

Patriarchy in Love Songs

by Nada Awar

Throughout the centuries, ancient as well as medieval and contemporary history, females were and still are considered to be more sentimental than males. Love songs in general, project the romantic story of a hero and a heroine; thus, speaking of a psychological situation, pronouncing conflict and sometimes provoking a revolt, reaching the unconscious to direct the actors to a particular pattern of social behavior which is either traditional or liberal, and thus outlining the institutionalization of the patriarchal system.

In this article I will discuss the romantic behavior of an Arab woman by analyzing the lyrics of two love songs and by studying the effects of such songs on both males and females.

The songs are *Habaitak biSaif* (I loved you in Summer) sung by Fairouz⁽¹⁾ and *Intal Hubb* (You are the Love) which is sung by Um-Kalthoum⁽²⁾. A large Arab audience - irrespective of class, religious and other socio-political and behavioral variables -- is known to identify with the stars' songs.

Both songs depict an ancient well of traditional female submission and surrender to male lovers who are only heart-breakers. The heroines are helpless and dependent. Their stories are old-fashioned tales of tears and lament for the superman of their dreams, who never really acknowledges or reciprocates their love. Ironically, both songs 'beautify' the image of submissive women by emphasizing determination and loyalty to an essentially melancholic, unjust and unequal relationship. Her submission and slavery to love is due to the discrepancy between their feelings for each other and reinforced by the patriarchal and societal sex-role definitions.

The songs are widely broadcasted and enjoyed by a large audience of women who dance to the music as if in a therapeutic search for easing the inner pain of their own hopeless love stories. Hence, they (the songs) seem to personify their own stories and romantic inequalities.

Habaitak biSaif is the story of endless suffering . . . It tells of a young woman who sacrifices her days and the seasons, while years pass by, waiting for her sweetheart who is completely careless and ignorant of her feelings. She waits for her lover at a fictitious date, season after season, year after year, he remaining indifferent. As the song unfolds, she repeatedly emphasizes her love and loyalty. She represents the ideal image of that female who cherishes love and romance, delivering her life, happiness, and soul to it. It sounds, almost, like a version of Romeo and Juliet, in which the heroine plays both roles, while the intended hero is an absent and cold lover.

Intal Hubb justifies the attachment of a deprived woman to an unappreciative man. This love portrays a master-slave relationship in which our heroine, again, insists on playing the role of the ever-lasting martyr. The song seems to reinforce traditions of women's passivity to love, whereas men, on the other hand, are blessed with their freedom. The hero is welcomed into the heart of the heroine, although he is lavishly enjoying other women, when she says *so many hearts are flying around you wishing to reach happiness and gain your satisfaction, but I am the one whose heart belongs to you, you make me happy, you deprive, as you wish* . . .

However, when alone, she realizes that he does not reciprocate her love, yet does not blame him. There is no revolt, only hopeless devotion and

while he remains master of the game, she refuses to put an end to her jealousy and torment by breaking free. The lyrics go on in a torrent of illogical sentimental self-torture.

These two songs can be considered an extension of the *al-Jahilia* period when Arab women were owned as *Jawary*. A *Jariah* did not have any freedom or will to choose her life. The more educated she was, the more expensive she became and consequently, the more owned and enslaved. *Al Jariah* had to satisfy her owner in any possible way. She was considered his property with no considerations to her feelings as a human being.

However, the inherited master-slave patriarchal system acts as an invisible thread of backwardness hindering young women from making their own choices and producing change in traditional norms and customs. These socially inherited concepts dictate certain role definitions for women. They have to be patient, submissive, passive and bear the burden of being the martyrs. Women are compelled to walk in the shadows of male guardians, whether father, brother, cousin, lover or even a friend.

Hence, songs like the ones reviewed in this article are nothing more than a call supporting the patriarchy imposed on women. They (the songs) are representative and influential for they have spread throughout the masses. Even if they hold different interpretations for each of the sexes, they express the ultimacy of romance and love •

(1) (2) Fairouz is a Lebanese Singer who enjoys a wide Arab audience for her romantic songs. Even more acclaimed throughout the Arab world is Um-Kalthoum of Egyptian origin. For further information also see "Female Singers in the Arab World: Cultural Symbols in a Traditional Society" by Nada Awar in *Al-Raida* #51, November 1990.