

**“KILL THE MAN WHO KILLED THE DOG - STORIES BURIED UNDER THE  
SKYSCRAPERS”  
FOLKTALES OF KUWAIT**

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Németh, K.(2022). “Kill the Man Who Killed the Dog - Stories Buried under the Skyscrapers”. Folktales of Kuwait. *Különleges Bánásmód*, 8. (1). 77-90. DOI [10.18458/KB.2022.1.77](https://doi.org/10.18458/KB.2022.1.77)

**Abstract:**

The current paper intends to draw a kind of picture of numerous compelling viewpoints of the Kuwaiti community relying on folk tales. The research is in line with the theoretical and epistemological questions that are cornerstones of researching folk narratives.

**Keywords:** Kuwaiti, folk tales, epistemological questions

**Discipline:** ethnography

*“ÖLD MEG AZT AZ EMBERT, AKI MEGÖLTE A KUTYÁT – A FELHŐKARCOLÓK ALÁ  
TEMETETT TÖRTÉNETEK”. KUVAITI NÉPMESÉK*

**Abstract:**

Jelen tanulmány egyfajta képet kíván megrajzolni a kuvaiti közösség számos meggyőző nézőpontjáról a népmesékre támaszkodva. A kutatás összhangban van azokkal az elméleti és ismeretelméleti kérdésekkel, amelyek a népi narratívák kutatásának sarokkövei.

**Keywords:** Kuvaiti, népmesék, episztemológiai kérdések

**Discipline:** néprajz

## Introduction

The present article is aiming to introduce the reader to numerous compelling aspects of the Kuwaiti community through its folk tales while prying on the theoretical and epistemological questions that are cornerstones of researching folk narratives. Offering a complete comprehensive image of an entire community from this aspect is inconceivable under one individual article, therefore the presented narratives and theoretical questions are the excerpts, extracts of a currently ongoing research project, and its conclusions are drawn since 2021. Interview techniques were applied throughout fieldwork in the Arabic community in Kuwait, aiming to understand the attitudes towards the folktales at large that, together with previous theoretical findings of previous researches, analysis of texts, draw the theoretical frameworks to a non-westernized anthropological understanding on the world-view presented through the examined narratives.

The narratives were chosen from previously noted down collections in English, and all the interviews were concluded in the same language throughout a 3 months period. The chosen subject also necessitates the understanding of Islamic religious and cultural principles and their standpoint of pre-Islamic textures, which are widely explained under this article.

## A brief introduction of Kuwait

Kuwait stretches in the North-East areas of the Arabian Peninsula on the borders of Asia and the Arab world, next to Iraq in the North, Iran in the East, Saudi-Arabia in the South.

The country is a semi-arid desert area in the GCC without any rivers or freshwater resources, where the average temperature is around 50-celsius degrees in the Summer months, sometimes 60-62. The sun is inescapable, and the weather does not

cool down to below 40 degrees even for the night. The yearly rainfall is approximately 112 mm, but it comes all at once, causing severe chaos, floods, and several deaths even today, every other year. The land is mostly arid, and nature is unforgiving in the Summer, while only the blessing of air conditioning made it bearable in the past century.

The winters are relatively mild, however, the temperature can fall below zero in December and January. Tremors can often be felt partly because of present-day's oil production, partly because of the proximity of Iran.

Kuwait is one of the most demographically fragmented communities in the GCC, which is the consequence of its geopolitical, economical position. Only about 30 percent accounts for the Kuwaiti population in the country. The remaining 70 percent consists of about 1.1 million Arab and 1.4 million Asian expatriates. Nearly 98 percent of the population is urbanised. Only about 25 percent of the country is built today, urbanised areas are concentrated along the seaside of Kuwait where all the essential infrastructure is being built and developed. The outskirts of the desert areas are characterised by and used for oil production, military activities and farming.

Kuwait City was established as a sheikhdom in 1613 after the Portuguese rule over the country ceased (the old gates of the city can still be seen at the old borders). A network of semi-nomadic tribal alliances was particular to the society which sustained living by means of shepherding, fishing, pearl fishing, and trading.

The civil processes that were so particular to Europe, and have produced a considerable pop culture had not started in 17th century Kuwait, which was still ruled by Iraqi origin shaikhs at that time.

From the 18th century, however, the area has gone through considerable changes, and it became the most important trading center of the region,

developing significant diplomatic and trading connections with India, Oman, Arabia, Iraq.

Kuwait played a key role in trading between Aleppo and the Persian Gulf in the mid 18th century, and sea trade started flourishing also, while the region has accumulated incredible wealth, utilising its geopolitical position.

Kuwait was able to become a stable foundation of the Persian-Gulf trade, due to its politically neutral position. They are the best shipbuilders, fishermen, and tradesmen of their age in the region.

Kuwait used to be referred to as the Marseilles of the Mubarak-era (18th century), a religiously tolerant, cosmopolitan society of traders that attracted incredible crowds.

#### **Epistemological questions from a comparative perspective - Is “folktale” a relevant identity construction factor in the Kuwaiti national character?**

Folklore and national movements aiming at self-definition were on the rise in the same era in Europe; Epithets such as folk (“volkskunde”) in these movements, implied to be the roots and/or catalysts of a consensually represented national identity in the process of the establishment of the Hungarian civic society, thus the foundations of modern ethnography and national identity have been laid. On the contrary, the rapid economic and social changes of Kuwait, still have not been sufficient katalizators of significant civic movements. Although a new urbanised “middle-class” appeared, that shall not be confused with the Hungarian or wider European context, instead, shall be looked at through a customised magnifying glass and defined within its own characteristic niche of definitions.

The same socio-economic processes that entirely re-shaped and transformed the European more or less secular systems causing a sensation of identity-

loss and generating “folklore-movements”, have barely had any effects (if at all) in the theocratic Islamic areas due to the preserving and tradition-based core-values of Islam.

It can be generally stated that in such societies, the “communal-spirit” is less exposed to changes, which phenomenon (in this case) may be attributed to Islam as a main identity-constructing element on a nation-wide grade.

Understanding Kuwaiti folklore and traditions through its folk-tales require drawing fundamentally different epistemological, theoretical frameworks, as the ethnographic methods were also bound by culture-specific scientific development. Taking into consideration the nature of the examined area, one must change glasses to see a much clearer picture and advance towards true anthropological understanding.

Folk-aware (Al-Shamy, 2017) research methods grew out of the area-specific, 17- 20. century turbulent events. These methods were not only directed towards understanding one’s self but to a much clearer (mirroring or even comparative and romanticised) understanding of the exos, without a truly tangible need for understanding the self-perception of the “other”. This raises important ethical questions, which are represented only through application rather than detailed explanation under this article. Such is crucial, as even Arab folklorists adapted the European research tools and methods (Al-Shamy, 2017), which do not necessarily correspond to actual research needs and requirements specific to the given group.

An interesting phenomenon that while folklore, oral traditions were flourishing and fairly well survived before and during Christianity, and the tools developed during the industrial revolution, urbanisation, were means of preservation and provided the backbone of identity construction, in Kuwait an inverse process and erosion on such texts, legends, myths, sagas can be observed. These

stories have been transformed into Islamically acceptable narratives or have been ostracised into the kingdom of oblivion. (Germanus 1961). Islam, on its rise, gave the backbone of identity construction in Islamic regions. Islam in its mission takes on anyhow, unifying nations under the same umbrella of ethics and beliefs whilst not oppressing the culture itself. All of its elements are free to flourish as long as they are not extra-norm phenomena to Islam. Consecutively, Islam has minimised the role and significance of pre-Islamic poetest poets and storytellers leaving in place only texts that were not extra-moral to Islam (Germanus 1961).

Islam provides a set of very specific moral guidelines. According to its set of rules, any entertainment is permissible that is not encouraging acts of Islamically immoral activities. Therefore openly polytheistic ideas, worshipping of idols, and their stories cannot circulate to the audience.

Pre-Islamic archaic texts, the oral tradition, therefore, cannot stand in such a significant cultural and epistemological normative role as in the European scientific traditions and their history. This propounds, how much would these stories really tell about the people of Kuwait today? The answer lies in the contemporary narratives to be found in the country.

It is a compelling idea that the oral, folk (as they call it “pop”) narratives, are either niche formulas in this geographic region, there are variants of the already noted down narratives (such as modules or variants of the Arabian nights) or narratives of Islamic relevant contexts (the latter one is the effect of Islam’s normative-selective role in preserving narratives).

In the case of variant narratives or survival modules, the exact geographic origin is considered mostly irrelevant under this article from an analytic viewpoint of these stories while searching for the deeper meaning, the self-image, the world view,

which shall and must be a cornerstone of research aiming to understand the exos, the narratives that are still used, provide a reflection image of the world-view of the community.

It is clear from the answers of Kuwaiti people, that the “term” folk for the local community, is attributed and linked to the image of the nomadic-semi-nomadic tribes’ lifestyle that used to roam the desert living the romantic life of the “puszta” which are mostly rejected by the presently urbanised. It might be concluded that this phenomenon of oblivion is the opposition of the “urbanised”- “modern” - civilised and the “primitive” - “natural” - “country-like”.

The interviewed individuals were not only unable to accept or even interpret such stories when heard but cannot give any references that they have heard as a child. The education, the classic (canonised) literature are simply not accommodating such narratives. The literature in commercial use is the classic Arab Islamically acceptable texts, written in Fusha and modern-day standard Arabic, not dialects, which further deepens the trench between folk-customs and self-image. As per such information, it can be hypothesised that this phenomenon is, in part, a conscious self-representation of leaving the past of illiteracy and poverty behind.

### ***Folktales of Kuwait and mythical creatures of the desert***

AlKhamiri (2015) referred to folktales as the historical-narrative and moral educative tools of the illiterate population. In Bahrain, such roles are undertaken by women and were called to live by the need of disciplining children (go home on time, go to bed on time, etc.)

Researches of the fairy tales and most magical stories that are so important throughout the history of Western epistemology are scarce in the Kuwaiti - and in general the Arabic - scientific literature

(Hurreiz 2002, p. 38), due to the nature of the commonly known, interpreted and used stories that is - from one hand - the consequence of Islamic aspirations mentioned before in this article, and that the surviving texts are passed down in Kuwaiti dialect, which is not the preferred language of the canonised literature. (It is important to mention, as speakers of different dialects often have difficulties understanding one another without the aid of standard modern Arabic).

The noted down and preserved narratives are mostly classical poems and stories from the Islamic era, and they are rarely epical, however even they are rich in survival motifs (ghoul). Works such as the Iliad and Odyssey are entirely missing (Germanus, 1961), or date back to the pre-Islamic era, and not paid much attention to, as it is the literature and works of “fire-worshippers” (an emic category in the Islamic community, referring to pagan cultures in general that were worshipping idols, not the monotheistic God).

The dissociation between high-culture and pop-culture is extremely well articulated even though the availability of scientific literature and demand towards literature. The term “folk” or folk culture is implied rather as heritage and is the field of historical studies. Even its interpretation does not imply such a positive content as in European cultures. The Arabic “إرث” (“eerth”) is the equivalent of the English term “heritage” which is used for all inherited traditions, whilst the term kharareef (in Emirati dialect) is the equivalent of a fairy tale. The rest of the interview subjects however did not understand what “folktale” means, they were familiar only with the term “fairy tale”. When asked to mention a few of them, they cited Western stories such as Cinderella and Frozen. The explanation lies in the Islamic viewpoint of storytelling, permissible forms of entertainment, and the question of authenticity. Islam is often referred to under this article since culture and Islam are so intertwined that it is

practically impossible to peel the two off each other, and Islam even nowadays has an absolute normative role over cultural phenomena. Therefore understanding the particular questions Islam raises towards narratives is inevitable.

The below quote from Al Sousi perfectly summarises a prevailing mentality towards Arabic folktales and legends that are extra-norm to the culture and the religion today.

*“He further said - AlSousi - all these myths and folk tales and mythical characters spread around the society at a time when illiteracy and ignorance prevailed. With the advent of modern times and the ubiquity of education these old wives’ tales have fully receded and children can now go to sleep without being prodded with the tale of a terrifying ogre.”* – KUNA archives - By Sarah Al-Mukhaizeem” (Kuwait Times, 2019/01/17)

Opinions to the contrary however can be heard, but they are much more particular to academic fields. Mohammed AlHaddad, professor of Anthropology at Kuwait University states in the same article, that mythical folk tales are organic and inseparable parts of the narratives of any nation. He hypothesised that the below-mentioned characters were called to live by the need to discipline children in a very cruel and arid natural environment where simple everyday existence itself is a challenge as mentioned before. Accordingly, it is not unanticipated that the tales of locals were filled with scary figures of the heat and the desert as explained through the examples below:

*The “Tantal”* (Kuwaiti dialect), is a 3 meters tall black male figure with disheveled hair, whose steps are rumbling, and is wandering through the landscape at night holding a huge stick, looking for victims to beat them to death. Sometimes, becoming invisible, searching for young children to kidnap them. Even though this story rarely says anything to the people of Kuwait, the word “tantal” is still used to describe exceptionally tall men and women in the local dialect (Alhaddad).

Without any doubt, these are intensely eerie characteristics, especially for a devoted Muslim. Grooming alone has extensive importance in Islam, and tangled, ungroomed hair marks a person that does not care about himself and is outside of the community. Tangled hair indicates first a traveler, second, someone who for some reason does not care to follow Islamic imperatives. Blackness is also undesirable for the community. It is not only that white and fair skin are attributes of absolute beauty and status, but blackness also dirt, and lower social status (a summary of a story will provide a sufficient example later on in this article) that may be dangerous to people.

*Al-Seolu*, is a Nubian (presumably black) a Nubian slave with long teeth who kidnaps and eats children. (Yousef Bin Issa Qinaï, Pages from the History of Kuwait, 2017). These tales and stories seemed so real to the folk even in the early 20th century, that the death of a 10-year-old child who drowned in water in 1910, was blamed on Al-Seolu. The contrast between past and present awareness of these narratives is compelling, however not without reason.

This oblivion is probably the result of two processes. Firstly, after discovering oil, the local society has been transformed and urbanised at a historically unprecedented pace, which not surprisingly tore up the fabric of traditional life, and consequently, its living narratives. Secondly, with the fast pace spread of media and technology, Islamic principles are a lot easier to access and to spread, which is utilised exceptionally well in the country to the benefit of Islam.

*Sehaila Um Al-Khalajeen*, is a homeless woman who is digging in a litter to find rags she can sew together and wear. These rags are often too big, so she is pulling them in the dirt after herself. From an Islamic point of view, this is an ultimately absurd and disturbing image; the woman is homeless, which is an Arabic, Islamic society is not only unacceptable but almost impossible. A woman

is always taken care of by a male relative, let it be a brother, a husband, or a father. A woman living alone in the streets is inconceivable from an Islamic perspective.

Therefore this character is unquestionably extra-normal to the community. Second of all, dirt as an epithet of extra-social characters that mean danger to the community is a repetitive motive. (By Islamic standards, dirt is unacceptable and implies low status, someone who refuses to comply with Islamic standard practices, such as the daily five voodoo - ritual washing before prayers. For a Muslim, appearance, especially the tidiness of clothes is a primary matter.

*Um Al-Sa'af Wa-Alleef*, is a grotesquely disfigured woman, flying around on a palm leaf. (Hani AlSousi)

*Hemarat Al-Gayla*, is a half-human, half-donkey character used for scaring children. They were told that if they don't obey, this character will kidnap and eat them. People being eaten is a common element in these narratives.

The character of *Al-Duaidea* is a glowing, hot piece of amber that entices people to follow it, causing the person's tragic end. This (and many others) character resembles the narratives about the ghouls. Ghouls (just like djinns) are able to take on any form and are masters of deceit, whilst their aim is inflicting damage.

The character of *Bu Darya* is a very characteristic and well-known figure, that is infamous in societies that base their living on the sea. It's a half-human, half-fish character that tricks fishermen into thinking that someone needs to be saved, by screaming in the middle of the night for help. Anyone who attempts to help and approach this figure is cruelly pulled in the deep and drowned there. (AlSousi).

Many characters, but especially Hemarat Al Gayla implies manifestations of ghouls. A ghouls can take on any form, mostly of beautiful women,

however, the figure of the legs is never changing. A ghoulish figure is unable to get rid of the hooves and the curbed donkey or goat legs. These mythical figures of Kuwait may be representing an archetype of an evil creature, or evil in general. The frequency of repetitive characteristics is striking and suggests more than coincidental concurrence (of deceit, invisibility, ability to fly or to hide, to change form) with the ghoulish figure itself, that may be perceived as the archetype of the Djinn (Iblis) of Islam. It may appear so, that the djinn's archetype can still be found in these "old-times" tales". To provide further explanation, let us have a glimpse into the character of the ghoulish figure and the djinn.

Djinn are very complex characters of the Quran. The literal meaning of the word is to "hide" or to "conceal". The word originates from the Arabic "janna", which means "to hide". Djinn are invisible, humans have no ability to see them. They are created from smokeless fire, and just like humans, have free will. They are also ordered to worship the one and only God. "*And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me*". (Surah Al-Dhariyat, verse 56.)

In Surah 72 of the Holy Quran, the jinn recant their belief in false gods and venerate Prophet Muhammad for his monotheism, however djinn, just like humans, can be Muslim, non-Muslim, and have the free will to repent, convert and follow. Those who refuse to follow are called Shaytan. Shaytan was the djinn, (Iblis), that refused to prostrate in front of Adam, therefore was cast out of Heaven. The djinn are invisible by nature, but are able to see and influence humans. Their (the disbelieving djinn, followers of the path of Iblis) purpose is to take humans away from the path dictated by God.

Many attributes of the djinn appear to be similar to the ghoulish figure that the Quran, the hadith and several authors further explain.

*"As a kind of devilish genie, the ghoulish figure was part of beliefs held by Arabs long before the advent of Islam and was a*

*perceived reality for most people living in Arabia. Throughout different historical and religious periods, the character of the ghoulish figure remained the same, being represented as an ugly human-like monster that dwelt in the desert and secluded locations, in order to delude travellers by lighting a fire and thus leading them astray. In some cases, this creature was said to have killed travellers."* (Al-Rawi, 2009)

From an Islamic perspective, the ghoulish figures are mentioned in the Hadith as those Shaytans (devils, who refused to prostrate to Adam and follow the order of Allah) who were forbidden to enter the Heaven, and despite being gradually ostracised from each sphere, continued to rise to the Heavens and they were burnt by comets. Those that weren't, became deformed, were driven to insanity, and then fell on Earth, to deserts, where they are forced to roam as ghoulish figures.

Conclusively, pagan folk narratives and those influenced by the Quran and the hadith, have attributed the same characteristics to the archetype of evil and dressed the fears of Kuwaitis in the same clothes throughout centuries. The lurking, invisible evil that is untouchable is one of our worst nightmares in common. It can be anywhere, hence we don't even know about it; it may destroy our lives before we notice, it may kill those we love, and may rob our most precious aspiration, the desire for eternal life, and our only weapon against this evil is our belief in God, our obedience to the prophets, to God, our parents, and whatever means to offer protection against getting devoured or lost in the fire of hell.

In all these characters, one single trait is striking; deceit and invisibility, which represents the fear of the unknown that we are all defenseless against. No one has a weapon against an unknown, invisible and deceitful enemy, only the obedient one, who follows the advice of a wiser one, let it be a God or a parent. Anyone who ever felt the endlessness, the complete darkness, and the silence that is the deepest in the desert, anyone who has ever burnt

thirsty under the desert's scorching sun will understand these narratives in a deep-down elemental way. Wandering alone in blind darkness through thick silence in the desert is one of the mightiest experiences one may have. The lines that Gyula Germanus wrote live only in those who once visited these landscapes and understood the importance of the support of its people, the closeness of the community. One must experience the desert, to understand the Arab soul and its narratives in real depths, on a cellular level.

Hence it is compelling that all interview subjects remembered the character of Hemarat al-Gayla and the Tantal, the Ghoul, but not the rest when they were asked to recall a story about these characters. They could only remember their parents or grandparents scolded and scared them saying "if you don't obey the Tantal or the Ghoul will take you away", but nothing more than this was quoted, not even a contemporary urban legend. Further, none of them were able to describe the looks of these characters. When being asked what they think about folk tales, they didn't understand either the question or the term. After further clarifications, they explained that they associate folk tales with actual historical narratives about actual people such as fishermen and shepherds that lived in real life. (Also a compelling conversation is how alien metaphors and figures of speech are perceived within the community). The interview subjects one by one, without exception, stated that the narratives of these characters are just scary stories from their old lives, and they minimised their significance as they were not true stories.

The interview subjects were, without exception, living in Kuwait City (not in rural areas), grew up, were educated in and working in Kuwait, are from different Arab nationalities, and are between the age of 25-60, men and women. It was a common question they asked through the interviews "why are you even searching for these old stories, I don't understand".

### The tales

Apart from the mythical creatures of Kuwait's oblivion, some narratives are still well understood and relatable for the local community, due to the historical and religious context of the tales. Below, three of these narratives are summarised and briefly analysed. The analysis is an attempt to provide an insight into the world and self-perception of the local community.

#### *Kill the man who killed the dog*

The name "Kill the man who killed the dog" (It is a badu (badawin) (plural of Bedoons) folktale that was noted down by H.R.P. Dickson around 1949. H.R.P. Dickson was a British political agent who lived most of his life in the Middle East, and as being wet-nursed by a Kuwaiti woman, was treated as part of the tribe, and the culture literally was his own. The term "badu" is an emic name that refers to a stateless minority of Arab tribes that were not included as citizens at the time of Kuwait's independence due to their political affiliations.) is a realistic approach and follows the usual pattern of any folk narrative; one reappearing motif that describes the conclusion is given as a title.

The story tells about a family from the Mutairi tribe and a poor shepherd man with very little affluence and social status. One day, a man of the Mutairi tribe went to the poor shepherd. His shepherd dog started barking at the visitor, so he shot the dog to death. The poor man's damage was great, as without a shepherd dog his animals barely had protection. The three Mutairi sons of the poor man's neighbor told their father about what happened and asked for his advice. He just said, "Kill the man who killed the dog." The sons did not follow his advice, as they judged that a man's life for dogs is not on par. While the sons did not follow the advice of their father, the old man got abused 2 more times, got beaten, and his properties destroyed, taken each time. The sons asked the father what to do on every occasion and the father



answered the same. “Kill the man who killed the dog”. The last time the sons decided to listen, as their father told them that the poor man’s abuse wouldn’t have gotten this far, had they listened at the first instance he advised them. They searched for the man who had killed the dog, and after this, the poor man got reimbursed for all of his damages, his honour was restored.

This very tale holds valuable information about various aspects of the principles that guided desert life. The narrative in the first place, names the Mutairi family, therefore most conclude that this is a story that actually has happened among the people of the same tribe, and it is true. Since the name is mentioned, it is most probably an authentic story taking into consideration Islamic narratives.

The conflict arises from a very realistic situation and has a dire outcome. A poor man’s most important companion is cruelly killed for no obvious reasons other than doing its “job”, trying to scare off the “intruder”. This act is not only cruel for the empathetic, but it is also a terrible crime in the eyes of Islam. According to the religion, killing without any well established reason (for honour, eye for an eye, or slaying animals for food etc.) is forbidden let the subject be a human being or an animal. Further, under Islam, a working dog is not only a living being destroyed for no reason in this case but a very important asset for a shepherd. Therefore two instances of sin are committed right in the beginning. As the events move forward, and the sons are asking for their father’s advice, other mistakes are made. The father, who is to lead the family by merits of wisdom, is giving advice to the sons, which seems unreasonable to them. Therefore, instead of listening to the advice of their parent (which would be their duty under Islam), they choose to act according to their own opinion. It is not only the disrespect against the parent and the stubbornness

that is obvious, but also a powerful statement about one essential principle that is fundamental to all Abrahamic religions; Advice and guidelines from above must be followed not out of respect or fear, but because they are given for a good reason. The wiser ones, (God, parents, tribesmen) do have the knowledge that the young generation does not, regardless of the amount of experience or the quality of the character they have. There are situations, where one must follow seemingly nonsense, foolish or even cruel orders to save a life. However, since the sons ignore the fatherly advice, someone else, someone weaker who is not able to defend himself suffers. This is another intricate and important implication of Islam. Whatever one does will affect the other one. Your honour is my honour, your problem is my problem, your shame is my shame. It’s a common phrase that is repeated among Muslim couples that I am your blanket, you are mine. Whatever we do, will affect the other one. In Islam, it is not only desirable, but it is commanded to have a good, supportive relationship with neighbours, and even defend them if necessary. Therefore the sons didn’t only disrespect their father but also failed to follow through with their duty to Islam, and in addition, they make the same mistake 2 times until they realize that without an effective intervention their neighbour, a poor defenceless man may be abused to death. Each time, the old man is being abused by different people, still, the sons choose to go back to the original problem and the original advice. The solution to the conflict is killing the man who killed the dog. The killer in this case is nameless and faceless, his personality or where he is from is not important, only his act bears significance.

The sons kill him to solve the original mistake. They do not touch any of the other abusers, that is not the core of the original moral of the story. They reach back to the root, the beginning of the conflict, and the problem, which is not actually the

dead dog, but their disrespect to their father. The conflict was able to spiral so far because a seemingly minor act and minor death have not been retributed either the way it was advised or any other way. The sons tried to console the old man by talking ill about his abuser, but no follow-up action was taken, therefore they made the old man a hunting prey, labelling him defenseless by their lack of action that was rooted in their disobedience to their father. Consequently, as Islam says, one thing is coming from the other, and they get out of hand and the old man suffers the consequence of disobedience and the actions of cruel, moral-less people, *bedoos* (which is an interesting representation of ethnic stereotypes in the story).

When the sons decide to listen to their father and do as he asked, the order is restored. However a man is killed and his family could easily ask for blood money, no one does. This is the motive of justice being served and its understanding. It's not only that the old man gets reimbursed and even receives some gifts, but his abuse stops completely from that day on, as the community understands that the abuse against him is retributed, therefore wrongdoings have severe consequences.

In conclusion, the moral of this folktale is that the order is abused when people abuse their power, and the abuse just continues as long as someone takes the necessary steps that may even be more severe than the original crime. The aim of such a moral is to articulate that wrongdoings have threatening consequences, retributions. As taking a man's life for a dog may not seem rational at first sight, in this instance was the only solution to stop further abuse. The order was gradually demolished by the disobedience of the sons and was restored by their obedience. One may not go too far saying that the old man in this story may represent destroyed justice, the abusers represent injustice, and the father represents the law and order of Islam that restores peace in the community.

Having faith in its laws and following them is essential for the peace of the group.

Another tale that is very rich in ethnographic values is the one of the black pearl and the white pearl. As mentioned before, Kuwait is famous for its pearl fishing traditions, and the Gulf is incredibly rich in good quality pearls. Maybe it doesn't come as a surprise that a community that sustains itself by means of pearl fishing, fishing and searade, will also be rich in stories organised around these professions. The story is about a true rarity, a black pearl. The main characters are a black (African origin) pearl diver and a princess from Baghdad (today's Iraq). This princess used to have a beautiful black pearl that she received from her father as a gift. However the pearl was beautiful, she wanted to have the exact same match for it, so she started to search for someone who could bring it for her. She found a famous pearl fisher whom she interviewed. It came to light very quickly from the conversation, that the young man's father was the one bringing the first pearl to the king, and he paid with his life for this quest, as a huge octopus was guarding the treasure. The man doesn't want to go, but the princess convinces him with the promise of treasures, however the young pearl fisher makes it clear that he goes on the quest because he is enchanted by the beauty of the princess. He goes on the quest, and he almost loses his life too, although he secured it in a smart way, and relied on the help of his companions too. He returns to the princess and gives her the black pearl that is the perfect match of the other one. The princess is giving away several "hints" that the man impressed her, and offers him not only the half of the kingdom, and the princess seems ready to even marry the hero. The young man professes his love to the princess, but instead of the happily ever after that everyone would expect, plunges his own dagger into his heart stating that such a love and marriage is not possible.

To put such a sad ending in context, it is best to provide some information about the history of the Arabian peninsula. Arabs starting from the 8th century have been wealthy traders, trading with many goods, including slaves. The slaves were sold to them or taken by force from the African continent, mainly Sudan, Tanzania, Somalia. The slaves oftentimes didn't only convert to Islam, but earned their freedom, and entered professions, such as pearl diving. Even though people of colour were able to get their freedom back and earn their living, their social status has never risen high. Such a wedding between a "working-class" person of colour who used to be a slave and a princess is impossible even if all the requirements are met (In present day Kuwait, lower class jobs are usually done by people of colour from third world countries regardless of their qualifications. Ladies usually marry from their own social class or higher, men do accept a bride from lower social status groups.)· Dowry - a gift willingly given by the husband to his new wife - is a mandatory custom advised by Islam and compulsory by tradition. It is for the bride to prepare herself for the married life, and proof from the groom's side that he is able to provide the necessities and above to his family. Dowry is often a financial security for the wife above the nafaqa that she receives in case of divorce. It used to be and is a common problem today that the extreme financial requirements of a marriage mean a lifetime burden for a man to overcome, and many therefore stays unmarried, even though Islam does not require the man to overload himself. In fact, Islam teaches modesty and temerance, as in the example of the young man who was asked by an old one to marry his daughter. Being poor, he asked his future father in law, how he could marry his daughter. He is poor, he doesn't have any possessions other than the verse he can recite from the Quran. "*Then recite the verse and let that be the dowry for my daughter*", said the old man, as he understood the groom is a God

fearing person who with his daughter will live an honourable life even in poverty. However these kinds of marriages are extremely rare in real life, it is impossible for a man to expose his poor finances or that he is not able to fulfil the role of the provider. The protagonist of this tale is risking his life to fulfil the wish of the princess, and later on takes his own life because it is a social paradox for them to live together in a marriage due to the social and the racial difference. Even though Islam says that all races and nationalities are born equal, such inter-racial marriages are almost unimaginable even today, at least there are a very few examples. Last and not least of all, it is more than dramatic that from the beginning of the folk tale it's understandable that when the princess is looking for someone who can bring the pair of her pearl, she is looking for a husband who would bring her the highest of her desires even at the cost of his life. The man - even though not easily - accepts the mission, and he himself states it's for the two most beautiful black pearls in the world, the eyes of the princess. He sets out on the mission even though he already understands that this kind of love is impossible for him. He still fulfils his promise, and chooses to leave this world of hopeless love despite the princess accepting him as an equal suitor.

As of the above, it is conclusive to state that the oral narratives which still may be circulating are the Islamically, culturally relevant and acceptable narratives or variants of pan-Arabic (the same tale of the "black pearl, white pearl" is found also in Baharein for example) motifs that were all heavily influenced by the development of Islam, the spread of literacy, language reforms, urbanization and multimedia, erosion of the traditional community (urbanisation and migration - multiculturalism).

These stories present a morally, socially relevant content that serves an educational purpose just as the tale of The helpful dog (collected by folklorist Hasan Al Shamy around 1970), in which one of

three poor sisters makes her luck through morally desirable decisions and luck.

This girl is from a very poor family. One day the father brings home a pot of meat and starts cooking it on the fire. However the girls were hungry and greedy and they kept taking from the pot before the meat was cooked properly. The youngest girl got so angry that she grabbed the pot and ran away with it, and her dog ran away with her. She fell asleep at the palace, where the prince took her in, washed, dressed, fed her, and seeing how beautiful she was, he married her. After this, a series of careless words she said had put her in trouble, but her dog advised her. Following the dog's advice she gets out of trouble, and continues living happily with the prince. After all, the dog decided to test the girl, and pretended to be sick, to see how she would treat him. To his disappointment, the girl treats him badly, so he decided to tell all of the girl's lies to the prince, as he helped her to lie about her identity. The prince ostracised his wife from his bed, and she had to live in the kitchen, doing all the dirty cleaning jobs. Then the dog became sick, this time for real. The girl treated the dog well at this instance, and although the dog passed away, the prince took his wife back, whilst this act had no connection with her amended actions.

This story is not only teaching morals, but also gives an insight to the dynamics of relationships between men and women in the Arab world.

In this example, the tale talks about extremely poor people, who are so hungry that the children take the raw meat out of the pot before it has time to cook properly. The girl's jealousy and hunger leads her to do the unimaginable, and run away with the pot, otherwise her sisters wouldn't leave anything for her. This is a real-life tragedy, drama, the actual history of Kuwait, where neighbours borrowed only one piece of match from each other, because they couldn't give back more. This is sociographic. Raw truth that strikes in the middle

of the hearth. These words are short but heavy, and reading superficially it is easy to ignore the depth and the seriousness of the situation that the protagonist leaves behind. Unimaginable poverty and hunger, where a little girl must run away with a pot of raw meat to not starve. She is incredibly lucky to be taken in by a prince, whose motive is the representation of a male guardian who is committing himself to care for the girl in need. It was a common custom in Arab countries (and hadn't died everywhere) that girls got married off early, against or even by their will to a male compatriot, family member or a good-willed person for the sake of having someone to provide for them. Arabia and in general the Islamic world has been an environment where women did not only depend on men (a guardian), but it was (and it is today) their most important mission in life to take care of the women around them. A man is the provider of his family, and is unconditionally responsible for all of his wife's needs and demands. If a father dies, usually the oldest son takes care of the mother, brothers are taking care of divorced or widowed sisters, often first cousins and uncles are marrying first cousins and nieces if the situation necessitates. It often happened that crowds of women remained without men after an unsuccessful battle, or simply the family was hit by a disaster, or was poor. In this tale, the protagonist is lucky, and fate provides her a male caretaker. When she enters the palace, she is immediately being provided all her needs, and is married to the prince in a legal way. From extreme poverty to the world of abundance and into a marriage that is considered the best possible outcome. Her luck is only broken by her disloyalty to her dog and that she is trying to keep her past and family hidden from the prince. She lies to her husband. Lying is a sin in Islam, so that the story has arrived at a point where the protagonist breaks the laws of religion, violates her loyalty to her dog who helps her through the bad situation arising from the girl's

lies, and eventually she is getting punished by getting an unfavourable position in the kitchen, doing a dirty job. It's also important to mention that her punishment didn't finish because she has corrected her ways and started to care for the dog. The tale states that the prince has taken her back when he started to miss her. Therefore the final outcome, returning to her life with the prince - is not the result of a character development (however it happens in the meantime), but the sole outcome of the prince's decision upon his emotions. A man in Islam, has the power to divorce his wife any time he wants to even without a sufficient reason, but also has the power to reconcile at his will. This story is a classic example where a couple separates due to a problem and ends their separation when the man (and also the woman) feels that it's time to leave the past behind. It's interesting that the first problem results from the clumsiness of the girl. She tries to cover up a lie with another one. She lies to the prince that his beard reminded her of a golden broom with gems at home. Due to this one lie, she has to get a fake family to herself to be presented to the prince, but when she betrays the dog, the dog tells on her to the prince. This sequence of events is self-explanatory, one lie needs another one, and one must be loyal to the one who was loyal to her in the most difficult times. The dog here is peculiar. Muslims didn't keep dogs as companions (it is only a modern day phenomena), they only had a place at the home if they had a function (guarding the house, guarding the sheep, etc.). The dog stays with the girl out of loyalty. When she runs off with the pot, he runs after her, he doesn't leave her side, doesn't run back to the family. Thanks to his loyalty, and that magically he can communicate with the girl which in itself is peculiar. The dog can be considered here as a magical helper, and also the representation of loyalty and finesse or craftiness, as he is the one who advises the little girl on what to do to cover her lies. The only time the dog betrays the girl is

when the dog is betrayed by her. The dog really dies when the girl corrects her actions, gets her punishment and the prince is ready to take her back.

### **Summary**

The straightforward narratives with a relatively small amount of complications or perplexing rhetorical forms do not give the impression that the storytellers were aiming to produce artistic corpus. The briefed tales are uncomplicated in form and also very short. They do not contain numerous layers or segments in structure, they don't use complicated poetic tools such as allegories or metaphors. The narratives are straight and simply provide the chronological sequence of events, which makes them more of an anecdote than a fable as long as their structure and category shall be defined. The simplicity in structure and the use of words in fact covers layers of context that are to be revealed and concede the hypothesis that their mere function is to provide moral conclusions to the local community. Without understanding the cultural context however, it may be complicated to unveil why the pearl-fisher would stab himself in the heart although he won over the princess, or why the man who killed the dog also has to die. This line of story-telling is very different from the usual "happily-ever-after" where the evil gets punished and the good is rewarded. The purpose of these stories is to present the audience with examples of how order, let that be the to order of God or the order of society is abused and the means of restoration of such order.

The context and the morals offered by these folktales are largely understood within the Arab community in Kuwait, whilst the stories themselves are generally unknown, which demonstrates the erosion of such oral traditions. Story-telling itself has lost its significance throughout times of

modernization, while the eased spreading of a deeper understanding of Islam and its principles, transferred such roles to the prevailing religion. It leads to confusion when a comparative analysis is an aim, and the researcher is unwilling to de- and reconstructs already existing categories and definitions for the sake of truly pioneering research. Reading and revealing the deeper context of the offered narratives constrains replacing comparative standpoints with an independent viewpoint that is tailored to the community in discussion. It is hypothesised in this article that Islam as a religion is a closed, comprehensive world-view system that is imminently transforming or displaces and replaces all aspects of culture that are incompatible with Islamic principles, therefore understanding Islamic context and history is inevitable for accurate analysis. The phenomenon of disbelief, shock, or simple confusion upon the mentioning of pre-Islamic mythical figures also seems to reinforce the hypothesis of Islamic influence on oral traditions and the transformation of texts mentioned above. All the briefed narratives that were collected and noted down in the last century do have deep connections to Islam, as the culture of its people is rooted in Islam itself due to the aforementioned cultural traits of Islam. As a conclusion, however, upon the context that the interview subjects provided until now, it can be stated that folktales by the European definitions are not organic identity construction aspects, only representations of the Kuwaiti national character. They are accepted as a historical phenomenon, however expressive significance is not attributed to them. The imprint of the society in the presented narratives is very clear, and would conclusively lead to the hypothesis that they can be categorised as anecdotes or fables, however, the aim of this article is to avoid forcing them into already existing categories. Such an aim can be fulfilled or rejected only upon the analysis and presentation of the

typology of the complete corpus. The objective of this article was not to provide a comparative analysis on the examined narratives, but to point out the uniqueness of the texts, that necessitates a research attitude characterised by the same epithets, and to provide a unique insight into some aspects of life in Kuwait.

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