

**An Intersectional Study of Saud Al-Sanousi's Novel****The Bamboostal****Samar Sayed Mohamed, Ph. D.****Faculty of Humanities,****Al-Azhar University****الملخص:**

ساق البامبو رواية من تأليف الروائي الكويتي سعود السنوسي و الذي فاز عنها بالجائزة العالمية للرواية العربية لعام ٢٠١٣ و هى رواية تدور أحداثها بين الكويت و الفلبين حيث تستعرض بعض الأحداث و القضايا التي تخص البلدين.

يستعرض البحث موضوع الاقصاء الاجتماعي أو "فقدان الهوية" عند الكاتب ، و ذلك من خلال بطل الرواية عيسى أو خوسيه و تبدو ازدواجية الأسم من البداية حيث أنه ابن لأب كويتي و أم فلسطينيه و تدور أحداثها بين البلدين و كون البطل ابن لوالدين من جنسيات مختلفة شعر أنه لا ينتمى الى اى من الثقافتين و بالتالي شعر بفقدان الهوية. تدور الأحداث لتوضيح الفارق الشديد بين البيئتين و الثقافتين مما يسبب و يفاقم الشعور بالقهر الانساني لدى عيسى او خوسيه.

تستخدم نظرية "التقاطعية" أو "تقاطع أشكال التميز" لتظهر و تؤكد كيفية تأثيرها على البطل الذي عانى من التهميش و كونه أحد الأفراد المهمشين في المجتمع و طبيعة ما عانى منه البطل طيلة أحداث الرواية حيث أن البطل عيسى أو خوسيه سيتم تناول مراحل حياته من الطفولة الى مرحلة البلوغ حتى نستوعب جيداً مراحل نضجه النفسى و تشكيل هويته و مدى تأثيرها بكونه ينتمى دون محض ارادته الى ثقافتين مختلفتين تماما و مدى تأثير ذلك على هويته الشخصية و حجم المعاناة و احساس القهر المتكرر الذى عايشه البطل.

حيث تنقسم الرواية الى ستة فصول تتبع عيسى كجنين حتى يبلغ من العمر ٢٦ عاماً. يعانى العديد من المشاكل و التي تظهرها نظرية "التقاطعية" التي تؤكد على تشابك التمييز في جميع أشكال الهويات السياسية و الاجتماعية و الاقتصادية و الدينية الذى يظهر جليا خلال أحداث الرواية.

كلمات مفتاحية: سعود السنوسي - ساق البامبو - الهوية - التهميش الاجتماعي -  
التقاطعية

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the theme of social exclusion in Saoud Al-Sanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*. The protagonist of the novel, Isa/Jose, is oppressed and marginalized in two atmospheres. Being a son of a Kuwaiti father and a Filipino mother, he does not totally belong to any culture, and then he experiences interlocking forms of oppression. To clarify such oppression, the present paper employs the intersectional theory to show the distinct form of marginalization the protagonist experiences. This means that this paper will discuss different aspects of Isa's life so as to fathom the real nature of his experiences.

## **Key Words**

Saoud Al-Sanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk*, Identity-Bildungsroman, Genre-Intersectionality

## **Introduction**

The Bamboo stalk comes from a tree that grows in any land and it can be cut down and planted in a distant land and then it can re-grow there easily, so the author chose the name *The Bamboo Stalk* to indicate the resilience of the personality of Isa who has multiple roots, nationalities, names, religions, and even multiple mothers. This novel was written by Saud Al-Sanousi, a Kuwaiti journalist who

was born in 1981. He wrote four novels, namely *The Prisoner of Mirrors* (2010), *The Bonsai and the Old Man* (2011), *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), and *Mama Hissa's Mice* (2015). It can be said that Saoud Al-Sanousi is one of the most prominent Arab novelists in the current time. Asked about his responsibility as a writer, he answered as follows: "I believe that my role goes beyond writing for pleasure only... I aspire to leave that effect; to influence the reader's thinking at first and then his behavior" (Personal Interview with Al-Sanousi). He is widely acclaimed as his novels won numerous award prizes. In the research paper "*Third Space Identities: Hybridity In Saoud Saounisi*" Zurays et al say that Saoud Al-Sanousi "is a leading figure among young Kuwaiti writers who challenge the rigidity of class-stratification and the social submission to cliché and patterns of thought among the tamed intelligentsias."

The International Prize for Arab Fiction (IPAF), one of the most esteemed literary prizes in the Arab world, was awarded to Al-Sanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* novel. It was administered in collaboration with the Book Prize Foundation in London and supported by the TCA Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. However, the book was released in 2013 and translated into English in the following two years. Furthermore, his novels were translated into many languages. As for *The Bamboo Stalk*, it

is translated by Jonathan Wright. In the article "The Gulf that Separates Love", Azadeh Moaveni speaks of the novel in such glowing words: "The book deserves its accolade and such a literary voice \_ ambitious, cultivated and brave \_ is badly needed in the Middle East" (Moaveni 12).

There is a mix of different backgrounds and nationalities, but above all, they all play together. On the same vein, *The Bamboo Stalk* is written in Arabic, but the author Al-Sanousi makes a trick and claims that this Arabic novel is a Filipino autobiography of the protagonist. He says that he only offers the translation of this novel. This reminds the reader of what Youssef Ziedan did when he offered his *Azazeel*. Likewise, he claimed that the novel is a mere translation of syrianic scrolls. But, on the contrary to Al-Sanousi, Ziedan said that it is him who translated those scrolls. Here, Al-Sanousi creates an imaginary translator with copious footnotes so as to support his trick. We can come up with an illation that the book opens with an introduction from "the translator" of the work, which reads more like a disclaimer. As a result, it takes the reader some time to figure out who the translator is and what his role is in the book because the author is an Arab and the book is written in Arabic.

Al-Sanousi's *the Bamboo Stalk* is classified as a Bildungsroman novel. This means that it traces the phases of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood. In their

paper “Psychological maturity and Identity Formation: a Study of John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* as *Bildungsroman* Genre”, Hassoun & Rasheed give the following account on this genre:

“A bildungsroman is a German word that means “book of education”. It concerns with showing how a young protagonist matures from innocent world to a world of knowledge; it is a story about coming of age. Experiencing an emotional loss at the beginning of the novel prompts the protagonist to embark on a journey of self-realization and maturation. The goal of a Bildungsroman is maturity, which the protagonist acquires slowly and painfully. This genre is therefore a story with educational and philosophical significance which shows the psychological growth identity formation of the main character after undergoing serious and critical hardships” (1).

The scholars Geoffrey & Abrams show that the importance of such novels is “the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis— into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world” (193).

In showing the reasons why the novel won the Booker Prize, Anne-Marie E. McManus, a Professor of Modern Arabic Literature, writes: "The novel's major theme is hybridity: with two names, Jose/Isa belongs in both places and in neither. More accurately, however, it probes his marginalization in Kuwait: Jose/Isa is a Kuwaiti citizen but is not accepted because he is seen to belong to the Gulf's laboring underclass" (234).

The novel is divided into five main parts. Each one of them narrates a phase of the protagonist José's life. José's journey to and from his father's land influenced some sort of development in his life. The main five parts have no subtitles, so I need to put my own headlines according to the chosen citations that are relevant to the study purpose.

Why are we here trembling around, pleading with others for help and not ourselves? In whom does our faith dwells if not in us? *Bamboo Stalk* novel explores this question and gives a vivid answer that teaches the reader to love and accept themselves before seeking acceptance from others. The novel revolves around Isa, or Jose, who is a son of a Filipino housemaid and a wealthy Kuwaiti father. It traces Isa from birth until he becomes 23 years in age. Isa is torn between the two cultures. He feels that he has no identity; he is neither a Filipino nor a Kuwaiti. Having parents of two religions, this son has two names; one is a Muslim while the other Christian. In other words, he is

called Isa by his Muslim father and called Jose by his Christian mother. Raised in the Philippines, he moves to Kuwait when he turns 18 years old. Isa's Filipino countenances are different to those of the Kuwaiti people. Such a matter makes him feel marginalized and excluded. In fact, there are many factors that make him feel so.

The novel is divided into six chapters which trace the story of Isa from he is a fetus till he becomes 26 years old. Chapter One "Isa... Before He Was Born" where Isa speaks of his family. Being a poor Filipina, his mother goes to work in Kuwait as a housemaid. As for Isa's father, he is Rashid Al-Tarouf who comes from one of the most prominent families in Kuwait. He has three sisters: Awatif, Nouriya and Hind. He gets married to their housemaid, Josephine, in secret. When his mother knows what happened, she ousts them from her house. Subsequently, Josephine flees with her child to the Philippines. Chapter Two "Isa ... After His Birth" which traces Isa from his first day in his grandfather's house till he becomes 16 of age. His desire to go to Kuwait is increasing. When Isa is 16 years old, he decides to go to Manila. Chapter Three "Isa ... The First Wandering" which traces Isa's life in the Philippines from the age of 16 to 18. He works hard jobs to just earn his living. Ghassan, Isa's father's friend, tells him that his father's corpse was sent from a mass grave in Iraq, so

he should go to Kuwait. Before heading to Kuwait, Isa goes to the Cathedral of Manila and to a Buddhist temple to pray.

Chapter Four "*Isa ... The Second Wondering*" where shows Isa's arrival in Kuwait on the day on which Emir Jabir Al-Sabah dies. His grandmother lets him live in an annex with male servants. His aunts Awatif and Nouriya firmly reject him as a member in the family, but Hind, a human rights activist, is unbiased. Khawla, his half-sister, is the only one who considers him a member of the family. When Iman, Khawla's mother, knows about the existence of Isa in the Tarouf's house, she wants to take her daughter away from the house. Chapter Five "*Isa ... On The Margins Of The Country*" Isa finds a flat in an old building where he sees what a foreigner may experience. He finds a job in a restaurant with a low salary, One day, Isa forgets his identity card, so he is arrested in a jail with foreign workers. On another occasion, when Isa is heading to his apartment, a drunk Kuwaiti man runs after him to rape him, but Ghassan rescues him.

Chapter Six "*Isa ... Looks Back*" shows three years of Isa's life in the Philippines. At the airport, he brings with him only a bottle full of soil from his father's graveyard, a Kuwaiti flag, a Qur'an, and a prayer mat. With sadness, the people who love him go to say goodbye to him. Isa says that he finished writing his novel entitled *The Bamboo*



*Stalk*. He leaves Kuwait with his wife, Merla, and his son, Rashid. The story ends.

### **The Theoretical Framework**

The present paper employs the intersectional theory so as to show the multiple aspects of discrimination and oppression which the protagonist experiences. It can be said that intersectionality is a set of various theories because it examines the discriminatory system in different perspectives. This theory first appeared in Crenshaw's paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." This theory is originally introduced to clarify the experiences of black women. Nevertheless, it can be now adopted to study the experiences of on any group, indeed, any individual in order to show their own forms of discrimination and marginalization.

In their groundbreaking book "*Intersectionality: Key Concepts*" Patricia Hill Collins & Sirma Bilge clarify the intersectionality as following:

"In the early twenty-first century, the term "intersectionality" has been widely taken up by scholars, policy advocates, practitioners, and activists in many places and locations. College students and faculty in interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies,

ethnic studies, cultural studies, American studies, and media studies, as well as those within sociology, political science, and history and other traditional disciplines, encounter intersectionality in courses, books, and scholarly articles. Human rights activists and government officials have also made intersectionality part of ongoing global public policy discussions” (11).

Al-Fahim et al. give a brief account of the origin of this theory:

“Intersectionality was initially introduced as a concept that centered Women of Color scholars and activists working in liberation-focused social movements and was subsequently incorporated into the academy (Hancock 2011, Harris & Leonardo 2018). Its genealogy in the United States includes a long lineage of Black feminist thinkers as well as other Women of Color scholars and thinkers” (“Intersectionality: From Theory to Practice”, 247).

### **Intersectional Forms of Discrimination in *The Bamboo Stalk***

In Al-Sanousi’s *the Bamboo Stalk*, the protagonist is not marginalized for one factor. Rather, he is marginalized for a number of factors. What is more, he experiences the same form of discrimination in two different ways due to

his twofold identities. By way of illustration, there are two worlds, viz., the Philippines and the Kuwaiti. These parallel worlds stand for Isa's parallel identities. It can be said that the plot itself is twofold. There are the same symbols in the two worlds.

In the research "Saud Al-Sanousi's Bamboo Stalk: Deconstructing the Split Border of a Double Identity", Sana' Mahmoud Jarrar comments on this fact as follows: "As Issa / José's identity is split into two halves, the plot of the novel is set in two countries: the Philippines and Kuwait. Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses" (13).

Such a matter reflects the fact that Isa seeks to have one identity. It is worth mentioning that the elements of identity are as follows: language, culture, religions, among others. Each above-mentioned element is double for Isa. He has two names (Isa/Jose) and considered with two religions (Islam & Christianity) and torn between two lands (Kuwait and the Philippines). Although Isa has two names, Isa/Jose, his problem goes beyond this to "what lies behind them" (The Bamboo 3).

He neither totally belongs to the Philippines nor to Kuwait. He is caught between the two identities, and then he experiences a double form of racial discrimination.

Identity plays a crucial role in defining a person's values and social standing within a given culture. Geert Hofstede asserts that each culture has its own unique set of symbols, rituals, myths, heroes, and values that help to define its identity (Jandt 6). This is why a person adheres to the religion, ideologies, values, and language of the culture that defines his or her identity. The diversity of cultures, however, causes cultural clashes. Because of this, we witness Isa's suffering from his damaged identity. As Middle Easterners, we cannot deny that difference is not readily accepted and that foreign customs, features, and ways of life continue to be foreign and are difficult to recognize in Arabian lands. This is due to the distinctiveness of Arabian society with its strong adherence to its customs and traditions since ancient times.

“José was seen as an Arab in the Philippines and as a Filipino in Kuwait

which is different from what he wished. The Kuwaiti people regarded

him as a stranger and so did the Filipinos. The meaning behind the name

was the ascribed identity. That is, people named him according to the way

they categorized him (“The Religious Identity as Portrayed in the two Novels Things Fall Apart by Achebe and The Bamboo Stalk by Alsanousi”, 161)

Numerous factors work in harmony to prevent Isa from living as an individual with rights. In the Philippines, he is so abused in his family home. In Kuwait, he is also oppressed and looked down upon by his aunts. His status in the Philippines is so miserable, and then he feels that he is lost. He confronts low respect with no voice or identity of his own. He is unable to face the oppression that he experiences. By way of illustration, Mendoza torments him physically and spiritually, Isa never faces him. Isa says: “no one but me obeyed Mendoza” (88), and “Whenever he shouted out, I would run to him, I would bow down, I would take his hand and press it to my forehead in a show of respect, but inside me I heaped curses on him” (89).

In the same way, Isa is not welcome in Kuwait due to his mixed blood. He is labeled by nicknames such as 'the Filipino' and 'Isa Josephine'. Although maleness and richness provide power and social respect in Kuwait, Isa is considered by his family to be an outsider of a low social rank. Isa explains: “I was her grandson – Isa Rashid Isa Al-Tarouf, a name that brought honor. But I had a face that brought shame.... the son of the Filipina maid” (187). Thus, for a whole year in his family's house, his existence is a top secret. He lives in the annex with servants and it is not permitted for him to show his real identity. “In fear of being thrown out, of being humiliated, and of not being

accepted” (189), he halfheartedly accepts these conditions in the hope of winning their hearts by obeying their demands. Through this, it can be obvious to every reader how customs, traditions, identity, and different facial features can be stronger than blood ties, kinship ties, and religious orders. Isa's departure from the Philippines and his arrival in Kuwait is nothing but an attempt by him to search for the truth and live with the real members of his family with whom he is related by blood. Unfortunately, fearing society and fearing for the family's reputation, the grandmother (the dean of the family) decides to hide this secret by declaring that her grandson, Isa, is a new servant.

Intersectionally speaking, Isa can be discriminated for many things such as: descent and immigration. This means that he is discriminated for being an Arab when he is in the Philippines, and discriminated for being an immigrant when he is in Kuwait. Therefore, his experience of discrimination is different because it is interlocking or rather ‘intersectional.’ It is noteworthy to mention that he is also oppressed in the Philippines for being of mixed blood. He has no identity in any place for such a reason, or rather, this reason is the most important one in shaping his experience of discrimination. He speaks of this matter in such glowing words:

“My name is José. In the Philippines it's pronounced the English

way, with an h sound at the start. In Arabic, rather like in Spanish,

it begins with a kh sound. In Portuguese, though it's written the

same way, it opens with a j, as in Joseph. All these versions are

completely different from my name here in Kuwait, where I'm

known as Isa. How did that come about? How did that come

about? I didn't choose my name so I wouldn't know. All I know is

that the whole world has agreed to disagree about it" (Alsanousi 2015:3)

In the research entitled "The Religious Identity as Portrayed in the two Novels Things Fall Apart by Achebe and The Bamboo Stalk by Alsanousi", Abdul Hakam writes

"The differences in José's name in the different countries indicate the various facets of his identity. If the people do not agree on someone's name, this means that they perceive him in various ways according to the different names: 'José or Isa, whatever. There's no great need to talk about my problem with names or how I acquired them, because

my problem isn't really with names but with what lies behind them" (160).

Concerning the idea that everyone has a distinct identity (hence a distinct system of discrimination), Abdulrahman Mokbel Mahyoub Hezam demonstrates what Eric Erikson in this respect:

"Erikson thinks that each individual has an identity, which is very exclusive to him, and he should have an understanding of his own or her own identity. The individual is conscious of his/her innate qualities and uniqueness. Any ambiguity about one's capabilities, relations, future objectives, strength and power to control one's own destiny and future, results in identity confusion which Erikson considered as an identity crisis. Identity crisis is one of the difficult problems that everyone faces at some stage of life. It varies from individual to individual depending on the social context and circumstances in which one is placed" (11).

Isa explains that the crisis of identity is prevalent in the Philippines:

'I wasn't the only person in the Philippines born to a Kuwaiti father. Plenty of Filipina women have had children by Kuwaiti men, or other Gulf men, and even other Arabs. The women worked as maids in houses in the Arab world or messed around with tourists from Arab countries who came seeking pleasure at a price that only someone in dire need



would accept. Some people engage in vice to satisfy their natural urges; others, due to poverty, engage in vice to fill their stomachs. In many cases the outcome is fatherless children' (Alsanousi:4).

In addition to the fact that his immigrant status plays an important role in excluding him from the Kuwaiti society, he is excluded and discriminated for being a housemaid's son. On many occasions, Al-Sanousi shows many examples and forms of classism. When Isa's father, Rashid, got married to the Filipina housemaid, his mother described him as a "selfish despicable man" (29). She justified this description by saying that such a marriage would have bad influence on his three sisters: "Who'll marry them after what you've done with the maid?" (29). Furthermore, Isa's mother, Josephine, clarifies the reason why Rashid sent them to the Philippines: "The decision wasn't your father's. A whole society stood behind him" (60).

It is worth mentioning that Isa finds that the Al-Tarouf family's mode of thought is common in the Kuwaiti society. On one side, some Kuwaiti people consider him to be a foreigner when they see his "Asian features" (337). On the other side, some Filipino people poke fun at him when they discover that he is Kuwaiti. For instance, a Kuwaiti man makes fun of him and says: "Yes, you're right. You really are a Kuwaiti, but Made in the Philippines" (136). In

addition, other people stereotype him for being a Filipino. It is widely known that Filipino males are stereotyped as queers (i.e. homosexuals) in Kuwait, so a drunken Kuwaiti man tries to rape Isa saying: "I want to give you an Arabic lesson" (309). From this point and from Isa's response to others who make fun of him, it can be deduced how discrimination and racism can affect the person himself to the extent that he thinks that this is what he deserves. How is it possible for a person to accept the ridicule of others and their racist comments about him by remaining silent and not responding? The weakness that controls Isa is nothing but surrender to what he sees from his own family as his real family rejects him and his existence. How can a person accept himself if his family does not accept him or recognize him as part of it in the first place?

In an intersectional view, it can be said that his Filipino blood aggravates the forms of discrimination that he experiences. As mentioned above, this race/nation is stereotyped in a bad way. In the eyes of Arabs, Filipino people are no more than a group of poor, queer people. In this respect, Abdu-Alhakam at al. comment:

Poverty is the reason for many Filipino women to migrate in search for work; others were forced by circumstances to earn money by engaging in vice actions and the product of that is to have fatherless mixed-race children. The financial condition of some

families drove parents to exploit their young girls for bringing money regardless of consequences of this greedy action on the girls and their children (176).

Isa imagines himself if he had not the 'multiple' inferior identities:

"If I had been born Muslim to a Kuwaiti father and a Kuwaiti mother, I would be living in a big house with a spacious room on the upper floor, with a forty-six-inch television, a walk-in closet and an en suite bathroom. I would wake up every morning to go to a job I had chosen myself, wearing a loose white thobe and a traditional headdress'...' I could go to the mosque on Fridays and listen to the man standing in the pulpit and understand what he was saying, instead of just raising my hands, imitating the men around me and repeating 'Amen, amen' like a parrot" (Alsanousi:47).

It is therefore clear that the Kuwaiti society conformed to the social hierarchy, and looked down upon any one who belongs to the toiling class (i.e. the poor). Over and above, they disdained all those who are of mixed-blood. This supports the idea that Isa is discriminated for many interrelated factors. As mentioned earlier, he is discriminated for being an immigrant (hence an outsider) and for being a son of a housemaid. He is not an immigrant

of a noble lineage; If so, he would be treated in a much more respectful way.

Many situations in the novel show how much Isa is excluded and disdained for his low lineage. Nouriya, Isa's aunt, refuses to admit Isa as a relative of hers. She says: "If my husband and his family find about this boy, it will change the way my husband sees me. I'll lose respect of Adil family and I'll be the laughing stock.... I have a son and a daughter of marriageable age and I won't allow this Filipino to wreck their prospects" (196). Likewise, Khawla, one of his relatives, considers him as a social stigma who "will reduce [her] chances of finding a decent husband" (341).

Being arrogant, his aunts, Awatif and Nouriyah break into his modest room in order to kick him out of his house. In doing so, Awatif makes use of the religion and tries to persuade him that he should surrender to his fate as a slave, and then he should not demand his rights as a member of an rich family. As for Nouriyah, she attempts to bribe him with any amount of money he wants on the condition that he leaves their house. Such a situation shows that his inferior status as a weak, poor person contributes to making him more oppressed. If he were rich, Nouriyah would not be able to make use of his need for money to deprive him of his rights. This sheds light on the idea of the intersectional experience of oppression. The more one has inferior identities, the more oppressed he is. No single

factor has the whole impact on oppressing and marginalizing Isa.

Looking closely at the psychological impact of the significance of the concept of reputation in the Kuwaiti society, scholars Nicholas C. Scull and Khadeja Mousa write:

“Because the reputation of any member of the family group reflects on all of the other members, indiscreet behavior or poor judgment can damage his or her relative’s pride, social influence, and marriage opportunities. For this reason, family honor is the greatest source of pressure on an individual to conform to accepted behavior patterns, and one is constantly reminded of his or her responsibility for upholding that honor” (Scull et al. 1217-1218)

It can be said that Al-Sanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* is regarded as an application of the above-mentioned words about the significance of reputation in Kuwait. In an intersectional view, the preservation of the family reputation can be considered to be one axis of oppression. In other words, the fact that Kuwaitis are afraid for their social prestige acts as a factor which contribute to shaping the system of discrimination for Isa. This factor aggravates his experience as a marginalized individual. Isa says:

“It's almost impossible to live when you have to be so careful about what you do, say and go.... What is this power that people have over one another? Why is the tongue the thing that people in Kuwait fear more than anything else? It's just a small muscle wet with saliva, but it can do plenty of damage” (340)

In regard to gazing at others, Isa comments, “Staring at other people seemed to be part of the culture of the society.... I rarely came across someone who didn't stare into people's faces.... No one does this more than us” (306).

It should be added that the Kuwaiti people themselves discriminated one another. This means that it is not foreigners who are discriminated but also some sects of the Kuwaiti people are discriminated. Saoud Al-Sanousi exposes the Bidoon's oppressing social conditions. Isa defines Bidoons as following:

“Through Ghassan I met a new and special type of person. A new species.... They were people who belonged where they didn't belong, or didn't belong where they did belong.... Although Ghassan's parents were born in Kuwait, and he too was born in Kuwait, although he knew no other country, had served in the army and defended the country when it was under occupation, he was still a Bidoon” (166).

The author sheds light on the oppressive physical treatment of workers by some householders. Isa shows the difficulties that they bear when watching the workers in his family's house. He says that they work from 6 in the morning to 10 at night. The Indian cook, Babu, tells Isa: "in some of the houses nearby they didn't have set work hours. The hours depended on the needs of the household. Anytime someone in the family needed something, they had to be fully prepared to respond" (234). What is more, the Indian cook and his wife have a vacation one time only in each month, and the Filipino housemaid, Luzviminda, has no single day off and works as "an automaton" (234).

It is worth mentioning that the Filipino identity does not only make the Kuwaitis insult Isa for being a mere outsider, but also it makes them consider him as a queer because this is a stereotype of Filipinos. Intersectionally speaking, one identity can lead to different forms of oppression. This is because one identity can be related to various stereotypes which are related to various social categories. By way of illustration, the identity of Isa as a Filipino makes him stereotyped as a racially low person as well as a queer.

According to the intersectional theory, one individual may be victim and victimizer at the same time. This means that a person can discriminate people, and this

person can be discriminated. In the novel, Isa is oppressed by the Kuwaiti people for many factors. Likewise, he feels prejudice towards the Kuwaiti people because they are Muslims. He clearly shows that he is afraid of the religion of Islam when he is going to Kuwait, saying: "I had a strange, vague impression of Islam" (181).

He shows that Islam is related to "symbols" (181), which can convey a negative or positive image of the religion and its adherents. As a child in the Philippines, Isa likes the religion of Islam because of the Sultan of Mactan Lapu-Lapu, a historical Muslim figure. Isa says: "Lapu-Lapu was seen by Filipino as one of their important national heroes because he resisted colonialism [Portuguese] in the sixteenth century" (182). This admiration, however, is eliminated by the Abu Sayyaf group. Isa shows: "The heroism of Sultan Lapu-Lapu, and the way ordinary people, regardless of religion, admired him...were positive images that made me feel close to Islam. But the Abu Sayyaf group, by killing missionaries and other innocent people, very much alienated me from Islam" (183). However, at some point in life, people will believe what they see, not what they hear or read about. It is interesting that a Muslim family like the Al-Tarouf family, one of the largest families in Kuwait, is known to be stripped of the tolerant values of Islam just to please society and to feel ashamed of a person that carries their blood in his veins but holds different facial



features. The negative image that the Al-Tarouf family reflects through its treatment of Isa and its lack of recognition reflects, to some extent, the family's wrong behaviour and does not reflect the traditions of Islam at all. All of this gives Isa one more reason to hate Islam. Above all, do they then seek the judgement of the days of ignorance? And who is better in judgment than Allah for a people who have firm faith? No one can have an advantage over another person because of things we had been given and did not ask for.

### CONCLUSION

Nobody is born with the desire to hate someone else because of the color of their skin, their family history, or their religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can, they can be taught to love because the opposite of hate comes more naturally to a human heart. We were born with a pure body and a pure soul. We were born flawless. If we can instill in ourselves hatred of certain races, features, and identities, then we can uproot what we have instilled. We cannot swing between being half flawless and half flawed. Consequently, it can be concluded that Saoud Al-Sanousi's *Bamboo Stalk* sheds much light on many forms of discrimination, whether in Kuwait or in The Philippines. To do so, he draws two parallel worlds: Kuwait and The Philippines. Such a twofold entity may be reflected in all

things in the novel. The protagonist of the novel has two names: Isa and Jose. As for two languages, he is torn between two languages. He speaks the Filipino language but he confronts much difficulty in communicating with Arabic-speaking people; he is forced to learn Arabic. His parents themselves are different; one is Kuwaiti while the other Philipna. Everything in the novel seem to be twofold.

In such a manner, the forms of discrimination and marginalization that he experiences are double (or rather multiple). He is oppressed for having no clear identity. On one hand, when he is in the Philippines, he is labeled as an 'Arab'. On the other hand, when he is in Kuwait, he is labeled as an 'Filipino'. This is called racial discrimination or race-based marginalization. Furthermore, he is stereotyped as a queer just because he is a Filipino. It can also be said that the Filipino people frames him as a violent man just because he is a Muslim. This means that he experiences a special type of stereotyping.

Due to the fact that he is a stranger to the two families of his parents, he is mistreated and abused by the two families. In the Philippines, his grandparent torments him. In Kuwait, he is treated as a slave and commanded to stay in the annex. This is a result of being a person of mixed blood. Moreover, being a son of a housemaid makes his prestigious Kuwaiti family refuse to admit him as a member. It should be noted that Saud Al Sanousi sheds

much light on the oppression and mistreatment of the domestic workers in the Kuwaiti society.

Al-Sanousi wielded the features of the Arabic Bildungsroman to emphasize this process of maturation and growth. Just as personal growth and the reconciliation between two cultures in the Arabic Bildungsroman are journeys from the inner heart to the outside world, in *The Bamboo Stalk*, the protagonist's inner dissatisfaction drives him to search for his identity by reconciling his bicultural identities. Isa goes through all of the stages of the transition of the Arabic Bildungsroman protagonist. This transition culminates in his return to the Philippines when he comes to the full realization of who José is and what his newfound principles are. The return to the Philippines thus becomes the culmination of Alsanousi's story about his Kuwaiti-Filipino protagonist's coming of age, as well as the culmination of his years of bewilderment, confusion, suffering, and pain.

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