneself for a woman does not fit in with the masculinity ‘Azmī adheres to.

Another man who watches Adham’s transformation is the elderly neighbour Jūstān who has previously observed Aliksī go through the same phases. He tells Adham that his only way of winning Klīr is to behave like a man. By giving this advice, he shows that he does not think that Adham is performing masculinity correctly. Like ‘Azmī, and Adham himself in his internal monologues, he believes that masculinity entails being strong and assertive, which Adham definitely is not. Jūstān is described as having had a great marriage and is still so in love with his now deceased wife that he plays her favourite melody on the piano every night, with no regard to the neighbours’ complaints. Nevertheless, he still does not understand that Adham is willing to change in the way he has done in order to live with Klīr. Jūstān and ‘Azmī both actively discuss Adham’s relation with Klīr with him and try to give him advice. However, the most important influence on Adham and Klīr’s relationship is Klīr’s former boyfriend Aliksī, whom Adham for long thought was her husband. Adham’s first infatuation with Klīr soon turns into an obsession with Aliksī. Despite the fact that the relation between Aliksī and Klīr is over, he considers Aliksī a sort of role model for how to perform a masculinity of which Klīr is in favour.

In a way, Adham’s image of Aliksī, a man he has only met once in a bar, becomes the ideal in relation to which he measures his own masculinity. He projects

226 Ibid., 145.
his principles onto Aliksī who is never given a chance to correct or verify this view of himself. In his quest for the ideal masculinity he thinks Aliksī performed, Adham wears the former’s clothes and uses his shaving articles. At one point, he even pretends that he is Aliksī when he meets a girl during one of his walks. By trying to impersonate Aliksī, Adham’s new personality is placed further away from himself, and his changing masculinity can be attributed to Aliksī as well as to his own choice. In order to know how to talk and behave, Adham asks everyone who might know Aliksī about details of the former’s life. He even asks Klīr detailed questions about who used to drive, where they used to go and what Aliksī liked and disliked. It is as if he wants to understand himself and his relation with Klīr through an understanding of Aliksī. Adham’s preoccupation with Aliksī can be read as a symptom of his wish to perform hegemonic masculinity. Aliksī, a foreigner like himself, obviously managed to become part of French society and this is Adham’s goal too so he chases the shadows of Aliksī in order to imitate him and gain respect.

When Aliksī sends a letter to Klīr, Adham’s first reaction is to hide it. He feels that Aliksī must have perfected the relation with Klīr and when she reads the letter, she will realise that he is only a fake version. Then he decides that it is better to have ‘a fair competition’ about Klīr, so he leaves the letter on the table. When Klīr does not seem interested and does not open the letter, Adham is almost disappointed and he checks the letter several times to see whether Klīr has opened it or not. Having got over the fear of losing Klīr to Aliksī, he now wants to measure his own performance with that of his predecessor to see if he has mastered the role of Klīr’s partner. Adham is not able to rely on his own judgment of the way he behaves, but instead needs constant confirmation and the letter, as he sees it, and Klīr’s reaction to it, will be the ultimate answer to his question. Adham’s fear of not measuring up to Aliksī’s standard and hence be found out as wanting, and not a real man, makes the letter much more important to him than to Klīr. It is also the letter that finally breaks the relation between Adham and Klīr. Not because Aliksī has written a love letter asking Klīr to come back - the letter is in fact never opened - but because one day when the letter is no longer in its place on Klīr’s table Adham desperately searches for it everywhere, including in Klīr’s handbag. Klīr sees him going through her things and she throws him out of the

227 Ibid., 46.
bedroom and then begins to stay away from the house. Adham patiently waits for her to come back and when he finally understands that she has a new relation he decides to leave and go home to Syria. Upon leaving the house for the final time, he finds Aliksī’s letter in his own, or rather Aliksī’s, coat pocket. He ponders whether to open the letter or not but decides to leave it. The relation with Klīr is over and he, like Aliksī before him, is leaving the house. He no longer needs to understand the other man to understand himself, nor does he need to measure himself against his predecessor.

Adham is aware of the other male characters’ views on him and his performance of masculinity; despite this he does not change but does what he thinks Klīr will like. He is only concerned when he feels that she is not impressed with his way of performing masculinity and when she makes fun of him. When they go to parties, he believes the other people think of him as a fool but he consoles himself with the fact that he is the one who will bring Klīr home at the end of the night. He can live with what he feels is their condescending looks because he will prove them wrong by winning Klīr.

Karīm, in Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid, on the other hand, is constantly worried about what society and his neighbours and colleagues think of him. He does not, like Adham, have anything he can show off to prove himself and therefore finds himself at the mercy of others’ opinions. His desire to fit the traditional male role is what forces him to go against his own principles in order to earn some extra money. The two characters are both aware of the external pressure but they deal with it differently. For Karīm it is important to obtain a general acceptance so that he can begin to live the life he thinks he deserves with a wife and family. For Adham the situation is different, he has chosen to stay because of Klīr and he can afford, as a foreigner, to disregard others’ opinions, even if he agrees with them, as demonstrated above.

In al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl, society’s views are presented in comments on Inās’ behaviour more than on Aḥmad’s actions. Aḥmad is made out to be the ideal male and as such, he only meets with approval from the other characters, male and female, and he does not have to contemplate his own conduct concerning what other men do. However, in comparisons done through descriptions of other men and their behaviour, the hegemonic view on masculinity and femininity in the society described in the novel does not agree with Aḥmad’s performance of masculinity. At the same
time, the hegemony described is not one that is supported by the narrative, and the other male characters are not favourably described. All the novels can therefore be said to contest the hegemony they present. Adham, Karīm and Aḥmad, though not similar, illustrate that although the hegemony is governing, it is not absolute in its power. Whether it is an active decision, as in Adham’s and Aḥmad’s cases or a forced decision as in Karīm’s case, the novels suggest that society plays an important role in the performance of masculinity and men’s perception of themselves and others. The connection between masculinity performance and society, and how this connection is used by the authors, will be elaborated on in the next section.

2.7 Social Critique through the Performance of Masculinity

Though very different in topics and settings, all three novels engage with the formulation and self-perception of the performance of masculinity. The narrative of al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl is situated in a society where, according to the characters, most men consider women as incapable dolls. Inās’ father has only one child, and he wants the best for her. To do this, he decides to bring her up as a boy, acknowledging that within the society they are living, boys have more opportunities and possibilities to shape their own lives. Through the narrative and dialogue, the father’s decision appears strange. Neighbours and relatives expect Inās to marry and have children rather than to study. They are worried that no man will agree to marry her since she will have a better education than he will.

Set against this background, Aḥmad stands out as different with his acceptance for women’s work and respect for their choices and beliefs. Aḥmad advertises himself as a model man. He very eloquently discusses his feelings, hopes and fears and his wish to live in an equal relation while at the same time supporting and helping Inās. He wants to be a model man because he has met Inās; she is the one who has opened his eyes to women’s abilities and he accordingly changes his behaviour. Aḥmad’s awareness of the change he has gone through, and that an educated woman is the reason for this, emphasise the point that gender is relational and that women have a role in the formation of masculinity. At the same time, Aḥmad is the one who has changed. Instead of accepting one of the marriage proposals he is offered, he visits Inās, talks to her, and tries to come to an agreement with her. He himself is surprised at the patience he shows when he could just marry any girl. His
new masculinity wants a woman of his choice who also wants him, not just any woman to start a family.

Unfortunately, for Aḥmad, Inās does not trust that he actually is different from other men she has met and she refuses to marry him. As such, the novel formulates a strong critique against the hegemonic masculinity of the novel, which forms the shadow to Aḥmad’s ‘new masculinity’ and which has shaped Inās’ image of men. The hegemonic masculinity that prevails in the novel looks down on women, does not allow them a personal life and wants to separate them from the public sphere. This is not followed by Inās’ father and Aḥmad, but is seen and quoted as the dominant view in society. Aḥmad presents a masculinity that he believes to be what Inās, or any woman, would want. His position is that of the educated, travelled man and he seems sure that others will follow suit. He is also sure that Inās will change her mind and marry him. Whether she does or not, the father in al-Hubb wa al-wahl, but especially Aḥmad can be read as important contributions to the gender debate at the time of the novel’s publication, as a content and satisfied divergent masculinity. As such, the novel, like other novels of the time, supports women’s freedom but with the help of men rather than as a reaction against men.

Whereas Aḥmad is satisfied with his own way of performing masculinity, Adham in al-Zahr al-‘ārī is constantly re-examining his own actions. If Aḥmad consciously takes a stand against the hegemonic masculinity in his fictional society, Adham is torn between what he thinks he should do and what he actually does. He feels the pressure from his own expectations and those of his male friends but at the same time he is not sure how to behave in order to please Klīr, which becomes more important to him than to live up to other expectations. This contradiction is mirrored in his behaviour. On one hand, he is described as a male stereotype, unable to resist a beautiful woman, spilling his whiskey because he cannot take his eyes off her. On the other hand, he is aware of what he sees as stereotypical male behaviour and avoids it.

The play with gendered behaviour in the novel can be read as a critique of changing gender roles. The fact that Klīr performs all the actions Adham considers masculine leaves him to do nothing, or perform what he sees as feminine tasks. Klīr is definitely not excited by Adham’s cooking, nor by his cleaning or willingness to serve.
her. Adham’s inability to assert himself as the man of the house - in the eyes of Klīr, himself and their friends - ultimately leads to him losing Klīr and having to return home. The male femininity he performs does not lead to love and respect. His constant comparison between what he should do, and what he actually does, underlines how far he is from what he sees as hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, Klīr does not perform traditional femininity either and she is not seen as a victim in the novel, on the contrary she is portrayed as happy and successful in her life.

Another possible reading is to reverse the gender roles again. Klīr’s actions stand out as both inconsiderate and mean, seen from Adham’s perspective; at the same time Adham calls her ‘the husband’ and sees her behaviour as normal ‘male’ behaviour. Read like this, the novel plays with biological sex and expected gender roles. Conduct that is interpreted as abnormal when performed by a woman is interpreted as normal for a man. By reversing the roles, the novel chisels out the expectations brought into a relation and how, when not met, these expectations can become more important than the actual actions. The novel further emphasises the possibility of gender, especially masculinity, being performed differently than what is usually expected. Even if Adham is not successful in his quest for love, through his changes and adaptations he exemplifies that masculinity is not a fixed way of being but rather the adaption to a specific setting and specific demands, as argued by the editors of *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*.228

If the two previous novels presented an ideal and a divergent masculinity respectively, the third novel does not critique the masculinity presented but rather the social circumstances that makes it difficult to perform what is expected. Karīm’s understanding of masculinity as being honourable, truthful, generous and helpful is supported by the novel’s characters. It is also the role he wants to have at home. As a student working extra he can live up to the demands placed on him, but as a practitioner with his own clinic the demands rise but not his ability to meet them. Karīm feels the injustice in his sister living a good life due to her rich husband, but he cannot bring himself to ask her openly for financial help. On the contrary, he uses his last money to buy expensive fish for her when she comes to visit and saves money to buy presents for her daughter. As the older brother, he sees it as his role to provide for her, not the

opposite, even though she could easily pay off all his debts and buy him an office so that he does not have to pay the rent. His sister and mother, though aware of his problems, seem to think that as a man he should be able to sort out his life by himself. His sister sports the view that all a girl needs is a rich husband, further solidifying the idea that it is the man’s prerogative to make everything she needs available to the woman.

Rather than analysing the gendered expectations, the novel critiques the social and governmental system, which in Karīm’s mind means that one has to either be connected to influential people or accept and administer bribes in order to reach a position in society. A man like himself, with no powerful connections and no wish to use bribes has no chance of advancing. Hence, society reduces and marginalises men into a position of performing subordinate masculinity, at the same time as those who are able to bend the rules are able to buy a position in society. Instead of changing the expectations on men and women, a social change that enables them to perform their roles successfully has to be set in motion.

The first person narrator in the three novels bring out the controversies discussed through the internal monologues. The use of male narrators by the female authors further shows what Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky claims, namely that as a woman she is “a producer of masculinities and a performer of them.”229 Through their narrators, the female authors create an arena where they can link together social problems and masculinity. They produce masculinities for different purposes and in the characters’ monologues they tease out what they see as society’s demands and how they relate to them, whether they negate them as Aḥmad, or struggle with them as Adham and Karīm. Whereas the novel from the 1960s appears slightly didactic in its tone and its discussion of masculinity and femininity respectively, the later novels from the 1990s, allow for various aspects of gender formation such as class, culture and external expectations. The masculinities that appear are therefore torn between exterior anticipations put on them and their own abilities, which demonstrate that masculinity is a constant performance.

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There are more than 30 years between the publication of *al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl* and the two other novels. The time between the novels might explain the diverse approach to masculinity formation. *al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl* was written during the period ‘Āṭifa Fayṣal names ‘Traditional Female Discourse’ in her essay on female writing in Syria. The female characters are still created around a male centre and, like Inās, in need of male support. The male character thus fills the function of supporting female emancipation and demonstrate its advantages. The other two novels discussed here are formulated during the period named ‘New Female Discourse’ where women’s and hence men’s roles too, change and become more difficult to define.

To use Fayṣal’s division fully it will be adapted to fit the analysis of masculinities. Rather than focusing on the female characters’ development, the masculinity exhibited will be fore fronted. To do this the periods will be re-named. The first period, in this thesis between 1959 and 1970, will be named the period of ‘the Father Figure’, the second period, between 1970 and 1985 will be named ‘the Political Man’ and the third period, between 1985 and 2000, will be named ‘Problematic Masculinity’. The different divisions and masculinities will be elaborated on in the coming chapters when the scope for comparison is larger.

### 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the importance of expected versus actual behaviour through the characters’ way of advocating a certain behaviour whilst at the same time acting differently. This practice illuminates how the characters on one level agree to the commonly accepted gender roles whilst on another level undermining them by showing that they can be broken. The masculinity presented in the novel can thus be said to exemplify the fluctuant, unstable nature of masculinity. This is similarly accentuated in the cultural confusion between concepts of masculinity, which in turn lead to marginalisation. The analysis further shows how the characters adjust their gender performance in accordance to those important to them; in all three novels these are female characters. The immediate response of close relatives and friends is more important than the reaction of society. Through this, the novels seem to suggest that masculinity is shaped in cooperation between the characters, male and female.

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The chapter has furthermore discussed female writers’ appropriation of the male voice in an act of cross writing. The chapter argues that the appropriation of the male voice gives weight to the discussion of masculinity, both as a critique of gender roles and as a discussion of society’s expectations on masculinity. The chapter has further demonstrated that women’s construction of men through first person narrators destabilises the preconception of gender by introducing concepts such as male femininity and female masculinity. In addition to this, the construction of masculinity in the novels seem to serve specific purposes. The novel from 1963 uses the male voice in order to promote a certain masculine behaviour, particularly in relation to women’s education and liberation. The two novels from the 1990s give the impression of being more concerned with examining masculinity than advertising a certain type of man. At the same time, they too contribute to the discussion on gender formation by pointing out the problematic situation for those unable to perform the expected masculinity. Through the discussion of the characters’ hopes and feelings, the expectations on masculinity such as stability, protectiveness and an ability to provide have been detected in all three novels. In the following chapter, a discussion of the formation of masculinity from boyhood to manhood will be held where some of the expectations elaborated on this chapter, such as an ability to provide, will re-occur.
3. Becoming a Man – Developing Masculinity

You have now got responsibilities…the event will create a man out of you.

*Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb* (Steps in the fog, 1984) by Malāha al-Khānī (b.1938) tells the story of Haytham, a first year university student living with his parents and younger brother in a flat in Damascus. When Haytham is first presented, he is in a constant fight with his parents, whom he feels treat him in a restrictive and old-fashioned way. He sees himself as a modern young man and he plans for a future very different from the life his parents are living. Haytham shows no consideration or understanding for the help and support his parents are offering him. When his mother turns ill during two weeks, he simply moves in with his friends to be able to continue studying without having to help out at home. At a later stage, when his father has an accident resulting in coma, Haytham’s initial reaction is to leave all the responsibility to his mother. As the family’s financial situation becomes worse, Haytham has to choose between, as he puts it, the family’s future or his own future. He decides to help the family, drops out of university and finds a job with an estate agent. At his new job Haytham assumes more and more duties, and as he is now the main earner in the family, his position vis-à-vis his parents changes. From having been irresponsible and spoiled, he is now a source of strength for the family. However, the harmony Haytham feels does not remain. The novel ends with his employer being killed for participating in black market affairs and Haytham is left without a job. Despite this, the experience has changed him, and the Haytham that appears at the end of the novel is very different from the young man he was at the beginning of the book.

In this chapter, the transition from boyhood into the performance of masculinity will be discussed. The focus is on how parents, siblings and society in various ways are presented to uphold a hegemonic masculine in the fictional societies described. The male protagonist is then, through these ideals, shaped into becoming what he, and they, see as a good performer of masculinity. The chapter elaborates on how members of

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the fictional society interfere and interact with the gendered performance of the main male character and how gender becomes a communal project. The discussion moreover shows an awareness in the fictional society of a hegemonic masculinity and that men and women have to position themselves in relation to this concept, or rather be positioned by others in relation to it, in order to find a place in society. Through the strong female voices in the novels, represented by mothers, sisters and girlfriends, a female perspective on masculinity formation is examined. Hence, the chapter elaborates on what the female characters want from men when they have a chance to interfere and interact and mould a certain masculinity rather than focusing on their reactions to already grown-up masculinities. Whereas the previous chapter engaged with male characters’ views on themselves this chapter analyses how female writers see masculinity through their female characters. Through the novels’ engagement with different periods of the 20th century, a comparison between expectations on masculinity, as presented in the novels, will be conducted.

In addition to *Kaṭawāt fī al-ṭabāb, al-Riwāya al-mustahīla: fusayfusā’ dimashqiyya* (The Impossible novel: a Damascene mosaic, 1997) by Ghāda al-Sammān and *A’āṣīr fī bilād al-shām* (Cyclones in the Levant, 1998) by Nādyā Khūst will be discussed. al-Sammān’s novel addresses an unusual upbringing of a girl. It pinpoints the expectations normally placed on boys and young men through the portrayal of a girl and her cousins. In addition to this, the novel underlines how the patriarchal dividend is an accepted notion in the fictional society and demonstrates an attempt to benefit from this norm by bringing up a girl as a boy. Khūst’s novel instead follows a young boy’s upbringing at the beginning of the 20th century. The novel shows how his mother and father both do their best, in different ways, for him to grow up into what they see as a successful young man.

The chapter starts with an outline of the narrative structure of the main novel, then goes on to discuss influences on masculinity as seen in social and anthropological work on masculinities in the Arab World. Through the analysis of the novel, the chapter demonstrates how the main characters communally create gender. They do this by judging others’ behaviour whilst at the same time accepting and reacting to others’ judgment of the own gendered behaviour. The focus is then directed to expectations placed on girls and boys throughout their upbringing. The chapter
concludes with a discussion of changing hegemonies through a comparison of the novels.

3.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure

This section will outline the narrative structure of the main novel. In contrast to the novels in the previous chapter *Khāṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb* is narrated in the third person singular by an all-knowing narrator, a style that to some extent creates a distance from the events. It further makes the novel more of a chronicle than an actual engagement with the problems of gender formation. The narrator moves between the characters, and the novel can therefore be said to exhibit multiple focalization. This structure introduces Haytham as the main character, and then invites different perspectives through the supporting characters’ opinions before moving back to Haytham and describing his development. The novel starts with Haytham, who is the main focalizer, then moves on to his mother, some of Haytham’s friends, then his girlfriend’s mother before moving back to Haytham again. The multiple focalization serves the purpose of strengthening Haytham’s experiences and expectations of masculinity. In order to create a homogenous view on masculinity in the novel, Haytham’s views on and ways of doing masculinity are mirrored in other men and women’s views. Haytham’s perspective on masculinity changes throughout the novel. His initial attitude of only wanting freedom and authority, which he sees as the benefits of masculinity, later changes when he sees the need to look after his family.

That Haytham is the main focalizer makes the development from boyhood into a performance of masculinity apparent in the text. He is concerned with his status vis-à-vis other young men, his role in the family and his position at work and these themes are repeatedly discussed in the narrative. Whereas the mother returns as a focalizer the father, and presumably Haytham’s role model for masculinity performance, does not take over the narration. Interestingly, the father is only portrayed while talking to the other characters or through their thoughts about him. He, in opposition to the mother, is not introduced or explained by the narrator, nor is the little brother, Jamāl. The male viewpoint is hence almost exclusively Haytham’s, that of the growing boy finding his way in his relations with the other characters. The mother on the other hand comes back repeatedly with comments, interpretations and worries about her son. Haytham’s development is therefore partly seen through her
eyes and partly explained by his own feelings, reactions and thoughts on the other characters. The mother’s reoccurring intervention with Haytham’s narrative can be read as a sign of her interference in his life; through her actions and ideas she influences his behaviour. Despite this, the text can be said to stand for the ‘Male Gaze’ discussed in the introduction. Even though the father is silent and the mother takes an active part, the novel, as narrative and content, reinforces a patriarchal structure. The text itself is focused on how men perceive and understand themselves, women and the world. The female perspective, discussed further on, reinforces the patriarchal values and the need for men to take control and be in charge. Through its characterisation and focalization the novel thus creates an understanding of masculinity for its reader very much in line with the patriarchal ideal that was found difficult to reach by the characters discussed in the previous chapter.

The narrator’s movement between the characters leads to an understanding of Haytham’s choices concerning his studies and family. The different characters offer their stories of poverty, hardship and political experiences and thus give a glimpse of the various layers of the fictional society presented. In the discussion of masculinity, this multitude of voices strengthens certain aspects of consensus based, gendered behaviour. It further illustrates the importance of individual differences in the understanding and performance of masculinity and femininity, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the text. The many voices further have an impact on the characterisation. As direct characterisation, through comments and judgment, the harmony between the multiple voices strengthens the hegemony of the novel. Through indirect characterisation, an analysis of Haytham’s actions and speech, it becomes clear how he develops throughout the novel and moves closer to the hegemonic masculinity of his fictional society. The novel’s title, Steps in the Fog, can be seen as a reference to Haytham’s development of masculinity. The various demands placed on him both guide him through his confusion and at the same time disturb his balance through the added pressure of conforming to the various standards presented.

The timeframe of the novel is relatively short, the end of Haytham’s first year at university and the beginning of the second year, with the exam period in between. There are sparse flashbacks, usually used to explain or comment on certain features of the narrative. A brief discussion of the father’s political youth is for
example added as a contrast to the dictatorial person Haytham finds him to be at the novel’s present. Since there is very little information about the past, the section on the father’s political ideas and previous imprisonment stands out as particularly important in the narrative. It gives the reader a better adjusted picture of the father in opposition to the tyrant Haytham describes. It further shows how the society described, and its expectations for its participants, change people with time. The father, once a freethinking political activist has become a man worried about reputation and tradition. A similar transformation as Haytham goes through later in the novel and which makes him, towards the end of the novel, perform a comparable masculinity to that exhibited by his father at the beginning of the narrative.

The time period chosen places Haytham in a vulnerable time in life. He is young enough still to be able to depend on his parents when it comes to money and protection. At the same time, he is old enough to be able to set up a family and take part in grown up life. The relatively short time period and the examination stress, which affects not only Haytham but also the whole family, lend a feeling of pressure and importance to the events. At the same time, the repeated description of Haytham’s exam preparation transfers the cumbersome feeling Haytham has towards his studies to the reader. When he is presented with a chance of doing something else, with varied tasks, it seems logical that he decides to leave the routine of his studies and embark on something new, especially since this choice enables him to contribute to the family’s survival. When Haytham later fails his exams, it is just mentioned in passing in the narrative, despite the detailed build-up to the examination. At the time he knows the results, he has already gained a job and is passing a more important exam, that of becoming the breadwinner of the household.

The novel forms a circle through its events. Haytham is first introduced as a spoiled youngster on his way home from friends. Throughout the novel, he develops and towards the end he is seen as a man, performing the expected masculinity and treated as such by his family, employer and friends. However, in the final chapter Haytham is insulted by one of the men he works with; he overreacts and starts a fight and is subsequently told by his employer that he is still a child. The following day, when Haytham turns up for work, the police have surrounded the office and he is told his employer has been killed. The rosy future he has painted for himself is crushed and
he returns home, in much a similar fashion as the novel started. Despite his development and change, Haytham proves not to be fully able to perform the expected masculinity. He fails, and dramatically loses the job that forms the basis upon which he formed his masculinity. With no income, he cannot provide for his family and he has lost the power he had secured for a while. With this circular motion, the novel seems to suggest that the surrounding circumstances, as well as other characters, are influential in the perception and performance of masculinity. It also underlines that performing masculinity is a constant struggle of asserting oneself. The following section will elaborate on how the female perspective in the novels relates to the struggle of asserting oneself as a performer of masculinity.

3.1.2 A Female Perspective

The novels in chapter two focused on the male first person narrator and women’s views were filtered through their consciousness. The same is true for Aʿāṣīr ḍī bilād al-shām, which is told through the perspective of the young boy Qays. In both Khaṭawāt ḍī al-ḍabāb and al-Riwāya al-mustaḥila, the narrator changes and different perspectives are therefore offered. The main female voice in Khaṭawāt ḍī al-ḍabāb is heard through the mother. The novel begins with her worrying about her son being out too late, drinking and mixing with, in her mind, the wrong type of people. She presents a view of Haytham as careless and unable to choose good friends. She does not trust him to take the right decisions and she sees and treats him like a small child. At the same time as she sees him as a child in need of guidance she is proud of her son who studies at university and realises that he is beginning to grow up. Since her initial view on Haytham is that of a child, she forgives him for not buying bread, avoiding helping her and breaking the rules she and her husband have set up. When she later needs his support, her view on him changes, and with that her expectations of him.

This development in the mother’s treatment of her son and her changing demands exemplify the change from boyhood to manhood. She does not turn to the much younger son Jamāl for any support, and his role in the family does not change when the father turns ill, whereas Haytham is no longer allowed to behave as a child. The mother’s new expectations illustrate how the parent-child relation transforms into a female-male relation. This happens when she believes that he is old enough to look after her. Her initial position as parent diminishes as Haytham grows up and she sees
no need to look after him, on the contrary; she now expects Haytham, as the man of the household, to look after her. Her perspective hence reinforces the patriarchal structure and assumes clearly defined gender roles for men and women, where men automatically become responsible for the family.

Haytham’s girlfriend Munā gives another female perspective on him. The shifting perspectives between the mother, who sees him as a child, and Munā, who sees him as her boyfriend, show some of the different circumstances to which Haytham has to adjust. Whereas the mother at the beginning of the novel feels a need to look after and protect her son, Munā expects him to be able to look out for her. At the beginning of the novel she is very much in love with Haytham, they have been together for a while and have made plans for a future together. However, she does get more and more frustrated with Haytham’s lack of initiative. She pushes him to find them a place to meet in, she wants him to study so that their future will be secured and she wants him to invite her home. She cannot, and does not want to, see a child in Haytham but a young man with whom to build her future. When he does not live up to this role, she begins to lose interest. At around the same time, Haytham no longer comes regularly to university and Munā starts to look for someone else. Although from a different generation than Haytham’s mother, Munā has very similar views on what it means to perform masculinity properly and she does her best to guide Haytham into this role.

When Haytham finally comes back to university after a long absence, a ping-pong match is organised between him and Munā’s new admirer, with Munā as the referee. The symbolism in her judging the two young men’s achievement is evident. Significantly, Haytham is more disturbed by Munā’s view of him as a loser than his actual loss. When he much later, after having begun to earn money, buys flowers and brings them to university to give to Munā, she does not even see him. What he has accomplished outside the university world does not give him any credit within it, and Munā judges him on the criteria of the student world. Failing to keep up his position, he is no longer interesting to her. Both the mother and Munā do their best to shape Haytham into a performance of masculinity that they see as successful.

In *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*, the narrative voice changes from first person to a third person, all-knowing narrator but is mainly focused on the little girl Zayn. The father, and other characters, offer flashbacks retelling events in her deceased
mother’s life, a woman who is described as very progressive. In addition to Zayn and her friends’ voices, that of a conservative aunt and a worried grandmother are the most distinctive female voices in the narrative. The heterogeneous group of female voices negates that there is a gender-based consensus on how to perform masculinity and femininity. Instead, they assert that factors such as age, education, background and upbringing play an important role in the upbringing of children. Their collaborative efforts in bringing up Zayn and her cousins therefore lead to more than one conflict throughout the novel. However, as in *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḥabb*, the female perspective offers insights into how the female characters see, and try to influence masculinity.

In *Aʿāṣir fī bilād al-shām*, the mother takes a less obvious role in the upbringing of her son. She is aware of the obligations that await him as a man and tries to prepare him for them by encouraging him to be with his father and the other men to learn from them. She, like the other characters in the novel, seems to believe in two separate spheres, one for women and one for men. Her way of bringing up her son is therefore to show him that he is different from her. Through the upbringing of her son and the values she transmits to him, she too establishes a patriarchal gender order. She wants her son to be accepted and popular and her way of assuring this is to encourage him to follow the hegemony of the fictional society they live in. The following section will discuss how mothers, and other characters, together shape masculinity.

### 3.2 Shaping Masculinity

Since Judith Butler’s seminal work *Gender Trouble*\(^\text{232}\), the concept of individuals doing gender rather than performing predetermined acts based on biology has become the domineering view in gender research. Connell adopts this view when she writes that “[g]ender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body.”\(^\text{233}\) The body, the biological sex, places certain expectations on an individual. In the novels discussed, this becomes flagrant when in one scene it is impossible for a group of boys to tell if a new child they meet is a boy or a girl. Then the actions speak and they decide it is a boy who can safely be

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included in their group. When they later find out the biological sex of the child, the girl, whom they were about to make their leader they are utterly appalled.

Their confusion illustrates their distinct preconception, based on sex only, of what girls and boys can do. When they face a girl who can run, swim and jump as skilfully as they can, they do not know how to handle the situation. The girl’s grandmother feels that this confusion can destabilise the relation between the children and therefore decides to pierce the girl’s ears and give her earrings. By this clear marker of which sex the girl belongs to she has strengthened the binary gender structure and placed a visible reminder for the girl herself and others that she is doing something wrong if she performs actions gendered male. Connell says that: “gender relations, the relations among peoples and groups organised through the reproductive arena, form one of the major structures of all documented societies.”

Through the earrings, the grandmother reinforces the structures of her immediate society and makes sure that the division between the genders stays intact.

Gender can thus be said to be both context bound and performed in a symbiotic fashion with the surrounding society or, as Oystein Gullvåg Holter puts it: “a social psychological link between the individual and the collective.” At a specific moment, an individual action can be interpreted as either masculine or feminine, but the general division rests on social structures. These social structures are something one has to learn and to adapt to. In Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām, this is pointed out by Qays when he sees a little girl playing. Though still a small girl, her game concentrates on finding a husband and having children, a game he himself was never encouraged to play. To perform the expected masculinity (or femininity), is a process that starts at a young age and goes on for the rest of one’s life. In their article “Boys and Men in Families,” Michelle Adams and Scott Coltrane maintain that especially the patterns of play in separate groups of girls and boys lay the foundation for later adult behaviour. They further quote examples of how boys and girls choose gender separated playgroups, even when they are not prompted to do so by caretakers. The fictional scenario involving Qays and his reflection on games demonstrates the texts’ awareness

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234 Ibid., 72.
of children’s ability to create gendered worlds. In Live and Die Like a Man, an anthropological study from Egypt, Farah Ghannam shows how this process involves all members of the Egyptian families she has interviewed, rather than just the children.\textsuperscript{237} She asserts how enactments of masculinity are observed, critiqued and evaluated by other members of society, including women.\textsuperscript{238} This communal construction of masculinity guides children from an early age into what is seen as correct masculine and feminine behaviour. In Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām, Qays would prefer to be with his mother and listen to the stories she and her friends tell. Rather than welcoming her son to join, the mother tells him that he is big enough to go and sit with his father and the men in the other room. He is no longer allowed to take part in the women’s conversation and she thus signals to him and to her female friends that he has become a man. His own desire to stay is not important and the mother tells him that as a man he will find more interesting things to listen to in his dad’s company.

Another example of how boys are eased into future performances of masculinity is given by Deniz Kandiyotı. She shows how young boys are jokingly treated as the head of the household when other men are absent.\textsuperscript{239} This game primes the boys from a young age towards a certain behaviour, including a feeling of power when sisters and mothers obey their orders. As noted by Adams and Coltrane the family circle is thus often the first place where boys understand that they are different from girls and begin to exercise their power.\textsuperscript{240} It is however not only a fun game; young boys without older male support are from an early age expected to take up the responsibilities preserved for the male of the household. In Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb, Haytham is not placed as the head of the household as a joke. It is, on the contrary, a demand from his mother when his father falls ill. In al-Riwāya al-mustahīla, Zayn notices how her male cousins are given the task to look after her, even though they are the same age. Her aunt further treats her son, Zayn’s cousin, whose father has died a few years earlier, as the head of her family unit. In this case, the aunt is priming her son to take on the responsibility he will later shoulder on his own. She further creates

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{237} Ghannam, Live and Die.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 24.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Adams and Coltrane, “Boys and Men,” 233.
\end{itemize}
a position for herself by using her son, whom she can control, as the head of the family rather than turning to her brothers. In a conflict, her son is however subordinated to his uncles due to the age difference, even though he has power over his immediate relatives.

Consequently, children’s upbringing can give insights into the dominant views on gender relations in a society and the roles prescribed for each gender. At the same time, the transition from boyhood into manhood and the performance of masculinity is not always easy, despite the early preparations that mothers and family members organise for their sons. While mapping out the field of masculinity studies Stefan Horlacher notes that “[m]asculinity, as a notion, [...] is not a simple fact but has to be acquired through struggles, painful initiations, rites of passage, or long and often humiliating apprenticeships.” 241 Through various tests, the young boy proves that he is able to perform masculinity and learns the values of his society. As part of a specific group or society, adhering to the social rules or breaking them becomes not a personal choice but a decision which determines your position vis-à-vis others. Whereas, as stated above, the family setting is often the first place where a boy realises that he is different, it is outside the everyday life of the domestic setting that a boy, and later man, has to prove his masculinity. 242 This can for example be done in school, at work or in other social circumstances.

Bo Nilsson examines the same notion in his study of boy scouts and their rules and regulations. He too argues that boys can obtain masculinity through winning competitions and handling challenges. 243 Even though, as argued in the initial chapter, masculinity is always performative, the transition period between boyhood and manhood seems particularly focused on being able to prove oneself worthy of being a man. This is reflected in all three novels, where the boys constantly wait for others’ approval to be accepted. They moreover participate in actions with the sole purpose of appearing better than other young men and boys, in order to improve the image of themselves in front of the others.

241 Stefan Horlacher, “Charting the Field of Masculinity Studies; or, Toward a Literary History of Masculinities,” in Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present, ed. Stefan Horlacher (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
243 Nilsson, Maskulinitet, 16.
In the novels discussed in this chapter, there are shifting ideas and ideals about gender roles between different generations within the families and between the male and female characters. Nevertheless, there are certain structures included in the development from boyhood to manhood. In *Live and Die Like a Man*, Ghannam uses the term ‘Masculine Trajectories’ to refer to the process of becoming a man.\(^{244}\) In this process, she includes structures such as class and gender relations, while emphasising that the masculine trajectories are different from a life cycle and intend to capture the shifting norms that inform the making of men.\(^{245}\) Masculine trajectories further illustrate how class interacts with the expectations placed on masculinity. Men, and women, from the upper classes have more leeway in their performance of gender roles and a possibility to deviate to a certain extent from what is expected, without being seen by their peer group as losing in power or position. This leeway however never sanctions a major change of gendered behaviour, as the characters discussed in this chapter demonstrate.

In her anthropological work on Damascene women’s lives, Sally Gallagher has exemplified precisely that the particular gender expectations on men and women are the same over class boundaries, but that the enactment of them might vary.\(^{246}\) This is verified by Dalya Abudi who, in a discussion on the Arab family as a miniature of Arab society, pinpoints education and wealth as two key factors for change. She particularly connects between these two factors and more liberal views on marriage and gender roles in the Arab world, in comparison with the dominant views in society.\(^{247}\) In *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*, Zayn’s mother comes from an upper class family from the coastal region and she marries a man from an old Damascene family with a moderate income and position. Whereas the forms for how things are done vary between the two families, the general demands on the role of a man and woman respectively are very similar. The expected masculinity includes being the decision taker and moneymaker of the family. When Zayn’s mother buys a flat for her money, the father refuses to move there since he does not want people to think that he is dependent on his wife. In *Khaṭawāt fī al-ğabāb*, Mūnā and Sa‘īd respectively show

\(^{244}\) Ghannam, *Live and Die*, 6.
\(^{245}\) Ibid.
\(^{246}\) Sally Gallagher, *Making Do*, v.
how class and education interfere with the abilities and possibilities of performing gender, as will be discussed further with regard to relations with the opposite sex.

This division of provider and provided for, which hinders Zayn’s father from accepting his wife’s offer, is further enforced by the law which forces Zayn’s grandfather to make his nephew, rather than his daughters, the beneficiary of his inheritance. As the male of the family, his nephew is supposed to look after the females and he therefore has a right to the family money and land. The gender regime discussed in the introduction is therefore not just based on culture and tradition but enforced legally. Whereas the Syrian constitution stresses the equality of its citizens regardless of biological sex, the personal laws regulating for example marriage, inheritance, travelling and childcare are gender specific and vary between the religious groups.248 These laws, which are reinforced by the state, support a division of gender that the citizens have to position themselves towards. This creates a hetero-normative society where distinctive gender roles are of importance; women have to be women for men to be able to be men.249 Any violation of the hegemonic behaviour thus becomes not only an individual expression of lifestyle, but also a threat to, and a questioning of the social, law enforced, order.250

In a study on feminism in Syria, Mayya al-Rahbī has touched upon what effects these laws have on women’s views of themselves and their possibilities of shaping their lives.251 She argues that the laws can be seen as discriminating against both men and women; women since they are not seen as equal to men, and men since they have the burden of providing for and protecting their female relatives.252 This


250 Ibid., 179.

251 al-Rahbī, al-Nisawiyya, 193.

252 Ibid., 179.
thesis does not examine the different Syrian personal laws, however, since the writers engage with society, and hence its laws, the social and legal frameworks within which the writers produce their fiction is known to both themselves and their readership. Different approaches in engaging with this reality can thus be read as ways of supporting or denouncing existing social structures. In al-Riwāya al-mustaḥila, this division is for example critiqued through Zayn’s, the child’s, confusion about what she interprets as inequality, whereas the grown up characters do not think it is an odd event that the male relative inherits the money.

Country explicit laws hence inform the performance of masculinity, but specific places can also impose their own rules. Specific places, like military and educational institutions, can also to a certain extent negate the importance of class and other markers. In Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb the university stands out as a world of its own. The university is an area closed for outsiders, such as parents, and the young men and women live the mixed social life they are not able to have outside the university gates. This suggests that gendered behaviour is somewhat situational. Class and regional differences are not forgotten, but they are not as prominent as in life outside the gates. Despite this, the structures of the relations between male and female students are built on the same foundation as in their lives outside the gates. Inside the gates, they can sit together, talk and play in a way that is unthinkable outside the university. However, the expectations on the male character to be active, assertive and protective still linger in discussions and actions, in addition to the heteronormative distinction between those who have a girlfriend and those who do not. What is considered normal, and even expected, within the university gates might not be seen in the same way outside the gates. Having a girlfriend is one of these things. Whereas it stems from the same idea of male virility as part of masculinity, the way to display it in society is through marriage, whereas inside the gates it is sanctioned behaviour to have a girlfriend.

In Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām, it is the fields at the outskirt of the village that form this place of freedom for the children and offer a possibility to meet and play without the grown-ups’ constant watch. This is an area where the normal gender rules do not apply as strictly as in the rest of society. It is however clear through the interaction between the children, and the elaborate games played by the boys to show off their courage and strength, that the general norms are not forgotten. Girls are
allowed to participate to a certain extent, but the main purpose of the games is for the boys to find a place in the hierachical order. This place then determines their position in the group and the respect they are shown.

In *Khaṭawāṭ fī al-ḍabāb* the mother plays a major role in Haytham’s life. She is the caretaker and simultaneously the executioner of the father’s ideas. At the same time, she is able to intervene with the father on behalf of her son. In Ghannam’s interviews, she proves that women, contrary to what many previous studies have suggested, have a fundamental role in the formation of masculinity. As mothers, sisters and other close relatives, the behaviour of the family’s men reflect on their status and position, so it is of utmost importance that the male performs masculinity as expected. Through advice, help and their own conduct they influence their male relatives’ behaviour. Another example of this can be seen in *Harwala fawqa ṣaqī‘ tūlidū* (*Hurryimg over the frost of Toledo, 1993*) by Mārī Rashū where a woman returns to Syria to find a bride for her son. Through her behaviour and previous conduct she becomes the guarantor that her son will be a good husband. When she later in the novel no longer is able to control her son and he rebels against both her and his wife, she, as his mother, becomes responsible vis-à-vis the girl’s family. She is moreover held responsible by her son for having interfered with his life.

The male-female relationship thus further means a burden for the women since their behavior affects the male characters’ perception of themselves. In *Yawmiyyāṭ muṭalliqa*254 (*Diaries of a divorcing woman, 1994*) by Haiṭā’ Bīṭār, the main female protagonist knows that she breaks not only her father’s heart but his view of himself by asking for a divorce. Even though she is the one who has been unable to complete her marriage, he, as the one who brought her up, is held responsible by society. Although he does not oppose her decision, she feels that he has changed his habits and ways of dealing with people since he no longer sees himself as respectable. She is unable to continue her marriage but she does everything else that she can to reinstate her father’s feelings of self-worth.


254 The normal usage is the passive participle Muṭalliqa, emphasising the agency of the male partner. In this case, the active participle is used, accentuating the will of the female protagonist to go through with her divorce.
All three novels discussed in this chapter show this intertwined relation between the genders and how the female relatives often stipulate the masculinity the boys are taught to perform. The gender dichotomy that appears in the novels cannot be said, therefore, to be a male creation but is rather formed in collaboration. The female characters are the ones in charge of the day-to-day education and upbringing of the children and the expectations that make up gender roles are formulated and learnt at a young age. Another example of this is Banāt ḥāratina (The Girls of our neighbourhood, 1998) by Malāḥa al-Khānī where the boys and girls are separated from an early age and further treated differently within the household. Whereas it is seen as natural that the boys leave the house and study, the female protagonist has to fight for a chance to educate herself. The awareness of gender differences from a young age is demonstrated in, among other places, a study on adolescent boys in rural Egypt by Nadia Zibani and Martha Braidy. The study shows that schoolboys have a clear view of what they think masculinity entails. They divide the roles of masculinity into conduct, responsibility and privilege. The boys are further aware that there are certain obligations that have to be met in order to perform successful masculinity. For example, they mention earning and spending money in order for masculinity to be performed correctly.255 The concept of being the earner of the family is also discussed in Samira Aghacy’s Literary Masculinity where she argues that a young boy’s ability to bring home money results in his parents’ respect and admiration.256

This can be seen in Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb, where Haytham changes his position within the family by becoming the main provider. In these cases, it is hence not to be born a man that leads to a respected position but the actions one performs. Moreover, it is others’ approval of the actions that actually counts and leads to a change from childhood to manhood in Haytham’s case. In Banāt ḥāratina, mentioned above, one of the boys is seen as good-for-nothing. When he runs away to join the army the father is enraged at how the boy can throw away his life in this way, but the action still shows agency and bravery, which later serves the boy well in his transition from boyhood to manhood.

256 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 154.
The boys in Zibani’s and Braidy’s study go on to discuss masculinity and conduct, which is connected both to their own behaviour and the ability of controlling the conduct of female relatives.\textsuperscript{257} The third component, privilege, was seen as internal to being born male and includes the right to be looked after by female members of the family. Whereas the researchers suggest that the same ideas the boys put forward are internalised into society as a whole, they mean that the time of adolescence is a period when these notions are intensified and the young boys feel a need to prove their masculinity and thus strictly adhere to what they see as the hegemonic norm.\textsuperscript{258}

In \textit{al-Riwaysa al-mustahila}, the female character Zayn’s behaviour enrages her male cousins since they feel that what she does implies that they cannot control her, which in turn leads to a loss of masculinity. In the matrix of gender relations, they are depending on her gendered behaviour to prove their own success. When she does not adhere to their wishes and to society’s norms, they try to scare her to behave in the way they see correct. Whereas the boys’ sisters take pride in the male wish to protect the family’s honour, and thus play the expected female role in the gender game, Zayn refuses. Zayn’s refusal to conform illustrates how gender roles are formulated on mutual agreement. When one party no longer performs the expected actions, the other part loses his (or her) ability to perform the contrasting part, a point very similar to the confusion of gender roles discussed in the previous chapter.

One way of enforcing the gender roles is through role models. The aunt in \textit{al-Riwaysa al-mustahila} is therefore worried that her fatherless son will become less manly than his friends who have present fathers. Despite herself being influential in the children’s upbringing, and very authoritative on what is masculine and feminine, she fears that her son is less equipped than other children to perform gender correctly. She is therefore careful to make use of her brothers in the children’s upbringing. One example is when the aunt tells off the girls, and then asks her brother to tell off the boys, adding that they will listen to him as a man. Like this, the boys are told off twice, indirectly through hearing the aunt tell their uncle and directly by the uncle. They are also given the information that the aunt, though commanding her brother, does not give herself authority over them. In \textit{Khatawat fi al-\dabab} the father is used as a final

\textsuperscript{257} Zibani and Braidy, “Adolescent Boys”, 65.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 66.
judge or authority more than as a role model for his children. When Haytham’s mother
sees that Haytham will not listen to her, she seeks support from the father, not as an
equal parent but as the head of the household, someone who has more power both than
her and her son does. In both cases, the women are verbal about what they want and
what they think is correct behaviour, but they refer the actual action to a man.

The so called role model does not necessary have to be the biological
father. In *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, Haytham’s manager, the wealthy estate agent, tries to
become a father figure for his young employee. The father-son relationship invoked
by the manager is used as a way of socialising boys into men. Since he holds a higher
position in the hierarchal system of masculinity performance, he can support Haytham
in his struggle with masculinity. He has the ability to help the younger man with
money, work, and even marriage and thus creates a dependency on himself from the
side of the younger man. By using his position to provide a possibility for Haytham to
reach all the material aspects of masculinity performance, the manager strengthens his
own position by creating a network of young men dependent on him. Qays in *Aʿāṣīr fī
bilād al-shām* is put in the same situation when he moves in with an elder man in the
city. The man takes it upon himself to educate Qays and show him how a man behaves.
Through his contacts and financial position, he has the possibility to influence the
young man and affect his life choices.

Even though role models are important, the young men and boys take
women’s opinions into account. In *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, Munā and the girls at
university exert power over Haytham and the other boys and indicate what is accepted
and expected behaviour from them. In one part of the novel Haytham and a friend
discuss girls, and the friend says that anyone can get a girlfriend these days since girls
only want to get married. Haytham disagrees, and points at the many demands modern
girls have on their future spouses, demands he feels he has to live up too.259 Whereas
his friend seem to think that being a man is enough to find a wife, Haytham instead
advocates that acting like a man is what counts. He adds that modern girls have specific
ideas about what this means, which cannot be overlooked, something that previously
might have been possible. The boys’ discussion can be read as a sign of a changing

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society, where girls have won more power over their life choices, which affects their men’s performance of masculinity.

Thus far, the role of society, individual people and external circumstances have been discussed as instrumental in the formation of masculinity. The transition from boyhood to manhood is usually described as more complicated than just a long adaptation process aided by society. David D. Gilmore points out that: “[t]his current notion that manhood is problematic, a critical threshold that boys must pass through testing, is found at all levels of sociocultural development regardless of what other alternative roles are recognised.”

The change from child to man, from dependent to provider builds on a set of tests showing that one is worthy of the new position. This can to some extent explain Haytham’s hesitation. He knows that there is a possibility to fail and he further knows that there is no going back once he is accepted as a man.

In *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* the first section addresses institutional and social practices that function as tests for manhood. These can be religious rituals that one has to go through, as will be discussed further on in this chapter, or stages in social life such as obligatory military service, which is seen as a way of initiating a boy into manhood. These rituals or practices are important not only for the boy himself but for the whole family. In the novels discussed, this is seen to a varying degree through games and religious and official ceremonies. In *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, Haytham is not put through any type of official testing, but there are still two trials that shape and distinguish him as a man. Firstly, when his father falls ill and he is forced to step in and take responsibility for the family, a role he does not really want. The second time is at his work. Having performed simple tasks for a while, he is asked to accompany the owner on a late evening tour. He is however told that it is his own choice and that he can leave if he wants to. Haytham chooses to accept and to go through with the tour. When he has accomplished what is asked of him, Haytham has passed the test, and his manager tells him that they are now equal. The trials function as symbols of the transition from one world to another, manifested in both Haytham’s own behaviour and how others treat

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him. However, as Connell emphasises, masculinity is not something one earns once and for all in order to rest assured of having accomplished it, but it is rather a constant struggle, something that Haytham also learns in the novel. Having been told he is a man and an equal to the manager, an angry outburst at a colleague reduces him to a child again in the eyes of his superiors.

In his study on boy scouts, Nilsson elaborates on the way infantile behaviour is used as an accusation of femininity in stereotypical accounts, and can be equated to castration. He concentrates on its usage in stories with the purpose of teaching moral values to young boys. In the transmission period between boyhood and manhood, while working actively to be seen as a man, to be judged childish or even infantile means a great loss of self-confidence and masculine identity. In Haytham’s case, this is evident in his arguments with his parents before the father’s accident where he feels reduced to a child. He is torn between his life as a boy and the possibility of being a man. He is attracted by the privileges he sees in manhood and at the same time he is not willing to take on the responsibility linked with it. The quote from the novel, which begins this chapter, shows the awareness of Haytham’s friends whilst at the same time pointing at the social circumstances that will make him into a man anyway.

However, whereas a man’s position within the hierarchal structure of masculinities can be affected by his behaviour, there are certain rituals, which initially allow him to enter into manhood. One of these rituals is the circumcision of boys, described in al-Riwa`ya al-mustahaul. Zayn witnesses the preparation for, and later the festivities after, her cousin’s circumcision. Though too small to understand properly what happens, she realises that her cousin has, through a ritual she herself is excluded from, suddenly obtained a much more important role in the household and among the children. He, though still technically a boy, is now half included in the category of men and as a result, his power increases, something he makes sure the younger children and particularly the girls are aware of.

In a chapter in Imagined Masculinities, two accounts of circumcision in Islamic countries are given and both stress the function it has as the transition from

262 Nilsson, Maskulinitet, 65.
boyhood to manhood. In one account, it also forms a test of manhood. To be able to endure the circumcision without crying or screaming means that the boy will turn into a strong man - the opposite shames the boy and the family for the rest of their lives. The mother described in the chapter, though worried about her son, is still filled with pride when he asks the circumciser to cut off a bit more, showing that he can handle the pain inflicted on him. Her feelings of pride acknowledge that her own position is affected by her son’s behaviour. This can also be seen in Khaṭawāt fi al-ḍabāb, where the mother relies on her son to perform what is expected of normative masculinity in order to keep the family’s reputation intact, in addition to helping them survive.

Khaṭawāt fi al-ḍabāb deals with its contemporary time and is set in the 1970s whereas the other two novels have an historical outlook and are set at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite this, all three novels sport similar views on masculinity formation. Through the novels’ focus on the importance of social and communal influences on the formation of gender identity they present masculinity as a social project. They further emphasise the importance of a correct performance of masculinity for the reputation and survival of the immediate family. As such, masculinity becomes an essential project for mothers and sisters, who have the educational responsibility. Through the creation of masculinity and femininity in the novels, the writers show the intricate connection between femininity and masculinity. Through the characters, they further suggest that the women both actively take part in the formulation of masculinity and participate in the upholding of the gender regime. The next section will further demonstrate how boys are eased into being participants in the gender regime.

3.3 Building up the Performance of Masculinity

When Khaṭawāt fi al-ḍabāb begins, Haytham is spending the evening with some of his friends. It is getting late and he decides to go home. His friends mock him and ask whether it is free will or fear which is the motivation for him to break up and leave. Haytham’s reaction and his thoughts on the way home confirm that he does not find

264 Ibid.
265 al-Khānī, Khaṭawāt, 3.
their comments funny, on the contrary, he sees them as a sign of his own lack of power and self-command. What his friends are implying is that he has no ability to assert his free will but is under the power of his parents and as such, he is still a child. Masculinity, as seen by Haytham and his friends, includes being responsible for oneself without having to answer back to anyone. The following morning, Haytham’s father tells him off for having arrived home late the previous evening.

عليك بفهم الأمور: طالما أنت في هذا البيت يجب أن تخضع لقوانينه. تصرف كرجل، كفاك هزلاً. 266

You have to understand: As long as you are in this house, you have to follow its laws. Behave like a man, stop fooling around.

The subsequent conversation between father and son is illuminating in two ways. The father demands that his son follows the rules and stops fooling around. He then finishes his orders by demanding that the son behaves like a man. Haytham’s reaction to this is to point out the contradiction in his father’s words. 267 How can he be treated as a child, i.e. without any respect or responsibilities, and then be asked to act like a man? The conversation shows firstly how both the father and the son have an idea of what it means to be a man and to perform masculinity, and secondly that it is something desirable, something to aim for. It is also a state, which gives privileges denied those not included. Still considered a boy, Haytham has to follow the rules laid out, accept the pocket money he is given, and deal with his friends’ mockery. The juxtaposition of father and son clarifies the hierarchal positions between boyhood and manhood. It is further used to show Haytham’s initial reluctance and disgust at his father’s power, a feeling that is turned into desire for the same position during the course of the narrative. The father-son relationship, though not elaborated on in detail in the novel, can thus be taken to exemplify how Haytham gradually builds up his performance of masculinity.

Further on in the novel, Haytham takes his friend Sa’īd to task for not having cleaned up his room and therefore living in a mess. Sa’īd is quick to reply with what he knows will keep Haytham quiet, namely a comparison of their situations. As a country boy, Sa’īd’s student days mean not only living on his own, but also providing

266 Ibid., 7.
267 Ibid., 8.
for himself whilst studying, whereas Haytham is looked after by his parents.\textsuperscript{268} Haytham, who has looked down on Sa‘īd’s small and dirty room, is shocked by this comparison and comes back to it when he later considers the life he is leading and the lack of respect he meets.\textsuperscript{269} Yet again, someone has touched on his initial lack of masculinity by pointing out that he is looked after and provided for by his parents. These aspects are included in the performance of masculinity and as such, something he should be able to do himself – or accept being treated as a child. When he is later forced to change his life and start working, it is the income and the ability to provide for himself that give him a sense of capability and self-pride. By then, through his friends’ comments and the setup of his fictional society, he has internalised the idea of a ‘real’ man as the provider. He enjoys being able to do this and to show off by buying slightly more than what is really needed for dinner for example. The roasted chicken that he brings home becomes a symbol for his ability to sustain the family and a proof of his masculinity.

At the beginning of the novel, Haytham’s inability to take decisions is pointed out by his girlfriend Munā, who wants him to invite her home. Haytham replies that it is impossible because of his parents and their views and restrictions. Munā, whose mother sees Haytham as a harmless experience for her daughter,\textsuperscript{270} laughs at him and says that it seems she is the male between the two of them.

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 20.

So, the verse is turned upside down. We have changed sex, I have become the boy and you have turned into a girl. I did not know that your character was weak to this extent.

Munā’s comment illustrates the expected rules for males and females in their society, where the males traditionally have the freedom Haytham lacks, or is too afraid to exercise. It shows that this ‘weakness’ is not seen as an asset, she wants someone who is assertive and powerful and stands up for what he wants. Soon after this discussion,
Haytham feels that he needs to find them a way to meet privately if he is not to lose his girlfriend. They start to meet in Sa‘īd’s student room, which gives them a bit of privacy, but it is not until the father becomes ill and Haytham takes a greater responsibility at home that he dares to let Munā visit the house.

Through the comments by Munā, Sa‘īd and his father, Haytham detects the missing parts in his performance of masculinity. By not trying to change his behaviour he will continuously be treated as a child, or half male, and thus remain dependent on others to decide for him. Haytham decides to incorporate the other characters’ values, and when he returns to university after a long absence due to his father’s illness, he feels that he has changed. When he tells one of his female friends about his situation, he feels that he gets a very different reaction from his previous feelings of continuous pity and mockery from his friends.

وقلت: إنك رجل، تحملَ ذقنه ونظرت عميقاً في عينيه، وكأنها تقول: أنت رجل، تحمل المسؤولية.

She raised his chin and looked deep into his eyes as if she was saying: You are a man, you can handle the responsibility.

In the role Haytham has built for himself, he identifies himself as being responsible for women and children. Concurrently, he needs the reassurance of his female friend that he is actually performing masculinity correctly. Haytham continues to measure his behaviour through other people’s views, expressed or imagined, still very insecure in his performance of masculinity he is constantly looking for reassurance in others. The transition from a child, to the man he believes he observes in the eyes of his friend, happens at the hospital where he sees his father for the first time after the accident. Instead of taking on the calm role of the oldest son, Haytham falls into tears and quickly leaves the room with his bedridden father and grief-stricken mother and runs to the lavatories to throw up. Having got over the first shock, Haytham understands that he is now responsible and he feels the weight, as he says, on his shoulders. He realises that his initial reaction was not that of a man but of a child, unable to handle problems and definitely not a support for his mother. However, it takes him a bit longer

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272 Ibid., 122.
273 Ibid., 88.
274 Ibid., 89.
to act upon the responsibility he feels. At first, he is reluctant to give up the life he is used to, despite previously dreaming of being a man rather than a child. When he does, and takes on the responsibility by looking for and finding a job, he is treated differently. His mother, though still worrying about him, does not lay out rules for him, nor does she tell him off for being late or having girls calling the house.

Moving from child to grown up, or dependent to responsible, carries with it not only different treatment, but also a set of new expectations and commitments. Haytham is now the one who provides for the family and when he earns some extra money, his first thought is to buy food for the family, not cinema tickets or cigarettes, things he longed for when he previously was given pocket money by his father. With his new role, his priorities have changed and he is portrayed as responsible and careful with his money, without being stingy. After a few weeks in his new occupation, he tries to organise for a new home with better conditions for the family. He takes the role he has been assigned very seriously, and as the head of the family, he tries to prove himself worthy of the responsibility by giving the family the best he can. From his upbringing and the surrounding society, he has understood that performing masculinity includes exactly this behaviour. Performing masculinity in this way will return favours in the form of respect and power to himself.

The change, in both expectations and treatment of Haytham is best exemplified in the father’s reactions to his son’s actions and decisions. When Haytham decides to leave university and concentrate on his work, the mother disagrees with him and brings up the topic in front of the father. The father, who before his illness exercised absolute power in the home, now says that the choice is up to Haytham, who is surprised.

هل تعني أنك موافق؟
لم أقُل أني موافق أو يير موافق. هذا شأنك ومستقبلك...وفي مثل حالي ووضعي لا يسعني أن ألزمك بأمر تاباه. أقول لك من وجهتي فقط؟ فكرّ مرتين أو ثلاث قبل أن ترفس الجامعة غداً.275

275 Ibid., 163.
Does this mean that you agree?

I did not say that I agree or disagree: This is your matter and your future…In my situation and circumstances I cannot attempt to force you to do something you refuse. Shall I say my view? Think twice or three times before you give up university completely.

The father acknowledges that even though he still holds a privileged position in the home, and his wife turns to him for important decisions and the final word in key matters, he has lost his powerbase. Unable to provide for his son and look after him, the father feels that he no longer has any right, or possibility, to interfere in his son’s life. The roles are reversed, and Haytham, now the breadwinner, is the decision maker.

To avoid a similar situation, the father in Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn, discussed in detail in chapter five, does not rest until he has made sure that he has an income, so that he can support the household despite being bedridden and bankrupt. In spite of his physical state, he feels that he needs to fulfil his obligations towards his daughter and that he cannot allow his sons to take over the finances and the right to decide. He knows that he cannot afford to lose any more of his power, having lost all other ways of gaining respect, being unable to provide for his household would be the final blow to his masculinity and his power. Whereas the father in Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn fights to keep his position, the father in Khaṭawāt, fī al-dabāb does not put forward any claims on power. By being a man, and a father, he benefits from the patriarchal dividend and is respected by his wife and son, but he can no longer force them to do what he wants. Haytham, who is described at the beginning of the novel as disagreeing strongly with his father, but still obeys him, is now seen to ask for the father’s advice, but then acts upon his own ideas, for which he then gains respect. The performance of masculinity here becomes a conscious, or unconscious, agreement between the members of the family. The collective behaviour of, and reactions from, the mother, father and Haytham allow, or force him, depending on how the events are read, to perform a grown man’s masculinity.

The masculinity formation in the novels discussed is created to support the strong, patriarchal masculinity that exists in the fictional society. The boys are socialised into a particular behaviour and the other characters, male and female, support this development. In comparison with the masculinities described in chapter two, the characters seem sure of what masculinity involves, even though the
performance of it can be felt as demanding. The novel that to some extent breaks this pattern is *al-Riwaṣa al-mustahīla* where Zayn questions the traditional division between male and female, a topic elaborated on in the next section.

### 3.4 Bringing Up Boys and Girls

In *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, the family consists of two sons and does not allow for comparisons between the upbringing of sisters and brothers in the same family. However, the parents’ expectations of their sons, as well as what they do not expect, give an idea of gender specific behaviour. After the mother falls ill and is bedridden for two weeks, she gets out of bed to find the house in need of cleaning. No one of her sons, nor her husband, has done anything concerning cooking and cleaning while she has been in bed. She does not complain about this, or find it strange. Her only concern is whether Haytham has eaten properly and been able to change his clothes while she has been ill.276 In her division of gendered behaviour, it would have been stranger if any of the male members of the family had taken care of the household while she was ill. When she does ask her sons to help her with household tasks, it is always actions located outside the house, such as buying bread or collecting things.277

It is not only Haytham’s family who sees the division of labour like this. Saʿīd, who has his own small room, lives in a mess of dirty clothes, plates, cigarette butts and left over food. Haytham reflects over his friend’s untidiness, and though he would like the freedom Saʿīd has, he prefers the cleanliness and tidiness of his family home, kept in perfect condition by his mother. The idea that he could live alone, and clean and tidy by himself, does not cross his mind. When Munā visits Saʿīd, she cannot help herself from immediately beginning to clean up. This could be explained as her character, but the all-knowing narrator explains the cleaning with the fact that her femininity pushed her to start tidying up.278 Cleanliness is thus connected to femininity in the novel’s presentation of gendered behaviour. Saʿīd, as a man, can only be pitied that he has no woman to help him look after the house, not really blamed for his inability to organise his life. Munā is also the one, as mentioned above, who points out

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276 Ibid., 76.
277 Ibid., 14.
278 Ibid., 22.
that there are specific expectations on boys and girls’ behaviour in their society and that boys are allowed more freedom.

The opportunities that Haytham, as a boy, takes for granted are similar to what boys in *al-Riwāya al-mustaḥīla* can assume. The deceased mother in the novel wanted the best future possible for her daughter, and the father decides to give her the freedom he would have given a son. This conscious choice highlights the differences in girls’ and boys’ childhoods and hints that the femininity which pushed Munā to start cleaning Saʿīd’s room, might be taught rather than essential to her being. The problem that Zayn faces is that other characters find it difficult to know how to react to her behaviour. Other characters, such as Zayn’s grandmother and aunt, do what they can to rectify what they see as the father’s careless upbringing. The aunt forcefully includes Zayn in the household chores and prevents her from playing with the boys while the other girls work. For them, and for most of the other characters in the novel, it is inconceivable to bend the gender rules in the way Zayn’s father does with his daughter. They, especially the grandmother, are worried about what will happen when Zayn grows up and has to function in a wider social reality than their home, and between her closest relatives. The novel leaves Zayn before this happens and the text never gives an answer to what will happen when she grows up. What is clear is however that for a girl to adopt what is seen as masculine traits alienates her to a certain degree from her society.

The same can be seen for Haytham; when he is indecisive and, as his friends see it, too obedient to his parents, he is teased for not being manly or even being a girl. To distinguish what is accepted and expected behaviour for each gender enables the characters to live in relative harmony. For Haytham’s part, both his close family and society as a whole prime him towards a specific behaviour. Similarly for Qays in *Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām*, who acknowledges that he needs both his mother and father, but who accepts society’s division and realises that in order to form a place for himself he needs to follow his father’s and older brother’s example and become a man.

The overall view presented by *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, through events and conversations, is that of a normative heterosexual society where there is a clear division in gendered behaviour. It is a society where male characters are more likely than female characters to be in charge, especially if they conform to what is socially
expected of them. The mother in *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb* refers to the father as the foundation of the house and she does not know what to do if he dies. The same type of society crystallises in *al-Riwaṭa al-mustahīla* and in *Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām*. In all novels, there is, however, space for deviations based on class or regional customs. Whereas heterosexuality is seen as normative, and the young boys are intrigued by sexual relations with girls, something that is described to give them status and a sense of pride, their sexual appetite and actions are very different. Saʿīd in *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb*, who is described to come from a poor rural area, is seen as unable to handle his attraction for women. He is depicted as standing in front of a clothes shop, stunned by the plastic female mannequins and their flimsy clothes. He then goes home and on the stairway he meets his young female neighbour. He feels that her lips are talking to him and silently drags her towards him and kisses her passionately, unable to resist the temptation. This action is not condoned, but neither condemned, by the all-knowing narrator, just presented in a matter of fact kind of way. Interestingly these sudden pangs of attraction never affect Saʿīd at university, despite lying on the grass together with the girls of the group. He, like the other students, has adapted to the mixed university environment and how to behave in it, but outside it, he lives by his old rules. The other male characters in the novel, all city boys, are never inflicted by this raw desire for women and are happy to kiss their girlfriends or hold their hands, but do not feel the need to attack their female neighbours to get kisses. Saʿīd’s action is at the same time a sign for heterosexual desire and a signifier that he is not one of the sophisticated city dwellers, used to women’s presence.

In *Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-shām*, Qays’ father is a womaniser, something which plagues the mother but gives him status. During his son’s upbringing, he explains to him several times the right of a man to have girlfriends in addition to a wife. When he sees that his son seems to be as interested in women as he is, he feels proud. Qays himself soon realises that having girlfriends is a way for him to appear manly and grown up in front of his friends. Having girlfriends is seen as a sign of matureness in *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb* too. At the beginning of the novel, the mother is strictly against that her son has relations with girls. When Munā calls the house, the mother says that

279 Ibid., 80.
280 Ibid., 16.
281 Ibid., 18.
Haytham is not at home, and in front of Haytham she pretends that the caller had dialled the wrong number.\textsuperscript{282} When she later sees Haytham as a man, it becomes part of his performance of masculinity to have girlfriends and she jokes with him about the girls calling and discusses relationships with him.\textsuperscript{283}

While she now supports her son’s right to see girls, she feels sorry for Munā, whom she assumes has to lie a lot to her parents in order to see Haytham. Like most of the other characters in the novel, she believes that girls and boys should not meet before they are married and she knows that society, as a whole, does not support this type of behaviour. At the same time, she likes Munā and does not try to stop her from visiting. What she does not know is that Munā’s mother does not mind her daughter visiting her boyfriend and sees it as a way for her to try out her femininity. The social norms are cancelled out by class, but only within Munā’s immediate family, not for society as a whole.

The way the different novels treat children’s upbringing and gender formation suggests an acceptance of male privileges as norm. With the exception for Zayn in \textit{al-Riwa‘ya al-mustaḥīla} the female characters are content to support this performance. Even Zayn does not demand a change in masculine behaviour but a right to behave like her male cousins. With respect to both male and female characters, the masculinity formation in these three novels can hence be seen to uphold, rather than problematize, the patriarchal gender regime. As caretakers and relatives, the female characters are given the possibility to form a masculinity they support and want to see in their fictional societies. The masculinity created and promoted is a masculinity that is caring, supportive and strong and a sustenance for the female characters.

3.5 Changing Demands

\textit{Khajawāt fī al-dabāb} was published in the 1980s and is set during the 1970s, whereas \textit{al-Riwa‘ya al-mustaḥīla} and \textit{A‘āsīr fī bilād al-shām} are both set between the 1930s and the 1940s but published in the 1990s. Following the division outlined in the previous chapter, this places the three novels on the border, or within, the category ‘Problematic Masculinity’. On one hand, this shows the challenging nature of periodisation, especially when the literary output of 60 years is divided into three blocks. On the

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 126.
other hand, using Kamal Abu Deeb’s concept of literary waves,\(^{284}\) which allows trends to co-exist before a change takes place, the division can be used as a tool to understand the changes in masculinity creation. It also demonstrates the organic nature of fiction as a continuous development and a constant dialogue with the ideological climate in which the literature is produced.

As was developed in the previous chapter, and as most of the novels produced in the category ‘Problematic Masculinity’ demonstrate, a majority of representations of masculinity in this period are seen as awkward, contrary to the novels discussed here. However, whereas most of the female-authored masculinities seem to concentrate on subordinate or marginalised masculinities, al-Khânî gives the impression of suggesting a different way of dealing with the problem. Rather than following the trend of failing, deceitful and incapable masculinities seen in for example *al-Dawwāmā* (The Whirlwind, 1983) by Qamar Kilānī, *Imrā‘a fi dā‘īrat al-khawf* (Woman in a circle of fear, 1985) by Ḍiyā’ Ḍaṣābī and *Shams khalfa al-ḍabāb* (A Sun behind the fog, 1986) by Nawāl Taqī al-Dīn, she creates a dissimilar masculinity. Haytham is faced with what is described as the worst that can happen a family, the loss of one’s father and he has to deal with the situation. Despite his initial difficulties, he pulls himself together and performs the role expected from him. Read in the wider literary climate his masculinity, though interpreted as traditional, becomes a symbol for unity and protection. Rather than escaping, he takes on the role assigned and saves the family from poverty.

The later novels, particularly *A‘āṣīr fī bilād al-shām*, can be read in a similar fashion, especially since Khūst’s articulated goal with many of her novels is to remind her readers of the golden days that have passed. Quays becomes an historical character from a time when masculinity and femininity are made out as still easy to understand and the roles were clear-cut, not complicated and difficult to formulate as in the novels discussed in the previous chapter. The novel seems to suggest an understanding of life that was simpler than present day society with its many obligations. At the same time, a return to the time of Qays’ childhood includes a loss of the equality that Zayn fights for and Munā takes for granted.

Even if the masculinities in the three novels appear very similar, the setting shows a development in the relations between men and women. In *A’āṣīr fī bilād al-shām* and *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*, education is not for everyone and especially not for girls. In *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*, this is seen from a girl’s perspective and with jealousy. Though supported by her father, all the things Zayn achieves, such as climbing trees, swimming, going out, publishing poetry and studying are things she has to fight for, whereas they are seen as natural rights for her male cousins. In *Khāṭawāt fī al-dabāb*, the interaction between girls and boys is mainly taking place at university where they, as discussed above, participate as equals. In the rural society described in *A’āṣīr fī bilād al-shām*, the distribution of labour is based on gender and from an early age boys and girls are quickly divided into two separate spheres. Whereas it is evident from the novels that the opportunities for girls have changed with time, the expectations on masculinity are very similar.

The mother in *Khāṭawāt fī al-dabāb* describes the father as ‘the oak of the house.’²⁸⁵ In her perception, he is the one who is strong enough to carry all the burdens, despite the fact that she too works outside the house and shares the obligations of the family. When he becomes bedridden, it is as if her whole world has fallen apart, not only because her husband is ill, but also because without him she believes that she is unable to continue her life as she used to. Her solution to the problem is to turn to her oldest son and instigate him in the role as head of the family. In *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*, Zayn’s aunt laments the fact that her husband is dead, again not so much because of her love for him, but for her loss of support and position. Her son is still young, but she does what she can to introduce him to the role of family head. In *A’āṣīr fī bilād al-shām*, the mother tries all possible ways of keeping her husband, including magic. Even though she is hurt by his affairs, and the fact that he stays away for long periods, she still prefers to be married and have a husband than to lose her male support. When the husband is not around, she turns to her young son instead.

Despite the difference in time setting, the elder female characters, though described as very capable, turn to their young sons in order to take on the responsibility their fathers’ previously had. In this fashion, they reinforce the expectations that males, even at a young age, should be able to shoulder responsibility and family burdens. In

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²⁸⁵ Ibid., 80.
addition to the demands they place on the boys, they also treat them with new respect and make sure they feel the privilege of performing masculinity. As a result, the boys are fostered into what the mothers’ hope will be copies of their fathers and masculinity, as performed by the father, is reproduced.

3.6 Conclusion
This chapter has demonstrated how there are certain expectations, in the fictional societies described, on how male and female characters should behave. The conscious, or unconscious, agreement upon these expectations means that members of society will try to change themselves accordingly in order to be part of a homogeneous society. This is particularly important in the upbringing of children and is seen through actions and reactions to an individual’s behaviour. The transition from childhood to the world of grown-ups includes learning a new coding system for how to behave. Not conforming to these expectations can in some cases, as for Zayn, lead to opportunities she would not have had, had she followed the expected behaviour of girls. However, Zayn meets opposition to her behaviour from close family and from society, which seems to be the usual reaction to non-conformist behaviour. The same happens to Haytham, who is mildly mocked by his friends for not being manly and assertive enough. He takes the comments to heart and together with other circumstances, they are factors in his transition to an accepted performance of masculinity. The social interaction becomes a constant reminder of how one should and should not behave to be a suitable member of society.

The conscious choices of Zayn’s father show awareness that boys and men enjoy privileges denied women and that it is family and society that are responsible for granting these privileges to men. However, as seen in Haytham’s case, though enjoying possibilities girls might not have, he is expected to act accordingly towards both his girlfriend and his mother. Though set in different periods, the 1930s, 1910s and the 1980s the novels are close in their description of masculinity formation and furthermore of what women want from masculinity.

All three novels demonstrate how the individual performance of masculinity (or femininity) affects not just the person him or herself, but the surrounding family as well. Not only when it comes to reputation, as is brought up with regard to Zayn and to some extent to Haytham, but also the possibility for the
family unit to continue living according to the social norms and expectations. The novels demonstrate how the female characters actively shape their male children and relatives to perform a role of masculinity that agrees with the role set out by society. Their performance of this role means that women can live according to society’s expectations and, for example, be looked after and cared for. The novels hence seem to convey that the masculinities formulated is what women want. Paradoxically even Zayn, who benefits from her borrowed patriarchal dividend, could not do what she does without the dreamlike image of her father protecting and supporting her.

The following chapter will discuss how women see men and their performance of masculinity as a possible way of change. In a similar fashion to how the female characters in this chapter formulate masculinities they can benefit from, the next chapter presents masculinity as a way of changing a woman’s life.
4. Dream Masculinity - Or the Male as a Vehicle for Self-Realisation

I dreamt of a lover who would grant me all that life had denied me.

*Ayyām ma‘ahu* (Days with him, 1959) by Kūlīt Khūrī (b. 1936) tells the story of Rīm, a well-to-do Damascene girl living in the 1950s. When the novel starts, Rīm is seventeen years old and has just finished high school. Filled with hope for the future, she writes and publishes poetry and dreams of becoming a writer. When Alfrīd, the son of her mother’s cousin, comes over from France to spend time with the family, she sees him as a chance for her dreams to come true and accepts to be engaged to him. Soon after the engagement, the two realise that they are too different to be happy together. Nevertheless, they make an agreement to stay engaged for a year, during which each of them can consider him/herself free. Alfrīd goes back to France and Rīm stays in Damascus. Soon after this, Rīm’s father unexpectedly dies. Rīm decides to stay with her sister and the maid in the family home rather than to move in with her relatives, an unconventional choice. She uses her new freedom, and the protection of being engaged, to start working and to create an independent life for herself, something that enrages her paternal uncle and stirs up gossip. A few months into her new life, she meets Ziyād, a music composer who has lived in Europe for a long time. At first, Ziyād is only a passing acquaintance, but gradually Rīm falls for him and they embark on a relationship. In Rīm’s mind, Ziyād becomes the saviour who can give her the life of art, music and freedom she longs for. He looks out for her, admires her and encourages her to do things she would not normally dare to do. However, with time it becomes clear that her dream image and the real Ziyād are very far from each other. What was meant to be the perfect match turns into a stormy relationship, which Rīm cannot understand that she entered into in the first place. When Ziyād finally asks her to marry him, Rīm, who has dreamt of this question for months, is no longer interested.

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This chapter will discuss a masculinity dreamt up by the female characters as a way of creating an escape route from the routine and problems of their lives. In contrast to the previous two chapters where masculinity was shaped and presented from a partly or wholly masculine perspective, it is the female view that has the presidency in this chapter. She is the one who looks for, and needs, a particular masculinity. Masculinity will thus be analysed in relation to female hopes and expectations. As shown in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, the female characters see their dream man as someone able to give them all what they cannot obtain themselves. The analysis focuses on how they project their hopes and ideals onto a male character in order to use him as a tool to reach their dreams. The discrepancy between what they see as dream masculinity, and the masculinity performed by the man they meet, is significant in the understanding of the literary masculinity formulated through the novels. It further demonstrates a literary negotiation of the fictional societies’ hegemonic masculinity. The protagonist models what she wants on the prevailing expectations on masculinity, as seen in discussions with other characters, while she, at the same time, yearns for different characteristics in her dream man. This fictional struggle, between accepted and individually favoured masculinity, places the protagonist in a difficult situation versus society, represented by friends and family, and the man she expects to perform her dream masculinity. This leads to a discussion of what the characters respect and reject in masculinity.

In Ayyām ma’ahu, which the analysis focuses on, this development coincides with the protagonist growing up. In the other novels brought into the discussion, Shajarat al-ḥubb – ghābat al-ahzān (Tree of love – forest of sorrows, 2000) and Arṣifat al-sa’am (Sidewalks of tedium, 1973), it is a change that takes longer time for the protagonists to achieve. However, the same theme of self-realisation through a man’s performance of dream masculinity re-appears in all three novels. This is particularly interesting due to the time difference in the production of the narratives, which will be examined later in the chapter.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the narrative structure of Ayyām ma’ahu and how that influences the formation of masculinity. Next, it outlines the usage of the notion dream masculinity. The paradox of turning to a certain way of performing masculinity in order to avoid the effects of other masculinity performances
will then be addressed. Furthermore, the protagonists’ usage of men as vehicles to advance themselves in life will be discussed as both an acceptance of the patriarchal system and a way of negotiating a space within it.

4.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure

*Ayām ma’ahu* is narrated in first person by Rīm, but at two different ages. Rīm, who at an indefinite age has decided to write down ‘her story’ as she calls it, and the seventeen-year-old Rīm who is living the events and telling them as they happen. The older Rīm introduces the novel, but then only ‘interferes’ twice to comment on how differently she sees these specific events in hindsight, otherwise the seventeen-year-old Rīm is the first-person narrator throughout the novel. The focalization is done through Rīm, which emphasizes how her reactions and actions change, and puts focus on her developing expectations of men and masculinity. That the focalization is kept fixed, though with external comments from other characters, makes it difficult to grasp the two male characters fully. At the same time, this structure underscores that it is a woman’s creation of masculinity that the novels present, contrary to the previous chapters.

At the beginning of the novel, Rīm is only interested in becoming free and formulating a life for herself far from socially imposed rules. Her attitude is that of a young woman tired of a patriarchal society and longing for change. At first, she expresses this desire through a wish to study and work, but when she meets Ziyād, he becomes the symbol of change in her life. His different style, modernity and disregard for social convention are what stand out in her description of him. However, Rīm changes, and since she is the fixed focalizer, the image of Ziyād changes with her. Towards the end of the novel, when she has started to doubt their relationship, the traits she previously found irresistible are seen as irritating. Whereas Ziyād does not seem to have changed, it is not possible to get a thorough understanding of his character since he is filtered through Rīm. Since Rīm is the sole focalizer, the characterisation of all other characters is done through her and her understanding of society. This further means that there is little ambiguity in the descriptions except the description of Ziyād, which goes through a transformation from dream to nightmare. The other characters are either seen as good and supportive or bad and disruptive in Rīm’s life and she leaves no grey zones with possibilities for different interpretations. Seen
through the eyes of a seventeen-year-old girl, this does however not stand out as strange but rather solidifies the characterisation of Rīm herself.

The novel starts abruptly with a break up scene. An unknown ‘I’, later identified as Rīm, is picking up a book from someone, later known as Ziyād. She looks him over, very slowly, and in her mind, she cannot understand how this man could ever instil feelings of love in her. She leaves the flat feeling free and starts to look back on her memories, as if were they a film. This becomes the cue for the older Rīm to place the story in a frame of sad memories. She then leaves the word to the seventeen-year-old Rīm, who begins retelling the events. The contrast between the disillusioned voice of the prologue, and that of the seventeen-year old Rīm, happy and innocent and with dreams of a future filled with music, art and poetry, hints at what is to come. When the same paragraph used as the prologue is later seen in its context, towards the end of the novel, the words carry a different meaning and the repetition functions as a closure of the events.

The novel covers a period of approximately four years, a time which at points is described as short, and at times as very long. No exact years or dates are mentioned, just that a number of months have passed between an event and another. Short time periods are of utmost importance and the number of days between visits and the number of hours between telephone calls are often specified. This underlines how the small details in the relationship between Ziyād and Rīm takes up a lot of time, whereas the outer world and its events become uninteresting for Rīm. Through her love story, her perception of the world is changed. From the minutely detailed descriptions of her meetings with Ziyād, the time that lies ahead of her after she has left him is described as infinite and full of opportunities. Her planned trip to Europe is not determined by an end date and she sees it as a chance of recreating herself. This handling of time and detail makes the final part of the relationship appear as restraining and restricting, whereas her future without Ziyād is an endless, undefined row of possibilities.

The novel is divided into four parts of roughly the same length, and each one can be read as a distinct feature of Rīm’s and Ziyād’s story. The first part introduces Rīm, her life and friends and tells of her engagement to Alfrīd. It is also in the first part that she meets Ziyād. The second part narrates the beginning of their
relationship and how they get close to each other. In the third part, Ziyād loses interest in Rīm and she moves between utter happiness when he sees her, and utter despair when he disappears for days. In the fourth and final part, Alfrīd comes back to Damascus. When Ziyād no longer has Rīm for himself, he suddenly falls in love with her. Rīm on the other hand slowly wakes up from the spell she has been under and cannot see what attracted her to Ziyād. The narration closely follows the developing love story in rhythm and focus. Before her meeting with Ziyād, the novel is similar to a diary. It tells of Rīm’s work, her friends, parties she goes to and family visits. The more she gets involved with Ziyād, the less of such events are mentioned, and the end of the second part and the third part of the novel are mainly taken up by their meetings, discussions, telephone calls and arguments. In the fourth chapter, when the relationship deteriorates, other voices are let into the narrative again and the close world of the relationship is opened up.

Among the other voices in the novel, in addition to Rīm, Ziyād and Alfrīd, there is a distinction between named characters, who actually take shape, and unnamed characters, who seem to be required to fulfil a certain role. Rīm’s father is nameless, as is her paternal uncle, her grandmother and a number of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. What connects all these characters is that they, though loving Rīm, as her father and grandmother do, are all in disagreement with her behaviour. They form a nameless representation of a traditional society, which Rīm on the one hand respects and loves, and on the other hand tries to break down and change. The named characters are instead her supporters; among them are her maternal uncle, who does not utter a word in the novel, but who has a name instead of being called just ‘uncle’ as his speaking, paternal counterpart is. The maid, whose main job seems to be to bring coffee at the right time, is also known under a name, not just ‘the maid’. Until the very end of the first chapter Ziyād is referred to as ‘the musician’, both in conversations with others and in her own thoughts. She can neither decide what he thinks of her and nor what she herself thinks of him. It is only when they are getting closer to each other that he is mentioned as Ziyād. The usage of names conveys levels of intimacy with the other characters. It further hints at Rīm’s way of distancing herself from the values presented and expected by society and the dominant masculinity performed by her uncle and, to some extent, her father.
In her foreword to the novel, Khūrī states that she wants her readers to learn from the events in the novel. The narrative structure can to some extent be compared to that of a bildungsroman, a genre usually connected with a young man’s journey to self-realisation. In this case, it is instead a young woman, who at the end of the novel reaches self-realisation and understanding after having dealt with a number of problems in her life. This can be seen through the introspection that happens in the many parts of the novel that are taken up by Rīm’s internal dialogues. In her dialogues with herself, she tries to come to terms with the conflict between her dreams and Ziyād’s behaviour on one hand, and her dreams and society on the other hand. The internal dialogues illustrate how Rīm changes from justifying her behaviour and wishes in front of what she thinks of as society’s expectations on her, to realising that she herself is society, or a part of society. She understands that as part of society she can both influence the dominant way of thinking and be coloured by the values she, at the beginning of the novel, tries to denounce.

The focalization, time and characterisation in this novel lend themselves to a discussion of ambiguity brought up by feminist narratology. The female character is presented as looking for, or lacking, a quality that the male character has, only to later find that she herself has this quality, at which point a transformation into a unity can be made. The transgression between male and female is used to reach a new, combined level of existence. In *Ayyām ma’ahu* the development is slightly different. At first, Rīm is convinced that she needs qualities found only in a certain performance of masculinity in order to succeed in life. As the novel develops, her belief that only a man can free her from her present situation is falsified by herself. Rather than reaching a new level together with Ziyād, it is freeing herself from him that makes her able to proceed in life. The initial ambiguity of what she wants and how to get there is replaced with a distinct focus on the possibilities of the future at the end of the novel.

4.1.2 A Female Perspective

As discussed in the previous section, the narrative is presented through Rīm. Other characters, including male characters, participate in discussions with her, but the reader
is not given access to their thoughts or ideas. It is hence the maturing female’s voice that dominates the narrative. It is a voice, which knows, or thinks it knows, exactly what it wants from life. The fact that the older Rīm neither explains, nor justifies, her younger self’s behaviour adds a feeling of authenticity to the way the novel serves as a memory, or history, over a certain time. Male characters are not particularly developed and despite having an influence on the female characters, the novel does not present their ideas and worldviews. The female gaze, which must be said to be prevailing in the narrative, further change as the protagonist grows.

The other novels discussed in this chapter Shajarat al-ḥubb – ghābat al-aḥzān and Arṣīfat al-sa’m also give precedence to the female voice, even though these two novels have sections where the male voice takes over the narration. At times, the female voice becomes almost confessional as the characters look back on their younger selves’ hopes and dreams, and how they have grown up to realise that dream and reality are often far from each other. A shared experience in all three novels is the initial feeling that a man is needed to help the women reach their goals. By the end of all novels discussed in this chapter, this is no longer true, and the women have reformulated their idea of dream masculinity from a saviour to a partner. The protagonists have gone through a phase of dependency on males, neither of whom performed the dream masculinity expected of them. They have then moved on, and seem to have deduced from their experiences that even though they need male friends and partners, they cannot live through another person. The dream masculinity hence has to be reformulated, as Rīm does towards the end of the novel, to become an equal partner with whom to enjoy life. Through the shifting view on men and masculinity, the women’s view of themselves changes from needing and dependant, to believing that they have something to offer a potential partner. However, this does not mean that the novels offer versions of female masculinity or male femininity. It seems instead to be of utmost importance for the characters to divide between male and female conduct.

The female creation of masculinity in these three novels is thus not a direct critique of masculinity. On the contrary, even when the female characters at the end of the novels move on, they are not dissatisfied with the masculinities as such, but they have realised that this particular performance is not what will make them happy. Rīm’s initial thoughts on needing a man to be able to live through him is changed to
her wanting to live for herself, but with a companion who needs her for what she is. As her relationship with Ziyād deteriorates, Rīm reconsiders many of the characteristics she saw as necessary when first formulating her dream masculinity. She moreover begins to see her own role in making Ziyād the dream. While Rīm is mourning her broken relationship with Ziyād, Nādyā, her aunt, tries to explain to her what it is that has happened. During the discussion, Rīm disagrees angrily, but at the end of the novel, it becomes evident that Nādyā’s analysis is the key to the events, and also to some extent to the other two novels discussed in this chapter.

It is the story of the Eastern girl who knows nothing of the world. She is steered by her feelings and pours her whole life into the existence of a man. The girl who loves with her whole heart, soul and body, she lives a dream for a short while, then suddenly wakes up to the shock of reality. The girl who sees her lover as her imagination presents him, and when he appears as his true self, the surprise crushes her.

The masculinity formation seen is thus connected to the development of the female characters more than it is connected to a general view of perfect masculinity. The connection between the individual woman’s wish and masculinity will be developed further in the next section.

4.2 Dream Masculinity

The chapter’s usage of dream masculinity refers to a masculinity formulated by the female protagonist to meet her wishes for a model masculinity. The dream masculinity is her imagination of how an ideal future partner or husband, with all the traits she wishes for, would appear. In addition to that, and more importantly, the performer of dream masculinity has the ability to grant the protagonist a better life than what she believes she has at the moment of dreaming. He embodies a way of transforming her

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288 Ayyām ma’ahu, 280.
life in a positive way, whether that means a higher financial standard, more freedom, protection or something else that the protagonist sees as necessary.

Dream masculinity in this context does not mean individual wishes of having a rich husband, or a tall husband or a husband who likes children. These separate wishes are indeed expressions of preferences, but the protagonists do not believe that having a tall husband will change their life. The dream masculinity is not just a way of performing masculinity, but the protagonist’s hopes for the future and how she thinks she wants to live her life. The performer of this masculinity is seen as a guarantee for a transformation to a better life. As such, dream masculinity forms an alternative to the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional society and creates a new standard, specific for the protagonist, against which she measures masculinity. The protagonist therefore often finds herself caught between her own, personal ideal and that of society and has to relate to the social power structures that might not support the man and masculinity she favours, but instead work to uphold the prevalent hegemonic masculinity.

In Helena Eriksson’s study of American female-authored fiction, the masculinity of lovers and dream lovers appears instrumental to the female protagonists’ search for freedom. This agrees to a certain extent with Rím’s search in Ayyām ma’ahu for a man who can help her to become free. Eriksson has examined 13 novels, written during the 1970s, in order to see how male characters in the roles of husbands, lovers and dream lovers are described and how female desire can be linked to the different roles. Whereas the opposition in Eriksson’s study stands between the masculinity of husbands and that of lovers’ and dream lovers’, the opposition in Ayyām ma’ahu, and the other novels discussed in this chapter, rests between a masculinity represented by the father or society, and a dream masculinity which will turn into a husband.

Disregarding the cultural differences between the American novels in Eriksson’s study and the Syrian novels under discussion in this thesis, the search for an ideal masculinity as a way for the protagonists to realise their dreams is similar. Eriksson notes that the masculinity of the dream lovers is often based on a mixture of

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the protagonist’s own constructions of desirable masculinity and conventions idolised in popular culture.\textsuperscript{290} It is hence not solely an individual desire stemming from the protagonist, but a combination of influences. The same can be seen in the Syrian novels discussed here, where the protagonists look for the traditional characteristics in a male in agreement with the hegemonic masculinity they have grown up with, but in addition to that, they each have other requirements that make up their dream masculinity. The breaking point between individual hopes and general expectations is what formulates an alternative to, or a variety of, the hegemonic masculinity. The constant reformulation of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell argues is vital to the theory,\textsuperscript{291} is here exemplified through both the writers’ formulation of alternative masculinities and the protagonists’ desires. The protagonists’ wishes develop during the novels due to changing financial, educational and personal circumstances. There is hence not a specific set of characteristics that makes up dream masculinity, which, as Eriksson shows, makes dream masculinity ambiguous and difficult to characterise.\textsuperscript{292} What is similar is the belief that the performer of it will be able to save the protagonist.

The meaning of “being saved” is based on individual needs stemming from the backgrounds of the female protagonists. For a protagonist with a poor background, financial independence becomes very important. Rīm in Ayām ma‘ahu, who can support herself, is more concerned with the feelings of being loved and protected. The view changes as the protagonists develop. When they get both financial freedom and a chance to complete their studies through for example marriage, their views on what dream masculinity is changes. The individually expressed needs are important as ways of re-negotiating hegemonic masculinity, but of higher importance is that the female characters project their needs on male characters and thus see men as vehicles to realise their hopes and dreams.

This paradoxical situation of a woman using a certain way of doing masculinity in order to escape another performance of masculinity\textsuperscript{293} can be seen as a variation of the patriarchal bargain as described by Deniz Kandiyoti.\textsuperscript{294} Kandiyoti’s

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{291} Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity.”
\textsuperscript{292} Eriksson, Husbands, 122.
\textsuperscript{293} Ibid., 123.
formulation of the patriarchal bargain can, in a simplified way, be described as a young woman’s acceptance of men’s privileges in order to later be able to profit on her own, male children’s, power. The woman hence accepts patriarchy, even though it at times is a system that restricts her ability to act, in order to benefit from the same system at an older age in the position as mother or mother-in-law. The protagonists discussed in this chapter are not organising their lives around a waiting period in order to assume power through conceiving male children and thus obtaining a position as powerful mothers-in-law at an old age. Instead, they are concerned with obtaining power over their own lives to begin with. However, they too accept the patriarchal structures of their societies and the dream masculinity becomes a way of managing the system from within. It is therefore both a support for, and a challenge to, hegemonic masculinity. It is supportive in the sense that the dream masculinity builds on popularly accepted ideas of masculinity, and thus strengthens the hegemonic image of masculinity. As the novels demonstrate, the female characters are not demanding a very different masculinity in terms of actions expected. They are rather looking for a possibility to be allowed to take part in society through the support and help of their men. The novels address women’s hopes and dreams of how masculinity could be performed to be ideal in the eyes of the protagonists.

Though paradoxical, as described above, the exchange of one masculinity for another is in many cases the only way available to the female protagonists in order to influence their lives. In a society where single households are rare, and where both men and women live with their family until they marry, marriage is the most likely way for a girl to leave her family home. In interviews with Damascene women, Sally K. Gallagher shows that marriage is seen by many as the natural choice for a girl, and that unmarried girls, even if it is an active choice on their part, are pitied. A husband thus becomes a bridge to another kind of life; that as a grown-up with the responsibility for a family and the respect the institution of marriage carries with it. However, a future husband is not only the father of a woman’s children and a life partner, he is also responsible for the female’s wellbeing in the eyes of the


295 MENA Development Report.
296 Gallagher, Making Do, 105.
law and society.\textsuperscript{297} The husband further holds the threat of divorce, which gives him the ultimate tool to run the family concerning both small and big decisions if he wishes to use it. To choose a husband is hence not only an emotional decision, but also a life changing decision.

Navigating within the patriarchal system in the way the novels’ protagonists do has the consequence that there is no outright rejection of a specific type of masculinity or patriarchy in the characters’ thoughts or comments. Even in the cases where the father figure is seen to perform, in the eyes of the protagonist, an unacceptable masculinity, he is always excused, if not immediately at least after the protagonist has left the family home and moved in with her husband. The dream masculinity is not a sign of rebellion towards the patriarchal structure, but hopes of renegotiating the content of it. It shows, as Eriksson proves in her study, the difficulties involved in moving beyond familiar cultural models of desire, even when they are deemed insufficient to realise the protagonists’ hopes.\textsuperscript{298} As discussed in the previous section, marriage is a major, and expected, transition in life. For the female characters in the novels discussed, it is also their only option to change their lives. Rîm, who several times states that she is against the idea of marriage, still decides to be engaged to Alfrîd and thinks he is going to be her way to a better life.

And when he asked me to marry him I agreed immediately, despite the fact that I hated marriage, because I assumed that my marriage to him was the one way I could realise my dreams, complete my studies, feed my artistic inclinations and build my personality in freedom.

At the beginning of the novel, Rîm is told by her father that she is not allowed to attend university. Rîm, who has just finished high school and is full of hopes for the future is devastated. After long discussions, she is allowed to study by correspondence. To attend a mixed university environment is not seen as a possibility for a young girl. Rîm

\textsuperscript{297} al-Rabbî, \textit{al-Nisawiyya}.

\textsuperscript{298} Eriksson, \textit{Husbands}, 129.

\textsuperscript{299} Khûrî, \textit{Ayyām}, 26.
has, from a young age, written poetry that she now has begun to publish. This enrages her uncle who believes that she shames the family by publishing poetry with her name and picture. Rīm interprets the restrictions her father and uncle put on her as signs of an outdated and traditional masculinity, built solely on the repression of women. Seeing her hopes for the future crushed by her father and uncle, she, despite her conviction, decides to get married to escape the rules restricting her life. By this action, Rīm adheres to the views of her father and uncle, namely that it is only through a man that a woman can find happiness. The importance of marriage is hence not only to create a family, but also to be able to influence the possibilities one will have in life. This explains the paternal uncle’s rage at Rīm’s father for allowing his daughter to choose her husband herself. By granting her this power, the father is allowing her to shape her future. Her uncle, who seems to feel that the more freedom she is given the less power he is seen to have, fears that she will make choices that have an impact on him and his family to. When Rīm later meets Ziyād, she sees him as a new chance of a man who can give her the life she wants. Still opposed to marriage, Rīm nevertheless convinces herself that she is prepared to give up her life and her dreams in order to be Ziyād’s wife. Despite her failed hopes with Alfrīd, she is determined that her only way forward is as someone’s wife and when stating this, she is sure that Ziyād is the man to perform her dream masculinity and transform her life.

In Shajarat al-ḥubb – ghābat al-ahzān, Madā has no say in choosing her husband ‘Abdu-lah, but when she gets to know him she considers herself lucky because he has all that it takes to ‘save’ her from the life she is leading. During the long engagement she projects her hopes for the future on ‘Abdu-lah’s character and feels sure that he will give her a better future. Her idea of a better future includes a life full of travels, freedom and a loving family home, all things that she has been missing while growing up. When her father cancels the marriage she is so sure that her husband-to-be is the right man for her that she elopes with him, not willing to let her dream of a better future become a meagre mirage. She too, sees marriage as the only way of achieving the future of her dreams. By choosing the person who will be in

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300 Ibid., 212.
301 Darwish, Shajarat al-ḥubb, 28.
charge of her, she has participated in shaping her life, even though she has only chosen the one who will chose for her.

Despite reflecting on the unequal marriage of her parents, Mārīā in Arşifat al-sa’m, believes that her future will be different. She is certain that her husband Sāmī, with his money and modern life style, will be able to perform the dream masculinity she thinks will grant her a better life. In a sense he does, but only by leaving her in Damascus with their son to build his own life abroad. When he leaves for London to earn money, Mārīā finishes her education, which he has previously forbidden her, and gets a job in one of the ministries. She enjoys the status of having a husband’s protection in the eyes of society at the same time as she can act freely since he is abroad. A similar situation to that of Rīm who enjoys the protection of being engaged while knowing that Alfrīd is in France and will not interfere with her life. Both women use the absent man to reach their own goals and the protection of a formal alliance to save their reputation in the eyes of society. However, both women use their freedom to look for another man, a man who does not only give them the formal protection through marriage but who can fulfil other dreams. As discussed above, Rīm falls in love with Ziyād and Mārīā meets a man at work, Ḥabīb, whom she thinks will be able to give her what her absent husband cannot provide, namely love and respect and a feeling of importance.

The dream masculinity that appears in the novels cannot be summarised as noted above. However, all three novels locate the dream masculinity in connection to the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional society. They are created in dialogue with the hegemonic masculinity rather than as a break with it. This suggests that alternative masculinities do not have to be very different to make a change in their own and others’ lives. At the same time, it seems like there is a fear of the characters being seen as ‘female masculinities’, and the male characters are therefore clearly contrasted with the female characters in the novels, as will be seen in the next section.

4.3 Hegemonic Femininity

As discussed in the introduction, Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is always relational to hegemonic femininity. She defines hegemonic femininity as the accepted way of performing femininity, giving a woman status within a group of women and
acceptance by men.\textsuperscript{302} Sarah Frantz and Katharina Rennhak further note that women’s texts about men give clues to “[t]he underlying mutually constitutive ideals and stereotypes of femininity and masculinity with which every era must struggle.”\textsuperscript{303} In Ghāda al-Sammān’s novel Kawābīs Bayrūt (Beirut Nightmares, 1976), Connell’s claim that masculinity always is relational to femininity is supported by both the male character Amīn and the female narrator. They are described as measuring Amīn’s masculinity in relation to the narrator’s behaviour. What he, as the male, is supposed to do in comparison to the female character seems to define not just the masculinity of his character but also the assumed hegemonic masculinity in the fictional society the characters live in.

This theme is also prominent in Ayyām ma‘ahu, where Rīm feels that she becomes a woman through Ziyād,\textsuperscript{304} and she describes how he has awoken her inner female. The binary opposition between male and female gendered behaviour that confused Adham in chapter two is creating problems for Rīm, but on a different level. If Adham was mainly concerned with external attributes and division of actions, Rīm, who is at an age when she tries to find out what type of person she wants to be, uses Ziyād as a model man. This means that the opposite behaviour to his should be performed by a model woman, which she strives to be. Her constant search for model behaviour leads to her scrutinising every action performed by herself or Ziyād in order to determine if it was up to her standards or not. The dream masculinity she projects on him is instrumental not only in reaching her outer goals, such as studying, but also her inner goals and the formation of her own self. He has to be strong so that she can be weak; he has to be rational so that she can be emotional. Her way of performing femininity is closely linked to his way, or her expectations of his way, of performing masculinity. When he does not do what she expects him to do, she feels lost. Not only because their relationship is breaking apart, but also because she cannot see herself through his eyes anymore. When the dream masculinity fails, her dream of herself fails too.

Despite her well formulated thoughts on life and the world, the young Rīm at the beginning of the novel is very insecure and needs reassurance that the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{302}Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 848.  
\textsuperscript{303}Frantz and Rennhak, eds., Women Constructing, 3.  
\textsuperscript{304}Khūrī, Ayyām ma‘ahu, 143.}
choices she makes are correct. Initially, Rīm does not pay attention to the way she looks or dresses and her favourite pastime activity is to eat. When she begins to fall in love with Ziyād, she says to herself that he has awoken the woman within her and it suddenly becomes imperative for her to define herself in relation to him. His opinion of her becomes important as for example when he points out to her that looking after her hair in a better way would be desirable. She shrugs off his comment at the time it is uttered but then duly starts to comb her hair and put it up in order to look feminine. She dresses to look womanly and thinks of how she behaves and talks in order to perform femininity correctly. She navigates between the traditional expectations of her society, and what she thinks Ziyād wants.

Her will to adapt means that she thinks a man has the right to put conditions on her appearance, and that femininity – in opposition to masculinity – includes being neat, quiet and well behaved, whereas these points are not mentioned in the descriptions of the male characters. Rīm is delighted when Ziyād describes her hand, which she finds very normal, as feminine, whereas she herself dreams of his strong, masculine hands. Rīm wants Ziyād to be free and open minded, so she tries to find a female reaction to this behaviour that is accepting, but not too free at the same time. When Ziyād accuses her of not being a woman since she does not want to be intimate with him, she is devastated. Devastated because he does not see her as a woman and more so because her performer of dream masculinity is not meant to see women as commodities in the way Ziyād seems to do. Having imagined that the performer of dream masculinity would see her in a pure and asexual way before marriage, she is shocked when he demands a kiss. This demand not only tells her about his behaviour, but it changes her view of herself. Through Ziyād’s demand, she sees herself as a woman who could be intimate with a man before marriage. Rīm accepts Ziyād’s definitions of her both as not being a woman, as he says, and as being an easy woman, as she interprets his demand of a kiss. Having no other way of defining herself,
she is lost in his definitions of her. The way Rīm adopts Ziyād’s perception of femininity and masculinity demonstrates how the male gaze is incorporated in her understanding of gender roles. Even though she portrays herself as a freethinking young woman, she reifies the male values of the society she lives in.

At the beginning of their relation, Rīm is worried that Ziyād, as a musician, will be emotional and she is relieved when she finds him to be very rational instead. This strengthens her view of her own femininity as emotional and that he then stands for the opposite. Towards the end of their love story, when Ziyād becomes more and more emotional and vocal about his feelings, she finds him overbearing. As a man, she wants him to stand for reason and leave it to her to base her decisions on feelings. The dream masculinity she wants is therefore partly built on what she thinks she is not capable, or willing, to do. She sees herself as emotional and looks for someone to balance that; stability and rationality therefore become part of her dream masculinity.

The fact that Ziyād is a lot older than Rīm adds to the feeling of opposites. He tells her that she is very young and does not understand. She agrees and accepts this distinction and looks to him to be taught and guided. The age difference and his experiences are in her mind changed into a gender difference where he, the man, teaches her, the woman, what to think and do. In another scene, she describes how she positions herself in relation to him.

I curled up by his feet like a small friendly cat. I looked up and contemplated this face which had been imprinted in my eyes and through which I have come to see the world.

Again, it is clear how Rīm sees, and formulates, the power distribution within the relationship. She seats Ziyād in the armchair and places herself at the floor next to him. She makes the performer of her dream masculinity take the position of a small God who will save her and sort out her life. Later, when they are on the verge of breaking

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312 Ibid., 60.
313 Ibid., 158.
up, she feels a sudden urge to see Ziyād to tell him that she loves him, but also to yet again feel small and childlike in his arms.\(^{314}\) He still upholds the position of the powerful masculinity, able to sort everything out in an instant and make her feel good again by offering the support she cannot give to herself. She does not blame him for making her feel miserable but looks to him for the cure.

When the relationship turns from wonderful to bad, Rīm begins to wonder if Ziyād really is the right performer of her dream masculinity. She is not willing to give up easily and decides to be patient to see what is going to happen. She is still sure that Ziyād embodies the answers to how she can become happy.

وصرتُ، آملة أن يجدُ زياد نفسه، فأجد حينذاك نفسي.\(^{315}\)

I was patient, hoping that Ziyād would find himself so that I, at that time, would find myself.

Seeing masculinity and femininity as two sides of a coin, she needs him to be in balance for herself to be in balance. When he performs masculinity the way it should be done according to her, she knows how to perform femininity. She cannot at this point see herself independently from him but can only find herself through him. Leaving Ziyād, after what she knows is their last meeting, she feels empty. However, she soon realises that for the first time in her life, emptiness feels good. She tells herself how she will fill the emptiness with things she likes and decides to travel with her aunt and uncle to Europe to see new things and meet new people.\(^{316}\) The dream femininity she lost when Ziyād was not able to perform her expected dream masculinity is no longer important for her; she herself will fill her own life and reinvent herself.

Mārīā in *Arṣifat al-sa’m* is looking for similar reassurance from Ḥabīb. She wants to be seen as a woman and needs confirmation that her behaviour is correct. Her husband, who has not turned out to be able to perform masculinity in the way she hoped, is not available and she does not see him as someone she can model her own behaviour on. Ḥabīb, on the other hand, does at the beginning of their relationship make her feel that she is a woman again, not only because of the sexual attraction but also since he looks out for her in a way her husband has not done. Despite being older

\(^{314}\) Ibid., 239.

\(^{315}\) Ibid., 226.

\(^{316}\) Ibid., 407.
and having more experience than her lover she looks for certain traits in a man to justify and find support for her own behaviour.

The novels’ portrayal of the female characters’ search for a strong masculinity to model their femininity on, on one hand solidifies the view of hegemonic masculinity as the binary opposition to subordinate masculinity and femininity as discussed in the introduction. On the other hand, the female character’s examination of the masculinities and their final rejection of them, despite having chosen them from the beginning, instead pinpoints the female characters’ agency in the formation of masculinity. It further shows that contrary to the characters’ beliefs, they do not need masculine support to be successful in their lives. However, before getting to this conclusion the female characters do look for someone who can protect them and provide for them, as will be discussed in the following sections.

### 4.4 The Protector

In *Ayyām ma‘ahu*, as in the other novels discussed, the formulation of dream masculinity contains a wish to be protected and looked after. This expectation on masculinity is in alignment with what is presented as hegemonic masculinity in the novels, and as has been discussed in the two previous chapters. Laylā, Rīm’s best friend in *Ayyām ma‘ahu* illustrates the general expectation of protection when she claims that for a woman to love a man she needs to feel that he can protect her. What she means is nothing more than that the man should take responsibility for everyday problems, whereas the dream masculinity, as seen in *Shajarat al-ḥubb* for example, includes protecting the main female character from her family and relatives and taking her abroad. In *Ayyām ma‘ahu*, Nādyā, the wife of Rīm’s maternal uncle, disagrees and argues that protection has nothing to do with love. Nādyā, who voices ideas of female liberation throughout the novel, argues instead that women are lazy and that this is the reason they rely on men. If they dared to take their own decisions, and later responsibility for the results of their decisions, society would change in her view. Her statement, despite negating the wish to be protected, confirms the notion that in general, men protect and women are protected.

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317 Ibid., 254.
Because she [the eastern woman] is lazy and does not dare to pursue her own path in life…yes she is lazy! She walks behind the man, hiding in his shadow to avoid facing the problems of life by herself.

Whereas Laylā sees being protected as something desirable, Nādyā sees it as something that consciously or unconsciously hinders women from forming their own lives. They agree however, that being protective is part of what is expected from men by women. Rīm sees protection as highly desirable when she formulates her dream masculinity and projects it onto Ziyād. She wants him to protect her physically, for example when he takes her to the cinema.

He stretched his arm in a natural way around my shoulders and back to protect me, first from the gathered crowd and then from the darkness of the corridor. I wished that he would always stay like this; big…serious…strong, feeling my weakness and protecting me.

In addition to this physical type of protection, also seen in a later scene where she wishes Ziyād was there to protect her from people’s looks, she wants to be protected in an emotional sense. She wants to have someone who decides for her and tells her what to do, urges her on and takes responsibility for decisions taken, such as to continue to study, publish her poetry and be less traditional in her behaviour. She does not feel that she herself is able to do these things unless she has protection and support. Rīm reads Ziyād’s protectiveness as love and care. In another scene, she compares his way of protecting her with, as she feels it, Alfrīd’s way of taking her for granted and assuming that she will tag along like anyone of his male friends. Ziyād becomes the man onto whom she projects her dream masculinity. Nevertheless, her wish to be

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318 Ibid., 253.
319 Ibid., 109.
320 Ibid., 238.
321 Ibid., 48.
protected is not specifically connected to his person, rather she says that she has always yearned for masculine men and to be engulfed in their protection. His behaviour becomes a testimony that he is impersonating the dream masculinity she has always wanted.

I always yearned for a man to surround me with his masculinity, his power and his love … I was thirsty for the feeling of a man’s protection.

The emotional protection and guidance Ziyād offers make Rīm compare him and her father. At one point, she even states that she sees him as a father figure. She connects the loss of her father at an early age and an additional need for male protection. She does not turn to her uncles, but imagines a future husband who will be able to look after her the way she needs.

It seems as if her father, despite their disagreements, after his death has turned into an ideal man, and she is looking for someone like him. This comparison is later toned down, but her initial attraction is connected to Ziyād’s age, that he is grown up and relaxed and knows what he wants from life. In one scene, he cooks for her and ensures her that he is there to look after her and make sure she is well fed and taken care of. This caring way becomes an ultimate sign of his protectiveness and confirms her feelings that he indeed performs a role that she needs. He further worries when she is sick, and orders her to stay in bed and dress well. Small actions that for Rīm indicate that he indeed is the man who will look after her for the rest of her life and make sure her life will be as she wants it to be.

In the beginning of the novel, Rīm sees Alfrīd as a way of escaping her present life. When she understands that he is not what she is looking for, she projects her dream masculinity onto Ziyād, but later in the novel he too is seen as exchangeable. When the first passionate love has ceased and Ziyād starts to keep away from Rīm, she feels

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322 Ibid., 154.
323 Ibid., 144.
324 Ibid., 115.
325 Ibid., 127.
lonely and afraid, especially during the winter storms. At first she says to herself that she needs Ziyād to comfort her, then she corrects herself and says that she needs ‘a man’. \(^{326}\) She is convinced that ‘a man’ is what she needs; a friend, her sister or aunt, who are all close by, do not come to her mind to save her from her fear. She has begun to see that Ziyād is not the performer of her dream masculinity, having chosen his personal freedom over protecting her, but she is not ready to give up her dream masculinity yet. When she definitely understands that Ziyād is no longer her safe haven, she interprets this as the end of their relationship. Her connection between protection and ideal masculinity is too strong for her to be able to ignore the lack of this characteristic in a man.

She continues to meet with him, but she is no longer able to tell him that she loves him and to use the phrases and sweet words she previously did. \(^{328}\)

But today I was in need of one thing that he no longer had, the feeling of me being the small girl he brought up. Ziyād was no longer the person to whom I used to run in order to seek refuge from the world…the rain…loneliness.

In *Arṣifat al-sa’m*, Māriā is brought up being told that men are monsters of whom she needs to be scared. \(^{329}\) She therefore finds it very odd that her mother’s, and society’s, way of protecting her from ‘the monsters’ is to marry her off to one of them. \(^{330}\) She accepts the idea, and projects her dreams and hopes for a better future onto her husband-to-be. When he turns out to care more for his friends and their wellbeing than for Māriā, she soon realises that her husband is never going to perform the dream masculinity she had hoped for. She pins her hope on Ḥabīb and starts an affair with him. When she understands that he is too worried about her husband to be able to protect her, the initial infatuation quickly fades. The clash between the reality

\[^{326}\text{Ibid.}, 216.\]
\[^{327}\text{Ibid.}, 248.\]
\[^{328}\text{Ibid.}, 331.\]
\[^{329}\text{Nuwaylātī and Umm ‘Isām, *Arṣifat al-sa’m*, 21.}\]
\[^{330}\text{Ibid., 21.}\]
that the male characters present and her dream picture forces her to rely on herself rather than to project her dream of protection onto a new man after her husband and Ḥabīb. This is also the conclusion Rīm reaches at the end of Ayyām maʿahu. Having looked for protection and not found it, she decides to depend on herself and take responsibility for her own decisions.

Rather than feeling protected by her strong father, Madā, in Shajarat al-hubb, is terrified of him and describes his voice as a thunderstorm. Her need for protection is both physical and emotional. When ‘Abdu-lah offers to elope with her and then suggests they travel out of the country she agrees. When he later, as she sees it, becomes overprotective and does not want her to go out alone, she feels captured, not secure. At this point, one of the characteristics she first fell for becomes a reason for her to look for someone else.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, it is not necessary that a specific action, even though it is incorporated in what is seen as ideal masculinity, actually enhances the view of a particular man’s performance of masculinity. As in Madā’s case, what she thought of as ideal becomes problematic when it is, in her eyes, overdone. To perform ideal masculinity does not only mean to perform specific actions. It also means to perform them in a way that is seen as agreeable to the surrounding society, or in this case, the female characters.

By focusing on the idea of protection and how it is executed, the masculinity creation in the novels first seem to condone the hegemonic masculinity of the respective fictional societies. The dream masculinity accepts the traits of the hegemonic masculinity and tunes them slightly to fit the needs of the particular female character. However, as the plot develops, it becomes clear that the initial beliefs are proven wrong and the protection offered is either not enough or too much. The novels hence give the impression of suggesting that dream masculinity, as masculinity in general, is indeed a dream and not the answer the female characters believe to begin with.

331 Darwish, Shajarat al-hubb, 11.
332 Ibid., 129.
4.5 The Provider

As mentioned regarding the ability to protect, the dream masculinities the protagonists formulate are coloured by the hegemonic masculinities of their fictional societies. To expect the future husband to provide is consequently not a strange demand. However, the protagonists in the novels discussed are not daydreaming of a rich husband and then settling for anyone who is able to give them their daily food. The principle for them is that the performer of dream masculinity is able to change their life, even regarding provision. Both Madā in Shajarat al-hubb, and Mārīā in Arṣifat al-sa’m, are from poor backgrounds, so a future free of financial problems is high on their list of demands. They both marry well, and find that as they hoped financial security, nice houses and cars indeed give them status and an amount of freedom they did not have in their previous lives. At the same time, financial security does not grant them all of which they dreamt. A gradual change of dreams and desires can be seen in both novels and when the basic, financial needs are fulfilled, other expectations appear. Their husbands cannot be accused of being negligent and bad providers and as such, they fulfil the fictional societies’ demands on hegemonic masculinity. Nevertheless, the female characters seem to understand ‘being provided for’, not strictly in a financial sense, but as a wider concept.

In Ayyām ma’ahu, the question of being provided for financially is never an issue. The parents have left enough money for Rīm and her sister to not change their habits of travels, parties and clothes, or to look for alternative sources for income, such as marriage. Wealth is hence not an issue for Rīm in her search for an ideal man. Having fulfilled the basic needs of food, clothing and a house, Rīm’s search is concentrated on other values in life, which appears in her views on work. Whereas Nādyā, her aunt, sees working outside the house and earning an income as a way for women to gain independence from men, Rīm is concerned with her personal fulfilment, and when her work does no longer give her that she resigns. Rīm’s occupation is however an issue for the other characters. Her grandmother is shocked when she learns that Rīm is working, since a girl, in her opinion, should only work if there is no man there to provide for her. The expectation on masculinity in this case

333 Khūrī, Ayyām, 29.
334 Ibid., 148.
335 Ibid., 33.
becomes a double burden for the characters; it assumes that men provide, and it hinders women to take up an occupation. In *al-Hubb wa al-wahl* by In’ām Musalima, Inās, the main female character, puzzles everyone when she goes on to study at university. As a woman, she will be supported by her husband so why is she wasting time by studying? The expectation is hence placed on both men and women to shape men to be providers and women to be receivers.

According to one of Rīm’s colleagues, only those girls who acutely need to work should do so. The social status of the protagonist hence plays an important part in how and what is considered important in dream masculinity. Though still assuming that Ziyād will invite her out and pay for her, and hence upholding the ideal that the man should provide, Rīm is able to have parties at home and to arrange trips to see Ziyād. Her dependence on him is out of tradition, not need. For her, and for Madā and Māriā when they are financially stable after marriage, other concerns such as emotional needs, discussions, education and respect become values that they look for in men.

Like the case of protection discussed above, the idea of provision is linked to the norms of the fictional societies. This aspect of masculinity is embraced by the characters at first and seen as necessary for their new, better lives. The novels thus portray the young protagonists’ acceptance of their societies’ hegemonic masculinities. When the characters grow, and get more experience, they gradually change their minds. The masculinities formulated can thus be said to mirror the development of the female characters. Through this development, they are used, though never openly condemned, to show what appears as the flawed idea of man as the saviour of women through a particular gendered behaviour.

### 4.6 Hegemonic Masculinity versus Dream Masculinity

The fictional societies described in the novels are preoccupied with the categorising of people according to gender. In all three novels, it is important to adhere to, and correctly perform, the expected gendered behaviour. This further means that the concept of hegemonic masculinity becomes vital since it is the tool used to measure a man’s performance. It further means that if anyone deviates from the expected behaviour it creates instability and becomes a threat to others’ performance of gender. It is therefore not strange that the dream masculinity Rīm formulates in *Ayyām ma’ahu*
is influenced by the society she belongs to and by the prevailing hegemonic masculinity. She is, however, caught between her wishes and reality. Her choice of Ziyād, and the fact that she openly goes out with him, causes controversy among her relatives and friends. Concurrently, the middle way she wants to take with an open, but non-sexual, pre-marital relationship confuses Ziyād, who, like the fictional society, seems to think that a relationship is either all or nothing. Rīm’s dream for a performance of masculinity that respects her in a traditional way and spends time with her in what she sees as a modern way, is hence difficult for both society and Ziyād to grasp.

Another dimension of their relationship is the fact that Ziyād is known to have had a number of previous love stories. Instead of making him appear as a virile man, he is seen as lacking responsibility and control in the eyes of society for not having settled for one of the girls. It is moreover interpreted as a lack of respect for the girls and their families. Relationships outside of marriage are frowned upon in the fictional society Ziyād and Rīm live in and hegemonic masculinity includes respecting the social morals. For Rīm, the past, hers or his, has no value, she prefers to live in the present and does not believe that the relations Ziyād has had make him into a careless person. This view, like her previous views, deviates from the norms of the fictional society where both men and women are meant to abstain from relationships before marriage. Her view is also difficult to defend in front of friends and family. How can she accept to be with a man who has been with so many other girls before her?

Madā in Shajarat al-ḥubb is also caught in having to defend her choice of not accepting hegemonic masculinity. However, whereas Rīm is portrayed while looking for a husband Madā is instead faced with the opposite challenge. When she feels that she can no longer live with ‘Abdu-lah, whom she thinks has turned into a despotic tyrant, her mother and sisters do their best to make her change her mind. They see what ‘Abdu-lah does from an outsider’s perspective and as such he seems perfect. He fulfils all the aspects of what they believe is hegemonic masculinity and more importantly, he is all what Madā ever dreamt of. They can therefore not understand that whereas ‘Abdu-lah indeed was the answer to Madā’s dreams, Madā herself has

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336 Ibid., 178; 159.
changed. What she wanted as a young girl, and what her sisters still look for, is no longer enough for her.

As mentioned above, money is not an issue for Rīm. In the eyes of society however, Ziyād’s career, despite being successful and famous as a musician, is not stable enough for him to be seen as desirable marriage material. Working extra as a teacher on top of his position in an office are not choices that carry high status with them. Rīm, who is more interested in their emotional and intellectual relationship, is not bothered by Ziyād’s occupation, but the comments made by family and friends, and their comparisons between Ziyād and Alfrīd, make her consider the topic. Alfrīd on the other hand is seen as the ideal man by both relatives and friends. He is educated and well off, so his ability to provide for her cannot be doubted. He has no known love affairs, and he is from within the family. Rīm’s initial excitement about Alfrīd, which disappears when she feels no love for him, is slowly reignited when he returns a second time to Damascus. Through her relationship with Ziyād, Rīm’s expectations have changed and she finds herself drawn more to Alfrīd’s calm and trusting way of behaving than Ziyād’s emotional changes. Through experiences, and through the comments from friends and family, her image and her expectations have changed and she admits that the dream masculinity she projected on Ziyād did not work.

It seems that as soon as the dream masculinity has been projected onto a specific male it is difficult to reapply it to someone else. Even though Rīm at times talk of ‘a man’ rather than Ziyād, it appears as if she has tried out her dream and seen it crushed, regardless of the fact that the dream might still be valid, even though Ziyād was not able to perform it. Trying the dream against reality tells the protagonist that she cannot rely on someone else to sort out her life for her. At the same time, without the experience with Ziyād, she would never have reached this conclusion. In this respect, the failure of dream masculinity to save her has in itself saved her, and made her aware that she herself has to formulate the life she wants to live.

Mārīā in Arṣīfat al-sa’īm experiences the same thing. Having understood that her husband will never be able to give her what she needs in life with regard to love and understanding she projects her feelings onto Ḥabīb. She is sure that the young man, with his political views, many sisters and modern outlook will be able to give her

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337 Ibid., 202.
a new, better life. When he, too, fails her dreams she is no longer interested in looking for someone else.

The construction of dream masculinity reuses traits from the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional society but in an opposite way. Rīm objects to her father’s way of protecting her by not letting her go to university, and to her uncle who wants her to live in his house so that he can protect her. She reads these actions as control whereas the men see them as ways of protecting her, and themselves, from things that might happen to Rīm. When it comes to her dream masculinity, she wants to be protected and looked after, but only in order to be able to do what she wants. She does not want to be locked up in the house so that people do not talk about her, but rather to be taken out by a man who will then protect her from people’s talk. Hence, the same trait that is rejected in the hegemonic masculinity is repeated in the dream masculinity, although in a different form. Protection is still part of what a man is supposed to do, but how he is supposed to do it varies from understanding to understanding. The traits seen in hegemonic masculinity are used to form a powerbase for the performer of dream masculinity. He can then rescue the protagonist and move her to his base where she will be safe and secure. The critique of the hegemonic masculinity is shown in the fact that no one of the protagonists finds true happiness living through her dream masculinity. At the same time, no one of them proposes a fundamental change of society but sees it as a personal failure, which she now has to clear up herself.

4.7 Developed Dreams

The novels were published in three different periods. Written in 1959, 1973 and 2000 they together cover the period examined in this thesis. Through their similar way of dealing with dream masculinity, they hint at a continuous view on male and female gender norms. However, the circumstances the three characters want to escape from show a change in the formulation of literary masculinity. In Ayyām ma’ahu from 1959 Rīm wants more from life than what her father allows her to realise. However, she does not criticise him but rather finds excuses for him based on reputation, tradition and care for her. Her dream masculinity, though later found flawed, is an example of ‘the father figure’, ready to lead her right and enable her to reach her dreams, very similar to the conduct of the adoptive father in Laylā al-Yāfi’s novel Thulūj taḥta al-shams (Snow under the sun, 1961). He encourages his daughter to study, then takes
time off his work in order to take her and her mother on a trip around the Arab countries so that she can learn about the culture. He likewise insists that she herself choses her husband. He does all of this in agreement with his wife, but he is clearly the one who decides in the household. The masculinity of this period, as discussed in relation to al-Ḥubb wa al-wahl in chapter two, functions as rolemodels and facilitators for women’s emancipation and development. Whereas new performances of masculinity are suggested the criticism of previous performances of masculinity is not developed.

Arṣifat al-sa’m from 1973, published ten years into the reign of the Ba‘thist government, echoes the ideals of the period. Mārīā’s husband is described as a selfish capitalist, leaving his wife and child to earn more money in Europe. Mārīā, unhappy with his decision, takes up her studies again and finds a job in one of the governmental offices. As a government official, she fulfills the expectations on educated women to contribute to the country’s well-being. Although her husband manages to meet all the criteria of hegemonic masculinity as formulated in the novel on the surface, he does not meet her needs. Her choice of dream masculinity is someone who can take her closer to the ideal life she wants to have in addition to giving her recognition for what she does. Arṣifat al-sa’m is published at the beginning of the period named ‘the Political Man’ in this thesis. Ḥabīb is not the type of revolutionary hero that will be discussed in the next chapter, however his political engagement is one of the things that attract Mārīā. At the same time, although the novel does not present a political man as such, the husband can be seen as an anti-hero, embodying all of what a man should not be doing in this period. It is therefore not strange that the novel follows Mārīā’s extramarital affair without any of the characters blaming her for what she does. Her husband is seen as a traitor whereas she does her best to fulfill her role in the new society that is being constructed.

In Shajarat al-ḥubb from 2000, published in the period named ‘Problematic Masculinity’, Madā is trying to find an escape from her dictatorial father. Whereas the protagonists in previous periods, though not always agreeing with the

father’s behavior, have found excuses for it, this period sees an increase in unreasonable fathers who use their power only to reap personal benefits. Initially, Madā is not reacting against the patriarchal gender regime; on the contrary, she uses it for her benefit, but she is not satisfied with the way her father exploits his power. A similar reaction can be seen in Harwala fawqa ṣaqī’ tūlidū (Hurrying over the frost of Toledo, 1993) by Mārī Rashū. The main female character supports a patriarchal gender role but she condemns the way her husband uses his privileges to live a very different life from what he allows her, whilst at the same time abusing her if she complains. Her problem is with a specific performance of masculinity not with the general norm. Other novels written in this period where the problematic masculinity has been developed further are for example Furāt by Mayya al-Raḥbī and Afrāḥ saghīra afrāḥ akhīra by Haifā’ Bīṭār. Both these novels display a violent, dictatorial type of masculinity who negates any opportunities for women to participate as equals in society.

Although formulated for different reasons, the three novels discussed portray a dream masculinity created to save the female protagonist and change her life. Except for the financial aspect, which is important for two of the female main characters, the dream masculinity is very similar in the three novels. The similarity in the three masculinities is the ability to demonstrate action. The female characters are shaped by the societies they are living in and they do not see possibilities for themselves to change their lives. The most important quality they see in the masculinities they look for is thus the agency to promote change. By this initial expectation, the female characters subscribe to the stereotypical division of masculinity as equal to activity and femininity as equal to passivity, a view that seems prevalent in all three novels, and a view that the women at the beginning of their narratives strive to uphold. The male characters are urged to be active and take control, even in situations where the female characters are controlling the events. Though negating this division by actively choosing their partners, they select a partner with the expectation that he will change their life. The masculinity they look for is active, assertive, and able to carry the responsibility for his own, and her, life. The themes of provider and protector, as seen in the previous chapters, reoccur. Nevertheless, all three novels later exhibit this active and assertive masculinity as an illusion. The female characters realise that the characteristics they were looking for in their dream
masculinity cannot be used as a way of escaping from the life they lead. What they are looking for is hence not a specific masculinity, but a way of navigating within the patriarchal societies they are living in. The female characters are using the tools they have at hand, which happen to be either a masculinity close to the hegemonic masculinity in the fictional society, in order for the woman to position herself through her husband, or a man who performs a different masculinity, like Ziyād, whom Rim finds different from the general man in her society.

4.8 Conclusion
This chapter has demonstrated the female characters’ use of masculinity as a way of dealing with the patriarchal society within which they live. The protagonists’ internal negotiations and reformulations of dream masculinity have illustrated how the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional society is reformulated through the female characters’ dreams. They further show how time, place, class and education change the expectations placed on gendered performances.

As the protagonist develops and gains experiences, her dream masculinity changes from being a saviour, whom she lives through, to becoming an equal partner with whom she can share her life. The novels thus seem to propose that masculinity is a compliment to femininity rather than the answer to a better life. At an initial stage, the female protagonists are convinced that a strong masculinity performed by their partner will change their lives. As the narrative moves on, they realise that even though their lives have changed through their encounters with their dream masculinities, the fundamental problem still exists. They further see that relying on a specific type of masculinity performed by one man is an illusion. In all three novels, the women leave their dream masculinity and start their search for a different life afresh. The chapter has further shown that the dream masculinities described are very similar in their formulation despite the time difference. However, placed in their context it is evident that they are reactions to different forms of social or political ideologies. The following chapter will discuss a similar theme through the politically involved man as a saviour for women and society.
5. Real or Ideal Masculinity?

The man of complete masculinity is the one who faces the current without hesitation.

*Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn* (Damascus, o smile of sadness, 1980) by Ulfat al-Idlibī (b.1912) tells the story of Ṣabriyya, her family and their life in Damascus during the first half of the 20th century. The family consists of Ṣabriyya, her three brothers Rāghib, Sāmī and Maḥmūd, and their parents. When the novel starts, both the parents and Sāmī are dead, and the remaining children are about to divide the inheritance. Without her brothers’ knowledge, Ṣabriyya has spent a large amount of money on a memorial service for their father. When they learn of the money she has spent, the brothers become extremely upset, both because of the money and because they, the male relatives, have been sidestepped. Ṣabriyya, on the other hand, seems content with what she has done and when her brothers scold her she calmly tells them how they have ruined her life. She goes on to say that she finally wanted to decide something for herself. The brothers leave and when they come back the next morning, they find that their sister has committed suicide. Before committing suicide, Ṣabriyya has given her diary to Salmā, her niece. Through the diary entries, Salmā then follows the family’s history, through her aunt’s perspective, during the Syrian nationalist struggle against the French army and the initial years of independence in the first half of the 20th century.

This chapter discusses novels written between 1975 and 1990. The masculinities presented are closely connected to an idea of political and social change and the main male characters are therefore treated as symbols of transformation. The vantage point is that of the female protagonist who seeks the support and help of male characters in order to reach her goal. The connection between the male characters and social changes means that the male characters’ traits stand for what is suggested to be a better society. The chapter further demonstrates how what is seen as outdated forms of masculinity are contrasted with the new, transformative ways of performing masculinity and how,

in this way, hegemonies change. The analysis focuses mainly on *Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn* but examples from other novels with a similar theme, told from a female perspective, will also be brought in, most notably Qamar Kilānī’s (b. 1932) novel *Bustān al-karaz* (The Cherry orchard, 1977) and Ḥamīdā Na’na’ī’s (b.1946) novel *al-Waṭan fī al-‘aynayn* (The Homeland in a pair of eyes, 1979).

The chapter begins with a discussion of the narrative structure of *Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn* and the impact its biographical tone has on the character formation. It then moves on to the fluctuant nature of hegemonic masculinity and how different notions of hegemony can exist in the same society. In the novels discussed, the hegemonic masculinity is symbolised by a father figure and a society that can be seen to stand for ‘real’ masculinity. The changing hegemony is then illustrated through a discussion of ‘the new man’ as seen in Egyptian literature, a masculinity that is seen as ‘ideal’. The idea of a politicised masculinity used for ideological reasons is then developed. The analysis of the novel focuses on the female character’s perception of the various masculinities and as the initial quote shows, the female character knows exactly what to expect from masculinity. The chapter concludes by demonstrating that the function of masculinity in the novels discussed can be read as a signifier of a certain ideology or viewpoint and that the changing hegemony from real to ideal is a hope for a change in society.

5.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure

The narrative is built around a frame story told by Salmā, Ṣabriyya’s niece, and then a core narrative, which is Ṣabriyya’s diary. The frame story covers about a week of events, starting on the day of the memorial service of Salmā’s grandfather, and includes the time it takes for Salmā to read her aunt’s diary. The diary covers Ṣabriyya’s life from the age of about ten until she dies. Even though it is quite a long time that is covered, the focus is primarily on Ṣabriyya’s youth, as if her grown up life is too boring to be covered in detail. It appears as there is nothing more to report in her diary once she has left school, her boyfriend has been killed and she is confined to looking after her father. The distribution of time is therefore very unequal between different periods of her life.

The focalization throughout the novel is multiple, even though it is primarily Salmā who seems to organise the text. She is the one who sets the scene, she chooses
what parts of the diary to read and in which order to present them. She makes it clear
from her comments and her selection that her aunt is to be pitied for the tragic life she
has led. Her attitude towards the diary and the things she focalizes on is that of anger
mixed with sadness. She sides with her aunt, but is at the same time caught in the fact
that her father, whom she loves, is not favourably portrayed in the diary. The other
strong voice in the novel is Šabriyya’s who, as the main narrator of the diary, is the
sole focalizer of the events described in it. The fact that she seems to have written it
down at an old age, as a sort of explanation to her life, makes it more of a statement
of how she interprets her life and the possibilities she has had and lost, than daily notes.

The two narrators never disagree; on the contrary, the two voices mingle into
one, eager to convey a particular message: that of the hardships and inequalities of
women. This is also evident in Salmā’s comments on the text. For certain customs and
expressions, she adds an explanation like “this is how things were done back then,”
explaining for her modern day readership the differences between the time of the novel
and the present. However, not once does she make such a comment in connection to
her aunt’s or other women’s laments about how difficult and unfair the role of women
is. These statements are left undiscussed as an eternal truth; no modifications that
things have, or have not, changed are made.

Salmā’s other comments are all in alignment with how unfairly her
hardworking and clever aunt has been treated because she is female. Šabriyya herself
does the same thing in her diary, a text she was determined to burn but which she at
the last minute gives to her niece instead. This is important for the narrative structure,
and for the argument that this novel is written to convey a message. Someone who is
determined to burn his/her diary has most likely written it for his/her own sake. In
Šabriyya’s diary there are explanations, clarifications and discussions of what she is
doing as if she was writing for a reader long before she, on her last night alive, suddenly
decides to give the diary to her niece.

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340 al-Idlibi, Dimashq, 67.
341 Ibid., 6.
I was on the point of burning this diary before I passed away. But at the last moment I preferred to give it to you.

The explanations are all of the same type, pointing at the inequalities between men and women and made by a person who is well versed in feminist discourse. It is also worth pointing out that for a diary, and especially a diary written down long after the events have taken place, it is very detailed, retelling long conversations between characters. Being a personal diary, it also spends a significant amount of time on the other family members, in particular the male family members. The fact that both the narrators in the novel are clearly communicating with, and explaining to, a reader adds to the feeling that the plot of the novel functions as a vehicle for the author to send out a specific message rather than as a literary text. This has implications for the characters too, especially the male ones, which rather than developing into full-fledged characters remain stereotypical. The characteristics for the various male characters are repeated several times and it becomes obvious whom the novel sees as the bad and the good. In case of doubt, either Salmā or Šabriyya adds a comment, explaining the character or situation further. The characterisation is mainly direct through Šabriyya’s comments. Indirect characterisation appears through actions performed and interaction between characters, however these events are filtered through Šabriyya’s diary and she therefore has the final say in what is transmitted. The characterisation plays a part in the ideological framework of the novel; the sharp division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ outlines the theme of the novel and supports the general idea of a new ideology that will change life to the better.

The fact that Šabriyya’s suicide takes place early on in the novel means that the outcome of the events is known before the diary is retold and the young Šabriyya’s dreams and hopes are exposed. The reason for the suicide and Šabriyya’s bitterness are explained prior to her suicide and the diary appears as a thorough account of the same events, only with more detailed information being added. This choice of narrative structure adds to the feeling that the novel is educational and exists for its

342 Ibid., 280.
message only. That the novel can be understood as instructional increases the importance of the masculinities presented, since they can be taken to represent both ideal masculinity and the opposite as seen by Şabriyya.

5.1.2 A Female Perspective

In all three novels discussed, the female character is the focalizer and it is through her reactions and feelings that the masculinities are judged and understood. In addition to this, the main male characters are for different reasons killed or removed, which means that many of their actions only exist as memories or fantasies. Each of the female main characters uses what she thinks her ideal man would do in a specific situation in order to judge others’ and to some extent her own, behaviour.

All three novels are set at a time of political unrest, where the female characters are working for a change in their respective societies. The man they describe is the female’s initiator into political thought or activism and their main contact with the cause for which they are fighting. The masculinity the male characters perform can therefore be read as a signifier for the political cause, and not only as individual traits for a single character. How the male characters perform their masculinity becomes symbolic of the political struggle and the female characters’ wish for change. The novels further present a juxtaposition between the generation of fathers and other older men, who represent the former or failing governments and regimes, and the young men who represent the future. The masculinity performance the women meet in society, and see as real, is the one performed by their fathers, neighbours and relatives, whereas the ideal masculinity is their hope for the future represented through young men of their own age. This connection between a man’s performance of masculinity and a change of political and social life can be seen as a continuation from the previous chapter. However, whereas Rīm and the other characters in chapter four were concerned with their own happiness, the characters in this chapter are concerned with social change. Like the novels in the previous chapter, these narratives are set in societies that place the female characters’ lives and happiness at the mercy of male relatives and relations. Especially, Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn is a testimony to how a woman’s life can turn into a catastrophe if a negative, as Şabriyya sees it, masculinity becomes influential in it. The description of the male characters in Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn can be seen as instructive of how masculinity should be performed from a
female point of view. They are further distinctly different from the dominant femininity of the novel.

As discussed in chapter two the use of male characters as heroes and models for change gives the writer a possibility to approach areas otherwise off-limit for female characters. Especially in *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn* is it impossible for Ṣabriyya to be allowed to take part in fights or find the political material she reads. The projection of change onto a male character is necessary at the same time as it enables the female characters to watch from afar and comment. The male characters further become personifications of ideals and it is therefore symbolic that they die but stay alive in the minds of the female characters. The hope of change that the male characters symbolise is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Changing Hegemony
The concept of hegemonic masculinity, as seen in the introduction, is never stable but constantly reworked, due to new influences and changing power dynamics. Sometimes these changes take place due to a number of disconnected events, whereas at other times changing the hegemony is seen as a project. In *Working Out Egypt*, Wilson Chacko Jacob gives an example of the last type of change. He shows how a conscious, long term reworking of what he calls ‘Effendi Masculinity’ leads to a new performance of masculinity within this particular stratum of society in Egypt. The change was triggered by a discontent for the role of masculinity that Egyptian men felt the British colonisers had imposed on them and it was fuelled by a sense of nationalism. A similar scenario can be seen in the novels discussed, where the younger generation of men reacts towards the older generation’s way of performing masculinity. The Effendi Masculinity, as outlined by Jacob, is constantly contrasted with what ‘it is not’ and hence exemplified by its opposite. This internal dichotomy, the fluidity of the new masculinity and its fixation with what ‘it is not’ forms the core of the analysis in this chapter. It is in particular Ṣabriyya in *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn*, who constantly compares between what she sees as old masculinity, which is the ‘real’ masculinity

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344 Ibid.
she sees her relatives perform, and ‘ideal’ masculinity, which is what she believes her boyfriend would perform.

The ‘ideal’ masculinities discussed in the chapter are all performed by participants in ideologically coloured groups of young men; the ideal masculinity is therefore as much a political stand as a comment on gender relations. ‘Ādil, in *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn*, fights against the French colonising powers. His performance of masculinity is a stand against both the coloniser and the elder generation, whom he sees as silent supporters of the French. He, and consequently Ṣabriyya, wants to see a new performance of masculinity, one that acknowledges the role of women and rejects what is seen as traditional and colonial values. This idea of masculinity as a political signifier is similar to the concept of the ‘new man’ used by Huda Elsadda and others in relation to Egyptian society and Egyptian literature. It refers to a well-read, nationalist man who sees social change as the only way forward for his country at the beginning of the 20th century. This character from the beginning of the century is also common in Syrian literature. In her trilogy on Syria, Nādyā Khūst portrays the new man, as does Ghāda al-Sammān in her novel *al-Riwāya al-mustahīla*; he further appears in *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn*, to be discussed in this chapter.

The idea of a politically influenced masculinity is however not limited to novels set at the beginning of the 20th century. ‘The intellectual’, which is Samira Aghacy’s name for the politically engaged masculinity, became a feature in Arabic, and Syrian, literature towards the end of the 1960s. He differs from the ‘new man’ by being engaged in contemporary politics, an active advocate for various ideologies and opposed to what he sees as old-fashioned governments. Through his political ideas and the radical, often militant, solutions he proposes, he believes he will change society for the better. This type of masculinity continues to be popular until the beginning of the 1980s, when, as discussed further on, the disillusioned hero suddenly takes over.

This politicised masculinity, though formulated by male and female writers alike, coincides with the period when Syrian female writers became more involved in politics in their literary texts. Aghacy points out that the masculinity

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347 Fayṣal, “Taḥawwulat al-khiṭāb al-unthawī.”
performance of ‘the intellectual’ includes virility and sexual ability. Many of the male characters she analyses are particularly active in their sexual relations. She makes a connection between the potent man and an ability to save the virtuous motherland. The male characters discussed in this chapter do not conform to this description, instead they die or disappear before they can commence a sexual relation with the female characters. The focus is instead on their ideological foundations and struggle for a better society. Whereas virility, and the ability to father, appear in relation to other characters it never becomes an issue for the main male characters of the novels. This is particularly telling since women writers have dealt with these topics in other circumstances. It seems that in these three novels the masculinities are incarnations of a better society. The ideal men function as symbols for change and they are consequently removed from physical and bodily needs and actions, although able to confess a pure love for their girlfriends.

In order not to confuse between concepts, and since the masculinities in the Syrian literature of this period, 1975 to 1990, are often fighting for change in armed battles, the concept ‘revolutionary man’ is used in this chapter instead of ‘new man’ or ‘intellectual’. This opens up the discussion to similar masculinity formations, published in the same era but with plots situated in different periods. In Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn the young men who are seen as performing the ideal masculinity are active members of the nationalist movement. The novel is set in the first half of the 20th century and the time preceding Syria’s independence in 1946. Qamar Kilānī’s Bustān al-karaz takes place in Lebanon at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s. Ḥamīda Na'na’s al-Wāṭan fī al-'aynayn does not give clear dates and disguises many place names, but it appears that the narrative moves between Europe, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Despite not giving dates, it seems to be describing events during the 1970s and is thus, like many other novels from the period, dealing with the reality in which it is created.

Even though ‘the revolutionary man’ is used to dislocate the characters from a specific time, the discussion still draws on the concept of the ‘new man’. The ‘revolutionary man’ in the novels above, like his brother ‘the new man’, calls for the

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348 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 56.
349 Ibid., 57.
education of women as a way of bettering the country. At the beginning of the 20th century, it is a question of basic education such as reading and writing, whereas later on it is a question of political and military training. However, as Elsadda points out in her discussion of the ‘new man’, “aspiring to a more egalitarian relationship with women does not, however, compromise male dominance and control,” something that is evident in all the three novels mentioned above. The female characters are invited and encouraged to take part in the men’s world of knowledge and fighting, but by coming in as beginners and allowed to participate at the mercy of their male companions they never take control.

Despite new vocabulary and a new theoretical framework, the internal dichotomy between male and female seems to be firmly in place within the characters’ minds, male as well as female. Aghacy even argues that the nationalistic discourses and the ideologically coloured characters distinguish more firmly than previous literary trends between what is considered male and what is considered female. Signs of masculinity are still to be in control, to be protective and to take care of women, while at the same time criticising previous generations’ ways of doing the same thing. The revolutionary man is therefore a re-shaping of masculinity and the internal power foundations rather than a reformulation of intra-gender relations. The revolutionary men in the three novels use their relations with women as a way of forming a new powerbase vis-à-vis the older generation, rather than changing the power relations between the genders.

Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti argues in a chapter on the paradoxical nature of masculinity in the Middle East, that being ‘a new man’ was a way for sons or young men to rebel against their fathers rather than an actual male revolution for women’s education. The new man, as well as the revolutionary man, is preoccupied by freeing his country from external powers and defending what he sees as the national values. External, political motives are incorporated into the concept of masculinity and used by the younger generation to gain power and positions. To give up everything to fight for ‘the cause’ is brought out as the core of masculinity, whether it is Syrian nationalism against the French or Arab nationalism against Israel. The male characters,

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350 Elsadda, Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel, xxxi.
351 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 56.
352 Kandiyoti, “Paradoxes of Masculinity,” 196-213.
as well as the female ones, take an active part in forming these values. Rather than looking at the revolutionary man and his own interpretations of what he wants, the analysis will focus on how the main narrators, all women, see the revolutionary men in the novels. In order to explain what is new and different the female characters need a comparison and in the three novels discussed in this chapter the father, and to some extent older brothers, play the role of both ideal and symbol of the past, as will be discussed in the following section.

5.3 The Father – Paternal Ideal

In the introduction, the concept of authorisation was discussed in connection to masculinity performance. Authorisation can be a specific position or background that makes a certain man’s masculinity performance valued and respected more than others. This is often seen in the portrayal of the father figure who, until the 1990s, is usually excused when he performs actions that are not seen as part of the female characters’ expectations on masculinity. The explanations and excuses they offer are based on the authorisation the position as ‘head of the family’ gives the fathers. Brothers or husbands who lack the authorisation of the father are not excused in the same way when performing similar actions. Authorisation is not a guarantee for power and influence. Men who benefit from authorisation can still lose their powerful position and become subordinate if they deviate too much from the hegemonic norm. Authorisation may also work partially; the position as the oldest son gives a man certain leeway within the immediate family, as seen further on, but in meetings with other men, this particular position does not carry with it any privileges.

The father figure in Syrian society is in himself a sign of power and importance. Lisa Wedeen has shown how he is incorporated in the political discourse in order to gain acceptance and credibility. To position oneself as the father of the nation carries with it obligations and a promise that people can expect to be looked after, but more importantly the role demands respect. As the utmost symbol of the patriarchal system, the father is a fundamental part of the power structures in Syrian society, as discussed by Kamal Abu Deeb in a study where he analyses the links

between power, fatherhood and divinity. He connects the elevated position of the father, and how he is treated as a small God, and how that is then transferred to society through the political system. The connection between fatherhood and goodliness further means that it is difficult, or even impossible, to criticise the father and his actions, whether in the family or as symbolised through a state apparatus.

In the novels, the father stands for the performance of the respective societies’ hegemonic masculinity. That is the ‘real’ masculinity, which has an immediate effect on the female characters’ lives. The link between the father’s power and the daughter’s life is examined further in Līndā ‘Abd al-Raḥman’s Tamthīlāt al-abī al-riwāya al-niswiyya al-ʿarabiyya al-muʿāṣira (The portrayal of the father in the contemporary Arabic female authored novel). She shows how the father has a direct influence on the daughter’s life, not only as a role model and caretaker but also through his decisions over her life based on his own political and religious motives. In the novels examined in this chapter the father figure is not openly critiqued; the ‘real masculinity’, which he stands for is however contrasted with what is perceived as ‘ideal’. In this way, a suggestion for change is made but without affecting the power of the father.

Through the following example, it is demonstrated that it is a common truth, also in the novel, that a father holds an elevated position. During the memorial service that Şabriyya organises forty days after her father’s death, two women discuss whether Şabriyya is truly sad or just relieved that her father has passed away. After discussing for a while, one says to the other:

ٌّمَهما يكونُ الأمرُ فالأبُ عزٌّ وْدُرَّ٢

The other woman immediately agrees. The word ‘izz emphasises the importance of the father figure and the power connected to this position. The fact that the sentence is said and agreed to as a general statement shows that it is not specific to Şabriyya’s relationship with her father, even though it indeed applies to it. In the two other novels

356 al-Idlibi, Dimashq, 12.
discussed, the father, though playing a less prominent role than in *Dimashq yā Basmat al-Hūzn*, still enjoys an elevated position with regard to other family members. Fatherhood can in this respect be seen as a type of authorisation; a man who has achieved fatherhood has with it obtained respect and power. Even in cases when he does not live up to the expectations on him, he still enjoys the advantages the position of fatherhood has given him. The position further means that he does not constantly have to prove himself and his performance of masculinity. Because of the special place that the father occupies, the female characters’ rejection or reformulation of the masculinity he performs becomes significant.

In the patriarchal societies described in the novels, contesting the role of the father implicates contesting the system and furthermore the hegemonic masculinity, which is exactly what the female characters attempt to do. However, whereas they disagree with what the father figures in the novels do, they remain the “source of power and dignity” and as such, they are not openly critiqued. Instead, the novels focus on the future and the female characters’ struggle is concentrated on young men of their age. The behaviour, which is accepted when the father performs it, is reacted to with anger when performed by a brother or young man of their age. They can to some extent accept, and respect, the past but they do not want it repeated in the future. Hence, the father figure is dealt with, and looked upon, with mixed feelings by the female characters.

In ‘Aynān min ishīliya (Sevillan eyes, 1965) by Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī the main female character leaves home since her step-mother mistreats her. She finds a job in a shop but is soon asked to become a model. Her father, who does not really know what she is doing, lets her know that she is no longer his daughter since she has accepted this job offer. The daughter completely understands the father’s feelings. She is sad that he does not listen to her point of view and gives her a chance to explain her actions. She knows however that society’s norms are with her father and she acknowledges that he has a right to be upset. When her innocence and high morals are revealed and her father wants to meet with her again she is ready to forgive all the hardships she has gone through because of him. In *al-Riwa‘a al-mal‘ūna* (The Naughty novel, 1968) by Amal Jarrah, the narrative goes as far as to suggest a relationship between the daughter in the family and the father. The young girl idolises
the father to the extent that she cannot think of letting any other man into her life and she is dreaming of taking the place of her late mother in the household. Her infatuation with her father can be read as an ironic comment on the period when father figures were idolised and seen as saviours for all women, as discussed previously. At the same time, as the novel develops, the father actually does give up large part of his life to save his daughter and the initial irony is lost.

In *Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn*, Şabriyya is torn between her respect and love for her father and her wish to be treated differently. In the diary descriptions of the father, he is seen as the provider, the source of moral right and good reputation, the protector, the hard worker, the pious man whose presence gives the house life.357 The father symbolises the centre of power and respect and he protects Şabriyya and her mother. Through the justifications of her father’s behaviour, which she writes down in her diary, a critique of what she sees as traditional masculinity emerges, in addition to a view on how she wants masculinity to be performed.

As the master of his household, the father deals with the members of it as he sees fit, and Şabriyya does not question his right to do this or the way in which he executes his orders. On the contrary, she seems content that she is part of a family where a strong and decisive father looks after its members. When she comes home late after participating in a demonstration, she knows that she is in trouble, but she does not expect her father to hit her repeatedly. Nor that he, when her brother Rāghib insinuates that she might no longer be a virgin after having mixed with boys, should demand to have her virginity checked. Both these acts infuriate Şabriyya who sees herself as innocent. However, when she has calmed down she reasons with herself and decides that her father is the victim of traditions and a ‘wrong masculine ideal’ as she says. She tells herself that ‘he would love to ask her forgiveness’ but that he cannot, so she forgives him despite him not asking.

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357 Ibid., 255.
I imagine that he is tormented now, he wants to take me in his arms and wipe away the pain he caused me. I know very well how much he loves me and how dear I am to him but he is not able to do it because he sees it as weakness that would undermine his masculinity. Everything is easier for him than for this sacred thing to be harmed. What a wrong concept of masculinity this is!

Despite her bruises, both physical and mental, she convinces herself that the father himself is not responsible but that an external power forces him to prove his masculinity and she has to put up with this. She restores her internal picture of the father as a man who cannot do her harm and always wants her best but who is misguided. His behaviour is explained by a wish to appear strong in front of his sons and neighbours. The traditional masculinity Ṣabriyya paints is one concerned more with outer images and gossip than with values such as respect for the individual and an active role for women, which she herself thinks is the way forward.

Similar internal negotiations are seen in the two novels Ayyām maʿahu and Layla wāhida by Kūlī Khūrī. In both novels the father behaves in a way that displeases the daughter but he is forgiven and the blame put on society. The father’s behaviour is explained by the fact that he only wants what is best for his daughter and hence works according to the rules of society. The father in Usayma Darwīsh’s novel Shajarat al-ḥubb is also forgiven by his daughter and, though she feels the need to run away from home to escape his tyranny, she later blames herself for breaking her father’s word and she is pleased when they forgive each other. In al-Waṭan fī al-ʿaynayn Nādyā sees her father and brothers as example of old and dictatorial types of masculinity but whereas she, like Ṣabriyya, finds it difficult to cope with her brothers’ wish to decide over her, she too finds excuses for the father.

In a later part of the novel, another example of how Ṣabriyya reasons with her principles to accommodate for the father’s ideas is seen when the father is on the verge

\[\text{Ibid., 207.}\]
of becoming bankrupt. The nationalists have demanded that all shop-owners participate in a strike to finally prove to the French that they are serious and that they have the people with them. The strike goes on for several months and the father is deeply upset about his loss of money. Ṣabriyya, whose political inclination lies with the nationalists, at first says to herself that the fact that rich people like her father lose money is a small cost to pay for freedom. Then she immediately retreats on her unspoken words. She adds that her father is not among the greedy capitalists and his sorrow has nothing to do with losing money but rather to do with the fact that his shop is his life. She is aware of her father’s faults, especially in comparison with her new ideals, but refuses to see them and instead covers them up even in her own mind.

I do not think that the money alone is the cause for my father’s sorrow. …The shop was very dear to him. …He lived more of his life in it than in his house.

She herself has given her gold bracelet to pay for weapons and food for the fighters, and her brother and boyfriend, her ideal performers of masculinity, have given everything they have for the cause. To be stingy and care more about personal losses than the greater good of the country is thus very far from what Ṣabriyya expects from a man she respects. It is moreover a critique towards the older generation that is accused of benefitting from the situation of colonialization rather than changing, it for fear of how the changes might affect them personally.

In Bustān al-karaz, Sūnyā has similar thoughts about her father, a wealthy businessman who seems more interested in himself and his own success than the development of the country. Despite this, she reasons with herself that he has earned his money to look after his family. She, too, is torn between the wish to sacrifice everything for the cause, as she has seen her boyfriend do and as she has done herself, and a wish to justify her father’s behaviour. As in Ṣabriyya’s case, the previous generation, as symbolised by the fathers, is somehow treated as responsible for the situation, whilst at the same time the critique is not clearly articulated. While critical

359 Ibid., 251.
of her father’s ways of earning money, Sūnyā simultaneously acknowledges that he is a good provider, so her criticism is lost in appreciation of him as a father.

In another section in *Dimashq yā basmat al-huзн*, the question whether Ṣabriyya should wear a full veil or not is raised. It is Rāghib, her older brother, who instigates the discussion, but it is the father who makes the decision and tells the mother to buy a veil for Ṣabriyya. Nevertheless, Ṣabriyya’s anger is directed towards Rāghib. The father, the one giving the order, is excused as being led astray by Rāghib’s discourse of honour and shame. She excuses the father’s behaviour and sees it as a result of social pressure, a situation where she has to take the consequences and wear the veil in order to protect her family’s reputation. Through this reasoning, she accepts and incorporates the gender division by agreeing that her father, in order to remain unblemished in the eyes of society, has no other choice than to ask her to wear the veil. She acknowledges both that society puts certain demands on female and male behaviour and that her behaviour might harm her father’s position.

Ṣabriyya does not only make excuses for her father’s behaviour, she also relies on him heavily for many things that she expects in her life, both financially and socially, therefore she cannot outright denounce his position and power. When Rāghib violates the moral codes by bringing a former prostitute to the house as his wife-to-be, Ṣabriyya turns to the father to set things straight and guard the reputation of the family.360 When her brother and his girlfriend are thrown out, Ṣabriyya is content with the father’s strong principles and morals. It seems that she accepts that the protection she is offered by the father comes with the price of abiding to the rules.

The father is aware that his position as the head of the family places expectations on him. When the French bombard the city, Rāghib suggests that they all run away. The father does not hinder him, but says that he himself will stay since he is responsible for the women.

أنا مسؤول عن نفسي وهاتين الحرمتين. لن نخرج من هنا أبداً وليحدث لنا ما يحدث.361

I am responsible for myself and for these two women. We will not leave and let whatever happens to us happen.

360 Ibid., 226.
361 Ibid., 144.
There is no discussion of what the women, Ṣabriyya and her mother, might prefer. The father is responsible and he is the one to take the decision. It is interesting to note that neither Ṣabriyya in her diary, nor Salmā in her comments, reacts to this. They are otherwise quick to comment on things they perceive as unjust. Perhaps they too agree that in time of emergency a man should be in command. From the above-mentioned events, it seems as if Ṣabriyya expects a performance of masculinity to be protective and caring. She does not herself attempt to solve the situation with her brother and his girlfriend, but waits for the father to take action. During the bombardment, she moreover patiently waits for his command rather than suggesting a plan for action.

The actual father, or a man in his position, formulates a good and just masculinity in the novels discussed. He is however connected to the past and some changes are therefore necessary in order to allow for women’s participation and equality. The father figure is therefore never in direct opposition to the revolutionary man, he is instead a sort of source to begin from. In this way, the revolutionary man is depicted as a better, but not very different version of masculinity. He is still able to look after the female characters as the father does, but he allows them greater own initiative. The new creations of masculinity thus function as a mediation with reality rather than a strong demand for change. The masculinities that are opposed to the revolutionary man are instead those that are unable to protect the country or those who pretend to follow the ideals but do it only for their own sake. The various ways of performing masculinity and the female reactions to this will be elaborated on in the next section.

5.4 Exaggerated versus Underdone Masculinity
From the father’s activities and Ṣabriyya’s reactions, the hegemonic masculinity of their society and what she meets every day as ‘real’ masculinity crystallises. From a young age, Ṣabriyya learns, through her family and through school, how masculinity should be performed and she finds this behaviour in her father. He is protective of his family, both financially and physically. She understands that he has the right to take whatever decision he wants, but at the same time, she expects the decisions to be fair and in accordance with the social rules. She further admits that there are certain social expectations a man must fulfil in order to gain respect, even if those same expectations go against his or his family’s wishes. She sees the father as morally incorrupt and
unable to break religious or social rules. Through her upbringing, she has internalised the hegemonic masculinity of the society she lives in but in addition to this, through her brother Sāmī, she has begun to look upon masculinity differently.

Her inability to criticise the father’s behaviour means that hegemonic masculinity is instead commented through her perception of her two brothers’, Rāghib and Maḥmūd’s, behaviour. They are examined both in relation to hegemonic masculinity and in relation to her ideal masculinity. In her judgment of them, she returns to the same core traits that she found important in her father. However, in Rāghib’s case she thinks he overplays his masculinity and in Maḥmūd’s case she does not find him masculine enough. In an article on masculinity in a feminist text, Helen Nabasuta Mugambi makes the point that all the male characters are crafted around the same traits, however their position in the fictional society depends on how the traits are utilised and seen by other characters.362 This is similar to the way the male characters are treated in the novels discussed in this chapter. Ṣabriyya’s, and other female characters’, acceptance of different performances of masculinity differs depending on how the male character is viewed. This is comparable to what one of the respondents in Farah Ghannam’s book on masculinity in Cairo says when she suggests that there are two types of men: “a raagil [a man] and illi bye‘mil raagil (one who pretends to be a man).”363 The first type performs the normative masculinity with the purpose of looking after himself and his family. The second type tries to get advantages by assuming the role of normative masculinity when it suits him, and avoiding it when it does not. He can, for example pick fights to show off his manliness, but run off in a real fight, or have many relationships with women to boast about virility, but not being able to marry and build a family. The female respondents’ reaction and the view of the fictional characters are very similar, since they take into account the underlying motive for specific actions and seem to accept only what they believe are genuine actions.

Ṣabriyya’s definition of Rāghib as a performer of exaggerated masculinity is connected to her understanding of the gender roles. As discussed in the previous section about her relation with her father, she expects a man to be able to look

363 Ghannam, Live and Die, 31.
after her and provide for her and, in return, she as a female will care for the man. This attitude is later applied to her ideal masculinity. The fact that Rāghib, who as the oldest son holds a powerful position in the family, imposes his will on her should therefore not be seen as surprising or odd in Ṣabriyya’s world. However, what differentiates Rāghib from the father is the awareness of one’s obligations and the underlying motive for performing certain actions. On a surface level, the two men hold similar opinions; for example, that women should not work or mix with men, that men should be responsible for all decisions in the household and that women should serve men and do it quietly. Nonetheless, while Ṣabriyya feels that adhering to these rules gives her respect and gratitude from her father, from Rāghib she gets only scorn and more orders. In her relation with her father, she fulfils her part of a silent agreement on gendered behaviour and she can count on her father to do the same, whereas Rāghib is seen by Ṣabriyya to impose rules only as a way of solidifying his own power.

When Rāghib, as mentioned above, forces his sister to veil, she believes that he does it only to annoy her. She thinks he knows how cumbersome the veil is and how difficult it is to wear it and that he encourages her father to take the decision in order to make her life more complicated. When the decision is taken, she looks at Rāghib who smiles victoriously. Whereas the father was seen to take the decision in order to protect Ṣabriyya, since veiling is expected from a girl of her height and appearance, as it says in the novel, Rāghib is seen to do it out of a wish to demonstrate his power. The power men have is not disputed by Ṣabriyya, but she wants to see it implemented fairly. She therefore further looks down on her brother for using his power and position to break the unwritten rules of the family.

Rāghib takes advantage of his position to come home late, party, waste money and travel. For example, as discussed above, he brings home a prostitute and spends the night with her, a huge scandal and more importantly proof that he judges his own behaviour very differently from how he judges others. This action changes the meaning of his moral judgments of his sister into a way of subordinating her rather than an actual judgment of her actions. Whereas the father personifies moral righteousness, Rāghib uses the notion that the oldest son has the right to correct other

364 MENA Development Report.
365 al-Idlibi, Dimashq, 75.
family member’s behaviour without actually taking any care of his own behaviour. He uses his position to assert his power without backing up his claims with a good conduct of his own, which makes Šabriyya detest him. When he finds no other way of asserting his power, Rāghib turns to physical violence. The father compares between his children in front of them and tells Rāghib that it is a shame that he is not as clever as his sister is, and gets as good grades as she does. As soon as the father leaves, Rāghib attacks his sister and does not leave her until she faints. He feels sure that she was smiling sarcastically at him while the father was praising her and he cannot allow for anyone, especially not a girl, to look down on him.

I will continue to hit her until she refrains from laughing in front of me.

The father, as described above, does not abstain from physical violence, but when he is violent Šabriyya finds a justifiable cause for him and in the end sees the violence as a rightful punishment. In Rāghib’s case, there is no justification, she is only afraid and disgusted by his attacks. Rāghib is also described as being physically violent in his relations to other men. If he feels threatened, he does not back down from a fight if he thinks it is necessary. Whereas the ability to protect oneself and one’s country is seen as important by Šabriyya, she interprets her brother’s use of violence as an inability to control himself. His appropriation of what other men do to perform masculinity is therefore not approved of by her since his motive, as she sees it, is not right. Rāghib is furthermore involved in the killing of Šabriyya’s boyfriend, whom he sees as inferior to the family and as a threat to his own power and position. He has learnt of Šabriyya’s plan to run away with her boyfriend and he cannot tolerate this; instead he uses violence to solve the situation.

Šabriyya is not alone in worrying about Rāghib’s behaviour, the other family members are also aware of Rāghib’s faults and do not see him as a successful performer of masculinity or worthy of his position. The father doubts his abilities to look after himself and does not trust him to help in the shop, the natural job for the oldest son. The mother, who is the one the father blames when Rāghib makes a
mistake, feels the need to exaggerate the times he behaves according to expectations. When he brings home fruit or gifts, she makes a great fuss and plays him up as the great provider, even though everyone knows it is a rare occasion and not an actual habit of Rāghib’s. The mother’s behaviour both underlines Rāghib’s shortcomings and accentuates what is expected from a man, namely to provide for his family. When he actually holds a job for a short time, he brings home make up and perfume for his mother and sister, even though he himself does not approve of them using such things. Even his attempts to provide are hence most of the time misplaced. When he finally marries, he, according to Šabriyya, fulfils his wife’s every wish for expensive things but does not care at all for his sister and father. The money he spends on furniture and jewellery for his wife does not count as careful provision of the kind her father stood for but is, in Šabriyya’s eyes, a wasteful way of dealing with one’s income.

Whereas the father is seen as holding on to traditional values due to age and habit, Rāghib is seen as actively working for the French and taking a stand against the nationalist movement. He earns money in a position within the French administration and cannot see anything positive in the changes proposed by those who want to end the colonisation. His excessive use of violence and imposed rules to demonstrate power can in this light as well be read as signs of a political stand far from what Šabriyya and her ideal masculinity supports. The French and their treatment of Damascus are described in similar terms as Rāghib’s conduct towards his sister. The ideal masculinity that Šabriyya looks for is therefore more than just an escape for herself, it is, as she sees it, a way to rescue the country.

In Bustān al-karaz, Sūnyā’s brother never tries to dominate her but, like Rāghib, he chooses a political path far from the ideal path chosen and described by his sister. His choice, which is mainly based on the possibility to make money and decide for himself, leads to the death of his sister. Rather than fighting to save the country and provide a better future for everyone, he uses violence and his position to create a power base for himself. As in Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn the political stand and the performance of masculinity are mixed, and the female protagonist judges the conduct of the male characters based on what she sees as the performer’s motives, not the actual actions included.
If Rāghib is seen by Šābriyya to use the discourse of masculinity to boost his own power, she sees Maḥmūd, her other brother, as incapable of performing masculinity at all. She is critical of Rāghib, who forces her to veil and tries to stop her from going to school in the name of protecting the family’s reputation. However, she is just as critical of Maḥmūd, who is not in the least interested in what she does or with whom she talks. The question of provision comes up again and if Rāghib’s attempts fail as he brings home luxury goods the women are not allowed to use, Maḥmūd does not even try. When he marries, he is moreover unable to provide for his own family and depends financially on his wife, again, in opposition to Rāghib, who provides for his wife but in a wasteful way, as Šābriyya sees it. Rāghib is described as violent, both inside and outside the house. Maḥmūd, on the other hand, is described as weak, he does not fight and he never attempts to hit his sister. At one point, when he sees a group of killed revolutionaries, he begins to cry and finds it difficult to get home. Šābriyya, who has been at the same place, is shocked by the sight of the dead men, but she is even more appalled that her brother, rather than taking care of her, has to be supported by her. Her expectation is that as a male he will be able to look after himself and those dependent on him, not break down at the sight of blood. Maḥmūd does not seem to worry about his reaction; contrary to his older brother he never actively tries to compete for a position within the family or within society. He is content with whatever happens to him. Despite that, he is judged by Šābriyya with the same standards as she uses for all men. In her world, Maḥmūd, despite being the opposite of Rāghib, still fails to fulfil the ideal masculinity she expects from a man.

In al-‘Waṭan fī al-‘aṣayn, Frank, a man Nādyā meets in France, performs a similar, disinterested type of masculinity. Nādyā is at first attracted to him, since he has a reputation as a strong freedom fighter who has fought in Africa against colonialism. However, whereas she is still full of energy and a wish to take up arms, he is no longer interested in fighting. Instead, he tells her that the time for revolution and change is over. He is content to live a calm life in Paris without any responsibilities. He has left his wife and young daughter to avoid being committed and he tells Nādyā that she does not need to be faithful to him. He does not want to perform any of the actions involved in what Nādyā sees as hegemonic masculinity and is far from her ideal. She, who was hoping that this man would be able to become her new
partner, is utterly disappointed at his lack of initiative. Whereas she did not like her brothers’ aggressive way of trying to force her to behave in the way they wanted she, like Şabriyya, does not see anything positive in a man who behaves in the opposite way either.

Returning to Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn, there is one thing the brothers have in common, which Şabriyya points out when she tells them off after the father’s memorial service: neither of them has ever cared for her. As their sister, she has demands on them and these demands have not been met by the aggressive Rāghib or by the passive Maḥmūd. Both brothers benefit from the patriarchal dividend and are treated differently than Şabriyya by her parents. However, they have positioned themselves on opposite sides of the hegemonic masculinity she sees her father perform. Neither of them have changed in a way she approves of; what she instead looks for seems to be a progressive version of her father’s masculinity. The traits that Şabriyya has assigned to her father’s performance of masculinity hence come with a negative trait attached to them where assertiveness becomes aggressiveness and protection becomes hindrance, in addition to the opposition formed by the inability to perform masculinity completely. She is not happy with Maḥmūd who does nothing but nor is she happy with Rāghib who overdoes his masculinity. As Helen Nabasuta Mugambi points out, this play with the traits included in masculinity can be used to criticise masculinity from within.\(^\text{367}\) It further emphasises that the situation, and the viewpoint of the female character, play an important role in how the performance of masculinity is interpreted.

The creation of rejected masculinities problematizes the idea of hegemonic masculinity as a set of actions or traits. The characters, male and female, are not just interested in actions but how and why these actions are performed. The rejected performances are either attempts to use the patriarchal dividend and the idea of hegemonic masculinity to gain advantages or a failure to adhere to the performance. In both cases, the norm of the fictional society is what decides if a man is successful or not. It is furthermore clear that even though the fictional society does not grant the female characters power to change or punish the men that perform masculinity at the expense of the female characters’ well-being, the literary depiction of them functions

\(^{367}\) Nabasuta Mugambi, “Reading Masculinities,” 217.
as a way of exposing them. They further strengthen the idolisation of the revolutionary man since he appears as outstanding in his fight for social justice. The next section will outline the construction of ideal masculinity in the novels.

5.5 Ideal Masculinity – the Revolutionary Man

Sāmī, the third of Ṣabriyya’s brothers, is the one who represents ideal masculinity. In contrast to the two other brothers and the father, Ṣabriyya cannot find fault with his behaviour. On the contrary, he becomes the ideal against whom she judges everyone else. In the same section where Ṣabriyya discusses her father’s masculinity, she specifies what she herself sees as real masculinity and says:

أليس الرجل الكامل الرجلة هو من يقف أمام التيار ولا يبالي؟ يفعل ما يمليه عليه ضميره ولا يبالي بالأخرى. يقول كلمة الحق ولا يهمه رضي الناس أم غضبوا. ⁴³⁸

Is not the man with a complete masculinity the one who faces the current without hesitation? He does what his consciousness tells him to do and does not care about others. He tells the truth and does not worry if people will be pleased or angry.

This description applies to Sāmī. He studies and is interested in politics. He brings home books and articles to read and shares some of them with his sister. Even when his father and Rāghib argue with him, he stays convinced of his principles and ideas. In the end he decides that, in order to not just talk, but actually work for a change, he needs to take part in the armed struggle and he runs away from home to take up arms.

Sāmī’s conviction influences Ṣabriyya’s views on the future and on society. She welcomes the changes promised by the nationalists and sees how they will shape a new man and masculinity as opposed to what her father and two brothers stand for. This new man is the one, together with the new woman, who is going to make society better. In addition to Sāmī, her boyfriend ‘Ādil is a model for this new, ideal masculinity which will change society. She sees the two as very different from what she labels old masculinity and she is excited about their ideas and discussions. Both Sāmī and ‘Ādil are among the nationalists and take part in the uprising and fighting against the French. In addition to the fight for a free Syria, their political ideas include things like education for women, the removal of class boundaries and a revival of the

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 207.
Syrian nation.\textsuperscript{369} Sāmī is for example adamant that his sister shall be allowed to finish her schooling and not be married off to someone. When the mother keeps on saying that Şabriyya’s only chance for a happy future is if a good man comes to ask for her hand, he tries to persuade her to change her mind.

أرجوكِ يا أمي أن تفهمي كلامي وتقتنعي به: إياكُ وإن تقبلين بزواج صبرية ولو جاءها ملك الزمان قبَل أن تنال شهادتها.\textsuperscript{370}

Mother I beg you to understand and be convinced by what I say: Do not agree to marry off Şabriyya before she has her degree even if the king of all times would ask for her hand.

Sāmī and ‘Ādil are furthermore against the veil,\textsuperscript{371} and believe that marriage should be a private matter for the individual, not something for the family to decide.\textsuperscript{372} Sāmī confides in his sister about his girlfriend and at the same time supports her love for his best friend ‘Ādil. The father, in contrast, does not even acknowledge his love for the mother and the way the two of them look at marriage is as a business deal.

The first mention of ‘Ādil in the diary is when he and Sāmī follow Şabriyya to school.

فكانا يوصلاني أولاً إلى مدرستي ثم يتتابعان سيرهما. كنت أسير بينهما لا أنسى بكلمة.\textsuperscript{373}

The two of them used to take me to my school then continue on their way. I used to walk between them without uttering a word.

She walks between them, protected, not speaking in order not to disturb their conversation. ‘Ādil is described as sometimes asking her to participate in the discussion despite the fact that she is both younger and a girl. All the ideas she hears make Sāmī and ‘Ādil stand out as new and different in comparison to the father and her other brothers. Şabriyya spends time with her brother and boyfriend reading and discussing. She is filled with the new nationalist ideals they teach her, and sees a great role for women as educators for future generations. Since mixing between genders is

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\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 68.
difficult in the fictional society, the summer vacation brings a halt to the daily conversations.

Next time ‘Ādil is mentioned, Ṣabriyya is older and he comes to give back some books to Sāmī. Ṣabriyya is the one opening for him and they have a quick and secret conversation at the door. ‘Ādil recommends novels to Ṣabriyya and when she appears sad after having read a particular novel he warns her about another one that might upset her, confessing that he himself cried when he read it. He is both sensitive and at the same time protective of Ṣabriyya’s feelings. It is interesting here to compare Ṣabriyya’s reaction to ‘Ādil’s tears with how she reacted to Maḥmūd’s crying described above. In this context, she sees the crying as a sign of sensitivity and a demonstration of how ‘Ādil is connected to his feelings. In the case of Maḥmūd, Ṣabriyya pities him since he is unable even to see blood without crying. The act of crying is hence closely connected to the circumstances. As a sign of fear and weakness, it is seen as a fault by Ṣabriyya but as a sign of the new, more sensitive man, it is welcomed.

It is empathy which Ṣabriyya looks for in her new man, not cowardice and hysteria, as she finds in her brother. Both Sāmī and ‘Ādil are described as being fearless and firm towards those who oppose them. The empathy they feel is with the poor and weak, groups that will be redeemed and looked after, as soon as the new nationalist government is in power. The new, sensitive man still looks after and protects but the objective is different. He protects out of care not out of obligation, which is how the father is described. Later on in the novel, when Sāmī is killed, ‘Ādil writes to Ṣabriyya, explaining how much he hates to see her sad and tells her that he will now step in as the one looking after her.

أشعر أنني مسؤول عنك أمام سامي، أتساءل كيف أستطيع أن أمسح الخنز عن عينيك وأعيد إليهما ألفهما الذكي؟

I feel responsible for you in front of Sāmī, I ask myself how I can wipe out the sadness in your eyes and bring back their clever sparkle?

374 Ibid., 72.
375 Ibid., 132.
376 Ibid., 163.
Ṣabriyya is the only one of the narrators who has two ideal men, her brother who acts as a facilitator, and her boyfriend who becomes the true performer of ideal masculinity and the one she wants to build a family with. The setting of the novel might be a reason for this set up. In the other novels, the narrators have the freedom to study at university and come and go as they want. Since they are not confined to the house in the same way as Ṣabriyya, they have bigger possibilities of meeting with men performing different types of masculinities and do not need an ally at home to allow for their meetings.

In al-Waṭan fī al-‘aynayn and Bustān al-karaz, Nādyā’s and Sūnyā’s revolutionary men are very similar to Sāmī and ‘Ādil. Nādyā joins a radical group, which fights for the right to a Palestinian state, and she takes Abū Mashhūr, the most experienced fighter in the group, as her model. Like Ṣabriyya’s model masculinities he stands for a new society where old injustices are going to be wiped out, he supports Nādyā’s fighting and practicing and discusses political and revolutionary texts with her. The same feeling of renewal as Ṣabriyya feels when listening to Sāmī and ‘Ādil fills Nādyā when she thinks of Abū Mashhūr. Sūnyā in Bustān al-karaz is also living through a transition. The novel is set at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war and Sūnyā has, thanks to her boyfriend, joined a left-wing Palestinian armed group. Like Ṣabriyya and Nādyā, she is swept away by the ideas of men and women working together for a better future. They all think of new gender roles where women are no longer only wives and mothers but companions and comrades participating in a joint life, not just existing as a part of the man’s life. As discussed in the previous chapter, part of the changing masculinity is an allowance for women’s advancement. The female characters see a need for the male role to change so that women can take up important roles in society.

In all three novels, the revolutionary men disappear after a while. Sāmī, Ṣabriyya’s brother, dies during one of the French attacks and Ṣabriyya has no way of knowing how he would have become as a grown man. His 20-year-old idealist self becomes for her the real Sāmī. She keeps coming back to his memory every time she feels unjustly treated. To support herself she thinks of what Sāmī would have done and how he would have helped her had he been alive. She turns her dead brother into an ideal masculinity by which she judges the rest of the world. When her former girlfriend
suggests that Sāmī would not have mourned over her more than a few days and then found a new girlfriend, had she died instead of him, Şabriyya is outraged. In her world, ideal masculinity equals high moral standards and fidelity and she is sure Sāmī would have behaved accordingly. She herself cannot imagine marrying someone else when ‘Ādil is murdered and she assumes he would have done the same. ‘Ādil, through surviving longer than Sāmī, is turned into another ideal masculinity for Şabriyya. She imagines their life together and how they would have lived happily in a small village. As with Sāmī, she plays out different scenarios in her diary about how her life would have been with ‘Ādil and how he would have reacted to different events in their life. Her fantasy of ‘Ādil is transformed in her mind to reality and she laments the future she believes that she is missing.

In al-Waṭan fī al-‘aynayn, Nādyā and Abū Mashhūr are separated after having completed training and a successful mission. When they are reunited again, they are only allowed a short time together before Abū Mashhūr is reported missing after an attack in Israel. Nādyā returns over and over to his memory and when she later marries, she wishes her husband were more like how she thinks Abū Mashhūr would have been as a husband. In another relationship she has with a French revolutionary man she measures him against her ideal picture of Abū Mashhūr and finally leaves him, since he does not live up to her standard. Having only lived with Abū Mashhūr in combat situations and training camps she still sees him as capable of being the ideal man in any situation and he, or her own image of him, influences her life and decisions.

In Bustān al-karaz, Sūnyā is separated from her boyfriend Sāmī on their first mission and she does not find him until the end of the novel, where she soon loses him again. For most of the novel, Sāmī functions as the ideal revolutionary man for Sūnyā. She does not know what he is doing, but she assumes he is the perfect fighter and she judges others and herself on that basis. The three narrators create characters that cannot be negated, since they are either dead or not present, nor can they disappoint the narrators by behaving differently from what they expect. It is also significant that the men die and the women live, but in a world that does not change in the way they were hoping. Sūnyā finds that the group she has been fighting with begins to treat her as a servant, exactly what she was working to avoid. When she leaves them,

377 Ibid., 261.
she leaves for a world of chaos and different armed gangs, one of which later kills her. Nādyā wants to return to the fighting and to do something for the cause, but she too is held back by the changing world. Lastly, Šabriyya becomes a voluntary prisoner, staying by her father’s bedside to look after him without leaving the house.

No one of the three characters has built her ideal masculinity on imaginations alone. In Šabriyya’s case she knows the way both Sāmī and ‘Ādil looked at masculinity and masculine ideals when they were alive and the same is true for Sūnyā and Nādyā. What they do not know is how time and circumstances would have shaped the men had they lived on to marry and complete their lives as fathers and husbands. Based on what they know, they imagine what the men would have done and said, and from that information, they form a picture of ideal masculinity for themselves. The ideal masculinity of the revolutionary men is contrasted with other men’s behaviour in the novels. In some cases the narrators reflect on the differences and in some cases they are left uncommented.

The discussion of the father figure and the brothers as examples of variant masculinities has circled around similar types of behaviours but interpreted differently. The ideal masculinity as performed by the revolutionary men is another type of masculinity, which shows differences on the surface although the underlying structures are similar to those seen in the traditional or old masculinity. For example, in all the meetings between ‘Ādil and Šabriyya he is the one who thinks, organises and understands on more than one occasion Šabriyya comments that she understands part of what she is given to read, or writes about how happy she is when she thinks she has understood everything. Her father or Rāghib would never have bothered to discuss anything with her or ask for her opinions, so the interest ‘Ādil and Sāmī pay her is certainly new. At the same time, she does not think of herself as an equal to them but as someone they educate. At one point after a summer holiday, she feels sure that she will now behave as an equal to the boys.

378 Ibid., 11; 206.
379 Ibid., 68.
380 Ibid., 72.
I will listen to Sāmī and ‘Ādil’s discussion and understand it well. I too will participate in the discussion, have I not become a serious reader just like them?

This never happens because after the holiday Ṣabriyya is forced to wear a full veil and as a veiled woman she is not allowed to walk with men, hence she is deprived of the chance to prove to Sāmī and ‘Ādil how serious she is. Next time any discussions are mentioned in the diary, neither Ṣabriyya nor the boys are acting as if they were equals. To herself, Ṣabriyya admits that she is as good as the men, but in reality, she awaits their invitation to participate. More importantly, she does not find it strange that she has to await an invitation, her subordination is still internalised by both her and the men. The equality she expects is by invitation only, as when her father invites her mother to talk to him after the children are in bed. The ideal masculinity she hopes for is therefore not so different from the real masculinity she wants to change.

The same pattern appears in both al-Watān fī al-‘aynayn and Bustān al-karaz, where the girls exercise and study in order to fit into their respective combat groups but are still, in particular Sūnyā, considered less worthy members of their groups. Nādyā, who at one point functions as the leader of a group hijacking airplanes in Europe, is quickly dispensed with when she disagrees with the leaders of the group, and the other members are told that she has left the group to marry and have children. Even within the struggle for the new society, there is a gender order that places males over females. The connection between performing male activities and power is evident in all novels. This power leads to the narrators having an unshakable belief in their ideal men and what they can do. When Ṣabriyya is forced to leave school, ‘Ādil steps in and promises to teach her so that she can sit the exams with her friends. He has not studied the same topics but he does not hesitate. For him, the books from a girls’ school cannot possibly be a problem. Ṣabriyya does not question his ability either and

381 Ibid., 74.
382 Ibid., 76.
383 Ibid., 210.
seems content that as her husband he will take over as her brother, father and teacher personified in one.

When ʿĀdil is back from fighting, he and Ṣabriyya take to meeting in an orchard close to Ṣabriyya’s school. One week Ṣabriyya does not turn up for their weekly meeting and the following week ʿĀdil is very upset with her for standing him up. When he hears that the reason for her absence is that her mother is ill and that Ṣabriyya needs to take care of her, he immediately advises her to do as much of the work at home as she can. He does not ask what her brothers are doing to support their mother nor does he suggest getting help so that Ṣabriyya can concentrate on her studies. It seems that women’s education and work are only important for him if there are no pressing needs, such as ill mothers or babies, to keep them home. Ṣabriyya herself, who previously has complained about the unfairness of her doing all the housework and her brothers sleeping or being out with friends, now agrees. It is her sense of duty towards her ill mother that later hinders her from eloping with ʿĀdil, a decision that effectively changes her future. The fact that she herself has a part in her broken dreams is never analysed by Ṣabriyya, who lays the blame solely on her brother and his wish to see her unhappy. This is also a clue to her perception of gender. She as a woman has no agency to act and influence things, so the acting and hence the responsibility must be placed with her brother.

Another example of the mix between new and old can be seen in Ṣabriyya’s participation in the demonstration. As an advocate for a new society, ʿĀdil encourages Ṣabriyya to participate with the other girls. The father, when he later knows about the demonstration, states that he has no daughters who demonstrate with boys. His problem is not with the political ideas but with the fact that Ṣabriyya has been talking to, and walking with, men. Had he been present at the demonstration he would have been pleased. The girls do not take part as equals to the men, but as symbols to convince the French that all of the population is against them. They are driven around on a lorry and the boys and men are protecting them, making sure that nothing happens to them and that no one can reach them, not the police, not the French, and not unknown men.

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384 Ibid., 195.
385 Ibid., 201.
There were fights between the police officers and the demonstrators in order to prevent the police from reaching us.

Ṣabriyya, initially excited that she as a woman will do something for the revolution and not just wait around patiently, is pleased to see how the women are looked after. She wants to participate but she also wants the security of being protected by someone. Sūnyā and Nādyā, who unlike Ṣabriyya are used to mixing with men, also expect to be protected and looked after by their men. Sūnyā trusts Sāmī to look out for her and save her. When the roles are reversed and she saves him from the guarded wing of the hospital, they are both uncomfortable and their relationship crumbles. Sūnyā starts to question her motives for participating in the fighting and when Sāmī leaves on a mission without telling her any details she decides to leave. No longer protected and looked after, she can just as well look after herself somewhere else. When Nādyā has a breakdown after Abū Mashhūr’s disappearance, she is pleased to see her father and mother come to her side to look after her. Her parents, who were previously a hindrance, now become a welcome sight of comfort and protection. When she begins to feel better, she agrees to accept the proposal of her doctor and they get married. One of her reasons for accepting the marriage is that she feels secure and looked after with him.

The masculinity Ṣabriyya looks for in Ḍāhil is on the one hand the listener who discusses with her and attaches value to her opinions and sees women as necessary participants in society. On the other hand, she expects him to be the provider, both of knowledge and of money. She further expects him to protect her, both from her brother and from people on the street. She assumes him to have high moral grounds, sure that he will take her straight to the village hall for them to get married once they have eloped, so that no immoral things might happen. She appreciates the fact that he trusts her not to have kissed anyone before him but does not find it strange that the topic is broached; on the contrary, she sees it as his right to have an unkissed wife.

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386 Ibid., 197.
Nādyā and Sūnyā express similar ideas. They want to be looked after and cared for in addition to being appreciated for what they do. They want a new society and at the same time, they expect that parts of the previous hegemonic masculinity will stay in place so that they are looked after and feel secure. What Ṣabriyya expects from ‘Ādil is essentially what she has grown up to expect from her father. She wants to be protected, provided for and respected. She does however want the execution of these things to be different from what she has seen from her father. She agrees to the what – what a man should do, but wants a change in the how – how a man should perform these things. She is also certain that a woman on her own has very small chances of living a good life. In her world, the man stands for power and decision-making. When ‘Ādil is killed it is as if Ṣabriyya’s dreams are killed too and she says:

مات عادل، وانتهى كل شيء!387
‘Ādil died and everything ended!

She no longer goes out and refuses to take up her studies, even though her parents change their mind and allow her to go back to school. She stops following the political scene and does not mix with people. Without the support of someone, ‘Ādil or Sāmī, she sees no possibilities for herself. Her previous ideas of women taking part in society are completely forgotten when she has to support herself. Her earlier critique of her mother, who did not dare to leave the house without the father permitting her to leave,388 could now be directed towards her own life. She does not allow herself to carry on with her life without the necessary (male) support.

The revolutionary man is hence not a revolution, he is a new version of the masculinity previously performed. He is however important nonetheless, because in these three novels he is half-real and half imaginary. The absent boyfriend performs the ideal masculinity and becomes the measuring rod for everyone else who does not just quite measure up. The female narrators have created their own hegemonic masculinity which no one, probably not even the idolised absent boyfriends, is able to live up to. The fact that the boyfriends disappear and leave the female characters to continue the struggle, with varying results, is also significant. The hopes and changes

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387 Ibid., 213.
388 Ibid., 134.
they were eager to implement in their societies are still alive in the memories of their girlfriends, but the hegemonic masculinity, the real masculinity, which they worked to change, is still prevailing at the end of the novels.

The fact that the expectations the narrators place on their revolutionary men are very similar to what they, especially Ṣabriyya, have grown up with and criticise as old fashioned, is a sign of the duality of hegemonic masculinity. There is a fixed idea of what masculinity is and all men, whether they agree or not, are judged against this scale, but when time changes and political ideas influence society the views on how to execute masculinity change. The ideal masculinity Ṣabriyya, Nādyā and Sūnyā dream of is a new manifestation of an old structure. The ideal masculinity they formulate is connected to their belief that a man is needed to make them happy. Not just as a subject of love but as someone fighting for their right to study, work and have an opinion. It is further a manifestation of how they want the whole society to change in order to become better for all, men and women.

Ṣabriyya’s and the other characters’ views on masculinity together form a hegemony that builds foremost on the difference between men and women. One of the arguments to urge men to fight is that only women sit at home – real men make a difference.³⁸⁹ Secondly, men provide for those they are responsible for. The father makes sure there is food in the house even during the long times of bombardments and curfews.³⁹⁰ Thirdly, a real man has high moral standards and does what is deemed right for him, his country and family; in the novel this is symbolised by supporting the nationalist cause. The fourth element in the novel is to protect those one is responsible for – both physically and mentally. Fulfilling these four expectations leads to power and respect. In all three novels, nationalism functions as a fifth indicator for how characters should be judged.

Whereas all the ideal masculinities are active armed fighters for the nationalist cause, the corrupt father in Bustān al-karaz leaves the country when things get bad. Similarly, Rāghib is against the nationalists and profits from doing business with the French. Since the five indicators are linked to all male characters, it is not enough to say that they form hegemonic masculinity. There is a difference in the power

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 148.
³⁹⁰ Ibid., 138.
and respect Rāghib earns for his behaviour in comparison with for example Sāmī. The male characters are not judged on a basis of performing or not performing elements included in the hegemonic masculinity, but rather on how they perform them. Rāghib’s over performance places him as far from the ideal masculinity Ṣabriyya looks for as his brother Maḥmūd’s underperformance. The ideal masculinity the narrators formulate is hence drawn upon masculinity as the narrators see it performed in their encounters with other men in the novels.

5.6 The Revolutionary Man through Time
The three novels discussed in detail in this chapter are all written within the same time span of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the period named ‘the Political Man’ in this thesis. During this period the politically engaged masculinity or the revolutionary hero became a feature in both men’s and women’s fiction in Syria.391 When the political situation changed, the revolutionary hero consequently disappeared and in the novels of the 1990s the idealistic, ideologically influenced masculinity as main theme is rare. The masculinities discussed in this chapter can thus be seen as an example of Syrian female authors’ engagement with the social and political life, through their plots. The masculinity created can be read as a reaction to the changing political landscape. Whereas the masculinities discussed invite the female characters to participate in the change, they also stand for promises of security and protection.

At the same time, the revolutionary man, though having relationships with women, seems to be detached from the family setting to the extent that it is necessary for him to die before anything more serious than an engagement has happened. As dead, the men continue to influence the female characters and their masculinity becomes even more idolised. Having given their lives for the cause, or the country, they cannot be criticised. Even if the ideal men are not connected to the female characters through personal relations, they stand out as active and assertive. In Kawābīs Bayrūt (Beirut Nightmares 1976) by Ghāda al-Sammān it is not the revolutionary man who forms the ideal masculinity but the military man. After a period of hardships, it is finally the military that come to the main female characters’ rescue from the wartorn city. They, and especially their commander, exhibit the same

characteristics of idealism, bravery and determination as the previously discussed masculinities, this time literally saving the female protagonist from chaos and death. Even if the army is rarely described, all the political men eventually take to weapons against their enemy, and the ability to handle firearms becomes another way of measuring their masculinity.

In the narratives, the revolutionary man somewhat stands out as a fantasy. He states his goals and makes his plans and he fights for them, but he is not around to see them materialise. As a result, the revolutionary man becomes connected to a utopic version of reality that even the fiction cannot produce. However, he does inspire the female characters to, in a sense, take control over their own lives. In Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn, Ṣabriyya uses her power to commit suicide. She defies the wish of her brothers to live a quiet life in order not to disturb them and instead punishes them by creating a scandal that exposes them as incapable of taking care of her. Through her death and her diary she orchestrates her revenge. Nādyā in al-Waṭan fī al-‘aynayn uses her power to enjoy sexual relations. When she feels she is ready, she challenges the orders of the group leaders and goes back to the Arab world to take up the armed struggle. Sūnyā in Bustān alkaraz leaves the group she is fighting with when they begin to treat her as a servant rather than a fighter, and sets up her own life in the midst of wartorn Lebanon. In the three novels, the created revolutionary masculinities function, in different ways, as liberators for the women.

Towards the end of the period, the failed revolutionary hero instead becomes a theme, as can be seen in Qamar Kilānī’s al-Dawwāma (The Whirlwind, 1983). In this novel, the main male character is so absorbed by his political struggle that he neglects his wife. When Syria is then attacked by Israel he can do nothing to protect the country, or his wife, and the novel ends in chaos. The failing revolutionary hero ignites the trend of the 1990s with troubled or aggressive masculinities. The function of the male characters in the female authors’ narratives has moved from potential partners in the struggle of changing society, during the period of the ‘political man’, towards being confused in their performance of masculinity and the adversaries of the female characters in the period of ‘problematic masculinity’.
5. 7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the political change, which the novels propose or deal with, is channelled through the characters of young men. The masculinity of these young men becomes synonymous with the cause they are fighting for and the female characters are infatuated both with the men and with the political ideas. As representatives for political trends, the men are idealised and idolised by the women. The masculinities created can be said to craft a new ideology rather than simply a new gender role.

Their ideal masculinity is contrasted with a real masculinity of the fictional societies described, and though they are made out to be very different, they appear to rest on similar foundations. The ideal masculinity is hence more about how masculinity is performed than what it entails. Various ways of performing the same or similar actions are judged on their motives rather than the actual performance. The ideal masculinity of the novels is never properly tested, the young men disappear or die before their masculinity can be accurately implemented. The worldview they propose remains a fantasy for the female characters and can be said to signify a utopian society. At the same time, the revolutionary man gives the female protagonist power to change her own life.

The following chapter returns to the same characteristics of masculinity which have been discussed previously, but looks at the problematic situation of not being able to live up to the hegemonic ideal for various reasons.
6. Masculinity – a Demanding Role to Play

"معكر قرش ينشؤ قرش". ولكن نقوده تكاد تنفد. إنه لا يساوي شيئاً في هذه المدينة المفترسة.392

“If you have a penny you are worth a penny.” But his money is about to run out. He is worth nothing in this ravenous city.

Bayrūt 75 (Beirut 75, 1975) by Ghāda al-Sammān (b. 1942) begins at the long-distance-taxi station in Damascus. A taxi headed for Beirut is slowly filling up and finally leaving. Among the passengers are Faraḥ and Yāsmīna, both travelling to Beirut as a way of escaping poverty and social taboos. At the border some of the passengers leave the taxi and one by one the empty places are instead filled by Abū al-Mullā, Ṭa‘ān and Abū Muṣṭafā on their way towards Beirut. Together with Faraḥ and Yāsmīna they form the centre of narration in the novel. Except for the initial taxi ride, only Faraḥ and Yāsmīna meet again. The other characters’ stories are connected through the themes of social and financial restrictions but separated on the level of actual events. Each of the characters carries a dream for a better future. Abū al-Mullā wants to be able to bring home his young daughters, whom poverty has forced him to send off as maids. Abū Muṣṭafā is looking for a treasure in order to save his family from poverty. Ṭa‘ān is trying to escape a family feud that has made him the next victim in a never-ending vendetta. Yāsmīna is looking for love and a relationship, and Faraḥ is looking for fame. No one of the characters is successful in his/her quest for happiness, and in one way or another they all fall victims to social rules, either by breaking them or by making fatal mistakes while trying to live up to them.

This chapter returns to the male vantage point and examines the link between hegemonic and subordinate versions of masculinity. The chapter proposes that an enforced hegemonic masculinity hinders and restricts the male characters and leads to a performance of a masculinity void of meaning. The chapter further illustrates how the performer of subordinate masculinity reinforces the hegemonic masculinity despite being unable to perform it. In previous chapters, the performance of hegemonic

392 Ghāda al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75 (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghāda al-Sammān, 1975), 22.
masculinity has generally led to respect and power whereas the analysis here demonstrates that the male characters’ quest for this power leads to their own destruction. What the characters see as hegemonic masculinity through their interpretations of social appearance and reactions from fellow characters, forces them to take actions with which they are not content. As the initial quote shows, the expectations and views of others have an important impact on the formation of identity and masculinity. The narrative is male centred and seem to propose that masculinity is formulated in contrast to femininity. At the same time, femininity, or what is seen as female behaviour, is what saves the main character from death. The novel hence suggests that a modification of the hegemonic masculinity is needed.

The discussion is centred on Bayrūt 75, but examples from other novels, most notably al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī (Wild Mint, 1997) by Anīsa ‘Abbūd, will be brought in to support the argument. Though written 20 years apart, both novels use a flawed performance of masculinity as a way of criticising society. The chapter starts with a discussion of the narrative aspects of Bayrūt 75. Next, it discusses the understanding of different types of subordinate masculinities that appear in the novel. The analysis rests on Connell’s understanding of the hierarchal nature of masculinity. The chapter then goes on to show how different aspects of what is seen as hegemonic masculinity in the novel can be used to place men in a subordinate position rather than giving them power. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the feminine aspects of the male characters and how the novels seem to suggest that femininity can restore the broken masculinities performed by the male characters. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the social norms of the fictional societies are presented as obstacles rather than support systems in the formation of gender identities.

6.1 The Novel’s Narrative Structure

Two of al-Sammān’s later novels are given subtitles with the word ‘Mosaic’ and that would have been suitable for Bayrūt 75, too. The novel is constructed through a number of interwoven tales, or fragments of stories, which at points make the text appear as if it was a collection of short stories rather than a novel. Some of the

characters reoccur whereas others just appear once. The construction of the novel in this fashion enhances the overall feeling of fragmentation and chaos that the narrative builds up. The masculinities presented are in most cases, like the rest of the narrative, disjointed parts of the male characters’ lives and add a sense of static inability to the plot. The individual stories are sometimes connected through common characters, which give the narrative a reference point of collective experiences and beliefs. Yāsmīna’s boyfriend Nimr knows Farah’s manager and hence he becomes the link between the two characters’ stories. Nimr’s father is in charge of the fishing industry and thus Abū Muṣṭafā and his son, both fishermen, are connected with the others through him.

The links between the characters further function as comparisons. Nimr is by his friends seen as a virile young man known for his many girlfriends, whereas Farah, made out to be ‘the singer of manliness’ and advertised as the embodiment of virility, cannot have sexual relations with girls. The hegemonic masculinity that both characters are aware of, and make use of, is an impediment in Farah’s life. The comparisons between characters and the hegemonic norm further form a part of the novel’s characterisation. Without using direct characterisation, the characters’ actions and interactions give an understanding of how they are perceived and understood in their fictional societies. The fact that ‘society’ often is given the role of accepting or rejecting the masculinities performed, through the reactions of its citizens, increases the pressure the characters seem to feel. It further clearly outlines the hegemonic norm of the fictional society, against which the characters measure themselves and others.

Between Abū Muṣṭafā and Abū Nimr, the comparison is based on their social position, where their similar actions are interpreted differently due to their background, which in turn shows the hollowness of the novel’s hegemonic masculinity. In other cases the weather, or sounds such as Israeli bomber planes, are used as connectors between chapters. On the level of content, there are more things that connect the stories. More or less, they all revolve around social roles and expectations on men and women, with the expectations on men in the foreground since most of the main characters are male. Together, the chapters expose a society where individual problems are similar, but rather than connect the citizens they distance them from each other. The fact that the characters are described in different chapters also
underlines that they are preoccupied by themselves and their own problems. This becomes evident when Faraḥ does not remember where he has seen Yāsmīna before when he meets her again, nor does she recall where she has seen him.

The treatment of time in the novel intensifies the overall themes of appearances and social expectations as they appear in the narrative. The feverish wait to come to the new city is described through a detailed account of the taxi ride from Damascus to Beirut, including the waiting time at the border. Once in Beirut, the city pulse takes over, events happen simultaneously and are described almost as flashes or scenes in a film, despite some of the characters’ repetitive occupations. When Faraḥ, towards the end of the novel, turns mad the speed slows down and his actions are again described with more detail. Once he steps out of the life of the city, he is again able to function at a more natural pace. Despite being labelled crazy he gives a precise and detailed account of his actions. This usage of time supports the content of the novel, which seems to suggest that the city with its demands destroys the naturalness of the characters.

The chapters present a society where appearance and position govern people’s lives. It is not so much the social rules themselves that are restricting, but the shame if a character is found wanting. Many of the characters break taboos such as drinking or having extramarital or premarital sex, but they try to hinder others’ knowledge of these actions. The social rules can then be placed together with the Israeli airplanes flying over the city and the thunderstorms mentioned several times as a restricting and menacing background to the novel. In all three cases, the danger rests in the threat. The light never strikes in the novel, but it forces people to lock themselves up indoors. The Israeli planes do not strike either, but they too force people to remember that a war could erupt at any moment. They further remind the Syrian characters of the Israeli bombings of Damascus a few years before. Like the planes and the storms, the social expectations are not killing in themselves, but the fear they create among the characters of not being accepted forces the characters to actions that destroy them. The acceptance of these feelings of fear and submission is what lies behind most of the characters’ actions.

394 al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 16.
The third person narration used through almost the whole novel strengthens the focus on the individual characters. The move between characters leads to multiple focalization, where different characters have different motivations for focalizing on certain topics. The main theme stays that of being socially accepted and, for the men, to be socially accepted through performing masculinity. The characters interpret and react to events based on their background and position in the fictional society, but the reoccurring theme is to keep, or improve one’s situation. The dominant male characters present an example of what was discussed in chapter two as an authoritative version of masculinity, whereas at the same time other male characters struggle to meet the expectations placed on them. As in chapter two, the choice of mainly male focalizers seems to function as an alibi for the creation of problematic masculinities. Whereas the many characters and the multiple voices on one level add to the fragmented view of the narrative, the relative agreement in the characters’ understanding of social rules and expectations enforces the stifling feeling of a society obsessed with external appearances, but with no real internal values.

The voice of the narrator is all-knowing and brings out the characters’ inner thoughts and feelings. Towards the end of the novel, when Faraḥ is becoming more and more mentally ill, he takes over the narration of his own story and the narration switches to first person. This switch is significant in more than one way. Up until this point, the narrator has ‘known’ the characters and been able to choose what to tell. Here Faraḥ becomes impossible to handle and he bursts of his will to explain and share his nightmares. ‘Nightmares’ is also what the chapters are called in the final part of the novel; in the rest of the novel the chapters are unnamed and unnumbered. This break coincides with Faraḥ freeing himself, whether he is aware of that or not, from the role of the ‘singer of masculinity’, which has been created for him by his manager.

While lamenting his loss of masculinity, he simultaneously seems to enjoy bringing out what he sees as his feminine side. The madness can thus be read as a way of breaking free from the rules ruling those supposedly in possession of full mental health, including the narrator. Faraḥ’s deviation from the gender norms of the fictional society can be seen as a way of dealing with the fragmented and subordinated masculinities that the novel has presented. Rather than accepting the subordinated
position, and constantly striving towards fulfilling an inaccessible role, breaking with the norm is an alternative option. Faraḥ is indeed seen as mentally ill, but his position is different from when he was attempting, and failing, to perform hegemonic masculinity. In his new role, he feels free and full of hope that he can reconstruct himself. His proposed acceptance of his female sides seems to have freed him from the pressure of masculinity and made him see the city of his dreams in a clearer fashion. As such, the narrative’s move from structure to chaos and from an obsession with the correct performance of masculinity to an acceptance of femininity forms a critique of the hegemonic masculinity and its hierarchical social order.

6.1.2 A Female Perspective

Yāsmīna is the only female among the main characters. She is primarily described in relation to Nimr, her boyfriend, and how she develops in their relationship. Yāsmīna is aware that her behaviour is not what is traditionally expected from a woman, but at the same time she seems to expect and accept traditional gender roles. She says at one point that she can never love a poor man, and by this statement she reinforces the hegemonic norm of the man’s need to provide for his wife that all the characters adhere to. She is content to stay at home waiting for Nimr without any other occupation. She assumes that he will look after her financially and keep a flat for her. Yāsmīna would like to marry Nimr, but waits for him to realise that marriage is what he wants, rather than showing initiative and asking him. It is only in bed that she takes command and displays that she wants Nimr’s body. This is an act of initiative and agency that in the end is what makes him decide he cannot marry her. Having given herself to him before marriage and seemingly enjoyed it, he does not deem her to be a suitable wife.

In the discussion of masculinity, Yāsmīna’s character becomes interesting both as offering a woman’s ideal view of men and for Nimr’s reactions towards her behaviour. He is scared by her open interest in sex and is sure that there must be something wrong with her. Women in his world are not supposed to have an appetite for sex, whereas he and his father both have a number of lovers at the same time. This view both reifies and subverts the expectations on male and female behaviour. Yāsmīna openly enjoys sex, and as a female she thus proves his argument.

395 Ibid., 9.
396 Ibid., 39.
wrong. Yāsmīna is herself aware of this view of women, which is one of the reasons she travelled to Beirut in the first place. She wanted the freedom to act out her desires and to take command of her life. But even in Beirut, the city of freedom and possibilities as she sees it, her agency as a woman is limited and the course of her life decided by the male characters around her.

The male domination, exemplified by the lack of female voices in the text, is however broken towards the end of the novel when Faraḥ, who has become more and more feminised, takes over the narration as it changes to the first person. As previously discussed in chapter two, the male characters can be a way for the author to offer criticism from within, by describing the hardships the men have to go through to live up to the fictional society’s expectations. In addition to this, Faraḥ’s transformation contests the value of masculinity. In their book Kvinnorna gör mannen, Fjelkestam et al. point out that women’s creation of male characters is more than a reproduction and/or challenge of apparent gender structures and that studies of their constructions of masculinity can help formulate how hegemony is destabilised.397 Through her male characters, al-Sammān does precisely that. They are not pitied for their inabilities and with the exception of Nimr, who is also seen through Yāsmīna’s eyes, the male characters are presented as individuals with the all-knowing narrator’s ability to tell what is going on in their heads. Hence, the impossibility of the situations they are in stands out and emphasizes the gap between their lives and the hegemonic masculinity they are striving to perform. This, in turn, destabilises the idea of the hegemony and shows it as an appearance but not a true value. Furthermore, Faraḥ’s escape from what he feels is the burden of masculinity signifies that a female point of view is a possible change of the hegemonic structure and a way of subverting the restrictions he feels.

In al-Na’na’ al-barrī, the narration is shared between ‘Alī and ‘Alyā and thus the narrative has both a male and a female voice. However, the male perspective through ‘Alī’s view of events dominates the narrative and it is his life that is the focus of the novel. Whereas ‘Alyā indeed offers her opinions and readings of events, it is ‘Alī who stands for the female point of view through his engagement with female relatives and female friends. Whereas Beirūt 75 is only concentrated on city life and

397 Fjelkestam, Hill and Tjeder eds., Kvinnorna, 11.
the high tempo and strict demands which produce a specific hegemony, *al-Na’na‘ al-barri* contrasts the city with the countryside and builds up a binary opposition between the two. This binary opposition is then linked to masculinity and femininity respectively. The hardness of the city becomes a signifier of masculinity and the softness of ‘Alī’s childhood village is linked with femininity through the narrative.

Like the characters in *Beirūt 75*, ‘Alī feels the city’s demands on him to behave in a specific way, to have girlfriends and form a position for himself, actions he feels unable to master. Instead, he dreams of the village of his childhood, a place, which in his dreams appears coloured by strong women, tales, fantasies and an unstructured, free spirited way of living. At the end of the novel, he retreats to village life and rejects the demands of the city. Like Faraḥ in *Beirūt 75*, he needs to take up his feminine side in order to break the madness the city has inflicted on him. The novel seems to suggest that a female perspective or understanding of life is necessary in order to return to the roots and what is seen as valuable in life.

### 6.2 Subordinate Masculinity

In the previous chapters, hegemonic masculinity has been used to refer to the normative way of performing masculinity as agreed upon by the characters. This section will instead focus on the opposite, namely subordinate masculinity. Performing hegemonic masculinity has in many cases meant ‘ways of gaining and keeping respect and power’ for male characters. The previous chapters have demonstrated that the characters, male and female, make use of social expectations and traditions in their interactions with each other and in their formation of gender. As elaborated on in chapter three, a man’s performance of the hegemonic masculinity has an impact on his immediate family and thus they become involved in the formulation of his masculinity. Performing a different type of masculinity than what is expected by the hegemonic norm has either led to a celebrated, ‘new’ masculinity, as shown in one example in chapter four and as the political man in chapter five. Alternatively, it has led to a subordinate position vis-à-vis other male characters and a lack of respect from female characters, for example the characters Maḥmūd and Frank, in chapter five. The constantly changing and collaborative nature of masculinity formation leads to ‘man’ becoming:
“[a] kind of artefact, and as such always runs the risk of being found wanting. [...] The result of the enterprise [to perform masculinity] is so uncertain that it has to be stressed if it is successful. In other words: In order to praise a man it is sufficient to say: He is a man!”

The problem facing the characters discussed in this chapter is precisely this, the fear of being found wanting, which in turn powers their pursuit of ‘being a man’. Through this quest, the novels reveal versions of masculinity and how they are received and reacted to. They further demonstrate how the importance of being ‘a man’ and of performing an accepted form of masculinity drives the characters to actions that seem contrary to their nature as depicted by the novels.

Rather than reinforcing the hegemonic masculinity they present, both novels finally offer femininity, or an acceptance of female characteristics, as a way of breaking the hegemony. The fear of being found wanting, and the struggle to avoid being seen as weak and feminine, and hence be subordinated to other performances of masculinity are counteracted by internalising femininity and denouncing the prevailing masculine norm. Notably, this is done through madness in both novels, signifying that it is not a generally accepted way of handling gender. At the same time, it suggests that what is perceived as normal might not be the ideal solution. Except for the respective main characters’ madness and acceptance of femininity as a way of looking at society, the other male characters do not contest or subvert the hegemonic masculinity of the two novels. Instead, they seem trapped by the demands placed on them and unable to change the pattern of their lives.

In the discussion of hegemonic masculinity in the introduction, subordinate masculinity is defined as the opposition of hegemonic masculinity, which is true in the respect of power, influence and position. It is however not true with regard to ideals. Subordinate masculinity either strives towards the performance of hegemonic masculinity, but is unable to succeed, or overuses the patriarchal dividend in order to assert his own position without any foundation for his actions. In the same way as acting according to hegemonic masculinity gives power and respect, inability to do it means loss of power for the characters and they are only able to perform a subordinate masculinity which contains very little power in relation to other men. It

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also means a constant struggle to keep up appearances and assert the small amount of power one has. Rather than being empowering, the performance of masculinity becomes suffocating for those who cannot live up to it and several of the characters in Bayrūt 75 are broken by the expectations placed on them. ‘Alī in al-Na’na‘ al-barri is also unable to handle the pressure and escapes from the city back to the seclusion of village life.

In their article “Manhood in Crisis”, Amirhussein Vafa and Rosli Talif argue that what causes the crisis in masculinity formation is the discrepancy between the lived reality and the inherited language of masculinity. The masculine discourse depicts a masculinity that no longer exists or is impossible to perform in a modern society, but remains as an ideal to strive towards. The same problem faces the male characters in Bayrūt 75, as they live a reality that makes it difficult for them to meet the expectations placed on them. When they try, they create chaos for themselves and others. ‘Alī in al-Na’na‘ al-barri feels the pressure from his family but also from neighbours and friends. He believes that they all look upon him as a failure and the higher he feels the demands rise the more incapable of meeting them does he feel. Michael Kimmel means that this fear of failing is the problem that should be the centre of masculinity studies. The worry of not being seen as a real man is more important than the constant concentration on the power that hegemonic masculinity brings with it.

However, as seen in the novels discussed in this chapter, the two are intertwined with each other. The fear of not being seen as a man is driven by a loss of power. Simultaneously, power is seen as a receipt of masculinity. It is the fear of not being ‘man enough’ that is the driving force for the characters and which urges them to take certain actions, not always in alignment with what their believes and morals tell them. Samira Aghacy makes a similar claim in her book on Masculine Identity, arguing that masculinity becomes a masquerade where the construction of masculinity disrupts the self-autonomy of individual men and creates a sense of inadequacy and failure to measure up to the ideals. Rather than attempting to recreate the hegemonic

401 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 4.
masculinity or perform a variant version, these characters carry on in their attempts to live up to the norm. They no longer take decisions based on their feelings or wishes but do everything to follow the norm and hence lose their self-autonomy.

The two contrary parts of hegemonic masculinity can be summarised by Pierre Bourdieu’s argument in *The Male Dominance*, where he means that the privileges men have can quickly be transformed into a burden when virility has to be proven, honour defended and dependents provided for. He goes on to say that the added burden lies in the fact that these actions can only be valued by others. The ‘success’ of a certain performance of masculinity is therefore always relational to the surrounding society and their reactions. The characters are constantly in need of approval from others in order to rest assured that their performance of masculinity is accepted, and when this approval is not given they work even harder to perfect their images.

At the same time it is important to remember that as Lynne Segal argues, even though masculinity is a form of instable identity it is an identity that is powerful. The combination of powerfulness, instability and a wish to live up to a certain form of masculinity can lead to a desire to overcompensate for what one sees as lacking in one’s character. As miriam cooke shows in a discussion on masculinity in Naguib Mahfouz’s fiction, the inability to meet approval often leads to the characters seeking another way of asserting their position through violence or in relations with women. This reaction cements these men’s position as subordinate even further, since their empty performance of masculinity only exposes their inability to adhere to the norms. In *Bayrūt 75*, this overcompensation to cover up an inability to perform the hegemonic masculinity is especially clear in the short episodes on Yāsmīna’s brother who pretends to uphold the values of honour by killing his sister. Having displayed no concern for his sister’s, or his own, honour previously, his

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403 Ibid., 66.
reaction does not so much reinstate his honour as it reinforces his performance of subordinate masculinity, as will be elaborated on further on.

In a chapter called “Oedipus Deposed”, Samira Aghacy analyses examples of what she calls fragile and vulnerable masculinity.406 Her examples are explicitly written after and about the Lebanese civil war whereas Beirūt 75, the main novel analysed in this chapter, is often read as a prequel to the war. Despite this, many of her arguments are valid in the discussion of the unstable masculinities discussed in the novels in this chapter. They illustrate that whereas certain historical or political events might bring about change or instability, gender roles are under constant reformulation. Under particularly straining circumstances, as for example poverty in the novels discussed, and war in Aghacy’s examples, the will or need to reformulate is intensified. It might further be that these circumstances force through reformulations that are not condoned by the characters but are accepted since no other solutions are available.

The subordinate masculinities created in the novels are formulated in contrast to a hegemonic norm. Although all characters agree to the norm and do their best to adhere to it, the novels do not suggest that the hegemonic norm is correct. On the contrary, the hegemonic norm, though celebrated on the level of the individual characters, is presented as flawed, inhumane and corrupt through the overall narrative. The subordinated masculinities appear helpless and pitiable, similar to chapter two, rather than unable or violent as in chapter five. Through their entanglement with questions of class and work-migration the male characters further seem to function as a comment on society through their struggles with masculinity. The following section will elaborate on the relation between social background and masculinity performance.

6.3 Varying Social Backgrounds
The class background of the characters play a pivotal role in their ability to perform masculinity and their capacity to adapt to different social situations. As described by Connell, hegemonic masculinity cannot exist without the support of cultural and institutional power, and it forms a sort of symbiotic support system between military, business and governmental practices, which founds and upholds the factors of

406 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 130.
With regard to Syria in general, Sally Gallagher has shown in her book *Making Do in Damascus* that the construction of gender in Syria is largely entangled in social structure, traditional culture and political economy. Hindering certain groups of men to enter into business in a society where successful performance of masculinity is connected to financial prosperity effectively stops these men from performing hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, cultural institutions can promote specific cultural expressions at the expense of others and thus contribute to the creation of the solidification of hegemonies.

In this regard, many of the female authored novels are examples of solidifying cultural hegemonies through their focus on the middle or upper class city man until the 1990s, when other types of men began to appear in their fiction. Nevertheless, the factors that are counted as authorisation and marginalisation are not static. When societies change, and for example a different religious group take over power, what has been a marginalising factor might suddenly become the key to authorisation. What the novels of the 1990s however show plainly is that the hegemonic norm is far from inclusive and when migration between city and countryside increases the clashes between variations of masculinities are intensified.

In *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn*, discussed in the previous chapter, the male characters were homogeneous in the respect that they came from the same neighbourhood and had the same religious believes. Except for the age difference, they met similar problems and had similar advantages in comparison with other men. Their choice of either subverting or supporting the hegemonic masculinity as it appeared in the novel was connected to political beliefs and the performance of masculinity became a part of preserving or rejecting the political system as much as a performance of gender construction.

In *Bayrūt 75*, the characters are from varying backgrounds and have very different possibilities of affecting their lives, which needs to be taken into account while discussing their approaches to masculinity. Though spanning over a large group of characters from several levels of society, the hegemonic masculinity, which governs the fictional Beirut, seems very similar; what differs is the different characters’ ability

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to adhere to it. This creates separate hegemonies in different levels of society. Abū Muṣṭafā’s fellow fishermen see him for example as performing masculinity according to the expectations and they respect him; at the same time he is seen, and sees himself, as subordinate to Abū Nimr, the manager of the fishermen.

In *al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī*, the differing hegemonies between city and countryside are obvious and ‘Alī struggles to find a performance which is suitable for both places. The hegemony of the city is imported to the village through the governing sector of village life. The opposition between the two is therefore played out in a class perspective as well as in a cultural perspective. For ‘Alī, to adopt the masculinity condoned in the city means an acceptance of the village leader and his corrupt lifestyle. At the same time, to not conform means to be seen as subordinated in his new life.

Although the micro societies in the novels differ in their understanding of masculinity they are aware of what is seen as the stronger hegemony. Therefore, rather than separating the characters, this chapter presents an internal hegemony that applies to the novel as a unit and fictional society. This approach highlights the relations between the characters, and how their views on their own and others’ masculinity, materialise through the narrative. This further means that class differences and education, for example, become factors in the formulation of masculinity. The way money and a position can be used to ease a man’s performance of masculinity will be discussed, as well as the problems lack of money causes in the struggle to fulfil certain expectations. The analysis brings out that the expectations on men are reoccurring over the class boundaries, as is the governing effect the expectations have on the male characters’ lives. In *al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī*, ‘Alī is for example extremely jealous of the young man Sāmī who is ‘Alyā’s student. Sāmī is from a rich family and can therefore afford to have a car and to treat ‘Alyā to things ‘Alī can only dream of. His connections with important people in society further make it easy for him to find a job and form a position for himself. His money will thus simplify his performance of masculinity in comparison with ‘Alī, which makes him worried that he will lose ‘Alyā’s interest.

As demonstrated in the introduction, subordinate masculinity is a type of masculinity that is seen as not able to live up to hegemonic masculinity. An example often quoted is homosexual men. In an analysis of the Tunisian film, *Man of Ashes*,
Robert Lang and Maher Ben Moussa discuss the main homosexual character and the way society stifles his life. As a homosexual man, he is subordinated and he has limited possibilities of forming a position for himself in a society that values the performance of masculinity. They make the point that he has no chance of saying: “get stuffed. I’ll do what I’d like.”[^409] He is bound to live his life according to the norms set out in the society of which he is part. The same is true for the characters in Bayrūt 75. The manager Nīshān prefers men to women,[^410] but when dining out he makes sure that he has young girls with him to give the impression of being heterosexual so that he does not lose his powerful position. On one hand, Nīshān can be seen as caught by society’s rules and norms, which deny him a possibility to live life the way he wants. On the other hand, he himself supports the fictional society’s normative ideas of a masculine and powerful man as someone with a number of girlfriends and an aura of (heterosexual) virility. This opposition of what can be seen as private and public discourse is however not very different from how many of the other men handle the expectations of hegemonic masculinity in the novels discussed in this thesis.

Nīshān does not perform a weak masculinity in the novel, on the contrary, when he forces himself on Farah, Farah is the one who loses what is described as his masculinity, starts dressing like a woman and gets confused. Nīshān on the other hand only allows for those dependent on him to know about his preference, and has hence already an advantage in the relation. In his detailed analysis of homosexuality in Arabic literature, Joseph Massad discusses this dichotomy in the view of homosexuality.[^411] In one way, desiring men is, as Nīshān puts it, a truer desire than the one for women. Since men are strong and powerful, it is more rational to be in love with them than with weak women who can make no difference in one’s life. A similar discourse appears in European male homosexual circles during the 20th century as discussed by Arne Nilsson. He asserts that men who were described as ‘real men’ and dressed and behaved as heterosexual men in addition to being the active, penetrating partner in a homosexual relationship were seen as masculine. The partner who was

[^411]: Massad, *Desiring.*
penetrated was instead emasculated, especially in the cases where the man in question chose to wear different clothes or behave in a way that differed from the hegemonic, male norm.  

The men were not judged on the basis of their partners’ biological sex but on what they did with, or to, their partners.  

The same value system echoes in the events of the novel, which show that being penetrated, like Faraḥ, is emasculating whereas performing the action, as Nīshān, is seen as a sign of being powerful. Nīshān’s behaviour can moreover be read in the light of Michael Kimmel’s statement that “[a]t the same time as gender shapes sexuality, sexuality confirms gender.” As with many levels of masculinity the characters are judged on their actions, what they actually do, not their biological sex, asserting that the performance of masculinity is action centred.

Whether it is the norm of heterosexuality or other parts of masculinity the expectations on the characters are internalised in a way that does not allow them to change, despite being aware of the problematic behaviour, or knowing that it is not their own fault that they cannot live up to the expectations. If they try to change, the characters are soon reminded by others of their obligations and are hence forced back to their previous attempts of living according to the norm. ‘Alī, in al-Na’na’ al-barrī, feels the same pressure. As a poet, he seems to have more freedom than other men do to disregard the norms, but he is still reminded by other characters that he cannot do what he wants. His neighbours keep track of his guests, when he comes and goes and how he acts towards them. So do his relatives and friends and even though he would like to free himself from the expectations placed on him, as long as he lives in the city he feels trapped by the external pressure on his conduct.

In al-Na’na’ al-barrī one of the returning questions is when ‘Alī is going to get married and build a family. The fact that he lives by himself is seen as suspect by the surrounding society and his friends and mother repeatedly try to tempt him to marry. In societies where children are a sign of virility and fathering a part of

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413 Ibid., 211.
masculinity, marriage becomes a vital step in order to perform masculinity completely. Lang and Ben Moussa describe marriage and fatherhood as a man’s graduation into real manhood,\(^{415}\) and as seen in the previous chapters the father holds a specific position within the gender hierarchy. Regardless of how well a man fulfils other aspects of hegemonic masculinity in the Arab, patriarchal society they describe, and which is similar to that of the novels, an unmarried man is seen as having failed.

After marriage, childlessness can be a reason for subordination, as Marcia Inhorn has demonstrated in studies on Palestinian and Lebanese men. Even though she has shown that a majority of the men interviewed choose to look at their inability to father as an illness that can be cured, most of them acknowledge that this view has not spread to the rest of society yet.\(^ {416}\) Despite agreeing that it is a medical problem, deviating from the expected norm of fatherhood makes the men spend huge amounts of money on treatment or agree to take a second or third wife, against their own will, with the hope that the childlessness is the first wife’s fault. The external expectations and the feeling of weakness for not being able to perform the role in a complete way govern their lives. Whereas ‘Alī in al-‘Na‘na‘ al-barrī is seen to be in need of a wife to be able to fulfil the expectations on masculinity, the two poorest men in Beirūt 75 use the same notion to prove themselves as men. Each of them has ten or more children as a way of exhibiting his masculinity through virility. What is empowering for one man, to fulfil the expectations of masculinity, becomes hindering for another who is unable to do so.

Poverty is another problem for several of the characters. The inability to provide for oneself and one’s family becomes connected to how the characters look upon themselves and how others look at them. In this case, masculinity and the performance of gender roles are closely associated with the character’s social position, which in turn hinders or enables him. Victor Seidler touches on this point when he discusses how, in some working class cultures, the only tool the father can utilise to show love is by providing for his family members. Since caring words, touches and kindness are seen as signs of femininity, they are not possible options for the father, who is left with a material way of giving love. If he loses his job, it does not only put

\(^{415}\) Lang and Ben Moussa, “Choosing to Be ‘Not a Man’”.

\(^{416}\) Inhorn, New Arab Man, 80; 83 and 88.
a financial strain on the family but the father’s only way of showing love and care has been taken away from him.\textsuperscript{417} In \textit{Bayrūt 75}, it is Abū al-Mullā who is especially plagued by poverty. Not only can he not provide for his children, he has also had to send three of his young daughters to work as maids to support themselves. In the novel, his thoughts are constantly with his daughters. He thinks about how he can secure enough money to bring them back home again and to prove to them how he loves them and looks out for them. His inability to provide for them is seen in his own eyes both as a failure to perform masculinity and as a lost chance to show affection. Poverty has made it impossible for him to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and he therefore sees his own performance as wanting, a problem that the characters who are better off never face. They are always able to use their money to at least create a façade of successful masculinity, as Abū Nimr and Nimr do in \textit{Bayrūt 75}.

As noted in the previous section, by locating the characters within a particular social stratum, the authors put the focus on social inequalities and financial problems and the created masculinity becomes a tool for social critique. As such, the male characters’ actions are seen as the result of external pressure rather than their own free will. As noted in chapter two, the female authors utilise male characters, who are meant to hold strong positions in society, to further show social inequalities and social burdens.

\subsection*{6.4 Virility}

At the beginning of the novel, when Faraḥ waits in the taxi in Damascus, he dreams of his future in Beirut. He thinks of all the women he is going to have and he enjoys looking at Yāsmīna’s white legs and short skirt. The excitement he feels at hearing the name ‘Beirut’ is described as the feeling of having a woman’s naked body close to him.

He shivers at the name ‘Beirut’ as though the name was sticking to him as a body of a naked woman.\textsuperscript{418}

\begin{flushright}
یرتعش لاسم بيروت كما لو التضق به الاسم حسداً لامرأة عارية.
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{417} Victor J. Seidler, \textit{Transforming Masculinities: Men, Culture, Bodies, Power, Sex and Love} (Abingdon, Routledge, 2006), 96.

\textsuperscript{418} al-Sammān, \textit{Bayrūt 75}, 5.
The image presented is that of a heterosexual man, Farah’s excitement about travelling is contextualised by using the desire of a man for a woman’s naked body in a way that makes it the normative behaviour. The sentence sets the tone for the hegemonic masculinity that the novel presents. In her discussion on masculinity in fiction Samira Aghacy brings up how the virile male body is the exemplary expression of masculinity. In another section of her book she elaborates on how sexual ability is linked to a sense of power. This is further elaborated in Evelyn Accad’s analyses of sex as a symbol for war in Middle Eastern literature. She argues that consciously or unconsciously a sexual discourse assuming man as the attacker and woman as the attacked is applied in the war literature. In Beirūt 75, this type of discourse is used by Farah at the beginning of the novel. He sees the trip to Beirut as his chance to become the man of his dreams. He already holds himself as a potential performer of hegemonic masculinity, but he needs the right arena to be able to complete the role to perfection. He therefore looks forward to life in the new city, which he will overpower through his masculine force. When he sets off, Beirut is compared to a beautiful woman and he says to himself that he will invade her.

كل هن وكل هم يحلم ببيروت. لست وحدي، ولكني وحدي ذاهبٌ لِق تحامها.

They all, men and women, dream of Beirut. I am not alone, but I alone am going to invade her.

When the name Beirut is called out at the taxi station, he feels as if the man is presenting a dancer at the cabaret. His whole idea of the city is something to be used for his own pleasure in the way he wants. His initial presentation lays bare parts of the hegemonic masculinity of the novel, that of the virile, heterosexual man who proves himself through sexual acts. He is the active partner invading the woman, or in this case, the city. He is going to Beirut to earn money, form a position for himself, and show his father that he is someone to be proud of. Farah’s dream of the future is of himself as the performer of hegemonic masculinity and someone able to enjoy the

419 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 21.
420 Ibid., 150.
421 Accad, Sexuality and War.
422 al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 5.
423 Ibid.
privileges this role carries with it. At the end of the novel, when he has been treated for mental illness, Faraḥ reminisces about his arrival to Beirut when he was still strong and able, and when he could have all the women he wanted.

لا تكفي بيروت.

Oh the day I came to Beirut I was as tall as the night [...] and all the women of Beirut were not going to be enough for me.  

His view of his previous self as ‘a man’ is closely connected with that of a womaniser and someone able to perform sexually. He knows that he has changed, and he believes that he has lost his manliness and is therefore no longer able to conquer either women or cities. His dreams of performing masculinity are not only expectations Faraḥ has on himself. He expects this behaviour of men he thinks of as important. When he sees articles about his future manager Nīshān, he is especially careful to look at the half naked women dancing around him on the pictures as a verification of Nīshān’s manliness and success. That the women are only signifiers of active heterosexuality and used as markers of a successful masculinity underlines the deception that hegemonic masculinity is made out to be in the novel. As the effective manager he is, Nīshān knows society and its expectations. When he later decides to make Faraḥ into ‘the singer of masculinity’, he works hard to make sure that this is the image Faraḥ also lives up to.

The ability to perform sexually as a way of asserting one’s masculinity is likewise seen in Abū Muṣṭafā’s behaviour. He already has a number of children, eleven to be exact, and he still sees producing more offspring as a way of being manly. Every time he fails at work and is unable to bring home money to provide for his family he has sex with his wife to prove to himself, and possibly his wife as well, that he is at least able to be a man in this respect. Similarly, Aghacy shows in her discussion of what she calls ‘the politics of masculinity’, that sexual activity can be used as a way of compensating for a lack of masculine behaviour in other domains.  

424 Ibid., 108.
425 Ibid., 19.
426 muṭrib al-rujūla.
427 Aghacy, Masculine Identity, 76.
son is however not so impressed by his father as he is appalled at the result of the sexual activity.

كلما عجز والدي عن الصيد وعاد مدحوراً من البحر يذهب لصيد العصفور الذهبي في حدائق أم ي. والنتيجة فم جديد يجب إطعامه وجسد طفل جديد يرتمي في غرفتنا الضيقة.

Every time my dad failed with the fishing and returned home defeated by the sea he went to hunt the golden bird in my mother’s gardens instead. The result is another mouth to feed and another child’s body to be thrown into our small room.428

The sexual ability is interpreted by the characters as such an important part of performing masculinity that Abū Muṣṭafā is able to use it to compensate for his inability to perform other parts of the expectations placed on masculinity and Nīshān can build his public image on his ability to seduce women. This hegemony is further supported by Yāsmīna, who, on several occasions, thinks about the pleasures she gets from the male body. When her boyfriend Nimr decides to leave her, she is more upset about losing the bodily contact than his financial support or the emotional connection they have. For her it seems obvious that the performance of masculinity entails being able to sexually please a woman.

In al-Naʿnaʾ al-barrī, ‘Alī has casual relations with women. He feels the pressure of having a relation in order to prove his normality, even though he is not interested in a permanent partner until he meets ‘Alyā. When one of his female friends comes to visit him late one evening, he feels both his own and her disappointment when he does not sleep with her. Despite not wanting to have sex with her, he feels that he should in order to confirm that he could. He further worries about his reputation in case the girl tells their mutual friends that he did not offer her to stay over, even though she was clearly signalling that she was both willing to stay and to do more with him. The females’ expectation on the men to please them is evident in several novels. In Hanrīyit ‘Abbūdī’s novel al-Zahr al-ʿārī, discussed in detail in chapter two, Klīr both expects virility to be part of masculinity and is pleased when she finds out that Adham is very skilled in bed. His shortcomings in other aspects become less important for her when he displays his virility. In Layla wāhida by Kūlīt Khūrī, Rashā spends

428 al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 58.
the night with a man she has only met briefly on the train. She explains her action with the coldness of her husband both in and out of bed. She reasons with herself saying that had her husband been able to perform this part of masculinity well, there would be no need for her to look for another man.

As demonstrated in the above discussion, the idea that virility is part of hegemonic masculinity reoccurs in several novels. In Bayrūt 75, it rests at the core of the performance of masculinity, however, as shown by the example from Layla wāhīda, inability to live up to the hegemonic norm can also lead to a loss of power. Returning to Bayrūt 75, Faraḥ is unable to have sex with one of his girlfriends and due to the huge expectations placed on his masculinity, the loss of respect is also enormous.\(^{429}\) In order for him to gain respect from the masculinity that has been made his trademark, he also needs to live up to the expectations. In his case, as the singer of masculinity and a symbol of virility, which is what the advertisement says, it is vital that he can live up to his reputation. Nevertheless, even for ordinary men the expectations placed on them have to be realised. The image created for Faraḥ, which he himself cannot live up to, actively functions to idolise super-virility. It further strengthens the already existing hegemony of heterosexual virile men, as the norm. The importance of the hegemonic norm is moreover exemplified in an argument between the parents in Haifa Bīṭār’s novel Qabw al-‘abbāsīn (The Abbaseen basement, 1995). The parents throw insults at each other regularly, but when the mother one day accuses the father of being impotent, he strikes her, which has never happened before. He is able to accept other insults but not comments on his sexual ability, whether they are false or true.\(^{430}\) Masculinity, virility and respect are closely connected both when it comes to the characters’ self-images and their views on others.

Since virility is seen as such an important part of masculinity, it becomes a hindrance in the performance of masculinity not to be allowed to have sexual relations. Muṣṭafā’s frustration with his parent’s sexual life can be read as a sign of his own inability to have a girlfriend or wife, and a sexual relationship himself. He cannot get married due to the poverty the family is suffering from, and his own position as the oldest son, the one supposed to shoulder responsibility for his sisters and brothers.\(^{431}\)

\(^{429}\) al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 63.
\(^{430}\) Bīṭār, Qabw al-‘abbāsīn, 31.
\(^{431}\) al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 58.
The poverty he experiences hinders him from fulfilling his own desires, and stops him from doing what in society’s eyes will make him a complete man; marry and father children. In Dimashq yā basmat al-huzn, it is Maḥmūd who is put under the pressure of showing masculinity through virility, having been married for a long time before finally having a daughter together with his wife. The time waiting for his wife to become pregnant is filled with comments and suggestions, from relatives in general and his mother in particular, about having a second wife or taking different remedies in order to be able to have children. The comments are made with the assumption that a couple without children is not a normal couple. For Maḥmūd, who is looked down upon by his siblings for not performing a hegemonic masculinity, it becomes a victory when he finally has a daughter and is able to show that he can produce children. Having a daughter is however not perfect, but as the mother says: “the one who has a daughter can also produce a son.”432

A statement that illustrates how deeply rooted the expectations of having children, and explicitly male children, are.

In Imra’a fi dā’irat al-khawf (Woman in a circle of fear, 1985) Sāmī, Ḥasnāʾ’s husband is incapable of having children. Ḥasnāʾ is prepared to stay with him and live without children, though admitting to herself that had the roles been reversed, she would not have blamed him for leaving her to become a father with someone else. Her comment shows how important it is for a woman to have the support of a man, almost regardless of who he is and what he does. The man on the other hand does not gain respect through his wife but needs to prove himself in order to be honoured, in this case by having children. For Sāmī however, the need for a child becomes so strong that he develops psychological problems where he secretly plays that he is a baby himself. When he is found out by Ḥasnāʾ, he decides to leave her and live with his shame, as he sees it, by himself. He sees the failure of not being able to have children too problematic to handle and opts for a divorce from an otherwise successful marriage.

On the other hand, Nimr, Yāsmīna’s boyfriend in Bayrūt 75, is aware that for his future wife and her family it will not be seen as a sign of virility that he has had a longer relationship with Yāsmīna. He therefore does what he can, including bribing her brother, in order to cover up his relationship with her. His father does the

same with his mistresses and states that he prefers foreign girls since they are less clingy, and do not cause him problems by placing demands on him or informing his wife or friends about their relationship.\textsuperscript{433} Nimr and his father both use their sexual relations to show off for a select group of friends or co-workers, but their awareness of the social restrictions make them careful not to be open with their lovers. The hegemonic masculinity they know states that virility is part of masculinity, but at the same time the society they live in does not support sexual relations outside of wedlock.

As with other parts of masculinity, virility is judged both on its own and in relation to surrounding circumstances. Inability to live up to the expectations can harm one’s reputation as in the case of Faraḥ, and to some extent Maḥmūd. In this case, subordinated masculinity becomes the opposite of hegemonic masculinity and the characters suffer from a loss of respect and power in their interactions with other characters. However, overdoing the performance does not always lead to an increase in respect and power but can result in the opposite. Abū Muṣṭafā tries to compensate for his inability to perform other parts of masculinity, and though he sees himself as a strong man through his many children, his son is no longer impressed, but disgusted, by the number of his siblings. Nimr’s father is well aware that extramarital affairs for a rich businessman and politician like himself do not signify virility but corrupt morals. His overplayed virility would only cause him a loss of power if it became known. His son, Nimr, gains respect from his friends for sexual prowess as a young man, but it is not a reputation he wants his future parents-in-law to know about. As discussed in previous chapters, the aspects of hegemonic masculinity can thus be turned into factors of subordination, both if they are not performed and if they are overemphasised in a character.

Even though virility and the ability to have children form an important part of masculinity as demonstrated above, Yāsmīna is one of only two female characters in the novels examined for the thesis that openly declares her satisfaction with the sexual act. The other character is the protagonist of \textit{Qabw al-‘abbāsīn} by Haifā’ Bīṭār who has sex in order to take revenge on her father and realises that she enjoys what she is doing. In the other novels, the focus is instead on fatherhood, the result of the sexual act. The female construction of masculinity thus assumes virility,

\textsuperscript{433} al-Sammān, \textit{Bayrūt} 75, 47.
but does not discuss it as explicitly as is done in *Beirūt 75*. An aspect that has been discussed previously is that of providing, which reoccurs even in this novel as seen in the next section.

### 6.5 Providing

Faraḥ is travelling to Beirut in search of a job to earn money. In order to be able to marry and perform what the novel presents as hegemonic masculinity he first needs to be able to provide for himself and others. The idea of a financially independent man, who is able to look after a wife and children, is an aspect of hegemonic masculinity and forms part of the burden for some of the characters while it works as a sign of ability for others. In the same way as Nimr uses virility as a way of proving his masculinity in front of his friends, he also uses his ability to pay as a way of boosting his image. With his father’s money, he can appear as the perfect provider, even though he only arranges for material goods. He takes pride in showing Yāsmīna off in expensive clothes in front of his friends, as if the dresses and furs she wears can vouch for his masculinity.

يحلو له أن يكسوني بالثياب الثمينة. أن يخرج معي إلى المطاعم الفخمة كي يبرز بصدقاته. [...] ويحب اذلال أمامهم تدليلاً على سحره الرجولي.

He likes to dress me in expensive clothes, to go out with me to superb restaurants for his friends to see us. [...] and he likes humiliating me in front of them as a sign of his masculine magic.434

When he later wants to end his relationship with her, he stops giving her gifts and money and tells her he will no longer pay her rent.435 By stopping providing for her, he shows that he no longer feels responsible for her and that their relation is over. He feels no need to prove himself to her, he will soon marry and through marriage assert his masculinity and abilities in front of his friends.

In other novels, the idea of provision also turns up. In *Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn*, the father sells his shop in order to be able to continue providing for his daughter even though he is bedridden from a stroke. That she should work to support him is unthinkable. In *al-Ẓahr al-ʿārī*, Adham, the main character, borrows

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434 Ibid., 38.
435 Ibid., 87.
money from his friends in order to avoid a situation where he cannot provide for his girlfriend. For him it is easier to beg from his friend than to appear unable to spend on Klīr. In Bayrūt 75, it is only Yāsmīna who offers a female view on the matter of provision and, as shown above, she sees it as normal that Nimr is responsible for her financially. The fact that she herself supports her brother financially makes her look down on him. As her brother, he should look after her, not the opposite, hence she too supports the novel’s hegemony. In the other novels discussed, Yāsmīna’s understanding of the different financial roles of males and females seems to be the prevailing view, which exaggerates the expectations on masculinity.

In Bayrūt 75, the quest for money is plaguing Abū al-Mullā and Abū Muṣṭafā who are both responsible for families. The need for money is also what kills each of them in the end. Abū Muṣṭafā, whose health is getting worse and worse and who knows that soon he will no longer be able to go out fishing, decides to try one last time to find the magic lamp he has spent his whole life looking for. The lamp, with its magic spirit, will secure the economy of the family even if he cannot fish anymore. To get hold of the lamp he decides to fish with dynamite, something that he himself has forbidden others to do previously, and in the explosion, he is killed. The fact that Abū Muṣṭafā, who is described as very rational and down to earth, believes that a magic lamp is going to save him and his family from poverty suggests the impossibility of the situation. Nothing he does can change his life and he has to resort to magic to find a solution to his problem.

Abū al-Mullā, in the same novel, is similarly forced to change his habits in order to achieve his goals. He, who his whole life has been honest and guarded the archaeological site he works on, finally decides to steal a statue and sell it on to earn money to bring his girls back home again. He steals the statue, but shame overpowers him and he dies from a heart attack. Reading these two stories only as the result of poverty, even though that is a major part of the problem, leaves out the social expectations that are placing extra strain on the men. Neither of them, as described in the novel, has asked his wife to take on work. Instead, they shoulder the whole financial burden themselves. Both of them have a number of children, even small

436 Ibid., 79.
437 Ibid., 66.
children, though both of them are described as being old and having grown-up sons and daughters. Neither of them is considering asking for help. Abū al-Mullā has, as mentioned before, sent his daughters to work as maids, not in order to earn money from them, but since he cannot afford to feed them. Both men seem to think that provision is the man’s duty. Furthermore, Abū Muṣṭafā is introducing his son to the trade in order for him to take over the boat when he gets old enough and thus have an income to support a family. Both Abū Muṣṭafā and Abū al-Mullā prefer to take risks and do things they are not at ease with in order to make things better for their families and be able to afford food and clothes for them. For them, as for the rest of the characters in the novel, it is more important to keep the appearance of a strong and able family father, than that they are comfortable.

Whereas the masculinity construction is formed in correspondence with the hegemonic masculinity of the fictional societies, the view in which inability to provide is described is from the viewpoint of the characters themselves. The subordination the characters suffer from is thus presented as unjust rather than justified and it further leads to a use of violence, as will be discussed in the following section.

**6.6 Violence**

In *Beirūt 75*, violence appears in the story of Ṭa‘ān. His relatives have killed a man from a neighbouring clan and since the murdered man had a degree, the other clan decided that they would kill the first man obtaining a degree from Ṭa‘ān’s family, which happened to be Ṭa‘ān. He is therefore living under a constant threat of being murdered, suspecting everyone he sees on the streets of being his potential killer. One day, a tourist taps him on the shoulder to ask for directions and Ṭa‘ān turns around and shoots him, believing that it is the hitman from the other clan who has found him. At the police station, he realises that even though the other clan has not managed to kill him physically, they have destroyed him mentally by scaring him and turning him into a killer of an innocent man.

لقد نجحوا في النتيجة في قتله. بطريقة ما. أرادوا قتله لأجل رجل لم ير وجهه قط.

ودفعوه ليقتل بنفسه رجلاً لم ير وجهه قط. ثم ها هم يشدوونه إلى المشنقة ليقتله.

رجلٌ لن يرى وجهه قط.
They had succeeded in killing him in the end. In a way. They had wanted to kill him because of a man whose face he had not seen. And they pushed him to kill a man whose face he had not seen. Then, here they were, dragging him to the gallows to be killed by a man whose face he would never see.  

Ṭa‘ān and his family are described as having no choice but to accept the vendetta they find themselves in. There seems to be no way of solving the problem with less than Ṭa‘ān’s death which, though not killing him in the course of the novel, still ruins his life. Despite being worried, Ṭa‘ān knows that the result of him backing out of the challenge is to be considered a coward, which is worse than to die, for both himself and the entire family. Whereas Ṭa‘ān sees the hegemonic norm in the novel as a justification for using violence to protect oneself and others, the narrative illustrates the meaninglessness of his actions. By not actually killing the men who are after him or meeting them in a proper fight, Ṭa‘ān has lost his chance of proving his masculinity. His fear has instead led him to use violence in a way that leads to ridicule rather than respect.

In a short study of violence in female-authored Arab fiction, Angela Abdel-Malek suggests that violence has become an internal part in women writers’ depiction of masculinity. She means that in the binary opposition created by female writers, physical violence becomes a signifier for male behaviour. In the novels discussed in this thesis, this might be true for the revolutionary men who use violence to save their countries or support their political ideas. It is also one aspect of the novels produced in the period called ‘problematic masculinity’ where violence becomes a male strategy to control women. However, as shown in the above example, Ṭa‘ān is forced to use violence in a way he does not welcome. As with other traits, it seems that the particular action of violence does not signify masculinity as much as the reason why it is performed. This is particularly telling in the case of Yāsmīna’s nameless brother, and how he uses the pretext of honour to rationalise the murder of his sister.

When Yāsmīna no longer brings home money for him to spend on himself and his friends, he suddenly realises that he has nothing. He has no job, no family and no girlfriend. The only reason his friends have spent time with him is

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438 Ibid., 81.
because of the money his sister has given him. Without the money, he has no chance of forming a position for himself. He accuses Yāsmīna of trying to build a new life for herself where she will keep all her earnings from him. In a rage he starts hitting her, screaming that she must give him the money she has hidden. When he cannot find any money, he kills his sister. He is not killing her for having a boyfriend, but for being unable to give him money. Nevertheless, when he goes to the police station he says he is there to reclaim his honour.

لقد قتلتُ أختي دفاعاً عن شرفي، وأريد أن أدلي باعترافات كاملة!

I have killed my sister to protect my honour and I want to present a complete confession.\(^{440}\)

To confess that he has killed his sister for not providing for him would make him both a murderer and tell of his lack of ability to provide. Killing her as an act of defence for his honour makes him grow in the eyes of the police officer, who is described as being impressed.\(^{441}\) In the same way as Ṭa‘ān’s supposed killing of his perpetrator would have been seen as sanctioned violence and earned him respect. Cleansing one’s honour through violence is in the novel seen as normative behaviour, supported by the policeman’s, the state representative’s, admiration. Yāsmīna’s brother uses the expectations placed on hegemonic masculinity to build up a cover for his true motives for killing his sister. Rather than being crippled by the expectations on masculinity, he makes use of them for his own purposes. By killing her, he has also ended the expectations placed on him of looking after her and taking care of her as her brother.

The next step for Yāsmīna’s brother would be to attack Nimr, and he makes threats of this at the police station. Nimr can however, when accused of having had a relationship with Yāsmīna, pay off the brother rather than being killed by him. He also manages to persuade him to say that his sister was a prostitute, despite the fact that the brother knows that her only relationship was with Nimr. Position and money play a role in creating leeway for oneself concerning what is seen as strict codes of honour and moral rights. This sudden switch in Yāsmīna’s nameless brother’s behaviour, having boasted that he wanted to reclaim his honour to confessing that his sister was a

\(^{440}\) al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 89.
\(^{441}\) Ibid., 89.
prostitute, emphasises that for him the talk about masculinity and demanding his rights is more a show for society than based on his own convictions. For money, he accepts to work under the man who used his sister, the man he should really kill.

أنا زلمتك، يا بيك. اخترتُ. اخترتُ. نسيتُ اسمك. وينهار شقيق ياسمينة باكياً

I am your man, sir. I have chosen. I have chosen. I have forgotten your name. Yāsmīna’s brother collapses crying.  

At the same time, the fact that he collapses gives away that he knows that he has lost. He can no longer claim to be the righteous man he was when he walked in to the police station. In the eyes of himself, the police and Nimr he is now weak and at the mercy of Nimr and his men. The exact image that he tried to avoid when coming to the police station, that of himself as a jobless, moneyless man with no control of his sister is now registered in the police protocol for everyone to read and know of. Through money and contacts, Nimr was able to save himself and destroy the image Yāsmīna’s brother had created. The situation at the police station further shows how the novel depicts hegemonic masculinity as a deception that one can buy for money or paint with words, rather than actually perform.

Another example where the characters are seen to use violence as a sanctioned way of performing masculinity can be seen in Dimashq yā basmat al-ḥuzn, as discussed before. The oldest brother has his sister’s boyfriend killed in order to hinder his sister from eloping with him. The brother is not described as considering other options, such as agreeing to the marriage or discussing the relationship with the boyfriend. His only thought is to get rid of him to put an end to the relationship. He does not boast about the murder, but nor does he exhibit any signs of regret, despite seeing how upset his sister is at the news. He sees the murder as his obligation as the oldest brother in order to protect the family name.

In these cases, despite the fact that Nimr got away with his actions, the expectation on the men to protect their right and the family’s reputation becomes actions to be proud of as seen in the policeman’s reaction, but at the same time cumbersome burdens that have to be taken care of in order not to lose face. The male characters are aware of the expectations, and how to bend the rules, as shown by Nimr,

442 Ibid., 89.
but they all submit to the expectations, even when it means killing and causing harm to others. The harm made to their own pride is more difficult to bear than causing the death of someone else. The use of justified, in the eyes’ of the characters, violence enhances their masculinity and proves that they are able to protect themselves and those dependent on them.

Physical violence as described above is an example of how actions seen as embodiments of masculinity move from being righteous to blameworthy actions. Bo Nilsson’s definition of masculinity as “a collection of changing conceptions, practices and positions, forming the foundation of male identities,”\(^{443}\) can be seen in the fact that the same actions are displayed by all characters but used and interpreted differently. When the father in *Thulūj taht al-shams* hits a man it is seen as brave and the right thing to do in order to save his and his daughter’s honour. When the freedom fighters use violence it is seen as a sign of their bravery and ability to defend themselves and their country but when the violence appears in the later novels it is seen as brutality and inability to control oneself.\(^{444}\) The conception of what is accepted behaviour in a society has changed and with it some of the notions of masculinity. ‘Correctly performed’ masculinity is still the key to power and influence over women and other men, but the framework of what is currently accepted has changed with time and place.

Whilst the hegemonic masculinity the characters in *Bayrūt 75* adhere to seems to sanction the violence used, the narrative exposes both murders, the one committed by Yāsmīna’s brother and the one committed by Ṭa‘ān, as unnecessary acts of brutality. Ṭa‘ān’s victim is a nameless tourist and Ṭa‘ān is driven to his act by the fear of being killed himself by a nameless killer. Yāsmīna’s brother also remains nameless throughout the novel. The namelessness of these characters could be explained as them not being very important to the plot, however, there are other characters that play significantly lesser roles that are named. The fact that the characters are nameless can instead be seen as a representation of a violent system, where both perpetrators and victims are not so much individuals as parts of a structure.

\(^{443}\) Nilsson, *Maskulinitet*, 35.

\(^{444}\) With the exception of Nādyā Khūst’s novels which are set in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.
The critique is hence of the system, which is allowed to go on and on with more and more people caught up in the consequences of the actions.

In relation to providing, virility and violence, the male characters are struggling with external pressure which they have no power over. At the same time, the characters seem to be aware that the expectations are empty and flawed. Farah can be made into a singer of masculinity, his whole appearance and fame is produced by him and his manager. Nimr can use his position to cover up for his actions and pretend to be the perfect husband-to-be according to the expectations, while at the same time living another life secretly. Tā’ān tried to create a different life for himself through studying, but he is still caught up in the old traditional ways of proving oneself as a man and protecting the family’s honour, something which in the end turns out to ruin his life rather than pride him.

While being aware that the expectations are flawed, the characters actively use them to form positions for themselves in relation to others. The emptiness does not stop them from reaping the benefits of power connected to living according to the rules. Farah enjoys living the life of a rock star that he dreamt of during his childhood. He likes the women and the fame and the power, but when the demands become bigger than he can handle he goes mad. For Nimr and his father, their money is what saves them, but they, too, buy into the expectations and produce images of themselves as providers and protectors as well as virile men. For Abū Muṣṭafā and Abū al-Mullā, many children become a receipt of their ability as men, even though one or two children instead of 11 or 12 would have solved the problem of provision. The simultaneous acceptance of and struggle with the expectations make the hegemony as presented in the novel both extremely strong and extremely vulnerable. As long as everyone accepts it, as all the characters do, it will last. However, since they all more or less deviate from it in their personal life, the possibility of the hegemony changing is present.

As the quote from Bourdieu at the beginning of the chapter stated, the privileges have for most of the men turned into burdens, and through their dependence on others’ approval they have very little agency in changing their position unless the norms themselves change. As pointed out by Ben Moussa and Lang, the room for movement by the characters is very limited and they have no possibility to reject the
social norms that govern them. On the contrary, they work to reinforce them and Abū Muṣṭafā even organises for his son to be able to take over the fishing trade, so that he too one day can provide for a family and live a similar life to his father. The discrepancy between the reality they live in and the norms they are striving towards, as demonstrated by Vafa and Talif as the main cause for a subordinated masculinity, is not acknowledged by the characters, even though the narrative makes it clear that they cannot live up to the goals they have set for themselves. Despite the fact that no one of the characters actively seems to refute the hegemonic norm, and least of all Farah, who on the contrary makes his name through it, his character is the only one that offers an exit route from the demands of masculinity as the next section shows.

6.7 Farah’s Changing Masculinity

Despite the multitude of stories, Farah’s destiny is central to the novel and can to some extent be read as the key to the other individual stories. The novel starts with him leaving Damascus for Beirut, full of hopes and dreams, and ends by him exchanging the sign for Beirut with one reading ‘Hospital for Mental Illness’. At the beginning of the novel, he is only focused on the privileges and does not seem to see that masculinity includes obligations, something which life in Beirut soon teaches him. Throughout the novel, Farah’s certainty and sureness of himself decrease and he realises that to become what he wants, he is at the hands of his manager. He is the object rather than the subject he imagined himself to be. After a few days in Beirut, his thoughts of the city as an easy dancer ready for him to conquer is gone and he even apologises to a dog that he accidentally steps on. His original masculinity, characterised by the owning of both women and the city, is changed to a worried, unsure performance where he places the lowliest inhabitants of the city, the dogs, above himself. His initial image of himself ‘taking Beirut’ is finally completely crushed when he himself is taken by his manager.

The fact that masculinity is presented as an image is further proved when he is later given the role as ‘singer of masculinity’. The role embodies all the dreams he had when he came to Beirut: money, a position, girls and fame. When he is given the chance to live his dream life he is, however, unable. His manager Nīshān’s demand

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445 al-Sammān, Bayrūt 75, 108.
446 Ibid., 17.
for sexual favours, in addition to the pressure of the city, have made him unable to perform what he is asked to do. He begins to take different types of pills in order to forget and do his job, which makes his situation worse. The ideal masculinity, which he is meant to perform, cannot be done without illusions and pills, which illustrate the impossible nature of hegemonic masculinity. The role works for a while when everyone, including himself, plays the game, but as soon as he no longer agrees to, and cannot perform the actions asked of him, the game is over and he is seen as fake.

The performance of masculinity is hence only successful as long as everyone abides by the rules, and if one decides to leave, the cost has to be paid by someone. This hegemonic norm is only as strict as the participants in a certain group or society who can either accept changes or, as in Faraḥ’s case, refuse to see that the hegemony they are upholding is an illusion. Nīshān, the manager, who realises that others judge masculinity regardless of what one does, tries everything he can to cover up the broken masculinity of his star. When Faraḥ does not cooperate he asks himself ‘who does not want to embody hegemonic masculinity?’ then sends him off to an asylum. The same pattern governs the other main characters’ lives, except the fact that they themselves, not their managers, work to strengthen and cover up what they perceive as weaknesses in their masculinity. When they can no longer handle the pressure, they see themselves forced to actions that kill them, or in Ṭa‘ān’s case, lead to prison. Though not questioning outright the hegemonic masculinity that governs the novel, the escape that Faraḥ finds suggests that a change is necessary in order to continue with life.

By consciously or unconsciously adopting what the novel characterises as feminine behaviour, before and after his period at the mental hospital, Faraḥ can finally step out of the circle of demands that he has been caught within since his arrival to Beirut. Although expressing a longing for his previous life and abilities, the way he describes his life, for the first time as the first person narrator, shows that he has taken control. A similar development can be seen in al-Na’na’ al-barrī where ‘Alī is taken prisoner by unidentified men and forced to agree to the masculine ideals of the city. When he is let free, he has become mad and does not know what to do. He tries to find ‘Alyā so that she can help him, and when he is told that she has disappeared he is completely lost. When she comes back, reincarnated as an old woman, he accepts her
female lead and through her, he acknowledges his roots and feminine side, and is promised a better, more complete life. By rejecting the masculine restrictions and accepting the feminine side both characters are able to move on and are allowed a second chance in a life they both thought was over. Farah’s and ‘Alī’s development serves to destabilise the hegemonic norm, not by actively breaking with it or reformulating it, but by showing that contrary to the characters’ belief the ‘insane’ Farah is saner than the characters locked, by the norms, in a repetitive behaviour of reproducing an image of masculinity no one of them completely embraces.

6.8 Masculinity through the Years
The two novels mainly discussed in this chapter are from two different eras. *Beirūt 75* was written at the beginning of what is named ‘the Political Man’ and *al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī* is an example of the period called ‘Problematic Masculinity’. Despite this, their portrayal and use of masculinity is similar. But whereas *Beirūt 75* can be said to use masculinity to define the uneasy atmosphere of Beirut and the Arab world in 1975 without really defining the problem, *al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī* examines the question of masculinity from several different angles. That the masculinities of the final wave are discussed and problematized to a higher degree than previous masculinities have been is particularly interesting. Amjad, the father in *al-Riwäya al-mustahlīla*, is given a chapter of the novel where he discusses with himself the reasons and motives for his change of behaviour after his marriage. The behaviour of the husband in *Imra‘a fī dā‘irat al-khawf* is discussed and partly normalised by a psychiatrist and Karīm in *Nasr bi-juwān wāḥid* constantly re-evaluates his conduct. The male character in the last wave of novels has become human in a double sense. He can both be criticised and stereotyped as a despotic patriarch and shown with faults and problems, far from the ideal and idolised political man preceding him.

In her study on masculinity in the novels of the 1990s in Syria, Maysūn al-Jurf concludes that the female writers’ negative representation of masculinity is connected to a changing worldview that, what she calls traditional masculinity, cannot adjust itself to. She argues that regardless of the number of masculinities existing in a novel, there are only two types which female writers can create; either the monstrous

man or the female alter ego i.e. a male character written as a female character. She has a point in the fact that the number of disagreeable ways of performing masculinities has risen and that ideal masculinity, presented by for example Nādyā Khūst, is different from previous generations of masculinities. Despite this, the multitude of masculinities, and the fact that they are mostly presented as problematic, is more complex than this division. On one hand, it means that the formulation of masculinity has become more divergent and as such can destabilise previous hegemonies. On another hand, it signifies a possibility to critique the patriarchal system and point at ways in which it is misused and exploited by individuals or groups. The multitude of masculinities further offer an ambiguous understanding of masculinity and show the relational nature of how it is shaped, and received, by society.

A role or position that has been affected by the new masculinity formation is the position of the father. The firm belief that all the father does is for the best of the children, which it often is in the earlier novels, has changed to a firm belief that the father uses his position only to make problems for the children and demonstrate his power. Hindering them from studying, traveling and marrying, not for their own good but based on whims and forced by violence. The same position is still part of masculinity, but it is perceived in a different way. Whereas the specific characteristics for an ideal masculinity are interpreted differently from novel to novel the greatest change over time lies in the female characters’ perception of the men and their performance of masculinity. The earlier novels generally assumed that the male characters should and would take on the role as provider and protector and guide the female characters in the right direction. Later novels instead assume that the female characters know better what is good for them and are not in the same position of dependency. The changing representation of masculinity in the fiction of Syrian female authors is closely connected to their views on their female characters and their ability, which reflects their relation with male characters and their expectations of them.

The majority of novels in the previous two waves, ‘the Father Figure’ and ‘the Political Man’, have instead presented a homogenous view of an educated, middle class man or a well-read political man. Returning to Connell’s definition of masculinity as the “[c]urrently most honored way of being a man,” it is clear how

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448 Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity”, 832.
that is to be interpreted in the first two waves. In these two eras, the masculinity presented has been the answer to whatever problem the novels’ characters have faced, whether it has been questions of personal development or modernisation on a national level. In the final era, the masculinity created has instead become the problem in the majority of the novels. In the third wave it is not the masculinities described which form the most honored way of being a man, but the ‘shadow masculinity’ that forms their opposite and for which the female characters dream or hope. Beirūt 75, produced at the beginning of the second era, can be seen as the exception to this rule through its portrayal of subordinate and problematic masculinity. However, through its complete disinterest in a political hero figure it creates an army of anti-heroes, which tells the reader how masculinity should be performed.

6.9 Conclusion
This chapter has demonstrated how the hegemonic norm of the novels governs all the characters and that even those considered to perform subordinate masculinity actively work to reinforce the hegemonic standard. The chapter has shown how components of hegemonic masculinity, which usually are seen as granting power and respect, can be used to diminish a male character who is not able to perform the actions in a socially accepted way. The novels thus present social rules in general, and expectations on masculinity in particular, as roles to be performed even when they are far from the characters’ true selves. Living up to the expectations can only be done by wiping out or ignoring what the characters believe to be correct and normal behaviour. Hence, the masculinity the characters perform, though sanctioned by themselves and the other characters, stands out as empty and flawed. The chapter has further shown that in the formulation of masculinity, the characters are concerned with their appearance and the acceptance of others to the point where they act contrary to their own beliefs in order to be accepted. This in turn leads to the result that hegemonic masculinity becomes an image that is at the same time governing and empty. Through Farah’s and ‘Ali’s respective symptoms of madness, which results in their acceptance of femininity, the spell of masculinity is broken and the norms governing the narrative can at last be disregarded and the hegemony is thus destabilised.
7. Conclusion

This thesis has examined the construction of masculinity in the fiction of Syrian women writers during the second half of the 20th century. It has done so with the use of feminist narratology and a structure of hegemonic masculinity adapted for this research. The thesis has analysed 34 novels written between 1959 and 2000. The analysis has demonstrated how the formation of masculinity in the female-authored novels is based largely on the same traits and characteristics throughout the period studied but that the utilisation and significance of these characteristics vary due to political and cultural factors. In this final chapter, the arguments used in the thesis are summed up and the results outlined.

The thesis began by locating the field of literary masculinity in relation to masculinity studies and outlining the parts of hegemonic masculinity used in the thesis. Particularly Raewyn Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and her hierarchal levels of masculinity performance provided useful tools for the examination conducted. Throughout the work, the concept of masculinity has been used to mean what the characters in a fictional society see as the expected, valued and normative behaviour of a grown man. This definition, in line with the theories of gender as a social construction, emphasises the fluidity of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its applicability to various settings. The masculinity formation in the novels has been examined in connection to the novels’ female characters, acknowledging Connell’s idea that masculinity is formulated in contrast to femininity, as well as Judith Butler’s concept of gender as a product of social interaction. The theories of masculinity studies have been used to approach the content of the novels and the actions of the fictional characters. The research done has contextualised the masculinity formations found in the novels through a discussion of secondary material consisting of scholarship both on the Middle East and on masculinity in general. Through the discussion of the primary material in the light of the secondary material, value systems around male and female conduct have been highlighted as well as the mechanisms of gender formation. The use of secondary material in Swedish and Arabic, in addition to English, has enriched the exploration of literary masculinities in this research.
In addition to the content based analysis the thesis has applied close reading and feminist narratology to the novels in an attempt to see how the novels, through their use of characterisation, focalization and time, influence the formation of masculinity. The text based analyses have shown how the narrative structures, together with the content, create understandings of masculinity through the choice of narrator or plot division for example. Some of the novels make use of male first person narrators, which affects the presentation of gender and, as shown throughout this work, changes the perception of masculinity in the novels.

Having discussed the concept of literary masculinity and its application to novels, the thesis gave a brief overview of the literary scene in Syria between 1959 and 2000, with particular focus on women’s literary production. The thesis established why masculinity construction in Syrian female-authored fiction is of interest by considering the close connection between literature and social and political life in Syria, in addition to women’s early participation in the literary scene. It is argued throughout the examination carried out that women’s use of male main characters has afforded them greater possibilities to deal with diverse topics and thus made them able to write for example politically committed novels. Through this analysis it has been shown that the technique of cross-writing, women writing men, introduces an element of ambiguity to the formation of gender and dilutes otherwise often strict gender roles. Hopefully, a deeper understanding of Syrian female-authored novels has been achieved through the discussion of the formation of masculinity, which has been shown to be closely connected to the performance of femininity. It is further shown in the research that the function of masculinity in women’s novels has been interpreted as a political or social comment and as such, male characters, together with their female counterparts, are shown to represent the female authors’ engagement in society.

The initial examination of the 34 novels led to two ways of categorising the novels. The first division is based on the change in masculinity formation detected in novels from different decades. The change is connected to the development of women’s writing from a feminist point of view. The separation of the literary output into three eras is therefore modelled on earlier divisions made by scholars of literature in Syria with focus on female character composition. For the purposes of this work, the thesis has suggested its own division of the novels into three periods; ‘The Father
Figure’ (1959-1970), ‘the Political Man’ (1970-1985) and ‘Problematic Masculinity’ (1985-2000). Each of the periods has been shown to formulate masculinity in a particular way, often closely connected to female emancipation. The masculinities created during the period called ‘the Father Figure’ are formulated as a patriarchal response to women’s demands for equality. The masculinities from this era form a support system for their wives, sisters and daughters. The characters often denounce patriarchal power and inequality but the gender matrix of the novels still supports a patriarchal system. The novels do not critique the patriarchal performance of masculinity but instead use it as a way of gaining more freedom for women. Examples from this era are al-Yāfī’s, Jarrah’s and al-Musālima’s novels published in the 1960s.

The ‘Political Man’ appears between 1970 and 1985 and is linked to a period of political and ideological change. Through the creation of this type of masculinity, and the female protagonists’ interactions with it, the authors use gendered performance as a signifier for modernisation and political change. As demonstrated in the previous era, the performance of masculinity is used as a way of bettering society and allowing women greater possibilities to participate in their communities. The ‘Political Man’ appears for example in novels by al-Idlibī and Na‘na’. Towards the end of the era, a disillusionment with the possibilities for political and social change takes over and a new formulation of masculinity is introduced.

This new masculinity formation, appearing between 1985 and 2000 transforms masculinity and men into a problem rather than a solution for the female characters. This era is therefore called “Problematic Masculinity” and appears for example in novels by al-Raḥbī and Bīṭār. Problematic Masculinity shows a masculinity that is uncertain or aggressive or both. This development from a benevolent patriarchal figure through a saviour of the world to an aggressive brute or uncertain figure follows the development of the female characters and, as becomes apparent in the novels, their increasing demand for equality. This division and development show how the view of masculinity in the novels has changed throughout the period studied in this thesis.

The other division, which led to the chapter division in the thesis, builds on the usage of masculinity in the novels. The first theme detected, that of ‘Female Masculinity and Male Femininity’, showed how the application of gender specific behaviour in an unconventional way led to the destabilisation of the understanding of
masculinity and femininity respectively. In their exploration of gender stereotypes, the authors seemingly reproduce the binary gender regime, but a closer examination shows how the characters instead break the gender boundaries and perform variant versions of masculinity and femininity. The analysis further demonstrated how the characters are aware of the distinctive roles for men and women but how they in their actions prefer to behave differently and therefore create blurred concepts of what male and female means. The creation of Male Femininity has also been shown to have a political motivation when creating a male character who stands for change, as demonstrated in the analysis.

The second theme, that of ‘Developing Masculinity’, demonstrated how male and female characters participate in the formation of masculinity. In the case of mothers and close relatives, it is established that their own position is linked to that of their son or husband and it is hence of importance that the performance of masculinity matches the norm. The desire and ability to look after the family are seen as important factors in this type of masculinity formation. Through their choices, the female characters show an awareness of the patriarchal gender regime governing their societies, and they further support it by adhering to it. The examination of the novels has shown that the female characters are depicted to be as active as the male characters in their attempts to shape and change the performance of masculinity. The analysis further demonstrates that even though the power connected to masculinity is often what attracts the young men of the novels, the female characters focus on the obligations that masculinity performance includes. They expect to be looked after and provided for by their male relatives. As such, the novels have been shown to formulate masculinity performances that are aware of the demands and expectations placed on the roles, rather than just reaping the benefits.

The third theme, that of ‘Dream Masculinity’, explored how female characters made use of the patriarchal norms in order to form a better future for themselves. The chapter showed how the female characters, rather than contesting the gender regime of their societies, worked to change the ideals from within. Through an analysis of the structure and content of the novels, the thesis has shown that although seemingly accepting patriarchy as a solution, the novels finally conclude that women do not need men to succeed in life. The novels were read as suggestions of a more
equal relation where women are not dependant on men but equal partners. In alignment with the other themes, the analysis did not show an outright rejection of what was presented as hegemonic masculinity in the novels but rather a suggestion for modification. The masculinities presented as ‘Dream Masculinities’ are expected to conform to the norm of society but with a greater interest in what the female characters want and need.

The fourth theme, that of ‘Ideal Masculinity’, showed how masculinity constructions were used as symbols for political and social change. This theme was mainly found during the period referred to as the ‘Political Man’ in the time division above. Through a relation with a politically engaged man, the female characters formulated a new world-view connected to the masculinity performance of their man. The analysis showed that although the rhetoric of both male and female characters referred to great changes, their foundational understanding of masculinity was similar to what they rejected in the older generation. As such, the masculinity constructions showed a gradual change of hegemonies rather than a clear break with previous performances. The male characters performing the ideal masculinity all died or disappeared at an early stage from the narrative and therefore only existed as memories for the female characters. This led to their idolisation, which further strengthens the thesis’ claim that the masculinities of this period are symbols of change and ideology rather than life like fictional characters.

The fifth theme, ‘Demands on Masculinity’, elaborated on how masculinity performance, often connected to power and ability, can be an obstacle in a man’s life if he is not able to perform it according to the expectations placed on him. The chapter showed how class and money are some of the factors that influence the acceptance or rejection of a specific masculinity performance. The chapter further elaborated on how the female authors have used struggling masculinities to pinpoint social inequalities. By using what is expected to be the stronger person in a gendered society and showing his weaknesses and then connecting his defects to for example poverty, the authors are able to discuss both gender roles and social problems. The specific gender roles are further seen as the root of the problem of unreasonable demands on masculinity and the novels analysed seem to suggest that an acceptance
of the feminine sides of a man’s character might be a way of easing the pressure of masculinity performance.

Through the analyses of the different themes, the thesis has demonstrated that women use literature as a way of both contesting and supporting masculinities. Through their descriptions and plot constructions it becomes clear what masculinity formations the novels present as positive. Through their formation of masculinity, female authors have moreover engaged with female gender roles as the binary opposition to, or in some cases performers of, masculinity. As such, the analyses of masculinity in the thesis have contributed to the discussion of gender formation for both male and female characters.

As shown in the five chapters, hegemonic masculinity comprises similar aspects of gendered behaviour - provision, protection and procreation - but is approached differently depending on the era in which the novel is written. The acceptance of a specific masculinity is partly based on whether these aspects are present in a man’s masculinity performance, but more importantly on how these aspects are performed. Therefore, though building on the same concepts in all novels, hegemonic masculinity is proved to vary from setting to setting, sometimes even within the same novel. Women’s views on the masculinities performed further serve to show the fluidity of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. By evaluating not only the action performed but the motive behind it, use of violence is seen to signify hegemonic masculinity at times and subordinate masculinity in other circumstances. As a way of protection, it is seen as desirable and celebrated whereas when it is used as a way to take power or suppress others it is seen as a sign of weakness and does not invoke respect from the women.

What is hoped to be seen as an original contribution to knowledge is thus a comparative textual analysis of masculinity formation in a body of primary material, the work of Syrian female writers, previously un-examined in this aspect and to this extent in Western academia. Although literary masculinity studies have been produced before, the focus on women’s construction of masculinity formation is rare, as is the focus on literary masculinity in the Middle East, and this thesis is a step in the process of filling this gap. Through the examination of masculinities, this research also considers the female characters’ roles in the formulation of gender and their view of
themselves and of femininity in the process. Approaching the female authored novels from the viewpoint of masculinity studies enhances the understanding of female authored fiction as well as the view of society put forward in these novels.

In addition to the aforementioned contribution to the studies of literary masculinity, the thesis has established a division of the masculinities produced between 1959 and 2000 in Syrian fiction and linked them to the development of female emancipation. By putting the findings in the novels in conversation with works of sociology, anthropology and analyses of literature and film, the thesis has located itself within the framework of gender studies. The thesis has traced the female authors’ application of masculinity in the novels and shown that the characteristics and traits embodied in masculinity performance are similar during the period studied but that how and why they are evaluated change. The change in perception of masculinity is shown to be connected to the female characters’ wish to participate in social life. This leads to several questions to be explored further, one of them being how masculinity is presented and used in the novels of the 21st century. Does it follow the trend of ‘Problematic Masculinity,’ or are there new formulations and usages of masculinity construction? Another question is that of male writers’ formulation of masculinity during the period studied. Have they too used masculinities as a way of trying to shape and critique society and have they supported or contested the hegemonic norm of their fictional societies.
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Biographical Appendix

‘Abbūd, Anīsa (1958-) was born in Jabla in the coastal region of Syria, she studied agricultural engineering at university. She has published short story collections, for example Ḥīna tunza‘ al-aqni‘a [When the masks are removed] (1991), poetry collections, for example Qamīṣ al-as‘ila [The shirt of questions] (1999) and novels, among others al-Na‘na‘ al-barrī [Wild mint] (1997) and Bāb al-ḥīra [The door of confusion](2002).


Bīṭār, Haifā’ (1958-) was born in Latakia. Bīṭār is an ophthalmologist by training and begun publishing novels and short stories in addition to her day time work. She is a very productive writer and among her short story collections are Wurūd lan tamūt [Roses do not die] (1992) and Mawt al-baja‘a [The death of the swan] (1997) and among her novels are Nasr bi-janāḥ wāḥid [A One-winge eagle](1998) and Afrāḥ ṣaghīra afrāḥ akhīra [Small joys, final joys](1998).

Darwīsh, Usayma (1939 -) was born in Damascus and studied Arabic at university. She has published one novel, Shajarat al-ḥubb –ghābat al-ḥzān [Tree of love – forest of sorrows](2000) and non-fictional work on literature.

al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbārī, Salmā (1923-2006) was born in Damascus and studied political science by correspondence. Al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbārī lived parts of her life in Spain and in Egypt. She was a prolific writer who published novels in addition to biographies, translations, poetry and short stories. Among her novels are Yawmiyyāt Hāla [Haala’s diary](1950) and ‘Aynan min Ishbīliya [Sevillan eyes](1965) and her short story collections include Ḥuzn al-ashjār [The sorrows of trees](1986) and Zawāya [Corners](1955).

al-Idlibi, Ulfat (1912-2007) was born in Damascus. She began her literary career in 1947 by writing and publishing short stories. In addition to several short story collections she has published non-fictional work on the history and culture of
Damascus and two novels. Among her short story collections are *Qiṣṣa shāmiyya* (1954) and *Ma wara’ al-ashya’ al-jamīla* [What lies behind the pretty things ](1993) and her novels are *Dimashq ya basmat al-ḥuzn* [Damascus o smile of sadness](1980) and *Hikayat jaddi* [My grandfather’s tale](1991).

**Jarrāḥ, Amal** (1945 - 2004) was born in Lebanon to Syrian parents, during the war in 1948 the family moved to Syria. Jarrāḥ was a poet and journalist. Her only novel, *al-Riwāya al-Mala’ūna* [The Naughty novel](1968/2010), was published posthumously in accordance with her wishes. Among her poetry collections are; *Rasā’il imra’a Dimashqiyya* [Letters of a Damascene woman](1970), *Ṣafṣāfa taktubu ismaha* [A Willow writing its name](1986) and *Imra’a min shama’a wa shams wa qamar* [A woman of wax and sun and moon](1992).

**al-Khānī, Malāḥa** (1938 -) was born in Damascus and has worked as a TV presenter and editor. She is a novelist and short story writer and among her publications are; *Kayfa nashtarī al-shams?* [How do we buy the sun?](short stories, 1978) and the two novels *Khaṭawāt fī al-ḍabāb* [Steps in the fog](1984) and *Banāt ḥāratina* [The Girls of our neighbourhood](1998).

**al-Khush, Umayma** (1948 -) was born in Misyaf on the Syrian coast, she has studied, and later taught, Arabic at Damascus University. She writes both novels and short stories and among her published work is *Da’wa’ ila al-raqs* [An invitation to dance](short stories, 1991) and the two novels *Zahrat al-Lutūs* [The Lotus flower](1993) and *al-Tawq* [Longing](1997).

**Khūrī, Kūlīt** (1936 -) was born in Damascus. She has worked as a lecturer at Damascus University and also been politically active. In addition to poetry, short stories and novels she has published biographical work on her grandfather’s life and theatre plays. Among her short story collections are; *Dimashq baytī al-kabīr* [Damascus is my big home](1969) and *Qiṣṣatan* [Two stories](1972) and among her novels are *Ayyām ma’ahu* [Days with him](1959) and *Layla wāhida* [One night](1961).

**Khūst, Nādyā** (1935 -) was born in Damascus. She studied in Russia and obtained her PhD in comparative literature from Moscow University. She has worked in the media.
industry and has been active in the preservation of the Old city in Damascus. In addition to her fictional work she has written literary criticism and on identity and culture in the Arab world. Among her short story collections are *Uḥibbu al-Shām* (1967) and *La makān li-l-gharīb* [No place for the stranger](1990) and among her novels are *Ḥubb fī bilād al-Shām* [Love in the Levant](1996) and *Aʿāṣīr fī bilād al-Shām* [Cyclones in the Levant](1998).

**Kīlānī, Qamar** (1932-) was born in Damascus. She worked as a teacher both at schools and at the teacher training academy and wrote regularly for the Arabic press. In addition to her fictional works of short stories and novels she has written biographies and on Sufism. Among her short story collections are *ʿĀlam bi-la ḥudūd* [A World without borders](1972) and *Ḥulm ʿalā jīdrān al-sujūn* [A Dream on prison walls](1985) and among the novels are *Bustān al-karaz* [The Cherry orchard](1977) and *al-Dawwāma* [The Whirlwind](1987).

**al-Musālima, Inʿām** (1938-) was born in Darʿa, she studied medicine in Damascus and London and has worked as a surgeon and dentist in Syria. She has published her work in newspapers and magazines and has one novel, *al-Ḥubb wa al-wāḥl* [Love and mud](1963) and one short story collection, *al-Kahf* [The Cave](1973).

**NaʿNaʿ, Ḥamīda** (1946-) was born in Idlib, in northern Syria, and completed her university studies in Damascus. NaʿNaʿ is a journalist based in Paris and in addition to her two novels, *al-Watān fī al-ʿaynayn* [The Homeland in a pair of eyes](1979) and *Man yajruʿ ʿalā al-shawq* [Who dares to long](1989), she has published poetry and critical and political works.

**Nuwaylātī, Hīyām** (1932-1977) was born in Damascus. Nuwaylātī obtained and MA in philosophy from Cairo University. She is mostly known for her numerous poetry collections but she also published two novels, one in co-operation with Um ʿIsām. Among her poetry collections are *al-Qaḍiya* [The Issue](1973), *Madīnat al-salām* [City of peace](1974) and *Yā Shām* [O Damascus](1977) and her novels are *Fī al-layl* [At Night](1959) and *Arṣifat al-saʿam* [Sidewalks of tedium](1973).

**Qaṣabjī, Diyāʿ** (1939-) was born in Aleppo, she studied law at university then taught Arabic for a while in Algeria before spending time in Saudi Arabia. In addition to her
novel *Imra’ a fi da’irat al-khauf* [A Woman in a circle of fear](1985) she has published a number of short story collections among others *al-’Ālam bayna qawsayn* [The World between parenthesis](1973), *Antum yā man uhībbukum* [You whom I love](1981) and *Thulūj dāfī’ a* [Warm snow](1992).

**al-Raḥbī, Mayya** (1954 -) has a PhD in medicine. She writes on medicine, literature and feminism for Syrian and Arab newspapers. She has published one novel, *Furāt* [Euphratis](1998) and a collection of short stories in 1995.

**Rashū, Mārī** (1942-) was born in Latakia. She is a productive novelist and among her novels are *Harwala fawqa saqi’ Tūlīdū* [Hurrying of the frost of Toledo](1993) and *al-Ḥubb fī sā ’at ghādab* [Love in a time of anger](1998). She has also written short stories and her collections include *Wajh wa ughniyya* [A Face and a song](1989).

**al-Sammān, Ghāda** (1942-) was born in Damascus. She studied English literature at the university and after her graduation she moved to Lebanon to complete her MA. She lived for a long period of time in Beirut working as a writer and journalist before moving to France and then back to Beirut. Al-Sammān has her own publishing house and a large number of publications including poetry, essays, novels and shorts stories. Among her novels are *Bayrūt 75* [Beirut 75](1975), *Kawābīs Bayrūt* [Beirut nightmares](1976) and *Laylat al-milyār* [The Night of a million](1986). Her short story collections include *La bahr fī Bayrūt* [There is no sea in Beirut](1963) and *al-Qamar al-Murabba’* [The Square moon](1994).

**Taqī al-Dīn, Nawāl** (1942 -) was born in Damascus. She has studied philosophy and psychology at Damascus University and worked as a journalist. She has published two novels, *Shams khalfa al-ḍabāb* [A Sun behind the fog](1986) and *Fajr al-Ḥubb* [The Dawn of love](1995).

**Umm ‘Isām** (Khadija al-Jarraḥ al-Nashawātī) (1923 -2000) was born in Damascus. She wrote articles and short stories and TV scripts in addition to a novel together with Hiyām Nuwaylātī. Among her short story collections are *Dhākir, yā turā?* [Do you remember, I wonder?](1960) and *Ilhayka* [To you](1970) and her novel is called *Arsifat al-Sa’ām* [Sidewalks of tedium](1973).
al-Yāfī, Laylā (nd.) was born in Damascus. She has published poetry and novels. Her two novels are *Thulūj tahta al-shams* [Snow under the sun] (1960) and *al-Wāḥa* [The Oasis] (1982).