

Telling stories online in the Gulf

Prolegomena to the study of an emerging
form of Arabic literary expression

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Introductory Chapter

1.1 Choice of Topic

Online media are used and recognized in most parts of the developed and developing countries of the world. It is agreed that it is essential to make use of the Internet to keep up with contemporary times. Therefore, it is only natural that online access has also been available in the Gulf countries for more than a decade. Of course, different branches of use have expanded and there seems to be space for all sorts of applications and purposes in the online sphere. Within the last decade, a field of online literary production has opened up in various Gulf countries. But other forms of media use can also be found, such as political or religious activism and all sorts of commercial fields. Studying the development and tendencies shows the increasing importance of cultural production in the region online and away from the screen. Online literature as a research field is a natural choice when looking at current developments in Arab culture.

Online literature is distributed all over the Arabic-speaking world. A variety of factors have contributed to its popularity. During the last decade, online literary production increased massively. In the Arabic-speaking countries of the Persian Gulf, the phenomenon started spreading in the mid-2000s.

Over time, the distribution of online literary texts became more popular in many countries and also more acknowledged by a broader audience, as well as by academia. This is due to the progress made in Internet access and Internet literacy. On the one hand, cultural production has flourished. On the other hand, researchers become more familiar with the medium and this form of distribution has become more popular. With the increase in online access, more people have the chance to make literary works accessible. Through this opportunity, an expanding number of users have desired to write for and share content

on an online platform. Additionally, writers who first wrote in print started to distribute their works online and, vice versa, some of those who began by blogging went into print. As Internet access spread in the Arab world, literary texts found their way online in a variety of forms, such as forums and blogs. Examining online literature gives insights into contemporary cultural production in the Gulf.

Upcoming Chapters

It is important to clarify that this thesis is a first attempt to present an emerging cultural phenomenon. It is intended to carefully suggest a first contextualisation of a new form of literary presentation. Hence, literary texts are not only examined through literary and aesthetical norms but also within their surroundings in the online sphere.

To understand the significance of online literature in the Gulf it needs to be discussed against the background of the increased importance of the internet as well as against developments in print.

The **Introduction** will therefore present perspectives on online literature and serve as a gate to grasp concepts and ideas related to the field and medium. An overview of online access and the start of literary production in the Gulf will serve as a basis for understanding the following chapters. The reasons for choosing the subject of research will be evaluated. The research question and hypothesis will be outlined. Terms such as blog, forum and e-publishing house will be defined. Additionally, the value and quality of online literature will be discussed. Also, the Gulf as a research field will be introduced with its distinct cultural and traditional aspects that influence contemporary text production. New perspectives on the examination of online literature will help to understand the process of presenting the cultural phenomenon from a variety of viewpoints.

The thesis is divided into four interconnected parts. Each part highlights one distinct aspect of online literature from the region. Three chapters embed literary examples: *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One) *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) and *Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes* (Chapter Three). The chapter dealing with *Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution* (Chapter Four) is more theoretical and will include less original source text. There are many more aspects of online literature from the region that can be examined. The particular aspects that I analyse were chosen because

they are striking when dealing with the subject, highlighting three fields that are relevant for a media analysis as well as for an analysis of text. ***Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language*** (Chapter One) is a separate chapter because it deals with the literary text itself, describing language and narration as well as aesthetics in expression; digitalisation; and the influence the medium has on the composition of literary texts posted online in the Gulf. ***Participatory Culture*** (Chapter Two) is an important feature of online interaction and online cultural production. This subject is selected for an examination of literary text because it highlights the distinct functions and benefits of online participation. This includes circulation and redistribution of text, Web 2.0 studies, interactivity, communication and authorship. Many of these sub-subjects are inherent to online media and differ from earlier distribution of literary products. ***Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes*** (Chapter Three) is chosen as an aspect of examination because reading literature distributed online suggests an analysis of self-representation, because characters often situate themselves in their cultural contexts. It would be possible to analyse a variety of other perspectives when dealing with literary texts from the region, opening up a deeper debate on the "virtual space", analysing online literature from a post-colonial perspective, or even from a perspective of the beginnings of hypertext literature and poetics. Several perspectives on literary production online are not included in this research. These include perspectives on the representation of religion, approaches to historical perspectives or broader discussions on Orientalism or post-colonialism. This work eschews discussion of cyber theory, like Espen J. Aarseth's "Ludogy".¹ Nor is code discussed. These perspectives on text are neglected for a variety of reasons, but mainly because they did not seem natural elements to study when analysing the text of the original sources. All of the aforementioned perspectives on online literature are valuable in themselves and might be worth applying to various kinds of online literature from other parts of the Arabic-speaking world.

The following explains the choice of subject by discussing the increasing importance of the Internet, a presentation of Internet statistics in the Middle East and a general view of the Gulf as a research field.

1 Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore 1997.

1.2 Why Research Online Literature?

A vast variety of literary texts are distributed online. In the Gulf, written and oral poetry and short stories can be found on blogs, forums, and other media. Additionally, poems are spread by micro-blogging applications such as *Tumblr* or *Twitter*.² There is a smaller selection of online novels on blogs and at e-publishing houses. This is worth attention in itself, since the focus in this research is on short stories and short literary texts published on blogs, in forums and at the e-publishing house Nashiri.³ My focus lies on the three major sources, blogs, forums and e-publishing, because they are the forms most frequently used by online writers from the region and have a longer tradition. Literary products written during the last five to seven years are representative and offer a vast research field that makes it possible to grasp which topics are commonly chosen by authors and what formats are used to place literary texts. These three forms of publication can be seen as established ways of sharing literary works with readers. This means writers have found a way to make use of them and know how to present their works and make them accessible to be read by others. Readers who adjust to the medium are skilled enough to naturally interact with writers and subscribe to preferred blogs. My selected platforms of online distribution can therefore be seen as well-established forms of sharing literary works online. The selection of texts to be analysed in the following is usually not distributed on *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Tumblr*. I chose not to examine works distributed on *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Tumblr* because they are so new that it might be difficult to find common categories for them yet. Also, literary texts published on these micro-blogging platforms are even more abstract in their composition than the already short literary texts in my selection of online platforms. It is beneficial to study these literary forms, because the aspect of sharing and re-posting is even stronger in them than it is on blogs, forums and e-publishing. My choice of sources is explained later in this chapter.

The history of online distribution in the field as manifested in most popular works, underscores the novelty of this cultural phenomenon. Blog novels were first published in Egypt in the mid-2000s; as their popularity grew, some blog novels were also printed. The first novel that was originally distributed online and later published in print was Ghāda ‘Abd al-‘Āl’a ‘*Ayza ’atgawwiz* (I Want to Get Married). As a blog, it was already very

2 Micro-blogging is a continuation of regular blogging. Twitter is limited to 140 characters. Tumblr is a micro-blogging platform mostly used to post pictures, quotes, audio files and videos. In both platforms redistribution of content is encouraged.

3 Terms will be defined later in this chapter.

popular and gained a lot of attention. Literary production online drew more attention in the Gulf region in 2006. “Banāt al-Riyād” (Girls of Riyadh) by Rajā’ ‘Abdallāh al-Ṣāni’ was published that year; it resembled online literature but was originally written for print.

The Gulf region is an ideal place to research online literature because of its relatively high level of education and its quick development of cultural and economic infrastructure. Online literature and other cultural production are on the rise. In contrast to printed literary works, production and distribution online moves rapidly, both in the sense of the speed of publishing and in the number of published texts. The young population, in particular, participates in and enjoys the available opportunities.⁴ A major benefit of online cultural production is that it provides a space for free, unrestricted distribution. There is room for experimenting; even inexperienced writers, but also other artists, have the chance to try out what effect a particular work has on an audience. Hence, feedback may affect the development of such production.

In the Arab countries, censorship influences every kind of publishing, including the various kinds of literary production online. All the Gulf states have relatively strict censorship on cultural goods. All Gulf countries are ruled by autocratic leaders and their families, which makes censorship easier to implement.⁵ Online media offer opportunities to step out of this censored area and make works accessible that otherwise might not have found their way to an audience. Distinct aspects of Information Communication Technology (henceforth: ICT) use and the challenges of censorship are discussed in a separate chapter (Chapter Four). The ever-increasing volume of literary text distribution in the Gulf countries, its distinctive features and the relative absence of censorship make online literature an interesting field of study.

4 This becomes apparent when dealing with writers in the field and analysing information provided on blogs and profile pages in forums.

5 Much has been written on political aspects of the Gulf countries. See, among others, Christopher Davidson, *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies* 2011; Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* 1995.

1.3 Increasing Importance of Online Media

Internet use is increasingly important. From the mid-1990s on, private households all over the world have had access to the Internet. Nowadays, many essential processes of everyday life in Europe, American and Asian countries are carried out online. This includes information gathering, various forms of communication and even shopping. In the Arab world, the quality and availability of online access for average people varies from country to country. Richer countries and countries with a higher average educational level also have a higher Internet penetration rate. Since the 2000s, research interest in Internet use in the Arab world has increased. As can be seen in the works of Douglas A. Boyd (1999), Henner Kirchner (2001), Deborah Wheeler (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008) Naomi Sakr (2004, 2007), Jabbar Audah Al-Obaidi (2007), Rasha A. Abdulla (2007), and many others.

1.4 Internet access in Arabic speaking countries

A brief history of Internet access in the Gulf region provides some background on online literary production there. Internet access did not develop synchronously all over the world. Countries allowed Internet access at different times, including in the Gulf region. In the mid-1990s, a community wider than just governmental and financial spaces in the Gulf began to gain access to the Internet. The first country to enable its people to go online was Kuwait in 1995.⁶ A couple of years later most of the other Gulf states also allowed their citizens to go online.⁷ User statistics differ, depending on the institutions that gather them; the official figures at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/> are commonly used in academic research. User statistics in Iraq are not presented here.⁸ According to this source, the highest number of Internet users is in Bahrain with 88%, followed by the UAE with 75.9%, Qatar with 51.8% and Oman with 41.7 % in the mid-range, while lower user numbers are found in Kuwait with 39.4%, and Saudi Arabia with 38.1%.⁹

6 Deborah L. Wheeler, *The Internet in The Middle East: Global Expectations And Local Imaginations In Kuwait*, New York 2005.

7 Grey E. Burkhart, Seymour E. Goodman: *The Internet Gains Acceptance in the Persian Gulf*. Commun. ACM 41(3), 1998, pp. 19-25.

8 Iraq is not included in the researched sources and also has a special position because of the destruction of infrastructure in the Iraq War that started in 2003.

9 "Middle East Internet Usage & Population Statistics" <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>, January 2011, last accessed December 29, 2011.

Statistics on Internet penetration in Gulf countries present a challenge. In the countries of the Gulf which have large numbers of expatriate workers it is impossible to differentiate whether the local or the expatriate population is going online. As an extreme example, the population in the Emirate of Dubai consisted of almost 90% foreigners in 2011.¹⁰ Online access in Internet cafés does not influence the analysis of statistics in the Gulf region as much as in other Arabic-speaking countries; relative wealth means that people tend to go online in private settings. Nevertheless, younger users often access the Internet at universities.

The number of expatriates in the Gulf countries varies. The two states with the highest percentage of foreigners are Qatar and the UAE (about 80%). In the UAE, the proportions vary from emirate to emirate.¹¹ Kuwait's foreign population, too, is high: 68%.¹² Bahrain has a population of a little over one million, of which 37% are foreigners.¹³ Oman and Saudi Arabia have similar percentages of foreigners, about 25%.¹⁴ Oman has policies promoting citizen employment in preference to expatriate employment, given equal qualifications, in order to reduce dependencies among citizens.¹⁵ Other Gulf countries, for example Saudi Arabia, also foster hiring locals.¹⁶

The huge volume of expatriate labour influences not only Internet user statistics, but also society as a whole. Globalisation is mirrored in the sheer diversity of nationalities visible in everyday life; this includes culture, shopping and foodstuffs.¹⁷

It is interesting to compare the level of Internet access in less-wealthy Arabic-speaking countries, which have fewer expatriates, with that in the richer Gulf countries that have more expatriates.¹⁸ The lowest numbers of people accessing the Internet is in Libya, with 4.55%, which may be due to political circumstances. Syria is relatively low with

10 David Rosenberg, "UAE's expat population surges to reach almost 90 percent", *Arab News*, April 3rd 2011, <http://arabnews.com/middleeast/article342321.ece>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

11 Qatar: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5437.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

UAE: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5444.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

12 Kuwait: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35876.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

13 Bahrain: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26414.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

14 Oman: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

Saudi Arabia: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

15 Information on "Omanization" is provided by Ashley DeFlumere on her website on the subject.

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~deflu20a/classweb/omanization/omanization.html>, last accessed November 29, 2011 and on oman.net <http://www.omanet.om/english/misc/omanise.asp>, last accessed November 29, 2011.

16 Saudi Princess Ameerah gave an interview on Bloomberg TV on this subject, September 23, 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxVJ9PnikI8>, last accessed November 29, 2011.

17 More on the influence of globalisation in Gulf countries in connection to language and literature is found in the chapter *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One) as well as in the chapter *Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes* (Chapter Three).

18 <http://www.Internetworldstats.com> October 2011.

19.8%. In Egypt, 24% of the people go online, in Jordan 26.8%, Lebanon follows with 29%, Tunisia's Internet users are about 33.9% of the population and Morocco has an Internet penetration of 41.3%. The greatest number of Internet users is measured in the Palestinian territories with 53%. Percentages of Internet penetration are often difficult to interpret. Various factors affect online access statistics. It is impossible to determine how many users are online in Internet cafés or on shared devices. Going online at Internet cafés is especially common in countries where people cannot afford private Internet access at home. Additionally, more than one person in a family may use a single private computer. Universities also offer Internet access to their members, which may influence the statistics. Often politics play a role whether, when and how Internet access is provided in a country. This is connected not only to online censorship and censorship in general, but also to the level of education provided in a country. Helen Milner states that access to free information can threaten autocratic regimes.¹⁹ To avoid this threat, restrictions are made. User numbers therefore cannot be estimated by counting households with Internet access.

Fewer people use the Internet in Arabic-speaking countries without oil resources than in the Gulf countries.²⁰ Education levels and illiteracy percentages are a factor in this. Additionally, some governing systems restrict online access. Restrictions online and offline are an important factor in online literary production in the Arab countries and especially in the Gulf.²¹

Despite these reservations it seems safe to say that the number of Internet users in Gulf countries is relatively high. Even if the above caveats leave the figures uncertain, comparing Gulf statistics with those of other countries reveals tendencies of Internet use.

19 Helen V. Milner, *The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion*, *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 2, 2006, pp. 176-199, p. 184.

20 Except of Libya which is due to political circumstances.

21 More on restrictions in the region can be found in: Bruce Etling, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey: *Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture, and Dissent* (2009) http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2009/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere, last accessed December 29, 2011.

1.5 The Gulf as a Research Field

Aside from online access, social and political surroundings also affect cultural production. Since Gulf countries show cultural similarities it made sense to look at the Gulf as a research field of its own. Online literature should be analysed embedded in a cultural setting in order to understand discourses in a local background. During the last 40 years, growing wealth resulting from the discovery of oil has led to rapid development in business, tourism and construction in the Gulf.²² The Gulf developed differently than other Arab countries in the last century, initially being a rather poor region and suddenly becoming wealthy. North Africa and countries such as Lebanon were colonized, resulting in exploitation but also in the provision of educational institutions and academic exchange with European countries; by contrast, colonial influence was minor in the Gulf. Colonial forces were present but did not (or to a much more limited extent, at least) provide the region with hospitals, educational institutions, roads or railway systems. With wealth increasing, the role of expatriates, including those from Europe and North America, also increased. But in contrast to other Arab countries, these workers and consultants are hired by and ruled by local institutions to build up infrastructure of all kinds. Paralleling economic growth, the cultural sector has also grown during the last ten years, as manifested in the many art fairs, book fairs, art exhibitions, poetry TV shows and poetry houses (which resemble literature houses in Europe) and also architectural heritage sites and museums.²³ A steady investment in culture has enriched the cultural scene, and the local and expatriate community benefits from this. The production not only of visual arts, but also of literature is on the rise. The governments support the on-going cultural development financially and encourage it by awarding prizes to extraordinary artists and ideas.²⁴

The increase of literature is also new because until the 1960s the educational level in all of the Gulf countries was relatively low and it took some years before education spread.²⁵

22 Volker Perthes, *Geheime Gärten: Die neue arabische Welt* (2009); Roni Zirinski, *Ad Hoc Arabism: Advertising, Culture, and Technology in Saudi Arabia* (2005).

23 Art Dubai started in 2007, Abu Dhabi Art in 2009, Sharjah Book Fair since 1982, Sharjah Biennial since 1993, Museum of Islamic Art in Doha since 2008, Mathaf Doha since 2011, Bahrain National Museum since 1988, and much more.

24 The International Prize for Arabic Fiction, Abu Dhabi, Abraaj Capital Art Prize, Arab Creativity Award, etc.

25 For more insights on the development of the Gulf countries Mohammed al-Fahim's *From Rags to Riches. A story of Abu Dhabi* (1995) can be consulted. Here, not only the development of Abu Dhabi but also the rest of the Gulf countries is narrated by an eyewitness.

Since the 1960s, the Gulf countries have developed rapidly. Roads and highways were constructed to provide safe and fast connections between cities through the desert. Hospitals, schools and universities were established. One important improvement was the increasing supply of water produced by desalination plants. As soon as basic needs were met, investment turned to new fields such as tourism and the cultural sector. As an example this can be seen in recent developments in the UAE.²⁶

Once basic education was ensured, more people had the privilege of expressing themselves in written words. With the Gulf's long tradition in poetry and storytelling, it was just a question of time before literary texts were produced for the Internet.

2. Research Question and Challenges

A context for a further perception of online literature in the Gulf was set through introducing the research field. Following, an outline of the research question as well as research challenges will deepen insights on upcoming perspectives.

Online literary texts display recurring themes that are picked up by a variety of writers. Several literary texts deal with common subjects, either as a main focus or disguised in other aspects of stories. Selecting texts and analysing the secondary literature raises the question of how globalisation and change in society are incorporated in online literature. The rapid change in infrastructure and wealth inspires texts that deal with a tension between preserving the cultural heritage and embracing the global economy. Online literature raises questions of literary style, language and motifs. Is online literature in the Gulf unique? Is it different from online or digital literature written in other parts of the world? Does it differ from print literature? And if so, what aspects contribute to this? From the point of view of media studies, what are the benefits, for writers of online literature in the Gulf as compared to other regions, of distribution in online media? How influential is censorship there? What is the function of participatory culture in the region under discussion?²⁷ How does participatory culture influence online literary production in our

26 Joan C. Henderson , "Tourism in Dubai: Overcoming Barriers to Destination Development", in *International Journal of Tourism Research* 8, 2006, pp. 87–99.

27 Participatory culture is the opposite of consumerist culture. It is made from people for people and can involve an interactive process.

case? How much more freedom does this medium offer? How significant is the audience? It is essential to deal with these questions to explore the position of online literature in a broader picture of cultural production and in a more detailed framework of the literary canon.

This thesis also aims to locate these literary products within the context of literary studies and to find a place for a new kind of literary production either inside or outside already established categories. Are these works a continuation of a literary tradition, or are they a new and unconnected phenomenon that does not fit earlier perspectives and categories?

Blogging and posting stories in forums is not only a new and convenient form of distribution, but can also be seen as an additional form of communication. It is a form of communication through cultural production: writings are distributed in order to receive feedback. This can be seen as a social expression that is part of a cultural process.

A number of problems appear when dealing with online literature from the region. The biggest challenge is the extensive number of sources that have to be skimmed to select what might be called “representative”. Steadily increasing amounts of material of all qualities have to be read. A further challenge here is the storage and archiving of the sources, keeping in mind that online media are easy to change and edit. Another problem in analysing online distributions is its unsustainable availability. This can either mean that users remove their literary works or that a blog host or forum host is either taken down by external forces or decides to cease distribution. Additionally, governmental restrictions can shut down websites. Also, writers sometimes change privacy settings, turning a public blog into a private one that can be accessed only with the author’s permission.

For a researcher who is not from the region, another challenge is the use of colloquial language. The majority of literary texts published in forums are written in the various dialects of the Gulf. These dialects not only differ from Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth: MSA) and other Arabic dialects, they also include a fair number of words derived from Hindi, Urdu and Persian.²⁸ The influence of foreign languages is more apparent in forums than in blog posts. In addition, these texts often do not conform to grammatical and orthographic standards. Unlike forums, texts written on blogs are mostly in MSA, though sometimes coloured with dialect. Below, I will describe how these challenges have been met in the present study.

²⁸ More on this in Chapter One.

The selection of sources will be explained later in this chapter. The instability of text was dealt with by taking screen shots and saving websites on an external medium to prevent a loss of research material. As a researcher who is not from the region and whose knowledge of dialect is limited, I had to consult locals who helped me extract the meaning of colloquial language as well as to spot foreign influence in language.

The current research seeks to understand the contemporary Middle East from the perspectives of individualization, politics and democratization processes. This thesis is a study of literature and not a study of current political or philosophical blogs and can therefore only present findings appearing in literary texts. Literary texts are not a documentation of contemporary events in a form that could substitute for academic research or newspaper articles. Still, they can involve readers in discussions of general interests and discourses that are part of society. Individualization might be a phenomenon that can be represented in online literature. This might be embodied in self-representation as well as in interaction with an audience. Politics are rather a minor aspect of literary texts from the Gulf. Instead of addressing politics in literary texts, bloggers prefer to post a plain essay with their views on current events. Usually, it is obvious what kind of text is meant to have literary characteristics and what kind is provided to debate politics. The same is true for works posted in forums. Forums generally pre-structure a strict division between political debates and literature by providing different categories of discussion in several sub-pages. Other researchers have discussed democratization and its influence by online media, so this is not the subject of my research.²⁹

Even though this examination of online literature from the Gulf does not examine democratization or politics in general, it picks up other aspects of research on the contemporary Middle East, for example the description of the representation of identity in the portrayal of heroes (Chapter Three), often connected to the field of global influence vs. heritage, as well as the process of individualization. Global influences are also part of the description of language use when it comes to the distinctiveness of online language and dialect.³⁰ Another aspect that is connected to politics is the subject of censorship, which is treated in a separate chapter (Chapter Two) that deals with governmental restrictions on print and online media. Part of this chapter deals with the significance of this research for a greater research community.

29 cf. Kirchner (2001), Baker (2002), Kahn and Kellner (2004), Milner (2006), Alabtain (2008).

30 More on this in Chapter One.

First, however, an overview of current research related to the thesis will be summed up, methods will be introduced and an outline of upcoming chapters will be presented.

2.1 Overview of Current Research

It is essential to place this research project within the framework of current and on-going research on the field. So far, research on electronic, digital and online literature has been conducted in research fields outside the Gulf. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, who researches media with an interest in digital textuality, published the article "The Pleasure of the Blog" (2009), which deals with literariness of blogs.³¹ She states that not only the voyeuristic aspects of reading a blog, but also the interaction with the writer provide pleasure to the reader. Being part of the content production leads readers to return to blogs. She also outlines the problem of distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction in blogs, a problem that she notes also occurred when the novel began to emerge as a literary genre in Europe. In her view, in blogs the personal is political. She would also include "blog diaries" in this field. These findings are interesting because they underline my own view that online literature from the Gulf touches on societal discourses, even when it is not explicitly political (for details, see chapter three). Also, she sees that the structure of blogs resembles the "picaresque and the epistolary novel".³² My research also compares contemporary online literature to earlier printed novels (Chapter One). She agrees with Himmer that part of the pleasure of reading blogs is their ambiguity between fiction and nonfiction. Fitzpatrick presents the idea of a collective in intersubjective authorship that is also initiated through links. The chapter *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) addresses the perspective of communication and linking.

Academics from the region and other parts of the world have intensely researched political blogs and forums in the Middle East. The Berkman Center for Internet and Society edited "Mapping the Arab Blogosphere" (2009), analysing 35,000 active blogs in Arabic in terms of the subject of discussion, the blogs' links and other aspects.³³ Albrecht Hofheinz

31 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "The Pleasure of the Blog: The Early Novel, the Serial, and the Narrative Archive" 2007, machines.pomona.edu/dossier/files/2009/10/fitzpatrick-**blog**talk.pdf, last accessed January 27, 2012.

32 Ibid., p. 174.

33 Bruce Eting, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey, *Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics,*

distributed two articles on the use of the Internet in Arab countries – "The Internet in the Arab World: Playground for Political Liberalization" (2005) and "Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact" (2007) – that highlight the relevance of both for understanding the position of online media in the early 2000s.³⁴ My research draws substantially on his research on censoring forces in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Some research has been conducted on digital or electronic literature created in Europe and North America, for example Loss Pequeño Glazier's "Digital Poetics" (2001).³⁵ He states that the increase in the use of technology and media created a place for the distribution and writing of literature. His main focus is on hypertext, visual or kinetic text and programmed media. He examines the avant-garde of electronic literatures. My focus lies elsewhere, mostly on popular distributed texts. However, parts of his research help contextualize my findings, for example, his idea that digital media are contributing to a redefinition of writing itself and his finding that digital practices are truly international. These international practices are defined as a series of national practices that "constitute an international web of interests".³⁶ One of his valuable thoughts on digital literature is that the writer can be seen as a maker, as he is the "typesetter, graphic artist, and director of the work".³⁷ I will draw on his research in the chapter *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One) as well as in the chapter *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two). Peter Gendolla edited a collection of articles dealing with Internet literature, *The Aesthetics of Net Literature* (2007).³⁸ This collection of articles on net literature discusses several perspectives on aesthetics. The article "Playing with Signs" by Peter Gendolla and Jürgen Schäfer is especially valuable for understanding antithetical theory on net literature, because it evaluates an open process in communication between author and reader and discusses a change of media conditions and the specific resulting aesthetics that differ from those of traditional media. Roberto Simanowski's *Interfictions* (2002) defines digital literature as an artistic form of expression that needs digital media as an existential basis because it is characterized by at least one of the following distinct features: interactivity,

Culture, and Dissent (2009).

http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2009/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere, last accessed December 29, 2011.

34 Albrecht Hofheinz, "Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact", in Naomi Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*, London 2007, pp. 56-79; "The Internet in the Arab World: Playground for Political Liberalization", in *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 3/2005, pp. 79- 96.

35 Loss Pequeno Glazier, *Digital poetics*, Tuscaloosa 2002.

36 Ibid., p. 152.

37 Ibid., p. 29.

38 Peter Gendolla and Jürgen Schäfer, *The Aesthetics of Net Literature: Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media*, Bielefeld 2007.

intermediality or orchestration.³⁹ This definition is essential for my research, for he is one of the few researchers who give a clear and short definition of what electronic literature actually is.

All of these works deal with a different kind of electronic literature that is very unlike online literature from the Gulf: they deal with an art form that displays a more technical and aesthetical representation of literary text. Most of the results of this research, valuable as they may be in themselves, are however difficult to apply to my findings on my sources, because their composition and layout are different and they incorporate multi-medial applications very differently. As one of the few analyses of Arabic online literature, the Arab magazine for literature "Fuṣūl: Journal of Literary Criticism" can be named as it partially dealt with the issue.⁴⁰

Until now, researchers have not dealt with the phenomenon of online literature in the Gulf region. Most research in this geographical area has focused on political online participation, but even here the Gulf has not played as important a role for European and American academia as Egypt and Lebanon have.

My research is influenced by David Gauntlett, the British media theorist who shaped the term "Web 2.0 studies" and who also researched participatory culture and cultural production. He makes it clear that new research methods should be applied when dealing with creative online production because of the blurring or overlapping between audience and producers.⁴¹

A chapter of the present investigation deals with the portrayal of "heroes" in online literature. The chapter deals with perspectives on gender and the influence of globalisation, but it is also essential to study distinctive features of identity representation on the net. Two researchers who have studied this phenomenon are Susanna Paasonen and Sherry Turkle. Susanna Paasonen is a researcher in media studies and the author of *Figures of Fantasy* (2005), which dealt with gender and identity online.⁴² Are her findings also applicable to the Gulf? Sherry Turkle, a researcher in the social studies of science and technology, discusses people assuming different personalities online in her *Life on Screen*, published in 1997.⁴³ Although this is a very early work on the topic and includes an analysis of identity representations in Multi-User Dungeon's (henceforth: MUD). It is difficult to apply the

39 Roberto Simanowski, *Interfictions*, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

40 مجلة النقد الأدبي (فصول) العدد 79، شتاء وربيع 2011

41 <http://theory.org.uk/>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

42 Susanna Paasonen, *Figures of Fantasy*, New York 2005.

43 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York 1997.

concept of multiple identities to online literary forums and blogs from Gulf countries because there is not enough reliable material to build research on.

The field of Internet use in the Middle East has been researched for almost a decade. One of the most important monographs on the subject was produced by Deborah Wheeler, who pioneered Internet studies in the Arab world. She sees the Internet as an agent of change in the region and emphasizes that context and local identity still matter. Global expectations and local imaginations play a role when comparing Arab Internet cultures. Her work *The Internet in the Middle East* (2005) provides an early ethnography on the field of Internet use in the Arab World.⁴⁴ A main focus in her monograph is on Kuwait, making her research even more relevant for my thesis. She examines how the Internet influences public discourses, thereby presenting the meaning of the medium for society. Her research tries to grasp the Internet's effect on individual freedom, democratization processes and the economy. The chapter "Women, Gender, and the Internet in Kuwait" is especially valuable in examining gender representation in online literary text.

Research on the digital divide⁴⁵ has been conducted by many researchers, such as Helen Milner in *The Digital Divide* (2006).⁴⁶ Milner's work focuses on the diffusion of technology and the impact of politics. For her analysis, she uses data from 190 countries from 1991-2001, which was a very early time for Internet adoption in the Arab world. Things have changed with the development and spread of online media use in the area and also with the recent developments of several revolutions in 2011. Still, some of her ideas are still inspirational inspiring? Milner suggests that Internet adoption is driven by political factors because states and authoritarian governments condition the ways society uses the Internet. She also points out that more democratic countries have "more hosts per inhabitant"⁴⁷, which can also be seen in the Gulf because the ISPs are state-run.⁴⁸ Johanne Kuebler's paper "Overcoming the Digital Divide" (2011) also deals with this subject and focuses on the Middle East.⁴⁹ Her paper deals with what its title says, using political

44 Deborah L. Wheeler, *The Internet In The Middle East: Global Expectations And Local Imaginations In Kuwait*, New York 2005.

45 The digital divide describes the gap between social classes or countries which have different possibilities to go online, either because of a lack of knowledge or a lack of hardware and other possibilities.

46 Helen V. Milner, "The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion", *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 2, 2006, pp. 176-199.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

48 An Internet Service Provider is the institution that provides Internet to people. This can be privately owned or state owned.

49 Johanne Kuebler, "Overcoming the Digital Divide: The Internet and Political Mobilization in Egypt and Tunisia", in *CyberOrient*, Vol. 5, Iss. 1, 2011. <http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=6212>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

mobilization in Tunisia and Egypt as its example. Kuebler sees print media as a bridge that connects online activists with the general public sphere. In the Gulf, too, some authors of online literature publish works in print, either in newspapers or in books.

It is difficult to measure the actual age range, gender and nationality of Internet users in Gulf Cooperation Council (henceforth: GCC) countries. The digital divide in GCC countries is rather between the younger and the older generation than between rich and poor – at least when it comes to the local population, which is usually a minority, as described earlier. Warschauer and Grimes make clear that “privileged groups” are the main participants in online media.⁵⁰ In the Gulf, locals usually belong to these groups and have the hardware and knowledge required to go online. In her 2004 article, Wheeler states that in Saudi Arabia most female Internet users belong to the elite.⁵¹ As the use of Internet has spread since the distribution of her article, the number of users has also increased. Hofheinz, too, states that the number of young and female users is rising and reflected in the traffic of several portals.⁵²

One of the aspects this study also is interested in is the literariness of shorts text published in forums and blogs. It is therefore essential to look at recent developments in contemporary Arabic literature, which have been researched, among others, by scholars such as Sabry Hafez, Stephan Guth, Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Christian Junge. For the Gulf region in particular, Gail Ramsay is one of the active researchers on literary production. Many other pieces of research also contribute to the analysis of contemporary Arabic literature and will be relevant as a background against which to read online literature. It is interesting to see the degree to which studies on printed literature are applicable to online distributions.

Stephan Guth analyses changes in contemporary Arabic literature and discusses "countering modernity" and "reviving literary heritage" as aspects of culture and identity in post-1980s literature. He observes a “'return' to 'traditional, pre-(post) modernist modes of writing critical realism’”.⁵³ A similar "return" seems to be happening also in the stories

50 Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, "Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0", in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 1, 2007, pp.1-23, p. 15.

51 Deborah Wheeler, "Blessings and Curses: Women and the Internet Revolution in the Arab World", in Naomi Sakr (ed.), *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power through Self-Expression* 2004, pp.138-161, p. 155.

52 Albrecht Hofheinz, "Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact", in Naomi Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*, London 2007, pp. 56-79; "The Internet in the Arab World: Playground for Political Liberalization", in *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 3/2005, pp. 79- 96, p. 70.

53 Roger Allen quoted Stephan Guth's talk at the EURAMAL conference 2008 in Uppsala, Sweden, in "Fiction and Publics: The Emergence of the “Arabic Best-Seller”", in *Viewpoints Special Edition. The*

analysed here, which seem, at least partially, to employ the style and writing techniques of critical realism. Reviving literary heritage is apparent all over the Gulf, for example in the support for traditional poetry on TV shows and at other poetry events.⁵⁴

Angelika Neuwirth, a researcher on contemporary Arabic literature (and Quranic studies), is one of the editors of *Arabic Literature. Postmodern Perspectives*.⁵⁵ Her research on contemporary literature deals with ideas of “memory and identity” and “collective memory”; this is also valuable because identity representation in the form of the heroes’ portrayal is a recurrent aspect in short stories published online in the Gulf. Individual identity can be seen in contrast to collective ideals, as will be presented in the chapter *Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes* (Chapter Three).

Gail Ramsay, a researcher on Arabic literature, is one of the few who has also conducted research on blogs. One of her research foci is on short stories (in print) from the UAE and Oman. Another emphasis in her studies is on globalisation in the Gulf and the “post-structural concepts of cultural representation”.⁵⁶ She also takes up the subject of globalisation, an aspect of great value in the examination of short stories and short literary texts from the region.

Andreas Pflitsch, a researcher on contemporary Arabic literature, examines the opposition between cultural heritage and Western modernity, emphasising that a Western perception of Arabic literature is often “oriented on exotic allures” and also “disregards its diversity and quality”.⁵⁷ This perspective on literary text might be interesting to adopt when applying “Western” research methods to sources from the Gulf. I do not regard online literature from the Gulf as more exotic than online literature from any other region. Still, I apply European methods of literary analysis to text that is set in and written in Gulf countries. There is a lack of analysis of online literature from the region because the field of

State of the Arts in the Middle East, Washington.

www.mei.edu/Portals/0/Publications/state-arts-middle-east.pdf, last accessed January 2, 2012.

Additional discussion on that matter can be found in: Stephan Guth and Gail Ramsay (eds.), *From New Values to New Aesthetics*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and Thereafter*, Wiesbaden 2011.

54 TV shows such as "Prince of Poets" or "Poet of a Million" from Abu Dhabi might serve as an example.

55 Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.), *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, London 2010. Translated from the original German version: *Arabische Literatur, postmodern*, München 2004.

56 Gail Ramsay, "Global Heroes and Local Characters in Short Stories from the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman", in Paul Starkey, Boutros Hallaq & Stefan Wild (eds.), *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 9 (Number 2) August 2006, pp. 211-216.

Gail, Ramsay, "Globalisation and Cross-Cultural Writing in the United Arab Emirates and Oman", in Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, Stefan Helgesson, Margareta Petersson, Anders Pettersson (eds.), *Literature and Literary History in Global Contexts: A Comparative Project*, Vol. 4, Berlin, New York 2006, pp. 241-277.

57 Andreas Pflitsch, "The End of Illusions: On Arab Postmodernism", in Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.), *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, London 2010, pp. 25-40, p. 36.

study is relatively new. It is important to keep the debate on Orientalism initiated by Edward Said in mind when dealing with texts from the Arab world, as preconceptions should not be applied to the sources. Attention should be paid to the individuality of the literary texts published in online forums and on blogs.

Christian Junge researches literature of the 1990s in Egypt, which is interesting to compare with contemporary literature online because both deal with self-reference in narration and choice of language.⁵⁸ Junge works on a stylistically completely different kind of texts, but his analysis of self-reference and narration is interesting because both are crucial and apparent in online literature from the Gulf.

Common to all these scholars is their emphasis on the dichotomy between heritage or memory and global influence, as well as on self-presentation or identity presentation.

2.2 Approaches to Method and Theory

The following section describes method and theories that are adopted to outline the distinctions of online literature in the Gulf. As I am working on a new field that is not well researched yet, I decided to use an assortment of theoretical approaches to the matter. My choice of methods derives from my research question about the distinctive aspects that recur in my sources.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) helps analyse the settings of literary texts. CDA is interdisciplinary and examines language as a social practice. Even if it is more often used for analysing political discourse, I will apply aspects of it to literary texts. CDA is vital because it draws on the analysis of separate discourses that form a public reflection on a single subject. I use the term “discourse” as defined in Critical Discourse Analysis: a form of language use in writing and speech that is seen as a “social practice” and shows social identities.⁵⁹ This method is needed to analyse selected discourses in a variety of stories.

58 Christian Junge, "I Write, Therefore I Am. Metafiction as Self-Assertion in Mustafa Dhikri's "Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth"', in Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.), *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, London 2010, pp. 444-460.

59 CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of “social practice”. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) that frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo and in the sense that it contributes to transforming that status quo. Since discourse is so socially

The chapter *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) draws on a different methodological approach because, here, forums and blogs are analysed by identifying their function for readers and writers. In this chapter I will draw on the findings of Louis Leung's article "User-generated content on the Internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment" (2009) because they help to identify the process of interaction and communication.⁶⁰ David Gauntlett's findings in "Participation Culture, Creativity, and Social Change" (2008) are also vitally relevant.⁶¹ Another valuable article on the subject is Carolyn Guertin' "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World" (2008).⁶²

The chapter *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One) analyses a variety of perspectives on text. The chapter is important for the whole of the thesis because it reflects stylistic and aesthetic distinctions that are apparent in literary text from the region. Gerard Genette, a French literary theorist, provides a methodological approach to the actual literary source texts. He coined terms that are relevant for the analysis of narration. His method is suitable for examining the voice of the narrator as well as narrative moods in my sources. Distance and perspective are also two important aspects of literary texts published online in the Gulf. Aesthetics is the focus of "Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades" (2008), by Christopher Funkhouser.⁶³

The chapter *Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution* (Chapter Four) is discussed against the background of views on the Internet as a public sphere. This is necessary since I analyse censorship as well as the redistribution of text. Both are social functions that influence the dynamics of literary stories that are posted on blogs and in

consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways they represent things and position people (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

60 Louis Leung, "User-generated content on the Internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment", in *New Media & Society*, London 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1328 f.

61 David Gauntlett, *Participation Culture, Creativity, and Social Change*, November 29, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqgXbI1_o8&feature=related, last accessed November 11, 2011.

62 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012.

63 Christopher Funkhouser, "Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-11&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-5-11&brand=9781405148641_brand, last accessed January 27, 2012.

forums. Inspiring findings on this subject can be found in James Bohman's "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy" (2004).⁶⁴ Also important for this chapter are the findings in H. Kirchner's article "Internet in the Arab World: A Step Towards 'Information Society?'" (2001).⁶⁵

2.3 Proceedings

As mentioned earlier in this Introduction, the thesis is divided into four chapters and one introductory and concluding chapter. All chapters are linked by a variety of perspectives (media studies, literary studies etc.). To present the findings in a form suitable for print, the chapters are in a sequence. However, the chapters can be read independently, aside from the hierarchy forced on the thesis by its paper embodiment. Four chapters deal with aspects of online literature and try to illuminate distinctive features.

The chapter on *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One) looks at/deals with questions of layout and the use of multi-media elements. The setup of online short stories and other literary blog texts will also be examined. Later, the style of writing and narration will be examined. To highlight distinctive features of language use, an investigation of linguistic aspects in online literary texts and an analysis of the purpose and function of dialogues and monologues will be conducted.

The second chapter, which deals with *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two), includes views on the following aspects of cultural production: first, an introduction to Web 2.0 is essential to highlight the function of user-generated text and the benefits of online writing with Web 2.0. This serves as a basis to understand the role of authors in online literature, which can be seen in connection with the public and private dynamics in the online sphere. Later, the vital role of the audience will be discussed. Connected to the audience is the interactive process of reposting and remixing on the Internet, which underlines the interpersonal experience that happens and is dependent on elements of time and space on the net. Additionally, interactivity can be expressed through links, which can also serve as a

64 James Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy", in John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford 2004, pp. 131-155, p. 138.

65 H. Kirchner, "Internet in the Arab World: A Step Towards 'Information Society?'" , in Kai Hafez (ed.), *Mass Media, Politics and Society*, Hampton 2001.

form of communication.

The third chapter (*Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes*) deals with perspectives on gender identity, globalization and individualization processes. The protagonist's struggle over identity can be expressed as a critique of social norms in online literary text from the region.

The fourth chapter (*Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution*) will attempt to identify challenges to online writing, such as the impact of online media on political conditions, as well as the influence of authoritarian regimes on literary texts. These texts are strongly influenced by Internet censorship and global and local influence on ICT use. Anonymised distribution will be discussed as a tool that may be beneficial for online writing.

To fully grasp the consequences of online literature and the influence it has on society and vice versa, it needs to be approached from a wide spectrum of viewpoints. Accordingly, texts have to be analysed and examined critically. All the chapters are connected to each other. Participatory culture (Chapter Two) influences visual setup, features of narration and language (Chapter One). Another connecting factor is the disorganized, non-hierarchical sphere that shapes both processes. This is not a completely anarchistic sphere, but is much less controlled and organized than other, earlier media. Users can interact with less restriction from social conventions and power structures. The audience is part of the analysis of *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) because the audience takes an interactive part in online literary production and communicates with writers in various ways, as will be elaborated in the relevant chapter. A common element can also be seen in the process of individualization, opinion making, issues of privacy and publicness and self-regulation. The chapter *Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes* (Chapter Three) is also linked to *Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution* (Chapter Four) because both address the topics of global influences and freedom of speech. As mentioned earlier in the summary of each chapter, globalisation plays an important role in identity representation as well as in the net's influence on political changes, in addition to providing a space for discussion that is more open than communication in the space away from the screen. These aspects are also shared with the chapter *Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language* (Chapter One). This is due to the impact that restrictions on writing have on the literary text itself, and also to the actual plot of the text and to the same extant the setup as it is impacted by global perspectives.

3. Significance and Relevance

After presenting an overview of current research and applied methods and an outline of upcoming chapters, it is worth showing the thesis' significance. It evaluates a new phenomenon that has not been previously examined. It is a contribution to the analysis of contemporary Arab media, as well as a different representation of Arabic literature and thereby fills a gap in current research. In the introduction to her book "*Electronic Literature* (2008) N. Kathrine Hayles asks: "Is electronic literature literature at all?" and whether it will open publication to everyone, something that may "result in a flood of worthless drivel". She continues to ask if this type of literature is inferior to printed literature and which cultural and social changes are bound to this new field.⁶⁶ On the other hand, in her introduction to *Arabic Literature. Postmodern Perspectives*, Angelika Neuwirth states that "literary voices can also be seen in other forms or art such as 'cinematic projection'" and "should finally be recognized".⁶⁷ In the same sense, it is probably time to recognize Arabic literary online production as a new manifestation of literary text.

This research is relevant for many fields because it combines several perspectives on online literature. A number of results of the thesis will be relevant in the context of literary studies, other aspects of it might will inform media studies. For Arabic literary studies, this research is vital since it examines and shows distinct aspects of a completely new form of distribution. For media studies, an examination of Arabic literature is of value because studies of Arab media have so far usually focussed on other fields, such as politics or gender. The study of online and digital literature, on the other hand, has been mostly Eurocentric, dealing solely with texts from Europe and in part North America. Digital literature from Arabic countries – unlike Japanese and Chinese online literary text – has not been the subject of in depth research yet.

Who could benefit of this research? Its interdisciplinary approaches put it between literary studies and media studies and make it interesting for both fields. Since its protagonists are situated in Arabic-speaking countries of the Persian Gulf, it can also be of value for researchers on the Middle East and anthropologists. The thesis is meant to be useful also for domains outside Middle Eastern studies, including the study of cultural production, participatory culture and censorship. An analysis of distinct Arabic features of this activity vitally broadens the view on these social processes. Results from the chapters

66 N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Notre Dame 2008, p. 2.

67 Angelika Neuwirth, "Introduction", in Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.), *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, London 2010, pp. 41-64, p. 63.

Participatory Culture (Chapter Two) and *Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes* (Chapter Three) can be of relevance for other studies in those fields. The results of the *Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution* (Chapter Four) are valuable for studies on the same issue. The events of the recent “Arab Spring” have fuelled interest, even in a mainstream audience, to learn more about what happens online in the Arab world. Literature has always been closely interrelated with societal discourses. Online literature can therefore be seen as one of the main expressions of contemporary cultural life and in this way also as a means to gain immediate insights into society.

4. What is out there? Description of the Material

Presenting literature related to this research field and showing the significance of the project serves as an introduction to present selected material. As forms of spreading literature online, forums, blogs, and e-publishing each cater to a different audience. My source material is administered and institutionalized in a variety of ways by hosts and users, as will be elaborated in later paragraphs dealing with each type of distribution. The chosen examples are a microscopic sample of what is available and serve as a selection of representative material that tries to capture the essence. The texts to be examined includes selected blogs and forums as well as short stories from the e-publisher Nashiri. A selection has been necessary due to the enormous amounts of material to be found online.

The number of literary texts online appears to be infinite. New texts pop up every day and a rapidly growing supply of cultural goods is accessible. As a worldwide phenomenon, this can also be observed in the Gulf region. For this reason I limited my text selection to sources distributed online in the time frame between 2000 and 2011. Most of the selected texts were published on the net from 2004 onwards.

I will present texts with a variety of forms and lengths. Are there trends in online literature? At present, it can be said that shorter texts are preferred. In the Gulf and elsewhere, short texts are constructed in from just a few paragraphs up to a few “pages”.⁶⁸ Shorter texts are appropriate for the medium because a user's eye and concentration span

68 It is not definable what "a page" is on screen but when printed out it is possible to see that most stories take up the space of half a page up to eight or nine printed pages.

are not used to longer texts on screen. Poems and short stories are therefore particularly suited to the medium and more accepted by readers.

The problem of defining boundaries in online research is discussed by Christine Hine, Lori Kendall, and danah boyd (sic!). They note that much of the problem stems from the field of study being so huge.⁶⁹ Therefore in my study to highlight certain patterns, the vast majority of texts published online in the Gulf will not be studied. Besides my selection of literary texts, a number of texts, which is impossible to measure, are distributed every day in the region. These other texts deal with such a wide variety of subjects that I can merely mention some of them, and will most certainly not be able to include all the subjects and texts genres, that are not part of my field of study. These other texts can be about fashion, politics, technology, health, family and many more subjects. My most important criteria for text selection was whether the texts had an aspect of literaryness. That is the reason why the above mentioned texts are not included in my research. This does not necessarily mean that the analysed texts are the type of high literature that would be considered for a nomination of a Noble Prize of Literature, but rather a selection of texts that have a literary character. It is very difficult to find a precise definition of what is literature, and it is debatable if the texts of my choice can be seen as literature or not.

It might be easier to explain my choice of selection according to a generic approach than to an approach of finding criteria that is met by all the texts I have studied. My sources can be seen as good examples of a larger variety of texts that are distributed online in the Gulf. Ludwig Wittgenstein considered a similar approach to the matter; explaining that instead of naming criteria that are met by all the texts a "family resemblance" can also be used for explanation. He states.

(...) we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.⁷⁰

69 Christine Hine, Lori Kendall, and danah boyd, "Question One: How Can Quantitative Internet Researchers Define the Boundaries of their Projects?", in Anette N. Markham and Nancy K. Baym (eds.): *internet inquiry. conversation about method*, London 2009, pp. 1-32.

70 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. New York 1953, p. 31-32.

As an example he introduces the term "game" which is used for different things such as boardgames or Olympic games. Both have features in common but are still different from another. It becomes obvious that not all categories to describe the term are met by all the words that include this term but there are overlapping similarities. In my view, common features of online literary texts from the Gulf can be seen in that they are all: written texts, that they have a common medium in which they are distributed, the category of the websites that they are published on is intended for literary texts, and the authors intended them to be literary.

Literary texts of my selection are usually short stories or short texts that describe a fictional event. It is not possible for me to verify the fictional quality of the event in every case, as the writer does not always explicitly mentions fictional nature of the text. However, on the website of the e-publisher Nashiri it can be assumed that texts that are published under the headline of "short stories" are fictional. The same is applicable for stories published in forums in the category of "short stories". Of course not all literary texts need to be fictional; it is also possible to define non-fictional texts as literature. Additionally, it is debatable how to categorize something as fictional or non-fictional. What can be generally said about my choice of sources is that they appear to be representative and particular for its genre, and, in my own view, illustrate many features that are common in many texts on blogs, forums and in e-publishing that I consider literary online productions. The only justifiable explanation that I have for not including all literary online texts distributed in the region is that this is beyond my capacity.

As I explain below, in the separate part on blogs, I narrowed my field of study from a large pile of distributed online texts to a much smaller range of published texts that I consider interesting and worthy to study. Each criteria of selection is highlighted in the separate sections below. that These sections explain and describe my choice of blogs, forums and the e-publishing houses.

It is perhaps worth to note that the increase in popularity of short literary texts is not a new phenomenon, it could be observed in earlier times with the spreading of newspapers in the 2nd half of the 19th century. The present thesis is however not the place to further investigate into the parallels of current developments and those of the *nahḍa* period.⁷¹

When dealing with texts from forums and blogs it is apparent that my selection does not include literature with strong religious influence. Religion in my examples does not

71 Cf., entry "ṣaḥīfa" in EI². A. Ghedira, "ṣaḥīfa", in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 8, 1997, pp. 834-835.

take an important role. Through the search for literary texts in blogs and forums I did not come across stories that are heavily influenced by religion. This might be due to the fact that the blogs I analysed did not link to such religious stories and therefore did not seem to be well read. With a change of search mode it may be possible to get to completely different results. For forums not finding religiously influenced stories might be related to the choice of category that I used within forums. On most forums there is a special category for religion, for my selection I just analysed stories from the category "short stories".

A vast field of online literary production is necessarily missing in this analysis. This is due to the enormous spectrum/variety of texts available online. In order to be able to carry out an in-depth study of popular cultural processes I decided not deal with poetry, neither in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) nor in dialect. A variety of platforms offer spaces to discuss and distribute poetry from the Gulf: websites, special sections on forums and personal blogs. A selection of poetry from the region can be found on *YouTube* and some of the more popular poetry is distributed on *Tumblr*. The most important reason for not including poetry is that poetry forms a vast world of its own. For the purposes of the present study short prose texts seemed to be more appropriate; analyses of poems would have overloaded the thesis with explanations of metaphorical language and choice of colloquial vocabulary. Not including online poetry restricts my field of study to other kinds of short literary texts that also deserve attention as they are not less popular. This notwithstanding, there is of course no doubt that poetry in online and offline spaces in the Gulf greatly deserves study.

In the following, the three major sources of this research are introduced. I will start with a description of historically older forums, then discuss blogs and finally deal with an e-publishing house. The following short definition of terms aims to provide a basic understanding of the media in use.

4.1 Forums

An online forum is a website that enables users to discuss by posting messages. A post in a forum that is commented by another is called a "threat". Threats are organized in a hierarchical form and develop with users' engagement. Hierarchy here means that posts are

organized chronologically. Usually, a forum is organized by subjects of discussion and these subjects are split up into sub-divisions. Many Gulf forums are not devoted solely to literature, because one and the same forum also offers categories for discussing finance, politics, family issues or cars. One part of the forum allows users to spread literature. Sub-categories are also split up into various subjects, for example literature can be subdivided into poetry, short stories and very short stories. Users can post their literary texts in each field and others can comment on these texts. Additionally, every user has a user profile page that can be individually composed and altered. A user profile often shows a picture that does not display the user's real person but rather a performer, a child or a flower. The profile often shows the nationality of a user and sometimes his or her hobbies or interests. Most people in forums express themselves using nicknames that often lead to assumptions about the gender of each individual. Forums can be moderated to delete offensive content. In addition to posts that are visible to a public, it is possible to send direct, private messages to other users. Literary texts in forums are more often written in dialect rather than in Modern Standard Arabic. It appears that it is common practice in forums that literary stories are reposted in other forums by different users.

To examine short stories in forums, I have chosen, out of a total of roughly ten forum initially monitored for a couple of weeks, two particular forums, *Gulfgate.net* and *Alamuae.com* because they both seem to offer a vast variety of stories; also it appeared that the quality of literary text differs in terms of composition, language and grammar.⁷² *Gulfgate* is rather colloquial and unstructured, while *Alamuae* seems to be more clearly structured and its literary texts are presented and categorized with a clearer design. In addition to my own direct search for stories, others sent me links to very popular stories that appeared to be read by a wide audience. Selecting short stories from forums is a difficult task, because many lack coherent plots and others were simply not representative for the themes that are examined later. Even if these stories are legitimately part of literary online production online in the Gulf, and also have value for their readers, they did not fit my criteria. I ignored other stories because a lack of clicks and comments showed they were unpopular. After reading about 80 stories, I conducted a text search to find out whether they might belong to other writers and have been in print before. This search revealed that stories were redistributed on a regular basis. They have rarely been published in print before, but some of these short stories were redistributed more than 50 times in a variety of

⁷² Other forums that I looked at are also listed in chapter two and chapter four in the tables that present reoccurring stories.

forums in the region (for examples see chapter two and four).

Within forums, I tried to find texts that were either often clicked or often commented on. It is easy to see how many readers have clicked the web page that shows the complete text (and not only a summary) and also to see the number of comments that were appended to a story. Usually, already on their first page, forums give visual expression to the popularity of posts with an overview of current stories. A story that is declared as having already attracted a wide audience is likely to continue attracting a wider audience; its tabulated page views are taken as references for its popularity.

4.2 Blogs

A blog can be most simply described as a personal website; the following elaborates some distinctions. The term blog, a blending of the two words “web” and “log”, was coined by Peter Mehrholz in 1999.⁷³ Blogs are commonly used to disseminate text or other media. This is also true for forums, but aesthetically blogs differ from forums by offering more scope for visual expression because there are more opportunities to adjust layout and graphics. Also, users of blogs appear to use a variety of media applications much more often than users of forums do. Blogs are distributed in reverse chronology, i.e. the newest blog post is shown first. “Blog post” means the individually published content. Blogs can allow a commentary function and/or provide links to other websites, depending on the bloggers' preferences. Often, bloggers provide an “about” page for the visitor that tells something either about the purpose of the blog or about the producer. The infrastructure of a blog is commonly provided by a blog host, who offers basic tools and ready-made solutions to set up and individualize a personal blog in just a few clicks. A blog need not contain only a single genre of text, but can include a variety of genres. Blogs can be personal, political, corporate, literary or any of many other categories. The space that unites bloggers and blogs is called the “blogosphere”. The blogosphere is the virtual space that hosts blogs. Most often, the only thing these blogs have in common is their choice of the Web 2.0 application, which also applies to a personal website or *Tumblr*. Within blogospheres, discussions can

⁷³ Peter Mehrholz, *Play With Your Words*, May 17, 2002. <http://www.peterme.com/archives/00000205.html>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

be conducted by commentary on the same blog or through “trackbacks” or “backlinks” to blogs that discuss the original post.⁷⁴

In the Gulf, many blogs are written in Modern Standard Arabic, but since there are potentially an infinite number of blogs, all kinds of language distinctions are present. The Gulf hosts various kinds of literary blogs, whether professional or more private, depending on the audience they cater to. Some authors do not use blogs to present literary texts, but rather host their works on personal websites. An additional reason to choose a variety of blogs and bloggers is to obtain a wide selection of writers from different Gulf countries. The following examples will be examined in upcoming chapters. The blog <http://www.muawiyah.com/> is run by a male Omani who has been blogging since 2008 and has 134 blogger- followers. He also writes for print media. **Alzain** blogs since 2007 on <http://al-zain.blogspot.com>. The blogspot profile states that the writer’s gender is female. Her occupati⁷⁵on is given as “admiring clouds” and her location is marked as “The space between my breath and his breath.” As interests she lists “Everything that is connected to beauty”.⁷⁶ **t716** is a blogger from Kuwait who blogs on <http://t716m.com/> since 2011. **7osen** describes himself as a Kuwaiti male and blogs on <http://7osen-man.blogspot.com> since 2007. **Salat Maiwa** blogs since more than two years and has just recently changed her blog into private mode on <http://www.salatmaiwa.com>. Other blogs analysed are **Nada** from Saudi Arabia <http://ymam.wordpress.com> (who has now switched to privacy settings), and <http://othersandme.blogspot.com/>, a female blogger who has been blogging since 2006.

I began gathering material by looking at about 100 Arabic blogs from various Gulf countries. These were selected on the basis of a variety of criteria. Either I found links to these blogs on metablogs⁷⁷ that link to blogs written by authors from one specific country, or I found links on the website of the Arab E-Writers Union.⁷⁸ Then I began a long process of reading through many blogs on different subjects. To select blogs relevant for my studies, I searched the blogrolls⁷⁹ of literary blogs that I found worth studying, thereby

74 A simple explanation of what a backlink is can be found in the article "What is a backlink?" <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-backlink.htm>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

75 These are registered users of blogger.com that subscribe to his blog.

76 Information taken from the "about" page, <http://www.blogger.com/profile/12556657322197441433>, last accessed December 26, 2011.

77 A metablog is a blog that gathers blog posts from a variety of blogs on either the same subject or from the same region.

78 The Arab E-Writers Union is an organization that enables Arab online writers to connect. Additionally, it organizes events and distributes webspace for distribution. www.arab-ewriters.com/, last accessed December 30, 2011.

79 A blogroll is usually organized in a side bar or separate website on a blog that links to other blogs that the blogger finds worth linking to.

finding literary blogs. I also looked through the comment sections of popular blogs that seemed interesting. This enabled me to find an even wider range of blogs. After taking these initial steps, I selected blogs that I find representative and particular. One criteria for a selection of a blog was popularity, which was measured by comments of readers. Additionally, blogs were selected because writing style, layout, or content of stories were interesting or appeared to be representative for a wider selection of blogs.

The selection of text variety was also important. As it is often the case that not only literary texts are distributed but a variety of texts on different subjects. I consider my selection of blogs representative because they appear to have much in common with other blogs from the same countries that also distribute literary texts. Common features can be seen in the use of media that includes visitor counters, audio files and pictures. Blogs that were dropped from my source selection either did not offer enough material that was literary, did not appear to have a visible audience or were not representative for of the aspects that often reappear in other literary blog posts, and hence did not mention subjects that I wanted to examine as particular for online literature.

This selection is clearly subjective and leads to result and conclusions that will differ from an analysis of other blogs. Literary texts published on blogs are often not actual short stories but rather prose poems or short expressions on subjects that run through the author's mind. Unlike texts published in forums, blogs are often written in Modern Standard Arabic. Still, authors are relatively free in their creative choices, because bloggers are the producers, editors and publishers in addition to being writers (more on this in *Participatory Culture*, Chapter Two). The texts analysed in this thesis were chosen in order to have representative material providing a round picture of the phenomenon of blogging in the Gulf; I thus examined blogs from the Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. There are likely to be interesting and valuable contributions of bloggers from the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain but the examples discussed in my thesis are composed by writers of the above mentioned countries. The analysed blogs were of differing literary style and written by authors with a variety of backgrounds. Some of the blogs focussed solely on literary texts, while others chose to post a variety of texts on different subjects, for example religion or politics. I measure a blog's popularity by the number of links from and to blogs, as well as by the number of comments individual posts receive.

4.3 Nashiri

My third source of online literature is the e-publishing house Nashiri, which is host to a variety of authors who post short stories and other literary works. E-publishing houses can be either for profit or non-profit, and Nashiri is non-profit. Commonly, e-publishing houses distribute articles, stories or novels on their websites. These products can either be read online or downloaded in a format that is readable on computers or e-readers. The website offers different categories for various kinds of texts such as articles, poetry, letters on culture, novels and stories. Podcasts as well as a video program are displayed on the website. The literary texts that are published there for the first time and have not been published in print earlier. Nashiri offers its products in Portable Data Format (PDF). Texts on e-publishing websites are commonly edited, unlike distributions on forums or blogs. The Nashiri e-publishing house offers authors opportunities to distribute novels and short stories. If an author wants to publish texts on this platform, he has to follow a set of rules. Publishing texts through Nashiri is different from the more private method of publishing on a personal blog and from distributing texts in forums. Authors here publish with their real names, and a short biography of the writer is posted. As part of contract agreements between the writers and the publisher, all stories are published in MSA and must not violate morals or the law.⁸⁰ Nashiri is a recognized e-publishing house. Recognized means established within its cultural surrounding in Kuwait. The publishing house has been portrayed in local newspapers and also won an award from the “Internet Contest Award 2005” that was given by Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah of Kuwait.⁸¹ The guidelines that writers have to follow make Nashiri seem a rather *formal* way of online distribution. Writers are more limited in their production than they are in independent publishing in forums and blogs. Restrictions are set on content, language and layout. On the other hand, distributing with Nashiri implies that an audience is already established and users do not need to encourage readers to visit their websites. From Nashiri’s website I selected short stories in accordance with the number of comments and clicks they received. Additionally, the selection presented here is connected to the kind of common features that I want to highlight. In the case of the two stories from Nashiri that are part of chapter three I intended to illustrate the particular differences in gender representation on blogs, forums and Nashiri. While dealing with original source material from this very platform I studied approximately

80 Rules for publishing are posted on the website <http://nashiri.net/join.html>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

81 More on this on Ḥayāt al-Yāqūt personal website <http://www.hayatt.net/>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

20 stories distributed on the website. The selection of presented stories in this thesis is subjective. If other stories of Nashiri would be analysed different results may appear. However, the stories presented in chapter three appear to be representative for a wider range of stories from this platform.

5. Online Survey as an Additional Source of Information

In addition to a selection of source texts I conducted an online survey in which authors were asked to answer questions concerning their motivations of writing online as well as challenges of distribution. The survey was anonymous in order to encourage a larger group of online writers to participate. However, it was possible to leave a link to their personal blog or website of the participant. Also links to preferred other blogs could be added. 33 participants provided information for the survey. Two of them explicitly stated that they do not write online and a three participants were not from the Gulf. This left me with 29 participants who fitted my criteria for answering questions, that is, being online writers from the Gulf. Obviously, this survey is not representative of a general view on online literary production from the Gulf. Nevertheless, it sheds some light on motivations and processes within online writing in the region. An analysis of the material gathered from my survey showed that answers from writers from the Gulf were very close to answers given in studies on other regions, as will be outlined in Chapter Two which deals with participatory culture.

I. Visual Setup, Features of Narration and Language

To introduce the characteristics of online literary text, a variety of aspects of blog posts and short stories published in forums will be examined in this chapter. This is meant to lay a foundation for understanding specific features of how online literary text is distributed. This process helps to outline one part of this cultural phenomenon and intends to highlight a selection of distinct characteristics in order to explore emerging literary online texts.

The first chapter deals with the visual setup, features of narration and language of online literary text. The visual setup is characterized by distinct features such as the layout and arrangement of the story, as well as by the additional use of multi-media applications. The section on features of narration will include the analysis of the narration of stories, the use of language and writing style. Later chapters will go deeper into still other aspects of online literature, such as globalisation, freedom of expression and participatory culture. The present chapter explores the basic distinctions of online literary text.

The use of language and choice of topics in online literature in the Gulf make it unique. The digital body of online literature differs from printed texts from the region, providing more possibilities of expression. Important in digital texts is the actual textuality, which differs from that of printed stories. Not only is the layout easier to handle, the text can also be edited whenever desired and online text is easier than print text to copy and distribute elsewhere.

The analysis in this chapter starts with a description of the texts' outward layout and use of multi-media applications and continues on details such as structure and narration, choice of language and use of dialogue.

The chapter first examines the appearance of the texts, underscoring the distinctness of layout and the inclusion of such elements as audio files and pictures. Then the general setup of stories is examined, including introductory phrases and other characteristics of the setup. The third part of the analysis examines the style of the writing and forms of narration found in the original material. A fourth part outlines

linguistic aspects of short stories and blog posts. The fifth and last part of the analysis looks at the purpose and functions of dialogue, which is especially vital to stories distributed in forums.

1.1 Form and Appearance - Text Layout Multi Media Elements

An eminent aspect of digital literature is its appearance. Since the first appearance of digital literature, authors have frequently made use of the possibility to design and create unique text forms. Digital literature first appeared in the 1960s in Europe and the US,⁸² later followed by hypertext literature. Major newspapers reviewed and awarded prizes for especially esteemed examples of this particular field of literature.⁸³ Roberto Simanowski's research on digital literature names intermediality as one characteristic of digital literature. As a digital medium, it builds on traditional media by including texts, pictures and music.⁸⁴ Since the 2000s, Internet access has increased in the Gulf region and Arabic digital literature is published in forums, on blogs, and at the e-publishing house Nashiri.

Two researchers who have dealt with visual appearances of digital literature have reached interesting insights. Nicole Mahne (2006) says texts that plainly consist of words need to be distinguished from "Gesamttexten" (overall texts) that use more than one medium.⁸⁵ On the other hand, David Crystal (2001) states that the mere possibilities of new visual language provided by digital media does not mean that everyone is able to use them.⁸⁶ No research has been done so far in this respect on online literary production from the Gulf; what is available has examples from other

82 Christopher Funkhouser, "Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-11&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-5-11&brand=9781405148641_brand, last accessed January 27, 2012.

83 One example of such awards is the German "Pegasus" prize, awarded to Dirk Günther and Frank Klötgen for "Die Aaleskorte der Ölif (1998 by the German weekly newspaper "Zeit", IBM, and a state-owned television channel (ARD). More information on the art work as well as the prize can be found on the website <http://www.aaleskorte.de/>, last accessed December 26, 2011.

84 Roberto Simanowski, *Interfictions*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 18.

85 Nicole Mahne, *Mediale Bedingungen des Erzählens im digitalen Raum*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 43.

86 David Crystal, *Language and the Internet*, Cambridge 2001, p. 35.

parts of the world as its source material.

The function and use of visual elements within forums and blogs will be analysed in the following.

1.1.1 Multi-Media Elements

There are three major multi-media elements often appearing in digital texts from the Gulf, especially in forums and blogs: images, videos and audio files. Most common is the integration of images into the texts.

Images are used to underline the message of a story. A good example of this is the story “How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”.⁸⁷ This crime story appears in more than 50 forums and is commented on by many readers.⁸⁸ The introduction first posted with the texts claims the story is true. A true story may have greater appeal for an audience’s voyeurism than would a story explicitly described as fiction. The pictures in the story are imprinted with the name “Dam3tshog” who also appears to have a photobucket⁸⁹ account to share the pictures. The truth or fictitiousness of the story is irrelevant to the analysis of and further dealing with the story. Depending on how the story has been reposted, the layout, title, pictures, and description differ slightly. Details of the changes to this story are discussed in the chapter *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two).

The chapter on portrayals of heroes gives a more detailed summary of this story. Here it is enough to note that the story, narrated in the third person, tells of a young Emirati woman who is tortured and finally killed by her husband.

An important element of the story is the use of photographs that illustrate the crime scene. These photographs vary in the various repostings, but many versions show the same picture at the end: a close-up of the described well with an arrow pointing to a stain that might be the victim’s blood.

87 كيف قتلت؟/القصة الكاملة للفتاة الامارتية التي عثر عليها في بئر مقتولة
forum.uaewomen.net/showthread.php?t=476260, last accessed January 30, 2012.

88 The story is also part of the analysis of participatory culture in Chapter Two.

89 A photobucket is a website that offers image hosting. Pictures can be stored and shared on this website.



This picture is taken from <http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html> January 2, 2012.

Surprisingly, in the first few repostings of the story, pictures were not involved. Not until four days after the first distribution of the story did repostings with pictures appear. This movement shows the interaction and creativity the medium offers. The story is processed by the users. Independently, a user decides to repost the story and add something to it. One reposting of this story uses different pictures; surprisingly, this is the only version that has not itself been reposted. Instead, the version presented here was most commonly republished. In later repostings of the story, photographs are no longer included; rather, users started changing the font colours within the text in order to highlight what they considered important.

The pictures used can have several functions. First and foremost, they illustrate the descriptions of settings. Short stories are usually not very detailed in their description of set and characters, leaving scope for the reader's imagination, so pictures might supplement details left out in textual description. Stylistically, these stories are

condensed, and the anthropologist Rebecca L. Torstick states, “Such pieces require their reader to fill in the gaps and insert the required meanings as they move from sentence to sentence in the piece.”⁹⁰ Additionally, these pictures might serve as proof of the authenticity of the story. They underline the introductory message that the narrated story is true.

The first example of media use having been that of photographs in forums, the next example illustrates a different way of including medial elements. In regard to incorporating media, blogs differ from forums because they provide many more possibilities of individualising and adjusting design and layout. This is because the layout of forums is predetermined and not many individualizing changes can be made. By contrast, blogs permit a variety of adjustments. With the applications provided by Web 2.0⁹¹, the average user no longer needs to write computer code. Designs and layouts can be copied and pasted with the help of toolbox systems.

The first visual aspect of the blog “From the stories of Alzain”⁹² is in the header. Alzain's header consists of three pictures that seem to be taken from a fashion magazine and show three women in what might be called “oriental” fashion.



This picture is taken from the personal blog <http://al-zain.blogspot.com/> November 10, 2011.

Right underneath the picture is a disclaimer that says that the texts on the blog are protected and that it is not allowed to re-distribute them without reference to the original author. This message stands in contrast to what happens with stories in forums, which usually “travel”

90 Rebecca L. Torstrick and Elizabeth Faier (eds.), *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States*, Westport 2009, p. 46.

91 This term is explained in Chapter Two that deals with participatory culture.

92 <http://al-zain.blogspot.com/>, last accessed December 26, 2011.

quite quickly without reference to the original author. This aspect of stories posted in forums is discussed in the chapter on participatory culture. Another visual element on this blog is the list of “followers”.⁹³ Blogspot followers are clustered in the right-hand column of the blog, followed by a statement in English:

”GREAT minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Shallow minds discuss people.”

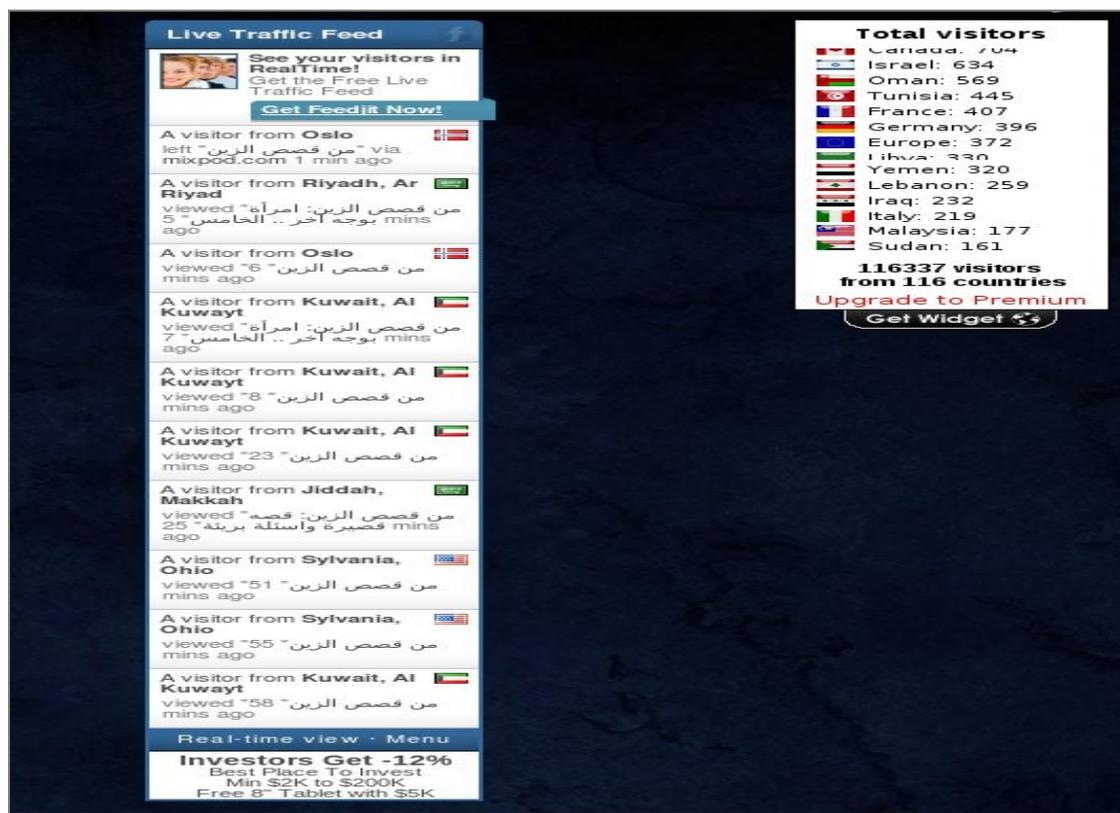
This statement can also be seen as a visual element because it stands out from the other texts. Statements like this function as a representation of the author's identity. They underline the author's ideas and attitudes. Ironically, the author herself discusses events and people in blog posts. Located beneath the statement is the archive, and blogspot blogroll, which shows that Alzain has been blogging since May 2007. The blogger can choose the location of such elements within the website as part of the layout. Three additional elements are placed on the website to inform the user about other visitors to the blog. These are a widget that shows users from different countries who have visited the blog,⁹⁴ a live traffic feed⁹⁵ and also a *radarurl*, which is used to measure the number of users.⁹⁶ These three tools are visible to the visitor of the blog and help users to know about its popularity and international audience. They also show that the blogger is able to implement applications and knows how statistics make it possible to monitor the readers' interest.

93 Followers in social media such as blogs and Twitter are other users who subscribe to the cultural product offered by one user.

94 A *widget* counts the number of visitors to websites.

95 A live traffic feed shows the number of users visiting the website from different locations in realtime.

96 *Radarurl* is another tool that measures the number of visitors to a website.



This picture is taken from the personal blog <http://al-zain.blogspot.com/> November 2011.

As an additional multi-media element, Alzain's blog is underlain with music: when users open the page, a *mix pod* starts and plays a variety of songs chosen by the blogger:⁹⁷ soft, classical guitar tunes by the Turkish composer Melih Kibar. In contrast to the transparency of the statistics and readership, not much is revealed about the blogger.

Multi-media applications can be used to underline messages in the blog posts and as tools of self-representation. Pictures and music can be used to catch the reader's attention. Using multi-media elements expands the reader's participation to more than one sense.

Some examples of creative exceptions in digital literature from other Arab countries put the mainstream use of media tools in blogs and forums in context. In some cases videos, for example with songs or poetry, are used to support the mood of the story. Poetry might be displayed overlaying a picture, accompanied by music or a reading of the text. Videos are not very frequently used.

⁹⁷ *Mixpod* is a tool that allows users to create their own mixed tapes and embed them in websites <http://www.mixpod.com/>.

Still, some users create visual art works, e.g. “Hicham” from Morocco, who makes videos with poetry.⁹⁸ He produces visuals for his works and posts them on YouTube.⁹⁹ Visuals are in the background of the videos, and the foreground is a canvas for literary texts; music underlines the video. Another example of multi-media application use is an interactive online novel. The Jordanian writer Mohamad Sanajleh produced the novel “shāt” (chat), which is integrated in a flash animation and hosted on the website of the “Arab E-Writers Union”.¹⁰⁰ *Chat* is an interactive novel that leads the user through its story by encouraging him to click on each new text bit, offering extra text pieces in pop-up windows that simulate IM conversations.¹⁰¹ This interactivity encourages the reader to travel actively through the story and take part in its process by selecting reading steps on his own.

These two projects differ from each other in several ways. First, they are of course different genres, the first one video poetry, the latter an interactive novel that uses different multi-media applications. Second, they are distributed on different platforms. Posting on *YouTube* is similar to self-publishing and very independent, but the creator needs to attract an audience. In contrast, distributing on the E-Writers site is more institutionalized. It is an official union site with members, so an audience is already established. Both projects are exceptions among Arabic literary works online. Most online literature in the Gulf is posted in blogs and forums and often pictures and music are included.

Muawiyah's blog serves as an example of a conservative approach to online literature. His texts are on a literary level closer to print literature than to other online literature, as will be discussed later in the example of the story "The Sting". The blog is kept very simple in layout, with two columns and a *Blogger* theme design.¹⁰² No multi-media elements are added to the text, not even emoticons. It could just as well be a story published in print.

98 Hicham distributes his works on World TV, which is hosted by YouTube, http://worldtv.com/hicham_tv, last accessed December 26, 2011.

99 YouTube is a website that allows users to distribute videos.

100 <http://www.arab-ewriters.com/chat/>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

101 Instant Messaging is a form of text-based communication carried out online in real time.

102 A *Blogger* theme is a layout for blogs that is offered by the blog host Blogger.com. These layouts come in many forms and are free to use for every subscriber to the platform.



This picture is taken from <http://www.muawiyah.com> in October 2011.

To sum up, in many literary forums, the text remains relatively static. Instead of using visuals, text colour can change and pictures, sound layers, and emoticons can be included. All in all, design and layout are much calmer than in blogs. The layout of online literary texts from the Gulf is usually very basic compared with the possibilities the medium offers. It is modest even in comparison with ready-made solutions like the themes that can be chosen on blog hosts such as Wordpress or Blogspot.¹⁰³ Perhaps this is often a conscious decision and the simplicity is a question of taste, rather than of skills in using online media. But it is still a big change compared with its printed predecessor.

1.1.2 Set-up of Online Literary Texts on Blogs and Forums

The following section deals with the setup and genre of online literary texts in forums and blogs. First, the distinctiveness of blogs will be illustrated. Later, an example of a story posted in a forum will be discussed.

Outlining the benefits and distinctions of short stories and short texts sheds light on the kind of texts that are published in forums. An example will be given of the kind of setup

¹⁰³ Both blog hosts provide personal publishing tools for online use.

often used in these texts distributed in forums. Finally, blog posts and forum posts will be compared.

Many of my source blogs provide a variety of texts: criticism of cultural products such as films, music and events, rants about things that concern the author, literary texts or political views. It is very rare that a personal blog presents only one genre of texts or addresses only one subject. My research focuses on the literary texts and ignores the other published texts. Characteristic of literary texts in blogs is that they are usually not complete stories with a beginning and an end; rather they tend to resemble more a column or a short essay. Typical blog texts often consist of informal descriptions of thoughts or events. They do not need to have a thoroughly planned plot.

Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd (2004) deal with the challenge of categorizing blogs, which cannot be seen as one homogeneous form of text production. They point out that a blog is private and public at the same time and addresses everyone and no one. Blogs have multiple ancestors, such as reality TV, memoirs, political journalism, journals and diaries. They are a form of self-expression. The uniting elements of blogs are their chronological structure, personal commentary and links that are provided through the texts. As a defining conclusion, Miller and Shepherd state:

We see the blog, then, as a genre that addresses a timeless rhetorical exigence in ways that are specific to its time. In the blog, the potentialities of technology, a set of cultural patterns, rhetorical conventions available in antecedent genres, and the history of the subject have combined to produce a recurrent rhetorical motive that has found a conventional mode of expression. Bloggers acknowledge that motive in each other and continue enacting it for themselves. The blog-as-genre is a contemporary contribution to the art of the self.¹⁰⁴

This statement, on the one hand, shows what uniquely characterizes blogs and, on the other

104 Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd, *Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog*, 2004, http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

hand, takes up the notion of the “art of the self”, which will later be discussed in connection with autofictional aspects and in the chapters *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) and *Who are the Actors? Portrayals of Heroes* (Chapter Three).

Most of the literary blog bits that I analyse are prose and can include dialogues, pictures or videos. Arabic blogs from the Gulf mostly deal with everyday events and sometimes include criticism of individuals or society. These kinds of texts are very typical of blogs and *Tumblrs* but might have been found in newspaper columns before. They usually have a playful tone and a fresh style.

The following blog post is an example of the diversity of styles in use, though the shifts in style are unusual within one posting. This text was posted on Alzain’s blog on February 14, 2011. The title of the blog post “Love in a Loveless Age.” Since the aim here is to present various text categories on blogs, the content of this text will not be interpreted here. These examples are merely illustrating the diversity of literary texts distributed in blogs and will not be analysed. The blog post comes in six parts. The first part is rather political.

عندما طغت السياسة في زمن الثورات على كل اللحظات المباحة للحب ..
توارى ذلك المسكين خلف ستائر المساء .. وبات يرتشف من العتمة لونا
بعيدا عن الأحمر .. ينزوي خجلا في زاوية من التأجيل المستمر .. ويموت مللا
على رفوف الأخبار الطارئة .. والحكومات المنحرفة .. والتغيير القادم ..
ويغني كمدا على حاله .. الثعلب فات فات بيدينه سبع لفات ..
وفي زوايا الانتظار خلعت سندريلا حذاءها لأنه ضاق ذرعا بقدميها .. وفضل
الجلوس على اعتاب سجادة فارسيه تزخر بكل الزخارف المتوارثة من عهد
النار الى جمهورية الدين وزمن الثوار .. وأجلت الدعوة لحضور حفل اختيار
الزوجات الموعودات وفضلت الاسترخاء امام شاشة التلفاز ومتابعة اخبار
ثورة الخامس والعشرون من يناير ..¹⁰⁵

105 These and the following translations are my own. http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

When politics prevailed in the times of revolutions over all moments that were sanctioned for love ... that poor one hid behind the curtains of the evening.. and began to sip on the darkness of a colour that is far from red ... It hides in shyness in a corner of continuous deferment ... and dies out of boredom on the shelves of breaking news.. and the deviant governments ... and the coming change ... and wistfully laments its own condition ... the fox has passed with seven rolls in its hands ...

In the corners of waiting, Cinderella took off her shoe because it grew tight on her foot ... and the shoe opted to sit on the edges of a Persian carpet decorated with designs passed down from the era of fire to the republic of theocracy and the era of revolutionaries ... and it deferred the invitation to attend the party for the selection of the betrothed wives and opted instead to relax in front of the television screen and follow the news of the January 25 revolution ...

The second part is written in a lyrical language with pictures added underneath every paragraph.

عندما خلعت ليلي رداءها الأحمر لأنهم اوهموها انه يمثل الغواية المطلقة
لذلك الذئب المترصد بكل خطواتها البريئة .. واختلفت الأهداف وتأولت
المقاصد .. فهي تعلم انها تبحث عن الحب والاحتواء .. وهو يعلم انه يبحث
عن المتعة وتجارة الغواني والبغاء ..

أُبلغت ليلي ان عليها ارتداء العباءة .. واسدال الخمار .. وتحجيم المساحات
المستحقة لها للتعبير عن ما ترنو اليه .. وانتهاج التنسك .. لأنها نوع من
انواع الفتنه .. وكل فتنة ضلاله وكل ضلالة بالنار.¹⁰⁶

106 http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

When Little Red Riding Hood took off her red clothing, because they made her believe that it embodies absolute seduction by that fox watching each and every innocent step she takes.. and the objectives changed and the intentions were misinterpreted.. for she knows that she is looking for love and shelter.. and the fox knows that it is looking for pleasure and prostitution ..

When Little Red Riding Hood was told that she has to wear the cloak.. and cover with the veil.. and limit the space given to her to express her desires.. and that she has to be a monk.. because she is a form of seduction.. and that any seduction is a stray act and any stray act leads to hell..

It is a prose texts based on the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" but redefined and given a new meaning.

The third part is a poetical text. It is followed by a reply in the same form from a reader, which I will reproduce here in order to give an example of how communication is achieved. The following example shows the poetic text of the blogger that is responded to in the comments.

كوني جميله ليحبك
كوني رقيقه القلب هينه المعشر ليحبك
كوني ربه منزل وطباخه ماهره يشهد لك بالبنان ليحبك
كوني مدبره لأموره اليومية والمعيشيه والماديه ليحبك
كوني ام حنون وزوجه رؤوم ليحبك
كوني سخيّه معه واحفظي ماله وعرضه وبينه في غيابه ليحبك
ظلمك التاريخ يا حواء .. وباع لك سيرة الجواري بقليل من الحب
سؤال على هامش اللائحة التي قد تطول
ابن النصائح المقدمة له!!¹⁰⁷

107 http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

Be beautiful so that he will love you
Be gentle-hearted and easy to live with so that he will love you
Be an excellent housewife and cook [...] so that he will love you
Be a manager of his daily living and financial affairs so that he will love you
Be a loving mother and a forgiving wife ... so that he will love you
Be generous with him and protect his wealth and honour and house / family in his absence so that he will love you
History has not been just to you, O Eve ... and it sold you the stories of female slaves in return for a little love
A question on the margins of the list that might be too long
Where are the advices given to him!!

This reply can be found in the comment section:

كوني رقيقه
كوني نسمة
كوني بسيطه
زيوون ،،، دخلت جو مع أنغام كلماتج
أنامل تسطر حب
لو ما كتبتني في الحب
نغم
ياخذني بعيد
وانتي بعيدة عني
أحبج :
انتني كل الحب (:)¹⁰⁸

Be gentle

Be (like) a breeze

108 The user "why me" from Kuwait comments on February 14, 2011. <http://www.blogger.com/comment.g?blogID=4206372790954602508&postID=3474297634664883683>, last accessed December 26, 2011.

Be easy
Zayyoun¹⁰⁹ ... you have added Joe¹¹⁰ to the beat of your words
Fingers that chart love
If you don't write about love
A tune
Takes me far away
And you are far away from me
I love you :*
You are love itself :)

The content of this literary piece is worth discussing, but of interest here is that the commentator has picked up on the form of a poem in order to reply. The commentator uses two emoticons to emphasize emotions:

:* symbolizes a kiss

:) expresses pleasure.

The fourth part is a dialogue written in a Gulf dialect. In it, two people are talking to each other, each marked by a different colour of writing, red or grey. White is chosen as a colour for stage directions.

109 Zayyoun is the affectionate form of the name Zayn.

110 It is not completely sure if Joe is the adequate translation.

سؤال وجه لي اليوم وجعلني اصمت لبرهة
"شنو البس له اليوم؟؟"
"مدري .. مو المفروض تلبسين له احمر!!"
"واذا فيه عمى الوان!!"
"هاا .. شلون يعني؟؟"
"ما يشوف اللون الأحمر"
صمت .. صمت .. صمت
"عيل شلون يشوف اللون الأحمر اصلا؟"
"يقول ان يشوفه رمادي"
"اهاا .."
صمت ..
"لبسي رمادي عيل"
تفكر
"صاجه .. ما فرقت .. ويقول له لابسه احمر."¹¹¹

A question that was posed to me today and made me quiet for a bit:

"What should I wear for him today?"

"I don't know ... aren't you supposed to wear red for him!!"

"What if he is colour blind!!"

"Ha!! What does that mean??"

"He does not see the colour red"

Silence ... silence ... silence

"How does he then see the colour red?"

"He says he sees it as grey."

"Ha! ..."

Silence ...

"Then my clothes look grey." (Ich vermute, es heißt eher: So, put on grey then, kid!)

She is thinking.

"True ... It doesn't matter ... I will tell him I am wearing red."

111 http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

The fifth part shows separate lines in staccato form and resembles a prose poem.

تويتتر ...
مسج منك ..
مكالمة هاتفية ..
نقاش مثري ..
نقاش آخر عقيم ..
اوراق ..
استلام وارد .. توزيع صادر
كتاب موجه للوزير ..
مواعيد مؤجله
لقاءات بعيدة ..¹¹²

Twitter ...

A message from you ...

A telephone call ...

An enriching discussion ...

Another futile discussion ...

Papers ...

Incoming received ... outgoing distributed

A letter addressed to the minister ...

Postponed appointments ...

Long-term meetings

¹¹² http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

The sixth part directly addresses the readers.

كنت اتمنى اكتب شيئا قريبا من رومانسيتي .. تشبهها نوعا ما ..
شيئا غارقا بالعشق.. يحكي سيرة الحب .. ويتغنى مع ام كلثوم بالف ليلة
وليلة .. وانت عمري .. وربما بعيد عنك
ولكن .. يا اصدقائي ..
اكتشفت انني في عهد الثورات .. والحراك السياسي اليومي ..
قد شحت انسكابات قلبي .. ووضحت مشاعري عنيده
تبا لهذا العصر المتعب ..
وتبا لوعود اللقاءات التي لن تتحقق.¹¹³

I wished I could write something that would come close to my
romanticism ... that would be like it to some extent ...

Something drowned in love ... that would tell the story of love ... and sing to
Umm Kulthoum “Alf Laila wal Laila” and “Inta Umri” and maybe “Ba’eed
Annak”

But ... my friends

I discovered that in the age of revolutions ... and the daily political turmoil
My heart’s outpourings have become scarce ... and my feelings have become
stubborn

God damn this tiring age ...

and God damn the promises of meeting that will not materialize.

The text is followed by a comment section with 45 comments. About half of the comments

113 http://al-zain.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html, last accessed December 26, 2011.

are from readers and the other half are replies from the author. Many of the commentators have their own blogs, as can be seen in the links connected to the commentators' names. Comments by readers vary in nature; most creative are the replies to the poem in which a reader writes his or her own poem in the same style.

1.2. Forums, Short Stories, and Story Telling

In forums it is much more common to post rather traditionally structured short stories in a variety of styles and genres.

An on-going academic discussion deals with the value and relevance of short stories in contemporary Arabic literature. Paul Starkey points out that short stories are “particularly flourishing”.¹¹⁴ Ibrahim Abdullah Ghaloom's analysis of the Arabic short story shows that it has always been popular.¹¹⁵ Online readers are used to reading short texts, structured in a few paragraphs, which are easier on the eyes.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the Internet is inviting for literary production of this kind. The layout and the readers' shaped perception of the medium themselves lead to a preference for this literary genre. It is only natural that the stories are put in the contexts of the medium they are published in. Short stories in forums are often organized similarly: an initial incident occurs, the setting and characters are briefly described, complications arise and a climax is reached and later the initial problem is solved. Stories posted in forums show a specific feature that differs from their printed ancestors. The structure of an average story posted in forums shows the interactive part of the stories as well as a “storytelling” character. The composition and narration, in particular, are often close to oral traditions¹¹⁷ or even a performance of a basic plot on stage.

114 Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature*, Edinburgh 2006, p. 154.

115 Ibrahim Abdullah Ghaloom, *The Short Story in the Arab Gulf. Kuwait and Bahrain- Article and analytical Study*, Basrah 1981.

116 Cf. Tom Johnson, "Less Text, Please: Contemporary Reading Behaviors and Short Formats", January 21, 2011. <http://idratherebwriting.com/2011/01/21/contemporary-reading-behaviors-favor-short-formats/>, last accessed January 2, 2012.

117 Online literature resembles the “storytelling” of oral tradition in that stories are sometimes changed a little when retold on different platforms. When I asked online writers during my research whether they see themselves in the tradition of storytellers, they all rejected the idea and explained that there is no connection between traditional storytelling at the tea house and what they are doing. This contrasts with the self-perception of poetry websites and poetry TV shows that always present a connection with the past. Examples for that can be the TV show "Prince of Poets) that is produced in Abu Dhabi www.princeofpoets.com.

Spreading stories in forums seems to have become more popular from the end of 2004 onwards.¹¹⁸ Oral storytelling is a traditional form of literature in the Arab world. Traditionally, a storyteller performed and narrated in teahouses or tents to entertain or inform his audience. Storytelling is a great art and an essential part of Middle Eastern culture, carried out by experienced and accomplished storytellers, so it is interesting to look at online literature as a digital adaptation of storytelling. This form of storytelling can be found in online literature from other countries, but the sample texts selected here continue traditional forms of storytelling that have been performed for centuries in all the Arabic-speaking countries.

Knut Lundby edited a collection of articles on the subject of digital storytelling in 2008.¹¹⁹ The collection deals with a variety of aspects of digital storytelling such as narrative, authorship and authority, and views on authenticity. These are all aspects that are also part of my analysis. Birgit Hertberg Kaare and Knut Lundby (2008) make clear that digital story telling should not be seen as equivalent to oral story telling or written narratives which is in accordance to my findings of carefully assuming that storytelling in the Gulf may be a continuation or merely inspired by oral storytelling but can not be seen as the same process.¹²⁰

Bridget Connelly and Henry Massie researched oral traditions that travelled from Tunisia to Egypt and were actively transmitted for more than 800 years.¹²¹ Simon Jargy describes a variety of oral poetry in the Gulf region and shows that even if there are fixed rules there is room for improvisation.¹²² Of course, storytelling is not unique to the Gulf, but has traditions in many countries. Still, the particular use of this technique indicates a connection between the act of performance in an offline context and its re-application in online media. What is new in digital media is enhancement through the use of multi-media elements such as pictures and audio files that are not part of the original form of storytelling.

A phenomenon of Arabic online literature in the Gulf is the “travelling” story. This

118 Many of the various forums seem to present more literary production from 2004/5 on.

119 Knut Lundby, *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008.

120 Birgit Hertberg Kaare and Knut Lundby, "Mediatized lives. Autobiography and assumed authenticity in digital storytelling", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 105-122, p. 107.

121 Bridget Connelly and Henry Massie, "Epic Splitting: An Arab Folk Gloss on the Meaning of the Hero Pattern", in *Oral Tradition*, 4/1-2, Columbia 1989, pp. 101-124 .

122 Simon Jargy, "Sung Poetry in the Oral Tradition of the Gulf Region and the Arabian Peninsula", in *Oral Tradition*, 4/1-2, Columbia 1989, pp. 174-188.

means that users post their favourite stories on a variety of forums. As a result, these stories appear in various places online and circulate at different times in countries all over the Gulf. This also resembles traditional oral stories, since these online stories are transmitted from one (virtual) place to another. In the chapters *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two) and *Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution* (Chapter Four), tables will illustrate these repostings.

Blogs and forums both present a variety of texts. While blogs are rather simple in their setup of stories, they present a wider variety of texts. Both blogs and forums distribute short texts.

1.3 Style of Writing and Narration

This section will examine the style of writing and narration in the sample texts, beginning with a look at what other researchers on narration in digital literature have found. Second, aspects of self-referentiality and autofiction will be examined. Third, online literature will be contrasted with literature from the 1990s.

Researchers who have dealt with digital texts from other regions of the world emphasize the similarities between narration in digital texts and in print. N. Kathrine Hayles (2008) analysed digital literature from an American perspective. She points out that online narration differs significantly from earlier and most contemporary online literature. She puts things into perspective by noting that printed literature also has a basis in electronic files, since it is first typed on computers. Accordingly, it is not entirely different from digital text.¹²³ Loss Pequeño Glazier (2002) points out that literary practice in digital poetry is often not ground breaking, but still oriented toward techniques in use before the World Wide Web.¹²⁴ This appears to be particularly true for Arabic online literature in the Gulf, where digital narration is not very different from printed literature. What *is* different is the text's personal approach, self-referentiality and use of language, which will be discussed in the following in connection with the autofictional character of stories. The

123 N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Notre Dame 2008.

124 Loss Pequeno Glazier, *Digital poetics*, Tuscaloosa 2002.

interactive and communicative quality of narration in online literature forums in the Gulf is a continuation of practices in earlier works.¹²⁵ This will be discussed in detail in the chapter *Participatory Culture* (Chapter Two).

Birgit Hertberg Kaare and Knut Lundby (2008) studied "assumed authenticity in digital storytelling."¹²⁶ They make clear that the autobiographical writing is narrated depending on circumstances.¹²⁷ It is concluded that there is no guarantee for authenticity in digital narrations and "disparate types of expressions and reflections" can be found.¹²⁸ In my examination of sources I came to the same result of a literary variety of online literary texts. The question of authenticity is also related to autofictionality which is discussed later in this chapter.

The collection of articles *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives* (2010), edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler, presents findings on the development of printed literature over the last three decades that contrast style and narration in online literary text and explore its similarities to contemporary printed literature. The novels analysed in this collection are not from the Gulf, but from other Arab countries.

I will compare online literature with postmodern texts here because many recent earlier novels have borne the postmodern label. Very contemporary sources need to be contextualized within the literary canon.

One example of a literary category that was distributed in print shortly before the Internet became more popular and more accessible is Egyptian literature of the "new generation of the '90s". Christian Junge examines aspects of this literary category in the aforementioned collection. This genre can be compared to contemporary digital texts as differences and similarities are observable. In the following paragraph features of this earlier genre will be compared to online literature. Junge examines the autofictional character of literature, which can also be discovered in online literature. Junge shows that self-referential literary texts have an autofictional character;¹²⁹ the same is true of some of

125 Interactive means here the users' ability to participate in reading the texts through clicking on pictures and links. Communicative means that the readers can be in a dialogue about the texts and have a discussion in the comment section.

126 Birgit Hertberg Kaare and Knut Lundby, "Mediatized lives. Autobiography and assumed authenticity in digital storytelling", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 105-122.

127 Ibid., p. 109.

128 Ibid., p.120.

129 Christian Junge, "I Write, Therefore I Am. Metafiction as Self-Assertion in Mustafa Dhikri's "Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth"', in Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (eds.), *Arabic*

the literary texts in forums and blogs. In blogs, fiction and fact blur, as authors mix political thoughts and literary texts; here, readers might have difficulty distinguishing fiction from other forms of texts. In forums, an autofictional touch sometimes gives the story a more authentic character. There are a lot of aspects that differ in both forms of literature but it is important to see that there are some aspects in both that seem to overlap.

In order to show autofictional aspects of online literature the following features need to be highlighted. Frequently, short stories in forums start out with an introductory statement. The narrator explains that he or she has heard the following story somewhere and felt the need to share it because it was interesting or entertaining. I chose the story “How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well” as being representative of stories posted in forums because it received a lot of feedback and reposting. It exemplifies how texts are changed by various users and move and spread in different forums. It also provides an example of the multi-media practice of using pictures. The story’s introduction is a good example of autofiction in online forums. The story is supposed to be based on an actual event, but for literary purposes it is altered. Ultimately it does not matter whether the story is fictional. The introduction is already enough to get the reader’s attention and satisfy his voyeuristic desires. The first time the story was posted it was prefaced with an introduction that explains how the narrator got to know about the story, making clear that there is a personal connection to the described events. For the narrator it is important to stress that the story itself is 100% true and authentic but that it is narrated differently and thus the story which is told in the forums is merely 99% true.¹³⁰

This introduction shows the writer’s personal relationship to the story. It lets the reader know that the writer is also the narrator by emphasising his personal relationship to the heroine of the story. At the same time, it cautions that the story is only 99% authentic, the narrator tells the audience that he has altered the facts.

Narration in online literary text in forums is simpler than in its printed predecessors. Stories in forums, in particular, tend to show a relatively homogeneous style of narration. Narrators are mostly first-person and omniscient or third-person; time is arranged chronologically. The comment function makes narration much more interactive and instantly more personal. In blogs this may also be important as it is apparent in the above

Literature: Postmodern Perspectives, London 2010, pp. 444-460.
130 <http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

example, in which Alzain and the commentator communicate. The aspect of communication will be picked up again in Chapter Two (Participatory Culture). As a stylistic choice, this particular example is told in questions. The narrator asks in an accusing tone why and how the villain was able to commit the crime. In later repostings the introduction was dropped and the story moved directly into the action. I have not been able to determine with certainty why the introduction was later dismissed, but pictures added in repostings may replace the introduction as “proof” of authenticity.

Sabry Hafez, a researcher on Arabic literature, describes the language used in Egyptian literature of the 1990s as fragmented and fractured. New narratives are used and epistemological mazes are part of the text.¹³¹ This is in strong contrast to contemporary literary text online. In these newly distributed texts, narration is rather straight-forward, either first- or third-person, and the plots are mostly linear. Examples of simple narration can be found in stories published in forums, additional examples for that can be found in chapter three. Above in the section that dealt with the story "Love in a Loveless Age" an example of a simple narration can be found in the first and last section that was exemplified. Especially, the last paragraph, which is clearly directed to the reader and establishes a connection.

In style and narration, the two examples are much simpler and linear than preceding printed texts from the 1990s as described in Junge’s and Hafez’s articles. The plots are clearly presented the composition offers no mazes and is not fractured or fragmented.

1.4 Linguistic Aspects of Online Literary Texts

The range of formal and colloquial language in samples highlights the variety of language used in literary texts in the net. This section also deals with global impacts on online literary text from the region and describes the discussions around the question of the quality of literary language in recent literature from Arab countries, part of which is the MSA/fuṣḥā vs. dialect issue. Traditionally, the language used for literary writing in Arabic

131 Sabry Hafez, "The Aesthetics of the Closed Horizon. The Transformation of the City and the Novel in Egypt Since 1990", in Stephan Guth and Gail Ramsay (eds.) *From New Values to New Aesthetics Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature, 2. Postmodernism and Thereafter*, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 109-138, p. 18.

is either classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), while much of the online texts are written in less formal varieties of the language.

I.4.1 MSA and Colloquial Arabic in Forums and Blogs

The following section deals with the use of MSA and colloquial language in online literary texts from the Gulf. The online sphere is divided into those authors who use colloquial and those who stick to MSA.

Three major groups can be differentiated: a) blogs that are written in MSA, b) literary texts that are mostly in MSA but with dialogues in dialect, and c) stories – posted mostly in forums – that are written completely in dialect. The use of foreign words is also increasing in literary language online.

Literature, newspapers, TV and official occasions are the only places/instances where formal Arabic (MSA or Classical Arabic) is used. “Correct/eloquent” (*faṣīḥ*) Arabic is highly valued and of great importance for literary scholars and academics. However, colloquial language has been present in literary texts for more than a century¹³² and is increasingly in use when narrating dialogues. For example, Rajā’ ‘A. al-Ṣāni’, in her best-selling novel *Banāt al-Riyād* (The Girls of Riyadh, 2006), uses colloquial language to make her dialogues sound more natural. Many literary texts in online media are partially or completely written in dialect, much to the disapproval of conservative critics. In public discussions, the subject of using dialect appears frequently. Alireza Doostdar emphasizes, “The main critics of ‘vulgar’ language and culture in weblogestan have been journalists, writers, and literary critics (...).”¹³³ But the audience does not seem to agree with these critics; blog literature and other online literary products are still widely read.

Colloquial language is especially prevalent in forums where correct spelling is, from the outset, considered unimportant. Creating a specific atmosphere and conveying a distinct message are the goals of stories in forums. Internet language is less formal than language

132 The use of dialect has also been present in literature before internet was part of mainstream culture. In theatre plays this was observable already more than 100 years ago. More on that can be read in the collection *The Performance of the Comic in Arabic Theatre Cultural Heritage, Western Models and Postcolonial Hybridity*, edited by Mieke Kolk, and Freddy Decreus (co-editor) 2005. www.artsafrica.org/archive/documents/docu-01/002_comic.pdf, last accessed January 3, 2012.

133 This example is from Iran but can also be applied to my field. Alireza Doostdar, “The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging: On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogestan”, in *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 4, 2004, pp. 651-662, p. 658.

used in printed literature. Without an editor or copy-editor, every writer decides individually which variety of language to use and how important it is to stick to conventions of grammar, spelling and diction. Often, even reposted stories are left uncorrected in spelling and grammar, whether because the reposters do not care about these aspects or because they accept them as a stylistic means that creates an impression of immediateness and urgency.

Culturally, the Gulf is influenced not only by its immediate neighbours, but also by European and American culture, on the one hand, and South East Asian, Korean and Japanese culture, on the other. People from all over the world come to work in these countries. Their presence influences the use of language in everyday life as well as in literature. The influence of Hindi goes back until long before the discovery of oil and the huge waves of immigration to the Gulf that accompanied increasing construction and wealth. Hindi began entering the language with the rise of seagoing trade centuries ago. Clive Holes emphasizes that the longstanding contact between India and the Gulf region has influenced the Gulf Arabic dialect. In addition to Hindi and Urdu, other languages such as Persian and English have an impact on the language used in everyday life.¹³⁴

Digital literature has had a global flavour from its beginning, as Funkhouser states: “Digital poetry has always been a multi-continental, de-centralized practice. Works have been created in many languages.”¹³⁵ Using different styles of language as well as foreign words is thus a common element. As a manifestation of global influence on Gulf society, many stories in forums are coloured with English phrases, for example the expression “Counter” and brand names.¹³⁶ In all the stories I examined such English phrases are written in Arabic characters. That here English is written with Arabic letters is interesting because in chat-room Arabic it is the other way around: Arabic is transcribed in Latin letters.¹³⁷ Other languages and dialects are also used in the stories. Often, a character’s use of a sociolect or dialect marks his cultural background. For example in the story entitled “Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver”, the protagonist uses language specific to migrant workers in the Gulf.

134 Clive Holes "Gulf States", in Versteegh, K., Woidich M., and Zaborski, A. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics Vols 1: A-ED*, Leiden, Boston and Cologne 2006, pp. 210-216.

135 Christopher Funkhouser, "Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-11&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-5-11&brand=9781405148641_brand, last accessed January 27, 2012.

136 "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver" is also examined in Chapter Four, *Who are the Actors?* <http://www.alghat.com/archive/index.php/t-614.html>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

137 More on the phenomenon of using English letters or words in Arabic can be found on the blog <http://arabizi.wordpress.com/>, last accessed January 17, 2012.

For example, the driver calls the young women “mama”.

مریم : رفیق سیر قاعة الأعراس الفلانيه .
حمید مستغرب وحایر ویکلم نفسه شو اسوي شو هالورطه والله فشله,
صرنا رفیق بعد, بالله مشي .
حمید : زين ماما .
مریم : وهي محرجه أنا مب أمك .¹³⁸

Mariam: *Rafiq*,¹³⁹ drive to such and such wedding hall

Hameed finds it strange and is perplexed and asks himself 'what do I do?'

'what is this situation?' Surely he is embarrassed, started to be a 'Rafiq'

after all. Let's go, it's o.k.

Hameed: Ok, mama

Mariam: And it is embarrassing. I am not your mother.

Here, language is used to define the character's status in society and ethnic background. The stereotype is that most taxi drivers in the Gulf are from India. In blogs, it is more common to find texts written in a mixture of colloquial and MSA or entirely in MSA. Since Internet language in the Gulf is influenced by many regions, emoticons from Asia like (^.^) are visible as well as European/US emoticons like :-).

Writing in dialects leads to a regionalisation of literature, rather than making thoughts and feelings accessible to a bigger audience. This is due to the fact that not everybody understand dialect in comparison to a general understanding of formal language. It underlines the personal side of online literature and contradicts the assumption that the Internet is encouraging the spread of cultural goods to a worldwide audience. Every blogosphere in the Arab world in fact serves a limited region or subject and tends to be limited to a more or less 'isoglossic' region.

It is difficult to generalize whether the literary quality of language is poorer or richer in blogs and forums than it is in print, because the styles are individual and quite varied. Blog posts on “Muawiyah” are often linguistically more elaborate than, for instance, *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*. Posts published in forums differ greatly in language and style between

138 <http://www.alghat.com/archive/index.php/t-614.html>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

139 Rafiq means buddy or friend and is a way to address an unknown male.

“Muawiya” and *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*.¹⁴⁰

One of the major issues here is that readers of digital works approach electronic literature with expectations that were formed by print media, trying to force criteria of forms, conventions and modes on them.¹⁴¹

Language and style are individually chosen in both printed and online literature. There is not *one* definition of what constitutes good literature, and a classification as high literature or trivial literature is often debatable.

When looking at the literary quality of digital stories, Friedlander argues that the global phenomenon of digital stories are "not so much 'bad' stories as new stories suited to new kinds of times."¹⁴²

My observation is that blog literature differs from forum literature. While blog literature often seems carefully composed with language playing an important part, in forums it appears that the intended message is considered more important than literary style as measured by the aesthetic standards of earlier printed texts. Blog literature might not differ greatly from printed literature in the structure of its plots and its style of narration, but its interactivity and communicating function are new, as discussed in Chapter Two (*Participatory Culture*) and Chapter Four (*Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution*).

In recent decades, colloquial language is increasingly being used in dialogues. Academia is controversially discussing the quality of recently published Arabic novels such as *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* and *‘Imārat Ya‘qūbiyān*. At the EURAMAL conference 2010 it was debated whether works such as *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* are even worth translating.¹⁴³ These novels’

140 *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* was one inspiration for conducting research on online literature. It was written by young female Saudi author Rajā’ ‘Abdallāh al-Ṣānī’ and reached great popularity in the Middle East as well as in many other countries as it was translated into more than 18 languages. A change in printed literary production could be observed after the publication of *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* (Girls of Riyadh) in 2006. The novel mirrors the openness of the web as chapters were arranged appearing to be emails, sent through a yahoo news group to all Saudi users. After its publication the number of printed literature increased to the double of what was there before. This is also due to the fact that writers could actually see that Rajā’ ‘Abdallāh al-Ṣānī’ was not penalised for her publication. Possibly, *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* marks a transition of literary style in the Gulf. Making the style of online literary texts more popular within a broader readership in print. Also introducing it to an audience outside the Gulf, even outside the Middle East, and outside the internet.

141 N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Notre Dame 2008, p. 4.

142 Larry Friedlander, "Narrative strategies in a digital age. Authorship and authority", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 177-196, p.181.

143 At the 2010 EURAMAL conference in Rome, recent developments in Arabic literature came up for discussion. Roger Allen said he refused to translate *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* because he did not find its literary quality worthy of translation.

language and plots differ from those in “high literature”. Some literary products that are not accepted as literature by more conservative critics might fall into the category of popular literature, which reaches a broader audience than its postmodern predecessors. Clive Holes points out that there are "whole genres of popular literature" that are composed and distributed in Gulf dialect. He continues, "This kind of language is sometimes frowned upon by language purists, but is very popular among ordinary people nonetheless."¹⁴⁴

Online literature in the Gulf interacts not only with print literature, but also with a local literary category, *nabaṭī* poetry, which is spreading in the region. (On this genre, cf., among others, Saad Abdullah Sawayan, *Nabati Poetry: The Oral Poetry of Arabia*, 1985) This poetry in colloquial language has a great tradition in the area. It is generally accepted as a form of art and presented at performances, on the radio and on television shows, as well as online and in printed books. Here, the use of colloquial language is a return to traditional local culture and therefore not an innovation, but rather a kind of renaissance.¹⁴⁵ From the examples that I studied it appears that dialect is used more often in literary texts in forums than in literary texts in blogs.

As was shown through the examples, in blogs and forums a variety of language usage is observable. Colloquial and vernacular language is used in written form in complete texts or just in dialogues in order to underline social settings. The particular function of dialogues will be highlighted in the following because they are often incorporated in stories and blog-posts.

144 Clive Holes "Gulf States", in Versteegh, K., Woidich M., and Zaborski, A. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics Vols 1: A-ED*, Leiden, Boston and Cologne 2006, pp. 210-216, p. 214.

145 P.G. Emery, "Nabaṭī", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 7, 1993, p. 838.

1.5 The Purpose and Function of Dialogues

The use of dialogue is a feature even more common, more space-consuming and of greater impact in stories posted in forums than in texts in blogs or in print. The story “Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver”, for example, makes use of much dialogue.¹⁴⁶ Dialogue performs a number of functions in the stories. It enhances the setting and creates a mood, helps to set a tone and develop the characters by revealing their desires and motivations. Dialogues are thus intensifying elements that bring the story to life and make it appear more “real”.

Dialogue is essential in transporting the general mood of the youth and in conveying characters’ social status and the values of society. These numerous dialogues are humorous and include word play. Additionally, language in dialogues is typically vernacular language. The witty and humoristic character of dialogue is exemplified in the final part of “Our supermarket is closed”, which contrasts the ignorance of wealthy locals and the gratitude of refugees using the phrase “It doesn’t carry brioche?”, as will be shown in more detail in the following.

The story which is found on the blog *t716m.com* displays the use of dialogue as well as the use of colloquial Arabic and MSA.¹⁴⁷ It is narrated in the first person. A male protagonist intends to go to the supermarket, but finds it closed. Inquiring why it is closed, he learns that the supermarket is hosting Somalis who found refuge in it. The narrator describes in detail men, women and children feasting on the food offered to them and expressing joy over what kind of food they eat whatsoever. Talking with one of the Somali men, he learns that, for poor people, his country is like paradise because there is enough to eat and enough to shop. The narrator answers that this is truly great and that he thanks God for the circumstances he lives in. After leaving the mosque, he meets locals outside, who indicate that, despite all the luxury, they are not satisfied. He is disappointed by their

146 But also other short stories in forums can serve as examples:

قصة مؤثره لفتاة على الانترنت <http://www.hbktmlkni.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-2855.html>

السّر المخفي؟ <http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=385> D

أوطانك غربيّتي <http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=396>

حب في اليونان <http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=391>

ليه عمري مالقي لبرده دفي الا دفاكي؟ <http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=395>

نار الغيرة تحرق رجلا <http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=394>

All stories were last accessed December 15, 2009.

These links just serve as examples, there is an infinite number of short stories in colloquial language that make use of dialogues in forums from the Gulf.

147 <http://t716m.com/category/%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%B5/>, last accessed December 30, 2011.

ingratitude and judges them, saying, “Shame on you.” The story and all its dialogues are written in MSA except for the last dialogue with the locals, which is written in Gulf dialect. The text is followed by 12 comments, half of which are the author’s replies to the audience.

قال: “أنت من أهل هذه الجنة”
أجبت “بل أنا من أهل هذا البلد”
قال: “أعلم إننا محطوظون فلا نزال أحياء في هذه الدنيا ولم
نموتنمُتْ/نهلكُ كما هلك جوعاً آلاف من شعبنا ولكن بلدكم جنة ويكفي
سوقكم هذا ففيه سلع لم نراها من قبل, ولم نسمع بها, بل ولم يخطر في
بالنا وجودها في الدنيا. فهنيئاً لكم بلدكم”
قلت: الحمد لله فنحن في خير غامر, ... السلبيات, وأدعو الله أن نحمده على
هذه النعمة ونحن ننعيم بها لا أن نقدرها بعد أن نفقدها.¹⁴⁸

He said, “Are you a resident of this paradise?”

[I replied,] “Rather, I am a resident of this country”

[He said, “You should know] we are lucky, for we are still alive in this world and did not die like thousands of our people who starved to death. Your country is Paradise and this market of yours is the best proof, for it has goods we have never seen; we may have heard of them before (but) it never crossed our minds that they might exist in this world. Congratulations to your country.”

[I said,] “Thank God, we live in prosperity, in spite of all the negativities.

And I pray to God to thank Him for this blessing as we are enjoying it, rather than to appreciate it after we lose it.”

In this first paragraph the narrator is in a dialogue with a Somali man and uses MSA.

148 <http://t7l6m.com/2011/08/08/%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9/>, last accessed December 26, 2011. Text part seems to be missing in the last two lines of the original source.

خرجت ... من الجمعية فإذا المواقف مليئة بالسيارات، والناس تخرج من البوابة الأخرى يتبعهم عمال يدفعون عربات مليئة بالأكياس.... لم أصدق عينيّ فعدت مرة أخرى إلى الداخل. فوجئت ... بـرجل بملابس رياضية ينهر موظف الجمعية "شالسالفه كل الحليب بتاريخ أمس" تبعته امرأة مواصلة النقد والتذمر "شئو هالجمعية ما فيها بريوش" وقفت في منتصف الجمعية وصرخت "يا ناس حرام عليكم. حمدوا ... ربكم ترى النعمة زوّاله"¹⁴⁹

I left the cooperative to find the parking lot bustling with cars, as people left from the other gate followed by workers pushing carts filled with bags. I could not believe my eyes, so I went back inside again. (...) a man wearing gym clothes scolding the supermarket worker, "All the milk expired yesterday!" A woman followed suit, criticizing and complaining, "What kind of supermarket is this? It doesn't carry brioche?"

I stood in the middle of the supermarket and yelled out loud, "O people, (...) thank God, for this blessing may disappear."

In this second paragraph, the narrator turns away from his conversation with the Somali refugee and speaks in the vernacular to local visitors outside of the supermarket.

In this case, the dialogue shows different uses of language in order to present forms of communication. The first dialogue is written in MSA and creates a distinct atmosphere. Both parties to the conversation speak about a serious subject in a formal language. The second part shows a conversation in colloquial language. Here, a mood is created through the choice of words. The story takes on a humorous twist by displaying the ingratitude of the narrators' fellow locals. This later dialogue mirrors a disposition in society.

149 Ibid.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with how text layout and multi-media elements affect the appearance of texts. Examples illustrate the use of pictures and audio files that either underline or exemplify the stories' messages. Additionally, elements for self-representation, such as quotations and requests to provide visitor numbers and the visitor's location are present. A number of blogs do not use multi-media elements and have a modest layout, suggesting that here the emphasis is on the literary quality of the text.

A variety of texts and genres are present in blogs. In forums, short stories are popular. Short stories in forums bear resemblances to oral storytelling, since stories are retold and redistributed.

The style of writing and narration in literary online texts does not differ much from printed texts, but other aspects are different. Autofictionality is found in both earlier printed texts and online texts. Simple narration and linear story line are more common in online texts than in printed literary texts from the 1990s or postmodern texts.

Online literature makes use of both colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic. The literary quality of recent literary texts online and offline is an aspect of a broader academic debate on the use of language. Dialogues are an essential part of short stories in forums. Often they are humoristic and function to transport a mood, while their sociolects accentuate the protagonists' backgrounds.

Structure, narration and choice of language are important features of online literature everywhere, and not just in the Gulf region. A distinct style of language and the use of multi-media applications are typical of online cultural production, and not only in the region. It will be interesting to see how the use of language in a local and global context and the use of hardware and software will continue to change literary production.

As this is a first attempt to contextualize the emerging literary phenomenon this chapter attempted to introduce an impression of the distinctiveness of blogs posts and forum posts under the headline of visual aspects, language and narration. The above examination presents an initial observation. Many additional aspects can be examined in future research

projects on that matter.

II. Participatory Culture, Interaction, and Web 2.0

As elsewhere, participatory culture is a distinct feature also of online literature from the Gulf. Having examined the visual setup and features of narration (Chapter One), in the following I look at the variety of influences that participatory culture has on the text. Examining participatory culture embeds literary texts in a broader context of online content production. For the sake of grasping factors that impact the emerging field of online literary text from the region this chapter intends to emphasize the aspect of interaction.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first deals with various aspects of Web 2.0; the second deals with distinct features of participatory culture. Both parts are again divided into smaller sub-chapters that highlight processes of literary production in participatory culture. The first part, on Web 2.0, is divided into five sub-categories that discuss several aspects of user-generated content, beginning with its value and function. Then the problems of easy redistribution are discussed to show not only the benefits but also the challenges of spreading user-generated content. Additionally, the advantages of writing in Web 2.0 (II.1.1) are considered in order to show a change in writing. The part that follows deals with the role of the author (II.1.4), which changes with the new tasks that arise when distributing by means of Web 2.0 applications. This new role is closely connected to the dynamics of publicness and privateness (II.1.5), which are examined in the context of the newly gained privileges that online media offer. So I examine what is open and accessible for all users and what is kept private. Online, it is possible to distinguish between information intended to be shared with all users and information targeting only a selected group of users. The audience influences decisions on publicness, which also affects the writing of literary texts. These are vital aspects of the processes of distribution. Accessing online literary text from blogs and forums within

the context of digital text production will be examined in the second part of the chapter.

The second part (II.2) of this chapter deals with participatory culture online, which is one of the major outcomes of Web 2.0. Here, I examine the role of the audience (II.2.1), its changing position in literary reception, and the new, more direct mode of interpersonal experience (II.2.2) between author and audience, an experience that is made possible by online media and encouraged by both sides, as opposed to the static relationship between author and audience in printed texts. This interaction can take a variety of forms, such as feedback, remixing, reposting (II.2.3) and linking (II.2.5). The following brief introduction to participatory culture provides information needed to understand upcoming discussions.

II.1 Participatory Culture

Participatory culture connotes cultural production in which the audience not only consumes a product, but also interacts with the producer. Both reader and writer can be considered users of the medium. The term “user” may sound passive, but the opposite is true; the medium’s users, both authors and audience, are active members of online literary platforms. Their interaction means that often more than one person contribute to a cultural product. Online media, as a means of participatory culture, enable producers from different backgrounds and in a variety of locations to work together. Unlike earlier forms of distribution, they offer a decentralized and less hierarchical platform for interaction. This new liberty easily leads to the assumption that “Web 2.0 is user-controlled”¹⁵⁰ This assumption is debatable and debated, because in point of fact the medium is not completely free of power structures. Almost all commonly used applications (*Blogger*, *Twitter*, forums) are owned by corporations and are therefore not completely user-controlled. But they are much more user-controlled than any other medium before.

As a basis for participating in online participatory culture, distinct preconditions must be fulfilled. Cultural production online is closely dependent on access to facilities

150 Louis Leung, “User-generated content on the Internet: An Examination of Gratifications, Civic Engagement and Psychological Empowerment”, *New Media & Society*, 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1329.

as well as on knowledge of how to use those facilities. Not only is it necessary that the technical utilities are accessible, the user also needs to have enough spare time to create such works.¹⁵¹ As a consequence, producers of artistic works usually belong to a distinct social class. The facilities to participate in user-generated content are well established in the Gulf region, since it is one of the richest regions in the world with a high gross domestic product (GDP) and a young population, giving more people possibilities to create and distribute creative pieces than in poorer countries, for example nearby Yemen.

Online participatory culture is a global phenomenon, but media usage and media coverage exhibit regional characteristics. This is also true for literature; as Nils Erik Enkvist (1985) underlines, literature has to be viewed against “a situational background”. He emphasizes that communication as well as “the subject, the occasion, and the relevant cultural traditions, fashions as well as taboos”¹⁵² should be considered when dealing with texts.

With every introduction of new media, a new form of perception is necessary. Online media offer unlimited information for all kinds of perspectives. Access to such a variety of information forces users to make many choices in selecting their sources. Additionally, they have to learn how to use the media. Since online media developed very fast in the last 15 years, their users are challenged with constant changes and new additions to the sources of information and with the use of distinct applications to work with these media. A generation that grew up with technology and intuitively knows how to deal with it has been called *digital natives*.¹⁵³ In the Gulf, as well as in most of the richer and developed world, including Korea, Japan, Europe, North America and many other countries, people grew up as digital natives in the last 20 years. Digital natives have a different use behaviour in relation to media than their parents’ generation did, and they integrate contemporary technology in most aspects of everyday life. The Internet and mobile phones are “catalysts” of this new meaning of information for the new generation in the Gulf.¹⁵⁴

151 Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, "Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0", in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-23, p. 15.

152 Nils Erik Enkvist, "Text and Discourse Linguistics, Rhetoric, and Stylistics", in Teun Adrianus van Dijk, *Discourse and literature*, Amsterdam 1985, p. 16.

153 More on this in: John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, New York 2008.

154 Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Mohammed al-Mutawa, John W. Fox and Tim Walters, "Media as Social Matrix in the United Arab Emirates", in Alanoud Alsharekh, Robert Springborg and Sarah Stewart (eds.), *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, London 2008, pp. 121-142, p.

II.1.1 Introduction to Web 2.0

“Web 2.0” is one of the key tools for online literary production worldwide. Web 2.0 was preceded by Web 1.0, but the latter triggered much less production of art works such as audio files, films and text in the Gulf. Web 2.0’s stimulating effect is not peculiar of the Gulf, but can also be observed in other countries that adopted the medium. I will not further discuss the term Web 1.0 as it not relevant for the following analysis.

Writing in Web 2.0 is easy, helps to spread texts fast, and is free and open to a variety of cultural products. Participatory culture and user-generated content online have rapidly increased and Internet access for average households has increased because of the introduction of Web 2.0. The term “Web 2.0” was coined by Tim O’Reilly, who organized a conference on it in 2004.¹⁵⁵ In 2009, the media researcher Louis W. Leung came up with a concise definition:

Within Web 2.0, the web is seen as a platform for service delivery which emphasizes user control, participation and emergent behaviour and can be defined as a way of creating pages focusing on microcontent and social connections between people .¹⁵⁶

In his own definition of Web 2.0, O’Reilly emphasizes, “Web 2.0 doesn’t have a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core.” Alternatively, it is “a set of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core.”¹⁵⁷ It is difficult to pin this term down to one clear description. As O’Reilly explains, it is “a set of principles and practices” that unites various Web 2.0 tools. Blogging can serve as an illustration of these principles. Blogging is usually conducted through a “platform for service delivery”, for example a blog host that provides the coded background to blogs. The

127.

155 Paul Graham, "Web 2.0", November 2005. <http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html>, accessed November 11, 2011.

156 Louis Leung, "User-generated content on the Internet: An Examination of Gratifications, Civic Engagement and Psychological Empowerment", in *New Media & Society*, 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1329.

157 Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0", posted September 30, 2005, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>, accessed November 11, 2011.

participation of bloggers and audience make it user-controlled, and it facilitates establishing social connections between people. These aspects of Web 2.0 are also found in other tools such as *Twitter* or *Tumblr*, as in O'Reilly's description of a loosely organized set of practices and principles. All of these platforms share the goal of enabling users to easily and quickly distribute content such as films, audio files, pictures and texts. They all make it easy for all participants to interact.

Web 2.0 has led to a big leap in online cultural production because it offers easy access to ready-made solutions for distribution. It has not only increased user-generated content, but also takes this content a step further by influencing traditional media. It is more conducive than corporate-owned media to the distribution of independent views. It influences print media by encouraging cooperation among lay journalists and it increases interactivity in the form of comments and polls. Also, most of the traditional media now also have a representation online.¹⁵⁸

Critics of Web 2.0, for example Andrew Keen (2008), emphasize that Web 2.0 created a cult of amateurism and encourages narcissism in the digital media.¹⁵⁹ He states that it is a misguided assumption that all user-generated content is equally relevant. As explained in the introductory chapter, I was selective about the sources for my analysis, because for this research not all distributed literature is equally relevant.

II.1.2 User-Generated Content: What Is It and Why Is It Used?

User-generated content is beneficial to producers as well as to users. For every society, it is essential to have creative people who spread thought and inspiration, encouraging discourses. The distribution of creative products is beneficial on several levels. On the one hand, it can be a stimulus to users and promote a wider debate or simply entertain. On the other hand, the production of user-generated content empowers its producers

158 Louis Leung, "User-generated content on the Internet: An Examination of Gratifications, Civic Engagement and Psychological Empowerment", in *New Media & Society*, 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1329.

159 Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the rest of today's user-generated media are destroying our economy, our culture, and our values*, Random House 2008.

because they receive feedback in various forms.

Interestingly, many user-generated cultural products are made without economic motives, as Gauntlett, a researcher on Web 2.0, points out.¹⁶⁰ Individuals pool their time in order to create something new.¹⁶¹ One example of this is the non-profit publisher *Nashiri.net*, the first online publishing house in the Gulf, physically located in Kuwait and launched by Hayat Alyaqout (Ḥayāt al-Yāqūt), a Kuwaiti freelance writer. “Dār al-Nāshirī” was founded in 2003 and has published more than 120 e-books by about 100 writers. As a non-profit e-publisher, financial benefits are not part of the reward system for either writers or producers.¹⁶² If money is not the source of motivation for online writers, what is?

No data on this question can be found for the Gulf, but research projects have been conducted in other countries that might provide insight into this process. K. D. Trammell (2004) conducted a study on more than 300 randomly picked Polish blogs.¹⁶³ For Polish bloggers, the following motivations were found: first, self-expression was relevant; second, social interaction played a role; third was “entertainment”; fourth was “passing the time”; fifth was information; and sixth was “professional advancement”.¹⁶⁴ These motivations can also be presumed behind literary works posted online in the Gulf. Self-expression and social interaction seem to be the most important factors in posting creative content online. In the survey that I conducted, writers state that they also blog because they want to practice their writing to be more professional.¹⁶⁵ Many of the participants in the survey mentioned that they wanted to give expression to their thoughts and feelings and share them with an audience. Three out of 32 participants specifically mentioned that online publishing is the easiest way to get feedback on thoughts. The aspect of distributing without many restrictions was also one of the reasons for going online. Participants made it clear that censorship was an important

160 David Gauntlett, *Transforming Audiences 3 - introduction by David Gauntlett (Sept 2011)*, August 22, 2011.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQp3q_z47ys, last accessed January 3, 2012.

161 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, New Haven 2006, p. 81.

162 Benkler states that money is typically absent of the majority of projects. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

163 Trammell, K.D., A. Tarkowski and J. Hofmohl (2004, June) “Rzeczpospolita blogów” [“ Republic of Blog”], paper presented at the 5th Annual Meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers, Brighton, September 19–22, 2006.

164 Louis Leung, “User-generated content on the Internet: An Examination of Gratifications, Civic Engagement and Psychological Empowerment”, in *New Media & Society*, 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1328 f.

165 In 2010, I conducted an online survey with 35 participants of different ages, contacting them via

issue for them.¹⁶⁶ Online publishing is an alternative when an author lacks opportunities to have his or her works distributed in print – and also because it can evade state censorship. Motivations for distributing online are plentiful. Most important is the mere possibility of distributing cultural products and receiving feedback on them from other users. McLuhan emphasised, already before the time of online media, that participation compels in "our new environment."¹⁶⁷ For David Gauntlett, another important aspect of participatory culture is that users engage with the world and help create a positive environment.¹⁶⁸ The participants in my survey also mentioned the aspect of meeting like-minded people.¹⁶⁹

Clearly, the research previously conducted does not include my research field and hence can function as a benchmark at best. Still, the results of my online survey that modestly attempted to learn users intentions might help to grasp regional distinctions.

II.1.3 The Benefits of Online Writing with Web 2.0

Web 2.0 offers essential tools for distributing user-generated content. Since the introduction of Web 2.0 in the mid-2000s, it has become much easier for people with limited knowledge of coding or other relevant skills to distribute cultural elements such as audio files, films and texts online. Blog hosts and forums offer ready-made spaces that encourage users to make their works public. Such software already presents a coded frame and users simply need to fill in the blank spaces. Web 2.0 applications provide a possibility to adjust visual elements and personalize the individual online representation. A variety of themes¹⁷⁰ or layouts and other applications are offered to

email, in forums and by twitter.

166 Survey data, 2010.

167 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message. An Inventory of Effects*, Corte Madre 1996, p. 24.

168 David Gauntlett, *Participation Culture, Creativity, and Social Change*, November 29, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqgXbI1_o8&feature=related , accessed November 11, 2011.

169 Survey data 2010.

170 A theme is a visual frame for blogs that is provided by the blog host of the platform.

customize personal representations of cultural production. Additionally, publishing is much faster than in print – these works of art are instantly public. Another difference from print media is that Web 2.0 offers the possibility of intermediality through the use of multi-media applications.

A crucial benefit of online media for producers of creative works such as audio files, films and texts is the opportunity to share and spread them. Under favourable circumstances, the content can be shared with a wide audience. Web 2.0 enables a broad group of people to share their creations. In the Gulf, the most frequently used tools for spreading user-generated content are forums and blog hosts such as *Windowslive*, *Maktoob*, *Wordpress* and *Blogger*. Additionally, writers post their works on *Twitter* and *Tumblr*. Another mode of distribution, but much less frequently used, are facilities such as those provided by the e-publisher *Nashiri.net* in Kuwait and literary criticism on Goodreads.¹⁷¹ All of these platforms except *Nashiri* and *Maktoob* are intended to serve a worldwide audience. *Maktoob* is owned by *Yahoo!* and was explicitly designed to serve an Arabic writing and reading audience.

Online publishing is usually¹⁷² free of charge for both author and audience and therefore enables the distribution of cultural products that might not have found a way into print or other forms of distribution because they are judged unprofitable. As K.D. Trammell already established in the 2004 study on blogs, the circulation of cultural products such as literary texts is a primary mission.¹⁷³

Carolyn Guertin, a researcher on culture and technology, examines online distribution from a historical perspective. The phenomenon of easy distribution of thoughts is not new and cannot be solely credited to online media. She points out that the movement of “interactive authorship and personal publishing” started in the 1940s with Xerox machines.¹⁷⁴ It can be argued that interactive writing has happened even before. For instance in the Dada movement and also within Surrealist circles, as Peter

171 Goodreads is a Web 2.0 application that enables readers of printed literature to share their thoughts on what they just enjoyed reading.

172 When texts are not published in open media, non-profit or other free Web 2.0 applications, audiences sometimes have to pay for e-books provided by corporate or other for-profit publishers.

173 Trammell, K.D., A. Tarkowski and J. Hofmohl (2004, June) “Rzeczpospolita blogów” [“ Republic of Blog”], paper presented at the 5th Annual Meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers, Brighton, September 19–22, 2006.

174 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012

Gendolla and Jürgen Schäfer (2004) clarify.¹⁷⁵ Even if this is a valid point, Xerox publishing was not a widespread or mainstream movement. If this was a starting point, it was only with the introduction of the Internet and, even more, with the introduction of Web 2.0. that a broader movement in this direction started. Compared with Xeroxing, online distribution is a mainstream, worldwide phenomenon. As can be observed, distribution of texts without a traditional publisher is not a feature that can be uniquely attributed to online writing platforms, but in contemporary times, similar processes of online writing spread widely all over the world through the net.

II.1.4 Authors in Online Literature

As for the role of the author in online writing, it is important to distinguish between the situation in the Gulf and in the world in general. Most research on online writing is conducted in the context of European and North American writing, which is one-sided.

Although most research on online literature is not conducted on the Gulf, it is essential to examine authorship. The means of Web 2.0 have changed perspectives on authorship as well as on the replication and alteration of cultural products. Authorship online differs from authorship offline in many ways. Four distinct aspects will be examined in the following: a) the writer has a stronger impact on the outcome of the work because of a newly gained independence, b) anonymity is much more present in online writing, c) from a narrative perspective, a blurring and fading of the lines between *us* and *them* is apparent and d) users are empowered through writing. The aspects discussed below are valid for online literature from the Gulf as well as from other parts of the world.

a) In the past, it was more difficult for an author to publish. Usually, s/he was not self-published. Thus, between writing and publishing was the instance of the editor who re-worked the text. The author receives new freedom concerning a choice of style

¹⁷⁵ Peter Gendolla and Jürgen Schäfer, "Auf Spurensuche: Literatur im Netz, Netzliteratur und ihre Vorgeschichte(n)", in *Dichtung Digital*, 2002, <http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2002/05/08-Gendolla-Schaefer/index.htm>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

and content. On the other hand, the author is challenged with new tasks when publishing online such as dealing with formatting layout, but this means that s/he is also the maker of his/her own product when it comes to typesetting, graphic art and editing of cultural products.¹⁷⁶ It is a quality of Web 2.0 and user-generated content that people can become their own authors, readers and publishers at the same time.¹⁷⁷ But this unfiltered content means that quality and style of literary texts vary a lot. This is general applicable to the Arab countries but also the publishing processes of other countries of the world.

Particularly against the background of the Gulf, the relative anonymity of and less censorship applied to online literature gives greater freedom in writing than in print media.

b) A major phenomenon of online writing is the vast number of writers who distribute anonymously. This is especially true for the forums in the Gulf because anonymity shields against social or governmental punishment for unapproved content. Hence, it is important to distinguish between writers who distribute with their real names and others who work with a nickname or pseudonym. Usually, a writer does not distribute completely anonymously, but rather picks a permanent nickname that makes him or her recognizable for readers. Historically, publishing under a pseudonym is not an invention of online media. Much has been published anonymously in print. What is new is that it is easier online to *distribute* anonymously, due to the absence of instances that would want to know something about the original author, such as editors or publishers. Not distributing with a real name is usually linked to a fear of societal or state censorship. In forums, almost everyone writes anonymously, whereas in literary blogs the tendency is to publishing under one's real name.¹⁷⁸

When censorship and surveillance is intense, anonymity is a beneficial tool that can be used online. But simply using another name does not make a user anonymous on the net. If circumvention tools¹⁷⁹ are not used, it is easy to track an IP address back to the user. However, societal censorship is easily avoided by using a pseudonym.

176 Loss Pequeno Glazier, *Digital poetics*, Tuscaloosa 2002, p. 29.

177 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012.

178 As found in my analysis of a wider selection of online literature from the region.

179 More on this in Chapter Four.

Albertain (2008) emphasizes that anonymity is beneficial for an open dialogue online. He states that it increases the users' willingness to communicate "without reservation".¹⁸⁰ This means an open dialogue can develop with unknown others, which might not happen on the same subject in an offline space.

James Bohman (2004) argues that this anonymity is influencing the relationship between audience and author.¹⁸¹ They state that anonymity alters the context and is "making speaker and audience not only indefinite but also indeterminate in its many-to-many form".¹⁸² This stresses a point made about stories in *Visual Set-Up and Features of Narration* (Chapter One), that spreading the message is becoming more important than the identity of the writer. This is observable at least in forums where one-to-many and many-to-many forms of communication are preferred. In forums, users often publish under a pseudonym, as will be shown in the table presented later in this chapter.

A different way of identifying a writer is presented in blogs. Authorship in blogs tends to be strongly identified with a real or pseudonymous person by means of a user name or display name for each blog and blog entry, or using an "about" or profile section that gives information about the writer.¹⁸³ In my sources I could observe that bloggers usually publish their stories under their real name. The following section will deal with problems that appear when producers of a text do not publish with real names, for example when they present text under what is obviously a nickname, and with the challenges of sharing intellectual property.

For the Gulf, one example of anonymity in redistribution of a single theme, often slightly altered in wording and layout, is "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well" (cf. table below, chapter II.2.3 Reposting and Remixing of Works of Art Online). In every single forum, a different user distributes the story. The users are male or female, and not all of them claim the story as their original product. Most of them do not mention where it originated, or they use an introduction that appears identically in several repostings.

180 Afraa Ahmed Albertain, "Downloading Democracy. Bloggers in the Gulf", in *International Relations and Security Network*, 2008, p. 62. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch-Archive/Detail/?fecvnodeid=128146&ord588=grp1&fecvid=21&ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&v21=128146&lng=en&id=90279>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

181 James Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy", in John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley (eds.) *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford 2004, pp. 131-155, p. 133.

182 Ibid., p. 138.

183 Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, "Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0", in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-23, p. 8.

This introduction states that the story is based on hearsay.¹⁸⁴ This form of distribution creates problems for readers and researchers. Usually, the reader cannot be sure about the identity of the original author of the stories, because the stories are reposted so many times. Later in this chapter, in the section about remixing stories, a table shows changes in one and the same story that was redistributed several times.

In the Gulf, the relevance of anonymity differs in accordance to the publishing platform. Writing on blogs differs from writing in forums because the process of distribution is not the same. Usually literary texts on blogs are distributed exclusively on one blog and are not cross-posted elsewhere. Thus, authorship in blogs tends to be strongly identified with a real or pseudonymous person through a user name,¹⁸⁵ and it is clear to the readers who wrote the texts, who often know earlier texts by the author. In contrast, if the literary texts are published in a forum, the author seems to be unknown because the texts are copied and republished in other forums at different times and in different countries, with either many people or no one at all claiming credit for the story.

c) The narrative of online literature is also affected by interaction, and this is true all over the world. Carolyn Guertin points out that there are new forms of digital narrative that do not clearly separate between “us” and “them”, i.e. between the writer and the audience.¹⁸⁶ The accustomed distance gives way to the possibility of interacting with the audience. The Egyptian author Ghāda ‘Abd al-‘Āl (Ghada Abdel Aal) explained the influence of this interaction at *The Emirates Airline International Festival of Literature (EAIFL)* in Dubai 2011. She said that she was always interested in seeing what the audience suggested and then changing her next post into a surprise for the audience.¹⁸⁷ This is a move of unexpectedness that helps to keep readers interested and returning to the blog. In print literature, such interaction is not possible – certainly not at the speed that is so distinct for online participatory culture.

Larry Friedlander (2008) emphasises that "in the digital realm, authorship is

184 Find Example in *Visual Set-Up and Narration*, Chapter One.

185 Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, "Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0", in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-23, p. 8.

186 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012.

187 Panel: Digital Revolution 1: Margaret Atwood, Ghada Abdel Aal, China Mieville. Real Readers, Virtual Communities: A revolution in the way authors are connecting with readers, Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature (Dubai), March 11, 2011.

dispersed, collaborative, and understandable."¹⁸⁸ He suggest that the problem of recognizing new forms of stories is also related to the "conventions of modern authorship" which is not contemporary any more.¹⁸⁹ More on this new role of the author is also discussed in chapter IV.3 on anonymity in distributions of literary texts.

d) A component of user-generated content is what the producers themselves *gain* from the process. Researchers like David Gauntlett and Richard Sennett believe that the process of creating and distributing empowers users.¹⁹⁰ Louis Leung (2009) defines the process of empowerment as enabling people to “gain mastery or control over their lives, improve strengths and competences and develop proactive behaviours”.¹⁹¹ The extent to which online participatory culture empowers users has not yet been thoroughly studied.¹⁹²

II.1.5 The Dynamics Public and Private

Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and many others have given many definitions of what a public sphere is. Generally, it is defined as a public space where individuals discuss societal matters. James Bohman (2004) holds that the conservative criterion that a public sphere must be a face-to-face space for communication should be relaxed.¹⁹³ That means that communication not occurring in a physical room should be defined as public as well.

For authors it is important to decide what to make public and what to keep private. What can be posted online and what is material that should not be shared;

188 Larry Friedlander, "Narrative strategies in a digital age. Authorship and authority", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 177-196.

189 Ibid., 183.

190 David Gauntlett, *Participation Culture, Creativity, and Social Change*, November 29, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNqgXbI1_o8&feature=related, accessed November 11, 2011.

191 Louis Leung, "User-generated content on the Internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment", in *New Media & Society*, 2009, pp. 1327-1347, p. 1330.

192 Ibid., p. 1327.

193 James Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy", in John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford 2004, pp. 131-155, p. 133.

“online media” is mostly understood as an open sphere that *everybody* can access.¹⁹⁴ Studies show that not every user sees the online sphere as a public space. Studies conducted usually did not examine online behaviour in the Gulf, but rather in Europe and North America. As an example from outside the Gulf, Zizi Papacharissi’s study (2007) analysed 260 blogs and found that many of them were directed to family members and friends.¹⁹⁵ This is the users’ personal perception, since blogs are actually public. Writers in the world at large sometimes assume that their online audience is limited to friends and family and no one else would be interested in reading their works. This perception seems to differ in the Gulf, as is shown by the particular use that writers from the region make of the medium.

According to the data from my survey, writers distribute online because they want readers to have access to their works. They do not mainly publish for people they know personally, even though they know some readers, either from before from “real life” or through interaction online.¹⁹⁶ Some of the female bloggers are well aware of the openness of the web and protect their blogs with passwords, so that only their friends can read and comment. This phenomenon shows clearly that the perception of private and public varies in different cultures as well as offline and online.¹⁹⁷ It also shows that users try to create their own boundaries in a space that can be described as rather free and unrestricted, in order to preserve the privacy of data and material rather than making all their information universally accessible.

“Nada”, a female blogger from Saudi Arabia, used to have a blog that was accessible for everybody, but later changed the blog’s privacy settings to protect her writers’ privacy. “Nada” does not restrict her posting to literary texts, but a lot of her textual production is literary. Her blog is hosted by *Wordpress*. “Nada” is well connected to female writers all over the Gulf and is interlinked with blogs and on *Twitter*. “Nada” posts regularly in literary form and in diary form about things that happen in her life. Her texts are mostly in Arabic, but sometimes in English as well.

194 Everybody who has the needed skills and hardware, that is.

195 Zizzi Papacharissi, “Audiences as media producers: Content analysis of 260 blogs,” in M. Tremayne (ed.), *Blogging, citizenship, and the future of media*. London 2007, pp. 21–38.

196 Survey data 2010.

197 Uwe Boker and Julie A. Hibbard, *Sites of Discourse - Public and Private Spheres - Legal Culture: Papers from a Conference Held at the Technical University of Dresden, December 2001: Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft*, 2002, p. 9.



Picture taken from <http://ymam.wordpress.com/>, February 10, 2010.

Now the reader see the following log in form:



Picture taken from <http://ymam.wordpress.com/>, January 17, 2012.

It is not clear why this blogger switched to private settings, since she is in active contact with other bloggers and on *Twitter*. However, it is interesting that already established bloggers also sometimes shift their blogs into a private mode. Similar shifts can also sometimes be observed with the Omani blogger Muawiyah, who switches between public and private settings. Sometimes his blog is not accessible at all, though it is not clear whether he or an institution is blocking access.

Researchers have presented various arguments on how online participation leads to a blurring of public and private spaces. Carolyn Guertin (2008) claims that, in a

technological age, our “very notions of public and private are being eroded”.¹⁹⁸ On a general note and placing public and private spheres in a cultural context, Uwe Boker and Julie A. Hibbard (2002) point out that every culture draws this line differently.¹⁹⁹

While researchers such as Jodi Dean explain “Why the Net is not a Public Sphere” (2003), other researchers outline distinct aspects of the Internet as a public space. Dean sees the Internet rather as rooted in a notion of networks. Tyler Curtain (2006) also describes the interactive aspect of the medium, with an on-going and unfolding interaction between readers and writers in blogs. He emphasizes that a blog’s public goes beyond its links and blog rolls.²⁰⁰

James Bohman (2004) argues that the Internet is a public of publics and not a unified public sphere. This public of publics still needs to enable communication among an “indefinite (although not unitary) audience” that must first become a series of publics connected with an institutional context of other publics.²⁰¹

In contrast to the above discussants, it can be argued that computer-mediated communication is the contrary of a public sphere because of the possibilities to limit access to a restricted audience and to maintain anonymity.²⁰² This anonymity can either promote freedom of expression or it can undermine it.²⁰³

Connected to the discussion of public and private is also the blurring of fiction and fact that may appear in autofictional text distributed on blogs or in forums. Autofictionality is discussed in *Visual Set-Up and Narration* (Chapter One).

As the example of “Nada” and the different perspectives on public space online showed, it is difficult to make distinctions between notions of public and private on the net. However, bloggers from the Gulf seem to be aware of the difficulties that

198 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012.

199 Uwe Boker and Julie A. Hibbard, *Sites of Discourse - Public and Private Spheres - Legal Culture: Papers from a Conference Held at the Technical University of Dresden, December 2001*, Amsterdam/New York 2002, p. 9.

200 Tyler Curtain, "Promiscuous Fiction", in Barbara M. Kennedy, David Bell, and Tyler Curtain (eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader*, London 2006, p. 326.

201 James Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy", in John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, Oxford 2004, pp. 131-155, p. 152.

202 Ibid., p.132.

203 Ibid., p. 138.

come with publishing online. The following section focuses more on the audience than on the writers.

II.2 Participatory Culture Online

User-generated content in Web 2.0 has to be placed in a framework of participatory culture online. The following section focuses on interaction and connection with other producers of cultural products and their audiences. First, the function of the audience will be examined. Second, the phenomenon of interpersonal experience with fewer temporal and spatial restrictions will be discussed. Third, reposting and remixing as forms of communication will be analysed. Finally, the function of links is investigated. These factors have a strong influence on the literary texts and are therefore essential in forming a complete picture of online literary production in the Gulf. The possibility of communication and interaction, in particular, is unique to the medium; to contextualize digital writing it is essential to outline these interactive functions, since they impact texts on a variety of levels, as will be illustrated in the upcoming sub-chapters.

II.2.1 The Role of the Audience

The following outline of the role of the audience is a summary of findings that are applicable to literary production or creation and distribution of other digital artworks all over the world, and not solely to the Gulf. However, these findings are also important for reading online literature from my field of research. The “audience” plays an important role in online participatory culture. Participants in the space of forums differ from those in the blogosphere.²⁰⁴ An advantage of a blog is the writers’ knowledge about the number of readers, since he can actually see how many people have read his

²⁰⁴ The term “blogging” is the processes of distributing on a blog.

story or at least clicked it. In the following, role of the audience in blogs serves as an example of interaction with the audience; forums are discussed below in the context of the remixing and reposting of stories. Blogging, if practised in the most efficient way, can reach a very large audience.²⁰⁵ However, not every blog or forum post that is produced attracts a considerable audience. Warschauer and Grimes (2007) make clear that just a small number of “A-list bloggers” dominate the blogosphere.²⁰⁶ Even if this finding is based only on blogs from a different region, it is equally relevant for the Gulf. In each country, some A-list bloggers dominate the blogosphere, and their blogs get more comments on blog posts than others. According to statistics, they also have a higher number of visitors/readers.²⁰⁷ Popular blogs are read not only by users from their own country, but also by people all over the Gulf or from other countries. The audience is an important part of blogging because without an audience there is no purpose in distributing. Authors who publish their works online intend to share their content and interact with the audience. Distributing literary text online is often connected to an expectation of feedback from the audience, as many participants in my survey also mentioned.²⁰⁸

Several researchers deal with the function and value of an audience in online distribution. Alan Kirby (2009) underlines the value of the recipient of texts as “fetishized”. He sees the reader as part of the texts. The audience becomes “part of the text” by participating in comments and feedback. Kirby’s idea rates the audience very high in value for the complete process of online literature, while withdrawing credit from the original author. The writer is no longer seen as the one and only creator of an artwork. A process of interaction forms a new cultural good. Kirby sees “fetishizing” the audience in contrast to a post modern “fetishizing” of the author. This emphasis on the importance of the recipient in his findings can be seen as democratising culture or as generating “excruciating banality and vacuity” in cultural products.²⁰⁹ Analysts differ in their judgement of the audience’s importance in correlation with their general views of online media. Optimistic and positive examiners might see the audience’s importance and increasing value as an interactive process of democratisation in literature. More

205 E.g. the Egyptian Uprising 2011.

206 Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, "Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0", in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-23, p. 6.

207 Technorati is a company which regularly measures these numbers, Technorati.com, last accessed January 3, 2012.

208 Survey data 2010.

209 Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*, London 2009.

pessimistic or sober researchers might judge the influence of the audience negatively because they fear that the quality of these cultural products will suffer if produced solely for the enjoyment of the readership.

Carolyn Guertin also emphasizes the role of the audience by stating that without its “acts of conversation” there is no work of art.²¹⁰ She sees the act of “re/seeing it” as already a part of the text. Guertin regards digital media as much more interactive than its predecessors, TV and books. This interaction makes it difficult to separate between audience and producer. Thus, reading literature online can be seen as an active process.

While critics might focus on the recipient from a theoretical perspective, writers have a more practical relation with their audience. My online survey on online writing in the Gulf showed that some writers were embracing contact with and feedback from the audience.²¹¹ This proves the influence of the audience on online writers.

II.2.2 Interpersonal Experience, Time and Space

Interaction with the audience is influenced by notions of time and space that will be outlined in the following. This section will deal with a variety of issues connected to the interpersonal experience of online media, as well as online temporality and location. The temporality of online distribution is closely connected to communication with users and producers.²¹² Users can be connected without being physically in the same location. Finally, an additional form of communication can be seen in the interactive process of reposting and changing already existing cultural products such as audio files, films and texts.

It is evident that interpersonal experience is essential for online participatory culture. Especially in the Gulf, where genders do not mix outside of a work situation or

210 Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World", in *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.), Oxford 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-5-6>, last accessed January 27, 2012

211 Survey data 2010.

212 Communication through online writing was also analysed in the research field of Chinese digital literature by Xiaomeng Lang in the article *Der Dialog der Kultur und die Kultur des Dialogs : die chinesische Netzliterat* on http://dokumentix.ub.uni-siegen.de/opus/frontdoor.php?source_opus=398&la=de, last accessed January 3, 2012.

family meeting, this form of communication is an alternative to offline spaces. Relationships can be established, either between bloggers and other bloggers or between bloggers and readers. Uniquely characteristic of the medium is that instant contact between writer and reader is possible. One of the connecting instances for writers is the *Arab Union for E-Writers*, which unites authors from all over the Middle East. Within the Union's online site, authors are able to create their own profile sites with contact data, pictures and samples of their works. Only a small group of bloggers and online writers are actual members of the Arab E-Writers' Union. Since online platforms or writers' unions promote authors, online literature in the Gulf region also function as a platform for like-minded people and help them to communicate. For example, the Arab E-Writers Union supports communication among authors by hosting meetings, e.g. a conference in spring 2010.²¹³

Whether in the Gulf or the rest of the online world, an essential benefit of interactivity online is the option to interact in a variety of temporalities and without being restricted to a particular physical location. Annette Markham (2003) highlights how crucial the temporality of online literary texts and other culture works is, as one distinct characteristic of this medial communication. Online distribution can work in "real time"²¹⁴ as well as in "delayed time".²¹⁵ This means that posts can deal with past events as well as with current events, published as live streams or tweets. Responses to these posts depend on the audience. They can either interact in "real time" by commenting directly on shared material, or they come to know about the material later and add their thoughts whenever their schedule allows it. Older and newer texts can be read at any time. A delayed reply is influenced by changes that happen in the time that has passed since the original publication. This can have an effect on the interaction between producer and recipient. In print literature, this speed of interaction is impossible to attain and interaction in general is rather uncommon. The author is less accessible and more static, which creates a gap in communication between audience and author. Most printed literary works do not offer a direct communication connection with authors; to make contact with the authors, readers would need to invest time and energy in research. The following example shows that readers' responses to postings in

213 More information on the union can be found on the website www.arab-ewriters.com/, last accessed January 11, 2011.

214 By "real time" I mean the actual instant communication experienced in phone connections and chat rooms.

215 Annette N. Markham, *Internet communication as a tool for qualitative research*, November 18, 2003, markham.internetinquiry.org/writing/silvermangalleyproofs.pdf, accessed November 11, 2011.

forums and blogs are rarely in “real time”. This is because blogs and forums are not real time media (unlike *Twitter*, chat or streams). Still, responses to blog postings often come within a few hours or days, meaning interaction is much faster than was possible with earlier media.

Another essential advantage of online media is that interaction does not depend on being in the same physical location. Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi (2007) points out that de-territorialized groups created by mass media “imagine and feel together”, no matter which location they are physically at. She continues by quoting Raymond Williams to underline the argument that locality can be produced by technology. Williams states that groups can produce and work together, independently of their actual location.²¹⁶ Benedict Anderson uses the concept of *imagined communities* in connection with nationalism and language. In his view, a nation is

"imagined because the members [...] will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"²¹⁷.

I will not go into Anderson’s work in detail here; Niels Kayser and Fadia Rafeedie have given valid criticism of his work.²¹⁸ Rather, I want to link the idea of an imagined community to an online sphere, because here, too, members feel as a part of it without (really) knowing one another. Technology such as telephones, instant messaging and chat rooms, as well as forums, can create a common space. It is a virtual space, but it is still a location where participants from different physical places can interact. It differs from earlier media in that the communication is not between just two persons, but among many. Additionally, users communicate although they do not know each other from other contexts. This is advantageous for connecting not only people from different

216 Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi, *Literary intermediality: the transit of literature through the media circuit*, New York 2007, p. 248.

217 Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London 1991, p. 224.

218 Niels Kayser Nielsen , *Welfare-nationalism: Comparative aspects of the relation between sport and nationalism in Scandinavia in the inter-war years*, *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 1997. www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/SportsHistorian/.../sh172h.pdf, last accessed January 18, 2012.

Fadia Rafeedie, "Review of Imagined Communities, by Benedict Anderson" <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~mescha/bookrev/Anderson,Benedict.html>, last accessed in September 2000.

places, but also people whose movement is restricted by societal obligations. Some blogs use a chat box to facilitate instant communication. An example can be found on the blog <http://rarain.blogspot.com/>.

The example shows the chatbox on the right hand side. Within the whole page it is located in the right column next to the blog texts. In the captured sequence, a chat is going on between *Mawt* (Death), a *Hāla* (a name), a 'Awtār 'adhiba (Sweet strings/melodies), and *Butterfly*. On the left of the picture the regular blog text is visible. Conversations in chatboxes do not necessarily have to be about the distributed content.



Picture taken from <http://rarain.blogspot.com/>, last accessed, December 27, 2011

Chat boxes allow instant communication on blogs without the need to submit personal information to one's interlocutors. They underline the bloggers' desire for interaction with the readership.

Ola Erstad and James V. Wertsch (2008) deal with communicational factor of digital storytelling. They see digital narration also as a cultural tool that helps to express intentions and may differ in various cultural contexts.²¹⁹

219 Ola Erstad and James V. Wertsch, "Tales of mediation: Narrative and digital media as cultural tools", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 21-40, p. 28 f.

Another form of communication may be seen in the phenomenon of reposting and remixing stories, which will be presented in the following part.

II.2.3 Reposting and Remixing of Works of Art Online

This section focuses on forums and neglects blog posts because remixing and reposting are much more common with content posted in forums than with content in blogs. Cory Doctorow, an Internet activist and writer of novels published in print but also accessible online free of charge, emphasizes that copying is part of contemporary art: he (she?) even says that art that is not copied is not contemporary.²²⁰ As a consequence, copyright is a widely discussed subject as on the one hand cultural products are easy to copy and spread nowadays and producers might gain more popularity to the possibilities. On the other hand they do not get financially rewarded as reproduction often happens without a contribution to the original source.

One form of communication and interaction online manifests itself in the re-editing and reposting of original cultural products such as audio files, films and texts. The best-known form of communication by changing an original cultural product is found in the remixes posted on YouTube, the most representative interactive space for user-generated-content. This platform allows users to upload (their own) videos. A variety of communication forms can be observed; there is often interaction, either through the comment function, the “thumbs-up” button or a video reply from other users. Here, the audience is also a creator because content can be created, exchanged and also remixed. Michael Wesch, a media anthropologist, researched this aspect of *YouTube* in depth in his “An anthropological introduction to YouTube” in 2008, which is itself distributed on *YouTube*.²²¹ Wesch made it clear that, when spreading from one place to another, a cultural product keeps its original meaning, but also becomes transformed into something more personal. According to Wesch, the new media are a tool to connect people and make them interact.

220 Reason TV, *Cory Doctorow on The War on Kids, Boing Boing, & His Next Novel*, July 15, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLf3nldagXc>, accessed November 11, 2011.

221 Michael Wesch, *An anthropological introduction to YouTube*, July 26, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU, accessed November 11, 2011.

Remixing and reposting is often carried out in forums in the Gulf, where stories are constantly published and rewritten. Immediate interaction takes place and stories can also “travel” and develop. Replicating and spreading stories, as users do with literary works in the Gulf, is therefore a means of this communication. Although participatory culture invites the audience to contribute or remix art works, the original author is still important for the initial creation and inspiration. Without the initial cultural product there can be no remixing of it. In contrast, it is not common that blog posts are remixed.

The following table presents an example of a story that was reposted several times in different forms in various repostings. This is a summary of the story:

A third-person narrator tells the story of a young Emirati woman who is tortured and finally killed by her husband. As a stylistic choice, most of the story is told in questions. The narrator asks in an accusing tone why and how the villain was able to commit the crime. The story introduces two characters: the evil husband, a policeman who violently kills his wife; and contrasting with him is his wife, the innocent victim. The narrator underlines the victim’s pureness and innocence by noting her virginity and her reputation in society, as well as her family background. The description of the criminal act of violence is detailed.

DATE	USER	TITLE	PICTURES	FORUMS	CO ²²²	CHANGES	CITY
May 28, 2009	Dam3tshog	How was she killed. A tradegy that I narrate	With links of pictures at photobucket	http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html	26	- Is introduced with “In the name of God” - Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start" - Additional note: "Sat ,, 23-May-2009 ,, 3:14 pm ,, in the bus .. from fuj to alAin ,, BY: Dam3tshog ~"	
May 29, 2009	شَامِحْ كَجَلْمِي	How was she killed. A tradegy that I narrate.	No pictures	http://www.alwasluae.com/vb/showthread.php?t=133307&langid	54	Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start"	Dibba

222CO= number comment

				=2			
May 29, 2009	بدمي أماراتيه	How was she killed. A tradey that I narrate	no pictures	http://www.do7atkom.com/vb/showthread.php?t=11729	23	Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start"	
May 31, 2009	ورد جوري	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	No pictures	http://www.dhnuae.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-26.html	18		Fujairah
Jun 1, 2009	راصد ميداني	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	No pictures	http://www.arabmet.net/vb/showthread.php?t=26546&page=1	17		
Jun 1, 2009	روعه	How was Maha killed (RIP)??? A crime in the city of Dibba in the UAE	Three pictures	http://www.al7nan.com/vb/t26106.html	3	Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start"	Dibba
Jun 1, 2009	toota	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	No pictures	http://www.shrquae.com/vb/showthread.php?t=5470	1		
Jun 3, 2009	فتكاوي 999	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	No pictures	http://www.zaimuae.com/alain/showthread.php?p=2176960	25	Text in different colours	
Jun 6, 2009	ذكر 2	A crime in the city of Dibba in the UAE	Links to pictures do not work	http://fr1.startimes2.com/f.aspx?t=17249957	0		Dibba
Jun 7, 2009	زائر	Picture of the well where Emirati	No pictures	http://bint-uae.mam9.com/t1480-topic	2		Fujairah

		woman was found dead					
Jun 8, 2009	العيون	The killed young woman in Fujairah	No pictures	http://www.women.uaeec.com/showthread.php?14586-%C7%E1%DD%CA%C7%C9-%C7%E1%E3%DE%CA%E6%E1%C9-%C8%C7%E1%DD%CC%ED%D1%C9	23		Fujairah
Jun 8, 2009	العصفورة مداول متميز	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	Completely different pictures: The first pictures is a drawing that shows a protest of women and one man holding a banner which says "stop the violence" violence. The second picture shows a photograph which displays a man beating a woman.	http://www.uaetd.com/vb/showthread.php?t=57662	23	Completley different introduction: a list of recent rapes of women and girls in different places is introduced. The narrator alludes to events in Egypt that then transferred to the UAE where violence against women can be found during the events of this story.	
Jun 9, 2009	مبارك بن لندن	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	All but one pictures	http://www.zayedbinhamdan.com/vb/showthread.php?p=178089	31		
Jun 10, 2009	ابو الهش	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://shabaaaab.hooxs.com/t376-topic	0	A picture is inserted as a header that greets the readers and additionally includes the formula "In the name of God".	
Jun 12, 2009	أسيرة الأحزان	Location where an Emirati woman was found dead in	Three pictures	http://www.3yobi.com/vb/showthread.php?p=87398	8		

		a well in Fujairah with real pictures					
Jun 12, 2009	أنسة صغيرة	Emirati young women who was killed in a well in Fujairah "pictures"	No pictures	http://saleh-saad.com/vb/showthread.php?p=61304	5	Includes an animated (gif) rose and coloured fonts	Fujairah
Jun 12, 2009	الح 7مادي	Picture of the well where Emirati woman was found dead	No pictures	223	9		
Jun 13, 2009	بنت الأسود	Emirati young women who was killed in a well in Fujairah "pictures"	No pictures	http://www.alkhawatir.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-8258.html	9		Fujairah
Jun 15, 2009	جاسم محمد	Location where an Emirati woman was found dead in a well in Fujairah	Pictures	http://www.rafha2.com/vb/showthread.php?t=35515		Coloured fonts	Fujairah
Jun 20, 2009	وجه الخير	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	No pictures	http://www.oman10.com/vb/showthread.php?t=740&page=9	6		
Jun 20, 2009	بنت الزعامه	"How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well"	Links to pictures do not work	http://3inawi.yoo7.com/t265-topic	2		

223<http://www.3nabi.com/forums/showthread.php/171732-%D8%B7%C2%B5%D8%B8%CB%86%D8%B7%C2%B1-%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B7%C2%A8%D8%B7%C2%A6%D8%B7%C2%B1-%D8%B7%C2%A7%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B7%C2%B0%D8%B8%D9%B9-%D8%B7%C2%A3%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B8%E2%80%9A%D8%B8%E2%80%B0-%D8%B8%D9%BE%D8%B8%D9%B9%D8%B8%E2%80%A1-%D8%B7%C2%A7%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B8%D9%BE%D8%B7%DA%BE%D8%B7%C2%A7%D8%B7%C2%A9-%D8%B7%C2%A7%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B8%E2%80%A6%D8%B8%E2%80%9A%D8%B7%DA%BE%D8%B8%CB%86%D8%B8%E2%80%9E%D8%B8%E2%80%A1?p=3286276>

		well”					
Jun 21, 2009	زهور الريف	How was Maha killed (RIP) with pictures	Links to pictures do not work	http://www.afif.ws/sahat/archive/index.php/t-142563.html	10	Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start"	Dibba
Jul 19, 2009	جنيف.نت	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://dibba-al-hisn.com/vb/showthread.php?p=9888	9		
Aug12, 2009	منتسب فعال	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://www.yaf33.com/vb/showthread.php?p=117499	5	Introduced with personal greeting	
Sept 29, 2009	ملكة الورد	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://www.lil-3.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-15916.html	10		
Oct 6, 2009	alaany_999	The truth of ... a young woman killed in Fujairah	No pictures	http://vb.we3rb.com/archive/index.php/t-41847.html	9	Introductory phrase: "I do not know where to start and I do not know how to start"	
Mar19, 2010	حاقه بنات بوطني	“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://www.mo7adha.com/vb/180311-post1.html	0		
Jul 14, 2010		“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	http://www.roadeed.net/showthread.php?t=15757	3		

Jul 16, 2010		“How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well”	No pictures	www.mmmoh.blogspot.com	3		
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The story is posted in more than 50 forums and varies slightly in layout, title, pictures and description. The earliest posting of the story can be traced back to May 28, 2009. It was most often posted in June and July 2009. Depending on the time and platform on which it is posted, it is redistributed with different titles. To find more examples of the same story, I picked a random sentence (“How was he able to stab her with such shaaaaaarp and painful tools?”)²²⁴ and looked up the first 50 hits on Google, but there were many more redistributions than I was able to include in my analysis. The search engine asked whether the sentence in use was misspelled and provided an alternative²²⁵ which did not lead to any additional redistributions. This emphasizes the importance of the use of a distinct vernacular and Internet language. Language in use is rather colloquial, and repeating a letter several times for emphasis is an example of a different use of written language among young people on the Internet. Language in online literary text has already been discussed in greater detail in *Visual Set-Up and Features of Narration* (Chapter One).

It is said to be a true story which might make it more interesting to read for the audience because a voyeuristic need gets satisfied if it is an actual true story instead of a story that is specifically marked as fiction. For the analysis and further dealing with this story it is not relevant if it is fictional or true.

The story claims to be true, which might make it more interesting to read for the audience, whose voyeurism is better satisfied if a story is labelled true rather than fiction. For the analysis of and further dealing with this story, it is not relevant whether it is fictional or true.

224 The original sentence was كيف استطاع أن يطعنها بأدوات حادة مؤلمة بهذا الشكل .

225 كيف استطاع أن يطعمها بأدوات حادة ومؤلمة بهذا الشكل , i.e., without the emphasis on *ḥādda* “sharp”.

Most striking in the different distributions is the use of pictures (this is also discussed in Chapter One) supposedly taken at the crime scene. Surprisingly, all but one redistribution of the story make use of the same pictures, but not all of them use all of the pictures provided in the first posting of the story. Photographs were no longer included in distributions of the story later than the middle of June 2009. A very striking version of the story is found in June 8, 2009 in the forum *Uaetd.com*. This story differs immensely from other repostings: the introduction is not the same and the pictures in use are completely different. Instead of the pictures showing the location of the brutal act a drawing is presented that displays the message: Stop the violence. The introduction mentions other violent events against women. After this introduction the story is reposted.



This picture is taken from <http://www.uaetd.com/vb/showthread.php?t=57662> January 19, 2012.

The visual appearance of the story varies also because the layout and choice of fonts vary. The font can be very plain and sober with black script on a white background or, in contrast, very colourful texts can be found. Changing font colour for emphasis appears to be a common choice in changing layout.

As already mentioned above, it is striking that the story is reposted by many different users. I did not find any repetition of user names in my analysis of sources. The titles of the story are changed in many re-postings. The title of the story sometimes includes the location of the crime scene or the nationality of the victim. The nationality

of the victim is always Emirati, but the setting of the story shifts between Dibba and Fujairah, which are both cities in the UAE and not far from another.

An analysis of readers' participation shows that a large number of comments were posted within the first days of distribution. The first posting of the story received 26 comments, and the second one received 54 comments, which is high compared with the later numbers of comments. Comments are usually not on the story's style or setup, but rather emphasize the reader's sympathy for the victim or submit societal critique.

The actual text does not change much. In some redistributions, the story starts with the sentence "I don't know where to start and I don't know how to start." In others this sentence is left out. Rarely, the story starts with the formula "In the name of God", which is commonly used in the Gulf when writing. In the first appearance of the story, this sentence precedes the introduction. The first posting also includes a striking note in English above the forum post:

"Sat ,, 23-May-2009 ,, 3:14 pm ,, in the bus .. from fuj to alAin ,, BY:
Dam3tshog".²²⁶

The story itself was distributed five days later. This remark suggests that the story either was first heard or first created on the bus from al Fujayrah to al-'Ayn. The remark may have been made to underline the story's authenticity.

Thus, stories are redistributed by a variety of users at different times. This coincides with Wesch's aforementioned findings on YouTube videos. Images are an important factor in the redistribution of stories, but later these pictures are abandoned and users focus more on the text itself. Often users change the distributed story a little but in ways that do not effect the plot of the story.

226 <http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html> January 2, 2012.

II.2.4 Interactivity in Online Literary Texts

Web 2.0 enables people to distribute works quickly and to interact with other writers and the audience. Warschauer and Grimes underline this, stating that authorship is an increasingly interactive task. They assume that the author has to interact with and join the audience to practice their norms and achieve discursive competence.²²⁷

Alan Kirby documents another form of interactivity. He makes clear that online media are interactive because of the way users move in the medium. A user navigates through the Internet individually, thereby deciding which sites to use, depending on his or her interests: watching videos, listening to music, reading or participating in a social network. In online literary texts, users have a choice between following links or reading texts chronologically or in some other order. Kirby states that this participation is a cultural process and “far more intense” than in any medium before.²²⁸ “You click, you punch the keys, you are ‘involved’, engulfed, deciding.” This gives readers a wider choice and also a greater responsibility in selecting what and how to read. Readers do not need to follow pages in sequence, but can instead pick and choose their own way through texts. Due to this freedom of choice and interaction, Kirby assumes that everyone is now part of the literary work and concludes: “You are the text.” He claims that there is no author in the Internet and that users and the text are free.²²⁹ In its changeability and its independence of institutions, online text is freer than print, but it is still bound to a context of societal norms and cultural standards. These can differ from those in the world outside the Internet, but social rules also apply online. When Kirby says, “You are the text”, “you” can stand for an interactive user taking part in an online literature experience. Users do not have unlimited freedom in their choice of actions on blogs. Influencing a text is restricted to the administrative rights or possibilities the original writer offers, and consists mostly of a rating button or the comment function. In contrast, texts published on forums are copied, rewritten or remixed on another platform. Interaction has broader or narrower limits, depending on the platform approached.

227 “Authorship involves not only writing for an audience but also, in essence, joining an audience by entering into a community of practice and acquiring its norms of discourse competence.” (Bizzel, 1992) Mark Warschauer and Douglas Grimes, “Audience, Authorship, and Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0”, in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-23, p. 4.

228 Alan Kirby, “The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond”, *Philosophy Now* 58, 2006, <http://www.philosophynow.org/issue58/58kirby.htm>, accessed November 11, 2011.

229 Ibid.

II.2.5 Links as a Form of Communication

Part of the interactive mode online is the use of links. Links have several functions. For producers they help to contextualize and place themselves. Users or readers recognise links as a means of navigation. Links can visually express relationships to other bloggers and show fields of interest. By linking to specific pages and blogs, a writer situates himself and displays his personal interests and connections. Gert Lovink states that social networks are not a parallel reality but “reflect and accelerate tendencies that already exist”.²³⁰ The online representation of networks mirrors connections that have already existed offline or those that have developed through similar interests or admiration. Links, as the name implies, aim to make connections to different writers but also to websites that might be valuable to readers or writers. (Links are also a representation of identity, cf. Chapter Three: *Who are the Actors? Portrayals of Heroes*, below).

Additionally, links are set inside blogs to refer to texts published earlier on the same blog that are connected to the current post or provide background knowledge. On the blog <http://al-zain.blogspot.com/>, bloggers link to each other’s blogs but also comment on each other’s blog posts. Following links to these other bloggers, the user finds further comments from writers who are connected within a wider network of bloggers and online writers. A structure of networks among different writers is evident. As can be seen in Loyal’s blog (<http://layal7.blogspot.com/>), these links can also connect to Arabic-writing bloggers from countries outside the Gulf, such as Morocco and Egypt.

II.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the advantages and challenges of Web 2.0 and participatory

²³⁰ Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, New York 2007, p. 236.

culture online. The medium has an impact on cultural products through its many ways of interaction and reuse and through its promotion of the changeability of text. Authors are challenged by seeing their works changed and remixed by others as well as by dealing with repostings that do not credit to the original author. Additionally, producers must decide what should be public and what private online.

Related to public and private space is the distinct feature of online interactiveness that influences contemporary online writing. Authors and audience both make use of the interactive aspect of online distribution. Both sides benefit from this interaction and might form a cultural product as a collaborative process.

Interactiveness can lead to a process of changing texts. Thus, changeability can be mirrored in remixing and reposting stories in forums; a vast number of users do this.

Participatory culture is also subject to criticism. For example, if a blog's privacy settings are changed, texts can suddenly disappear for a broader audience, remaining visible only for a smaller selected audience. Online distribution also poses the problem of infringement of intellectual property rights.

Although the distribution of cultural products has increased, user-generated content is not an entirely new phenomenon; for example, it is part of Xeroxing culture. However, distributing online means authors no longer need to send their products to mainstream media to make their works accessible. Hence, material posted online is often published unedited. But this can also mean that content is published regardless of its actual literary value for a larger audience.

The role of the audience and its perception is shifting; observers do not agree on its importance. Some say the stronger focus on the readership is encouraging a democratisation of literature; others, that this is weakening the literature's quality.

Cultural production and participatory culture online are still in its beginnings. Web 2.0 has existed for less than 10 years and participants need time to learn to control quality and deal with interactiveness and privacy issues.

In this chapter it was important to outline circumstances of distribution as they influence writing and publishing. Certainly a variety of other circumstances of online writing can be studied in future research.

III. Who are the Actors? Portray of Heroes

This chapter deals with the various ways heroes (in the sense of protagonist of a story) are described in online literature from the Gulf. After having dealt with the language, narration and setup of online literary text and having examined participatory culture and communication with the audience, I now turn to societal discourses in connection with the portrayal of protagonists. The term "discourse" is used here with the definition that it has in Critical Discourse Analysis, i.e. a form of language use in writing and speech that is seen as a "social practice" and displays social identities.²³¹ Studying a variety of perspectives on online literature reveals components of discourses in society in the contemporary Gulf. Discourses in society are strongly related to a manifestation of identities because forming them is possible only within societal norms and boundaries.²³² This means that a story represents a character's identity in its relationship and interaction with the natural surroundings. It is important to mention that internet activities do not restructure public discourse.²³³ Studying heroes in literature involves studying fictional characters in fictional settings. As it is an analysis of fictional stories, it is not possible to apply the findings on real, non-fictional circumstances. The study of heroes in fictional stories merely highlights discourses that seem to be of relevance for

231 CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of “social practice”. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) that frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways they represent things and position people. (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

232 Rom Harré discusses the conceptualization of personal being and here embeds the self in a social context that suggests a more important role for the (narrative) understanding of self. R. Harré, *Personal Being* Oxford 1983.

233 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, New Haven 2006, p. 271.

writers. That means that subjects are of value and importance for writers and therefore are composed and distributed as literary texts.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of representations of heroes in short literary texts in online forums and blogs. An important field of examination is the depiction of gender roles. A new generation is changing in comparison with and in relation to the older generation. These alterations may also be linked to individualization processes in the region that influence the representation of identity in literary texts. The chapter also explores global impacts that change society as observed in a variety of short stories. These perspectives on literary texts are chosen because they are presented in many of the literary texts that were examined. This means that all the aforementioned topics are recurring themes that online writers find important to express. In the texts that I studied more than half seem to deal with at least one of the subjects that are analysed in this chapter. Other aspects of portrayals of heroes such as class or nation, will not be examined in detail here because they play a minor role in my sources. That means they are subject of much less than half of my sources.

III.1 Perspectives on Identity Online

Closely related to the portrayal of heroes is the presentation of identities, which is discussed in research on users of online media. Many researchers describe the online sphere as a unique space for creating and portraying identity. Identity can be created and portrayed in offline space as well, but the anonymity of the Internet might lead to a different approach. Two important researchers who deal with the subject are Susanna Paasonen and Jenny Davis. In 2006, Susanna Paasonen edited *Figures of Fantasy*, which deals with discourses of femininity in cyberspace; part of her research focuses on self-representation. She found that users often do not limit themselves to presenting one identity on the net, but "multiple identities may flourish".²³⁴ This means that one and the same user may distribute literary texts through more than one online identity. This might be especially easy in forums, where users act much more anonymously than in

²³⁴ Susanna Paasonen, *Figures of Fantasy. Internet, Women and Cyberdiscourse*, New York 2005, p. 107.

blogs and usually disguise their true identity with nicknames.

Jenny Davis, who works on the same subject but focuses on *MySpace*,²³⁵ underlines the flexibility of creating identity online. In the article "Architecture of the Personal Interactive Homepage: Constructing the Self through MySpace" (2010), she examines representations of identity and states that "the internet (...) can be seen as a prevalent means for creating and negotiating our identities".²³⁶ In Davis' article the emphasis is on possibilities to enhance and arrange identity on the net. That means self-representation is formed as an "ideal self". People present "one piece" of their identity. This self representation is limited to the boundaries which are set by the platform they are published in, in addition to the boundaries that are set by users.

While Paasonen talks about multiple identities, Davis restricts herself to the negotiation of a single identity. Neither focuses on the Middle East. Still, patterns of use in the US or Europe can serve as a benchmark and help identify patterns of use in the Gulf. So far, according to my findings, it seems that use does not differ much when it comes to the interactive aspect of using online media. Both researchers discuss the issue of the identity of producers of cultural products. For the following examination, literary texts will be the source material to be analysed. Of course representation of identity can also be found in a lot of other texts which do not need to necessarily be literature. As the focus of this thesis is online literature from the Gulf I limit my field of analysis to literature distributed on the Internet.

Instead of focussing on the producers' profile or "about" page, which would help form a picture of the author, I will rather look into the representation of identity or portrayal of heroes within the stories.

The following examples from my sample texts will serve as a basis for discussion of the aforementioned perspectives on identity representation. First I will summarise my examples and then, in separate sub-chapters, examine the perspectives they open up. Not every sample fits all of the chosen discourses, but some of them share a variety of themes that are worth analysing.

235 *MySpace* is a social network that allows to connect to others as well as distributing music.

236 Jenny Davis, "Architecture of the personal interactive homepage: constructing the self through MySpace", in *New Media & Society* November 2010, first published on May 4, 2010, pp. 1103-1119, 1106.

III.2 Sample Texts

In the following, three examples of stories are presented from Kuwaiti blogs. Two stories are from the same blogger, 7osen-man: a) "Fantasy world" (*‘Ālam khayālī*) and b) "What shall we eat?" (*mādhā na’kul?*) One blog post is from Salatmaiwa.com: c) "Your nose belongs to you, so what?" (*Anfik minnik – wa-law!*). Additionally, two examples are selected from forums: d) "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well" (*al-Qiṣṣa al-kāmila li’l-fatāt al-imārātiyya allatī ‘uthira ‘alayhā fī bi’r maqtūla²³⁷*) and e) "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver" (*Ḥiṣṣa wa-rā’ī al-taksī*). The stories were first found on forums in 2009/2010; after some research I found that they were published on other forums at earlier and later times as well. Two stories presented in this chapter are taken from *Nashiri*, the Kuwaiti e-publishing house: f) "My Child and the Ant Colony!" (*Ṣaghīratī wa-qaryat al-naml*) by Ilaf Alrish and g) "And Rebecca Asks me about the Wali (Guardian)" by Hyatt Alyaqut (*wa-tas’alunī Ribikkā ‘an al-waliyy*).

Language and style differ in the texts, underscoring the variety of the source material.

Two stories distributed through the blog 7osen-man.blogspot.com are worth presenting as examples of the representation of identity. In his BlogSpot profile titled "Below Zero", 7osen-man describes himself as a Kuwaiti male. He mentions that his favourite book is *Mawsim al-hijra ilā ’l-shamāl* (1966, "Season of Migration to the North") by al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ (Tayeb Saleh), which gives the reader a hint about his literary preferences.

a) The first story that I want to present is "Fantasy world", posted on June 18, 2011. In this story the narrator describes an evening he spends in the cinema together with a friend. The male friends watch a romantic comedy. The protagonist describes the situation at the cinema as "We are a diverse society in everything", explaining that the things that bind people together are the same as those that separate them.

التفاوت الكبير في الأوضاع الاجتماعية يظهر بصورة جلية بين الناس
عبر الأشكال طريقة اللباس الحديث .. المعاملة " نحن مجتمع متفاوت
بكل شيء، الأشياء التي تجمعنا هي ذاتها التي تفرق بيننا."²³⁷

237 Blog-post from 18.6.2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/06/blog-post_18.html, last accessed December 28, 2011. The syntax in this text is not completely clear.

The big gap in social status is evident between people from their looks ... the modern style of clothes ... the treatment ... “We are a diverse society in everything, the things that bring us together are the same as those that set us apart ...”

The protagonist is waiting for his friend to come to buy "Nachos" and "M&M's", which his friend does habitually every time he goes to the cinema. The protagonist reflects on "the curse of habits" and that "change is the best".

كنت أنتظر صديقي الذي ذهب لشراء بعض "الناشوز" و"الأم أند أمز" كما هي عادته دائماً، قلت في نفسي: "تباً للعادات التي تبقينا عبيداً لها دون أن نشعر، ياليتنا نستطيع أن نتغير، التغيير أفضل ما يمكن أن نصنعه في حياة شديدة الغرابة والوضوح معاً.²³⁸

I waited for my friend who went to buy some Nachos and M&Ms, like he always did, and I said to myself: God damn these traditions that keep us as slaves without knowing; I wish we could change; change is the best thing we can do in this very strange and at the same time clear life.

The story continues with the main character going inside and seeing a young woman whom he finds attractive and who is wearing clothes that accentuate her figure. The protagonist asks his friend if he has ever fallen in love before; the friend laughs this off and tells him to just sit down. The film triggers emotions in the protagonist and he describes the wish to cry after the movie has ended. To extend the evening, he asks his friend if they can take the long ride home instead of the regular way. The protagonists' thoughts during the car ride are described.

بدأت لي الطريق الاسفلتيه معبده على نحو غريب .. وشعرت بلحظة ما

238 Ibid.

أن بأمكان المركبة أن ترتفع وتلج بنا أبواب ذلك العالم المنتظر ..
العالم الكبير ، المثالي، الصادق، الذي بأمكانه أن يمنحني دفء الحياة
الغائب ابداً.

كنت أتمنى أن تُختصر كل الحياة في هذه اللحظة . أن ينتهي العمر وأنا
سارح في خيالات تطير من الارض وتحط في السماء.
قطع صديقي حبل أفكارى المشدود .. وقال ، : " البطلة كانت جميلة
جداً لها شفيتين تقتلان "ضحكت بصفاء طويلاً .. وقلت : "هناك فقط
بأمكانك أن تشعر بالحياة.²³⁹

The asphalt road looked strange to me ... I felt for a moment that the
car could fly and sweep us to the doors of the awaited world ... the big,
ideal and honest world that can give every absent warmth of life.

I wished that all life would come down to this moment, that life would
end while I am chasing fantasies that take off from the earth and land
in the sky.

My friend interrupted my trail of intense thought and said: "The
heroine was very beautiful with killer lips ..." I laughed so hard and
then said: "Only there you can feel alive."

While the protagonist is contemplating life and giving his imagination free rein, the
friend talks about the movie.

The story ends when the protagonist arrives at home:

حين دلفت إلى غرفتي كانت خطوات الفجر الاولى تتقدم بتأني ساحر ..
صليت الفجر .. وتكورت داخل فراشي طلباً للنوم قبل أن يبدأ يوم طويل
آخر .

فجأة قفز مدير عملي إلى مخيلتي رأيته يستفسر عن الواجبات التي
ينتظر مني أن انهيها تذكرت ايضا الأوراق الكثيرة التي تنتظر على مكثبي
.. وحالة النعاس والأرهاق في منتصف اليوم.. حلت هذه الأشياء فجأة
كعاصفة مباغتة واقتلعت كل ماهو جميل في نفسي

كان الحب والحكمة والمتعة والحياة آخر ما أفكر فيه في تلك اللحظة.²⁴⁰

239 Blog post from June 18, 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/06/blog-post_18.html , last
accessed December 28, 2011.

240 Blog post from May 25, 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_25.html , last
accessed November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog post again on December 28, 2011, it
had been deleted.

When I entered my room, the first crack of dawn was creeping up with a captivating slow pace ... I prayed the dawn prayers ... and crawled up into my bed to sleep before another long day started.

Suddenly, my manager jumped to my mind. I saw him inquiring about the duties that he waits for me to finish and I also remembered the many papers that await me on my desk ... and feeling sleepy and exhausted in the middle of the day ... these things suddenly gripped me like a sudden storm and uprooted everything beautiful inside me.

Love, wisdom, pleasure and life were the last things on my mind at that moment.

b) The second story by 7osen-man that I find relevant to present within the topic of the portrayal of heroes is the story called "What shall we eat?" that was posted on May 25, 2011. The story starts off with the narrator telling the reader about a pain he feels. The pain appears at night.

لم تكن هذه الليلة الوحيدة التي يمرني بها هذا الشعور ، بل الليالي
السابقة كلها، منذ أن أبتعدت عن عالمي الذي احبه بسبب سلطة
المجتمع الذي أنتمي إليه وأنا اتشظى إلى نتف صغيرة في كل ليلة ،
أعانق الألم بصمت، وأتمنى أن تجود نفسي بماء الروح عليّ أرتاح لكنها
صامتة وجافة مثل أيامي.²⁴¹

This was not the only night I felt this way, I [had] felt it every night before that, since I left the world that I loved because of the authority of the society I belonged to, and I am torn into tiny pieces every night, embracing the pain in silence and wishing that my soul would be so kind to me as to give me some peace, but it remains quiet and dry just like all my days!

241 Ibid.

The narrator tells his story of wanting to get married to a female colleague whom he has fallen in love with. He asks his father to marry him to her, but his father refuses because the girl is not from the right family and the family's reputation might be harmed. After accepting his father's words, the protagonist feels tears coming to his eyes. He says that he does not know why it is necessary to still stick to the law and old rules.

لماذا يجب عليّ أن أقترن بإنسانة لا أعرفها ، لماذا يجب أن أتزوج من العائلة، أي قانون هذا، وأي عرف مهترئ من يتحكم بمصائرنا.²⁴²

Why should I marry someone I don't know? Why should I marry someone from the family? What law is this and what outdated tradition is this that controls our destinies!

The narrator describes his personality as non-confrontational because he fears dealing with the consequences.

لم أثور ولم أقاوم كلمة والدي بل أنصعت له بكل هدوء رغم رفضي الداخلي لجميع مظاهر مجتمعي.²⁴³

I did not rebel and I did not resist my father; rather I quietly obeyed him in spite of my internal rejection of everything in my society.

He describes the traits of his beloved, to whom he feels attracted.

242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.

وحيث أقتربت منها كثيراً وبدأت أتحدث معها ذهلت من كمية المنطق التي تمتلكها، وادهشتني نظرتها التحليلية للحياة، كان منطقها قريباً من المنطق الذي يقع في داخلي ، كانت تقول ما تؤمن به دون إنتظرا لرأي أحد، تحترم حق الجميع في ممارسة قناعاته دون التدخل في قناعات الآخرين، متمسكها برأيها وبذات الوقت مستعدة أن تفتنع برأيك أن اقنعها، كانت فتاة جدية جداً صاحبة شخصية قوية ومسيطره ، تستطيع أن تصد كل متملق و تافه وما اكثرهم في عالمنا بكل بساطة وأدب.²⁴⁴

When I got to know her better and began to talk to her, I was amazed by the amount of logic that she had, and her analytical view of life amazed me ... her logic was closer to the logic inside me. She said what she believed without waiting for other people's opinions and held on to her opinion. At the same time, she was ready to believe your point of view if you convinced her. She was a very serious girl with a strong dominating personality who could easily and politely stand up to any hypocrite or idiot – and how many idiots there are in this world.

After describing her character he moves on to descriptions of her physical appearance. The narrator alludes to her family's openness when she states that her father has always taught her the values of freedom and respect.

He mourns the separation while complaining about his father's and his community's customs and convictions.

أحببتها جداً بكل بساطة قلبي و غراية أحساسي، أحببتها بإنسانية خالصة بعيداً عن تجاذبات القناعات والاعراف، إلا أن الأخيرتين هما من يحدد مصائرنا على نحو بالغ الأثر ، وشخصاً في مثل وضعي لا يمكنه مواجهتهما، أعرافنا وقناعات مجتمعي ووالدي الرجل القوي ، وضعفي الذي يصور لي أحيانا كل ما أفعله على إنه مجرد حماقات ملعونة ، جعلاني ارضا بحكم الفراق بيننا، وأستسلم للقدرالذي يراه والدي

²⁴⁴ Blog post from May 25, 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_25.html, last accessed November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog post again on December 28, 2011, it had been deleted. The words التحليلية and إنتظرا seem to be spelled differently from the norm.

مخلصا لي من كل "نزوات العقل".²⁴⁵

I loved her very much with my simple heart and strange feelings. I loved her with pure humanity that is free from the attractions of convictions or norms. However, the latter immensely determine our destinies and a person in my position cannot stand up to them ... Our norms and the beliefs of my society and my strong father and my weakness that sometimes makes me believe that everything I do is nothing but damn idiocy. They beat me to the ground, given the huge differences between us, and make me surrender to the fate that my father decided for me, free from all the "whims of the mind".

After telling his female colleague at work about his fathers' response and that he will work elsewhere, they agree to stay friends but not to be lovers. Except for two SMS that he sends some months later, the contact ends.

The protagonist decides that he wants to get over it and asks his family to find him a suitable wife whom he then marries. He finds her obedient and attractive.

In the last paragraph, many years later he goes to a restaurant with his family and happens to meet his former beloved, who is there with her husband and children. They look at each other and introduce each other to their families as old friends. The story ends with the awkward moment overcome with the words "What shall we eat?"

فرأنا وأبتسمت ببراءة ، صافحتني وعرفتني على زوجها الذي ابتسم بأدب وحياني ، تبادلنا كلمات معتادة قليلة ثم توادعنا ونحن نشكر الصدفة الجميلة. عندما مضوا سألتني زوجتي بشيء من الانزعاج من هذه ، قلت بعدم أكثرات زميلة قديمة، قالت بتهمك وهي تقصد زوجها فعلا الطيور على أشكالها تقع. إبتسمت بعدم مبالاة وقلت لها وانا اشير إلى قائمة الطعام "ماذا نأكل".²⁴⁶

245 Blog post from May 25, 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_25.html, last accessed November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog post again on December 28, 2011, it had been deleted.

246 Blog post from April 6, 10 http://www.salatmaiwa.com/2010/04/blog-post_05.html, last accessed on November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog post on December 28, 2011 the settings had

She saw me and smiled innocently and shook my hands and introduced me to her husband who smiled politely and greeted me. We exchanged the usual small talk and then said goodbye, grateful for this great coincidence. When they [had] left, my wife asked me with some annoyance who she was, and I said carelessly: an old colleague. She cynically blurted out, while in reality meaning her husband: birds of a feather flock together. I smiled carelessly and said as I pointed to the menu: "What shall we eat?"

c) The Kuwaiti blogger Sullat Maywah²⁴⁷ has been blogging since 2009 at <http://www.salatmaiwa.com>. On April 6, 2010, she distributed the story "Your nose belongs to you, so what?" The narrator tells the story of a young woman, 23 years of age. It starts with a female protagonist, stopped at a red traffic light, realizing that a man in another car is looking at her. This makes her self-conscious and leads her to touch her nose because she thinks it is exceptionally unattractive, while her eyes are portrayed as beautiful. The narrator tells us that the protagonist dislikes pictures of herself and that she covers her nose when photographed and that she dislikes the picture on her ID card. She is so unhappy that when she received a car as a birthday gift from her father she started crying because she preferred to hide in the back seat with a driver in the front so that no one could see the profile of her nose.

فأكبر عقاب لها هو مطالعة بطاقتها الشخصية! تتذكر عيد ميلادها
الثامن عشر، حين اهداها والدها سيارة بكت ليلتها كثيراً لأنها لم تكن
تنوي القيادة، فلا تريد أن تكون على مرأى من ناظري أحد، بل كانت
تخطط الجلوس في أحد الكراسي الخلفية لسيارة يقودها سائق!²⁴⁸

been changed to privacy mode.

247 The name of the blogger might be translated with "fruit basket". This nick name might lead to a variety of associations. Maybe one of the most striking one is freshness. However, there are surely other ways of interpreting this blogger's name.

248 Blog post from April 6, 10 http://www.salatmaiwa.com/2010/04/blog-post_05.html, last accessed on November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog post on December 28, 2011 the settings had been changed to privacy mode.

Her biggest punishment is looking at her personal identity card! She remembers her eighteenth birthday when her father gave her a car. She cried so hard all night, not because she did not plan to drive, but because she did not want to be seen by others. She planned to sit in the back seat of a car driven by a driver!

When another student at college asks her whether her nose is crooked, she decides to wear a *niqāb* in order to hide her nose and highlight her eyes.

لكنها منذ تلك اللحظة قررت أن تلبس النقاب!
كانت نقلة كبيرة في حياتها، فلا شعر متناثر حول وجهها، بل قطعة
قماش سوداء تغطي نصف وجهها الذي تكرهه، لكن ذاك القماش
الأسود
كان خلاصها، فيه إختبأت عن العالم، فما أن تضعه حتى تنسى أنفها
وتطل من عينيها الجميلتين حولها، لتوهم الناس بجمالها، مدّها ذاك
لنقاب بالثقة مدها بما كانت تحتاج إليه لتنتهي دراستها دون خجل.

But since then, she decided to wear the *niqāb*!

This marked [lit. was] a great transformation in her life, for there was no hair covering her face, but rather a piece of black cloth covering the one half of her face that she hated. That black cloth was her salvation, behind which she hid from the world; and soon, as she put it on, she forgot about her nose.

And she would look around with her beautiful eyes to delude people with her beauty; that *niqāb* gave her confidence and what she needed to complete her studies without being shy or evading her colleagues.

One day she decides to take the *niqāb* off once and for all and to finally face her nose. She goes to a beauty clinic to get her nose "fixed". While she waits for her turn, she leafs through magazines and reflects on a TV presenter who could not work with an

"ugly" nose. In her thoughts she already plans to get a new picture taken for her ID card.

Later she takes the bandage off her nose and discovers it is still the same nose. This realization makes her shout for the doctor and nurses and tell them that the nose is still the same. She starts crying bitterly.

بخوف فتحت عينيها لتراه، صرخت بهم!!!! ما هذا!!!!
نظر كل من الدكتور والممرضة إلى بعض!
لم تغيروا انفي!! مازال كما هو!²⁴⁹

With fear she opened her eyes to look at it ... she yelled at them!!!!

What is this!!!!

The doctor and the nurse glanced at each other!

You did not change my nose!! It still looks the same!!

When shown pictures, she admits that the nose feels different. Still, the protagonist sees her nose the same way it was before and is disappointed. In the end she realizes that her nose will always be her nose and decides to cover it with the *niqāb* again.

هو انفها .. هو هو.. مهما غيروا فيه هي تراه كما كان، ذات الأنف
القبیح.. عادت تقف أمام المرآة لترتدي النقاب وتعاود الإختباء خلفه..
وفكرة واحده تدور في رأسها (انفك منك ولو كان أجدع)²⁵⁰

(...) it is her nose ... the same old nose ... no matter how much they changed it, she still sees it the same ... the same old ugly nose ... she stood in front of the mirror to wear the *niqāb* and hid behind it once

249 Ibid.

250 Ibid.

again ...

With one thought running through her head: (Your nose is yours, even if it is made smaller.)

d) A story that differs very much from the above is the following. This crime story appears in many forums and is commented by a lot of readers. Its title is "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well". The story already served as an example in the chapter on setup and narration because of its multi-media features.

A third-person narrator tells the story of a young Emirati woman who is tortured and finally killed by her husband. The short story starts out by describing the female victim as a virgin and a moral person and then continues, stating that the victim's husband physically abused her. The setting is described as in the middle of the mountains. This literary narration is to a large extent told in the form of rhetorical questions.

كيف له أن يضربها ويضربها وهي تقاوم ... تصرخ ... تترجى الرحمة؟!
كيف استطاع أن يطعنها بأدوات حادة مؤلمة بهذا الشكل؟
كيف لعاقل أن يخطط لجريمة قتل بهذا القبح؟!²⁵¹

How could he beat and beat her as she resisted ... screamed ... begged for mercy?!

How could he stab her with such painfully sharp tools?

How could any sane person plan such a heinous crime?

When her husband wants to kill her, the woman tries to escape, but she stumbles and falls. Her husband then hits her on the head with a stone and pours corrosive acid on her. The husband is described as a policeman who is supposed to protect the nation and the family. He leaves her, injured and in pain, in the middle of the night in a hole that is 25 meters deep. The victim wishes to die instead of suffering from the torture. The husband returns to his house and pretends that his wife ran away. He goes out and

251 <http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011

pretends to search for her, too, and is later interrogated by the police. A search for the victim is depicted and the crime scene is described in detail in words and pictures.²⁵²

The narrator accuses the authorities of not protecting women sufficiently. A description of the crime scene is present in text form and underlined with a picture (cf. p. 37).

هذه الحفرة .. حوافها تحمل بعض الدماء اليابسة ..
بعضها تبدو كمسحة أصابع مليئة بالدماء .. وبعضها تدل على أنها
تطايرت بعد ضربة قوية .. لترسم على الحجر دليلا لمدى الشناعة التي
من الممكن أن يصل لها الإنسان ..
وقريبا من ذلك البئر .. بقعة أو اثنتين .. لمادة اختلطت بالرمل وجفت
.. تبدو صفراء اللون ..
استنتجنا أنها الحمض.²⁵³

This ditch ... its edges have some dried blood

Some spots look like the swipe of bloodied fingers ... and some indicate that they splashed after a severe blow ... to etch on the stone a testimony to how horrible human beings can be ...

Near the well ... lies a stain or two ... of a material that mixed with the sand and dried ... it looks yellow...

We concluded that this was the acid.

The narrator states that it is God who decides on life or death. The story ends with calls to God.

e) An often-redistributed short story from forums is "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver". The earliest example of the story that I found was published in the forum alghat.com on January 3, 2006. It goes like this:

One day three young women need to take a taxi because their car has broken down and the driver is unable to fix it. The same day a guy who owns a taxi but is not actually a taxi driver has the same problem: his car has broken down. So he takes the taxi, which he owns but which is usually used by one of his employed drivers. The girls

²⁵² The role of the pictures in this story is examined in the chapter on participatory culture.

²⁵³ <http://www.adbuae.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-4491.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011.

happen to get into his taxi; he drives them, pretending he is an Indian driver, even trying to talk like an Indian (as shown in chapter one).

One of the girls forgets her phone in the taxi, so the driver and the girl have to meet again. She forgets the phone another time in the taxi, both feel uncomfortable with the situation because by this time the girls already know that the driver is a local and not a real taxi driver. So the phone will be deposited at a local Starbucks.

حميد : هيه

حصة: إذا مافي تعب عليك.. وده الأستار بوكس.. وعطه اللي على الكونتر.. وقوله وحده بتي تأخذه.. وأنا الحين بتصل فيهم.
حميد: إنشاء الله

حصة : شكراً اخويه وأنا أسفه على الإزعاج.²⁵⁴

Hamid: Yes

Hissa: If it is not tiring you ... you can leave it at the Starbucks ... and leave it for me at the counter [using the English word] ... and tell him a girl will pick it up ... and I will call them now.

Hamid: Inshallah

Hissa: Thank you, my brother, and I am sorry for the inconvenience

Some time later they see each other again in a mall. They don't talk to each other, but they look at each other and accidentally touch shoulders on the way out of a shop. Later that day they start communicating via mobile phone. The story has a happy ending and the two come together.

وتصلو أهل حميد بأهل حصة وصار النصيب وتزوجا في نفس الصالة
اللي وصلهم فيها حميد يوم كان راعي التاكسي.²⁵⁵

254 <http://www.alghat.com/archive/index.php/t-614.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011

255 Ibid.

And Hameed's family called Hissa's family and the relatives visited each other and they got married in the same hall in which they met on the day when Hameed was the taxi driver.

f) The following story "My Little One (Child) and the Ant Colony" was posted on the website of the Kuwaiti E-publisher Nashiri.net on February 4, 2010 by Ilaf Alrish and received eleven comments. A short biography underneath the story states that the writer was born in 1985 and studies in Kuwait. The story is introduced as fictional, but the narrator explains her inspiration from a real incident the day before she wrote it. After the introductory paragraph, the actual story begins.

A girl runs to her mother, telling her about the discovery of an ant colony. The mother follows her outside in order to take a look. The daughter's curiosity is presented by showing her counting ants.

شرحت لها بعض المعلومات الصغيرة عن مملكة النمل , ومملكة النمل ,
حاولنا على مريض أن نعد كل نملةٍ تخرج أو تدخل , ولكن خبرة ابنتي
في الأعداد لم تسعفها ! لم تكتفي تلك الفيلسوفة الصغيرة بمعلومات
أمها القليلة , وبدأت تراكم في حجري المزيد والمزيد من الأسئلة التي
لا أملك لها جواباً .²⁵⁶

I explained to her a little about ant colonies and the queen bee. We hopelessly tried to count each ant entering or leaving the colony. However, my daughter's knowledge of counting did not help her much! That little philosopher was not satisfied with her mother's scant information and she began to heap in my lap more and more questions that I do not have an answer to.

Later that day the mother buys a book about ants and reads it to her.

²⁵⁶ <http://nashiri.net/stories/short-stories/4348-2010-02-05-19-54-41.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011.

قبيل النوم , اندست في فراشها الزهري الصغير , واندست بجانبها ,
وَصَعْتُ الكتاب على رجلها وبدأت أقرأ لها , سعيدة كانت بالصور ,
بالمعلومات , وبالكتاب ..²⁵⁷

Before bedtime, she slipped into her little pink bed as I lied besides her. She put the book on her leg as I began to read to her ... she was very happy with the pictures, the information, and the book ...

The story ends with the mother putting the girl to sleep and placing the book on the daughter's bookshelf.

g) The second story from Nashiri.net that I will discuss was first published on September 12, 2011 by Hayat Alyaqut, who also founded the website. The story's title is "And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali (Guardian)". The story received one comment on the website and two additional comments through Facebook.

The story describes a conversation between the foreigner "Rebecca" and the local "Mayy" that the two conduct while Mayy's grandmother paints Rebecca's hands with henna. Rebecca asks Mayy if she feels oppressed to be married off through a guardian. Mayy is not content with this question but answers it. A discussion arises about the differences between men and women. While Mayy points out:

الحب حَظِرٌ جدا على الطرفين، لكن على المرأة أكثر، فالرجل إن أحب
يظل قادرا على الاحتفاظ ببعض عقله. أما المرأة فنظام التشغيل في
المخ لديها يُظهِر شاشة زرقاء كتلك التي تظهر حين يتعطل نظام
"الويندوز" عن العمل. لدينا عاطفة ليست لدى الرجال، ولا أظن أن
رجلا سيحوزها في يوم.²⁵⁸

Love is very dangerous to both, but it is more so for women. If a man falls in love, he continues to be able to maintain at least some of his

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ <http://nashiri.net/stories/short-stories/4945--qq-.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011.

senses, but for women, the operating system in their head shows a blue screen just like the one you see when "Windows" stops working. We have emotions that men don't have and I don't believe men will ever have them.

Mayy emphasises that, also in Rebecca's country, a woman's father walks her down the aisle in the wedding ceremony, which Rebecca shrugs off by saying:

لا، لا. هذا مجرد طقس تقليدي، وهو من بقايا النظام الأبوي حين كان
يسلم الأب ابنته إلى "المالك الجديد"! عُذِّيهِ فولكلورا، أنا عن نفسي
مشيت في الممر منفردة يوم زواجي.²⁵⁹

No, no, this is just a tradition, it is a remnant of the patriarchal system that prevailed when father handed his daughter to the "new owner"! Consider it folklore. As for myself, I will walk down the aisle alone on my wedding day.

The conversation continues about agreements of marriage and perception of women in each culture. Mayy makes a comparison to the animal world:

الرجال لديهم مرونة نفسية عجيبة، قلوبهم لا تنكسر بسرعة مثلنا لهذا
وعلى مدى التاريخ الرجل هو الذي يقدم ضمانات، هو الي يبدي جديته،
هو الذي يسعى وراء المرأة، وهو الذي يدفع المهر ويبدل والنفيس،
حتى في تاريخكم، هو الذي كان يجثو على ركبته حين يتقدم للمرأة.
وهذا ليس على مدى التاريخ البشري وحسب، بل حتى التاريخ
الحيواني.²⁶⁰

Men have an amazing psychological flexibility; their hearts do not

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ <http://nashiri.net/stories/short-stories/4945--qq-.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011.

break fast like ours and, over the course of history, it has been the man who gives guarantees, and he is the one who shows that he is serious and he is the one to run after the woman and he is the one to pay the dowry and all that he owns and he is the one who goes down on his knees when he proposes to a woman. This is not only true of humans, it is also true of animals as well.

Which Rebecca replies to by jokingly saying:

ما دخل الحيوانات في الأمر؟ لا تقولي لي أن الجمل لديكم يتقدم لولي
الناقة التي يحبها قبيل موسم التكاثر؟!²⁶¹

What do the animals have to do with this? Do not tell me that where you come from, a male camel proposes to the guardian of the female camel before mating season?

The conversation continues back and forth. At the end of the story both women agree on similarities in the behaviour of men in both cultures. The story ends with a bonding over the beautification process as Mayy says:

(...) أريدك بعدما أن تغسلي يديك أن تضعي لي - "French Manicure"
كالذي على أظافرك فقد تكشف لي أن العالم صغير، وأن "الناس
كالناس، والأيام واحدة."²⁶²

(...) after you wash your hands, I want you to do a "French manicure" for me just like the one on your nails.

This may make me understand that the world is small and people are people and that the days are the same."

And Rebecca replies

261 Ibid.

262 Ibid.

أجل يا مي، جميع النساء يحببن تزيين أيديهن وإن اختلفت السبل، وإن
اختلفت الأزمنة.²⁶³

Yes, Mayy. All women like to have their fingers painted, even if the ways are different and the times are different.

III.3 Depicting Heroes

Now that examples have been introduced, an examination of the portrayal of heroes can follow. In online short stories and blog posts, heroes' features are described when showing behaviour and thoughts. The degree to which features that are attributed to heroes are intentionally constructed to reflect distinct changes in society, or if their description serves other purposes within the story, is debatable. However, the sources make certain aspects of heroes' characteristics apparent. The focus in this analysis lies on portrayals of the new generation and where they feel they belong in terms of gender, societal norms and taboos, individualization and other factors such as globalisation and local culture. The older generation in the stories is usually described as a contrasting foil to actions by younger heroes. When heroes are portrayed in stories, personality and physical appearance, settings, description of social behaviour, emotions and many other factors come into play. A majority of stories published on blogs seem to portray struggling *male* protagonists; these heroes are not able to overcome obstacles set up by the system. In forums, on the other hand, more often *heroines* take an active role. As will be analysed later, aspects of gender and cultural surrounding are part of heroes' description.

III.3.1 Representation of Individualization and ICT

263 Ibid.

The new generation in the Gulf was brought up completely differently from their parents, who in turn were brought up very differently from their grandparents due to the changes in the economy over the last 60 years.²⁶⁴ These alterations have become topics of online literature. What might be new in the new generation? Which aspects are described as distinct for this generation? Is individualization part of the prescribed characteristics of the new generation and, if so, how is it presented? Connected to this is an increase of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) usage. It may be vital to outline the impact of ICT on an individualization process.

What is apparent after analysing a variety of stories distributed in forums online is the recurrent theme of ICT use.²⁶⁵ In the story "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver", the frequent use of contemporary communication technology is an essential reference to current reality to describe all of the rather young protagonists. A major part of communication between the characters is conducted on mobile phones. This might be due to the setting of the story in Saudi Arabia, where gender segregation is customary, but might also emphasise the importance of ICT for young people.

Individualization is mirrored in ICT usage. That means, the use of ICT is impacting individualization processes in two ways: on the one hand, it enables users to have a private interaction with each other via online media or mobile phones without the knowledge or control of the surrounding society, including friends or family. On the other hand, online media in particular enable users to express themselves, present their ideas and (re)present themselves even in narcissistic ways. Gunilla Bradley (2010) outlines the aspect of a greater individual autonomy from society through ICT.²⁶⁶ Valerie Frissen and Hermineke van Bockxmeer (2010) also emphasise the shift that appears in society when people increasingly use ICT.²⁶⁷ They argue that two processes are happening at the same time: individualization and citizens' involvement. Neither Bradley nor Frissen and van Bockxmeer conducted research in the Gulf, but Bradley included research on Asian countries and argues that this is a global development. An example of embedding terminology connected to ICT is the metaphor used by Mayy in

264 More on changes in development is presented in the introductory chapter, cf. chapter 1.5.

265 Either ICT is part of the communication between actors of the stories, or it is mentioned in a side note that the original story was typed on a mobile phone or notebook.

266 Gunilla Bradley, "The Convergence Theory on ICT, Society and Human Beings", in *tripleC - Cognition, Communication, Co-operation*, Vol 8, No 2, 2010, pp. 183-192 .

267 Valerie Frissen and Hermineke van Bockxmeer, "The Paradox of Individual Commitment. The implications of the Internet for social involvement", in *Communication Strategies*, no. 42, 2nd quarter 2001.

the story "And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali". She compares the loss of a clear mind when a woman falls in love to the crashing of "Windows", which shows a blue screen (cf. p. 121).

Individualization can be seen as part of a development in societies all over the world. A change from a life lived within family structures to a more individually experienced life is the subject of research on many cultures.²⁶⁸ It can be seen as part of a development of recent generations in general. As individualization is taking an increasing position in societal discourses, it is interesting to ask about the degree to which individualization is a subject of literary texts in the Gulf.

To this end, "individualization" first needs to be defined. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2001),

"(...) individualization consists in transforming human identity from a given into a task – and charging the actors with the responsibility of performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance (...)"²⁶⁹

So individualization is strongly related to the emancipation of an individual. Individualization is usually seen in opposition to collectivism. That means that, in order to scan literature for expressions of emancipation, we need to ascertain the degree to which protagonists act within collective societal limits, or the degree to which emancipation processes are depicted within the texts. Hazim Saghie edited a collection of articles on individualization, "The Predicament of the Individual in the Middle East" (2000), that claims that no real individualization process has happened so far.²⁷⁰ The work is from the time before uprisings have taken place in Arab countries and some of the ideas might be challenged after recent events. The European Science Foundation

268 Examples for this trend can be seen in publications as *Sticking Together or Falling Apart: Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization* (2010) by Paul de Beer and Ferry Koster; *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (2010) by Yunxiang Yan; *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (2002) by Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim; *Paradoxes of Individualization* (2011) by Dick Houtman, Willem de Koster and Stef Aupers, just to mention a selection of works that all deal with same ideas.

269 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*, Cambridge 2000, p. 31 f.

270 Hazim Saghie, *The Predicament of the Individual in the Middle East*, London 2000.

hosted a project on the subject of "Individual and Society in the Mediterranean Muslim World" from 1996 to 2001 where it was dealt with many aspects of the subject.²⁷¹

Stephan Guth (2007) highlights some changes that can be observed in the representation of identity in late 20th century Arabic and Turkish literature. He states that in these printed texts, which some ascribe to a period they call "postmodernism", "real individuality [...] consists in an acceptance of your *un*individuality, a *fragmented self* made up of *multiple identities*";²⁷² he continues:

"Accepting yourself as a composite being, however, frees you from the burden of having to search for a fixed and definite identity and of committing yourself to the tight and almost strangling corset of an ideologically prefabricated self. With the freedom you gain by accepting yourself as a composite being you also gain fun, because only now will you be able to live life truly and wholly, with all its fascinating aspects, no more having to suppress any of the elements of your self, of whatever origin they may be."²⁷³

These observations are made about texts from Arabic and Turkish literature from the period immediately preceding the one this thesis deals with. A lot of my text sources do not show the same characteristics as the novels that Guth analysed.

The story "Your nose belongs to you, so what?" (see (c) above, p. 79) is a good example of part of the way individualization processes are represented in my text sources. The protagonist is stuck in her own subjective perception of what is going on around and with her. Not even when the outside world effects a change of her physical appearance, namely altering her nose, does it reach her "inside". Additionally, the protagonist seems to be left alone with her thoughts. Minor characters of the story, like her father, the other student and the staff of the clinic, do not interact with her in depth. She does not seem to be embedded in social surroundings such as a family or a circle of

271 More on this can be found on the website of the project <http://www.esf.org/activities/research-networking-programmes/humanities-sch/completed-rnp-programmes-in-humanities/individual-and-society-in-the-mediterranean-muslim-world.html>, last accessed January 19, 2011.

272 Stephan Guth, "Individuality lost, fun gained. Some recurrent motifs in late twentieth century Arabic and Turkish novels", in *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Volume 7, Number 1, 2007, pp. 25-49, p. 32.

273 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

friends. The protagonist is part of a family, but she appears to be left alone. On the other hand, she does not separate herself from the society, either. In fact she tries to blend in and to fit the standards of beauty of her surroundings to avoid attracting attention. Her wish to assimilate even goes to the point of covering her face with a *niqāb* to hide her "ugliness". This story might also reveal notions of heroes' portrayal in a post-postmodern form. The character, unlike the postmodern understanding of a hero, strives to be like everybody else, instead of wanting to be different from the mainstream. The main character has internalised societal norms and values, and she desires to fit in. It may be possible to see a process of individualisation in this short story in the main character's self-acceptance towards the end of the plot. This means that, in the end, the heroine accepts her individuality as it is narrated "Your nose belongs to you, so what?". Of course, this individualised self is accepted after it becomes apparent that even a physical change of the nose cannot change her view of herself. The heroine's struggle and the process of accepting her nose mark the process of individualization as painful; she does not appear to be completely free of internalized social norms. However, this story may be interpreted as presenting a change in paradigm and might serve as a metaphor for a blueprint of a change in society to make it more self-accepting.

The story "Fantasy World" (see (a) above, p. 76) could also be seen as an example of making individualization part of the discourse in online literary text. The narrator reflects on the society he lives in as "We are a diverse society in everything", which highlights room for a variety of individualized ways of living. The narrator is usually stuck in his imagination but clearly sees differences in society.

Many of the stories posted in forums and blogs describe individualized characters. Often there seems to be no connection to the family. The family might be mentioned in a side note or in their function of restricting certain actions of the protagonists, but most often the characters lead their lives quite independently and individually. Still, the opposite is shown in the story "What shall we eat?" (b), in which the main character is still trapped in a hierarchically organized family system with no choice of his own to find happiness by marrying the woman he loves. This story is about a quest for individuality that the protagonist is not strong enough to achieve. He wishes to follow his own desires, such as marrying the girl he wants, but then is trapped by family claims on his marital life.

The examples that were discussed earlier describe an alienation of protagonists from the established system of norms and values. Breaking with the system is shown in actions like changing one's appearance or protesting circumstances and norms like those in the story about the young women being killed by her husband. These examples make it evident that there are various forms of representation of individualization in online literary text. Portrayals of heroes formed through generational conflict are shown presenting challenges to the family collective. Other discourses visible in the sources may shed light on the depiction of individualization. In the following sub-chapter, the portrayal of gender roles will be examined.

III.3.2 New Gender Roles – Some Examples

Individualization might also be seen in connection with a portrayal of gender roles in a process of change; gender roles can be altered and new ideals or definitions can be imagined. Since gender representation differs in its forms, I will discuss this topic in two sections. First, I will introduce the representation of heroines and second the portrayal of heroes. Womanhood is portrayed in a variety of forms, for example, in the context of gender segregation, of differences in social interaction, or within cultural contexts.²⁷⁴

Valentine M. Moghadam (2003) makes clear that it makes no sense to speak of “the” Arab woman, but that obviously women differ not only in their societal and economical surroundings but also individually. She emphasises that women in Morocco and Saudi Arabia might have little in common when it comes to their position in society and responsibilities within their cultural context. Moghadam agrees that there is some overlapping “in cultural conceptions of gender in Morocco and Saudi Arabia”, but she underlines “profound dissimilarities”.²⁷⁵ It is thus difficult to apply general research on women in the Middle East to countries that are not included in studies. During the last

274 Nawar Al-Hassan Golley and Miriam Cooke's *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing* (2007) studied the literary representation of women. Within the examination of autobiographical writing by female authors boundaries in self-representation become apparent.

275 Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Boulder 2003, p. 10.

few decades, a number of researchers have tried to study the particular role of women in Gulf countries, for example Soraya Altorki with *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite* (1988), Haya al-Mughni with *Women in Kuwait* (2000) and Helen M. Rizzo with *Islam, Democracy and the Status of Women: The Case of Kuwait* (2008). These works are valuable from an anthropological perspective but may not be applied to literary texts.

In the following, some examples from the sources introduced above will illustrate the depiction of femininity in literary texts.²⁷⁶ (For masculinity see p. 133.)

In the story "My Little One and the Ant Colony" (cf. above, p. 119), quite a traditional model is presented. Mother and daughter are portrayed as having a good relationship. The mother takes care of her child and provides her with knowledge. The mother's role is to educate her daughter and take her to her "little pink bed" in the evening. Femininity seems to be clearly defined, although no male character is part of the plot. Male protagonists are not necessary for creating a contrast because gender roles are established in societal discourses outside the literary context. However, features are clearly assigned to mother and daughter within the role they take in the story. Adding symbolism through the choice of colour is just an addition to underline presented stereotypical roles.

The story "What shall we eat?" identifies two different kinds of young women. On the one hand there is the beloved whom the protagonist intends to marry but is not allowed to because of the decisions his father made. She is characterized as being analytical, strong and dominant in her nature. Still, her appearance is depicted as feminine with beautiful black hair, conforming to rather conventional norms of female beauty:

276 Sabry Hafez developed a terminology for evaluating gender roles in modern Arabic literature. Hafez analyses a variety of novels written by female authors and divides his examination into the categories feminine, feminist, and female which he sees in corresponding with the development of national identity. He finds it necessary to develop a classification system of Arabic literature written by women because their work should not be studied with expectations applied to literature written by men. His way of analysing literary text written by women is valuable in it self but will not be applied in my examination as online literature is varying from his sources. Sabry Hafez, "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology", in Roger Allen et al. (eds.), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, London 1995, pp. 154-74.

كانت نحيفة جداً وطويلة، شعرها أسود فاحم يسترسل على كتفيها بأهمال متقن، غالباً ما ترتدي الجينز والتي شيرت بطريقة عملية وأنيقة، عينيها ضيقة وتكاد تختفي عندما تضحك، أنفها صغير وشفاهها مكنتزة ومغرية، وجهها دائري جميل وبشرتها تميل إلى السمارة.²⁷⁷

She was very slim and tall, her black hair falling on her shoulders with perfected negligence; most often she wore jeans and T-shirt in a sporty and elegant way. She had narrow eyes that almost disappeared when she laughed, with a small nose and full sexy lips and a beautiful round face and brown complexion.

On the other hand, the brief portrayal of his actual wife is much shorter than the above description, because this woman is not the object of his desire. She is depicted as a decent wife whose features are obedience and physical attraction.

تراجعت درجات العذاب قليلاً بعد الزواج فالفتاة التي اقترنت بها كانت جميلة فعلاً ومطبعة، كنت أكن لها كل الاحترام والتقدير لكنها فتاة أخرى، رقم من جملة الأرقام الملتصقة بالناس. فقط أولئك الغير موصومين بالأرقام بإمكانهم أن يوصلونا إلى غاياتنا المرجوة.²⁷⁸

The severity of the suffering eased a little after the marriage, as the girl I married was indeed beautiful and obedient. I had a great deal of respect and appreciation for her, but she was another girl, just another number. Only those who are not marked with numbers can lead us to our desired goals.

It is clear that the more independent and strong female character is the one who is more attractive to the protagonist. It appears that ideals of traditional womanhood are challenged in the representation, as there is a discrepancy between the hero's desires and actions, on the one hand, and the portrayal of society, on the other. As the narration

²⁷⁷ Blogs-post from May 25th 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_25.html , last accessed November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog-post again in December 28, 2011 it was deleted.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

of the story "What shall we eat?" suggests, a strong, independent and attractive woman is more desirable than a woman who obeys. However, the narrator seems to criticise social norms, hence the sadness, or even "suffering" ('*adhāb*), of the protagonist living under circumstances that did not lead him to find love. The protagonist does not initiate further steps of independence.

By criticising norms, the story may lead the audience to feel that injustice has happened and a change of norms is necessary. This may also be seen as a parallel to *nahḍa* literature that emphasises the importance of change within society. This is often reached by presenting emotional conflicts. One example for this can be found in the "first" Egyptian (national) novel *Zaynab* (1913). The author M. Ḥ. Haykal illustrates a love story that shows conflicts related to class. The heroine here is not allowed to engage with a farmer but instead is married off to the neighbour.

The story "Your nose belongs to you, so what?" presents a weak female character who used to suffer from a lack of self-confidence. Beauty is a major focus in this story, in which the protagonist reacts to the beauty standards of the outside world by rejecting her own appearance. The main character in this story wears a *niqāb* not for cultural or religious reasons, but as a cover for her perceived lack of beauty. Beauty standards are set by fellow students and by TV presenters and magazines. This story not only focuses on the loneliness of the protagonist, but also criticises the obsession with beauty and distinct standards of beauty that are forced on women by the media and society. However, at the end of the story, the perspective of the heroine changes and she accepts herself. That means a process of maturity is outlined in order to suggest a decent role model to the readers.

The heroine of "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well" is depicted in the very first paragraph of the story as a young woman of good morals and a virgin. She is an innocent victim who is weak and in pain. Her suffering is caused by male domination and violence. Her physical condition makes it impossible for her to fight back or have an active role in the story. Oppression in its most brutal form is shown in this story. This can be also seen as taking up typical themes from *nahḍa* literature. Authors such as al-Manfalūṭī or Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān depicted the brutal destruction of heroes by the authorities.²⁷⁹

279 Stephan Guth, "fa-ḡrawraqat 'uyūnuhum bi-d-dumū'. Some notes on the flood of tears in early modern Arabic prose literature", in: Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska (eds.), *Encounters of Words and Texts. Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday, March 2, 1997, Presented by His Pupils in Bonn, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 1997*, pp. 111-123.

Even though the heroine is victimized, the story itself is told in a manner that condemns violence and abuse. No new ideal of women is formed, but the story functions as a moral appeal. The readership is encouraged to condemn the brutal actions. The vast number of redistributions of and comments on the story, which are discussed in the chapter on participatory culture (see above, p. 91), suggests that this story inspires discussions of such incidents.

A completely different representation of female characters is found in the story "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver". All of the female characters here are rather independent, funny, chatty, witty and proactive. Short stories posted in forums often feature eloquence and wit. This can be compared to depictions of female protagonists in *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*. Here heroines are portrayed as witty and funny as well as being independently acting women who take the initiative.

These young women are described as living between their own curiosity and outgoingness, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, wanting to protect their reputation. This is apparent in the change in communication with the driver as soon as they realize that he is a local, and also in other parts of the story where the three young women do not want to be seen leaving a taxi. On the one hand, they make their own choice to reach their desired destination by any means, including taking a taxi. On the other hand, taking a taxi it is not generally considered appropriate or in compliance with societal standards. The author seems to intend to uncover a form of mild rebellion within social behaviour of female protagonists. This is described in a positive way of narrating actions taken by heroines. It appears that a general tendency towards female empowerment is approved and presented as something that should be strived for in order to reach happiness. Inner conflicts are illustrated, but breaking with conventions, are depicted as something that are worth doing as they leads to finding love.

A similar description of heroines can also be seen in the new ideal of woman outlined above in the example of "What shall we eat?" within the description of the desired colleague.

A brief examination of the examples shows that there is not only a single typical form of representation of femininity in online literary texts from the Gulf. As could be observed, a wide variety of female portrayals are represented. Heroines can be weak or strong, attractive or not, witty, chatty or silenced as victims.

Now that the portrayal of female characters has been briefly outlined, I will examine the representation of **male protagonists** in short stories and blog posts. Like

femininity, masculinity too can be represented in many ways. Online literary text from the Gulf displays a variety of descriptions of male emotions.

In his article "Mohamed 'El-Limby' Saad and the popularization of a masculine code" (2011), Koen van Eynde describes changing ways of presenting masculinity in Egyptian cinema. Paul Amar approaches the subject from a meta-perspective when he discusses the perception of masculinity in a variety of Arab countries in his article "Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourse of 'Men in Crises', Industries of Gender in Revolution" (2011). Mai Ghassoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb edited a collection of articles on *Imagined Masculinities* in 2006 that highlights aspects of fear, body hair, homosexuality in the military and other subjects. The problem with contextualising representations of masculinity in the Gulf is that not much research has been done on the field and even less when it comes to literature. Research on masculinity is very limited even in other Arab countries, and it is unfortunately not really applicable to the Gulf. Culture and tradition in Egypt and Gulf countries are dissimilar, and even within the Gulf countries it is not possible to talk about one homogeneous culture. Examples of a more popular way of examining masculinity in the Gulf can be found in newspaper essays. Yousra Samir highlights the cultural distinctiveness of "Kashkha" in her brief article on *qatarvisitor.com*, where she outlines the importance of grooming for men in Gulf society, whose intensity differs from that of masculine grooming in Europe or North America.²⁸⁰ Ali A. Al-Tarrach outlines perspectives on masculinity in Kuwait in his article "Socialization and Masculinity Values in Kuwaiti Society".²⁸¹

The following analysis of stories outlined above provides examples of representations of masculinity in online literary texts.

"And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali" presents traditional male roles. Although men are not active characters in the story they are subject of the conversation. Stereotypical descriptions take a considerable part within the short story. Men act more rationally than women and therefore appear stronger.

المرأة إذا أحببت نسيت كل شيء، أما الرجل، فإن عمله ونجاحه في

280 Yousra Samir, "A Qatari Man and His Kashkha",

<http://www.qatarvisitor.com/index.php?ID=412&pID=1639>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

281 Ali A. Al-Tarrach, "Socialization and Masculinity Values in Kuwaiti Society"

<http://pubcouncil.kuniv.edu.kw/jss/english/showarticle.asp?id=760>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

المقام الأول، ثم وضعه المادي، ثم حياته الاجتماعية، ثم، ثم، ثم، ثم، ثم تأتي الحبيبة في مرتبة ما، قد ترتفع أو تصعد قليلا. نعم هناك رجال نادرون إذا عشقوا، فهم يعشقون بضمير، لكنهم قلة ولا تنال رجلا كهذا إلا ذات حظ عظيم. أما الغالبية من الرجال فلهم أولويات أخرى قبلنا، ولهذا كثيرا ما نقول نحن النساء عن الرجل أنهم أنانيون، لأننا نتوقع منهم أن يضعونا في المقام الأول، وللأسف نادرا ما يفعلون، لكن هكذا خلقهم الله، وخير لنا أن نفهمهم بدلا من محاولة تغييرهم.²⁸²

If a woman falls in love, she will forget everything else. But for men, work and success are their number one priority, followed by their financial status, then their social life, then, then, then, then their love comes to occupy one position or the other and her status will move up or down a little. Yes, there are rare men who, when in love, do so with their conscience, but they are few and only a lucky woman gets to win one of those. For the most part, men have other priorities before us, and that is why we women often say about men that they are selfish, because we expect them to make us their priority, and unfortunately, they rarely do ... this is how God created them and it is better for us to understand them than to attempt to change them.

Gender differences here are described as God-given and as something that should not be changed.

As already suggested in the section on differences between generations, "What shall we eat?" presents two male characters who are unlike. The son is weak and does not stand up for himself; he is non-confrontational because he fears consequences. On the other hand, the father is strong and dominating.

والدي القبلي المتشدد، كبير الأسرة ، ذو الكلمة النافذة والسلطة
المطلقة على الجميع.²⁸³

282 The word الرجل may intended to be plural. <http://nashiri.net/stories/short-stories/4945--qq-.html>, last accessed December 28, 2011.

283 Blogs-post from May 25th 2011, http://7osen-man.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_25.html, last accessed November 22, 2011. When I wanted to access the blog-post again in December 28, 2011 it was deleted.

My father, the tribal and strict one, is the head of the household/family and his commands are orders and he has absolute power over everyone.

Given the fact that the father in the story's structure is assigned the role of the opponent, it seems that this portrait aims to emphasise a change of representation of male identity. It can also be argued that this is a representation of the "in-between", because the son is trying to fight back, though he is not able to. Another challenge for the hero is the struggle with himself, knowing his role as not to oppose and not take initiative in form of rebellion against the patriarchal system.

شعرت بعد هذه الاحداث بالمهانة لكنني لم أحرك ساكنا، صحيح إنه لم يتغير شيء في عالمي ، فأنا أقوم بخدمة ضيوف والدي كل يوم في "الديوانية" على أكمل وجه.²⁸⁴

After all these events, I felt humiliated but I did not lift a finger. It is true that nothing in my world changed, since I served my father's guests every day at the "guest house" perfectly well.

The rejection of old role models seems to be based on general humanistic ideals and the condemnation of physical violence and other injustices, for example the denial of permission to marry the desired partner, in order to comply with common norms and traditional values. Descriptions appear to promote the values of finding individual fulfilment without exploring why norms and values are as they are in society; nor is there a direct attack on these norms. Rather, it appears that the readership is expected to have internalised a common understanding of justice.

It appears that writers want to trigger emotions in the readers to make them understand specific societal situations, leading the reader to feel with the stories' victims or heroes and making them feel that change is needed. This is a form of narration that makes readers draw their own conclusions instead of accepting the writer's prefabricated conclusions. Still, this strategy motivating readers is intended to

284 Ibid.

suggest the conclusions the writers expect. As mentioned above this stylistic feature of using emotions for sending the message of a necessary change was already applied in earlier literature that appeared in the *nahḍa*.

Both stories on 7osen-man's blog present male characters who are emotional, and both characters feel tears coming at some point in the story. Emotions are presented as rather natural. The hero is not ridiculed for his expression of feelings, instead it appears that his sensibility is underlined. This kind of sensibility is also presented in literature from the *nahḍa* as well as in the Saudi novel *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*. It is always connected positively and often described in details of love stories.

Another example of the description of masculinity can be found in the story "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well". Here, the male character is portrayed as a cruel aggressor who is nothing but violent. His cruelty and brutality are described in detail in torture scenes. Brutal depiction implies rejection of this behaviour and advocacy of humane treatment. Two features are ascribed to the male protagonist that would seem to make him a protector: his job as a police officer and his other role as a husband. Both roles are usually supposed to be filled by caregivers. In this story, however, the protagonist does the opposite of what is expected of him, torturing his wife with the consequence that she dies from his violent acts. Male oppression of women is presented to the fullest extent in this short story.

A different kind of masculinity is presented in the story "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver". Here, the male character is demasculinized when the young women assume that he is an Indian driver. He is not seen as a man, as can be observed in the way the young female characters talk to him. So here it seems that because of his ethnic identity an individual is not seen in terms of his gender. Additionally, it is mentioned that they did not wear their veils properly in the car. Later in the story, the male protagonist becomes more active and when it is discovered that he is a local, he also receives his masculinity back. At this point I will not further discuss the role of social class and ethnic belonging, but in this particular story class code overrules gender code.

Although the above examples are too few as to cover the variety of literature distributed online, I think that they nevertheless can be regarded as typical of the attitudes towards masculinity as encountered in the texts analysed in the present study. A variety of male characters are depicted in the stories. Some seem strong and dominant; others are weak and negotiate their identity with themselves. It is also

important to highlight that most of the selected stories are written by female authors or authors that present themselves as female. This might also have had an influence on the depiction of male characters.

III.3.3 Narration of Gender and the Normativity of Traditions

Taboos and norms are often part of the discourses in online literature. They are related to gender or generational issues but also to traditional values. The story "And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali" portrays conservative views on traditions, as can be grasped in the following example:

ثم ألا تتفقين معي أنه نادرا ما تجدين رجلا لا يتنصل من المسؤولية. لا
يد من ضمانات، وأفضل من يجس نبض الرجل ويتأكد من جديته رجل
مثله، هم أعلم بأبناء جنسهم.²⁸⁵

Also, don't you agree with me that it is rare to find a man who does not evade responsibility? There must be guarantees and the best person to sense a man's seriousness is another man like himself, they know each other best.

In this part of the short story stereotypical characteristics of men are described. The protagonist Mayy explains why a guardian is necessary in order to help selecting a future husband. As she states, men know men best and that is the reason why it is more helpful to let somebody responsible find a partner for life. Mayy tries to explain her own perspective and rationalises the function of a guardian. She stresses that women do not have the same opportunities to judge if a man is good or not. In order to guarantee the best choice of husband he must be picked by a guardian.

In the story "Ḥiṣṣa and the Taxi Driver", inappropriate contact between men and women is best exemplified in the scene in which the "taxi driver" and the young woman meet in the mall by chance and coincidentally touch shoulders on the way out of a shop, thereby coming to feel closer to each other. This description is part of the end of the story shortly before it is clear that the two protagonists will get married. In order

²⁸⁵ <http://www.nashiri.net/stories/short-stories/4945--qq-.html>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

to understand this scene it may be valuable to highlight that coincidental touching of shoulders is not common in gender segregated societies. It may be seen as if an erotic tension is built up in this illustration. In context of traditions and customs this can be seen as an inappropriate situation. That means with depicting the contact challenges the norm.

The story "What shall we eat?" presents norms. The need to maintain the family's reputation and to comply with social norms leads to the protagonist's sadness at not being allowed to marry the woman he loves. Social norms here are the need to get married to somebody socially appropriate. The protagonist agrees with these norms and traditions and does not challenge them. However, it becomes apparent that he regrets his decision of not acting on his desires.

When breaking down criticism of societal norms in online literary text from the Gulf, a majority of the texts deal with issues of love, such as the struggles to communicate or to see each other.²⁸⁶ Many stories describe how two lovers want to get married but cannot because of obstacles society puts in their way. The problem of being handicapped in pursuing a love relationship because of traditions and norms is also subject of *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*.

The online literature from the region does not paint a homogeneous picture of men or women. Gender roles are part of the stories, but all kinds of normative gender identities are presented. The context here is generally heterosexual. In mainstream blogs and forums, homosexuality does not appear in the stories. This does not mean that it is not present at all – there are niches for dealing with this subject – but mainstream online literary distribution does not pick up the subject of homosexuality. By mainstream online literature I mean stories on forums and blogs that seem to represent mainstream norms and are read by a larger audience. I have not looked into niche blogs that might deal with non-mainstream subjects. Gender is one aspect of how protagonists' identities are marked, but it is not the only one. Another perspective on heroes – criticism of social norms, among which also those that are connected to global influences – will be discussed in the following.

286 This is especially observable in a number of short stories published in forums.

III.4 Criticism of Social Norms

Criticism of social norms in online literary text should be viewed in its political and cultural context. It is also necessary to examine whether criticism of social norms is actually part of a literary text or if it is rather presented in essays and commentary form.

In my selection of stories, criticism appears in relation to issues such as restrictive societal conventions, expatriate workers, and the relationship between women and men. Depending on the platform of distribution and the individual writer, criticism in forums is often not a direct attack on societal values and in this way also reproduces and reinforces societal discourses. On the other hand, blogs present explicit criticism of societal problems. Criticising social norms is strongly connected to forming and representing identity in online literary text from the Gulf because protagonists always situate themselves within and against these norms. The texts challenge the protagonists' perception of themselves and others.

All of the examples introduced above seem to criticise or at least address society and norms, so the reader can form an opinion and position himself in relation to them. Among them, the stories presented by Nashiri illustrate rather conservative views, while in "What shall we eat?" the critique of a patriarchal system is direct and straightforward. There, the consequences of this patriarchal system are portrayed as obstructing the individual's happiness.

In the story "Hışsa and the Taxi driver" all freedoms that the young women take for themselves show their independence. However, steps that are taken are always in accordance with the aim of protecting the women's reputation. Boundaries are crossed but within the limits of a normative understanding of how an honourable woman should behave.

One recurring theme in online literary text from the Gulf is the vast change in the region wrought by globalisation. A dichotomy between social norms and new global influences is part of the representation of identity in many ways, for example in the choice of settings, language and portrayal of the hero.

The tension between globalisation and local or national heritage is part of a wider framework of topics studied by many researchers, so this field might reveal much about the contemporary Gulf.²⁸⁷

287 Cf., e.g., Clement Moore Henry and Robert Springborg (2010); Bassel F. Salloukh and Rex Brynen (2004); David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen (2011).

One way of connecting heritage and contemporary developments is poetry. All over the Gulf, poetry is a popular form of culture on TV and radio, at public events and in written form. Usually the style of this kind of poetry is traditional and local. Nismah Ismail Nawwab (2008) attempts to show "how poems evolve with the rendering of societal and political factors".²⁸⁸ She states that, for example, in Saudi Arabian poetry, themes of societal discourses are prominent (p.86). Recent poems, she states, "capture life in present-day Arabia" (p.92).

"My journey into poetry, in particular, is an example of how much the society – be it the local Saudi or the ever-wider and closer global community – is reflected in the themes, evolutions, styles and voice of the poems,"²⁸⁹ Nawwab says. This means that traditional forms of literary production deal with contemporary issues and themes. This integration of traditional poetry in the media and its reflection of contemporary issues is a fusion of contemporary developments, on the one hand, and reviving or maintaining the heritage, on the other. Another form of fusing the culture of the past with the present is the transmission of stories in the form of storytelling. This is discussed in greater detail in the Chapter One (see above, p. 53 f.).

Local culture and heritage impact representation of identity, and are in turn affected by global impacts. Partly this has already been dealt with in the chapter "Visual Set-Up and Features of Narration", where global influences on language have been documented. Globalisation influences the use of language, but also a variety of other aspects. According to Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi (2007), that global impact can be found in the authors' work in the way they envision new perspectives on the current situation. Print and online media and works of imagination such as plots and design can be embedded in a global frame while producing a local feeling within the text, thereby presenting a local perspective on global issues.²⁹⁰ Aside from language, global impacts on stories can be found in the descriptions of settings, brands or the presence of foreign labour, for example.

In the Gulf, globalisation is much more visible in everyday life than in many other places of the world. The presence of expatriate workers alone, who usually form the majority of the population in Gulf states, means that people from a wide variety of

288 Nismah Ismail Nawwab, "The Social and Political Elements that Drive the Poetic Journey", in Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (eds.), *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, London 2008, pp. 85-96.

289 Ibid., p 86.

290 Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi, *Literary intermediality: the transit of literature through the media circuit* Bruxelles / Bern / Berlin / Frankfurt am Main / New York / Oxford / Wien 2007, p. 248.

nationalities live in just one country. In some cities, the percentage of expatriates is very high: Dubai's population, for instance, is 90 per cent foreigners and only 10 per cent locals.²⁹¹ To put this into perspective, Oslo has 28 per cent foreign passport holders and 72 per cent locals.²⁹² In New York City, 36% of the residents are foreign-born.²⁹³ Of course it is easier to get Norwegian citizenship than an Emirati passport, but the proportions are clear. The presence of many different nationalities in public spaces is therefore much more striking and immediately manifests the effects of a global economy.

Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Mohammed al-Mutawa, John W. Fox and Tim Walters' article "Media as Social Matrix in the United Arab Emirates" (2008) deals with young people's approaches to media use in the UAE. They state that the "new generation" of locals has more in common with each other around the world than with their parents' or grandparents' local generation.²⁹⁴ This is especially true when it comes to popular culture, but also in the use of interactive communication devices. This is a superficial bond between a global youth and represents just one layer of identity. Regional cultural differences are still present and relevant for everyday life. These values do not disappear, but stay visible in regional and global culture. Even if popular culture and ICT are connecting factors for youth worldwide, it is apparent that the use of ICT is culturally influenced and distinct in its context. Mourtada-Sabbah et al. clarify that the young generation understands ICT differently than their parents' generation understands the same technologies, because digital media were not available when the latter were young and they could not grow up as "digital natives". ICT creates a social matrix for young people. This is mirrored in the use of online forums, chat rooms, social networks and other interactive online media, as well as the widespread use of mobile phones.²⁹⁵ The sense of collective memory also differs between these generations.

The influences of globalization are a regular component in the stories. Globalization is not criticised as an attack, but rather described and reflected upon. Fast

291 David Rosenberg, *UAE's expat population surges to reach almost 90 percent*, April 3rd 2011, <http://arabnews.com/middleeast/article342321.ece>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

292 "Many new European immigrants", http://www.ssb.no/innvbef_en/, last accessed January 16, 2012.

293 "Population. The Newest New Yorkers", http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nny_exec_sum.shtml, last accessed January 16, 2012.

294 Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, Mohammed al-Mutawa, John W. Fox and Tim Walters, "Media as Social Matrix in the United Arab Emirates", in Alanoud Alsharekh, Robert Springborg and Sarah Stewart (eds.), *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, London 2008, pp. 121-142, p. 126.

food chains like “Hot Burger” and “Starbucks”, as settings for the story, are landmarks of globalization.²⁹⁶

The frequent appearance of ex-pat labourers as characters in the stories also highlights globalization. In "Hışsa and the Taxi Driver", the taxi driver is supposed to be from India. As mentioned earlier, class code trumps gender code in the story. The form of communication between the girls and the male protagonist changes as soon as it becomes clear that he is local. Even though the setting of the story includes global cultural dimensions such as the local Starbucks, the essence of the story is deeply rooted in traditional norms.

The story "Fantasy World" is partly set in a cinema called "Avenues", and the main characters' friend eats "M&M's" and "nachos". They watch a romantic comedy and the narrator lets his audience know that he is fond of change in society. These details are not necessary for understanding the complete plot, but they emphasise the globalized dimensions of everyday culture. The same setting might have been described in short stories from Asia, Europe or other parts of the world. The distinctiveness of Gulf culture can be seen in "And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali". Cultural differences are presented in the form of a dialogue between two women with different cultural backgrounds. While Mayy tries to explain the benefits of her culture and traditions, she justifies the current situation; her grandmother, on the other hand, does not participate in the conversation, but remains mostly silent. She embodies heritage by applying henna to the foreigner's hands. The foreigner Rebecca challenges the narrator Mayy with her questions, and the tone of her voice is characterized as biased in her judgement of cultural differences. However, at the end of the story the two women agree that they still have things in common, saying that "people are people" and "all women like to have their fingers painted".

The connection between the heroes' portrayal and globalisation is made in details. Representations of globalisation can be found all over the world, materialised in venues and products. The short stories analysed here mirror these developments.

Valentine M. Moghadam states that social change and development "come about principally through technological advancements, class conflict, and political action" and are "located within and subject to the influences of a national class structure, a

295 Ibid.

296 In the short story "And Rebecca Asks Me About the Wali" the technical term "French Manicure" is used and not transliterated into Arabic. Another example can be found in the short story "British Airways". The name of the company as well as the term "economy class" are used in English. <http://www.alabudaiah.com/vb/showthread.php?p=17807>, last accessed January 26, 2012.

regional context, and a global system of states and markets".²⁹⁷

The terms and setting mentioned here are superficial indicators of a general opening to the global economy and a natural understanding as a part of ordinary social life. Embedding global influences in short literary texts helps to define identity in its context of a globalized society. Here, identity is not represented by gender roles or social norms but within an understanding of changes in the local infrastructure. This enhances the understanding of the self in contemporary times, no longer restricted to a self-image conveyed by literary culture from earlier times, as it was set in Bedouin life and the poetry of the desert.

III.5 Conclusion

As this is a first study of literary texts posted in forums and blogs of the Gulf texts are merely cautiously interpreted because this emerging cultural expression needs more examination from a wider variety of perspectives. Therefore examples were rather tentatively interpreted and described in order to avoid premature judgement. In further research on this field indepth interpretation can be approached.

However, these text examples and their analysis show that a variety of factors influence identity representation in online literary texts from the Gulf.

It can be observed that heroes portrayed in forums differ from those depicted in blog posts: change is desired in many stories on blogs, and change is approached in stories on forums. In these stories, individualization can be interpreted as a way of finding one's own position in self-acceptance. The stories posted on the e-publisher's website are more conservative than those on blogs and forums.

In blogs and forums, it appears that there is a desire to get rid of old ideas and create new ones. This new ideal and the struggle for it meet resistance in the form of traditions and established norms. Pro-activeness serves as an ideal type of acting in society but is seldom actualized. In some of the stories, protagonists begin to take the initiative for change, but are unable to carry through.

297 Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Boulder 2003, p. 2.

The representation of gender is part of the literary text. There is no homogeneous representation of womanhood. Female identities differ in various ways. Tendencies towards a preference of stronger, active female protagonists can be observed in some of the stories, but other forms of female identity – weak characters – are also present. The general tendency is towards an ideal of a "new woman".

The representation of male heroes is also an important part of short stories from the region. Male characters are sometimes presented as vulnerable and indecisive, showing their emotions. On the other hand, strong characters are also presented. These could be a violent husband or powerful father figure who control their families.

In stories like "What shall we eat?" or "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well" a male character has the role of the villain. This male character embodies stereotypical masculine features such as physical and emotional strength. Villains oppress heroes in these stories and harm them mentally or physically. The hero is depicted in contrast. In "What shall we eat?", a sensitive young man is in love and shows his emotions, expressed through sadness and tears. In "How was she killed? The complete story of an Emirati woman who was found dead in a well", the heroine or victim is described as innocent and pure with a good reputation in society. Readers here may sympathize with the emotional and pure heroines who struggle against oppression and abuse. In "Your nose belongs to you, so what?", the heroine is exposed to a society that takes the evil role, making her feel forced to adopt beauty standards. The heroine struggles with this impact and her emotions and fears are portrayed in opposition to societal forces. These stories are easily comprehensible for the reader, because the roles of the protagonists are clearly presented and it is not difficult to choose a figure to sympathise with.

The sources show a heterogeneous society described in a variety of texts and that heroes portrayal is bound to multiple factors. Societal discourses are picked up and embedded in all of the blog posts and stories posted in forums.

Social norms and globalization are both part of identity representation in online literary text. Global influences are represented in settings and culture. Social norms influence identity representation as much as globalisation does, since both impact a new way of living.

IV. Constraints and Challenges of Online Distribution

The following chapter examines the context of literary production distributed in digital media. Aspects of this chapter are connected to an earlier examination of participatory culture as well as to perspectives of identity representation, especially their consideration of anonymity, intellectual property and re-postings of stories. Constraints and challenges are contextualising factors that impact literary expression. As my examination is a first attempt to capture the cultural phenomenon from a variety of perspectives it is necessary to include this aspect.

Two major challenges that online literature production confronts are, first, autocratic forces affecting authors and literary text online and away from the screen (offline), and second, the authors' dealings with copying (reproduction) of intellectual property and the repostings of stories. In order to understand the intensity of the usage of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the Gulf, patterns of use will be briefly introduced. Additionally, to outline the mutual influence of online media and politics, the reasons for censorship will be evaluated. One of the optimistic views on the influence of online media is that it promotes uncensored information, which enables people to organize against states.²⁹⁸ But the Internet is not a space that is free from censorship, and governments in the GCC countries have means to tap and control ICT use and also to close down forums and blogs. Still, compared to print media it is much easier to distribute digital media of any kind and of any content. Yochai Benkler researched this new-gained freedom in *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (2006).²⁹⁹ Benkler describes the opportunities for actions taken online as greater in their autonomy, better informed, and more critical.³⁰⁰

The use of ICT in the Gulf influences literary text production. The medium used

298 Helen V. Milner, "The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion", in *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 2, 2006, pp. 176-199, p. 184.

299 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, New Haven 2006.

300 Ibid., p. 92.

to distribute literary text affects the way literature itself is perceived and written. Marshall McLuhan studied the relationship between medium and message in (1964 and 1967) and emphasised that the perception of a message is always impacted by the medium that it is sent through.³⁰¹

The following will deal with the adaptation of ICT, global and local influences on use that are especially connected to the sub-chapter of opinion making, and opportunities of having a “global voice”. Additionally, the issue of the creative commons license and other distinct ways of dealing with intellectual property will be examined.

I will start with a general description of the censorship and restrictions imposed by the authorities and of the political aspects that come into play in ICT use. Because all Gulf countries are ruled by autocratic regimes, it is much easier to enforce restrictive laws on media and control publishing. In the following, the impact of online media on politics will also be discussed.

IV.1 The Impact of Online Media on Political Conditions

Stressing the mutual impact of online media and political conditions sheds light on literature in the region. Literature often takes up societal discourses and challenges, as well as inspiring debates on many aspects of life. As already mentioned in earlier chapters, online literature can be seen as more democratic than print because it encourages communication between writers and readers. The following discusses the Internet as a tool for hosting more opportunities for freedom of speech and for inspiring debates.

I will start by looking at the general debate in research on the net’s influence on democratisation processes and political change, but also on literary production in print and online, because the circumstances of publication affect the text itself.

In the early stages of research on online media in the Arab world it was suggested that the mere introduction of the Internet might lead to a political change.

³⁰¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York 1964. And *The Medium is the Message*, New York 1967.

Kirchner points out that there was an emphasis on the “democratising” function of the Internet.³⁰²

Researchers often focus on the influence of online media on politics and societal change, especially, on development and in undemocratic countries.³⁰³ Online media were used to spread information and to communicate during the uprisings that occurred throughout 2011 in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt.³⁰⁴ While online media facilitated the organization of activities and communication for a limited period of time (before the Internet was shut down), it was not the only force fuelling these events. Veva Leye (2007) holds that ICT by itself will not lead to a change of institutional settings “as there are no changes in political decision-making processes”.³⁰⁵ Even though this article was written earlier than the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, it makes a very important point: if decision-making processes are not changed, there cannot be a change in politics. What changed decision-making processes in Egypt and Tunisia was people taking collective action, rather than blogging alone. Thus, the events of 2011 bore out Leye's findings.

After the Internet and cell phone connections were shut down in Egypt for two days (January 27-28, 2011), the uprising continued to work even without access to ICT. However, some people managed to restore a connection and eventually spread news about what was actually happening. In this case, the Internet helped to inspire and organize uprisings initially, especially because online media circulates news much faster not only within a country, but also globally. Tunisia may have provided inspiration for Egypt because the events there were very well documented online. The information and inspiration transported from Tunisia to Egypt online and via other media is an example of the power of local and global connections on the net. In his book *Zero Comments* (2007), the media researcher Gert Lovink makes the point that the movements online are started by local events rather than by general ideas.³⁰⁶ In the case of Egypt and Tunisia these are mass gatherings in public spaces. The general idea was to rise up against the ruling political power. Local events documented and partially initiated online aimed to help gather a vast number of people for an actual protest away

302 Henner Kirchner, "Internet in the Arab World: A Step Towards 'Information Society?'," in Kai Hafez (ed.), *Mass media, politics, and society in the Middle East*, Cresskill 2001, pp. 137-158, p. 138.

303 Veva Leye (2007); Helen V. Milner (2006); Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner (2004); Nick Crossley, John Michael Roberts, and James Bohman (2004); just to name few.

304 This is also true for other countries that had uprisings in 2011.

305 Veva Leye, "UNESCO, ICT corporations and the passion of ICT for development: modernization resurrected", in *Media Culture Society*, 29, no. 6, 2007, pp. 972-993, p. 983f

306 Gert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, London 2007.

from the screen. The medium was used for collecting and spreading information but measures had to take place in the offline world in order to achieve change.³⁰⁷

Online media's influence on offline life in the Gulf is not as deep as in the aforementioned countries. This means that discussions in online sources do not transfer to a life away from the screen, or at least not until someone decides to transfer them. Afraa Ahmed Albabtain researched Internet forums in Saudi Arabia in the article "Downloading Democracy" (2008) where it is stated quite clearly: "Although forums play an important role in promoting political awareness, they have not yet developed to an extent that pushes the forum member to positive political and social action, which means his participation is limited to the virtual world."³⁰⁸ These findings underline Veva Leye's argument that the change has to be effected *outside* the virtual world, i.e., in political decision-making.

One exception in the Gulf countries were the uprisings in Bahrain in 2011, which were however violently put down by the Bahraini regime with support from the armies of the neighbouring countries Saudi Arabia and the UAE.³⁰⁹ One might argue that one could find exceptions in Kuwait as well, such as the Orange movement in 2006.³¹⁰ What is of great interest for this study is that in Bahrain, poetry was one form of protest on Pearl Square, the venue where people gathered.³¹¹ A number of Bahraini people began reciting poetry. These performances emphasize the value of literature and poetry in everyday life in Gulf countries and also its political importance.

IV.1.1 The Influence of Authoritarian Regimes on Literary Texts

Literary text in the Gulf is influenced by the medium it is published in, and this medium

307 I would be outside the scope of the present investigation to go into details here but let me remark that the same form of internet use could be observed in Tunisia, Egypt and most recently Syria.

308 Afraa Ahmed Albabtain, "Downloading Democracy. Bloggers in the Gulf", in *International Relations and Security Network*, 2008, p. 63. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch-Archive/Detail/?fecvnodeid=128146&ord588=grp1&fecvid=21&ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&v21=128146&lng=en&id=90279>, last accessed January 3, 2012.

309 Ethan Bronner and Michael Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest", in *New York Times*, March 14, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html?pagewanted=all>, last accessed January 16, 2012.

310 Jon Nordenson, *We Want Five!: Kuwait, the internet, and the public sphere*, Saarbrücken 2010.

311 Sarah Hoffmann, "Give Us Back Our Bahrain", on pen.org, June 9, 2011, <http://www.pen.org/blog/?p=71>, last accessed January 16, 2012.

is strongly structured by external forces that put pressure on what is written and what is distributed. This is true not only for digital literature, but also for literature published in print. Differences between print and online literature are highlighted in the chapter on setup and narration (cf. especially I.1.1, I.1.2), as well as in the chapter on participatory culture (cf. especially chapter II.1.3, II.1.4, II.2.1), and will not be further discussed here.

Every medium in the Gulf – TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, books and the Internet – requires approval from the local authorities. The approval of a cultural product depends on its content. People have a general awareness of these rules, so they affect what is written for distribution in the first place (‘self-censorship’). Mainly, it is not supposed to be offensive in any way: It should not attack religion, political leaders, nor should it mention details about sexuality, the three big taboos discussed already by Marina Stagh for printed literature in Nasser’s and Sadat’s Egypt.³¹²

William A. Rugh (2004) gives an example of print censorship in Saudi Arabia: “Newspapers publish on sensitive subjects such as crime or terrorism only after news has been released by the government through the official Saudi news agency SPA, or from William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*, Westport 2004, p.71. government official.” Rugh continues that foreign printed

312 For the Gulf countries, the following framework of censorship have to be taken into account:

KSA: Saudi Arabia filters sites related to opposition political groups, human rights issues and religious content deemed offensive to Muslims. Pornographic and gay sites are pervasively filtered, as are circumvention tools and online privacy tools. Bloggers have been arrested, and blogs and sites run by online activists have been blocked. <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/saudi-arabia> , last accessed January 25, 2012.

OMAN: The Sultanate of Oman engages in extensive filtering of pornographic websites, gay and lesbian content, and anonymizer sites used to circumvent blocking. The censors have added to the blacklist content that is critical of Islam and websites on illegal drugs. Although there is no evidence of technical filtering of political content, laws and regulations restrict free expression online and encourage self-censorship. <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/oman> , last accessed January 25, 2012.

QATAR: The censors in Qatar admit to filtering pornography, political criticism of Gulf countries and material deemed hostile to Islam. The authorities also pervasively filter gay and lesbian content, sexual health resources and privacy and circumvention tools. Political filtering is highly selective, but journalists self-censor on sensitive issues such as government policies, Islam and the ruling family. <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/qatar> , last accessed January 25, 2012.

KUWAIT: Though the media in Kuwait are among the most outspoken in the Gulf states, journalists self-censor on issues related to the royal family. The primary target of Internet filtering is pornography and, to a lesser extent, gay and lesbian content. Secular content and websites that are critical of Islam are also censored. Some websites that are related to religions other than Islam are blocked even if they are not critical of Islam. <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/kuwait> , last accessed January 25, 2012.

BAHRAIN: Bahrain is a regional ICT leader and is one of the most Internet-connected countries in the Middle East. The country’s Internet filtering regime focuses on political websites that are critical of the Bahraini government and ruling family, but also targets pornography, content related to gays and

media is censored, depending on its “offending” content.³¹³ This means that people are well aware of censorship and the government’s demands are followed in order to avoid punishment. Self-censorship is very common in literature and other media in Arab countries. Due to strict external constraints, i.e., governmental restrictions but also social pressure, works are self-censored to protect the author and the audience. Self-censorship is impossible to measure. In my survey it appeared that 12 participants thought censorship was important to them. 11 did not find censorship important, 1 participant asked what kind of censorship was meant and 1 stated that it was not very important. 1 participant made it clear that there is only social censorship and another 1 emphasised the importance of self-censorship.³¹⁴ Ola Erstad and James V. Wertsch (2008) highlight aspects of self-censorship in online writing in Iran and emphasis that the individual sets the limits of censorship in this case.³¹⁵

In the region, social censorship is also an influential and active buttress of state censorship. Since people can ask for websites to be blocked, they have the power to increase censorship. Robin 'Roblimo' Miller, former editor in chief of various Linux related websites, points out that it is not difficult to bypass the Saudi internet filter. It took him less than 30 minutes to do so. He interviewed Eyas S. al-Hejery who was head of the ISU (Internet Service Unit) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at that time. During this interview al-Hejery admitted that he knows how easy it is to avoid the blocks but that the filter is a protection for children “and other innocents from Internet evils.”³¹⁶ He points out that the system has wide public support, as is demonstrated by the fact that the Internet Service Unit currently receives over 200 “legitimate” requests to *block* sites every day, but only a “trickle” of requests to *unblock* sites that members of the society feel are being hidden improperly.³¹⁷ This seems to be a strange approach to deal with the openness of the Web but the same behaviour can be recognized offline. The content of Rajā’ ‘Abdallāh al-Ṣāni’s novel *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* (The Girls of Riyadh) offended

lesbians and content that is critical of Islam. <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/bahrain> , last accessed January 25, 2012.

313 William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*, Westport 2004, p. 71.

314 Survey data 2010.

315 Ola Erstad and James V. Wertsch, "Tales of mediation: Narrative and digital media as cultural tools", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 21-40, p. 35.

316 Cf. Robin 'Roblimo' Miller: "Meet Saudi Arabia's most famous computer expert", 2004, <http://www.linux.com/articles/33695>, accessed September 7, 2009.

317 Ibid.

religious people.³¹⁸ She received threatening mail and death threats. In addition, two Saudi men asked the Ministry of Information to withdraw permission to distribute the novel in Saudi Arabia and demanded that the author be punished.³¹⁹ It was argued that the novel misrepresented the lifestyle of young Saudis and gave them a bad reputation all over the world. In this case it was not the religious police or the Ministry of Information that worked to suppress the novel, but rather conservative members of society who interacted to force their moral standards on society. Marc Lynch states that there is a general tendency for religious actors to impose censorship on the media, as can be witnessed in the Arab public sphere.³²⁰ Though they can increase censorship, they cannot decrease it, i.e. they have only negative powers in this regard.

This pressure of society on individuals is clearly connected with state censorship. Also, it influences the authors to carefully choose which material should be published under their real names, online and offline, and what should rather be kept private or distributed anonymously.

The question of censorship of literary texts is publicly debated, for example at book fairs and on public panel discussions. The following example from print literature is a general example of people's awareness of censorship in Arab countries and outlines two contradictory positions that can be taken in this debate. When I attended a panel discussion with two winners of the "International Prize for Arabic Fiction"³²¹ (the so-called 'Arabic Booker' Prize) at Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in March 2011, the topic of writing under censorship came up. The audience asked whether censorship influenced the text and writing of the two winning authors. Two opposing ideas were discussed in answer. The Saudi author Raja Alem (Rajā' Ālam) held that there is no censorship and it is up to the author whether he or she feels the need to self-censor literary works. The Moroccan author Mohammed Achaari (Muḥammad al-'Ash'arī), on the other hand, stated that censorship does influence literary production. These two standpoints highlight differences in the perception of authoritarian influence. Both

318 Raid Qusti, "Court Rejects Case Against Rajaa Al-Sanea", in *Arab News*, October 9, 2006, <http://arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=87886&d=9&m=10&y=2006&pix=kingdom.jpg&category=Kingdom>, accessed January 4, 2012.

319 Ibid.

320 Mark Lynch, "The Structural Transformation of the Arab Public Sphere", in *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*, New York 2006, p. 86.

321 Event: Meet the Winners of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction 2011, Venue: KITAB Sofa, Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, ADNEC, March 14, 2011, Participants: Mohammed Achaari and Raja Alem.

writers were moderate in promoting their opinions in comparison with Joumana Haddad (Jumāna Ḥaddād), a Lebanese writer and the editor of the literary magazine "Jasad" (Body). She strongly criticized censorship not only in her manifesto "I killed Scheherazade" (2010) but also during a public discussion at Emirates Airline International Festival for Literature in Dubai in 2011. In her strongest expression on the subject she writes:

"Some Arabs speak of the virtuous mission of literature while denying writers freedom of expression. Is there a more whorish act than depriving an author of his/her words? Let's call things by their names: censorship is an act of RAPE."³²²

Later in the same manifesto she emphasizes that censoring books contributes to their popularity and mentions the possibilities of circumventing print censorship through online media:

"For what can censorship really hope to achieve, when banning a book guarantees it notoriety and widespread success? Why impose censorship in an age when, at the press of a button, we can get all the information we need and more?"³²³

Writers can employ various strategies to deal with censorship. Paul Starkey (2006) points out that, to circumvent censorship, writers of print literature can set their stories in another historical period and use it as a metaphor for present conditions.³²⁴ In doing so, they draw on a long tradition of metaphorical writing in Classical Arabic literature, so of them even imitating the style of medieval Arab writers (cf., e.g., Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī in his famous novel *al-Zaynī Barakāt* of 1974).

Of course authorities also know about the advantages of distributing literary and political texts online. They deal with it not only through censorship, but also by

322 Joumana Haddad, *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman*, London 2011, p. 69.

323 Ibid., p. 86.

324 Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic literature*, Edinburgh 2006, p. 144.

supporting projects that act in accordance with the rules. Government and government-affiliated organisations are involved in online activity. They can influence opinion-making through their distribution of state subsidies.³²⁵ This is most easily achieved with media prizes awarded to active online creators/producers who work in accordance with the guidelines of common agendas. In the UAE, this can take the form of honouring projects, for example the *Sheikh Majid Youth Media Award*, which was first announced in 2008.³²⁶ In Kuwait the e-publishing house Nashiri was granted the *Internet Contest Award 2005* by Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah of Kuwait.³²⁷ Nashiri allows online literature to be distributed if it follows guidelines, which include the use of Modern Standard Arabic as well as avoiding offensive content.

IV.2 Internet Censorship in Gulf Countries

This part will sum up what Internet censorship is about in the Gulf countries. Compared with offline spaces, the Internet is still a space for open discussions. Online media did not initiate uprisings in the Gulf, but they were used as a tool for spreading independent information and enabling communication, for example during the uprisings in Bahrain,³²⁸ in Saudi Arabia, too, it fuelled demonstrations,³²⁹ and also in Kuwait, where demonstrators even stormed the parliament.³³⁰

The *Reporters without Borders* 2007 annual report makes it clear that the situation is difficult for journalists in Saudi Arabia. Newspapers are shut down and journalists who write about subjects that the government disapproves of are

325 Eric Louw, *The Media and Cultural Production* London: Thousand Oaks / New Dehli 2005, p. 46.

326 More information about the award can be found on <http://www.sheikhmajidawards.com/about-sheikh-majid-media-award.aspx>, last accessed January 4, 2012.

327 More on this on Hayat Alyaqut's personal website <http://www.hayatt.net/>, last accessed January 2 2012.

328 Global Voice online offers an overview on activities in Bahrain in the post "Bahrain Protests 2011", December 19th 2011, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/specialcoverage/bahrain-protests-2011/>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

329 "Saudi Arabia bans protest rallies", March 5th 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/201135143046557642.html>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

330 "Protesters storm Kuwaiti parliament", November 16th 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15768027>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

dismissed.³³¹ The *Open Net Initiative* also provides information on censorship in individual countries. It offers detailed data (until 2009) on Gulf states that highlight restrictions to be met with when going online, e.g., legal restrictions and surveillance.³³² On the website on Bahrain it is clarified that "Bahrain allowed relatively unfettered access to the Internet, especially compared with its neighbors" but that there is no transparency when it comes to filtering of content.³³³ For Kuwait it is said that surveillance and censorship are observable and that "journalists self-censor".³³⁴ The reports about Oman say that "extensive filtering" is conducted and self-censorship is encouraged. It is emphasised that "the authorities impose legal and physical controls to ensure that the Internet community does not access or publish objectionable or unlawful material."³³⁵ In the description on conditions in Qatar it is pointed out that additionally to the censorship that is also conducted in the neighbouring countries, filtering of circumvention tools is processed and internet is "heavily censored".³³⁶ Circumvention tools can be VPNs³³⁷ or proxies³³⁸ that allow users to connect to the Internet outside of the censored ISPs. Going online through these tools might also enable users to escape surveillance. It additionally helps to circumvent geo-filtering, which Google applies on its video platform *YouTube*.³³⁹

The report on Saudi Arabia shows that in addition to the censorship that is also conducted in other Gulf countries, circumvention and privacy tools are filtered. For online actors in Saudi Arabia it can be said that "Bloggers have been arrested, and blogs and sites run by online activists have been blocked." Surveillance measures are also

331 Reporters without Borders published their last Annual Report on Saudi Arabia in 2007.

http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/article.php?id_article=20775, last accessed May 28, 2009.

332 <http://opennet.net/>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

333 "Bahrain", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/bahrain>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

334 "Kuwait", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/kuwait>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

335 "Oman", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/oman>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

336 "Qatar", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/qatar>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

337 Virtual Private Networks help to guarantee access to the net through an often encrypted network that prevents disclosure of private information. More on how a VPN works can be found in the video *Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)*, posted April 6th, 2010, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJdW0_yB9vo&feature=related, last accessed December 29, 2011.

338 Acting online through a proxy server enables users to access data that would be inaccessible due to restrictions through geofiltering or other forms of restrictions by ISPs. More on how proxy servers work can be found in a brief summary on the website of Indiana University in: *What is a proxy server?*, May 3rd, 2011, <http://kb.iu.edu/data/ahoo.html>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

339 A geofilter limits access to data online according to the physical location of the user. More on geofiltering can be read in: Geofiltering: Jillian C. York, *How to Alienate Business Customers Without Really Trying*, March 3rd 2009 on OpenNet Initiative, <http://opennet.net/blog/2009/03/geofiltering-how-alienate-business-customers-without-really-trying>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

applied in internet cafés.³⁴⁰ As for conditions in the UAE, there are many examples suggesting that in addition to the type of content that is also blocked in the neighbouring countries, "Online privacy and circumvention tools" are blocked. It is highlighted that "the state has extended its filtering scheme to the Dubai free zones, which previously enjoyed unfettered Internet access".³⁴¹ Efforts are made to monitor activities in internet cafés and "electronic surveillance to monitor objectionable online activities is publicly acknowledged by the authorities."

Despite all these restrictions, online media in the Middle East provide a space for expression and independent distribution of news about current events that is much less restricted than offline facilities. This is one of the reasons why the Internet is censored in the Gulf. In the following, I will introduce forms of Internet censorship and procedures of conducting surveillance online. It is vital to present forms of censorship because it affects literary production and might also explain the vast popularity of publishing literature on the net. Online censorship differs in each GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) country, but it shares a number of similarities the way it challenges users. As early as March 1997, the regimes of the GCC countries gathered to discuss a common approach to the Internet.³⁴² This was even before the Internet was widely accessible in all of the Gulf countries and shows that the medium and its influence were, and are, taken seriously.

In the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, general online censorship in the form of Internet filters and the blocking of specific pages limits access to and the production of online literature. Many Arab states set up Internet filters, primarily to censor content.³⁴³ The Internet is censored in GCC countries before it reaches users. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are usually owned by the state or by members of the ruling families. The cases of online censorship in Saudi Arabia and the UAE can be taken as typical also of the other Gulf countries. In the UAE, e.g., Etisalat and DU distribute Internet access.³⁴⁴ Albrecht Hofheinz (2007) points out that Saudi Arabia does not keep Internet censorship a secret. The Ministry of the Interior runs an Internet Service Unit (ISU)

340 "Saudi Arabia", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/saudi-arabia>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

341 "United Arab Emirates", <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/uae>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

342 Henner Kirchner, "Internet in the Arab World: A Step Towards 'Information Society?'" in Kai Hafez (ed.), *Mass media, politics, and society in the Middle East*, Cresskill 2001, p. 150.

343 Cf. OpenNet Initiative, entry: Saudi Arabia, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/saudi-arabia>, accessed September 7, 2009.

344 Etisalat is 60 % government-owned and 40% public-traded. DU is 40% government-owned, 20% belongs to Mubadala, which is completely owned by the Abu Dhabi Government, and 20% is owned by TECOM, which is a subsidiary of Dubai Holding. The rest, 20%, is publicly owned.

situated in the environment of King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology in Riyadh and is in charge of the process.³⁴⁵ Making the state responsible for ISPs and ISUs enables it to control the medium in a way that would not be possible if it allowed private companies to offer Internet access. In addition to the general state filtering, users can ask an official institution to either censor websites or to unblock them if it is claimed they do not do harm, e.g., medical sites that use censored terms. Hence, everybody is encouraged to participate in making the Internet a “morally suitable” zone. For the UAE the following site is shown when content is censored. Reasons for censorship are presented in Arabic and English. The cartoon character taken from an Emirati produced popular TV show called "Freej" trivializes censorship.

345 Hofheinz, Albrecht, "Arab Internet Use: Popular Trends and Public Impact", in Naomi Sakr (ed.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy and Public Life*, London 2008, pp. 56-79 , p. 57.

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If you believe the website you are trying to access does not contain any such content, please [click here](#).

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Source: <http://opennet.net/sites/opennet.net/files/WestCensoringEast5.jpg>, last accessed January 25, 2012.

However, it is possible to access censored content by using circumvention tools.

The reason that the authorities give for Internet censorship is to “protect cultural identity”.³⁴⁶ Websites that could interfere with moral views on religion and politics or that provide pornography are censored. Marina Stagh (1993) studied limits of freedom of speech in Egypt in the time of Nasser and Sadat.³⁴⁷ This study was conducted in a different research field and a different time period; yet, it highlights subjects that may be difficult to publish even today. She refers to the three taboos of "sex, religion and politics" but rephrases them into "obscenity, blasphemy and political opposition"³⁴⁸. In her analysis she emphasises the growing impact of censorship of publishing in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states since the 1970s.³⁴⁹ Applying these findings to contemporary times, constraining access to literature can be even more limited. This means that also literary websites and blogs can be closed down or made inaccessible by

346 Henner Kirchner, "Internet in the Arab World: A Step Towards 'Information Society?'" in Kai Hafez (ed.), *Mass media, politics, and society in the Middle East*, Cresskill 2001, p. 151.

347 Marina Stagh, *The Limits of Freedom of Speech: Prose Literature and Prose Writers in Egypt under Nasser and Sadat*, Stockholm 1993, pp. 127-132.

348 Ibid.

349 Ibid., p. 132.

filters, denying readers and writers access to the web pages. The blog of "Saudi Eve" is an example. This blogger writes in English and Arabic and at times her texts can have an erotic tinge. As she writes on her blog, she discovered that her blog was banned in Saudi Arabia when she returned to the country for a visit.³⁵⁰ Saudi Eve stopped writing on her blog in 2009.

IV.2.1 Global and Local Influence on ICT Usage and the Potential of Opinion Making

This sub-chapter deals with the possibilities and challenges of making use of a truly global media and the importance of user contributions in spreading a message and sharing literary works.

Online media offer the potential of gaining access to worldwide views on a huge variety of subjects, including politics and culture. This is not restricted to mainstream media, because the tools provided by Web 2.0³⁵¹ allow many people to easily distribute their works. Web 2.0, a set of tools that facilitates user-generated content, gained its popularity because of the audience and producers who contributed.³⁵² Users have to share their ideas, creations, and inspirations to make it an attractive platform of discussion. The terminology in the research on this field is extensive and often changing, Axel Bruns (2008) emphasises the need to find new terms for user-led content and introduces the term *produsage*.³⁵³

Online media offer the option to interact with members of almost every country in the world, but an important obstacle is the language barrier. This is one of the reasons why blogospheres are often regionalized. Another reason for regionalization is that the subjects of choice may differ from blogosphere to blogosphere. A blogosphere can be limited by subject of discussion, genre, language, region or other factors. Later in this

350 Blog-post "Back and Blocked" from June 2nd 2006, <http://eveksa.blogspot.com/2006/06/back-and-blocked.html>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

351 This term is explained in the chapter on participatory culture

352 Benkler points out that anyone can publish online "alongside the traditional mass-media environment. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, New Haven 2006, p. 214.

353 Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia. Second Life. and Beyond: from production to produsage*, New York 2008.

chapter, an example of how this regionalization works will be seen in the "movement" and redistribution of one and the same short story among different forums in the Gulf.

The purpose of expression online seems to have changed since earlier research. Deborah Wheeler stated (2004) that women rarely mentioned the concept of a "global voice" when using the Internet. Her article was written before the uprisings in Arab countries like Egypt and Tunisia, and perspectives may have changed since then.³⁵⁴ Wheeler's perception differs from my findings, which may be explained as resulting from a development in Internet usage in recent years. In the online survey I conducted, some of the users explicitly mention that they consider it important to spread their thoughts and make their ideas read by and accessible to an audience. Their answer to the question why users write was most often that they feel the need to express themselves and they love writing or that it helps them to breathe. More than half of the participants answered in this vein.³⁵⁵ Asked why they distribute their texts online, they often answered that they wanted to share their thoughts and that this was the easiest way of distributing them. Two participants explicitly clarified that the Internet was the only way for them to publish without being constrained in their expressions.³⁵⁶ They did not specifically mention a global audience, but this can be because they all write in Arabic, a language that is not usually read by a global audience. However, there is an internationally dispersed Arabic diaspora that might also serve to spread messages.

Distributing thoughts online may also lead to a position of influence in public discourse. If an online writer is popular, and thus visited by many users, his messages can spread. If authors have a larger audience, they may act as a trendsetter or role model. That means the author can be an "opinion maker", someone who sets the tone. In the movements of the "Arab Spring", it was possible to spot popular political blogs that encouraged and inspired wider discussions. Bloggers like Sandmonkey (<http://www.sandmonkey.org/>) and Wael Abbas (<http://misrdigital.blogspot.com>) documented the Egyptian uprisings.

Opinion making can operate on a direct level through explicitly marked blog posts that deal with current events and politics, but also through the more subliminal messages conveyed by stories or literary essays. A story can take up current debates and

354 Deborah Wheeler, "Blessings and Curses: Women and the Internet Revolution in the Arab World", in Naomi Sakr (ed.), in *Women and media in the Middle East: power through self-expression*, London 2004, pp. 138-161, p. 160.

355 Survey data, 2010.

356 Survey data, 2010.

social issues and make them part of the plot. In the Gulf, love stories often serve as a basis for promoting discussion of contemporary topics. Within these love stories, details describe social events, surroundings, norms and values, as well as political or societal conditions (these aspects are examined in Chapter Three).³⁵⁷

The subject of my research is not how political blogs influence politics in the Gulf region, but online stories that pick up what is going on in society as well as general features of Internet use as a tool of communication through literary texts. However, it is apparent that even literature is having an impact. It can also threaten authorities, as evidenced in the actions that were taken against writers in the region. Authors were arrested because authorities condemned the content they were publishing. One example is the Saudi Arabian case in which the poet Rushdi al-Dawsari was detained for eight hours. He had written a poem that included verses on sorcery. Before he was released, he had to sign a pledge vowing that he would not publish heretical or sorcerous poems online again.³⁵⁸

All the aforementioned examples show that online distribution encourages actors to use their voice to share news, opinions, and cultural products.

IV.3 The Challenges of Anonymity, Intellectual Property and Redistribution of Stories

This sub-chapter connects the phenomenon of distributing anonymously in forums and the redistribution of stories, on the one hand, to the aforementioned restrictions placed on writers. As already explained, censorship in print and online greatly impacts literary production. Posting stories in forums might be a way to circumvent these restrictions for two reasons. Firstly, stories in forums are distributed with nicknames, so the real identity of a user is not exposed. Secondly, the volume of postings in forums makes it difficult to maintain close surveillance on them. This means that the deleting or editing of stories is not excessive. Additionally, if a story is interesting or entertaining for a vast audience, it will be redistributed in other forums and spread quickly. In the following, I will briefly introduce the debate on copying intellectual property online and then

357 Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media*, Cambridge 2007, p. 17.

358 Cf. Sonia Farid: "No more online publishing, religious police demand Saudi poet busted for "sorcery" poems", 2008, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/11/09/59794.html>, last accessed September 7, 2009.

present an example of a story that has been redistributed many times.

An important issue that is debated all over the world is copying of intellectual property. Mark Poster took up this subject in his book *What's the Matter with the Internet?* (2001). He emphasizes that in these times of digitalisation of print, film and audio media, "the media in which intellectual property appears alters the message of its legal integument".³⁵⁹ In the Gulf, intellectual property online is just like in other countries – poorly protected. In an interview with an Omani blogger, I raised this issue and she told me about her concerns. During my interview I learned that producers of online literary texts simply turn to personal blogs. Copying literary goods is less frequent with texts published on blogs. In my survey several participants explicitly mentioned the problem of copying stories.³⁶⁰

It is problematic for the original authors, because their stories are being copied and posted elsewhere with credit given to a different author. When I conducted an online survey of online writers from the Gulf in 2010, most of them pointed out that they are conscious of incidents when their works have been (re-)published without crediting them to them. Until now there is no creative commons license in the Gulf to protect the artists' work online. Some pages, however, such as *alamuae.com*, do not allow users to copy texts from the websites by consistently blocking this function.

Young online writers from the Gulf who publish either on blogs or in forums are mostly concerned about their distributions because texts can be republished by others. These writers are aware of other people claiming their texts as their own, and so they sometimes turn to writing blogs, instead of publishing in forums, because these are more personal and less frequently copied.

Two divergent positions can be taken on this subject. Copying intellectual property can be seen as stealing. Or, as Cory Doctorow, an Internet activist and writer, puts it, it can be seen as proof that your work is contemporary,³⁶¹ i.e., it has a value and is therefore worth to be copied. He argues that if your work is not copied, it is probably not contemporary. Of course a differentiation has to be made between copying intellectual property with giving credit to the original source and not mentioning the original author and claiming the cultural goods as one's own.

On forums from the Gulf, where stories are simply widely redistributed, the

359 Mark Poster, *What's the Matter with the Internet?*, Minneapolis 2001, p. 3.

360 Survey data, 2010.

361 Cory Doctorow on The War on Kids, Boing Boing, & His Next Novel, Reason TV July 15, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLf3nldagXc> , accessed November 11, 2011.

problem is mostly ignored. This might be interpreted as showing the importance of spreading the message. The message here is prioritized before the individuals right on self produced intellectual property. When McLuhan deals with authorship and copyright he states that "Teamwork succeeds private effort."³⁶² But blogs often post notices that redistribution is allowed as long as the original source is mentioned in the reposting.

The following chart illustrates the reposting of one story as an example for many. It shows the date of publishing and the title of the story. The country that I assign to the forums depends either on the name of the forum or on user statistics from <http://www.markosweb.com> and <http://www.websiteviewer.com>³⁶³ which give visual expression to the forum's visitors from different countries.³⁶⁴ This example shows the movements and popularity of a story among the different Gulf countries.

The short story that I chose to follow is not offensive and rather comical. The following brief outline shows its "innocent" content:

A man enters a shop for used books. He browses through the books and buys one. When he opens it, he realizes that a girl has written a letter inside the book. She writes about being bored and wanting to do something exciting by communicating via the used book. The girl who wrote the letter asks the young man to write back and to sell the book back to the used book store in order to allow her to buy it again to read the reply. The man answers the girl's letter and the book becomes a medium that goes back and forth, and a relationship is built up through the letters. The narrator explains to his readers that the person who benefits the most of this system is the owner of the bookshop. One day the young man comes into the bookshop with the intention to pick up his book, but it is not there anymore. He asks the bookseller where it is and he replies that it was sold. The protagonist leaves, disappointed, thinks about the situation and comes to the conclusion that the bookseller was talking about another book that was not the medium he used to

362 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message. An Inventory of Effects*, Corte Madre 1996, p. 122.

363 <http://www.markosweb.com> and <http://www.websiteviewer.com> are a commercial websites that measures details of users of websites and offer data analysis.

364 There are many reasons why this result merely serve as a benchmark as user statistics are easily manipulated by a huge variety of factors. However, this is a simple way of at least trying to to place forums regionally. More on that can be read here: Loren Baker, "Alexa: Worthless & Easy to Manipulate?" September 30th 2006, <http://www.searchenginejournal.com/alexa-worthless-easy-to-manipulate/3847/>, last accessed December 29, 2011, and here: <http://www.searchenginehistory.com/>, last accessed December 29, 2011.

communicate with the young woman. He returns to the shop to clarify the mistake and witnesses the bookseller writing in the book he shared with the young women. He realizes that his beloved was not real, but rather that the bookseller himself had written the letters to him in order to make money.

Title	Forum	User	Country	Date	COM ³⁶⁵	Distinctive additions
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.hdrmut.net/vb/t215789.html	قلب الأسد 77	KSA	Aug 08, 2006	13	
قصه حب ...بالرسائل فى كتاب.!!!!	http://majdah.maktoob.com/vb/majdah30789/	رومانسيه	KSA	Sep 03, 2006	5	
يقول بطل القصة	http://forum.arjwan.com/t33.html	صدى الاحزان	KSA	Feb 22, 2007	11	
يقول بطل القصة	http://forum.sedy.com/t41348.html	«®.°.°.®» جوريه الهدا «®.°.°.®»	KSA	Jul 11, 2007	8	
على ذمة الراوي	http://www.ksfhi.net/forum/show.php?main=1&id=996	عبدالهادي الثويني مشرف	KSA	Apr 22, 2007	3	
يقول بطل القصة	http://forum.brg8.com/t10522.html	MAS KSA	KSA	Oct 11, 2007	15+	A statement about the authenticity of the story is added.
يقول بطل القصة مو انا ؟؟؟	http://www.arabchat.net/forum/t11321.html	العاشق المجروح	KSA	Oct 27, 2007	6	User states that this is his first time posting in the forum.
قانون العرض و الطلب	http://www.amwalnet.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1204	Laser2Purchase	KSA	Dec 01, 2007	1	User tells the audience that he read the story and found it funny.
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.souqaldoha.com/vb/t811.html	leader	QATAR	Mar 03, 2008	9+	

365 COM = number of comments.

يقول بطل القصة	http://www.bdr130.net/vb/t253794.html	ديم الدمع	KSA?	Mar 29, 2008	5	
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.love-m.com/vb/t107133.html	مفسر أحلام البنات	KSA	Mar 30, 2008	6	
ورود الشمس	http://www.almsloob.com/vb/t9462.html	ورود الشمس	KSA	Apr 29, 2008	5	User introduces the story through naming it sweet and funny but also with the advice to to trust anybody.
يقول بطل القصة	http://forum.bantiraq.com/bnatiraq20687/	أميرة الورد	IRAQ	Aug 20, 2008	1	Small changes within the text.
هذه قصة لشخص ما يقول بطل القصة	http://www.m0dy.net/vb/t100896.html	طيف الورد	KSA?	Oct 07, 2008	5+	
قصة حب على كتاب !!	http://www.ammartalk.com/?p=373	Ammar	QATAR	Oct 22, 2008	24	
يقول بطل القصة	http://vb.ta7a.com/t146858/	تفوق الوصف	KSA	Dec 17, 2008	10	
قصه حب غريبه ادخلو وشوفو؟	http://forum.al-wlid.com/t46634.html	روميو المنتدا	KSA	Jan 30, 2009	7	
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.alhotcenter.com/vb/showthread.php?s=&threadid=2682	الوردة البيضاء	KSA	Jan 31, 2009	5	
يقول بطل القصة	http://faisalfw123.jeeran.com/fw/archive/2009/10/959422.html	فيصل الرسلائي	USA	Oct 23, 2009	12	Introduction by the user is changed and more personal.
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.omaniaa.net/avb/showthread.php?p=1367263	روعه جاطر	OMAN	Dec 12, 2009	6	
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.madaralroh.com/vb/showthread.php?p=132089	Cadetblue	UAE	Dec 23, 2009	7	
يقول بطل القصة	http://forums.graaam.com/271363.html	سيدة كل	KSA	Jan 05, 2010	1	

القصة		العداري				
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.7be.com/vb/t118651.html	عشقي سحاب	KSA	Jan 19, 2010	8	
يقول بطل القصة	http://www.soson.com/showthread.php?p=59909	Cadetblue	KSA	Mar 01, 2010	5	
يقول بطل القصة	http://abuadah.forumarabia.com/t963-topic	ملك الرومنسية	KSA	May 02, 2011	3	

(The chart does not show all redistributions of the story but rather serves as an example)³⁶⁶

The table shows the reposting of a story since 2006. It presents the benefits of the medium for keeping a short story "alive" and exposed to many readers. The story's continuous reappearing shows that it has been entertaining an audience over the last five years. It also presents the distinctiveness of forums by showing a story whose original author is unknown. Coming back to the issue of copying stories without referring to the original author, it appears that repostings in forums are not perceived as problematic, at least judging by the comments underneath the repostings. My online survey showed that some of the participants were concerned about copying intellectual property in online platforms.³⁶⁷ This procedure is rather common in micro-blogging in platforms such as *Tumblr* or *Twitter*, where redistribution is encouraged. However, on micro-blogging platforms it is customary to refer to the original source, since Retweets³⁶⁸ and repostings usually credit the first user who published it.

This story is clearly not political, nor does it offend anyone; yet, it is posted in forums, obviously because it is entertaining and attracts a rather wide audience, as can be seen in the number of redistributions of the story. The story itself is irrelevant for an examination of its "travelling" or redistribution. However, its popularity is due to its content and deserves to be briefly interpreted in the following. This story is clearly not political, nor does it offend anyone; yet, it is posted in forums, obviously because it is entertaining and attracts a rather wide audience, as can be seen in the number of redistributions of the story. The story itself is irrelevant for an examination of its

366 Data distributed in this table is selected. For practical reasons the first result for the first 10 Google search pages (September 2011) were analysed. In addition, a search for subsequent years of distribution was conducted in order to get a broader idea of the story's redistribution over a longer period.

367 Survey data, 2010.

368 A distribution on *Twitter* is called a "Tweet", a re-distribution on *Twitter* is called a "Retweet".

"travelling" or redistribution. However, its popularity is due to its content and deserves to be briefly interpreted in the following. The story is written colloquial language and includes several discourses that are already discussed in chapter three. These are Discussing Norms, Gender Roles, and Globalisation. In the story of the used books, gender segregation is an essential part of the text. The two characters have to communicate in secret because society permits contact between men and women. Both lovers overcome this social norms to pursue their own happiness. This communication against traditional values in society adds excitement to their. Ex-pat labour is fequently part of short stories, as the bookseller is from Sudan. The sales-men of the books is led to his actions by the thought of increasing turnover. Feelings of the main characters are abused for the sake of generating income. This could be interpreted as a funny way of criticising capitalist society for giving monetary values a higher importance then the value of love.

Two aspects of the story seem to attract a larger audience. First, the secret love story may be exciting to read and second the dependency on institutions which provide access to media appear to familiar to the reader.

The table shows that the story began to be published in 2006 in Saudi Arabia and then slowly gained popularity. The same nickname is rarely used for redistribution; rather, the nickname of users who repost the story changes frequently. The reposted stories are not connected to the author any more. Larry Friedlander raises question concerning stories that are not author controlled which can be related to re-distribution and remixing of short stories in online forums. He sees "the reader/user/player" taking over some of the functions of the author.³⁶⁹

The story does not "travel" outside the Gulf countries, a fact that might be due to the story's distinct plot and also because it is written in colloquial Arabic from Saudi Arabia. Because of its extensive distribution in a variety of forums, it has never received a large number of comments in one thread, but rather a modest number of comments in a wider selection of forums. Some of the users who redistributed the story clearly stated that it was not their own story but that they had heard it elsewhere or that someone had sent it to them and they thought it was worth sharing with others.

³⁶⁹Larry Friedlander, "Narrative strategies in a digital age. Authorship and authority", in Knut Lundby (ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-representation in New Media*, New York 2008, pp. 177-196, p.180.

IV.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the challenges of distribution in online literary platforms. Two major factors were presented as influencing online publishing in the Gulf. First, authoritarian pressure and power heavily restrict publication. Social as well as self-censorship limit writers in their creative expressions. Different ways of dealing with these problems can be observed. One of them is to turn to distributing elsewhere, either online or in other countries. Online media are a convenient and less restricted space for publishing literary works. The second challenge appears in relation to intellectual property in online media. Two ways of dealing with this problem can be observed. One is turning to blogs, where copying content is less common and texts are often ascribed to one author. The other way of dealing with it is to accept the copying of cultural products as a given in digital times.

Both challenges, censorship and copying, also show the benefits of the medium in that it offers more freedom and is read by a vast audience even without a publisher. Earlier chapters showed a wider selection of positive aspects of online distribution; this chapter has presented the difficulties in online writing and highlighted the challenges for the authors.

V. Concluding thoughts

I have presented my findings in several steps from different perspectives. This field of research is relatively unexplored so far, and a variety of considerations have to be kept in mind while dealing with online literary texts from Arabic-speaking Gulf countries. I chose the perspectives on composition and setup, linguistic features, heroes' portrayal and ICT use and restrictions because they were the most striking in the original sources. The results extracted from my research opens up a view into new literary expressions and can be applied to literary studies of the Arabic-speaking world.

My goal was to highlight this emerging cultural phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. This research was a first attempt to outline what kind of online literary texts can be found in the field of studies.

The research field is new both in terms of its physical location in Arabic-speaking Gulf countries and of the novelty of research on online literature, because even in other countries online literature did not emerge until the last two decades.

The following sums up my findings in order to shed light on the project *as a whole* and the variety of connections between the perspectives that have been in the focus of single chapters.

The form and appearance of texts are the first two elements of my analysis. Examples in my presentation of text layout and usage of multi-medial elements illustrated the integration of pictures and audio files. Results showed, on the one hand, that multi-media features underline the message of texts and, on the other hand, that they exemplify details within stories. Another feature of layout was the use of applied elements, such as quotations and additional applications that structure blog entries. As the analysis showed, these serve the purpose of self-representation. Consequentially, it turned out that the other visual features, such as visitor counters, also function as self-representation by showing the popularity of blogs. As I showed, multi-media elements are not employed in every literary blog from the region; many blogs exhibit a rather modest layout and a clearer focus on the literary text.

It turned out that blogs do not represent one genre of texts but rather embody a variety of subjects and writing styles. However, similarities can be observed in the setup of blogs, because they are all organized chronologically and make use of links and commentary. Blogs and forums often need to be examined separately, because they differ in the style of writing and in a variety of visual aspects. An analysis of some samples showed that short stories are popular in forums. The frequent distribution of short literary texts might be due to the medium, which invites short text. Reading on-screen is usually not popular for longer texts. In addition to the visual features used in online literature from the Gulf, in forums a distinct form of composing and reposting short stories is observable. The analysis of a selection of stories shows that many stories are introduced with a personal note by the user that explains the circumstances or background of stories, followed by the story itself, and then a discussion of the story in a separate section. The investigation of composition and redistribution and rearrangement showed that this form of literary texts has some resemblances to storytelling. These are the personal introduction by the user, interaction with the audience, and a retelling of the same story in other locations, meaning other forums.

One focus in my examination of original sources was on the style of writing and narration. In the introduction I asked whether or not online literature can be seen within the literary canon and whether it is a continuation of earlier literature or if it is not connected to it. My analysis suggests that online literature may be seen as a continuation and a part of contemporary literature, depending on its composition and style. An analysis of a number of blog posts made it evident that Internet literature has much in common with printed texts, mostly with regard to narration and language. Stories posted in forums are not as close to earlier printed literature as blog posts are, because they are less careful with grammar and seem to have as their major function the spreading of messages rather than concentrating on aesthetic objectives. Narration does not strikingly differ from printed texts; the distinctiveness of online literature is rather found in characteristics of participatory culture. Noteworthy is autofiction, which stands between fact and fiction and blurs the lines between personal narrations and literature; both blogs and forums reflect tendencies of autofiction. Ongoing research on this subject is conducted by Teresa Pepe from the University of Oslo.³⁷⁰ As mentioned before, short stories in forums come with a personal

370 Teresa Pepe presented her result in presentations entitled "Autofiction on Screen: Self-representation of an Egyptian "Spinster", at *Technologies of the Self: New Departures in Self-Inscription*, Cork September 2011 and at *International Forum on 'Women and the New Media in the Mediterranean Region'*, Fez, June

introduction that is not clearly marked as authentic or fictional. Blogs describe personal opinions side-by-side with fictional texts, which often makes it difficult to decide what is fiction or fact. In this sense, sources from blogs and forums show autofictional character.

To contextualize this relatively new literary category and to highlight differences from and similarities to earlier literature, I conducted a comparison with literary texts from the 1990s and postmodern perspectives. It showed that online literature tended to have a simpler narration and a more linear story line, while the autofictional aspect resembles earlier printed literature.

The first chapter examined the use of language, which is essential when dealing with new forms of literature posted on the net. My analysis showed that blogs tend to be written in Modern Standard Arabic, while forum postings are most commonly written in colloquial language. An academic discussion on literary quality was presented to stress the variety of perspectives on new literature. This showed that not all researchers accept new forms of literary texts as quality literature. Connected to the use of language is also the incorporation of dialogues that are essential to characterize class or heritage. An examination of forum postings showed the significance of dialogues as a tool for incorporating humorous arguments. Analysing the features of online literature helps us understand blogs and forums and may also reveal new perspectives on recent published texts (in print).

In the introduction I asked whether and how online literature from the Gulf is unique. One of the most important aspects that contribute to its contemporary features is its interactivity. But this poses certain challenges to authors: it influences text production from the region in many ways, as is exemplified in the process of remixing and redistribution of short stories in forums. This process is part of cultural production in Web 2.0 and of participatory culture. The challenge to authors, however, is that texts are often reposted without giving credit to the original authors.

Interaction and communication between readers and writers are closely related to the notion of public and private spaces in online media. Since interactivity in open platforms such as blogs and forums is a form of communication in public space, notions of public and private come into play when examining interactive processes online.

2011.

Additionally, this interaction impacts online writing. Authors and audience are both part of the process of creating a cultural product as a whole because commentary from both sides affects both current and future texts. Interaction also allows texts to be changed in a variety of remixes and repostings of stories that are distributed in forums. On the other hand, distributing cultural products or intellectual property without naming the original source is a problematic trait of the medium. User participation in creating and remixing videos, audio files and texts can be seen as one feature of the great freedom of possibilities on the web. Still, not everyone who creates works and distributes them wants others to redistribute them. In my sources, redistribution in forums inspired discussions, as the number of commentators proves.

Writers can restrict the openness of personal representations online; this does not contradict the idea of more freedom of publishing online, but is an aspect of this freedom. However, for readers this might be restricting, since bloggers may limit access to their personal blogs to just a selected audience by turning it into private mode.

Another advantage of distributing literary texts online is independence from institutionalised publishers. This offers benefits and challenges at the same time and also leads to unedited text publication because the instance of an editor disappears in blogs and forums. On the other hand, this independence might be beneficial to the audience, since texts can be distributed no matter what their content might be. Nevertheless, it may lead to a lack of the quality control exercised by editors at publishing houses. This means that amateurish texts are part of online literary production. Related to this is a scholarly argument presented by Alan Kirby, which shows two different perspectives on the matter: the strong impact of freedom in online media facilitates democratic processes in cultural production; but these new possibilities are weakening literary quality.³⁷¹ In either case, online literary distribution allows publication apart from questions of profitability. Blog posts and stories in forums show that literary quality varies, since some writers place a higher value on the literary quality of texts while others focus on the message they want to send to a broad audience.

Examining the appearance, composition and interactivity of the texts helped prepare an analysis of content and recurring themes that provide deeper insight on important issues. Chapter Three ("Who are the Actors? Portrayal of Heroes") examined fields of gender representation and globalisation as well as dealing with social norms.

³⁷¹ Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*, London 2009.

The analysis of sources showed that the most frequently appearing subjects of discussions relate to gender and a variety of notions on globalisation. Both topics are often illustrated in the portrayal of heroes, which tends to be different in blogs from in forums. Hero portrayal in blogs illustrates a striving for societal change, but most often heroes cannot reach their ideals because they are handicapped by values and norms deeply rooted in their normative culture. In forums, on the other hand, heroes and heroines not only desire a change in society, but also actively work to reach their personal goals. Here, social rules are sometimes broken to strive for an ideal of self-acceptance. I have not yet found an explanation of this phenomenon, because not enough information is accessible on the writers and users in my online literary sources.

An analysis of heroines in the short stories and blog posts of my material found no homogeneous image of heroines. There is a tendency towards a preference for stronger, active female protagonists, but other forms of female identity – "weak" characters – were also present.

The representation of heroes is not homogeneous in online short stories from the region, either. However, two different types of male actors can be described. On the one hand, there is the vulnerable and indecisive character who also shows emotions. On the other hand, a strong masculine protagonist appears in other stories. Stronger men are often portrayed as violent and controlling their families. In some stories, the role of the villain is taken by a male character who embodies stereotypical masculine features such as physical and emotional strength. In these stories, villains oppress the stories' heroes and harm them mentally or physically.

As is observable in the analysed texts, struggles with society are reflected in the heroes' descriptions; it appears to be intended that readers sympathize with the more emotional heroes who struggle against oppression and abuse and societal controls. Heroes try to overcome these conflicts going by through an individualization process.

Another aspect of hero portrayal can be seen when looking at the hero in a social context. Globalization and societal norms are both part of identity and hero representation. Settings and cultural impacts are often contextualised with global influences.

The last chapter of the thesis highlights challenges facing writers in relation to literature distributed via the Internet. Two major factors affect online publishing in the Gulf. Authoritarian pressure and forces that restrict publications are one factor: societal censorship or self-censorship may limit writers in their creative process. Everything

published needs permission from the Ministry of Information, so the choice of content is restricted. Self-censorship and social censorship are personal and not a measurable restriction on developing cultural products.

Online writers seem to have developed a variety of approaches to deal with these issues. Online publishing is convenient because it is the least restricted space for distribution. Anonymity serves as a beneficial tool to avoid social censorship. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the risk of abuse of intellectual property is present on the net. Authors handle the problem of being copied in a variety of ways. The two most common forms of dealing with this issue seem to be, first, that authors who frequently copied in forums may turn to blogging, where the likelihood of being copied is said to be less than in forums. Second is the possibility of accepting being copied, as is common in this medium, but also in contemporary culture in general. Copying and remixing are part of cultural production not only in digital media. One of the most successful artists of the last century, Andy Warhol, based some of his success on remixing and reproduction. Stories published in forms are often redistributed without changes. Nevertheless, it is also possible to see repostings with changes in narration, introduction and media use.

My findings show that both challenges, censorship and copying, underline the benefits of online distribution because they emphasise the opportunities and freedom of expression and the writers' responsibility to reach a vast audience in real time. Redistribution has good and bad aspects to it. On the one hand, a story finds its way to many people, which may be the goal of writers who focus on spreading a message. On the other hand, the author will most often not be credited for his cultural contribution. The original author becomes irrelevant, as the retelling and redistribution of the story still inspires discussions within the readership.

V.1 Perspectives

Online literature in the Gulf and all over the Arab countries is a rather new phenomenon that is growing continuously and developing in many directions. It is vital to examine developments and tendencies of future online literary production. Since wider cultural tendencies can be inferred from and read about in online literary text, it is valuable to study a wider variety of samples and more discourses that are recurring on a long-term basis.

Studying short-term trends will also provide a broader picture of developments.

Cultural production and participatory culture online are still in their beginnings. There is much scope for research on the field of online literature in Arabic-speaking countries, for example, the huge variety of poetry that is distributed and discussed. Additionally, an analysis of literary production of texts distributed on *Twitter* and *Tumblr* might be enlightening. Also worthy of study is religiously or politically motivated cultural production online.

Online literature is a global phenomenon. It allows new freedom in the distribution of unique digital works. Comparing online literature from different regions of the world will reveal a variety of motivations and aesthetic approaches. This could be modified versions of digital literature that contrast or show similarities as for example SMS and Twitter novels.

For future studies in the field it would also be of great value to look at the activities and cultural developments of the reading public. That means how far will the readership participate in the writing process and what will be its new role in this.

This exploration of distinctive features of literary text online attempts to grasp the cultural phenomenon as a continuation of recent developments in Arabic literature. My research examined the cultural processes of online writing, mainly in forums and blogs. These processes needed to be highlighted from various perspectives to form an overall picture of how these practices work.

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November 24, 2007 رجلان

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/10/blog-post_26.html

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http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post_20.html

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http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post_25.html

August 18, 2007 كذب ولكن

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July 7, 2007 قهقهة ودموع

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/07/blog-post_07.html

July 23, 2007 الواحد لا يقبل القسمة One does not accept division

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/07/blog-post_23.html

June 16, 2007 عالم مخصي

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June 9, 2007 أحجية

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-post_30.html

May 13, 2007 هل توقف الزمن بهم في الثمانينات؟

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-post_13.html

May 5, 2007 شوية حش

http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-post_05.html

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http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/04/blog-post_27.html

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http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2007/04/blog-post_16.html

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http://othersandme.blogspot.com/2006/10/blog-post_05.html

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June 2, 2006 "Back and Blocked"

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..! أولاد الأفاعي ..! أحداث غريبة تقع لفارس

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=378>

.. بقايا أنثى مجروحه

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=393>

أوطانك غربتي

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=396>

حب في اليونان

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=391>

ليه عمري مالقى لبرده دفى الا دفاكي؟؟؟

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=395>

!السر المخفي .؟

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=385>

هُم قِصَّةٌ لَا تُشْتَرَى

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=389>

القصص القصيرة

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/forumdisplay.php?f=3>

نسيت أنساك

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=377>

هو و هي يوم اجتمعوا

<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=330>

ود ..بتزوج

(<http://www.alamuae.com/story/showthread.php?t=379>)

<http://www.gulf-gate.net>

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نذاله الاولاد وين وصلت ادخل وشوف October 2009

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/386164-post1.html>

صفحاتي هنا : مساحتي November 2009

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t19851.html>

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قصة مفيدة فيها عبرة وعض December 2009

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قصتي الحزينة ::: جديدي ::: November 2009

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t19427.html>

قصة ولا كل القصص..75 دور و 3 شباب December 2009

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t20084.html>

قصة راعي التاكسي December 2, 2009

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t18932.html>

November 22, 2009 طفل احضر تراب الجنة

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t19402.html>

October 21, 2009 بعد ماتقروها قولولي ايت قصه ادھشتك

<http://www.gulf-gate.net/vb/t18761.html>

<http://www.omanxa.com>

(all accessed December 15, 2009)

August 28, 2010 مشاهدة النسخة كاملة

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-18161.html>

November 26, 2009 British Airways

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?p=180729>

November 27, 2009 الليل, حطي, طحت

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13437>

October 30, 2009 فتاة قالت لسوداني

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13047>

July 21, 2009 بنت 17 سنة

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=11678>

March 11, 2009 ... لا تسمع من طرف واحد

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?p=177558>

November 17, 2009 ان زرعت الامانه فستحصد الثقة

<http://www.omanxa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13317>

Forums MISC

July 31, 2010 ..! رجل // في قاعة الزفاف

<http://shjn-h.com/vb/showthread.php?p=23593>

July 31, 2010 لعسى الأيام ... تجمعا

http://www.ksayat.com/showthread-t_78197.html

كيف قتلت؟/القصة الكاملة للفتاة الامارتية التي عثر عليها في بئر مقتولة August 6, 2009
forum.uaewomen.net/showthread.php?t=476260
last accessed January 30, 2012.

November 20, 2011, "British Airways"
<http://www.alabudaiah.com/vb/showthread.php?p=17807>
last accessed January 26, 2012.

Survey Data

The survey was conducted from February 2010 until January 2012 through freeonlinesurveys.com. Most answers were given in the first month of placing the survey online.

1) كم عمرك؟

	Percentage Responses	
15-17 ·	18.8	6
18-20 ·	12.5	4
21-23 ·	15.6	5
24-27 ·	21.9	7
28-31 ·	6.3	2
32-40 ·	12.5	4
Other ·	12.5	4
	Total responses:	32

2) من اين انت؟

(all results shown)

- الجزائر
- الجزائر
- مصر
- المملكة العربية السعودية
- Tunisie
- Muscat
- البحرين
- السعودية
- المملكة السعودية
- من السعوديه
- عراقية أعيش في الإمارات
- الإمارات
- السعودية
- الرياض، السعودية
- Saudi Arabia

- المملكة العربية السعودية
- سلطنة عمان
- hail - saudi arabia
- عمان ، مسقط
- عمان
- الكويت
- من الكويت
- سلطنة عمان
- محافظة مسقط
- سلطنة عُمان - مسقط
- من سلطنة عمان
- السعوديه
- سلطنة عُمان
- سلطنة عمان

Comparison
response:

لماذا تمارس الكتابة؟

3)

- لكونها روح لها المقدرة في اختراق العوالم الغابرة، والمجهولة،
- واستنطاق الكيانات، و استشفاف المبهمات؛ لأننا في كون تحتضنه
- التساؤلات التي تدفعنا للبحث عن الاجابات الشافية، و لو نسبيا.
- البحث العلمي
- هوايه
- لأنني أراها تبعث ا بداخلي على الورق خشية الاختناق ..!
- Le chomage
- طريقة للتعبير عن الذات

- لأنني أحب الكتابة
- كما أنها إطلاق لعنان المشاعر و الأحاسيس
- لأعبر عن ذاتي
- لأنها تعبير للمشاعر بصدق وأيضاً أشعر براحة نفسيابذلك
- ..أريد أن أصبح أديبه, لأنني أحب الأدب العربي
- لأنها إحدى وسائل عرض رسالتي في الحياة
- وسيلة للتنفس و التعبير عن الذات

- لأعوض غياب من يسمعي -
- لأنني أحب الكتابة، و أنتفس بها -
- لأنني أحب الكتابة. لأنها تعبر عني. لأنها هوايتي. كيف تتعرف الشعوب -
- على بعضها دون الكتابة؟
- عشقي وهوايتي والاحب عندي -
- لأفهم نفسي ومن حولي أكثر. وربما لأخلد ذكريات معينة. وأحياناً لأنني -
- لا أجد من أبوح له فألجأ للكتابة
- cuz i like it
- لأنها مجلّية لما في النفس -
- نعم -
- لابرار موهبه احاول تطويعها في حب الكويت -
- للتعبير عن نفسي وعن ارائي وأفكري -
- لأنها وسيلتي أعبر بها عن نفسي -
- ولأنني أعتبرها رثتي الثالثة
- اجد فيها متعة وتفريجا عن صعوبات الحياة اليومية -
- هوايه منذ الصغر -
- نعم .. وبشكل دائم تقريباً -
- هواية -
- لأنني أحبها -

Compariso
n
response:

لماذا تنشر كتاباتك في الإنترنت؟

4)

(all results shown)

- لكون الانترنت تقنية حديثة تمس معظم شرائح المجتمع، على اختلاف -
- أعمارهم وانتماءاتهم العرقية والثقافية...، كما أنها الأنجع لتحقيق التواصل، -
- فهو الأسرع و الأيسر.
- للاستفدة العامة -
- طريقة اسهل فى النشر واسرع ويقرأها عدد اكبر من -
- .. ليقرأني الآخرون -
- Pour que les autres en profitent..
- نوع من التنفيس ... و نوع من الإفادة -
- لأتلقى النقد الايجابي و أطور من مواهبي -
- لكي أستطيع التنفس -

- ليشاركني الاخرين فيما كتبت ويسدو الي انتقاداتهم -
- .. لكي أستفيد من نقد من هم أكبر مني وأوسع درايه مني -
- لأنه الوسط الأكثر شعبية بين أوساط الشباب -

- و لأنه لا يلتزم بقيود أو حواجز
- جميل أن يشاركك الآخرون في قراءة ما تكتب و يبذون آراءهم حوله -
- لعدم وجود مساحة مماثلة تكفل لي الحرية بالتعبير -
- لأنها الطريق متاح بكل خياراته، الذي أتحكم في شروطه و مكانه كما -
- أريد، و لأن الانترنت تتيح لي اختيار قراءتي و بناء تواصل فعال معهم
- لأنها طريقة سهلة للوصول إلى العالم -
- لا يوجد نشر -
- أتمنى لو أصبح كاتبة ذا قيمة يوما ما. كنت أنشرها لأنني أردت معرفة
- .. رأي الآخرين بها. حتى أطور من أسلوبتي وما شابه
- i dont usually
- ربما لا أكتب أدبا، ولكن أكتب تعليقات حول ما ينشره الأدباء ممن
- ،، يتصفحون مواقعتي
- ليطلع عليها الناس، ولأواكب التطور الذي حصل للمجتمع، فهم يقرأون
- من الإنترنت أكثر من الصحف والجرائد أحيانا
- لكي تجد سبيلها الى الاخرين -
- لانها مكان ارحب وأوسع -
- وغير مكلف
- لأنه يساعدي على نشر كل ما اريد أن اقله ،بالإضافة إلى انه وسيلة -
- انتشار كبيرة لمختلف الفئات من الناس
- لأن الانترنت مجاني .. ويمكنني أن أكتب أي شيء أريده دو الخضوع -
- لرقابة أحد غير نفسي وقيمي ومبادئتي
- ارى في كتاباتي نوعا من البوح ولذا اريها للعامة على الانترنت -
- لكي الاقي عدد كبير من المشاهدين وذلك لان الكثير من الناس في هذا -
- ... الوقت يلجأون الى النت
- لأنها افضل طريقه للوصول لما تريده .. وعرضها على اكبر شريحة من
- مجتمع الانترنت
- اسهل طريقة ولا تحتاج لتعقيدات المحررين ودور النشر -
- لتنشر الى أبعد مكان -

Comparis
on
response:

منذ متى تنشر كتاباتك في الإنترنت؟

5)

(all results shown)

- مؤخرا جدا -

- منذ سنة -

- فترة قصيرة -

- منذ 7 سنوات -

- 4 ans

- عدة سنوات -

- منذ سنة و نصف -

- منذ فترة -

- منذ عامين -

- منذ أسبوعين -

- منذ أكثر من 5 سنوات .. بدءا بالمنتديات ثم الماي سبيس ثم مدونة -

خاصة

- 2003

- سنتين تقريبا -

- منذ عام 2003 -

- منذ 2006 ربما -

- لا يوجد نشر -

- منذ 8 سنوات -

- i've done that before but not anymore

- لم أكتب شيئا أدبيا ، وإنما أنا قارئ ومتابع -

- سنة -

- اغسطس 2006 -

- منذ قرابة الخمسة سنوات -

- منذ عام 2004 -

- سنة ونصف -

- في هذه السنوات الاخيرة -

- تقريبا منذ 2005م -

.. تقريبا منذ 5 سنوات واكثر

- منذ عام 2006 -

- منذ سنة تقريبا أو أقل قليلا -

Comparison
response:

كم ساعة تكتب كل يوم؟

6)

(all results shown)

.الكتابة لا تفيد بالساعات أو الأيام -

- ساعات 4

- ما بين ساعتين الى ثلاثة

- بحسب الحالة التي اعيشها , بين 4 الى 5 ساعات

- 5 heures

- اقل من ساعه يوميا

- .. لا أكتب كل يوم

الأمر يعتمد على ما يسمى بالالهام

- ربما ربع ساعة و أحيانا لا أفعل

- ساعة وان كثرت ساعتان

- نصف ساعه

-

لا أكتب يوميا

أكتب 4 ساعات إسبوعيا تقريبا

- حسب المزاج

- على حسب توفر الأفكار قد أكتب باليوم عشر تدوينات وقد لا أكتب لأيام

- ربما ثلاث ساعات في الأسبوع

- لا أكتب كل يوم، بل حسب المزاج. قد أقضي يوم كامل أكتب. أو قد

يستمر نص معي عدة أشهر، و قد تخطر لي فكرة و لا أجد الوقت لتدوينها

فأكتب رؤوس أقلام عنها و أوجل فعل اتلكتابة لوقت لاحق

- من ثلاث ساعات الى اربع

- ساعة باليوم

- hmm not much

- ربما في ساعة اتصفح فيها الانترنت

- على حسب .. ليس كثيرا

- ساعه

- ليس لدي عدد ساعات معين .. على حسب الفكرة أو الموضوع

- يختلف الأمر فأحيانا أكتب كثير وأحيانا تمر أسابيع دون أن أكتب شيء

- نصف ساعة

- ساعه او ساعه ونصف

- لا يهم عدد الساعات بقدر ما يهمني ما اكتبه وتقريبا من 3-4 ساعات

بين الساعه والثلاث ساعات تقريبا -

حوالى ساعتين متفرقتين أو أقل أو أكثر -

Compariso
n response:

هل تملك كمبيوترك الخاص بك؟

7)

(all results shown)

- نعم.

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم ..

- Oui

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- لا

- لا

- نعم

- yes

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- الان لا

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم وبعد لاب توب

Comparis
on

هل تكتب بإسمك الحقيقي أم المستعار؟

response:

8)

	Percentage Responses	
Yes ·	65.4%	17
No ·	34.6%	9
Total responses:		26

9)

هل تعرف عائلتك أنك تمارس الكتابة في الإنترنت؟

	Percentage Responses	
Yes ·	70.4%	19
No ·	29.6%	8
Total responses:		27

10)

هل تشجعك عائلتك على الكتابة؟

(all results shown)

- نعم.
- ليس الكل
- ليس دائما انها هوايه
- نعم
- Non
- احيانا
- ..نوعا ما
- نعم
- قليلا
- نعم , وبقووة
- نعم
- نعم
- نوعا ما، و إن كنت لم أخبرهم عن مدوناتى
- نعم تشجعني عائلتي على الكتابة في الإنترنت. لكنها تفضل النشر الورقي لأنه أكثر أمناً من ناحية حفظ الحقوق للكاتب
- اعيد كلنا من بيت علم
- لا
- yes
- نعم

- لا

- احيانا

- نعم باستمرار

- موقفها من كتابتي غير واضح فهم يعلمون أنني أكتب ولكنهم لا يعلقون
على الأمر

- لا

- نعم بالتأكيد

- نعم

- غالبا

- ليس كثيرا وبالأحرى فالإجابة هي لا

Compari
son
response
:

هل التعليقات على ما تكتب مهمة بالنسبة لك؟

11)

(all results shown)

- أكيد فهي مهمة جدا، لكونها الحافز و الدافع للمضي قدما.

- نعم جداحتى أعرف أخطائي

- طبعا

- نعم , جدا

- Bien sûr

- احيانا

- نعم

- ليس تماماً

- نعم

- أكيد

- نعم

- بالتأكيد

- لا

- نعم بالتأكيد

- نوعاً ما. التعليقات تبين ردة فعل الآخرين على ما تكتب

- نعم مهم

- نعم

- yes

- نعم

- نعم -
- جدا -
- مهمة جداً -
- ليس دائماً -
- كثيرا -
- نعم طبعاً -
- اكد مهمه .. تعطيني الدافع في الكتابه مهما كانت تلك التعليقات سواء
- ايجابيه او سلبيه لانني احب النقد على كتاباتي
- ليس دائما وفي بعض الأحيان يعتمد بحسب كاتب التعليق -
- نعم لأنها تساهم في التشجيع والاستمرار للأفضل -
- هل تستمر بالكتابة على الرغم من عدم حصولك على أي تعليقات؟

Comparison
response:

12)

(all results shown)

- أكيد، لأن الكتابة نسما ستشنتشق يوما ما -
- نعم -
- ساستمر -
- نعم ,
- Oui
- نعم -
- نعم -
- أجل -
- نعم -
- نعم ..
- نعم -
- لم يحدث لي أن كتبت يوماً و لم أحصل على أي تعليق. و حتى لو صار قد
- ألجأ لوالدي أو أختي أو من أثق برأيه من الأصدقاء ليقيم لي النص و
- يريني نقاط القوة و الضعف فيه
- اكد -

- نعم
- yes
- أجد تعليقات
- بالطبع
- بالتأكيد
- نعم
- نعم
- نعم وهذا يدفعني لبذل المزيد
- نعم .. سأستمر على الرغم عدم وجود تعليقات لكي اثبت وجودي
- نعم
- في بعض الأحيان لأن عليك معرفة الكتابه أو الموضوع الذي يحبه القراء
- Com
paris
on
respo
nse:
إذا أصبحت قصة او شعرك من كتابتك مشهورة فهل تعيد الكتابة قصة
جديدة بنفس الاسلوب؟

13
)

(all results shown)

- ليس بالضرورة، لأن الكتابة التجارية لا ترقى .
- لست قصاصة وانما باحثة في اللسانيات
- نعم
- امم , ربما
- Peut-être
- لا
- نعم
- ربما
- سأغير من الاسلوب اذا امكن
- لا بأسلوب أجمل
- ليس شرطاً
- لا أحاول أبدا أن أكرر نفسي، الحروف تختار بنفسها الطريق الذي تريد
- لا
- لا أدري
- يعتمد.
- سأحرص بالتأكيد على عدم تكرار الموضوع
- لكن إن كنت تعين الأسلوب القصصي، لو وجدت موضوع آخر يناسب هذا

الأسلوب سأكتب به بالتأكيد

لا بتأكيد ارقا الى الحسن -

- ربما -

- yes

- لا

- لا

لا أعتقد -

- ربما -

احاول التجديد -

نعم اذا حالفتي الحظ لما لا -

لا سيكون الاسلوب مختلف -

ربما .. القصة بالنسبة لي حالة نفسية ممزوجة بانفعالات داخلية متأثرة -

بمحيطها الواقعي فإذا توافرت نفس الظروف فربما اكتب قصة بنفس

أسلوب القصة الأولى

لا بل أجدد وأضيف وأعدل نحو الأفضل -

لأن الافق الذي يكتب به الكاتب غير محدود

Compa
rison
respons
e:

ما هو الموضوع المفضل لديك في شعرك/كتابتك/قصصك؟

14)

(all results shown)

أسرار الحياة -

الشعر أحله ولا أكتبه -

قصص -

الحزن و الألم , وبعض البشر -

- La société

- كل شيء -

.. الموضوع الذي اتكلم عنه غالبا هو الحزن و الموت -

الروح -

ولأننا نحن بشر -

جميعها -

-

اليوميات و عروض الكتب التي أقرأها

- الأدب -

- المعاناة
- لا شيء محدد
- الحياة، الحب، الأصدقاء، الناس، يوميات
- كثيره منها استراحه قلم
- تجاربي الخاصة ، مشاعري
- romance
- جميعها
- نشر الحب
- المشاعر الإنسانية .. وهموم الناس الصغيرة التي تقبع في دواخل نفوسهم
- لا أكتب قصص بالمعنى الحرفي للقصة
- الاكتئاب والحزن والمشاكل النفسية والحب
- الامل
- الحزن
- التفاضل
- الموضوع الحزين أو البائس أو الطموح

Comparison
in response:

هل تقرأ موقع من خارج الخليج؟

15)

	Percentage	Responses
Yes	70.4%	19
No	29.6%	8
Total responses:		27

16)

هل تطلع على موقع آخر؟

	Percentage	Responses
Yes	92.0%	23
No	8.0%	2
Total responses:		25

17)

هل عندك موقع خاص بك؟ ما إسمها؟

(all results shown)

- لا
- لا
- نعم , [روح]

- Non

- لا

- نعم ،

- لا املك موقع خاص بي

- نعم

-

www.etharalsaadi.com

- نعم ، www.orjo7a.com

- http://nothing0.wordpress.com

- http://vain.invain.me/

باطل نزيه

- سيرتُ يَمَام -

ترجمتها بالانجليزية Swarm of dove

http://ymam.wordpress.com

- نعم

- no

- نعم

- نعم ..www.alnaseebi.page.tl

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- لا

- لا

- لا

- لحد الآن لا

يمكن في المستقبل

وإذا لقيتك بخبرك

Comparison
response:

هل يقرأ أصدقاؤك /شعرك/كتابتك/قصصك؟

18)

Yes ·

No ·

Percentage Responses

84.6% 22

15.4% 4

Total responses: 26

19)

هل ترسل شعرك/قصصك عبر الهاتف المتحرك لأصدقائك؟

213

	Percentage Responses	
Yes ·	24.0%	6
No ·	76.0%	19
Total responses:		25

هل قابلت شخص يمارس الكتابة سبق أن تعرفت عليه عبر الإنترنت؟ (20)

(all results shown)

- لا.

- نعم الكثير

- نعم

- نعم

- Non

- نعم

- نعم

- لا

- لا

- نعم

- نعم

- لا

- كثيراً

- لا. و لكنني أعرف أشخاص يكتبون على الإنترنت

عرفتهم من الحياة سابقاً ثم اطلعت على مدوناتهم على الإنترنت

- كثير

- نعم

- no

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم

- لا

- لا

- نعم -

- لا في الحقيقة لم أقابل بعد -

وأتمنى أن أقابل كاتبات لكي أتعرف على طريقة كتابة المرأة

Comparison
son
response
:

هل تأثر الكتابة في الإنترنت على حياتك؟ كيف؟

21)

(all results shown)

- نعم، فيها نتواصل حال -

- أصبحت أكثر علما وأكثر سرعة ونسيت أموري الخاصة -

- لا -

- لا ..

- Non

- لا -

- نعم ؛ عندما أكتب أشعر بالراحة .. وأحيانا أكتب عن حياتي وما يدور من -

حولي على شكل قصة كنوع من الغموضه

- لا -

- نعم كثيرا -

تريد ثقتي بنفسي و تزيد خبرتي و تفيدني في دراستي

- نعم -

- العالم الافتراضي هو حياتي الأساسية -

- نعم، تربطني بالكثيرين، و تنفس عني -

- لا بل تزيدني اصرار وعزمه -

- نعم -

- no

- ليس كثيرا -

- لا -

- بالطبع -

- إلى الآن لا -

- لا -

- نعم -

- نعم -

- نوعاً ما -

- نوعا ما -

- اذا كانت تطور فنعم -

لانني اقيسها أولا

هل سوف تدمر أم سوف تنفع

Comparis
on
response:

هل تشارك في المنافسات مثل سجال؟

22)

	Percentage Responses	
Yes ·	20.0%	5
No ·	80.0%	20
Total responses:		25

23)

هل ترغب بنشر كتابتك/شعرك/قصصك في كتاب مطبوع؟

(all results shown)

- طبعاً ، هذا مؤكد -

- أتمنى -

- نعم -

- نعم .. أتمنى ذلك -

- Si j'ai les moyens

- لا -

- ربما -

- نعم -

- لحد الآن لم اكتب شيئاً يستحق النشر -

- ليس الآن -

-

- نعم بالتأكيد

- أتمنى -

- لا -

- نعم، في يوم ما -

- بالتأكيد -

- ان شالله قريب -

- نعم -

- yes

- نعم -

- لقد تحقق حلمي في نشر كتاب مطبوع -
 - نعم أتمنى ذلك -
 - نعم -
 - اكيد -
 - نعم -
 - لا -
 - ربما في المستقبل -
 - نعم لان هناك أشخاص كثيرين يحبون القراءة فقط من الكتب أو ليست لديهم معرفة كبيرة في البحث عن الكتب في الانترنت
- هل تريد أن تعمل ككاتب؟

Comparison
response:

24)

	Percentage	Responses
Yes	66.7%	18
No	33.3%	9
Total responses:		27

25)

هل الرقابة مهمة لك؟

(all results shown)

- نعم.
- أرفض الرقابة أقصد أرفض الحجر هلى الأفكار -
- نعم -
- Non
- لا -
- نعم -
- نوعا ما -
- نعم -
-
- نعم
- لا -
- نعم -
- أنسى مهمة الرقابة، تبقى الرقابة الاجتماعية فقط -
- أي نوع من الرقابة تعني؟ -
- مش قد كذا -

- لا

- yes

- نعم

- لا

- بالتأكيد

- لا اطلاقاً

- ليس كثيراً

- لا

- نعم

- لا تهمني ابداً

- لا

- لا ليستيرا لانني أعرف نفسي أنني على حق

Comparison response:

هل سياسة مهمة في كتاباتك؟

26)

(all results shown)

- لا؛ لأن السياسة عائق

- عند تحليلي للنصوص لا بد أن أعرض لهذا الجانب من وجهة أكاديمية

- لا

- , اممم لا

- Oui

- لا

- نعم

- لا

- نعم

- قليلاً

- لا

- أحياناً

- نعم

- أحياناً

إذا كان هناك موضوع يهمني أو شدني بشكل ملفت على الصعيد

السياسي قد أكتب عنه

- لا

- لا

- no

- لا

- لا

- لا

- ليس كثيرا

- لا

- لا

- كل ما يقوله القلب وتقذفه اللسان مهم لدي

- لا تهمني ابدا

- لا

- لا لانني اهتم كثيرا بالمواضيع الحزينه والرومنسية أو التي تكون ذات

طابع خاص

Comparison
response:

هل تعتقد أن الكتابة في الإنترنت أكثر حرية من النشر في الكتب؟

27)

(all results shown)

- . يمكن قول ذلك

- نعم

- نعم

- نعم ,. احيانا

- C'est évident

- نعم

- نعم

- ليس كثيرا

- نعم

-

نعم

- نعم

- لا

- بكل تأكيد

- نعم

- اكييد

- نعم
- yes
- نعم بالتأكيد
- نعم
- بالطبع
- نعم وبصورة كبيرة
- نعم
- طبعاً
- بالتأكيد
- نعم
- نعم
- نعم لانك في الانترنت يمكنك القول ما تشائين دون رقابه وأكثر انفتاح وحرية ولكن يلزم على الجميع مراقبة ضميرة

ما هي المشاكل أو الصعوبات التي وجهتيك في الكتابة في الإنترنت؟

Comparison response:

28)

(all results shown)

- الخلل الذي يصيب شبكات الأنترنت، بالتالي تلاشي الأيقونات
- انقطاع الانترنت
- ! عندما أكتب طويلاً دون مسودة مسبقة ويحذف كل شيء
- J'ai mal aux yeux et je ne peut pas poursuivre le traitement des romans
- وجود المساحة المناسبة
- عدم الرد على كتابات الشخص تفقده ثقته بنفسه و رغبته في الكتابة و
- خصوصاً إن كان مبتدئاً
- البعض ينتقد بأسلوب جارح وهذا لا يعجبني
-
- × ضعفي في الأمور التقنية
- × قلة المقرئية
- × انشغالي الدائم عن الكتابة الانترنتية على الرغم من حبي الشديد لها
- غياب حفظ الحقوق
- لا يوجد
- لا شيء محدد
- مشاكل عدم حفظ الحقوق فقط

أي قد يسرق أي شخص نص لك و ينسبه لنفسه و لا توجد رقابة عادلة
بخصوص هذا الموضوع

بدايت الكتابه وعدم الرد من قبل المطلع يمر مرور الكرام -

- non

- لست أدري -

- لا شي -

- معرفه اسمي بعد نشري لاول ديوان مطبوع -

- أصعب المشاكل هي تلك التي تتعلق بالانتشار وتعريف موقعك عن -

طريق مشاركة الغير في مواقعهم ، فهذا الأمر يحتاج إلى مزيد من الوقت

الذي قد لا يكون متوفر في ظل مشاغل الحياة اليومية

- التأويل ونسب الضمائر الذي يمارسه البعض -

- لا يوجد -

- الكثي منها عدم التشجيع -

- لا توجد اي صعوبات نهائيا -

- انقطاع الخدمة -

- لا توجد الى الآن مشاكل لأنني بعدني ما بديت بجد -

أفكر أني ابدأ الكتابة

أصلا انا الحين بس أقرأ

هل تعتقد أن نشر شعرك/قصصك عبر الإنترنت إكمال لتقليد الحكواتي؟

Comp
arison
n
respo
nse:

لماذا؟

29

)

(all results shown)

- لا، فلكل موقعه و وظيفته -

- قلت اني لست شاعرة ولا كاتبة قصص بل باحثة في المجال اللساني -

- لا ..

- Je ne comprends pas ..

- لا -

- ربما .. نحن في آخر الأمر نروي -

- لا اقلد احد في كتاباتي -

- لا -

- لا أبدا -

- لا -

- لا أدري -

- لا أظن، مواصلة لدور الأمسية الشعرية ربما، على أفق مفتوح من الزمن -

- لم أفهم السؤال -

- لا يطبع كل شي له طابعه الخاص -

- لا -

- yes

- لا -

- لا -

- لا أظن ذلك -

- لا -

- نعم لان هناك ناس فاضية تقرأ القصص ايا كانت -

واخيرا أتمنى لك التوفيق في دراستك

عاد لاتنسين الهديه اذا وفقتي بالنجاح

اوكيه

يا الله باي