

# The World of Al-Gharbi Emran in *Mushaf Ahmar*: A Critique of Tripartite Taboo

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**Abstract** Very few studies have been carried out to investigate *Mushaf Ahmar* (2010), a narrative that questions conventional and tripartite taboos surrounding religion, politics, and sex in a conservative Yemeni milieu. Its appearance elicits a conflicted response of extreme hatred and great admiration. Though it can be addressed and analyzed on numerous and diverse levels, none of which are far removed from controversy. It provokes controversial questions about the homeland, existential issues related to interreligious interactions, equality between social classes, and its own crises, leading to a cultural interpretation that helps the community promote awareness and freedom struggle. It is hypothesized that the novel violates the Forbidden Trinity and that religion, politics, and sex are thought to be essential components of what defines a man, and avoiding them would be equivalent to writing an angelic earthbound story. By employing an eclectic method, in which a literary text's form and content are inseparable, the novel is analyzed. One of the most significant findings is the disclosure of the loopholes over which institutional literature has kept mute and refrained from delving into them openly and daringly by violating taboos. Emran, unlike some other writers, does not use sexuality in its two forms: homosexuality and heterosexuality, to arouse suppressed sexual urges. Instead, he uses sex to critique social and political corruption as well as extremism. The novel addresses broad humanitarian issues that concern everyone around the globe and offers an alternative perspective to the more widespread perspective in society.

**Keywords** Forbidden Trinity; politics; religion; sex; taboo.

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## Introduction

Whether it has to do with religion, politics, sexuality, conventions, or anything else, the term “taboo” refers to anything that is regarded as sacred, forbidden, or otherwise socially unacceptable. It is the speech, expression, or emotion that society, family, a political authority, or a religious institution forbids one from using or indulging in because it might violate people’s inalienable beliefs, symbols, and values. Messaoud et al., in *Taboo between the Novel Production and the Temptation to Receive the Story of Riyagh for Raga Alsanea as a model* state that taboo refers to a person or a group that fails to follow social norms pertaining to religion, sexuality, politics, or tribalism (304-305).

The topics of religion, politics, and sex (traditionally known as the Forbidden Trinity), despite being essential to life, are taboo in our culture on the grounds that addressing them facilitates the spread of nasty misinformation. Tackling taboos have terrible repercussions that cause a person to stray from morality and religion. As a result, for a very long time, writers shied away from taboo topics before approaching them to uncover and shatter them. They feel inspired to challenge social norms and create groundbreaking works that defy expectations. It is not possible to develop characters who do not hold any positions on issues of politics or religion and do not engage in sexual behavior. Yet, a literary work’s exploration of politics, religion, or sexuality is not an end. Instead, it serves as a means of employment and the purging of selfish desires and intentions. Every person’s life and the life of society are influenced by sex, politics, and religion. Since they are human in their morals and baseness, they cannot be separated. Even if someone is dressed in monks’ robes or is acting immorally, he is still a human being who is shaped by circumstances and motivated by desires.

A narrative has been touched by modernity due to a significant break with tradition in both form and content. Ahmed Murad, a novelist incorporated sex and religion into his works, such as “Season of Hunting Deer.” Regarding the religious taboo, Naguib Mahfouz’s name appears in his novel, “Children of Gebelawi,” as well as Haider Haider’s novel “A Feast for Seaweed.” There are two novels by Muhammad Shukri, “The Barefoot Bread and the Shaytar,” as well as novels and short stories by Ghada al-Samman that address the topics of sexual taboo. As for the political taboo, we find the novels of Abdul Rahman Munif such as “Cities of Salt,” show the brutality of political prisons and their gloomy hallways, which rob people

of all their humanity and reduce them to nothing more than a number.

Numerous literary works' most recent efforts seem to soar above the localized monotony and frustration to achieve a standard befitting of both local and global recognition. The Yemeni novel, which is not an exception, has experienced a sudden change. A well-known contemporary Yemeni novelist named Al-Gharbi Emran has deviated from traditional narratives in terms of content, style, and dialectical devices. His writings stand out for their broad audacity and depth in terms of culture, politics, and philosophy. He strives to make sense of the world around him and make it understandable to everyone. His purpose is to place the modern Yemeni novel within the context of both contemporary Arabic literature and international literature. His writing is well known for its audacious and caustic critique of reality and peculiar societal mores. *Mushaf Ahmar*, his first novel, challenges superstition, religious dictatorship, the annihilation of the other, sex, and political and social backwardness. Emran is aware of how to pique the reader's interest and evoke his feelings, and occasionally shifts his conceptions resulting in a distinctive reading experience (Editorial Board, 2008 245).

*Mushaf Ahmar* breaks taboos and causes controversy in several areas, including politics, sex, social concerns, and religion, evoking a range of responses to the point that it was banned from entering the country and its author has been fired. Aside from being a critique of the authority represented by the Sheikhs, who are a state within a state and religious leader, the novel also tackles the topic of sexuality, revealing homosexual and lesbian relationships. It may set out to be enlightening from the start, respecting religion to its purest limits. It argues with authority to bring it back to the right path when desires and a lonely voice become overwhelming, and it comprehends the soul and human nature within the framework of innocence, as well as the nature of creation (AbuTaleb 56). The narrative could be a powerful statement against religious oppression and the elimination of the other, and its themes seem to be an appeal to love, coexistence, tolerance, and acceptance of the unity of plurality, which has long been a Yemeni trait.

Abu-Taleb adds that the narrative is a mental and creative splash to uncover and dissect the reality of underdevelopment and the factors of monotony that late society has crammed into a terrifying black box to prevent the simple-minded from approaching them. From the outset, the book presents itself as enlightening, fully respecting religion and engaging the authorities in discourse to guide it back onto the proper course ( 56). From the perspective of the fundamental purity of creation, it understands the soul and human nature. It exposes society's hidden mechanisms, which stand for a discrepancy between internal claims and actual conduct. One

might wonder whether the taboo is broken here just for the sake of excitement, and later renown, or whether it is a necessary component of the tale.

### Analysis

Through a series of letters between Samparia, Taba'a, and their son, Handala, the novel tells the story of a Yemeni rural family's plight, separated by the civil war (between the north and south of Yemen) and the struggle between the right and the left. Al-Atawi (Taba'a's father and Samparia's maternal uncle) is the only one who resists the Sheikh's avarice and injustice to the people. As a result, the Sheikh and his bodyguards cruelly humiliate him to set a bad example for those who would challenge the Sheikh's unquestionable authority. Taba'a takes revenge for his father's humiliation, but he is arrested. However, he manages to escape to the frontiers near the former south of Yemen, where he meets Mawlana, a spiritual and mystified personality. Taba'a accepts Malwalna's offer to work as an assistant for him (Emran 58). Mawlana is a religious singer who performs religious melodies and anthems at weddings and recites Quran verses at funerals. Both men live in village's mosques because there are no other places to stay due to the lack of accommodation. One night Taba'a was shocked to find Mawlana playing with the young's penis (Taba'a penis). Taba'a is perplexed by being at the mosque and getting such sexual arousal from an allegedly holy man. Mawlana, however, is seen castrated, much to Taba'a's surprise.

Taba'a is presented to the National Democratic Front (NDF), a Marxist movement supported by the state of South Yemen that wages attacks against the political regime in Sana'a in North Yemen. The Islamists were appropriated by the political regime in Sana'a. The scenario is not favorable for the Marxist insurgents. Some of them fled to Aden, while others were granted amnesty. Al-Atawi is in prison because of his communist beliefs. Handala, who receives a scholarship to study medicine in Iraq, does not return as a physician. Instead, he reappears as an extremist whose head is filled with Islamic fundamentalism. He disagrees with his mother and despises his communist father. At the conclusion of the story, his name is on a blacklist and Interpol is looking for him. Samparia, who is introduced to the Hammam rituals, ends up lesbian "I've never imagined that a female would stimulate me" (204). Samparia is also taken aback by Shakhmina's marriage proposal to marry her "She astonished me by asking me to marry her" (207).

Following a brief plot outline to obtain a sense of what is going on, it is critical, to begin with, the title of the narrative (*Mushaf Ahmar*) that has sparked outrage towards the novelist. The word "Quran" refers to the book that the prophet Muham-

med (PBUH) received as a revelation from God. These revelations are gathered and preserved in a book known by several names, the most significant of which is Mushaf (plural Masahf). Because the word is used interchangeably to denote the Quran, any use signifies a direct reference to the Quran. Many people start questioning why such a “sensitive” word with so much religious, cultural, and ideological connotation is employed. Emran was asked to justify his title in an interview with Al-Riwayah online magazine. He replies by stating that the word Mushaf, which many people assume to mean Quran, does not have that meaning. Per the novelist, the word is not an Arabic word. It is derived from an ancient Yemeni language such as the Sabaeen or Himyarite and means “book.” To some, this response appears ornate and remorseful.

In general, the indefinite form of the title “*Mushaf Ahmar*” indicates that there is a Mushaf other than the well-known Mushaf, when compared to the definition form, “Al” (The), (Al-Mushaf Al-Ahmar), this indefinite form marginally seems to lessen the title’s provocative nature. This Mushaf Ahmar—as the narrator calls it and as described in it—is different from the Mushaf that is known by Muslims. It includes passages from the holy books of various religions like the Holy Quran, the Torah, and the Bible, as well as teachings from other religions like Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Sabinism (Emran 139). Yemenis have embraced and learned from all the main world religions, and most of them are practiced today. Neither fanaticism nor extremism have been able to stop them. This highlights the significance of coexistence and dialogue in all matters pertaining to man, rather than having religion, sect, race, or belief listed as potential sources of conflict.

Religion and its establishments, such as the mosque, a holy sacred place in Islam and one of its basic doctrines, is shown here as a site that shares and contributes to people’s misery. It is utilized by the political regime to question, imprison, and torture political dissidents. This means the mosque is shifted from a place of worship to a place for rest, sleep, and homosexual practices. Many nights of playing with Taba’a’s penis transform the mosque into a place where desire can be fulfilled. In this way, Emran deconstructs the mosque’s portrayal and its historical importance in the Muslim community.

This deconstruction infuriates people because it violates a religious taboo. The theme of religion appears through the symbol of Mushaf Ahmar, that is, with the red cover, and not the Red Qur’an, according to the translation on the cover of the novel, because the writer does not mean what the publisher wanted from this non-innocent translation, or say, the literal translation, perhaps for marketing purposes of the novel. Moreover, there is nothing in the novel about the issues of terrorism. The

title bears this interpretation, but the reader of the novel knows that what is meant is a call to tolerance and that religion in its entirety is one and the belief in the heavenly books is one of the pillars of faith (Abu Taleb 57).

At every opportunity, Al-Atawi would read passages and verses from all three books, indicating that all three religions have a common aim and are of equal significance “Allah originates creations; He repeats it; then to Him shall you be brought back” ... “And this is what the Lord said: I will destroy the whole earth, but I will not annihilate it” (Emran, 2010 34). To Al-Atawi, combining all the beliefs and religions known to humans in one book is essential for living in peace, and such a book should be a solution to conflicts and wars that stem from different and scattered beliefs derived from a purely religious reference. This also implies that Yemenis have believed in all religions since ancient times, and the story makes no distinction between them. The narrator brings up Yemeni characteristics from ancient history: “He is the one who prepared the trial against everyone who opposed Judaism. The Najran groove and burning those who followed Jesus’ teachings, written in the celestial writings, brought about the one male’s curse” (11). By promoting the spirit of tolerance, particularly religious and ideological tolerance, *Mushaf Ahmar* aspires to end the curse. “Your ancestors begin looking in Sana’a’s treasuries (for heavenly books) to gather them into one Mushaf” (11). Perhaps what Al-Atawi’s Mushaf (book) contains is evidence of religious and cultural compatibility. This does not imply blasphemy or atheism, but rather that we are in a context with its own peculiarities, one that has witnessed co-existence in Yemen since ancient times. The Red Book (Mushaf Ahmar) in the novel, is nothing more than a symbol of the coexistence of religions and beliefs, as well as their tolerance, within one man’s heart.

Al-Atawi seen by society as irreligious for accepting co-existence with all religions “does not deny that he believes in Judaism, Christianity, and other unknown religions that we have not heard of, nor does he deny that he believes in socialism. But he also believes in Islam” (Emran 228). Seen as a secular man who violates the taboo of religion as he “confuses Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and believes that the three religions are but one religion and professes that he is a secularist in principle” (139). *Mushaf Ahmar*, from which the fictional text’s title and initial threshold are derived, is committed to the concept of openness, and possibly a form of tolerance and uniformity between the doctrines that shaped the nation’s conscience/history.

Perhaps the authorities’ decision to remove parts of Al-Atawi’s book, such as the Old Testament and the Gospels, highlights the ugliness of the attack on freedom of belief and the violation of privacy. By refusing to succumb and continuing to

struggle silently, Al-Atawi might be considered the other face of forgotten Yemen, bearing noble values and the face of the history of religious coexistence with the reality of destruction, devastation, and tyranny. He stands for Yemen, which has been the victim of murder, displacement, and dismemberment.

The paradox is that Handala, who represents the third generation, is meant to maintain these tolerant values and embrace modern technology and knowledge. Handala, a representative of the country's younger generation, goes to Iraq to study medicine to transform the nation's image, which has been marred by wars and crises. Though he gets a scholarship to study medicine in Iraq, he returns to Yemen after years of university studies and has embraced religious extremism and learned to abolish the other because it is religiously or doctrinally different. Samparia addresses her son, Handala, in a dialogue between them, which was mentioned in the last pages of the novel:

Samparia: Isn't the heaven under the feet of mothers?

Handala: Yes

How do you allow yourself to say so many nasty things? Samparia

Handala: It was God who created us all, not me, who said that.

Samparia: leave me alone! [...]At that moment, I recognized that our conversation had come to a dead end and that my life was in jeopardy, and that you believed ... that God was only with you. (236)

Through the character of Handala, the narrative unveils practices that use religion as a cloak and a pretext to achieve their goals and conveys a message that wars provide fertile ground for extremism and terrorism, as demonstrated by Handala's experience in Iraq during the Iraq war. Emran might send an indirect message that since no one can be certain of others' genuine beliefs, even if they appear to be on the same path as the group, intellectual and open dialogue on religion is not taboo. Due to the internal leakage of hazardous ideas and the outward exaltation of religion, these taboos are a significant contributor to the emergence of extremism and terrorism. The novelist used mosques to discuss their religious role, and how they were also used by powerful people to assist some of their worldly business through clerics or those who served in the same area.

Black and red are the cover's two primary colors, which go well with the book's title and subject matter. The blood drops on *Mushaf's* paper are a symbol of the bloodshed in the name of religion throughout history, even though religion in general, and notably Islam, which shares its linguistic foundation with peace, begs for

love and peace. The novelist's message is that if a religion promotes hatred, malice, and premeditated murder, it is no longer a religion. In terms of the indication of the red color's association with Mushaf, we may find a preliminary explanation in the narrative that this Mushaf's color is red, but the symbolism may prompt us to look for the closest indication attached to this characteristic, which is the red color's association with blood. Then there was the blood link to terrorism, which took many forms, including Handala's intellectual shift following his study trip to Iraq. Rather, the story has several varied images of terrorism. The novel is likely meant to convey the message that *Mushaf Ahmar*, which some individuals use to justify their acts of terrorism, has nothing to do with the Holy Quran, which is replete with mercy and justice.

It serves as a metaphor for thought that has been purified of all traces of extremism. It represents an intellectual movement that upholds tolerance, the diversity of viewpoints, and the freedom for others to accept any ideologies, sects, or beliefs they choose without fear of compulsion or arbitrary judgment. Therefore, it is an approach to thinking that opposes individuality, dictatorship, and authoritarianism, and inflates one's own ego at the expense of the group, regardless of the justification—political, social, or even religious.

However, it is impossible to dismiss the possibility that the Mushaf, which Al-Atawi chooses as his constant companion and method, is a different religion. This religion is a synthesis of all religions, as it ultimately leads to a single path. However, the novelist addresses the taboo of religion, without scratching anything from the three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Even man-made beliefs are treated with extreme caution by Emran, and he sticks to the catchphrase he first coined for Al-Atwal: "I am a believer, not a Muslim" (228). This is because faith is more all-encompassing and superior to Islam, and beneficence is higher than faith. This saying is based on the noble verse in Surat Al-Hujurat, chapter 49: "The Arabs of the desert say, 'we believe.' Say, 'You have not believed yet; but rather say, 'we have accepted Islam,' for the true belief has not yet entered into your hearts'" (Ali, 2004, verse 15). Because religion is the religion of God and because man is fallible, literary works' task is to criticize delinquency and not offend religions. Since religion forbids deviations, abnormality between men and women is common and these activities can be committed in secret, particularly in oppressed countries.

### **Politics**

Every aspect of life, including the arts and religion, has been significantly impacted by politics. Though people are still reluctant to discuss politics since it is still

viewed as taboo, writers are determined to break the taboo around politics. It is worth mentioning that political issues and political history are interwoven, so it might be difficult to separate them in the narrative arts. According to prevailing opinion, the writer should be a member of the society she/he is writing to. Therefore, setting the text in its historical and social milieu is a key methodological step in determining themes and meanings. There have been many unspeakable social calamities throughout history. Through their writing and shattering of taboos, novelists advance society's understanding and combat injustice, persecution, and corruption.

More than the taboo topics of sex and religion, politics is the focus of *Mushaf Ahmar*. The narrative is set in the politically volatile era of the 1970s when there was intense political turmoil and ideological strife between the two Yemeni regions: Politically, South Yemen is referred to as the People's Republic of South Yemen, and North Yemen is known as the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). The story centers on the ensuing struggle, which escalated into a civil war between these two sections, with each attempting to enforce its ideology on the other under the guise of uniting Yemen. The entire atmosphere of ideology was governed by a major issue. It's simple to bring a country together, but what about a country divided by ideologies? The south of Yemen adhered to a Marxist worldview, while the north clung to Islamic and traditional societal traditions. This inconsistency creates a slew of impediments to unity.

The main political concern of the story is evident in the criticism of the tribal Sheikhs' assumed leadership positions and their unchallengeable dominance. Al-Atawi's book embodies the ancient spirit of resistance and revolt against injustice and exploitation. Both characters, males, and females, engage in a dialectical conversation that can be perceived as political protest and rejection of classical and despotic forms of power. The novel attacks the Sheikhs' ultimate authority, who believe they are the entire state or a state inside a state and who take decisions without trial. "You must leave the village. In a fit of rage, the Sheikh finished his speech" (Emran 37). They enjoy absolute power to the extent that when Taba'a tries to flee the Sheikh's prison, one of the inmates urges him to abandon the plan. "You must think reasonably. Do not think of escape. Patience is better. Don't think that angels once they receive you in your grave after death .. they will ask you who is your God, your prophet, and your Sheikh... " (27). The writer mocks the Sheikhs' unassailable authority, which is comparable to that of God: "This is how you obtain my satisfaction...God bless my subjects" (38). This means the Sheikh behaves like God on the earth and that people must seek his pleasure. However, by beating the sheikh and knocking him to the ground, the author breaks the Sheikh's taboo (26).

On the other hand, the narrative also vilifies those who rebel against tyranny, even though they represent the other side of oppression and exclusion.

Do you know why you are here?

You know?

Do you remember the year of famine?

Any year?

And what are you doing now against me? do you not consider it oppression?

Who has given you the right to stand trial me?..... (132)

The conversation described above is between the Sheikh (who was abducted by the National Front) and members of the National Front. The National Front members sacrifice their lives and money to put an end to the unjust sheikhdom because they regard it as a representation of the dictator who robs people of their rights by force. The Sheikh and that group are engaged in a conversation in which each member attempts to defend the validity of his own beliefs. The Sheikh believes he has the right to dispose of other people's lives and possessions as he sees fit. The National Front sees itself as a wise judge that interrogates the Sheikh and holds him accountable for all his unjust actions against his subjects. It is as if the novelist shouts at us, saying: Yemen will not rest if individuality reigns supreme and tribalism persists, exclusion, marginalization, murder, and displacement are the only ways for different ideologies to communicate with one another.

There is a religious authority, which is represented by some priests who are dressed in piety to fulfill their own and other authorities' goals. They employ their ability to use religion to bolster certain members of society, and the matter goes further to the extent that the priests involve convincing people of the significance of those in positions of authority both in this world and the hereafter. One of the Sheikh's soldiers is heard saying to a prisoner who wants to get out of jail: "Don't think when the angels receive you after your death, they will ask you who is your Lord, Prophet, and Sheikh? If you answer incorrectly, God's curse and wrath will befall you" (Emran 27). In this conversation that demonstrates how powerful the Sheikh is, the novelist mocks the Sheikh's absolute power, which is akin to that of God.

As stated in the preceding passages, there is a connection between politics and religion. Such a connection is also evidenced by the terrible end of the socialist, Shakhmina at the hands of women in the mosque. Shakhmina is the woman who fought beside the Taba'a comrades and never wavered in the fulfillment of her na-

tional duty until she, too, died as a martyr. Yet, the justification for murdering her is that “This is the punishment for prostitutes, and another one said: Society must rid itself of them” (194). This is not unusual in any country that rejects the other’s point of view and refuses to accept what he or she presents. The danger lies in connecting religion and politics because it binds man with the shackles of fear, which makes any coup or objection to it in the circle of unbelief and exclusion. As a result, individuals who see themselves as guardians of the people in the name of God choose this method since it is the most effective and efficient means of controlling people.

“O Ye who believe! obey Allah, and His Messenger and those who are in authority among you” In the noble verse, our sheikh is the one who is concerned with authority. To obey him is to obey God and His Messenger. You must know that the imprisonment of our sheikh is obedience and loyalty. (27)

Thus, anyone who disagrees with its point of view or method is silenced. Al-Atawi is a one-of-a-kind model of liberal thought and a person who is adamant about the values and opinions in which he believes. Regardless of how much injustice and persecution he faces, he is convinced of the future’s justice.

Tyranny will grow old tomorrow, and no one will be able to restore its youth... sharpens its fangs..... And the whip we used to scrub our skin will wear away, and the executioner will be unable to find anyone willing to listen to his explanations for his tyranny. (170)

Al-Atawi’s *Mushaf Ahmar*, is a symbol of an intellectual movement that promotes tolerance, diversity of viewpoints, and the right of others to adopt whatever ideas, sects, and beliefs they wish without fear of force or arbitrariness. It is a way of thinking that opposes individuality, despotism, authoritarianism, and the ego under any justification, whether political, social, or even religious. Oneness of thought is a symptom of barrenness, lack of fertility, the flowering of authoritarianism, the dominance of totalitarian mentalities, and man’s tyranny over his fellow man as much as it is a sign of consistency and development of life. Individuality is a long-standing problem that predates any single epoch or historical period, and eliminating its curse necessitates a historical background as well as a mantra that reorganizes things according to the logic of plurality and variety, hence *Mushaf Ahmar*’s presence was required.

The novel depicts political conflicts as well as Yemenis’ yearning for unity

between the country's northern and southern sections, Sana'a and Aden, the dream, which has come true. It highlights the relationship between Yemen's political, tribal, and revolutionary authorities, as well as the tribal sheikh's authority in Yemeni society at that time, and yet still today, over many aspects of Yemeni life, events, and trajectory. Even though the novel portrays urbanization and cultural progress, it closely monitors the sites of flaws and proposes alternatives that might be considered, even if they are utopian and not currently possible. The narrative of *Mushaf Ahmar*, describes a significant and sensitive period in Yemeni society's history, which was torn apart by civil conflicts from north to south as the ruling authorities continued to exterminate and exploit many segments of the downtrodden. Yemen would be transformed into a hotbed of violence, with many crimes taking place between the eastern and western camps, both of which are backed by the Arabs, who in turn support Sana'a. The narrator says, "Within days, Sana'a succeeded in winning the support of some Arab leaders and formed a front against anyone who supports the armed struggle to achieve Yemeni unification" (118).

The international support manages to recruit the opposition that has sided with personal interests over the nation's overall cause. Supporting the Salafist movement's battle against renegades, infidels, and communists is remarkable. This rendered mosque imams into trumpets, chanting Surat Al-Fil and some supplications recited after the Maghrib prayer during the occupation of Iraq or Kuwait. "Oh God, do freeze the blood in their veins, demolish them, and scatter them into pieces. Oh God, make them captives and their property booty for Muslims" (176). Not only was the leadership bought, but a series of assassinations and looting were practiced by releasing the hand of Salafi jihadism to confront communism. This results in the siege and bombardment of entire villages, but rather their burning.

"Mawlana," one of the National Front's undercover spies in the north is a symbol of a religious group that once dominated northern Yemen before succumbing to the Salafi movement, backed by the government in its fight against the communist invasion. He never succeeds in controlling the front's revolutionary thought, which crumbled early, because he's been castrated, thus, his impact may appear to be restricted. Under the authoritarian system, the term "castration" is frequently used to describe political impotence (Driss 82). "Political and sexual castration are ironically related to homosexuality and masturbation" (82).

This is also true with Samparia who turns to new forms of desire after failing to satisfy her own cravings in the traditional manner. While Mawlana finds solace in arousing Taba's desire, Samparia is likewise initiated into Hammam ceremonies and eventually ends up as a lesbian. One of the more captivating passages for the reader

is the scenario where Taba'a and Samparia's marriage contract is performed in an unusual way. They were alone without a guardian, witnesses, or judge when he proposed to her after they stripped off and descended to swim in the waterfall because, as Taba'a states, they do not need that paper "that kills love. "How then, do we get married? Like this!! I extended my palm to you.. I shook hands with you.. I addressed you: -would you accept me as husband..? If you wish, say: "I accepted you as a husband... and if... " (Emran 126). Through this scenario, the author questions moral and social norms, breaks the taboo of using sex in politics, and gently promotes marriage based on love.

Under the guise of purifying the country of communist elements, Salafist groups in Yemen committed terrorism by displacing the inhabitants and plundering property (222). Al-Atawi who is arrested and imprisoned since he is the only opponent, is taken to the mosque's court and given three days to repent. Arresting Al-Atawi on suspicion of possessing *Mushaf Ahmar* shows that anyone who does not belong to the power group will face arrest and a loss of dignity, whether he is a member of the revolutionary, nationalist, or Marxist left, or a believer in God, His angels, books, and messengers. Thus, it is not strange to find that the people's view of the ruling authority in the remote areas is shaped by a kind of blind sanctification shrouded in ambiguity, as Taba'a says:

We visited several villages...the inhabitants of these unusual regions follow inherited customs passed down from their Himyarite forefathers... Some pagan practices, such as ruler sanctification, persisted. Many of people believe that his authority comes from God...they live in primitive conditions. (135-136)

The ugly picture introduced by the novel about the Yemeni war is the reality of the struggle for power in various parts of the world. However, the reasons differ depending on the influence of history and geography, which demonstrates how leaders achieved unity at the expense of the people, who remained the first and last victims.

The rebel, the opponent, the downtrodden, and the furious lover all see Taba'a as a symbol of the Yemeni cause. From the perspective of his beloved Samparia, he was not portrayed as a normal human being.

He is the one who has reawakened in me human feelings. He instilled in me the concept of respect and equality.... I absorbed from him the principles of socialist freedom from engraving the initial letters of love on the purity of the

heart. (219)

Moreover, Taba'a was viewed as something great by "Mawlana," the guy who goes between villages and districts as an opponent and a new transmitter. "I was searching for myself, hoping to find you Today, I see you as a man working for a good cause, and I view you as someone amazing" (83). Taba'a wished for a united Yemen because he was an international revolutionary combatant who thought that change would come via the guns, not through politicians' words and with the military invasion. He was confident in the capabilities of the front, which we learned through a message sent to Samparia "Tomorrow, .....we will live in a country where justice and equality prevail, a country that extends from sea to sea... a country that is anti-secession" (195).

Strangely enough, Taba'a rebels against his slogans and allies with his old enemy that is still exercising injustice against the subjects, including his father "Al-Atawi" who is still imprisoned in a covert prison, and the Sheikh of Arfata fortress, who is still exercising his powers freely. This change is not unexpected because it was preceded by a period that gave the new grace time to take effect on his face. Taba'a is shown abusing his erstwhile allies and calling them mercenaries while blinding himself from what he is doing. This is how the novel shows contradictions, refractions, and transformations. This represents the betrayal and political hypocrisy that spread among the members of the revolutionary groups, which were defeated by the repeated betrayals of the leaders who ruled them and who used them to stop their progress as they approached victory. It has split up, lost credibility, and appeared to be motivated by its authoritarian aspirations like other weak groups. "Suddenly, Taba'a appeared on Channel One's screen... to announce that the coalition had entered into a political dialogue with the ruling party through an alliance with it... He curses in his words the former comrades...accusing them of treason" (231).

The story essentially shows how corrupt authorities are in North Yemen. It also shows how the people are unable to topple the rulers despite their wrongdoings because they are exploiting religion as a tool of power, as already alluded to. Moreover, Sana'a authorities depend on the tribal system that controls the fates of the populace. In the basements of the mansions of the most prominent citizens of the state, there are hidden jails across Sana'a. The revolutionary movements were merely catchy slogans used to achieve utilitarian purposes. They are only a replica of the oppressive systems they are criticizing. There are many events in the novel that reflect a bleak image that reinforces the negative view among many who belong to the National Front: images of homosexuality, e.g., Mawlana.

In brief, the ideal image of the “National Front” that has been constructed in the reader’s mind for years has been demolished through the character of Taba’a. It is manifested clearly when Taba’a met his son, Handala for the first time. When “Taba’a” arrived clandestinely to bid his son “Handala” goodbye before he left for Iraq to pursue his studies, Handala was surprised to see a frail old man instead of the one portrayed by Samparia as a strong, muscular young man and a daring and indomitable knight “Where is whom you have drawn, Mom?... remains of a human” (13). Furthermore, the novel highlights the fact that external forces are what really drive the Yemeni conflict and that the country’s ruling elite is more interested in safeguarding its own interests than the welfare of its people. “The major catastrophe is that the split leadership is subjected to a command from the influential exterior forces” (218).

### **Sexuality**

*Mushaf Ahmar* breaks the taboo of sex and boldly highlights a rare sexual philosophy aspiring to generate rarefaction and explicit change in a variety of systems. Addressing social flaws that jeopardize society’s ideals is the first step toward fixing them. It makes mention of male-to-female gay relationships, and it does so in a way that suggests that it is normal. Rather, the novel dares to connect the characters’ militancy with sexual behavior. Through its characters and dialogues, as well as its postulates, the novel has demolished the sex taboo. It deliberately exposes the manifestation of homosexuality among the women in the bathrooms and the men in the mosque, which is an example of moral degradation in Arab society.

The story devotes space to the issue of homosexuality between Sheikh (Mawlana) and “Taba’a” “I left him...his fingers had withdrawn after he had brought me to the climax, and his fingers were polluted...that night I only slept before dawn” (64). Taba’a is perplexed by this elderly Sheikh who transforms into a frail and eccentric person at night. Sheikh’s action is the result of impotence, as Taba’a discovers the secret, saying: “I saw him without genitals” (83). This action draws attention to the amputation of “Mawlana’s” genitals, which were amputated for various reasons or as part of the ruling party’s torturing of him. It can be said that the novel’s criticism of Mawlana has broken and destabilized the religious institution and the clergy alone, rather than shattering the taboo of religion. Emran wants to convey through the clergy that nothing other than what is on the surface is considered holy, while there are many deviations, and this is a criticism of a person’s delinquency and violation of the law.

On the other hand, it might be argued that criticism of religious symbols con-

stitutes a breaking of a political taboo or an indirect attempt to undermine it. Taba's sexual complicity with Mawlana, on the other hand, foreshadows his political complicity in the final years of the struggle. Mawlana is credited with preparing the intellectual and organizational groundwork for the political uprisings that broke out in the country's northwestern areas.

I changed the way I dealt with him...He began by briefly introducing me to the names of the settlements in the area...He provided me with the names of persons who were known for standing up to authoritarianism and injustice. He taught me about the ideas of liberty and struggle. He explained the powers of evil, good, and progress, bringing me closer to the foundations of achieving justice and equality. I acquired the fundamentals of national ideas from him during my last stay with him... and he taught me how to confront life. (81-2)

Throughout the novel's chapters, Samparia's relationship with Shakhmina appears to be based on friendship. Yet, the ritual of bathing turns into lesbian sexual practice. "Shakhmina fingers had crept into sensitive areas... my body collapsed. I closed my eyes and collapsed onto kneeling as her fingers stretched above my thigh" (202). Such practice for a simple reader apparently seems to be attributed to the absence of Samparia's lover, son, and uncle causes her to lose her femininity, and she starts to seek out things she has lost. Significantly, the bond between Samparia and Shakhmina symbolizes the desire for the union of "Sana'a" and "Aden," as well as their decision to unite the North and the south of Yemen, the dream that came true in 1992.

The scene in the bathroom is one of the most prominent scenes that indicate the writer's ability to convey the unspoken, making it a human issue within a psychological framework and a physiological requirement. "All of the singing and dancing, I discovered, was merely a warm-up for a far more thrilling ceremony....." (200). The narrative here reveals the unspoken by reading the alternative underworld of a society whose two sides are battling for survival and unity or no unity. There are no men in this female underworld; instead, there are passionate partnerships that embrace the spirit of homosexuality in scenes illustrating the extent to which a society has fallen into the retreat of its men by waging deadly struggles for survival, power, and control.

The bathing room has been the private haven for women to break away from the routine of sexual intercourse while searching for something new and different. The narrator's opinion on the subject of sex and pleasure has changed. He's deve-

loped a new sexual philosophy that will lead him down the path to absolute pleasure. "My dreams... over the past years revolve around having a man take over me... To turn me into a waterfall of pleasure... But I didn't think of the woman Shakhmina pushed me to the edge of an unfamiliar sensation" (204).

The use of sex is not so much offensive as it reveals a particular response to the human spirit, which is caught between anguish and waiting, death and the desire to live. This means sex's main purpose is to make people forget their anguish. Moreover, many types of societal and governmental corruption are fought using sexuality as a weapon. When the National Democratic Front operations against Sana'a's political regime are successful, Taba'a's sexual encounters with his "wife" are extremely fruitful. These attacks by Marxist combatants, among whom Taba'a is a prominent character, are juxtaposed with Taba'a and Samparia's fruitful sexual encounters. However, we discover sexual failure when things start to crumble apart for these fighters following the signing of the agreement between the governments of North and South Yemen. Samparia describes a moment in which a failed sexual communication occurs:

I lay naked in my bed indifferently ..he continued sipping his drink cheerfully. The light of dawn approached. He tried again and again. I submitted myself to him without responding to his attempts. His lips did not stop. I left him to plan. ...He exploded crying and cursing himself with abusive words. I embraced him consoling him and reminding him of our past happy memories. (Emran 20-21)

Taba'a's aspiration of a united Yemen ruled by a Marxist political state is crushed, leaving him impotent. His world's demise was the primary cause of his impotence. Mawlana is also revealed to be a castrated person who has lost hope in life as a result of numerous personal and societal political and ideological setbacks. This parallel to and coupling of sex and politics is a distinguishing trait of the modern Arabic novel that characterized Emran's *Mushaf Ahmar*.

Sex is also viewed as both the social manifestation of freedom and the essence of the human experience that women go through. This appears clearly in *Mushaf Ahmar* which examines the essence of extremism in all its forms, positive and negative. The characters meticulously chosen by Emran to represent all the conflicting currents show exaggeration. Samparia practiced obscenity (lesbianism) and sexual perversion when she grew radicalized in her socialist current, and her view that it is one of the freedoms, despite her religious upbringing. The Sheikh's

mother, Fatmina, and her maid, Shakhmina, shared the same traits. Both were early members of the Salafist movement, and it's possible that these characteristics led to their marginalization, ignorance, flatness, and dependence. It is an upbringing that purposefully kept women out of a patriarchal culture ruled by religion and guardianship. Taba'a was also submissive and submitted to the abnormal sexual activities of (Mawlana), who was hiding beneath the Sufi court's tent, in his weird attempts to masturbate Taba'a. The writer portrays the exaggeration in the philosophy of possession through the dialogue between Taba'a and Mawlana:

Taba'a: Mawlana, I can't sleep if someone teases me.

Mawlana: Even if you get married. I was taken aback by his logic. I took a deep breath and gathered my thoughts.

Taba'a: even if I get married

Mawlana: What's wrong if I tease you? Do you think I'm harmful?

Taba'a: But foreplay consumes me.

Mawlana: [...] for a little while longer, and then I'll put you to sleep...you provide me with enormous pleasure...a sense of ownership [...]. I don't think in the same way that others do...and I don't want to hurt anyone. (68)

From the above discussion, it can be said that sex is only an alluring cover for its real objective, which is to combat political corruption, fanaticism, and extremism. Moreover, it seems that perhaps the expansion of the space of events is what made the aspects of life in the novel overlap. The political overlaps with the religious, and the intellectual modifies the social and becomes a form of religion and a form of politics.

### **Technique**

The epistolary method used by the novelist recounts the injustice, cruelty, and feudal sheikhdom that were once and are still prevalent in many Yemeni districts. The letters are convenient here as they work as a link between the characters who are separated from each other; Handala in Iraq, Taba'a escaped the tyranny of the Sheikh, while Al-Atawi is in jail. The strategy of suspense starts with the title and lasts throughout the narrative space until the conclusion, swiftly moving between the past and present tenses while utilizing different narrative techniques.

The narrative makes use of intertextuality. There are several references to the Quran Bible, the Turah, and other traditions such as Buddhism and Confucianism. When addressing political events, direct reporting is also used. The dialogue te-

chnique is appealing since it is devoid of invention and was executed expertly. In addition to the objective competence and dexterity with which the narrative was constructed, the dialogue profited significantly. Besides employing external dialogues, the novel contains internal dialogues that delve into the depths of the various characters.

Emran has a great deal of faith in the meaning of the names he provides for his characters, as well as in their spatial and conceptual value. The grandfather's name, Al-Atawi, is Arabic for "to give and to offer." The name is taken from the word "atta," which means to give, and the character, in this case, alludes to this meaning as it follows its development through the story. He has never been a hindrance, a stopper, or detached from the act of giving. This is reflected in his role as a struggler in thought, politics, and aspirations, as well as in weaving the close relations between members of the one family that feeds into the larger family, which is the homeland. The name Taba'a, which in Arabic means "to follow," followed the father's lead in pursuing his vision for the unification of Yemen. He is also the one who walked with his father, convinced of the necessary part to be played. Samparia is more than just a woman; she is a symbol of the 26<sup>th</sup> of September Revolution against the Imamate regime. Handala, Samparia's son, passed away after losing his chance to be a doctor. Because Handala is a bitter plant, its name implies bitterness, and I believe there may be a connection between some of the implications. It is hurtful to see Handala reject his father when he says goodbye, because he does not adhere to his beliefs, and the mother, because she possesses the drive and ability to work for the good of the nation and its citizens through political or social action. The term "Handala" describes the gap that has developed between the son and his mother since his travels, and it predicts that one day the son will return to stand in front of these letters and read them, at which point he will be aware of the anguish the mother was going through. The names made the novel more in-depth. They are handled with high professionalism and generality. It becomes an indirect or strange novel because of their nodding, not stating, pointing, and lack of clarification, as well as the release of some of their occurrences into the world of imagination, which is distinct from reality. This demonstrates Emran's ability to connect the semantics of various objects, names, locations, etc.

The components of time and space are present in the narrative work. Through them, the events develop and travel through space, just as the writer who mastered the game of time that interferes with each other did, and this occurs through a letter, or a memo written by Samparia. Throughout all this time, questions about society's problems, changes, and relationships among its members have been raised. The

places vary according to the requirements of the narrative event and the narrative work process. Mosques have been used in the novel to discuss their religious significance as well as how powerful individuals take advantage of them to further some of their worldly interests. The story's setting, characters, and events provide an artistic portrayal of the political scene during the period that spans the years 1970 to 2006.

### **Conclusion**

*Mushaf Ahmar*, a narrative that can be interpreted in a variety of ways, is a true turning point and significant transition in Al-Gharbi Emran's experience and creative vision, not just in terms of content but also in terms of form. It transcends certain conflicting social norms rather than breaks down the taboos of sex, religion, and power. Although it focuses on "The Forbidden Taboo», a destructive and frustrating league for Yemen's development, it succeeds in avoiding stimuli that influence morals and public decency. It avoids violent breaks and flagrant transgressions of religious beliefs and symbols. It also neither advocates sectarianism, ethnicity, or racism, nor does it violate the system of values or beliefs. Instead, it emphasizes the danger of extremism and condemns it in all its manifestations. The narrative doesn't violate religious beliefs. On the contrary, it addresses religious issues to correct mistakes committed in the name of religion. By criticizing religious symbols, it indirectly transgresses a political taboo, condemning how bizarrely politicians exploit religion to their advantage. The novel exposes the policy of ignorance, and the corruption of Sheikhs, politicians, and authorities. By addressing the topic of homosexuality, the novel breaks the sex taboo.

The novel subverted reality by removing the image of the man in favor of the interest in the woman and by elevating her to a major position in the narration, events, and heroics. The novel's distinguishing feature is the women's voice (Samparia) in its excellent furnishing, which distinguishes it as a unique, profound novel with a deep human depth, in addition to the dream of Yemen's union. It is concluded that to create a cultural reading that helps the community and to increase awareness of and aid in the search for liberation from domestic crises, political, religious, and sexual concerns must always be tackled. This indicates that the so-called "Forbidden Trinity" is nothing more than a fear-based ruse that has kept many people in the dark. It is nothing more than a vicious spiral that will create generations that are incapable of being creative or powerful.

The novel's theme is an appeal to love, coexistence, tolerance, and acceptance of the unity of diversity, which has long been a Yemeni trait. It reveals the hidden

and sheds light on people who falsely claim virtue. It illustrates the untruth of man, society, and reality, as well as the falsehood of individuals who profess convictions that crumble at the first shock, conflict, or change. It exhibits an exaggeration of fanaticism when Samparia became radicalized in her socialist movement. Despite having been raised in a spiritually committed household, she practiced lesbianism and homosexuality, feeling that they were among their liberties. The same is true with Fatmina, who belongs to the Salafist movement.

The novel as a whole is a literary work that recounts Yemeni unity and tracks its stages since its inception. It's all wrapped up in a wonderful symbolic and creative cover that, as far as the researcher is aware, no one has ever dealt with from this perspective. It is stated that the Yemeni crisis is no longer a domestic issue, but rather one in which external forces are at work.

In short, politics, religion, and sex are integral parts of a person and go side by side. They are intertwined in the novel to the extent; talking about politics naturally leads to talking about religion, and religion leads to sex. Emran's ability lies in highlighting the contradictions and the unsaid. He does not use sex to elicit repressed sexual urges as some Arab writers do. On the contrary, he fuses sex with politics and religion. Neither public modesty nor religion is transgressed by the novelist. Sex is employed to combat radicalism and the ruling regime.

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