

## ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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**Woman and Yemen in Three Novels  
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Among scholars of literature, there is a discussion about whether modern Arab women write fiction differently from their male counterparts. Some argue that women writers have special concerns which result from their specific experiences in Muslim society and determine not only the thematic spectrum of their works, but also a specific, sometimes vague manner of their literary expression. This discussion is based mostly on the works of prominent women writers from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, North Africa, sometimes Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States. Yemen has not received much attention in this discussion, as well as in literary studies in general. This article examines to what extent the suggested female, or “feminist”, manner of writing is manifested in the works of Yemeni novelist and short story writer Nadia al-Kawkabani, who is one of the most prolific women writers in her country. In her three novels, *Not More Than Love* (2006), *Submissive Wives* (2009), and *My Sanaa* (2013), “feminist” topics are touched upon repeatedly, but practically none of them is represented by a detailed story with a sufficient degree of sentiment and psychologism. On the contrary, a great deal of attention in these novels is given to the culture and modern history of Yemen, and the narrative, like in many male writers’ works, is dominated by sociopolitical issues. One may argue that Yemen in Nadia al-Kawkabani’s novels prevails over the “feminist” issue.

*Keywords:* Arab novel, Yemen, Nadia al-Kawkabani, feminism.

In the recent decades, much scholarly attention has been attracted by literary works of Muslim Arab women, who until not so long ago had been “silent, passive, and submissive”, but “have made great strides in freeing themselves from the bondage of illiteracy and seclusion, and have entered more productively into national life” [1, p. 24]. Special studies have been devoted to these Arab women writers [2–7], and anthologies of their works compiled [1; 8].

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One of the issues that the researchers actively discuss is the question of whether Arab women authors write differently from their male counterparts. Dalya Kohen-Mor writes, “Some critics argue that the elements of imaginative literature do not differ from gender to gender. What differs is the concerns of each gender, resulting from their specific experiences and impressions of life and society. Hence one should not look for a distinct type of literature with particular qualities in women’s writings, although one should acknowledge that women have different interests owing to their different social and psychological circumstances” [1, p. 18].

A rather opposing view is expressed by the famous Egyptian writer Yusuf Idris (1937–1991), who, after reading women’s short stories from Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States, wrote “It is a new and strange kind of writing that the Arab woman who remains distant from the course of events has invented in order to do with it something that will affirm to her that she is a live being, indeed a person who possesses the power of action and reaction. It is a literary action arising under an overpowering feverish pressure that interferes with the creative process to the extent that the writing appears like a puzzle to the reader. She wants to say something and yet she does not want to say it. She wants to express something, and at the same time she does not want anyone to grasp her expression — I might almost say her secret” [1, p. 19].

In the context of this discussion, in this article I am going to analyze three novels written by Yemeni Nadia al-Kawkabani, who is one of the most prolific women writers in her country. Nadia al-Kawkabani’s works may be useful for this discussion for three reasons. Firstly, Yemen culturally is a very traditional Arab and Islamic country with the majority of female citizens not familiar with the Western lifestyle, and this suggests that their literary works may be even more “puzzling” than those written by Saudi and the Gulf women writers. Secondly, names of Yemeni women writers almost do not appear in this discussion because they are quite rare in scholarly studies of Arab female literature, and so are their works in the respective anthologies. Thirdly, Nadia al-Kawkabani is the author of novels, which (to a greater extent than the short stories read by Yusuf Idris) allow the reader to get a clear idea of the author’s writing manner.

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Nadia al-Kawkabani, a short story writer and novelist, was born in 1968 in Taizz. She studied architecture at Sanaa University, completed PhD in the same field at Cairo University in 2008 and now is a professor of architecture at Sanaa University. She is married, with three children.

By the time she published her first novel, *Not More Than Love* (*Ḥubb laysa ’illā*, 2006), she had been already known as the author of three short story collections, *Jasmine Sigh* (*Zafrat yasmīn*, 2001), *Rolling* (*Daḥrajāt*, 2002), and *Peeling of Clouds* (*Taqashshur ghaym*, 2004), which in 2004 were published in one volume titled *Half Nose, One Lip* (*Nisf ’anf... shafa wāḥida*). The plots of these stories were mostly related to the typical problems of Yemeni women: the shame of extramarital pregnancy, infertility, emigration of a beloved man, etc.

The story in the novel *Not More Than Love* is told by the heroine, Farah, who has much in common with the author herself. The main storyline, love, seems in the novel somewhat artificial, intended only to introduce a kind of intrigue into the narrative. The background on which this intrigue unfolds is more important in the narrative, presenting the social problems that really concern the author.

Farah, a lecturer at Sanaa University, while sorting through her diaries accumulated over many years, tells the story of her personal, family and professional life, covering the period from the late 1970s to the early 2000s.

The main intrigue of Farah's personal life is that in her student years she had a close, loving relationship with one of her university teachers, who then suddenly disappeared. This inexplicable disappearance of the beloved became a painful mystery for her for all subsequent years. Many years later, after a failed marriage, when she gained material and, consequently, personal independence, she finally meets her beloved: he acts as an opponent for the defense of her PhD thesis at Cairo University. It turns out that after the unification of Yemen in 1990<sup>1</sup>, he chose to leave his professorship in Sanaa and returned to Aden, from where he had previously fled to Sanaa, and where his wife and children lived, who Farah knew nothing about.

Although much of the narrative presents Farah's sentiments, there are various episodes from her life and the lives of her relatives that expose to the reader important events in the history of the country, as well as characteristic features of the country's social and cultural life. Following the infamous bloody clash of January 1986, Farah's beloved, a philosophy lecturer at the University of Aden, realized the fallacy of his Marxist beliefs and fled to North Yemen with the help of smugglers. At about the same time, Farah's brother lost his life in Sanaa at the hands of car thieves, tribesmen, who the corrupt police did not even try to search for. Farah compares the death of her brother with the death under similar circumstances of a son of a state Minister. In the second case, the perpetrators were detained within a day; their leader turned out to be a son of a mighty tribal sheikh. For a long time, the whole country was discussing how the sheikh would manage to save his bandit son from the deserved punishment. According to the sheikh, his son was innocent, he just fell under the influence of bastards, who "deceived him by taking advantage of his good nature" [9, p. 38]. "The sheikh's arguments turned out to be very convincing", Farah tells with bitter irony. "The Minister had no choice but to accept them, so as not to complicate the situation, which otherwise could have escalated into an armed conflict between the state and the tribe. And what's the problem here, if the Minister can once again prove his masculinity by giving birth to another son, and celebrate by this the recent prolongation of his ministerial powers! And the sheikh can punish his son himself by replacing him as the future leader of the tribe with one of his numerous brothers. As a result, the parties reached mutual agreement. Let bygones be bygones. This is how problems are solved, there is no other way" [9, p. 38–39].

Farah witnesses the blockade of Aden during the Civil War of 1994. In Aden, she learns about the bombing of Sanaa by South separatists' aircraft, and about the changes in the life of South Yemeni people that have been brought by the unification of Yemen in 1990. For example, she is told about a former Yemeni Socialist Party functionary, who, after taking up a responsible post in the united government, soon resigned, "having realized that, while in this post, he does not have the opportunity of making independent decisions corresponding to his professional level, but is forced only to sign all those documents that are required of him to sign, and adjust to the conditions of the current policy, losing respect for himself" [9, p. 104].

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<sup>1</sup> Before 1990 the country was divided into two independent states: Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR) in the North and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the South.

After the Unification, Farah tells, Adeni women began to wear long black robes covering the body from head to toe, absolutely unsuitable for the hot climate of Aden. The reason for this change in clothing was “the fear of being accused of belonging to the Socialist Party... or of adhering to Marxist ideology, and — after the summer war of 1994 — of sympathy for the separatists” [9, p. 104].

The heroine’s studies and lectureship at Sanaa University put her under the pressure that is exerted by Islamists on the student community and the education system in general. A three-day trip of the best graduates of a University department, male and female, to Aden caused a storm of indignation among Islamist students. “In the departmental mosque”, Farah tells, “after the noon prayer, they listened to a long sermon, the theme of which was our trip. They exaggerated every detail related to this trip incredibly, calling the very idea of the trip a crime, and the joint participation of male and female students in it a terrible sin. They made up an incredible lie about the excursion program... in which, allegedly, such things were happening — created by their sick imagination and stagnant mind — which normal people cannot even think of. Only those whose outlook is limited to the navel area and what is below can invent all this” [9, p. 68].

“Trips like this never happened again”, Farah goes on. “Even the trips necessary for the students of some departments, such as archaeology and geology, became extremely rare. If students went somewhere, it was somewhere nearby, a couple of hours” [9, p. 68].

About the university education decline, Farah says the following: “Students complain that the teachers do not lecture well and do not explain anything at all, and that textbooks are unavailable. Teachers complain about the students, who are not able to do anything without their help, as if teachers were the only source of knowledge, and about the students’ unwillingness to engage in independent research, and about the low level of the student work, which does not meet the requirements of university education [9, p. 159–160].

“Indeed, puzzling are those”, goes on Farah, “who return from abroad, from Arab and European countries where they received higher education. It is unclear why they accept the status quo, why they do not take any initiative to improve the situation, why they do not put forward any proposals. It is not clear why they only relentlessly scold our low level of education, which does not stand comparison with the level of those institutions from where they came, forgetting, or pretending to forget that they themselves are responsible for this low level. At the same time, their main desire is to find any opportunity to go abroad” [9, p. 160].

One of the major problems of Yemeni society that is touched upon in the novel is the traditionally marginal and oppressed status of women. This theme in the novel is represented primarily by the story of Farah’s failed marriage and by her striving to achieve a high academic level, which Yemeni women do not often achieve. However, Farah’s success in the academic field appears in the novel not as a result of her specific consciousness or of her outstanding efforts, but as a result of a lucky combination of circumstances.

As for the general socio-cultural situation in Yemen, presented in the novel with high credibility and much detail, it can be summarized by the following passage from the novel: “George, together with us, completed his studies at Sanaa University and decided to return home to Egypt. I asked him, ‘Why?’ He answered me with one phrase, simple and sincere, conveying everything that he had in his soul. In his pleasant Egyptian dialect, he said, ‘I cannot breathe here’. I didn’t ask him what prevented him from breathing in Yemen. I knew perfectly well what his answer would be” [9, p. 116].

In the preface to her second novel, *Submissive Wives* (*ʿAqīlāt*, 2009), Nadia al-Kawkabani writes: “I strive to come to something that could change many things that deprive both women and men of the right to freedom of choice — in the conditions of our public opinion, which imagines itself to be a deity, and everyone else to be its miserable slaves” [10, p. 7].

The novel is notable for its unconventional plot-and-composition structure. The heroine-narrator, a middle-aged woman named Roda, spends a night at the house of her female schoolmate Jud. In the morning, she starts reading Jud’s personal diary, which Jud intentionally left exposed before leaving for work. The diary is titled *ʿAqīlāt*, that is, “submissive wives”, as Roda learns by finding out the meaning of this rare Arabic word with the help of Google. It’s worth noting that the idea of the exceptional importance of the Internet for a modern person, especially a creative one, comes up repeatedly in the novel. Jud’s diary contains a collection of stories — mostly sad ones — of various women with whom Jud, headmaster of a school for girls, had a chance to communicate. As it becomes clear later, Jud decided to familiarize Roda with the diary, hoping that the latter, literary talented, would use the diary’s materials in writing short stories or a novel.

Meanwhile, Roda tells the reader the story of her friendship with Jud, about Jude’s unhappy love, about her own failed marriage (Roda is divorced, and her two daughters and son live with her ex-husband), about the relationship of her parents, about how she started writing the novel *Submissive Wives*. In this narration, much attention is paid to Yemeni social mores, to cultural, social and political problems of the country — exactly as it was in Nadia al-Kawkabani’s first novel. Roda touches upon such topics as the extradition of Yemeni immigrants from Saudi Arabia in 1990, the ostentatious piety of many Yemeni women, behind which their life disappointments are hidden, the negative attitude of Yemenis to women’s education, to women’s creativity, and to working women, the role of Muslim obscurantists in preserving the plight of women, the low level of the higher education in the country and the negligence of Yemeni students abroad, the corruption in the field of water and land use, and the revival of South Yemeni separatism in the 2000s.

There are also some scandalous stories of the time, which had received wide coverage in mass media. One such story is about the arrest in 2001 of a maniac who hid the bodies of the girls he killed in the morgue of the Medical Department of Sanaa University. Another story is about Yemeni girl Nujud (widely known as Nojood Ali), who was married off at the age of eight and — in an unprecedented way — managed to get divorced and in 2008 be designated by American women’s magazine “Glamour” as the Woman of the Year.

Interestingly, Roda discusses Nadia al-Kawkabani’s novel *Not More Than Love*, which she has read, and Jud in her diary outlines the contents of Nadia al-Kawkabani’s short story *Salute to Commemorate the Deprivation of Innocence* (*Alʿāb nāriyya li-ḥtifāl faḍḍ bikāra*), which has been translated to a number of European languages.

Very expressive and very typical for Yemen is the image of Roda’s father — characters of his kind can be found in many Yemeni works of fiction. Before the Revolution of 1962 in North Yemen, Roda’s father served as a private informant of a deputy of Imam Ahmad, the ruler of Yemen, and, using his position, practiced bribery. During the Revolution he readily gave away the treasures belonging to the former rulers to the new government. He did not participate in the fighting of the Civil War of 1962–1970, hiding all this time in his wife’s house, but after the war ended, he managed to convince the government of his personal “revolutionary merits” and by this gained access to governmental posts and

material resources. Dissatisfied with the theme that Roda has chosen for her novel *Submissive Wives*, he offers her to help him to write memoirs about his revolutionary struggle, but she refuses decisively.

Roda's narration of her life experience and life observations is followed by seventeen women's stories borrowed from Jud's diary, which are preceded by epigraphs — quotations from the works of Yemeni writers and poets. In this part of the novel, the author allows herself to be more explicit and shocking — perhaps because the narrator here is not Roda, who the reader may associate with Nadia al-Kawkabani, but fictional Jud.

This is what she writes about the role of some Muslim clerics in preserving archaic and barbarous social mores:

“...Therefore, he allowed himself to do with me what he had been doing since the moment I stopped being a child, that is, when I first began menstruating, which in our country means that I became a woman suitable for intimate relations — in full accordance with the opinion of the imam of one of the mosques, who expressed his views in a newspaper, objecting to the decision of the Parliament to prohibit marriage to persons under the age of seventeen” [10, p. 227].

And this is how marriage is often arranged in Yemen:

“She was ordered to leave school and prepare for the wedding in a month. And so she did. The cousin is ready. He returned from America with an engineering degree. He has paid a big *mahr*<sup>2</sup> and prepared a luxurious house for her. After all, and above all, he is her cousin, who will always appreciate her and give her everything she needs, which should not be expected from a stranger. What else does she need? Of course, nothing! In their opinion, of course, nothing. After all, her going to school was just entertainment. It was intended for the only purpose of preventing her feeling like a black sheep among other girls” [10, p. 151].

And this is what is said about the behavior of a typical Yemeni in the marital bed:

“The man, my friends, does not care at all whether the woman gets pleasure from him or not. He does not care about her needs, which in fact do not differ from his needs, since she consists of the same flesh, blood and desires as himself. Of the same three sacred things, which concern the man only to the extent that he himself admits. And a woman who has such a man, who, having barely poured his muck into her, freezes without breathing on the bed, has to run to the bathroom and, locking the door behind her, independently complete the task that he had to do. And while doing this, she must suppress the moans of pleasure in herself so that he does not hear how she satisfies her own desire, trying at the same time to match his idea that she is frigid and does not keep adultery even in her thoughts, because her body is indifferent to sex and does not need it” [10, p. 179–180].

Unlike many typical Yemeni characters and situations that are described in Jud's diary, it is only the desire of Nadia al-Kawkabani to shock the reader that can explain the presence of characters having sexual deviations or suffering from mental disorders that may occur in representatives of any society, not only the Yemeni society. There is, for example, a husband who did not fulfill his marital duty because he was homosexual (the story of N. J.). There are a pedophile relative, a pedophile imam of a mosque, and a sadist husband (the story of N. H.). There is a husband who worked abroad as a call boy and infected his young wife with AIDS, which caused her to commit suicide (the story of N. S.). There is, finally, a father who has raped his daughter for many years (the story of N. B.).

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<sup>2</sup> Mahr is the obligation, in the form of money or possessions paid by the groom, to the bride at the time of Islamic marriage (note by M. Suvorov).

The presence in the novel of these deviations and perversions, which are not, of course, characteristic of Yemeni society, may make the novel feel like yellow press for the reader.

In the final part of the novel, where Roda talks about how writing helped her overcome the depression that lasted for years and about the publication of the novel in Lebanon (with a description of the real design of the book's cover!), much attention is paid to the comparison of social mores in Yemen and in the West. This is because Roda meets her half-brothers, whose Italian mother Catherine escaped with them many years ago from Roda's father and returned to Italy. People's attitude to their work, to their public duties, to the state power, to other people — in all these aspects make the comparison not in favor of Yemen, which is evident even on the example of Roda's "Yemeni" and "Italian" brothers. It is funny that one of the "Italian" brothers, while making this comparison, says that the life of people in Italy is more consistent with the principles of Islam than the life of people in Yemen. Obviously, the writer, by this artificial endowment of the young man (who grew up in Italy and was raised by Christian mother) with knowledge of the principles of Islam, sought to emphasize her commitment to Islamic values, which the reader was about to doubt. And absolutely discouraging for the reader is the joy of Roda (who wrote about the "horrors" of a marriage concluded without prior close acquaintance between the future spouses), when she herself marries one of her daughters off to an "advanced" young Yemeni, educated in America and very fond of computers, but almost unknown to the girl, and marries her other daughter to a brother of this young man, also educated in America and, presumably, also "advanced". Of course, Roda (and Nadia al-Kawkabani) is not so naive as to believe that a person educated in America and fond of computers cannot be a homosexual, or a pedophile, or a sadist, or impotent, or a scoundrel, etc. Why then did Roda agree to marry her daughters off to guys who they all did not know closely? Apparently, Nadia al-Kawkabani simply could not figure out how Roda's daughters could get to know two young people intimately without violating Yemeni public morality and thereby discrediting Roda's (and Nadia's) honor. And in this case, one may suspect that everything stated in the novel was dictated not by the writer's conscious rejection of Yemeni social mores, but only by her desire to compose a kind of a thriller about Yemeni life, intended to shock the reader.

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The action in Nadia al-Kawkabani's third novel *My Sanaa* (*Sanā'ī*, 2013) [11] takes place in the capital of Yemen in 2009. The story is told by two protagonists, Subhiya (chapters 1, 3–5, 7, 9, 10, and 12) and Hamid (chapters 2, 6, 8, and 11).

Subhiya is an unmarried woman aged 35, a painter who owns a modest art salon located in the old part of Sanaa. Subhiya was born in Sanaa, but six months after her birth, she and her family moved to Cairo, where she spent 26 years. After the death of her father in 2000, Subhiya returned to Sanaa with her mother.

Hamid is a fifty-year-old retired police officer, a family man. He spent his childhood in the years of the Revolution and the Civil War in Northern Yemen, and he witnessed the 1967–1968 seventy-day blockade of Sanaa by the monarchists, during which his father lost his life defending the city.

Hamid's accidental visit to Subhiya's salon leads to their acquaintance, and a close relationship develops between them, which makes up one of the two main storylines

in the novel. Subhiya and Hamid are admirers of the architectural beauty and the general atmosphere of the old city of Sanaa, and their joint walks through its streets and neighborhoods contribute to the development of their feelings towards each other. This storyline occupies the first six chapters of the novel, after which it practically ends — due to the lovers' quarrel caused by Hamid's inadvertent tactlessness (he admitted that Subhiya may have had a love relationship with someone before). Subhiya makes the final decision to break off her relationship with Hamid after she is visited by a woman named Huriya, who tells her about her own long-standing love affair with Hamid, which has never been interrupted. Subhiya understands that Hamid will never break off his relationship with Huriya.

The second storyline, which prevails in the next four chapters, is driven by Subhiya's desire to find out what exactly caused her family to emigrate from Yemen to Egypt. Her parents had never given her any relevant explanation, and this question comes up again when she learns about her father's prominent role in the defense of the republican regime during the Civil War. This happens at a dinner party hosted by the administration of the President of Yemen and intended to honor the veterans of the Revolution and the Civil War, as well as the children of those veterans who are no longer alive. Hamid also is among those invited to the party. Subhiya's desire to learn more details of her father's participation in the defense of Sanaa during the seventy-day blockade makes her agree to a date with Hamid, who is a witness of those events. Hamid tells her in great detail everything he knows about the defense of Sanaa, including his childhood memories (the story takes 10 pages of the text!). In particular, Hamid explains that soon after the blockade was lifted, in August 1968, a conflict arose in the ranks of the Republicans. The essence of this conflict still raises a lot of questions and discussions.

As a result of Subhiya's participation in the President's party, she gets acquainted with Ghamdan, a son of a late veteran who served with Subhiya's father in one airborne assault unit. Ghamdan tells Subhiya about the conflict that arose in the ranks of the Republicans after the blockade was lifted (Ghamdan's monologue occupies 21 pages of the text!). The essence of that conflict, in his opinion, was the struggle for the right to determine the future path of the country. The struggle was between progressive forces, represented, for the most part, by migrants from Lower Yemen<sup>3</sup>, who were the real defenders of Sanaa, and reactionaries, who fled the city at the very beginning of its blockade. The reactionaries won the conflict, and those members of the losing side who were not killed and did not manage to escape were thrown into prison. Subhiya's father was among them. Ghamdan also tells Subhiya about his own miserable childhood after his father was killed in this conflict and his mother married another man.

Ghamdan tells Subhiya about one more hero of the defense of Sanaa, the valiant paratrooper Abdo Said, who disappeared from their neighborhood, where he lived, immediately after the events of August 1968. Ghamdan met this man ten years later, barely recognizing him in a half-crazed old man living in the city cemetery of Sanaa.

Continuing his story, Ghamdan says that the 1977 assassination of the President of North Yemen, Ibrahim al-Hamdi, who set a course for democratic transformation, was carried out by the same forces that won the 1968 conflict. These forces, represented by North Yemeni tribal leaders, have ruled the country up to these days.

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<sup>3</sup> Lower Yemen is the southernmost part of North Yemen, occupied by the provinces of Ibb and Taizz.



Subhiya's mother, being aware of her daughter's interest in the events of the seventy-day blockade, gives her the papers of her late father, which include many photographs and observations related to the Civil War. Among these papers there are more than a hundred copies of a brief biography of Abd al-Raqib Abd al-Wahhab, a hero of the Civil War, commander of the airborne assault units. He was the military leader of the losing side in the conflict of 1968 and was killed in Sanaa in early 1969. The father's view of what exactly happened in August 1968 completely corresponds to what Subhiya learned from Ghamdan. In his opinion, the majority of books, written by Yemenis about the Civil War, present falsifications of the history of those years. In a letter her father tells about his detention and imprisonment in the central prison of Sanaa. He describes unbearable prison life and the administration's abuse of the prisoners. After fifteen months of imprisonment he was released; no charges had been brought against him. However, not feeling himself safe in North Yemen, he immediately left for Aden, the capital of South Yemen, which had gained independence from Britain by that time. After some time in Aden, he picked up his family from Sanaa and moved with them to Cairo.

Having read this letter, Subhiya has no questions left; she is only shocked by everything she learned. And at this point the novel ends.

Remarkably, the two outlined storylines in the novel have little relation to each other and could have made up two independent works. This suggests that the basis of the novel for the writer herself was not these two lines, but a third, which is hinted at in the title of the novel. This third storyline is represented by numerous, sometimes very extensive digressions devoted to various aspects of the history and culture of Sanaa. One may assume that Nadia al-Kawkabani intended, in the first place, to write a novel about the city itself, about its history and culture.

Among these digressions are stories about the political history of the city, about the history of the city's infrastructure, about the traditional architecture of Sanaa, about family and marriage traditions, about the traditions of visiting baths (7 pages of the text!) and family gatherings, about the traditions of the month of Ramadan, about beliefs and legends of Sanaa, about local cuisine, about traditional women's clothing and criteria of feminine beauty, about local songs and dances, etc. This focus on the city, which, perhaps, is the central image in the novel, is manifested, among other things, in the author's constant use of the epithet *Sanaani* (i. e. of Sanaa) — even for those objects and phenomena which are most likely common for all Yemeni cities.

It should be noted, however, that most of these digressions resemble in their style references from popular encyclopedias, which do not present any “visual” image — contrary to what is generally accepted in fiction. In this sense, Nadia al-Kawkabani's narrative manner is very close to a journalistic one, which is very characteristic of another Yemeni novel writer, Habib Saruri<sup>4</sup>.

Besides, Nadia al-Kawkabani has an inclination for telling the reader everything she herself is interested in, despite the requirements of the harmony of the plot. For example, one can assume that Huriya's story about her relationship with Hamid (11 pages of the text!) was introduced in the narrative with the only purpose of telling the reader about the Yemeni women's plight and about some piquant details of their first sexual experience. Indeed, this long story adds nothing to the story of relationship between Subhiya and Hamid.

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<sup>4</sup> About Habib Saruri see [12].

In her introduction to the anthology of Arab women's short stories, Dalya Kohen-Mor identifies eight themes typical for these stories. These are: "the experience of growing up female in traditional Arab society", "the mysteries of love and sexuality", "gender relations", "the institution of marriage", "the issue of childbearing", "the issue of self-fulfillment", "the impact of custom and tradition on the lives of women", and "the improvement in the status and lifestyle of Arab women" [1, p. 8–17].

In Nadia al-Kawkabani's novels, all these themes are touched upon repeatedly, in relation to various characters, and at times seem even redundant for the general plot. But practically none of them is represented in these novels by a detailed story with a sufficient degree of sentiment and psychologism.

One may assume that the mentioned themes receive convincing coverage in literature if they relate directly to the heroine-narrator, in whose consciousness they occupy a significant part. However, the main feature of Nadia al-Kawkabani's female protagonists is that they all are, in fact, a reflection of the personality of the writer herself, who is successful in her professional work, in literary writing, and, apparently, in her personal life. For the most part, these female protagonists tell about the typical problems of Yemeni women as external narrators, and not as people who have experienced these problems themselves. The heroines practically do not have to challenge society and to make moral choices. Even some failures in the heroines' personal lives (Farah's failed marriage, Roda's failed marriage and her separation from her children, Subhiya's quarrel with Hamid) do not occupy much place in the narrative. The description of the heroines' love feelings is quite schematic and does not touch the reader much. Moreover, the reader may notice the writer's obvious caution in discussing sexual and other sensitive "feminist" topics, especially in relation to the female protagonist, who may be associated by the reader with the author herself.

What does occupy much place in Nadia al-Kawkabani's novels is culture and history of Yemen, and, first of all, sharp criticism of the sociopolitical situation in modern Yemen. The narrative, like in many male writers' novels, is dominated by sociopolitical issues, which Nadia al-Kawkabani discusses in detail and to which she turns at every opportunity, easily leaving "feminist" themes aside. Besides, there is nothing in Nadia al-Kawkabani's novels that "appears like a puzzle to the reader", to use Yusuf Idris's expression.

In conclusion, it should be said that it hasn't been without purpose that the article has been titled *Woman and Yemen...* not *Woman in Yemen...* After all, despite the fact that the protagonists in Nadia al-Kawkabani's novels are women, it cannot be said that Yemen as a whole interests the writer less than the fates of Yemeni women. On the contrary, one may argue that Yemen in her novels prevails over the "feminist" issue.

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## Женщина и Йемен в трех романах Надии ал-Каукабани (Йемен)

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Среди литературоведов идет дискуссия о том, пишут ли современные арабские писательницы иначе, чем их коллеги-мужчины. Некоторые исследователи утверждают, что у писательниц есть свои характерные заботы и проблемы, обусловленные их специфическим положением и жизненным опытом в мусульманском обществе, которые определяют не только тематический спектр их произведений, но и особую, иногда «завуалированную» манеру их литературного самовыражения. Большая часть этой дискуссии основана на работах известных писательниц из Египта, Ливана, Палестины, Сирии, Северной Африки, иногда Саудовской Аравии и арабских государств Персидского залива. Йемену в этой дискуссии, как и в литературоведческих исследованиях в целом, до сих пор не уделялось должного внимания. В настоящей статье рассматривается, в какой степени эта предполагаемая женская, или «феминистская», манера письма проявляется в произведениях йеменки Надии ал-Каукабани, автора рассказов и романов, которая является одной из самых плодовитых писательниц в своей стране. В трех ее романах: «Всего лишь любовь» (2006), «Покорные жены» (2009) и «Моя Сана» (2013) — многократно затрагиваются «феминистские» темы, но практически ни одна из них не воплощена в развернутом сюжете, обладающем достаточной степенью сентиментальности и психологизма. Напротив, в этих романах очень большое внимание уделяется культуре и современной истории Йемена, и

в повествовании, как это бывает во многих произведениях писателей-мужчин, преобладают вопросы социально-политического характера. Можно утверждать, что Йемен как таковой в романах Нади ал-Каукабани преобладает над женским вопросом.  
*Ключевые слова:* арабский роман, Йемен, Надия ал-Каукабани, феминизм.

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