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# **Ghanem's *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba*: Rereading Violence in the Shadows of Dictatorship**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Designating Ghanem's *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba* as a Yemeni-Canadian novel, the current study examines the author's political, cultural, and social preoccupations with his homeland, Yemen. As an immigrant writer in Canada, he describes the horrific violence, injustice, corruption, and exploitation that have destroyed the entire country. The rereading of violence in the shadows of tyranny is the novelist's perspective to probe into the problematic roots of Arab Spring and the confidential reality of the past events that lead to the ghastly current consequences. Bringing out the novel's political concerns, the investigation employs many fictional characters and incidents from the novel within their historical contexts. It concludes that the story is a resistant discourse project that conveys the neglected voice of the unprivileged Yemenis to the world.

**Keywords:** *Ghanem; Yemeni-Canadian novel; political corruption; violence; Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the wake of the Arab Spring, a new wave of the Arab diaspora occurred across the countries stormed by political upheavals, conflicts, and

even civil wars. Yemen is no exception. The recent political catastrophes have added burdens to the country afflicted with an unending array of disorders, including poverty, corruption, internal conflicts, external interventions, and tribal

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backward hegemony. The Arab Spring revolutions, however, note to the prior political instability in the region, causing many enlightened activists and liberal writers to evade the oppression of totalitarian regimes and find in exile a one-way escape to survival. Qais Ghanem [1] is one of those emerging Yemeni writers who settled down in Canada to look back on a collapsing homeland and interrogate the possibilities of its embittered history at a moment it was delving into a critical turning point. Being a revolutionary political activist, Ghanem figures out a fictional world set against corrupt politics, dictatorial despotism, and a self-serving regime in Yemen. Such political preoccupations never distract the author from criticising the social and cultural manners to raise people's awareness. His obligation to make radical amendments contextualises his writing within the broader framework of Arab political literature [2,3].

Political literature represents a dominating trend in contemporary Arab writing because enlightened Arab writers have been doomed to exile due to their liberal ideas against the region's repressive regimes. The Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf [4] confirms this fact by listing many political reasons such as "repression, insecurity, poverty, and lack of opportunity" (p. 38) that have ensued displacement and diaspora. The displaced Arab writers have furious desires for homecoming, but they cannot work their path a reconnect to their roots due to the above political factors. Hence, homeland issues have always been a progressive theme persisting in the people's collective memory across the generations. Like his Arab peers, Ghanem finds exile as a way to escape a seriously debilitating location brimming with social problems, different maladies, misuse of power, corruption, discrimination, poverty, wars, and redundancy. Brought together, the above issues reflect the extent to which Ghanem's novels are imbued with political concerns. Nevertheless, his treatment of political themes tends to be innovative rather than traditional.

Traditionally, the political novel was associated with the conflict of ideas and oppressor-oppressed relationships. Many authoritative critical voices such as Speare [5], Fisher, Howe [6], Gordon [7], Blotner [8] and Spender relate the political novel to the events taking place and characters moving within political environments. Morris Edmund Speare [5] refers to political fiction as "ideas' than to emotions, dealing with

"the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given legislation." (1924, p. ix) He adds that the most important motivation of the writer is "partly propaganda or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or the forces which constitute governments" (p. 24). The above designation fits with the fictional setting of great novelists like Joseph Conrad, Benjamin Disraeli Stendhal, Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and V. S. Naipaul. Many contemporary trends in political writing, however, tend to shift the focus from those direct relationships to the lives of ordinary people whose tragic torments are ensued by some political agencies in the background.

In his book *The Political Novel: Re-Imagining the Twentieth Century*, Stuart A. Scheingold [9] comes up with a trope of the political novel referred to as "novels of political estrangement" which, in his words, "engage not with political processes and institutions but instead with those who are subjected to, but have little or no say in the decisions made by authoritative agencies on their behalf — and too often at their expense" (p. 1). This is a type of fictional setting viewed from the perspective of characters whose lack of any active agency presents them as the victims of hideous political authorities. Typical examples of such a genre can be recognized in the protagonists of writers including Franz Kafka, Dostoevsky, Joseph Heller, Elie Wiesel, Pat Barker, Russell Banks, etc. Scheingold [9] confirms this point,

*"novels of political estrangement shift attention from political actors and institutions to the general public — ordinary people whose agency has been appropriated by autocratic regimes, by bureaucratic institutions and by professionals with the expertise to colonize consciousness."* (p. 2).

By and large, Ghanem's novel re-imagines history from the viewpoint of many oppressed characters who struggle to work their way out of a tragic existence. But, since his goal has to convey the dilemma of an unfamiliar nation to the world, Ghanem incorporates allusions to historical figures and incidents to make the story more realistic.

Although there has been no such category as a Yemen-Canadian novel, the term is used in the

present study to frame Ghanem's sensibility as distinct from any other Canadian immigrant writing. The writer locates his country in the contemporary English Canadian literary mosaic. His text is Canadian, but his context is about Yemen with all its dystopic realities. Therefore, the novelist addresses the dilemma of his country and its traumatic history by representing a love story. The dark image Ghanem depicts of Yemen gives many clues that the adverse effects on the unprivileged strata of society, especially on women and the powerless, by corrupt political regimes can produce horrific political facts. Sherrill Wark (Canadian author) comments in the novel cover the western voice;

*"the author takes us on a journey of mystery, passion, and risk amidst a backdrop of things amazing to the Western mind. Death is waiting around every curve, in every whisper, and every kiss."*

*The Arabic diasporic voice of Tahani Shihab, among many other critics and readers, has a similarnote , amazingly stating that you will not be able to put this book down once you start reading it, enticed by the writer's versatility in crafting the story with tact and competence. "As a Yemeni woman, I'm proud of my heritage; she feels genuine in this novel" (the novel's back cover).*

Being concerned with the political conditions of the author's homeland, the present study examines the fictional characters and incidents in light of historical facts and genuine political relationships that set the backdrop of events. It enquires the novel's re-imagined history based on the new-historicist methods of Gallagher and Greenblatt [10]. While highlighting the incidents and characters corresponding to the historical ones, the study reads the relationship of the main characters of the novel in terms of their political agency, provided that it envisions an alternative understanding of the nation's history whereby a voice is given to the marginalised.

## 2. GHANEM: THE UNREQUITED LOVER

As an exile, Ghanem is a writer whose love for the motherland is not appreciated as long as it is usurped by Claudius-like statesmen. It gives clue to his profound preoccupation with a home that fails to reward that love with a good space to live. Born in Aden, Yemen, Qais Ghanem resided in different countries such as Britain, the USA, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates, and Canada

47 years ago. He shifted his interest from medicine to literature to be the author of three novels. His first novel, *Final Flight from Sana'a* [11], introduces the writer's initial obsessions, which become more evident later. *Two Boys from Aden College* [12] proves his remembrance and loyalty to his school and criticises corruption on the other side. *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba* (2014), the third novel, probes different social and political aspects of Yemeni society. He is also the co-author of a non-fiction book, *My Arab Spring My Canada* [13], which casts light on his sentimental affiliation to people's causes. His radio show "Dialogue with Diversity" won four national awards. In 2015, his name was listed among the 25 top immigrants to Canada. He is frequently invited to speak on several different issues. Throughout his writing, it is evident how he devotes his life to serving humanity, human rights, gender equality, fighting corruption, and reforming the political system of his homeland.

In his debut novel, *Final Flight from Sana'a* [11], Qais Ghanem draws the political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of his writing that sum up his fight against injustice, all types of corruption, and commercial/financial exploitation. The author is preoccupied with current issues that destroy the whole nation. His writing challenges the existing illiteracy, introducing the protagonists or the notable characters as doctors who can diagnose people's illnesses and society's maladies. In the novel under focus, he politically and critically attacks the autocrat's monopoly of power with the help of self-interested statesmen who never scruple to commit inhuman crimes against the community. The author encourages and promotes individual rebellion against the measures implemented by the regime to restrict freedom. Basically, the novel narrates a story of love that hides beneath stories of oppression and injustice. The fictional characters, as well as relationships, render real and symbolic images of contemporary Yemen, although the title refers to its ancient kingdom.

## 3. POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN *FORBIDDEN LOVE IN THE LAND OF SHEBA*

The relevance of the book's title comes from resurrecting the ancient kingdom's historical and political position in order to contrast Sheba's golden period and cultural heritage with her current decline. The writer seeks to contrast the prosperity and goodness of a prior female monarch with the corruption and filthy politics of male cliques now by adopting a moniker that

symbolises a historical space of tremendous civilisation. The title of the work, "Forbidden Love," focuses on the outcome of various unlawful political connections that have resulted in destruction and continual turmoil in the land of Sheba to this day. Sheba is the ancient and major country referenced in numerous religious sources, including the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the Quran, which tells the account of Saba or Sheba, a South Arabian civilisation. Kenneth Kitchen [14], who dates the kingdom to between 1200 BCE and 275 CE with Ma'ribas its capital, emphasises the Yemeni queen's political success in building a huge empire (n. p.).

As a result, the historical allusion in the novel's title and text demonstrates how new-historicism can work alongside other techniques of rereading the text in context. It's the concept of gathering information from ordinary people to create a history. Here, the novelist offers a fictionalised version of history that shows how hegemony has impacted the middle class and women. Ghanem's way of historicising the text is to examine the story's political essence by referencing the history of ancient civilisations; namely that of Sheba. This allows him to situate his fictional setting and theme concepts in their right historical context. Taking this into mind, the word "Sheba" is used throughout the narrative to represent the vast Arabic history and culture passed down from the ancient kingdom whose ruins can still be seen in Yemen's heartland. This attempt also draws numerous parallels between fictitious events and people and Ghanem's sociopolitical relationships and intended audience. The analysis is divided into four categories to make the approach to the novel's political violence more orderly.

#### **4. INSTITUTIONALIZED CRIME AND CORRUPTION**

The image of the state depicted in the novel resonates with Winston Churchill's idea of the modern dystopic state corrupted by "the destabilization of democracy and the emergence of totalitarian regimes in which state prerogatives overrode political agency and made a mockery of accountability" (quoted by Scheingold, [9]). Accordingly, the political corruption in Yemen, as drawn by Ghanem, assumes a totalitarian grip over legitimate authority, religion and tradition that restrict the creativity of the individual and constrain the social and educational system. The novelist uncovers how authority is full of corrupt

cliques who seek their interests even if that leads to the destruction of the educational system. This is also the view of Al-Aghberi [15] who, diagnosing the Arab political regimes, comes up with the analogy that "the autocrat is but the iceberg hiding beneath the real base of the authoritarian regime" (p. 821).

The political setting against which the events of the novel are cast is sombrelly coloured by the institutionalized crime practised by the corrupt government described as a "giant octopus of crime and corruption?" [1]. The governmental violence is additionally practised indirectly by weakening the law in front of powerful individuals and bodies who can violate it and practise their authority to, and even beyond, its limits. Being referred to as "octopus", suggests its complicated network and multiple arms imparting the corrupt government with immunity against any potential attempts at reform.

Yemen has a history of political unrest. The political conflicts lead to the assassination of statesmen and even presidents ensuing in the persistent state of volatility and instability. Allegiances to external and internal influential powers make the members of the same political regime prone to conspiracies and self-interested calculations. The novel points out this political status when it referred to some junctures in the recent history of the country when the "previous two Presidents had been assassinated by people within their own circle" [1]. This is further confirmed intertextually by quoting the famous statement of President Saleh that "being President in this country is like dancing on the heads of snakes" (ibid, p. 119). Saleh's above statement is made at a crucial moment of the country's political history when he had to cope with the public rebellions against his regime, which had lasted for over three decades. Being on the top of such a regime for a long period makes Saleh experienced enough to handle all matters sophisticatedly and build a powerful network of allies and loyalties around. Following the 'divide and rule policy, Saleh has to govern with an alert insight and play on the contradictory inclinations of the political parties, religious sects, tribal forces, and even individual ambitions. His regime ends up as a totalitarian system where the statesmen are allowed to be corrupt so that their loyalty can be ensured. The novel, therefore, does not exaggerate when it describes the systematic governmental prostitution, "everyone in the cabinet is sleeping around with a mistress" [1]. The dark records of the cabinet

members are kept in store to make public in case a member chooses to stand out of the group or criticise any of the regime's policies. One can wonder how reminiscent the real situation of Yemenis to the fictional one of Oceania in Orwell's novel 1984.

The political network of crime and corruption engages a large number of statesmen, tribal sheikhs, businessmen, and military leaders in a wide spectrum of illegal deeds, ". . . from arms sales to alcohol . . . and . . . maybe cocaine sales, to prostitution, to human trafficking and this whole story involving the girl, Fatan, and murder for harvesting kidneys and other organs" [1]. Women are the most victimized since they are trapped in multiple exploitation, beginning with prostitution, rape, and addiction, "[They get] addicted to sniffing jasmine flowers. . . [but in reality] snorting cocaine" (ibid, p. 65). Yet, the female body, which has been used all along to satisfy the desire of the horny criminals, ends up at the mortuary as for-sale parts, the proceeds of which go to the pockets of the same criminals. Hana, whose husband is part of the above network, expresses her sense of estrangement, "I'm living with organized crime, and I'm not allowed to know what's going on" (ibid, p. 51). Regardless of the feminist stance that Hana might represent, her voice suggests the dilemma of the vulnerable people who lack any political agency.

Standing out as an iceberg, Gihad hides beneath a wide base of officially criminal network allied by illegal business and mutual interests. In a talk with his cousin Farook, Hamed reveals how they manage the business with rapacious corruption everywhere: "Gihad knows them. Members of the ruling class, senior military officers, senior judges . . .", "You mean senior judges are corrupt, too?" Hamed replies, "Sure" (ibid, p. 35). When the judicial system is afflicted with political corruption, none of the dystopian elements can be exempted. Again, Farook and Hamed's talk highlights the represented dystopia where corruption is governing every sector. Farook discloses, "I hear that there's a lot of bribery and corruption in the import-export business" and Hamed conformingly states, "Oh, yeah. In Yemen, there's corruption in everything . . . maybe even in medicine?" (ibid, p. 34). It is commonly known that justice and health systems represent the final refuge for those who complain of social and physical maladies respectively. In this context, however, they cannot help because they simply are part of the problem. No wonder

then, in such degrading and inhuman circumstances if the organs of the people, whose basic rights are confiscated, can be trafficked. The novel talks about the "illegal sale of organs" taken from "poor people, those who need money to eat" and the "victims of road traffic accidents" [1]. Causally, even the willing act of selling one's organ is deemed to lack the free will since there is hardly any option left for poor people who are not so much to blame as the entire socio-political system pushes them into committing it.

Apart from the institutionalized form of the above crimes, their significance arises from the locale where they take place. Taking into account the conservative and religious nature of the Yemeni society, one cannot avoid the shocking effect resulting from the fact that the fictional events of the novel are derived from historical ones. Afflicted with the same sense of disgusting amazement, Farook wonders, "My hair is standing on end. That such a thing can happen in this Muslim country is just unbelievable. I don't know what to say... but the description of one of those bastards seems to fit Gihad" (ibid, p. 69). In addition to his heroic role which endows the novel with an optimistic tone, Farook carries forth the readers' sensibility as well as its undercurrents on the moral collapse and secret hair-raising crimes.

## 5. CHAUVINISTIC VIOLENCE

At the social level, the novel depicts a horrible image of a husband-wife relationship. It is sufficient to have a look at Gihad-Hana relationship to understand the nature of the broken law and violated values in the Yemeni context where a wife can be easily punished with murder, "Gihad might kill me" (ibid, p. 48). Hana's life is not her own as Gihad, her chauvinistic husband, might kill her upon any trivial fault committed consciously or unconsciously. She re-enacts the role of the duchess in Browning's "My Last Duchess" with Gihad assuming the Duke of Ferrara's queer position to suspect, sentence, and execute her upon a triviality. To Hana, the marital relationship is no more than an existential entrapment: "I'm trapped in this marriage . . . I feel I'm in real danger" (ibid, p. 51). The real danger she feels unfolds when Hana is the subject of her husband's physical aggression which could be detected on her body, "All those blue marks were made by his fist" (ibid, p. 12).

Regardless of its familial nature, Gihad's treatment of Hana is deep-rooted in the

chauvinistic beliefs and practises of the regime's privileged people. That is why the situation gets worse when Hana tries to set herself free or even question the torture she has to endure, "that's when the bruises began, it's become routine. It's as if he uses violence to pre-empt any nosy question from me" [1]. Standing for the helpless oppressed, Hana is further silenced by Jihad, the oppressor, who epitomizes the violent force practised by the political clique. Her voice as well as annoying questions are seen to subvert the authority that Jihad strives to keep up. Broadly speaking, the fierce marital relationship of Jihad and Hana underlines the dilemma afflicting the Yemeni people excluding the ruling groups whose existence feeds on maintaining that status quo.

The sexist violence assumes a cross-cultural form when Alayma, the Indian nurse working as Dr. Farook's medical assistant, is subject to sexual exploitation. She is additionally forced to suppress what is happening to her till it reaches a point that it can never be kept as a secret any long. At a crucial moment, she blurted out to Dr. Farook justifying her need to stop the work and leave to Bangalore, India, "I am pregnant," "by your cousin, who is also my sponsor, and your landlord . . . a horny millionaire who can buy anyone and everyone" (ibid, p. 28). Alayma's decision to leave the country gives clue to the paralysed justice system by which the victim's oppression multiplies. For, she is too helpless to reveal the identity of her exploiter due to the latter's authority supported by institutionalized political corruption. To survive, therefore, she has to flee the entire scene of a crime that even if she literally leaves behind, yet it would be born, grow up, and keep her trauma afresh. Alayma is a case in point of a female's dilemma arising from the fateful combination of being a woman who happens to exist in the wrong place.

## 6. MEDICAL COLLEGE MASSACRE

The fictional account of *The Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba* is based on an incident that occurred in 1999 at Sana'a University's Medical College. The crime committed by dishonest decision-makers left the entire town in a state of shock. Nonetheless, the trial was abruptly ended by the execution of one foreigner technician who was used as a scapegoat to conceal the identities of many corrupt politicians and state officials involved in various crimes such as prostitution, organ trafficking, and weapons trafficking. Through various dialogue in separate chapters, the striking politics and corruption in

the ruling class, senior military officers and senior judges are strongly driven to shed light on current issues that lead the country to fall apart.

The medical college massacre, in which many innocent female students lost their lives, is a turning point in the corruption of the political system of the time. The crime looms large in the background setting of the novel due to its centrality to the media reports and public attention, "A lot of talk in the street that there have been about a dozen female medical students who have disappeared" [1]. In addition to revealing the degrading, materialist downfall of the self-serving lobby, the incident is intended to eradicate the enlightened movement of female literacy in a society where there is "near fifty-percent illiteracy rate in the country" (ibid, p. 79). Many families revised their consent to girls' education upon hearing the media reports on the horrible fate of the medical college women students.

The tribal nature of the community represents a congenial environment for violence against women where even the severest sexual crimes can go undisturbed and even unheeded. Families prefer keeping the disappearance of their slaughtered daughters secret to coping with the disgrace arising from the questions on the circumstances of their disappearance. For, the several possibilities are often overshadowed by a single conclusion of elopement. The criminal, therefore, finds no difficulty in carrying out the genocide against the victims exploiting their families' willing silence to avoid disrepute. After her disappearance, Fatan, the poor girl is accused of being a "loose girl – maybe a prostitute – and she and her Iranian girlfriend were on drugs" (ibid, p. 75). Her death uncovers the fact "about a dozen medical students who have disappeared" (ibid, p. 76). Hence, the girls are victimized by a very complicated machinery in which the weird goals of the persecutor join hands with coward social system wherein a girl's life is easily sacrificed for the family's name. In Yemen, it is a big shame to inform the authority about the loss of their girls. "The father had no choice but to keep quiet in the end. He didn't want half of the population of Yemen to know that he was unable to avenge his honour" (ibid, p. 67). Fatan's mother, being a Palestinian, is the one who searches about and discovers the murder of her daughter as one of many girl victims. To the deluded families, the biased rumours might justify every detail about the crime except the victims' ignorable innocence.

The told terrible crime, however, encompasses multible untold ones in which many statesmen were involved. Osman, the morgue technician was held as a scapegoat. In the beginning, the accused Osman denied raping, murdering and even participating in any crimes, "I never raped either of them, and I didn't kill them" (ibid, p. 86) stating that his duty was only "to receive such bodies from the hospital emergency room . . . and dispose of them according to the instructions of my superiors" (ibid, p. 85). Finally, Osman, who stands in reality for Mohammed Adam, admits:

*"I concluded that I must seek forgiveness from Allah, and secondly, from the families of the women I have harmed, for I've done horrible things to them and committed acts against my principles and Islam". [1]*

Consequently, he accounts for the several crimes he has done one by one, not in a group and how he has raped and strangled each girl before cutting and getting rid of the corpses. His confession, however, is questionable. How did one person manage to commit many crimes in such a setting? Moreover, is it credible that many professors did not discover or observe their technician's gruesome work? How is it possible for one to indulge in this kind of brutality simply? The main question is: How did Captain Tahhan succeed to bury this scandal literally? How Captain Tahhan tricks the lab technician into confessing that he is the criminal and he would rescue him. He said, "but we can stage a false execution" (ibid, p. 103). The way this technician confesses is unbelievable because they threaten to harm his wife, daughter and the whole family.

Here, we have a case in which a corrupt government is a part of "the ring of the murder and sale of organs, and the prostitution?" (ibid, p. 98). They have the power to choose and replace the prosecutor and judge, as well as change the country's regulations and laws, as they have done by allowing the senior trial judge, Abdul-Hameed, to take an extended vacation to undergo prostate surgery abroad and appointing a new younger judge, Qadhi Omar Babili, to oversee the trial (ibid, p. 107). Similarly, the book depicts the role of the brave Kenyan mortuary technician's defence lawyer and how he was slain together with his wife and three children in a filthy manner in order to conceal the hand of the real criminal statesmen in numerous unsolved crimes linked to the main story. The enormity of the crime in the land of injustice eventually fades into vagueness.

Based on collective and personal experience, the novel offers a new concept of politics. To do so, the author attempts to transform historical accounts by interrogating the dominant ruling group's formal political narrative and allowing the subaltern voice to speak for itself, as in the case of the above crime, Hana and the Indian nurse Alyama, Fatan's mother, and many others who oppose hegemony. This project pushes social and cultural boundaries, re-establishes religious equality for men and women, and shares the anguish and suffering of the majority who have been marginalised by the oppressive regime. The novelist reveals the realities of the powerful and influential, as well as how ineffectual people's struggle to express themselves is in the face of the customary concept of accepting their current condition without saying anything. For example, during a conversation between Jihad and Dr. Farook, Jihad cautions his cousin to refrain from participating in the trials of those female medical students, saying, "Compared to him, you're small fry" in comparison to this "great octopus of crime" [1]. Despite his criminal cousin Jihad's threats, Dr Farook testifies in court with the victims' – medical students, saying, "It is my business when you fuck my nurse and make her pregnant and then have to deport her before your half-Indian bastard is born." (ibid, p. 99).

## 7. LOVE AS A POWER OF RESISTANCE

The novel's treatment of love is allegorical and ironic. Among the numerous illegal actions, Farooq-Hana love is solely forbidden. In spite of its illicit nature, this relationship is sympathetic and creative. It stands out in contrast to the variable – not forbidden – crimes with which the land of Sheba is afflicted and which wreak havoc upon man and nation. This suggestive irony may point out the significance of the novel's title. In the land of Sheba, all types of violence, rape, and aggression against women are not labeled as forbidden, but love is. From a different perspective, the love which is forbidden might be the love of the motherland provided that the state's upper strata are in love with nothing but personal gain. Regardless of the identity of the beloved, the lover, Dr. Farook, epitomizes a candle of love fighting against huge masses of hatred and darkness.

The novelist's brilliance lies in his portrayal of Dr. Farook as a saviour with multiple important goals: to save his cousin, Hana, from that brutal and criminal world, to inspect the dead body of one of the victimised students at the university

hospital morgue, to testify at the trial of the suspected Kenyan morgue attendant, and to resist the oppressive authority and police. Through his various heroic roles, Dr. Farook represents the individual championship in an imbalanced war against the forces of darkness. To deal with the cruel and violent machinery of corruption, his gentle power of resistance employs every frail tool at his disposal.

Ghanem's strategy of resistance is built on the self-realization and evolved thoughts of the main characters. As a result, the tale begins with Hana contemplating suicide by taking sleeping pills, but Dr. Farook and his Indian nurse intervene and save her life. She reveals her husband and brother Hameed's intimate connection with arms trafficking, gang rapes, and murder for organ harvesting from female medical students as she retells her memories and situations. The writer then tracks the ups and downs of his community and their impact on history formation throughout the work, allowing readers to notice the fears and critiques throughout, but with no offered solution to the stated difficulties.

The plot of the work is developed through reversal shifts in power relations between Hana, the repressed wife, and her powerful, unscrupulous, and violent husband Gihad. While Gihad is undergoing treatment for a major brain hemorrhage in the intensive care unit, Hana and Farook engage in forbidden love and flee. Hana needs to flee the "Land of Sheba" because she is afraid of Gihad's return or Hameed, her husband's brother, who is planning to kill her in order to obtain all of his partner's inheritance because she does not have the right to inherit without her husband's children. A fragile lady like Hana can only hope to survive in a such patriarchal environment with the support of a man like Farook. Given the novel's political subtext, Dr. Farook's support for Hana might be compared to the situation in Yemen, where the government needs a strong leader like Farook to reclaim what has been lost. The *Forbidden Love* is considered one of the best political books in Canadian literature because it combines an immortal love tale with a serious attempt to improve the government and civil systems. On the one hand, Hana and her beloved Dr. Farook share an extraordinary and indescribable love. On the other side, there is an amazing new public consciousness about the necessity to battle for the nation's misplaced political freedom. Hana's forced marriage to her overweight, harsh, enormous cousin, which

depresses her, is akin to the usurpation of power and money that might one day be returned to its rightful owner. Hana, on the other hand, has married her true love, Dr. Farook, and traveled abroad with him towards the end of the tale. The country, on the other hand, is dying at the hands of local criminals who are aided by foreign weaponry, politics, and support.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this paper explores Ghanem's discursive history of Yemen from several political and social viewpoints. The characters' resistance and conflict with the prevailing political and historical hegemony are accounted for by an exile whose critique springs from great love and concern for a collapsing homeland. By recalling the variable scenes of violence, oppression, injustice, and even love from his country, he invites the reader to ponder the unnoticed dystopic present of a nation with a great past. The heinous abuse of power for many decades by a corrupt regime marks the nihilistic pattern of criminalising politics and politicising crime. The novel derives its significance from the current prolonged dilemma of the country which becomes a theatre and a battlefield for civil wars and intersecting disputes controlled by universal and local forces and players. Therefore, the author sheds light on the existential abyss to which the nation and the weak people are prone from the outset in the scene of the attempt to commit suicide by the female protagonist due to the inability to cope up with oppressive politics locally and globally. The above insights note to how Ghanem's challenges to the political hegemony assume multiple forms: giving the subaltern narrative of historical incidents, imparting the marginalized with a resistance agency, and making love win against the powers of darkness.

Although poetic justice is not achieved, an optimistic note is suggested through the protagonist, Dr. Farook. The author endows him with a firm faithfulness to medical ethics and harsh scrutiny of aspects of Yemeni culture. Dr. Farook, stands as a symbol of the collective consciousness by revealing the corrupt people's involvement in the unreasonable fraud stories supported by the political regime. Without his relationship with Hana, goats cannot be sifted from sheep. Through the main character's relationships with other characters, the reader can detect the current issues related to politics where justice, equality of both genders and



political freedom have to be fundamental human rights for all citizens. In addition, the violence, marginalisation and suppression of women, alongside the exploitation of foreign female characters, bring out the worst internal and external politics. It is a novel in which the unnamed, unseen working class encounters, sympathises with, and shows their underdog circumstances. The author claims that the novel as a strong message to the world is based on the victimisation of the characters portrayed. It is the truth that is being withheld. These characters represent the oppressed people worldwide, not just in rural and urban areas of Yemen.

Indeed, *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba* is a project of moralising discourse that sends Yemen's small voice to the entire world—individuals, societal structures, decision-making leaders, and all campaigners who claim to support human rights. The novelist successfully balances his message, challenging various aspects of the narrative voice expressed in his own tone, vocabulary, and style. His uncompromising devotion to his country is expressed without exaggeration or in violation of literary conventions. He embodies an unspoken political discussion between the ruling class and regular citizens, creating the groundwork for what can confidently be described as a Yemeni-Canadian political fiction.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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