

Veiled Pearls: Women in Saudi Arabia in Contemporary Fiction

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Abstract

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In comparison to other Arab/Muslim women, Saudi women are underexamined and/or often misrepresented. This thesis resists Saudi women's obscurity and sheds light on their struggle to overcome domination and achieve emancipation. It analyses Hilary Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2008), Zoe Ferraris's trilogy, *Finding Nouf* (2009), *City of Veils* (2011), and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012), and Alys Einion's *Inshallah* (2014). The thesis examines the significance of pre- and post-9/11 political and social contexts of representations of women in Saudi Arabia, compares depictions of Western (English, Welsh, and American) and Saudi women, and scrutinizes the effect of genre (the Gothic, the thriller, detective fiction and Chick Lit) on representations of women in a Saudi context. It draws on Arab/Muslim feminism to assess the degree to which the novels reproduce or challenge prevailing discourses of gender and Orientalism. This thesis argues that, through their employment of genre, the writers examined highlight women's injustices. It contends that, although the novels analysed indicate that white women are not less oppressed than Saudi women, they provide an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia as a fearful space. Finally, this thesis demonstrates that Alsanea is the only writer that provides Saudi self-representation. However, she falls into self-Orientalism by restricting her depiction of Saudi women to the social elite. This thesis sheds light on Western representations of women in Saudi Arabia, broadens the very limited number of feminist studies of Saudi women, paves the road for more studies of gender in Saudi Arabia and provides much-needed material for international scholars interested in investigating the lives of women in Saudi Arabia.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the greatest men in my life, my father, may his soul rest in peace, and to Mishal.

Also, I dedicate it to my beloved Nouf, who came in the middle of this long process and endured my absence lovingly.

Finally, I dedicate it to my sons who always waited and understood patiently.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
Chapter One:	
The Gothic Orient: Hilary Mantel’s <i>Eight Months on Ghazzah Street</i>	52
Chapter Two:	
Alys Einion’s <i>Inshallah</i> : A Flight from Abuse to Empowerment.....	82
Chapter Three:	
Zoe Ferraris’s Detective Fiction: Investigating Saudi Women.....	114
Chapter Four:	
Rajaa Alsanea’s <i>Girls of Riyadh</i> : Marginalization of Women and Cyber Resistance..	153
Conclusion.....	184
Works Cited	191

Introduction

In *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (2013), Madawi Al-Rasheed emphasizes: “Compared to other Muslim women, who have been the subject of much serious academic research in history and the social sciences, Saudi women’s gender issues remain the least studied” (33). She adds: “A persistent problem facing researchers is the limited historical knowledge about and current research on Saudi women” (33). In other words, instead of devoting some attention to Saudi women, “Most of the academic literature on the country has focused on history, politics, oil, security, and Islamism” (Al-Rasheed 33). The scarcity of extensive studies and critical investigations in this area illustrates the need for research into the representation of Saudi women. Hence, as a Saudi woman, I present this comprehensive study of representations of Saudi women and women in Saudi Arabia to Anglophone and Arab scholars and audiences. This thesis seeks to resist the obscurity and mystery surrounding Saudi women. Thus, it offers a groundbreaking in-depth study of woman-centred novels written by British, American and Saudi women writers that focus on the historical, cultural, social, political and economic features of women’s lives in Saudi Arabia. This thesis presents an analysis of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988) by the British author, Hilary Mantel, who portrays the experience of a white Western woman in Jeddah in the 1980s; *Inshallah* (2014), a thriller by the Welsh writer Alys Einion, who portrays a Welsh Muslim convert’s experience in Riyadh during the first Gulf War; *Finding Nouf* (2008), *City of Veils* (2010) and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012) by Zoe Ferraris, a white American (previously married to a Saudi) whose protagonist is a Saudi female forensic scientist from Jeddah; and *Girls of Riyadh* (2008), a Chick Lit novel by Rajaa Alsanea, a Saudi woman who writes about four Saudi female characters from Riyadh. Focusing on these novels, this thesis reveals how Saudi women are depicted either as struggling to achieve empowerment and resisting social restrictions, as endorsing patriarchy and/or as passively oppressed.

The thesis examines living conditions and status of women in Saudi Arabia, focusing on how the texts challenge Saudi ideals of womanhood and Western stereotypes of Saudi women. Furthermore, it examines similarities and differences between Western and native representations of Saudi women. It also explores the effects of employing genre in revealing female subordination. For example, I assess how

Gothic fiction, the thriller, detective fiction and Chick Lit express women's anxieties about patriarchy and discrimination. This aids in revealing the restrictive social rules that govern the lives of women in Saudi Arabia. I examine how writers appropriate these genres and alter their conventions, which parallels these authors' rebellion against social norms in their novels. This is comparable to Saudi women's rebellion against gender-segregated jobs and their attempts to join vocations that have previously been limited to men. I consult feminist explorations of Arab women and Arab/Muslim Women's Studies, since Middle-Eastern women share similar social and cultural features that are mainly extracted from Islam. Therefore, I draw on Margot Badran's illustration of an Arab/Muslim view of feminism as a Western social movement and Middle-Eastern adaptation of concepts of women's liberation. I utilize Miriam Cook's investigation of Saudi women's activism and cyber resistance to overcome social limitations. In addition, I investigate Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, Lila Abu-Lughod, Leila Ahmed and Nawal El Saadawi in their critique of Arab social views – such as considering women *fitna* or a source of seduction and responsible for representing their families' honour and male guardianship over women in Arab countries. I focus on Shereen El Feki's study of sexual roles and rights in the Arab world, which I link to the representation of women in Saudi Arabia. I consult Ahmed's and Abu-Lughod's depiction of the revival of the veil and the hijab in the Arab world since the 1960s, and how they symbolize national and religious identity of Arab and Muslim societies, and I relate it to the depiction of the veil and the hijab in the novels I investigate. I refer to critical analysis of Anastasia Valassopoulos, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley and Lindsey Moore in evaluating Arab/Muslim women's writings and their projections about Westernization, feminism, Arab/Muslim identity, the veil and sexuality. Additionally, my thesis draws on Orientalism through the lens of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its demonstrations of Western hegemony and superiority and subordination and inferiority of the Orient. I also employ Reina Lewis's view of the nineteenth-century harem by defining the projections of the twenty-first-century harem like environment in which Saudi women live.

Exploration of genre and its effects in illustrating inferiority of women and in producing Orientalist discourse plays a fundamental role in this thesis and adds coherence to its different interrelated areas of focus. Three of the four examined genres are categorized as popular fiction. According to David Glover and Scott McCracken's

The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction (2012), popular fiction is defined as: “those books that everyone reads, usually imagined as a league table of bestsellers whose aggregate figures dramatically illustrate an impressive ability to reach across wide social and cultural divisions with remarkable commercial success” (3). Hence, these genres are socially influential, and their messages are effectively political. Employment of genre amplifies, critiques and investigates injustices that women are exposed to. This could lead to the assumption that appropriation of genre, whether conscious or subconscious, expresses the examined writers’ perception of Saudi Arabia as a space that does not particularly support ideals of women’s liberation and that limits women’s activities, dress-code and mobility. Additionally, utilizing the tropes and conventions of the Gothic, the thriller, and detective fiction results in depicting the country as a fearful and Gothic space, which contributes to the Orientalist discourse through which Saudi Arabia is represented. For example, Mantel’s Gothic novel depicts mysterious murders, corruption and violence taking place in Jeddah; Einion’s thriller illustrates the anxieties of her protagonist due to domestic violence and rapes that she faces in Riyadh; and Ferraris’ detective fiction investigates women’s conditions as much as it examines brutal crimes, murders and mutilated bodies in Saudi desert and different cities.

Political and historical context interrelates with genre, as well. For example, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* is set in the 1980s, when Western oil and construction companies started to work in Saudi Arabia, and it expresses scepticism about fundamentalism and women’s status in Saudi Arabia during that era. Ferraris wrote her novels in the post 9/11 context, while Einion wrote it in 2014 when ISIS attracted young women from Europe to serve as terrorists or to become wives of terrorists. This underlines the role of genre in illustrating political and historical contexts and in producing Orientalist discourse in the examined novels. Due to the fact that this thesis explores Anglophone women’s writings, novels like Raja Alem’s detective fiction novel, *The Dove’s Necklace*, are excluded since it is originally written in Arabic. Finally, Alsanea’s Chick Lit represents the twenty-first-century Saudi Arabia, where technological advancement granted Saudi Arabia’s openness to global progressiveness and made social innovation possible. The novel resists conventions of the conservative genre, local writing features, and ideals of Saudi womanhood, which defies the common view of Saudi women as passive and/or dominated. From a non-Saudi perspective,

appropriating Chick Lit broadens the dimensions of this genre beyond its common focus on Western women and adds value to the disreputable category of novels by going against social restrictions and injustices. Through subversion and manipulation of genre conventions, *Girls of Riyadh* undoes stereotypical images of Saudi women and Saudi society, which underlines the importance of genre writing in delivering social messages and highlights the significant effect of examining genre in this thesis.

I argue that the four writers investigate women's status in Saudi Arabia. I also assert that the authors' cultural perspective, social, historical and political context – such as the Gulf War, post-9/11 and the rise of Islamophobia - shapes their representation of Saudi Arabia.¹ Additionally, I propose that the white Western writers I examine simultaneously challenge and endorse Orientalism. By presenting their white protagonists as victims of patriarchy, Mantel and Einion challenge the Orientalist assumption that Western women are more free than Saudi women.² Yet, at the same time, Mantel and Einion represent Saudi women as passive and dominated or overlook them altogether. In contrast, I demonstrate that Ferraris's and Alsanea's representation of Saudi women highlights their attempts to overcome patriarchal limitations and cultural restrictions. I also contend that the women writers examined in this thesis do not fully comply with generic conventions, which signifies their challenge to patriarchy, social injustices and writing cultures. Further, genre writing illustrates women writers' attempts to challenge phallogentric culture by constructing female voices and viewpoints in genres that have historically been restricted to male writers or conservative women authors, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie, a writer of detective fiction. Nonetheless, Alsanea is the most subversive among them because she reinvents Chick Lit in a Saudi context and alters the conventions of the genre, making it a reverse form of colonization; she provides a more progressive image of Saudi women; and she offers the most substantial challenge to stereotypes of Saudi women as veiled pearls. In addition, this thesis claims that, despite the texts' potential challenge to the Orientalist perception that Western women are more free than local women, Mantel, Einion and Ferraris endorse an

¹ 9/11 is a shorthand that refers to the three-plane attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by Islamist terrorists on 11/9/2001.

² The term "patriarchy" that I refer to in this thesis is not monolithic but rather indicates Middle-Eastern patriarchy of Arab/Muslim societies, which involves local women's social features and limitations, and Western patriarchy that describes white man's oppressive behaviour in Arab countries or in the West.

Orientalist conception of Saudi Arabia as a place of horror and terror, portray Saudi men as corrupt and savage, and perpetuate stereotypical images of Saudi women, like the lavish princess or the veiled and concealed. This Orientalism is articulated through the use of genre: Gothic fiction (Mantel), the thriller (Einion) and detective fiction (Ferraris). Thus, genres influence these writers' depictions of Saudi Arabia. Simultaneously, the authors' perception of Saudi society as unjust to women inspires and determines their choice of genres that present Saudi Arabia as horrifying and fearful.

The Social Situation of Women in Saudi Arabia: Historical, Religious and Cultural Background

Hibba Abugideiri indicates that Saudi women are overlooked because they are "locked away in the privacy of their homes, oppressed, uneducated and dependent on their male kin" (Loc 2979). She suggests that their deprivation of participation in the outer world is the main reason for being overlooked by scholars and absent from historical records (Loc 2979). Being affected by social and religious strictness, Saudi women's conditions distinguish them from other Arab/Muslim women. For example, local women are prohibited from driving, are required to have male guardians' protection and consent to leave the country or even to become employed and are obliged to wear the veil and the hijab.³ These restrictions are usually presented to Saudi women as a means of guarding their precious chastity, which makes them prisoners due to social restrictions that aim to guarantee women's conformity to cultural rules. Meanwhile, social ideology presents limitations as necessary protection to preserve women, which makes them as precious as pearls and jewels.⁴ Hence, the idea of associating Saudi women with different kinds of gems does not only stem from Saudi affluence as much as it is motivated by the image of hidden jewelry for the sake of protection and

³ Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* defines the hijab as: "the veil or head covering that some Muslim women wear" (1).

⁴ M. Patricia Marchak's *Ideological Perspectives on Canada* (2011) defines the term "social ideologies" as "screens through which we perceive the social world. Their elements are assumptions, beliefs, explanations, values and orientations. They are seldom taught explicitly and systematically. They are rather transmitted through example, conversation and casual observation" (1).

preservation. Conversely, women who do not conform to cultural rules are considered cheap, degraded and inappropriate.

Saudi conservatism could be explained by two reasons. The first is the geographical religious significance of Saudi Arabia since two of three Muslim holy cities – Makkah and Madinah – are in the Saudi region that is called Hijaz and to which Muslims from all over the world perform yearly pilgrimage.⁵ This causes Saudi women to endure more conservative social rules because of the country's religious significance. Because Saudi geographical features include huge deserts – the Empty Quarter and Nefudh desert – the country has been inhabited by many tribes who are known for their endorsement of conservatism and strict interpretations of Islamic teachings. Al-Rasheed stresses that “the state endeavoured to keep their tribal ethos, which, among other things, keeps women in a patriarchal relationship under the authority of male relatives” (5). The second reason is the strong effect of Wahhabism, which is a conservative socio-religious movement that was founded by Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab, which has provided strict interpretations of religious scripts and has caused a clear distinction between Saudi Arabia and other Arab/Muslim views of religious teachings.⁶ Wahhabism strives to employ a stricter religious perspective in terms of women's veiling, the hijab, gender segregation and domestic role. Accordingly, “the academic community” became divided into a part that considers Islamic teaching “a real potential for the emancipation of Arabian women from the restrictions of tribal society and those who regard its teachings as laying the foundation for later discrimination and disempowerment” (Al-Rasheed 44). For example, Natana J. DeLong-Bass' *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (2008) asserts, while illustrating features of the founder of Wahhabism, that “Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's life and writings reflect a concern for women and women's rights” (124). She also adds: “Like Muhammad, he sought to ensure that women's rights, as granted by the Quran, were implemented and that women are aware of them” (124). Finally, she describes Abd al-

⁵ Hijaz lies in the Western region of Saudi Arabia and it is the geographical area where prophet Mohammed was born, lived, and spread his teachings. It is also the setting of the two Islamic Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah.

⁶ According to Leila Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*: “Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92) was a zealous religious reformer who sought to cleanse Islam from what he called blasphemous ‘innovations,’ practices that had crept into Islamic usage over the centuries and needed to be purged in order to bring about a return to Islam's pure, original beliefs and practices” (94).

Wahhab's ideology of women: "His interactions with women indicate that he recognized them as human beings capable of serving as positive, active agents in both the private and public realms and who therefore deserved access to both education and public space" (124). Conversely, some other writers, like Eleanor Doumato's *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (2000), consider social strictness in Saudi responsible for women's marginalization and exclusion from the public sphere (40). This illustrates how Saudi society's distinctiveness is unique, especially in terms of woman-related social laws and life conditions. An example of this is an inability to trace women's lives in the history of Saudi Arabia due to their absence from historical records and literary representations. In the introduction of *Gulf Women* (2012), Amira El-Azhary Sonbol underlines the difficulties scholars face when they research Gulf women: "it is not surprising that women rarely appear in historical narratives" (Loc 84). She adds: "Very little information on social life, let alone the life of women, has been documented" (Loc 84). This resulted in what Sheikha Moza Bint Naser describes, in the Foreword of the same book, as "historical amnesia about the role of women in the Gulf" (Loc 51). I note here that women's lives in Gulf countries are similar.⁷ Miriam Cooke's *Women Claim Islam* (2001) emphasizes that Arab women "have been left out of history" (viii). She adds that these women have been "out of the narratives of emigration and exile, out of the physical and hermeneutical spaces of religion" (viii). Thus, Saudi women are historically concealed and overlooked.

Gender segregation of Saudi women distinguishes them from women in other Arab/Muslim societies and marks their limitation that is implemented by strict Sharia law.⁸ They are restricted to the domestic sphere, gendered job spaces and forced veiling, which makes their living conditions comparable to women in traditional harems. Leila Ahmed defines the 'harem': "The very word 'harem' is a variant of the word '*haram*' which means 'forbidden' (and also 'holy')" ("Ethnocentrism" 529). She adds:

⁷ The Gulf is a term that refers to six countries – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait – that surround the Arabian Gulf and that are part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These countries share similar religious, historical, cultural, and social features.

⁸ Amira Mashhour explains "'Shari'ah is an Arabic word that means the Path to be followed,' referring to a number of legal injunctions known as Islamic law. The primary source of Islamic law is the Quran, which Muslims believe to be God's words" (565).

The harem can be defined as a system that permits male sexual access to more than one female. It can also be defined, and with as much accuracy, as a system whereby the female relatives of a man – wives, sisters, mother, aunts, daughters – share much of their time and their living space, and further, which enables women to have frequent and easy access to other women in their community, vertically, across class line, as well as horizontally. (“Ethnocentrism” 524)

In *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem* (2004), Reina Lewis defines the term “harem” as “that part of the house forbidden to men who are not close relations.” Finally, Lewis confirms that the harem “was for a long time common to many different ethnic communities in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, where codes of honour and shame encouraged the seclusion of women” (*Rethinking Orientalism* 97). In other words, “harem” is a term that was coined in Muslim societies to describe areas in Muslim houses that were allocated to female residents and prohibited for male strangers. Abugideiri highlights that Gulf women have endured “seclusion and the harem” more than other Arab/Muslim women in the Middle East (Loc 2979). Harems eventually disappeared in the Arab world – especially due to the feminist movements’ achievement that enabled women to go out into the public sphere and abandon the veil and the hijab – by the end of the first half of the twentieth century and were replaced by gender-segregated spaces in conservative societies. The social obscurity of Saudi women has depended on the local cultural view of women as “fitna” for men, a source of seduction. In addition, women’s isolation from public life has been considered a sign of social piety.

Immobility and the inability to drive outlines unique social conditions of Saudi women. Moreover, women’s transportation is limited by the need to have related male companions whenever travelling/venturing/existing outside the domestic sphere. Recently, wealthy modern families are hiring Far-Eastern drivers to replace the male escort and to do the driving. Al-Rasheed emphasizes Saudi women’s reliance on “their male relatives or foreign drivers for transport” (30). She also stresses that less fortunate women choose to remain unemployed due to the “low salaries” of the jobs that are allowed for women, “such as teaching,” which “makes working outside the home a less attractive option if women have to pay a substantial proportion of their monthly salary

to foreign drivers” (30). Thus, immobility is another factor that reinforces women’s seclusion in Saudi society.

Religious teachings have contributed to the formation of conventional social rules that determine Saudi women’s status, values and behaviour and men’s patriarchal expectations. For example, until recent years, young girls were forced to be married to older men to guarantee their chastity. Also, divorced women are compelled to abandon their children because it is the father’s right to maintain the children after divorce. This is depicted in Einion’s *Inshallah* where the novel illustrates women’s deprivation of child custody in Saudi Arabia. Finally, women’s domestic violence and physical abuse have been pardoned for decades by an extreme explanation of a religious script. *Inshallah* demonstrates this through severe examples of domestic violence and marital rape. These extreme conditions led many female youth to flee their family homes in rebellion against ferocity and discrimination. Hence, the Kingdom’s society is united by piety and submissiveness to Islamic teachings more than other Arab/Muslim societies.⁹ It is significant to note that since Saudi Arabia is not a secular country, religious instructions are not restricted to mosque preaching and Islamic education at schools. Rather, these teachings spread over local media – newspapers, radio, television and social media. An example of this is a question posted on a fatwa website, “Fataawa Noor ‘alad-Darb”, where a man asks about appropriate job conditions for Muslim women: “What are the permissible areas in which a Muslim woman can work without opposing the teachings of her religion?”.¹⁰ A sheikh replies to him: “The areas in which a woman can work are those which are specific to women, such as her teaching girls – whether that work is in administration or technical; [in addition] she can work at home sewing women’s clothing and that which is similar. As for working in areas which are [generally] specific to men, then that is not permissible for her to do, since doing so necessitates her free mixing with men, and that is a great fitnah which should be avoided”. This is relevant to Ferraris’s trilogy, where the female protagonist strives to work in a police station among men and faces social critique because of her gender-mixed job. Despite its endorsement of social and religious rules in Saudi society,

⁹ Population in Saudi Arabia’s population is made up of indigenous tribes, metropolitan locals, and immigrants from many Muslim countries who settled down in Saudi either because of the religious significance of the country or due to its recent oil prosperity.

¹⁰ A *fatwa* is an opinion issued by a religious sheikh.

Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* also demonstrates resistance to gender segregation through the narrator's attempts to engage in gender-mixed cyber activities and through challenging arranged marriages and social restrictions to relationships among men and women. Also, this question and answer in the fatwa website mentioned above promotes social conservatism in relation to Saudi women's lives – such as rejection of liberation ideals, prohibition of gender-mixed societies, limitations of women in the public sphere and formation of concepts of appropriateness for women. Teachings on similar fatwa websites travel through social media, reach millions of Saudi men and women, and contribute to the formation of their values, culture, and traditions. They stress the necessity of restricting women's activities, limiting them to the domestic sphere, prohibiting their mixing with men and creating a distinction between women's jobs and men's jobs. Expansion of social media allows such ideals to become global and effective in a wider range of Muslim communities.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, innovative and different interpretations of the Quran emerged to challenge and undo gender inequality in the Arab/Muslim world. Al-Rasheed emphasizes that Saudi women have suffered from “injustices” and “exclusion” (139). Moreover, she confirms that activists have argued and sought reform in issues like “the guardianship system, women's employment, women driving, child marriage, mixing between the sexes, custody of children after divorce, polygamy, and other less formal marriage arrangements” (270). She also underlines that Saudi women:

became a regular domestic concern in the pages of the local press, in addition to being a prominent subject in international media. Domestic violence, the unemployment of women, the marriage of minors, mixing between the sexes, the guardianship system, the ban on driving, drug abuse, the elopement of young girls, and representation in the courts were hotly debated both inside Saudi Arabia and abroad. (155-56)

It is significant to note that before the last two decades of the twentieth century, such discussions were prohibited and were viewed as blasphemy. Margot Badran declares in an article in the *The Guardian* that:

Female scholars have been talking for two decades now about the gender equality they find in Qur'an. Activists use these egalitarian readings to push for

new practices within families and societies and to support reform of Muslim family laws. This combination of intellectual and activist work undertaken in diverse parts of the globe has been called Islamic feminism. (n. pag.)

This demonstrates that women in the Arab world are aware of their social rights and they seek solutions for their cultural problems without defying social or religious codes.

Nurturing this type of thought underpins feminism in the Arab/Muslim world and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it caused women to undo what Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2014) considers an "absence of a woman's point of view for over 1440 years," and led female scholars to research the Quran to produce moderate readings (266). Thus, Cooke highlights that during the 1990s, a group of women created an "an Islamic and explicitly feminist journal" that was named *Zanan* and that aimed to read the Quran "from a women's viewpoint" (*Women Claim Islam* xii-xiii). Cooke emphasizes that this journal planned to generate "new legal interpretations" and to "awaken women so that they will proclaim their rights" (*Women Claim Islam* xiii). An example of this is the interpretation of a Quranic text that was viewed, for hundreds of years, as direct advice in the Quran to hit disobedient women. Western societies have considered such interpretation of the Quranic verse a religious consent to practice violence against Muslim women. In 2007, Laleh Bakhtiar provided a translation of the Quran that challenged previous interpretations of a vital verse (Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution* 265).¹¹ Ahmed explains that Bakhtiar's exploration led her to provide a challenging explanation of the verse:

Bakhtiar found that the root verb 'daraba' had a number of possible root meanings besides 'to beat,' including 'to go away.' In addition, Bakhtiar points out, the Prophet Muhammad was never known to have beaten any of his wives and thus had never himself put into practice a method of controlling wives that the Quran purportedly recommended. Furthermore, taking account of the fact

¹¹ "Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great." [Quran Verse 4:34]

that the interpretation of the word ‘daraba’ as ‘to beat’ is internally inconsistent with the broad, general tenor of Quranic statements and recommendations regarding relations between men and women. (*A Quiet Revolution* 267)

Amina Wadud’s *Quran and Women: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (1999), describes Quranic illustrations of women’s rights: “It should be noted that all references to female characters in the Qur’an use an important cultural idiosyncrasy which demonstrates respect for women” (32). Moreover, Wadud underlines that Islamic teachings do not discriminate between men and women (34). Further, the writer declares that misogynist thinkers, such as Abbas Al-Aqqad, interpret the Quran in a manner that allows “restrictions placed on women” (35). In light of such views, Ahmed asserts: “Bakhtiar concluded that the correct interpretation of this word could not possibly be ‘to beat’: rather, she concluded that in this context it must mean ‘go away from.’ The verse thus basically instructs men, as Bakhtiar interprets it, to leave—divorce—women who persist in challenging or resisting them” (*A Quiet Revolution* 267). This illustrates how feminist interpretation of religious scripts undoes social patriarchal injustices and allows women’s perspective to defy chauvinism.

In 2014, an Egyptian sheikh in the Islamic Egyptian university that is known as Al-Azhar, Khaled Al-Gendi provided a similar interpretation of the above mentioned Quranic verse to clarify the issue of violence against women, relying on the fact that Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, who was the major source of Islamic teachings, never committed physical assaults against men, women, children, or even animals.¹² Like Bakhtiar, Al-Gendi explains that the more appropriate interpretation of the word is to leave women alone. This explanation serves to undo the false association of Islam with violence and abuse and reveals how prevailing domestic violence is a misinterpretation of Islam. It also serves to support Muslim women’s quest, not only in Saudi Arabia, to achieve a better status by exploring religious teachings from a different perspective to accomplish women’s empowerment and to stop assaults on women in the name of religion.

¹² An Islamic preacher who studied in Al-Azhar University and has a master degree in interpreting the Quran and Prophet Mohammed’s speech <http://khaledalgendy.com/السيرة-الذاتية>

The Archetypes and Ideals of Saudi Womanhood

Social archetypes are viewed as a source of inspiration for Saudi women to adopt predesigned ideals – such as chastity and piety – and form men’s expectations of women – like obedience and fertility. For example, Saudi society portrays its women as princesses and pearls to motivate them to endorse domesticity, the veil and gender segregation. Oil wealth and affluence in modern Saudi Arabia enhanced the association of Saudi women with luxury and grandeur to prevent them from participating in financial, economic, or political activities. In this regard, Al-Rasheed reveals how some Saudi women view their restrictions as a source of value: “Ironically, it is not uncommon for both men and women to cherish the way Saudi women are honoured as a result of trading their rights for affluence and protection. Many Saudi women see themselves as protected ‘jewels’ freed from the burden of sharing household expenses” (23). Accordingly, many Saudi women refrain from participating in the public sphere despite their need for a job to provide for themselves and for their families financially, which illustrates the invalidity of social myths. In support of this view, Al-Rasheed explains that Saudi women have been detained from work and from participation in the public life because a woman’s job is viewed as “a luxury” that she does not need “despite the fact that today many women do contribute their wages to support their families” (24). Many Saudi communities consider professional life inappropriate for women. Hence, local social rules portray females’ confinement to domestic life as honourable because it keeps them under the protection of male guardians, ensures the achievement of ideals of Saudi womanhood, and eliminates women’s effect as a source of “*fitna*” or seduction to men (Cooke, *Women Claim Islam* 135).

Women’s sexual purity is an important ideal of Saudi and Arab/Muslim womanhood, which explains the religious teachings and social laws that ensure its maintenance. Like concealment, gender segregation and immobility, girls’ education is utilized to guarantee conformity to rules of conservatism that guarantee women’s purity. In the 1950s, Saudi women’s education was restricted to religious teachings and, like most females’ activities, took place in gendered spaces. This demonstrates that, according to a conventional Saudi social perspective, Saudi women do not need secular education because it contradicts their social role – as protected chaste women – in the domestic sphere. Al-Rasheed clarifies that in the 1950s elite, Saudi girls “had limited

education in the household. Families often hired the services of local religious scholars” (84). The girls’ curriculum was usually “Quranic verses to perform their prayers, in addition to lessons relating to purity, ablution, and other matters relevant to performing religious rituals and obligations” (84). After the 1950s, adds Al-Rasheed, Saudi girls from the upper-class in Najd and Hijaz went to “boarding schools in Arab capitals” like Cairo and Beirut (85).¹³ In that era, most Saudi girls did not have the advantage of education, yet women “made a valuable economic contribution to their households;” ran “vegetable markets;” “made important clothing for men;” and worked as “women traders, known as *dallala*” that sold cosmetics and other women’s products (Al-Rasheed 87). Amani Hamdan adds that Iffat Al Thunayan, King Faisal’s wife, “established the first girls’ school in 1956.” Hamdan also notes that “The prospect of Saudi girls travelling through the public streets every day to attend school aroused alarm in the extremely conservative Saudi society. Yet, Faisal and Iffat were so committed to educating girls that they planned for the first women’s academy located in Jeddah, the first of its kind in the country” (49). Accordingly, Saudi girls were taught by “Arab women teachers” (Al-Rasheed 89) and mixed with Arab girls from different nationalities, mainly Egyptians, Syrian, and Lebanese, whose families were imported to supplement “local expertise” (88). This demonstrates how Saudi women’s education remained faithful to ideals of Arab/Muslim womanhood to ensure preservation of chastity.

Additionally, Saudi women’s sexual purity has always played a major role in representing man’s honour, the family’s honour and the tribe’s honour, which makes women responsible for the social reputation and dignity of their male family members. It also has been the explanation of many social injustices practiced against women to protect them from possible loss of purity, especially regarding their virginity. Sonbol emphasizes the fact that Arab societies view women “as symbol of honor and pride” (85). Shereen El Feki’s *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World* (2013) describes how Arab/Muslim women are obliged to guard their “virginity before marriage” and maintain their “chastity ever after, even in the face of miserable, unsatisfactory unions” (22). Accordingly, El Feki draws attention to the fact that in some Arab/Muslim societies “Keeping women on the straight and narrow is more than a

¹³ Najd is the province in the middle of Saudi Arabia where the capital, Riyadh, lies.

matter of ‘just say no’” (103). For example, in Saudi Arabia, women undergo gender segregation and restriction to the domestic sphere. In Egypt, they are exposed to genital mutilation and, in most Arab countries, women face honour crimes in the case of subversion. Abu Lughod reveals that guarding women’s chastity can lead to so-called ‘honour crimes’, which are common in the Arab world, where “The multiplication of cases lends credibility and objective weight to the existence and specificity of the phenomenon” (129). Abu-Lughod also emphasizes that “These incidents are not to be considered as individual aberrations or pathologies but as patterned forms” (129). She defines ‘honour crimes’ as “the killing of a woman by her relatives for violation of a sexual code in the name of restoring family honor” (113), which she considers the greatest offense practiced against Arab/Muslim women (112). As part of belonging to Arab/Muslim societies, Saudi women are required to refrain from engaging in sexual activities outside wedlock to maintain community approval and to avoid social and family condemnation and consequent punishment. Due to all the social restrictions faced by Saudi women, Ahmed emphasizes that “Saudi society gives individual men control over individual women” (“Ethnocentrism” 528). Through this control, women cannot leave their houses, work, or travel without a male’s permission and they are considered inferior to their male counterparts in family, marriage and work (Ahmed, “Ethnocentrism” 528).

Another archetype of Saudi women is the obedient wife and mother. Therefore, girls’ education and religious teachings remain faithful to this major objective: “educating a girl is to bring her up in a proper Islamic way so as to perform her duty in life, be an ideal and successful housewife and a good mother, ready to do jobs suitable to her nature such as teaching, nursing and medical treatment” (Al-Rasheed 90). These jobs also work to guarantee women’s purity – by providing female doctors for women because they should not be seen by male doctors – and influence their ideology through education that guides them to become submissive housewives and devoted to their domestic role. As a result, according to Shirin J.A. Shukri’s *Social Change and Women in the Middle East: State Policy, Education, Economic and Development* (1999), during the 1990s only five percent of Saudi women had jobs and these were restricted to “teaching and health sectors” (28). In the twenty first century and due to the kingdom’s openness to the West through the internet and media, this kind of education started to be doubted and resisted. Al-Rasheed explains that girls’ traditional educational curricula

raised a “plethora of urgent questions, doubts and shifting perceptions of reality rather than certainty” (106). In other words, girls started to question their prescribed domestic roles, the prohibition of having more variety of jobs and the dilemma of choosing between abandoning education for marriage or vice versa.

Ancient tales and classic literature are important sources of cultural ideals and values in Saudi society. As much as they affect people’s view of gender roles, define women’s status and limitations, and form culture and tradition, they are affected by Arab/Muslim conservatism and piety. In other words, Arab and Muslim societies have required and created a cultural heritage that complies with their moral system and helps to implement conventional behaviour. One of the most influential works in the history of Arabic literature is *The Arabian Nights*, which was written in the fourteenth century. According to Husain Haddawy in Muhsin Mahdi’s *The Arabian Nights (New Deluxe Edition)* (1995), it was translated into English for the first time during 1704-1717 (193). Haddawy declares that “The stories of the *Nights* are of various ethnic origins, Indian, Persian, and Arabic” (105). In addition, he reveals that “The work consists of four categories of folk tales-fables, fairy tales, romances, and comic as well as historical anecdotes” (95). These different genres mix “the unusual, the extraordinary, the marvelous, and the supernatural into the fabric of everyday life” (95). Haddawy emphasizes that “In the process of telling and retelling, they were modified to conform to the general life and customs of the Arab society that adapted them and to the particular conditions of that society at a particular time” (105). Moreover, Susanne Enderwitz underlines that “before they were even translated into French, English, and German, the *Nights* made their mark on European literature” (188). She highlights the effect of *The Arabian Nights* on modern literature in Europe and America as well as in the Near East: “writers in the twentieth century (in fact more so than ever) still used the characters of Shahrazâd’s tales and her narrative mode as models for their own writings” (188). Finally, Enderwitz emphasizes that the narrative techniques, themes, and ideals projected in *The Arabian Nights* have affected Western writers “from Edgar Allan Poe to John Barth” (191) and Arabic authors and dramatists, such as “Taha Husain, Tawfiq al-Hakim and Naguib Mahfouz” (189), which “contributed to ‘making the medieval *Alflayla wa-layla* a vital and influential part of the Arab literary heritage today’” (189).

Enderwitz emphasizes how *The Arabian Nights* provides a conservative and conventional representation of gender and contributes to the formation of patriarchal social ideals. For example, Shahrazâd is pardoned and her life is spared after she gives birth to three boys – in some versions to one boy (Enderwitz 190). This implies that she gains value and credibility through her contribution in the maintenance of male supremacy and through motherhood. Also, some versions of the tales indicate that the king falls in love with her for her “purity, virtue, and piety” (190), which underlines the fact that, for Arab/Muslim women, social approval is conditional and connected to specific ideals that relate to chastity, without which they are punished. From a theological viewpoint, *The Arabian Nights* emphasizes religion-related morals for women. For instance, the book amplifies the significance of virginity through associating danger and death with losing it. It also highlights the importance of accepting male guardianship through contrasting the safety of being protected by men, in contrast with the threats vulnerable women may face when on their own. Finally, it presents women’s confinement in harems and domestic spheres as an essential seclusion for virtuous women. Yet, *The Arabian Nights* illustrates Arab women’s paradoxical empowerment as they describe Shahrazâd’s ability to alter the king’s view of women through her talent in storytelling (Enderwitz 191). In addition, Enderwitz highlights that the tales’ importance does not lie in their content as much as it does in the heroine’s “life and narrative power” (189). In other words, “after we become hazy about the myriad details of the contents” (Enderwitz 189), Shahrazâd remains the idol of the narratives.

Arabic literature remained faithful to conservatism and piety and continued to reinforce conformity to social rules in terms of gender in the Arab world and across different historical eras from the fourteenth century until the twenty first century. For example, poets like Ahmed Shawqi celebrated women’s role as a mother and underlined the effect of this role on youth and their morality.¹⁴ Another example is the radical Egyptian Nobel Prize winner, Naguib Mahfouz, who infuriated strict Arab societies in some of his novels, such as *The Children of Gebelawi* (1988). In his writings, Mahfouz discards classic Arabic, employs Egyptian dialect and resists conventional rules of piety. This led to some of his works being banned in many countries of the Middle East.

¹⁴ Ahmed Shawqi was a prominent Egyptian poet and dramatist who lived between 1868-1932.

Raymond Stock confirms Mahfouz confesses that his novel *Children of the Alley* (1959) “is meant to parallel the stories of the sacred scriptures,” which is, according to religious conservatism, a type of blasphemy (176). The Egyptian author’s subversion of Arab/Muslim social rules led an Islamic sheikh to announce “a fatwa calling for Mahfouz’s death” (“Author Profile” 45). In addition, Stock illustrates that after the publication of this novel, a young Egyptian Islamist “stabbed Naguib Mahfouz twice in the neck with a switchblade as he sat in a car outside his Nileside home in Greater Cairo” (172). Nevertheless, despite his revolutionary style, Mahfouz remained conservative in his portrayal of female characters. Consequently, according to Anshuman Mondal, Mahfouz’s novels display a “patriarchal discourse” (4) that defines women’s spaces as either home or brothels and describes female characters in regard to “their relationships to men” (10). Mondal adds that Mahfouz divides women into two categories: respectable women, who are sexually accessed through “rigorously policed” methods and are restricted to domestic spheres (8), and prostitutes who inhabit brothels and are sexually available (10). Finally, Mondal emphasizes that Mahfouz’s novels “dwell repeatedly and at length on the female body as an object of sexual desire” (6) and women are “described in purely external terms in which their physical appearances denote nothing other than their beauty or otherwise, and hence their desirability” (7). Accordingly, despite his subversion of social and cultural norms, Mahfouz’s fiction remained traditionally conservative in his views of gender.

Western Stereotypes of Saudi Women

In contrast to the image of the pearl and the princess, Saudi women are often represented as prisoners in the West. Since its production in 1962, *Lawrence of Arabia* has played an influential role in shaping Western perceptions of the Orient as an exotic and fearful space, of Orientals as inferiors that need Western sovereignty and of Oriental women as concealed and oppressed. The film describes a British man’s experience in crossing the Arabian desert, which is massive and hellish. Christina B. Kennedy describes the film’s setting as “the worst place God created” (170). The movie provides images of the Nefudh Desert that help Western audiences visualize Arabian land, camels and tents. Ella Shohat underlines that Western cinema has always been obsessed by the “exotic Orient” (40). Kennedy emphasizes that “in Judeo-Christian accounts,” the desert “has always been a crucible for intense experience” (162). It is “a

cursed land, associated with the absence of water' where 'God sent men for punishment'" (162). In addition, it is stereotyped as harsh, hot and deadly (Kennedy 170). Despite the film's exhibition of the desert as "gloriously rich in color with interesting forms of dunes and cliffs or rock formations" (Kennedy 168), it is a setting of fear and annihilation, where storms, extreme weather and fast sands are sources of danger and fear.

Lawrence of Arabia contributes to stereotyping Arabs as savage, unwise, and passive. Shohat argues that Western cinema usually provides a "contrast" between "Oriental 'backwardness,' 'irrationality'" and "Occidental modernity and rationality" (40). Thus, such films express a "cultural and geographical reductionism whose subtext is a rationale for the subordination of the East" (40). Considering this, *Lawrence of Arabia* represents its white protagonist as ethically humane, clever and moral, in comparison to Arabs who are described as cruel, corrupt, bloodthirsty and foolish. The film also describes Arabs' perception of destiny and their submission to it as a sign of their passivity in comparison to white man's control over his life and surrounding events.

Lawrence of Arabia depicts Oriental women in terms of the virgin/whore dichotomy. Arab women are absent from the film's action scenes and they appear either as veiled and behind tent walls peeking at men's celebrations of victory or concealed behind black veils and cloaks greeting Arab warriors. Another instance of women's appearance is when Arabs invade Aqaba to take it from the Turks. A drawing of an Arab belly dancer in a revealing costume appears inside one of the taken houses, which emphasizes Western stereotyping of Arab women as seductresses. Moreover, it illustrates Arab social misogyny by stereotyping women as *fitna*. Shohat asserts that "the Western rescue fantasy" of Arab and Muslim countries creates an image of "a female saved from her own destructiveness" (40). This also contributes to the image of the white man as "an active, productive and creative pioneer, a masculine redeemer who conquers the feminine wilderness" and the "European heroic penetration into the Third World" (Shohat 40).

Predominant stereotypical images created during the 1960s remained stable until the occurrences of the terrorist attacks at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In a post-9/11 context, Western media has been dominated and obsessed by the rhetoric of

culture clash, articulated through anxieties over Muslim women's veil and Islamic dress. This has reinforced a binary opposition between the West and the East and emphasized differences between Western societies and Saudi culture. Ahmed announces that post-9/11 led to "one of the most eventful and volatile decades in modern history as regards relations between Islam and the West and specifically Islam and America" (*A Quiet Revolution* 13). Moreover, she shows that due to 9/11 terrorist events, America attacked "American Muslims" and "women in hijab;" exposed "Muslims to new levels of scrutiny;" and made "women in Islam" a fundamental concern "in the aftermath of 9/11" (*A Quiet Revolution* 13). An example of this is the 2007 movie, *The Kingdom* (2007). By describing a horrifying terrorist attack on an oil-company-residence compound, the film depicts Saudi Arabia as a dangerous space for white expatriates. It illustrates several incidents where white people are kidnapped, tortured, attacked and violently murdered for the sake of piety or to purify Muslim land from infidels. Hence, the film portrays Saudi anti-Westernization and evaluates Arab and Muslim immoral brutality against Western compassion. The film draws on Orientalist traditions that associate the Arab world with backwardness and the West with advancement and progression, which intensifies the chasm between the two cultures. It further draws a distinction between Western intellectual superiority and Saudi inferiority. This is indicated by the representation of Saudi police as incapable of finding clues or stopping the terrorists who commit several crimes in Riyadh and kill Saudis and expatriates. The movie reinforces stereotypical images of Saudi women by showing them as veiled and obscured. In contrast, American women are shown as liberated, involved in detective work in the public sphere and participating in the process of finding criminals. By associating terrorism with Islam, the film highlights post-9/11 prevailing Islamophobia. However, by illustrating a growing friendship between Saudi and American officers, the film underlines transnational human bonds and indicates that the distinction between the West and the East can become less visible if they cooperate to overcome terrorism.

Additionally, a continuous and frequent discourse that distinguishes between the definitions of Islamic Arab and secular Western identities emerged in post-9/11 context. This rhetoric depicts the East as backward and Muslim women as oppressed. Conversely, it shows the West as liberated and fair, and white women as more free. In that regard, Michelle D. Byng emphasizes that "the media have represented Islam and

Muslims as culturally incompatible with the values, norms, and interests of Western nations” (110). An example of this is *Korea Portal*’s presentation of a controversial photo of two women athletes in a beach volleyball match in the 2016 Olympics of Rio de Janeiro (n. pag.). The photograph illustrates an almost naked Western woman and a covered Muslim girl in the hijab (n. pag.). The image connoted the women’s different dress codes and their effects on women’s social conditions and lifestyles. Erlane Audrie illustrates that despite the role of media in unifying dissimilar peoples under the umbrella of sport “the 2016 Rio Olympics highlighted a distinct difference in cultures: clothing” (n. pag.). This showed when the Egyptian team appeared clearly different in their leggings, long sleeved blouses and “A hijab worn by Doaa Elgobashy of Egypt added to the apparent differences in their cultures” (Audrie, n. pag.). Another example of this is the burkini incident that, according to Ben Quinn, attracted the attention of global media and stimulated diverse reactions in the summer of 2016 after the prohibition of Muslim women’s swimwear on French beaches and how Western policemen oppressively forced a Muslim woman to “remove some of her clothing as part of a controversial ban on the burkini” (n. pag.) This makes liberating Muslim women an excuse to critique, attack and violate the East.

The portrayal of Saudi Arabia in the international media, movies and literature is affected by stereotypical images of dominated and veiled women, Islamic fanaticism, terrorism, intellectual inferiority and exoticism. Dina Ibrahim stresses that “After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam became the contemporary global threat that replaced Communism as the enemy of the West” (518). Hamid Mowlana adds that the image of the Middle East in the West is connected greatly to that of Islam (3), which leads to “increased homogeneity of images” and misleads “effects of direct contact” (4). In the introduction to *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (1997), Yahya R. Kamalipour emphasizes that “Big mainstream media are trapped in the same global system of finance, marketing images for sale to the highest bidder at the least cost, perpetuating rather than challenging the conventional stereotypes” (xiv). In addition, Kamalipour notes that “the American public often has very little knowledge of the Middle East; hence, the constant barrage of disasters, coups, uprisings, conflicts and terrorist activities, reported routinely by the U.S. media, fosters a gross misimpression of the Middle-Eastern peoples and cultures” (xx). Smeeta Mishra highlights that Muslim women are susceptible both to Western perceptions that “focus on the

‘oppression’ of Saudi women” and to “veiling and segregation in the public sphere” (259-260). Finally, Mishra underlines that Arab/Muslim societies utilise indigenous women as “cultural warriors who have to fight perceived Western decadence” through the veil, the hijab and other features of social conservatism (260).

This thesis focuses on a wider range of representations of Saudi women and women in Saudi Arabia. Like Mantel’s novel, some Western texts set in Saudi Arabia - such as Miranda Miller’s *A Thousand and One Coffee Mornings: Scenes from Saudi Arabia* (1989), Carmen Bin Ladin’s *Inside the Kingdom: My Life in Saudi Arabia* (2005), Kim Barnes’ *In the Kingdom of Men* (2012), Dave Eggers’ *A Hologram for the King* (2012) and Jean P. Sasson’s *The Princess Trilogy* (2012) – focus on the limitations of women in Saudi Arabia, depict Saudi women as passive and abused, use flashy titles that attract curious Western audience and include photos of anonymous white women with blue eyes – probably models – wearing the hijab, the niqab, or the veil on the covers of these novels. For example, Miller’s collection and Barnes’ novel, like Mantel’s *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, illustrate the theme of Western women following their husbands’ jobs to Saudi Arabia. In the process, they abandon their jobs and their liberation as white women. They also give up their Western lifestyle as they are compelled to endure gender segregation and adopt Saudi’s conservative dress-code. Barnes illustrates an American woman’s struggle to flee her grandfather’s domination and conventional behaviour. She marries the man she loves and travels to Saudi Arabia during the 1970s, when American companies started to export their employees to Saudi fields as experts in oil industries. She lives in an isolated compound for expatriates that limits women’s activities to shopping and social gatherings, which is a common theme in Western texts that explore Western expatriation in Saudi Arabia. The novel also underlines British couples’ sacrifice of their liberal life in England for the sake of financial gains, which is another usual theme of texts set in Saudi Arabia. Bin Ladin’s novel emphasizes the theme of entrapment of white women in Saudi Arabia and their enslavement to strict cultural codes. The novel draws a distinction between the compassionate West and the brutal East, describes Saudi Arabia as a land of corruption and shows Saudis as savages without feelings.

Eggers’ text and Sasson’s trilogy are examples of texts that portray Saudi women’s abuse through cultural and social ideals that expose them to imprisonment,

immobility, unemployment and inferior status. Sasson describes Saudi women's inferiority in relation to men's domination through guardianship and forced arranged marriages. Miller and Eggers also shed light on Saudi women's abuse and social segregation in terms of their relationships with men as well as men's advantages during marriage and after divorce. Finally, like Mantel, Einion, and Ferraris's texts, Miller, Barnes, Eggers and Sasson portray Saudi Arabia as a corrupt hellish land and Saudi weather as foul. An instance of Orientalism is Miller's short stories that describe Riyadh as "a dirty, airless, stinking cage" (13). Eggers also depicts Jeddah as a terrible desert, where his American protagonist experiences fear of car explosions and shock at passing by public executions. Accordingly, looking at these texts' portrayal of the ideals of Saudi womanhood – such as the concealed princess – reveals that what conservative Arabs consider honourable features of their women, progressive Arabs, Saudi feminists and Western societies consider a means of oppression. Despite their function in unveiling features of the lives of women in Saudi Arabia, I have not used these novels in my thesis since they do not employ popular genre in their representations of women in Saudi Arabia.

Feminist Resistance to Saudi Ideals of Womanhood and Western Stereotypes

Feminists have resisted local Arab/Muslim ideals of womanhood and Western stereotypes of Arab women. In *Feminist, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (1995), Badran declares that in 1923, Arab feminists refused to cooperate with Western feminism because they associated it with European political presence and imperialism (Loc 1103). Yet, Arab women were compelled "to join hands with the international sisterhood" when male nationalists "turned attention away from women's liberation" after independence (*Feminist, Islam, and Nation* Loc 1403). Moreover, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed writings by white women that criticize Orientalism and imperialism, consider Arab/Muslim women a part of global sisterhood, view local women as victims of gender inequality in their local societies, believe that Muslim women have the right to determine their living conditions and endorse their cultural and religious features, such as the hijab and the veil. This resulted in the emergence of books and essays that investigate Arab and Muslim women's lives and their attempts to achieve liberation and authority in Arab countries and in diaspora. An

example of this is Badran's above-mentioned book, which illustrates the beginnings of feminism in Egypt and surveys its different stages starting from the nineteenth century. Like Badran, Cooke's *Women Claim Islam* highlights Arab women's fight for agency against patriarchal social rules and focuses on women's social and cultural restrictions, such as the association of women with *fitna* – a dominant view of Arab/Muslim women, in Saudi Arabia and beyond. Furthermore, both writers illustrate the substantial influence of Islamic teachings in Arab societies, which leads to three consequences: first, these teachings form social norms in Middle-Eastern and North African countries; they cause Arab countries to have similar cultures and traditions; and they lead religious minorities – such as Arab/Christians – to endorse Islamic rules – such as strict dress-code for women. Despite these claims, Badran and Cooke emphasize that Arab women's restrictions result from social conservatism and patriarchy – that usually aim to guard women's chastity and honour – rather than piety.

Feminism has risen in the Arab world during the nineteenth century and continued to evolve in the twentieth century into what is known today as Arab/Muslim feminism. Its main purpose is to support Arab and Muslim women in their quest for equality, social justices and authority. Badran's *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergence* (2009) clarifies how, in Middle-Eastern societies, feminism connotes Westernization, colonization, imperialism and/or Western cultural invasion. She further shows how Western feminist plans are weakened by their collaboration with political forces that focused on Muslim women's disadvantages – the image that motivates the first world to invade the East and control it to liberate its women. It is significant to note here that the coinage of the term 'Arab/Muslim feminism' is problematic due to its misleading connotations. For example, it indicates a feminism that is simultaneously and paradoxically nationalist/secular and Islamic – a confusion that results from the fact that social rules and cultural norms in the Arab world are inspired by Islamic teachings. This shows in the behaviour of Arab/Christian communities who share the same traditions with Muslims. Furthermore, the term homogenizes the two types of prevailing feminisms in Arab countries – secular feminisms and Islamic feminism – and merges their features and functions. Additionally, it awkwardly homogenizes ideology of different feminist movements in the Middle East. Finally, it ignores women from other religious minorities by indicating that all Arab women are Muslim.

Badran differentiates between the different available kinds of feminisms in the Middle East and North Africa. She describes secular feminisms as nationalist movements that emerged in different countries and reject association with piety or religious features – such as the hijab, niqab, or the veil. Conversely, Islamic feminism endorses Islamic dress; accepts the hijab and veiling and researches the Quran in order to attain reform of family and social laws, suggests that patriarchy in Arab/Muslim societies is a result of social patriarchy rather than Islamic teachings and engenders Islamic discourse that addresses Muslim women globally – in the Muslim world and in diaspora. Badran shows that Islamic feminism mediates between secular feminism and male Islamism. Saudi women in *Girls of Riyadh* and Ferraris's trilogy prove this when they do not defy Islamic teachings to gain their social rights but rather oppose extreme conservatism and patriarchy. Therefore, they resist domesticity, financial dependence and male domination. Meanwhile, they embrace Islamic dress, fall in love, and accept marriage and motherhood. Badran also makes a distinction between secular feminisms and Islamic feminism. Rachelle Fawcett explains that Islamic feminism “is not simply a feminism that is born from Muslim cultures” but rather “engages Islamic theology through the text and canonical traditions” (n.pag.). Therefore, “A distinctly ‘Islamic’ feminism, at its core, draws on the Quranic concept of equality of all human beings, and insists on the application of this theology to everyday life.” Badran defines the term as well by clarifying:

A concise definition of Islamic feminism gleaned from the writings and work of Muslim protagonists as a feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Quranic notion of equality of all insan (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions and everyday life. It rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (by the way, absent in early Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh) conceptualising a holistic umma in which Quranic ideals are operative in all space. (“Islamic feminism revisited” 9-15)

Thus, Islamic feminists, as Fawcett clarifies, “insist on a return to the Quran and employ principles of contextual and rational analysis that disputes traditionally accepted beliefs about women through the very rhetoric by which they were formed.” Moreover, feminists’ views of reform do not apply to women only, but to society as a whole. Consequently, feminists from all over the Arab/Muslim world have started to write in defense of their liberation and social justices in the face of patriarchal and cultural rigidity. Women from Egypt, North Africa, Syria and Lebanon have moved towards achieving this mission. In the last two decades, very few female writers – such as Sonbol and Al-Rasheed – started to examine the lives of Gulf women. This has led writers to draw attention to the limits imposed on Saudi women and their attempts to gain authority. In addition, researchers have attempted to unveil social features of Saudi women due to Saudi Arabia’s unique geographical features in the heart of the Arab world that, since the 1990s, have affected the formation of cultural and religious features in the Middle East and North Africa through its domination of Arab Media – such as the Saudi-owned, most popular free set of T.V. channels in Arab countries, MBC – and its high level of internet connectivity.

One of the aims of Arab feminists is to critique injustices practiced against women in the Arab world starting from honour crimes and forced or arranged marriages to confinement and dependence on men. An example of that is Nawal El Saadawi who, through her memoir, novels and essays, describes the shortcomings and difficulties of Arab women. She utilizes her career as a physician in the rural parts of Egypt to describe occurrences of rapes, and honour crimes. Her book, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1977), is a pioneering text that demonstrates the inferior status of Middle-Eastern women in general and Egyptian women specifically. She illustrates the deterioration of women’s life-conditions in comparison to other civilizations and to previous Islamic eras. Part of her social criticism, El Saadawi, like Badran, highlights Arab social views of women as *fitna*, or temptation. Accordingly, she describes how Muslim societies treat their women as uncontrollable and guilty and consider men secure and superior, in the private and the public sphere, which contributes to the view of the East as a misogynistic place – a label that is usually associated with Saudi society (*Feminist, Islam, and Nation* 98). In agreement with Badran, Sonbol, Abu-Lughod, and Ahmed, El Saadawi depicts the hardships of Arab/Muslim women and their lack of agency, which makes them victims of severe

male guardianships. Moreover, due to women's function as representatives of their families' honour, they are prohibited from practicing many activities, especially those that demand interaction with men, to preserve their virginity. In addition, Abu-Lughod criticizes Arab societies that enforce gender discrimination in working places and politics (*Do Muslim Women* 1). In their attempts to gain emancipation and undo inequalities, Arab/Muslim feminists attempt to explore different interpretations of the Quran to achieve social advantages.

Despite Saudi's reputation for extreme conservatism, feminism is growing steadily in the Kingdom and Saudi women increasingly insist on their right to be free and equal. For instance, Cooke declares that Saudi women experience a new type of liberation through participating in cyber activity – this can be exemplified in women's activism and rejection of cultural injustices in social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram – which makes up for their absence from the public sphere and their confinement to domestic roles (*Women Claim Islam* xvii). This idea is illustrated in *Girls of Riyadh*, where an internet blog connects the narrator with people – locally and internationally. Cooke also emphasizes the importance of the internet for women's liberation and agency by revealing that Saudi Arabia is the country that is expected to undergo the most radical future change and global openness due to its greatest networking in the Middle East (*Women Claim Islam* viii). This is relevant to the employment of the internet and blogging by the protagonist in *Girls of Riyadh* to overcome her restrictions, compensate for social confinement, underline limitations and methods of challenging them, transcend national and local identity, and to become acknowledged globally. This new openness of the religious Kingdom, Cooke adds, is very significant due to its role in representing Islam and Muslims and its influence in shaping Muslim thought and institutions in the Middle East, the Gulf and North Africa (*Women Claim Islam* Loc 219).

In collaboration with feminist struggles to achieve liberation, Saudi filmmakers have produced movies that address gender inequalities and highlight women's challenge to the patriarchy. Making films about Saudi Arabia is as challenging as the subject matter Saudi movies tackle, especially since cinemas are prohibited by Sharia law. Haifaa Al-Mansour's movie, *Wadjda* (2012), is a sign of the increasing challenge to traditional ideals of Arab/Muslim womanhood in Saudi Arabia. *Wadjda* is the first

Saudi movie to be shot in Riyadh by a female director. It was released by Sony Pictures Classics and won several awards in different film festivals, such as the BAFTA prize for the Best Foreign Film in 2014. Al-Mansour explains the significance of her movie: “the film focuses on what a difficult place Saudi Arabia can be for women” (10). She further describes her frustration as a Saudi woman:

If I want to go anywhere, I need permission. I cannot drive a car, walk the main streets, or even take a train without family permission. But my film is not about complaints or accusations; it is more about what we can do to move ahead, to change our world, and to create a positive space on an intrapersonal level. (10-11)

Al-Mansour’s movie symbolizes modern Saudi women’s reactions to their social injustices for the sake of achieving a better status and liberation. She announces in the *Independent* in an article by Geoffrey Macnab: “‘I just wanted to have a voice’” (n. pag.). Eylem Atakav asserts that the movie unveils ideals of Saudi womanhood and touches on several controversial issues in Saudi society, such as “references to polygamy, significance attached to virginity, child brides, the implications of veiling, and religion’s place in education” (232). Further, Atakav underlines that *Wadjda*’s being directed by a woman is a “metaphor for freedom” and “self-empowerment” (233). Nancy L. Stockdale describes *Wadjda*: “Ultimately an optimistic yet bittersweet film, *Wadjda* presents its characters as diverse and multidimensional, all the while bringing up many issues for further exploration regarding women’s roles in Saudi Arabia” (105). *Wadjda* narrates the story of a young girl who faces the reality of her inferior status as a girl in Saudi Arabia. She contrasts her limitations to the privileges of her male friends who can drive bicycles and are not restricted to gendered spaces. She witnesses her mother’s agony of not producing a male child, of being prohibited to drive and of being anxious about her husband’s threats to take a second wife. *Wadjda* challenges gender roles in Riyadh by going against her public school’s rules of veiling, by having male friends and by aiming to buy her own bicycle to compete with the boys she plays with. The film critiques extreme conservatism and fundamentalism by showing examples of fanatical female teachers who strictly ensure young students’ veiling and concealment. When *Wadjda*’s mother buys her daughter a bicycle from her salary, the film indicates that the key to Saudi women’s agency lies in their financial independence. By showing

Wadjda's financial limitation, participation in a competition to gain the money needed to buy a bicycle and the mother's financial struggle to achieve independence and empowerment, the film resists stereotypical images of Saudi women as lavish, spoiled, and unwisely wealthy. Additionally, by going against social norms, *Wadjda* defies the image of Saudi women as passively oppressed. This marks a shift in Saudi women's self-representations, and it makes this film an important assessment and reevaluation of Saudi women's status. Hence, *Wadjda* signifies Saudi women's efforts to achieve local awareness of women's need to gain rights and agency in addition to international acknowledgement of Saudi women's struggle to undo various social hindrances.

Michael Rosser states in a *Screen Daily* article that three years after *Wadjda*'s "Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2013," the Saudi movie *Barakah Meets Barakah* (2016), by the Saudi writer and director Mahmoud Sabbagh, became "the second ever Foreign Language Academy Award entry for Saudi Arabia" (n. pag.). The movie "explores the clash between traditional values and the modern world of smartphones and social media" (Rosser, n. pag.). Like Al-Mansour and Alsanea, the movie director declares that the aim of his movie is to undo dominant stereotypes of Saudi society by presenting "a voice that represents the normal stories of the people in Saudi Arabia" and to reveal the presence of "hope" and attempts to "making change" (Rosser, n. pag.). The movie is a romantic comedy that describes how a man and a woman fall in love and struggle to meet in a conservative and gender-segregated society. It underlines contradictions in Saudi Arabia where convention clashes with modernity and where old-fashioned ideals conflict with youths' needs. Also, by providing examples of people that challenge and overcome conventional limitations, *Barakah Meets Barakah* shows hope in future changes for men and women in Saudi society. Like these films, *Girls of Riyadh* is a radical novel that plays a major role in representing feminist resistance to patriarchal rules and social restrictions in Saudi Arabia, challenging stereotypical images of Saudi women and showing Saudi women's struggle against strict ideals of womanhood.

Social conservatism and piety, signified by endorsement of the veil and the hijab, came as a reaction to political circumstances in the Arab world during the 1970s. For example, Arabs viewed their defeat in the war against Israel in 1967 as a sign of

God's punishment for their adopted secularism and abandoning Islamic dress during the 1950s and 1960s. In *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, Ahmed underlines that during the 1950s the veil ceased to be the norm in "'advanced' Arab countries" like Egypt or Syria (19). This social advancement affected Saudi cultures when the country imported teachers from these two countries during the 1960s and 1970s to teach in newly formed girls' schools. This progressiveness and enlightenment was viewed as sinful by fundamentalists. To rectify the damage purportedly caused by abandoning religious teachings, Arab societies implemented piety and strictness to make up for their previous sins. This devoutness, according to Arab/Muslim social views, led to their victory in their other war against Israel – the Ramadan War in 1973.¹⁵ These events led to what was known then as the "Islamic Resurgence" or "Islamic Awakening" and what is called since the 1990s "fundamentalism." Ahmed notes that this revival of Islamic thought and of Islamic identity after the victory in 1973 resulted in "spreading the veil" (*A Quiet Revolution* 9). As a result, "Islamic dress had suddenly become noticeable after the Ramadan War" and the veil started its "rapid spread" all over the Arab world (Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution* 78).

Since the 1970s, the veil has attracted the attention of Western and Arab feminists and stimulated controversial debates because it has been viewed as a sign of inferiority by secular feminists and as a sign of religious identity that distinguishes Muslim women from Islamic feminists. Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, Einion's *Inshallah*, Ferraris's trilogy, and Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*, like other literature that examines Arab/Muslim women, query the veil. Ahmed's *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, by contrast, explores the rationale for endorsing the veil, the hijab, and Islamic dress in the Middle East since the 1950s, which provides a basis for evaluating women's dress-code in the novels. Ahmed shows the effects of the revival of piety on the spreading of Islamic dress, the veil, niqab, and the hijab and notes that although this phenomenon first appeared in Egypt, it rapidly spread throughout the entire Arab world and across the globe. Ahmed describes how the hijab and Islamic dress eliminated social differences and achieved equality among

¹⁵ A war between Arab and Israeli armies that took place in 1973 during the month of Ramadan. It was named after the Muslim's holy month to indicate a religious cause.

people by its unified texture and colours – a phenomenon that still exists in Saudi Arabia and shared by Saudi and expatriate women. Ahmed and Abu-Lughod reveal that Arab women have numerous reasons for wearing the veil: it constitutes their Islamic identity and Arab nationalism, it helps to avoid harassment and it enhances spiritual peace and happiness.

Emphasizing Muslim identity is another motivation to adopt Islamic dress in Saudi Arabia and in other Arab/Muslim societies. Fadwa El Guindi illustrates how the hijab expresses identity for women by declaring that it “represents a social entity” (465). Byng adds that “Islamic clothing was used by Muslims to reassert their culture and identity” (110). As evidence of this, she confirms that “Muslim women in Europe and the USA have worn the hijab as an affirmation of their ethno-religious identity” (Byng 110). Jeffrey Louis Decker also considers the veil a means of unity and uniformity in Arab/Muslim societies because it “appears to grant stable and homogeneous signification” (188). To add to that, Frantz Fanon describes the function of the veil in Arab/Muslim societies: “it generally suffices to characterize Arab society” (43). Finally, Ahmed underlines that the hijab unifies Muslim women all over the Arab world because it is confined in colour and material to “sober solid colors, such as navy blue, brown, or beige” and “made of ‘thick opaque material,’” which also eliminates distinction between different social classes that can result from varied women’s clothes that express their different financial and social levels (*A Quiet Revolution* 82).

Expressing anti-Westernization and endorsing Muslim social laws are significant rationales for embracing the veil and the hijab in the East. Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013) defines anti-Westernization as Arab social condemnation of the West. Therefore, the term has many implications: First it stands for Arab rejection of a European dress-code that was employed by some locals as a sign of social modernity during the first half of the twentieth century. Secondly, it symbolizes Muslim social refusal of feminism as a Western product and of Western representation of Muslim women as victims and in need of saving. Thirdly, it indicates Arab/Muslim scepticism about “violences that have been associated with the Christian West over the past century, from colonialism to world wars, from slavery to genocide” (46) and of “Western intervention” that resulted in massacres “by the claim to bring freedom” (114) to Arab/Muslim countries from the first Gulf War to today. In relation

to this, Ahmed underlines that the hijab “connoted a turning away from and even an outright rejection of the West and its ways” (*A Quiet Revolution* 88). As a result, Saudi women have adopted the veil, the hijab and conservatism both to gain social approval in their conventional society and to express their disapproval of Western colonization in the Arab surrounding countries in the first half of the twentieth century – such as the British colonization in Jordan and Egypt, the French colonization in Lebanon and North Africa or the Italian colonization in Libya. Feelings of anti-Westernization in the second half of the twentieth century were fueled by Western imperialism in Gulf countries and the threats of Western cultural invasion after the first Gulf War in the 1990s.¹⁶ In that regard, Al-Rasheed declares that Islamic dress is viewed in Saudi Arabia as one of “the boundaries between pious Saudi women and corrupt Western women” (117). Thus, acknowledgement of indigenous Arab/Muslim culture, in opposition to the spread of Western imperialism and social values, motivated Saudis Arabia and other Arab/Muslim societies to embrace strict Islamic ideals – such as women’s veiling and the hijab – in the face of threats of Westernization.

Conformity to rules of veiling and hijab in Arab/Muslim societies grants women participation in the public sphere and to become present in gender-mixed spaces. Ahmed declares that the veil, which “makes women metaphorically invisible, or ‘not present,’ also enables women to be literally present” (“Ethnocentrism” 528). Decker also emphasizes that conformity to the veil grants Arab women “subjectivity and agency” (183). Thus, Saudi women wear the veil to overcome their restriction to private spheres, which makes them view the veil as a contradictory means of liberation. Accordingly, to participate in public sphere activities, Saudi women are compelled to wear the hijab. This is because adopting Islamic dress allows them to transcend the limitations of the domestic sphere. Thus, Einion, Ferraris, and Alsanea reveal that the veil, which is portrayed as a form of patriarchal domination of women, is utilized by Saudi women to overcome gender segregation and domestic restriction.

Abu-Lughod warns against equating the veil or niqab with lack of agency because Muslim women, as illustrated in *Girls of Riyadh* and Ferraris’s trilogy, choose to wear them (*Do Muslim Women* 17). Likewise, Einion’s *Inshallah* suggests that the

¹⁶ It is important to note that even though Saudi Arabia was never colonized, it was affected by the British colonization of its neighbouring countries in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

veil and the hijab are not signs of oppression when her novel features a veiled Bengali feminist in Wales, who is determined to take the veil. Hence, the novel indicates that Islamic dress is not limited to Saudi Arabia or the Muslim world and that veiled women are not necessarily oppressed and lack authority or agency. Conversely, some women go against their families and husband to adopt Islamic dress or the veil. Despite this mainstream endorsement of the hijab, by the end of the 1980s some women started to confess that they wear the hijab to avoid social critique and their husbands' and brothers' anger, which traps women into representing social piety and family honour. Many Arab feminists, like El Saadawi, view the hijab and veil as a sign of discrimination exercised against women in Arab/Muslim societies. However, many Western societies consider Islamic dress oppressive and a sign of inferiority of Arab/Muslim women's status. Ahmed highlights reactions to the hijab and veil in post-9/11 Western societies. For example, she describes how French schools prohibit the hijab and how German school teachers are prohibited from wearing the hijab, which led global feminist groups to revolt in support of Muslim women's right to wear the hijab.

Rejection of feminism as a Western social concept is another sign of Anti-Westernization in Arab/Muslim societies. Abu-Lughod's *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* illustrates Arab societies' scepticism about Western missions of liberating Muslim women from their social marginalization and abuse under patriarchy and Islamism (*Do Muslim Women* 9-12). One sign of this suspicion, according to Badran and Abu-Lughod, is Arab societies' rejection of feminism due to its European secular origin, its association with Western women's ideals and its attempts to force a Western version of social justice on Arab/Muslim women and societies (*Do Muslim Women* 9-12). A depiction of this is found in *Girls of Riyadh*'s and Ferraris's portrayal of Saudi women's endorsement of local social laws and their attempts to seek improved status and solutions for their social hindrances within the limit of their indigenous cultural and religious rules. Also, Badran and Abu-Lughod assert that a fundamental reason for rejecting white feminism is its neglect of Arab/Muslim women's indigenous perspective on change and advancement. This shows in Mantel's and Einion's novels, which focus on Western protagonists' experiences and suffering in Saudi Arabia and overlook Saudi women's attempts to achieve empowerment and undo injustices. Furthermore, Abu-Lughod's book and Badran's *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergence* cite some of the reasons for rejecting Western standards in Arab societies. Firstly,

because the presence of Western ideals in the East is considered a modern form of colonialism. Secondly, Abu-Lughod claims that the West ‘Others’ Arab cultures and lacks what she describes as cultural relativism, which is an essential quality to improve Western ethnocentrism.¹⁷ Thirdly, wars and deaths of innocent people result from Western attempts to rescue Muslim women – such as the war in Afghanistan in 2001 – who prefer to determine their own lifestyles without foreign guidance. In addition, in light of the post-9/11 context, many Western societies find Islam and feminism contradictory and reject Arab/Muslim feminism. This causes an Arab/Muslim feminists’ dilemma between rejecting patriarchy and Western racism. Finally, some texts like Mantel’s *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion’s *Inshallah* antagonize Arab societies by portraying them as corrupt and overlook Saudi women’s struggle for liberation, which strengthens existing stereotyping of Muslim societies. Despite these texts’ indication that their Western protagonists are as abused as Saudi woman, Mantel’s and Einion’s novels are examples of ignoring Saudi women’s suffering or struggle for agency. It is important to note that rejecting the West in the Middle East is not endorsed by all social classes. In relation to this, Abu-Lughod declares that Arab/Muslim societies distinguish between the superior, the urban and civilized modernist that endorses Western trends, and the uncivilized rural traditionalist who rejects foreign social intrusion (162). However, despite Arab/Muslim social scepticism about European and American feminisms and white feminists’ racist behaviour towards Arab/Muslim women, my thesis highlights the significance of transcultural and transnational sisterhood and women’s solidarity to overcome patriarchy, achieve authority, and gain rights on a global level.

Due to strictness and conservatism as essential ideals in Arab societies, sexuality remains a secretive and undiscussed topic, which makes it a challenging area of research. El Feki demystifies sexuality and answers questions about serious topics, like virginity, sex outside wedlock, masturbation, eroticism, arranged marriages, and reproduction in post-9/11 Egypt. It is significant that Egyptian social norms that relate to sexuality – if we exclude genital mutilation of women – are similar to those in Saudi Arabia. El Feki reveals sexual controversies; differentiates between Islamic rules and

¹⁷ Abu-Lughod defines cultural relativism as: “a relativism that says it’s their culture and it’s not my business to judge or interfere, only try to understand” (*Do Muslim Women* 40).

conservative social laws; and draws attention to young people's conflict between lack of financial ability to be married and social rules that prohibit pre-marriage sex. This makes El Feki's study an essential link to the female protagonists' dilemmas in Einion's *Inshallah*, Ferraris's trilogy, and Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* and their attempts to seek new definitions of chastity and virtue in contrast to sin and immorality. However, this thesis expands El Feki's theory by focusing on women's contradictory sexual roles, sexual inequality between genders, and women's revolutions against predominant sexual expectations in Saudi society. Hence, it transcends the perceptions of El Feki geographically and conceptually. The book also, in addition to El Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, explains social rage and severe punishment of subversive female characters – such as non-marital sex or violating strict local dress-code – in novels like Ferraris's *Finding Nouf*, *City of Veils*, or *Kingdom of Strangers*. El Saadawi discloses how honour crimes symbolize social reaction in the face of the revolutionary and unconventional female behaviour in Egyptian societies – a common response to subversive behaviour all over the Arab world. El Feki draws attention to the presence of cyber-sexuality and smart phone sexual relationships in the Middle East since introducing the internet in the Arab world. Therefore, Arabs make use of the secure secrecy the internet provides to its users to react to social restrictions. Finally, according to El Feki, El Saadawi and Ahmed, cyber sex signals an evolution of sexual rights for women.

Saudi Women: Existing Scholarship

A limited number of books address Saudi women's lives, social restrictions, and challenges. Two examples of this are Sonbol's *Gulf Women* and Al-Rasheed's *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia*. Sonbol's book illustrates various studies that shed light on different lifestyles, professions, literary works and representations of women in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula across different historical eras. Al-Rasheed's book provides a detailed study of Saudi women's social life, participation in the public sphere, role in the domestic sphere, contemporary and modern female writings, and shortcomings of being a female in Saudi society due to their immobility, gender segregation, concealment, and domesticity. Both books explore Saudi women's different living circumstances, such as education, work, and domestic and public roles. In addition, both books aim to challenge traditions of concealment in

Saudi society. They also reveal that Sharia law determines Saudi women's lifestyle, dress-code, work and marriage. Yet, it is significant to note that despite the connection between social limitations in Arab societies and religious teachings, Ahmed, El Saadawi, Abu Lughod, Sonbol, and Al-Rasheed distinguish between social and religious rules. Hence, Sonbol emphasizes that associating women's honour with the tribe's dignity is a cultural habit in pre-Islamic eras and it is a trend that Islam critiques as part of its rejection of women's marginalization. *Gulf Women* also defends the Islamic view of women by comparing women's status in Islamic and pre-Islamic societies to show that women are favoured by Islam. As a result, Sonbol highlights that Saudi women's status has undergone improvement and they have become a significant part of the public sphere today, which defies their present global reputation as oppressed and inferior. An example of this is introducing women in Saudi Arabia to different types of jobs in gender-mixed spaces that used to be prohibited, such as engineering departments. In relation to this, Sonbol and Al-Rasheed survey Saudi women's educational achievement, financial and economic contribution, literary production and religious roles in ancient Arabia, the pre-oil era and in a twenty-first-century context.

Despite the abundance of scholarly exploration of Muslim women's literature and literary writings about Arab women, academic research on literature about Saudi women is insufficient. Hence, I focus on studies that investigate literary representations of Arab women because Saudi women are Arab. They share social features and religion with other Arab/Muslim women and endure similar kinds of patriarchy, gender inequalities and hindrances. The first concept that Arab/Muslim women's studies usually examine is anti-Westernization in Middle-Eastern societies – signified by scepticism about colonization, imperialism, or Western feminism. Anastasia Valassopoulos' *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2007), Lindsey Moore's *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2008), and Nawar Al-Hassan Golley's *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing* (2007) focus on literature by Arab women writers, such as Ahdaf Soueif, Mohja Kahf, Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Nawal Saadawi, and Fadwa Tuqan. These critical books focus on Arab social rejection of Western interference throughout different eras and political statuses – Orientalism and colonization, anti-colonization and nationalism, and postcolonialism. Further, they examine Arab/Muslim feminism and its beginnings in relation to the Western presence

in the Arab world. They demonstrate how Arab/Muslim feminism challenged the idea of limiting feminism to white women, created a visible and tangible realization of feminism within the realm of postcolonialism and colonialism, and gave the term 'feminism' a cross-cultural and transnational dimension. Through utilizing Valassopoulos', Moore's, and Golley's literary criticism, I evaluate women's writings about women in Saudi, explore concepts – such as, the veil, the hijab, chastity, social reform, Westernization and indigeneity – from a different and underexplored geographical space, and I explore the effect of genre on these writings. I assess Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*'s depiction of social injustices as an Arab woman writer. I also evaluate Ferraris's trilogy as a representation of Saudi women by an American writer. I scrutinize Mantel's novel from a Thatcherite perspective that reveals the fragility of feminists' achievement and social and economic vulnerability. Finally, I explore the ways in which *Inshallah* lends itself to rape theory and trauma theory and in depicting fear in post-9/11-Saudi context. Hence, I provide a study of transnational and transcultural representations of women in Saudi Arabia.

Social advancement is another theme that Arab/Muslim women writers depict, which attracts the attention of critics. It is evaluated in three ways. The first is the texts' involvement in discourses of power, politics, and gender. The second is their demonstration of evolution in female agency. The third is their growing possession of a voice to speak for themselves and to determine their needs. In so doing, Arab writers challenge Western misrepresentations/lack of representations. This is exemplified in Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah*, which provides negative portrayals of Saudi women and ignore their attempts to achieve liberation and improve their social status. Thus, according to Moore, Arab women should avoid reproducing Western stereotypes of the Arab world in their self-representation. Finally, Valassopoulos notes that Arab/Muslim women, despite the economic advancement of their societies, suffer from social and political backwardness and still struggle for primitive rights (19).

Another significant theme examined in Arab/Muslim women's writing is women's contributions to modernization and the alteration of social norms in the twenty-first century. Moore describes how Arab women's writing illustrates the women's struggle with patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings, cultural and

social limitations, male dominance over female bodies, and controlled dress-code and education. Brinda Mehta's *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (2007) and Moore depict Middle-Eastern women's social limitations and examine their disadvantages. Both writers focus on gender segregation, lack of autonomy, lower social status for the widowed and the divorced, associating women's chastity with family's honour, restricting social respect to married women, negative outcomes of spinsterhood, assigning the veil as a source of social approval and social punishment for subversion of social rules. Such conflicts are relevant to the portrayals of Saudi women in Alsanea's and Ferraris's novels, where women go against their societies to join the public sphere, challenge male-restricted-job cultures, achieve financial independence, avoid arranged marriages, struggle with ideals like representing family honour, and endure severe male guardianship.

Women's confinement to restricted and gendered spaces and behind the veil is a commonly discussed theme in fiction about Arab/Muslim women and relevant to analysis of texts about Saudi women and women in Saudi Arabia. Moore, Golley, and Mehta discuss harems or areas that serve to obscure Arab women – like gender-segregated spaces in Saudi Arabia – and Saudi women behind the veil. Mehta describes how gendered spaces, such as hammams or harems, guarantee secrecy, enhance women's bonding, and enable women within to share hidden experiences and activities while they are concealed from the outer world and men's gaze – such as storytelling and public bathing. In *Girls of Riyadh*, Alsanea's central protagonist is involved in storytelling through the narration of different incidents and she utilizes a weblog to achieve the secrecy and security that other women achieve in harems. In *Inshallah*, Einion describes how gender-segregated activities and gatherings provide the protagonist with other women's company and the secrecy required to run away from her abusive husband. Mehta emphasizes that gender segregation in Saudi society is a continuation of the concealment tradition as a historical feature in literary texts and in spaces like hammams and harems. Therefore, this thesis makes up for the lack of representation of Saudi women's living conditions, status, and feminist struggle. It also reveals similarities and differences between their experience in achieving liberation and modernity to that of other Arab/Muslim women. I also highlight the importance of self-representation in overcoming misrepresentation.

Orientalism

Through their portrayals of Saudi Arabia, Mantel, Einiön and Ferraris Other the non-white characters and stereotype cultures and people, producing images of Saudis as inferior, and portraying Saudi land as a grotesque space. Said's *Orientalism* emphasizes that different areas of European knowledge, art, and literature project Western superiority. Said notes that this superiority is achieved when Occidental scholars and writers portray negative images of the exotic Other to define themselves against. Also, Said underlines that although modern Orientalist writings started during the end of the nineteenth century, Orientalism is reproduced in various settings and eras and it relies on the 'passive' silence and inability of the East to represent itself. Hence, Orientalism depends on Western techniques, authors, and audience on one side, and the Orient's submissiveness on the other.

Western representations of the East create images of monstrosity and corruption. In that regard, Said demonstrates that Orientalism has been affected by the culture of its producers – the West – more than by the Orient or its features. This allows modern media to stereotype and reinforce an “imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (26). I contend that Einiön's and Ferraris's novels are affected by the prevailing post-9/11 context in Europe and America because of Islamism's fanatic ideology that triggered – through terrorist actions like suicidal explosions and mass killing – fear and horror of what is Muslim and Arab. European travelers in *Inshallah* and in Ferraris's trilogy are described as endangered by dangerous Orientals who lack “morality” (166). *Orientalism* describes how Orientalists produced clichés about Arab women and men and asserts that these clichés became prominent in contemporary Western representations of the East. For example, discourse about Arab/Muslim women presents them as sensual, “stupid” (207), imprisoned in “harems” and are either a “princess” or a “slave” (189). Accordingly, Mantel describes Saudi women as unwisely rich, passively oppressed, imprisoned and limited to the private sphere, and they consider their featured disadvantages – such as the veil, domesticity, and male guardianship – a source of dignity and honour.

In their representation of Saudi Arabia, Mantel and Ferraris produce images of Western privileges and cultural superiority. Said affirms that Orientalists have always viewed themselves as a source of enlightenment for other societies, where they live a

“privileged life” because once a Western man/woman arrives in the East, she/he is not “an ordinary citizen” but rather “a representative European whose empire (French or British) contains the Orient in its military, economic, and above all, cultural arms” (156). An example of this is *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*’s and *City of Veil*’s description of Western compounds in Saudi Arabia, where Western expatriates live a privileged life in luxurious contexts, wear fancy clothes and jewelry, and ride expensive cars. Further, Said emphasizes that regardless of the discipline that represents the East, the Orientalist artist, writer, or scholar remains “outside the Orient” (222). Hence, Mantel presents a British protagonist who never develops relationships with Saudis and who overlooks Saudi women, criticizes their lifestyle and portrays them as beastly and grotesque. Einion also provides a heroine who, despite her marriage to a Saudi man, never manages to integrate with her Saudi in-laws because they are described as racist, discriminating, and abusive to their non-Saudi daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, despite her portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a fearful place, Ferraris illustrates Saudi women’s struggle to advance their social status. Thus, the protagonist of her trilogy is a Saudi woman who goes against social forces and job culture to achieve empowerment and authority. Finally, *Orientalism* highlights that racial dehumanization of Arab/Muslim communities has grown stronger and Muslims have replaced Black people and Jewish people as the perceived embodiment of evil and inferiority (262).

Since World War II, Western media has stigmatized the Near Orient and produced Orientalist images. Said claims that in the first half of the twentieth century, Arabs and Muslims were represented as “camel-riding” tribes (Loc 285). After 1973, their image transformed into oil-rich sheikhs who control the world’s energy while lacking intellect, morality, and common sense. In the post-/911 context, Arabs have been associated with Islamism rather than nationalism to ensure their distinction from the secular West. Film making – starting from *Lawrence of Arabia* – also contributed to the image of evil and bloodthirsty Arabs. Therefore, an Arab became “cleverly devious,” “essentially sadistic,” a “slave trader” or a “money changer” (Said Loc 286). Eventually, it became common knowledge that Arabs are “basically murderers and that violence and deceit are carried in the Arab genes” (Said Loc 287). *Orientalism* highlights that this portrayal of Arabs was motivated by the Occident’s need to show that the Near East is “ripe for reform and reeducation and to justify their colonial and imperial aims there” (Loc 291). In addition, he clarifies that Western representations

portray Islam as incapable of “self-reinterpretation” (Loc 297) and highlight Arab societies’ need for “Western methods to improve” (Loc 297). Also, according to Said, Arabs are viewed as incompetent because “institutionally, politically, culturally they are nil, or next to nil” (Loc 311). Hence, Western cultures label the Arab world as inferior, incapable of self-definition or self-representation, and fearsome in such a way that it should be repressed and controlled (Loc 300). In relation to these views, Mantel and Einion provide an Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia as a terrifying and fearful space and of Saudis as inferior and stupid in comparison to the superior whites. Conversely, Ferraris’s trilogy defies Said’s views by illustrating Saudi women struggling against strict social rules to achieve liberation and empowerment. Finally, Alsanea’s *Girls of Riyadh* provides a self-representing text that describes Saudi women’s struggle to achieve liberation and agency, that attempts to go against social rules and injustices and that tries to undo Western stereotypical images of Saudi women.

Reina Lewis’s *Gendering Orientalism: Race Femininity and Representation* (1996) draws attention to women’s roles in producing Orientalist texts in the nineteenth century, which guaranteed white women’s “involvement in imperial cultural production” (*Gendering Orientalism* 2) and constructed “professional creative opportunities for European women” (*Gendering Orientalism* 3). In so doing, they “propelled themselves into the potentially transgressive position” of representing the Other (*Gendering Orientalism* 3). Lewis adds that Orientalist “representations by women” endorsed patriarchal European ideologies that dominated social and political views of “race and gender” (*Gendering Orientalism* 3). However, Lewis debates whether the presence of female point-of-view in Orientalist culture undermines Said’s theory. This is because in *Orientalism*, Said overlooks the role of women in producing Orientalist and colonial discourse (“Feminism and Orientalism” 212). Additionally, Lewis critiques the rigidity of Said’s theory that represents the East as always passive and the West as necessarily political and dominating (“Feminism and Orientalism” 213). This challenges Said’s views of Orientalism as monolithic (*Gendering Orientalism* 4). My thesis expands Lewis’s theory about nineteenth century Orientalism by underlining the presence of women’s Orientalist writings in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Moreover, I demonstrate that their writings are still affected by dominant Western sociopolitical ideology, in terms of their representation of gender and racial inequalities. Such perceptions are obvious in novels like Mantel’s *Eight Months*

on *Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah*, where both protagonists project European ideology, describe Saudi Arabia through an Orientalist lens and define Western expatriates as superior to inferior Saudi locals.

European women's participation in forming Orientalist discourse in the nineteenth century led to "reconceptualization of the workings of power and knowledge in the domain of gender" (*Gendering Orientalism* 15). Accordingly, Lewis asserts that Orientalism should be viewed as "multivocal," heterogeneous," and a product of different socio-political conditions (*Gendering Orientalism* 4). She draws attention to white women writers during the nineteenth century who, although perceiving themselves as superior to indigenous women, they are considered socially inferior (*Gendering Orientalism* 5). This led "discourses of race" to become "gendered" and "discourses of gender" to become "racialized" (*Gendering Orientalism* 12). This thesis expands Lewis's perceptions by looking at some twentieth and twenty-first-century white women writers who challenge patriarchal discourse and sympathize with local women. I highlight that the novels I focus on portray Western women's social marginalization; describe their emancipation as fragile and compare their disadvantages and suffering to that of Middle-Eastern women. Although Othering Orientals and focusing on abuse of Oriental women, Western women's representations disclose the constructed inferiority of white females and the persistence of patriarchy in Western societies in texts like Mantel's. Through examining texts like Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah*, Western protagonists seem comparable to Arab/Muslim women and to their white sisters in the nineteenth century. Additionally, British and American writers examined here are ambivalent in their representation of Saudi women. In other words, they sympathize with Arab/Muslim women, yet, they end up overlooking their struggle for agency or Othering them. They also provide an Orientalist description of Saudi Arabia by depicting it as fearful and dangerous. Accordingly, even though these writers attempt to overcome Orientalist heterogeneous discourse, they end up reproducing it.

Despite their portrayal of women's marginalization and inferior social status, Western women writers perpetuated collective economic and political superiority of the West during the nineteenth century. Hence, their works promoted "imperial culture," "normalized imperial power" and marked the historical context of their writings

(*Gendering Orientalism* 13). However, Lewis debates that the “discourse of femininity” undercut the powerful imperial voice and emphasized the weakness of “imperial subjectivity as a whole” (*Gendering Orientalism* 15). My thesis employs this theory from a twentieth and twenty-first century perspective and evaluates Western women writings’ reproduction of Orientalist traditions and participation in creating imperialist texts that emphasize discourses of power. It expands Lewis’s theory by showing that European women’s articulation of power is not limited to the nineteenth century during the era of Western colonialism. Rather, Orientalist women’s writings have survived, and they reproduce a twentieth and twenty-first century Orientalist heritage, through texts like Mantel’s *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* that display English racial superiority and Western hegemony. Lewis warns against interpreting European women’s sympathy for Oriental females as “feminist anger” because it is part of emphasizing abuse of local women and drawing attention to their need for Western intervention, rescue, and emancipation (*Gendering Orientalism* 22). This illustrates that, like nineteenth-century-women Orientalists, some twentieth and twenty-first century Western women writings indicate female marginalization and echo dominant social ideology.

Since the nineteenth century, Western readers have been continuously exposed to media that portrays the East as inferior and grotesque and that stereotypes Orientals. Lewis marks that nineteenth-century-European readers were “familiar with imperial concepts” because they were exposed to “Orientalist references and analogies in literature or the increasingly common first-hand experience of travel in North Africa or the Near East” (*Gendering Orientalism* 73). Similarly, this thesis shows that Western readers in the twentieth century and the noughties are limited in their knowledge of Middle-Eastern societies to predefined media, film industry and literary representations of the East that have not greatly evolved since the nineteenth century. Additionally, Lewis highlights that British and French Orientalists in the nineteenth century focused on “images of deserts, souks and odalisques that were to become the key tropes of Orientalist painting” (*Gendering Orientalism* 110). This focus is also common in literary representation of texts written during that era. This thesis extends this view by illustrating the twentieth century literary depictions of Saudi Arabia as exotic, corrupt, and terrifying. Mantel, Ferraris, and Einion are examples of Western representations of Saudi Arabia as a hellish and terminating desert, as a dangerous space, and as an oppressive space to women.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter One, I focus on Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. Set in the Thatcher era, the novel focuses on Britons who work for big oil companies in Saudi Arabia for financial gain. The chapter examines the effects of Mantel's use of a Saudi setting and Gothic conventions in depicting disadvantages of women, highlighting white women's inferior status brought about by a reversal of liberation, lack of agency, restriction to domestic sphere, unemployment and dependence on male guardians. The chapter examines Mantel's adaptation of the Gothic genre. For instance, the novel depicts crimes instead of anticipated fear. Moreover, Jeddah replaces dungeons and misty woods. Finally, monsters are substituted by villains and corrupt people. Additionally, the chapter examines the novel's Orientalist description of Saudi Arabia. Thus, it investigates its portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a fearful and exotic space, of Saudi women as passive and controlled, and Saudi men as corrupt, racist and terrorists. In Chapter One, I argue that Mantel presents the deterioration of European women's status and British men's growing patriarchy and conservatism in Saudi Arabia. Also, I argue that Mantel provides an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia and Saudis by reproducing stereotypes of Arab/Muslim communities. Finally, I argue that the Gothic stresses the horror of women's disadvantages and endorses Orientalism.

Chapter Two assesses Einion's *Inshallah* and evaluates the novel in the context of Gulf War I and post-9/11 Islamophobia. It also examines the contribution of the thriller to depicting the abuse of women and creating an Orientalist image of Saudi Arabia as a horrifying space and Saudis as immoral and violent. It is significant to note that despite the novel's recent date of publication, it is a thriller that is set in the 1990s. The chapter engages trauma and rape theory in evaluating the novel's frequent rape scenes. Also, it evaluates the Welsh protagonist's responses to severe domestic violence and low social status in Wales and in Saudi Arabia. Like Mantel's novel, *Inshallah* questions the solidity of Western women's emancipation by illustrating the main character's abuse in Wales and in Saudi Arabia. The novel resists negative Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims through providing examples of empowered Muslim women, religious feminists, and liberated Muslim societies. For example, Einion's main character is a Muslim convert who demonstrates that Islam does not equate with violence or the abuse of women. Therefore, I examine the novel's representation of

Islam in relation to Saudi and other Muslim cultures. The chapter argues that, through its depiction of rape and domestic violence, Einion's novel highlights Western women's oppression and inferior social status. The chapter also contends that the novel indicates that fundamentalism is caused by fanatical practices in Saudi society rather than by Islamic teachings. Despite *Inshallah*'s resistance to Islamophobia, it produces an Orientalist depiction of Saudi space and Saudi women and overlooks their attempts to achieve liberation and overcome patriarchy and social injustices by focusing on the experience of a white, Western woman in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Three evaluates Ferraris's trilogy in relation to its challenge to the conventions of detective fiction, its representation of Saudi women's resistance to social conservatism and its rebellion against distorted and negative images of Saudi Arabia that prevail in the West. In this chapter, I engage Arab/Muslim feminism to assess the representation of Saudi women's attempts to achieve a better social status and justice in a post-9/11 Saudi context. The chapter reveals how the novels subvert the conventions of detective fiction and they demonstrate Saudi women's adoption of modernization and their rebellion against strict cultural rules. The chapter assesses the portrayal of Saudi men's reaction to modernity and women's attempts to achieve liberation, which varies between misogyny, confusion, and hesitation. The chapter demonstrates that Ferraris's trilogy, through its employment of detective fiction, investigates Saudi women's abuse and injustices. Moreover, the novels attempt to undo stereotyping of Saudi women as passive and dominated through highlighting their resistance to social oppression – such as arranged or forced marriages, women's limitation to the private sphere, forced pregnancy and child-rearing, and veiling and obscurity. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that the novels produce an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia by describing it as a hellish, mysterious, and corrupt space.

Chapter Four examines Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*'s employment of Chick Lit and a web blog in representing Saudi women's challenge to social rules, Arabic writing culture, and generic conventions. The chapter evaluates the novel's ambivalence in contravening Saudi social conventions and maintaining indigenous values, in resisting imprisonment and creating a harem-like-blog and in challenging Western stereotyping and Orientalist images of Saudi women. The chapter also demonstrates how Alsanea challenges generic conventions to resist stereotypes of Saudi women and to demonstrate

their struggle against restrictive social norms and cultural boundaries. Through engaging cyberfeminism, the chapter measures the importance of cyber resistance in implementing a new type of autonomy through the internet, where women can express their opinions freely, communicate with others in gender-mixed societies and violate the rules without being punished by strict and conservative societies. The chapter argues that the novel displays rebellion against Saudi social norms through appropriating a foreign genre, through manipulating Chick Lit conventions and through expanding genre dimensions to suit the representation of Saudi women. Additionally, the chapter contends that the novel undoes some stereotypical images of Saudi women. The chapter argues that, through its employment of a web blog, *Girls of Riyadh* displays cyberfeminism and cyberactivism, where the protagonist practices social critique safely and away from social punishment.

To sum up, this thesis examines the employment of popular genres by Mantel, Einion, Ferraris, and Alsanea and the effect of these genres on depictions of female injustices in different contexts. The thesis is a groundbreaking and timely investigation of an unexplored subject that attracts global media interest. Moreover, this thesis serves to defy and undo predominant stereotyping of Saudi women who are usually viewed as oppressed, luxurious, and passive. Additionally, it draws a distinction between writers that provide Orientalist views of Saudi Arabia and those that produce texts that resist images of Saudi women in the West. Most of all, this thesis challenges the lack of representation and misrepresentation of Saudi women. To do so, I examine a range of female experience in Saudi Arabia: white Western non-Muslim women, white western Muslim convert and Muslim Saudi women. Therefore, my thesis sheds light on modern women's lives in Saudi Arabia, describes their attempts to undo social abuse and to achieve liberation and amends foreign misconceptions about them. Moreover, it challenges prevailing views of Saudi women by illustrating their resistance to concealment, lower social status, immobility, gender segregation and restriction to the domestic sphere. Finally, my thesis highlights Saudi women's role in contributing to social advancement.

Chapter One

The Gothic Orient: Hilary Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*

Hilary Mantel's third novel, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), is a Gothic fiction set in Jeddah and depicts different living conditions of women in Saudi Arabia. The novel shifts between a third-person-narrator and a diary. It tracks the life events of Frances Shore and her husband, Andrew, who pursue their fortune through working for a construction company in Jeddah. Francine Prose describes the novel's role in depicting English expatriation in the East and how it "tracks the harrowing travails of a hapless British couple who have made the disastrous mistake of straying too far from home" and projects "the European traveler's deepest, ingrained desires or fears" (9). In an interview by Rosario Arias, Mantel confirms that her novels "are never cut off from the outside world; they are well embedded in their socio-political context" (277). Thus, the text unveils British social greed during the 1980s, anti-Westernization and conservatism in Saudi Arabia as a reaction to the presence of foreign oil companies and it indicates the fragility of Western women's liberation against growing patriarchy and declining feminism. The novel's employment of Gothic tropes and conventions aids in highlighting Western woman's oppression and in providing an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia as a hellish and fearful space. The Gothic effects reach their peak when Mr. Fairfax is mysteriously kidnapped and brutally murdered after he arrives in Jeddah on a business trip.

In this chapter, I focus on Gothic conventions and measure their effect(s) in creating an uncanny atmosphere that illustrates women's injustices and produces Orientalism. In addition, I scrutinize British society during the Thatcherite era and evaluate the effects of that period on the escalation of financial greed. Finally, I assess the novel's depiction of Western women's social status in comparison to their past feminist achievements. In this chapter, I argue that *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*'s employment of the Gothic aids in critiquing women's oppression and social patriarchy. I contend that the novel challenges the idea that Western women are more liberated than Saudi women. However, it ends up producing an Orientalist representation of local women. I assert that by describing Saudi Arabia as a land of horror and terror, the novel presents Saudi Arabia in an Orientalist fashion, which is articulated through the appropriation of the Gothic.

By employing the Gothic in depicting a Western woman's fearful experience in Jeddah, Mantel's novel underlines the importance of genre in expressing anxieties about cultural disadvantages. Thus, genre writing in the novel amplifies the hindrances of women and patriarchal injustices and questions social values. In *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume 2: The Modern Gothic* (1996), David Punter defines the modern Gothic as writing that "still bears a close relation to social fears and taboos." He confirms that "enormous changes have occurred both in the nature and degree of consciousness of those fears, and also in the literary self-consciousness of the medium through which they pass" (120). Additionally, Punter explains that Gothic tropes are utilized to express modern man's "anguish" within modern society (184). Finally, he asserts that the application of Gothic conventions expresses fear of the mysteries of the unknown (186). Clive Bloom's *Gothic Histories: The Taste for Terror, 1764 to the Present* (2010) indicates that modern Gothic fiction's portrayal of corruption and crime assesses and critiques social ideals (13). Lee Horsley's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005) demonstrates that even though some scholars consider crime thrillers, detective fiction, noir thrillers and hard-boiled fiction amusement for the ordinary and the uneducated, many others believe that these genres possess valuable features to explore (1). Bloom adds that despite commonly categorizing the genre as "a form of low entertainment," it is valued for its "democratic message" that "could shake the very concept of social cohesion" (*Gothic Histories* 67). Hence, Gothic fiction's importance lies in its popularity, which guarantees the widespread dissemination of its moral messages and social critique. Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes* (2007) asserts that Gothic fiction presents "women as the innocent prey of a corrupt and evil patriarchal system" (9). She also underlines that, through the "female gothic," women writers can undo "effects of phallogocentric discourse" and "break out of the masculine imaginary" to express their social fears, imprisonment and suffering (12). Hoeveler reveals that Gothic fiction "opens up imaginative possibilities for women" to express different kinds of injustices they are exposed to, rather than "listening only to what men or patriarchal discourse tells women" (11). Finally, she affirms that women writers transcend phallogocentric textuality through their portrayal of their disadvantages and shortcomings (11).

Appropriation of Gothic and crime thriller conventions in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* also produces a fearful atmosphere, horrifying events and threatening immorality, which results in an Orientalist portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a scary and mysterious space. Bloom highlights that a Gothic novel usually unfolds a terrorizing emotional and physical experience, indicates a sense of imprisonment and builds up mental and social downfall (*Gothic Histories* 78). Bloom emphasizes that supernatural elements are replaced by violence and human villains, and locked rooms replace dungeons (*Gothic Histories* 63). In *Crime Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (2005), John Scaggs adds that crime thrillers, as a genre stemming from the Gothic, have developed to display new features. Scaggs provides examples of the evolution of the genre: Firstly, ordinary people replace aristocracy (31). Secondly, persistent fear of a future danger substitutes investigating a past crime, violent deaths in scary settings and lack of justice. Thirdly, unidentified criminals turn into a fundamental feature of the modern genre (107). Scaggs compares modern cities to wastelands due to spreading violence and moral decay (70) and he describes their inhabitants as spiritually dead (71). Likewise, Horsley's *The Noir Thriller: Crime Files* (2009) explains that the representation of urban corruption in modern cities is an indicator of the general sense of immorality (238). This demonstrates that depicting Jeddah through a Gothic lens contributes to presenting it as a corrupt, fearful and terrifying space.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street did not attract much academic attention when it was first published, especially compared to Mantel's other novels and to the writer's achievement – Mantel won the Booker Prize twice, once for *Wolf Hall* (2009) and then for *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). In the *Scottish Review of Books*' interview with Mantel, she reveals that when the novel was first published, critics failed to see “beyond the domestic in their concerns” (n. pag.). This caused the novel to be evaluated as “a book about a woman by a woman,” which led Mantel to defend the role her novel played: “it has always been a natural thing to do, to use the family as a stand-in for the state or wider society” (n. pag.). In the same interview, Mantel claims that, through her depiction of Saudi society and its devotion to Islamism, she “was trying to say to people, look, look here, look at Islam, look at what's coming” (n. pag.). This quotation indicates that Mantel also claims she presented her novel in the 1980s as a prediction and a warning to the Western world of the probable harms of Saudi and Middle-Eastern fundamentalism. Yet, as Mantel reveals, “the critics took no note of that strand of the

book at all. They were more interested in it as a psychological novel” (n. pag.). Nevertheless, the novel has attracted some recent attention due to Western socio-political interest in Saudi culture and Islamic teachings. Additionally, Mantel’s text satisfies post-9/11 curiosity in Arab/Muslim societies and in issues like women’s mobility, the veil and the hijab, gender segregation, fundamentalism, and social injustices in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Nick Rennison’s *Contemporary British Novelists* (2005) emphasizes that *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* is Mantel’s “most overtly political novel, filled with a sense of outrage at the Saudi social system and Western willingness, for financial reasons, to turn a blind eye to its human rights abuses” (98). On the other hand, some critics, such as James Campbell, believe that Mantel’s representation of displacement and marginalization in Saudi Arabia is an extension of her “experience of being not quite at home, even when at home” (n. pag.). This can be assessed through Reina Lewis’s *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (1996) views, where the writer draws attention to the fact that images of the East created by white women artists and writers convey “meanings associated with the image of the artist herself” and reflect their status and marginalization in their own societies (85). Silvia Garcia Hernandez associates Mantel’s “non-belonging” in Saudi Arabia with her contribution “to postcolonial fiction, since some of her novels deal with postcolonial concerns and are developed in postcolonial settings” (87). Additionally, Hernandez contends that Mantel follows the tradition of “postcolonial writers,” who “depicted life in former British colonies from the point of view of British citizens” (88). It is essential to add, here, that Saudi Arabia was never colonized, yet “during the first three decades of the twentieth century” it was “under the sphere of influence of the British Empire” (Hernandez 87).

From a different perspective, Lucy Arnold considers *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* an illustration of Mantel’s experience of visibility and invisibility as a woman in Saudi Arabia. Thus, she highlights the author’s use of “semantic strategy” in drawing a link between “veiling, invisibility, and lack of agency” and “death or spectrality” (297). Arnold adds that the depiction of Saudi “women’s movements, hovering, drifting, and bobbing, combined with their reduction to an indefinite physical ‘shape’ gives them a phantasmal quality.” Arnold underlines that “Mantel is also able to posit these women as being subject to a social ghosting” (297). From a different perspective, Daphne Grace’s *The Woman in the Muslin Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*

(2004) emphasizes the Orientalist approach in Mantel's novel and stresses that the text provides a "sinister view of society" (57). Grace compares Mantel's approach to that of Western feminists because, like them, she makes the mistake of making "generalizations" about Arab and Muslim women by judging them through "concepts that cannot be applied universally or cross-culturally" (58). Yet, according to Grace, by keeping her Western female protagonist at "the margins of discourse," Mantel has proved that "Frances is in a similar position to marginalized Arab women" (60-61) and thus, the novel shifts "the normative east/west binary" (60). This thesis adds an exploration of genre writing in the novel and its effect in depicting unfavorable living conditions of women and Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia to existing studies.

Horror and fear in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* can be related to Mantel's experience of living in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s. She reveals to Arias that implementing the Gothic in the novel is a production of the unconscious and has been inspired by the Saudi setting and situations she encountered as a woman in Jeddah: "What is interesting, however, is that in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* I produced a Gothic novel unconsciously because I thought that what I had written was a true accurate account of my own experience, given that it was novelised, but I thought it had the texture of lived experience" (286). This unconscious depiction did not only produce the Gothic, but also provided Mantel's Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, in an interview by Eileen J. Pollard, Mantel highlights that people tend to overlook the significance of genre conventions and their functions: "people only look superficially at genre and setting and timeframe" (1037). In the same interview, Mantel confessed that writing *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* was a form of regaining authority after "being powerless as a woman in Saudi Arabia" which made her feel like "eighteenth-century women novelists" and made the novel "a form of recovered memory" (Arias and Mantel 286). In her essay "Once Upon a Life," Mantel describes the details of terror and fear she experienced in Saudi Arabia. For example, like her protagonist, she did not feel safe in Jeddah. She confirms that her novel is an account of her anxieties and horror in the kingdom: "I intended, as soon as I arrived in a safe place, to begin to write a novel about what I or a fictional representative of me had seen and learned in Jeddah" (n. pag.). Also, Mantel describes her confinement in her Jeddah house by comparing it to a "coffin-maker's flat" (n. pag.). This symbolizes her spiritual death in Saudi Arabia and resembles Frances's confinement in her house in Jeddah.

Finally, Mantel becomes more similar to Frances when she highlights her feelings of entrapment in the country: “It was as hard to get out of the Kingdom as to get into it” (n. pag.). Those fears of imprisonment accompanied Mantel all the time, even when she was in the plane to leave Jeddah forever: “Yet even on board, perhaps we could be hauled off for some unexplained and minor infraction of an unknown regulation” (n. pag.). To illustrate her experience in Saudi Arabia, Mantel responds to Campbell’s question ““What has been your happiest moment?”” by answering: ““Leaving Jeddah”” (Campbell, n. pag.). Thus, Mantel’s above-mentioned essay highlights illusions of Western women’s liberation and Mantel’s focusing on socio-political issues. In her interview with Arias, Mantel announces that she does not write “about someone’s domestic set-up”; rather she writes “about them as a reflection of politics in the wider world” (281). This demonstrates that the novel challenges patriarchal writing cultures that consider women’s personal experiences inferior, insignificant and an indicator of their incapability of writing beyond their personal lives.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street is faithful to its social, political, and economic context during the 1980s in Thatcherite Britain. According to Eric J. Evans’ *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (2013), the term Thatcherism “might be taken to imply a more or less coherent body of thought or ideology, much as well-established terms such as ‘Liberalism’, ‘Marxism’ or, indeed, ‘Conservatism’ do” (2). In addition, Peter Clarke’s *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* (2004) defines Thatcherism as “both more and less than a programme of economic liberalism, intent on maximizing the freedom of choice of the individual” (379). Clarke highlights that Thatcherism drew a “distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor” (380). Finally, he asserts that during that era, there was a call for “a crusade for economic modernization which relied upon a return to ‘Victorian values’” (379). Evans highlights that ideologies during this era were “seen as a series of non-negotiable percepts than as a consistent body of thought” (2). Peter Calvert emphasizes that Thatcherism “combined in a new synthesis two British political traditions: neo-liberalism in economic matters and authoritarian conservatism in social policy” (66). Thatcher is criticized for her “slavish adherence to the economic doctrine of monetarism whereas traditional Conservatism was rooted in pragmatism, flexibility, compromise and common sense” (Evans 3). Finally, Marxists “see Thatcherism as a malign campaign to further the interests of the capitalist rich and powerful, consolidating and then extending forms of political and cultural domination over the

under-privileged” (Evans 3). Mantel’s novel projects Thatcherite social, economic and political ideals. For instance, the Shores show material greed when they leave their country and give up social advancement to seek fortune. Also, the text displays British conservatism in its illustration of gender roles, oppression of Western women, and patriarchy of British men.

Evaluating social effects of Thatcherism in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* from a social angle unveils conservatism and chauvinism in English society and underlines that the first female Prime Minister in Britain has not improved women’s conditions in Britain. For example, Thatcher never related her success to feminism or to women’s liberation movements. Madeleine Kunin’s *Pearls, Politics, & Power: How Women Can Win and Lead* (2008) quotes Thatcher’s declaration: “‘I owe nothing to Women’s Lib’” (116). Joan Smith’s *Misogynies* (2013) asserts that “Mrs Thatcher’s success was built on other women’s failure” and that “she had a vested interest in keeping them in their place” to maintain her success and her state of “being unique” (159). Smith adds that Thatcher’s economic policies not only “limited access to work for millions of people,” but also “reduced the number of jobs available to women, not increased it” (158). Further, despite “the handbag that perpetually swung from the Prime Minister’s left arm” and that served as a “totem” of her femininity among men, her suit was nothing but “an adaptation of male uniform” (Smith 157). Therefore, Thatcher’s achievement as a female Prime Minister added masculinity to her appearance and behaviour to make her look suitably mannish for the job. Finally, Eileen Fairweather evaluates Thatcher’s contribution to improvement on women’s social status and advancement during her post: “Mrs Thatcher might be a woman, but she certainly wasn’t a sister” (qtd. in Smith 158). Mantel’s novel exposes and critiques British women’s subordination in Thatcherite England by highlighting Frances’s social inferiority and through showing her to be as dominated as local women in Jeddah. For instance, she abandons her career as a cartographer in England to follow her husband’s job in Saudi Arabia. By doing so, she becomes restricted to domestic roles, financial dependence on her spouse, immobility and gender-segregation. The novel additionally describes Frances’s struggle to undo injustices against women. She keeps a diary as a means of maintaining her agency and illustrating gender inequalities.

Western Women’s Oppression

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street highlights Western women's illusion of liberation and superiority, and compares their declining social status to that of Saudi women, which problematizes the binary opposition of Middle-Eastern and Western women. The novel assesses the soundness of Western women's privileges and advancement against Saudi women's social status. The text depicts Frances as a victim of social injustices and patriarchy in the domestic sphere. On her flight to Jeddah, the British flight attendant warns Frances: "You are a woman, aren't you? You are not a person anymore" (307). He foretells and prepares Frances for the effacement of women's identity that she will face in Saudi Arabia. In her diary, she describes how she moves to Jeddah because of her husband's decision to take a lucrative job offer in Saudi Arabia: "They're doubling my salary" (197). Then Andrew describes the financial gains his company offers to tempt Frances to accompany him to Saudi Arabia: "Your salary is paid in riyals, tax-free. All you need out of it is your day-to-day living expenses and you can bank the rest where you like, in any currency you like. Turadup are offering free housing, a car allowance, paid utilities, yearly leave ticket, school fees" (197). After that, Andrew encourages Frances to approve of his plans by saying: "We should think of it as a chance for us, to build up some security" (206). Finally, he sums up: "I really think we ought" (219). This portrays Andrew's efforts in pushing Frances to give up her job as a cartographer and to prioritize his work and pursuit of fortune in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it illustrates Frances's weakness and lack of choice in leaving the UK to accompany Andrew to Jeddah. Despite her androgynous name symbolizing her challenge to patriarchal ideals of femininity and womanhood, Frances reacts submissively to patriarchy and social conservatism. Further, her surname, 'Shore', symbolizes the line between emancipation and domination, between life in Britain and life in Saudi Arabia, and between privileges of men and disadvantages of women. It also stands for transformation, where she departs her country and arrives in Saudi Arabia. Finally, it indicates her obligation to cope with a set of new social rules in a foreign country. Marion, Frances's Western friend, complains that she also undergoes similar control because her husband keeps her in Jeddah by force: "he's just so mean, Fran, he's so mean. He says we're staying in Jeddah to see the next Five-Year Plan out, if they let him. That'll be 1990! I'll be forty! Can you imagine being forty in this place?" (1892). Thus, the novel draws attention to women's loss of independence and their shortcomings in the private sphere. Additionally, Mantel's text highlights a larger

scope of women's marginalization and disadvantages and amplifies the fragility of Western women's liberation.

Mantel's novel depicts women's imprisonment and limitation to the domestic sphere as a sign of their disadvantages and in compliance with the themes of Gothic fiction. Frances describes in her diary the several types of abuse she is exposed to, which emphasize her illusory social privileges. Her imprisonment is marked by her restriction to her Jeddah apartment in a building called "Dunroamin" – an apartment block that consists of four apartments occupied by British, Pakistani-British, and Saudi families – and that symbolizes the end of her mobility and liberation. This is ironic because she is a cartographer, which is a job that indicates empowerment and authority. On her first morning in Saudi Arabia, she wakes up to find out that Andrew has locked her in their house: "She heard a door slam and his key turn in the lock. For a second she was frozen with surprise. He had locked her in" (Loc 411). Frances describes her feelings of entrapment as she realizes that she is a prisoner in her own house, where doors are locked and windows look out into walls: "I felt that I was getting frustrated now—first blinds, then wall" (Loc 527). Her unemployment and imprisonment make Frances comparable to the previous tenant's wife who used to be locked in the same flat and forbidden to go out to avoid meeting men. Furthermore, Frances is exposed to similar patriarchal limitations that restrict women's activities to shopping. This is illustrated when Andrew arranges for her transportation in Jeddah. Frances responds to this by saying: "'I'm not that fond of shopping, you know?'" (Loc 577). Eventually, the novel indicates that imprisonment has a disempowering effect on Frances, which leads Frances to lose her ability to draw maps: "I used to be good at maps," then she continues: "They were my living. I must be losing my touch" (Loc 3696). This demonstrates her submissiveness to social hindrances and her adaptation to her new role in the private sphere, which makes her status similar to that of Saudi women.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street illustrates women's immobility because of the ban on women's driving in Saudi Arabia and due to the dangers of the outside world for women without men. This agrees with Gothic conventions that usually depicts the outside world as dangerous and threatening for women. For instance, to guarantee Frances's safety and to spare her the harassment she could face when walking alone in Jeddah streets, Yasmin, Frances's Pakistani-British neighbour, advises her to hire a

driver to travel freely in Jeddah. When Andrew's company fails to supply her with a chauffeur, Frances seeks independence through using public transportation. So, she asks Andrew: "Are there any buses?" He answers: "There are buses." Yet, he continues: "But I don't think it's advisable to take them" (Loc 583). This emphasizes the threats of Frances's safety in Saudi public transport. Hence, he confirms the dangers and fears of the outer world and suggests Frances's compliance with rules of confinement to remain safe: "You can't just move around as you like" (Loc 608). Later, when Frances ignores Yasmin and Andrew's advice, she becomes exposed to harassment and abuse. She describes this when she goes out with another Western expatriate in Jeddah, Marion: "*Although we were very respectably dressed, people still stared at us, and shouted from cars*" (Loc 1860).¹⁸ Finally, Frances depicts her experience on a bus as an example of women's public transportation in Jeddah: "*The buses are segregated, of course. Most of the bus is for men, but there is a small compartment at the back for women*" (Loc 1856). This illustrates that appropriation of Gothic conventions helps create a sense of danger in the novel.

Frances's diary demonstrates her attempts and failure to accomplish empowerment in Saudi Arabia. She utilizes the diary as a means of withdrawal from social misogyny and growing domestic patriarchy. Frances uses writing as a healing process that Hoeveler describes as a "talking cure" that takes place as a woman writer narrates her misery and misfortunes within a patriarchal society (13). This is illustrated in Frances' description of her diary: "*This is a new departure for me. In Africa there was no need to keep a diary to convince yourself you had an interesting life*" (Loc 549). Thus, through articulating her fears, abuse, and patriarchal injustices in Saudi Arabia, Frances, as this quotation suggests, seeks comfort and alters facts to cope with life in Saudi Arabia. She describes this when she confesses: "*or at least I like to think so*" (Loc 779). Frances's diary symbolizes her authority and expression in a society that is represented as restrictive to free expression. For example, she describes mysterious and terrifying events she cannot discuss with others, despite her fears of being caught exposing Saudi private life: "When Andrew came home yesterday he told me something very disturbing about the empty flat upstairs. I don't know if I should write it down.

¹⁸ *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* consists of third person narration and a diary. Most of the diary is written in italics.

What if somebody gets hold of my diary, and reads it?" (Loc 1448). Although she writes to exercise agency, Frances depends on Andrew to buy her stationary. This restricts her authority and emphasizes her reliance on him. When he does not buy her paper to write on, Frances stops writing: "Andrew had forgotten to get her a new exercise book for her diary; and she had not asked him again" (Loc 3410). This symbolizes her failure to transcend social hindrances. Her fear to document forbidden private information about Saudi Arabia is another limitation that challenges her writing: "She couldn't write to Clare, or to any of her correspondents, the sort of thing she had been putting in her diary recently" (Loc 3411). So, she announces: "Anyway, the diary's original purpose seems to have dissolved" (Loc 3410), which indicates that she gives up her struggle to achieve liberation or agency.

Effacement of identity is another sign of marginalization that Frances undergoes in Jeddah society and that is foreshadowed by the flight attendant as he warns her on her flight to Jeddah. For instance, she loses the liberty of maintaining her Western dress-code. Mrs. Parsons, the wife of Andrew's business associate, explains to Frances how to adapt to Saudi social demands that necessitate compliance with rules: "You ought to get some kaftans really. Especially for the souk, you know, and for when you're out without your husband. The shop people won't serve you, if they don't think you're properly covered up" (Loc 1212). Frances undergoes what Arnold describes as "lack of acknowledgement" (296). She depicts how men avoid her gaze or refuse to address her when she speaks to them. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Frances pays a visit to the pharmacy with Andrew to buy medication for her headache. The pharmacist ignores her, does not answer her questions and does not acknowledge her presence: "The pharmacist looked up, over her left shoulder. 'Sir?' he said. 'Large bottle or small?'" (Loc 1539). This leads Frances to wonder when they leave the shop: "Am I visible?" (Loc 1539). Thus, the novel illustrates Frances's exclusion from sight and hearing, symbolizing her marginalization and elimination from practicing political subjectivity (Arnold 296-7). This demonstrates that women are defined only in relation to men and that they have no autonomous identity. In reaction to social restrictions, Frances endorses her new status as a housewife and accepts her new role: "all I can do is be a good practical housewife, and offer a housewife's clichés" (Loc 620). This statement highlights Frances's adaptation to her new status and suggests that the novel affirms subordination of Western women.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street describes local women as submissive and perpetuating patriarchy and unjust social rules. Hence, the text portrays Saudi women's approval of the veil, gender segregation, restriction to domestic sphere and marginalization. Yan Yan and Jun Liu highlight the effect of the media in creating social ideologies: "when a person is exposed to stories that are either consistent or inconsistent with pre-existing beliefs, the interaction of the newly input information with prior beliefs might further enhance or assuage the magnitude of exemplification effects" (1029). Frances reveals Samira's rationale for wearing the veil: "*My neighbors say women are not veiled because they are despised, but because they are revered. It is out of self-respect that they cover their faces and bodies, and out of respect for them that men do not look*" (Loc 2481). Therefore, the text emphasises the influence of social norms on women and how it leads to their endorsement of the veil and associating it with dignity and respect. Moreover, Frances describes Samira's appreciation for male's guardianship over women in Saudi society: "our fathers and brothers must look after us. They give us their protection" (Loc 2145). This quotation illustrates Samira's faith in men's superiority over women.

Another example of Saudi women's compliance with social rules is Samira's acceptance of her financial dependence on male relatives: "Men must provide for us, that is their duty" (Loc 2143). This quotation indicates that Saudi women appreciate financial dependence and consider it a sign of their pride. As for gender segregation, Samira supports the ideals that separate women from men at working places and allocating specific jobs for women that aim to serve female clients only, such as teaching, banking or medical services: "And of course, Frances, we have women who work. There is the staff at the ladies' banks. And at some of the Ministries, they have women. They arrange it for them. They have a separate lift, and a floor by themselves" (Loc 2125). Samira adds: "we need women to work as doctors. Many girls are attracted to this, thank God. Because some Saudi men would kill any male doctor who looked at their wife" (Loc 2138). The novel portrays Samira's satisfaction with her domestic role as a housewife: "Home is best" (Loc 2142). She declares her beliefs in the uselessness of women's education or participation in the public sphere: "We will hang our certificates in the kitchen" (Loc 2153). Further, Samira criticizes Western gender-mixed societies and considers their cultural codes responsible for prevailing corruption and abuse of women in the West: "Why, it would be like the West" (Loc 2128). Then she

continues: “There would be harassment. People would be all the time having love affair” (Loc 2128). This demonstrates her endorsement of local social law because, according to Samira, they guarantee achieving social expectations of women in Saudi Arabia.

Despite her critique of Western social values, Samira resists Saudi anti-Westernization by attempting to call their daughter “Diana,” after Princess Diana, who symbolizes the white ideal of femininity and womanhood: “I wanted to call her Diana. But Abdul Nasr does not agree. He says it is foreign custom” (Loc 2161). Samira also endorses Western practices, such as celebrating birthdays: “I wanted to have birthday party, he says that’s foreign custom too” (Loc 2162), which reveals the dominance of Western culture in Saudi Arabia and the exposure of locals to foreign social habits. By comparing white women’s inferiority to that of Saudi women, the novel questions the idea of Western women’s liberation and advantages. For instance, Samira criticizes British women’s exploitation in both public and domestic spheres: “You women in the West are just exploited by men. They drive you out to work in offices and factories, and then when you come home you must cook for them and look after the children” (Loc 2145). This shows that although the novel evaluates women’s living conditions in Saudi Arabia, it exposes injustices perpetrated against women in the West, as well.

Mantel’s novel depicts Saudi scepticism of foreign cultures because they threaten cultural solidarity and gender roles. For example, Samira considers Far-Eastern domestic helpers bad influence on Saudi conservative community: “it always says in the papers that foreign servants are an immoral influence” (Loc 1606). After years of limitation to the private sphere, Saudi women can pursue a profession in the public sphere because maids provide them with the chance to leave household chores and child rearing to a female helper. Additionally, this leads local women to seek education to be well qualified for employment: “Yasmin says that the educated Saudi women are starting to want to go out to work, so the government’s campaign against maids and nannies is a way of nipping that in the bud” (Loc 1608). Thus, Mantel’s novel emphasizes Saudi anxiety of foreign influence because of its potential in challenging social gender arrangements.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street depicts the veil as a means of manipulating women and part of the novel’s compliance with Gothic conventions that express

mystery and obscurity. Frances criticizes the veil and sympathizes with veiled women in Jeddah streets, which symbolizes Western attitudes towards Muslim women's compliance with Sharia law and Islamic dress. Khaled Fahmy highlights that, since the nineteenth century, the veil led the West to associating Muslim women with social inferiority (36). Marnia Lazreg's *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (2009) stresses that because of the veil, Muslim women have been viewed as oppressed (1). Furthermore, she draws attention to the fact that this view has led to the assumption that "Islam is a backward and misogynous religion" and serves Western "political aims" (1) that utilize this justification to promote wars in the name of the liberation of women (14). Additionally, Lazreg's *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (1994) highlights that: "During the Gulf War the media were replete with contrasting images of veiled Saudi women and American women in combat gear" (14). This reinforces the binary opposition between Western and Arab/Muslim women. In "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," Reina Lewis stresses that Western societies view the hijab and the veil as "inimical to fashion" and "outside of the commercial circuits of the fashion industry" (Veils and Sales 424-5). Lewis further emphasizes that "new forms of Islamic dress" display "religious identities" that are viewed as the "opposite of secular/Westernized commodities and lifestyles" (Veils and Sales 425). Thus, veiled women "engage with overlapping sets of spatial relations whose socializing effects produce differences of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity" (Lewis, Veils and Sales 427). Finally, Anna J. Secor adds that women's veiling leads to "spatially realised sets of hegemonic rules and norms" (8) through which these women are evaluated and judged. This highlights how veiled women have been politically used by their societies to represent Arab/Muslim identity and by foreign countries as an excuse to criticize and attack Middle-Eastern societies.

Frances demonstrates resentment towards the veil and shows sympathy for veiled Oriental females. She meets women behind the black face-cover for the first time when she goes shopping with Andrew and she expresses shock and pity for them: "'I didn't know the veil was like this,' she whispered. 'I thought you would see their eyes. How do they breathe? Don't they feel stifled? Can they see where they're going?'" (725). During her visit to the local market, Frances describes veiled Saudi women: "Ahead of them, a collection of black-veiled shapes had drifted into the road. They hovered for a moment, in the middle of the great highway, looking with their blind

muffled faces into the car; then slowly, they began to bob across to the opposite curb” (1239). This quotation shows that despite her compassion for them, Frances dehumanizes local women when she calls them “shapes.” She objectifies them when she labels them as a “collection,” and she describes them as blind when she gives them a human quality. This also indicates that the novel considers the veil disempowering for women. Lazreg emphasizes that veiled Muslim women are considered a sign of social backwardness, weakness and misogyny (*Questioning the Veil* 1). Secor adds that the veil causes homogenisation of Saudi women (8). By depicting the married infidel veiled woman that meets her lover in Frances’s building, the novel utilizes the veil as a façade of moral idealism and preserved chastity while it conceals infidelity. Also, it draws attention to Saudi social contradiction. Frances concludes: “*Even in the Kingdom people aren’t perfect*” (Loc 1684). Although she resents Islamic dress, Frances is limited to a strict and conservative appearance in public places. Andrew shows resentment towards the veil when Frances tries it at home: “Please take it off. It’s sinister” (Loc 1178). Later in the novel, Frances demonstrates rage against the veil and other features of Saudi lifestyle: “*I would like to run down the street, hitting people. Run amok. I would like to stride up to the next veiled woman I see and tear the black cloth from her face, and rip it up before her eyes*” (Loc 2485). This quotation depicts Frances’s desire to rebel against social rules in Jeddah to engender change. Instead, she remains in Saudi Arabia and obeys local rules, which marks her submissiveness and her similarity to Oriental women.

Like their Western counterparts, Arab/Muslim writers demonstrate an obsession with the veil as a dominant trait within their societies. Marnia Lazreg asserts that: “The veil has had an obsessive impact on many a writer. For instance, Frantz Fanon wrote about ‘Algeria Unveiled’” (*The Eloquence of Silence* 13). Another example is Fatima Mernissi who “titled her first book, *Beyond the Veil*” (*The Eloquence of Silence* 13). Lazreg notes that Arab/Muslim societies view veiled women as powerful because, through their properly covered up bodies, they achieve safe participation in the public sphere and they remain away from harassment (*Questioning the Veil* 6). She adds that women in Islamic dress spare their husbands “experiencing jealousy,” which makes them gain social respect (*Questioning the Veil* 6). However, Lazreg exposes that the veil has been “so politicized that it threatens to shape and distort the identity of young

women and girls throughout the Muslim world as well as in Europe and North America” (*Questioning the Veil* 15).

Although Frances views the veil as limiting, Samira considers it a means of preserving Saudi women’s identity and modesty. The veil constitutes a controversial topic in Arab/Muslim societies as much as it is in the West. Accordingly, some consider the veil oppressive and restrictive, while others see it an expression of social identity and empowerment for women in the public sphere. Afsaneh Najmabadi illustrates that in Arab and Muslim world, there is “no single position on the issue of unveiling” (101). This lies in the fact that while some Muslim women “considered the veil and gender segregation as signs of backwardness and impediments to women’s progress,” other categories of women “considered the veil and gender segregation customs worthy of respect and preservation” (Najmabadi 101). Additionally, Lila Abu-Lughod declares that through their veils and Islamic dress, Muslim women “have become potent symbols of identity” (“Introduction” 3). Despite the fact that “Women who cover themselves are assumed to be coerced or capitulating to male pressure,” there are many “educated Muslim women in the past thirty years have struggled with the opposite problem: They must defy their families and sometimes the law to take on what they value as pious Islamic dress” (Abu-Lughod, “Introduction” 17). Therefore, Muslim “young women are voluntarily taking on the veil” (4). Abu-Lughod further describes how Egyptian veiled feminists are “reinterpreting Islamic law and the Qur’an” (“Introduction” 3) to gain agency and authority despite their strict dress-code. Hence, Arab/Muslim women participate in feminist “debates and social struggles” despite their endorsement of Islamic dress (Abu-Lughod, “Introduction” 3). From a strict religious perspective, Shereen El Feki’s *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World* (2013) emphasizes that Muslim women in Egypt wear the veil as a result of their theological teaching. They avoid going to hell and “hanging from their hair” as a kind of punishment in the afterlife, as they are socially trained (99). She argues that this type of teaching is “influenced by religious currents in the Gulf” (18). This results in people who attempt to “reshape” their societies through “recasting of laws in line with their strict interpretation of shari’a” (El Feki 18). Accordingly, evaluating the veil from an Arab/Muslim dimension shows that Muslim women do not necessarily consider themselves victims because of their religious dress-code.

The novel draws a distinction between Saudi and non-Saudi Muslim interpretations of Islam in regard to issues like gender segregation, the veil and the hijab. For example, Frances narrates to Andrew Yasmin's non-Saudi viewpoint of Islamic dress: "This morning she told me that the Saudis didn't mind seeing women's legs, it's their arms they mind. She said, since she is a Muslim, but she's not a Saudi, she doesn't feel she need cover her face, just her head, and her arms, and her legs" (Loc 1175). Further, Yasmin draws a distinction between compulsory veiling in Saudi society as a sign of backwardness and fundamentalism and her modern interpretation of Islamic teachings: "I am a modern woman, Frances. I have the British passport. I have not lived my life behind the veil" (Loc 1021). This quotation indicates that Saudi social strictness is criticized by other Muslim communities as much as it is by Western cultures. It also insinuates that Yasmin's liberation and rejection of the veil is influenced by Western social advancement. Raji, Yasmin's husband, also depicts differences between his and Saudi culture when he comments on Samira, the Saudi neighbour in Frances's apartment block, and her endorsement of Saudi social strictness and devotion to the veil: "'If we called them to dinner Samira would have to sit behind her veil. Thank God we don't all have to keep their rules'" (Loc 2080). Thus, the novel highlights dissimilarities between Saudi and other Muslim interpretation of Islamic teachings, which indicates that the novel draws a distinction between local social conservatism and Islamic rules. For example, Raji, prevents Yasmin from wearing the veil. She tells Frances: "I want to wear the veil. Completely, you understand, like the Saudi women do. Because I feel it is right. But Raji says, 'We are modern.' He has forbidden me. And I am so unhappy" (Loc 2975). Shabana, Yasmin's friend, explains to Frances the moderate views of Islam according to their Pakistani culture. She also complains to Frances about Samira's effect, as a Saudi woman, on Yasmin: "She is always with the Arab girl, I think she is a bad influence. You know what is the life of the Arab girl, Frances. Not like you or I" (Loc 3335). This quotation implies differences between Saudi strictness and non-Saudi Muslim temperance.

Despite Frances's critique of the veil, the novel indicates that Western women undergo a different type of veiling. Frances describes Mrs. Parsons's appearance when they go together to the local market: "She wore a flowing kaftan with a batik pattern, and her freckled arms were encircled by heavy antique bracelets of traditional design; around her neck on a long chain she wore another beaten silver ornament, which bore

an unfortunate resemblance to a gym-mistress's whistle. Her manner benignly poisonous" (Loc 1209). The quotation depicts Mrs. Parsons's adaptation to Saudi dress-code – a luxurious fancy kaftan or "abaya" – which veils her Western identity. Additionally, Mrs. Parsons's silver bracelets symbolize her enslavement to financial privilege and materialism in Saudi society. In contradiction with her kaftan and bracelets, Mrs. Parsons's whistle-like-pendant implies leadership and control. Additionally, Mrs. Parsons's white freckled arms conflict with her adaptation to local appearance, which indicates that despite their Western appearance, European women undergo a different kind of veiling in Saudi Arabia. So, at the end of the novel, Frances describes the effect of Saudi Arabia on her as a white woman: "to be honest, the longer I am here, the more we seem to resemble them" (Loc 3637). By this statement, Frances declares the influence of her expatriation in the kingdom on her loss of identity.

Orientalism

The novel represents Saudi Arabia as a grotesque place and provides stereotypical images of locals to its Western audience. In the introduction of *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said asserts that the Orient is a "European invention" that depicts "exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes" (Loc 318). Further, he emphasizes that Orientalism relies on "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" (Loc 346). Accordingly, Said notes that Western portrayals show the Orient as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" and describe the West as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Loc 1010). Thus, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said Loc 364). This demonstrates that the East is significant because it provides an image against which the West defines itself to prove its difference, superiority, and hegemony. Europeans see themselves as unique and "superior" compared to "all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said Loc 430). Additionally, they project "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (Said Loc 430). In *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2013), John McLeod explains: "In Orientalism, the East as a whole is 'feminized', deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and

tempting; while the West is thought of in terms of the ‘masculine’ - that is, active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled, and ascetic” (54).

Said underlines the fact that the Orient is perceived as “incapable of interpreting itself” (Loc 5836) and “the Arabs were believed incapable of representing themselves” (Loc 5911). Meanwhile, “only the Orientalist can interpret the Orient” (Said Loc 5836). Orientalist texts provide representations of Arabs and Muslims as corrupt, intellectually incapable and grotesque. Said highlights that Western writings provide “stereotypes of Islamic and Arabic sensuality, sloth, fatalism, cruelty, degradation, and splendor” (Loc 6898). He emphasizes that Europeans view Arabs as “psychologically incapable of peace” and they cannot be “trusted and must be fought interminably as one fights any other fatal disease” (Loc 6205). Mostly, Said declares that according to the Western viewpoint, Arabs are “inveterate liars, they are ‘lethargic and suspicious,’ and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Loc 984). Evelyn Alsultany’s *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* (2012) reveals that since the first half of the twentieth century, Arab women have been depicted as “belly dancers” or “harem girls” (7) and Arab men were described as “living in opulent palaces (or equally opulent tents)” (8). Conversely, she adds, white men are represented as the heroes who “save the day,” protect “the good Arabs from the bad Arabs,” free “female Arab slaves from their captors,” and rescue “white women from Arab rapists” (8). She highlights that Western interpretation of Islam considers it “central to understanding violence” (119). Finally, Said notes that Orientalists show Arabs as “oversexed [and] degenerate” (Loc 5783), which makes the Orient a dangerous setting for white women.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street’s employment of Gothic conventions results in depicting Jeddah as a fearful, mysterious, and corrupt space, which contributes to the Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia in the novel. Bloom asserts that in modern Gothic fiction, corrupt mansions have developed into perverted cities (*Gothic Horror* 92). Stephen Knight’s *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2004) demonstrates that filthy settings are a significant and prominent element in crime fiction (113). Horsley confirms that urban corruption prevails in modern crime fiction and is considered an indicator of moral decay (*Twentieth-Century* 238). Scaggs adds to this by drawing attention to the fact that in crime fiction, inhabitants of corrupt cities display

decadence, violence and are considered spiritually dead (70-71). Punter emphasizes that Gothic texts employ mystery to produce fear and horror (186). This underlines the role of genre in producing an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia.

Mystery is another dominant convention in Mantel's Gothic novel and it contributes to its Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia as dangerous and foul. Jerrold E. Hogle's *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002) highlights that British colonial society since 1800 has always feared what is not white and what is not Christian and considered it evil, which creates a sense of Otherness in postcolonial Gothic fiction (230). Said adds that Western representations of the East "have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of 'the mysterious Orient'" (Loc 793). Mystery is produced through the various incidents that demonstrate secrecy in Saudi Arabia's different life areas. For instance, it emerges from scenes of unknown imprisoned women behind locked doors or blocked windows, or through images of anonymous veiled women in black "abayas." The novel links this secrecy to danger and crime in Jeddah. Additionally, the different life-threatening incidents Frances witnesses and is exposed to since she arrives in Gazzah Street also contribute to a sense of menace. One of these events is when she finds out that there is a mysterious crate on the balcony of flat four that may contain an alive man, imprisoned and tortured for something he does or knows: "the man who had been crated up alive. What had he done? What had he known?" (Loc 4275). Another example is when Frances is attacked by a mysterious veiled person with a gun. Mr. Fairfax emphasizes the sense of danger when he blames Andrew and Frances for living in Jeddah: "You must be mad to live here," he continues: "I haven't felt safe for a single minute" (Loc 3718). After visiting the Shores, Mr. Fairfax spends the night at their house and disappears. Later, Andrew and Frances find out that he was murdered and dumped on a Jeddah highway: "They reckon the car came off the road at speed, he was thrown out, his skull was fractured" (Loc 3935). Mr. Fairfax's murder proves that Frances's fears are not illusory and that the mystery surrounding life in Jeddah is dangerous, especially for white expatriates: "The possibilities in the air of Dunroamin—those wraiths of violence and despair—had taken on flesh at last" (Loc 4274). Frances's description of Mr. Fairfax's corpse in the morgue reinforces the horror of his brutal murder and illustrates the threats people are exposed to in Jeddah: "The head seemed twisted on the spinal column, the face was clamped, jaundiced, marked by a trickle of black blood; the

expression was meaningless” (Loc 4235). Eric Parsons, Andrew’s friend, stresses the risks they face: “I think we’d better have you out of those flats today. It could be unpleasant. Go home and pack” (Loc 4279). He emphasizes the danger and mystery in Jeddah when he warns Frances: “People disappear in this place, don’t they?” (Loc 4260). Eventually, Frances expresses her frustration when she fails to explain mysterious events: “She would never know more than she knew now; would never know” (Loc 4274). Finally, Frances describes Saudi fearfulness when she declares: “strange country, strange Kingdom, where unaccountable corpses can blight your daily life” (Loc 4333). These quotations show Jeddah as scary, dangerous, and threatening to live in, which contributes to the Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia in the novel.

As part of its endorsement of the Orientalist tradition, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* provides its Western readers with descriptions of the mysteries and exoticism of Saudi life. By keeping a diary, Frances describes the East to her family and friends in England, which helps her maintain a relationship with life in England: “*I am keeping this diary so that I can write letters home. People expect you to have something exciting to tell them*” (Loc 536). This illustrates that the diary relates the East to the West to depict excitement in the Orient. However, Frances does not describe life in Saudi Arabia as exciting, which reveals inconsistencies in endorsing the Orientalist approach. Additionally, Frances critiques Western feelings of superiority: “*Expatriates do have this habit of laughing at everything. I suppose it is the safest way of expressing dissent. Sometimes, I think we should be more open-minded, and not think that we are the ones who are right, and that we should contrive to be more pious about other people’s cultures*” (Loc 794). This reveals that, despite her depiction of Saudi Arabia as a fearful and mysterious place, Frances criticizes Western superior behaviour towards Saudis, which indicates that the novel’s endorsement of Orientalist tropes is ambivalent.

The novel portrays Jeddah as a Gothic, corrupt, and lifeless setting, which provides an Orientalist depiction of the city. She describes Jeddah: “There’s no life in the land, it’s just people, highways, endless straight roads and rubbish and dust, there’s nothing to release you, there’s nothing to set you free inside. You feel as if you’re starving” (Loc 2758). This depicts Saudi Arabia as a dead land that has a negative effect on its inhabitants. Another example is Frances’s description of her neighbourhood:

a narrow street, made narrower by the big American cars, some of them falling to pieces, which its residents leave parked outside their apartment blocks. On one side is a stretch of waste ground, full of potholes; water collects in them when three or four times a year, rain falls on the city. The residents complain about the mosquitoes which breed in the standing pools, but none of them can remember whether there was ever a building on the waste ground. (Loc 318)

Through the description of American big cars, Frances underlines Saudi Arabia's political and financial relationship with the West. The contrast between the sizes of the big cars and the small alleys indicates that despite its wealth, Saudi society is incapable of adapting to Western technology and modernization due to its social limitations and cultural restrictions. Frances's description of the waste ground and collected rain water that eventually forms swamps and attracts flying insects indicates the physical and moral decay of the city. Thus, Frances provides a grotesque and dark image of Jeddah and its wasted and deteriorating lands that symbolize the wasted lives of Saudi women who are housebound and living limited lives due to strict social patriarchy in Saudi Arabia. Eventually, she shows resentment of Saudis' lifestyle: "how would they know how to live their lives?" (Loc 2758). The novel provides a representation of Saudi lives that evaluates it by Western standards.

Engaging Gothic conventions in describing Jeddah streets as fearful emphasizes Orientalist discourse in the novel. Frances's depiction of unsafe alleys underlines the harassment of women, their limited lifestyles and their inability to face the patriarchy or corruption in the outside world. For instance, she portrays streets of Jeddah as terrifying for women due to the possible harm by Saudi men in the streets. This causes women – because they are not permitted to drive cars in Saudi Arabia – to be homebound, unless accompanied by husbands or male companions to drive them and to protect them from possible annoyance. The novel unveils the different experiences of abuse its protagonist is exposed to in Jeddah streets: "She was alone, out in the street. The stray cats fled away. A dark-faced boy in a car blew his horn at her. He cruised along the street. He put down his window. 'Madam, I love you,' he called. 'I want to fuck you.' She walked on to the corner of the block" (Loc 977). On another occasion, Frances faces harassment by a man in a truck:

A man in a Mercedes truck slowed to a crawl beside her. 'I give you lift, madam?' She ignored him. Quickened her steps. 'Tell me where you want to go, Madam. Just jump right in.' He leaned across, as if to open the near door. Frances turned and stared into his face; her own face bony, white, suffused with a narrow European rage. The man laughed. He waved a hand, dismissively as if he were knocking off a fly, and drove away. (Loc 997)

The two incidents present Saudi men as a threat to white women's well-being and agency, regardless of their age difference, which is a dominant feature in Orientalist writings.

The novel reproduces the dangers of the Oriental setting and the sexual desires of Arab men for white female protagonists as another Orientalist theme. This is achieved by the text's portrayal of the prevalence of harassment of women in Saudi Arabia. For example, Mrs. Parsons informs Frances: "You've got that fairish hair, you see, fair hair's always an attraction to them" (Loc 1215). Mrs. Parsons's use of the term "them" Others Saudi men and draws a distinction between the moral white and the corrupt local. The two different age categories, boy and man, show that Saudi men are corrupt regardless of their age and that the younger Saudi generation is more sexually explicit in English than older men. This indicates Saudi society's sudden affluence and its exposure to American cinema and culture. Despite their abusive behaviour, both men acknowledge Western superiority by addressing Frances as "madam." The Mercedes truck is an indicator of Western technology that is utilized by Saudi men and not allowed for Saudi women. Frances describes how the second man waves his hand dismissively as if he were "knocking off a fly" (Loc 997), which symbolizes women's value and status in local society. This corrupt behaviour of Saudi males in Jeddah streets leads to women's restriction to the domestic sphere and makes them dependent on male guardians to guarantee their safety. By describing the escaping frightened cats, Frances anticipates her future desire to flee Jeddah. Moreover, by describing Frances as "white," "European," and moral, and the two Saudi men as "black," Arab and corrupt, the novel marks a distinction between the moral white and the corrupt black, which is a reiteration of Orientalist discourse. After the portrayal of the brutal murder of Mr. Fairfax, Jeddah is shown as a horrifying city of fear and danger, especially for white expatriates. Being entrapped in Jeddah and not being able to leave safely is another source of terror for its

Western residents. Mrs. Parsons comments on imprisonment in Saudi Arabia: “It isn’t the roads in town that are dangerous, it’s the roads out” (Loc 4010). The last example of the novel’s portrayal of moral corruption of Jeddah inhabitants is Marion’s description of a rape that occurs in Jeddah: “*a mother and daughter were raped in the souk, mind you they were wearing shorts, they were asking for it. They were Australians, she added*” (Loc 1880). This quotation draws attention to Marion’s patriarchal ideology of rape that considers women responsible for men’s sexual temptation. By drawing attention to the rape of Australian women, the novel reflects upon the dangers of Western women in the East as a major theme in Orientalist writings.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street depicts Saudi weather and nature as unbearably hot and humid, which provides an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia. The novel describes the hot, difficult and consuming Jeddah weather and its effects on the residents of the city. Frances describes the heat during evening times: “The city had taken on its nightmare life: a green moon, a vitiating heat” (Loc 4031) and “the evening’s stupefying heat” (Loc 4038). This shows how heat makes the country a difficult place to live in. The novel illustrates Frances’s unpleasant experience of walking in hot weather in Jeddah: “By the time she reached the street corner she realized that it was far hotter than she had thought. The air felt wet, full of the clinging unsavory fragrance of the sea. A trickle of sweat ran between her shoulder blades and down the back of her legs” (Loc 983). This portrays Jeddah as a hell-like city due to the intensive heat and bad smell. On another occasion, Frances describes the Jeddah shore: “If you walk, suitably dressed, along the Corniche, you can hear the sea wind howl and sigh through the sewers beneath the pavements” (Loc 347). The description of Jeddah indicates moral decay and corruption. Moreover, Frances’s depiction of the sea storms and the howling winds signifies her fears and feelings of danger. Meanwhile, the description of the “sewers underneath the pavement” implies unseen rot and hidden horrors, both prominent Gothic features.

The novel depicts indoor horrors through descriptions of insects either in Frances’s flat or in places she visits. For example, Frances describes “bigger cockroaches” in her apartment when spring arrives (Loc 2990). She depicts flying insects when she visits her friend, Marion: “Marion sips Diet Pepsi; insects from miles around come specially to drown in her glass” (Loc 1840). The described drink

represents Western lifestyle and the insects falling into it symbolize the effect of the East on Westerners and the dangers they face in the Orient. Additionally, Frances relates creepy images of cockroaches and ants in her bathroom in Jeddah: “Oh, look at that cockroach. There were five in the shower when I got up this morning. There were three in there just now. Where the hell do they come from?” (Loc 971) and “She turned on the bathroom light. On the floor, a party of ants, like pallbearers, were carrying a dead upturned cockroach. The cockroach influx had not been temporary; it was part of Jeddah life” (Loc 1166). This underlines that the novel represents Jeddah as grotesque, which illustrates its compliance with Orientalist tradition in depicting the East.

Bad smell is an additional negative effect in Jeddah. Frances describes the smell of her house as affected by “the smell of sewage” (Loc 2990) or by the smell of the curtains: “a faint smell of insecticide in your nostrils” (Loc 365). Samira’s house, another flat in Dunroamin, is described as dim and airless: “At eleven in the morning, Samira’s sitting room had a twilit air; a heaviness in the atmosphere” (Loc 1712). Frances depicts bad odors in Samira’s house: “There was a scent of mothballs, spices, of lemon spray polish, and the incredible smell of onion” (Loc 1713). Thus, the Gothic effect of the house produces fear: “Frances shivered a little” (Loc 1720). Stink, dimness, and stuffy spaces can be compared to scary swamps in Gothic fiction that stimulate horror, which contributes to the Orientalist image of Saudi Arabia the novel produces.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street creates images that Other Saudis and make a distinction between Western and Saudi social features. Said emphasizes that the “construction of identity” (Loc 6678) includes “the construction of opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us.’ Each age and society re-creates its ‘Others’” (Loc 6670). A good example of this is Eric Parsons’s instructions to Frances when she first arrives in Saudi Arabia, explaining the guidelines of appropriate behaviour with “*Arab neighbors*” (Loc 799). He describes to her how these rules require the British couple not to “*strike up a conversation*” with locals and to “*be quiet neighbors and polite*” (Loc 800). Also, Parsons warn Frances: “*if I am on my own and I meet the husband, better not smile too much*” (Loc 802). Additionally, he distinguishes between the “we” that includes Westerners and the “they” that refers to Saudis when he explains the rules of dealing with natives: “*wait until we are spoken to*” (Loc 795). Mrs.

Parsons also draws differences between the Oriental, signified by “they,” and the Western symbolized by “we”: “It isn’t arms they mind, I understand, it’s legs. Or if you want to just go out in your ordinary clothes, what you should do is get an *abaya*, you know” (Loc 1216). Finally, the novel depicts Frances’s and Mrs. Parsons’s demeaning local costumes of Saudi women and men. For example, Mrs. Parsons describes “abaya” as: “those black cloak things the Saudi ladies wear” (Loc 1216), which indicates that she belittles these women’s different dress-code. Additionally, Frances describes men’s white clothes: “the whole resembled nothing so much as a basket of laundry animated by a poltergeist” (Loc 455). This enhances the binary opposition between the East and the West, Others Saudis and underlines differences between the locals and the non-Saudi.

The novel reproduces the Orientalist representation of Arab men as corrupt and threatening to white women’s chastity. An example of this is the Saudi boy who screams at Frances from his car: “I want to fuck you” (Loc 980) when she walks alone in a Jeddah street. Another instance is when the landlord of Dunroamin visits Frances’s apartment to check on its maintenance and attempts to flirt with her: “‘you seem to be a girl of twenty-one, madam.’ He took occasion to sidle up to her, and pat her waist. She moved away. ‘You will be seeing more of me,’ he promised” (Loc 2599). Fear from local men outdoors and indoors aids the accumulation of fear in the Gothic novel and enhances the feeling of Saudi Arabia as a threatening space. In addition, illustrated local men’s behaviour indicates contradictions and double standards between social conservatism and actual practices, and between guarding local women’s chastity and harassing Western women.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street overlooks local women’s struggle for authority and liberation, and reproduces predominant Western stereotypes of Saudi women, such as the concealed, the lavish and the grotesque. Said highlights that in the “postmodern” age, there is “a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed” (Loc 791). Alsultany further emphasizes that “the U.S. media has stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century” (2). The novel describes Saudi women as concealed and preserved from outsiders’ gaze, through gender segregation, limitation to domestic sphere or veiling. The first example of this is the young veiled bride who lives in a house with blocked windows and doors, and who moves from one

place to another in a car with curtains to ensure total obscurity and to guarantee isolation from men. Additionally, the text provides different depictions of veiled Saudi women in Jeddah streets and in jewelry shops. The second stereotype the novel suggests is lavish Saudi women who enjoy privileges of wealthy Saudi society and are exemplified by Samira. Frances describes Samira's jewelry: "On her left hand she wore a single carat solitaire diamond" (Loc 1748). Also, Frances depicts rich and gaudy Saudi women in gold market: "sometimes a mother's *abaya* would drift a little, and you would see that she was draped and weighted with gold, with mayoral chains of it, from which hung gemstones the size and color of boiled sweets" (Loc 1515). Later, Frances describes her luxuriously dressed-up and made-up Saudi neighbour: "Inside the door, she unwound her head, revealing her perfect *maquillage*; her eyeshadow in three complementary shades, her shaped and frosted cheekbones, her precisely outlined and glossed-in lips" (Loc 2091).¹⁹ Finally, Frances describes Samira's expensive clothes when she visits her: "She wore blue jeans, tight-fitting, very new and stiff, and a scarlet sweatshirt with a designer's monogram on the collar" (Loc 1745). Frances's description of Samira's clothes and stiff jeans emphasizes Saudi lavishness. Moreover, Samira's Western attire contrasts with her traditional veil and "abaya" that symbolize Saudi/Muslim dress code, which suggests Western influence on Saudi society and the ability of Saudi consumerism to obtain valuable Western merchandise.

Mantel's novel produces an Othering description of Saudi women by depicting Samira as beastly and monstrous. For example, Frances provides an account of Samira's physical features when she visits her: "Samira was a sallow, stockily built young woman, with a cascade of coarse dark hair that had something of an animal quality about it-as if it led a separate life from its owner, but on a lower plane. As she arranged the cups, it swung over her shoulder, crackling with static" (Loc 1743). Frances describes Samira as dark, associates her with the demonic and the grotesque and links Samira's coarse and dark hair to animals' features. This demonstrates that she defines human physical features against white people's characteristics, like fair, straight hair and pale skin. Frances describes Samira's voice when she calls her maid: "She gave a single, guttural yell, like a battle cry" (Loc 1791). This quotation portrays Samira as odd, fearful, cruel and inhuman. Additionally, Samira is depicted as shallow when

¹⁹ Maquillage is a French word that means Makeup.

Yasmin describes her as intellectually inferior and superficial: ““Oh, Samira – she has no deep thoughts. Getting jewelry is what she thinks about. Showing off her clothes, going to weddings’” (Loc 2982). Moreover, Frances portrays Samira’s child as grotesque and atrocious: “the child had been dressed for an outing, in a frilly white dress with a sash which made her appear as wide as she was high. Her dark round face was truculent; she had a doll in one hand, hanging by its blond hair” (Loc 2095). Frances continues: “The child, with tiny strong fingers like pincers, was pulling out her doll’s hair” (Loc 2111) and “The child, at her feet, was twisting off the doll’s head” (Loc 2149). In addition to the American cars and European fashion brands, the doll is more evidence of Saudi consumerism and financial ability to buy luxurious goods from the West. Frances describes the child as dreadful and monstrous and she associates her dark skin with evil and corruption. Tearing the blond doll’s hair symbolizes the dangers a white woman is exposed to in Saudi Arabia – a common feature in Orientalist texts – and Frances’s fear of violence and corruption in Jeddah – a Gothic fiction convention. This violence against the blond doll – in addition to the rape of the two Australian women – foreshadows Mr. Fairfax’s murder at the end of the novel.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street provides an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia by associating veiled local women with danger, mystery and corruption. The first indication of infidelity in the novel is the presence of the unknown veiled married woman, who stealthily sneaks to the apartment upstairs to meet her lover in flat four. The second example is the suspicious and dangerous veiled person that Frances meets in the stair case, who Frances considers too strong to be a woman:

The visitor was tall; a strapping lass. Frances raised her hand. The visitor pulled back, but she had made contact. She tugged at the concealing *abaya*, felt it part, felt something cold, metallic, under her hand. She reached up, with her other hand, and clawed at the veil. But a veil is not something you can pull off. You can dream of doing it, but you cannot just accomplish it, because the black cloth is wound around the head. The head strains back; and then she is pushed away with all the visitor’s ungirlish strength, sent flying against the wall. (Loc 3388)

This quotation links the veil to blurred identities, mystery, violence and terror. Finally, the novel associates the veil with fundamentalism and terrorism when Frances describes Yasmin’s terrorist activities after she gives up her status as a modern Pakistani Muslim

woman and starts wearing the veil. Frances describes Yasmin: “She approached, and saw the black shoulders stiffen with shock; then Yasmin turned, and pulled back the veil, her eyes wide, her expression guilty; she put a hand to her throat, a pantomime of consternation and fear” (Loc 2701). This demonstrates that the novel provides an Orientalist depiction of the veil by associating it with obscurity, fear and menace.

Eight Months on Ghazzah Street portrays Jeddah as a catalyst for deterioration of the Shores’ marriage and Frances and Andrew’s psychic collapse, which are fundamental elements in both Gothic fiction and Orientalist discourse. C.P. Sarvan confirms that *Heart of Darkness* focuses on “the condition of European man” in the gloomy land (8). Likewise, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* depicts the effect of Saudi Arabia on Western expatriates. Frances describes the outcome of her experience in the kingdom on their marriage: “*We sit in the evenings, looking at each other, and I feel that he wants something that I can’t give him, and that I want something that he can’t give me*” (2820). Also, she illustrates the effect of Jeddah life on her and on Andrew: “*If we did leave here, where would we go? We don’t belong anywhere, physically. If we didn’t have each other we wouldn’t belong anywhere emotionally*” (2820). This quotation depicts the spiritual damage that results from living in Saudi Arabia. As part of its Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia, the novel shows that the Shores sacrifice their life in England, their physical and emotional stability, and their relationship for the sake of expatriation in Saudi Arabia and overseas financial advantages. Despite the deterioration of their marriage, the Shores give in to the temptation to spend more time in Saudi Arabia to make additional money, which demonstrates that the novel is a critique of Thatcherite greed and its effect on Britons during that era. Frances describes this attraction to gain more money in Saudi Arabia: “*They stash away everything they can and treat their time here like a prison sentence, or a stint in an up-country field camp*” (Loc 1415). She adds: “*They always say, we’ll just do another year. It’s called the golden handcuffs*” (Loc 1419). She explains to Mr. Fairfax the effect of this greed on Andrew who cannot buy her flowers since they are very expensive in Saudi Arabia: “Oh, Andrew can’t afford to. He’s saving up for a posh flat in London” (Loc 3664). This symbolizes the Shores’ sacrifice of their bond as a couple for the sake of material gains and sheds light on British financial stress in 1980s Thatcherite England, causing Britons to choose expatriation to overcome local financial stress despite the difficulty of dangerous overseas life. Mr. Fairfax describes the damage an expatriate can be exposed

to in Saudi Arabia by demonstrating the possible outcomes of his Jeddah business trip: “I shall become a cautionary tale in our company newsletter. He went out there to sell air-conditioning, and returned with scars on his soul” (Loc 3657). By stating this, Mr. Fairfax confirms the impact of Western expatriate narrations in describing the East as dangerous and spiritually contaminating for Western expatriates. It foreshadows his fatal injuries and death. Mr. Fairfax illustrates his disapproval of Saudi Arabia as an appropriate place for Western couples to live: “This is no place for men who like women” (Loc 3687). At the end of the novel, Frances reveals her realization of the negative consequences of the pursuit of money: “Having money makes people bad enough. The threat of not having it seems to make them even worse” (Loc 3635). This reveals Frances’s realization of their folly of leaving their country for the sake of material privilege.

To conclude, through its employment of Gothic fiction, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* criticizes patriarchy and gender inequalities in Saudi society, underlines the social disadvantages that Western women are exposed to and creates an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia as a dangerous and corrupt space. The novel displays ambivalence in its investigation of the abuse of women. It focuses on a white woman’s experience and compares her status to that of Saudi women. However, it overlooks the abuse of local women and their attempts to seek equality and improved social status. Instead, it focuses on conventional Western anxieties in the East, reproducing stereotypical images of indigenous women and judging Arab/Muslim cultural concepts – such as the veil – from a British perspective.

Chapter Two

Alys Einion's *Inshallah*: A Flight from Abuse to Empowerment

Alys Einion's *Inshallah* (2014) is a thriller that is initially set in Wales while its second part takes place in Riyadh during Gulf War I in the 1990s.²⁰ The novel illustrates the journey of a Welsh woman, Amanda, from oppression to liberation, from submission to assertion and from trauma to recovery. During her flight from abuse to authority and empowerment, Amanda undergoes marital and non-marital rape, forced successive pregnancies, physical exploitation and domestic violence. The novel's title – *Inshallah* or by the will of God – draws attention to the protagonist's parallel flight from restricted theological understanding, passive obedience to extreme interpretations of Islamic teachings and total submissiveness to fate to independent religious thought. By shedding light on women's comparable abuse in Britain and Saudi Arabia, the novel eliminates the binary opposition between women's conditions and status in Arab/Muslim societies and the West. Furthermore, by providing examples of non-Saudi Muslim feminists in Riyadh and in Britain, *Inshallah* warns against associating Islam with the oppression of women. Instead, it implies a direct connection between Saudi social conservatism and abuse of females. This underlines the novel's significance in defending Islam and its teachings against post-9/11 Western accusations of Islamic abuse and maltreatment of women. Thus, the novel provides a timely dissociation between Islam and patriarchal social injustices and the culture of violence. Like Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazal Street* (1988), Einion's novel critiques Western women's subordination to patriarchy and submissiveness to cultural rules.

By appropriating the thriller's conventions, *Inshallah* illustrates abuse of women, produces terror and violence associated with genre, demonstrates Western fears of ISIS and its threats, and provides an Orientalist portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a dangerous mysterious space. Therefore, this chapter examines the rationale of setting the 2014 text in the 1990s. Also, it scrutinizes the Orientalist depiction of the East and its effects in creating Otherness and exoticism. This chapter argues that Einion's *Inshallah* indicates that Western women are not more liberated or less oppressed than

²⁰ "inshallah" is a word that is commonly used in Arab/Muslim cultures and it means by the will of Allah.

local women. It asserts that the novel challenges Western Islamophobic views that associate Islam with suppression, patriarchy and violence. Finally, it contends that *Inshallah* provides an overriding Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia through its employment of the thriller's conventions and rape narrative, its depiction of Riyadh as a fearful and monstrous space, and its depiction of Saudi culture as patriarchal and hostile to women.

The novel's employment of the thriller's conventions results in what Lee Horsley's *The Noir Thriller* (2009) describes as "a socio-political critique" (8) through which the novel criticizes local cultural misogyny. Gina Wisker highlights that female writers use the "macabre" to criticize "patriarchal power relations" (116). *Inshallah* provides a terrifying and fearful account of Amanda's life. She is raped by a British man in Wales and by a Saudi man, Muhammed, in Britain and in Riyadh. After being unable to stop the attack against her body during the first rape, she reacts passively towards Muhammed's frequent rapes and allows him to control her body. Wisker adds that horror literature "unleashes anxieties and fantasies about forbidden areas of our lives, it carefully holds in check those disturbing aspects of everyday experience" that women usually attempt to hide and control (116-117). This appears in *Inshallah*'s depiction of Amanda's decision to marry her rapist, after becoming pregnant with Muhammed's child, and to move to his country to make up for her poor relationship with her unsupportive mother, her desperation for love and intimacy, and her financial and social insecurities. Horsley's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005) confirms that the first component of the thriller is the "subjective point of view" and "the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and society" (8). These elements can be identified with Amanda's description of her fearful experience as a white woman in a Saudi household, as a female in a conservative and religious society, and as an expatriate who fails to cope or form relationships with Saudis. Martin Rubin's *Thrillers* (1999) emphasizes the worry and horror stemming from the protagonist's weakness and exposure to violence and danger (7). Ralph Harper's *The World of the Thriller* (1975) adds that a thriller's protagonist is chased by villains, isolated by force, undergoes alteration of identity and is betrayed and/or exposed to violence (41-75). An illustration of this is Amanda's marital and non-marital rape and life-threatening domestic violence by her husband, her imprisonment and isolation in gender-segregated spaces, and her conversion to Islam and settling down in Riyadh to bring up her twin sons with her

husband's middle-class family. Another sign of Amanda's alteration of identity is wearing the hijab and the veil, speaking Arabic, complying with gender segregation rules and allowing her children to lose their English-speaking proficiency. Finally, Wisker emphasizes that even though the horror thriller draws attention to "unspeakable forces" and "embodies terror," it leads its reader to a comforting end (117). This is illustrated in Amanda's meeting with Grace, a Western Muslim feminist who lives in Riyadh and is married to a Saudi man, which becomes a turning point in her life. Grace helps her gain empowerment and confidence and, eventually, aids in Amanda's escape to London to avoid further assault.

Through its appropriation of the thriller and its conventions, *Inshallah* critiques women's social disadvantages demonstrated through rape and physical assault, which are considered the extreme of women's abuse and exploitation. The novel illustrates several types of rape, depicts effects of rape on female victims, and demonstrates post-rape trauma and means of adaptation and survival. Estelle B. Freedman's *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (2013) notes that the term "rape" is formerly derived "from the Latin *raptus* or *rapere*" and they refer to "nonsexual crime of violent theft" (3). Freedman draws attention to the change of the meaning of the word *rape* by the fifteenth century in England when it started to "apply to the theft of a woman's virtue, either a daughter's virginity, or a married woman's honor" (4). The definition of rape continued to evolve in the twentieth century to include both genders: "any form of forced sexual penetration of a man or a woman as well as 'non-forcible rape'" (1). Freedman underlines that "In the late twentieth century, feminists renamed non-consensual sex with acquaintances and husbands as rape" (2). Susan Brownmiller's *Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1993) challenges conventional ideologies that consider rape a manifestation of a man's lust expressed through assault against female's body. Instead, Brownmiller's asserts that rape is "man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood" (14). Also, Brownmiller emphasizes that rape is considered the "most pragmatic means of terror," "a fascist act of domination," an expression of "contempt for women" and a manifestation of "an overall philosophy of the master race" (64). Joanna Bourke's *Rape: Sex Violence History* (2007) argues

that the influence of social ideology leads to the approval of “items in rapists’ characters,” which results in perceiving women’s refusal of rape as approval and acceptance, causing condemnation of rape victims because they are considered responsible for seducing helpless rapists (49). Miranda Horvath and Jennifer Brown emphasize that “rape violates personal, intimate and psychological boundaries – what in human rights language is designated human dignity and bodily integrity, and in feminist and critical theory is termed sexual autonomy or sexual sovereignty” (3). Johanna Schorn asserts that rape literature underlines how rape victims usually “fight not just their abuser, but a misogynic, patriarchal system at large” (8). Amy L. Chasteen derives a collective informal understanding of rape through a questionnaire she distributed in beauty salons among women from different classes, ages, ethnic groups, and educational backgrounds: “rape as a form of personal destruction, rape was primarily about losing control of one’s physical body. Through the act of rape, the body of the victim is captured, manipulated, and controlled exclusively by the assailant” (127).

As part of the thriller’s disapproval of social misogyny, *Inshallah* criticizes the support of (marital) rape according to Arab/Muslim cultures. Anna Ball emphasizes that in Arab/Muslim societies, women’s acceptance of forced sex by their husbands is still considered a sign of their virtue (77). This can be a result of restricting custody of women to male family members, a father, a brother or a husband (Ball 73). Also, rape is a sign of a lack of “gender equality” or absence of “women’s sexual agency” that is motivated by the need to ensure women’s purity and honour in Arab/Muslim societies (Ball 75). Ball further asserts that in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1983), the protagonist, Firdaus, is advised by her uncle to endure marital rape when she complains about it: “a virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience” (47). Thus, fulfilling a male partner’s sexual desire is viewed as part of the obedience necessary to achieve ideals of Arab/Muslim womanhood. However, Najah Aloseimi reveals that “Saudi society admits the existence of partner rape” (n. pag.). *Inshallah* illustrates this by Muhammed’s repeated violation of Amanda’s body through violent rape, sodomy and other forms of sexual assault, which compares Amanda to nineteenth-century women who were denied “the right to withhold consent” (Freedman 4). *Inshallah* reflects social rules that, according to Abu Odeh, neglect women’s physical autonomy and necessitate keeping women’s sexuality under strict patriarchal control (152). This leads men to claim ownership over women’s

bodies. An example of this is when Muhammed orders Amanda to have sex with his friend, Yusuf, and expects her to follow his orders blindly: “I am your husband. You will do as I say” (Loc 1319). After that, he watches Yusuf raping her with satisfaction: “As he reaches his climax I glance over his shoulder. Muhammed is standing in the doorway, watching” (Loc 1326). This shows his joy in demonstrating sovereignty over her body and his satisfaction in her obedience. Nonetheless, Alooseimi confirms that “Saudi courts have recently seen a number of cases in which women have demanded divorces saying that they have been subject to marital rape and unwanted sexual activities by their partners” (n. pag.). This indicates that women in Saudi Arabia are more aware of their rights and physical agency.

Amanda’s rape symbolizes her lack of power and signifies the male violators’ authority and domination, which emphasizes *Inshallah*’s endorsement of the thriller’s conventions in shedding light on women’s marginalization and inferior social status. Therefore, although Amanda’s rape by a British man in Wales stands for her social subordination and suppression as a Western woman, her rape by Muhammed reverses colonialism, disrupts her national dignity and symbolizes post-9/11 Western fears of Arab/Muslim violations and terrorism. In the Introduction of *Feminism, Literature, and Rape Narratives: Violence and violation* (2010), Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne describe how colonists’ sexual abuse of indigenous women is associated with shame and how women’s rape by invaders leads to “cultural impurity” (9). So, a nation with raped women is “no longer capable of representing or propagating a clearly constructed, flawless national identity; by virtue of their rape they were contaminated by ‘the Other’ and so ceased to be of use in the construction of an ‘us’” (Thompson and Gunne 9). This also connects the novel to the 2014 social context, when Europe received frequent terrorist attacks from ISIS and many young Western women fled their family homes and European cities to join ISIS, either as warriors or as wives of male terrorists.²¹ For example, *The Guardian* confirms that “Hundreds of British teenage girls are still keen on joining Islamic State (Isis) despite the death of a London schoolgirl in Syria” (n. pag.). *The Independent* adds that “Women and girls are joining Isis after being seduced by the terrorist group’s offer of a twisted version of ‘empowerment’ for

²¹ ISIS stands for the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It is a fanatical military group that executed many terrorist attacks in the name of religion and piety.

Muslims, a new report has found” (n. pag.). Therefore, rape committed against Amanda’s body in the novel can be viewed as “a material and symbolic site of conquest” (Thompson and Gunne 10). As a result, this confirms that women’s bodies transform into a location where both violators, the colonizer and the indigenous, exert power against and abuse (6).

Oppression of Western Women

Complying with the thriller’s conventions, *Inshallah* depicts Amanda’s feelings of social, economic and familial disadvantages and abuse as a woman, which aids in clarifying her reasons behind marrying her rapist. The first rationale is that Muhammed provides her with needed security and protection that her family, especially her mother, does not supply: “he seemed to be the perfect knight protector” (Loc 721). He also offers what seems, to Amanda, to be emotional care: “At night he was caring and tender” (Loc 721). Initially, he seems to make up for her family’s abandonment. For instance, Amanda’s mother forces Amanda to give up college education: “I know you like your books but you won’t cope, it’s too much.... Forget this nonsense. You’ll never get to university. It’s not for the likes of you and me” (Loc 3181). Amanda’s mother also withdraws her financial help, which causes Amanda to quit studying: “Your father and me won’t support you to do A levels” (Loc 3172). Amanda’s mother adds: “you just want to swan about for another five years pretending to study and not getting work or taking responsibility. I worked from the age of sixteen, and so did your father” (Loc 2842). She forces Amanda to take financial responsibility to support her family by taking a job in a chicken factory and quit her studies, unlike the rest of her friends. This causes Amanda to describe her life as “narrow, grey-black slice of forgotten hopes and dead industry” (Loc 2823). This narrowness signals contrast with the spacious family house of Muhammed and the grey-blackness is unlike the bright sunny weather in Saudi Arabia. The novel depicts women’s lack of hope in Wales when Amanda describes middle-aged female workers in the chicken factory: “Hard-faced women, with lips worn thin and colourless from years of biting back anger and disappointment” (Loc 3025). This image provides an example of Amanda’s possible future in Wales, which is one of the reasons behind her decision to marry Muhammed in order to avoid her mother’s abuse. She describes that in a letter to her father after arriving in Riyadh: “In many ways I am glad I am here, so I am no longer a burden to her. Too far to visit, I am safely put

aside and dealt with, married off” (Loc 714). This demonstrates that a lack of family support leads Amanda to give up living in Wales for a family life with Muhammed in Riyadh.

As a sign of the thriller’s focus on women’s disadvantages, *Inshallah* sheds light on Amanda’s financial instability and dependence as another motivation for marrying Muhammed and moving to Riyadh. Relying on Muhammed to buy her a wedding dress marks her neediness and the beginning of her dependence on him: “a girl still wants a new dress on her wedding day” (Loc 35). This illustrates that Amanda desires a life beyond her means and she relies on Muhammed to provide it. She asks him about his Saudi house before she decides to marry him: “Do you have a house there?” Then she further investigates, “Or a tent? Or a palace, in marble and gold?” Amanda’s questions reveal that she evaluates his offer according to his financial abilities that hopefully will make up for her hardship. He answers her queries by confirming, “My family has a large house there. We will live with them” (Loc 1525). Her questions about a gold and marble palace reveal her material ambitions and the desired stability that she does not foresee in Wales: “He had plans for us, a home to make back in his country, a future to build” (Loc 721). She decides to take the opportunity to start a new and promising life in Saudi Arabia: “He held out a lifeline, and I took it” (Loc 4534). Amanda considers Muhammed’s financial support a rebirth: “This is the last day of my old life. I’ll emerge from the mosque today a Muslim wife, soon to be the mother of his children. Then he will take me away to a new world, a new life where I can begin again” (Loc 35).

Amanda’s arrival in Saudi Arabia signals the beginning of her financial advantages and the price she pays for them. After reaching Riyadh as a married Muslim woman, Amanda displays fascination with the room that Muhammed’s family allocate for her in their house: “A large room, painted white, with closed blinds and a big, wide bed and a large white cot next to it” (Loc 161). This quotation illustrates the price that Amanda will pay in exchange for that big room: the closed curtains confine her from the outside world and the huge bed is where she is supposed to entertain Muhammed sexually. She is expected to produce children to fill the cot next to her bed. Although abused and alienated in Riyadh, Amanda reconfirms her choice to be in Saudi Arabia to guarantee security, home and family: “Yes, it’s different here, but when I weigh things up, it’s a good life, and as long as I remember the rules, I get by” (Loc 1111). When

Amanda's maltreatment increases, she declares that she has no means of survival in Wales either: "I question my decision. I want desperately to go home. But I have nowhere else to go. I have to make this work" (Loc 298). Then she adds: "I have to try. I have to do this. I have nowhere else to go. My children need this, a father, family, a sense of place and security" (Loc 239). This demonstrates that Amanda's decision to marry her rapist is motivated by hopelessness, lack of future prospects and disenfranchisement in Wales.

As part of its critique of social norms, *Inshallah* indicates that Amanda maintains her relationship with Muhammed and accepts to marry him to achieve social empowerment and approval. She declares that she enjoys having sex with Muhammed: "My body responded, warming and chilling with each repetition" (Loc 3984), which illustrates Brownmiller's view that patriarchal societies believe "women also want rape done in the name of femininity" (312). This also illustrates that in chauvinist and misogynist cultures, women's bodies are trained to obey despite pain and suffering. Amanda defines her worth through her relationship with a man. Furthermore, she considers her consent to sex with Muhammed her fate and role as a woman: "This was what my body was made for. This was what a woman was for" (Loc 3984). She describes the effect of this relationship on her: "Being wanted felt amazing. When he walked in the door, his dark brown eyes would flash with desire and I felt powerful. It was me having that effect on him" (Loc 1348). This quotation clarifies that after being single and helpless, Amanda becomes strong through her new bond with a man. Her liaison with Muhammed further aids in developing what Amanda considers an acceptable image that grants her more social acceptance: "We went out to cafés and restaurants, nothing exotic or expensive, and we visited my family, and visited friends." (Loc 1343). In return, Amanda allows him to be in control of her body: "He wanted sex all the time, it seemed, from the moment he got in from college to the moment he fell asleep, often moments after his final climax. I didn't complain" (Loc 1348). Thus, the novel demonstrates that Amanda's pursuit of empowerment, financial stability and familial support lead her to accept to marry her rapist.

Employment of genre in *Inshallah* indicates that the fearful future of women due to patriarchy and marginalization could parallel the fearful events taking place in the thriller. As such, Amanda's rape by a British man and by Saudi men in England and in

Saudi Arabia suggests that women's abuse is alike in both societies. By depicting Amanda's rape and abuse in Wales and Riyadh, indicates that women's living conditions in Wales are similar to those in Saudi Arabia, challenges the idea that Western women are more liberated than Arab/Muslim women and highlights the fragility of British women's liberation. Hence, the novel critiques post-feminist concepts that consider feminism outdated and invalid because women's emancipation has already been achieved. Amanda's first rape takes place on her way back home from a late meeting with a feminist book group that her friend, Jane, introduces her to. Despite her attempts to fight back, the man manages to rape her: "I fought him, I screamed at him, but he forced me into a dark garden and raped me" (Loc 3862). This symbolizes her attempts to achieve empowerment in her chauvinist society. The darkness of the garden stands for the inferior and unjust conditions for women in Britain. It also signifies social punishment of women who attempt to express self-government or gain agency. It underlines Western women's ironical situation since, according to Aya Gruber, feminism is "identified with crime control and the prosecution of men who commit offences against women" (582). Gruber adds that due to the deterioration in women's conditions and increasing violations against women, feminists are more concerned about "laws of rape and domestic violence than with calls for equal pay and abortion rights" (583). By depicting Amanda's social marginalization and lack of future hope, *Inshallah* suggests that Amanda's unfortunate life conditions – including her marriage to Muhammed – result from a restriction of choices and low social status as a Welsh woman. This causes Amanda to ignore Jane's warnings against abandoning her present life for the sake of a mysterious future: "He's a man, and he's from another culture," and "You're giving up everything, your life, your home, your future..." (Loc 4077). Instead, she resists Jane: "Don't start, Jane, with all that women's right to choose stuff." Then, she continues: "*This* is what I want, for me, for the baby, ok?" (Loc 4063). This could be interpreted as cautionary advice against third wave feminism that accepts women's choices in endorsing conventional and patriarchal ideals of womanhood. The novel further indicates that although Amanda seems to choose her marriage, she actually has very little choice, and insinuates that self-government for women is a myth rather than a reality.

Einion's novel utilizes the thriller's conventions in projecting social patriarchy and conservatism as fearful and threatening to women. For example, it illustrates

Riyadh's domestic life as conventional and it emphasizes the effects of local traditions on Amanda. First, Amanda describes Muhammed's power and domination over her after he starts a relationship with her: "For such a slight man, he has an amazing presence, filling the room from his place in the doorway" (Loc 27). Despite his small physical structure and her superior height and size, Amanda explains that Muhammed is superior because of social advantages allocated to him as a man. This authority and supremacy are illustrated in their relationship and in many life-changing-decisions Amanda makes throughout the novel. For example, Amanda's conversion to Islam results from her obedience to Muhammed rather than her deep religious conviction. She initially refuses his demands to convert to Islam as a requirement of marriage: "Well, I am not sure I want to, I don't know enough about it. I can't just make that kind of decision in an instant. Islam doesn't seem to be a religion that does a lot for women" (Loc 1489). However, she eventually follows his commands. Amanda initially refuses to wear the hijab when Muhammed asks her to as part of her role as a future Muslim wife: "I'm not wearing a headscarf" (Loc 1514). He responds authoritatively: "You must get used to it. When we return home, you will wear it all the time" (Loc 1517). Thus, she accepts obediently: "I raise the headscarf and attempt to drape it correctly, folding the fabric around my head, across my shoulders, and securing it with pins around my face. Tight, tight, tighter, and the last part, the fold that covers my face, leaving only my eyes visible" (Loc 24). After arriving in Saudi Arabia, she describes how he orders her to wear niqab: "Muhammed picks up the *niqab* and pushes it into my hand. 'Put it on,' he says, and I do so. My breath is hot on the inside of the fabric, and I want to hyperventilate, to pant, to tear it off. But the eyes of those around me are no longer following my every move. I have become invisible" (43).²² Additionally, Muhammed prohibits Amanda to speak for herself in public and forces her to deal with others through him. An example of this is the incident in the airport when Muhammed prevents her from speaking: "Muhammed speaks swiftly with the uniformed guards in customs, showing my passport" (Loc 51), or when he orders her to "look down" and not to "look people in the face" so that her eyes do not "meet" other people's eyes (Loc 51). This quotation indicates that through Muhammed's authority over her and through

²² Niqab is a face cover for religious Muslim women as a sign of their piety. It only reveals their eyes and it is viewed as less conservative than complete face veiling.

social misogyny, Amanda is manipulated and forced to perform the traditional ideals of womanhood.

As part of its assessment of social inconveniences, *Inshallah* depicts gender segregation as a major feature of Saudi social misogyny and a requirement to achieve ideals of Muslim womanhood, such as chastity and piety. Thus, the novel shows harem-like women's areas in a Saudi house and spaces that provide confinement, concealment, and gender segregation, which is also present in Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Ferraris's trilogy. Amanda describes the exterior of the house when she first arrives in Riyadh from Britain: "A big square house with small windows and a dark door, and then inside, welcome shadows, and cooler air, cool, cold, but scented with food smells and something else, something like incense" (Loc 90). The first feature of the house is isolation of women from the outside world through its closed windows, because, according to Amanda's description: "windows are curtained," "windows are frosted glass," or windows are opaque (Loc 240). This causes Amanda to feel frustrated and to look through them seeking light and scenery: "I feel strange as I keep trying to look out. Like some insect drawn to the light" (Loc 240). Layla explains to Amanda the rationale for blocking windows: "Women must not be seen" (Loc 240).

Providing gendered areas in the family house is another sign of harem-like environments and gender segregation that is a common practice in Saudi Arabia and many other Arab/Muslim societies. Amanda explains: "It seems there are two areas to the house. There is the public area, in which the men sit, in a large, long room filled with light." Then she adds, "This is the family room, where the men sit and watch television, and talk when there are visitors." (Loc 302). Amanda describes the women's room: "In the central hallway, a screen divides the public area of the house from the rooms which the women inhabit. Behind this, I move between the women's sitting room, with its small television and perpetually covered windows, and the kitchen" (Loc 310). Additionally, when Muhammed's sister, Fatima, visits the family house with her husband and children, Layla explains to Amanda a rule that underlines concepts of relationships between men and women, according to local Saudi culture: "Do not go into the dining room. You must not be seen by the men who are not your family" (Loc 433). Gender segregation rules privilege male members of the family by serving men's meals before women and giving women the left overs. Layla explains this to Amanda:

“Men eat first” (Loc 433). Amanda describes women’s meal after men finish eating: “The men have eaten more than half of the food.” Then she continues: “the women start eating. The food is barely warm now, but none of them seem bothered” (Loc 449). This indicates that gender segregation does not only limit women to the private sphere and confine them away from men, but also ensures their inferiority and subordination to men. Although gendered spaces are not part of British social structure, Amanda describes the chicken factory as a place that is restricted to women: “They were all women, mostly middle-aged with a few older and a few younger” (Loc 3025), which indicates that gendered spaces are common feature in Britain as well.

Abuse by Muhammed’s mother is another sign of Amanda’s exploitation in Riyadh and it leads to escalation of fear and anxiety associated with the thriller. For example, Muhammed’s mother, or as Amanda calls her, Khala, introduces Amanda to Saudi traditions and dress-code by showing her how to wear Islamic dress, “abaya,” and emphasizing the significance of this dress by yelling aggressively at Amanda.²³ Muhammed’s mother’s social role includes supervision of other, younger female family members to ensure the achievement of patriarchal conventions in the household. She forces Amanda to put on the customary gold bangles usually given to the bride after the wedding night as reward of her virginity and as a symbol of her new marital status: “Khala takes a pile of gold bangles from Layla, and starts to try to force them over my knuckles and onto my wrists” (131). Amanda further resists: “I don’t like anything on my wrists” (Loc 131). Despite Amanda’s protestation, the old woman forces her to wear the bangles, which emphasizes her role in Amanda’s enslavement and suppression. Amanda describes the effect of the golden ornaments: “The bracelets ring sibilantly when I move, a constant constriction on my flesh” (Loc 142), which associates her with cattle. This symbolizes women’s degradation in patriarchal societies where they are forced to be led blindly by traditions and social conventions. Finally, Amanda becomes exposed to effacement of identity when Muhammed’s family members stop calling her by her name and start labelling her UmmShahid (mother of Shahid). Even though Amanda dislikes this title and she insists on being called by her name, Muhammed’s family members ignore her wish, which illustrates the disadvantages of women in

²³ Khala is an Arabic word that means maternal or paternal aunt and it is commonly used in addressing mother-in-law.

patriarchal societies where traditions serve to define women according to their relationships to men.

Enslavement to domestic roles and severe household work is another means of oppression implemented by khala and Amanda faces in Riyadh. She is introduced to her domestic obligations the day she arrives in Riyadh as a wife in a Saudi household: “I am put to work chopping onions and tomatoes” (Loc 233). Amanda describes her mother-in-law’s determination to allocate household work to her despite her inability to communicate in English: “she gestures me to the sink again, where I wash dishes and pots and knives, greasy bowls and spoons” (Loc 250). Eventually, house chores become part of Amanda’s daily tasks: “I perform the necessary cleansing, trying to remember the right order of things. I kneel and stand and kneel, and mumble my way through the Arabic words” (Loc 227). Housework is a stressful obligation that demands Amanda abandon feeding her children or taking care of them to manage the chores of the big family house. This becomes ironic since she refuses to work in the chicken factory in Wales to avoid the hard job and the smelly building. An example of this abuse is Muhammed’s mother’s reaction to Amanda’s wish to spend time with her children when she arrives in Riyadh after a four-day-trip in Dammam: “Leave the children, you are late, you need to start the cleaning.” So, the old woman adds: “Go, I am with the children. You must do the cleaning.” When Amanda insists on spending time with her children before she starts housework Muhammed rectifies Amanda’s behaviour violently to force her to obey his mother’s orders: “His face darkens. Then he slaps me, hard, in the face.” Muhammed explains his behaviour: “My mother pays for everything, your clothes, your food, the children’s needs. You have a home here. You should be grateful. You should work and repay their generosity” (Loc 1364). This implies that Amanda becomes obligated to pay for her financial dependence on Muhammed and his family, which forces her to tolerate their physical and emotional abuse.

Amanda’s arrival in Saudi Arabia signals the beginning of abuse and fear associated with the thriller and symbolized by repeated rapes, her exposure to domestic violence, disempowerment and deterioration of status. For example, Muhammed grows more patriarchal and follows conservative and strict cultural laws in dealing with Amanda in Riyadh. This is exemplified by Amanda’s description of Muhammed’s changed behaviour after their arrival in his family house: “I wait for him to reach out, to

touch me, or to come and sit beside me as we sat, back home, sharing space, our bodies connecting. But he doesn't" (Loc 189). Further, Amanda is exposed to continuous incidents of marital rape by her husband who starts to penetrate her body through vaginal intercourse and sodomy during her sleep from the first day of their arrival. She describes what happens when she takes a nap in the afternoon to rest after travelling: "A hand reaches for me in the darkness, and the scream retreats, secrets itself. The hand is on my breasts, then my belly, then clasping my hand and guiding it to Muhammed's erection." Then, when she finds out that he does not care about her reaction or involvement, she confirms: "Roughly, he enters, but I feel nothing, only his body heat and weight on top of my body. I sink into the too-soft mattress, and disappear" (Loc 269). By describing their first sexual encounter in Riyadh, Amanda shows awareness of her lack of authority and indignation that eventually leads to her desire for liberation from his control. Eventually, the non-violent rape develops into violence during rape: "The pushing, the thrusting, hands on my shoulders, bearing down on me, panting, grunting, his forearm across my throat now. I turned my head. His face came close to mine, panting his rank breath into my mouth. I turned my head the other way, he followed me, staring at me intently, inches from me" (Loc 3102). This symbolizes his control over her body and life. Muhammed's alcoholism, drug addiction and unemployment lead to his social deterioration, which causes him to exercise more ferocity against Amanda:

Darkness. Alone in the bed, I hear him in the room. He pulls back the sheet, turns me over, pushes my legs open. Like a blind man, hands all over me, mapping my body with hard probing fingers. He is on me, pushing, pulling, pinching, and then inside me. I can't move, he is pinning me down with his weight. I can't draw breath. He is heavier than he used to be. I can't respond. He punches me once in the face, then in the breast, once, twice, three times. I start to thrash, lights popping in front of my eyes as I struggle to breathe. His hand across my throat, pressing, pressing, choking me. Darkness. (Loc 2592)

This quotation describes Amanda's emotional and physical distress. The first is caused by her unfortunate life with her family that lead her to marry Muhammed, which leads her to severe agony. Amanda wakes up emotionally and physically injured and describes her state: "Pain, bruises, bleeding, a cut on my cheek, another in my groin,

and my throat is tender and sore. In the mirror, my face is pale, there are purplish marks of fingers on my neck.” This leads Amanda to the wonder: “Was he trying to kill me?” (Loc 2601). This sense of danger results in Amanda feeling threatened in Riyadh with Muhammed. Hence, her fear and endangerment cause her to consider an escape from Saudi Arabia.

Muhammed’s patriarchal ownership of Amanda’s body and his agency over her sexuality explains his offering Amanda to his friend Yusuf to rape when they visit Dammam. He plans a trip to the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia and keeps the children with his mother to ensure the necessary privacy to execute his plan. Amanda describes: “he removes the veil from my face” and “He leads me into the main room, and wordlessly offers me the whisky.” This indicates that Muhammed violates fundamental rules of piety and Islamic teachings, which makes him a sinner and a bad Muslim. It also suggests that the novel critiques Saudi social abuse of women rather than Islamic teachings. After that, Muhammed commands Amanda: “I promised Yusuf I would find him a woman while he was here,” then he continues: “It wasn’t possible. You will go to him instead” (Loc 1305). Muhammed’s behaviour confuses Amanda: “What kind of test is this? Am I supposed to obey, or resist” (Loc 1316). Initially, she refuses to obey to prove her chastity: “I don’t want to do this” (Loc 1316). This leads Muhammed to display a husband’s authority over her body, punish her for disobedience and force her to have sex with Yusuf: “He crosses the room and strikes me, hard, across the face. My head thuds against the bed and dizziness engulfs me” (Loc 1316). Then he explains to her: “I am your husband. You will do as I say” (Loc 1316). This makes Amanda realize that her husband is serious in his request and he forces her to obey him. However, this incident makes her question his physical authority over her, his violations of her body and the beginning of awareness of the abuse she endures: “Is it rape if I say yes?” Amanda further describes the effect of Muhammed’s control over her body: “My body says yes because it has learned to obey, on some primal, fleshly level” (Loc 1316). This quotation describes the climax of Amanda’s loss of power over her physique. However, she realizes that she is raped. As a result, Amanda regrets not fighting back and stopping Yusuf’s rape: “A hot flush rises, and something else. Shame. Not at what I have done, not really, but because in the end, I didn’t fight it” (Loc 1337). Despite her feelings of disgrace and humiliation, her financial and social dependence on Muhammed force Amanda to remain passive.

By highlighting Amanda's successive pregnancies during her marriage to Muhammed and after every rape, *Inshallah* critiques the protagonist's lack of control over her body in an era that grants Western women full authority over their choices of marriage, methods of impregnation and types of sexuality. In *Rethinking Sexuality* (2000), Diane Richardson underlines that since the 1960s, changes took place over the perspective of single women's sexuality and over "the social context in which people are bringing up children" (1-3). She also highlights the accessibility of contraception to both unmarried and married women equally, which allows them "to have (hetero)sex without reproducing" (1-3). However, in the introduction of *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (1984), Robin Morgan highlights that women's bodies are controlled through patriarchal social expectations that view them "as means of reproduction" (6). Amanda describes her physical passivity after her rape by Muhammed: "Somewhere, deep inside me, the single-minded sperm of a single-minded man met the submissive, receptive egg, which also allowed itself to be penetrated. That is, after all, the purpose of this one cell, its sole purpose. The act of violation was repeated microscopically inside me, with consequences that would repeat themselves forever" (Loc 3988). This illustrates Amanda's awareness of her physical submissiveness to her rapist while she blames herself for not resisting him. Amanda also provides details of pregnancies and miscarriages after her rape in Wales and in Dammam. After her first rape by the British man, she realizes that she is pregnant when her pregnancy ends in miscarriage: "Four months later I delivered a tiny, dead baby on a tide of pain and nausea" (Loc 3866). Pregnancy also follows Amanda's rape by Muhammed in Wales and Yusuf in Dammam, which also emphasizes her helplessness and lack of physical control. Amanda's successive conceptions, despite her deteriorating relationship with Muhammed, and her distress and physical weakness during and after different pregnancies also indicate her powerlessness and vulnerability, which highlights the novel's indication of Western women's weakness and lack of physical agency.

By underlining the fearful outcomes of passive submissiveness to fate and to conservative interpretation of religion, Einion's thriller criticizes Amanda's inactive reaction to abuse. For example, instead of following Jane's advice to bring up her child as a single mother or even to abort it, which implies physical agency and control over her body, Amanda decides to marry her rapist. She demonstrates her understanding of

pregnancy as an uncontrollable force over her body: “My body and its reproductive urges had decided my fate” (Loc 1530). After her conversion to Islam, Amanda remains passive to fate by obeying conservative interpretations of Islam that necessitates compliance with social rules and patriarchy to be a good Muslim woman: “What will be, will be. *Inshallah*.” She submits to the abuse perpetrated by Muhammed’s family and endures her husband’s frequent and repeated rapes. Amanda describes her views: “This is submission, yes, to God or fate or whatever it is that says this one will live, this one will die, this one will torment you first with weeks of uncertainty, fear and doubt” (Loc 3677). Therefore, she embraces these injustices as a sign of her devotion to Islam. Amanda wonders: “Is this, finally, what it means to be a Muslim?” (Loc 3676), which raises questions concerning the definitions of belief and ideal Islamic behaviour. Amanda’s endorsement of the word *inshallah* that generates submissiveness to fate is a direct link to the novel’s title, calling for a reevaluation and redefining of perceptions of fate, as well as seeking a different and interactive meaning of piety rather than the passive perception of submissiveness to destiny.

Trauma

The violent rapes and assaults suffered by Amanda leave her traumatized, which causes her to suppress abuse and receive repeated violations against her body passively. This enhances the thriller’s conventions, underlines Amanda’s oppression and draws attention to her flight from domination to authority and from trauma to healing. According to Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), “the originary meaning of trauma itself” refers to “an injury inflicted on a body.” Yet, the term *trauma* evolved, especially in relation to Freudian theories to refer to “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). Caruth emphasizes that according to Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principles* (1940) “the wound of the body, a simple and healable event,” is unlike the “mortal wound” of the mind, which also is “not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” and “that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). Therefore, Caruth stresses the significance of history in preserving the injurious incidents of the past and the repetition of assaulting actions (17). In addition, Caruth asserts that this “belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in

our very actions and our language” (4). Ann Whitehead’s *Trauma Fiction* (2004) underscores the presence of mystery in trauma narratives by confirming that “God alone knows the whole story” (30). Thus, “trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 91). Stef Craps’s *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (2012) defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience that resists integration and expression” (1). Whitehead adds that trauma fiction is paradoxical because it includes a traumatic experience that “overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation,” simultaneously and despite this resistance, trauma is narrated in fiction (3). Similarly, Judith Herman, in her *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (2015), highlights that “Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud.” Trauma narratives illustrate a haunting, silenced pain that results from violence narrated from incidents that happened in the past. However, some assaults remain unexplored. Further, Whitehead demonstrates that even though “re-enactments” with the past are “disturbingly literal and precise, they nevertheless remain largely unavailable to conscious recall and control” (140). They also are “accompanied by amnesia” and “the inability to have access to it” (140). Simultaneously, they “refuse to be buried” (1). Therefore, Wendy S. Hesford asserts that in rape narratives “women negotiate, resist, or reproduce” their rape stories (193). A cause of trauma is “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 61). Moreover, Whitehead confirms that there is a “recent journey of the concept of trauma from medical and scientific discourse to the field of literary studies” (4). These definitions suggest a relationship between comprehending trauma and history, since the past emerges “where *immediate understanding*” of some actions may not be available at that present moment (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11).

Amanda’s narration of her experiences of rape and domestic violence in Wales and Saudi Arabia is fragmented, retrospective, and chronologically random, which indicates trauma and stimulates anxiety associated with the thriller. Whitehead highlights that traumatized subjects narrate “fragments of the past” by describing “how the past appears in the present,” which is commonly affected by their current point of

view and by “the nature of its contemporary significance,” which makes the past “open to (re)construction and (re)interpretation” (67). In addition, “the effect of trauma on the collective construction of the past and the ways in which the past is remembered in the present” is, also, an area of concern (Whitehead 81). For instance, Amanda depicts her rape by the mysterious Welsh man in Swansea and her miscarriage after that rape near the end of the novel. She provides details of her rapes by Muhammed haphazardly despite her earlier announcement of her intention to marry her rapist in the beginning of the novel. This illustrates her suppression of disturbing and painful past events and her acceptance of their repetition. It explains her passive reactions to rape by Muhammed, having a relationship with him, and marrying and accompanying him to Saudi Arabia. Amanda starts her narration with a reference to her traumatic history: “Today, I will marry the man who raped me” (Loc 20). Then, she unsystematically relates different past rapes, insecurities and family abuse from a present and contemporary perspective. Furthermore, Amanda sometimes provides full details of past incidents, but at other times, leaves details out completely. For instance, she describes Muhammed’s physical features and cultural background, but she never clearly describes her Welsh rapist: “The man who attacked me was as tall as me, but broader, smelling of bear and sweat, and he had a fat, pasty face covered in stubble” (Loc 3860). Amanda also does not provide clear reasons for marrying the man who rapes her, although it becomes clear to the reader through the description of her life in Wales and with her family.

Another sign of Amanda’s trauma is her dreams, which unveil her subconscious and express her hidden anxiety. According to Caruth, dreams constitute a significant part of trauma narratives because they illustrate traumatized subjects’ anxieties of the external world (*Unclaimed Experience* 93-94). Amanda’s dreams express her anxieties of the outside world and describe her fear of abuse by mean people, evil spaces, or even war: “In the dream the light is blinding me, and I can’t see, and vague shapes are beyond me, many shapes, all clad in strange colours, all faceless, shouting at me in a language I don’t recognise. Too many shapes, people pulling at me, someone is tying my wrists, shackling me, holding me, I can’t get away, let me go, let me go” (Loc 168). This dream signifies Amanda’s fear of different rape experiences, of her exposure to social injustices, and of her abuse by Muhammed and his family. Her dreams are repetitions of her real-life assaults that she cannot prevent: “In the dream I am pinned. I am trapped, in a small place. I cannot get out” (Loc 168). This demonstrates that, by

dreaming, Amanda relives past experiences of rape and physical abuse. Dreams signal what Whitehead describes as a “re-entry into the experience,” which causes the victim to see and feel the assault, rather than only “remembering it” (17). Also, Caruth confirms that awakening from such dreams “is *itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding” (*Unclaimed Experience* 100). As a result, Amanda’s dreams make her relive her pains without being able to change the outcome.

Amanda’s journey from trauma to healing includes the process of expressing her pain, repetition of the fearful violent experiences, feeling safe with friends and reconnecting with the outside world. This is also part of the thriller’s conventions where all the protagonist’s fears and troubles are resolved at the end of each narrative. Herman announces that “The fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (3). Caruth also argues that “trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (*Unclaimed Experience* 58). Amanda starts her journey from abuse to emancipation and from trauma to recovery. She accomplishes this through communicating, by articulating her suffering and fears, and bonding with other Western women in Riyadh. This sisterhood helps her overcome patriarchy and establish a new understanding of Islam – one that differentiates between Saudi culture and Islamic teachings. Amanda’s life in Saudi Arabia changes when she meets Grace, the American woman who is married to a Saudi man, in the hospital. She supports Amanda and helps her express her experiences of abuse and achieve agency and empowerment. For example, Grace translates for Amanda the nurses’ directions in the hospital. She describes Grace the first time they meet: “A hand appears from under the long black cloak, and seeks out mine, to hold it briefly, rather than shake it. I see her light coloured fingers, feel warm flesh, soft skin, and catch a breath of perfume” (Loc 1058). Despite the black cloak that represents Saudi culture, white gentle fingers come out to symbolize Western kindness and help. Unlike Amanda, Grace does not seem oppressed and she expresses physical autonomy when she tells Amanda about her determination to stop having children and that she is in the hospital for pregnancy prevention: “A boy, a girl, then the twins, also boys, and my last was a girl. That’s enough, I think. I’m here to make sure of it” (Loc 1068). When Amanda is called to see the doctor of her baby, Grace makes sure that they get in touch again: “Take my phone number, and give me yours. We should have coffee some time, the kids can play

together” (Loc 1078). This meeting marks the first sign of Amanda’s communication with the outside world in Riyadh and her probable friendship with Grace: “for the first time, perhaps since arriving here, I feel a connection with someone. Someone who has no obligation to care for me, or accommodate me. Someone who might want to know me for myself” (Loc 1074). This quotation illustrates the effect meeting Grace has on Amanda’s self-realization, especially compared to her self-loss in her relationship with Muhammed. Carol Gilligan highlights that the “act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, makes the brain light up with quiet joy.” Gilligan also emphasizes that “for many women, the sense of self is invested more in maintaining relationships than in establishing hierarchy” (94). This indicates that Amanda’s relationship with Grace and other Western women in Riyadh helps her establish self and identity and accomplish the needed security in her flight to overcome trauma.

Through their growing sisterhood, Grace’s influence on Amanda aids her in her journey to healing. On her first visit to Grace’s house, Amanda receives advice from Grace to take care of her appearance: “You need to get that husband of yours to part with some money and take you shopping” (Loc 1457). Grace also indicates the importance of having a job to overcome enslavement to house chores and restriction to domestic spheres and child rearing: “You need to do something with your time” (Loc 1413). Hence, Amanda’s job as a British teacher at the same school that Grace works for provides Amanda with the needed financial independence that enables her to buy plane tickets for her herself and her children to flee Saudi Arabia forever: “I am really looking forward to working, to having my own money” (Loc 1643). In addition, Grace encourages Amanda to seek a separate house to move away from the abuse of her husband’s family: “it’s so much better, isn’t it, to be on your own?” (Loc 1627). Grace offers Amanda transportation, in a city that limits women’s mobility, to socialize or to go to work: “her car brings me and the boys back to the apartment” (Loc 1671). Through Grace, Amanda becomes connected to a network of Western women who support each other, socialize, and inform each other of the dangers of the Gulf War in Riyadh during the severity of bombing: “Grace is part of this network. She links me in, connects me” (Loc 1905). As a result, Grace invites Amanda to events taking place at her residence where she meets other Western women, “Grace insisted I come to one of her parties” (Loc 1838). This enhances Amanda’s connection with women’s

communities in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Grace helps Amanda travel to Britain to see her family: “It is Grace who helps me make the arrangements, and it is my money which pays for the tickets” (Loc 2650). Grace urges Amanda to resume her education through distant learning: “You must do this for yourself. If you wish it so, it will happen, and this is the first step. Do the courses you need, while you are here. Take a distance learning degree. Become the woman you want to be. You know that you can do anything you set your mind to” (Loc 3160). This illustrates Grace’s contribution to constructing Amanda’s confidence. It also contrasts heavily with the negative effect of Amanda’s mother when she discourages her interest in education. Finally, when Muhammed’s violent attacks become life-threatening, Grace urges Amanda to flee Riyadh and return to Britain to avoid the further harm he can cause her: “I am afraid for you, afraid how far he’ll go. Afraid that one day he just won’t stop” (Loc 3998). Additionally, this emphasizes the effect of appropriating the thriller, which escalates anxiety and fear of the harm that Amanda becomes exposed to and the hope that she will overcome this situation by escaping from Riyadh and returning to Wales. As a result, Grace formulates an escape plan to help Amanda and her children travel to England, “I’ll help. We’ll all help” (Loc 2989). When Muhammed steals Amanda’s collected money, Grace and her friend, Sheena, keep Amanda’s newly saved money safe and buy the tickets for Amanda and her children. This illustrates the novel’s depiction of sisterhood and its importance in empowering traumatized and oppressed women.

Describing the rapes to Grace helps Amanda realize that Muhammed’s physical violation against her body is rape, which is an important step towards healing. In the introduction of her *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing* (2000), Suzette A. Henke highlights that “the very process of articulating painful experiences” could “prove therapeutic” (xi). Henke additionally asserts that narrating a life “serves as its own testimony and, in so doing, carries through the work of reinventing the shattered self as a coherent subject capable of meaningful resistance to received ideologies and of effective agency in the world” (xix). Therefore, narrating rape and violent episodes to Grace helps Amanda view them as rape rather than sexual intercourse with her husband, which is a sign of her recovery. This leads Amanda to become aware of her exposure to constant physical violations: “He bound my wrists to the bed, and raped me. I can call it that now. I didn’t say yes to him. He never noticed.

He never asked. He just took. And I didn't want it, not last night, not for a long time. I didn't want him" (Loc 4534). This also illustrates that Amanda's trained-to-obey-body does not accept sex with her rapist anymore. At the end of the novel, Amanda realizes that her success in escaping Saudi Arabia is due to the group of women who helped her overcome fear and danger. She further implies that without them, she might not have succeeded in leaving Muhammed or Riyadh: "I think of all the women, the great web of wives and daughters and mothers who helped me to do this, who hid money for me in their houses, who lied to their husbands for me, who kept my secrets. Women who passed messages amongst themselves, made arrangements, bought us clothes, changed currency" (Loc 4509). This illustrates the importance of sisterhood in enhancing Amanda's self-confidence.

Inshallah depicts a relationship of intimacy, physical attraction and love between Grace and Amanda. In their journey to emancipation and healing, women find asylum from male violence, abuse and lack of affection in female gentleness. In addition, the novel indicates that this care between Amanda and Grace is necessary emotional and social support for Amanda in her quest for emancipation and healing. An example of this fondness is Amanda's admiration of Grace's appearance, clothes and makeup: "I notice the thick embroidery that frames the cloth, and the richness of her clothes, and her carefully applied make-up" (Loc 1460). Afterwards, Amanda notices Grace's perfume and body scent, which signals a more sensual attraction:

She removes her veil and headscarf, and the cloaking *abaya*. I take them from her, silk cool in my hands, her perfume rising from the fabric. For a moment, I am overwhelmed. This scent, it is Grace, everything that I think of when I think of her – bright laughing eyes, that unashamed earthiness, juxtaposed with innate grace, style...and compassion. (Loc 3073)

Amanda eventually shows appreciation for Grace's touch and physical attachment: "She settles in a chair beside me, lays her hand gently on mine. I curl my fingers around hers, feeling the roughened skin of my fingers against the warm velvet of hers. Feeling the skin, and the flesh and blood and bone under the skin" (Loc 3471). Amanda demonstrates the growing affection between them when she describes Grace feeding her and sharing physical closeness during one of their gatherings over tea: "she lifts the bread to my lips, leaning in, and I am enveloped in her light, sweet scent, so close I can

see the green flecks in her eyes, and the curving bow of her lips, rich and full. Her soft fingers and the doughy bread covered in powdered sugar, are teasing at my lips, and then with her other hand she strokes my cheek” (Loc 3398). Amanda describes her reaction to this intimacy, “Unable to help myself, I gasp at a rush of heat, at her body so close to me, her hand on my face” (Loc 3392). Despite their strong bond and growing intimacy, their relationship does not develop because once Amanda leaves Riyadh, everyone loses contact with her. Amanda describes her sadness to leave: “I leave Grace behind me, everything about her, everything that she was to me, all the feelings, the secrets, the unsaid words” (Loc 4555). This undeveloped relationship with Grace aids Amanda in her journey to develop confidence, understanding her rights, achieving independence and being loved.

Amanda’s self-assertion and liberation necessitates going against social injustices, obedience to conservative interpretation of religious teachings and submissive understanding of fate. Amanda gradually becomes aware of her abuse and starts to resist the physical and emotional violations committed against her by Muhammed and his family members. First, she shows signs of resistance when Muhammed hits her: “He twists my arm. The scream that bursts from my mouth surprises the both of us. Then his free hand is on my mouth” (Loc 2585). Amanda also challenges Fatima’s accusations when she indicates that Amanda’s Western background and behaviour is the cause of Muhammed’s corruption and addiction to drugs and alcohol: “you didn’t grow up here, and you’re a good mother, but being a good wife is probably different for you...” (Loc 4362). Amanda protests and defends herself: “In what way, exactly? Do I feed and clothe his children, keep a clean house, make food, behave with proper difference, wear modest clothes?” (Loc 4362). Then, Amanda continues, “Perhaps you are thinking of the things that go on between a husband and his wife, behind closed doors? ... Everything he has asked of me, I’ve done it. No matter what it is, no matter how hard, or...degrading, I’ve done it” (Loc 4371). Afterwards, Amanda rips her shirt and takes off her hijab to reveal her bruises to Fatima, bites, and abuse marks on her body: “I’ve been beaten, raped and strangled, and you never knew! I’ve been a good wife, a good mother. I’ve learned the language, behaved as I should. And I’ve lain on the floor as he kicked me and wondered if I’ll live to see the sun come up” (Loc 4381). Amanda revolts against Ahmed, Muhammed’s brother, when he attempts to take her children away to compensate for his lack of male children and

because Muhammed is a jobless drug addict, which leaves his family without a proper male guardian: “If the father does not provide for his children, it is the responsibility of the other men in his family. My wife has had only daughters.” Then he informs Amanda, “You.... would not be needed.” As a result, Amanda answers, “Over my dead body” (Loc 3128). This threat urges Amanda to run away to Britain to avoid being deprived of her children. Amanda takes another step towards liberation when she goes against Muhammed’s family who determines the name of her daughter without her consent: “Aisha, they’ve called her, but in my mind I give her another name, a name that means love and safety, a name for the woman she ought to be. Grace” (Loc 3883). Even though Britain is framed as a patriarchal, unsafe and unstable country for Amanda to bring up her children, she decides to take her daughter there. She explains to Grace: “I can’t be like you, and let my daughter grow up thinking that there is only one path open to her. I can’t” (Loc 4227). So, she declares, “my daughter will never have to wear the veil, unless one day she chooses to” (Loc 4576). This reveals that Amanda learns to reject extreme and patriarchal interpretations of the Quran and religious teachings. This illustrates her endorsement of Muslim feminists’ activism. It also depicts her rebellion against associating religion with patriarchy. Amanda refuses to equate her piety with wearing the hijab and the veil. Furthermore, she becomes active and involved in the process of understanding religious teachings, which is an authoritative action that contrasts with her previous inactive submissiveness.

Orientalism

Depiction of Arab/Muslim societies as dangerous and fearful in *Inshallah* is affected by the spread of violent terrorist Islamist attacks by ISIS in different Western societies post-9/11. Therefore, the employment of the thriller’s conventions, whether conscious or subconscious, can be affected by the socio-political and historical context of the novel. Additionally, the novel contributes to Western Orientalist discourse that represents Saudi Arabia as a place of fear and horror. Edward Said’s *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997) asserts that Islam is viewed as a brutal and aggressive religion (xii), which causes Western media to create a direct link between terrorism and Islam and associate Muslims with “fundamentalism” (xiv). Said draws attention to the fact that representation of Islam shows that it “equals everything-we-must-now-fight-against, as

we did with communism during the Cold War” (xix). Abdus Sattar Ghazali’s *Islam & Muslims in the Post 9/11 America* (2012) illustrates the effect of Hollywood’s film making on the creation of negative images and stereotypes of Muslims in the West. Ghazali also emphasizes that Western films, such as *Escape: Human Cargo* (1998), *The Kingdom* (2007), or *A Hologram for the King* (2016), “portray Arabs by distorting at every turn what most Arab men, women and children are really like” (175). This is clear in Einion’s representation of men’s patriarchal superiority in Saudi society. In addition, Ghazali emphasizes that film makers “regularly link the Islamic faith with male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror, depicting Arab Muslims as hostile alien intruders and as lecherous, oily sheikhs intent on using nuclear weapons” (175). This post-9/11 prevailing culture of violence and fear explains why Einion sets the novel during the Gulf War and describing severe violence and abuse in Saudi society as a representative of Islam and piety in the Islamic world.

Inshallah’s depiction of Amanda’s suffering in Saudi Arabia is part of post-9/11 ideology that considers Arab/Muslim women controlled and abused. El Saadawi argues that Muslim societies provoke curiosity in Western societies. Hence, she declares: “The word Muslim or Islam on the cover of any book makes it a bestseller” (x). Fawzia Afzal-Khan emphasizes that since 9/11 attacks, Arab/Muslim countries and communities have been homogenized and viewed as ideologically and culturally identical. She also states that the West believes all Muslims have the same “Islamic culture;” share common views concerning sex, politics, and prejudice (2). Elizabeth Warnock Fernea notes that, in terms of feminism, Western feminists have been skeptical about “Women’s activism within the Islamist movement” and this is an outcome of the post-9/11 political context (xi). However, Einion’s depiction of Amanda as abused and raped in Wales indicates that Western women are abused as well and ridicules Western calls for rescuing Arab/Muslim women. Finally, by showing examples of Muslim feminists and good Muslim men, *Inshallah* suggests that not all Arab/Muslim societies are necessarily misogynist. Yet, the novel indicates that Saudi culture and extreme interpretations of religious teaching are.

In contrast to contemporary representations and stereotypes of Muslims and negative images of Islamism, *Inshallah* provides an optimistic image of Islam relying on a distinction between Islamic teachings and Saudi patriarchal interpretation of Islam.

The novel provides examples of different categories of Muslims with different Islamic practices, which defies the homogenization of Muslims and introduces the idea that cultural interpretation of Islam varies among different Islamic cultures and nations. For example, before marrying Muhammed or moving to Riyadh, Amanda meets a Bengali/Muslim feminist, Khadija, who draws attention to the distinction between different social interpretations of Islam – such as Saudi and Bengali Muslim societies. When Khadija realizes that Amanda and Jane share their house with a Saudi man, she comments: “Well, I am from Bangladesh, and we are a different country to theirs. Not so much culture, no so much telling us the laws. Muslim and religion and Muslim and culture – two different things, Yes?” (Loc 2305). Afterwards, Khadija elaborates: “I am Muslim, my family is Muslim, we live life a certain way because we want to live a good life, in the eyes of Allah, of God. Some Muslim, culture, customs, traditions, like in Saudi Arabia, is not about faith, about Allah, it is about tribes, laws, control. So, there is a split, you see? A difference” (Loc 2314). Thus, the novel highlights Bengali women’s liberation in determining their dress-code: “We choose to wear what we wear as a sign to Allah that we are being modest” (Loc 2323). Khadija draws attention to gender equality in Bengali society: “I myself was studying medicine until I had the children. My husband sees me as an equal, you know, there is no oppression. I chose motherhood and I am glad I did. But in Islam, women and mothers are honoured, respected” (Loc 2323). Finally, Khadija concludes: “Islam, it is love, yes, it is not about war or even about the control of women” (Loc 2323). The novel thus challenges dominant stereotypes of Muslims as marginalized and compelled to wear the hijab and the veil, adopt domestic roles or cope with social inferiority. Further, the novel defies Arab/Muslim social ideals that consider feminism anti-Islamic or anti-patriotic and the Western views that consider Muslim women too oppressed to be feminists. For instance, Fernea notes that Western feminists think that “Women’s activism within the Islamist movement” is unlikely to exist, due to the view of Islam in the post-9/11 context. (xi) Hence, Jane describes how the members of the reading group evaluate Khadija as a feminist: “But some of the women there, good feminists as they are, think that Khadija cannot be feminist because she wears *hijab* and is a Muslim” (Loc 2351). Khadija answers: “I am of course a feminist. To be Muslim is to honour women. It’s about time more people understood that women should be respected, honoured, for everything they do.... Muslim men understand this” (Loc 2351). In this way, the novel

resists the common image of Islam as misogynist and proposes an optimistic depiction of Muslim societies.

Inshallah does not project Islamophobic views as much as it associates negative behaviour with the Saudi cultural interpretation of Islam. This is apparent through Amanda's declaration: "Coming here, the most Muslim country in the world, I thought, well, maybe I was stupid, but I thought it would be full of very spiritual people. Religious people. But it's not" (Loc 2406). Initially, the novel depicts Saudi Arabia as a patriarchal society where, unlike women in other Muslim communities, the veil and the hijab are compulsory social limitations forced on Saudi women and women in Saudi Arabia. As an example, Khadija explains that, as a Bengali/Muslim woman, she has the choice to embrace the hijab or the veil and there are no patriarchal rules in her Bengali culture that force her to wear them. By describing Khadija's kind Muslim husband, the novel suggests that men in other Muslim societies treat women well. However, the novel is ambivalent in its representation of Saudi men because it depicts Grace's husband as a good Saudi man, who treats his wife gently and provides her with a decent family life. This is demonstrated when Grace describes Muslim men as "kind, and caring, and most love and respect their wives, and take great care of them" (Loc 2617). Nevertheless, the novel's overriding representation of Saudi men and women is negative because the provided number of good Saudi men in the novel is limited to a single man, in contrast to the portrayal of Muhammed as a jobless, violent rapist and drug addict, Ahmed as a person who aims to take away Amanda's children and Yusuf as a rapist of his friend's wife. This illustrates that the dominant image of Saudi men and society the novel provides is fearful and corrupt, which emphasizes that the novel is not anti-Islamic as much as it is Orientalist in its depiction of Saudi Arabia.

Inshallah's use of the thriller and its conventions contribute to the Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia as horrifying and hellish. For instance, the novel emphasizes Riyadh's bad weather, dark buildings, disgusting food, evil inhabitants and disturbing sounds of Arabic language. Amanda describes her experience in Riyadh when she first arrives: "*Everything is so different here, from what I eat to what I wear*" (Loc 676). Primarily, Amanda illustrates difficulty in coping with unbearable Saudi weather since she arrives at the airport in Riyadh:

The doors open, and the heat hits me like a blow, and the brightness of the sun immediately makes my head ache. The smell of heat and exhaust, and something else, an almost spicy, organic smell, all suffocate me in the burning air. My mouth dries instantly. The heat closes in around me, like a vice, the air too hot to breathe, burning down my throat into my lungs. (Loc 76)

Later, she describes heat: “*It is hot here, hotter than the hottest day in summer, and the sun is blinding white*” (Loc 703). Amanda also stresses the ugliness of Saudi nature: “*There is no grass anywhere, and the streets are dusty and sandy.*” Then she highlights exoticism of Saudi Arabia: “*Everything is different*” (Loc 704). Moreover, Amanda describes to her father, in a letter, traffic in Riyadh streets: “Here, crossing the road is like some medieval test of courage, littered with booby traps.” After that, she adds: “negotiating the roads is nothing to negotiating the culture” (Loc 1109). Thus, the novel rearticulates Orientalist tradition in its description of Riyadh streets and framing Saudi Arabia as primitive compared to Western modernity.

Representation of Saudi Arabia as a foul-smelling place is another means of emphasizing Saudi exoticism and is further proof of *Inshallah*’s Orientalist approach. An example of this is Amanda’s description of the smell of the car when she first arrives in Riyadh’s airport: “smells of cigarettes and of the air outside, thick with the hot, strange smell” (80). Later, she depicts smells of different unfamiliar Saudi food: “the smell of hot oil and onions makes me feel disjointed” (Loc 232), “spice smell makes my nose itch; the onions keep my eyes watering” (Loc 410), and “Breakfast is an unfamiliar combination of a dish with onions and tomatoes, and some sort of porridgey, youghurty thing with fruit and nuts in it” (Loc 317). This illustrates how Amanda handles the differences between her culture and Saudi food and other social habits. For instance, she describes the smell of local meals and their effect on her when she is pregnant: “I take the stuff; it feels greasy but tough, and has an odd smell. My stomach churns. I chop it as directed, then Khala puts it into the pan. The smell that rises is awful, and I run from the kitchen, up the stairs, and into the bathroom, just making it in time” (Loc 647). Then she adds: “the smells are strange and wrong” (Loc 86). However, the novel’s representation of food in Wales is similarly unpleasant. This is evident through Amanda’s reaction and resentment of food smells in the chicken factory in Wales: “my hair and skin were thick with grease, and I felt like I would never get the

stench of the place from my nose” (Loc 3059). Additionally, when she visits her family after living a few years in Riyadh, Amanda describes British food as exotic:

“Everything tastes strange. The tea and the milk and the thick, doughy cakes” (Loc 2678). By describing smells and food equally strange and putrid in Riyadh and in Wales, the novel suggests that point of view is relative and can change depending on location and familiarity, which reduces the gap between the East and the West. This indicates that the novel is inconsistent in its Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia.

In contrast to its representation of Western women’s sisterhood, *Inshallah* provides an Orientalist representation of Saudi women by depicting them as mean-spirited and noxious. First, the novel portrays Saudi women as guardians of patriarchy in Saudi households. Mohja Kahf’s *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999) argues that Western representations of Arab/Muslim women since the beginning of Islam have described them as either “alien” (104) or as a “noble woman wielding power of harm” over others (111). For example, Muhammed’s mother ensures that Amanda wears the veil and the hijab once she arrives in Riyadh. She also guarantees Amanda wears gold bangles as a sign of marriage consummation. Finally, she overwhelms Amanda with severe and abusive housework. Amanda describes her mother-in law’s meanness: “Just when I start to relax, there she is again, my diminutive mother-in-law, shouting and gesticulating and physically pushing me around until I do what she wants. I help with washing, hanging the clothes to dry in a small courtyard” (Loc 378). Muhammed’s mother does not show sympathy even when Amanda gives birth to children and falls ill. For instance, when Amanda delivers her son Mahmood, she is given a blood transfusion because of severe blood loss, yet Muhammed’s mother never visits her in the hospital: “Women fill the other beds, female relatives come and go. No one visits me” (Loc 911). Muhammed’s sister, Layla, does not provide Amanda with support, either. She insists on calling Amanda “UmmShahid,” which signifies effacement of identity and the significance of being named after a male child to gain social recognition. Layla reinforces her mother’s patriarchal rules in the household. Finally, Fatima is described as mean when she suggests that Amanda’s behaviour as a Western woman leads Muhammed to drug addiction and alcoholism. This demonstrates that the novel reproduces stereotypical images of Arab/Muslim women. It overlooks their hindrances and struggle for agency and authority. Instead, *Inshallah* utilizes Saudi’s reputation as the most conservative

place for women as a backdrop to illustrate a story of rape, trauma, and survival of a Western woman.

Inshallah depicts Amanda's fearful experience in Saudi Arabia by describing Riyadh as a terrifying space and a dangerous war zone, which contributes to the Orientalist depiction of the country. This fear is expressed through dreams that Amanda narrates randomly in the novel. Amanda describes one of her dreams as: "I dream at last, in brief snatches, of deserts and sandstorms and the moonless orange city sky at night, but in the dream, the orange underglow is the smoky fire of torches, a mob with torches, and they are coming for me" (Loc 1554). This demonstrates Amanda's perception of Saudi Arabia as an unsafe and dark space. Later she describes her lack of safety in another dream by providing illustrations of the Gulf War, during which the novel is set: "The guns permeate my dream. I am standing against a blank backdrop, a wall plastered in white. Faceless people run past, in dark uniforms. The guns fire, too close, too close. I am covered in sweat, panting, I have been running away, running away, but I have forgotten something. The children. I can't leave the children behind!" (Loc 1991). The second dream expresses Amanda's anxieties about her children's safety in Saudi Arabia because of the dangers it includes. Both dreams contribute to the portrayal of Saudi Arabia as a fearful and dangerous space. This leads Amanda, despite her mother's cruelty and their bad relationship, to narrate her war-related fears to her mother: "With the war imminent, I would rather be with you. They say the Middle East is at boiling point" (Loc 1111). This quotation reflects the political context of 2014, during which the West perceived the Middle East as a fearful war zone. Additionally, Amanda's descriptions of Saudi Arabia contain stereotypical images of the East as a dangerous and lethal space for Westerners.

Through *Inshallah*'s employment of the thriller, the novel sheds light on different types of local social disadvantages practiced against Western women. Moreover, by illustrating examples of moderate Muslims, the novel challenges dominant contemporary Islamophobic views that associate Islam with terrorism, violence, and patriarchy. Nevertheless, the text attacks Saudi social conservatism and its fundamental interpretation of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, *Inshallah* ignores Saudi women's struggle for liberation and empowerment in both domestic and public spheres. Thus, the novel reproduces predominant Orientalist stereotypes of passive

Saudi women and evil Saudi men. It represents Saudi Arabia as a dangerous and exotic space and the country's weather and landscape as hellish. Through the theme of rape, *Inshallah* critiques female injustices in both Western and Saudi societies, which the novel uses to highlight similarities between the West and the East, which illustrates ambivalence in its Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Three

Zoe Ferraris's Detective Fiction: Investigating Saudi Women

Finding Nouf (2008), *City of Veils* (2010), and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012) is a detective fiction trilogy by the American Zoe Ferraris that is set in Jeddah during the noughties. It depicts the struggle of the two protagonists, Katya Hijazi and Nayir ash-Sharqi, to achieve balance between modernity and tradition and to overcome social restrictions without giving up their cultural identity.²⁴ The novels became international bestsellers and gained American recognition when *Finding Nouf* won the Los Angeles Times Book Award for First Fiction in 2008.²⁵ *Finding Nouf* also won the ALA Alex Award in 2009.²⁶ Nina Sankovitch declares that the novel's fame reached publishers in different countries because they "aren't just about love under Islam" but they utilize "the vehicle of a murder mystery to explore all the ramifications of a society separated by gender and ruled by restrictions" (n. pag.). The trilogy helps undo dominant Western views in the context of post-9/11 culture that considers Arab/Muslim women abused, marginalized and controlled.²⁷ Ferraris's novels shed light on women's lives during the noughties and its increasing Islamophobia in the West. They depict Saudi women's struggle to achieve empowerment and emphasize the evolution of Saudi social perceptions concerning women's living conditions, such as domesticity, financial dependence, mothering and child rearing, and participation in the public sphere. Thus, the novels resist predominant stereotypes of Saudi women and challenge the widespread Western image of local women as passively oppressed. The trilogy underlines the

²⁴ Yaacov Yadgar's "A Post-Secular Look at Tradition: Towards a Definition of 'Traditionism'" considers tradition "a 'frozen' relic of the past" (79). Whereas Mark Elvin's "A Working Definition of 'Modernity'" defines modernity as the difference that occurs in a society on the human, "economic" or "intellectual" levels (210-11). Yadgar suggests that there is "an inherent antinomy between tradition and modernity" (79). Elvin adds that modernity can be best distinguished when defined against tradition (212). From a Middle-Eastern social perspective, Lila Abu Lughod's *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle-East* defines social modernity as: Modifying "gender relations" and, essentially, formulating "new images of masculinity and femininity" (281). Abu Lughod highlights that this "articulation of new images and norms" must take place in "institutional arenas, from the classroom to the fashion magazine, from legislation such as the republican dress code to daily encounters on city streets" (281).

²⁵ Posted in Los Angeles Festival of Books: University of Southern California's website.
<http://events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks/book-prizes-winners-by-award/>

²⁶ Posted in Young Adult Library Services Association's website.

<http://www.ala.org/news/mediapresscenter/presskits/youthmediaawards/alexawards>

²⁷ 9/11 is a shorthand that refers to the three-plane attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by Islamic terrorists on 11/9/2001.

importance of transnational and transcultural women's solidarity and sisterhood as a means of empowerment against patriarchy. However, the texts remain faithful to the Western Orientalist tradition in their representation of the East. They depict Saudi Arabia as a dark, hellish and corrupt space. As a result, Ferraris's novels present Saudi culture in terms of Otherness, monstrosity, and exoticism.

This chapter examines the effects of using detective fiction on the portrayal of women's oppression. In addition, it scrutinizes the post-9/11 socio-political context and its influence on the representation of women in Saudi Arabia. I inspect the texts' Orientalist features and their effects. I argue that Ferraris's trilogy depicts Saudi women's struggle to overcome marginalization and this is achieved through its employment of detective fiction investigating women's abuse as much as crime. It contends that the novel's representation of Saudi women helps overcome the prevailing post-9/11 view of Arab/Muslim women as passive, oppressed and dominated. I further assert that the novels contrast Saudi economic advancement to social backwardness, which is achieved through highlighting conflicts between modernisation and tradition, sexuality and chastity, the public and the private spheres, appearance and reality, and rhetoric and truth. I demonstrate that despite the novels' effect in rectifying Saudi women's image in the West, they end up providing an Orientalist image of Saudi landscape and cities.

Through its employment of detective fiction, Ferraris's trilogy follows the genre's tradition in investigating women's lives, challenges, status and social injustices. Modern and contemporary detective fiction explores gender issues and reveals cultural discrimination practiced against women as much as it exposes crimes and immorality. Mary Hadley's *British Women Mystery Writers* (2002) emphasizes that female detective fiction "exposes general social ills," (87) criticizes "social injustices" (65) and assesses "societal mores" (64). Hadley adds that even though a female writer of detective fiction relies on a crime that is solved at the end of novel, her main aim is usually to build "a critique of particular aspects of her own society" (993). Stephen Knight's *Crime Fiction 1800-2000* (2004) confirms that detective fiction is popular among female readers because it reflects on issues related to their social fears and concerns (167). Moreover, Ed Christian, in his *Postcolonial Detectives* (2001) declares that "One of the conventions of detective fiction, particularly of the more hard-boiled variety, is the

movement from interrogating witnesses and suspects to interrogating culture and society. Often detective novelists show how crime and criminals are influenced by problems in social or political structures” (10). In her *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994), Sally R. Munt adds that detective fiction is an attractive genre for feminists because it is “a political form” in the sense that it allows female authors to challenge the male-dominated genre through female detectives and protagonists that challenge gendered professions and police work cultures (54). In *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005), Lee Horsley emphasizes that detective fiction is used as a means of socio-political criticism (55). She confirms that this genre is “well-suited to the tasks of critique and protest” (*Twentieth-Century* 6). Horsley emphasizes the significance of the presence of opposing and challenging dominant social ideals in modern detective fiction because they question outdated norms and traditions (*Twentieth-Century* 10). Finally, she underlines that the genre produces “detective figures who embody the oppositional values” or “who challenge the assumptions about race and gender” (*Twentieth-Century* 10). Ferraris’s novels comply with these conventions through their portrayal of corrupt characters that commit crimes against women, which express social misogyny. Further, by introducing progressive characters that challenge norms and traditions, the trilogy questions social justice and criticizes the inferior status of women in Saudi Arabia.

Because it still projects views that emphasize women’s intellectual and physical inferiority, modern detective fiction has failed to overcome its gendered culture or its original conventions of male superiority and dominance. This confirms Munt’s view that detective fiction endorses women’s inferiority and lack of intellect evidenced by their need for a male associate to help them solve crime mysteries, despite the genre’s function in critiquing traditional gender roles (48). Munt adds that despite the genre’s attempts to critique chauvinism and patriarchy, it still tends to present a male detective who is always ready to save the female detective’s life, which emphasizes the significance of the role of the “traditional male detective” (48). In Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *Great Women of Mystery Writers* (1994), B.J. Rahn highlights that in contemporary detective fiction, female detectives are stronger and “can survive on the mean street” (72). Nevertheless, Klein emphasizes that “their ‘victory’ is often incomplete or tarnished in some way” (72). Klein asserts that, in detective fiction, women are still marked as inferior and their worth, according to “universal

assumption,” is their “sexual attractiveness” (72). Finally, Knight writes that in crime fiction, a “male lover” usually solves most of the mystery (165). Hence, despite its attempts to overcome its patriarchal conventions, detective fiction remains a conservative genre that portrays men as intellectually and physically superior.

Finding Nouf, *City of Veils*, and *Kingdom of Strangers* critique local women’s inferior status. They highlight women’s low social rank, emphasize women’s struggle against cultural injustices – like being restricted to domestic spheres or to limited gender-segregated jobs – and shed light on their efforts to improve their living conditions and achieve empowerment. Hatoon Ajwad Al-Fassy points to gender segregation “in the religious rituals of ancient eastern Arabia,” since there were “priestesses responsible for female needs” (Loc 750) to ensure separation between men and women. Hoda El Saadi argues that women in the Gulf “were seen as standing outside of history, shackled by unchanging social norms based on a conservative religion and traditional values.” (Loc 2670). Amira El-Azhary Sonbol adds that women in the Arabian Peninsula are restricted to domestic roles or gender-segregated jobs since their jobs were limited to “dress-makers, beauticians, and midwives (*dayas*)” (“Introduction” Loc 341) until the last decade of the twentieth-century. Miriam Cooke’s *War’s Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (1987) emphasizes Arab/Muslim women’s inferior status by depicting literature that idealizes the limitations on Egyptian women to the domestic role and portrays them as “house angels who knew no other discourse than that of prudery and restraint with an occasional outburst at injustices so blatant as to overcome a well-honed sense of decorum” (*War’s Other Voices* 79-80). Cooke adds that social patriarchal rules in the Arab world determine women’s roles as wives and mothers (*War’s Other Voices* 79-80). As previously stated in the introduction to this thesis, women in Arab/Muslim countries share similar life conditions, which makes Saudi Arabia, Gulf, Egyptian, and other Middle-Eastern women’s lifestyles comparable. Reducing Saudi women’s jobs to teaching or medical treatment of other females is depicted in novels like Mantel’s *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, which represents Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and Einion’s *Inshallah* set in the 1990s.

Unlike these earlier social contexts, Ferraris’s novels illustrate Saudi social progressiveness that took place in reaction to post-9/11 context culture, such as

improvements in women's social status, education, and work conditions. Hence, Ferraris's trilogy resists Saudi women's prevailing reputation in Western media, which, according to Evelyn Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (2012), has been described as "veiled, oppressed, and in need of rescue" (71) since 9/11. This demonstrates that although women's education was introduced to Saudi society in the 1960s, when women left the domestic sphere for the first time to teach or study, real changes in Saudi women's lifestyle and participation in the public sphere took place only post 9/11. Madawi Al-Rasheed's *A Most Masculine State: Gender Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (2013) underlines that "Since 9/11, educated women have been called upon to serve the state's economic, social, and ideological needs," such as "greater participation in the public sphere" or granting women "greater visibility both locally and internationally" (134). For the first time, Saudi women occupied leading posts in different governmental sectors, such as the ministry of exterior or the Saudi Parliament. Moreover, Saudi women became socially visible as they started to appear unveiled in local media. Further changes occurred over relationships between Saudi men and women, which indicates women were challenging the norms that govern gender politics. Women have succeeded in their struggle against veiling, gender segregation, and restriction to the domestic sphere (Al-Rasheed 134). However, Al-Rasheed emphasizes that "combining modernization with traditionalism" is an important requirement to guarantee advancement "while remaining faithful to the principles of Islam" (93). This illustrates that any Saudi social change necessitates endorsement of piety rules and indigenous traditions.

The novels depict economic and educational progress in Saudi society and they achieve this through illustrations of advanced technology, description of big mansions, streets, and shopping centres, luxurious cars and educated women in different jobs. Killian Clarke argues that "Saudi Arabia's populace has become richer, better educated, and more diversely opinionated" (32). Thomas W. Lippman confirms that Saudi government encouraged education and training for men and women to make them suitable for vocational requirements. Lippman further highlights that governmental planning obligated "the participation of Saudi women in the development of the kingdom, including employment in the government jobs" (A17). Sanna Dhahir notes that "rapid socioeconomic changes have given women access to better education and allowed them to assume more varied careers" (40).

The twenty first century has witnessed great improvements in Saudi women's education. Charles Taylor and Wasmiah Albasri describe how King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud's educational scholarship agreement with president George Bush opened opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Saudi students, including women, to join American universities in 2005 (109). This programme is acknowledged as "the largest scholarship program in Saudi Arabia's history" (Taylor and Albasri 110). For the first time, Saudi women from different age categories travelled to the West to pursue higher education. Taylor and Albasri highlight that the goals of King Abdullah's Scholarship Programme is to prepare students "to be future leaders in their country," "to extend a mutual understanding of cultures" and "to allow a cultural exchange" (Taylor and Albasri 111). The scholarship program:

impacted the culture of Saudi Arabia. These students absorbed and learned from the culture of the country that they studied in. They raised children in the country, albeit temporarily, they become a part of that culture, thereby bringing some of that culture back to Saudi Arabia, expanding the potential for Saudi Arabia to show significant cultural changes in the future; and become more open and accepting of other societies. (Taylor and Albasri 117)

Noura Algahtani also draws attention to the alteration of Saudi women's conditions in the public sphere in post-9/11 society: "For decades, as a result of the prevailing cultural attitudes, Saudi women were limited to roles in teaching or banking, but the new era of modernity is allowing them access to various social and economic resources, and to gaining greater participation in the public sphere. Thus, highly educated women have challenged perceptions of their traditional role in terms of their participation in the labour market" (26). Education, openness to the West and other cultures, and political changes are forming a more liberated, diverse, and tolerant Saudi society. However, al-Khouli demonstrates that Saudi educational institutions still require proof of students' obedience to religious teachings to show that they aim to "help a woman know about the pillars of Islam, about faith, about how her prayers should be and how she should manage her home and raise her children" (Loc 4207). Clarke adds that Saudi's noticeable development is marked with a contrast that can be seen best in the "tension between modernity and tradition" (30). It can also be traced in the country's "modern economic institutions," like big oil companies and architectural multiregional

establishments versus old-fashioned “social systems” that still require gender segregation, gender inequalities and restricting dress-code for women (Clarke 30). This indicates that despite attempts to achieve economic development, Saudi social systems are still struggling to overcome tradition and archaic conventionalism.

Unveiling the mysterious crimes in the trilogy parallels a process of self-discovery and transformation for both protagonists, Katya and Nayir. Katya is a female forensic scientist and a detective, who explores means of empowerment and struggles to overcome social abuse as a woman in Saudi Arabia. In addition to other female characters, she illustrates women’s efforts to achieve liberation and agency in a society that restricts women. She is an Arab/Muslim woman with a devout Muslim Lebanese father, a dead Russian mother and Saudi upbringing. Her first name is Western and symbolizes Western women’s progressiveness and liberation. Her surname ties her to a geographical zone in the heart of Arabia, Hijaz, which is known for its advancement and modernity in comparison to other Saudi regions. Thus, her name combines Western liberation and enlightenment and Arabian Hijazi authenticity. Katya resists patriarchy, inferior status, social strictness and limitations. For example, she refuses to adopt traditional women’s domestic role in Saudi Arabia. She defies local marriage conventions and works as a forensic scientist and a detective in a police station. However, she practices social reforms without rebelling against local norms or religious teachings.

Nayir also represents conflict between modernity and tradition. He works as a pathfinder, helping Saudi police find their way in the desert and discover traces of murderers in the sand. His search for routes in the obscure sands symbolizes his endeavor to redefine ideals of Saudi manhood to discover a means of achieving balance between social restrictions and advancement. Through his conflict between his belief in arranged marriage and his desire to marry a woman he loves, Nayir depicts Saudi men’s struggle and dilemma between their need for social advancement and their desire to maintain traditional superiority and advantages over women. Nayir’s failure in his previous engagement causes him to avoid repeating his mistakes. He falls in love with Katya, supports her quest for liberation and accepts her career as a detective. Nayir lives up to his name, an Arabic word for the illuminated and enlightened clever person, since he is the one who solves the crimes in Ferraris’s three novels. Like Katya, his surname

ties him to a geographical location: in Arabic *ash-Sharqi* is an adjective derived from the word *Sharq*, which means the East, and it labels a person who belongs to or comes from the East. This implies that, despite his attempts to alter social restrictions, he seeks authentic, rather than foreign, reforms. Despite their confusion and struggles, both protagonists maintain a balance between tradition and progression in conservative Saudi society.

Social Advancement: Respect of Cultural Codes

The trilogy presents Katya Hijazi as a paradigm of Saudi women who make use of newly introduced social liberation in the noughties, successfully blending modernity and tradition to improve their social status in terms of job culture, gender relations and participation in the public sphere. Omaima Abou-Bakr emphasizes the significance of “contemporary activist women” in Arab/Muslim societies because their emancipation is “embedded within indigenous structures,” rather than derived from “strictly Western liberal understanding of ‘empowerment’” (Loc 3588). For example, Katya, who is in her late-twenties and unmarried, breaks her engagement with her wealthy fiancé, Othman, because he cheated on her with Nouf *ash-Shrawi* and because she accepted his marriage proposal to gain social approval. She rebels against the concept of a traditionally arranged marriage and remains single in a society that acknowledges women through their relationships to men. Also, Katya challenges Saudi’s strict patriarchal society by working as a forensic scientist in a gender-mixed environment. Her job demands accompanying male detectives in police cars to interrogate female witnesses. She sometimes provides help for other detectives and assists them in solving mysteries related to their private lives, which threatens her reputation and her future career as a female detective. For instance, Katya accompanies her boss, Lieutenant Colonel Inspector Ibrahim Zahrani, to the house of his mistress, Sabria, to investigate her mysterious disappearance: “She told herself she was going along because if something bad had happened to Sabria, she would feel terrible knowing that she’d done nothing to help. But she was really doing this because Ibrahim was in charge of the serial-killer case, and if this was what it took to get in on the investigation, then she’d do it” (70). Another example is when Katya meets detective Ibrahim in the men’s toilet: “Being locked in a bathroom with a man at work would be enough to get her fired on the spot” (54). This makes her a representation of Hadley’s description of female

protagonist in detective fiction as “economically independent,” “intelligent and courageous” and “a fundamental challenge to the traditional role” (71). However, Katya respects Saudi dress-code – she wears “abaya,” the hijab, and “burqa” – and shows obedience to social rules, which allows her to gain social acceptance and her bosses’ acknowledgement.

Ferraris’s novels portray Katya’s success in balancing conservative cultural rules and modernity, as a means to achieving advancement in terms of women’s domestic role and in relationships between men and women. Sonbol clarifies that “the process of modernization in Gulf countries, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, has altered gendered relations and the relationship of the individual and the family” (“Introduction” Loc 454). Therefore, despite her professional success, Katya feels threatened by heterosexual romantic relationships and marriage because they could lead her to submit to patriarchal forces and be restricted to domestic roles. Sally Munt notes that heroines of detective fiction are typically threatened by “potential or actual male lovers,” who represent “a danger to the detective’s independence, or further, a physical menace” (41). Although she loves Nayir, his marriage proposal is a threat to Katya’s career. She describes her worries:

Nayir wasn’t the type to be comfortable with her working such long hours. And what if they started having children? How would she work and raise kids-and clean house and cook and tend lovingly to her husband’s needs? He had proposed marriage a month ago. It was a painfully long time to make a man wait, and she still hadn’t given him an answer. She didn’t have one. (45-46)

These questions illustrate the novels’ investigation of Katya’s future, as a representation of modern women in Saudi Arabia, as much as they examine and inspect crimes. Even though the novels indicate that only married women can work as detectives or forensic scientists, Katya lies to her superiors about her marital status to keep her job. After Nayir’s proposal, she explains to him that she will keep her job and that he will have to contribute to house chores and child rearing. This shows that despite her desire to be married, she still resists conventional social roles and she resists cultural patriarchy. Munt emphasizes that in detective fiction, there is pressure on women to marry “in order to achieve social creditability and ‘happiness’” (15). Katya is exposed to the conflict of either losing her job if she does not marry Nayir or losing her job if she

marries him and becomes hindered by her domestic role and childbearing: “She hadn’t wanted to face this moment because what was waiting for her here was a marriage proposal and the man she hoped she loved standing patiently at the edge of her life. Here also was her mind-numbing terror at losing her job” (46). This quotation illustrates Katya’s conflict between her awareness of social forces that necessitate marriage at a young age and her resistance to arranged marriage. This leads her to “hope” to fall in love with a suitable man – such as Nayir – who can fulfil the role of a husband without affecting her liberation and future ambitions negatively: “It had become clear to him over the past few days that he was going to have to do a lot of the work. Katya would be at the station all the time. He’d be the one to pick the kids up from school, cook their dinners, and put them to bed. That was not the setup God had intended, but it was going to be the thing that actually worked” (227-228). According to Katya’s perceptions, ideals of Saudi manhood should change to fit the new perception of modern women’s needs and to enable Saudi women to achieve liberation. Katya and Nayir symbolize Arab/Muslim feminist and activist ideology that encourages women’s participation in the actual interpretation of the Quran and its prescriptions for women and men’s social role instead of relying on a traditional and conservative understanding of Islamic teachings.

City of Veils presents detective Osama’s wife, Nuha, as another example of Saudi women who successfully negotiate balance between modernity and tradition in Saudi society. Nuha is a successful journalist who is concerned with women’s advancement in Saudi Arabia. Osama describes an article she writes for her journal: “she was working on a story about the Kingdom’s effort to encourage more women into the workplace” (121). Like Katya, she challenges social norms by not having an arranged marriage. Instead, she falls in love with Osama and they meet many times before they decide to be married: “Theirs hadn’t been a traditional courtship, no parents involved. They had met through friends and chosen each other. They had gone on dates, gotten to know each other, made the decision themselves” (202). This demonstrates that Osama and Nuha defy social norms when they gather with their other friends in a gender-mixed environment. Additionally, Nuha rejects rules of veiling. She does not wear the “burqa” or the veil. Osama describes her as “one of those determined women who insisted that one didn’t need to wear a burqa in Jeddah” (201-202). Like many Saudi women, Nuha struggles to achieve balance between child rearing, house chores,

taking care of her husband and managing her career. Because she wishes to pursue a career, she has one child and resists social forces that urge Arab women to undergo successive pregnancies that hinder professional success. Shereen El Feki's *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World* (2013) asserts that most Egyptian couples are expected to "produce a baby by their first wedding anniversary" (84). Moreover, El Feki emphasizes "the pressure on couples to reproduce" (102). It is noteworthy that Saudi and Egyptian social norms are similar in terms of sexuality, marriage, women's role in the domestic spheres, and ideals of womanhood. Osama describes Nuha's explanation of the burdens she endures and her inability to fulfil both domestic and work obligations: "she couldn't find it in herself to be a mother and a journalist and a wife and a lover and a daughter and a friend, cousin, aunt, sister, and all the other things she was everyday, because it was just too much" (303). This illustrates the challenges Saudi women face by being required to meet domestic and family obligations and accomplish simultaneous professional success. Nuha's situation underlines women's confusion because, like detective Osama, many Saudi men want their wives to be modern, liberated and radical and, at the same time, they want them to be conventional and conservative. This leads Nuha to using contraceptive pills without her husband's consent. In so doing, she challenges Arab/Muslim cultural and patriarchal rules that prohibit married women from using birth control without their husbands' permission.

Tradition Versus Modernity

City of Veils illustrates Saudi men's reluctance to revise their gender roles in order to adapt to Saudi women's attempts to achieve empowerment and agency. For example, the novel describes Osama as a liberated man who socializes in gender-mixed gatherings, falls in love, refuses arranged marriages and endorses women's participation in the public sphere. Nuha describes her husband's modern views in terms of defining women's role: "he wanted her to work, wanted the second income, wanted to be able to tell his friends that his wife did something important, that they were a modern couple and perfectly successful" (303). Also, he admits his disapproval of polygamy: "he didn't believe in taking a second wife" (310). This illustrates that Osama is not traditional in his perception of women's social rights. However, he becomes shocked when he realizes that his wife uses birth control. Osama accidentally discovers it when

he opens Nuha's handbag to read an excerpt of an essay she is writing. Instead, he finds contraceptive pills "shaped, like a flying saucer" (121). The quotation suggests that Osama's first reaction to this discovery is disbelief as the presence of these pills in his wife's handbag is as uncommon and impossible as the existence of flying saucers that signifies the presence of aliens. Comparing the pill container to a spaceship demonstrates Saudi man's perception of social changes as unimaginable. It also symbolizes local men's resistance to advancement of gender roles and women's emancipation in Saudi society. After realizing that these are contraceptive pills, Osama becomes saddened: "It was crushing him now to discover that he'd been the ignorant one." He continues: "Discovering something like this—oh, he saw it so clearly—opened a terrifying chasm of fury and distrust" (141).

Despite the novel's indication that he is liberated and modern, Osama's reaction to his wife's behaviour reveals many contradictions. First, it reveals his resistance to features of women's liberation. Secondly, it illustrates the fact that Osama defines his manhood against traditional patriarchal standards. Thirdly, he believes in male guardianship and superiority over women and he expects his wife to accept it as a sign of her virtue. After realizing that the pills are taken as a means of pregnancy prevention, Osama immediately invokes a stereotype of women who use contraception: "He'd seen these pills before—once on a prostitute he'd interrogated and once in the hands of a violent husband who'd killed his wife over a little disc almost exactly like this one" (140). This suggests that the pills cause Osama to compare his wife to prostitutes and he wishes to punish her for that. El Feki stresses that Arab societies reject the concept of contraception and associate women who prevent pregnancy with prostitutes (154). Hence, Osama's frustration and confusion represents Saudi men's uneasiness and reluctance to adopt liberated social norms, to give up patriarchy and to support Saudi women in their quest for autonomy.

The trilogy depicts different types of Saudi men to illustrate contradictory behaviour, patriarchy, and misogyny in Saudi society. The first example is Abdulrahman in *City of Veils*. He is a wealthy, conservative and strict man whose wife is limited to the domestic sphere and who attempts to enforce similar conditions of concealment and confinement on Leila, his sister. He uses his wealth to dominate female relatives, but Leila's financial independence restricts his control over her.

Faroooha, Leila's school friend, describes Abdulrahman's disapproval of Leila's liberation: "He didn't like her being out of the house, and he thought that filming people was inappropriate. I think he considered it an invasive act. He wanted Leila to get married again, this time to a good Jeddawi man. If he'd had his way." She continues: "I know he kept threatening to cut her off. You know he was supporting her" (158). Additionally, Abdulrahman hits his sister. During the interrogation, Bashir describes Leila's endurance of her brother's violence: "It's ironic that she went to him for protection when he was the one who beat the shit out of her" (203). Detective Osama is another example of an oppressive man because he attempts to use social rules to force Nuha to have more children. In so doing, he robs her of her physical agency over her body.

As part of its critique of social conventions, the trilogy's representation of arranged marriage describes it as a sign of tension between modernity and tradition, a sign of patriarchy and misogyny, and a symbol of conflict between women's liberation and emancipation. The novels achieve this by contrasting different examples of failing arranged marriages with successful love relationships that end in marriage. In *Finding Nouf*, Nouf is forced into an arranged marriage so her family can achieve more wealth and power. To avoid this wedding, she plans to run away from Qazi, her fiancé, once she arrives in America during their honeymoon. In *City of Veils*, Leila's marriage to her cousin Bashir is also arranged. Bashir relates the details of their marriage: "I think we got married to please her mother. She was dying of cancer and we just wanted her to be happy. We divorced a week after she died" (234). *Kingdom of Strangers* describes detective Ibrahim's arranged marriage to Jamila: "They had married at eighteen, by parental arrangement, just like Zaki" (155). He explains: "The real problem was that they'd been promised to each other since birth. Their mothers were best friends" (133). This leads Ibrahim to live a miserable life with a woman he does not love. Jamila, in compliance with patriarchal customs, attempts to force her young daughter into an arranged marriage to a wealthy man who "owns a textile factory and three cell phone stores, and his father has more money than anyone in the whole family" (117). However, Ibrahim refuses to allow his ten-year-old daughter to be married for any reason. Thus, the novels critique arranged marriages by associating them with abusive relationships and child marriage.

Romantic relationships that result in marriage are represented as a successful alternative to arranged marriage since they illustrate women's empowerment, ability to choose their spouses and determine their lifestyle. Nayir and Katya exemplify this kind of couple since they cooperate to make their future marriage suitable for Katya's work and they decide to share household chores and child rearing. Detective Osama and his wife Nuha, despite their dispute over contraception and pregnancy, provide another example of consensual marriage. Even though he is devastated when his wife refuses to have more children, detective Osama indicates that he needs time to adapt to social change and to his spouse's control over her body and life. This suggests that Saudi men take steady steps towards modernity and change even if this change requires time.

Women's Inferiority: Detective Fiction and Actual Life

In an attempt to investigate injustices practiced against women, Ferraris's trilogy reveals unequal employment conditions for men and women in Saudi Arabia. The novels display discrimination and injustices that Katya faces as a forensic scientist and a detective in the police station due to patriarchal job culture. Despite her intellect and hard work, she is viewed as inferior to her male colleagues and her status in the police station relies on the man in charge. Munt notes that, in detective fiction, women maintain a lower rank in comparison to their male colleagues (14). A good example of this is Katya's leading role and responsibilities when Ibrahim is assigned as the chief of the Osiris case. The case is named after the ancient Egyptian God, Osiris. Sa'ud, a retired colonel, explains to Katya and Nayir the rationale behind this name when they both visit him in his house to ask about details of the case Katya is working on: "Osiris was dismembered by Set, the god of the desert. He was cut into fourteen pieces and scattered over Egypt. His devoted lover, Isis, went looking, found the pieces, and reconstructed them for a proper burial. Only one part was missing" (221). Then Sa'ud indicates that the missing part of the god's body is the male organ, which suggests that the novel foreshadows the disappearance of male hegemony in Saudi society. Because the emasculation is of an Egyptian god's figure, the novel predicts women's success in achieving social empowerment through their ability to reinterpret religious scripts. Detective Ibrahim believes in the effectiveness of women in police work and he defends that when he explains: "I thought it was okay to hire women. I pushed to keep them on the force. I fought with my boss about it all the time. And there were just too many

people in the department who didn't like it and who thought I was improper" (237). When he is accused of adultery because of his relationship with Sabria and he is dismissed from the police, Katya is asked to restrict her work to gender-segregated rooms in the police station. Instead of participating in further detective work, she remains with other female forensic scientists. This demonstrates that Katya's job as a detective is insecure and relies on her boss' conventional or liberated beliefs. Daher, another male detective in the station, shows his scepticism about women's presence in the station: "I just don't think it is entirely comfortable for women to be working so closely with men" (237). Moreover, women and men do not share the same terms and conditions of work within the police station. For example, rules prohibit unmarried women from working in the station while men are not restricted by their marital status: "Faiza had been fired? She couldn't have done anything to merit that. 'Turns out she wasn't really married' the chief said" (172). This amplifies inequalities in job conditions and keeps men in control at work.

Although the trilogy criticizes oppression of women and highlights their struggle for authority, *Finding Nouf*, *City of Veils*, and *Kingdom of Strangers* present female detectives as inferior to men and incapable of solving their cases without men's assistance. The novels provide many examples that demonstrate Katya's inferiority as a female detective and highlight her need for a male partner to solve mysteries and to protect her in crime scenes. For instance, Katya relies on Nayir's expertise in the analysis of collected evidence and interrogations, and for protection against dangers during her search for proofs. At the end of each novel, Nayir solves the crime, which demonstrates Katya's intellectual inability as a detective and her physical and mental reliance on a man. An example of this in *Finding Nouf* is when Nayir looks for Nouf in the desert, finds her body, interrogates Othman and Nouf's sister, Abir, and solves the mystery behind Nouf's romantic relationship and pregnancy. At the end of the novel, Katya sends evidence to her boss and reveals to him that Nayir is the one who solved the crime. She suggests to Nayir that he should consider working as an investigator for the police department: "the division could use an investigator like you. Have you ever considered working for the government?" (302). In *City of Veils*, detective Osama confirms Nayir's efforts too when he greets him: "By the way, congratulations on your success with the Nouf Shrawi case" (280). This confirms that the novel represents female detectives as incapable to fulfill the demands of their jobs without men's help.

City of Veils also provides examples of female detectives' inferiority and men's superiority. This is demonstrated when Katya fails to interrogate Miriam Walker without Nayir's help and translation – from Arabic to English and vice versa. When Nayir becomes more involved in the investigations, he finds out about Eric Walker and Leila Nawar's marriage, discovers the CD that has the photos of the ancient version of the Quran that is discovered in remote ruins in Yemen, saves Miriam Walker in the desert after being kidnapped by Apollo Mabus, the man who murders Eric and his friend Jacob, and finally, Nayir helps in capturing Mabus. In *Kingdom of Strangers*, Nayir helps Katya recognize the pattern within the burial of the victims' bodies. Katya displays her inability in analyzing evidence when she comments: "It looks like the killer just dumped them there" (169). Hence, Nayir belittles her ability to analyze a crime scene as he asks: "So this killer takes a great deal of time plotting out a hexagonal burial pattern, and then he simply tosses the bodies into their graves?" (169). As these examples suggest, the trilogy portrays Katya's intellectual inferiority and physical incapability. This indicates the importance of having a male guardian that provides her with protection. Nayir becomes Katya's chauffeur who drives her to investigations and her guard because he guarantees her safety. An example of this is when Nayir drives Katya to the bird shop, where the murderer of Sabria buys his birds. They chase him to his residence in Taif and search the mansion for any evidence or clue on Sabria's disappearance. Finally, Nayir protects Katya from the murderer's bodyguards when she digs Sabria's body from the wealthy murderer's garden under the newly planted rose bush. This draws attention to two major facts: the first is that female writers, despite their critique of patriarchy, reproduce a culture that emphasizes women's inferiority and dependence. The second factor is that Ferraris's depiction of Katya's subordination and weakness might be affected by the image of Saudi women's marginalization and disenfranchisement, rather than women's inferiority.

Chastity Versus Eroticism

The trilogy underlines the contradiction between private eroticism and public chastity of women in Saudi society. El Feki highlights injustices that women are exposed to by emphasizing that women's "sexual needs, beyond reproduction, were ignored or suppressed, held to double standards of virginity before marriage and chastity ever after" (22). Furthermore, Hibba Abugideiri highlights Gulf women's extreme devotion

and endeavour to please their husbands sexually by describing the dangerous processes women endure to satisfy their spouses and meet their desires. She demonstrates how women jeopardise their safety by packing their vaginas with salt to “shrink and tighten the vagina for male sexual pleasure after child birth” (Loc 3359). Eleanor T. Calverley’s *My Arabian Days and Nights: A Medical Missionary in Old Kuwait* (1958) stresses that “Mothers were told that they would be ‘ruined’ for future marital relations unless this drastic treatment were endured” (149). This suggests that Gulf women in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are encouraged to prioritize their sexual role and to be physically appealing, which contradicts other social demands that they safeguard their chastity and conservatism. In the trilogy, this contradiction is portrayed through the conflict between the required chastity of strict Islamic dress in the public sphere and the depiction of the erotic undergarments in the lingerie shop in *City of Veils*, the affair between Detective Ibrahim and Sabria in *Kingdom of Strangers*, and in *Kingdom of Strangers*’ depiction of sex slavery and physical exploitation of female expatriates in the house of Halifi – Sabria’s sponsor and the man who rapes her before she runs away from his house. These illustrations of women’s expected eroticism in Ferraris’s novels contradicts with Saudi social requirements of women’s chastity and modesty.

The trilogy examines contradictions between appearance and reality and between modernization and tradition, which underlines women’s challenges and progression in post-9/11 Saudi Arabia. In an interview by Mitzi Brunsdale, Ferraris highlights that Saudi society suffers from contradictory forces and is torn between “technological advances like cell phones, FaceBook, and Bluetooth” and “cherishing their Islamic traditions” (n. pag.). An example of this inconsistency in *City of Veils* is Abdulrahman’s, Leila’s brother, lingerie shop. It signifies sexuality and eroticism, which contradicts with ideals of Saudi womanhood, like chastity and piety. Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013) emphasizes the contradictions in Arab/Muslim societies by asserting that to women and girls’ “honor and sexual virtue were central to the social imagination” and constitute “the subject of constant discussion” (116). Despite this obligatory chastity of Saudi women, the lingerie shop reveals social expectations that mandate women to be erotic and seductive in the private sphere. Different kinds of lingerie shops have always existed in Saudi Arabia to satisfy women’s different tastes, social classes and needs. For example, French and European brands have been available in exquisite boutiques and sold by foreign Arab male shop

assistants, mostly Egyptians or Lebanese. A cheaper quality lingerie that is imported from India or Syria is also accessible for a wider variety of women. In the noughties, governmental regulations obligated the presence of female shop assistants in lingerie shops to provide more job opportunities for Saudi women and to promote decency, since many women find it awkward to discuss their preferences of undergarments with men.

City of Veils presents the lingerie shop as a sign of women's objectification. Crime investigations that take place in the shop symbolize a questioning of social norms and injustices. Unveiling mysterious and private sexual expectations of Saudi women through different types of erotic underwear is compared to the disclosure of crimes. The arrangement and poses of mannequins in the shop, run only by men, suggests that definitions of Saudi women's social and sexual roles are determined by men to ensure their dominance and superiority and women's obedience and inferiority. This becomes obvious when Osama buys Nuha's lingerie prior to their wedding as an indication of her lack of sexual authority. This is also illustrated in the novel's descriptions of the lingerie shop during the interrogations of Leila's murder: "Six enormous front windows displayed manikins in corsets and garters, one female manikin holding a whip above a second one who wore a burqa (but nothing else) and who was kneeling abjectly on the floor" (88). The naked mannequin in a "burqa" marks the contradiction between sexuality and religious conservatism in Saudi society. It could also indicate that conservatism is utilised to control women. Furthermore, its kneeling is expressive of women's suppression and lower status. The shop symbolizes differences between public and private life, between words and deeds, and mostly between Saudi women's desexualisation of appearance through the veil and "abaya" and their sexy appearance underneath Islamic dress. The novel provides another description of the shop: "The next window showed three manikins standing in a row. Behind them a neon green poster announced *Latest Syrian Thrills!* The manikins were wearing technology treats: a bra made of power cords, a cell phone covering each breast, a BlackBerry thong" (88). The text draws contradictory images of Saudi society. Hence it describes it as rich and benefiting from Western technology. However, it simultaneously depicts its backward social norms and conservatism that distinguishes it from other societies. For example, the novel highlights the blending of sex and technology, which stands for Saudi openness to the West in the noughties. Conversely, it depicts Saudi social scepticism

about technology or foreign trends by showing that local culture associates eroticism and sexuality with technology. Thus, the novel underlines conflict between economic advantages and conservative ideals in Saudi society. The presence “*Syrian Thrills*” indicates that Saudi society considers itself too pious and conservative to produce erotic trends, which leads Saudis to import them from surrounding countries. It highlights the contrast of Saudi strictness to other Arab/Muslim societies, which emphasizes the contradiction between superficial piousness and sexualized reality.

The lingerie shop emphasizes men’s conflict of ideals in Saudi society. The novel illustrates Osama’s embarrassment at watching the windows of the lingerie shop in the presence of his veiled female colleague, Faiza: “It wasn’t the ridiculousness of it that made him laugh, it was the knowledge that Faiza was standing beside him, staring at two computer mice strapped to the manikin’s firm butt cheeks beneath a sign that read *Click Me, Baby!*” (88). This illustrates men’s dilemma between appreciating the shop as an expression of their social privilege and conservatism as a social requirement. The novel provides another conflicting image of Saudi social devoutness, signified in the religious police’s reaction to items displayed in the window of the lingerie shop and how they remove signs of eroticism by applying a black spray on the shop windows as punishment for subversion: “There was a residue of black around the window’s edges, where no doubt some religious policeman had spray-painted the glass to cover the atrocity and where the owners had removed the paint incompletely” (88).²⁸ The novel underlines contradictions in Saudi customs: “women could confer with men in whispers about their panty preferences and cup sizes and which of the dazzling variety of erotic ‘looks’ they preferred in the bedroom” (85-86). This demonstrates that even though women endorse extreme Islamic-dress and display modesty, they have to discuss their preferences with strange male shop assistants in lingerie shops, which marks conflict in Saudi society.

Rejection of Local Culture: Social Punishment

Finding Nouf, *City of Veils*, and *Kingdom of Strangers* shed light on the social punishment of women who challenge social patriarchy by going against their

²⁸ In Saudi Arabia, Islamic religious police, or *mutawwun*, are governmental clerics that are appointed to maintain religious and conservative behaviour in public areas.

indigenous culture. This supports Munt's argument that crimes committed against women in detective fiction express social wrongs (65). The first example is Nouf ash-Shrawi in *Finding Nouf*. The victim is a Saudi teenager from a wealthy and powerful family. She attempts to achieve liberation and overcome imprisonment to fulfil her dreams of travelling to America to pursue her education in zoology. Muhammad, Nouf's driver, explains to Nayir: "Nouf's parents would never let her leave the country, especially to go to America! All she wanted was to go to school, to study zoology, and then she was going off to live in the wild somewhere" (102). Nouf attempts to transcend gender limitations and social inequality in Saudi society. This is demonstrated through a story that Othman, the Shrawi's adopted son, relates to Nayir: "She loved it when I told her about the different fish. There was one fish here, we used to see it all the time. It's a grouper of some sort, and the thing about groupers is that they're all born female, and when they get older, some of them turn into males." He continues: "She loved that. She said she wanted to be just like the grouper, so when she grew up she could act like a man" (268). This story underlines Nouf's desire to become a man to flee the limitations imposed on women. Despite Nouf's desire for gender equality, she is hindered by social rules that force her to become engaged to her rich cousin, Qazi, to follow in the footsteps of other women in her family and society. Muhammad, her private chauffeur, explains to Nayir Nouf's view of her restrictions: "All her friends at school get to go to London and New York. They're rich kids, just like Nouf, and they go wherever they want" (102). This reveals that Nouf suffers from two types of limitations. The first is her restriction to her family, city and country. The second is her imprisonment in her female body and the disadvantages associated with it.

In reaction to social disenfranchisement and cultural inequality, Nouf decides to exercise physical agency, violate cultural rules and provoke social contempt and family rage. She falls in love with her adopted brother, develops a relationship with him, loses her virginity and becomes pregnant outside marriage. After that, she plans to flee from her family and country. She arranges to escape once she reaches America with Qazi on their honeymoon through the help of an American, Eric, whom she frequently meets to prepare her formal documents of immigration. Nouf's first violation of cultural law is ignoring what Anastasia Valassopoulos' *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2008) describes as Arab women's understanding and acceptance of "what it means to be a 'woman', a 'girl' or a 'prostitute'" (32). Nouf rejects

Arab/Muslim “conventional images of accusation and blame: honour = female; responsibility for sexual initiation = male; woman who sleeps with another man regardless of her reasons = bitch” (Valassopoulos 132). Finally, Nouf disregards what Lindsey Moore, in her *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2008), describes as “women’s embodied burden of honour and shame” (9). This becomes vivid when Abir describes to Nayir her sister’s violations of chastity rules: “‘she was still using Qazi.’ Her voice was shrill now. ‘Still lying to him and sleeping with another man!’” (294). Also, Abir declares: “I knew what she was doing, sneaking around and having sex with Muhammad” (287). As a result, Nouf is brutally murdered by her sister, which symbolizes her social punishment for committing adultery and violating social and cultural rules.

City of Veils presents Leila Nawar as another example of Saudi women who seek liberation through rebellion against their Arab/Muslim cultural codes. Leila is a divorced woman in her late twenties, who lives in her brother’s house and is subject to strict patriarchal rules against which she revolts. Bashir, Leila’s ex-husband, describes her condition in her brother’s house: “He keeps his wife locked up in that prison of a house and he would have kept Leila locked up, too, but she wasn’t afraid of him” (237). Leila defies cultural rules that obligate obedience to male guardians. Farooqa describes Leila’s revolting against Saudi dress-code: “She let her cloak hang open so people could see that she was the kind of person who would do whatever she liked” (182). Leila also violates rules of chastity and gender segregation. This happens during one of her interviews, when she meets Eric Walker and eventually falls in love and marries him, which is considered a violation of Saudi religious and social rules. In *Finding Nouf*, Nayir ash-Sharqi demonstrates Saudi social fury and dismay at Arab/Muslim women’s relationships with Western men: “Muslim women were not allowed to marry infidels” (101). Furthermore, Leila’s rebellion against Saudi culture is signified by her job in a “media network in Dubai” (195). She works as a commentator on a documentary program that demands she appear in public places with a camera to record misbehaviour in Saudi Arabia, such as “drivers doing their ‘drifting’ thing on the freeways,” or interviewing “a woman who claimed to be a prostitute” (181). Leila “began going after anything that was controversial. Abused housemaids. Sex slaves. Men who marry twenty wives” (181). Finally, she “started visiting brothels and women’s shelters” (156). The novel suggests that despite social strictness and patriarchy in Saudi Arabia,

women can challenge traditions. Eventually, Leila makes her recordings available to an international audience. This demonstrates that Leila casts Saudi behaviour in a negative light that provokes social outrage. Faroooha explains to Katya that Leila's rationale for making such films is to show the contradictions between liberation in modern Jeddah – that is viewed by Saudis as morally corrupt – and holiness of the nearby religious city, Mecca, a site of pilgrimage visited by millions of Muslims yearly. Faroooha further elaborates to describe Leila's behaviour: "She loved this contradiction, the idea of sending people to Mecca through the Saudi equivalent of Monaco or Las Vegas" (181). This reveals Leila's fondness of the Western trends and social features available in Jeddah society that contradict Saudi conservatism and piety. Finally, Faroooha reveals: "Uncovering all of this city's unsavory behaviors became an obsession for her" (156). Leila's behaviour suggests that despite superficial endorsement of conventional traditionalism, Saudi women question social values, criticise them and sometimes rebel against them.

Leila's challenge to ideals of Saudi womanhood exposes her to social outrage and condemnation. Faroooha describes people's reactions and rage at Leila filming in public places because taking photos or recording video, especially of women, is considered taboo according to Saudi cultural laws. It also violates people's privacy and challenges women's concealment: "She was filming birds down at the Corniche one afternoon, and some woman noticed that Leila was filming her and she sent her husband to take care of it. The husband came after her and beat her up. He destroyed her camera *and* the film" (93). Faroooha adds: "She got attacked twice. One time some guy threw the camera in the ocean and physically assaulted her. He broke her leg." Afterwards, Faroooha resumes: "Another time, some guy grabbed her. If he'd been any bigger, he would have done some damage, but she managed to get away, although the guy followed her until she flagged down a cab" (157). Faroooha also highlights the misogyny in Saudi society that is provoked by Leila's behaviour: "There were plenty of people who might have wanted to harm her, aside from the larger-than-average number of men in this city who want to harm women whether they carry cameras or not" (157). This all illustrates Leila's exposure of Saudis' inappropriate behaviour in a society that is known for its conservatism and respect for privacy. In reaction to her indifference towards social and cultural rules, Fuad, her brother's assistant and a salesman in the lingerie shop, expresses his contempt, during the police interrogation after Leila's death, by

saying: “She had no virtue!” and “She was a bitch” (313). Later, when he admits to killing Leila, Fuad describes his rationale: “I kept thinking: This is Abdulrahman’s sister. She’s a fucking liar and a user, and she thinks she’s a virtuous woman. She really thinks that. But she was filthy” (318). This reveals that women’s rebellion against social conservatism causes women to lose social status and respect. This also indicates that he does not regret killing her or torturing her because he believes that women who do not conform to social and patriarchal rules do not deserve to live.

Details of Leila’s murder can be interpreted as a social punishment that results from cultural misogyny and patriarchy. Fuad describes the different steps of murdering Leila: “I grabbed the only thing I could find-this old ‘*iqal*’ that was hanging on a hook-and I started trying to hit her arms, to get her to drop the shit she was throwing at me. By then I was really angry. I wanted to hurt her.” Then he continues: “I couldn’t stop. I kept stabbing her. I just kept stabbing” (319). After stabbing her, he breaks her neck and heats oil to pour on her face: “So no one would know who she was” (320). After that he dumps her body into the sea to get rid of it. The method of Leila’s murder is symbolic of social patriarchy and misogyny. First, Fuad starts hitting her with his *iqal*, which is a garment Saudi men wear on the white head cloth to signify the honour derived from their women’s purity and chastity. This also reveals that using an old *iqal* in Leila’s punishment and murder symbolizes women’s suffering by traditional patriarchal cruelty. Her attempts to throw dishes and pots on him signify trying to overcome her abuse and limitation to the private sphere. Holding Leila’s hand and stopping her from defending herself also stands for patriarchal domination and control over her attempts to gain liberation. Fuad’s pouring of hot cooking oil on Leila’s face to conceal her identity is a means of punishing her unveiled face. His anger and repeated stabbing of Leila’s female body stand for social misogyny and hatred to women.

The third woman who revolts against social rules and suffers social disdain and punishment is Amina in *Kingdom of Strangers*. Amina is a middle-aged married woman who belongs to a middle-class family. She endures different forms of domination, such as domesticity, immobility and enslavement to patriarchal rules. At the beginning of the novel, Amina needs to go shopping to pick a birthday present for her niece and to help in the preparation for the birthday party. Because women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, she needs a male driver to take her to different places, she needs a male

family member to escort her, and, above all, she needs her husband's permission to leave the house. Amina's inability to find anyone to drive her or escort her forces her to run out and catch a taxi against the wish of Rashid, her husband: "Rashid hated it when she took taxis. It was unsafe to get in a car with a strange man, especially a foreigner. It wasn't so bad if she were with friends, but she was absolutely never allowed to do it alone" (43). Thus, Amina violates social and patriarchal rules by not following her male guardian's orders and being in a taxi with a stranger, which breaks the rules of gender segregation as well. Consequently, as a symbol of social punishment, Amina is kidnapped by the misogynist serial killer. One of her hands is severed and dumped downtown while she is still alive. Eventually, the murderer kills her and puts her other severed hand in his fridge as a totem while her body is never found. Detectives suspect that the killer utilizes her body to form a new religious sentence that starts with the letter A: "Katya suspected that he had already buried Amina somewhere after posing her body in a straight line-the shape of an A" (286). In the same novel, Sabria also dies because of her rebellion against social corruption since she supports raped Filipinas by blackmailing rich rapists, as a form of revenge, and by paying the victims money as compensation for the harm they are exposed to. Sabria is killed and buried in Taif under a rose bush as punishment for her subversive behaviour. This underlines that obedience to social rules and enduring patriarchy are important requirements and expectations of women, without which they are punished severely.

Blending Modernity and Tradition

Kingdom of Strangers presents Saffanah, the daughter-in-law of detective Ibrahim who is also Katya's boss, as another woman who violates social rules and who blends subversion and obedience to Saudi social rules. Superficially, Saffanah seems to be the ideal woman: "righteous, religious, praying five times a day, and asking him to take her to Mecca once a week?" (14). Saffanah epitomizes chastity and purity according to Saudi and Arab/Muslim standards of women's appropriateness. She also endorses ideals of devoutness that grant her Saudi social respect. She wears the hijab and the "burqa," that conceal her: "Not a single piece of skin was showing anywhere on her body; her burqa was an impenetrable slab of black, and she was wearing socks and gloves" (17). She respects social rules through her physical posture: "her posture said everything. She slunk down in her chair, arms curled around her torso, head bowed. Saffanah- 'pearl'"

(17). Through bowing, she illustrates obedience and modesty. By endorsing Islamic dress and conservative manners, she depicts chastity. An example of her conservative behaviour is that she refuses to reveal contours of her body when she refuses to wear seat belt. She explains this: “because the belt might outline her body and any man in a passing car would be able to see her shape, and that was unacceptable” (19). This makes Saffanah a representation of the Saudi women’s archetype: the concealed pearl. Despite her superficial piety that indicates submissiveness to cultural and religious rules, Saffanah confesses to losing her virginity and becoming pregnant during a non-marital, sexual relationship. This indicates that although she has premarital sex, Saffanah is genuinely pious as she demonstrates regret for having this relationship. It displays Saudi women’s struggle between social conformity and modernity. It is significant to note that what Saudi society considers ideals of womanhood, Western views consider marginalization and domination of women. The novel highlights a contradiction between reality and appearance by stressing that although she seems ideal, Saffanah defies rules of chastity. By showing that even though Saffanah has non-marital sex and becomes pregnant outside of marriage, she is pious and conservative. Although she seems superficially pious according to a local viewpoint, from a Western perspective, she is oppressed.

Oppression of Western Women

By depicting Miriam Walker as an oppressed woman, *City of Veils* underlines Western women’s inferior status after arriving in Jeddah. The novel indicates that Miriam Walker’s abuse is a result of local social patriarchy and misogyny. It illustrates how Miriam is compelled to follow her husband’s job in Saudi Arabia: “She didn’t like that he’d chosen Saudi Arabia, even if it was only for a year” (12). Yet, there is no further evidence that discloses any previous abuse in America. This implies that Miriam’s oppression by Eric Walker, her husband, is a result of the local marginalization of women. After arriving in Saudi Arabia, Miriam is exposed to different kinds of abuse. For example, she endures imprisonment and restriction to the domestic sphere: “As they walked back to the apartment, she tried to prepare for the shock of confinement. When Eric was at work, she found it difficult to leave the house” (34). This isolation occurs because she cannot drive or move around Jeddah. It also highlights the importance of the presence of a male guardian, as women in Saudi Arabia rely on a male family

member to escort them outside. Apollo Mabus, an Egyptian man she meets on her plane back to Jeddah, describes women's imprisonment in Saudi Arabia: "what do you do with yourself all day when you're not allowed to leave the house, drive a car, or even ride a fucking bicycle?" (12). Eric's frequent absences and long working hours keep her imprisoned at home. For example, when Eric disappears for four days, Miriam remains home and she waits for him helplessly without being able to leave the house even to buy food.

Like Mantel's and Einion's Western protagonists, Miriam faces infantilization as a sign of their inferior status. An example of this is when she is not allowed to leave the airport without a male guardian, which forces her to remain in the airport until Eric arrives to pick her up hours after her arrival. Miriam expresses resentment of this situation: "She felt like a child again, the one feeling she hated above all others. Everything about this country was designed to infantilize women" (29). Being compelled to wear the veil and the hijab is an additional sign of Miriam's oppression: "Eric had bought it for her. He hadn't noticed the eye-slit detail until he had brought it home and she had put it on. Embarrassed but amused, he had encouraged her to think of it as sunglasses. *Bastard*" (16). This quotation indicates that Eric ignores Miriam's disenfranchisement in Saudi Arabia. Eventually, Miriam becomes used to Islamic dress, for example, when she arrives in Jeddah airport from a vacation in America, she feels uncomfortable without the "burqa": "she dropped her passport in the well beneath the bulletproof window and reluctantly removed her burqa so the guard could see her face. She felt suddenly exposed and could feel the stares of the men around her" (16). Additionally, Eric deprives Miriam of living in compounds assigned for Western communities in Saudi Arabia where life is similar to life in the West: "women could wander around freely, walk their poodles, and lounge in their swimming pools" (33). He forces her to live among Saudis and adopt their cultural conduct. He explains to her his rationale: "He respected Muslim culture and wanted to be a part of it, at least while they were here" (32). This illustrates that despite her education, liberation in her own society and her job as a doctor, Miriam gives in to her husband's conservatism, social patriarchy and inferior status in Jeddah.

In contrast to Miriam's submissiveness in *City of Veils, Kingdom of Strangers* presents Dr. Charlie Becker as an illustration of Western women's defiance and

resistance to patriarchy and marginalization. Dr. Charlie Becker is a female American detective brought in to aid the Saudi police in solving the mysterious Osiris crime committed by an unknown serial killer. Because of her androgynous name and title, she is mistaken for a man in the police station. Katya describes how this allows her to overcome discrimination against women in Saudi job cultures: “It was clear from Riyadh’s voice that he’d had no idea that Dr. Becker was a woman until she’d arrived at his office” (35). Her feminine physical features and attractiveness conflict with her androgynous name: “Dr. Charlie Becker walked into the room. Her face was a clean porcelain, her button-down shirt almost a mockery of Saudi manhood: white and loose, but clinging in just the right places. She wasn’t even wearing a head scarf, and her long auburn hair had a springy quality that made it seem alive whenever she moved her head” (35). The quotation underlines Dr. Becker’s challenge to Saudi social strictness that is known for its full domination of women’s dress-code. Further, Katya’s description of Dr. Becker’s hijabless hair symbolizes her liberation, in contrast with other Saudi and Western dominated women in the trilogy.

Ferraris novels distinguish between femininity and feminism through demonstrating that one results in disenfranchisement and the other agency and power. It also illustrates the contrast between them in terms of politics of body, sexuality and agency. Clare Hanson emphasizes that “Feminism/femininity has been a foundational binary opposition.” She adds that “Feminism has always defined itself against femininity” (“Fiction, Feminism and Femininity” 25). The trilogy presents Dr. Charlie Becker, in *Kingdom of Strangers*, as a representation of Western feminism that defines itself against femininity represented in Miriam Walker in *City of Veils*. Although *City of Veils* does not discuss Miriam’s life in America, the novel demonstrates that she becomes exposed to disempowerment in Jeddah. For instance, she gives up her job as a doctor and follows her husband to Jeddah, becoming a housewife restricted to the domestic sphere. This is demonstrated through her declaration to Nayir and Katya when they visit her for the interrogation: “I’m really sorry I don’t have any tea or coffee in the house. Could I get you guys some water?” (154). This indicates that Miriam became dependent on Eric to provide her with food and other needs, and in escorting her in the outside world, which makes her comparable to Saudi women.

The novel depicts Miriam's physical features and Nayir's affection for her beauty as a woman. As part of her feminine appearance, she is depicted as vulnerable and adorably attractive to men: "Her profile had the delicately rounded edges of a line script cut into a marble wall. Against the paleness of her skin, her lips were bright red and he wondered, so fleetingly it might have been a spasm, what it would be like to kiss a mouth that small" (152). Through describing her as a marble sculptured figure, the novel compares her to a beautiful, yet lifeless, statue. This underlines Miriam's passive reactions to conservative social roles. The novel depicts Miriam as submissive and kissed, which highlights her physical subordination as a woman and Nayir's domination and superiority as a man. Miriam's small mouth is a sign of her mute obedience to social conventions. *City of Veils* portrays Nayir's satisfaction with Miriam's behaviour and his attraction to her because of his supremacy over her, in contrast to Katya's powerfulness. This aggravates Katya's jealousy: "She pictured Miriam, so petite and exotically lovely with her great blue eyes, black lashes, and cheeks as white and delicate as butterfly wings. And Nayir, who had suddenly become cold to Katya and, in some perverse but appropriate twist, become uncommonly responsive to Miriam, protective and kind, not judgmental at all" (156). Miriam's small physique stands for women's vulnerability in contrast to men's hegemony. After she knows about her husband's death, Miriam waits for her brother to escort her back to America, which underlines her dependence on men. By describing Miriam as a beautiful passive woman, the novel critiques femininity and indicates that it is responsible for women's marginalization.

Kingdom of Strangers presents Dr. Charlie Becker as a representation of women who challenge social patriarchy and male domination in the public sphere. She arrives alone in Jeddah, after occupying a job in Dubai, and is assigned as the boss of many male detectives. By remaining unveiled, she goes against politics of dress-code and gender segregation in the public sphere, which makes her the centre of Saudi men's gaze in a strict society and a male-oriented profession. By turning down male colleagues' offers to socialize or date, Dr. Becker resists conventional gender roles and male domination over her body. Instead, she helps Katya and socializes with her, which reveals that she seeks empowerment through professional success, instead of physical attraction and sexual allure: "The men at the office keep asking me out" (109). Dr. Becker resents the sexual harassment she faces: "It's hard to get any work done when you've got to field the sex stuff all the damn time. I'm sorry, I don't mean to criticize.

I'm just—I'm getting sick of it already" (109). This demonstrates that, unlike Miriam who prefers to seek Nayir's help, Dr. Becker spends time with Katya and provides her with help and support in the male-dominated job they both do. She symbolizes Toril Moi's view that femininity is the dark Other of feminism (108). This contrast also suggests that women's means of survival is self-empowerment and female solidarity rather than their attachment or attractiveness to men.

Ferraris novels represent relationships with men, specifically marriage, as dangerous to women since it threatens their liberation and enslaves them to patriarchy for the sake of romance or social security and acknowledgement. The trilogy indicates that marriage is unsafe for women due to men's betrayal. An example of this is Miriam, who is emotionally insecure because of Eric's frequent disappearances and mysterious behaviour. When she calls Eric's office to ask about him and to make sure of his safety, the lady who answers the phone explains possible reasons for Eric's absence: "I knew a nurse from Australia whose husband left her. He disappeared just like that." Then the lady in the office continues: "Turns out he was having an affair with his *maid*" (58). Later, when Miriam visits the house of her husband's friend, Jacob, to ask about Eric, Jacob's wife describes similar fears and suspicions of polygamy or infidelity: "I've always been afraid that Jacob would bring home a second wife" (91). Eric further feeds her insecurities about unfaithfulness when he teases her by discussions of his probable marriage to another woman: "The good news is, she's Saudi, and she does all the cooking and cleaning, so now you're off the hook" (35). Eventually, Eric marries Leila through a *misyar* marriage during Miriam's visit to America and she finds out about it accidentally through a marriage certificate that Nayir translates for her after Eric's disappearance.²⁹ After facing different kinds of abuse by Eric in Saudi Arabia, Miriam regrets her acceptance of his decision to come to Saudi Arabia: "how foolish she was for allowing herself to put up with it, especially for a man" (14). *Kingdom of Strangers* presents Dr. Becker as a powerful woman who does not seek marriage or relationships with men. By associating marriage with women's abuse and marginalization, the trilogy indicates that women gain empowerment through financial independence and revolting

²⁹ Nayir explains the concept of *misyar* marriage to Miriam as "a temporary marriage license that men and women sometimes used when they didn't want to commit to a full marriage" (216).

against patriarchal injustices, rather than seeking acknowledgement and identity through their relationships with men.

Kingdom of Strangers highlights the significance and effectiveness of transnational and transcultural women's solidarity and sisterhood in achieving women's empowerment and in overcoming patriarchy. For example, Dr. Becker defends her female colleagues against men's discrimination in the police station. She supplies Katya with official documents related to the investigation that male detectives keep for themselves: "Dr. Becker provided me this morning with the most up-to-date profile of our man, and I'm going to make sure you all get a copy" (150-151). In return, Katya supplies Dr. Becker with information, translates documents and introduces her to aspects of Saudi culture she needs to understand to be able to solve the crimes. Finally, when Saudi detectives refuse to follow Dr. Becker's instructions, she decides to team up with Katya to do her work: "I say screw it, we can do this ourselves" (315). This demonstrates how Katya and Dr. Becker develop a comradeship and defend each other against dominating patriarchy, which illustrates the importance of women's solidarity. This distinguishes Ferraris's representation of the relationship between Saudi women and Western women from that of Mantel and Einion. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street's* Western protagonist expresses superiority over Arab/Muslim women even though she undergoes similar living conditions and *Inshallah's* Amanda presents Saudi women as nasty and mean, which prevents the white Western female protagonist from forming relationships with them. Therefore, Ferraris's trilogy suggests that women's solidarity, professional success, self-reliance and financial independence are the factors that lead to women's safety and success rather than marriage or romance.

Orientalism

Despite their effect in rectifying Saudi women's image in the West, Ferraris's novels provide an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia and Saudis. The trilogy was published and marketed in the West to satisfy white audience's eagerness to become better informed about the East. In *Rethinking Orientalism* (2004), Reina Lewis describes books that were published in the West to illustrate the Orient since the first half of the twentieth century: "In order to pique the West's interest the packaging of a book was all important" (33). As part of that "packaging," the titles of Ferraris novels follow the Orientalist tradition of representing the East as exotic and mysterious.

Finding Nouf represents the Occidental desire to discover the mysteries of Saudi women's lives. *City of Veils* reproduces stereotypes of Middle-Eastern women as concealed and hidden behind veils or in gender-segregated spaces from intruding gazes. *Kingdom of Strangers* highlights the white man's alienation in Arab/Muslim societies. The three titles indicate Ferraris peeking into the forbidden premises of Saudi women's private lives and revealing their hidden secrets. The novels provide mysterious details of unusual people in big lavish mansions and intriguing features of veiled women. Hence, Ferraris's trilogy satisfies the curiosity of twenty-first-century Western readers whose curiosity is further stimulated about Arab/Muslim countries and post-9/11 Middle-Eastern societies.

Ferraris declares that her trilogy intends to narrate the Second World to a First World audience. In a newspaper interview by David B. Green, she announces: "What I feel is that there's so much that Americans don't know, and so much they need to know - namely the basics, like how people live, and basic rules and customs. These are things that most people don't have a handle on. So, my primary aim has been to open up the door a little bit" (n. pag.). This quotation illustrates that Ferraris writes for an American readership to amend predominant stereotyping of Saudis. She achieves this by illustrating Saudi women's struggle for empowerment and social justice to her Western audience. However, through her employment of detective fiction, Ferraris provides a representation of Saudi Arabia as a mysterious and fearful land. Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda, and Barbara Pezzotti argue that this depiction of the unknown foreign land transforms modern foreign crime fiction written by Western writers into "a new form of travel writing, allowing readers to embark on 'journeys' (from the comfort of their armchairs) not so much to explore new geographies or recently 'discovered' countries as to scrutinize different cultures and societies and, in so doing, to better define themselves" (1-2). This illustrates that despite Ferraris's endeavor to improve images of Saudi society, she ends up providing an Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia and this Orientalism is articulated through the genre.

Ferraris's Orientalist representation is a contemplation of her personal experience as a white woman in Saudi Arabia. In a *BookBrowse* interview with Zoe Ferraris, she describes Saudi women's imprisonment in Jeddah: "Women weren't allowed to leave the house alone" (n. pag.). She also underlines women's entrapment in

Saudi Arabia by describing how she was forced to spend a year in Jeddah, while her husband took her home to meet his family. She spent a couple of weeks in the Saudi city and remarks on how women need travel permits issued by their husbands to leave the country: “It turns out that you can't just visit for a week or two” (n. pag.). In *Finding Nouf*, Nouf is confronted with this entrapment through not being able to leave the country or pursue her education in America as she wishes because her family does not approve of it. Ferraris’s novels reflect her interaction with her husband’s large family, especially her Saudi mother-in-law. In the same interview, Ferraris unveils the fact that men are sometimes also affected by Saudi social rules, such as gender segregation: “The biggest revelation I had in Saudi Arabia was learning that men were just as frustrated by gender segregation as women were” (n. pag.). In the trilogy, Nayir illustrates men’s frustration and conflict between mandatory gender segregation and the need to meet women, fall in love and marry. In *Finding Nouf*, Nouf rebels against gender segregation and rules of arranged marriages. In *Kingdom of Strangers*, Lieutenant Ibrahim also defies conservatism by having an affair with Sabria and showing dissatisfaction with his arranged marriage and relationship with his wife. However, the novels describe how characters are severely punished when they seek relationships outside religious and Arab social norms.

While Ferraris’s deployment of detective fiction’s conventions produces critique of gender injustices, it also contributes to the Orientalist portrayal of Jeddah as a fearful and mysterious setting and landscape. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) asserts that, traditionally, the Arabian Orient is commonly viewed as a terrifying desert (173). Additionally, Philip Swanson states that because “Crime fiction is a repetitive genre” as it “renews itself from one generation to the next,” Western detective and crime fiction has always viewed foreign lands “as filthy and corrupt” (35). Furthermore, Valassopoulos confirms that “the exotic is something fixed and there for the taking, rather than a discursive construct or effect. So, Orientalist themes and ‘exotic’ landscapes are used to maximum extravagant effect” (140). Hence, Ferraris’s novels depict Western men’s suffering in annihilating deserts where they face their doom. An example of this is when Miriam, in *City of Veils*, is caught in the desert and Nayir rescues her from dying in a severe sandstorm. In the same novel, Eric and Jacob are murdered and dumped in a desert house. Finally, in the three novels, dead bodies are

either buried or dumped in the desert, which emphasizes the traditional Orientalist depiction of the desert as evil space.

By employing detective fiction and describing bloody crime scenes and murders, the trilogy depicts Jeddah as grotesque, filthy, and a place of fear and terror. Ferraris's novels associate Saudi settings – cities, houses, buildings, streets and the landscape – with a foulness that stimulates feelings of entrapment and malice. The first example of this is the descriptions of fearfulness, hideousness and entrapment experienced in Jeddah buildings. In *Finding Nouf*, the coroner's office is depicted as “tucked between two ugly office buildings and looking rather like a cousin of both” and as: “cracked eggshells in a cage. The lower floor was windowless, a sheer slab of concrete interrupted only by a pair of metal doors and a security code panel” (10). This depiction of a cage intensifies feelings of imprisonment and entrapment in Saudi Arabia. The unpleasantness of the forensic buildings is symbolic of judicial corruption. Nayir also describes the Western compound where Eric, the American who helps Nouf to flee to America, lives as ugly: “Suddenly the scenery became plain again-long, empty fields broken by ugly housing complexes” (164). Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah* also provide examples of dark and windowless houses to which women are restricted. This demonstrates that windowless buildings and houses are common in Western depictions of Saudi Arabia and indicate darkness, morbidity, lack of air, suffocation, staleness and imprisonment.

Another example is *City of Veils*' illustration of Miriam's building and neighborhood as ugly: “It was much like its neighbors, boxy and stucco white, except that theirs was the tallest on the block; a plaster wall enclosed the roof, adding an extra ten feet of height. Black wooden panels shuttered every window, and the front door, studded with upholstery tacks, looked as if it could resist a tank” (37). Additionally, descriptions of Saudi houses and buildings underline the uniform shape that indicates identical and inescapable corruption, danger and fear in different Saudi locations. Prevailing darkness in Saudi settings signifies mystery, while blocked doors symbolize the detectives' struggle to make progress in the case. The novels further create foul images of Western expatriates' houses and compounds that are repeatedly described as “ugly” and are viewed with disapproval by their Western inhabitants. This produces feelings of alienation for Western expatriates in Saudi Arabia, against which their

beautiful homelands and houses are defined. The trilogy depicts interiors of houses and buildings as decayed, contaminated and wrecked. In *City of Veils*, Miriam describes the inner part of her house and kitchen: “Paint curled from the cabinets. The stove, thick with grease, wore a bonnet of carcinogens and barbecue scum.... Once white, the linoleum looked like cauliflower mold, its tiles guttered with rivers of grime” (38). This contributes to depicting Saudi Arabia as foul, grotesque and imprisoning.

The trilogy describes Jeddah streets as ugly, filthy, crowded and full of corruption. In *City of Veils*, Miriam describes jammed streets and the view of “ugly” buildings and towers in the commercial city as she takes a ride with Nayir:

Nayir waited patiently for a break in the traffic, then pulled onto the highway. She watched the world speeding by, league upon league of generic apartment buildings, flat, ugly office towers, and sprawling factories. The overpass into city gave a view of the skyline, an expanse of sleekly modern buildings, billboards, and a sky heavy with vehicle exhaust and industrial by-products. The smell that poured through the windows had an acrid stench that made her think of rotten rice, of things that could kill you through your bronchial tubes. A few minutes later they passed a ship graveyard and the odor intensified, greasy like a swamp. Old ships lay atop one another, splintered and decayed, the foreground colored by the marine blue of weathered sails. (224-225)

This image indicates contradiction between modernity symbolized by towers, new buildings, and factories and the scenes of destruction, death, and rottenness. The description of Jeddah conveys a sense of chaos and clutter within the city that is compared to a polluted wasteland. Like the airless and dark buildings, the streets’ air is suffocating with a bad odour, the sky is darkened with fumes and the landscape is full of ugly and crammed buildings. Ships are wrecked and decayed, which is a sign of the greedy expansion of factories and foul buildings at the expense of nature’s destruction. Additionally, *Kingdom of Strangers* depicts poor areas in Jeddah, which conflicts with the country’s reputation as a land of lavish prosperity and wealth. For instance, it describes the Kandara area, where African settlers are exposed to poverty and unfortunate living conditions: “Beneath the freeway were shantytowns of the kind that made Kandara’s Sitteen Street Bridge look upscale. Most of the residents were Africans, men and their multiple wives, their innumerable children who ran naked and

blighted through the trash-choked streets” (193). This quotation highlights the fact that black immigrants inhabit underprivileged areas and trade drugs as a means of survival because they are disenfranchised in Saudi Arabia.

Utilising the fear and horror typical in detective fiction results in a pathetic fallacy, through which Saudi nature and weather are perceived as dangerous and terrifying. As a result, the novels represent Saudi nature as fearful and threatening, which contributes to the Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia. For example, *Finding Nouf* follows the Orientalist traditions of describing the desert as an annihilating fatal force. So, Nouf is dumped alive in a desert valley. She dies because of cruel and forceful nature: “The wrist was splattered with brownish mud. It seemed to have been baked into her skin by the heat” (17). The heat and direct sun exposure damage her body and the rain drowns her while lying unconscious in the valley. This is ironic because, according to the novel, Nouf “drowns in the largest sand desert in the world” (15). Pathetic fallacy is also observable in *City of Veils* through its representation of Saudi weather as hellish. The heat and sun negatively affect Katya, who is uncomfortable when she waits for Nayir to pick her up in front of the police station:

The sunlight was crashing mercilessly onto the street, reflecting off the windows of the building opposite, springing up from the marble courtyard, and flashing straight into her face from the car windows zipping by. She had sunglasses on under her burqa but it wasn’t enough, and she kept having to raise them anyway to squint at the faces of the drivers who were parked on the street. (142)

The heat is choking: “the suffocating heat wove itself around her” (41). The weather in *City of Veils* also leads to obscurity and illusion. Nayir faces great difficulty in his attempt to chase Miriam in the desert: “Shallow depressions in the land, small whirls of blowing sand, rising waves of mirage-producing heat could all obscure a small campsite or trailer or house, especially if it was white or gold-toned” (321). Inconspicuousness and delusion stand for mystery and hidden dangers in the corrupt and mysterious land, which intensifies the tasks of detective fiction and extends the Orientalist representation of the East. Destructive nature in *City of Veils* is further depicted when Nayir explains the dangers of weather on his car and tires – his only means of transportation and survival in the massive desert: “They were fuller than normal because of the heat, and a

rough drive on hot sand could swell them to bursting” (321). This underlines the effect of the novels’ employment of detective fiction’s conventions on the depiction of Saudi landscape and weather as destructive and fatal, creating an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia.

Effects of pathetic fallacy are vivid in *Kingdom of Strangers* as well. Saudi weather and heat are portrayed as malicious. For example, the hot summer is described as destructive and annihilating: “The blasting waves of heat began their killing spree by stealing the men’s appetites. Two men collapsed and had to be driven back to Jeddah in a Red Crescent van” (8). The weather is personified as mean and associated with criminal actions like “killing” and “stealing,” which transforms it into a threatening power. This demonstrates how the writer’s subconscious fear and horror of the unknown and fearful Orient shape her representation of Saudi weather and nature. Saudi climate is also utilized to highlight disadvantages of local women’s dress code and how challenging and stressful it becomes in hot weather. An example of this is Katya’s veil and hijab during working days: “She drew her veil across her nose and made an effort to breathe shallowly, but the stench was overwhelming, enough to make her eyes water. It was slightly cooler beneath the flyover, but it was an airless day and the stench stuck to everything” (89). The destructive and suffocating effects of Saudi weather are not restricted to the outdoors, but creep stealthily into houses. *Kingdom of Strangers* describes detective Ibrahim’s house and the malicious effect of weather on people: “The building was chocking him. It was dark and steamy, and the desert crept in, blowing sand beneath the doors and filtering sunlight through cracks in the walls” (155). The negative effects of nature also influence humans and plants: “A half-dead potted mint sat on the window, leaves curling in the heat” (154). The novel presents the house garden of Hakim al-Adnan – a rich corrupt Saudi businessman that Sabria tries to blackmail after he rapes a Filipina – as a hideous and uncanny setting where the corpse of Sabria is buried under the rose bushes. This links Saudi natural beauty with bloody violence and emphasizes that underneath the façade of picturesque floral attraction and greenery lies death and human destruction. Despite the natural beauty of this Taif residence, the novel indicates that reality of this beauty is morbid and fearful, which is part of detective fiction’s horrors that result in the Orientalist depiction of Saudi

Arabia.³⁰ As a result, the novels' employment of pathetic fallacy provides a representation of harsh weather and foul nature in the creation of the uncanny image of Saudi cities and landscape. This generates the fear and horror associated with detective fiction and produces Orientalist representations of Saudi Arabia.

Examples of Orientalism: Killers (Mabus)

Ferraris's trilogy follows Orientalist traditions of depicting Other people as corrupt villains. Andrew Francis asserts that British crime fiction, during its glorious era at the beginning of the twentieth century "helped alter the perception of the underhand, sinister foreigner traditionally considered French or Russian, to one who displayed the cultural, linguistic and militaristic attributes of a German" (153). If British detective fiction of the early twentieth century stigmatizes Germans, then Western (or Anglo-American) Gothic fiction, detective fiction, crime fiction and thrillers of the late twentieth century and the noughties – such as Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, Einion's *Inshallah*, or Ferraris's trilogy – stigmatizes Arab/Muslim societies and peoples through endorsing Orientalist images of Middle-Eastern cultures. Said asserts that, according to Western representations, the "Arab Oriental" is viewed as the European's "creeping, mysteriously fearsome shadow" (286). Abdus Sattar Ghazali's *Islam & Muslims in the Post-9/11 America* (2012) emphasizes that Western and American media portray "the Arab as terrorist, and the Arab as 'the Other' – one who is heathen, evil, and uncivilized. Popular western cinema also stereotypes the Islamic religion and portrays the followers of Islamic faith as religious fundamentalists" (149). Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2009) asserts that Arab/Muslim men are represented as dominating and authoritarian since the 9/11 (2). Additionally, Munt stresses that texts written by white authors can be "influenced by historical discourses of post-colonialism and Orientalism" (101). This illustrates that Orientalism in Ferraris's trilogy is a result of reproducing traditional Orientalism, which is induced by neo-Orientalism in the post-9/11 context.

Through the character of Apollo Mabus, *City of Veils* associates Arab/Muslim men with Post-9/11 images of fear and crime. Said argues that since the 9/11 terrorist

³⁰ Taif is a Saudi city known for its natural beauty, moderate and cool weather and floral gardens.

events, Western mass media represents Arabs as violent, which infuriates Western audiences and turns them against Muslims and Arabs (256). This also illustrates Alsultany's view of Western literature that portrays Arab men as the "bad guy," which leads to stereotyping (18). Mabus is described as mixed-race – his mother is British and his father is Egyptian. Miriam meets him on the plane during her flight to Jeddah, where he smuggles in a CD by putting it in her handbag. Miriam describes him when she first sees him in the plane: "He had the dark eyes and olive skin of an Arab but a shock of natural blond hair" (9). The novel depicts Mabus as an Arab/Muslim criminal, whose evil is related to his paternal Arab background. He murders Eric and his friend, Jacob, and he kidnaps Miriam to murder her as well. In addition to representing Mabus as a serial killer, the novel depicts him as a fraud, who fabricates many details about his origin and work. By naming this character Apollo Mabus, the novel follows the Orientalist tradition of associating the West with sunshine and healing and connecting the East to darkness and chaos: Apollo is a Greek God of prophecy, sunshine and healing, which represents the good Western side that he inherits from his British mother. Conversely, his Middle-Eastern and Arab/Muslim side is represented by the name "Mabus" that appears in Nostradamus' *The Prophecies* and is associated with chaos and catastrophic events:

Mabus then will soon die, there will come
Of people and beasts a horrible rout:
Then suddenly one will see vengeance,
Hundred, hand, thirst, hunger when the comet will run.

According to Nostradamus' prophecy, Mabus is the Antichrist who epitomizes evil and monstrosity. Therefore, despite the trilogy's attempts to undo mysteries and negative representations of Saudi Arabia, to shed light on Saudi women's struggle to achieve empowerment and modernity, and to undo predominant stereotypical images of Saudi Arabia in the West, *City of Veils* endorses Orientalism in the way it represents Mabus as a source of fear and terror and responsible for Westerners' deaths.

Through its illustration of successive vicious murders of women by a religious Saudi serial killer, *Kingdom of Strangers* provides an Orientalist image of Saudi men and associates Islam with crime, violence and misogyny. The novel depicts a Saudi serial killer, who arranges corpses of murdered women in different sets. In one of his

arrangements, he kills young and good-looking Filipina women, cuts off one of their hands to keep them as totems and sets their bodies in a grave to inscribe a religious message: “*Bism ’allah, ar-rahman, ar-rahim*. In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful. The beginning of every prayer” (143). In another group of murders, he kills Saudi women. The murderer sacrifices women to produce messages that transforms their bodies into Arabic letters in religious discourse. This expresses misogyny and severe Islamist ideology that confines the value of women’s bodies to expression of religious identity – a view that extremists utilize to justify forcing women to wear the hijab or the veil. The murderer is obsessed with controlling women by arranging them into shapes and letters to form a calligraphy made from women’s bodies. This build-up of macabre and horror associated with detective fiction contributes to the creation of the Orientalist depiction of the novel.

To conclude, by employing detective fiction, *Finding Nouf*, *City of Veils*, and *Kingdom of Strangers* critique Saudi social conventions in terms of patriarchy and gender injustices. This is achieved through challenging Saudi women’s domesticity, marginalization and subordination. Ferraris’s texts expose and critically reassess dominant sexual ideologies associated with Saudi women and highlight rebellious female behaviour that contradicts stereotypes of Arab/Muslim women as submissive and obedient. The novels reveal many contradictions within Saudi society, which mark a gap between appearance and reality. Yet, the trilogy indicates that despite violence, aggression and misogyny exercised against Saudi women, they endeavor to achieve agency and empowerment without violating social rules or defying cultural codes. Additionally, the novels warn against relying on marriage and relationships with men to gain social approval. Instead, Ferraris’s trilogy emphasizes the importance of transcultural and transnational women’s solidarity and independence to achieve empowerment. Therefore, the novels engage with a range of representations of Saudi women and society to offer American readership insight into Saudi culture and to undo what Miriam Cooke describes, in an interview by Maysa Abou-Youssef Hayward, as “mutual suspicion” (143). However, by representing Saudi Arabia as a fearful and terrorizing space, Ferraris’s novels end up providing an Orientalist depiction of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Four

Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*: Marginalization of Women and Cyber Resistance

Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) is an Arab/Muslim Chick Lit novel set in twenty-first century Riyadh and depicts the life of four young Saudi women, who challenge social limitations and conservative Saudi norms – like arranged marriage, gender segregation and confinement – which caused the novel to be banned in Saudi Arabia. Despite the ban after the publication of the Arabic version in 2005, Moneera al-Ghadeer highlights that “*Girls of Riyadh* rapidly occupied the top of the bestseller list, according to a major Arabic bookstore on-line, and now is in its fifth edition” (296). Yet, the novel was condemned by Saudi critics and conservative readers for its revolutionary approach, subversions of Saudi archetypes, social critique and employment of a Western genre. According to Noura Algahtani, this made Alsanea a representative of young, modern Saudi women writers that have the chance “to discuss and explore taboo issues, challenging patriarchal society and sometimes arousing its wrath” (28). Al-Ghadeer symbolizes this social anger when she expresses contempt for Alsanea's novel and its critique of “Arabian family values” and “Islamic ideals.” Thus, al-Ghadeer emphasizes that it is more significant to study the “threatening impact of the narrative” rather than “exploring the text itself” (297). However, this makes *Girls of Riyadh* part of the literature that Madawi Al-Rasheed's *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (2013) describes as “important as a social statement and a critical discourse that challenge many taken-for-granted stereotypical images of Saudi women” (32). The novel achieves this through hiding “‘behind an imaginary world, created out of fragments of reality, personalities, and historical moments’” (Algahtani 28).

Girls of Riyadh has gained European and American recognition because it allows Western readers to peek in on Saudi women's lives, restrictions and struggles to achieve liberation and acknowledgement. Joel Gwynne emphasizes that the novel is “a valuable text for exploring questions surrounding women's movement within both physical and virtual space” (46). He underlines that the “political and social significance” of the novel makes it “the most important novel published in the Middle East in recent years” (47). This reveals that the novel “captured both popular and critical attention to the same extent” (Gwynne 47). Moreover, Gwynne asserts that the novel

“became a bestseller throughout the Middle East, signalling its transnational cultural relevance to the wider Muslim world” (47).

This chapter examines the novel’s conformity and subversion to Arab/Muslim Saudi ideals. It argues that *Girls of Riyadh*’s appropriation of Chick Lit convention sheds light on the living conditions of Saudi women. Additionally, it demonstrates that utilizing this genre broadens the scope of Western Chick Lit that has been criticized for focusing on white women, which adds value to the disreputable, yet popular, genre. I contend that despite its appropriation of the genre, the novel diverges from the original conventions of Western Chick Lit, which underlines that Saudi female characters are more aware of their social injustices than their white counterparts in Western Chick Lit. Finally, I demonstrate that, through utilizing a web blog, the novel emphasizes the significance of the online world and cyberfeminism in Arab/Muslim women’s lives. So, through cyber communication, females have a safe context to disclose revolutionary life details and social critique without being exposed to social contempt and/or punishment.

Chick Lit is defined by many critics as an evolution of the courtship romantic novel and the novel of manners that were dominant genres in the nineteenth century. In *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (2005), Imelda Whelehan aligns Chick Lit with Jane Austen’s romantic novels, mostly *Pride and Prejudice* (15). Whelehan defines Chick Lit as the “new generation of generally humorous novels with a ‘confessional’ flavour written by women in their thirties and often with a first-person narrative” (“Sex and the Single Girl” 29). Stephanie Harzewski’s *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (2011) defines Chick Lit as “a new novel of manners” (5). However, she declares that a Chick Lit novel is not presented as “an exaggerated version of its codes, but in its often parodic and intricate bricolage of diverse popular and literary forms” (5). Cathy Yardley’s *Will Write for Shoes: How to Write a Chick Lit Novel* (2006), describes women’s conditions in Chick Lit: “woman’s life disintegrates, woman’s life changes radically after many mishaps, woman comes out a stronger happier person in the end. All told with what could be characterized as the ‘Chick Lit’ tone” (7). Emma Parker explains features and themes of the genre: “These novels share similar themes and concerns - a middle-class career woman’s self-deprecating obsession with appearance, a fear of singledom, the search for a male hero, and the problem of how to forge meaningful sexual relationships with men” (9).

Therefore, a Chick Lit novel is an illustration of woman's experience in love, despair, and happiness narrated lightly through a comic and tragic tone. Despite similarities between classic and modern versions of the genre, Chick Lit has unique features that reflect the 1990s, the decade in which it emerged, and highlights issues that concern modern women. Finally, Harzewski asserts that modern Chick Lit is produced within social circumstances that mark rejection of feminism, implementation of post-feminism, and a clear confirmation of conservative social ideals, which places the genre mid-way between feminism and post-feminism (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 8).³¹

Academics see Chick Lit as an inferior genre that is written by women to entertain women. Harzewski describes the Western view of Chick Lit: "Established women writers have publicly decried chick lit, perhaps to avoid association with commercial writing" (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 2). She adds: "These distinguished writers, as well as a growing number of women journalists, are concerned that chick lit not only will be taken as representative of 'women's writing' but will disqualify aspiring and younger women writers from critical recognition" (2). For example, Baratz-Logsted describes the triviality and unworthiness of the genre: "Please be advised: none of the stories solve the problem of what to do about Iraq or deliver a prescription for curing cancer" (qtd. in Harzewski's *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 7). Parker adds that conventional first-person narrator in Chick Lit novel is commonly attacked because it is viewed as a sign of women's lack of creativity, "self-obsessions," and incapability to "see beyond their own lives" (2). In addition, Whelehan's *Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary* (2002) highlights that women writers are criticized for writing about their personal concerns as women (69). Thus, this implies that they cannot think beyond gender-related issues and makes it hard for them to "achieve the standing of great writers" (Whelehan, *Helen Fielding's* 69). For example, the first-person narration leads to comparisons between the author and the narrator (Whelehan, *Helen Fielding's* 68-69). Additionally, it leads readers to feel identified with Chick Lit protagonists (Whelehan, *Helen Fielding's* 68-69). Finally, these factors lead the audience to see main characters "of no literary worth" (Whelehan, *Helen Fielding's* 68-

³¹ Harzewski defines Post-feminism as "'the period following the feminism (and improvement in women's status) of the 1960s and 1970s, characterized by further development of or reaction against feminism, especially in acceptance of masculine ideals or of aspects of the traditional feminine role'" (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 151).

69). Marilyn Booth further demonstrates that readers tend to “conflate female authors and their female fictional protagonists” especially when Alsanea promises “to carry the reader into the hidden domestic heart of the society” (“The Muslim Woman” 154). Booth adds that first-person narration challenges Saudi and Arab literary traditions and cultural limitations that condemn the exposition of females’ voices and revealing personal life experiences of women (“The Muslim Woman” 157). However, other critics evaluate first-person narration from a different perspective. Yardley, for example, believes that first-person narrator allows the reader to feel and see with the eye of the protagonist, which allows a total understanding of her feelings and views (76). A. Rochelle Mabry considers the first-person narrator an important advantage of the Chick Lit novel because it expresses “the notion that these novels, although fictional, are authentic, in-depth accounts of women’s experiences” (195). She adds: “The move towards the first-person voice in most contemporary chick novels not only strengthens the heroine’s voice and increases the reader’s opportunities to identify with her but also offers at least a temporary escape from the feeling of constantly being watched or controlled by a male-dominated society” (196). Finally, Mabry demonstrates that first-person narrator in Chick Lit novels emphasizes “the notion of intimate, personal women’s writing” (196).

By diverging from common protagonist’s features in Chick Lit novels, *Girls of Riyadh* proves inconsistent in its employment of genre conventions. Yardley highlights qualities of Western Chick Lit protagonists: “Protagonists were single; in their twenties and thirties; and dealing with shoddy relationships, career troubles, financial issues, and biological clocks, all while maintaining a circle of friends that were, for all intents and purposes, closer than any blood family” (8). Harzewski emphasizes: “the majority of chick lit concentrates on the middle and upper-middle classes, with protagonists often aspiring to greater material resources; to remain average is not the goal of a chick lit protagonist, though numerous novels reward an average protagonist with a more socially and economically superior man” (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 5). Unlike conventional Chick Lit protagonists, *Girls of Riyadh*’s four main characters are elite, glamorous, and in their early twenties. They go against social restrictions, challenge patriarchal laws, and question discriminating rules. Lisa A. Guerrero underlines that Western Chick Lit protagonists “wanted careers, economic stability, and self-determination because those were the things they were taught they had a right to claim”

(89). Unlike Western Chick Lit heroines who are socially inclined to support themselves through jobs and income that guarantee independent lifestyles, Saudi women struggle to have jobs to and income that guarantees their independence from male guardianship and domination. So, although set in the twenty first century, the novel emphasizes the significance of women's education, employment, and participation in the public sphere as a means of liberation from early marriages and marginalization. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol highlights that working women has always been limited to specific jobs in Gulf countries: "They worked as house-domestics, slaves, and water-carriers, and served their communities as dress-makers, beauticians, and midwives (*dayas*)" ("Introduction" Loc 338). As a reaction to such restrictions, Bernadette Andrea highlights that "women believed all professions should be open to their daughters" and they assumed that they have "right to an education" (12). This indicates that men have always had better chances and conditions of employment and their work is more appreciated, while women still are limited to domestic roles or a restricted range of jobs – as illustrated in Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah*. Therefore, Alsanea's novel indicates that women need to exercise resistance – as demonstrated previously in Ferraris's trilogy – to challenge job cultures in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the four main characters struggle to achieve employment, productivity, and independence in their strict society. For example, Sadeem founds a business as a wedding planner. Michelle travels alone to study in San Francisco. Afterwards, she settles down in Dubai, where she works in a gender-mixed society. Lamees, who comes from the Western and less conservative region, is the daughter of an educated couple and follows in their footsteps when she graduates as a physician and starts her professional life as a doctor. Finally, Gamrah becomes Sadeem's partner because she realizes that work and an income is her only way out of imprisonment and domestic restraint.

Despite its subversion and altering genre features, *Girls of Riyadh* still follows Chick Lit conventions. For example, Alsanea's protagonists undergo what Yardley describe as "a series of life-defining changes" and they become "different at the end of the book than he/she was in the beginning of it" (36). Therefore, *Girls of Riyadh*'s protagonist go through life-altering incidents that lead them to mature and change at the end of the novel. Harzewski describes a white Chick Lit protagonist as an "average female, though she may confront marginality and experience anxiety, even desperation, because of her single status" (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 5). Although far from

“average,” *Girls of Riyadh*’s protagonists are desperately searching for love, marriage and self-definition. This suggests that their education, prosperity and jobs do not compensate for the absence of men in their lives. Like Chick Lit Western protagonists, Saudi female characters seek social accreditation through their relationships with men. This indicates that by producing protagonists that exercise defiance against restricting social norms, Alsanea’s novel is ambivalent in its employment of genre conventions, challenges conservative genre endorsement of social norms and resists Saudi cultural restrictions.

Girls of Riyadh’s anonymous female narrator, who is one of the four protagonists (Sadeem Al-Horaimli, Gamrah Al-Qusmanji, Lamees Jeddawi, and Mashael Al-Abdulrahman, known as Michelle), unveils details of her three best friends’ lives in a weekly journal through a cyber blog. By doing so, she circulates personal scandalous events that defy, criticize and expose social traditions in elite Saudi society. The narrator receives disapproval of many angry blog readers and support of a few progressive readers who seek social advancement. The novel is considered controversial because it challenges the ideals of Saudi womanhood. Moreover, it introduces its female readers to revolutionary models of behaviour in conservative Riyadh society. *Girls of Riyadh* is highly criticized because it is perceived as a silly romance narrated through a web blog that attacks ethics and cultural norms disgracing Islamic societies.

Girls of Riyadh sheds light on different Saudi cities by connecting characters’ names to various geographical settings. Additionally, the novel emphasizes that women’s living conditions differ in diverse Saudi regions. The naming scheme in the novel connects each of the four protagonists to a different province or city, which demonstrates unique and dissimilar cultural codes in Saudi provinces. The narrator introduces the four girls in the first chapter of the novel:

Lamees had grown up in the capital city of Riyadh, but, as her last name implied, her family was originally from Jeddah—a port city with a long tradition of bringing together people from many places and therefore the most liberal city in the kingdom. Gamrah’s family was originally from Qasim, a city known for its ultraconservative and strict character. Only Michelle was not from a well-known family tribe linked to a certain region. (12)

The novel connects Lamees to Jeddah, through her surname “Jeddawi,” which represents liberation and enlightenment among other Saudi cities. The novel indicates that women from Jeddah are more progressive and ambitious. Lamees is described as educated, hardworking, liberated and open-minded. Men from Jeddah are similarly enlightened and support women. The novel describes Lamees’ fiancé, Nizar, as superior to men from other regions in his behaviour, appearance and style. For example, the narrator describes how he treats Lamees: “Nizar would randomly bring home a bunch of red roses for Lamees for no special occasion. He posted little love letters on the fridge door before going off to his on-call shifts at the hospital. When he was about to take his rest break there, he always called her before going to bed” (275). Men from Hijaz are also described as neat and well-groomed, in comparison to men from other Saudi regions: “And by the way, have you noticed how well groomed these Hijaz guys are? Nizar is positively glistening, he’s so clean and tidy! Just look how perfectly trimmed his goatee is. Every Hijazi bridegroom I’ve ever seen has a goatee precisely that shape, and not too heavy” (264). Gamrah Al-Qusmanji is representative of Qasim, a geographical district in the centre of Saudi Arabia that is known for its restricting and conventional social rules. This is demonstrated by depicting Gamrah’s hard life conditions, such as her arranged marriage, deprivation of university education and imprisonment after divorce, which makes her a representation of subjugated Saudi women. Sadeem Al-Horaimli’s name connects her to Horaimla, which Alsanea describes as: “a city within Najd, the center of Saudi Arabia” (317).³² Like Gamrah, Sadeem comes from a conservative background, yet her family is more liberated. Sadeem spends time with her fiancé, Waleed, without a family male escort – although many conservative families prohibit their daughters from going out or spending time alone with their fiancés during the engagement period. Additionally, she can travel by herself, unlike many Saudi women. Mashael Al-Abdulrahman or Michelle is different than the other characters because her name is not connected to a Saudi geographical space or a tribal origin, because she is half American. Her non-Arab nickname indicates her Western identity and her rebellion against Saudi social norms, which leads her to leave Riyadh and work in Dubai. The four girls meet regularly at the house of Um Nuwayyir, or Mother of Nuwayyir, who is a 39-year-old “Kuwaiti woman who works

³² Najd is a conservative region in the centre of Saudi Arabia.

for the government as a school inspector of mathematics curricula. Her Saudi husband divorced her after fifteen years of marriage to marry another woman” (24). She acts as a mentor for the four girls and provides them with more guidance and support than their families and mothers.

Girls of Riyadh’s title is extracted from a traditional song that illustrates ideals of Saudi womanhood and presents the social features of girls who live in Riyadh. The translation of the song comes at the end of the second chapter and it signifies the girls’ rebellion against social patriarchal rules, traditions and devoutness. The four girls gather to give Gamrah a pre-wedding celebration and they dance to the music and the lyrics of the song:

Girls of Riyadh, O girls of Riyadh,

O gems of the turbaned fathers of old!

Have mercy on that victim, have mercy

On that man who lies prone on the threshold. (22)

The song was once a popular Saudi song. The lyrics are repetitive and revolve around three major themes that underline the values and ideals of Riyadh women: beauty and bewitchment, concealment from the eyes of male strangers, and chastity and purity. The lyrics highlight important Saudi social ideals, like gender segregation and preservation of women’s honour. Guarding these ideals is the role of men in Saudi society. Once achieved, women become as valuable as gems that ornament the turbans of their fathers, brothers, husbands and other male members of their families and tribe. Thus, *Girls of Riyadh*’s title refers to the values against which the four protagonists define themselves. The four friends ironically celebrate Gamrah’s purity and approaching wedding by dancing to the music and lyrics of a song that signifies their inferiority and disadvantages. However, they violate the values of the song by their lifestyle – dating men and falling in love outside the knot of marriage, smoking in a society that restricts smoking to men, dancing deliriously under the effect of banned alcohol and exposing their social rebellion in a web blog for an international audience. At the end of the novel, the four characters, despite their previous social subversion, seek empowerment by balancing liberation and authenticity. This suggests that to gain social approval,

Saudi women should find local resolutions for their marginalization and social disenfranchisement.

As a sign of resisting social norms and genre features, *Girls of Riyadh* criticizes arranged marriages by illustrating its negative outcomes. For example, the novel underlines that non-consensual relationships end in divorce, which affects women's social status as they become inferior when they leave their husbands. Sonbol emphasizes that arranged marriage is the appropriate option for marriage in Arab/Muslim countries by underlining "the father of the bride having the last word ("The Family" Loc 5800). Jamil Khader illustrates Raimonda Tawil's depiction of arranged marriage as the "prison called marriage" (82). In her *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2008), Lindsey Moore highlights that within Arab societies, "men are complicit in their abandonment of educated women for arranged marriages" (53). *Girls of Riyadh* provides two examples of unsuccessful arranged marriages. Gamrah and Sadeem are victims of arranged marriages to men they do not previously know or love and that leads them to divorce. Gamrah comes from a conservative family who determines its daughters' lifestyles before marriage and sets up strict limitations on her daughters after divorce. After finishing high school, her family agrees to an arranged marriage proposal to wealthy Rashid: "Before the wedding, Gamrah had seen Rashid only once, and that was on the day of the *shoufa*, the day set for the bridegroom's lawful viewing of the bride-to-be" (57). She moves from conservative Riyadh, where women are restricted to the domestic sphere, to Chicago to join a more educated husband who is already in a relationship with a Far-Eastern woman. Her marriage and divorce make her an example of Saudi women who are victims of strict Saudi conservatism Gamrah attempts to change to please her husband. She gives up the hijab to impress him by her Western attitude and she communicates with Rashid's mistress to convince her to leave him, which infuriates Rashid. However, because of her traditional background, young age and lack of education, Gamrah fails to gain her husband's approval as an intellectual, which leads him to send her back to Riyadh. Despite Gamrah's struggle and humiliation, her mother attempts to maintain her daughter's marriage due to her awareness of the negative social impact of divorce on women in Saudi Arabia: "I don't care if your brother did divorce his wife. *Al-Qusmanji girls* never get divorced!" (111). Nevertheless, Rashid divorces Gamrah. After that, she suffers from her new status: "Dozens of times every day, Gamrah was

told the same thing: ‘What? Did you forget you are a divorcee?’ Of course she hadn’t forgotten it, not for a single second” (139). Based on the divorced female protagonist in Leila Abouzeid’s *Year of the Elephant*, Moore describes “the aftermath of the divorce” in Arab/Muslim societies as: “‘anxiety’, ‘despair’, and ‘bitterness’” (80). However, Gamrah’s status improves when she starts to work and is financially productive: “Gamrah’s mother wouldn’t let her go out on these work missions alone, but she began going easier on her daughter when she noticed how seriously Gamrah took it all. What most impressed Um Gamrah was when she saw her daughter make her first profit” (262). This indicates that the novel highlights the significance of financial independence and women’s employment to achieve emancipation from patriarchal rules.

Sadeem is another example of the novel’s critique of arranged marriages and the inferior social status of divorced women. As traditions necessitate, she has an engagement period following the signing of the religious contract to become familiar with her fiancé/husband.³³ Sadeem’s engagement to Waleed illustrates contradictions in Saudi society that suppress women. An example of these conflicts is the importance for a girl to be chaste and to guard her virginity, yet be seductive at the same time. Another instance is social pressure to be married at a young age while pursuing college education and a career, especially when women need an income or when the husband prefers to be married to an educated woman. Sadeem struggles to guard her virginity against Waleed’s attempts to have sex with her. Simultaneously, she works hard to graduate from college before her wedding day to make sure that her marriage does not interfere with her education and that her education does not affect her role as a married woman. This demonstrates how Sadeem struggles to accomplish conflicting missions. However, because of her awareness of the obligation to keep Waleed satisfied, happy and interested, she decides to have sex with him to compensate her husband/fiancée, who resents their delayed wedding so that she can finish her university exams: “She was afraid to get married during Eid Al-Adha break, worried that it would interfere with her

³³ In *Girls of Riyadh* Alsanea describes Saudi society’s engagement period: “Many native Hijazis prefer to shorten the engagement period and lengthen the time between the marriage contract-signing and the wedding, i.e., the *milkah*. Unlike Najdis, who would not mind a long engagement period but do not like a long *milkah* period, when the couple are considered officially married and have the right to meet and go out even before the wedding ceremony takes place” (231). However, in both cases, consummation of marriage is never allowed before the wedding celebration.

ability to study for her exams” (36). This leads Sadeem to decide to give in to Waleed’s attempts to consummate the already-signed religious contract:

Since Sadeem has vowed to make her beloved Waleed happy that night, and since she wanted to erase that disappointment over her insistence on delaying the wedding. She allowed him to go further with her than ever before. She did not try to stop him—as she had gotten used to doing—when he attempted to cross the line that she had drawn, for herself and for him, in the early days after the signing of the contract. She was convinced that he wouldn’t be satisfied unless she offered him a little more of her ‘femininity,’ and she was willing to do anything to please him, the love of her life, even if it meant exceeding the limits she had spent her lifetime guarding. (37)

This causes Sadeem to lose her virginity before the wedding night and Waleed’s confidence in her properness.

Despite his approval of her decision to have sex, he decides to divorce her due to her inappropriateness. Sadeem faces divorce, loss of virginity and social disapproval due to her lower status as a divorcee. Moreover, losing her virginity after signing the contract but before the wedding party is a taboo that categorizes Sadeem as an indecent woman, which minimizes her future chances of marriage. This is demonstrated when she confesses her situation to Firas, the educated Saudi man she meets in London and falls in love with. As a consequence, he decides to give her up for a virgin girl his family chooses for him. The narrator describes Sadeem’s disappointment and shock when she finds out about Firas’ intentions of marrying another woman:

Was it possible for Firas to marry someone other than her? How could such a thing happen? After all this love and the years they had spent together? Did it make any sense that a man of Firas’s strength and resourcefulness was unable to convince his family that he could marry a divorced woman? Or was it just that he was incapable of convincing himself of it? (233)

Michelle describes the effect of arranged marriage on Saudi men and women: “many of those brides and grooms were concealing their own sad and yearning hearts because they had been kept from choosing their life’s partner” (298). Finally, by showing that

Sadeem finds happiness through forming a relationship with her loving cousin and accepting his marriage proposal, the novel indicates that consensual marriage as a result of mutual respect and admiration is the solution for Saudi men and women. Hence, the novel suggests that arranged marriages have negative impacts on women's living conditions and leads to divorce, which leaves women enslaved to cruel social condemnation.

Despite its critique of patriarchy and social misogyny, *Girls of Riyadh* complies with Chick Lit conventions in its illustration of marriage and courtship as significant for the achievement of social approval and ideals of Saudi womanhood. Guerrero describe Chick Lit's protagonists' endeavour to be married: "But they also wanted to have husbands and children, to be taken care of, and to be the caretaker, because those were the things they had been socialized to recognize as characterizing real womanhood" (89). Whelehan confirms the importance of marriage and a love life to a Chick Lit heroine who would "want to be swept off her feet by an unreconstructed Byronic hero" (*Helen Fielding's* 17-18). She clarifies that Chick Lit protagonists search for wealthy men because "money and status do matter now that these women are looking for life partners rather than the temporary frissons of their twenties" (33). *Girls of Riyadh* also underlines the role of marriage and romance in providing women with social approval, stability and credibility, rather than financial security. In other words, the novel demonstrates that university education and professional accomplishment do not compensate for singledom in Saudi society. *Girls of Riyadh* provides various examples that highlight the importance of marriage as an indication of Saudi woman's social success. For instance, the narrator describes Gamrah's accomplishment of being married despite her humble share of beauty and education, especially when compared to her three friends. This makes her victorious and dignified among her friends – a situation that reverses after her divorce. Michelle also looks successful when she has a romance with a wealthy Saudi man, Faisal. Nevertheless, her luck changes when Faisal gives in to his family's strict rules that prohibit him from marrying a Saudi girl with an American mother and no tribal origin.³⁴ Michelle's bad experience with love leads her to revolt against social rules. Yet, she does not give up her search for love and affection

³⁴ Saudis who come from a tribal origin usually prefer to marry their sons and daughters to people from a similar background to preserve the purity of their blood, since they are the native inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula.

until she succeeds in having a relationship with Hamdan, her colleague in Dubai. Sadeem is another example of women's pursuit of happiness through a romantic relationship. Her engagement to wealthy Waleed, who comes from a reputable and powerful family makes her, like Gamrah and Michelle, feel powerful. Sadeem's victory transforms to failure after she breaks up with Waleed. In an attempt to restore social approval, she seeks love and marriage through her relationship with Firas. Sadeem is never portrayed as successful until she becomes engaged to her cousin. Finally, Lamees is portrayed as an ideal Saudi girl because she achieves marital, educational and professional success. The novel emphasizes her ability to formulate a compromise between arranged marriages and romance. Her ability to preserve social conservatism during her romantic relationship is viewed as the necessary wisdom to triumph in love and marriage. This indicates that despite its challenges to patriarchy and resistance to social limitations of women, Alsanea's novel remains conservative in its views of marriage and women's relationships with men.

Drawing on Western Chick Lit conventions, *Girls of Riyadh* emphasizes negative effects of singledom on Saudi women. Whelehan illustrates this effect on Chick Lit protagonists: "Single life may be portrayed as more treacherous than it has ever been before" (*Helen Fielding's* 43). Harzewski, also, describes belittled unmarried women in Western literature: "The never-married woman in Anglo-American literature has frequently served as the object of ridicule, when not depicted as a creature of pity" (66). Harzewski underlines that Chick Lit heroines seek "what Katherine Marsh named ... 'human connection'" since sex failed "to answer post-feminist women's" needs ("Tradition and Displacement" 39). *Girls of Riyadh's* single protagonists suffer from social criticism and seek self-definition and acknowledgement through marriage or courtship. Gamrah appreciates Rashid's marriage proposal because it adds value to her social status even when he mistreats her, abuses her or cheats on her: "He was the first man who had come forward to ask for her hand, and by doing so he had made her feel as though there were someone in this world who knew—maybe even appreciated—that she was alive" (59). This causes Gamrah to accept his maltreatment because their marriage gives her value: "Although her husband was tough and rude to her sometimes, Gamrah loved him" (59). Her knowledge of divorced Saudi women's disadvantages and lower status leads her to strive for her husband's approval and acceptance – such as quitting the hijab in Chicago to please Rashid. Finally, when she fails to convince

Rashid to maintain their relationship, she stops taking her contraceptive pills to force him to remain married to her after she becomes pregnant. Gamrah's divorce and her status as an abandoned single woman makes her the target of social condemnation and family degradation.

Sadeem is another example of single women who become victims of social attacks and distorted self-image due to their status as divorced women. For example, her loss of virginity and divorce makes Sadeem the target of Firas's domination and humiliation in many situations. First, he pushes her to wear the hijab and adopt Islamic dress. After that, he does not resist his family rules when they forbid him to marry a divorced non-virgin woman. Moreover, he maintains his relationship with her after his marriage because he claims he is still in love with her. Finally, he offers to marry Sadeem as a second wife. This makes Sadeem representative of what Whelehan describes as "the professional, educated woman who wept over the boyfriends who picked her up and dumped her" (*Helen Fielding's* 42). After her failure with Firas, Sadeem seeks a more permanent relationship. She decides to take Gamrah's advice: "Take the one who loves you, not the one you love. The one who loves you will always have you in his eyes, and he'll make you happy. But the one you love will knock you around and torment you and make you run after him all the time" (308). Even though Sadeem is not in love with Tariq, she accepts his marriage proposal, which illustrates her desperation for marriage as a means of social approval.

Michelle is a third example of women's desperation to overcome the negative results of male abandonment, which makes her an ideal Chick Lit protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, she has a romantic relationship with Faisal and she expects their romance to result in a marriage proposal. Like the other three girls, her relationship with a man grants Michelle worthiness and value among her friends. When Faisal marries another woman, Michelle's feelings of failure cause her to refuse to integrate into Saudi society and she rebels against Saudi traditions of marriage. Instead, she travels to America to study. Yet, she falls in love with Matti. Later in Dubai, she finds peace with Hamdan. Despite her claims of self-reliance and of her rejection of relationships with men, Michelle only becomes satisfied after she receives a marriage proposal from Hamdan. Finally, the novel portrays Lamees as the most successful among the four girls due to her ability to scheme and plan how to marry Nizar without going against the

social rules of chastity. Lamees decides to avoid the traditional arranged marriage without violating local traditions or culture of engagement and marriage. She plots to make Nizar propose to her: "From the start, she made it clear that their friendship did not mean he had the right to interfere or intrude in her life, asking her for an hour-by-hour rundown of her daily schedule" (239). Then the narrator describes Lamees' reactions to Nizar's attempts to be in touch with her: "She also never returned his text messages. She informed him that she didn't like to write messages, as she found that a waste of time and effort she didn't have to spare" (239). Unlike Sadeem, who permits Firas to control her lifestyle, dress-code and social life, Lamees sets strict limits for Nizar that he never challenges until he becomes her fiancé and, eventually, husband. This illustrates that, despite its attempts to challenge social rules and patriarchy, *Girls of Riyadh* endorses conservative gender roles and conventional views of marriage as the ideal situation for Saudi women. Although the novel criticizes arranged marriage and portrays it as responsible for divorce, Alsanea's novel indicates that the solutions lie in a conservative evolution of marriage and engagement culture that compromises between arranged marriages and romantic relationships before marriage.

Girls of Riyadh illustrates female bonds, emphasizing the significance of friendship in resisting social patriarchy. Whelehan demonstrates the presence of this theme in Chick Lit and describes its importance to modern women by showing its relevance to the main character in *Bridget Jones's Diary*: "Her close friends provide the understanding and solace to help her make sense of her world while her family symbolizes the pull of tradition where being single is definitely seen as a period of transition between adolescence and marriage" (*Helen Fielding's* 37). *Girls of Riyadh* draws attention to this bond through its representation of the strong friendship among the four female protagonists, which becomes essential to each of the girls and surpasses the importance of family. They frequently meet at Um Nuwayyir's house to discuss troubles, share secrets or for entertainment:

How very often Um Nuwayyir was the preserver of the girls' secrets! She was always right there with them when they were thinking through some issue or other, and she was always generous about suggesting a solution when one of them set out a problem for the clique to ponder. For her, it was a comfort to have them around, not to mention a diversion and source of entertainment, and her

home became the perfect setting for trying out the freedoms to which they had but little access in any of their own homes. (26)

The four girls meet at the older lady's house to discuss their romances, griefs or to celebrate special occasions like weddings, birthdays or graduations. Their friendship involves concern, support, love, cooperation and sympathy, illustrated by their support for each other when they are broken-hearted, divorced or betrayed by men or family. For example, when Michelle is betrayed by Faisal or when Sadeem and Gamrah are divorced they all stand by each other to help the one in need of comfort. Another example is Michelle's sympathy for Gamrah on the latter's wedding night: "Poor Gammoorah, I wish she had gone to the dress maker who made Sadeem's dress" (7-8). Michelle adds with disapproval: "By God, her makeup is painful! Her skin is too dark for such a chalky foundation. They've made her practically blue—and look at the contrast between her face and her neck" (8).

In agreement with Chick Lit conventions, the projected friendship in Alsanea's text does not stem from a feminist perspective sisterhood or women's solidarity because Saudi women are not quite exposed to ideals of feminism. Rather, it is a relationship that is limited to the four friends. Despite their support for each other, *Girls of Riyadh*'s protagonists are less sympathetic to other female characters in the novel. For instance, Sadeem resumes her relationship with Firas despite her knowledge of his marriage, which is harmful to his wife. Another instance is Gamrah's intention to harm Rashid by using his sister's name and photo to start an internet relationship to damage the sister's reputation. Additionally, the narrator describes Michelle's mean and victorious description of Faisal's bride: "Michelle was filled with confidence, seeing the bride's large body stuffed into the wedding gown, which was stretched tightly around her body unappealingly, creating unsightly folds of skin at her armpits" (297). Similar to Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* and Einion's *Inshallah*, *Girls of Riyadh* describes Saudi women as mean and vindictive towards other women and does not describe a general solidarity or support among Saudi women.

Unlike Western Chick Lit that highlights the heroine's physical imperfections, *Girls of Riyadh* emphasizes the protagonists' faultless physical beauty and youth. The novel presents glamorous young women who are obsessed with glamour, youth and beauty, who are insecure about weight gain and loss of desirability. Juliette Wells

connects the idea of beauty of Chick Lit protagonists to that in original Victorian novels: “In being beautiful but not too beautiful, chick lit’s heroines are the direct descendants of Austen’s. Nearly every Austen novel features a very attractive heroine” (59). Whelehan describes the obsession of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*’s protagonist with her own appearance: “the narrative remains obsessed with the body and physicality as the chief identity for women” (*Helen Fielding’s* 47). Harzewski describes Western heroines’ fears of aging as a “confusion of girlhood and womanhood, with female adulthood represented as a state oscillating between pleasure and panic” (*Chick Lit and Postfeminism* 9). Wells also draws attention to Western Chick Lit’s protagonists’ imperfection: “Chick-lit heroines are invariably more likeable than the characters around them, usually because of their endearing faults rather than because they are paragons” (52). *Girls of Riyadh*’s narrator illustrates details of the four girls’ efforts to perfect their appearances through grooming and shopping for accessories, jewelry and make-up, which is common among Chick Lit protagonists who work hard to manipulate their lives by dieting and exercising. Like most Chick Lit protagonists and despite their young age, *Girls of Riyadh*’s protagonists are obsessed with physical attraction and they associate it with worthiness. follies

Unlike Chick Lit conventions that illustrates imperfections in the appearance of female protagonists, *Girls of Riyadh* portrays physical beauty as a means of empowerment through which women manipulate men and become superior to less privileged women. For example, the narrator describes Michelle, Lamees, and Sadeem: “Lamees was proud to show off her distinctive height and her gym-toned body, and she made sure to dance slightly apart from Sadeem, who had expressly warned her beforehand against dancing next to her so that people wouldn’t compare their bodies. Sadeem was always longing to have her curves liposuctioned so that she could be as slim as Lamees and Michelle” (9). The narrator describes Michelle’s perfect beauty and glamorous clothes as a source of strength and superiority over Faisal’s bride: “She did her own makeup and put on a gorgeous Roberto Cavalli gown. It was slinky enough to show off her body perfectly” (295). However, Faisal’s bride, Shaikhah, is described as inferior to Michelle because of her fat body and her style of clothing:

Shaikhah was totally not his type! She was of a large build, when what he adored was petite women. Her hair wasn’t black—which he preferred—but dyed a

range of tints to the point where it looked like a disco globe reflecting a prism of colors. She had a big nose and a mouth with thin lips. What did they have in common with Michelle's cute nose and seductive lips? (295)

Finally, Lamees' glamorous wedding is considered a significant milestone in the novel because it marks a protagonist's achievement of social accreditation through her beauty, her distinguished fashionable taste in make-up and clothes, and her success in being married. The narrator provides a detailed illustration of Lamees' beauty and lavish appearance at the wedding:

Lamees looked more gorgeous than ever. Her long chocolate-brown hair flowed down her back in pretty waves. Her mother-of-pearl-studded gown dropped softly from her shoulders, draping gracefully in front and revealing her upper back before widening gradually until it reached the ground. Her tulle veil flowed from her head down her bare back. One hand held a bouquet of lilies and the other clasped Nizar's hand. (262)

The description of Lamees holding flowers in one hand symbolizes love and romance, while holding Nizar's hand in the other stands for her greatest social success. Despite subverting Chick Lit conventions by providing perfect, young and beautiful protagonists, Alsanea's novel remains faithful to the genre by portraying marriage as the most successful step a heroine takes.

Girls of Riyadh draws on Chick Lit conventions through its depiction of troubled family relationships and poor bonds among mothers and daughters. Whelehan describes the disturbed family ties in *Bridget Jones's Diary*: "Bridget is a woman burdened rather than supported by her family ties" (*Helen Fielding's* 36). Yardley also characterizes the protagonist of a Chick Lit novel as someone who develops friendships that compensates for dysfunctional family ties and thus keeps "a circle of friends that were, for all intents and purposes, closer than any blood family" (8). From a Saudi social perspective, Al-Rasheed describes how mothers "internalise the oppression of men against women and pass it on" to their daughters (194). Al-Rasheed explains women's motivation for reproducing patriarchy: "This gives her a status that is dictated by the institution of patriarchy; the mother thus becomes the greatest defender of men's supremacy. Women are accomplices in their own

oppression, as this is the only way to gain recognition in society” (194). She provides an example from Badriyya al-Bishr’s “Hind wa al-askar,” where the mother, Hayla, becomes: “a monster mother who seeks perpetuation of the violence, exclusion, and subordination that she herself suffered as a young bride” (195). Algahtani also highlights “the conflict between a mother and daughter, reflecting the clash between these two women who hold entirely different worldviews” which underlines the various forms of violence which women commit against other women (28).

An example of patriarchal mothers is Gamrah’s conservative mother, who reinforces patriarchy, providing a strict upbringing, supplying premarital and post-marital instructions, and establishing a dress code for unmarried, married and divorced daughters. The narrator describes her:

Since Gamrah’s marriage to Rashid, her mother had gotten bolder about discussing ‘the business of men and women.’ In fact, before her marriage contract was signed, her mother hadn’t talked about such matters at all. Afterward, though, Gamrah got immersion training in the art of seduction from the same woman who had ripped pages out of the romance novels Gamrah used to borrow from her friends at school, and who wouldn’t even let Gamrah go over to her friends’ houses, with the exception of Sadeem’s. (13)

This quotation emphasizes the conflict between ideals of chastity before marriage and expected seductiveness after becoming a wife. When Gamrah becomes a married woman, her mother shows her how to be seductive and tempting: “Her mother’s Golden Rule was spinning in her mind. *Don’t be easy*. Refusal—it’s the secret to activating a man’s passion” (12). After the divorce, Gamrah’s mother forbids her to go out alone or to visit anyone because her social status as a divorced woman makes her the centre of social critique and suspicion:

As for Gamrah, she kept up a steady stream of complaints about her mother’s constant harassment; she moaned that her mother forbade her to go out the way she used to, just because she was now a divorcee and, her mother claimed, all eyes were fixed on her, waiting for a single misstep and prepared to spread the most lurid rumors about her. (138)

This contradiction also shows in Ferraris's *The City of Veils* through the depiction of sexy undergarments displayed in the lingerie shop, the different roles women take before and after marriage, and the conflict between chastity in the public sphere and seduction in the private sphere.

The novel depicts Um Nuwayyir, who, unlike their real mothers, provides them with love, attention, care and guidance. She offers the girls what their families do not: "Sadeem really saw Um Nuwayyir as a mother. How very often Um Nuwayyir was the preserver of the girls' secrets! She was always right there with them when they were thinking through some issue or other, and she was always generous about suggesting a solution" (26). Additionally, she offers them liberty in conservative Riyadh society: "her home became the perfect setting for trying out the freedoms to which they had but little access in any of their own homes" (26). The novel highlights the patriarchal behaviour of older women, through which they reproduce misogyny and gain authority in the domestic sphere.

As a feature of Chick Lit, *Girls of Riyadh* depicts the glamorous and trendy city-life of London, San Francisco and Chicago as representatives of Western metropolitan life, and Riyadh and Dubai as attractive settings of Arab modernity. Yardley debates: "If you read early Chick Lit, you'll notice it's almost always set in one of two places: London or New York" (10). She also explains the importance of these settings: "With a metropolitan setting, you are able to show more expensive clothing, more ethnic diversity, more upscale industries, and more fast-paced lifestyles" (11). The novel utilizes city-life to create a trendy elite and fashionable characters who make use of abundant luxuries in wealthy Saudi society. Moreover, *Girls of Riyadh* illustrates the protagonists' failure in finding contentment or comfort in the Western cities they move to, which emphasizes the novel's message that the solutions for Saudi women's problems should not be imported from the West, but that they must seek local resolutions. Characters who travel to Europe or America for the sake of peace or consolation return to Saudi disappointed and dissatisfied. For example, Sadeem goes to London where she lives and works for a while. Instead of formulating solutions for her repression, she indulges in a relationship with Firas and endures his abuse and mistreatment. Michelle also travels to San Francisco to overcome her disappointment after Faisal breaks up with her. Yet, she does not find peace and eventually settles down

in Dubai as an alternative Arab/Muslim society. Finally, Gamrah fails to find happiness with Rashid in Chicago. Yet, when she comes back to Riyadh and starts her own business, working hard to achieve her success locally, she becomes powerful and satisfied. As a result, *Girls of Riyadh* indicates that Western city-life and lifestyle are not the ideal prescriptions for Saudi women to achieve relief from strict the patriarchal rules, inequalities or hardships they face in their country. The text suggests that Saudi women need to accomplish social reform through modifying local ideals and restrictions.

The novel demonstrates how the protagonists resolve their problems by challenging local injustices. For instance, Sadeem leaves Firas and decides to marry a man who does not judge her against rigid social laws. Gamrah escapes her family's domination by having a job that grants her financial independence. Michelle chooses to live in Dubai to be in a more liberated Arab/Muslim culture and falls in love with an open-minded Arab/Muslim man, Hamdan. Lamees achieves liberation by being educated and employed, achieving financial independence and having a consensual rather than an arranged marriage. Lamees' conformity to local traditions is symbolized by her endorsement of the hijab and Islamic dress at the end of the novel, which reemphasizes the novel's message of the significance of improving Saudi women's living conditions through new understanding of social rules and piety codes.

Cyberfeminism

As part of her attempt to overcome social restrictions and challenge social patriarchy, *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator employs a web blog to obscure her identity, communicate with people and revolt against social norms. By doing so, the novel challenges genre conventions that portray Chick Lit protagonist as submissive to social rules.

Additionally, the protagonist illustrates the twenty-first-century Saudi society and young writers' ability to transcend cultural and political restriction by utilizing media and the internet. Algahtani contends that "Young Saudi writers have been able to take advantage of new digital technologies and social media platforms to write, share and publish works and ideas. This has enabled a new generation to engage in political participation in Saudi Arabia, spreading ideas about human rights and freedom of expression in different media forms" (27). Miriam Cooke's *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (2005) describes "the revolution in

information technology” in the Arab world, “which is enabling a new kind of networking that links local, national, and transnational players and is instrumental in fomenting a global conception of identity and community” (viii). Cooke quotes Fatima Naseef’s description of the value of Saudi women’s confinement in the presence of connectivity and cyber interaction, and the juxtaposition of isolation and togetherness: “‘They are not together but they are also not isolated.... They have actually chosen physical isolation so as to be able to enhance their virtual community’” (*Women Claim Islam* xvii).³⁵ Consequently, the narrator transcends patriarchal space limitations and challenges the masculine heterosexual cyber spheres that, according to Jessie Daniels, “reproduce rather than subvert white, heterosexual, masculine cultures and hierarchies of power” (102). Therefore, the narrator practices cyberfeminism, which can be defined, according to Sonia Núñez Puente, “virtual networks that embody freedom and represent communities of voluntary choice and association ... thus ignoring the problematic exclusion of women from the world of technology” (436). Daniels defines cyberfeminism as the technologies that enable women to resist patriarchy (101).

The narrator’s employment of an internet blog enables her to critique social injustices, show resistance to cultural and patriarchal rules, and express her need for cyberspace to conceal her identity and to avoid contempt or punishment. Shahrzad Mojab underlines differences between realspace and cyberspace for Middle-Eastern and Muslim women. First, she asserts that realspace free expression is dangerous because “Women are readily killed on charges of violating ‘honour’ codes” (53). Secondly, she clarifies that “patriarchy or other relations of domination evaporate once they move from the real to the virtual world” (44). Mojab concludes that “The Internet is presented by many optimists as an open, borderless world in which no one is able to monitor the free flow of information” (54). Similarly, Dalia Al Nimr’s *Cyberfeminism in the Arab World: Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Arab Women’s Web Sites* (2009) suggests that the internet is a source of empowerment for women (13). Al Nimr also considers cyberspace a virtual place where women can be safe and “away from patriarchal structures” (16). She further emphasizes that cyberspace can provide women with a private sphere where they “share knowledge, exchange ideas, and develop a future

³⁵ Fatima Naseef is a prominent Islamic preacher for women and a University Professor in Theology in Saudi Arabia.

vision” (15). Rita Stephan emphasizes that “the Internet does provide safety from direct violence and a greater geographical freedom” (83). An example of this is Riverbend’s *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* (2005), where the writer’s identity remains mysterious to guarantee her safety and she utilizes an internet blog to relate stories about war horrors and political corruption in her country. Similarly, *Girls of Riyadh*’s narrator employs the internet to escape the dangers of an unveiled identity in realspace. She utilizes safe cyberspace to evaluate her society, express her grievances, imagine an alternative world and exercise unlimited agency away from fear and forced conformation to traditions, culture or piety.

The opening chapter starts with the narrator’s invitation to readers: “Ladies and Gentlemen: You are invited to join me in one of the most explosive scandals and noisiest, wildest all-night parties around. Your personal tour guide—and that’s moi—will reveal to you a new world, a world closer to you than you might imagine” (1). Through her introductory statement, the narrator declares the exposition of her female voice in conservative Saudi society; resists gender segregation by defining her gender-mixed audience; and reveals to her readers that her blog is rebellious, unconventional and geographically undefined and unlimited. Algahtani notes that “since 2000, the growth of digital technology has greatly influenced the lives of Saudi users, particularly women” (27). She adds that involvement in safe browsing and other internet activities “help Arab women escape from social pressures and isolation” (27). Finally, Algahtani illustrates that “participation in internet forums and blogging has allowed Saudi women to write freely in cyberspace in contrast to the restrictions placed on their freedom within the public sphere of their own society” (27). This can be identified with Loubna H. Skalli’s description of women who tend to seek “alternative discursive spaces where it is possible to redefine patriarchal gender roles while questioning the sociocultural, economical, political, and legal institutions constraining them” (36). Additionally, the narrator announces her liberation from fear and worry in the cyber medium as she states: “I fear no one. I am free” (2). She has the courage to reveal to her readers her personal features and different weaknesses: “I am religious, a balanced Saudi Muslim and I can say that there are a lot of people just like me. My only difference is that I don’t conceal what others would call contradictions within myself or pretend perfection like some do” (153). This indicates that by indulging in the cyber world, the

protagonist's fear of condemnation or punishment disappears, and she displays progressiveness and liberation that are unique and limited to the virtual world.

Throughout her conversations, the narrator moves from the global to the local and vice versa. She announces her transnational identity: "We all live in this world" (1). Then, she moves back to the local: "among us Saudis" (1) and "The heroes of my story are people among you, from you and within you, from the desert we all come and to the dessert we shall all return" (2). As a result, the narrator's blog entries indicate two-way traffic between transnational and global aspirations, and local constraints. It also suggests that the narrator tends to localize the global – when she presents herself and her readers as originally from the desert – and to globalize the local – when she associates herself with global, transnational and transcultural rules. This illustrates Arif Dirlik's view that highlights the unavoidable tendency to localize the global and globalize the local in cyberspace (120). Accordingly, through her employment of cyberspace, the author transcends geographical boundaries, practices free trafficking between different identities and overcomes restrictions connected to a specific space and culture.

The confinement of *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator creates a harem-like environment, where women used to live in isolation from men and the outer world. Moore asserts that "The term *harim* (pl. *hurum*) comes from the root h-r-m which also generates *haram* (sanctuary) and *haram* (forbidden and sacred); it can refer to one's wife but more generally denotes a part of the home where women are protected from encounters with men" (11). Andrea Bernadette adds to this description by clarifying that "a 'harem is by definition a sanctuary or a sacred precinct'" and "'In its secular application the word [harem] was used in reference to that portion of a Muslim house occupied by the women, because it was their haram, or sanctuary'" (5). Fatima Mernissi, in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), illustrates her personal experience of isolation in a harem: "Our house gate was a gigantic stone arch with impressive carved wooden doors. It separated the women's harem from the male strangers walking in the streets" (22). *Girls of Riyadh* indicates that contemporary Saudi women are still exposed to similar seclusion and confinement in realspace, which facilitates their taking advantage of hidden identities in cyberspace.

Similar to its rebellion against the conservative genre conventions, *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator transcends physical confinement, patriarchal limitations and imprisonment by utilizing the liberation of transnational dimensions that cyberspace offers to isolated women. In the introduction to chapter four, the narrator describes her seclusion: "Sitting in my own silent room." Then she continues to draw an immediate contradictory image of her busy active virtual life on the internet: "I can practically hear the blasts of condemnation and profanity coming from Saudi and Arab men among my readers" (28). Arturo Escobar draws attention to the fact that "Women have often been subordinated through restrictions linked to place and home" (45). In addition, Gillian Youngs asserts that "The influence and identity of women has been predominantly located in the context of the so-called private space of the family, the domestic, the sphere of social reproduction and caring" (59). Thus, Escobar describes women's reactions to such limitations: "They as easily originate reactionary and regressive changes as they might progressive politics" (45). This initiates what Youngs calls "a strong sense of the public/private contexts which shapes women's lives and communication" (63). From a different perspective, Youngs highlights the significance of this privacy in women's communications through cyberspace where, unlike in realspace, they can defy cultural rules and institute new standards to aspire to because they are safe from social punishment (65). Likewise, *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator utilizes her confinement and shows comfort in her seclusion by displaying her revolutionary behaviour and beliefs in cyberspace through her blog: "I don't analyze every move I make, and I don't worry about every act possibly being taboo and against social or religious laws" (64). This is also demonstrated by the narrator's indifferent reaction to angry male blog readers who express their rage towards her scandalous representation of Saudi girls from Najd: "Men have written to me saying: Who authorized you to speak for the girls of Najd?!" To which she answers: "We are only at the beginning sweethearts. If you are mounting a war against me in the fifth e-mail, then imagine what you will be saying about me after you have read the many e-mails to come!" (32). This indicates that the narrator utilizes her confinement to challenge social restrictions and practice virtual resistance.

Girls of Riyadh illustrates ambivalence in its protest and illustrates the tension between rebellion and conformity. This is portrayed in the narrator's insistence on maintaining a veiled identity, despite her critique of women's restrictions and her

rebellion against social rules, which indicates her respect for indigenous cultural rules. Frantz Fanon describes the importance of the veil for Arab women and how it becomes a means of specifying identity: “the veil worn by the women appears with such constancy that it generally suffices to characterize Arab society” (43). Maintaining the veil constitutes the protagonists’ identity. Mernissi’s *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987) adds that the veil, although limiting and restricting, has liberating features because the presence of the veil “means that the woman is present in the men’s world, but invisible” (143). Thus, the narrator, despite her rebellion against several social constraints, utilizes invisibility and veiled identity to indulge in the phallogocentric world of writing and internet. As a result, the veil becomes a means for women to access intellectual and virtual liberation. The narrator’s insistence on a veiled identity throughout the novel is an indication of her belief in the veil and concealment as an essential part of her Saudi authenticity. Additionally, it underlines her need, in light of Fanon’s view, to maintain her connection to her society, without which “She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside” (Fanon 52). Jeffrey Louis Decker also underlines women’s empowerment behind the veil: “marginalized subjects can manipulate representation and power from their (im)position behind the veil” (189). As a result, *Girls of Riyadh* demonstrates that veiling plays a fundamental role in Saudi women’s allegiance to their culture and religion. Furthermore, it enhances connectedness to their local traditions and culture. It demonstrates women’s awareness of the veil’s security while producing liberated and rebellious women’s discourse.

As a sign of its ambivalent conformity, *Girls of Riyadh* employs Storytelling in a web blog as another common empowering activity that the novel shares with harems, hammams and other female restricted areas, where female inhabitants practice storytelling as a means of liberation and rebellion against their physical and emotional limitations. Susanne Enderwitz highlights the importance of Shahrazâd’s storytelling in demonstrating the narrator’s supremacy the *Nights* (189). Regardless of the “details of the contents,” the remarkable authority, subversion and protestations of the narrator remain in our memory (Enderwitz 189). Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* describes the experience of storytelling and its liberating effect on the female members of her family in the harem:

Aunt Habiba's most popular tale, which she narrated on special occasions only, was about 'The Woman with Wings,' who could fly away from the courtyard whenever she wanted to. Every time Aunt Habiba told that story, the women in the courtyard would tuck their caftans into their belts, and dance away with their arms spread wide as if they were about to fly. (22)

This illustrates how storytelling becomes an expression of women's emancipation and the manifestation of their liberation and agency. In *Rituals of Memory: In Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (2007), Brinda Mehta clarifies how local Arab/Muslim women seek seclusion from outsiders' gazes in the privacy of gender-segregated hammams and achieve liberation through storytelling, which makes their visit to hammams a flight towards spiritual purification and emancipation. Furthermore, Mehta claims that women's narratives in hammams "expose the dual modalities of women's oppression and resistance as they struggle to claim intellectual, cultural, and political agency" (125). She illustrates that those women's narratives, like *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator's blog and Mernissi's harem, are a means of transcending confinement and social limitations.

As part of its resistance to social limitations *Girls of Riyadh*'s narrator challenges Saudi social and cultural forces that view the internet as a Western product and consider its unlimited gender-mixed, transnational and global spheres threatening factors to social conservatism and devoutness. Lamis Alshejni emphasizes that Arab/Muslim social rules silence women in cyberspace by prohibiting them from accessing the internet (214). Yet, Alshejni divides Arab women into two categories, the common and the elite. She emphasizes that the elite represents the "Western model of consumption" (215). They enjoy Western women's fashions – for example, the internet – and they are more liberated than common Arab women. On the other hand, common women are "left untouched by such trends" (Alshejni 215). Nevertheless, according to Alshenjani, both categories of women "constitute the dividing line between the Arab world and the Western one" (215). She further explains that women are utilized as "a diplomatic tool" that can be used according to Arab/Muslim societal needs: "If they want to present themselves as opening up to the modern world and democratic values, then they push for the development of women, but when they want to shun Western interference they point to the differences between the two cultures, evoking the image

of the veiled woman” (215-216). An example of this is the narrator’s emphasis on the shortage of female readers in her blog, an indicator of men’s greater access to internet than women, when she addresses a female reader in chapter eight: “Ghada (and by the way I thank you, for being the first girl to e-mail me since this scandal-sheet series began)” (55). By going against social norms that usually silence women, the narrator announces rebellion against her society and raises her female voice, utilizing the internet to seek change and acknowledgement as a woman.

The narrator draws attention to the punishments directed at women who defy social and religious laws by highlighting male readers’ condemnation and furious reactions to her violations. First, she illustrates how angry readers accuse her of misrepresenting Saudi women: “You are nothing but a malevolent and rancorous woman deliberately attempting to sully the image of women in Saudi society” (32). Then, they threaten her to reveal her identity, which is a severe punishment in a society that confines women and veils them to obscure their identity: “we will reveal you the same way you revealed us!” (125). Moreover, blog readers question the narrator’s devoutness when they criticize her for taboo activities, like fortune telling, which is considered blasphemy among extremists in Arab/Muslim societies: “most of them—were mad at me for talking about the sun signs and the Ouija board and reading coffee cups which not so many believe in” (64). Additionally, the narrator describes the life-threatening messages she receives: “Can any of you out there believe that someone would call for my blood?” (75). The danger increases when the narrator becomes exposed by the main service provider of the internet in Saudi Arabia: “I heard that King Abd Al-Aziz City is trying to block my site to dam up the channels of communication and ward off malicious acts, scandalous deeds and all causes of corruption or evil” (93). These reactions infuriate the narrator and lead her to announce her rationale of social criticism: “But isn’t there a starting point for every drastic social change?” (110). This indicates that the aim of her blog is social reform. She adds: “these strange and unusual e-mails have created a furor in our society, which has never before experienced anything like this. It is clear that these e-mails will continue to furnish fertile material for exchange and debate for a long time to come, even after the e-mails cease to appear” (116). This illustrates that her readers’ anxiety escalates because of their fear of social change. Hence, they accuse her of “becoming a role model to others who might be tempted to challenge our society’s traditions with such audacity, brazen insolence, and

self-assurance” (129). Strict blog readers’ behaviour shows the effect of social ideology in maintaining women’s conservative behaviour, which makes such participants concerned when they witness subversion because it can become part of the social mainstream.

Self-Orientalism

By illustrating Saudi female characters that struggle to achieve liberation and agency, *Girls of Riyadh* challenges Chick Lit conventions and undoes effects of dominant stereotypical images of Saudi women in the West. Algahtani emphasizes that because “Western media still present the same image of gender-related issues in the Arab world, focusing on the hijab,” women writers produce self-representations to avoid misrepresentation (30-31). Alsanea addresses her Western audience at the beginning of her book by declaring that her reason for writing the English version of the novel is to amend distorted depiction of Saudis:

It seemed to me, and to many other Saudis, that the Western world still perceives us either romantically, as the land of the Arabian Nights and the land where bearded sheikhs sit in their tents surrounded by their beautiful harem women, or politically, as the land that gave birth to Bin Laden and other terrorists, the land where women are dressed in black from head to toe and where every house has its own oil well in the backyard! (n. pag.)

Through this declaration, the author reveals that her novel aims to reverse Orientalist perceptions that – especially in the violent context of post-9/11 culture – commonly associates Saudi society with outdatedness, terrorism, fundamentalism, moral corruption and affluence. Alsanea adds: “I felt it is my duty to reveal another side of Saudi life to the Western world.” She concludes: “I hope you will see, too, that little by little some of these women are beginning to carve out their own way—not the Western way, but one that keeps what is good about the values of their religion and culture, while allowing for reform.” Thus, the writer draws attention to Saudi women’s attempts to achieve liberation without defying local traditions or piety. By doing so, Alsanea aims to correct the widespread image of local women as passively oppressed and in desperate need of foreign rescue. However, by revealing details about Saudi culture and women to different Western audiences, Alsanea embraces conventions of Orientalism. Al-Rasheed

asserts that novels like *Girls of Riyadh* “orientalised Saudi women” (216) because their writers are “self-orientalising” (215) and their “literature is dominated by the Oriental gaze that is still fascinated by the hidden lives of veiled Muslim women – their love, passion, and straight and queer sexuality – a gaze that yields fame, celebrity status, and money through publication” (217). Additionally, Booth considers the novel an attempt to satisfy the West’s eagerness to know about Saudi society and its unique norms:

“Memoir and popular fiction from the Middle East, circulating in English, respond to (and likely stimulate) heightened public interest among Western publics in all things ‘Islamic’” (“The Muslim Woman” 151). Booth adds that “‘third-world literature’” functions “as windows on the world” because it provides “native informant texts for an informationally eager Western readership” and that is loaded “with particular political force in this historical moment when genuine public concern in Europe and North America to ‘understand Islam,’ as well as targeted political agendas, have generated a frenzied post-9/11 information marketplace.” (“The Muslim Woman” 154).

Furthermore, Alsanea reproduces Orientalist images of Arab/Muslim women as confined and isolated in gendered spaces by creating the effect of a “harem (in Hollywood) all over again” (Booth, “Translator v. Author” 199) and through creating an internet blog that serves to gender segregate the protagonist and hide her identity. By not providing a broader representation of Saudi women that includes different class categories and restricting the depiction to the elite, the novel reinforces the image of Saudi women as rich and lavish. Despite her intentions to undo the stereotyping of Saudi women, the writer endorses self-Orientalism and reinforces Western stereotypes.

Girls of Riyadh provokes criticism and rejection within Saudi society because, according to local perceptions, it exposes social flaws and unveils mysteries about Saudi women’s lives, which scandalizes Saudi society. Algahtani claims that many Saudi novels written in the noughties, including *Girls of Riyadh*, “draw attention to the paradox of conservative and liberal culture, as they have written about taboos including cultural, religious and sexual issues” (30). This exposes their books to local critique and rejection. However, Algahtani emphasizes that “the translation of these texts to foreign languages has given them an existence in the world literary sphere that may also make them more visible and acceptable within their own national literary space” (30). Al-Rasheed contends that post 9/11 young Saudi women authors write “in response to market forces, consumption patterns, and the expectations of an international reading

audience” (216). She believes that central themes, such as “sexual desire, romantic love, society’s denial, and personal suffering” are part of “late modernity” that young female Saudi authors seek to be associated with (216). Hence, like other Arab/Muslim writers – such as Mernissi’s descriptions of Morocco in the first half of the 20th century – Alsanea practices self-Orientalism by describing the 21st century Riyadh to her Western audience, reproducing Western stereotypical images of Saudi women – such as the subjugated and the concealed – and restricting her representation of Saudi women to the elite and overlooking other social classes.

To conclude, through its appropriation of Chick Lit in the portrayal of Saudi women, *Girls of Riyadh* broadens the limits of a genre critiqued for restricting its focus to white women and challenges its conventions by resisting conservative social rules. The novel evaluates Saudi cultural norms and challenges rules of patriarchy and gender injustices without adopting a Western model of liberation. By doing so, Alsanea’s text suggests answers to Saudi women’s plethora of questions concerning education, gender roles, employment, domestic life and marriage. The novel neither defies indigenous Arab/Muslim norms and institutions nor endorses patriarchal conventions. It portrays characters that defy their predominant sexual and social models, and revolt against restricting cultural boundaries. The text provides examples of how Saudi women transcend their misogynist societies and undo the effects of predominant stereotyping that characterize them as passive and submissive. Yet, the novel also self-Orientalizes by limiting its depiction of Saudi women to the lavish elite, which reinforces the stereotypical image of Saudi women as princesses. Alsanea’s novel reveals how Saudi women utilize technology to overcome gender and physical hindrances to achieve safe self-expression. Finally, *Girls of Riyadh* proves that Saudi women writers “may have been denied a voice and place in the public sphere, but their literature attests to the quest for their right to exist as autonomous individuals” (Al-Rasheed 177).

Conclusion

In reaction to the lack of representation and the mysteries surrounding Saudi women – their lifestyle, dress-code, gender segregation, immobility, male guardianship and lack of agency – this thesis resists Saudi women’s obscurity through its exploration of Western representations of Saudi women by Hilary Mantel, Alys Einion and Zoe Ferraris, and the self-representation of Saudi women by a Saudi writer, Rajaa Alsanea. It investigates texts’ endorsement of or resistance to the portrayal of Saudi women as veiled pearls, and Western stereotypical images of women in Saudi and ideals of Saudi womanhood. It examines the novels’ historical and political contexts and their effect on the representation of women in Saudi Arabia. I have demonstrated how, through their use of genre, these writers shed light on marginalization of women and patriarchal injustices. I have shown how, despite their indication that Western women are not less subjugated than Saudi women, the Western writers discussed produce an Orientalist representation of Saudi Arabia by describing the country as unsafe and a space of terror and horror. This Orientalism is conveyed through genre – the Gothic, the thriller, and detective fiction. I contend that although Alsanea undoes stereotypical images of Saudi women in the West, she practices self-Orientalism by limiting her representation of Saudi women to the wealthy and the elite. By doing so, she reinforces the picture of local women as lavish and overlooks the struggling masses of Saudi women, who endeavour to achieve autonomy, agency, mobility and financial independence.

The women’s writing examined in this thesis indicates that historical context changes representations of Saudi women. Mantel’s *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* describes Saudi anti-Westernization during the 1980s, when European and American oil and construction companies exported employees and experts to work in Saudi Arabia. By illustrating their white protagonist’s inferior social status, both Mantel’s novel and Einion’s *Inshallah* – published in 2014 and set in the 1990s – suggest that Western women are not superior to local women and that their liberation is fragile and illusory. Thus, these novels imply that since the 1980s, Western women have been exposed to social marginalization and their status has not undergone much improvement, if any. Both writers eliminate the binary opposition between the West and the East. However, they overlook local women and present them as defenders of patriarchy, passively dependent on male guardians and limited to their domestic roles. Although *Inshallah*’s

historical context unfolds terror and fear because of the emergence of ISIS and its fearmongering in Middle East during 2014, it challenges prevailing Islamophobic ideology through its depiction of veiled feminists and progressive Muslim men. Like *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, *Inshallah* associates Saudi traditions and cultural codes with violence and abuse exercised against women. Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* and Ferraris's trilogy express a twenty-first-century Saudi Arabia where social advancement changes women's conditions and empowerment. This defies the image of terrorism that is associated with Saudi Arabia post-9/11. Although Ferraris sheds light on working women in Saudi Arabia and describes their efforts in achieving financial independence to provide for their families and themselves, *Girls of Riyadh* ignores the unfortunate masses of Saudi women. Alsanea and Ferraris present women that are keen on improving their social status and symbolize the onset of Saudi women's feminist resistance in the Kingdom. Also, both writers depict local women's resistance to repressive cultural rules – like arranged marriage – to misogynist employment cultures and to traditional relationships between men and women. Nonetheless, *Girls of Riyadh* and Ferraris's trilogy emphasize that successful social reform and undoing cultural misogyny relies on conformity to some ideals of Arab/Muslim womanhood, without which females become exposed to social condemnation and punishment. *Girls of Riyadh* and *Inshallah* show that Saudi society lacks the concept of sisterhood and women's solidarity. Consequently, they depict Saudi women as mean and cooperative with men in abusing other women, which is another symptom of self-Orientalism. They illustrate that mothers and older women are guardians of patriarchy in indigenous households after internalizing the abuse they endure at a young age. The three Western writers present Saudi nature as annihilating and its weather as hellish and suffocating, which indicates that despite their different historical periods, these writers still use traditional Orientalist tropes in describing the East.

This study draws new attention to Saudi women writers, Saudi female experience and their efforts to achieve liberation. It challenges stereotypes of Saudi women, which do not necessarily express their actual features or the described cultural norms. This thesis broadens awareness of the very limited number of Saudi women writers that explore indigenous women's lives. My research signals the beginning of feminist literary studies in Saudi Arabia. It underlines feminism's capability to include different cultures without conflicting with their religious or conservative contexts and it

resists Saudi rejection of feminist ideals by providing examples of feminists who do not reject all Saudi ideals. Consequently, my thesis paves the way for the emergence of more feminist studies and critical explorations in Saudi Arabia. From a transnational perspective, this thesis presents an in-depth investigation of representations of Saudi women and women in Saudi Arabia for international researchers. By drawing on resemblances between Saudi and non-Saudi women, this thesis narrows the perceived chasm between Western and local women, demonstrating that, despite their differences, the two groups are equally but differently disenfranchised. By connecting Saudi and non-Saudi women, this thesis enhances transnational women's awareness of their rights and of the importance of sisterhood and female solidarity.

This thesis responds to the emergence of feminist self-representation among Saudi women, which began in the twenty-first century and made social critique more visible. Writers, bloggers, media producers and broadcasters have started to utilize the internet to publish their work and to attract global attention to their complaints freely and safely. Samar Fatani contends that “women writers have contributed with constructive articles to guarantee the welfare of women” (n. pag.). She notes that, although many women “suffer in silence,” these writers have become “a source of strength, protecting the underprivileged, and the oppressed and projecting their suffering” (n. pag.). Fatani adds that they became “instrumental in changing the mindset of people and educating those who are influenced by rigid customs that stand in the way of empowering women” (n. pag.). She provides examples of these women, such as Badria Albishr and Fatina Shakir. Moreover, a new generation of young writers joined this quest and made use of their Western education, new technology and global media. A good example of these works is the first feminist magazine in Saudi Arabia, *Jahanamiya* – edited by Saudi Ahd Niazy who lives and studies in America. This is another example of Saudi feminist and literary efforts that challenge social misogyny, unveil disadvantages of women and struggle to undo prevailing stereotypes of Saudis Arabia in the West. The quarterly magazine focuses on Saudi women writers and the editor declares that its main aims are to undo stereotypical images, challenge obscurity and give Saudi women a chance at self-representation. This will aid in avoiding “the simplified western narrative of Saudi women's lives and experiences” (n. pag.). In Niazy's magazine, young writers provide narratives of women challenging strict social rules of sexuality and chastity, resist homogenizing Saudi women in the West and

redefine elements of their Saudiness and ideals of their womanhood. This illustrates that, through writing and utilizing media and the internet, Saudi women employ feminism, defy cultural conventions and become bolder in practicing self-representation or even activism, which stimulates a historic societal change.³⁶

Another example of growing feminist activism and awareness is the popular television series on one of the most viewed channels in the Middle East, MBC. *Selfie* is a prominent comedy show in its third season.³⁷ It critiques social faults and corruption in Saudi society and calls for modernity and progressiveness. On June 11, 2017, the episode was written by Albishr – a prominent Saudi woman writer – and its title was “I Am an Adult.” Beginning with its title, the episode tackles Saudi women’s struggle to overcome infantilization and their supposedly constant need for a male guardian to sponsor them regardless of their age. The show illustrates how women are prohibited from renting houses, being employed or keeping their jobs, and travelling without a male family member’s consent. It demonstrates how these hindrances are connected to cultural conservatism, rather than religious teachings. The episode ended with a screening of King Salman’s decree that announces women are equal citizens who do not need male guardian’s consent in dealing with governmental sectors in 2017. In October 2017, King Salman announced another historic decree that revealed his support of women’s rights when he allowed women to start driving cars in Saudi Arabia in June 2018. This reveals that, despite social conservatism, there are serious governmental efforts to improve women’s conditions, consult more enlightened Islamic interpretations of religious teachings concerned with women and to support the media in its quest to liberate women from patriarchal chains.

In December 2016, the Saudi director and producer Majed Al-Esa published a song on YouTube called *Hwages*. *Hwages* is an Arabic word that can be translated as ‘concerns’. The video shows three girls wearing colourful traditional costumes covered with black “abayas,” the hijab, and the “burqa.” They are riding on the backseat of an

³⁶ Feminism has been condemned by Arab/Muslim societies because it is viewed as a movement that is associated with the West, white women’s ideals and colonialism or imperialism.

³⁷ *Selfie* is a Saudi TV show that started its first season in 2015 and that focuses on social criticism and challenging extreme conservatism, fanaticism, and fundamentalist thought. It is on during the month of Ramadan – the ninth month of the lunar year – and each season consists of thirty unrelated episodes. The show stimulated controversy in Saudi society. Conservatives believe that it is anti-Islamic, while progressive people find it a means to express their need for modernity and liberty.

American car while an under aged boy proceeds to the driver's seat, which underlines the authority of the young boy over adult women. It signifies women's low status. Additionally, it highlights the conflict between advanced Western technology and social backwardness that is expressed through women's attire, lack of agency and reliance on male guardians. Later, the girls abandon the car to ride bicycles, scooters, skateboards and rollerblades to overcome their immobility and go beyond their imprisonment in the domestic sphere. However, men stop them, show them that they are not allowed to travel alone and tease them because of their disadvantages, especially in comparison to men, who can drive and travel without needing another person's consent. The video depicts the girls' liberation by having them play American basketball or dance American hip hop. This suggests that Saudi women, despite their endorsement of the hijab and the veil, can enjoy dancing and sports – activities that are still considered taboo for Saudi women and another indicator that women can show feminist defiance despite their embracement of religion. While men are involved in male-only jobs, girls are limited to dancing and basketball playing in gender-segregated areas and driving bumper cars. The clip depicts a troubled relationship between men and women. For instance, it shows the girls hitting balls against bowling pins with men's photos on them. In addition to their national costumes, men are shown in different Western outfits – full suits and casual jeans – a privilege women are denied. The video shows a puppet of President Trump behind a "House of Men" sign instead of "The White House" to emphasize his victory over Hilary Clinton as a symbol of transnational male triumph and female defeat. The lyrics are taken from two traditional Bedouin songs. The first part is a repetitive prayer that calls for men's annihilation and the desire to rid women of patriarchy and misogyny. This symbolizes the need to end patriarchy. Also, it underlines the presence of historical feminist resistance in Saudi Bedouin culture. The second part portrays a young woman singer who complains about women's misfortune. The song eventually transforms into repetitive beats, to which girls deliriously dance in a dark nightclub that symbolizes their mystery. Hence, the video suggests that women's obscurity can be utilized positively to practice liberating activities, which is different to the submissive obscurity behind the veil.

Since its publication, this song received thirteen million views, attracting national and transnational attention because it taps into several issues that touch the lives of Saudi women and those who rebel against the ideals of Saudi womanhood.

Thikra Al-Sulami in the Saudi newspaper, *Okaz*, describes different reactions to the video in the Kingdom. For example, Dr. Hatoon Ajwad Al-Fassi contends that the song describes different features of Saudi women's disadvantageous. However, she confirms that it homogenizes Saudi men by praying for all men's destruction (Al-Sulami, n. pag.). Likewise, Captain Nawal Hawsawi, a Saudi female pilot, argues that the lyrics pass unfair generalizations about Saudi men (Al-Sulami, n. pag.). Duaa Zahran, a female Saudi sociologist, considers the video insulting to social and religious norms and believes that Saudis should boycott such media products to prove loyalty to Islam (Al-Sulami n. pag.). From an international perspective, in *The New York Times*, Megan Specia comments: "it points a critical finger at the restrictions women face in Saudi Arabia. Activists in the country have long protested its patriarchal society that essentially prohibits women from traveling, marrying or attending college without permission from a male relative, who is called their guardian" (n. pag.). In the BBC News, Andree Massiah draws attention to conflicting local reactions to the video, which also symbolize Saudi social attitudes towards women's liberation and modernity in general. Reactions vary between considering the video a sign of disrespect for indigenous social rules, supporting the song because it advocates women's rights and exposes their abuse, or believing that the video has broken the silence and has proven that Saudis can be creative and artistic in response to social injustices. This undoes the prevailing stereotyping of Saudis as passive or fundamentalist. Basma Atassi further emphasizes, in the CNN International Edition, that the video revolves around the "male guardianship system that obliges all female citizens to seek permission from male relatives to travel, marry, and sometimes to work or access health care" (n. pag.). In the Huffington Post, Priscilla Frank considers the song a "feminist anthem" that hit Saudi society (n. pag.). This indicates that Saudi women have become locally and globally visible and discussable after being obscure, mysterious and forbidden. The song challenges images of Saudi women as protected pearls since they are outside the domestic sphere. However, it also portrays them as prisoners of their dress-code, cultural misogyny and geographical space, Saudi Arabia. Finally, this YouTube video indicates that Saudi men participate in the resistance and critique of social injustices that cause abuse of women.

"My luck is a sandstorm and my beloved is a piece of paper. How can I catch a piece of paper in a sandstorm?" With these words the female singer in Alesa's

video ends the song. The sandstorm symbolizes Saudi women's subjugation and conflicts between social conformity and the need to achieve liberation, authority, physical agency and modernity. Meanwhile, the beloved signifies women's long-sought liberation and empowerment. There is a great need for similar and bolder self-representations in literature, art and films to express Saudi women's need for independence. This will be achieved when female authors challenge social ideals that position women as veiled pearls. It is essential for Saudi women writers to follow texts like *Girls of Riyadh* and *The Green Bicycle* by continuing to express local women's efforts to achieve liberation and acknowledgement on a national and transnational level, to develop a stronger voice and to gain more courage to globally disclose their hopes and aspirations for further privileges. Additionally, women writers need to transcend cultural restrictions by depicting female characters that challenge social rules and supply Saudi women with examples of self-representations that escape the dominant images of women as prisoners or pearls. This would contribute to change. It would also minimize women's feelings of fear of social condemnation and punishment. Saudi feminists are developing a stronger voice and continuing to prove that being a feminist does not necessarily conflict with being a Muslim. Moreover, ideals of local and global sisterhood are starting to be promoted among Saudi women, which will strengthen their feelings of empowerment and enable them to learn from the experiences of their transnational sisters. By developing a stronger voice, Saudi women writers will show the world that they have transcended their images as veiled pearls.

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