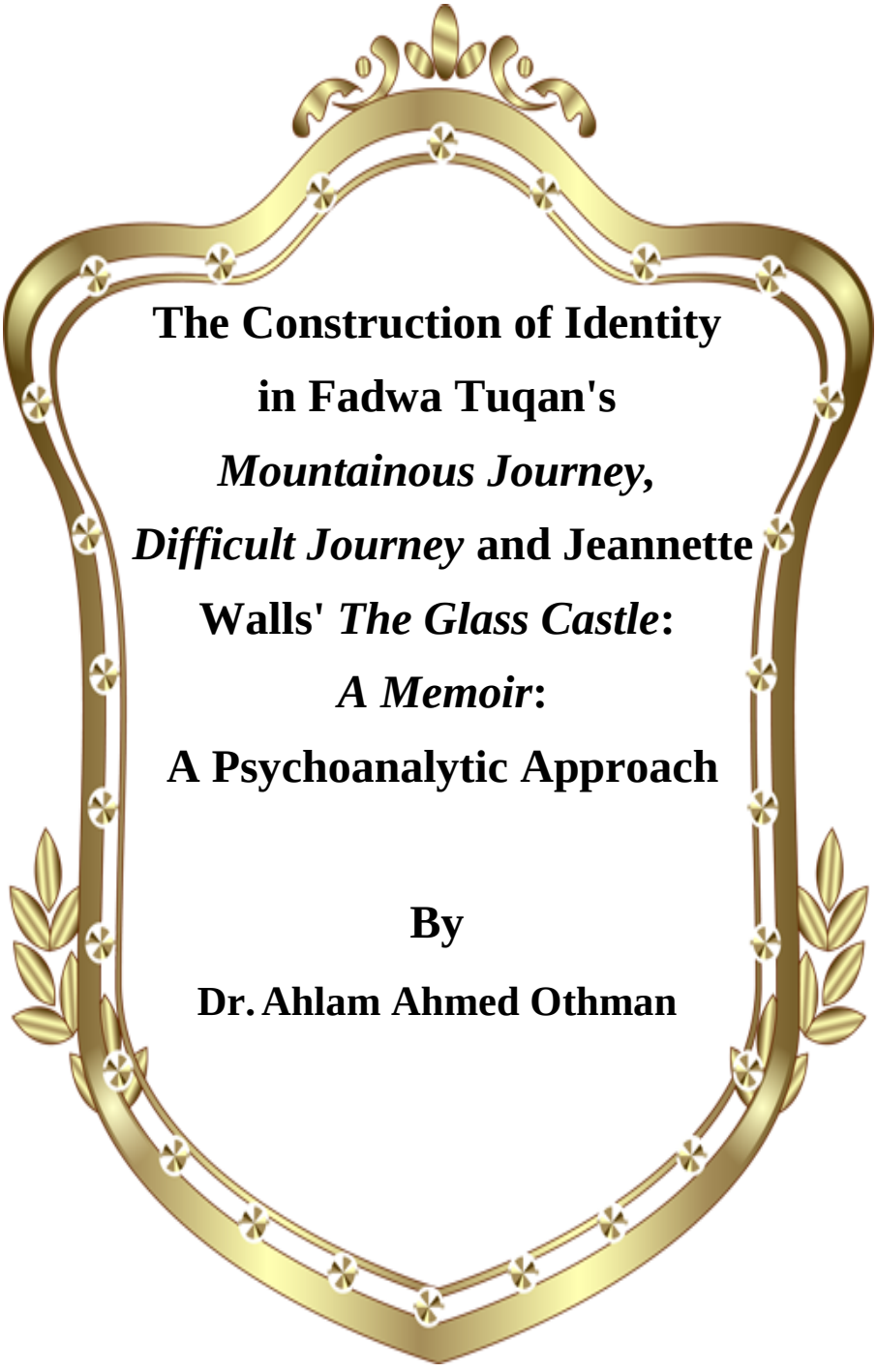

The Construction of Identity in Fadwa Tuqan's *Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey* and Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*: *A Memoir*: A Psychoanalytic Approach

By

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Abstract

In contrast to men's autobiography which emphasizes the autobiographer's individualism, women's autobiography often presents relational identities that exist interdependently with others. In Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography, *Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey*, and Jeannette Walls' memoir, *The Glass Castle,* the two autobiographers shatter the mirrors created by the dominant male culture and construct an alternate identity that is neither purely individualistic nor totally collective, an identity that merges the shared and the unique and invites a whole new understanding of the female gender. This paper aims at showing how these two autobiographers, despite their different cultures and social backgrounds, construct their identities in relation to significant others and emerge as fully independent persons and successful writers.

The genre of autobiography is hard to define. It is generally used to denote all forms of writing one's life. Though claiming to be nonfictional, autobiography shares with other literary genres the creative, imaginative aspect given the interplay of memory in the act of life writing. According to Paul de Man, the author of an autobiography cannot claim to be talking to his past self any more than claiming that his past self can reply to him. It is all fiction, but this fiction disguises itself as factual autobiography (Elam 65). If de Man's work deconstructs the genre of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune's seminal work, *On Autobiography* (1978), reduces the issue of fiction versus non-fiction to a simple matter of pragmatics by positing "an autobiographical pact" which the author and reader sign. He writes: "Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is identity of name between the author (such as s/he figures, by name, on the cover), the narrator of the story and the character who is being talked about" (Lejeune 12).

From the very beginning, critics of autobiography have placed great emphasis on individualism. Georges Gusdorf, founder of modern autobiography theory, argued that autobiography does

not exist in cultures where "the individual does not oppose himself to all others … does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others" (29-30). In his *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, James Olney asserted that an autobiographer has to be "surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness grown out of a unique heredity and unique experience" (Olney 22). Autobiographies which are considered high culture in this view are those that narrate the lives of great men and their deeds. Such an understanding of autobiography, however, excludes other forms of life narratives (diaries, memoirs, for example), other modes of writing about the private, everyday life, and other subjects such as women, slaves and ethnic minorities (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 195 - 196).

The second wave of psychoanalytic critics, however, emphasized that autobiographies of the marginalized, suppressed voices can be, albeit differently, representational. In "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," Stanford Friedman criticized Western individualism at the center of autobiography because it "ignore[d] the role of collective and relational identities

in the individuation process of women and minorities" (35). Psychologist Nancy Chodorow studied the way boys and girls come to develop their identities and concluded that a boy defines himself "by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and importantly, by denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers to be feminine in the outside world" (50). A girl, on the other hand, does not need to resist her identification with her mother; therefore, she develops a relational identity. In *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Rowbotham was careful to note that a woman is not born but made; i.e. a woman sees herself as a member of a group whose identity is defined by the patriarchal society. This collective identity, Friedman notes, can be a source of power and transformation. In autobiography, women shatter the mirrors created by the dominant male culture and create an alternate self that is "often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness – an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny" (Friedman 40-41).

Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography, *Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey*, and Jeannette Walls' memoir, *The Glass Castle*,

are just two examples of how marginalized women, through inscribing themselves on the page, construct an alternate identity that is neither purely individualistic nor totally collective, an identity that merges the shared and the unique and invites a whole new understanding of the female gender. Fadwa Tuqan (1917 - 2003) and Jeannette Walls, born in 1960, are two accomplished writers of modern time who wrote about their difficult journeys that led to fame and success. While Walls chose the memoir form to focus on a specific period in her life journey, namely her childhood, Tuqan wrote her autobiography to disclose the unknown aspects of her entire life journey. Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography, *Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey*, was first published as a series in *Al-Jadid*, a Palestinian journal, and *Addouha*, a monthly Arabic magazine. Later on, it was published as a book and reprinted three times, most recently in 1988. As for Walls' memoir, *The Glass Castle*, it was published in 2005 and figured for three consecutive years on the *New York Times* bestselling list with more than 250 million copies sold. It also received the Christopher Award, the American Library Association's Alex Award in 2006 and the Books for Better Living Award (Walls 245-281).

According to Estelle Jelinek, women's autobiography is differentiated from the canon of master life narratives by its focus on the private rather than the public. In her introduction to the first anthology of essays in the field, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, she explains:

> Women's autobiographies rarely mirror the establishment history of their times. They emphasize to a much lesser extent the public aspects of their lives, the affairs of the world, or even their careers, and concentrate instead on their personal lives – domestic details, family difficulties, close friends, and especially people who influenced them. (7-8)

This concern with the personal is characteristic of both Tuqan's and Walls' works. Tuqan declares the reason why she decided to write her autobiography at the beginning of *Mountainous Journey*. She tells the reader:

> Why then should I write this book, laying bare some of the hidden recesses in an unsatisfactory life? With sincere humility, I say that, despite its meagre output, this life has not been without its stormy conflicts. A seed does not see the light without first cleaving a difficult path through the earth. This story of mine is the story of the seed's battle against the hard rocky soil; a story of struggle, deprivation and enormous difficulties. This story, I hope, may provide a ray of light that may shine upon wayfarers on arduous paths. (Tuqan 11)

The reader's expectation of reading a personal life narrative of the accomplished Palestinian Poetess is thus raised from the beginning. His/ her role is to follow the "arduous path" Tuqan took to self-fulfillment. Not less arduous was the path taken by Walls to achieve fame and success. Born into a poor family in constant movement because of incurred debts, Walls spends most of her childhood worried about securing the basic means of survival. However, she manages to become a famous journalist and writer, own a home in Park Avenue and achieve wealth and fame. Upon her mother's urging, she decides to overcome her sense of shame, accept her parents for who they are and tell her life story as it happened without hiding from the past.

Another difference between men's and women's autobiographies that Jelinek noted has to do with aggrandizing oneself. While men "idealize their lives or cast them into heroic molds to project their universal import," Jelinek explained, women employ understatement to authenticate themselves in autobiographies that reveal "a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding" (14-15). This

is true of both Tuqan and Walls. Although Tuqan's achievement is clear, being one of the most accomplished poets of her time, she feels humble about it. In her prologue to *Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey*, she declares:

> Throughout my literary career I have shrunk within myself and shied away whenever confronted with questions concerning my private life and the factors that have directed and influenced it. I've always recognized that the reason for this shrinking and shying away may be that I have never been satisfied or happy with my life. Like a tree that has borne little fruit, I have always longed for greater achievement and wider horizons. (11)

At no point does Tuqan boast of her accomplishments however great they are. On the contrary, she feels that her life has yielded little fruit. If Tuqan is humble about her achievements, Walls is ashamed of herself for having achieved wealth while her parents are still roaming the streets of New York and foraging through trash. At the beginning of her memoir, she confesses to the reader:

> I'd tried to make a home for myself here, tried to turn the apartment into the sort of place where the person I wanted to be would live. But I could never enjoy the room without worrying about Mom and Dad huddled on a sidewalk grate somewhere. I fretted about them, but I was embarrassed by them, too, and ashamed of myself for wearing pearls and living in Park Avenue while my parents were busy keeping warm and finding something to eat. (4)

Far from idealizing herself, Walls lays bare her inner feeling of shame: shame of her parents' desperate and of her own comfortable situation.

In contrast to the individuated self-presentation of male autobiographers, women autobiographers present relational identities. According to Friedman, "The very sense of *identification*, *interdependence*, and *community* that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity" (41). Reversing Gusdorf's theoretical premise, Friedman emphasizes that women's autobiography is possible only when "the individual does not oppose herself to all others,' nor 'feel herself to exist outside of others,' 'but very much with others in an interdependent existence"' (41). Tuqan's and Walls' life narratives are both alienated from the group consciousness historically imposed by the dominant patriarchal society and transformative: they create an alternate self which is neither individualistic nor collective but exists interdependently with others.

The first key element in the development of Tuqan's and Walls' identities is their relationship with their mothers. At the beginning of her autobiography, Tuqan unravels a secret about her mother. She tells the reader that of all her nine siblings, she was the only child her mother tried to get rid of although she was number seven.

> I emerged from the darkness of the womb into a world unprepared to accept me. My mother had tried to get rid of me during the first months of her pregnancy. Despite repeated attempts, she failed. Mother had ten pregnancies: she gave birth to five boys and five girls. She did not try to abort herself until my turn came. (Tuqan 12-13)

This revelation immediately shifts the attention of the reader from the subject of autobiography, Tuqan, to her mother whose aborted abortion represents her failure to have control over her body. As Fedwa Malti-Douglas notes, Tuqan demystifies and subverts not only the ideal of motherhood, “a quasi-sacred activity and the life dream of virtually Middle Eastern women," but also "the mother herself, her power and the idea of matriarchy” (165). Tuqan tries to justify her mother's act of denying her birth. She writes: "She was

overcome with the burden of pregnancy, birth, and nursing, for every two or two and a half years, she presented the family with a newborn infant. Married at eleven, she was not yet fifteen when she bore her first son" (Tuqan 13). She even tries to justify her mother's coldness towards her by attributing it to the sad coincidence of her father's exile to Egypt. When Tuqan asks her mother about the date of her birth, however, the only answer she gets is that her mother was seven months pregnant when her cousin Kamil died. Tuqan asks her mother: "Tell me where I can find your cousin Kamil's grave. Then all I have to do is obtain my birth certificate from your cousin's gravestone" (Tuqan 15). As Malti-Douglas notes, "More is at stake than a mere birth-death connection. It is the death of a male that permits the establishment of the birth of the female" (166). Tuqan's relationship with her mother is further complicated when the latter fails to recall any anecdotes about Tuqan's childhood. She tells the reader that her mother used to tell funny stories about her brothers' and sisters' childhood, but when Tuqan asked her to tell stories about her childhood, she had nothing in response. Consequently, Tuqan developed a feeling of nonentity: "I would tell myself: I am nothing. I have no place in her memory" (Tuqan 19).

This feeling of nothingness, however destructive it is, is transformed by Tuqan into a positive drive to inscribe the self freely "unencumbered by any ties, biological or sentimental" (Malti-Douglas 167).

While Tuqan starts her autobiography with this revelation about her problematic birth and uneasy relationship with her mother, Walls starts her memoir with a scene which shows her overdressed in a taxi on her way to a party while her mother rummages through trash with rags over her shoulders. Again the reader's attention is focused on the mother. Walls discloses her true feelings of embarrassment upon seeing her wretched and homeless mother to the reader. She writes:

> I was overcome with panic that she'd see me and call out my n ame, and that someone on the way to the same party would spot us together and Mom would intr oduce herself and my secret would be out. I slid down in the seat and asked the driver to turn around and take me home to Park Avenue. (Walls 4)

Just as Tuqan tries to justify her mother's act of attempted abortion and neglect, Walls tries to justify her indifference towards her mother. She tells the reader: "I'd tried to help them countless times,

but Dad would insist they didn't need anything, and Mom would ask for something silly, like a perfume atomizer or a membership in a health club. They said that they were living the way they wanted to" (Walls 4). As one goes on reading Walls' memoir, it becomes clear that Walls' mother chose to lead this delinquent life despite all the opportunities she had to live comfortably. For example, the Indian jewelry Rose Mary kept for her self-esteem and the diamond ring that Brian found, but his mother insisted on keeping, could have solved some of their problems. More importantly, the property in Phoenix and the land in Texas that Rose Mary inherited from her mother could have helped the whole family live well had they been sold. When these revelations are made one after another, the reader cannot help but feel shocked at the selfish mother who sacrifices her kids' comfort for a false feeling of grandeur. In fact, Rose Mary's selfishness is shown in many other occasions; for instance, when she hides to eat the last bar of chocolate while her kids are hungry. When Brian discovers that she is chewing something, she justifies her act of selfishness by saying that she is addicted to sugar just as their father is addicted to alcohol. All these examples prove to the reader that Walls is not to blame for her mother's situation. Walls

recounts that the last time she met with her mother in the latter's favorite Chinese restaurant she asked her if she needed anything, but her mother's reply was that she needed electrolysis treatment. When she urged her to be serious, her mother told her: " I am serious. If a woman looks good, she feels good" (Walls 6). When Walls explained that she wanted to help her mother change her life, her mother retorted: "I am fine. You're the one who needs help. Your values are all confused" (Walls 6). When Walls asked her: "And what am I supposed to tell people about my parents?" She simply replied: "Just tell the truth … That's simple enough" (Walls 6). The memoir at our hands is a manifestation that Walls has come to terms with her mother's homelessness and that she no longer feels ashamed of her background. In fact, she decides to reveal all secrets about her life with the utmost honesty and transparency.

Although Tuqan comes from a wealthy background, she shares with Walls some feelings of deprivation and suffering. For example, Tuqan tells the reader that she never had a factory doll nor gold earrings. Unlike her cousin, Shaheera, who used to wear expensive dresses, Tuqan's clothes were clumsily made by her

mother and they did not fit her. Her mother used to comb her hair in a nervous haste and give her blows with her fists; on the other hand, Shaheera's mother would caress her hair and comb it gently whispering words of affection into her ears. On account of Shaheera, Tuqan's mother once punished her by rubbing red pepper seeds on her lips. As a result of this unfair treatment, Tuqan continued to have nightmares about her mother, even after her death. How heart-rendering is Tuqan when she tells the reader that she felt happy when she was often attacked by bouts of Malaria because only then would her mother show her affection. As for Tuqan's father, he always kept distance from her. He used the third person whenever he gave her orders. "He would say to Mother:' Tell the girl to do such and such," Tuqan writes. This emotional void coupled with her frequent illness and lack of appetite left Tuqan skinny and made her the subject of everyone's ridicule.

If Tuqan suffered from her mother's & father's emotional neglect, Walls suffered as a result of her parents' free, non-conforming spirit. Walls relates a horrible experience from her early childhood when she was merely three years old. She severely burnt

herself while boiling hot dog because her mother was busy working on a painting. Walls writes: “Mom didn’t like cooking much. ‘Why spend the afternoon making a meal that will be gone in an hour,’ she’d ask us, ‘when in the same amount of time I can do a painting that will last forever?’” (Walls 67). Walls' mother had strange notions about raising her children. She never tried to protect them because she believed that: "Suffering when you're young is good for you ... it immunized your body and your soul" (Walls 31). Walls' mother taught her children which plants were edible in the desert and then she left them to fend for themselves. Walls compares her family to the cactus: "We ate irregularly, and when we did we'd gorge ourselves" (Walls 25). Walls' parents never worried about their children being hit by the lightning. They would let them go out and play in the water while "great bolts of lightning cracked from the low-hanging clouds" (25). In one of their frequent "skeddadles", or escapes from debtors, Walls was accidentally hurtled from her family station wagon onto a railroad embankment. Walls was worried that her parents: "might not notice I was missing. They might decide that it wasn't worth the drive back to retrieve me; that like Quixotic the cat [which they tossed out of the car window], I was a bother and a burden they could do

without" (Walls 35). This is how Walls felt: she was a burden to her parents who would so easily get rid of.

In the absence of parents' role, Tuqan creates her own motherly and fatherly figures. At home, al-Haj Hafiz, her paternal uncle, was the loving father. She remembers him playing with her and filling her heart with warmth. She also compares him to her natural father in terms of importance. She writes: "To me he appeared an outstanding figure, a leader, a prince among men. But Father, in my view, was an ordinary man just like any other" (Tuqan 25). Although Tuqan' s father was not detached from the political scene, her uncle was always more prominent. He was held in high esteem by the masses and his house was always full of gatherings. When he died at the age of fifty-two from a heart attack, therefore, Tuqan was stunned. It was a huge blow from which she could not recover. For many years afterwards, she kept his scissors under her pillow and kissed them before going to bed. At school, Tuqan found in her teacher, Zahwa al-Ahmad, the motherly love and care she lacked at home. When Zahwa fell sick, therefore, Tuqan felt lonely and sad. Zahwa's premature death was the second blow to young

Tuqan. In Tuqan's memory, Zahwa stands as an elegant and attractive lady with white hands and a beautiful face. Tuqan even describes "the fragrance of the delicate perfume she always wore [which] penetrated my senses, making me wish she would stay beside me forever" (Tuqan 45).

Like Tuqan, Walls finds her own motherly figure who compensates her for her mother's negligence. Whenever her parents went bankrupt, Walls remembers, they would stay with Grandma Smith, her maternal grandmother. Unlike her biological mother, Wall's grandmother was a highly organized lady "with strong opinions about the way things ought to be done - how to dress, how to talk, how to organize your time, how to cook and keep house, how to manage your finances - and she and Mom fought each other from the beginning" (Walls 110-111). Jeanette Walls was her favorite child whom she expected to be something special when she grew up. At her grandmother's house, Walls was well taken care of. Grandma Smith used to comb her hair, buy her new clothes and take her to the movies. She even liked her grandmother's rules of washing hands before breakfast and clearing the table afterwards.

Therefore, Walls feels so happy when she learns that her parents decided to move to Phoenix having had enough of Battle Mountain, which was declared "the ugliest, most forlorn, most godforsaken town in the whole country" (Walls 98). When Walls' mother tells her that Grandma Smith is dead, Walls gets very upset. She finds it hard to believe that her mother should conceal such sad news from them. Her mother tries to console her by saying: "We've all got to go someday, and Grandma had a life that was longer and fuller than most" (Walls 112), but Walls feels deep grief at losing this kind and caring mother.

Unlike Tuqan, however, Walls does not feel the need to search for a fatherly figure despite all Rex's faults. "In my mind," she writes, "Dad was perfect, although he had what Mom called a little bit of a drinking situation" (Walls 26). She liked listening to his stories and adventures when he was sober. When he was not telling stories, he talked about the Glass Castle project he was going to build once he found gold. It would be made up of glass walls, ceiling and staircase. There would be solar cells on the roof to generate electricity and it would have its own water purification

system. Walls was convinced that one day her father would find gold and build the Glass Castle. In fact, Walls always believed whatever her father said even when she was convinced deep inside that it was illusory. When she was young, Walls expressed her fear of demons. To dispel her fears, Rex told her a story about his fight with a Demon that used to terrorize the whole town and taught her that: "All you have to do, Mountain Goat, is show Old Demon that you're not afraid" (Walls 43). The young Walls instantly believed her father and together they went on a search for demons. On another occasion, When Rex was teaching Walls how to swim, he purposely dropped her into the middle of the water and left her the choice: to sink or swim. After many failed times, Walls could swim back to the shore. She readily accepted his explanation for this seemingly cruel act because she trusted him. On Christmas Eve, when Rex had no money at all, he would point to the shining stars and ask his kids to pick one as present. When young Walls wondered: "You can't give me a star! ... No one owns the stars," Rex answered her: " That's right! No one else owns them. You just have to claim it before anyone else does" (Walls 47). On her tenth birthday, Rex asked Walls what present she wanted now that her

age reached double digits. When she asked him to stop drinking, he succumbed. The following day she would hear him groan in his bedroom, and after a week of abstaining from alcohol, he looked pale and thin. Even when he returned to his drinking habits later, Walls' faith in her father never shook and he was always held high in her esteem.

Of all their family members, however, Tuqan and Walls were attached to one brother in particular. For Tuqan, Ibrahim was more than a brother; he was her tutor and savior. When Tuqan's elder brother decided that she should stop going to school, Ibrahim took the responsibility of teaching her poetry composition. The first time the reader encounters Fadwa's name is when it stands on the cover of her study notebook together with the name of her teacher, Ibrahim Tuqan. The fact that it is introduced in a written text, Malti-Douglas notes, is significant: it is detached from the central character; moreover, it "signals a type of rebirth for the heroine. It is only when she embarks on her poetic path that she acquires a name and identity" (Malti-Douglas 168). The first poem Ibrahim picks for her and asks her to memorize is titled "A Woman Laments her

Brother" by al-Khansa from Abu Tammam's anthology, *al Hamasa*. The choice of this poem has dual significance: it assures Tuqan that women can write beautiful poetry and attain fame, but it also forebodes Ibrahim's premature death and predicts the role Tuqan plays later in lamenting the death of her brother, Ibrahim. Even when Ibrahim traveled to Beirut for a teaching post, he sent Tuqan letters encouraging her to write poetry and recommending classical collections for self-study. A well-known poet in the Arab world at the time, however, Ibrahim was ironically another pole Tuqan continued to resist. Whenever she published a poem, even after his death, she faced the allegation that Ibrahim was the owner. Tuqan complains: "Sharp tongues would repeat: 'Her brother Ibrahim writes the poetry for her and puts her name at the end of it'" (95). Thus, the patriarchal society that has always oppressed Tuqan continues to deny her poetic voice and doubt her ability to emerge as a full human being. It is the same oppressive force that drives Tuqan to publish her early love poems under the pen name of Dananir, a slave girl of one of the famous eighth-century Barmakid viziers. Ever since the boy handed thirteen-year-old Tuqan a Jasmine flower, Tuqan has linked love with disgrace and shame.

After this "tragic" incident, Tuqan was imprisoned at home and forbidden to go to school. Her family began to fix her with accusing looks; consequently, Tuqan writes: "the seeds of low self-esteem were planted in my tender young soul. I developed the habit of walking with my head bowed, not daring to raise my eyes to the faces that met me morning and evening with scowling aversion" (49).

Confinement at home and alienation from the rest of the society made Tuqan an antisocial person. She withdrew from the real world and engulfed herself in reading and writing poetry. Tuqan explains how reading helped her stand against the oppressive society, she writes:

> The world of books, papers and pens gave me strength; it helped me to hold on and plant my feet firmly on the ground that was quaking under them. My constant dream was to break off all association with whatever represented authority in the family: Father, male cousins, paternal aunt. I avoided them all and thus learned to loathe whatever represented despotic domination and unjust authority in all social institutions. (81)

However formidable Tuqan's will was, it was hard to break through the walls of "prison" when the ones closest to her were the

prisoners. Her father was her first source of oppression: though fond of music and singing, he would not let Tuqan sing or play music. He would not let her get involved in her country's politics. Therefore, when, after Ibrahim's death, he asks her to compose nationalist poetry, she wonders: "*How and with what right or logic does Father ask me to compose political poetry, when I am shut up inside these walls*?" (107). Following family traditions, women were prohibited from leaving home, participating in demonstrations or travelling alone. Although Tuqan's mother was a member of the Arab Women's Federation, she was not allowed to travel to their conventions or participate in women's demonstrations. Tuqan's mother was as much a victim of the patriarchal society as was Tuqan; confinement to the *harem* was the underlying cause of her unhappiness. Tuqan describes to the reader the *harem* life, she writes:

> The reality of life in that bottled-up harem was humiliating submission. Here the female lived out her dark, pinched existence. Looking around me, I saw nothing but faceless victims with no independent life… I never knew these victims as other than old women. Each had been an old woman since the age of twenty-five… Young girls with grey hair and faces prematurely wrinkled by repression. (106)

Ironically, the most oppressive member of Tuqan's family is a woman: her paternal aunt, al-Shaykha. "She felt haughtily superior, and was dominated by a mindless blind class arrogance," as Tuqan describes her (31). Being "illiterate in mind and feelings," (32) she forced her beliefs in what was lawful and what was forbidden on young Tuqan. Tuqan remembers al-Shaykha scolding her for wearing a short dress and warning her that she and her mother who sewed it would go to hell. She called Tuqan "*jinkiya*" or dancer because she loved music and singing. It was Ibrahim's who saved Tuqan from despair and restored her self-confidence. He recognized her talents in singing and playing the lute and rewarded her with gifts or money. Tuqan writes: "I felt as light as a bird. No longer was my heart weighed down with grief and boredom. In one moment the mountain of ignonimity had disappeared. The spaces of the future stretched in its place, bright with sunshine, vast and green like wheat-fields in spring" (Tuqan 59). Ibrahim was thus Tuqan's shelter that protected her from the forces of oppression and charged her with determination to achieve success.

As for Walls, she was particularly attached to her brother, Brian, with whom she shared her love of reading and adventure. One year younger than her, Brian read thick adventure books while Walls read stories about kids who lived at great historical moments. When Brian was just six years old, he would go with Walls to spy on the Green Lantern, "a big dark green house with a sagging porch right near the highway" (Walls, 74-75). Their mother told them that only bad things happened there, but it was a place of irresistible mystery to Brian and Walls. They would hide in the sagebrush but they could never figure out what was going on inside. Once, a woman was lying out on the porch and Brian went to ask her what happened inside. When he returned, Walls interrogated him, but Brian did not say much. It seemed that the young brother was trying to protect his sister from this hard knowledge; however, Walls learned about sex first hand when Billy Deel moved into the neighborhood, gave her a ring and forced her to kiss him while playing hide and seek. When Billy was untying his trousers, Walls bit him in the ear. The next day she returned the ring to him, but he retaliated by saying that he raped her. As Walls did not know what was meant by the word “rape,” she looked it up in the dictionary

because she guessed it was a bad word and that asking her father about it would cause trouble. Having learned what it really meant, Walls was able to protect Brian from the sexual advances of Erma, their parental grandmother. When Walls saw Erma untie Brian's trousers, she courageously shouted at her and ordered her to leave him alone. When her father returned, she tried to explain what happened to him, but he would not listen. She, therefore, concluded that her father was abused in his childhood and that is why he was reluctant to stay in Welch. After Brian's abuse, however, Walls' family had to move to another place even if it meant staying at a wooden, shabby house that was heated by coal and had no bathrooms.

Nearby the shabby house, Rex told his kids he was going to build the Glass Castle. Both Brian and Walls believed him, brought a shovel and pickaxe and started digging a hole to help him make the foundation. After a month, the hole was deep enough for them to hide in. However, their dreams were shattered when their father asked them to dump the garbage in the hole. Still Rex lied to them saying that it was a temporary measure and that he would bring a

truck to collect all the garbage at once, but that never happened. Walls writes: "I listened to Dad's plans and tried to encourage him, hoping that what he was saying was true but also pretty certain it wasn't" (Walls 204). As their condition worsened, Brian and Walls started to fend for themselves. Walls writes:

> Brian and I became expert forages. We picked crab apples and wild blackberries and pawpaw during the summer and fall, and we swiped ears of corn from Old Man Wilson's farm ... We'd heard of a dish called poke salad, and since a big patch of pokeweed grew behind our house, Brian and I thought we'd give it a try. If it was any good, we'd have a whole new supply of food. We first tried eating the poke weed raw, but it was awfully bitter, so we boiled it - singing 'Poke Salad Annie' in anticipation - but it still tasted sour and stringy, and our tongues itched for days afterward. (Walls 205-206)

This is how Walls and her brother improvised to secure food for themselves when they were young. Their love of adventure is evidenced even at a time when they could not find the basic necessities. Walls tells the reader that she was once hunting for food with Brian when they found an abandoned house. They climbed inside and to their surprise the kitchen was full of rows of canned food. Whenever they tried to open one of the cans, however, its

contents would explode in their face. At school, when all boys and girls were eating their lunch, Walls and Brian had to busy themselves with reading books so the others would not notice that they had nothing to eat. When this trick did not work, Walls would hide in the bathroom till the other kids finished their lunch and threw away their lunch bags in the garbage pail to retrieve them. Once she found extra food, a bologna-and-cheese sandwich, which she put in her purse to take home for Brian. "Back in the classroom," Walls writes, "I started worrying about how I'd explain to Brian where it came from. I was pretty sure he was rooting through the trash, too, but we never talked about it" (207).

Despite, or rather because of their various struggles, Tuqan and Walls could emerge as fully independent persons and widely recognized writers. Growing up in a stifling environment that oppressed women and alienated them from the rest of the society, Tuqan could create her own world. Tuqan the person turned the isolation imposed by patriarchal society into a means of self-discovery and transformation. "I became accustomed to withdrawing into myself and becoming oblivious of my

surroundings," Tuqan explains, "Detachment fortified me. I was with the family when, in reality, I was as far removed from them as possible. I lived in a private world they could not invade, a world closed to them that I never allowed any of them to discover" (50-51). Tuqan the poet constructed an independent self by breaking free from the limitations of classical poetry, to which she was introduced by her brother, Ibrahim. She wrote "poetry deriving its beauty from simplicity, flexibility, truthfulness, and poetical expression free of affectation" (Tuqan 74). In 1939, without Ibrahim's help, she published a poem in "al-Risala, the magazine of highest literary repute in the whole Arab world at the time (91). Tuqan's message to women is clear from the very beginning:

> The struggle for self-fulfillment is sufficient to satisfy our hearts and give meaning and worth to our lives. There is no shame in losing the battle. The main thing is not to give up and lay down our arms. The powers of darkness, whether metaphysical, social, or political, challenge us in order to destroy us. But, despite our weakness, we confront these powers with stubborn pride. (11)

As for Walls, she was able to break free from a destructive life style and become an independent person and a successful journalist and writer. In fact, the hardships Walls faced throughout her life made

her a strong person, as her mother used to say, "'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'" (179). At the age of thirteen, she could work and save money for her education and stay in New York. She began her career as a journalist, writing for *The New Yorker* from 1987 to 1993; *Esquire* from 1993 to 1998; and *USA Today*. Later on, she worked at a local Brooklyn newspaper called *The Phoenix* and became a famous reporter at *MSNBC.com* from 1998 until her departure to write novels full-time in 2007.

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