

## Kabbani's Women: From The Sultan's Wife To The Lady Friend in Exile

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### Abstract

*All through his work, Rabbani firmly and constantly assails the exploitation of women in the Arab World. in spite of the many voices that saw in his writings immoral exposure of the female body and objectification of women, he has maintained his position as a strong and reliable ally of feminism. Out of his poems emerge vivid animations of the Sultan's Wife as a metaphor for the conformist oppressed female, the Sultan's daughter another metaphor of the female who endures her subservience and enjoys the benefits of her entrapment, the Reckless Woman, a hefty challenge to all modes of patriarchy; and finally the Lady Friend in Exile, the mature, sophisticated and emancipated female who leaves nothing to be desired after her. The fact that the Lady Friend materializes with him only in exile provides a strong and sad statement on the stili on going predicament of the Arab woman at home.*

**Key Words:** feminism, female oppression, Arab women, and love

### Özet

*Suriye'li şair Kabbani tüm eserlerinde, Arab Dünyasındaki kadın istismarına karşı çıkar. Çoğu kereler, sairin eserlerinde kadın vücudunun etik kurallara aykırı sergilendiği ve kadınların nesneleştirildiği eleştirileri yapılmış olsa da, Kabbani, feminizimin güçlü ve güvenilir bir taraftarı olmaya devam etmiştir. Şiirlerinde, üzerindeki baskıya boyun eğmiş dişi olarak Sultan'ın karısı; pasif rolünü kabullenen*

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*ve durumundan mümkün olduğunca fayda sağlamaya çalışan Sultan'ın kızı; ataerkil sisteme ciddi bir tehdit oluşturan Korkusuz Kadın; yitirildiğinde yeri doldurulamayan, olgun, sofistike, bağımsız Sürgün Yoldaşı Hanım figürleri, neredeyse gerçekmişler izlenimi verir. Bu Yoldaş Hanımın yalnızca sürgünde şairin yanında yer alması, Arap kadınlarının süregelen çıkmazını ortaya koyar.*

## Introduction

Kabbani<sup>1</sup> has spent a lifetime fighting for women's liberation and empowerment. His constant attempts at inciting women to undermine the repressive patriarchal order gained him enemies and friends in the Arab world. Through the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century many traditional and conservative voices in the Arab universities and media, with nodding acquaintance of literary criticism, dismissed Kabbani as infidel and heretic and incited the masses to boycott his poetry<sup>2</sup>. The old generation among university professors did not take to Kabbani's liberties in tampering with traditional form of Arabic poetry and versification, and abhorred his permissive and immoral attitude towards conventional values of their Müslim Arab societies.

However, negative publicity proved to be good for Kabbani as he gained quick fame among the young generations of the sixties and after who were disillusioned by the various conventional social and political systems in the Arab world. These young generations found in him a subversive voice that rails at what is held sacred and often taboo by their conventional societies and they began to recite his poetry and sing it.

Kabbani took it upon himself to subvert the prevailing order of sexual politics<sup>3</sup> in the Arab World. As a result, his early writing has been marked by the tempo and cadence of a revolutionist who hopes, against all odds, to transform the conventional pattern of sex and politics in the Arab World. In one of his earlier poems, he briskly incites women to revolt against an Orient that sees in them feasts in bed, and admonishes them not to fear death as the "sky is the cemetery of eagles."<sup>4</sup> By equating his revolutionary woman with

<sup>1</sup> Nizar Kabbani (1923-1998) is often regarded as *the* Arab poet of the twentieth century. He started writing at the age of 16; at 21 he published his first collection of love poems. He ranks among the most read Contemporary Arab poets. He is widely known as the women's poet, and the poet of love.

<sup>2</sup> See Hassan Ezzedin; Leyla Mokhtar; Mervat Nabulsi; and Suzan el-Hilweh.

<sup>3</sup> Sexual politics as defined by Moi is the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. (25-27)

<sup>4</sup> Revolt! I want you to revolt Revolt against an Orient of slaves, convents and incense Revolt against history, and vanquish the great illusion Fear no one.\ The sun is the

the eagle, Kabbani attempts to elevate the active woman and set her apart from the passive and acquiescing one. His metaphor aims at giving women an overdose of carriage to face their tormentors and jailers. However, after the violent death of his wife in a bomb explosion in the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut and after the many setbacks that befell the Arab world as a result of corruption, aggression and absence of democracy, Kabbani lost faith in change in the Arab World and went into voluntary self-exile. Ironically, Kabbani finds his female match, the one he hoped and desired to see materialized on the Arab ground, in exile. This happy-sad encounter brings the poet to the end of his mission. It is so rewarding and pleasing for him to see an Arab woman that matches him in sophistication and adaptability, yet so sad to discover that this breed only exists so far in exile away from the oppressive homeland.

A close reading of Kabbani's poetry reveals that the poet has vividly created four types of women characters that express his vision of the oppressive nature of the Arab world. Those women as pointed out by Kahf (2002) are: the Sultan's Wife, the Sultan's Daughter, the Reckless Woman, and the Lady Friend in Exile.

### **The Sultan's Wife**

To begin with, the Sultan's Wife is presented as a collaborator with the brutally oppressive patriarchy. She sleeps and copulates with the vicious Sultan, receives his favors and enjoys the privileges her position with him accords her. Furthermore, she poignantly turns a blind eye to the truth of her inner feelings, beauty, warmth and freedom. Redgate sees the Sultan's wife as a "frigid woman below degree zero who accepts both the sexual subjugation of women and the political suppression of all citizens" (1973, 41). Indeed, this type of woman is a source of frustration and shame for the poet as he sees in her a defeated model that stands for the women

Whose aspirations have been smothered  
So that their supreme hope  
Is to get to pedicure  
The wife of the Sultan  
Or his daughter or his dog"<sup>5</sup>

cemetery of eagles  
A Revolt against an Orient that sees in you a feast in the bed. "Revolt," *Complete Works*. 1:95

<sup>5</sup> "Top Secret Report from the Country of Smother Land," *Complete Works*. 6:40

Roy observes that Kabbani occasionally sympathizes with this woman and sees her as a victim of the complicated network of values and traditions in the Arab world. In "O Wife of the Caliph" the poet-speaker is rebuffed by the palace guards when he attempts to meet her, but what they don't know, the speaker asserts, is that long ago, before the caliph took her, and long before the palace existed, the woman was his wife. Roy rightly concludes that the Sultan's wife "has been locked up in a system that has failed to recognize that she 'is the sun of life'"(1993, 37). However, Kabbani blames the Sultan's Wife for turning herself into a "Cashmerian carpet" for "The Man" to trample on. He resignedly asks how can he

Set free a woman

Who slips her own slavery into her eyes like mascara?

Who thinks of nothing other than the chains and

Golden bracelets

Tinkling on her wrists?<sup>6</sup>

Kabbani holds this woman accountable for her want of pride and self-esteem:

How can I set free a woman

Who lines up before Shahrayar's<sup>7</sup> door

Waiting her turn?<sup>8</sup>

The Sultan's Wife, asserts Badr, is not Shahrazad, the witty and bright bride who enters Shahrayar's legendary palace with an agenda for change, but one of the "sheep-women who submissively march into their daily marital slaughter" (1981,34).

In spite of all the impositions by the patriarch on the Sultan's wife<sup>9</sup>, Kabbani holds her guilty for her weakness before the test of freedom:

The Arab woman

Wants someone to chew for her freedom's morsel

And ingest it.

That's why she is anemic and feeble,

<sup>6</sup> "The Carpet," *Complete Works*. 5:116

<sup>7</sup> Shahrayar is the despot in *The Thousand and One Nights* who marries a virgin every day and has her killed the morning after.

<sup>8</sup> "Before Shahrayar's Door," *Complete Works*. 5:117

<sup>9</sup> In his poem titled "Holocaust" Kabbani draws a bleak and even tragic picture of the Arab man's household: "The Arab man's household / resembles a Nazi holocaust: / It has an entrance / but no exit" *Complete Works*. 5:105

Suffering from a deficiency in iron and courage.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Sultan's Daughter**

The Sultan's Daughter, on the other hand, appears to be more vague than his Wife. Though she discerns the genuineness in the poet's idiom of political and sexual emancipation, and though she is experienced enough to understand the mind set of the masculinity that dictates the mores of the tribe, she cowards in front of the great challenge of defying the Father as she acquires privilege and protection from her bonding with him.

Subhi describes the Sultan's daughter's predicament and compares her to Shahrazad in her struggle "for a stratagem to survive in a repressive order while hoping for change" (1979, 89). The poet-speaker tries all he can to push her into breaking her bond with the tribe and abandon Shahrayar:

I am the one who slew Shahrayar,

I am the one who incinerated *The Thousand and One Nights*<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes, at the risk of contradicting himself, the poet-speaker admits to being Shahrayar himself, and describes his attempts to escape his inherited patterns of masculinity. In any case, Kabbani spends a lot of energy on loving the Sultan's Daughter, attempting, in the words of Khaled "to pull her out of the dreams of Shahrazad" (1998,10).

In other poems, such as "From the Files of the Investigative Bureaus," Kabbani shows the Sultan's Daughter using her position to successfully challenge the tribe:

The poets of the tribe reproach me,

They whose poetry the princess trashes,

They whom the princess has ordered hung

One by one, at her balcony,

As they don't perceive femininity,

Don't feel the rhyme

And stutter when she asks about

The difference between the falls of iambic pentameter

And the cadenced cascading of her curls<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Limpness," *Complete Works*. 5:123

<sup>11</sup> "The Story of a Coup," *Complete Works*. 5:41

<sup>12</sup> "Love Will Always Be My Master," *Complete Works*. 4:376

Momentarily, the rebel lover sways her because in the splendor of his poetry she discerns her own beauty and remembers her true self. Yet, in "Song of Sorrow" the poet-speaker sadly realizes that "the Sultan's Daughter never arrives"<sup>13</sup>. The big question that Kabbani poses is whether the Sultan's Daughter will run off with the rebel-poet, or will she yield to her fears and keep him waiting under her balcony?

### **The Reckless Woman**

The third in the series of women created by Kabbani is the Reckless Woman. This socially daring woman is the antithesis of the Sultan's wife and daughter. This new model has seen through the lies of the Sultan and become "a deer fleeing the authority of the tribe."<sup>14</sup> Najm rightly observes that while the "Sultan's Daughter is caught in the dilemma of how to survive in the old order when the new order is only a vague hope, the Reckless Woman is the first to walk to the edge of the precipice and leap exultantly into the valley of lush promise"(1998,69).

The first unforgettable Reckless Woman in the Kabbani opus is the speaker in the 1968 book-length poem "Diary of an Indifferent Woman." Adapting a female voice, Kabbani vividly draws a young middle-class girl who indignantly recounts her discovery of the sexual duplicity of her old-fashioned society and asserts her desire to rebel against this fraudulent behavior:

I defy all the dwellers of the cave,  
 The people of superstition and nonsense,  
 Their slavishness that enslaves them,  
 Their breeding like cows.  
 In front of me are a thousand and one executioners  
 Behind me are a thousand and one butchers  
 Dear Lord, is there no disgrace but my nakedness?  
 Dear Lord, does this East have no occupation  
 But to fuss over my hemline?<sup>15</sup>

Ziyadeh (1996) observes that the Reckless Woman insightfully acknowledges the deplorable effect of political oppression on sexuality. Ziyadeh argues that Kabbani's Reckless Woman has paved the way for other

<sup>13</sup> *Complete Works*.\.:705

<sup>14</sup> "Do You Really Know Women?" *Fifty Years in Praise of Women*, 104

<sup>15</sup> *Complete Works*. 1:638

similar women to emerge in the writings of Nawal Saadawi, Ghada al-Sman and Sahar Khaliefeh.

Unlike her oppressed peers, the Reckless Woman is not mortified of her burgeoning womanhood; she calls her period blood the ink to which she will be the quill:

Here is ink without hand  
Here is blood without murder  
Shall I be mortified by it?  
I am its source abundant  
I am its hand  
I am its spindle<sup>16</sup>

In fact, menstruation ties the reckless woman's body to fertility while rhetorically linking uterine blood to the blood of the female victims in the symbolic world of Shahrayar. Thus, blood and bleeding are not accidental to but constitutive of women's subjecthood in Kabbani's poetry. For Kabbani, menstrual blood marks the renewal of life through procreation. In his poetry the reckless woman becomes aware of her body as a repository of memory, as a place where physical sensation echoes emotional feeling. This awareness is pivotal in Kabbani's women's progress from a state of denial, as in the case of the Sultan's wife and daughter, to acceptance of their heritage.

Khristu (1983) insightfully argues that Kabbani himself identifies greatly with the Reckless Woman due to her rebellious nature and authentic body. Unlike the air of uncertainty and vagueness that wraps the body of the Sultan's Daughter, the Reckless Woman's breasts defy gravity:

The difference between Newton's apple  
And your breasts  
Is that his apple falls down  
But your breasts fall up.<sup>17</sup>

Kabbani sanctions those wild breasts to lead revolutions against the Islamic caliphate. While the Sultan's Daughter is significantly shown to have exquisite taste in clothes, the Reckless Woman is shown to have an equally exquisite taste in her nakedness. In "Musical Variations on a Nude Woman" Kabbani jubilantly celebrates this nakedness:

<sup>16</sup> *Complete Works*. 1:598

<sup>17</sup> "Apple," *Complete Works*. 5:93

Once there were two fabulous roosters  
 In your chest  
 Little they slept  
 And they crowed a lot.<sup>18</sup>

Nizamaddin observes that it is not only the physicality of the nakedness that empowers the Reckless Woman and terrifies the backward sleepy Arab cities and provinces. Nizamaddin hails Kabbani for his skill in creating a woman with "a naked heart and an equally free and uninhibited mind who has fell upon the wellsprings of passion and joy within and knows there is no turning back into the desert" (1999, 49). He further adds that the "knowledge she derives from her body is what gives her recklessness, which is the power a woman needs to wash herself off the anxieties of the Sultan's Daughter and throw herself into the truth of love with all the joie de vivre" (1999, 52).

The Reckless Woman is discernible from other women by her pride. This is not to say that she is self-conceited because of her beauty and blooming youth. Rather she possesses the innate self-esteem of a vibrant individual who refuses to give in to the hideous Shahrays and Antaras<sup>19</sup> and opts, instead to confront the law of the tribe. Wild points out that Kabbani applauds the Reckless Woman's exuberance, "seeing her like himself, as an untamed and free Arabian horse" (1995, 206). He confirms that though she vocalizes her feelings and concerns in an authentically female voice, she also articulates the voice of youth, across gender:

I crave, I crave -  
 With every cell in my body,  
 I crave to live  
 Every pleasure of this world:  
 The velvety stretch of its night,  
 The chilliness of its winter  
 I desire, I desire to live.<sup>20</sup>

As Jameson puts it succinctly, "the Reckless Woman articulates the life-force of men and women everywhere and becomes the victory of beauty and freedom" (1997, 56). She, to the dismay of the tribe and its custodians,

<sup>18</sup> *Complete Works*. 2:87

<sup>19</sup> Antara Ibn Shaddad is a legendary Black-Arab hero known for his prowess in battle and zeal on the tribe and its women. He becomes a metaphor for the zealot protector and guardian.

<sup>20</sup> "Diary of an Indifferent Woman," *Complete Works*. 1:607.



demands that both men and women pay homage to the female body and realize the potentiality of joy, love and life it possesses.

### **The Lady Friend in Exile**

Kabbani's fourth type of women is the Lady Friend in Exile. This woman is a combination of his addressees, in poems from the late eighties and after, as "my female friend", *sadiqati*, and "my lady friend", *sayidati*:

Friend of a lifetime, she  
In whose eyes I read  
Gloomy stories  
Friend of a lifetime,  
Who shares with me  
The loaf of exile.<sup>21</sup>

Many of Kabbani's critics and commentators attribute the creation of this woman to several factors, among them the tragic death of the poet's wife, Balqis al-Rawi, in a bomb explosion in Beirut, his subsequent departure to Europe from the longtime home city where his wife was killed, and the maturity coming from his passing the prime of his youth<sup>22</sup>. These events have marked his latter work with a strong sense of loss and melancholy. As a result, and in a radical departure from his unwavering role as a sensual lover, the poet-speaker maturely reveals his latest brand of relationship with women:

If I knew how to separate  
Love and friendship  
I'd choose you as a friend.<sup>23</sup>

The Lady Friend in Exile whose presence permeates many of Kabbani's poems of the eighties and nineties has proved to be of a highly polemical nature. Jameson, for instance, asserts that Kabbani's new woman "is more than a corporeal woman addressee; she is one woman and all women" (1997,

<sup>21</sup> "Rereading the Prologue of Ibn Khaldun," *Complete Works*. 6:372

<sup>22</sup> Nassaj (1993, pp. 42-52) and Osman (1992, pp. 16-36) attribute Kabbani's increased sense of melancholy in his later work to the sudden and tragic loss of his wife. Bashir (1997, pp.31-9), in an interesting argument claims that the increased sense of loss and malaise in Kabbani's poetry after the eighties result from the poet's conscious and subconscious realization of the demise of youth and the loss of virility that accompanies it. In Bashir's opinion the melancholy that pervades Kabbani's late poetry was eminent with or without the sudden death of Balqis and his subsequent self-exile to Europe.

<sup>23</sup> "To Love You I Will Learn Ten Languages," / *Am Only One Man and You Are a Whole Tribe of Women*, 79.

77). Thorns, on the other hand, believes that Kabbani "never allows this new woman to dissolve into an abstraction. He does not intend to turn her into poetry, or the memory of a woman, or a city" (1998, 89). The Lady Friend, Thorns concludes, "is another real woman who comes from the poet's homeland and speaks his tongue" (1998, 90). Abdelkabar argues against the indigenous actuality of the Lady Friend. "If she were another real woman, she would still be in a state of immaturity like the women of the homeland who are still immured in sexual and political strictures that prevent their self-realization" (1996,133).

In spite of the controversial nature of the identity of the Lady Friend, she seems to be, like the poet, a sophisticated cosmopolitan and seasoned exile. "Beautiful you are, like exile,"<sup>24</sup> he tells her as they sit in a cafe in London brooding over the mixed sorrows of exile and bliss of freedom.

The Lady Friend appears to have combined in her personality both recklessness and sexual confidence and has advanced to a more sophisticated stage of love. Whereas the Reckless Woman is envisaged as youthful and carefree, the Friend in Exile gives the impression of a woman who feels and understands the subtle meaning of sadness more deeply than a young woman could. She "slumps" with the poet-speaker "on the curb of grief" and with him she discerns that "even grief is evergreen"<sup>25</sup>. Kabbani unequivocally stresses that she is his last harbor since he embarked on his solitary "sailing over the roof of the world"<sup>26</sup>, and that his chest is her "last sandy shore"<sup>27</sup>.

While with the Reckless Woman the poet addresses the dialectics of sex and politics in a predominantly oppressed Arab world, Fayad confirms that with the Lady Friend Kabbani addresses a "different set of issues related to the politics and emotions of exile in a postcolonial metropolis" (1997, 56). The poet and his Lady friend are often seen pondering together over an Arab world increasingly immersed in its tribal and ethnic division, still submerged into its apathy and abjection before the masters of the new world order.

With the Sultan's Daughter and the Reckless Woman, Kabbani performs the role of prompter and protector. With his fantastic resource of eloquence he constantly urges them forth in the trail of passion in his endeavor to help them vanquish their fears, shame, and sense of guilt. "Reject the era of the sultans,"<sup>28</sup> the poet-speaker tells, and at times impatiently admonishes, the girlfriend time and again in poems of the seventies. By contrast, the Lady

<sup>24</sup> "Beautiful You Are, Like Exile," *Fifty Years in Praise of Women*, 97.

<sup>25</sup> "Grant Me Your Love That I May Bloom and Glow," *Nizarian Variations in Love Minor*, 39

<sup>26</sup> "Flying Over the Roof of the World," *Complete Works*. 4:352.

<sup>27</sup> "To a Lovely Passenger Who Will Not Be Departing," *Fifty Years in Praise of Women*, 64

<sup>28</sup> "Beirut, Love, and the Rain," *Complete Works*. 2:21

Friend emerges as the poet's match, and even exceeds him, in breadth of cultivation and sophistication:

For the first time ever,  
I have been flooded  
By a cultural insurgency  
Instigated by a woman.<sup>29</sup>

Here at last, the poet admits that, after all the laborious efforts he has invested into constructing daring modern women, it is he who is manufactured by women. As a result, the professor of love pronounces genuinely his resignation as he finds himself dealing with the challenge of loving a new type of woman. The new woman who dominates the last decade of Kabbani's life is, in the words of el-Sheikh, "in command of great intellectual powers and emotional strength. She is at the mature peak of her sexual energies, and requires no education in bed" (1991, 88). Ironically, it is the poet speaker this time asking the Lady Friend to teach him:

Teach me  
How the mind recognizes the scent of a woman,  
How sex becomes a glorious hymn,  
A painting with sensitive brushes,  
A lunar bridge.<sup>30</sup>

Further more, it is he who is trying hard this time to catch up with his Lady Friend:

I love you so much  
I know that I've reached the brick wall  
At the end of words  
I sense that talk wears thin with you  
I sense that the arts wear thin with you  
And that articulatory gasps,  
And poetry and prose and language  
Race around your waist in vain.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Coup Led by a Woman," *I Am Only One Man*, 217

<sup>30</sup> "In Passionate Love I Become More Refined," *I Am Only One Man*, 63

<sup>31</sup> "To Love You I Will Learn Ten Languages," *I Am Only One Man*, 83

The Lady Friend now poses a great challenge for the poet to renovate himself. Kabbani intuitively realizes that renovation is only attained through poetic creativity and his love for her:

Aquatic Lady, you  
 Who take me to the brooks  
 And offer me asteroids,  
 Vineyards and pine nuts as gifts,  
 I thank you  
 A thousand times  
 For your munificence:  
 I had been dwelling in a desert  
 For so long  
 And now, by the charm of love,  
 I flower and flourish.<sup>32</sup>

This tone of gratitude reverberates and swells, until it transforms the image of the once self-assured, and conceited lover into a mere supplicant in the temple of the woman he used to claim he conformed. The Lady Friend in Exile remains the final feminine presence commanding Kabbani's last moments of poetry as the two partners embrace with all the memories of shattered homelands and exile fluttering in their heads.

### Conclusion

To conclude, Kabbani's opus exhibits the poet's earnest zeal for the construction of new gender relations based on freedom, equality, dignity, and beauty. All through his work, he firmly and constantly assails attitudes and practices used to exploit women in the Arab World: from polygamy through "honor" killing to the degrading ideal of female obedience and submissiveness. In spite of the many voices that saw in his writings immoral exposure of the female body and objectification of women, he has maintained his position as a strong and reliable ally of feminism.<sup>33</sup> His

<sup>32</sup> "Grant Me Your Love That I May Flower and Flourish," *Nizarian Variations in Love Minor*, 39

<sup>33</sup>For instance Ezzedin (1977, pp. 10-18) and Mokhtar (1993, pp. 23-31), among others, assert that Kabbani, especially in his early poetry, objectifies women and presents them erotically to an Arab youth imbued for sex. Ezzedin sites Kabbani's poem titled "the Return of the Adorned Skirt" in which Kabbani, wantonly, assaults with his gaze the body of a young woman: "Tighten now and billow with the breeze *I ... I* It's you against the wind and me: Do lift!" (*The Complete Works*, 1:314) Mokhtar argues that Kabbani's expressed desire to gaze

poetry expresses sound consciousness of oppressive gender relations and equal dedication to their change. Out of his poems emerge vivid animations of the Sultan's Wife as a metaphor for the conformist oppressed female, the Sultan's daughter another metaphor of the female who endures her subservience and enjoys the benefits of her entrapment, the Reckless Woman, a joyful model of release and empowerment for both men and women and a hefty challenge to all modes of patriarchy; and finally the Lady Friend in Exile, the mature, sophisticated and emancipated female who leaves nothing to be desired by him after her. The fact that the Lady Friend materializes with him only in exile provides a strong and sad statement on the still on going predicament of the woman at home. This is to say that the woman he has willed and applauded is not in the Arab world yet. The very fact that Kabbani's perfect Arab woman exists with him in exile is an indictment of the Arabs' patriarchies and their culture of oppressive practices.

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below the skirt and on the naked breasts of the young and desirable females he creates objectifies the object of the gaze and defeats Kabbani's claims of championing women. Nancy Amra (1997, pp. 63-74) and Luna Sarayra (1988, pp.12-26) rail back at Kabbani's accusers and argue that Kabbani assures women that he is different from the rest of the men of the tribe. Amra sees in Kabbani's "Poetic Communique #1" a denunciation of the accusation of female objectification. Kabbani warns and assures women: "Don't you dare picture that I think of you/the way the tribe thinks of its banquet dishes/Or that I want you to turn into a statue/so I can put you on a pedestal and serenade you/.../I am fleeing the brutality of our paternal line/escaping the era of woman-stifling/and breast-muffling/So put your hands like stars into my hands ... /For I love you that I may defend my existence/Don't you dare to imagine that I am on the prowl/For an adventure, a raid, a new conquest. (*The Complete Works*, 2:15) Amra and Sarayra believe that Kabbani's intention is to empower ordinary women to see the aesthetic perfection that lie within their bodies, when so much else around distances them from their bodies.

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