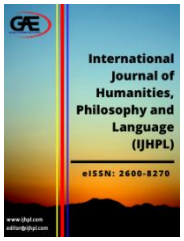
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DISCURSIVE STRUGGLES OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN IN THE POLYPHONIC NOVEL *"BITTER ORANGE TREE"* THROUGH BAKHTIN`S DIALOGUE THEORY

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Abstract:

The novel "bitter Orange Tree" by Omani novelist Jokha al-harthi is characterized by polyphony; the polyphonic structure of the novel allows for a more comprehensive portrayal of its dialogic nature and the characters' independent voices. Drawing upon "feminist dialogics", a feminist reconstruction of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory, this study conducts a systematic narrative and textual analysis of the novel to explore female discourse power. Specifically, it aims to examine how marginalized women achieve discursive resistance at both micro- and macro-dialogic levels within a polyphonic narrative space. The findings reveal that Al-harthi employs Bakhtinian polyphonic strategies to unfold discursive resistance across three interrelated dimensions. First, at the macro-level, the novel constructs a "chronotope" spanning the diasporic spaces of London and the rural landscapes of Oman, revealing the spiritual diaspora and spatial breakthroughs of female subjects amid historical fragmentation. Second, at the micro-discursive level, marginalized women implicitly resist patriarchal discipline through character dialogues, strategically embedded silences, psychological dislocations, and polyphony. Finally, the "unfinalized" presented at the novel's conclusion shatters the enclosure of historical determinism, reshaping a continuous and creative subjectivity for marginalized

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women. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of gender politics and narrative innovations in modern Arabic fiction.

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Keyword:

Arabic Literature; *Bitter Orange Tree*; Feminist Dialogics; Narrative Resistance; Jokha Al-harthi; Polyphony

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Introduction

Since 2019, when Jokha Al-Harthi became the first Arabic-language writer to win the Man Booker International Prize for her novel "*Celestial Bodies*"， contemporary Gulf literature and Arab literature have attracted significant international attention. Subsequently, she published the third novel, "Bitter Orange Tree"(*Nārinjah*, first published in Arabic in 2016 and translated by Marilyn Booth in 2022), which has received considerable scholarly interest due to its rich narrative style and linguistic complexity. The novel unfolds through the first-person narration of Zuhour, a student studying abroad, interwoven with her memories and retellings of her grandmother Bint Aamir's life. And the novel employs a nonlinear narrative structure and switches between the perspectives of different characters to interweave the "present" of the modern woman Zuhour with the "past" of the previous generation's woman called Bint Aamir, creating a picture in which "multiple voices and perspectives are presented simultaneously." The characters in the novel are not controlled by the author but express their own views and thoughts on an equal and independent basis; this "clamor of diverse voices" constitutes the core characteristic of "polyphony," defined by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin proposed his famous "theory of dialogue" and "theory of the polyphonic novel." he believed that polyphonic novels possess numerous independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, with true polyphony composed of different voices of sufficient value (Bakhtin, 1984). Polyphonic novels are characterized by subjectivity, contrast, and dialogism.

In light of this, this paper takes "Bitter Orange Tree" as its primary research subject, aiming to explore the "discourse struggle" exhibited by marginalized women in dialogue through an analysis of the novel's polyphonic structure. Employing qualitative research methods, this paper utilizes narrative analysis, closed reading, and dialogue analysis, examining both macro-level temporal and spatial narratives and shifts in narrative perspective, as well as micro-level analysis focusing on dialogues between the self and the other, the self and the ego, and double-

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voice. This reveals the evolving discursive power of marginalized women within the text. This is both a deconstruction of the one-way narrative of Omani patriarchal society and a reconstruction of the discursive space of Arabic literature.

Literature Review

This section focuses on two main areas: first, the development of feminist narratology, and second, a study of the novel "Bitter Orange Tree".

Research progress of the development of feminist narratology.

The narrative transformation in contemporary Arab women's fiction reflects a paradigm shift from social realism to polyphonic writing. The development of 20th-century Arab women's literature can be divided into three phases: first, the Enlightenment phase; second, the period influenced by the women's liberation movement, during which female writers often emulated the models established by male writers; and third, the period in which women's demands for liberation and independence were suppressed by state authorities. As Yu Yuping (2020) points out, in the 1960s, driven by the rise and development of the Western feminist movement, women writers' thinking evolved, and they began to continuously raise their self-awareness. This was primarily reflected in their works during this phase, which increasingly exposed the darkness of the patriarchal social system and the oppression of women, while advocating for women's liberation and the advancement of civil rights.

Within this context, women's writing in the Arab Gulf region can be traced back to approximately 1950. Scholar Ishaq Tijani (2005) examined five novels selected from the period between 1953 and 2000, analyzing how each author constructed the subjectivity of the women in their narratives to resist, escape, or subvert patriarchal authority. She also argued that even before Kuwait's oil era, women actively resisted male domination and worked to drive social change.

In the 21st century, women's literature in the Gulf region has flourished. Omer bin Musabah bin Jamil Saadi (2024) provides a systematic analysis of three Omani women's novels, demonstrating how contemporary Omani women writers integrate mythological elements into a polyphonic narrative context, achieving a "fusion of mythological narrative with multiple voices, languages, and ideologies." Accordingly, his study offers a valuable theoretical foundation for examining Omani women's literature—exemplified by the novels of Jokha Al-harthi—from the perspective of Bakhtin's dialogic theory.

From the vantage point of dialogic theory, Bakhtin's framework provides a rich methodological repertoire for analyzing the interplay of multiple voices—most notably through its claim that the author and the protagonist occupy equal positions and share equal rights to dialogue. However, this framework rarely engages with gender as a category of critical analysis. This theoretical gap has allowed feminist critics to build upon Bakhtin's work by developing a feminist dialogics.

From the late 1980s onward, feminist critics in Anglophone academic contexts have systematically examined the intersections between Bakhtinian thought and gender-related issues. The 1994 anthology A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin contends that Bakhtin's theoretical framework, being rooted in sociohistorical contexts and centered on linguistic interaction and intertextuality, closely corresponds to feminism's

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objective of dismantling gender-based oppression and exploring multiple forms of subjectivity. By integrating Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" into feminist literary criticism, this volume equips women with potent theoretical resources. These resources enable women to assert their right to speak and to deconstruct patriarchal structures. As Hajar Hawishi(2017)said, in modern times, women's social status has changed, and through feminist discourse, they are attempting to break free from the shackles of male-centered thinking.

Research Progress For Novel "Bitter Orange Tree"

Since the release of Jokha Al-Harthi's novel "Bitter Orange Tree", some scholars have approached it through a range of critical lenses, including existentialism, narratology, stylistics, feminism, and sociohistorical analysis. The existing body of research can be broadly organised around three principal themes.

1)Feminist and existentialist readings. Abdul Rahman Habib (2022 ,عبد الرحمن حبيب) investigates the portrayal of women in the novel from an existentialist angle. He observes that female characters are not restricted to domestic settings but also appear in public arenas such as government offices and corporate institutions. Through their particular ways of being, these women forge their identities both as individuals and within broader social frameworks. Ramallah (2018 ,رام الله) further highlights the forms of oppression experienced by women in the Sultanate of Oman. She pointed out that this novel employs narrative techniques that blend temporal and spatial dimensions. At the same time, the characters in the novel warrant a deeper analysis. Furthermore, John Domini (2022) argues that although both the novel "Bitter Orange Tree" and Al-Harti's earlier work " Celestial Bodies" feature detailed descriptions, the former places a greater emphasis on feminist concerns. This is mainly reflected in the contrast between the social contexts and worldviews of the grandmother and granddaughter in the novel. At the same time, the novel features women from diverse backgrounds and social layers, collectively forming a rich and multifaceted discursive space.

At the same time, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar (2025) analyzes the novel within the context of cultural change and transformation in Oman. Building upon Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and identity, the study examines the identity of the female character Zuhour, reflecting the impact of sociocultural factors on her identity. Besides, from a postcolonial critical perspective, the researchers Dr. Mariam Albadi et al.(2025) analyze the Omani-Arab "self" and the foreign "other" as depicted in "Bitter Orange Tree", revealing how Omani feminist narratives express the self and the other within Oman's complex cultural and historical context.

2)Studies on narrative structure and subjectivity. Through a comparative analysis of three Omani novels, including "Bitter Orange Tree", Youssef Al-Maamari يوسف المعمري (2018) argues that Omani fiction has reached a stage where it employs a narrative language that integrates the self and the other into a global literary framework, revealing the depth of narrative meaning and its implicit symbolism. Walid Abdellawiوليد عبد اللاّوي (2025) examines subjectivity in the narrator's self-construction, arguing that subjectivity is manifested through specific linguistic indicators (pronouns, spatio-temporal markers) and evaluative devices. By adopting a linguistic-narrative approach, he enriches the discussion of how subjective expression operates in narrative discourse. He further notes that subjectivity in narrative discourse is not merely a narrative strategy of the self, but also a literary marker and a form of self-affirmation and narrative celebration. Dr Vidya Merlin Varghese（2023）discusses the

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role of personal memories of Zuhair, Grandmother, and Suroor in helping them explore their cultural identities, while also depicting their experiences of living in a different place.

3)Linguistic features and sociocultural representation. Hamoud Al-Saadiحمود السعدي (2017) highlights the novel's linguistic features and its depiction of pre-Renaissance Omani society, though he criticizes the lack of coherence in the relationships between events and characters, which may detract from the reader's experience. Zahir bin Marhoon Al-Dawudi زاهر بن مرهون الداودي (2024) focuses on the linguistic structure of "Bitter Orange Tree", employing methods and criteria of imagery analysis to reveal the semantic connections among the title, the events, and the character portrayals, thereby foregrounding the author's creative strategies. Interpreting the text from linguistic and intentionalist perspectives, he argues that this approach contributes positively to exploring ideological issues within Omani society. Ramallah (2018 ,رام الله) also offers a detailed analysis of the novel's content, examining Omani cultural characteristics across different eras through textual analysis. John Domini (2022) further observes that the novel explores the legacy of slavery as well as themes of freedom and secularization following Oman's independence. The researcher Shousha, Muhammad Salim Muhammad Abd al-Samad (2024). employed narrative discourse analysis within the framework of cognitive literary criticism to analyze mimesis and representation in the novel. These two approaches analyze the narrative discourse of the text, thereby transforming narrative concepts into narrative elements embodied in myths, legends, folk heritage, and cultural heritage.

Research gap

It should be noted that the majority of the aforementioned studies rely on the Arabic edition of "Bitter Orange Tree". In comparison with the work that brought Al-Harthi international acclaim, "Celestial Bodies", the scholarly attention paid to "Bitter Orange Tree" remains considerably narrower in both scope and depth. Existing research has largely been confined to comparative analyses between the two novels, with a predominant focus on stylistic features, character portrayal, and narrative devices. What remains missing is a systematic examination of the novel's internal coherence, its polyphonic qualities, and its overall comprehensiveness.

Based on the above literature review, existing studies tend to force the text's multiple and contradictory voices into a unified authorial intent centered on "oppression and loss," while the novel's polyphonic narrative and women's right to speak under the principle of dialogue have received little attention.

Research Objectives

Accordingly, the present study adopts "feminist dialogic" as its theoretical framework. It analyzes "Bitter Orange Tree" through three dimensions: (1) revealing the evolution of female subjects' discursive rights in Omani society through the macro-level narrative dimensions of time, space, and the body; (2) depicting the transformative process of marginalized women within a power structure dominated by patriarchal monologue through micro-level discourse—specifically, dialogues between the self and the other, as well as paratactic speech acts; (3) arguing for the existence of female subjectivity and discursive power within the text through the unfinished, open aesthetic structure of the novel. These three levels build upon one another—from macro-level narrative space, to micro-level speech acts, and finally to the aesthetic design of the entire narrative framework—collectively constituting a comprehensive dissection of the novel's polyphonic narrative.

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Research Methodology

"Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."(John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth(2024).) Michael Quinn Patton (2015) points out that directed research can provide deep insights into the processes of constructed meaning behind texts and the concept of culture as a social phenomenon; literature is a field of interpretive research (2002)

Descriptive analysis is an in-depth research method in which researchers describe phenomena and issues, analyze them to resolve these issues, and then collect and analyze data to arrive at interpretive research findings. (Abbas Basma, 2023)

The researcher employed qualitative research methods, primarily focusing on descriptive analysis and discourse analysis. Descriptive analysis is a key method in literary research; the subject of this study is a novel text and does not involve specific data. Specifically, this study selected Jokha Al-Harthi's novel "Bitter Orange Tree" as its research sample and conducted data collection and analysis on the dialogues in the novel that pertain to women's discursive rights. The study analyzes the text and its content based on the theory of dialogue principles and the historical and cultural context of the status of women's discourse in Oman. It also examines both large dialogue and micro dialogue and how they reflect changes in women's discursive rights. The analysis process is as follows:

1. Conduct a close reading of the text and, based on the definitions and characteristics of macro-dialogue and micro-dialogue in Bakhtin's theory, extract relevant dialogues from the text.
2. Analyze the macro-dialogues and micro-dialogues, primarily classifying them according to expressions that align with the research themes—such as "spatio-temporal dialogue," "intergenerational dialogue," "dialogue between men and women," "dialogue between women," "double-voice", and "incompleteness."
3. Conduct a detailed analysis of the classified dialogues, primarily using methods such as narrative analysis and discourse analysis to examine specific dialogues and clearly identify how the dialogues in the text manifest women's discursive rights and their changes.
4. Taking into account the text's sociocultural context, summarize the changes in the discursive rights of marginalized women and analyze the causes of these changes, highlighting their continuity and their role in conveying the text's central theme.

Findings

"Everything in Dostoevsky's novels tends toward dialogue, toward a dialogic opposition, as if tending toward its center. All else is the means; dialogue is the end. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (Bakhtin, *1984,* 252)" Dialogic relations exist not between the rejoinders of a concrete dialogue, but between various voices, between complete images, between the complete levels of the novel (macro-dialogue); and at the same time, in every word, every gesture, and every feeling, there is an echo of dialogue (micro-dialogue)." (Bakhtin, 1998). P353) From this perspective, dialogue in Bakhtin's theory can be divided into large dialogues at the macro level and micro-level dialogues at the micro level.

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Qian Zhong-wen (1987) observes in the "*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*": Macro-dialogue and micro-dialogue are the fundamental characteristics that pervade Dostoevsky's fiction, and at the same time they constitute the artistic means by which the protagonists' independent and equal self-consciousness is realized. In terms of novelistic form, macro-dialogue concerns the structure of the novel and the architecture of character relations. Micro-dialogue appears in the open dialogues among protagonists, as well as in the structures of character and psychology. This micro-dialogue is grounded primarily in the dialogic relations between persons and in the dual nature of human self-consciousness.

Based on this, this paper mainly answers the above three research questions through a macro-level large dialogue and a micro-level micro-dialogue, as well as an analysis of the unfinished at the novel's ending.

Macro- Dialogue in the novel

Large dialogue is a type of dialogue that occurs between different characters and within the structure of a novel. In the novel Bitter Orange Tree, large dialogue is primarily manifested in the spatiotemporal structure of the text. That is, the dialogue is formed through the past time and space represented by the grandmother and the present time and space represented by the granddaughter, reflecting the changes in women's discourse power in different eras.

An analysis of the Chronotopic of Grandmother Bint Amir and Her Granddaughter Zuhour in "Bitter Orange Tree." This section examines how the two protagonists jointly produce a polyphonic narrative and, in doing so, establish the discursive agency of women situated at the margins of society.

Chronotopic Dialogue Among Women of a Bygone Era ： Rural Life and Omani History

Grandmother's Chronotopic manifested within a broader historical narrative, represents an unchangeable social context that spans different stages of Oman's social development; its presentation is also scattered and fragmented.

Regarding the circumstances of Grandmother's birth, the book describes it as follows: "She and her brother were born shortly after the war, in a village weighed down by inflation and drought" (p. 14)."a village weighed down" is not only a description of her hometown but also reveals the complex, unstable, and economically underdeveloped environment in which she lived.

Born amid war and poverty, my grandmother had no opportunity to make her own choices, nor did she possess any means of verbal resistance. This lack of agency persisted throughout her life. Even when she sought treatment for her eye condition, she encountered further adversity: "She climbed back into the truck bed, without a word, and returned to the village." (p. 16).. "without a word" is a silent expression of the material deprivation prevalent in society at that time.

In mid-20th-century Oman, social structures were deeply influenced by patriarchy, and women's voices had long been suppressed and distorted. My grandmother's silence and her physical act of "climbing back into the truck and returning to the village" form a coherent expression across time and space.

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In the text, clothes are not only a reflection of lifestyle habits but also serve as a social symbol, marking the individual's predicament of being confined within a rigid structure. *"She never shed the clothes that were native to the village she came from."* (p. 19). That old clothes which brought from her hometown, become a visual symbol of her lack of social capital and property rights as a member of a marginalized group.

During World War II, grandmother adopted Mansour, a child abandoned by his family, as her own son: "After Saddam invaded Kuwait… By the time the war was over and the sacks had disappeared… my grandmother was so lame that she could no longer get around." (p. 87) The narrative creates a dialogue between macro-historical processes and the changes in the grandmother's body. The persistence of the war contrasts with her loss of mobility, both of which serve as metaphors for the erosion of the voice of marginalized women amid turbulent social upheaval.

Furthermore, the narrative regarding the grandmother's marriage in the text further exposes the absence of female agency. *"*when she was aged twenty, that her father had rejected a man who presented himself as a suitor for her hand*." (p. 79)*. In the story of her father's rejection of the suitor, the grandmother exists merely as an absent object; her personal emotions are consistently obscured by patriarchal decision-making. Decades later, a former suitor recognizes her: *"You? You're Bint Amir? The horseman's girl? I tried to marry you fifty years ago, but your papa refused me." (p. 127*) Even in her twilight years, when the former suitor recognized her as "the horseman's *girl*," the grandmother still responded with silence. This silence highlights the plight of the grandmother as a marginalized woman deprived of her right to speak.

Land holds a central symbolic significance in the text. *"She dreamed of the tiny plot of land that she would tend, living off its proceeds, until her death. But her dream never came true, nor did any other dreams she had" (p. 15).* Elsewhere, the narrator observes: *"She didn't own the building, or the land, or even us. I think of her as my grandmother, but we weren't really her grandchildren" (p. 29).* My grandmother spent her entire life longing to own land, but in the end, she never obtained it; the unfulfillment of this desire reveals her multiple losses, ranging from the societal to the familial level. In this context, as a marginalized woman, my grandmother became a quintessential figure marginalized by social structures in the long river of history.

Chronotopic Dialogues for Women in the New Era: Modernity, Migration, and the West

In this novel, Zuhour represents a well-educated, independent modern woman. The novel places her at the beginning of the story on a British college campus, a social environment quite different from that of Oman:
"*Waking up to snow falling outside the window of my top-floor room in the university residence hall, I climb out of my narrow bed and stand barefoot on the wooden floor in my long nightgown, staring into the snow and the darkness." (p. 9)* This passage carries both temporal and spatial significance. "Snow" is not a depiction of Oman's natural environment; it brings the imagery of a Western winter to the reader's mind. The "top-floor room" establishes a detached, elevated yet lonely perspective. The "narrow bed" and "wooden floor" convey a sense of the struggle for survival; this spatial description foreshadows the granddaughter's inner unease. The narrator later confirms this sense of transience: *"I was in the dark, in a bed*

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*that was mine for now, in a foreign land" (*p. *24).* Snowy nights appear repeatedly in the novel, symbolizing moments of crisis and reflection. On one such snowy night, Zuhour confesses: *"When I felt like I was suffocating, wrapped up in my long nightgown, in my little bed on that snowy night, it was the remorse, the guilt, that choked me. Neglect. Negligence. Looking the other way. Pretending not to notice. Ignoring it" (*p. *9–10).* Here, the snowy night in the city echoes the spatial confinement of the grandmother's life in the isolated countryside. At the same time, it highlights a stark contrast between the granddaughter's inner crisis and the grandmother's silent endurance of external adversity.

Zuhour's evolving clothing choices further hint at her geographical and cultural alienation. The text documents a series of changes: *"When I started school, I changed… And later, when I went to Muscat, I replaced… When I traveled to this cold land, I changed out of…" (p. 19).* This transition from traditional Omani attire to modern clothing depicts her journey from the countryside to a wider world. However, this transformation does not merely represent liberation. It also signifies a break with her earlier identity, reflecting her struggle to adapt to a self that is still in the making.

More importantly, Zuhour's cross-cultural experience in London is not a simple story of empowerment. Through its depiction of her surroundings, the novel reveals her deep-seated sense of alienation and estrangement. She is unable to fully embrace the modern Western lifestyle, nor can she fully return to Omani traditional norms. Her physical freedom does not guarantee her psychological or discursive freedom as a woman. Consequently, her spatial and temporal realm remains in a state of transition.

Narrative Time as the Framework for Macro-Level Dialogue

Narratological studies often regard time as the core of the spatio-temporal framework. "Bitter Orange Tree" weaves its narrative using a dual timeline. The granddaughter's present-day life while studying in the United Kingdom serves as the first storyline, while the grandmother's past in Oman forms the second. The two timelines repeatedly intertwine throughout the novel, jointly constructing the framework for their dialogue.

The granddaughter's interactions with Suroor and Kuhl serve as a bridge to the present. Dialogue acts as a medium here, continually evoking memories of the past associated with her grandmother. Present experiences and recollections of the past are thus closely intertwined.

The zuhour's life after studying in the UK is documented in detail. The emotional dynamics among her three close friends, as well as the evolution of Imran and Kuhl's marriage, unfold within the present-day narrative thread. This layer of the narrative reflects contemporary society's acceptance of diverse ideas and a relatively free social context.

In contrast, Oman's past presents a different picture, characterized by strict institutional constraints and lagging social development. It is precisely within this environment that the grandmother's life is fully portrayed, as it is a struggle from utter loneliness to building a family. Her tenacious vitality is revealed amidst adversity. This narrative effectively deconstructs the traditional patriarchal constraints imposed on women. How women carve out autonomy from the margins and break free from the shackles of social structures are both profoundly illustrated along this timeline.

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The present and past timelines intersect throughout the novel, generating a large-scale dialogue at the narrative level. At the same time, the novel spans several historical periods: *Everything happened in the course of the First World War. (*p. *14) ; Salih, who became Mansour and would become my father, was born not long after the end of the Second World War. (*p. *43) ; After Saddam invaded Kuwait…By the time the war was over, and the sacks had disappeared …my grandmother was so lame that she could no longer get around. (*p. *87) ; In a place where people knew only traditional medicine until the late 1950s, (*p. *79)*

Other markers of temporal progression include references to traditional medicine persisting until the late 1950s (p. 79), changes in national policy such as *Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur's government in Muscat, which had increased taxes fourfold on all dates exported through the port of Sur (*p. *37) ; the terrible impact of the Second World War seemed to create an impasse before them that would never be overcome… He ventured to Bombay, seeking to expand his commercial ties(*p. *38)* and broader developments in Oman symbolizing the passage of time.

Moreover, the span of time covering the granddaughter's journey to study in the United Kingdom does more than illustrate the different challenges women faced across eras. It also reflects shifts in women's educational attainment and the gradual awakening of feminist consciousness over time.

The parallel treatment of characters, time, and space in "Bitter Orange Tree" reveals the historical development of Omani society and explores the complex social issues embedded within it. The novel alternates between the tragic life of the grandmother—who lost her mother in childhood, was driven from her home, and had to work for a living—and the life of the granddaughter, who grew up surrounded by the love of her parents and grandmother. This alternation creates a dramatic tension that is inextricably linked to Omani social development. As Al-Harthi noted in an interview, she skillfully weaves Omani history into the plot of "Bitter Orange Tree".

The Micro-Dialogue In The Novel:

Micro-dialogue is manifested in multiple instances throughout the novel. In Bakhtin's view, dialogue penetrates every word, arousing the conflict and interchange of two voices – and this is precisely micro-dialogue (Xiao Feng, 2022). In Bitter Orange Tree, micro-dialogue primarily operates on three levels: dialogue between, Dialogue Between "I" and "My Self", and double-voiced speech.

Dialogue Between Man And Woman : The Subordination Of Women's Voices

In a conversation between a husband and wife, "*They had been married only a few weeks when Sumayya realized that there was never going to be any real conversation between the two of them. Her husband was to be the center around which everything had to pivot….. Sumayya closed her eyes, hearing what she thought was the sweet, melodic chirping of birds…. Her eyelids flew open. "Don't go off to sleep and leave me all alone," he barked. "I didn't get married and lose my freedom just for the sake of a dumb statuette who has nothing to say." (*p. *61)*

Sumayya waved to her. Sumayya's husband hurled his glass of tea at the tree trunk.

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Sumayya shrank back. The veins flared on his temples as he lurched toward her. "Have you forgotten that .... Don't you understand anything at all?"

They had gone to Thailand on their honeymoon. When papaya fruits dropped onto the hotel room's glass balcony with a loud thud, the veins in his temples had throbbed visibly. But he hadn't raised his voice. Sumayya brand-new bride Sumayya—was bewildered by it. She tried to talk to him about it, to ask what the problem was. He slammed his fist into her mouth.

*Now he inched toward her, silently. Still seated, she kept pushing herself back until she felt her spine bumping the tree trunk. Fragments of glass cut her hands. She knew by now that when he was breaking things and the blue veins were bulging along his face, any word she said would cause the next breakage. That it had happened before did not lessen the terror she felt. All she could hope, in this silent tableau, was that he would start to shout or scream, because she thought that was the only thing that might possibly unfreeze her legs. If he screamed, she might be able to run. To flee. But he didn't raise his voice. Ever. (*p. *62)*

In this passage, the wife's interior voice and subjective identity are progressively marginalized. Mentioned in the text: *"They had been married only a few weeks when Sumayya realized that there was never going to be any real conversation between the two of them. Her husband was to be the center around which everything had to pivot" (*p. *61)*.. This explanation intuitively shows the inequality of the right to speak between two people. Sumayya is in a state of passivity and alienation, which is linguistically through such as "*Sumayya closed her eyes, hearing what she thought was the sweet, melodic chirping of birds…" (*p. *61)*. These descriptions show that under her husband's strict control and emotional rejection, she gradually lost her voice and became "numb" - which symbolized her inner isolation and helplessness. This state also reflects her marginal status as an "the other".

In Oman's patriarchal society, the voice of "husband" occupying an absolute central position, and his words are full of strong desire for control and violence. His "dialogue" is full of orders, coercion and denial - for example, he roared in the novel: *"Don't go off to sleep and leave me all alone," he barked. (*p. *61); "He slammed his fist into her mouth,"* （p. 62）. Such a dialogue denies and suppresses Sumayya's self-awareness and women's right to speak, and strengthens the concept that his words are the only truth.

The micro-dialogue in the text depicts the dialogue composed of extreme men and women. In the context of a patriarchal society, the husband has the right to speak, constantly suppressing and dominating the narrative focus of the scene. These language fragments reveal the fierce struggle for the right to speak between the two.

The Dialogue Between "I" and "My Self" : Self-Contradictions of Women's Voices

*"Kuhl and I are alone in the Three Monkeys Café. I want to speak. But silence is what we have. I want to ask about the corner of his mouth. About his fear of people. About how he left without making any promises. I want Kuhl, this sad woman across from me, to shout out his name. And I want to shout with her. Imran! I want to say something about different cloth, about how the weave of his trousers was not spun along with the weave of her skirt, and so it all unraveled. If only it hadn't come apart. If only grace had come down from a merciful heaven allowing me to cleanse their two hearts every dawn. Every dawn. (*p. *129)*

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The repeated phrase *"I want to speak ; I want to ask ; I want Kuhl ; I want to shout with her..."* in this text is a dialogue between the narrator and herself, which has multiple meanings. Its content contains both feasible actions and unrealizable wishes, thus building a dialogue structure that reflects the contradiction between the narrator's inner words and external reality. At the same time, the chapter title "triangle" itself is a structural metaphor. When it is read in combination with the phrase "standing at the apex of the triangle" that appears elsewhere in the text, it forms an intertextual dialogue within the narrative.

There are also some words worth reading carefully in the text, such as "*how the weave of his trousers was not spun along with the weave of her skirt, and so it all unraveled" (*p. *129),* which is a discussion of a failed love affair. The appearance of this narrative sound achieves two purposes. On the one hand, it reveals the depth of the complex relationship between characters and her feelings for her friend's husband, which is a complex and sexy description of women. On the other hand, it also expresses the desire for pluralistic and alternative forms of love, which is not in line with social norms and implies the speaker's own marginal position in emotions.

Taken as a whole, this passage enacts a layered polyphony. First, a dialogue between a woman's imagination and her lived reality. Second, it is a dialogue between her emotional needs and the ethical constraints imposed by that reality. And third, it is an expression of her self-reflection—an assertion of her own voice and, through that assertion, a claim to discursive power.

The Double- Voice： The Silent Resistance Of Women's Voices

In the novel, when the husband accidentally falls into the river one night, the description employs onomatopoeia.

Sumayya stood at the edge of the pool. Her husband was not a swimmer, and he had fallen into the dark, deep pool. His head bobbed below the surface as he fought the water, trying to save himself and calling out to her. With the sharp smell of urine rising from her clothes in her nostrils, Sumayya did not move. She could tell that he was struggling to breathe as he attempted to reach the edge. Her eyes stayed on him as she heard the voices of the men at their prayers, faint and far away. Her tongue felt heavy. The sign A MOMENT FOR TEA blinked on and off in her head, the word Moment growing larger and larger with every blink.

Her husband was drowning, and she stood there unable to move. The men finished the cycle of sunset prayers. They came out of the mosque and broke into scattered conversations, the affectionate tones of friends, as they descended the steps. (p. 68-69)

Hidden internal polemic discourse, as an active form of double voice, is characterized by its fundamental trait of reflecting the discourse of others, responding secretly to their consciousness, and remaining invisible, while retaining a faint shadow of its subject.

In this passage, these latent dialogues manifest through three overlapping levels within the formation of the self-voice and the implied other-voice at the hidden internal polemic discourse.

At the behavioral level, the implicit counter-argument between the refusal to rescue and the duty to help.

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The implicit voice of the other manifests itself in the form of the duty to help imposed by marital ethics and gender roles, it means Sumayya as the wife must rescue her drowning husband, it is a duty prescribed by social norms. Although it is not explicitly expressed, this voice is invoked through the context of the distress call seeking her help, thereby creating unspoken expectations regarding Sumayya's actions.

"Sumayya stood at the edge of the pool, Sumayya did not move". Her body had frozen.

Bystanders might have thought she was indifferent. In fact, this was a cry for help—an outward manifestation of her intense inner turmoil. Her lack of physical reaction offered no explanation; mirroring the fear and pain she felt during the domestic violence, she instantly lost the ability to act, completely trapped by an overwhelming sense of helplessness. This is the genuine reaction of a person who has been crushed by reality after enduring prolonged despair. She is not morally at fault; she is a victim whose last reserves of strength have been drained by cruel experiences. This stillness is truly a genuine expression of the indescribable despair and brokenness deep within her heart.

On the Religious Level: The Implicit Contradiction Between Prayer and personal Behavioral Choice

From the mosque, the sounds of prayer give rise to an invisible moral imperative. These teachings foster love and mutual assistance, elevating the dignity of life above all else. When a person is dying, this religious ethic becomes an unavoidable social pressure. Although distant and faint, the sound of prayer never stops. It does not directly intervene in reality; nonetheless, as an "other," it continually examines the decisions of each person present on a spiritual plane.

After her husband drowned, Sumayya's stillness took on a markedly charged form of self-expression. Her rigid body functioned as a mute repudiation of religious directives. She declined to shift her gaze—an action that may be read as an admission of guilt, while also serving as a quiet defiance of society's mandated obligation to intervene and rescue. In her, a contradiction was enacted, as though she were held in despair-driven apathy. This unwavering refusal of secular moral restraints is made visible through her stillness. Within her silence, the voice of the self and the voice of the other come into conflict, and this contradiction ultimately remains unresolved.

The husband's fall into the deep pool is not just an accident. It has evolved into a complex struggle involving gender, morality and individual discourse rights. Social traditions give women preset moral obligations; marriage is defined as an interdependent contract, and the wife therefore bears the social responsibility of saving her husband. Sumaya lost the power of patriarchal speech through inner panic and passive help. It shows the dilemma of women's survival under the framework of social ethics and morality, and the struggle between obedience and self-awakening is reflected in women's silent words. Second, The dialogue Between Life and Choice. The ethics of the sanctity of life emphasized in the hymns of prayer form an inherent contradiction with Sumayya's failure to save her husband, prompting reflection on the freedom and responsibility of choice—how should one determine one's choices when individual circumstances conflict with social norms? This openness, in and of itself, constitutes the fundamental value of the implicit discussion, as a positive pluralism of voices.

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"unfinalized " of the Novel

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future". （Bakhtin,1984, p. 166）

At the conclusion of *"Bitter Orange Tree"*, the grandmother returns to her childhood. On the one hand, this narrative turn stands in sharp contrast to the settings presented earlier in the novel. On the one hand, the grandmother emerges as a figure of incompleteness. Although she serves as the central character of the entire work, her portrayal extends well beyond the conventional stereotype of the "kind and resilient grandmother." Through successive shifts in narrative perspective among various characters, the novel persistently reveals the multiple dimensions of her life. The text states: *"(The grandmother) had a house, and that house sat amid small fields. Behind it was a stable for the horses. She had a father … and a mother who …, and a loving brother, and a name…. The mother had not yet died… She was a playful child… (p. 133)"*. On the other hand, this return to childhood is not an ending, but a brand-new beginning. The character of the grandmother in the novel remains unfinished, making her a figure full of possibilities, and a character whose story engages in an ongoing dialogue with both the past and the future.

Generally speaking, this novel features a multi-layered narrative structure and intricate character relationships, which is also reflected in the unresolved nature of these relationships. For example, Kuhl and her husband live in two completely different worlds. After a long and secretive marriage, what fate awaits these two people, whose identities and family backgrounds differ so vastly? The narrator deliberately leaves this question unanswered. This open-ended conclusion is not a narrative flaw but rather a formal choice—a relinquishment of discursive authority. Scholars argue that the future of these characters, like that of Oman itself, remains shrouded in uncertainty. As Bakhtin emphasized, the protagonist's thoughts and discourse also bear the mark of incompleteness. The world as defined by the protagonist is always a world of dialogue, rather than a closed world with fixed boundaries.

Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher examines the novel through three key dimensions: extensive dialogues, micro-dialogues, and incompleteness. By conducting a close textual reading and analysis, the marginalized female voices in Omani literature are made visible. The different ways in which these voices appear are closely tied to Oman's historical and cultural development.

The novel "Bitter Orange Tree" is not only a feminist narrative, but also exhibits a distinctly polyphonic textual organization. The discursive consciousness of marginalized women repeatedly surfaces through dialogue in the text, forming the novel's most central contribution to Arab women's literature.

This study has further advanced academic understanding of women's voice and autonomy in contemporary Arab fiction. Future research and scholarly discussion may expand into areas such as cultural integration, transnational narratives, and the construction of subjectivity. By

pursuing these lines of inquiry, Arab women's literature in Oman and across the broader region will receive a more varied and deeper interpretive framework.

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