

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper employs the conceptual metaphor theory framework introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their pivotal 1980 text, *Metaphors We Live By*, to explore the metaphorical constructs in Layla Al-Othman's 2000 autobiography, *The Trial*. The study proposes that a dominant conceptual metaphor, "EVERYTHING IS A PRISON" critically shapes Al-Othman's narrative, reflecting and potentially influencing the collective mindset of Gulf society, especially concerning the experiences of Kuwaiti women. This metaphor is not only central to the author's cognitive processing but is also vividly reflected through various linguistic metaphors in her text.

**Key words:** Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Kuwaiti Literature; utobiographical Narrative; Layla Al-Othman; The Trial.

# METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

## الاستعارات في رواية المحاكمة لـ (ليلى العثمان)

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### الملخص:

توظف هذه الورقة إطار نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية التي قدمها جورج لاكوف ومارك جونسون في كتابهما المحوري لعام ١٩٨٠ "الاستعارات التي نحيا بها" لاستكشاف البنى الاستعارية في السيرة الذاتية للادبية الكويتية ليلى العثمان والمعنونة "المحاكمة" والصادرة سنة ٢٠٠٨. تقترح الدراسة أن الاستعارة المفهومية السائدة "كل شيء هو سجن" تشكل بشكل حاسم الجانب السردي للرواية، مما يعكس ويؤثر بشكل محتمل على العقلية الجماعية للمجتمع الخليجي، خاصة فيما يتعلق بتجارب النساء الكويتيات. هذه الاستعارة ليست فقط مركزية في معالجة الكاتبة المعرفية، بل تعكس أيضاً بوضوح من خلال استعارات لغوية متنوعة في نصها.

الكلمات المفتاحية : نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية؛ الأدب الكويتي؛ السرد الذاتي؛ ليلى العثمان؛ المحاكمة.

# METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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## INTRODUCTION:

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits a deeper role for metaphors beyond their traditional literary interpretation as mere rhetorical devices. According to this theory, metaphors are intrinsic to cognitive processing, shaping not only how we communicate but fundamentally influencing our conceptualization and comprehension of abstract ideas. This perspective suggests that metaphors are not just stylistic embellishments but are essential cognitive tools that bridge our understanding of the abstract (such as LIFE) by mapping it onto more concrete (as PRISON or JAIL), experiential domains, as Al-Othman did in her selected novel for this paper. This theory thus underscores the significance of metaphors in both everyday and poetic language, revealing their capacity to structure thought and affect our interaction with the world around us.

In literary studies, metaphors extend beyond their aesthetic function, serving as windows into the cultural and historical contexts from which a work emerges. By examining the metaphors prevalent in literature from a specific era, we can uncover the collective beliefs, values, and experiences that permeate a society. Such an analysis provides insight into the shared cultural narratives and ideologies that influence an author's work and are reflected through their literary expressions. This paper aims to delve into the cultural underpinnings of Kuwaiti society, particularly in relation to the status and perception of Kuwaiti women, as portrayed through the metaphorical language in the writings of a Kuwaiti female author. By analyzing the metaphors she employs, we seek to illuminate the specific cultural values and societal attitudes towards women that are embedded in the literary landscape of Kuwait. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the text itself but also offers a broader view of how gender dynamics are conceptualized and communicated within the Kuwaiti cultural milieu.

Also, analyzing metaphors within a text is a critical approach that allows us to excavate beneath the surface of language to uncover the implicit assumptions and values embedded within an author's narrative. Metaphors do more than decorate speech; they structure our perceptions and understanding by linking the familiar to the unfamiliar, thereby shaping how we interpret the world. Through a meticulous examination of the metaphors used in a literary work, we gain insights into the subtle and often unspoken beliefs and values that the author conveys. This paper endeavors to probe deeply into the metaphoric landscape of Al-Othman's writings. By dissecting the metaphors she employs, we aim to uncover the foundational beliefs and values that underpin her narratives. This analysis not only provides a richer understanding of Al-Othman's literary oeuvre but also illuminates how her work reflects and possibly challenges the cultural

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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and social norms of her time. Through this exploration, we seek to reveal how Al-Othman's use of metaphorical language articulates complex themes regarding identity, tradition, and change within Kuwaiti society.

This study rigorously investigates the metaphorical landscape of Layla Al-Othman's autobiography, "The Trial." Our analysis is particularly focused on the pervasive conceptual metaphor "everything is a prison," which we argue plays a critical role in structuring the narrative framework of the text. This metaphor not only serves as a cognitive anchor for Al-Othman's storytelling but also acts as a reflective surface for the socio-cultural dynamics of Gulf society, especially in its depiction of the experiences of Kuwaiti women. The scope of this paper centers on how these metaphorical expressions shape the narrative and influence the reader's perception, offering a lens through which the audience can view the constraints and challenges faced by women in this cultural context. By tracing how the metaphor "everything is a prison" is woven into the textual fabric of Al-Othman's autobiography, we aim to illuminate how metaphors function not merely as literary devices but as powerful cognitive tools that encapsulate and convey complex societal issues. Through detailed textual analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate how these metaphorical constructs contribute to a deeper understanding of the text's thematic concerns and enhance our appreciation of its cultural and psychological depth.

In this scholarly inquiry, we confront a central question that drives our exploration into Layla Al-Othman's autobiography, "The Trial": How does the pervasive conceptual metaphor of "everything is a prison" not only articulate the author's personal cognitive framework but also reflect and potentially shape the collective consciousness within Kuwaiti society, particularly regarding the experiences of women? This metaphor, identified as a core element in Al-Othman's narrative structure, prompts us to investigate its implications on a broader cultural level. The problematization centers on understanding the dual role of this metaphor. Firstly, how does it function within Al-Othman's autobiographical narrative to depict her personal and societal struggles? Secondly, to what extent does this metaphor serve as a lens through which the conditions and perceptions of Kuwaiti women are revealed and perhaps even influenced? By addressing these questions, this study aims to bridge the gap between individual narrative and collective cultural identity, examining how metaphoric language encapsulates complex socio-cultural dynamics and individual experiences within the fabric of Gulf society.

In accordance with the theoretical constructs provided by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in "Metaphors We Live By," this study articulates its central hypothesis around the profound influence of the conceptual metaphor "everything is a prison" within Layla Al-Othman's autobiography, "The Trial." Our research posits that this metaphor not only crucially shapes the narrative arc

## **METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"**

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and psychological depth of Al-Othman's autobiography but also mirrors and potentially molds the collective societal perceptions, particularly concerning the roles and experiences of Kuwaiti women. The hypothesis drives our inquiry to explore whether and how this metaphor encapsulates broader societal dynamics and gendered experiences in Kuwaiti society, influencing the collective cultural narrative. We aim to determine the extent to which Al-Othman's use of the prison metaphor acts as a cognitive and linguistic framework through which readers and the society at large might perceive and interpret the realities of Kuwaiti women. This approach seeks to uncover deeper layers of meaning and social commentary embedded in the metaphorical language of the text, reflecting broader cultural resonances and potentially instigating shifts in societal perspectives.

The methodological approach involves a close textual analysis, supported by theoretical insights from cognitive linguistics, to dissect how specific metaphors operate within the text to encode complex themes of freedom, constraint, identity, and resistance. Through this focused examination, the paper seeks to illuminate the powerful impact of metaphor in crafting narrative realities and influencing societal perspectives.

Methodologically, the paper begins with an introduction that outlines the necessary biographical and contextual background of Al-Othman and her work. It then details the application of conceptual metaphor theory to her text, follows with an analysis that supports the hypothesis with textual examples, and concludes with a summary of findings.

### **1. LAYLA AL-OTHMAN AND THE TRIAL:**

Laila Abdallah Al-Othman OR Laylā al-ʿUthmān (born October 17, 1943) is a Kuwaiti author and writer. She was born into the prominent Al-Othman family, where her father was a well-known figure of his time. She began writing during her studies, and since 1965, she has published her articles in local newspapers on literary and social issues. She continued to contribute weekly and daily articles to local and Arab newspapers.

Laylā al-ʿUthmān, a prominent Kuwaiti author, critically engages with the themes of women's defiance and resistance within the contours of a pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Her literary oeuvre is marked by a profound exploration of the challenges women face under patriarchal oppression, where traditional gender roles and societal norms are both interrogated and challenged. Through her narratives, al-ʿUthmān vividly portrays the struggles of women navigating a male-dominated landscape, often employing a narrative voice that resonates with the dominant male perspectives, thereby mirroring the entrenched patriarchal structures that pervade the society. (Tijani, 2018, p 63).

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHTMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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Her works are distinguished by the portrayal of female characters who not only confront these oppressive structures but also engage in acts of defiance and solidarity, highlighting the resilience and agency of women striving for autonomy. al-Othman's stories bring to light the intricate complexities of gender relations and social hierarchies in the Middle Eastern context, providing a nuanced perspective on the intricate dynamics at play (Salhi & Alfraih, 2020, p. 915).

The analysis of her narratives often employs feminist lenses, focusing on the depiction of women's agency and the multifaceted challenges they face within a conservative society. Al-'Uthmān's contribution to literature not only serves as a critique of patriarchal norms but also acts as a medium for advocating social change, pushing the boundaries of the traditional roles ascribed to women, and promoting a dialogue towards greater gender equality. Her work thus stands as a significant cultural and feminist critique, enriching our understanding of the complexities of gender and power in the Middle East. (Tijani, 2009, p.63).

In her novel "The Trial," Layla Al-Othman presents a gripping narrative drawn from her own experiences towards the end of the twentieth century. The novel emerges against the backdrop of a lawsuit initiated by Islamic extremists, who were also members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, accusing Al-Othman of inciting moral decay through her literary exploration of taboo subjects such as sex and love. This accusation brings to light the tensions between creative expression and the restrictive norms enforced by conservative elements within society (Baudrillard & Abd al-Malik, 2013, p. 212).

"The Trial" is pervaded by an atmosphere of tension and fear, capturing the emotional turmoil of Al-Othman as she navigates the uncertain waters of the Kuwaiti legal system. The narrative is structured around the sequence of court dates, portraying her escalating anxiety and the profound sense of injustice she experiences. The conclusion of the novel, with a verdict that finds her guilty with a suspended sentence and a fine, reflects a compromised form of justice—it is neither an outright condemnation nor an exoneration but rather an ambiguous middle ground that leaves the moral questions raised by her work unresolved (Uddin, 2014, p. 641).

This novel serves as a poignant critique of the socio-legal dynamics in Kuwait at the time, highlighting the challenges faced by writers in a society where legal and moral boundaries are tightly controlled. Al-Othman uses her personal ordeal to underscore the broader implications for freedom of expression and the heavy toll that artistic and personal expression can exact in a conservative setting. Her narrative not only chronicles a personal struggle but also serves as a reflection on the broader societal conflicts between progressivism and traditionalism (Badar & Florijančič, 2021, p. 490).

# METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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## 2. CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY AND THE ARABIAN GULF FEMINIST LITERATURE:

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as advanced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work, *"Metaphors We Live By"* (1980), introduces a transformative perspective on the role of metaphors in human cognition and language. This theory posits that metaphors are not merely rhetorical flourishes within language but are fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape our understanding and interaction with the world. CMT suggests that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical in nature, which influences not only how we speak but also how we think and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 45-46).

Moreover, CMT distinguishes between conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors based on their functions and manifestations. Conceptual metaphors operate at a mental level, structuring our thoughts and perceptions in general, overarching ways, such as viewing "**LIFE** as a **PRISON**" or considering "**TIME** as a **MONEY**." These metaphors frame our conceptual experience and influence our everyday reasoning and actions. Conversely, linguistic metaphors are the specific, tangible expressions of these underlying conceptual structures, visible in the language we use to communicate ideas and experiences. They are the verbal manifestations that enable the communication of complex thoughts in relatable terms, such as saying "he wasted my time" to imply the misuse of a valuable resource. Together, both conceptual and linguistic metaphors contribute to a symbiotic relationship where the conceptual foundation informs our cognitive understanding, and linguistic expressions provide the means to articulate and share that understanding. Thus, through CMT, we appreciate metaphors not only as elements of language but as central cognitive tools that construct and communicate our reality, thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping our social and cultural perceptions as well as our individual and collective cognition (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013, p. 320).

Furthermore, at the core of CMT is the distinction between Source Domains and Target Domains, which underpins how metaphors function. The Source Domain consists of familiar, concrete experiences from which we draw characteristics to comprehend other concepts, whereas the Target Domain refers to the less tangible concepts or experiences that we aim to understand. For instance, in the metaphor "**TIME IS A MONEY**"<sup>1</sup>, "**MONEY**" (Source Domain) is used to conceptualize and articulate "**TIME**" (Target Domain), thereby

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<sup>1</sup> In cognitive linguistics, the use of capital letters in conceptual metaphors serves crucial functions. Firstly, it differentiates the abstract TARGET DOMAIN from the concrete SOURCE DOMAIN, avoiding confusion with ordinary language use (i.e. linguistic metaphor). Secondly, capitalization emphasizes the structured, systematic nature of these metaphors. This method highlights their role as fundamental elements shaping human thought (i.e. conceptual metaphor).

## **METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"**

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enriching our perception of time's value in a manner analogous to valuable commodities (Alessandroni, 2017, p. 630). This theoretical framework reveals that metaphors significantly influence a broad spectrum of human activities, including perception, behavior, and linguistic expression, by shaping our interpretations of complex or abstract ideas through more accessible, concrete associations. In literary studies, CMT enables a deeper analytical engagement with texts, uncovering enriched layers of meaning and demonstrating how literary creations both reflect and mold the cognitive frameworks of their audiences.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) emerges as a formidable analytical tool that illuminates the layers of meaning embedded in Gulf feminist literature. This theory serves as a foundational framework for examining how female writers from the Gulf region employ metaphors not only to depict their lived experiences but also to articulate their emotional landscapes and challenge the socio-cultural constructs surrounding them (El Amin, 2017, p. 585).

The potency of CMT in the analysis of Gulf feminist literature lies in its capacity to excavate the latent meanings within these texts. By scrutinizing the metaphors prevalent in such works, we gain insights into the emotional and psychological motivations of the writers, as well as their broader worldviews. These metaphors often convey deep-seated feelings of oppression, alienation, and a yearning for emancipation, reflecting the complex interplay between individual agency and societal constraints.

Furthermore, CMT is instrumental in critiquing the pervasive social issues that these writers address. Gulf feminist literature frequently employs metaphorical language to critique pressing issues such as gender discrimination, restrictions on female autonomy, and broader gender disparities within conservative societies. Through this lens, metaphors become powerful vehicles for social critique, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by women in these contexts (Abdel-Raheem, 2020, p. 720).

In addition to its critical capacities, CMT significantly enriches literary analysis by providing new methodologies for interpreting Gulf feminist novels. It enables scholars to uncover the implicit meanings and interpret the significance of the metaphors used, thus deepening our comprehension of these literary works (Tijani, 2018, p. 9).

Overall, Conceptual Metaphor Theory not only enhances our understanding of the experiences of Gulf women through the lens of feminist literature but also fosters a richer, more informed critique of the social and cultural dynamics that shape their lives. This theory stands as a vital analytical tool that extends the boundaries of literary analysis and enriches our engagement with Gulf feminist texts.



## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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### 3. METAPHORS IN THE "*THE TRIAL*":

This study posits that a singular, pervasive conceptual metaphor, "everything in life is a prison for women," profoundly influences the cognitive framework of Layla Al-Othman during the composition of her novel. This metaphor, representing a central theme of confinement and restriction, is not merely a literary device but a cognitive lens through which the author views and constructs her narrative world. Throughout the text, this underlying metaphor manifests itself through a variety of linguistic expressions, including specific words, sentences, and phrases that echo the theme of entrapment.

In this section, we will meticulously examine these linguistic manifestations, presenting them as concrete evidence of the metaphor's operation within the author's mind. By analyzing these textual elements, we aim to demonstrate how deeply this metaphor is embedded in Al-Othman's narrative, shaping her portrayal of women's experiences and reflecting a broader commentary on their societal constraints. This analysis will underscore the metaphor's centrality in the text, highlighting its role in structuring the thematic and emotional contours of the novel.

#### 3.1. Life:

In the quote from Layla Al-Othman's novel on page 45, where she writes, "*I felt that life was a narrow cage. Its door opens only to swallow me, and its bars are sharpened knives ready to seize my fingers and break them one by one.*" we see a vivid illustration of the central metaphor discussed in the research. This metaphor—**LIFE** as a **CAGE**—encapsulates the feeling of being trapped or confined, a recurring theme that Al-Othman explores to reflect the restrictive conditions imposed on women. This specific expression not only reinforces the conceptual metaphor of "**EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS A PRISON** for Kuwaiti women" but also intensifies the emotional resonance of the narrative. By describing life as a "cage" that actively "sucks" the narrator in, Al-Othman personifies life as an oppressive force, thereby deepening the reader's understanding of the protagonist's struggles and the psychological impact of her experiences.

Indeed, Laila Al-Othman's depiction of life as a prison is a recurring motif throughout her novel. In page 176, she explicitly reiterates this sentiment by stating, "*I am a hostage of life "the prison"*". This powerful declaration underscores the protagonist's sense of entrapment and suffocation within the confines of her existence. Al-Othman's use of the word "hostage" carries significant weight, emphasizing the protagonist's feeling of being held captive against her will. The prison metaphor further reinforces this notion of confinement, suggesting that the protagonist's life is devoid of freedom and personal agency.

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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This research assumes that "seeing life as a cage or prison" might be the logical motivation for the author's belief that "death" is a form of liberation and that "the dead" are freer than the living is compellingly supported by her statements on page 176 of the novel. When Layla Al-Othman writes, "*Will I think... about my mother, my father, my aunts, my grandmothers, my relatives, and acquaintances who have died and praise them because they are free in their graves,*" she vividly expresses this viewpoint when she thinks that **DEATH IS A FREEDOM**. This declaration by the author on viewing death as freedom illustrates a deep-seated perception of life's limitations. It suggests that the ultimate escape from the metaphorical prison of life of Kuwaiti women is death, which is seen not as an end but as a release from bondage. This perspective aligns with the overarching metaphor of life as a confining structure, extending the metaphor to suggest that true freedom, unattainable in life, is only found in death.

### 3.2. Customs and Traditions:

In page 8, Laila Al-Othman poignantly captures the protagonist's entrapment within the confines of societal expectations and traditional norms. Her quote, "*The law of 'customs and traditions' applies to me. My father decided that I should leave school, and with the submissiveness of a woman who has no power or strength, I carried out the decision*", powerfully conveys the protagonist's subjugation to patriarchal authority and the stifling influence of ingrained customs. The phrase "*the law of 'customs and traditions'*" highlights the pervasive nature of these societal norms, emphasizing their power to dictate individual choices and restrict personal freedom. The protagonist's father's decision to force her to leave school serves as a stark illustration of this power dynamic, demonstrating how traditional gender roles can limit women's educational opportunities and hinder their personal development. The use of the word "*submissiveness*" underscores the protagonist's lack of agency in the face of her father's decision. The phrase "*the woman who has no power or strength*" further reinforces this sense of helplessness, painting a picture of a woman bound by societal expectations and devoid of the ability to challenge or resist them. The protagonist's act of complying with her father's decision, despite her own aspirations, highlights the deep-seated influence of these traditional norms. It suggests a resignation to her fate, an acceptance of the limitations imposed upon her by society.

This passage effectively captures the protagonist's struggle against the constraints of traditional gender roles and societal expectations. It serves as a powerful reminder of the challenges faced by women in conservative societies, where their individual aspirations and desires may be stifled by the weight of ingrained customs and patriarchal authority.

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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### 3.3. The Verbal Actions:

On page 121, Layla Al-Othman continues to present examples of the abstract prisons that Kuwaiti women endure. She discusses another such prison surrounding the Gulf woman: the prison of false accusations. She writes "*What can people offer you when you are trapped by the bars of a false accusation?*"

This powerful declaration highlights the protagonist's vulnerability to societal judgment and the devastating impact of unfounded accusations on her life. The phrase "*bars of a false accusation*" effectively paints a picture of the protagonist being confined within the shackles of unjust allegations, her reputation and freedom tarnished by the weight of unfounded claims.

Al-Othman's use of the word "trapped" emphasizes the protagonist's sense of entrapment and helplessness in the face of these accusations. The phrase "*What can people offer you*" suggests a sense of despair and disillusionment, as the protagonist questions the support and understanding she can expect from others amidst such adversity. This quote serves as a stark reminder of the social stigma and prejudice that women in conservative societies may face, particularly when subjected to false accusations. It highlights the vulnerability of their reputations and the potential for such accusations to severely impact their lives. The "*prison of false accusations*" represents another layer of confinement that Kuwaiti women, as portrayed by Al-Othman, must navigate. It adds to the complex tapestry of challenges they face, encompassing not only societal expectations and gender roles but also the harsh realities of prejudice and unjust treatment.

Her conceptualizing metaphor of **ACCUSATION IS A PRISON** can be found also in her quote on page 15, "*Even if we humans stay at home, a pigeon is not safe from being pelted with accusations and words! We are all trapped, but the pleasure of flight is unmatched, a pleasure known to pigeons, birds, butterflies, and tiny flying insects, and known to us when we fly with our dreams!*". This quote highlights the human experience of confinement and the yearning for freedom, using the metaphor of flight to convey the transformative power of dreams and aspirations.

The phrase "*Even if we humans stay at home, a pigeon is not safe from being pelted with accusations and words*" draws a parallel between the lives of humans and pigeons, suggesting that both are subjected to criticism, judgment, and verbal attacks. The use of the word "*pelted*" emphasizes the intensity and harshness of these attacks, highlighting the vulnerability of both humans and pigeons to external negativity. The statement "*We are all trapped*" reinforces the sense of confinement experienced by both Kuwaiti women and pigeons. It suggests that despite our differences, they share a common struggle against limitations and restrictions, whether physical, emotional, or societal.

In the quote from page 10 where Layla Al-Othman writes, "*Questions that seize my time and spirit,*" she expands on the theme of confinement beyond just

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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accusations to include certain questions as another verbal act that imprisons the Kuwaiti woman. This expression vividly conveys how not only overt accusations but also seemingly innocuous questions can act as mechanisms of control and constraint.

Al-Othman's use of the verb "*seize*" in this context implies a forceful taking or capturing, which illustrates the invasive and restricting nature of these questions. It suggests that such inquiries, perhaps about personal life, choices, or even daily activities, can intrude deeply into one's private space, exerting a kind of ownership over one's time and inner life. This metaphor highlights how societal expectations and norms can permeate the most basic interactions, turning even simple questions into tools of surveillance and control. It reflects the pervasive watchfulness and judgment that women, in particular, may face, where every answer can be scrutinized and every silence filled with implication.

By focusing on this aspect, Al-Othman points out that the barriers to freedom are not always physical or easily noticeable. Instead, they can be woven subtly into the fabric of everyday life, manifesting through language and social interactions that dictate and shape women's experiences and perceptions.

In addressing verbal actions further, Layla Al-Othman views the silence of women in her community regarding their rights as a form of restraint, and these restraints are seen as a type of prison. On page 136, she writes, "*In their opinion: Silence keeps you safe. In my opinion: Break your chains and speak.*"

This quote highlights a critical aspect of the social dynamics within Al-Othman's depiction of Kuwaiti society. The prevalent belief that "*silence keeps you safe*" suggests that avoiding confrontation or not speaking out is seen as a protective measure. This reflects a societal pressure to conform and not challenge the status quo, which can be particularly oppressive for women who may feel compelled to stay silent about injustices or their own rights. Al-Othman's contrasting view, "*Break your chains and speak,*" serves as a powerful call to action, urging women to reject passive acceptance of their circumstances. By framing silence as chains—a clear metaphor for imprisonment—she emphasizes that silence, while seemingly protective, actually serves to maintain and reinforce the constraints imposed by societal norms.

### 3.4. Home:

On page 174, Layla Al-Othman writes, "*I remembered my father's big house, despite its spacious courtyards, its luxurious and elegant furnishings, the many material comforts, and the inhabitants consisting of brothers, sisters, and my father's wives. Despite all that, I used to call it 'Zenda Castle'.*"

Despite the house's spacious rooms, luxurious furnishings, abundant material comforts, and presence of family members, the protagonist perceives it as a "fortress" or "prison." This seemingly contradictory perception highlights the

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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protagonist's internal conflict and the disconnect between the physical opulence of her surroundings and her emotional state. The name "*Zenda Castle*" evokes a sense of isolation, confinement, and entrapment, suggesting that the protagonist feels trapped within the confines of this seemingly ideal home. The contrast between the house's physical grandeur and the protagonist's negative perception underscores the limitations of material possessions and societal expectations in providing genuine happiness and fulfillment. Despite the abundance of wealth and comfort, the protagonist feels a profound sense of emptiness and alienation.

On page 6, Layla Al-Othman articulates her sense that the house is truly a prison for her by stating, "*The house does not confine me with its walls and locks alone; there is a more painful siege by the inhabitants of the house.*"

This statement profoundly deepens the metaphor of the **HOME IS A PRISON**, which is a recurring theme in this novel. Here, she distinguishes between the physical limitations imposed by the structure of the house itself and the more significant emotional and psychological constraints imposed by the family members who live there. This insight highlights that the real source of her confinement and discomfort stems not just from the physical environment, but from the dynamics and relationships within it. The "*more painful siege*" suggests a type of emotional or psychological entrapment, where the behavior and expectations of those around her create an atmosphere that is even more restrictive than the physical boundaries of the house.

In this passage, it's important to mention how Al-Othman uses the home—a place traditionally associated with safety and comfort—as a setting that paradoxically embodies restriction and control. This inversion serves to critique the societal structures that, under the guise of protection and familial love, actually perpetuate control and suppression of individuality, especially for Kuwaiti women.

On the same page 6, Layla Al-Othman reinforces her view by stating, "*The house became a prison.*" This succinct declaration intensifies the metaphor of the home as a confining space that she has already elaborated on with her description of the emotional siege by its inhabitants. The use of the word "prison" carries significant weight, emphasizing the severity of the protagonist's entrapment. It suggests that the house, once a symbol of family and refuge, has transformed into a place of oppression and restriction, where she feels devoid of freedom and personal agency.

So, on the same page, Layla Al-Othman further intensifies her critique of the home environment by stating, "*Thus, I lived in a house built on cruelty.*" This statement encapsulates her perception of the domestic space not just as a prison but as a place fundamentally constructed on harshness and severity. This expression, "*built on cruelty*," suggests that the oppressive nature of the home is not merely a byproduct of the inhabitants' actions but is ingrained in its very

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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foundation. It highlights the systemic nature of the oppression she feels, rooted deeply in the values, norms, and expectations that have shaped the household. This goes beyond physical architecture into the architecture of interpersonal relationships and cultural constructs that define her existence within the family.

The metaphor of a house built on cruelty captures the pervasive and enduring nature of the hardships she faces. It reflects a stark reality where the environment that should nurture and protect instead perpetuates suffering and oppression. This portrayal challenges the traditional notion of home as a safe haven and reveals a more disturbing picture of how oppressive traditional and cultural norms can be when they serve as the underlying principles of familial and social interactions.

This metaphorical transformation of the house into a "*prison*" highlights the protagonist's alienation from her surroundings and the people who inhabit them. It suggests a profound sense of disconnection and a yearning for escape from the stifling environment she finds herself in.

The present paper postulates that her believing in **HOME IS A PRISON** as a conceptual metaphor, justified what she stated in page 7, when Layla Al-Othman expresses a contrasting view of her experiences between her home and school by saying, "*The repression of the home explodes in school, my wounds heal at school, the tender hearts that I miss at home, I find open, white, and warm at school.*"

This passage highlights the school as a place of relief and healing, contrasting sharply with the oppressive environment of her home. The use of the word "*explodes*" suggests a release of pent-up emotions and repression experienced at home, which are given space to breathe and heal in the more supportive and nurturing environment of the school. This portrays the school not just as a physical location for learning but as a sanctuary where she finds the emotional support and kindness lacking in her domestic life.

The imagery of "*open, white, and warm*" hearts provides a vivid contrast to the "*house built on cruelty.*" It suggests purity, openness, and warmth—qualities that are emotionally and psychologically restorative. This reflects a significant aspect of the protagonist's life, where school serves as a refuge and a place of emotional recuperation.

Laila Al-Othman's continued emphasis on the contrast between the protagonist's home and school environments further reinforces the notion of the house as a prison and the school as a place of liberation. The statement in page 6, "*Saturday was the day of liberation that freed me from the captivity of the house and returned me to school after the hardships of Friday, which I did not love because it was a day off*", poignantly captures the protagonist's yearning for escape from the stifling atmosphere of her home and her embrace of the school as a sanctuary. The phrase "*Saturday was the day of liberation*" highlights the protagonist's perception of the weekend as a release from the confines of her

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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home life. The use of the word "liberation" emphasizes the sense of relief and joy she experiences as she transitions from the oppressive environment of the house to the liberating atmosphere of the school.

The contrast between "*captivity of the house*" and the freedom of school underscores the protagonist's deep-seated desire to escape the emotional and psychological constraints imposed upon her within her home. The house, once a symbol of family and security, has transformed into a place of confinement and oppression, where she feels trapped and devoid of personal agency. The statement "*after the hardships of Friday, which I did not love because it was a day off*" reveals the protagonist's paradoxical feelings about weekends. While Saturday represents liberation, Friday, the traditional day of rest, is associated with "*hardships*" and a lack of enjoyment. This suggests that the protagonist's home life extends beyond the physical space of the house, encompassing the entire weekend, which she perceives as a period of confinement and emotional distress.

The experiences recounted by Layla Al-Othman, centered around the oppressive atmosphere of her father's home, vividly exemplify the metaphor of her father's house as a prison. This unique metaphor in her mind, as the research posits, serves as the basis for conceptualizing two additional metaphors: one where the husband's house is seen as a place of freedom **MARITAL HOME IS PLACE FOR FREEDOM**, and the other where marriage itself is equated with freedom **MARRIAGE IS A FREEDOM**. This is highlighted in her quote on page 174, where she says, "*I remembered my father's big house, yet I called it 'Zenda Castle.' And my greatest happiness was the day this castle opened its rusty gates to release me to the house of matrimony and life in 1965.*"

This passage reveals a significant shift in perception from one domestic environment to another. By referring to her father's house as "*Zenda Castle*," a literary allusion to a notorious prison, Al-Othman communicates the sense of confinement and restriction she felt within her family home. The depiction of the "*rusty gates*" finally opening symbolizes a long-awaited escape from this oppressive setting. The metaphor extends to suggest a liberation into a new life of marriage, which she perceives as a realm of freedom and new beginnings. Here, Al-Othman's narrative suggests that, in her experience, marriage was envisaged as an escape and a pathway to personal autonomy and happiness.

This interpretation invites a nuanced discussion on the dynamics of personal freedom within different social and familial structures. It raises questions about the conditions under which one form of living arrangement is seen as imprisoning while another is viewed as liberating. Analyzing these metaphors provides insights into Al-Othman's personal journey and broader social commentary on the roles and expectations of women in her society. The narrative prompts readers to reflect on how environments, be they parental homes or

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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marital homes, can variably restrict or expand personal agency and self-expression.

Continuing with the theme of the transformative power of personal spaces, Layla Al-Othman's depiction of her marital home as a sanctuary of freedom is further emphasized in her statement on page 50, where she says, "***I arrived at my home, my residence and my refuge, my spacious and safe freedom.***"

This declaration reinforces the conceptual metaphor of her home as a place of liberty, a stark contrast to her earlier experiences. Here, Al-Othman not only describes her home in terms of physical space—highlighting its spaciousness—but also imbues it with qualities of safety and refuge, framing it as a protective and liberating environment. The use of "***safe freedom***" is particularly poignant, suggesting that this new environment offers not just freedom from physical confinement, but also security and peace of mind, elements that were conspicuously absent in her father's house. This passage also underscores the emotional and psychological significance of her marital home. It's not just a place of residence, but a personal haven where she finds emotional solace and a sense of security, which are crucial for her sense of self and autonomy. The home here is portrayed as a foundational element of her newfound independence and personal growth.

On page 62, Layla Al-Othman reinforces her perception of her marital home as a place of liberation with the statement, "***In my home, I free myself from surveillance.***" This expression continues to emphasize the metaphors of the marital home and marriage as symbols of freedom and autonomy that persist in her thinking. This statement not only illustrates her sense of relief and freedom within her marital home but also highlights the contrast between this space and the environment in her father's home. The phrase "I free myself from surveillance" particularly underscores the stark difference in her lived experience, moving from a space characterized by constant oversight and control to one where she experiences personal freedom.

Layla Al-Othman's narrative reveals a significant transformation in her perception of the marital home as a space of freedom, which, over time, narrows to become only the bedroom. In a poignant reflection on page 73, she describes the constraining impact of social traditions in Kuwaiti society with the words, "***A woman's place is the depths of the home, the only space of freedom available to her - the bedroom - anything beyond that is forbidden.***"

This statement highlights a stark reality where the initial optimism about the marital home as a liberating environment gradually diminishes under the weight of enduring societal norms and expectations. Initially envisioned as a sanctuary from the oppressive environment of her father's house (referred to metaphorically as "***Zenda Castle***"), the marital home eventually becomes yet another domain where freedom is confined to very limited spaces – symbolically, just the



## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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bedroom. Al-Othman uses the bedroom as a metaphor to signify the limited scope of personal freedom and autonomy available to married women within the conservative social structure of Kuwait. This space, traditionally associated with privacy and intimacy, ironically becomes the only realm where a woman might exercise some control and express her individuality, sharply contrasting with her broader role within the home and society. This evolution in the spatial metaphor from the entire home to just the bedroom effectively illustrates the pervasive restrictions placed on women's autonomy and highlights the deep-seated cultural and social barriers that continue to govern women's lives. It reflects a critical and sobering insight into the reality of married life for many women, where societal norms deeply influence and limit their freedom and agency.

As Layla Al-Othman delves into the complexity of the concept of freedom within marriage, she further complicates the narrative by exploring the idea that liberation can also come from the end of a marriage, whether through widowhood or divorce. This shift is articulated on page 121, where she writes, *"Some widowed women cry from sorrow, many cry from joy when the husband was like a 'nightmare'; a woman rejoices at his disappearance."* This statement reflects a profound reversal of the initial optimistic view that equated marriage with freedom. Al-Othman introduces a starkly different perspective, suggesting that for some women, the death of a husband—who may have been oppressive or burdensome, metaphorically described as a *"nightmare"*—can actually represent a form of liberation. This perspective highlights the deeply ingrained societal and marital dynamics that can make marriage feel more like an imposition or a burden rather than a partnership of equality and mutual respect.

By distinguishing between the tears of sorrow and joy, Al-Othman not only underscores the varied emotional responses to the loss of a spouse but also points to the complex emotional landscape that women navigate in marriages that may be characterized by dominance or subjugation rather than support and companionship. The relief expressed by some of the women at the death of their husbands underscores the extent of their unhappiness and the oppressive nature of their marital relationships.

Layla Al-Othman's discussions on widowhood as a form of liberation from an oppressive marriage are complemented by her views on divorce as another critical pathway for women to achieve freedom. In her work, Al-Othman explores the concept of divorce not just as a legal dissolution of marriage but as an essential escape from marital constraints that some women may experience as suffocating or even dehumanizing. On page 138, Al-Othman delves deeper into the complexities of obtaining freedom through divorce, as she writes, *"The lawyer says this is a reason that makes the judge divorce you even against his will. Give me my freedom... Release my hands and for your sake to obtain your freedom, lawyers will not fail to find you exits from among them - lying - your*

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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*savior to the hoped-for freedom and a stigma to the other.*" This passage highlights the desperate measures some women may resort to in their pursuit of autonomy, where even dishonesty becomes a tool in the struggle against the strictures imposed by both their partners and the legal system. By connecting divorce with widowhood as forms of liberation, Al-Othman not only critiques the institution of marriage but also the societal and legal frameworks that govern it. Both scenarios she describes—rejoicing at a husband's death and resorting to deceit to secure a divorce—point to the extreme measures women may feel compelled to take to escape unhappy marriages. Overall, here the conceptual metaphor that operates in her mind could be **MARRIAGE IS A PRISON**.

### 3.5. Homeland:

On page 186, Layla Al-Othman expresses a broader sense of confinement that extends beyond personal relationships to encompass societal and cultural limitations. She states, "*I feel Kuwait has become a prison where all means of entertainment and enjoyment of life are forbidden, a prison in which we are chased by jailers who are accountable only to their parties.*" This statement reflects her perception of societal restrictions that curtail personal freedoms, depicting the country itself as a metaphorical prison.

Al-Othman's portrayal of Kuwait as a "*prison*" where "*jailers*" enforce strict prohibitions on enjoyment and entertainment serves as a poignant critique of the oppressive nature of certain societal norms and political or social factions within her country. The use of the term "*jailers*" metaphorically refers to those in positions of authority or influence who impose their restrictive views on the populace, emphasizing a lack of accountability to the broader community, being responsible only to their specific affiliations or "*parties*." This stark depiction aligns with Al-Othman's earlier discussions on the limitations imposed by marriage and the domestic sphere, expanding the theme of confinement to a national level. It illustrates her view that the constraints on personal freedom and autonomy are not only experienced within the confines of home or personal relationships but are also a part of the larger socio-political landscape. Her narrative suggests that these restrictions are pervasive and affect various aspects of life, from personal choices to broader societal engagements.

### 3.6. Motherhood:

Layla Al-Othman offers a nuanced view of motherhood in her writing, presenting it as a profound human emotion that can paradoxically serve as a form of confinement. On page 77, she articulates this complex perspective, stating: "*The mother, while a slave to the emotion of motherhood, rejects unqualified sovereignty.*"

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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This quote highlights the dual nature of motherhood as seen by Al-Othman. While motherhood is typically celebrated as a pinnacle of selfless love and nurturing, she describes it as an "enslavement" to the emotion itself, suggesting that the intense emotional bond and responsibilities associated with motherhood can restrict a woman's autonomy. The phrase "*a slave to the emotion of motherhood*" indicates that the very nature of this profound emotional commitment can dominate a woman's identity and choices, confining her within societal and personal expectations that dictate what a mother should be and do. Furthermore, Al-Othman's mention of mothers rejecting "*unqualified sovereignty*" reflects the internal conflict and societal pressure mothers face. They are expected to wield control and make decisions in their children's best interests, yet this "*sovereignty*" is often undermined by societal judgments and external criticisms that may deem them "*unqualified*." This points to the broader societal constraints that judge and often limit women's authority within their own families and beyond.

### 3.7. Upbringing:

Layla Al-Othman's perspective on upbringing and education as forms of imprisonment and enslavement is encapsulated in her statement from page 91: "*Naturally, you learn that whoever raises you for a month, you will be his obedient slave for a lifetime.*" This quote underscores her critical view on the power dynamics inherent in traditional forms of upbringing, particularly within the context of Kuwaiti society.

This expression reflects the notion that the norms, values, and expectations instilled during childhood profoundly and lastingly shape an individual's identity and agency. The phrase "*whoever raises you for a month, you will be his obedient slave for a lifetime*" suggests a form of deep psychological conditioning that binds individuals to the authority figures in their lives, long beyond their actual dependency or youth. This "*obedient slave*" metaphor indicates a lack of autonomy that extends into adulthood, portraying the traditional upbringing as a form of indoctrination that perpetuates a cycle of submission and deference to authority.

### 3.8. Male Authority

In the passage on page 121, Layla Al-Othman addresses the pervasive influence of male authority in Kuwaiti society, illustrating how it acts as a form of imprisonment for women. The excerpt, "The lawyer Rashid approaches me... he whispers: 'If they call your name in the hall, do not answer; I will handle it. I have a new guardian!' Females are chased by guardians: the father, the brother, the uncle, the cousin, the husband, even the lover might turn into a jealous guardian, and even the young son, upon reaching puberty, becomes his mother's

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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guardian. 'Mahram for Hajj and Umrah,'" vividly encapsulates the extensive and multilayered control exerted by male figures over women's lives.

This portrayal underscores several critical aspects of male dominance:

1. Ubiquity and Inescapability: Male authority is shown to be ubiquitous and inescapable, present in every facet of a woman's life. From familial relations to romantic partners, and even extending to legal representatives like lawyers, male figures assume roles of control and decision-making.
2. Legal and Social Structures: The reference to a lawyer acting as a guardian highlights how even within the judiciary and legal processes, patriarchal norms are reinforced. Women are not only under the control of male family members but also subject to similar dynamics in professional and public spheres.
3. Evolution of Control: Al-Othman notes how the control evolves and can be imposed by even younger male members of the family, such as a son, once he reaches a certain age. This reflects the deep-rooted cultural norms where male authority is automatically privileged over female autonomy, regardless of the personal maturity or independence of the woman.
4. Cultural Practices: The mention of a 'Mahram for Hajj and Umrah' highlights specific cultural practices that further enforce these restrictions. In many Islamic traditions, a woman is required to have a mahram (a male relative with whom marriage is not permissible) accompany her on pilgrimages, which underscores the societal expectation of male supervision in both domestic and religious activities.

By weaving these elements into her narrative, Al-Othman critiques the systemic nature of male dominance and its impact on women's freedom and identity. She portrays male guardianship not merely as a personal or family issue but as a societal and institutional mechanism that perpetuates women's subordination.

On page 173, Layla Al-Othman delivers a poignant critique of the systemic oppression within male-dominated societies with her statement: "***All men conspire against women. In patriarchal societies, women's rights and feelings are trampled in the name of many things: strength, guardianship, authority, and the sanctity of the marital institution, and the issue is never approached through the door of human relationships.***"

This passage highlights a core theme in Al-Othman's work — the collusion among men to maintain and enforce a social order that severely limits women's rights and freedoms. She articulates how patriarchal values are upheld under various guises such as "***strength***" and "***authority***," which are often cited to justify control over women's lives. The term "***guardianship***" reflects the legal and social mechanisms that institutionalize male dominance, while "the sanctity of the marital institution" suggests how marriage is often idealized in ways that can mask the inequalities and abuses that occur within it.

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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Al-Othman's critique extends to the fundamental nature of human relations within such societies, pointing out that the real human connection, respect, and equality are frequently absent in discussions about gender roles and rights. By emphasizing that the issue is not treated as one of "*human relationships*," she underscores the dehumanization and objectification involved in the systemic oppression of women.

Her narrative challenges readers to reconsider the structures and justifications that perpetuate gender inequality. By bringing these issues to light, Al-Othman not only critiques the specific cultural and societal dynamics of her own environment but also contributes to the broader dialogue on women's rights and gender equality. She advocates for a shift towards more humane and equitable treatment of women, where relationships are built on mutual respect and understanding rather than dominance and control.

Layla Al-Othman vividly captures the extent of control and surveillance that Kuwaiti women may experience, starting from a very young age, in her narrative. On page 130, she illustrates a poignant example of this control extending even into the realm of dreams: "*There are authorities that punish you even for your dreams... Once, my father heard me say: 'And he took me in his arms and kissed me a lot.' I was telling my sister about a dream I had, and he erupted and screamed: 'Who took you in his arms and kissed you?!' My sister had to remind him that it was just a dream before I could free my hair from the grip of his hands. My father threatened me, saying: 'Don't you dare dream of such indecencies.'*"

This passage highlights the oppressive environment in which the protagonist grows up, where even her subconscious thoughts and dreams are subject to patriarchal scrutiny and control. The father's reaction to a simple dream narrative shows the deep-seated misogyny and control that characterize his attitude toward his daughter, treating her as a possession whose thoughts and actions must be strictly regulated. His command that she not even dream of such things further emphasizes the unrealistic and suffocating expectations placed on women, to control not only their behavior but even their subconscious mind. This scene powerfully illustrates the broader theme of male guardianship and control within patriarchal societies, where women's autonomy is severely restricted at all levels of their existence. Al-Othman uses this example to critique the extreme invasiveness of patriarchal authority, highlighting the psychological and emotional toll it takes on women.

Layla Al-Othman's narrative on page 78 illustrates a poignant cycle of patriarchal authority that is perpetuated even by the younger generation. The passage where her son tells her, "*I've told you a thousand times, stop writing and stay at home,*" showcases how the patriarchal mindset is ingrained and reproduced even in the children raised within such environments. This statement

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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by her son to his mother not only reflects the societal expectations placed on women but also shows how these expectations are internalized and enforced by family members, including those whom the women nurture and raise.

This phenomenon where sons begin to exert male authority over their mothers is particularly significant because it highlights the deep-rooted nature of gender roles within patriarchal societies. Despite the mother's role in raising her son, he grows to adopt the dominant societal views that marginalize and restrict women's roles to domestic spaces, thereby silencing their voices and limiting their freedoms. His insistence that she quit writing is a direct attempt to control her intellectual and creative expression, reinforcing the notion that a woman's place is confined to the home.

### 3.9. Nature of Men and Women:

On page 122, Layla Al-Othman delves into a profound reflection on the societal constructs of gender roles, suggesting a deep-seated and traditional view that inherently associates freedom with masculinity and servitude with femininity. She writes, "*A crying woman's voice: they are the sons of free women; we are the daughters of slave women.*"

This poignant statement encapsulates a perception of ingrained gender disparities that are viewed as almost natural or preordained. By contrasting "*sons of free women*" with "*daughters of slave women*," Al-Othman highlights the stark divide in how men and women are perceived and valued in society. This metaphorical expression reflects a cultural narrative that glorifies male freedom and autonomy while relegating women to roles of subservience and dependence. Al-Othman's choice of words—"*free women*" and "*slave women*"—is particularly powerful, illustrating the extremes of autonomy and control that define male and female experiences in her view of society. This dichotomy suggests that men are born into freedom, their rights and independence taken for granted, while women are seen as inheriting subjugation, their destinies shaped by limitation and control.

### 4. CONCLUSION:

Layla Al-Othman's literary novel offers a profound critique of Kuwaiti society, especially in terms of its treatment of women. Central to her analysis is the recurrent use of the conceptual metaphor "everything is a prison," which Al-Othman employs to sharply delineate the multifaceted constraints imposed on Kuwaiti women. Her narratives explore the various dimensions of this confinement—ranging from familial oversight and societal norms to legal and institutional restrictions—painting a vivid picture of the systemic barriers that undermine women's independence and self-expression.

## **METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"**

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Al-Othman's incisive narratives reveal the entrenched nature of gender oppression within the Kuwaiti cultural, familial, and legal constructs. She adeptly illustrates the pervasive influence of male authority, which manifests both overtly and subtly, to maintain patriarchal control. This dominance begins in early childhood and extends across the lives of women, infiltrating even their personal ambitions and dreams, thereby constricting their identities and freedoms.

Furthermore, Al-Othman extends the metaphor of imprisonment to the realms of marriage and motherhood, institutions revered culturally yet often functioning as additional confines that hinder rather than enhance women's lives. Her critique transcends the boundaries of personal relationships to comment on the broader national scale, depicting Kuwait itself as a metaphorical prison that limits the potential and happiness of its women. Through her vivid portrayal, Al-Othman not only critiques but also calls for a critical reflection on the societal structures that bind and control female agency and expression in Kuwait.

## METAPHORS IN LAILA AL-OTHMAN'S AL-MUHKMA "THE TRIAL"

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