

A WOMAN'S SUBJECTIVITY IN ḤANĪN AL-ŞĀYIGH'S *MĪTHĀQ AL-NISĀ'*: AN EXISTENTIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE BY SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Mithāq al-Nisā';
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subjectivity.

Mithāq al-Nisā' by Ḥanīn al-Şāyigh depicts the existential struggles of a woman in Lebanon's patriarchal Druze society, in which women's bodies and fates are governed by religious authorities. The study aims to examine the position of Amal, the main female character, trapped in oppressive immanence, and her transcendental efforts to achieve her subjectivity. This descriptive study employs Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism as its approach. The findings reveal two key points. First, a woman exists within immanence as the Other due to the objectification of her body and social confinement. Second, subjectivity emerges through gradual transcendence, namely the bodily negotiation in exchange for education, economic independence, divorce, inter-community marriage, and international migration. Amal successfully transforms from the position of an object (the Other) into an authentic subject who holds full power over her own life. This study is expected to contribute to the development of existential feminism in the field of contemporary Arab literary studies, specifically in the Middle Eastern societal context, and offers a new perspective on women's subjectivity against communal patriarchal structures.

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تصور رواية حنين الصايغ ميثاق النساء الصراعات الوجودية التي تواجهها النساء في المجتمع الدرزي الأبوي في لبنان، حيث تخضع أجساد النساء ومصائرهن بالكامل لسيطرة السلطات الدينية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل وضع النساء المحاصرات ضمن حدود وجود خانق، بالإضافة إلى الجهود التجاوزية لتحقيق الذاتية الشخصية "أمل" في رواية حنين الصايغ ميثاق النساء. تستخدم هذه الدراسة الوجودية النسوية لسيمون دي بوفوار كإطار تحليلي. وتمثل المنهجية البحثية المستخدمة في التحليل الوصفي باستخدام تقنية مراجعة الأدبيات، مع التركيز على تحليل البيانات النصية للرواية استناداً إلى مواقف النساء وجهود التجاوز لتحقيق الذاتية. وتكشف النتائج عن نقطتين رئيسيتين. أولاً، توجد النساء ضمن الحاضر باعتبارها "الأخر" بسبب تجسيد الجسد والحصص الاجتماعي. ثانياً، تظهر الذاتية من خلال التجاوز التدريجي، أي التفاوض على الجسد عبر التعليم والاستقلال الاقتصادي والطلاق والزواج بين المجتمعات والهجرة. تنجح شخصية أمل في التحول من موقع الكائن (الأخر) إلى ذات حقيقية تمتلك السيطرة الكاملة على حياتها. ومن المتوقع أن تثري هذه الدراسة مجموعة الأبحاث حول الأدب العربي المعاصر، لا سيما في تطبيق النهج النسوي الوجودي لكشف علاقات القوة والجسد وذاتية المرأة داخل المجتمع الأبوي.

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INTRODUCTION

Besides functioning as an aesthetic platform, contemporary literature becomes a medium which excoriates social issues in the community. One of criticisms alluded in the literary works is feminist such as gender inequality and the violence forms towards women which are manifested in patriarchal culture (Altun, 2023). In relation to contemporary Arabic literature, female authors consistently make use of their own works to speak out gender issues, fight against the patriarchal norms, and reconstruct the women's identity in the midst of conservative society (Jumadi, 2024). Female characters in modern Middle Eastern novels are not portrayed as passive victims. Instead, they are depicted as figures who are able to survive structural pressures and even take action against patriarchal authority (AbdulSahib, 2025). This denotes that contemporary Arabic literature serves as a significant platform for resistance discourse towards patriarchy and women subjectivity.

The phenomenon of violence against women under patriarchal culture is oftentimes found in the structures that firmly uphold sectarian systems. As in Lebanon, on many cases, the subordination and oppression of women are not legitimized by state law, but rather by non-state communal authorities with strong sectarian systems (El Rahi & Antar, 2024). This authority usually takes the form of religious interpretations and customs passed down from generation to generation. It also takes part as a guardian of norms, interpreting religious texts, formulating customs, and also imposing social sanctions which make patriarchal culture seem pure. The patriarchal culture hereditarily creates a social construction whereby women are posited in subordinate position, considered as nature, tradition, and guardians of honor, and this positioning limits their latitude subsequently (Loza, 2022). Regarding the dynamics and empowerment of Lebanese women, through their analysis of Lebanese drama series, Sayah & Aladdine (2025) convey that even if Lebanese women have been progressive in various fields like economics, social, and politics, they still experience structural obstacles due to the dominance of traditional gender roles. This patriarchal culture is not only reflected in social practices but also in cultural and digital media. Aini et al. (2025) show that Arab women use memes on Instagram to criticize patriarchal domination such as through visuals of women driving their own cars as a symbol of autonomy. The female oppression can emerge resistance actions by women to oppose their marginalized conditions. Adnani et al. (2016) explain that the resistance is a strength of attitude to behave defensively, an attempt to fight, and a defiance towards the power of dominant social class in the society.

Mithāq al-Nisā', a novel by Ḥanīn al-Ṣāyigh, represents as a manifestation of women dynamics in contemporary Arabic society, particularly Lebanon. It raises the theme related to women in complex manner, from restrictions on social mobility, prohibitions on continuing education, pressure from state institutions and customary religious rules, unequal power relations between men and women, to the issue of women objectification and self-alienation amidst traditional rules. As the author, Al-Ṣāyigh chose the title *Mithāq al-Nisā'* which means a covenant of women, and also contains sharp satire on the social reality of a strong sectarian society (Al-Ṣāyigh, 2025). Generally, traditional agreements or customs are made by men to regulate a community. However, the novel offers a counter-charter that exhibits women's narratives for Al-Ṣāyigh's intention to deconstruct the sacredness of traditions that have confined and silenced them.

The narrative of *Mithāq al-Nisā'* shows the experiences of female character—Amal, which reflect Simone de Beauvoir's idea in her work namely *The Second Sex*. In the novel, Amal is depicted in a state of "immanence"—a term Beauvoir (2011) uses to describe a state of being "trapped" in social constraints that make a woman an object. The text in the novel also explicitly emphasizes this condition through the character's submission to patriarchal authority, as in the following statement: "*mamnū' 'alā al-banāt an yadkhulnā al-jāmi'āt wa-yadhabna waḥdahunna ilā al-muduni*" (In our place, girls are forbidden to enroll in a

university) (p. 16). Not only the immanence situation, but the novel also contains the character's struggle in carrying out "transcendence" as her effort to go beyond the limitations of her body and social destiny in order to achieve her subjectivity autonomously. According to Beauvoir's concept, women's failure to successfully reach subjectivity is based on a fundamental separation between the subject and the other (Rao, 2025). In a patriarchal community, men posit themselves as essential subjects while women are defined as the other whose existence is determined to be dependable on men. This concept suits on dissecting the story of *Mithāq al-Nisā'* since Amal as the female character not only fight against but also try to challenge the ontological definition the society has constructed to her. Beauvoir's existentialist perspective could assist the profound analysis of the Amal's inner struggle in interpreting freedom in the middle of the absence of external protection.

Some of previous studies have placed *Mithāq al-Nisā'* as their object of study. Employing Butler's concept and Cixous' feminist criticism as the approaches, Hamdan (2026) compared it with the novel *Thamrat al-Nār* and found that the female body becomes a site of resistance against sectarian and patriarchal identities in Lebanese Druze society. On the other hand, Ibrahim (2025) explored Al-Şāyigh's novel through cultural criticism perspective to reveal social satire in women's narratives with cultural focus. Several Arabic literary studies have applied Beauvoir's existential feminism approach to examine various contemporary literary works. Ramadhani (2025) used it to scrutinize the resistance of Omani women in *Sayyidat al-Qamar* through intellectual engagement and economic independence. Staniyah & Malik (2023) applied the similar idea to another work which was the anthology *Qālū* by Anis Mansour. Another existential feminist research by Anggraini (2026) compared the image of women in *Imra'ah 'Inda Nuqṭat aṣ-Şifr* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Built upon the mapping of those previous studies, there has been no specific examination about the movement of the female character from the confines of immanence to achieving subjectivity through transcendental efforts in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* by integrating the existential feminist approach by Beauvoir. Therefore, this research focuses on the representation of women's position while being in the immanence state amidst the patriarchal structure of the Lebanese Druze family and society, and also the revelation of the female character's position during her execution of transcendental efforts to achieve independent self-subjectivity.

The research is a descriptive qualitative with an interdisciplinary approach, specifically through feminist literary criticism. In line with the views of Cresswell (2021) and Faruk (2020), qualitative methods in literary studies are applied to dismantle the textual meaning, structure, and complex social relations within literary works. Therefore, this approach is used to dissect the depiction of a woman's positions in the middle of the patriarchal structure of Lebanese Druze sect, as well as, the efforts to transcend by Amal, the female character in the novel *Mithāq al-Nisā'* by al-Şāyigh which serves as the primary data source. The study would employ the theory of existential feminism by Beauvoir. Data collection would be executed through literature review by the reading and note-taking (Wiyatmi, 2017). The technique comprises reading thoroughly, marking, and classifying parts of narratives which are relevant to the concepts of immanence, transcendence, and subjectivity. The stages of data analysis include data description, classification, analysis of specific data, and formulation of conclusions. The study aims to offer a specific analysis of the representation of women's position and attempts at transcendence in *Mithāq al-Nisā'*, and a contribution to contemporary Arabic literary studies.

FINDING & DISCUSSION

In this section, the analysis result would be divided into two main focuses. The first one would investigate the depiction of women's position in the immanence state inflicted by the patriarchal construction of Lebanese sectarian society and family. The second one would

elaborate the resistance efforts through transcendent manners by the female character to achieve her body autonomy and subjectivity.

Woman's position and the immanence situation

Amal experienced the situation of immanence in *Mithāq al-Nisā'*, where she does not exist as a free and autonomous subject, but is constructed as *the other* by the structure of Lebanese Druze sectarian society instead. This position of confinement is depicted in three ways: domestication within the family and household, pressure from socio-religious authority, and the objectification of individual's body.

Domestication and patriarchal authority in the family and household

In accordance with Beauvoir, marriage oftentimes becomes a "fate" imposed upon women to block their access to the outside world (transcendence) (Edwards, 2024). In *Mithāq al-Nisā'*, this narrated when Amal's father forbids Amal to continue her education, and explicitly forces her to marry at her young age to a man of his choice. Not only does her father, Amal's husband also commits this oppression by treating her as "transactional object" who is required to obey rather than as an equal partner, as in the following excerpt:

"فالرجل الذي يرتدي زي الدين لا بد أن يعمل بمشورة المشايخ، وعندنا ممنوع على البنات أن يدخلن الجامعات ويذهبن وحدهن إلى المدن."

"A man wearing religious attire [Sheikh] must act according to the advices of the religious leaders, and in our place, girls were forbidden to enroll themselves in universities and going to the cities alone" (Al-Şāyigh, 2023, p. 16).

Through the description, the immanence situation (confinement) is imposed to Amal. The prohibition on education and traveling outside the city which are Amal's steps to become an independent subject, leaves Amal with no choice but to be imprisoned within the domestic sphere, awaiting her next destiny—to be bound by marriage.

The restriction in patriarchal authority, proclaimed by Amal's father, yields a dead end for her existence as the result. Being suppressed, Amal tries to negotiate with the patriarchal structure reining her in. She perceives "marriage" not as a romantic union of two human creature, but as a "transaction" or a step towards achieving the education her father has initially forbidden, as in the following excerpt:

"اعتبرت الأمر صفقة ناجحة، فهو يريد الزواج من بنت مشايخ صغيرة في السن وعلى قدر وافر من الجمال، وأنا أردت رجلا ذا ملامح مقبولة ويوافق على مساعدتي في إتمام تعليمي. كانت المعادلة سهلة، لأنه تاجر ويفهم بالصفقات."

"I considered it as a successful agreement. He wanted to marry the very beautiful young girl from the sheikh's family, while I wanted a man with decent looks, who was willing to help me complete my education. The formula was simple: because he was a merchant, he understood the bargaining very well" (Al-Şāyigh, 2023, p. 45).

The immanence form is evident in the metaphor of the word *şafqah* in the narrative, which represents the reality of marriage within a patriarchal society explicitly. As Beauvoir (2011) suggests, in conservative marriages, women are generally posited as objects of exchange, and each of them will be handed over from one man (the father) to another man (the husband). Amal realizes that her position as the objectified and, thus, attempts to

negotiate: she exchanges her body for the “promise” of a chance to pursue her academic studies. This narrative also illustrates the situation of female immanence, where a woman must surrender her autonomy through marriage contract. Amal’s effort to access education is not merely a personal conflict with her father, but a reflection of the real structural barriers within the Druze community. Slim (2025) explains Druze women in Lebanese community, especially those who are religiously observant, face challenges in accessing education and careers outside the sect community, and this happens due to patriarchal norms wrapped in the practices of social protection. This aligns with the “body barter” strategy utilized by Amal for it is not only an individual choice but also an existential response to a system that deters the achievement of the woman subjectivity. Amal thinks by marrying her husband, Salim, she can get a chance to obtain an education. However, without realizing it, it is solely an ownership transfer of patriarchal authority from her father to her husband. The family sphere, both from her father and husband, becomes the evidence, proving the patriarchal authority can operate as the confinement and oppression towards a woman by positioning her as *the Other*: a daughter’s compliance to the parents and a wife’s submission to her husband.

The patriarchal authority in sectarian community

Amal experiences patriarchal domination from both her father and her husband, but this is not stand-alone phenomenon. The oppression occurring to women in private space is often an extension of social norms that discipline women. Barakat (2022) argues that Druze religion formally recognizes gender equality, yet in its practices, patriarchal structures still dominate their daily lives. Druze women resist in individual ways because there is no openly dominant structural channels available. Within *Mithāq al-Nisā’*, the moral and theological principles of Lebanese Druze social and religious norms legitimize men’s patriarchal behavior in family. A woman is not perceived as independent individual but as a protector of community honor, and thus her action and behavior are controlled by rigid religious interpretations and binding social sanctions, as in the following excerpt:

"وحين قرأت ميثاق النساء - إحدى رسائل كتاب الحكمة - شعرت بانزعاج شديد من اللغة التي تكتنفها نظرة دونية تفرض الوصاية على المرأة."

“And when I read the Women’s Charter, one of the letters in the Book of Wisdom, I was deeply disturbed by its language, which is steeped in a demeaning perspective that imposes guardianship (control) over women” (Al-Şāyigh, 2023, p. 87).

The quote points that the religious text in Druze community is used to portray women as inferior beings. In the passage, Amal undergoes a sense of degradation, explicitly through the notion of guardianship. This guardianship concept performs as an erasure of subjectivity since women are considered incapable of acting on their own and must always be under the control of a male guardian. Amal feels alienated because her identity is negatively defined by the religious authority in her community before she can define her own self.

"الدروز سلسلة لقد سمعت هذه الجملة مئات المرات في هذا السياق نفسه أي عند التعارف، لكنني لم أفهم يوماً ماذا تعني حرفياً وإلام ترمز!"

“The Druze were a chain.’ I have heard this sentence hundreds of times in the same context, which was during the introduction, but I have never understood its literal meaning or what it symbolized!” (Al-Şāyigh, 2023, p. 11).

Amal's confession, that even after she hears the words *al-Durūz* hundreds of times and does not understand their meaning, reveals a mechanism of patriarchal hegemony operating through indoctrination. Beauvoir (2011) explains society often imposes a destiny upon women by the repetitive use of myths until they are considered as the absolute truth. Amal finds herself in the position of immanence (confinement) when she is bombarded by communal doctrines without being given the space to understand them. The metaphor "chain" symbolically eliminates Amal's individuality. She is no longer an autonomous subject, but erased to be just become a connecting link in the family lineage. She loses her freedom for each action she takes is considered as a violation of the existing doctrine. Her lack of understanding denotes her position as an object which must obey the prevailing social rules.

The legitimation of patriarchy through religious authority is in accordance with *Suqūt al-Imām* by Nawāl al-Sa'dāwī. Ramadhan et al. (2024) states that the Imam uses religious authority to exploit and subjugate women. Meanwhile, the Druze society in *Mīthāq al-Nisā'* is more communal and closed. Control over women is exercised not only by the means of the interpretation of religious texts but also by the way of the construction of physical space and the indoctrination of communal identity. In the context of Egyptian and Lebanese society, religious institutions and sects serve as ideological instruments that reinforce male dominance. In spite of its universality, patriarchy concrete forms are shaped by the social structure of each society.

Objectification of the woman's body

Pressure from family and the social community eventually leads to the most complex form of oppression, which is the female body. Beauvoir (2011) explains the body represents a situation that restrains women in their social reality. In this novel, Amal's body does not exist as a space of freedom, but rather becomes objectified as a tool for reproduction and a receptacle for sexual desire. Amal feels alienated from her own body and this also leads to a sense of being "detached" from her physical self which is consumed by her husband's ambition and medical needs entirely, as denoted in the following excerpts:

"تحولت إلى فأر مختبر من أجل الحصول على طفل لم أرغب في إنجابه أصلاً!"

"I turned myself into a laboratory mouse just for the sake of getting a child that I didn't even want from the very beginning!" (p. 99).

"كان من المفترض أن أنجب طفل أنبوب، فأصبحت أنا امرأة الأنبوب."

"I was supposed to give birth to a test-tube baby, but instead I became a test-tube woman" (p. 103).

Those quotes reflect how Amal's bodily autonomy has been destroyed completely. The phrase *fa'r mukhtabar*, meaning "laboratory rat", and also the term *imra'at al-unbūb*, meaning "test-tube woman" are the metaphors for objects, indicating that Amal is no longer a whole human being but only a biological machine. In her theory, Beauvoir (2011) refers this as "species enslavement" when a woman's function as a bearer of offspring is valued more important than her individual will. Amal is forced to undergo IVF to give birth to an heir she does not desire. It indicates that under patriarchy, a woman's womb is treated as property fully owned by her husband, not by the woman herself.

Amal endures the oppression not only in her reproductive functions but also to the point where her mental and physical health are damaged. As stated by Beauvoir (2011), when the situation of immanence becomes unbearable, a person will experience a dissociation of state in which feelings of alienation and detachment from their own body

arise. Amal feels this as well when the weight of depression makes her feel less like a human and more like an inferior being.

"في منتصف طريقي إلى المطبخ، رأيت نفسي من خارج جسدي. للحظة، شعرت أن لي نظرة الطائر، ورأيت نفسي أزحف مثل حيوان أليف وسط هذا الأثاث الفاخر،" فتح سالم باب الصالون ونظر إلي وأنا ملقاة على الإسفنجة، فاقترب مني دون كلام، ونزع سرواله وألقى بنفسه " (p. 215).

"As I was walking toward the kitchen, I saw myself from the outside of my body. For a moment, I felt I had a bird's-eye view, and I saw myself crawling like a pet among this luxurious furniture. Salim opened the living room door... took off his pants and threw himself on top of me" (p. 215).

Amal's experience of being out of body and seeing herself "crawling like an animal" indicates that she no longer accepts her own body. She perceives it as something despicable. Tragically, in this dehumanized state, instead of offering help, her husband comes to her and exploits the passivity of her body solely to fulfill his lust.

"وقفت على حافة السطح، ورحت أحرق في الحقل تحت البيت. كنت على ارتفاع ثلاثة طوابق، ولكن الأرض كانت تبدو قريبة. حذقت في الأتربة والأحجار ثم تخيلتها تغرق في دمي. إن قفزت الآن سأكون قد غادرت في لحظة، أنا اخترتها أمام البحر الذي أحب راق لي أن أهوي من الطابق الثالث بالتزامن مع نزول الشمس في البحر أغمضت عيني وتأهبت للسقوط الحر" (p. 217).

"I stood on the edge of the roof, staring at the field beneath the house. I was three stories up, but the ground felt so close. I looked at the dust and rocks, then picture them drenched in my blood. If I jumped now, I'd be gone in a flash a moment I chose on my own before the sea I loved. It felt beautiful to me to leap from the third floor as the sun set into the ocean. I closed my eyes and braced myself for the free fall."

The passage marks the final point of Amal's experience. The suicidal desire is not just a wish to die. Instead, it becomes an existential process toward immanence. In Amal's point view, she turns into a powerless object and thinks that the only way to control her fate is to destroy herself. It proves that the patriarchal system imposed on her has succeeded in damaging her life's self-defense instinct and leads her to the idea that it is better to disappear rather than continue being oppressed.

Overall, Amal exists in the situation of total immanence, ranging from the patriarchal pressure from her father and her husband, the sectarian Druze authority in her community, to the absolute control over her body. She becomes an object that almost loses her existence. However, the severe suffering she undergoes will become a turning point. Her alienation will emerge her self-awareness to reject her silent fate and begin a radical effort of transcendence in order to regain her subjectivity.

Transcendental efforts to self-subjectivity

After being imprisoned in an immanence which almost shatters her consciousness, Amal does not entirely surrender to her position. According to Beauvoir (2011), transcendence is an individual's conscious effort to be beyond their facticity situation and move toward a more open future. In the novel, Amal's transcendence unfolds in the means of gradual, strategic stages: from negotiating the use of her body to gain access to education,

economic independence and mobility, to the radical family estrangement through divorce, inter-community marriage with a non-Druze man, and migration.

Education as the Outcome of Bodily Barter

In order to remain aware of her existence and to resist the patriarchal oppression that nearly eliminates her subjectivity, Amal commits the intellectual strategy as her first step. Realizing that she is imprisoned in her roles as a wife and an expectant mother, she sees that pursuing a university education is a way to preserve her bodily awareness. However, living in the patriarchal structure would not possibly make her path to education easy. Amal has to negotiate a barter with her husband which is offering her body in exchange for her husband's permission to enroll at university, as illustrated as follows:

"فكرت أن أفاتح سالم بصفقة جديدة تنص على قبولي بالتلقيح في حال سمحلي بارتياح الجامعة. هذه الخطة قد تضمن لي تحقيق حلمي وتنقذني من إحراج إعادتي إلى البيت من قبل والدي." صمت سالم مطولا حين عرضت عليه الفكرة. هرش في رأسه قليلا ثم مسح بيده على فمه، وقال: 'حسنا.. سنتصل بالطبيب غدا'.

"I was thinking of offering Salem a new deal: I'd agree to IVF (test-tube baby) as long as he let me to go to university. This plan might ensure that my dream came true and spared me the humiliation of my father sending me back home. Salem fell silent for quite a while when I laid out the idea to him. He scratched his head, then wiped his mouth with his hand, and said: 'Alright... call the doctor tomorrow'" (p. 149).

It shows that Amal strives for her own comfort by preserving her mind autonomy. According to Beauvoir (2011), education is the key for women to transcend their natural boundaries, or what is called *biological fate*. Amal's decision marks the initial step of her resistance. She uses her husband's desire to have a child in order to secure her own space for freedom.

Economic independence and mobility

After committing the initial step of her transcendence by continuing her education, Amal figures out that this step is not sufficient to gain peace in her life and to break free from the patriarchal oppression she experiences. Beauvoir (2011) points that a woman's autonomy must be manifested in concrete reality, which is *spatial liberty* and *economic independence*. Amal then earns a master's scholarship and obtains paid work. She also dares to drive herself to Beirut, against her husband's prohibition who considers the highway dangerous for women, as depicted in the following excerpt:

"الآن أنا امرأة في منتصف العشرينيات، خريجة الجامعة الأميركية ومرشحة لشهادة ماجستير ولدي عمل مدفوع الأجر. لقد انقلب السحر على الساحر."

"Now I was a woman in my mid-twenties, a graduate of an American University, a Master's candidate, and had a paying job. The spell had backfired on its witch" (p. 208-209).

By the excerpt above, it is clear that there is a radical shift in the power relations between Amal and her husband. By earning her own income, Amal no longer depends financially on him. She also attests that her fear all this time is a myth built by him to control her. She is now transforming from an object into a subject who is economically, socially, and in term of mobility independent.

Radical family estrangement

Soon after reaching her existential turning point—working and pursuing her Master degree, Amal's fear of Salem's threat is gradually vanished. Moreover, she dares to make a radical transcendental decision in the form of fleeing her husband's home and insisting on divorce like in these following quotes:

"هل ستصبحين زوجتي مجدداً ابتداء من هذه الليلة أم تفضلين الطلاق؟"

"Will you be my wife as of tonight, or would you rather have a divorce?" (p. 298).

"منذ هذه اللحظة، لم يعد لك القول في المكان الذي سأذهب إليه. منذ الآن القرار لي.

وقفت في مدخل المبنى، أنتظر سيارة التاكسي التي طلبتها هاتفياً عبر مكتب لخدمات التوصيل يعمل على مدار أربع وعشرين ساعة."

"From this moment, you did not have any right to speak about where I was going. From now on, I was the one who decided. I was standing at the building's entrance, waiting for the taxi I ordered through the twenty-four-hour shuttle service" (p. 299).

Those quotes reflect the clash between patriarchal domination and the existential awakening of women. Salim uses his patriarchal power to enforce the bodily submission, meanwhile Amal responds it with a firm assertion of autonomy. In accordance with Beauvoir's (2011) point of view, to be human means to be the one who decides. Through the sentence *mundhu al-ān, al-qarār lī*, Amal revokes her husband's right to control her mobility. It marks the gradual return of her status as a subject.

After running away from home, Amal clearly understands that she is still legally tied to Salim. In a family meeting attended by her father, her in-laws, and a lawyer, Amal expresses her request as below:

"ما هي طلباتك يا أمل؟' سأل عمي أبو سالم بلطف. 'طلبي هو الانفصال الودي عن سالم'. حقي هو أن أختار. وبهذا الاختيار وصلت لي كل حقوقي."

"What do you ask for, Amal?" asked Uncle Abu Salem (her father in-law) gently. 'My request is to separate amicably from Salem.' 'I had a right to choose. And by this choice, all of my rights would be fulfilled'" (p. 309).

Amal's statement in the sentence *ḥaqqī huwa an akhtāra*—meaning "I have a right to choose."—becomes the core of Beauvoir's (2011) thought: to be a human means having the freedom to choose one's life, not the choices of others. Amal deconstructs the notion of "right" in a divorce. In general, a wife's rights are associated with matters such as financial support or marital property, but Amal rejects it. She asserts that her highest right is her autonomy. She even agrees to give the primary custody of her daughter to Salim, on the condition that she can still see her and care of her on the weekends (three days a week). This demonstrates that transcendence is now more valuable than returning to her conservative role as a wife.

Total transcendence beyond the religion's taboos and leaving the hometown

The peak of Amal's transcendence does not only end with her liberation from an oppressive marriage, but it extends to the deconstruction of her community's sacred values. Amal's radical action lies in transcending sectarian religious taboos by marrying Hamed—a non-Druze man, as denoted in the following quote:

"كان حامد على علم بأن خلفيتي الدينية تمنع على الدروز الزواج من خارج دينهم، بل إن أي زواج من هذا النوع يعتبر خيانة عظيمة للدين ورسالاته والمجتمع الدوري ككل. لهذه الأسباب ولأسباب تتعلق بحضانتني الجزئية لابنتي، ولحماية أهلي من مجتمع المشايخ قررنا أن نبقى زواجنا سرياً. كما اتفقنا أن يكون الزواج مدنياً كي لا أضطر إلى تبني قوانين دين آخر..."

"Hamed knew that according to my religious background, Druze were forbidden to marry outside their faith. This kind of marriage would be considered as a great betrayal of the religion, its teachings, and the entire Druze community. For these reasons—along with the issues concerning partial custody of my daughter, and to protect my family from the community of Sheikhs (the religious elders), we decided to keep our marriage as a secret. We also agreed to have a civil marriage so I would not be forced to follow the laws of another religion..." (p. 364).

The passage above indicates Amal's existential intelligence in negotiating with patriarchy. The phrase *khiyānah 'uzmā* meaning "great betrayal" signifies Amal's awareness that her decision of marrying Hamed, the non-Druze, will put her social status in damage since it is one of the unforgivable sins. Contrarily, Amal does not stay silent and give up. Instead, she takes a risk through validating herself. To have a civil marriage in Denmark by her decision confirms her rejection to be submissive to religious authority over her female body. Aldoughli (2024) censures how the discourse on sectarianism in the Middle East has systematically neglected the gender dimension. Women are not considered important but are only the objects regulated by the system. Amal's choice to marry non-Druze man is a declaration that she refuses to comply with the religious authority which controls her. For her decision is perceived as high treason, she keeps it a secret as a negotiation strategy to prevent losing partial custody of her daughter.

Amal's success in liberating herself from the sectarian chain leads her to the peak of her transcendence: migrating from Lebanon to Germany. Beside performing as physical escape, this migration is also an existential projection to break the immanence cycle for the next generation. To her daughter, she promises that her departure is an attempt to open "a window to another broader world", reflected in this following quote:

"ولكن الفرق بيني وبين سندريلا هو أنني لم أعد بحاجة لأستعير حقيقة شخص آخر كي أنال الحب الحب يا صغيرتي جعلني حقيقية وحطم كل الأساطير التي كانت تحجبني عن الحياة."

"But, the difference between me and Cinderella was that I did not need to borrow someone else's truth anymore to find love... Love, my Little Princess, had made me real (*haqiqiyya*) and destroyed every myth that had been keeping me from life" (p. 390).

The excerpt above is a part of a letter Amal writes to her daughter. Through her letter, Amal deconstructs the myth of the conservative woman who waits for a savior, like Cinderella. For Beauvoir (2011), women are often trapped in *mauvaise foi* (bad faith), which is living a life that relies on male identity or validation in order to be valuable. Amal is not the Other anymore. She has transformed herself into a sovereign subject who can define her own reality, shatter patriarchal myths, and claim absolute freedom over her own fate.

The significance of the findings in the map of existential feminism studies in Arabic

literature

The acts of defiance by Amal in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* elaborate the process of developing a complete female subjectivity. The struggle is not instant, but requires several systematic stages of transcendence—from the use of her body in exchange to gain access to education, economic independence and mobility, to the self-liberation from patriarchal culture by divorce. Her subjectivity is fully achieved when she dares to marry a non-Druze in a civil ceremony and migrates out of Lebanon, especially from her village. By refusing to remain to be *the Other* as imposed by her family and society, Amal establishes her own self as a sovereign subject in total control of her destiny, defining her own path forward, meaning, and values without the grip of patriarchal power.

The research findings indicate that Amal achieves her subjectivity by undergoing a phase of immanence in the first place, in which she is reduced to be an object (the Other) due to patriarchal pressures in the form of Druze community's sectarian socio-religious authority, her family, and body objectification which diminishes her existence into a crisis point—a suicidal thought. There is also a series of gradual phases of transcendence comprising bodily negotiations by means of education, economic independence and mobility, divorce, inter-community marriage with a non-Druze man, and international migration. These findings substantiate Beauvoir's (2011) framework of existential feminism: women in the patriarchal society are reduced to the *Other*, losing the autonomy over their bodies and fates. Amal's existence is degraded to the *en-soi*, trapped in domestic and biological roles as described by Beauvoir's immanence. Her efforts towards transcendence occur step by step, from the initial negotiations to more radical actions. It reflects Beauvoir's notion of the struggle to achieve *pour-soi* or self-consciousness as an independent subject. Novel *Mithāq al-Nisā'* exhibits the transcendence concept occurs in linear fashion and by means of complex negotiations, requiring Amal to sacrifice her body to access education. It is an existential strategy not explicitly described by Beauvoir, but rather an adaptation of the strict societal context.

Compared with a study by Bou Hamdan (2026) analyzed the same novel with the perspectives of Butler and Cixous as the approaches, those findings would share a similarity in identification of body as the site for sectarian identity negotiation. However, Bou Hamdan focuses more on the performativity of identity and the deconstruction of discourse, whereas the current research deepens the existential dimension and bodily experience of Amal, particularly how the objectification of her body yields the dissociation and a crisis of subjectivity. The novelty of this research lies in its cultural and existential analysis of female character, offering a richer understanding of women's lived experiences amidst the patriarchal and sectarian Druze society in Lebanon.

Furthermore, rather than Ibrahim's (2025) analysis of cultural pressure with cultural criticism approach, this research goes further. It shows that the pressure is not only cultural but also impactful to subject's autonomy loss. This Amal as the main character to a point of existential crisis.

In the realm of Beauvoir's existential feminism, for the idea of transcendence, the findings of this research, which identifies the resistance manifestations in the forms of working, being an intellectual agent, subordination rejection, and taking active role in the society, expand the study conducted by Ramadhani (2025) toward Oman women's resistance in *Sayyidat al-Qamar*. The analysis of this research discovers a more complex pattern including the bodily barter strategy in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* which was not informed in the previous study. The difference indicates that in more restrictive society such as Druze sectarian community. Therefore, the novelty is on the understanding of the variations in resistance strategy across different social contexts.

Meanwhile, in their investigation on the anthology *Qālū*, Staniyah & Malik (2023),

identified a pattern of intellectual resistance. This is dissimilar to the findings in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* which denote that education can be both self-actualization and a negotiation tool in the power relation. Moreover, there is also collective transcendence in the form of Amal's decision to leave her daughter to open "another window" and it reveals that transcendence is not always individual, but it is effective to the future generation.

Another study by Anggraini (2026) conducts a comparative analysis between *Imra'ah 'Inda Nuqṭat aṣ-Ṣifr* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* yielded a result that women resistance in Arabic and Indonesian literary studies share similarities in education and economic independence. To expand the previous study, the finding in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* shows that in the context of sectarian society in Lebanon, the resistance also involves breaking religious taboos through non-Druze civil marriage as the transcendental effort to directly challenge the communal authority. Besides the absence of this perspective in the previous study, the novelty of this research is the expansion of the concept regarding resistance in feminist literature, which had priorly been explored in domestic and economic spheres.

Based on the discussion above, several earlier studies have analyzed the novel *Mithāq al-Nisā'* through the lens of cultural criticism and performativity theory. The other previous investigations have applied the approach by Beauvoir's existential feminism on the other Arabic literary works. Nevertheless, there were no study which specifically examined women's position in a state of immanence and their processes of transcendence using Beauvoir's theoretical framework. This research fills the gap by critically scrutinized the dynamics of immanence and transcendence undergone by Amal in overcoming the patriarchal Druze society and family in Lebanon. It highlights women's existential experiences as a foundation for understanding how subjectivity can be constructed by means of the body negotiation, education, economic independence, divorce, and migration abroad, as suggested by Beauvoir (2011) that "*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*". The research aims to explain how Amal acts as a subject who establishes her awareness and identity through a series of transcendental efforts. This research contributes to the development of existential feminism in the contemporary Arabic literary studies, offers new perspectives on women's strategies of resistance against socio-religious pressures, and hopefully serves as a reference for future gender studies and feminist literary criticism.

CONCLUSION

The study investigates the process of subjectivity formation occurring to Amal in *Mithāq al-Nisā'* by Ḥanīn al-Ṣāyigh with the use of Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism as the theoretical framework. The results show that Amal endures an immanence position since she is imprisoned as the Other due to the objectification over her body by the authority of family, religion, and the social structures of the patriarchal Druze community in Lebanon. Amal also undertakes several actions of transcendence in order to gain her subjectivity. She negotiates through her body in exchange for education, economic independence, divorce, marriage to a non-Druze, and eventually moving to Germany, leaving her family behind. She effectively deconstructs the sacred values of the preserved religion and the myth of maternal sacrifice, and this provides evidence that female subjectivity can be achieved by an autonomous existential struggle, as suggested by Beauvoir (2011) that "*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*". Hopefully, the research contributes to the development of existential feminism in the field of contemporary Arab literary studies, specifically in the Middle Eastern societal context, and offers a new perspective on women's subjectivity against communal patriarchal structures.

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