

## The Experience of Coexistence and Love: A Critical Study of Al-Muqri's *The Handsome Jew*

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### Abstract

This study aims at exploring issue of coexistence and love in Yemeni society in the seventeenth century represented in Al- Muqri's *The Handsome Jew* by the prominent characters Fatima, a Muslim, and Salem, a Jew. The experience of coexistence is still controversial that has not received enough study in the light of the complexities that are involved in understanding the reasons of violence, social and religious conflicts in order to accept the culture and ideas of the other. The objective of the study is to show how this issue affects Muslim- Jewish women and men in a city that opens its doors for all people. Coexistence theory has often shed light on the language and practice of living together and love stories between Muslim women and Jewish boys and vice versa that stemmed from the social, cultural and religious coexistent in Yemeni society. Al-Muqri's novel depicts Muslim-Jewish love relation in a way that counters religious and conventional ideas. It is concluded that Ali Al-Muqri addresses the issues of tolerant and peaceful love of human beings that transcends religion, sects and classes. In this sense, he tries hardly to consolidate not only his views, but also all views about the values of cultural, religious and social tolerance and coexistence away from stereotypes, intolerance, racial discrimination and ideological hatred that leave nothing, but destruction to all of humanity.

**Key words:** Ali Al-Muqri; Coexistence; Jew; Love; Muslim; Yemen

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Handsome Jew* depicts the controversial relations between the Islamic majority and the Jewish minority in many important matters such as coexistence and love. It is considered one of the best novels in Yemeni literature that exposes the hatred and enmity of these extremist groups in order to build human relations that allow each group to accept the other. Thus, Yemeni literature is developing fast, and the genre of storytelling is more charming and significant. Hence, literature is basically a medium of people's voice to achieve freedom, justice, equal rights and change, which any other fields of writings fail to do (Al-Subari, 2017, p.263).

Ali Al-Muqri is a Yemeni journalist, poet, novelist and writer whose work has received a considerable attention from foreigner and Arab critics and researchers. He has also received many awards and prizes in spite of being a new growing novelist. Al-Muqri also contributed to bringing the Yemeni novel out of its social context and beyond the Arab borders. His novels convey a comprehensive and universal meaning of life, revealing the suffering, humility, obsession, oppression, violence and misery of the human soul (Qaid, 2017). It is also worth saying that Al-Muqri has attracted the attention of the international community due to the addressing of certain social issues such as violence against women, love, coexistence, sex, war and religious conflicts. Al-Muqri is a controversial figure in Yemen and the neighboring Arab region as he tends to boldly cross cultural red lines and deal with taboo themes such as free love and sex and sensitive topics such as war and religion (Alkodimi, 2020, p.3).

Ali Al-Muqri's novel *The Handsome Jew* (2009) tackles the theme of the love story of Muslim educated girl Fatima and the Jewish boy Salim. Fatima's silent suffering stems from her loyalty to the love in which she stands against her patriarchal society. She also stands against various types of violence, abuse, harassment, kidnapping, and oppression of women. Al Muqri has built for himself a reputation as an independent thinker, taking on some of the most controversial topics in his country, exploring Yemen's identity and the notion of tolerance in the Arab world. This is evident in his essay, "Liquor and Wine in Islam" (2007), or in his novel, *The Handsome Jew* (2009). In *The Handsome Jew*, Al-Muqri writes nostalgically about Jews in Yemen, a sensitive subject in the Middle East due to the regional impact of the continuous conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (Vericat, 2014, p.12).

*The Handsome Jew* is read as a work that speaks about the conflict between Muslim Arabs and Jews, and some others consider it a typical Yemeni situation. One of the writers writes that there is no more time to protest about the Palestinian cause, but this novel is a representation of it.

In reality, it was important for me to understand what people are saying about my work, and readers for me are very important and they have reactions, and I'm very interested in their reactions and knowing their opinion. But I think that literature is a cumulative work, not just like music, for example, where you can hear a piece of music or you read a poem, and you remember some different words. We have to give incentives to the reader to have an opinion, to have a position. Not that he would go and protest in the street, but this is the role of writing, in my opinion (Al- Muqri, 2011, p.11).

The novel deals with a topic that has been avoided by many Arab writer. It also deals with Jews as citizens, not relatives in Yemeni society. This comes through the love story that arises in Raida city that is full of relations between young men and women of the two sects. As Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Maqalih describes Love that transcends the walls of isolation and they make sense of the other. He also considers love as a human condition that transcends religions and fundamentalism. He adds that the novel is embedded in the conditions of the Jewish community in northern Yemen, under the rule of the Zaidi Imams that was subjected to the scourges of the Jews and their diaspora due to the rise of intolerance against them, especially during the rule of Imam Al-Mutawakkil in the seventeenth century (Basudian, 2011). The novel also sheds light on sectarian intolerance among Muslims themselves to the extent that followers of other sects meet with the Jews in the persecution and suppression that fall on them.

*The Handsome Jew* is considered as an exciting novel in which Al- Muqri turns the pain of difficult coexistence between sects and religious minorities. It also combines the narrator's personal intimate tone that crosses the

barriers of different groups on the wing of love and familiarity and the requirements of historical blogging in neutrality, divergence and objectivity. The model of this critical lover coexistence that Fatima presented in this novel, full of signs and indications, remains illuminating history and reality at the same time. Hence, it also treats the "suffering of the Jews during the Imam rule and how they were degraded in their society and their incapability to coexist with Muslims (Al-Khamisi, 2017, p.405).

Jamal considers the novel as a review of historical culture, but without departing from Al-Muqri's basic idea, which moves smoothly in time from grandfather to son, then to the grandson. He just wants to say that love can be taken as an idea and a banner in a different society and steeped in religious and sectarian conflicts, despite the fact that it is not possible to achieve the matter on the ground. But when reading, we ignore all this, hoping that the novel will find us a happy ending. Even if we do not find this a desired end, we are satisfied with the pleasure and durability of the narration (Jibran, 2017- 2018).

*The Handsome Jew* has an interesting title and it is unique from the rest of the Yemeni novels. It is also considered by some critics as an exceptional narration in modern world literature that displays an aesthetic sense of a person who stands against the discrimination, hatred, sectarian, ethnic and religious conflicts. It is a novel whose events transcend and overpower tyranny, ignorance, oppression and apartheid during the era of Imamate. It reveals many painful and problematic living traditions between ethnic minorities and religious sects in Yemen during the middle of the eleventh century AH, corresponding to the seventeenth century AD, where the human brotherhood triumphs in all its dimensions (*The Handsome Jew*, a Jewish-Arab love Novel, 2014).

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## A PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN CONFLICTING SOCIETY

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Bar-Tal defines coexistence as the conditions that serve as basic prerequisites for developing advanced harmonious relationships between groups.. . Acknowledging the right of the other group to exist peacefully with its differences and accepting the other group as a legitimate and equal partner with whom differences must be resolved in non-violent ways (Bar-Tal, 2004, p.256).

Because of the nature of its creation, humans need to live together as a society. Throughout history, this characteristic of a man has been one of the primary and foundational driving factors in the existence of nations. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the only person who lives in life will be subject to stories that have not acquired social reality. Therefore, it is almost impossible to find real life or widespread examples of people who led or lived a pure life for society. In fact, the history is only possible by living together through strong social

bonds. Because history is not the product of one man who lives alone, but the product of people who are able to live together.

Fatima, the heroine of the novel, is not an ordinary passive girl but rather a girl who is distinguished by her love for knowledge. She is also distinguished by her wide readings in religious and heritage books, and her wide reading prompted her to choose her lover from other world or sect because knowledge does not recognize boundaries and barriers. Moreover, Fatima is the daughter of the mufti, the city's highest religious figure who is supposed to be the ideal person among his followers and his family as well. Fatima appears to have a great knowledge of both Islam and Jewish religion to justify her decision (Alkodimi, 2019, p.41). As Fatima states that "I took this decision after studying the opinions of Sharia and saw a difference that brings together scholars without agreement. .. And for me, the fatwa is complete" (Al- Muqri, 2009, pp.74-75). Fatima was not satisfied with love only, but began to teach her hero how to read and write. Her knowledge helps her to satisfy her family and Salem's father too. It is a human behavior that falls within the human aspiration to coexistence, and rejecting domination and oppression because man is first and foremost the son of his environment, his society and his geography (Khazim, 2012).

The novel refers here to the first beautiful meeting between love and religion, between human hearts and minds. This meeting that establishes their salvation from Violence, killing, destruction and to be in a peaceful, prosperous and coexistent society. One of the most important concept of the coexistence theory is the pluralism. This concept states that "each group accepts and values the other's right to exist within the same environment (Loring, 2016, p.157). Almost, the situation is general to our reality today. Thus, the coexistence emerges as a first title, and a deep meaning for a life that accepts the differences in culture and religion. Al-Muqri, in his novel, talks about the meeting of culture, feelings of love between Muslims and Jews. He also expands the emergence of coexistent ideas such as open relationship, tolerance, peace, love, and respecting differences that lead to resist hatred, enmity, hostility and aggression which belong to the closed mind.

*The Handsome Jew* provides what can be referred to as a moderate Islam that accepts everyone and shows tolerance to other religions. This view is represented by Fatima, which embodies love, peace, forgiveness and tolerance, and it is these attributes that attracted Salem and lead him to convert to Islam. On the other hand, he represents the Imam and his men and other figures like Saleh, the fundamentalists who seem to be hostile and aggressive towards other religions and societies. The Imam, as ruler and president in the country at that time, was responsible for the suffering of many Jewish

individuals during that time. It is clear that, through the contradiction between Fatima and the Imam, Al-Muqri seems to advocate a moderate Islam that shows tolerance and understanding with other people and religions (Alkodimi, 2019, p.41).

The nature of human being accepts communication with others, and accepting their opinions in spite of they have different nations or religions. "She surprised me one morning, saying that she would start teaching me tomorrow how to read and write, and she told me to be ready to stay with her every morning for that. Did they teach you, my handsome Jew at them ? ((Al Muqri, 2009, p.10). *The Handsome Jew* succeeds to relieve the pressure of different traditions by establishing an exceptional relationship between "Fatima and Salem". This relationship is not only naturalized by feelings, but also by the spiritual culture of the holy books. Salem tells his father that he would go to Fatima in order to teach him how to read and write, but his father warned him and said to him:

"Listen to and understand me.. Learning to read and write, this is reasonable but. . Be careful, to learn their religion and their Quran. . They are Muslims, my son and we are Jews.. did you understand me? (Al Muqri, 2009, p.11).

Despite Fatima uses the holy Qur'an and reinforces her opinions with a verse that recognizes the other. Salem's father tries many times to avoid him from learning Quran. He is afraid about his son that he will convert to Islam by the help of Fatima.

The novel demonstrates the vital role of young generations in accepting the other, in contrast to the generation of parents. Fatima and Salem accept the idea of open cognitive to the human and Islamic behaviors, and its culture. This knowledge will lead to the abolition the privacy of Salem's father that addresses his son. Reading and writing, this is reasonable, but be careful, beware that you will learn their religion (p.9). The Cognitive openness will not lead to the cancellation of the other's religious identity, but to accept the idea and thoughts of others. The diversity of their religion, ethnicities, and ideas lead to respect and share the equal rights with others in the same society.

In this sense, Al-Muqri appears to raise some questions and doubts about the barriers between the two religions and the legitimacy of such marriages, but he does not provide an answer at all. In her letter, for example, she referred to important books of great religious scholars on which she bases her decision (p.74). Fatima's decision to fall in love and Mary Salem was born out of her knowledge that the two religions allow this as if she says that these practices practiced by religious scholars should be changed. Thus, Fatima is presented as a person with extensive knowledge who knows not only well about Islam, but also about Hebrew (Alkodimi, 2019, p.41).

Therefore, we will not be surprised by her insistence

on teaching Salem Quranic verses, and his ignorant mother thought that her son recites Arab poems, in which he talks about the sun and the moon, and God bless the orphan, her husband repeats, this is a Quran of religion. Salem's mother tried several times to persuade my father that I was talking about cosmic phenomena and livelihoods, but he shouted at her face. Thus, the speech of Fatima is going to broaden the significance of freedom of culture and belief. As Salem explains that:

My father heard me while I was reciting some Quranic verses. He was shouting, "Oh my God's". My mother tried to calm him down and asked him about the reason for his screaming. What happened? Just he was repeating an Arabic poem about the sun and the moon, and the blessings of God for orphan. But my father said "they will spoil the son, they will spoil the son of the Jew. .. Oh my God" (Al Muqri, 2009, p.13).

This is the Cosmic unit, which unites a person regardless of his identity, culture and belief. Thus, it is the beginning and the end of the unit of source and the fate "All of you are Adam and Adam from dust (p.16)." Besides books, especially Sufi, which contributed to relationship between lovers, is strengthened, and this is why the lovers exchange the books of the two different religions.

The belief of Fatima holds the positive word that adopts human love, tolerance, coexistence to achieve peaceful and prosperous life with others. She wants to eradicate the negative conceptions like hatred, aggression, degradation, humiliation and fundamentalism in order to live together in a city that opens its doors for all different people. For example, when Salem's father asks about Fatima's intentions to teach his child, Fatima explains to him:

"What I taught him is a science in the Arabic language, so that he can read and write, I know that he is a Jew, and "You have your religion and I have my religion".. There is no problem. We are all from Adam and Adam from dust. . I tell you and I swear by God, there are many books on the shelves of our house. If the Muslims read it, they will love the Jews, and if the Jews read it they will love the Muslims (Al Muqri, 2009, p.16).

Fatima uses the language of dialogue that respects the privacy of the other. Her language seems credible because it is derived from her religious authority. It also seems open, and accepts the other's culture, so she is able to transcend a familiar language in a society governed by Ignorance. It means that Language has no religion only, but it has history, poetry and science. Salem explains the effective speech of Fatima towards his father after the first meeting. Fatima's argument make Salem's father accept her request. «He does not mind, even if I become a Muslim," he adds that "My father does not have the same hate like other Jews, and he doesn't carry any hatred against Muslims since Fatima came to our home (p.17). Coexistence theory explains how groups of people with shared interests in natural resources (e.g., a fishery) can

come to coexist sustainably (Loring, 2016, p.154). Hence, understanding how a biologically and culturally diverse group of people can coexist despite the potential for conflict among them (p.155).

Because of Fatima's initiative to teach Salem reading, writing and knowledge, he is able to have a degree of awareness to understand the reality of peaceful life, life without hatred, humiliation, racial discrimination, violence and religious conflicts. As he describes that "this book has transformed me, and what I have read before to another creature, or to convey a person with a sense (Al Muqri, 2009, p.27). Thus, Fatima is able to capture the heart of Salem by planting the love of knowledge in it. As a result of this, Salem remained obsessed with her words, it attracted me to life, life will not be beautiful without peace. It can be said that the "Fatima Doctrine" represents the idealistic human condition that attempts to restore the Civilized, rational, logical Islam. This is shown by what Fatima has written in her letter saying:

"So I write to you, begin by asking about your health, your conditions, and congratulations to you on our festival days, and I ask God for you and all Jews and Muslims, as well as followers of different religions and bees, and those who have no religion, the safety of days and the joy of eternity (p.59).

The problem posed by the novel lies in the negative selectivity of heritage, and the solution is to start with a repetition of cultural construction of the Arab mind that is based on an open reading. What we have in our texts of love, tolerance, open dialogue embody "Fatima Doctrine." This idea dedicates these beliefs in the minds of Arab. Art also has a share of being among us, because it addresses the soul, goes to the core of matters and dissolves negative distinctions between people. This leads us to search for a result for those who embraced the "Fatima Doctrine". Furthermore, Fatima's approach appreciates the surrendered and degrading Jews, so that Salem's father was "rejoiced and shining, like a person who regains his dignity." This confirms that although Fatima is older and the relationship begins, Salem is not a lesser partner, over the years of their friendship and engagement, the decisioner showed that Fatima respects and appreciates the Judaism of Salem (Irving, 2016, p.352).

Salem and Fatima, the protagonists of the novel achieved the knowledge of inter-faith coexistence through knowledge and science and accepting the other's culture. Salem seems different from his brother. He symbolizes the good voice of the Jewish community. Like Fatima, Salem seems reasonable and has an understanding of his mind that is pure and untainted by false beliefs or extremism. Fatima taught him, and therefore he is moderate in his philosophy of life including his religion (Alkodimi, 2019, p.42). Then, Salem doesn't not find any other way, but to send his child to Fatima's sister: "I told her, this is your son, the son of Fatima, the Jews did not accept him, in

their legacy, the son followed his mother, I swear she remained Muslim throughout her life.” ((Al Muqri, 2009, p.96).

According to peaceful coexistence, the mother and son crisis is used in a manner that honed the author’s critical voice on both sides, Muslims and Jews, as both sides refuse to accept the innocent mother and child on a religious basis. Ultimately, Salem only finds Saba that represents his Judaism to feed that newborn baby and there grows within Saba environment, the Jewish girl and her husband Said, the son of Muzzin. The coexistence of Saba and Said symbolizes the possibility of tolerance and coexistence between the two religions together if they accept and respect each other. It goes without saying that Fatima and Salem’s marriage can be read as another sign of love, tolerance, peace, religious tolerance. It is also the basic factors for coexistence between groups and races. In other words, Fatima and Salem’s relationship indicates, “They inhabit a haven of kindness and wisdom, which is in stark contrast to the mainstream of society” (Irving, 2016, p.252).

Hayim, the Jewish drunkard, is a symbol of peace, coexistence and tolerance in his village, Raida in Yemen. He is addicted to alcohol, singing amazing poems, hated violence and religious fanaticism. His goal in life was for the community to live in the city of Raida in peace and tolerance. According to the hot debate between Saleh and Assad about Jerusalem, Saleh tries, however, to expose their claims and persuade them that it’s a Muslim lands. Hayim tried several times to calm down the discussion between Assad, the Jew, and Saleh, the Muezzin through quiet songs that aim at peace, love, tolerance and coexistence between them, but he will not be able to. Also, Salem tried to distance them from the fanatic debate through various hymns from the Qur’an. They kept quiet until Salem completed, and the Muezzin said it is verses from the Holy Qur’an. Even that Qasim when he heard it, came back quickly and said, “God willing. .. God bless you and keep your voice (((Al Muqri, 2009, p.50).

In fact, this argument has religious roots, as each group believes that they have the right to have Jerusalem for themselves. This is the basis of the long-standing conflict between Muslims and Jews. Significantly, the author appears to deliberately choose a religious figure to argue with the Jewish people in order to convey a message that this conflict is based on a religious basis, or that religious figures are really the root of the matter. In other words, the author notes that religious figures are responsible for stirring up hatred between the two sects because both institutions are driven by certain ideological rhetoric that exacerbates hostility against the other (Alkodimi, 2019, 41).

Salem stays several months with Hayim, sharing with him wine and singing lyric poems. These poems symbolizing love, peace and coexistence between sects. Salem used to love and respect Hayim because he loved

the whole society, regardless of their different sects and religions. Hayim also speaks to me about Jerusalem as a religious city and symbolized tolerance, love and coexistence among societies. He spoke to me about the history of Jerusalem and its dependence in its different times on the rule of Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Rome, and about the reverence of a number of peoples and religions for some places in it, including Christianity, and the view of both Jews and Muslims to it (Al Muqri, 2009, p.53). Al-Muqri’s main concern seems to be people’s obsession with the idea of homeland at the expense of the man himself. He has a humanist view of people and society and he criticizes people’s tribalist attachments and attitudes by poking ruthless and unsparing ridicule at all parties involved (Alkodimi, 2020, p.8).

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## THE EXPERIENCE OF LOVE

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Ali al-Muqri’s novel, *The Handsome Jew*, offers scenes that allow us to experience a human relationship. It happens between the Muslim character, “Fatima” that embodied love, forgiveness, peace, tolerance and the Jewish person “Salem” that embodied the same features. They live in one place that is called Raida in Yemen. The title of this novel increases the amazing human relationship between them. It is based on love relation. But in the Yemeni city of Raida, their love is forbidden because of the religious difference between them. And when they decide to flee to Sana’a in order to stay together, they do not think about the consequences that will result from their decision. However, she is also presented as a lustful woman who evokes love and admiration for Salem from the first time she meets him. Thus, even though she is a religious Muslim, she violates Islamic law and falls in love and marries a young Jewish man. Interestingly, it was Fatima who gave the title of the story because she had never called Salem apart from the “handsome Jew” since their first meeting. In fact, from the beginning, she had the inspiration for handsome Jews to admire her (Alkodimi, 2019, p.41).

According to the title of the novel, the Jewish name occupied the position of the forefront in view of its importance. Most Yemenis describe the title of the novel directly as the handsome or beautiful to negate any social background related to social race. Now, “What do you like?” Write your name, Salem the Jew, or the handsome Salem, and I am not telling you, the handsome Jew”(Al Muqri, 2009, p.11).

Ali Al-Muqri’s novel *The Handsome Jew* puts society in front of a mirror of conscience, so that errors and even crimes can become evident in the relationship between its sects, especially between Muslims and Jews. The novel deals with a topic that has been avoided by many Arab writers, which is dealing with Jews as citizens, not relatives. This comes through the love relationships

that arise in the "Raida" area between young men and women of the two communities. Love adorns the walls of isolation and they make sense of the other (Al-Hayat 2009).

The role of Fatima Doctrine enlightens and establishes the feelings of love among people, whether they are Muslims or Jews. Also, Fatima raises the importance of culture, and shows her enlightening role in establishing feelings of love and tolerance among people, whether they are Muslims or Jews. Fatima then proceeds from that reference to the truth of the unity of human belonging and the unity of destiny. The novel portrays a relationship that needs us to rethink about our social relations in order to reach a society in which the coalition prevails even if we disagree. Hence, the importance of openness, and respect for difference. This combination of love and tragedy is utilized to explore the forbidden. The novels I examine here use historical, nostalgic settings that open up these possibilities but also subject their characters to tragic endings that reinforce the limits of those possibilities (Irving, 2016, p.346).

Fatima and Salem are symbols of love, tolerance, peace and forgiveness that makes them reduce the struggles of parents. They dive into the forbidden love, which triumphed by the marriage of the two. When Salem approaches the youth stage, he uses to make more visits to the Mufti House in order to visit Fatima. Salem's father bothers him and asks him for helping in the work and stop teaching of Fatima. He tried to persuade his father to stop his decision, but he refused. My father insisted that he would take me to work. Salem tells Fatima the next morning that he could not live without her and told her, "I cannot live without you. And whoever says that you will live without me, or that I will live without you. We will stay together if you trust in our destiny (Al Muqri, 2009, p.30). "According to that, Salem chooses Fatima his deep love and married her. It means that Salem becomes more attached to moderate Islam. However, he is still Jewish until she dies which means that although he loves Fatima, the symbol of moderate Islam, he was never separated from his Judaism until it passed (Alkodimi, 2019, p.40).

The novel narrates a charming love story that revolves around the conflict between the Muslim and Jewish sects. The meeting of Salem, the Jew and Fatima, the daughter of the Muslim mufti, does not stop for they have different religions. Fatima is used to call him the handsome and then offer him a marriage. Thus, the literature of Muslims and Jews belonging to a culture of coexistence, rationalism and love. Salem himself says:

"I found myself moving to her side... I was the one who was afflicted with religious suspicion except Fatima, I mean entering Islam, not because I think it is a religion, but I wanted to carry an attribute to it." And he adds: "on its side there is nothing, but . love, forgiveness and peace. This is her path" (Al Muqri, 2009, p.102).

Fatima is dubbed with the intensity of her love for him. The Yemeni term handsome is used for praise, and is intended to show the beauty of its owner. Salem, the Jew, abandons his feeling of not belonging to the homeland as the case of all Jews, after he falls in love with Fatima. Salem is engaging in the love of Fatima even though he refrains from visiting her. As Salem states: "Fatima was not my homeland, but it was for me, the alternative to the homeland. I did not forget it since we parted. She was structures of my dreams" (pp.35-36).

The knot of the novel begins when Fatima gives birth and dies, and in the scene of her death, the author says that he was affected by the state that Fatima had gone to such a degree that he cried at Her death. Salem used to call her while he was looking and clinging to the body, and he cried her name Fatimah, but she can't answer. "I shouted loudly as I cling to her, smelling her for the last time" (p.93). This was the most painful situation when you lose the person you love and believe in. Because Fatima is not only Salem's wife or his sweetheart, but his country and faith in that world. Salem talks about her and her attributes. He explains that Fatima is not like the others. she loves the Jews in spite of being a Muslim and she marries me and I am the handsome Jew. Salem is truly when he talks about Fatima. He is also saying "Do you hear me, Fatima? (p.93).

Because of her death, her secret is revealed that Fatima is a Muslim, not a Jew. As a result of this, the fate of their son, Saeed, is suspended between two possibilities that he is ascribed to his father, a Jew or to his mother, a Muslim. Between this, Fatima stands out as a symbol of tolerance, peace and love, as she views all human beings as God's Creatures, regardless of their religions. Because of love, Fatima breaks the norms of Muslim society and visits a Jewish home. She also learns Hebrew and the law of the Jews to know the differences between the two religions. Love grows between them, and it was decided after she found in the words of the religious scholars what would help her to marry Salem, the handsome Jew, as she used to call him, and to leave with him.

The love is a human condition that transcends religions and nervousness, and the novel is embedded in the conditions of the Jewish community in northern Yemen, under the rule of the Zaidi imams. The Jews were subjected to the scourges of torture and their diaspora as a result of the rise of intolerance against them, especially during the rule of Imam Al-Mutawakkil in the seventeenth century. Despite the novel adopts historical facts, it focuses on tension in the plot of love and it is common for a Muslim to fine a Jew and marry her. But a Muslim woman has no right to marry a Jew without asking him to change his religion. And if she decides to marry a Jew without asking him to change his religion, this is not familiar to the Muslim community. Salem says:

“I felt that I was in a dream. I never imagined that I would ride a donkey in front of a Muslim, so how can I believe that I go before him riding on his presence and desire. As for the Muslim woman who became my wife, I am not in a dream, but in a dream greater than” (p.83).

And when Fatima falls in love with Salem, she appears as a person who ignites fires not only in the neighborhoods of Muslims and Jews, but also on the map of all religions. The novel revolves around the romantic love between Fatima, a young Muslim woman, and Salem, a Jewish young man. The story is set in seventeenth-century Yemen; however, it addresses issues that are still largely relevant to, and prevalent in, current social life in the country. The story takes place in a village a few kilometers from Sana’a, a patriarchal and conservative society where communication between unassociated men and women is rigidly monitored, especially for highly distinguished females like Fatima, a daughter of the mufti (Alkodimi, 2020, p.2).

Fatima does not carry a weapon, but she carries the feelings of love and passion. When Fatima and Salem decide to escape from Raida (One of the districts of Amran governorate in Yemen) in order to get married, they take a break in front of a village on the road. They were talking about the beautiful memories of love they had in Raida. “Do you know what I told my father six years ago that I wanted you to stay with me? I told them that I will teach you Arabic to attract you to Islam (Al Muqri, 2009, p.88).

It was an exciting break, they exchanged conversation. Salem’s jokingly asks her: Were you really aiming to convert me to become a Muslim? “In fact, I do not know whether your handsome little face was behind my desire to stay with me, or the Hadith of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, or both (p.88).”

The novel seeks to search for presumed rationality and rare formulas for the voice of love in the midst of an atmosphere of religious and social struggles overwhelmed by hostility and hatred. However, achieving this seems like a fast dream that will be aborted.

Also, it ends with a tragic conclusion. Fatima’s love becomes a curse that haunts its owners to the grave. The cemeteries of Muslims and Jews refuse to keep the remains of Fatima and the present Jew in one place, what makes their son Saeed get confused and in a condition that makes him at one with all that is human. “Grind their bones and throw it in the wind. .. thus in the wind. . no grave.. no country.. in the wind? (p.149). “ In the morning, they cannot find Saeed at home, while they find the tombs of Fatima and *The Handsome Jew* open. “They told us that our father Saeed went in the east, others said, towards the west. Some thought he was heading north. While others asserted that he had gone south, few believed otherwise (p.149). The story of Fatima, Salem and their son Saeed communicates to the grandson in a similar style, identity,

and a confused fate that concludes the novel. It cannot elaborate further so as not to spoil the fun of the readers. It is a charming love story that revolves around the conflict between the sons of two religions.

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## CONCLUSION

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It has been concluded that *The Handsome Jew* is one of the best Arabic novels that dealt with the spirit of coexistence and love among the Yemeni communities and the minorities living with them not only in the region of Raida, but in all parts of Yemen. Ali Al-Muqri was able in his beautiful novel to show to Yemeni people the importance of intellectual, social and religious coexistence for the sake of building an educated community that accepts the opinions and ideas of others regardless of their different nationalities. The novel doesn’t only focus more on the foolishness of Jews but also the foolishness of Muslims in order to handle the hypocrisy and the racist features of those individuals.

Once again, the coexistence is an example of the success of societies that managed to maintain social solidarity and inclusion, as well as the disappearance of societies that failed to coexist as a result faced fragmentation. Integration of religious, national and cultural values as a whole and coexistence through shared ideals is essential to the future and survival of societies.

Ali Al-Muqri has addressed the issues of tolerant love and coexistence that stems from human feelings that transcend religion, sects and classes under the current situations not only in Yemen, but also all over the Arab World. In this sense, Al-Muqri tries not only to establish his opinions, but also all perspectives on the values of cultural, religious and social tolerance away from stereotypes, intolerance, racial discrimination, and ideological hatred that leaves nothing but destruction to all of humanity.

Finally, the story of Fatima and Salem presents as an example of romantic love in order to get rid of the most important social life obstacles such as intolerance, arrogance, degradation and racial discrimination that are still largely relevant to and prevalent in current social life in conflicting society. It stresses the need for a peaceful life through Fatima, the heroine. Therefore, the paper gives an account of how an ethics of toleration and coexistence may provide valuable alternatives that enrich existing interpretations of love and accepting the otherness in educational surroundings of conflicting societies.

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