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Social Issues in the Kuwaiti Play '*The Bird Has Flown*': Hybridity, Gender, and Belonging

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ABSTRACT

Many theatre scholars have focused on Arab dramatists and yet theatre in Kuwait has not received enough scholarly attention. One Kuwaiti dramatist (writing during the twentieth century) has paved the way in presenting issues of identity, hybridity, and belonging. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Surayyi's influential play *Ḍāʿ āl-Dīk*(1971) was translated into English (*The Bird Has Flown*). This article offers a close reading of the English translation and interrogates issues of identity, family, and belonging in Kuwaiti society during the twentieth century. The play's hero, Yousef, is the son of a Kuwaiti father and Indian mother. Arriving to Kuwait, he tries to assimilate but ultimately fails, leaving behind a tragedy. The article traces Yousef's coming-of-age narrative and analyses the play's showcasing of social issues.

KEYWORDS

Kuwait, identity, hybridity, theatre.

Theatre in the Middle East has not received much critical attention in scholarly works although it has a rich history to consider. Theatre scholars have delved into the history of Arab theatre and offered extensive analyses (Robin 12). Much scholarship has focused on the Arab world (mostly Egypt and Syria) and its engagement with Western theatre (Amine 146). Less critical attention has been paid to Kuwait's position with the rise of the theatre in the Arab world during the first half of the twentieth century. Recent scholarship revolves around only one Kuwaiti dramatist, Sulaiman al-Bassam, who founded Sulayman Al-Bassam Theatre (SABAB) Kuwait in 2002. al-Bassam has an international reputation for his adaptation of classic Shakespearean works such as *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*, The al-Hamlet Summit, and others. While al-Bassam's work is globally significant, there is a largely neglected area of Kuwaiti Theatre that needs critical attention. Historically, Kuwait was pioneering in the field of theatre amongst other Gulf countries. Kuwaiti theatrical origins began in 1933, when the Kuwaiti pioneer Abd al-Aziz al-Rasheed wrote and directed the first play in the Gulf on the stage of the Ahmadiyya School, and in 1939 another play was performed by students, "Islam Omar Ibn al-Khāṯāb" (Al-Shammari 3; Al-Ojairi 4). The play was supported by Palestinian teachers at the time who helped the play come to life (Al-Shammari 3). Several theatre groups were established in the 1960's: including the Public Theatre Group (1957), the Arab Theatre Group (1961), the Arabian Gulf Theatre Group (1963) and the Kuwaiti Theatre Group (1964), according to Michalak (165). All of these theatre groups began to stage plays written primarily in standard Arabic and not in Kuwaiti dialect in order to reach the largest audience. Theatre in Kuwait was a major social influence and most plays presented social critiques and commentaries, similarly to theatre in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world, where theatre served as an outlet for social and political expression (Badawi 12). Kuwaiti dramatists were preoccupied with social injustice, political repression, socioeconomic class differences, and the rapid urbanization of Kuwait. In Kuwait, there are two types of theatre, *āl-Masraḥāl ījtīmā ʿī* (Social Theatre) and *āl-Masraḥāl-tārfīhī* (Milalak-Pikulsa 172). For the purpose of this article, the Social Theatre offers insight into Kuwaiti society's clash with modernity and the quick changes taking place during the twentieth

century, specifically in the 1970's.

The focus of this paper is Kuwaiti dramatist Abd al-ʿAziz al-Surayyi's play '*The Bird Has Flown*' (*Ḍāʿ āl-Dīk*).Written in 1971 and first performed in 1972, the play was written and performed in Kuwaiti dialect, but al-Surayyi later revised it to Arabic *fūsḥā* for publication. Revising it to standard Arabic allowed the play to be read and accessed by neighbouring Arab countries. This is the only Kuwaiti play to be translated into English and the English translation of the title is 'the bird' although the word '*Dīk'* literally means rooster. According to Mikalak-Pikulsa, Abd al-Aziz al-Surayyi has left his literary imprint on Kuwaiti theatre:

> The greatest literary output among Kuwaiti authors falls to the credit of 'Abdal-Aziz al-Surayyi...In his plays he stresses the importance of the artistry of utterance thanks to which his works can be considered as universal for the whole Arab world…The hero is always themost important in his works…the characters inthe majority originate from the middle class (167).

Al-Surayyi has written numerous plays including *āljūwʿ* (Hunger), *ʿIndāhu Shāhādaẗ* (He has a Degree), *Fulūs wā Nufūs* (Money and Souls), among many others, the last being an adaptation of Arthur Miller's play *The Price*, which he adapted in 1988 to the Kuwaiti stage and was performed in 1988 and recently in 2020 at the Shaikh Jaber Cultural Centre. His career as a dramatist is noteworthy and has included supervising the Arabian Gulf Theatre Group, supporting youth theatre endeavours, written screenplays for television and radio, and served as a judge for theatre festivals in Kuwait. Most of his plays were directed by late Kuwaiti director Saqr āl-Rushood, including *The Bird Has Flown.* They had a long history of collaborative work and continued to work together until al-Rushood's early death in 197.8

In *The Bird Has Flown*, Yousef is on a self-discovery journey and is in conflict with his external environment. Al-Surayyi's protagonists are mostly on a mission to find themselves amongst the rapid changes in Kuwait. Yousef's character stands out from other plays that al-Surayyi wrote as he is a complex character with opposing beliefs and values, struggling with

hybridity and identity issues that cause conflict within the family. The hero's journey culminates in a tragic ending, as the hero escapes the pressures of hybridity, assimilation, and Kuwaiti societal expectations. As al-Surayyi's work can be viewed as a cultural artefact, this paper offers a literary analysis of the play as depicting Kuwaiti society's understanding of identity and hybridity in post-oil Kuwait, gender politics, and the question of belonging.

The play's hero, Yousef, is a on a journey to find his identity and his home in Kuwait. Estranged from his father for thirty years, Yousef was left behind when his Kuwaiti father decided to divorce his Indian-British mother, Theresa. Theresa's father was Indian and her mother was British, but she meets Yaqoub in India, where she gives birth to his son, raises him, and then moves with him to Britain. Years later Yousef arrives in Kuwait looking for his father and demanding to know his true heritage. Yousef wishes to forge a connection with the country, its traditions and ways of life, but struggles to belong to a place in which he cannot learn the dialect, nor understand the intricate family dynamics. Regarded as immoral and too foreign by his Kuwaiti family, his brother, Salem, tries to help Yousef integrate into his native culture, while his sister Fatima attempts to teach him Arabic. Yousef lands himself a job as a company consultant and seems to be settling in. The game-changer is meeting his cousin Sara (Sou Sou), with whom he makes love. Although Sou Sou is his brother's love, Salem is unaware of this infidelity. Not only was Salem defrauded by this illicit sexual relationship, he is also later indicted of raping Sou Sou and is forced to atone for his assault by marrying her.

Yousef decides to disassociate himself from the subjugation of his family and leaves after writing a note of apology. The family are at a loss as to the reasons for his departure and cannot understand what they consider to be a betrayal of their trust. The play raises many questions about modernization and its effects, the uncertainty of identity, the implications for differences in language, and the social constructs of gender stereotypes. Of note is the play's prophetic title, the rooster alludes to Yousef, the lost son, separated by a difference in cultural upbringing. The rooster is an interesting choice as this animal is symbolic of potency. Yousef, having committed

a sexual indiscretion, returns to Britain, leaving the audience transfixed on the family's misfortune. The "bird" or rooster, flies away, escaping Kuwaiti society's expectations of him. The rooster (Yousef) is lost, gone, and has not found anything valuable in his search for home or identity; everything is lost instead.

Before moving to a textual analysis of the play "*The Bird Has Flown*" we need to examine Kuwait's engagement with neighbouring countries and trade, in order to contextualise the play's depiction of social and economic realities. In her case study of Kuwait's media history and contemporary situation, al-Salem surveys Kuwait's history succinctly:

> Kuwait had been, for many centuries, an independent sheikhdom living on trade, fishing, and pearl harvesting. In the early eighteenth century, tribes such as *al-ʿUtūb*and *al-Sabaḥ* fled to Kuwait from the Arabian Peninsula, away from danger and dispute with other tribes. After they had settled in the town of Kuwait, the small town developed into a commercial hub and began to thrive because of its location overlooking the head of the Arabian Gulf. This led Kuwait to become one of the most prosperous countries in the region (164).

Kuwait's prosperity began in the post-oil, but the country also experienced an increase in general trade due to the pearling boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her excellent study on Kuwait's history of urban development, al-Nakib traces Kuwait's urbanization and position pre-oil discovery and post-oil in 1932. Al-Nakib gathers that "Kuwait's first period of commercial prosperity came during the Persian occupation of Basra, where the British East India Company's factory was located, beginning in 1777" (26). In the early half of the twentieth century, many Gulf merchants set up trading businesses in Bombay, India. Many Kuwaiti merchants played an important role in the development of pearl trade. Even after the discovery of oil, these merchants continued their general trade and businesses. Cultural exchange was part of the reality in this contact zone between Kuwait and India. For instance, many of these merchants spent many years in Bombay and as such a school was set up by the Government of Kuwait:

> The Kuwait School in Bombay was established by the Government of Kuwait after a visit to India by the former Shaykh of Kuwait in 1952. The school helped to maintain Arabic culture and education for the boys and girls of Arabs living in Bombay (13).

Kuwait's cultural engagement with Bombay spans many decades and it is this precise history that plays a role in *The Bird Has Flown*. As mentioned earlier, theatre in Kuwait offered a mirror to lived realities and problems facing society. Using humour to poke fun at the characters' is a technique that dramatist al-Surayyi uses to engage the audience and examine larger social issues that otherwise would be difficult for the audience to respond to. Similar research on humour in Iranian theatre has been conducted and shows the audience's reception of humour in a conservative society. As Beeman suggests, in Iran, and to a larger extent Middle Eastern performance: "Comic performance are the norm, and in the clearest measure of success, in the estimation of both performers and audience, is the amount of laughter produced among spectators" (510). Watching the live performance of *The Bird Has Flown* presents the roaring laughter of the audience, at times stopping the performers from continuing the dialogue. Part of the success of the play is its comical and satirical dialogue, its play on Kuwaiti dialect (which gets lost in the translated text) and the performers' facial expressions. Audiences especially enjoy the protagonist's frustration with the intricacies of the Arabic language and Kuwaiti proverbs. The more confused he gets, the more the audience laughs at the linguistic and cultural clashes. The play deals with a dark reality through a comical lens that allows the audience to respond favorably.

The Bird Has Flown became the most popular play and iconic in Kuwait and the Gulf and this is evidenced by its translation into English for a more global audience. The English translation of the play is carefully done by Salma Khadra Jayussi, and the text primarily captures the plot and main dialogue, while a lot of humour and cultural idioms are missing. I will examine the song at the end of the play which is left out entirely from the play's translated text. The song became part of the play's recap of its main themes and plot, sung by the actors and actresses as

they remain on stage after the final scene. The character of Yaqoub, dramatized by Abdulaziz Almasoud, is the father of Yousef, the main protagonist of the play. Yaqoub begins to croon the song in the final scene, lamenting the loss of his rooster, the fated ending that has fractured the family. The lyrics offered here are my translation:

> Yaqoub (Yousef's father): The story has happened between Kuwait and England, I lost my Rooster, my rooster is lost!
>
> Chorus (all actors and actresses on stage): Who looked for him?
>
> Yaqoub: I bought my Rooster, but Theresa stole him from me!

These lyrics, sung in Kuwaiti dialect, are catchy and offer the audience a chance to connect with the symbolism behind the usage of the lost rooster. The symbol of the rooster allows al-Surayyi to emphasise the play's focus on the lost hero. The lyrics rhyme and have a comical effect (also partly due to the actor's performance) although the content of the song is critical and tragic The audience roars with laughter, claps, and sings along as the performers summarize the main events of the play through the well-crafted lyrics. Although the play offers a social critique, its use of song and humour is effective in engaging the audience. The song is still widely popular.

Family dynamics are also emphasized throughout the play, as Kuwait is a collectivist society that values family and kinship. The portrayal of a tightly knit family through character and dialogue works to reveal the narrative backstory. As Yaqoub recalls his past, a nostalgic atmosphere hangs over the stage, evoking a longing for a pre-oil Kuwait, a different time. As Yaqoub belongs to the older generation, he has stories to tell that his daughter, Fatima, is eager to heed. The dialogue between these characters reveals previously hidden details and enhances the mood. Yaqoub narrates his journeys to India of more than thirty years previously to his daughter, who asks about his relationship with Theresa. He indicates that he used to leave the country for "four, five months, sometimes even eight. I went on like this for years" (Act I, Scene 1, 219). However, his social status indicates that he would have been representing the merchant elite. The

large house, financial security, and focus on the family's wealth and business allows us the audience to infer his socio-economic position in society is the result of trade and business. Al-Nakib asserts that:

> The merchants' elite status stemmed primarily from their control of the town's pearling, shipping, and trading industries… The majority of the town's population consisted of laborers. Most laborers were sailors and pearl divers who worked on board the merchants' trading and pearling ships (28).

Yaqoub's narrative is pushed forward and revealed to us by his daughter's many questions, and the audience is able to feel Yaqoub's yearning for his lost youth, as he stares into space and recalls the Indian setting, his strength, and his love for Theresa. It is in this contact zone between two different cultures that the play's main conflict takes place. Mary Louise Pratt used the term "contact zones" to describe those spaces where cultures meet and negotiate these contested spaces, often times in an asymmetrical relationship of power (38). What comes out of this contact zone is Yousef, who is a hybrid, existing between multiple spaces. Yousef's arrival to Kuwait after his father's narration of events propels the play's action forward, shifting the focus to Yousef's conflict of identity and belonging.

The actor playing the role of Yousef is Kuwaiti actor Mohammad Al-Mansoor, who has physical features that would have resembled a foreigner (light skin and a full head of blonde hair). Al-Mansour was also a leading actor in the first Kuwaiti film *The Cruel Sea* produced in 1972. The film was a major success and continues to be part of Kuwait's cultural history. Both roles placed al-Mansour in the limelight. Al-Mansour's role as Yousef was pivotal in his acting career and is a role that remains etched into the audience's and critics' collective memory. Even today, when discussing the potential of Kuwaiti youth, Yousef's name is mentioned to allude to 'lost youth'(Al-Shammari 3). Al-Mansour's performance as Yousef is superb and realistic, portraying the broken language of Arabic, the confusion with his father's requests to dress and speak like Kuwaitis do, and his facial expressions convey his obliviousness to Kuwaiti culture

and social norms.

Many scholars have written about hybridity and it is Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhaba's definition which remains essential to an understanding of hybridity and third space ("Anxiety in the Midst of Difference" 125). Bhaba's understanding of identity is that it is never fixed, "identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality" (131). If as Bhabha suggests, identity remains in a state of flux, then Yousef's identity is malleable and shifts to be able to accommodate the new culture he finds himself in. Yousef lives a sort of "hybrid mutation" that he embodies through his language, behaviour, and values (136).For instance, Yousef's request for pork invokes a taboo, which elicits wrath from his father and siblings (Act I, Scene II, 225). While Yousef struggles to explain why he likes pork, his father bursts into racist recriminations and calls Yousef a "pig" and "scoundrel" (225). The disappointment in his son's non-Muslim choice of meat is the first instance in which Yaqoub misunderstands Yousef's alternative cultural upbringing. The father constantly upstages Yousef, which results in raucous hoots of laughter from the audience. This wry humour is dependent upon certain cultural and linguistic prompts. Yousef initially responds only to 'Joe', shortening for Joseph/Yousef, but later tries to accommodate his family's wishes and begins to acknowledge the name of Yousef and to wear the traditional Kuwaiti costume, the dishdasha. He also attempts to learn Arabic, with the help of his sister, Fatima, who is presented as nurturing and empathetic. In spite of his linguistic and clothing readjustments, Yousef's attempt at assimilation into Kuwaiti society is rather chaotic. Yousef finds himself positioned as Other amid both his family and the audience. It is this Self/Other binary that is the focus of the play. Yet the audience empathizes with Yousef because he provides a third path towards identity. It is in this recognition of the blurriness of boundaries, of us against them, that a third space opens up. Al-Surayyi's stage opens up a third space where nations and identities are in dialogue. Bhabha describes this third space as: **"**the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable

differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Cosmopolitanism 132). Yousef is the hero of the play who pushes against every boundary between Self/Other and presenting his experience allows the audience to consider other experience. According to Postcolonial scholar Edward Said, one way to deal with these polar experiences between East and West is to "think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant." (28) These discrepant experiences between Yousef and his father, Yousef and his brother Salem, and East and West are placed on stage for the audience to reflect on. Yousef attempts to "emerge as authentic through mimicry" and yet the final scene has him abandoning this performance of identity and mimicry. There is no way out for Yousef except to return to another home, England, after his attempt at assimilation has failed. Having left the family with a shock that cannot be healed, Yousef's journey culminates in an ending that leaves the family heartbroken, his father and Uncle (Sou Sou's father) in tears, lamenting the loss of the rooster.

Critic Joseph Massad clarifies the ideas attached to the Arabic *turāth (*Literally: legacy*)*. "The term *turāth* refers today to the civilizations' documents of knowledge, culture, and intellect that are said to have been passed down from the Arabs of the past to the Arabs of the present" (17). For Massad, *turāth* was set up against modernity and, unsurprisingly, Western ideals and globalization. In al-Surayyi's work (232-234), the rapid urbanization of Kuwait was set up against the traditional and conservative Kuwaiti culture. Most clearly, it is personified in the way that the characters act as foils to each other. Yousef's brother, Salem, is the traditional and responsible Kuwaiti, embodying masculinity that his father (and society) approves of. This usage of Salem as the foil character is accentuated when Sou Sou falls for Yousef and is unable to stop comparing the two men. She is attracted to Yousef's dress code (pants and a shirt, symbolising his Western background) and the way he speaks, although it is broken Arabic. He is unlike Salem, who struggles to speak to Sou Sou due to his reserved nature and Kuwaiti upbringing. The dichotomy between male and female characters is foregrounded. Salem also functions as the savior, the one who will fix his brother's mistakes and selflessly put his own

feelings to one side in order to save the family's reputation and honour. In contrast, Yousef taints the family's honour and leaves them behind, refusing to marry Sou Sou, who gave herself to him, despite the family's request. Similarly, Sou Sou is contrasted with her cousin, Fatima (Yousef and Salem's sister), who is to her culture. Sou Sou's choice to be called Sou Sou rather than Sarah is one small act of defiance that confuses Fatima and leaves her bewildered. Sou Sou insists that these are "old-fashioned names" (Act I, Scene II, 232) Fatima shakes her head and refuses to follow the trend of shortening one's name because it is inconsistent with Arabic tradition. She epitomizes feminine wisdom, shying away from engaging with the public sphere, and remaining responsible for the family's reputation throughout.

Sou Sou's character is an archetype for the modern girl, standing in sharp contrast to Fatima, speaking boldly about her desire to meet Yousef, and makes no attempt at hiding her fascination with him: "They say he's typically English…blue eyes…I'd like to see him" (Act I, Scene II, 233). Sou Sou is regarded as the 'badgirl' who dares to flirt with Yousef. When she first meets him, she takes an active role and approaches him, touching him, and he starts laughing nervously. It is Sou Sou who takes on a more active role and the curtain closes as their bodies get closer. This is not mentioned in the play's translation but is evident in the actual performance of the play. Sou Sou stands as the femme fatale figure who dares to transgress the boundaries of cultural ideologies of women's decency and behaviour. Kuwaiti scholar Haya al-Mughni's study of women status in Kuwait pre-oil and post-oil examines the rapid changes that took place after oil was discovered. From the 1930s women were excluded from the outside world, regulated only to the domestic sphere. Women in Kuwait "lived their lives from birth to death in the mud-walled town. They knew nothing of the seafaring voyages, of the charm of Indian cities" (44). Having no preconceived notions of the world beyond Kuwait, women remained unaware of the possibilities beyond the family home. Fatima's mother, Sharifa, is unaware that her husband had taken another wife in India, all these years. To her, there was nothing beyond Kuwait and she had no suspicions prior to the arrival of Yousef to Kuwait, thirty years later. The generational gap

and differences are apparent with Sou Sou's insistence on seeing what an English blonde man looks like.Sou Sou is more daring and likes to explore the world around her. In Act II, the audience finds out that Sou Sou has not returned home and was with Yousef at Ahmadi. Ahmadi is a city in Kuwait where the expat community usually resides, close to the oil companies such as Kuwait Oil Company. Through the characters' dialogue, we know that Yousef works as a Consultant for the oil company in Ahmadi. When Fatima asks why she was not invited to Ahmadi along with Yousef and Sou Sou, his response is that "it's not your kind of place…you're too proper" (Act II, Scene I, 236). In Yousef's view, along with the audience, Fatima is too traditional and dignified to visit Ahmadi, but Sou Sou is not. Sou Sou is presented as the archetype of the 'bad girl', a common archetype in drama. In her influential study on female representation and archetypes in theatre, Lesley Ferris contends that:

> Archetypal Images of Women in Theatre are broken down into a number of categories such as Penitent Whore, Speechless Heroine, Wilful Woman, Golden Girl and Women Acting Men (79).

Many feminist scholars of theatre have examined the representation of women in theatre, especially the 'new woman.' The 'new woman' in theatre was essentially a daring, bold, subversive figure who threatened the patriarchy and challenged male figures (Goodman12). While most studies dealt exclusively with women in Western theatre, the idea of the 'new woman' is embodied in Sou Sou's character. Sou Sou's embracing of modernism and a more liberal culture allows her room to approach Yousif and she is also the one who drops him off back to his house. Women in Kuwait were driving during the 1970's and had gained much economic freedom but it is still considered a reversal of stereotypes with Sou Sou driving Yousef (Tetreault and de Gay 412). When Fatima learns of this, she is shocked and does not say anything. When asked what has happened with Yousef, Sou Sou asserts that she fell in love with him and "gave myself to him…that's what happened and I do not know what the consequences will be" (al-Surayyi 237). She does not cry the same way that her father, Abu Abdallah, cries and

laments her honour. For all of the men in the family, Sou Sou's honour and reputation resides in her body, and her body is the property of the collective. It is a patriarchal and misogynistic ideology which permeates the play and considers women to be symbols of the family and the nation. Losing control over Sou Sou's body and sexuality is a threat of loss of control of the nation to modernity.

The representation of women in Arab theatre has been largely regulated by male dramatists, and 'the written text remained the property of men though it was often inscribed on women's bodies and voices.' (Selaiha and Enany 641). Reading *The Bird Has Flown* as a Kuwaiti play offers us a view of gender and women's bodies as the site for familial reputation and honour. Sou Sou is tainted because her act of love becomes an act of disgrace and ignominy. Although each partner is stigmatized after copulating out of wedlock, it is only Sou Sou who is to be disgraced by wearing a scarlet letter unless Yousef marries her. Her father refers to her as a "*bālwā"* (burden, *my translation*) at the end of Act III. This part of the play is not translated and is left out of the entire text. Both Sou Sou and Yousef are stigmatized, punished, and regarded as sinners and traitors, having shamed the family. Feminist critic Sara Ahmed aptly notes that "Family love may be conditional upon how one lives one's life in relation to social ideals… Shame secures the form of the family by assigning to those who have failed its form the origin of bad feeling ('You have brought shame on the family')" (107). In Kuwait and collectivist societies, family love is always conditional on securing the family's honour and avoiding any 'shameful' acts. Gendered relationships are aptly performed as the father feels shamed, burdened, and hates both his daughter and Yousef (his daughter is blamed for being a woman and a burden). The father plays the victimized role of the shamed father who cannot face society after his daughter loses her 'honour.' There is much to unpack here and there remains a gap in the literature regarding women's honour in Kuwaiti families as it is still a taboo subject that remains hidden. The words virginity and honour are not explicitly referenced in the play and it is up to the audience to piece the pieces of the puzzle together, with Sou Sou's allusions of "gave him

myself" as she covers her face.

In the play, the 'contact zone' has produced problematic tensions that are left unresolved in a dramatic ending that includes sombre music and tears shed by the entire family. This play offers an intricate and complex look at Kuwaiti society and its understanding of the Other, women, and the nation. Similar narratives exist today, but nothing has received as much critical attention as a contemporary novel by Kuwaiti novelist Saud al-Sanousi. *The Bamboo Stalk* was published in 2010 and later won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. It was the first novel written by a Kuwaiti author to receive an internationally prestigious prize. Al-Sanousi's novel received worldwide recognition and was translated into English. This facilitated its global reception and critics have commented on its popularity and rise to international literary recognition (McManus 239). The novel was later adapted into a Kuwaiti television serial airing during Ramadan 2016. The serial was a close adaptation of the novel and yet Kuwait television refused to air it due to its controversial representation of citizenship issues, hybridity, and identity politics. Viewers watched it on other channels such as Dubai TV. Al-Sanousi comments in an interview with *Arabli:*

> The original idea was to write on India, as it is much closer to Kuwait than the Philippines. I even traveled to India, but I couldn't finish working on that idea – Gulf citizens just don't look that different from Indians. When I was in India, people would speak come up and speak Hindi to me – same thing in London. So if the protagonist was half-Indian, it wouldn't pose a huge problem for him. Even the Kuwaitis, in the age of sail before oil, used to go and marry people from India. That didn't pose a big problem for society, and it wouldn't provide much of a central problem for the novel.

al-Sanousi's commentary lacks critical and reflexive awareness of identity politics on a larger scale. It also does not acknowledge the canonical play *The Bird Has Flown* as being the first to introduce the topic of hybridity in Kuwait. Nevertheless, *The Bamboo Stalk* now seems to be the literary depiction of Kuwait that most readers know, and it certainly echoes al-Surayyi's

examination of a hero who occupies a hybrid space. al-Sanousi's hero is Jose/Isa, who is of Kuwaiti-Pilipino parentage. Jose, like Joseph/Yousef, comes to Kuwait on a journey of self-exploration and a search for heritage, identity, and belonging. He searches for his father and paternal lineage, coming into close contact with his grandmother, aunt, and other women in the family. As the novel progresses, issues of women's rights, marginalization, and citizenship privileges are exposed. Isa, like Yousef, recognizes that assimilation will include changing one's dress code, speaking Arabic (Kuwaiti dialect), following close customs and traditions of the family, and mirroring cultural ideologies which he refuses to believe in. He begins to suffer in this contact zone between Kuwait and the Philippines. He is constantly met with racial discrimination, an inability to assimilate and returns to the Philippines to continue his life there. Unlike Yousef, Isa does not leave behind a tragedy, but simply decides to stop trying to assimilate and accept that the Kuwaiti part of his identity has to be left behind. The novel then, like *The Bird Has Flown*, examines social issues in Kuwaiti society and offers a hero who ends up escaping, thus, a lost rooster.

Al-Surayyi's work has left a marked impression on Arabic culture and has influenced the literary output of other writers such as al-Sanousi's laureate of International Prize for Arabic Fiction. Al-Surayyi has produced more plays that mirror Kuwaiti society and to a larger extent, the Gulf region's encounters with the West and modernization. His contribution to theatre and social critiques are unmatched. His plays ought to be translated into English, as lingua franca, to reach a global audience and theatre scholars. These plays are significant in their representation of Kuwaiti social issues, modernization, and gender. Because theatre mirrors society, these productions can offer insight into the changes, challenges, and obstacles in contemporary Kuwaiti society. More critical attention needs to be paid to literary output from Kuwait, while tracing the historical and social changes in the arts and culture movement in the 20th century.

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