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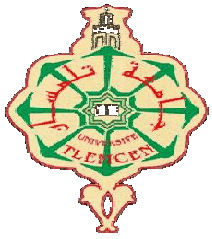

University of Tlemcen
Faculty of Letters and
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The (Mis) representation of Arab Women in Jean Sasson's Trilogy

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Houaria Bouchentouf**, declare that this dissertation was composed by myself and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Date: 10-10- 2022

DEDICATION

To my mother

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Abstract

This dissertation critically examines Jean Sasson's trilogy, composed of *Princess*, *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, and *Princess Sultana's Circle*, as feminist works that offer a nuanced understanding of the situation faced by Arab Muslim women, which is influenced by both religion and culture. By employing an analytical methodology, the study uncovers a plethora of contradictions and stereotypes within the novels, presenting Arab women as passive, exotic, and voiceless. These portrayals perpetuate the notion of Western superiority and reinforce the belief in the necessity of Western intervention. The research questions posed within the study delve into the potential of non-fiction to deepen our comprehension of how the circumstances of Arab Muslim women are simultaneously shaped by religion and culture. Additionally, the study investigates how Western literature molds perceptions concerning the status of Arab Muslim women, why it is essential for Western audiences, and particularly feminists, to gain insight into this status, whether it is their responsibility to liberate Arab Muslim women, and whether these women even require liberation. Drawing on cultural and postcolonial feminist theories of representation, culture, and religion, the research highlights the complex nature of the depiction of Arab Muslim women in the trilogy, emphasizing the tendency to associate their plight with Islam as a religion. It also underscores the significance of moving beyond narrow religious and cultural lenses to understand the multifaceted reality of these women. Furthermore, the study cautions against the misuse of literature as a tool to promote hatred, misunderstanding, and prejudice, particularly in relation to Arab culture and religion. In conclusion, this dissertation underscores the need for nuanced and intersectional approaches in examining the representation of Arab Muslim women, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

Keywords: Arab Muslim women, Western literature, post-colonial feminism orientalism, and Islam.

摘要

本论文批判性地研究了吉恩·萨松（Jean Sasson）的三部曲《公主》（Princess）《苏尔塔娜公主的女儿们》（Princess Sultana's Daughters）和《苏尔塔娜的圈子》（Princess Sultana's Circle），将其作为女性主义作品，提供了对阿拉伯穆斯林妇女所面临的情况的细致理解，这种情况同时受到宗教和文化的影响。通过采用分析性方法，研究揭示了这些小说中存在的大量矛盾和刻板印象，将阿拉伯妇女描绘为被动、异国情调和无声的形象。这些描绘强化了西方优越感的观念，并加强了对西方干预的必要性的信念。研究中提出的问题探讨了非虚构文学深化我们对阿拉伯穆斯林妇女境况如何同时受到宗教和文化的塑造的理解的潜力。此外，研究还调查了西方文学如何塑造人们对阿拉伯穆斯林妇女地位的看法，以及西方观众，特别是女性主义者，获得对这种地位的洞察力的重要性，他们是否有责任解放阿拉伯穆斯林妇女，以及这些妇女是否需要解放。研究借鉴了文化和后殖民主义女性主义的表征、文化和宗教理论，强调了这部三部曲中对阿拉伯穆斯林妇女描绘的复杂性，并强调了将阿拉伯穆斯林妇女的困境与伊斯兰作为宗教联系起来的倾向。它还强调了超越狭隘的宗教和文化视角以理解这些妇女多维的现实的重要性。此外，研究警示不要滥用文学作为促进仇恨、误解和偏见的工具，特别是与阿拉伯文化和宗教有关的方面。总之，本论文强调在审视阿拉伯穆斯林妇女的描绘时，需要采用细致和交叉学科的方法，挑战刻板印象，促进对她们经历的更全面的理解。

关键词：阿拉伯穆斯林妇女、西方文学、后殖民主义女性主义、东方主义和伊斯兰。

ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة دراسة نقدية لثلاثية جين ساسون، والتي تتألف من "الأميرة" و"بنات الأميرة سلطانة" و"دائرة الأميرة سلطانة"، كأعمال نسوية تقدم فهمًا دقيقًا للوضع الذي تواجهه النساء العربيات المسلمات والذي يتأثر بالدين والثقافة على حد سواء. من خلال استخدام منهج تحليلي، تكشف الدراسة عن تناقضات وصور نمطية متعددة داخل الروايات، حيث تصوّر النساء العربيات على أنهن ساكنات وغريبات وخاصةً بلا صوت. تؤدي هذه التصوّرات إلى تعزيز مفهوم الغربية الفائقة وتعزيز الاعتقاد في ضرورة التدخل الغربي. تتناول الأسئلة البحثية في هذه الدراسة إمكانية استخدام الأدب غير الخيالي لتعميق فهمنا لكيفية تأثير الدين والثقافة معًا على وضع النساء العربيات المسلمات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستقصي الدراسة كيفية تشكيل الأدب الغربي للمفاهيم المتعلقة بمكانة النساء العربيات المسلمات، ولماذا يعتبر من الضروري على الجمهور الغربي، وخاصة النسويات، أن يكتسبوا فهمًا لهذه المكانة، وما إذا كان من مسؤوليتهم تحرير النساء العربيات المسلمات، وما إذا كانت هذه النساء بحاجة حقًا للتحرير. باستخدام نظريات نسوية ثقافية وبعد استعمارية في مجال التمثيل والثقافة والدين، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الطبيعة المعقدة لتصوير النساء العربيات المسلمات في الثلاثية، مع التأكيد على اتجاه ربط محنتهن بالإسلام كدين. كما تؤكد الدراسة أهمية التحرك خارج العدسات الضيقة الدينية والثقافية لفهم واقع هذه النساء المتعدد الجوانب. وعلاوة على ذلك، تحذر الدراسة من سوء استخدام الأدب كأداة لتعزيز الكراهية والتفسيرات المغلوطة والتحامل، خاصة فيما يتعلق بثقافة ودين العرب. في الختام، تؤكد هذه الأطروحة على ضرورة النهج المتعدد الجوانب والتداخلي في دراسة تمثيل النساء العربيات المسلمات في الخلاصة، يتطلب التحول من الصور النمطية وتعزيز فهم أكثر شمولًا لتجاربهن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة العربية المسلمة، الأدب الغربي، الاستشراق النسوي ما بعد الاستعمار، والإسلام.

Contents

General Introduction

General Introduction

This dissertation proposed to analyze the image of Arab Muslim women in the trilogy of Jean Sasson; *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia* (1992), *Sultana's Daughters* (*1995*), and *Sultana's Circle* (*2000*) to find out how Arab Muslim women are represented in 20th century American literature. *Princess* trilogy, is about the reality of being a female in Saudi Arabia. The author, Jean Sasson, called herself a voice for Middle Eastern women. She spent 12 years in Saudi Arabia and worked as a medical administrative coordinator at King Abdul Aziz Hospital. Sasson befriended many members of the royal family who visited the hospital. The most notable of these friendships was that of Sultana, the princess whose life *Princess* tells. The overall research goal is to explore the image of Arab Muslim women in the trilogy, to see whether 20th-century non-fiction can give us a deeper understanding of whether Arab Muslim women's situation is simultaneously determined by religion or culture. Based on the hypothesis that Sasson uses Western feminist assumptions to judge 'Third World women,' this study intends to analyze the images of Arab women and relate them to their contexts. This study provides convincing answers to refute the persisting stereotypes of oppressed, docile, voiceless Arab Muslim women, the false association between Islam as a religion, and the plight of Arab Muslim women in Western literature.

Historically, the East has formed a mysterious place to the West with which stereotypes, adventures, and superstitions are associated. With their deliberate exploring journeys, early Western travelers tried to dispel the dark image of the East in their books and letters. Since then, the attempt to picture Eastern culture by Western writers, artists, filmmakers, and designers has continued. This image has been introduced by the book of the famous post-colonial critic Edward Said as *Orientalism*. This term also implies the extreme Western interpretation of other's cultures and beliefs. With the increasing political and economic

interests in the Middle East, especially after the Gulf War, extensive reports given by Western journalists and American soldiers turned the media's attention to the area, particularly Saudi Arabia, as a new territory for orientalist investigation. The West sees Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of Islam, the second-largest religion in the world, where Islam plays a significant role in everybody's life, especially for women. The image of Saudi women as oppressed and subjugated in a male-dominated society was introduced to Western fiction of the 19th century after the Gulf War. Sasson's trilogy has significantly impacted the Western shaping of Saudi Arabian women's image and Arab women in general.

Although Islam is a supporter of women's rights, it remains a sour theme and a source of women's oppression by western feminists. The literature on Arab Muslim women is filled with perceptions and stereotypes of women as voiceless veiled victims who seek the help of western saviors. Neglecting women's experiences and the social, cultural, economic, and contextual aspects that influence the situation of women in any society, western feminists and international readers relate the plight of Arab Muslim women to religion. Based on this idea of false association and the persisting stereotypes of women, this dissertation investigates the images of Arab Muslim women presented in the trilogy. It analyzes the novel's main female characters, Sultana and her daughters, through feminist ideas to see how a Western writer sees Arab Muslim women. It also aims to answer questions relating to the position of women in the Arab World. This attempt may allow the research ideas and knowledge to be shared to encourage readers to adjust their perceptions of Arab Muslim women.

The American novelist Jean Sasson writes about women in the Middle East and calls herself a voice for Middle Eastern women. She is the author of several novels about Arab women; among her novels is her trilogy *Princess*, which narrates the story of women's oppression in Saudi Arabia. The story's main female character, Sultana, is a Saudi Arabian

royal family princess who reacts against the age of discrimination between males and females in the kingdom of Arabia. The story setting is Riyadh (1950-1990). According to Sasson, the story is authentic of a woman born into a wealthy family who dares to defy customs and laws. For her, Sultana is an example of women's emancipation in a society close to its traditions and customs. Therefore, this research will incorporate an analytic study of the trilogy to explore the images of Arab Muslim women. Moreover, these novels also explain how the relationship between Islam and the plight of Arab women is established.

The evidence from the Quran and Sunna will break the false assumptions that relate Arab oppression to Islam. Moreover, it will prove that the current male domination in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries with Islamic societies comes not from Islam but rather from the loosely stated rules and laws that govern the countries and the local cultural traditions. Sasson mistakenly uses Western feminist ideas to judge women, who belong to different cultures and religions, and empowers her main female character with Western culture and allows her to break the social and religious norms. This study also intends to correct the misconceptions and prejudices about Islam and blame women's oppression where it belongs.

The following research questions serve as a magnifying lens for this study. Firstly, given that much literature on Sasson's trilogy directly relates women's oppression to religion, can non- fiction give us a deeper understanding of how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture?

Secondly, how Western literature shapes perceptions of Arab Muslim women's status, and why is it essential for Western audiences and feminists to understand the status of Arab Muslim women? Is it their task to liberate Arab Muslim women? Do Arab Muslim women need their Liberation?

This dissertation argues that non-fiction gives a far more detailed image of Arab

women's position to Western readers, who end up relating women's plight to Islam as a religion. This latter has an obscure image dating back to the first orientalist, explorers, and travelers to the East, their stories of the Harems, different beliefs, and glamorous lives. However, the feminism Arab women call for is based on their religion and culture, and it is difficult to explain to Western feminists because of their mutual incompatibility. Indeed, no feminist movement can be related to Western feminism because of how feminists formed their group; an example is the diversity of feminist groups in the USA (Krolokke, Charlotte and Anne, and Anne Scott Sorensen, 2006).

Moreover, the Western notion of Islam as a symbol of oppression is a constructed image that does not represent the experience of those who live and practice Islam in the Arab World. In her author's note, Sasson states that the lives and stories of women in the novels do not reflect the lives of all Arab women. However, her representation of privileged Saudi women cannot be overgeneralized for other Saudi women or all Arab women. Neither credits her the title of the voice of the voiceless, as she declared in her interviews.

In this dissertation, an effort is made to prove that the image of Arab women as oppressed is a writer's point of view and a reflection of the Western perception of women historically. It is not a contemporary perception but dates back to the dichotomy between the East and the West, which is summed up in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995). The constructed images of oppressed Arab women had always served colonial powers and orientalists in the past and continue to do in the present.

Western literature of Homer, Dante, Flaubert, and T.S. Eliot has dominated world literature and marginalized and excluded non-Western traditions, cultural life, and forms of expression. This marginalization widened the gap between the center and the periphery, First world and Third world. Thus, instead of using a Western framework that considers

all women as a homogenized group regardless of their experiences, class, economy, and social backgrounds, it is essential to use a framework that sets them apart. In this light, this dissertation foregrounds the images of Arab Muslim women using a post-colonial feminist lens. Furthermore, it is crucial to use localized perspectives when analyzing women who varied in values, traditions of thought, and literature from Western ways of thought and ideologies.

Moreover, Western feminism is a norm against which the Third World is to be the judge. Mohanty emphasizes that 'Third World women's issues should be analyzed within the precise social relations in which they occur" (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 289-290). While post-colonial theorist struggle against the representation of the 'others' former colonized as inferior to the colonizer, post-colonial women struggle against double colonization, the effects of colonialism, and the patriarchal society.

Post-colonial means resistance to the colonial discourses that continue to shape the cultures, histories, and economics of the former colonized South, especially those whose revolutions overthrown the ties with colonial powers. Therefore, post-colonial theory attempted to subvert the colonial discourses that distort the realities and experiences of the colonized, "It is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness." **(**Tyagi, 2014, p.45) Post-colonial studies as a field can be described in different ways. In the historical sense, post-colonialism describes the liberation movements that ended European world dominance. (Douglass, p.1). In this sense, the post-colonial theory is the radical philosophy that interrogates the legacy of colonialism, and it tries to understand the mentality of the colonizers in the past to undo them.

The post-colonial critic Edward Said, in his famous book Orientalism (1979), explained how the dichotomy of Orient and Occident identifies and subordinates people of the Orient

(Arabs) —establishing the West (Occident) as a superior in an unequal power binary relation to justify political expansions and colonialism. According to Said, Orientalism had served the Western powers in their mission in the Near East. He defines it as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philosophical texts." Orientalists elaborate the geographical halves of the world, the civilized white Western 'Occident,' and the uncivilized barbarian others' Orient' (Said,1979, p.378). It is a series of interests by a mean of scholarly descriptions of landscapes, sociological and psychological descriptions of the oriental for the will and intention to understand the 'other' and, in some cases, to control, manipulate and take hold of the whole Orient. Said's work paved the way for many voices, mainly the marginalized ones, to be heard worldwide.

Post-colonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha (1994), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 1988), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Mohanty, 1988, 2003) oppose the Western Eurocentric ideology of constructing notions and knowledge of the non-Western other. Instead, they peel away the veneer of Western power dominance and call for decolonizing Western ideologies and perspectives.

All theorists mentioned above agreed that the purpose of post-colonial discourse is to redefine and reconstruct how the colonized self is spoken about and the lens is discussed. Put differently; it is about constructing a safe space where particular identities can speak to who they are and are not stipulated under a Western framework of thought (Mohanty, 1988). It is about breaking the reproduction of "'the West' as the primary referent in theory and praxis" (Mohanty, 1 9 8 8 , p. 334). Finally, it is about accepting a different way of understanding the world (epistemology), so we can change *what* we think (ontology).

The two prominent scholars, Mohanty (1988) and Spivak, had shaped the field of post-colonial feminism. Mohanty's (1988) essay "Under Western Eyes," a keystone in post-

colonial feminism, explains how Western feminists' writings about Third World women colonize these women's historical and cultural background. She states that Third World women tend to be depicted as victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices. However, this depiction pays little attention to these women's cultural and historical backgrounds. Moreover, Western feminism is a norm against which the Third World is to be the judge. Mohanty emphasizes that "Third World women's issues should be analyzed within the precise social relations in which they occur" (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 289-290).

Furthermore, in her essay, she posits that women should not be considered as a 'coherent group with identical interests, desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally." (p.55) Mohanty clarifies the difference between third-world women who fight against patriarchy affected by colonial imperialism and race and class and Western women who fight a patriarchal society that holds sexist views of women as inferior to men.

Similarly, Spivak (1988), in explaining how the saving of women has been the tendency of colonial power throughout history, has cynically put it: "White men saving brown women from brown men." (p. 287). This illustration explains the historical division between the civilized West and the barbaric East. It also shows Western attitudes toward oriental people, which justify their moral imperative to invade Eastern territories to save women. In line with Spivak (1988), Indian women in need of Western savings, Laila Abu Lughod (2002), an Arab-American critic and author, provokes international readers to question their savings of women: 'Do Muslim Women need Savings? She argues that the calls to rally around the 'savings of Muslim women' are frequently taken as an excuse for the U.S. military operations or occupations of countries such as Afghanistan. Abu Lughod gives an example of First Lady

Laura Bush's speech about saving Afghan women before the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which justified the American invasion and the bombing of cities and fields where Muslim women lived.

Moreover, post-colonial critic Fanon (1965), in his dynamic and enduring book: *The Wretched of Earth*, has spoken in the colonial tongue to reflect the point of view and theory of French colonial power in Algeria. He says,

If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society and its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide and, in the houses, where the men keep them out of sight (p. 39).

Fanon's writings have inspired the masses in Algeria to protect their identity, and veiled women have also participated in the liberation of Algeria. However, the examples stated above, saving Indian and Muslim women and the French interest in Algeria, as expressed by Fanon, are all backed by military troops to save Arab women.

Therefore, post-colonial feminists agreed that the saving of non-Western women from cultural oppression had always been and still is the tendency of colonial powers to justify their occupations of Third World territories. Moreover, it establishes a universal narrative of oppressed Muslim women, prevents deeper conversations from occurring, silences many stories, experiences, and knowledge of Third World women, prevents many voices from being heard, and prevents real progress from happening.

In this sense, this dissertation is trying to disrupt the image of Arab Muslim women as victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices. Since the study is about women from Saudi Arabia, readers may assume that Saudi Arabia had never been a former colony in the sense of troops' presence. However, the term colonization adopted from Mohanty's (1984) words describes how feminists' writings discursively colonize the heterogeneities of women's

lives, specifically Third World women (p.333).

This part gives a brief overview of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to set the context of the novel setting for readers. According to the literature, Saudi Arabia is often labeled as masculine and the world's most segregated country, where women are restricted in many societal spheres (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The literature indicates the absence of women representation on many occasions and that a masculine ideology is constructed in favor of both religious and governmental laws of the country

Women in Saudi Arabia are often constructed as protected and confined members of society and have been described as being systematically treated as perpetual minors (Hodges, 2017). It is argued that this narrative has manifested in the minds of both men and women and has become entrenched in the ways gender is done (West & Zimmerman, 1987); thereby becoming the unwritten rule that governs women in Saudi society (Elamin & Omair, 2010; Omair, 2008).

Saudi Arabia, officially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is the cradle of Islam; it is the world's most conservative Islamic country. Islam and Saudi Arabia are seen as intertwined, indicating a knit relationship between the two. Many scholars have commented on this close relationship; Denman and Hilal explained how "the Islamic religion is considered as much a part of the Saudi identity as the country's longstanding history as part of the greater Arab Peninsula" (Denman et al., 2011, p. 304). Moreover, Ochsenwald (1981) wrote: "In Saudi Arabia, from its inception, Islam has been the omnipresent and dominant factor in public life" (p. 274). Globally Saudi Arabia is known for its adherence to Wahhabism, a strict and intolerant sect or doctrine of Islam. However, today's Saudi Arabia, which once adopted the Wahhabi teachings 'beyond its theological nature to become the official and only basis for laws and conduct,' is now gradually changing to more opening policies through a less strict, extremist policy towards women's seclusion in public space and sex segregation, allowing women to

drive and reconsidering the women guardianship issue. (Rami F. Mustafa & Salah, Troudi, 2019, p. 134)

Due to the subject matter and the context of this study, a qualitative method is employed. Because it seeks to understand Arab Muslim women's experiences and interpret them concerning their contexts, the analysis was based primarily on Jean Sasson's trilogy and incorporated an analysis of different sources of information, studies about Saudi and Arab societies, and Islamic sources. In addition, W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of representation as an aspect in literature and post-colonial feminism perspective of relating women's position to their social, geographical, and religious backgrounds are adopted to analyze this trilogy.

This dissertation consists of 6 chapters and a general introduction and general conclusion. The general introduction establishes the topic and maps the whole body of the dissertation. The First chapter, entitled: Review of Related Literature is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the literature written on Muslim women's representation, mainly those related to the *Princess* Trilogy, and the second part gives a glimpse of Arab women. It explores the essential components of the Arab world, which may allow readers to have better insights and understanding of this place of the world regarding its basic constitution that shaped the mentality of its people and the status of its women. This quick glimpse of the Arab world shows that the Arab world is not a monolithic unit as the West may assume, and Western feminists in particular. This none monolithically has formed the different situation that Arab women are living now in the Arab Muslim world; for instance, women in Saudi Arabia are different from women in Tunisia regarding human rights, social status, educational rights, and political rights.

Initially, this chapter explains the background of the Arab Muslim world and shows its culture and religion. Then, it emphasizes the status of women in Islam in the light of the

Quran and Sunna. Next, the history of women's rights movements in the Arab world and Arab feminists' roles in improving women and defending their rights are discussed. Moreover, some difficulties that Arab feminists face are pointed out.

The second, third and fourth chapters are about the research findings. Since the results were too long, the analyses are divided into three chapters. Each chapter deals with a novel. The second chapter is entitled: The Representation of Arab Women in *Princess*. The first novel of the trilogy. The themes that emerged were; 'Oppressed Arab women.' It scrutinizes the characteristics of princess Sultana Al-Saud as oppressed in a male-dominated society. The theme 'Rebellious Arab Women' depicts the protagonist's rebellion against her society and how she vows to struggle with customs and religious beliefs. Additionally, an explanation of religious terms was made that non-Muslim readers may need help grasping. Furthermore, the contradiction in many parts of the novel was pointed out, where two voices were distinguished; the author and Princess Sultana Al-Saud.

The third chapter is entitled: The Representation of Arab Women in *Princess Sultana's Daughters*. The trilogy's second novel is named *Daughters of Arabia* in the U.K. In this chapter, the analyses of the stories of hardship of Sultana's children, mainly her teenage daughters Amani and Maha, were the focus of this chapter. These second-generation royals who grow up in the most luxurious castles in Arabia are stifled with patriarchy and Saudi local customs and traditions. Through their detailed stories of hardship, Sultana unfolds the unbearable injustices Arabic society and culture levels against women while admiring the freedom lucky women in the West have.

The forth chapter is entitled: The Representation of Arab Women in *Princess Sultana's Circle*. The third novel of the trilogy is named: *Desert Royals* in the U.K. In this chapter, Princess Sultana continues her fight against women's oppression. Fighting patriarchy and oppression gives Sultana the strength to support all deprived women in all Muslim countries.

She and her sisters form a circle against every wicked man who takes advantage of women. In this part, the study focused more on Sultana's cause for women's Liberation and discussed the themes emerged from the analyses.

The fifth chapter is entitled: *A Comparative Analyses of the Novels*, this chapter analyzed the unifying themes among women of the trilogy, considering the post-colonial feminist perspective presented in Chapter one. Themes were: Representation of Arab women in the trilogy as; oppressed/rebellious Arab Muslim women, the representation of Arab Muslim men, third world difference, Eurocentrism and Western women as the norm, representation versus discursive self-representation, the veil as oppression. The research argued that these representations should not be taken for granted through these patterns and themes because any representation should be interrogated at the level of ideological context. As stated in the central research question, Arab Muslim women can be understood through their social, cultural, economic, and contextual aspects that might influence their experiences and situation in any society.

Chapter six is entitled: *Conclusions and Discussions*, this chapter compared the novels' women protagonists' stories and relate their position to their social, geographical, and religious backgrounds to better understand whether women's position is simultaneously determined by religion or culture. This part answered the research questions about the novel analyses and the literature. This dissertation may inspire those who want to know about Arab Muslim women's status and the post-colonial perspectives on the trilogy. The research's wish is to leave the reader with a better understanding and appreciation of the status of Arab Muslim women. And hopes that this dissertation provides convincing answers to refute the false association between Islam and the plight of Arab Muslim women in literature, media, and whatever. Within the theoretical frameworks of post-colonial feminism, this study examined first the image of Arab Muslim women in the three novels *Princess*, *Princess*

Sultana's Daughters, and *Princess Sultana's Circle* as represented by the author through Sultana Al Saud. Second, it compared the emerging themes in the three novels concerning the theoretical framework, cultural representation of both men and women, eurocentrism, third-world difference, self- representation versus discursive self-representation, and veil as oppression. This study highlighted the complexities of understanding the status of Arab Muslim women. It is significant in that it gives readers clues to think about the factors that may affect the identity of people and adjust their perceptions of Arab Muslim women. This chapter provides an overview of the image of Arab Muslim women in Western literature, including the history behind the representation of Arab Muslim women and the theoretical perspectives that undertook the analyses of women's representation. These critical contextual pieces will be explored in detail in Chapter 1, which sets out the foundation from which to examine the representation of Arab Muslim women concerning the theoretical frameworks. The focus of this study is to answer the two research questions:

Firstly, given that much literature on Sasson's trilogy directly relates women's oppression to religion, can non-fiction give us a deeper understanding of how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture! Secondly, how

Western literature shapes perceptions of Arab Muslim women's status, and why is it essential for Western audiences and feminists to understand the status of Arab Muslim women? Is it their task to liberate Arab Muslim women? Do Arab Muslim women need their Liberation? Chapter 1 reviewed the existing literature by insiders and outsiders about Arab Muslim women. The literature broadly assesses topics of women's representation throughout history and literary analyses of Sasson's trilogy. These topics are pertinent for theorists and non/Western feminists as they consider the factors influencing the situation of Arab Muslim women and understand their plight in their contexts. At the end of this chapter Mohanty's terms that are the focus of this study are explained.

In Chapters 2-4, the study findings from the analyses of the three novels: Princess, Princess Sultana's Daughters, and Sultana's Circle are represented. Each novel unfolds the stories of women's suffrage and hardship in Saudi Arabia. The results are divided into three chapters. Each chapter deals with a novel. Chapter 2 deals with the representation of the novel's protagonist Sultana Al-Saud, while Chapter 3 deals with Sultana's daughters, Maha and Amani, fighting to maintain their position in a misogynistic society. Chapter 4 is about the analyses of the events that call for the formation of a circle to defend women's rights in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The results are related to the themes that emerged from the analyses. Chapter 5 analyzed and compared women's stories, experiences, and representation with the post-colonial feminists' themes of representation versus discursive self-representation, third-world difference, eurocentrism, the harem, veil and oppression, the representation of Arab men and culture. Chapter 6 answered the research questions and gave an overall discussion of the study's implications and significance. It also identified suggestions and recommendations that may be applicable to readers who deal with women's studies and Arab Muslim women in particular.

Chapter One

Review of Related Literature

1.1. Introduction

Much research has been carried out by both insiders and outsiders in Arab Muslim women's studies. By insiders, we mean authors from the Arab World or authors with a Muslim background, while the outsiders are Westerners in general. In this review, we will present an overview of post- colonial feminism and summarize the literature on Arab Muslim women's representation by both insiders and outsiders. In the first part of this review, we deal with the literature written on Muslim women's representation, mainly those related to Sasson's *Trilogy*, and in the second part, we give a glimpse of the Arab World, which includes; the Arab World, Arab women movements, and differences between Western feminism and Arabic culture.

1.2. An Overview of Post-Colonial Feminism

The post-colonial feminist theory examines how women are represented in colonial and post- colonial literature and challenges assumptions and perceptions about women in literature and society. Post-colonial feminists reject the singularity of thought, whether about the universal "woman" or the rejection of the reified notion of the "third world woman" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 51). They also reject the Western terms of core and periphery, based on Eurocentrism that sets the West as a norm and a model for the non-West to follow.

The post-colonial critic Edward Said, in his famous book Orientalism (1979), explained how the dichotomy of Orient and Occident identifies and subordinates people of the Orient (Arabs) —establishing the West (Occident) as a superior in an unequal power binary relation to justify political expansions and colonialism.

According to Said, Orientalism had served the Western powers in their mission in the Near East. He defines it as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philosophical texts." Orientalists elaborate the

geographical halves of the World, the civilized white Western 'Occident,' and the uncivilized barbarian others' Orient.' (Said,1979, p.378) It is a series of interests by a mean of scholarly descriptions of landscapes, sociological and psychological descriptions of the oriental for the will and intention to understand the 'other' and, in some cases, to control, manipulate and take hold of the whole Orient. Said's work paved the way for many voices, mainly the marginalized ones, to be heard worldwide.

Post-colonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 1988), and Chandra Mohanty (Mohanty, 1988, 2003) oppose the Western Eurocentric ideology of constructing notions and knowledge of the non-western other. Instead, they peel away the veneer of Western power dominance and call for decolonizing Western ideologies and perspectives. All theorists mentioned above agreed that the purpose of post-colonial discourse is to redefine and reconstruct how the colonized self is spoken about and the lens is discussed. Put differently; it is about constructing a safe space where particular identities can speak to who they are and are not stipulated under a Western framework of thought (Mohanty, 1988). It is about breaking the reproduction of "'the West' as the primary referent in theory and praxis" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 334). Finally, it is about accepting a different way of understanding the World (epistemology), so we can change *what* we think (ontology).

The two prominent scholars, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have shaped the field of post-colonial feminism. Mohanty's (1988) essay "Under Western Eyes," a keystone in post-colonial feminism, explains how Western feminist writing about third women colonizes these women's historical and cultural background. She states that third-world women tend to be depicted as victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices. She asserts that,

> Western feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group that is placed in kinship, legal and other structures, defines third-world women as subjects outside of social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted as women through these very structures (Mohanty, 1991, p. 80).

According to the illustration Third, world women as a universal coherent group can be defined as religious, family-oriented, not conscious of their rights, and ignorant and backward. Compared to western centrality, that is the norm for third-world women to be judged. Eurocentric assumptions Reinforce that people in the Third World have not evolved to the extent the West has. The feminist analysis of third-world women that homogenize and systemize women's experiences of different groups erases all marginal and resistant modes of experiences labeling the "East" and "woman" as others. In contrast, Western women and men are represented as the center, the norm.

However, this representation pays little attention to these women's cultural and historical backgrounds. Moreover, Western feminism is a norm against which the Third World is to be the judge. Mohanty emphasizes that "Third World women's issues should be analyzed within the precise social relations in which they occur" (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 289-290).

Similarly, Spivak (1988), in explaining how the saving of women has been the tendency of colonial power throughout history, has cynically put it: "White men saving brown women from brown men." (p. 287). This illustration explains the historical division between the civilized West and the barbaric East. It also shows Western attitudes toward oriental people, which justify their moral imperative to invade Eastern territories to save women. In line with Spivak (1988), Indian women in need of Western savings, Laila Abu Lughod (2002), an Arab-American critic and author, provokes international readers to question their savings of women:

'Do Muslim Women need Savings? She argues that the calls to rally around the 'savings of Muslim women' are frequently taken as an excuse for the US military operations or occupations of countries such as Afghanistan. Abu Lughod gives an example of First Lady Laura Bush's speech about saving Afghan women before the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which justified the American invasion and the bombing of cities and fields where Muslim women lived.

Moreover, post-colonial critic Fanon (1965), in his dynamic and enduring book: *The Wretched of Earth* has, spoken in the colonial tongue to reflect the point of view and theory of French colonial power in Algeria. He says,

> If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society and its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight (p. 39).

Fanon's writings have inspired the masses in Algeria to protect their identity, and veiled women have also participated in the Liberation of Algeria. However, the examples stated above, saving Indian and Muslim women and the French interest in Algeria, as expressed by Fanon, are all backed by military troops to save Arab women.

Therefore, post-colonial feminists agreed that the saving of non-Western women from cultural oppression had always been and still is the tendency of colonial powers to justify their occupations of third-world territories. Moreover, it establishes a universal narrative of oppressed Muslim women, prevents deeper conversations from occurring, silences many stories, experiences, and knowledge of third-world women, prevents many voices from being heard, and prevents real progress from happening.

In this sense, the image of Arab Muslim women as victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices this dissertation is trying to disrupt. It is essential to mention that the colonization we addressed in this dissertation is adopted from Mohanty's idea of discursive

colonization. Since the study is about women from Saudi Arabia, readers may assume that Saudi Arabia had never been a former colony in the sense of troops' presence. However, the term colonization in Mohanty's (1984) words describes how feminists' writings discursively colonize the heterogeneities of women's lives, specifically third-world women (p.333).

1.3. Arab Muslim Culture vs. Western Feminism

Culture is an important term in understanding feminism. The problem with finding an exact definition of culture is due to the different ways people learn about the culture. According to politics defining culture, groups like women are excluded from their definitions "women, people of races other than Caucasian, gays, and lesbians, formerly colonized people, minority ethnic or religious groups, and indigenous populations" (Okin, 1998, p.661). How can we deal with feminism if we cannot find a definition of culture? How can we understand feminism?

Finding a definition of culture is almost as tricky as defining feminism. Feminism began as a universal movement in the 19th century. The concept originated in the West and related to the French revolution when women started to ask for equal rights with men and to be treated as "full-fledged citizens." When women start to claim their equality and subsequently obtain their rights, any women's society in the World that does not grant these rights to women isconsidered barbarian's culture or uncivilized people. According to the popular belief that feminism originated in the West, Egypt was the primary pioneer of feminism.

It is hard to put an exact definition of feminism; in the USA, for instance, there are three types of feminism. Historically feminist movements were mainly concerned with white women's needs regardless of the women of color in the USA because they were still regarded as enslaved people. However, modern feminism tries to encompass all women regardless of color or background. Western feminism has been grounded in Western values and beliefs incompatible with Islamic culture. According to Dr. Avruch's definition, culture has six

components:

1. Shared ideas- guiding behavior or a shared understanding of the World.
2. Cumulative culture accumulates from generation to generation.
3. Systematic based on rules that define how we manage our lives.
4. Symbolic lens through which we see the World
5. Passed intergenerationally passed from one generation to the next.
6. Extra–genetically-is not passed genetically (Avruch, 1998, pp. 14-16).

Each of the six components can be applied to every culture to see the different views of cultures. The same difficulty we find in defining culture exists when we define feminism. However, culture and feminism have a common link: patriarchal rules govern all societies. Muslim culture and Western feminism differences lie in religion. Many Westerners believe that the plight of Muslim women is embodied in the Islamic religion. In reality, Arab Muslim woman activists try to change the situation of Arab Muslim women that was created by interpretations and history.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) had changed the situation of Muslim women since the 7th century Arabia when he revealed the World of Allah. Under Islamic law, girls' education became a sacred duty and gave women the right to own and inherit property. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) liberated women from the chains of the dark ages when women were still considered property by men.

Muslims, whether Arab or non-Arab, believe their societies do not follow Islamic ideals and traditions such as the Quran. As we noted before, women did not historically have less equal status in Muslim societies because the modern rights feminists are struggling for had been granted to Muslim women since the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing

be upon him). Islamic tradition considers both males and females to have separate identities in society. In Islamic societies, women have the right to own property and conduct business independently, and marriage has no consequence regarding women's legal status. Western feminists support this legal status in marriage. The only misconception is that western feminists do not know Muslim women's legal rights; they directed all their misconceptions toward the Muslim women's hijab. Because of the hijab, Western feminists believe that Muslim women need to be liberated; in the same Western women have been struggling for it. Muslim women believe they have already achieved separate legal status, whereas Western feminists have only recently achieved this very same goal. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, women own banks and hospitals [...] no one could snub Arab Muslim's achievements.

Western feminists tend to criticize the practice of polygamy in Islam. Westerners believe Islam uses polygamy to subjugate women; however, they misunderstand this practice. Although Islam allows a man to marry up to four, it is not a common practice among Muslims because it has conditions to be legal. Muslims resort to polygamy in exceptional situations. For instance, a man may marry a widow who lost her husband during a war. In another instance, polygamy may be used to unite different families to maintain peace. Polygamy is not a widespread practice among Muslims. Therefore, Muslim women will not support the ideas of western feminists to eliminate this practice.

Western feminism has been grounded in Western values and traditions that differ from those of Islamic tradition. Moreover, no feminist movement can be related to western feminism because of the way feminists form their groups. Most westerners are unaware that there is a feminist movement in Islamic countries because many Muslim women do not want to have any connection with Western feminism. Muslim women hold negative attitudes towards Western feminists because their movement is anti-religion, and Muslim women belong to their religion. Muslim women take Islam as their basis and friend while regaining their rights in their societies

and not denouncing their religion.

1.4. Studies on Arab Muslim Women

Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam; moreover, it is identified by the West as a country where religion plays a significant role in everybody's life, especially women. The image of Saudi women as oppressed and subjected to a male-dominated society is introduced to Western fiction of the nineties after the Desert Storm Operation. *Princess Trilogy* significantly impacted the Western shaping of Arab women's image. One of the earliest American studies on Middle Eastern women is that of Elizabeth Fernea and Basima Bezirgan, *Middle Eastern Women Speak* (1977). Subsequently, Fernea published several other books, essays, and films on women in the Middle East. For example, Fernea, after a visit to Saudi Arabia, states in her book In *Search of Islamic Feminism*:

> […] Saudi women, we found, are not all the idle, passive creatures portrayed in media accounts, novels, and memoirs. Within the limited spaces available to them, many, if not most Saudi women were taking advantage of the opportunity for education of control of their inherited ranted wealth (rights granted by Islamic law). They were working to improve themselves and their families, and those who were able gave generously to charitable projects (as mandated by Islam). They also invested capital in future development (Fernea,1998, p. 342).

Unlike Sasson, Fernea refutes the Western assumptions of Arab women, in what she calls ghostwritten novels and media, as passive and dominated. Moreover, she praises Saudi women for their charitable projects and awareness of their social needs.

Laila Abu Lughod (2002), an Arab-American critic and author, in her article 'Do Muslim Women need Savings? Argues that the calls to rally around the 'savings of Muslim

women' are frequently taken as an excuse for the US military operations or occupations of countries such as Afghanistan. Abu Lughod gives an example of First Lady Laura Bush's speech about saving Afghan women before the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, which justified the American invasion and the bombing of cities and fields where Muslim women lived.

In explaining how the saving of women has been the colonial powers' tendency throughout history, the famous feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) has cynically put it: "white men saving brown women from brown men." (p. 287). This quotation explains the historical division between the civilized West and the barbaric east. It also shows Western attitudes toward Oriental people, which justifies their moral imperative to invade eastern territories to save women. History is full of similar cases of savings. In British-ruled Egypt, for instance, Lord Cromer attacked the Muslim veiling, which he considered a symbol of oppression for Muslim women; however, he did not support women and girls' education. Leila Ahmad, an Egyptian feminist, calls this action the revival of colonial interests, which she termed 'colonial feminism.'

Furthermore, Fanon, in his dynamic and enduring book: *The Wretched of Earth* (1965), has spoken in the colonial tongue to reflect the point of view and theory of French colonial power in Algeria. He says,

> If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society and its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide and, in the houses, where the men keep them out of sight (p. 39).

Fanon's writings have inspired the masses in Algeria to protect their identity, and veiled women have also participated in the liberation of Algeria. However, the examples stated above, Lady Laura's speech, British-ruled Egypt Lord Cromer, and the French interest in Algeria, as

expressed by Fanon, are all backed by military troops to save Arab women.

Lawson (2004), in her study "*For the Believing Women: A Classification and Comparative Analysis of the Feminine Space in Islamic Scripture,"* describes the inappropriateness of context for the literature written by some authors and many Western journalists about Muslim women in the war turmoil based on their observations as, Many of these assignments covered conflicts such as the Gulf War, or the Afghani resistance movement—such political and social turmoil is undoubtedly not the appropriate context to draw broad conclusions on the status of Muslim women. Among the most egregious accounts, one will find the 'tell-all sagas of the lascivious affairs of some royal families, frequently highlighting the subjugation and objectification of women, such as the *Princess Trilogy*. (p.1)

Unlike Lawson, Mehta & Mahajan (2017), in their article *Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Jean Sasson's Works*, consider Sasson's novels as actual events uncovered by the author to support the rights of women in the Middle East and uncover the reality that women are victims of both male and traditions and religion. They argue that,

> Female victims of violence have not been given much attention. Thanks to the feminist writers who have laid bare the conditions of the female victims. Jean Sasson has honestly portrayed the grim realities of women victims in her books- Princess, Daughters of Arabia, Desert Royal, and for the love of A Son. (p. 157)

In addition to these Western authors, there is a new generation of Middle Eastern women authors who write in English, French, and Arabic about women in the Middle East and raise their voices, for instance, Nawal Sa'dawi of Egypt, Fatima Mernissi of Morocco, Evelyn Accad of Lebanon, Deniz Kandiyoti of Turkey, and Mahnaz Afkhami and Valentine M. Moghadam

of Iran. Those are just a few in this group of activists and feminists. They are novelists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists who reasonably talk about Arab Muslim women and 'Third World women in general as educated, energetic, and confident. Nevertheless, on the other hand, many Arab Muslim and third-world feminists within their context did not judge Arab Muslim women according to their Arab Islamic standards.

Arab critics like Suha Sabbagh consider *PrincessTrilogy*as a form of attack on Arab values under the guise of supporting women's rights. In her introduction to *Arab Women Between Defiance and Restraint* (1996), she points out that,

> Just because there is a stringent patriarchal system in the Arab World does not mean that women are docile non-entities. Strong patriarchies often breed the opposite: strong women who work very hard to ensure the compliance of the system with their needs. Such an attitude reflects the ignorance about cultural differences on the part of western writers, cartoonists, and press readers. (Sabbagh, 1996)

Sabbagh states that such work is a form of championing Arab women's rights to attack Arab culture and "contains preposterous lies about Arab values." She adds that the book "gives the impression that honor killing occurs in the Arab world as often as afternoon teas and that families discuss together the premeditated killings of their daughters who get in the way of family honor."

Ahmad (2009), in *Not Yet Beyond the Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature*, investigates the imagery of Muslim women presented in American popular literature, mainly 'the wildly proliferating subgenre of the first-person narratives of oppressed Muslim women as described by Ahmad. In analyzing the images of Muslim women in this literature, Ahmad points out that Muslim women are depicted as "veiled, subjugated,

indomitable in spirit, but still in need of rescue from an enlightened West." (106). She also sheds light on decorative, attractive covers of many narratives, such as *Princess Trilogy*. The covers are meant to attract audiences and win their sympathy toward the oppressed women of the Middle East. Ahmad finds that the narratives need more specificity and political contexts. They are narrated to American audiences on many occasions. The novel distinguishes between the Arabic primitive culture and the US (West) civilized culture. To Ahmad, there is a combination of narrative and packaging, which has a single effect, to allow American readers to "simultaneously sympathize with, and also to distance themselves from, the politicalprocesses that bring anti-female regimes into being" (p,106).

Other reviewers would not consider it a feminist text but rather a true story that states facts, and Sultana has some feminist traits that she uses to gain the little independence she can. For them, although Sultana was given all the luxuries, money, and family influence, no other common person could threaten or harm her; however, the threat comes from inside the family.

Her father and brother were a threat to her and, to some extent, to her husband Kareem, who was engaged in alcoholism and prostitution. Masturoch (2009) considers Sultana as a victim who was raised in the luxurious palace of a cruel, domineering father, a kind of but overly acquiescent mother, and a drunkard husband, Kareem, who indulged in alcoholism and prostitution. Masturoch, a critic with a Muslim background, establishes the difference between Islamic Sharia and Arabic culture. She harshly criticizes the Arabian culture as giving more power and rights to men to overrule and dominate women and says that woman is a property that moves from father to husband. She points out, "The inferiority of women in traditional Arabian families is supported by custom and law which are still obeyed by the majority of the people" (p.26).

Another reviewer, Sifana (2018), in Treating Arab women in Jean Sasson's *PrincessSultana's Daughters*, has also referred to customs that date back to the pre-Islamic era

that is still performed in Saudi Arabia, for instance, female genital mutilation, temporary marriage (mut'ah) and thoughtless divorce by using the valid law of divorce in Islam. These practices are influenced by culture and not religion. She explains that,

> Although the men use Islamic teachings as the basis of their treatment towards women, […] Arabian life describes that the concept of honor and shame gives different treatment towards men and women. The women often get sufferings and pain caused by men's authority. On the contrary, men often get benefits from treating them arbitrarily. This culture becomes the main trigger for women to struggle for their rights in life continuously. Thus, the ways of treating Arab women described above are not the implementation of the rules based on Islamic teachings but are influences of the culture. (p.24)

Thakur (2018), in his article, "*Sharia Law: An Abominably Institutionalized Women Rights Breach in Jean Sasson's Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia,"* Describes how the Sharia Islamic law in Saudi Arabia has transformed women to tools in men hands, he says,

> Sharia Law is the unchallenged constitution, presumed to be run by Allah and Islam. Therefore, it plays mayhem with the lives of women predominantly, equating them to a silenced object of men's pleasure and expunging them from exercising fundamental human rights. (p.123)

Thakur's understanding of Sharia Law is based on the interpretation of the novels, though Jean Sasson keeps reminding readers in her Forward words that she is aware of the difference between Arabic traditions and Islamic religion, and her aim is not to demean the Islamic religion. However, the novels read the opposite of her and Sultana's claims. As the

debate about *Princess*es raged in 1996, the Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs outlined significant problems with the case. The articles claimed that Sasson's novel is riddled with factual inaccuracies. Among them is female circumcision, generally not practiced in the Middle East, and the misstatement of the veiling and the permission of women to enter mosques. Critics, including the former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, James Akins, pointed out that even if these problems were not in work, many of the events described are so horrific that they would have been widely known and condemned in Saudi Arabia.

Sasson's *Princess* Trilogy and other novels are written in the field of women's studies were not welcomed by Arabic critics because the feminism that Arab Muslim women are calling for is based on their religion and culture and is challenging to explain to Western feminists because of a mutual incompatibility between these two. In fact, "no feminist movement can be related to Western feminism because of the way feminists formed their group; an example of that is the diversity of feminists' groups in the USA (Krolokke, Charlotte and Anne, and Anne Scott Sorensen, 2006) Western feminism is based on Western values, thoughts, and ideologies that differ from those of Islam and Arab culture. For instance, the fact that Western feminists attack religion in their movement is a sore subject among Arab Muslim feminists.

Muslim women see the teaching of Islam as their best friend and supporter rather than their enemy, as Western feminists do. The Quran's directive embodies the ideal Muslim women want to encourage, not denounce. Here comes the crucial need to bridge the gap between Western feminists and third-world feminists for the better of women in both worlds. This bridge will assess women of the World to reach a reconciliation that may take women to a better status economically, socially, physically, religiously, and politically.

In this regard, in this study, post-colonial feminism is chosen as a fundamental theory because it makes clear how crucial it is to pay attention to cultural, religious, social, and

geographical differences among objectified women. In *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007), Gill Plain defines how post-colonial feminist critics are engaged in contesting the notion that privileges Western liberation and progress and portrays third-world women as victims of ignorance and religions (286-7). In her essay "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Mohanty explains how Western feminist writing about third women colonizes the historical and cultural background of these women. She states that third-world women tend to be depicted as victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices. However, this depiction pays little attention to these women's cultural and historical backgrounds. Moreover, Western feminism is a norm against which the Third World is to be the judge. Mohanty emphasizes that "Third World women's issues should be analyzed within the precise social relations in which they occur" (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 289-290)

1.4.1. Women's Movements in the Arab World

The most dominant trend in the development of Arab women's movements is the ongoing increase in these women's movements dealing with aspects such as health, education, legal literacy, and rights advocacy. This growth in the women's movement can be seen as a sign of the failure of Arab states to bring social change and development. These movements are viewed as the development of Arab "civil society" and a sign of "bottom-up" democracy in the region. On the other hand, they have been viewed as dependent on the West.

Many debates are raised about the proliferation and efficacy of these movements and their roles in the Arab World. Are Arab women activists merely imitating women's liberation movements in the West? How can we interpret Western interests in the situation or "plight" of Arab Muslim women? Do women's liberation movements work against the interest of the Arab family? Do demands for women's rights seek to undermine religion? Finally, is such an Arab women's movement that brings about a full-scale social change?

Arab women's movement in the Arab World arose and developed in a specific

environment and within social and economic contexts; local, regional and international (UN Report10). Colonization and the struggle for freedom are the most influential factors in the evolution of Arab women's movements in the Arab Muslim World. The struggle for liberation from imperialism has encouraged the emergence of many Arab women's organizations that initially called for the liberation of the Arab nation from colonization and continued to call for women's liberation from all types of manipulation and segregation.

Arab women's movements in the Arab Muslim World vary concerning specific trajectories and current practices. However, they are similar in that they share several historical and political factors, such as their link to social, national, and political movements in the Arab Muslim World. An example is the Arab women's movement in Egypt and Tunisia were part of the national and liberation movements. Some other movements were part of the religious movement in Egypt.

Buthaina Shaaban, an Arab feminist, and scholar contends that Arab Muslim women contributed extensively to the efforts made at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century regarding the cause of women's liberation in the World. She also asserts that before the World War, there were 25 magazines published and circulated in the Arab World by women (Shaaban, 1999). After exanimating and evaluating the history of the Arab women's movement, we find that it covers three closely linked phases. Each phase is essential for understanding the women's movement that enables women to claim their full rights in society.

The first phase is the early phase before World War II. This period is tied to the trauma of imperialism and its impact on women's families. The second phase is the post-World War II period; it concerns the building of a post-independent nation-state. This concept raises tensions between the states and leads to the involvement of parties in it. Finally, the third phase is the contemporary period, which started after the liberation of the Arab World from Western colonization until now.

Each historical phase plays a role in establishing women's awareness of their status in their societies and shaping the character of the reformist under the varied influence. The first phase started with men voices like Qasim Amin and Sheik Mohamed Abdo. Qasim Amin received his education in France and wrote his first book in 1899, entitled "Liberation of Women," immediately after his return from France (Amin, 1899). In his book, Amin stimulated huge public debates on women's status in the Arab World. He believed that the only way to liberate Egypt should start with its women's liberation. In order to convince people that his ideas were not westernized, he quoted many verses from the Quran to call for reforming the position of women in the Arab World. Amin criticized the social isolation of women, the veil, polygamy, and the divorce practice. His book and ideas continue to be controversial in the Arab Muslim World. He was accused of being westernized (Amin, 1899).

By the end of the 19th century, a group of women activists emerged to establish a welfare organization. These first generations of women come from the upper class and ruling families. They started creating welfare organizations despite witnessing their societies' inferior social and economic status (UN Report, 2004,10-12). However, these distinguished women initiated Egypt's first women's educational society in 1881. They aimed to raise public awareness of the importance of women's education. In 1908, Huda Shaarawi, an Egyptian feminist, founded "The Mohammad Ali Charitable association" and the Instructive Women's Union, which was formed in1910 to study women's issues in the Arab World, re-examine the personal status law, which stemmed from Sharia's law. In 1923, three Egyptian feminists; Huda Shaarawi, Ceza Nabrawi, and Nabawiya Mousa, after they came from an international women's conference in Rome, took off their veils in the Cairo train station to show their resistance to women's constraints and symbolize liberation (Sarahan, 2011)

Huda Shaarawi is considered the mother of the Arab women's liberation movement. She was the first to lead the first women's national liberation demonstration in Cairo. She also

established the first women's liberation organizations. Shaarawi's women's organizations called for women's equality with men, the right to education, the right to vote, and reforming laws that regulate marriage, divorce, alimony, and child custody (Shaarawi, 1986).

In Egypt in 1936, Zaynab Al Ghazali, at eighteen, established the first independent Muslim organization that broke with traditional Islamists. Al Ghazali's organization was a women's liberation model in the 1950s and 1960s. Although this model was a defensive reaction against the colonial culture, it was more liberating than the traditional model, which was controlled by patriarchal values at the time of marriage, divorce, and rights to education (UN Report, 2004, p. 11). At the same time, women's movements were raised in Arab countries to empower women's rights.

Egypt is the pioneer country among Arab world countries for the number of its associations; for instance, the Egyptian Women's Party was formed in 1942, moreover the efficiency of its associations. Others were the Tunisian and Moroccan associations; The Union of Tunisian Women in 1944, The Union of Moroccan Women in 1944 and the Association of the Sisters of Purity in 1946, and the association of Moroccan Women in 1947 (UN Report: 10-12). Other Arab countries benefited from the intervention of Western imperialism in raising in peoples' social consciousness, which helped in the emergence of women's liberation movements. Lebanon is an example of those countries; many associations were established, such as the Lebanese Women's Council in 1943 and the Association of Lebanese Women's1947 (UN Report: 10-12).

Among other countries that were promoted by the Western intervention were Iraq, Sudan, and Jordan. There were many associations, such as The Iraqi Women's Union in 1945 and The Jordanian Women's Union in 1945. (Keddie, Nikki R., and Beth Baron, 1993)

During colonization, Arab women's liberation movements focused on women's issues besides the rise of political awareness. An example of that was the Egyptian activist Duriya

Shatia who established the Daughter of Nile Association to demand equality in political rights for both women and men (UN Report: 11).

Arab women's movements had succeeded in the era of colonization; they played a significant role in the freedom of their countries, for instance, the example of Algeria. Since women's discourses were linked to their national liberation, they liberated their countries. The rise in political awareness by both men and women marked this period; however, feminist consciousness and gender issues appeared after independence because of the transformation in social and economic issues. Thus, Arab Muslim women are involved in higher education and professions. Moreover, they were granted higher political positions in their governments.

The third phase of the Arab women's movement extended from the independence of most Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s until now. This period is marked by political awareness of women's organizations and associations in the Arab Muslim World that they should adopt programs to respond to their social and political conditions. For example, in Tunisia, in 1970, Islamists started to encourage women to enroll in no more than minimal education and not to have any relation with men before marriage or kinship. Moreover, the Islamists could overcome their defensive stands against feminists and started to expand their outlook on gender roles (Najib, 1995, p.25).

In the other half of the 1970s, women's associations appeared independent of political and official organizations. Among these organizations is the Tunisian Al Haddad Club (1978), founded by a group of female students who rose against the unequal treatment of women by the Tunisian state (Keddie, Nikki R. & Beth Baron, 1993).

In the 1980s, this period witnessed many women's associations, mainly in North African countries, due to the transformation in the Arab women's movement. Although these women's associations were authentic and met the needs of Arab Muslim women, it is worth mentioning the influence of international discourses on women's issues that helped shape Arab

women's goals and reform their struggles.

Thus, it is essential to clarify that all these women's associations and organizations, which increased to 225,000 organizations in 2004 (Butler & Sara, 2004), did not copy the example of Western feminism blindly. Instead, they followed the Arabic Islamic culture in their task of women's liberation and rights. For example, Arab women's movements did not integrate themes such as gay and lesbian rights in their call for women's rights; neither have they talked about the right to choose one's religious belief because such issues contradict the Arabic Islamic culture.

While digging deep into the history and issues of the women's movement, we realize the pressure of the UN on the Arab countries comes from their research on women's issues in the Arab World. According to the UN data results, Arab women's representation in the Arab parliaments is only 3.4 % as opposed to 11.4% in the rest of the World. Besides, 55% of Arab women are illiterate (AL Qudus Al Arabi, 1999). As a result, the UN constantly pressures the Arab countries' regimes to improve Arab women's rights. Arab countries' regimes differed in their responses to the UN in improving women's rights. Some regimes initiated mild improvement in women's status instead of radical reforming because they believed that more reformation in women would change their religious ideologies, such as in the Gulf countries.

As a result, two groups in the Arab Muslim world question women's rights. The first group is the Religious Fundamentalist, who tried to impose certain concepts on women's rights that were considered backward. The second group is the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), which have been trying to impose new concepts for women's liberation. The Arab Muslim World rejected their concepts because it was seen as an alien of the West to change the values of the Arab Muslim culture. Despite these arguments of the two debating groups, the Arab women's movement remained strong and determined in the Arab World. Most of the

women's rights initiated by Shaarawi's organizations have continued to be claimed by contemporary Arab women's movements. An example of that is Nawal Alsaadawi, who established the Arab feminist organization entitled Arab Women Solidarity Association in 1982, which was banned in 1922 because her demands were entirely against religious values (Keddie, Nikki R., and Beth Baron, 1993).

Recently in the Arab World, countries like Syria and Tunisia improved women's rights for their benefit as they needed international financial and political support, especially after the post-colonization era. These regimes made progressive changes at both political and educational levels for women; however, still, they have accused Arab women activists that their changings were just on the surface, done mainly to please the UN and to receive Western funds. Some Arab activists refer to incidents in Syria in 1982 when the Asad's regime attacked veiled women' Muhajjabet' in Damascus and forced them to take off their Islamic garbs to please the UN and the West in general (Najib, 1995, p. 22).

Several debates were between fundamentalists and women's activists on whether Arab women's movements are the imitation of the West or stem from the Arabic Islamic culture. Arab women themselves have their opinions about the type of liberation they need.

Buthaina Shaaban, a Syrian feminist, points out in her book *Both Right and Left Handed* that the Arab women she interviewed have their interpretation of the liberation they need. Shaaban asserts that all the women she interviewed from Algeria, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon were asked about their opinions of the Western model of women's liberation; all the women held the same answer that they do not want a Western liberation, but instead struggle in their way (Shaaban, 1999). These answers show not only their opinions about the different liberation of the West for women but also their stereotypical image of Western women as being emancipated from all manners and ethics. Moreover, in the West and because of their exaggerated liberation, women had been the domesticity of their homes at an early age to

become male-like figures in their autonomy and demeanor while others were attacking in pamphlets male chauvinism and defending the status of women.

1.5. The Arab World

In order to study the status of Arab Muslim women in the Arab World, one has to understand the Arab Muslim society regarding geography, history of occupation, culture, and religion. These factors have influenced the status of Arab Muslim women in the past and now. The specificity of the Arab World lies not only in its geographical and historical background but also in the impact of its religion and culture that shapes the identity of its people regardless of their class, age and education.

The Arab World is a vast area that encompasses many diverse cultural phenomena. Many Western feminists would assume that the Arab World is monolithic and has the same structure, culture, and religious beliefs. However, this chapter refutes the idea that the Arab World is monolithic. Initially, it is essential to clarify that the Arab World stretches around 5 25 Million Square Miles between the Gulf and the Atlantic (Barakat, 1993). The specificity of the Arab World is that it is the birthplace of some of the earliest and most significant human civilizations. It is the area where humans first domesticated animals, developed writing and legal codes, cultivated land, and created irrigation systems. The Arab World is also the home of the World's oldest cities, universities, and hospitals. It is of no coincidence that three of the World's Seven Wonders are located there: The Great Pyramids of Giza near Cairo, built around 2560 BCE; the Light House of Alexandria, in Egypt, built around 290 BCE; and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in Iraq, built around 600 BCE. The Petra City in Jordan, built around 500 BCE, is one of the more recently selected Seven Wonders of the World.

The Arab World is also the birthplace of the World's great monotheistic religions; Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Together, these religions have close to three billion followers in

every corner of the World. Due to the strategic location of the Arab World, it was the gateway to Europe and linked Africa and Asia. So, it was, in the past, a historic crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. This location led to an exchange of influence and culture, including the spread of various faiths.

The term Arab World refers to the 22 countries that cover a large area that stretches from Morocco and Mauritania in north-western Africa to Iraq and Kuwait in north-western Asia. These countries are Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Lebanon, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Djibouti, Comoros Islands, Sudan, and Somalia. These 22 countries display a wide range of climates and natural resources besides the diversity in demographics, such as income level, education, urbanization, and an array of ethnicities and faiths. Moreover, there is much diversity within each country. Despite these differences, the Arab World has much in common, including history, culture, and language. Islam has continued to serve as a unifying factor between them, especially regarding women's issues, where little has changed regarding the laws and regulations affecting their lives. These commonalities shared by these divest Arab Muslim countries have fostered a shared Arab identity.

All Arab countries are constitutionally Muslim, meaning the state's religion is Islam. Although the majority of Arabs in the Arab World are Muslims, there are significant numbers of Arab Christians and some Arab Jews. Other religions are also practiced in the Arab World. Colonization impacts Arab women's status; it is significant to show that Europeans colonizedthe Arab countries. For instance, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine were occupied by Britain. France colonized Algeria and Lebanon. Italy colonized Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia for a period. However, the French stayed in Tunisia, Morocco, for almost forty years, between 1912 and 1952. The French remained in Algeria from 1830 to 1962, almost 130 years of occupation; during this period, French colonial powers tried to unveil the

Algerian women; in this regard, Fanon says:

> It was the colonialist frenzy to unveil the Algerian women. It was his gamble on winning the battle of the veil. In this battle, the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria because there was in it the will to bring women within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession (Fanon, 1965, pp. 46-47).

Thus, the French ruled over North Africa and had a significant influence, seen not only in the buildings and roads but also in the culture, like the French language and literature (Ferro, 1997). In 1916, the Sykes-Picot agreement gave Syria and Lebanon to France, whereas Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine were given to Britain.

However, some Arab countries were occupied by more than one European country due to the richness of their geographical space and their natural resources. For instance, Egypt was occupied by the British from 1882 until 1992 and by the French from 1798 until 1801. Besides, France occupied Algeria in the year 1830 and 1911 Italy. This kind of occupation left these countries with much more influence regarding the language and culture of the Colonizers' countries. The French culture was apparent today in some of these countries, like the legal system in Morocco and Tunisia, which were impacted greatly by the French one. In Algeria and Morocco, most people still use French in their daily lives as a primary language over Arabic.

European forces' years of occupation of the Arab World left positive and negative impacts on the occupied countries and people. Arab countries were liberated from European colonization. Morocco and Tunisia were liberated in 1956, Algeria in 1962, Libya in 1951, Syria and Lebanon in 1945, and Jordan in 1946. In 1948 mandate on Palestine initiated the Israeli occupation. In the Arab Muslim World, it is crucial to mention that culture and religion are not a singular unit, and Islam is not monolithic as depicted by Western feminists. Western

feminists' writing shows many misconceptions about Islam as a religion.

Their writings curry stereotypical concepts about the status of Muslim women, veiled women, and the homogeneity of Islam. Many Western feminists address Islam as a monolithic unit and are confused that most Muslims in the World are not Arabs, and Arabs are not all Muslims. Arab World includes diverse religious beliefs, such as Sunni and Shia Muslims. Another religious belief in the Arab World is Christianity with its different sectors such as Catholics, Maronite, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, and some Arab Jews. Moreover, there are other non-religious beliefs like the belief of Druze in Syria and Lebanon and some Kurds in Iraq.

Despite all this enormous religious diversity, the Arab Muslim World is mainly connected to Islam by its linguistic history. Besides, according to Islam, most Arab countries use Sharia law as family law to regulate family life. The Sharia laws are based on the Quran and Hadith of Prophet Mohammad. Family laws or personal status laws in most Arab Muslim countries are derived solely from Sharia. However, there are differences in interpreting the Islamic laws between these countries. Also, these laws depend on Sharia. Sharia law tackles issues such as marriage, children's custody, divorce, polygamy, inheritance, treatments, and contracts between people, worship, and other related public and private issues in the Muslim's daily life.

1.6. The Legal Status of Muslim Women in Islam

Women for some Arab tribes, like Mudhar and Qatada, in pre-Islamic times were considered a heavy burden on their families. The birth of a daughter was embracing for the father, for she was considered a disgrace and a shame. Therefore, they were locked as something just created for serving men.

Women in this time of ignorance before Islam

> (Jahiliyya) were subjugated to their relatives or husbands. They were considered chattel to be possessed, to be bought, to be sold, or to be inherited. Men had absolute domination over them. They were not individuals; they belonged to their fathers or husbands (Jawad, 1998, p. 1).

Furthermore, some Arabs tribes practiced wildly the act of infanticide, which was very common at that time and viewed as a generous act. Qatada said: “Mudhar and Qatada used to bury their newborn alive. The most strident in perpetrating this was Tamim alleging fear of being subjugated and that unqualified others would take advantage of them." The Quran describes the mentality of ignorance underlying such a practice as:

> Moreover, when one of them is informed of (the birth of) a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides from the people because he has been informed of the ill. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide (16: 58).

Some Arab tribes at that time did not welcome females born because of the nature of their society. At that time, Banu Tamim, Kinda, and other Arab tribes were witnessing intertribal blood feuds, and since there was intense jealousy and fear of being ashamed, wars and invasions never ceased, and taking revenge never stopped, and all these tasks demanded more males than females to defend their tribes. Women were unable to do such tasks, they were the targets of the enemies, and they were captured mainly for money ransoms or service (of the enemy) so that they could collect heavy ransoms or take them as a means of entertainment. For these tribes, if they paid these heavy ransoms, they would lose money. If not, then their women's chastity and honor were at stake. For these reasons, some Arab tribes of Jahiliya believed that their daughters were a heavy burden, and the easiest way they found to get rid of them was to dig them on the earth immediately after their birth.

In order, not to blame all the Arabs, there were people amongst the Arabs who were enlightened and would refrain from committing this heinous crime. Al- Qurtubi has narrated that: "those honorable men amongst them would refrain from committing infanticide and forbid others from committing it." The idea of a fixed institution of marriage was absent from pre-Islamic Arabia. Women were not given the right to choose their husbands; they were sold either for business affairs between the tribes or people or bought for men's pleasure. They were considered property that someone might inherit from his father. Furthermore, women were not given the right to inherit, divorce, or own any property, and they were forced into prostitution, especially the slave girls.

To conclude, this inhuman treatment of females in pre-Islamic Arabia contributed to the degradation of womanhood. The woman of that era believed she should not be only a servile and a submissive creature but also had no right to expect any respect and honor in the world. Such a deplorable situation illustrated that women's rights at that period were tramped upon and entirely denied.

Islam stands for "silm," an Arabic root that means peace and submission to the only one God. The last Prophet of Islam is Muhammad (peace and Blessing be Upon Him); his message to humanity is that Islam means peace and amity, an essential precondition for maintaining harmony and friendship with non-Muslims.

1.6.1. The Spiritual Aspect

The Prophet Mohamed (peace and blessings be upon him) radically redefined the status of women in 7th-century Arabia when he revealed the word of God. The Quran has commended that both men and women share in equal humanity duties and responsibilities as creatures of Allah. The Quran stipulates:

O humankind, fear your Lord, who created you from

> *one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. Furthermore, fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer (4: 01).*

Stressing this noble and natural conception, Allah says:

> *It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its mate that he might dwell in security with her. Moreover, when he covers her, she carries a light burden and continues therein. Furthermore, when it becomes heavy, they both invoke Allah, their Lord, "If You should give us a good [child], we will surely be among the grateful (7: 189).*

In the two verses, it is clear with no doubt that Islam looks at both women and men equally because Allah created them from the same soul and assigned them the same duties and responsibilities. Muslims believe that Adam and Eve were created from the same soul. Both were equally guilty of their sin and fell from grace. Allah forgave both. Allah in Quran blames Adam more than Eve. Allah says: "Thus did Adam disobey his Lord, so he went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and turned to him with forgiveness, and gave him guidance." (20:121-122).

There is an emphasis on women's issues and their equality with men before Allah, especially in religious duty. Several verses call on women and men to adhere to Allah's law and repeatedly emphasize that both sexes are equally addressed; the following verses are an excellent example of this:

> *Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient*

> *men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fast women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward (33: 35).*

In terms of religious obligations, such as daily Prayers, Fasting, Poor-due, and Pilgrimage, the woman is no different from man. In some cases, the woman has certain advantages over the man. For example, the woman is exempted from daily prayers, fasting during her menstrual periods, and forty days after childbirth. She is exempted from fasting during pregnancy and nursing her baby. Suppose there is any threat to her health or her baby's. If she misses the obligatory fasting (during Ramadan), she can make up for the missed days whenever she can. She does not have to make up for the prayers missed for the above reasons. Although women could and did go into the mosque during the days of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and after that, attendance at the Friday congregational prayers is optional for them, while it is mandatory for men (on Friday). It is a tender touch of the Islamic teachings, for they consider that a woman may be nursing her baby or caring for him and thus may be unable to go out to the mosque at the time of the prayers. They also consider the physiological and psychological changes associated with her natural female functions.

1.6.2. The Social Aspect

Despite the social acceptance of burying unwanted female newborns alive among some Arabian tribes before the revelation of Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him), Islam prohibited this practice of infanticide and considered it a crime like any other murder. Moreover, it restored women's rights to live and elevated their status of being as worthy of human dignity

as men. Henceforth, both women and men are regarded as equal in humanity. Allah says: "And when the girl (who was) buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed." (81: 1-9) [8]. Criticizing the attitudes of such parents who reject their female children, The Qur'an states:

> *When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance) and contempt or bury her in the dust? Ah! What evil (choice) did they decide on? (16: 58-59).*

From saving the girl's life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment. Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) in this regard are the following: "Whosoever has a daughter, and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise" (Ibn Hanbal, No. 1957). Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together). A similar Hadith deals in like manner with one who supports two sisters (Ibn-Hanbal, No. 2104).

The right of females to seek knowledge is not different from that of males. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) makes it sacred for both men and women. He said: "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim" (Al-Bayhaqi), Muslims as used here, including both males and females. The Quran indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves (men and women) of the society and its objectives are, besides perpetuating human life, emotional well-being, and spiritual harmony, and its bases are love and mercy.

Among the most impressive verses about marriage in the Quran is the following: "And among His signs is this: that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest,

peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect." (30: 21).

According to Islamic Law, women cannot be forced to marry anyone without their consent. Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), and she reported that her father forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her a choice (Between accepting the marriage or invalidating it) (Ibn Hanbal No. 2469). In another version, the girl said: "I accept this marriage, but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)" (Ibn Majah, No. 1873).

All provisions for her protection were decreed explicitly at the time of marriage. A woman has the full right upon the expansion of her *Mahr*, a marriage gift, and is included in the nuptial contract. This dowry does not transfer to her father or husband. The concept of *Mahr* in Islam is neither an actual nor symbolic price for the woman, as was the case in certain cultures, but rather it is a gift symbolizing love and affection.

The rules for married life in Islam are clear and in harmony with human nature. Considering the physiological and psychological makeup of men and women, both have equal rights and claims on one another, except for one leadership responsibility. In this case, responsibility is natural in any communal life, consistent with man's nature. The Quran thus states: "[...]*And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them." (2: 228).* Such a degree is Quiwama (maintenance and protection). It refers to the natural difference between the sexes, which is natural and rational; physically, a man is more substantial than a woman.

Consequently, man is capable of shouldering more obligationstowards the family. All these obligations have been placed on the shoulders of men and not on the shoulders of women. It implies no superiority or advantage before the law. However, a man's leadership

role with his family does not mean the husband's dictatorship over his wife. On the contrary, Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions. The Quran gives us an example: *"If they (husband wife) desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation, there is no blame on them." (2: 233)* Over and above her fundamental rights as a wife comes the right emphasized by the Quran and is strongly recommended by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him); kind treatment and companionship. The Quran states: "*But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them, you may hate a thing wherein God has placed much good."* (4: 19) and Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "The best of you is the best to his family, and I am the best among you to my family." "The perfect believers are the best in conduct, and best of you are those who are best to their wives." (Ibn-Hanbal, No. 7396) "Behold, many women came to Muhammad's wives complaining against their husbands (because they beat them) those (husbands) are not the best of you."

Women's right to decide about their marriage is recognized, and her right to seek an end to an unsuccessful marriage is also recognized. However, to provide stability to the family and to protect it from hasty decisions under temporary emotional stress, specific steps and waiting periods should be observed by men and women seeking a divorce. Women's relatively more emotional nature, a good reason for asking for a divorce, should be brought before the judge. Like men, however, a woman can divorce her husband without resorting to the court if the nuptial contract allows that.

More specifically, some aspects of Islamic Law concerning marriage and divorce are attractive and worthy of different treatment. When the continuation of the marriage relationship is impossible for any reason, men are still taught to seek a gracious end for it. The Quran states about such cases: "When you divorce women, and they reach their prescribed term, then retain them in kindness and retain them not for injury so that you transgress (the limits)"(2: 231). In

another verse Quran says:

> *Divorce is twice. Then, either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment. Moreover, it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of Allah. Nevertheless, if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of Allah, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them. Moreover, whoever transgresses the limits of Allah - is those who are the wrongdoer. (2: 229)*

In another: "*O You who have believed, when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them, there is no waiting period to count concerning them. So, provide for them and give them a gracious release*." (33: 49).

According to Islamic theology, the mother is three times more honorable than the father. Islam recommends kindness, respect, and obedience to parents and specifically emphasizes and gives preference to the mother. Islam raises parents to a status more remarkable than any religion and ideology. The command to be good to one's parents begins in the Quran. Allah says:

> *Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful. (4: 36)*

The mention of servitude to parents immediately follows the servitude to God. It is repeated throughout the Quran to emphasize it and as a reminder for those who harm their

parents. Allah says:

> *Furthermore, your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "off," and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word. Moreover, lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small. (17: 23-24)*

A man came to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) asking:

> *O Messenger of God, who among the people is worthy of my good company? The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, your mother. The man said then who else: The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, your mother. The man asked, Then who else? The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, your mother. The man asked, Then who else? The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, your father. [Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

A famous saying of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is: “Paradise is at the feet of mothers.” [In An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ahmad] (Badawi, 1995). The Prophet Muhammad says: "It is the generous (in character) who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them." (Badawi, 1995)

1.6.3. The Economist Aspect

Women had suffered degrading treatment for centuries, and they were considered inferior. As an unfortunate result, they were deprived of many rights, including the right to inherit property. Women were not entitled to a share of family property. Thus, women had suffered for centuries. It was not until the advent of Islam that, for the first time in the history

of humankind, Islam restored to woman the right of inheritance after she, herself, was an object of inheritance in some cultures. Her share is ultimately hers, and no one can make any claim on it, including her father and her husband.

The Quran prescribes the inheritance as: *"For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much - an obligatory share."* (4: 07)

The famous historian J.M. Roberts writes about Islam:

> It's coming was, in many ways, revolutionary. It kept women, for example, in an inferior position but gave them legal rights over property not available to women in many European countries until the nineteenth century. Inside the community of the believers, even the enslaved person had rights, and there were no castes nor inherited status. This revolution was rooted in a religion, which, like the Jews — was not distinct from other sides of life but embraced them all. (Roberts, 1984, p. 355)

A woman's share, in most cases, is one-half the man's share, with no implication that she is worth half a man! It would seem grossly inconsistent after the overwhelming evidence of the equitable treatment of women in Islamic law. This variation in inheritance rights is only consistent with the financial responsibilities of men and women according to Islamic Law. In Islam, a man is fully responsible for maintaining his wife, his children, and sometimes his needy relatives, especially the females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife's wealth or access to any personal income gained from work, rent, profit, or other legal means.

On the other hand, women are far more financially secure and are far less burdened with any claims on their possessions. Her possessions before marriage do not transfer to her

husband, and she even keeps her maiden name. She has no obligation to spend her properties or income on the family after marriage. Furthermore, she is entitled to the "Mahr," which she takes from her husband at the time of marriage. If she is divorced, she may get alimony from her ex-husband. Examining the inheritance law within Islamic Law reveals justice and an abundance of compassion for women.

Concerning women's right to seek employment, it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither house cleaners nor baby-sitters can take the mother's place as the educator of upright, complex-free, and carefully reared children. Such a noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations, cannot be regarded as "idleness."

However, there is no decree in Islam that forbids a woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity, especially in positions that fit her nature and where society needs her most. These professions include nursing, teaching (especially for children), and medicine. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from woman's exceptional talent in any field. Even for the position of a judge, where there may be a tendency to doubt the woman's fitness for the post due to her more emotional nature, we find early Muslim scholars such as Abu-Hanifah and At-Tabari holding there is nothing wrong with it (Badawi, 1995).

1.6.4. The Political Aspect

Any fair investigation of the teachings of Islam into the history of the Islamic civilization will indeed find clear evidence of woman's equality with men in what is called today "political rights." including the right to election and nomination to political offices. It also includes woman's right to participate in public affairs. In the Quran and Islamic history, we find examples of women who participated in serious discussions and argued even with the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Quran says:

> *Indeed, has Allah heard the speech of the one who argues with you, [O Muhammad], concerning her husband and directs her complaint to Allah? Moreover, Allah hears your dialogue; indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing. Those who pronounce their among you [to separate] from their wives - they are not [consequently] their mothers. Their mothers are none but those who gave birth to them. Furthermore, indeed, they are saying an objectionable statement and a falsehood. But indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving (Al-Qur'an, Surah 58: 1- 4)*

In another verse, Allah says:

> *O Prophet, when the believing women come to you pledging to you that they will not associate anything with Allah, nor will they steal, nor will they commit unlawful sexual intercourse, nor will they kill their children, nor will they bring forth a slander they have invented between their arms and legs, nor will they disobey you in what is right - then accept their pledge and ask forgiveness for them of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (60: 12)*

During the Caliphate of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab' a woman argued with him in the mosque, proved her point, and caused him to declare in the presence of people that the woman was right and he 'Umar was wrong. Although not mentioned in the Quran, one Hadith of the Prophet is interpreted to make a woman ineligible for the position of head of state. The Hadith is translated from Arabic as a people would not prosper if they let a woman be their leader. The limitation pointed out in this Hadith does not mean that women are not rightful or undignified. It is somewhat, related to the biological and physical differences between men and women in Islam (Badawi, 1995)

In Islam, the head of the state is a figurehead. He leads people in the prayers, and he is engaged in the decision-making process and his people's security. This demanding position is inconsistent with the physiological and psychological makeup of women; It is a medical fact that women undergo various physiological and psychological changes during their monthly periods and during their pregnancies. Such changes may occur during an emergency, thus affecting her decision, without considering the excessive strain produced. Moreover, some decisions require a maximum of rationality and a minimum of emotionality - a requirement that does not coincide with the instinctive nature of women (Badawi, 1971).

In modern times and the most developed countries, it is rare to find a woman as a head of state rather than a figurative head, whether acting as a woman commander of the armed services or a proportionate number of women representatives in parliaments or other high positions. We cannot describe this as the backwardness of numerous nations or to limitation of woman's rights. It is more logical to explain the case in terms of natural and biological differences between the two sexes, which does not imply any supremacy over the other. The difference shows the roles of women and men in life.

1.7. Conceptual Framework

This dissertation aims to challenge prevailing perceptions and stereotypes of Arab Muslim women that have been perpetuated in the literature. These portrayals often depict these women as voiceless, veiled victims who rely on Western saviors for assistance. However, such portrayals overlook the diverse experiences of women and fail to consider the complex social, cultural, economic, and contextual factors that shape the lives of women in any society. Furthermore, they tend to unjustly associate the challenges faced by Arab Muslim women solely with their religion. In light of these false associations and persistent stereotypes, this dissertation investigates the representations of Arab Muslim women found within a trilogy. By examining these portrayals, the study aims to shed light on the nuanced

and multifaceted realities of Arab Muslim women's lives. It seeks to challenge preconceived notions and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences, agency, and complexities of Arab Muslim women that extend beyond simplistic and misleading narratives. The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to a more nuanced and informed dialogue regarding the experiences of Arab Muslim women, the influence of Islam, and the socio-cultural factors that shape their lives. By examining the portrayal of women in Jean Sasson's trilogy and exploring the broader dynamics at play, the research aims to challenge stereotypes, promote cultural understanding, and foster a more accurate representation of these women's lived realities.

Therefore, this research seeks to explore the potential of non-fiction literature in providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between religion and culture in shaping the circumstances and experiences of Arab Muslim women. The central research question driving this study is as follows: can non-fiction enable us to have a deeper understanding of how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture!

Previous research has dedicated significant attention to understanding the experiences and challenges encountered by Arab Muslim women, with a particular focus on the complex interplay between religion and culture. In Western fiction, a prevailing image of Saudi women has emerged, portraying them as oppressed and subordinate within a male-dominated society. This perception gained prominence following the Desert Storm Operation, and it has shaped narratives and representations of Saudi women in various literary works.

The literature reviewed provides a range of perspectives on the portrayal and experiences of Arab Muslim women, while also considering the influence of Orientalism. Orientalism, as discussed by Edward Said in his seminal work, refers to the Western construction of the East as a homogeneous and exotic "other," often portrayed as inferior and

in need of Western intervention. This framework has shaped the representation of Arab Muslim women in various ways. Suha Sabbagh (1996), in her book “Arab Women Between Defiance and Restraint," emphasizes the importance of recognizing cultural differences and avoiding simplistic narratives when discussing Arab women's experiences, challenging Orientalist assumptions that homogenize Arab women's experiences. Ahmed's (2009) critique of the depiction of Muslim women as veiled and in need of rescue, reveals the Orientalist tropes that perpetuate misrepresentations and reinforce cultural stereotypes and narratives of Western superiority. Masturoch (2009) highlights the systemic disadvantages and unequal treatment faced by women in traditional Arabian families, attributing them to both cultural norms and legal frameworks.

Sifana (2018) challenges the notion that the mistreatment of Arab women is based on Islamic teachings, arguing that it is influenced by cultural dynamics, particularly the concept of honor and shame. This can be seen as a response to Orientalist assumptions that Islam is inherently oppressive to women. Whereas, Thakur raises concerns about the potential restrictions on women's rights under Sharia Law, pointing to the marginalization and objectification of women within certain interpretations and applications. Abu Lughod’s (2009) critique of narratives of saving Muslim women as justifications for military actions examines how these narratives serve as a form of "imperial feminism" that masks underlying political and military agendas. Her critique reveals how Orientalist perspectives have been used to legitimize Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries. Together, these perspectives contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of gender dynamics, cultural influences, religious interpretations, and the potential manipulation of narratives for political purposes in the context of Arab Muslim women's experiences.

Overall, this literature review highlights the need for nuanced analysis and a recognition of the diversity of experiences within Arab Muslim communities. It underscores the

importance of avoiding essentialist or monolithic portrayals and engaging with the complexities of gender, culture, and religion when discussing the lives of Arab and Muslim women. It emphasizes the importance of moving beyond Orientalist stereotypes and engaging with the complexities of gender dynamics, cultural influences, religious interpretations, and geopolitical agendas. By critically examining these issues, a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Arab and Muslim women can be achieved, free from Orientalist assumptions and misrepresentations.

1.7.1. Theoretical Framework

As documented in the literature above, the representation of Arab Muslim women in Western literature has been always negative. Women are perceived as victims of patriarchal societies that imply traditional cultures and religions. However, these images are to be challenged. Edward Said argues that the images of Arab Muslim women in literature should be interrogated for their ideological content, for no representation can be truly real or objective (Said, 1978).

That is, literary representation is not a mere reflection of reality but it is also shaped by the author's perspectives, intention, and artistic choice. It can be also influenced by cultural, economic, and social contexts, as well as the author's personal experiences and beliefs. Therefore, literary representation can challenge or reinforce the dominant discourse of narratives. question societal and cultural norms, explore diverse perspectives, and provide insights into the complexities of the human experience.

This framework centers on postcolonial feminist theory to analyze women's representation in 20th-century American non-fiction. Drawing on the work of postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty, Under Western Eyes, which argues against the "othering" and exoticization of women from formerly colonized societies, highlighting how they are often depicted as passive victims or objects of desire, this dissertation analyses Jean Sasson's

Princess trilogy and its representation of Arab Muslim women. It also delves into how these narratives construct and challenge gender. By utilizing this framework this dissertation seeks to contribute to the discourse on postcolonial feminist theory, challenge existing stereotypes and narratives, and highlight the diverse experiences and agency of women in postcolonial third-world contexts.

1.7.2. Key Concepts

1.7.2.1. Representation

Representation is the foundational concept in aesthetics and semiotics. It is the portrayal or depiction of gender roles in literary texts. Representation plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of social and cultural identities. It encompasses the portrayal and depiction of various groups, individuals, or communities in various forms of production whether media or literature. Examining how gender is represented in Sasson's novels allows us to uncover underlying ideologies and narratives. Theorists such as Mohanty and Mitchel argue that the process of representation is far from being a neutral or objective endeavor; rather, it is profoundly shaped by power dynamics, particularly within the framework of colonial legacies.

1.7.2.2. Representation Versus Discursive Self-representation

Mohanty's concept of representation versus discursive self-representation is based on Gayatri Spivak's criticism of the dominant Western representation of women of the global south as passive victims. Mohanty argues that representations of Third World women often homogenize their experiences and construct them as monolithic victims of oppression. This representation tends to reinforce colonial power dynamics and perpetuate the idea that Western feminism is the only solution to their problems. Mohanty highlights the danger of the "single story" by demonstrating how these representations flatten the diversity and complexity

of women's experiences in the Global South. The concept of "discursive self-representation" is a way for marginalized groups to challenge and subvert dominant narratives. Discursive self-representation involves the active engagement of individuals or communities in shaping their representations and articulating their own experiences and perspectives. It is a strategy for reclaiming agency and resisting the imposition of external interpretations. These concepts contribute to the ongoing project of decolonizing knowledge production and challenging the power imbalances inherent in representations.

1.7.2.3. Third-World Difference

Mohanty (1986) argues that the construction of third- world difference is rooted in colonial discourses that have historically pathologized and eroticized the Global South. She points out that Western feminist scholarship often positions itself as the liberator and savior of Third World women, perpetuating a hierarchical relationship where Western feminists are seen as the authoritative voices, while Third-World women are passive recipients of Western knowledge and intervention.

1.7.2.4. Oriental Tropes

Oriental tropes as explained in Edward Said Orientalism, refer to recurring themes, images, and stereotypes that have been historically associated with the Orient, a term often used to refer to the East or non-Western cultures. These tropes emerged from Western perceptions and representations of the East, particularly during the era of European colonialism and Orientalism.

a) Harem

The harem is a concept that has been frequently depicted in literature, particularly in Western literature from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. It refers to a part of a household in certain societies, particularly in the Middle East, where women, particularly the

wives and concubines of a polygamous man, lived in seclusion. In literature, the harem has often been portrayed as an exotic and mysterious place, shrouded in secrecy and intrigue. It has been a popular subject for Western writers who sought to explore themes of sexuality, power, and the "Other"(Said, 1978).

b) The Veil

The veil has often been depicted in Western literature as a symbol of mystery, exoticism, and oppression. It has been a recurring motif used to explore themes of gender, sexuality, cultural difference, and the "Other." Additionally, the veil has frequently been linked to ideas of female subjugation and oppression in Western literature and media (Haddad, 2007). It has been used to depict women's lack of agency and autonomy, reinforcing stereotypes of Eastern women as passive and controlled by patriarchal societies.

c) Eunuch

In nineteenth and twentieth century Western literature, eunuchs were portrayed as exotic and mysterious figures from the Orient. They were often depicted as part of the harem, serving as guards or attendants to the women within (Rycaut, 1972). These narratives perpetuated Orientalist stereotypes and reinforced power dynamics between the East and the West.

1.7.2.5. Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism assumes that European culture is the standard against which all other cultures should be measured. It often views European history, art, literature, philosophy, and scientific achievements as the pinnacle of human civilization, while downplaying or disregarding the contributions of other regions. Sundberg (2009). Edward Said in his book Orientalism defines Eurocentrism as, “Eurocentrism is a way of seeing that is rooted in the geographic, economic, technological, and political dominance of Europe and its overseas empires in the modern period.” (Said, 1978)

1.7.3. Relationships and Connections

The research argues the way Arab Muslim women are portrayed in the trilogy is influenced by Orientalist narratives and power dynamics. The representation of Arab Muslim women as veiled victims leads people to think that Islam is a religion that oppresses women.

Oriental tropes, such as the harem, veil, and eunuch, are examples of how Arab Muslim women are represented in Western literature and media. These tropes perpetuate stereotypes and distort the reality of their lives. The misrepresentation of Arab Muslim women through Oriental tropes contributes to a skewed understanding and reinforces stereotypes and power dynamics.

Eurocentrism, as a dominant perspective, has influenced the representation of non-European cultures, including Arab Muslim women. Eurocentric notions of superiority have often resulted in the exoticization, marginalization, and distortion of ‘others’’ experiences. The representation of Arab Muslim women within Eurocentric frameworks reinforces power imbalances and perpetuates a limited and biased understanding of their identities and struggles.

The concept of discursive self-representation provides a counter-narrative to dominant representations of Arab Muslim women for instance ‘Diverse Experiences and Empowered Voices of Arab Muslim Women." It allows marginalized groups to challenge the monolithic victimhood narratives imposed upon them. By engaging in discursive self-representation, Arab Muslim women can assert their agency and offer diverse perspectives that challenge the construction of Third World differences perpetuated by Western feminist scholarship.

Representation is deeply influenced by power dynamics, particularly within the context of colonial legacies. The Orientalist narratives that shape representations of Arab Muslim women have roots in colonial discourses, where the East was constructed as exotic, inferior,

and in need of Western savings. These power dynamics continue to shape representations, reinforcing hierarchies and unequal relationships between the West and the East. By recognizing these relationships and connections, we can better understand how misrepresentations of Arab Muslim women are influenced by Orientalist narratives, power dynamics, Eurocentrism, and the need for discursive self-representation to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim agency and dismantle the Western gaze of misrepresentation and assumptions.

It's crucial to emphasize that Arab Muslim women have diverse experiences and that should not be oversimplified or subjected to stereotyping. Many of them are actively challenging traditional gender roles and working for women's rights. By recognizing and challenging these misrepresentations, we can foster a more nuanced and accurate understanding of Arab Muslim women and promote inclusivity and respect. It is important to engage in dialogue, listen to diverse voices, and acknowledge the individuality and agency of Arab Muslim women.

1.7.4. Justification

The chosen theoretical framework, post-colonial feminist literary theory, is appropriate for this study because it emphasizes the importance of analyzing and understanding women's experiences, within their specific socio-political and historical contexts. It provides a critical perspective to analyze the representation of Arab Muslim women in literature and offers insights into how these representations reflect and challenge broader power structures. By investigating Sasson's novels through a post-colonial feminist lens, this research contributes to the understanding of Arab Muslim Women's representation in literature and reveals the complexities, diversity, and agency that exist within these contexts and that influence the experiences of these women.

1.7.5. Conceptual Model

The following figure that we created indicate the intersection of the theoretical frameworks that guided this qualitative study. In the figure, the central concept is "Representation of Arab Muslim Women." It is connected to two main branches representing the key influences on representation. On the left side, we have "Oriental Tropes," which refers to recurring stereotypes and themes associated with Arab Muslim women in Western literature. This connection highlights how these tropes have influenced and shaped their representation. On the right side, we have "Eurocentrism," which represents the Eurocentric perspective that views European/American culture as superior and influences the representation of non-European cultures that are perceived as inferior and backward. Eurocentrism connects to "Power Dynamics," illustrating how power imbalances, particularly stemming from colonial legacies, influence the representation of Arab Muslim women. For instance, Arab Muslim women have often been depicted as submissive, oppressed, and in need of Western intervention. This intention reinforces colonial power dynamics and perpetuates stereotypes.

At the bottom, we have "Third World Difference," which signifies the construction of difference rooted in colonial discourses. This connection highlights the marginalization of Arab Muslim women's perspectives and experiences within Western feminist scholarship. This is particularly evident in Sasson Trilogy, where Arab Muslim women are often portrayed through a narrow lens that neglects their individuality and diverse experiences.

Finally, at the top, we have "Discursive Self-Representation." This concept represents the agency of Arab Muslim women in challenging dominant narratives and shaping their representations, acting as a response to the misrepresentation they face.

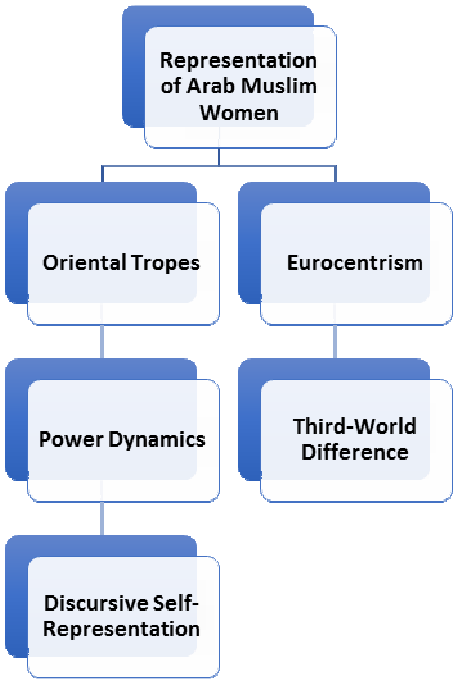

Figure 1. Decolonizing Representations of Arab Muslim Women

While the relationships between the concepts depicted in the figure above may not be linear, it is important to consider other factors that mutually influence the representations of Arab Muslim women. In this research, we have focused on describing and highlighting key themes that are relevant to understanding these representations and how they are shaped. These themes encompass a range of interconnected factors that have significant impacts on how Arab Muslim women are portrayed. By examining these factors, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics influencing the representation of Arab Muslim women and their lived experiences.

1.8. Conclusion

The problem with feminism lies in how feminists portray the images of women of different cultures and judge them to their Western culture. Western feminists' task to liberate Arab Muslim women and all deprived women has widened the gap between the two primary cultures, the West and the East. Through the stereotypes and prejudices the West formulated about the East, hatred and misunderstanding shape the relationship of the West

with the Eastern people. Ahmad (2009) explains how Arab Muslim women are represented in *Princess* Trilogy, and unlike the imperial harem, they can speak, at least purportedly, "but only in ways that are legible and familiar within the language and experience of American feminism." (p.107)

Thus, feminism is a concept unique to each culture or geographical location. In order to get a clear picture of the various attitudes of Arab Muslim communities, one has to look at the Arab Muslim countries, for instance, Saudi Arabia and Algeria, which share the Islamic culture with Turkey and Iran. However, they differ regarding national cultures and the implementation and understanding of Islamic Sharia laws. Saudi Arabia, for instance, has the tightest restriction on women, unlike Algeria and other Arab countries, due to its geographical and national cultures. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is the epitome of Western feminism's perception of how a Muslim country treats women. No wonder the strange stories written by Western feminism, such *Princess* Trilogy about the glamorous lives of women of the veil, will be consumed widely by Western audiences; it is empty of any geographical, doctrinal, or economic specificity as political context. Therefore, such narratives will have two effects on Western readers: 'To allow their audiences to sympathize with and to distance themselves from the political processes that bring anti-female regimes into being' (Ahmad, 2009, p.106)

Chapter Two

The Representation of Arab Muslim Women in Princess

2.1. Introduction

Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia (1992), the first trilogy novel, is about the reality of being a female in Saudi Arabia. The author, Jean Sasson, called herself a voice for Middle Eastern women. She spent 12 years in Saudi Arabia and worked as a medical administrative coordinator at King Abdul Aziz Hospital. Sasson befriended many members of the royal family who visited the hospital. The most notable of these friendships was that of Sultana, the Princess whose life *Princess* tells.

Princess narrates stories of hardship and injustices faced by Princess Sultana and women in Saudi Arabia. Sultana's miserable life started in childhood, being a female in a family that honored males and looked down on females. She was neglected by her father and scorned by her brother, the only male child in the family, who was given all rights to torture his sisters. Later, Sultana was humiliated by her husband, who planned to have a second wife. The detailed stories of injustices in the novel have made a significant impact on Western readers' shaping of Saudi women's image and Arab Muslim women in general. In this chapter, we analyzed the representation of Arab Muslim women in *Princess* mainly the novel's protagonist Sultana.

In her epilogue addressed to readers, Sasson sums up the plight of women in countries such as; Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Gaza Strip, and Iraq, and how some of these women need their cause to reach the globe, and interested human rights actors have to take women's issues in the Arab Muslim World seriously. In the case of Algeria, Sasson reported how Algerian women are harshly treated by the Algerian constitution, which considers women no more than permanent minors who require the consent of their fathers and husbands to do most activities. Moreover, the women of Algeria are kept under the control of men. Algerian women are limited in public life and services. She asserted,

> In fact, Algerian law considers women permanent minors, requiring the consent of their husbands or fathers for most activities. Therefore, life for women in Algeria is still minimal in public life, and females are kept tightly under the rule of men." (p.13)

In the case of Bahrain, although women are more liberal than in most Middle Eastern countries, however, they are perceived as weak and in need of male protection. Women are allowed to steer the wheels of their cars, yet arranged marriages are still performed. Sasson explained,

> Although Bahrain is more liberal than most Middle Eastern countries, most men still consider women weak and need male protection. Arranged marriages are the norm, although the bride and groom are often allowed supervised meetings before the wedding. Women are allowed to drive. (p.14).

In a country like Egypt, women gain more and more freedom than other Arab women yearn for, yet their situation needs more interference from human rights to watch in the case of female genital mutilation. A custom originated in Africa and is still performed in some societies and tribes worldwide. However, the more educated Egyptian families abandoned this custom. Another issue that faced Egyptian women is the male escort present in all women's activities in public life. She noted,

> In Egypt, women work outside the home, drive automobiles, and enjoy many freedoms other Arab women yearn for. Nevertheless, there are many unsolved problems facing Egyptian women. For example, female circumcision is not uncommon in many regions of the country, although the more educated families have turned away from that appalling custom. In addition, many Egyptian

> women complain of rampant groping should they make a trip to the market without their husbands or a male escort (p.14).

Women of the Gaza Strip, unlike other Palestinians under the control of Israeli conquerors, suffer under the control of Hamas rule. Their lives went from bad to worse. Sasson referred to their plight "as the never-ending exchange of violence with Israel" (p.15). And solely to the election of Hamas. Sasson explains how Hamas Taliban-like laws had altered the life of poor Palestinian women. The segregation of men and women in public life and the obligation of wearing the Hijab. However, before the Hamas election, women had the right to choose to put on their Hijab. Besides, women in Gaza are exposed to harsh penalties when refusing polygamy and adhering to the Hijab. Sasson confirmed,

> Hamas campaigned for "Taliban-like laws," including total segregation of women and men and wearing the total Hijab. (Women in Gaza had always had the right to personal choice regarding veiling.) Since the Hamas election, some government officials have attempted to impose the most severe penalties should women not adhere to strict Islamic dress and other restrictions against the civil population, such as the promotion of polygamy, card-playing, and dating. Palestinian women in Gaza need someone to take up their cause. (p.15)

The quote indicates the political standpoint of the author, who sums up women of Gaza's plight to the election and governance of Hamas. The author merely referred to the source of oppression as the segregation of males and females and the wearing of the Hijab and that Hamas had worsened the situation of women of Gaza by leading endless violence against the innocent civilian of Israel. The so called Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a history of colonizer and colonization.

Similarly, women of Iraq are no exception, and the author declares how women suffered under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Whereas, in the past Iraqi women enjoyed many rights, "In fact, a 1958 law allowed Iraqi women to divorce their husbands, inherit property, study, work, and even move without the permission of the male member of the family" (p.16) The mentioned rights are dictated in the Quran for Muslim women and are rights granted to women since the coming of Islam. The law reinforces the application of such amendments. Again, the suffering of Iraqi women is summed up in the obligation to wear Islamic Hijab. Sasson concludes, "With regional control held by various tribes, women are beaten for not covering themselves in Hijab, with others being raped, women's bodies used as a weapon b y tribal factions at war." (p.17)

Sasson reported how women were beaten for not adhering to the law, alongside women raped and used their bodies as weapons in the war. These reasons, mainly using women's bodies as weaponry, justified the American rule in Afghanistan and Iraq. The international audience usually supports the idea of leading wars to save women.

In Kurdistan, Iraq, much to the relief of many women, the government passed laws restricting polygamy and banning minors' marriages. However, "Honor killings and self-immolations have reached an all-time high. Some teenagers have been killed for the crime of talking to a boy over their cell phone." (p.16-17). In the last part of this quote, there is an exaggeration of considering talking to a male over a cell phone to some teenagers as a crime. Again, using the body as a weaponry fraction in wars is also high. It is again another justification for the war on Iraq.

In the case of Kuwait, it is considered one of the best Middle Eastern countries for women. "Women are allowed to drive, work without the consent of a man, acquire passports, travel out of the country, and even hold government positions, all without the consent of a male family member." (p.18). Moreover, Kuwaiti women have the right to vote. However, the only

issue for women in Kuwait is that the testimony of two women equals one man in the case of civil, criminal, and administrative courts. Besides social and legal discrimination. Although these shortcomings, the future for women in Kuwait is brighter (p.18).

In the case of a country like Qatar, the kingdom had done much to better the situation of Qatari women. The royal family in Qatar had established various committees for women to propose programs to upgrade their potential of women. Women in Qatar are allowed to vote and participate in governance. In Qatar universities, female students outnumber male students.

Besides, women hold 52% of jobs at the ministry of education. Although Qatar society is very conservative, "the government is working to ensure that women are encouraged to pursue their private goals." (p.20). In the United Arab Emirates, women's lives have significantly changed, and “the UAE ranked 29th among 177” (p.20) when it comes to women empowerment. Whereas in a country like Yemen, women face violence and discrimination. A virgin girl of eight years marries a man three times older than her. Marriages are still arranged, and women must obey their fathers and husbands. Besides, honor killing is often performed when there is an accusation of an immoral act done by women. However, men usually escape the punishment and are treated leniently. Two Women's testimony equals one man's testimony. Women in Yemen yell for support and more rights. Sasson asserted,

> Tragically, the women of Yemen face violence and discrimination in their lives. Women are not; choose their husbands, and in many cases, girls as young as eight years old are married against their will. Once a woman is married, she has no rights but must obey her husband, even forced to gain permission to leave the house. When women testify in court, their testimony is valued at half that of a male. If a woman is married, her value is compensated half

> that of a male. Honor a woman's head sword over the head of a woman if there is gossip about her behavior. While men are treated leniently, women will be put to death if there is an accusation of any "immoral" act. (p.20)

In Saudi Arabia, Sasson reported how few things have changed since her last visit under the rule of king Abdullah who was a man of common sense who used his authority to help women". Princess Sultana reported, "that two of her cousins, King Abdullah's daughters, encourage their father to pursue this important course, which has opened the way for more Saudi women to seek recourse when treated harshly." (p.21)

2.2. Oppressed Arab Women

Arab women are often perceived as oppressed by both men, and the loosely culture that gives men the right to dominate, torture the female in their household. Sultana is an is an example of an oppressed woman who wants to change her and daughters' fates and all women in her country? In these parts, the characteristics of Sultana are presented.

2.2.1. The Enslaved Sultana

As illustrated by the author, Sultana's story is filled with many anecdotes of misogynistic treatment; Sultana and the women in her family and country endure at the hands of men. Even though Sultana is a member of the royal family, she is bound by a strict society that sees women as nothing more than vessels of sexual relief and breeders of children for men. Sultana describes how women in her land are treated: "women in my land are ignored by their fathers, scorned by their brothers, and abused by their husbands" (Sasson, 1992, p. 29).

Princess depicts how even royal women are beaten, executed, and enslaved by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. She reveals how her mom was oppressed: "She had been married at the age of twelve to an intense man filled with dark cruelties. She was ill-equipped to do little more in life than his bidding." (Sasson, 1992, p.27). She describes how

women from birth are given no identity; their births and deaths are not made official in the public record. However, the males are documented in the family and tribal records. Her oppression starts with her father, since she is the tenth daughter, and her brother Ali, the only male child, is treated better and given all attention by her father. Moreover, Ali is given all the rights over his sisters.

From a young age, Sultana is determined to get back at her brother's unfairness by putting him into serious trouble. Ali would be jealous of any things his sisters may have desired. Sultana brings back her first vivid memory, "Ali slapped me to the ground, but I declined to hand over the shiny red apple just given to me by the Pakistani cook" (Sasson, 1992, p. 33). As punishment for Sultana, the father decrees that Ali will have all the right to fill her plate at mealtime. Moreover, her toys will be given to Ali to teach her "that men are her master" (Sasson, 1992, p. 34).

Princess is chained by the veil, as described in the novel. When Sultana gets her menses, she has to bid farewell to her childhood and welcome the world of womanhood. Although Sultana considers her veiling a threat, a danger that will not end until she is safely wed and put behind walls, ' life changed quickly; I had entered the souq area as an individual bursting with life, my face expressing my emotions to the world. I left the shopping area covered from head to toe, a faceless creature in black" (Sasson, 1992, p. 111). This one-sided view of the Veil shows the author's mistreatment of the Veil as a symbol of Arab Muslim women oppression.

Sultana's enslavement does not end; she describes herself as a property soon to be transmitted from her father's ownership to a stranger she will call her husband. Her husband, Kareem, slapped her three times across the face because of a dispute between Sultana and her mother-in-law. After giving birth to her three children, Sultana is informed that she has breast cancer and will breed no more children. In addition, her husband informs her that he has decided to wed another woman. This sudden tiding brings sadness to Sultana, who directly asks

for a divorce. Sultana describes Kareem as "a man who could blackmail the one who had born his children. Without shame, he had dangled the sinister possibility of his second wife, my children's happiness, my children. That should connect me with the reality of my male-dominated world" (Sasson, 1992, p. 248).

2. 2.2. Sultana's Failure

Through the character of Sultana, we realize her quick decision the divorce because her husband threatens to have a second wife. Then, she runs to London, where she finds refuge for herself and her children. Thus, her escape from the country and family indicates failure because Arab women struggle to save their families rather than give up and escape.

Sultana describes her attitude and quick decision: "At last, my rage was spent. A deadly calm fell over me. My mind was made up. I told Kareem that I wanted a divorce; I would never submit to the humiliation of his taking another wife" (Sasson, 1992, p. 247). Sultana describes how in the Saudi society, divorced women if they cannot have the opportunity to find a lucky second marriage or have a caring family to accept her, she will carry the failure and the blame for being divorced all her life, "As with everything else in Saudi society, the failure of the marriage and the blame for divorce rests with the woman." (p.390)

2.2.3. The Dependent Woman

The text has two types of dependencies: dependency on men and Western saviors. Sultana compare American man to Arab man in stating how she usually feels fearful at the presence of her father and brother Ali and how she detests Ali and her other half-brothers, "Like my sisters, I pretended to revere my brother, but I hated him as only the oppressed can hate." (45). She was attracted to their open, friendly manner through her trip with the American pilot. They gently asked her to sit in the cockpit. To her surprise, she felt comfortable and leaned over the pilot's shoulder, 'I found myself leaning over his shoulder,

completely at ease. For one of the few occasions in my young life, I felt calm and comfortable in the presence of men." (p.111) Sultana confesses, "It was a strange feeling, yet I felt intoxicated with the knowledge that men, whom I had been brought up to think of as gods, could be so ordinary and non-threatening." (p.111). According to the illustration, Sultana perceived man as a God in the way men are holy and threatening, although the comparison is incomparable. But the image she forms of Arab men is threatening and holy. She expresses the priority of American men over Arab men.

Sultana's dependency is on Western American visitors. Upon the coming of the American troops to her country, Sultana was happy about the changing of events; in her opinion, the American presence in Saudi Arabia was a spark of life for the Saudi feminists' dreams (Sasson, 1992, p. 270). However, Sultana's attitudes toward the coming of the U.S. troops and how they would make specific changes to support the rights of women were very naive. It is a negative image presented in comparison with independent woman, who is usually taken as strong women by feminists, and dependent women as a weak character.

Her attitudes towards American troops and how they will 'wonderfully alter the lives of women' (Sasson, 1992, p. 273) reminds us of Spivak's quotes about how the coming of white men to save brown women from brown men is the mission of Western feminist in the Third World.

2.3. Rebellious Sultana

Arab Muslim women in the novel are portrayed as oppressed and voiceless in male-dominated societies. Sultana and since her childhood, had a rebellious character. She vows to fight her elder brother Ali who rules with supreme. Sultana rises against patriarchy and oppression exposed to her and all Saudi women by society and religion. Sultana breaks religious and social norms. As a result, she fails to cooperate in her society since her

struggle is unlike the Arab Muslim women who work within the common social understandings that underpin value and legitimacy in their society rather than provoking confrontation. Therefore, Sultana is considered an outsider to her society.

2.3.1. Sultana Rebellion Against Patriarchy

Sultana realizes that she lives in a patriarchal environment that limits her choices and freedom. She has seen her mother and sisters suffering from male domination, so she decides not to give up in a rebellion against males' absolutism; she vows to face these cruelties. Sultana declares war at an early age. She is considered a troublemaker for she has done many tricks to get her brother Ali annoyed as a revenge for his mistreatment of them:

I created havoc in our household. I was the one who poured sand into the motor of Ali's new Mercedes; I pinched money out of my father's wallet; I buried Ali's gold coin collection in the backyard; I released green snakes and ugly lizards from jars into the family pool as Ali lay sleeping on his float (Sasson, 1992, p. 57).

Sultana gets so irritated with the tidings that Ali will accompany them on their trip to Cairo. As revenge, she flushes his' headdress down the toilet and slams the bathroom door on him (Sasson, 1992). She covers up what she has done by bringing Ali's collection of Playboy magazines to the religious men; however, in doing so, she feels incredibly guilty for bringing shame to her family. Sultana rebels against her husband when warning her to wed another wife by escaping with the children to London. She decides to return home once she is sure he has suffered enough.

2.3.2. Against Saudi Traditions

Among women's rights in Islam, Islam gives woman the right to marry a suitable person. Therefore, a woman in Islam should not be forced to marry a man without her consent. However, where Sultana lives, women are forced at a young age to marry men who

are older than them. Considering the forced marriage of her sister Sultana decided not to accept any husband without seeing him before marriage. Though it is not allowed in her society to meet the husband before marriage, Sultana insists on seeing Kareem before marriage. Sultana is so happy when her father allows her to meet Kareem, "I danced around the room when father told me the news. I was going to meet the man; I would marry before I married him" (Sasson, 1992, p. 151).

Sultanas' reaction to the birth of her child shows her attempt to change the tradition that favors males born over females born. Besides, she wants to change the patriarchal culture of her society.

2.3.3. Against Government Laws

In the novel, Sasson details the laws of Saudi Arabia, which adhere to Islamic precepts. This law is called "Sharia," the path that embraces the whole way of life ordained by Allah. The sources of Sharia are the Quran (the word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad) and the Sunna (the reported words and behaviors of Prophet Muhammad). All Muslims are expected to conduct their lives by the traditional values set by the Prophet of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him), who was born in AD571 and died in AD632. Thus, it is too difficult for Westerners to understand the total submission of Muslims to the laws of the Quran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad.

Princess Sultana's rebellion is against the implementation of these rules in society. Sultana reveals a story that happened to her brother-in-law Muneer who was engaged with other princes in risky behaviors, like transporting alcohol to the kingdom. The ministerial committee (muta was) did not punish Muneer since Sultana's father and other princes downplayed the incident as foolish by a young prince whom the West influences. As a result, Muneer was brought into his father's business and sent to Jeddah to manage the new offices.

To buy off his discontent, he was awarded many government contracts. Within a few months, he told his father he wanted to wed, a suitable cousin was found, and his happiness increased (Sasson, 1992, p. 187).

Sultana recalls other stories that happened to her Filipino servant's friend Maledine. A housekeeper finds that her job contains "duties" that are not what she expected. Her employer and his two sons sexually exploit her. Since "the police do not help Filipinos in this country" (Sasson, 1992, p.132), Maledine is sent back to her country at the end of her two years contract, and two other Filipinos replace her.

2.3.4. Sultana Opposition to Islamic Law

The ideal Muslim women are in many ways like her male counterpart; pious, modest and caring for her family. However, Islam provides various rights to be educated, inherit, choose her husband, and divorce. Etc. Among those, she looks up to as her ideals are the Prophet's wives, such as Khadija, Ayesha, and his daughter Fatima.

Chapter one emphasizes the pre-eminent position of women in the early days of Islam and the hadith of Prophet Muhammad that how a person may best locate paradise is, at one, a comment on the role of women in society and Islamic ideology. Islam has raised the woman's status from below the earth so high that paradise lies at her feet.

In *Princess*, there are many contradictions about the Islamic faith. At the novel's opening, Sultana blames her country's customs and traditions for women's plight. She asserts, "it is wrong, however, to blame our Muslim faith for the lowly position of women in our society […] our Prophet Muhammad taught only kindness and fairness toward those of my sex" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). Those to be blamed are “the men who came behind the Prophet Muhammad have chosen to follow the customs and traditions of the dark ages rather than to follow Muhammad’s words and example.” Then, Sultana contradicts her words by stating that:

"the Koran does state women are secondly to men, much in the same way, the Bible authorizes men over women. (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). Thus, in this novel, we can realize two different voices, one of Sultana and the other of the author.

2.3.4.1. The Misstatement about Hijab

The hijab to Muslim women is a symbol of heritage, ethnic pride, identity, and a mean of protecting their modesty according to cultural requirements, yet for Western women, the hijab may symbolize repression and discrimination. In the novel, there is a misstatement about the hijab that cannot belong to a Muslim woman. Sultana expressed her veiling experience as a threat and danger. She considered the Veil a way to prevent her from seeing the blue sky. She asserts: "the sky was no longer blue, the glow of the sun had dimmed; my heart plunged to my stomach when I realized that, from that moment, outside my own home, I would not experience life as it is in all its colors. The world suddenly seemed dull" (Sasson, 1992, p. 111).

2.3.4.2. Honor Killing

A common misconception pervades the West that women are mistreated in the Arab world due to the application of Islamic law (Sharia). In *Princess*, Sasson refers to honor killing occurrences as often as afternoon tea and that Arab families discuss together the premeditated killings of their daughters who get in the way of family honor. But, first, it is necessary to have knowledge of Islam about what the author refers to as an honor killing.

Honor killing is known in Islam as crimes of *hudud* that include: theft, drinking alcohol, defamation in Islam, fornication, and adultery. Every crime gets its punishment; for instance, persons found guilty of theft are paid by fines, imprisonment, or amputation of the right hand (or the left hand if the right has already been amputated). However, this is not done haphazardly,

these punishments have numerous conditions to be implemented, and there are specific people's punishments. For instance, theft conditions are not to be implemented if conditions are not presented, such as evidence and confession, the amount of money stolen, and the purposes of the action of theft. Allah most high says in Quran: "*And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse; indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way"* (1: 32); thus, fornication and whatever leads to it are all considered significant sins, hence must be avoided in Islam by both men and women at all times.

The Islamic legal punishment for fornication is established by evidence and confession. The evidence is that four people give testimony against a man and a woman that they committed fornication. When these people testify in court, the judge will inquire from them about the precise details of the place of the incident, the time, the identity of the women involved, and the exact scene of fornication.

When the four people give details such as stating that the woman was unlawful upon the man in every way and testify the observing of the intercourse taking place, and the witnesses are considered upright both privately and publicly, then the judge will give the order for the legal punishment to enforce upon both the man and the woman equally. However, if the above conditions do not meet, the punishment will not be enforced. For example, if those witnesses take back their testimony before the actual punishment, they will (the witnesses) be punished for the crime of false accusation.

If an individual who is sane, mature, Muslim, and is married to a spouse who is sane, mature, and Muslim, carries out the crime of fornication, and their marriage is consummated, then the legal punishment is that he/she will be stoned to death. The Imam and witnesses will take part in the stoning. However, if the witnesses refuse to participate in stoning, the punishment will be dropped, as this would be considered a sign of them taking back their testimony. If an individual does not qualify to be in the above category, then the punishment is

that he/she will be given one hundred lashes. These whips and lashes will be spread over the body, avoiding the face, head, and private parts.

The pregnant woman will not receive the punishment until she gives birth to her child after her natal bleeding (*nifas*). The various legal punishments prescribed by Sharia prevent people from committing unlawful actions and corrupting society, yet the rules and conditions for a legal punishment to be enforced so stringently that an individual would be punished very rarely. Legal punishment is considered a deterrent, but if an individual did involve him/herself in some unlawful activity, the objective is not to get him/her from the punishment.

The Westerners could not understand the conditions and purposes of Sharia completely. In *Princess*, Sasson exaggerates in describing the fornication punishment as happening as often as afternoon teas. The cover of *Princess* reads as follows:

Because she is a woman, she is considered worthless, a slave to the whims of her male masters. Following harsh and ancient religious laws, she has watched her sisters, cousins, and friend […] brutally murdered for the slightest transgression.

In the illustration above, murdering is the punishment for the slightest transgression. This accusation is exaggerated for honor killing has requirements and is an aberration that happened rarely. Sasson describes Saudi Arabia is following a harsh and ancient religious laws.

Sabbagh, 1996, criticized the exaggeration of killing occurrences by the author. She stated there are no statistics about how many honor killings occur in the Arab world because it is an aberration occurring far less often than the random murders in the U.S., the author's homeland.

2.3.4.3. Committee of the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice

Mutawa is an Arabic word that means volunteers; it is referred to the religious police in Saudi Arabia whose mission is to enforce the Sharia law as explicitly defined by the committee on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. These police forces consist of more than 3,500 officers and thousands of volunteers. They can arrest any males or females engaged in homosexual behavior or prostitution and to enforce the Islamic dress code.

Moreover, they enforce Muslim dietary laws by preventing alcoholic beverages and pork. In the novel, Sultana describes the *mutawas* as fanatics feared by both Saudis and foreigners, for they have much power. Even the members of the royal family try to avoid their attention.

The in-depth study of the novel reveals that Sultana hates the *mutawas* since they forced her sister Sara to return to her husband. Moreover, they tolerate the misconduct of members of the royal family, whereas ordinary people are punished severely. Sultana states how she escapes their punishment through the trick she puts for her brother Ali:

> I knew I was fortunate to be a royal, for I, like Ali so many years ago, could ease through difficult legal and ethical situations without the interference of the men of religion. Where I not of royal blood, the pounding of stones would end my life for such actions (Sasson, 1992, p. 262).

In the quotation above Sultana royals are privileged to escape crime punishment. Royal members of the family can disrespect the Sharia Law and yet went unpunished, the example of her brother Ali who had escaped many punishments. Being a royal permit them to perform all forms of transgressions. Sultana recalls how the religious committee *mutawas* will congratulate people who murder their daughters or wives for crimes of incident

behaviors:

"…public congratulations are given from the men of religion for the fathers' 'notable' act of upholding the commands of the prophet" (Sasson, 1992, p.74). This quote indicates another sarcastic way of explaining how religious man congratulate men for murdering their daughters and wives.

2.3.4.4. Women's Guardian

The guardian means '*wali'* in Arabic. It is derived from *el-wilayah*, meaning in Islam the willingness to take responsibility or to take up the authority to administer something, such as managing the orphans by attending to their needs and becoming a *wali* for a woman by performing a marriage contract to her. The *wali,* legal representative of the woman was, first and foremost, understood as a family relative who takes charge of protecting the interests of the bride by accompanying and supporting her in her future choices. This can be clearly understood from the hadith by Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him), The guardian means '*wali'* in Arabic. It is derived from *el-wilayah*, meaning in Islam the willingness to take responsibility or to take up the authority to administer something, such as managing the orphans by attending to their needs and becoming a *wali* for a woman by performing a marriage contract to her. The *wali,* legal representative of the woman was, first and foremost, understood as a family relative who takes charge of protecting the interests of the bride by accompanying and supporting her in her future choices. This can be clearly Understood from the hadith by Prophet Muhammad

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In the novel, Sultana describes the guardian: "in Saudi Arabia, a man must write a letter granting permission for the females in his family to travel. Without the papers, we might be

stopped at the customs office and prevented from boarding the plane" (Sasson, 1992, p.66). Writing a letter and granting permission in a written form is adopted as a law in Saudi Arabia due to the nature of their society. But religiously speaking, it is not the case. In an incident, Sultana planned to run from her husband when he decided to find a second wife. She prepared all the traveling papers using her husband's seal. She later described that her deceitful actions were an attempt to keep her husband away from her traveling and prevent him from seeing their children, as she knew it was his weak point.

2.4. Divorce

In *Princess*, men can easily divorce their wives by saying 'I divorce you' or 'you are divorced.' They also can re-marry second, third, fourth without the consent of their first wives. They can also have concubines under the status of *muta'a* marriage. Moreover, women can be 'divorced after being afflicted by a serious illness. Some of these women are mothers and their terrorized children are taken from their arms to be raised by another woman." (28-29). And women are also forced to become the 3rd or 4th wife of an old men.

The incident of Sultana's father who divorced his second wife because of not giving birth to male children, "My father took another, younger wife for the purpose of giving him more precious sons. The new wife of promise presented him with three sons, all stillborn, before he divorced her." (p.44). He always threatened Sultana's mother with divorce.

Another incident is Sultana's brother Ali who thoughtlessly divorced his wives at least one to two times for each wife. Ali is known of his high tempered character, he often divorces his wives and resume the marriage when his temper is cooled. Ali takes the benefit of divorcing and resuming the marriage as there are no problems happened in the household. In Islam, the men can do such matter twice. Then, if it is done in the third time, the men cannot resume the marriage anymore because there are other requirements must be fulfilled (Sasson, 2001). Nada, Ali's had been divorced twice. She would be very happy if Ali divorces her, however, the fear of losing custody of her three female daughters did not disturbs her, because female children are less worthy for Ali, so he allows Nada to take them (Sasson, 2001).

Sultana accused Islam for granting men the thoughtless divorce. Whereas, women are not allowed to divorce when they mistreated and brutally tortured by their husbands, "Islam gives the right of divorce to men, without any question of motive. Yet it is very difficult for a woman to divorce her husband." (p.116- 117) The thoughtless divorce granted men power to

rule over women. They can obtain divorces easily and often divorce capriciously.

2.5. Custody

"Like most countries following Sharia law, divorced women lose custody of their sons when they reach age 7 and their daughters when they reach age 11." (p. 17/18) Generally, most Arabian countries, after divorce, grant the mother custody of her children if they are still suckling. Then, the father gets custody if the daughters are in the age of puberty and sons are in the age of seven. However, in the case of male children, the father will not allow their mother to take them even though they are still children (Sasson, 2001). However, the case is different when the fact shows that Nada's children are females. Ali allows them to live together with their mother even though they are in the age of puberty. It is an effect of culture and nature of some Arabs who favor males over females. In *Princess*, Sultana threatened her husband Kareem in case he takes a second wife, she will divorce him and flee with her children Abdullah and Maha and Amani to live in another country.

2.6. The Representation of Arab Men in *Princess*

The theme that parallels women's representation is Arab Men representation. In the novel's trilogy, Arab men are represented as cruel, sensitive, greedy, and sexual abusers. Sultana reported how her father loved his sons only **"**My father only loved his sons" (p.27). Men are considered superior to women in Arabic culture. Sultanas' father was unkind to his daughter, whereas their only male brother Ali was given all powers to cruelly torture his sisters. Sultanas tried in vain to protect their sister, who rebelled against all kinds of discrimination towards women. Sultana was a troublemaker and a supporter of women's rights in her family and outside the family.

2.6.1. Men are Gods

Although sultana was a direct descendant of Al Saud, her vivid memories were of

violence. She recalled a memory when her mother slapped her for imitating her father in doing prayers. Instead of praying in Makkah's direction, sultana prayed to her six-year-old brother Ali, whom she considered a god. Sultana questioned every Arab family that considered male children as gods. There is a connotation in how females are treated less worthy than male children. She reported,

> If my brother was not a god, why was he treated like one? In a family of ten daughters and one son, fear ruled our home: fear that cruel death would claim the one living male child, fear that no other sons would follow, fear that God had cursed our home with daughters. My mother feared each pregnancy, praying for a son and dreading a daughter. So she bore one daughter after another—until there were ten in all (p.41).

According to the above quote, sultana describes how her lovely mother lives in fear for every pregnancy she undergoes. She was afraid of being cursed with only daughters, afraid she would not be blessed with more male children. Her fear was based on the common customs that privileged men over women. Finally, Sultana's mother could only give birth to a male child.

Sultana's father took another young wife to give him more male descendants; however, the three male sons were all stillborn. With the fourth wife, sultana's father became wealthy with sons, yet Ali, his elder son, remains supreme in the family. Therefore, in Saudi Arabia, men marry more than four wives to be blessed with sons who will carry their names. Sultana hated her brother Ali just like the oppressed hate their oppressors, "Like my sisters, I pretended to revere my brother, but I hated him as only the oppressed can hate." (p.42). Sultana's father was a merciless man; consequentially, her mother was a melancholy woman. Sultana pointed out how today she and her sisters' "ten-female offspring" lives are

controlled by their husbands, and Ali, a prominent Prince, and a businessman, is leading a life of great promise and pleasure with four wives and numerous mistresses (p.45). Male sons are allowed to speak, whereas female children are forbidden to respond and frown from voicing their opinions. Ali, as a god, was given all toys of his sister, and as a punishment for Sultana's misbehaviors with her brother, the father decreed that "Ali would have the exclusive right to fill my plate at mealtimes" to teach Sultana that men were her masters. (p.53)

2.6.2. Transgressors of Sharia Law

As an eager child, Sultana was peeping into men's quarters in her house. She discovered that men in her family, mainly her father and brother, were addicted to tobacco and whiskey, "I used to peer into their quarters with the curiosity of the child I was. Dark red velvet curtains closed out the sunlight. A smell of Turkish tobacco and whiskey embraced the heavy atmosphere." (p.56) Men, usually royal princes, were not punished for such addiction. However, women of no royal blood are punished.

2.6.3. Favoring Male over Female Children

Sultana's father refused to consider educating his daughters; Sultana's five elder sisters received no schooling except memorizing Quran. Sultana's mother manages to educate her daughters. Sultana's father refused to further the education of his daughter. Whereas, in the case of sons, they are very fortunate to have all their wishes come true. Ali, for instance, had his first Rolex watch at age ten, whereas Sultana wanted a thick golden bracelet, but her request was brusquely turned aside. As an act of revenge, Sultana, overcome with jealousy, took a rock and pounded the Watch into pieces when Ali laid his Watch on the table beside the pool (p.77). Arab men, as depicted in the trilogy, are given all the authority over women; they favor male children over females. They transgress religious and governmental laws and take

advantage of women. They are decision-makers in all matters. For instance, Sultana's father decided that his most charming daughter Sara would marry a man of great wealth and prominence. An older man who is three times older than Sara. Although Sara was brutally and sexually tortured by her husband, her father refused her divorce.

2.6.4. Thoughtless Divorce

Arab men usually use divorce as a threat; when Sultana's sister Sara could not stand the sexual abuse of her husband, her mother supported her in asking for a divorce. Sultana's father furiously refused the divorce and threatened his wife with divorce. However, Sultana's mother "Stood fast and told him to do whatever he had to do, but her daughter would not return to swim in such evil." (p.109).

Meanwhile, in the case of her brother Ali, when accused of delivering forbidden items and his guilt was established no doubt, his father tried to save him by presenting a higher amount of money to the mosque, and as a punishment for Ali, he was asked to pray the five-time prayers in the mosque. Sultana explained how such a punishment was harsh for royal princes; she reported,

> Father gave a huge sum of money to the mosque, and Ali had to be present for prayers five times each day to appease the men of God, along with God himself. The mutawas knew that few of the younger royal princes bothered to go to prayer and that such a punishment would be exceedingly irksome to Ali. (p.128).

Sultana recalled her grandfather's personality from her mother's side, who was an exception in the land of Arabs. His attitude towards his daughters was different. He was a loving father; he loved his daughters the way he loved his sons. She expressed,

> Mother's father had been a compassionate and kind man. He had loved his daughter as he did his sons. When other men of the tribe sulked at the birth of their daughters, Grandfather laughed and told them to praise God for blessing a tender touch in their home. Mother said she would never have been married at such She believed he early age had her father lived. Her childhood freedom for herself, she believed. (p.150)

Although sultana considered her grandpa as an exception, we can realize many examples in the trilogy of Arab men who care for their daughters' lives and education and grant them decisions in their lives. For example, the grandfather considered females a gift from God and tender touch in their homes. Another example of a loving father is Sultana and her sisters' instructor, who is given all she desires. The instructor's father sent his daughter to England to finish her career. Another example is Kareem, sultana's husband, who loves his son Abdullah, the way he loves his daughter.

2.6.5. The Marriage of Pleasure

Polygamy is expected in the Arab world. Although it had specific conditions for taking a second, third the fourth wife, having four wives was very common in Saudi Arabia for both the wealthy and poor Bedouin. Men depicted in the novels often had four wives with numerous mistresses. Sultana's father avoided Sultana's mother's villa since her death. Within, the children were informed by their father's second wife that their father was preparing to wed again. Sultana explained that treating four wives equally was not a problem in her country; there was an exception for middle-class Saudi "who has to find contentment with one woman, for he cannot find the funds to provide middle-class standards for four separate families." (p.158).

2.7. The Luxurious Lives of Saudi Royals in Princess

The representation of the luxurious lives of princesses and princes was overwhelmed in the trilogy. Sultana and her husband purchased four new homes. The family had their palace completed in Riyadh, but Kareem, Sultana's husband, purchased a new villa in the city of Jeddah, afraid that his son Abdullah might 'grow hardier if he inhaled fresh sea breezes.' Every royal member owned at least three or four villas on a different continent. Sultana's father, for example, owned a lovely apartment four streets away from Harrods, London. He offered the property to any of his children who might be interested. Sultana's other sisters also own an apartment in London, whereas her sister Sara purchased an apartment in Venice (p.344). Besides the ownership of villas and palaces in different parts of the world, royals usually put a large number of Limousines under their use through their trips and hired drivers, servants, and caretakers at their service (p.131).

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the themes and the sub-themes that emerged from the analyses of stories of injustices in *Princess* with supporting quotes from the novel and researcher observations. In *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia*, Sasson depicts how Arab Muslim women are oppressed in male-dominated societies. Although Sultana lives in the most luxurious castles in Arabia yet, she is controlled by all males in her family, starting with her father, brother, and later her husband. Princess Sultana has vowed to struggle against oppression in her society since she was a child. Sultana struggles with all customs and religious beliefs that control women's lives. Sultana is depicted as a dependent woman, dependent on men and Western liberators whom she thought might support their rights and helps them burn the veils and abayas that limited their freedom. The focus on the Veil as a symbol of oppression has a long history in oriental writings that consider Islam an oppressor of women's rights. Moreover, the contradiction in many parts of

the novel that sometimes show the protagonist as an admirer of sharia law and sometimes as a revolt against religious law indicated two voices, one of the authors as a Westerner and another of Princess Sultana Al -Saud. Princess has also focused on the suffering of other Saudi women and Arab women from Egypt, Kuwait, and Yemen to overgeneralize women's plight in the Arab lands.

The cultural representation of women in this novel cannot be traced to religion or culture. We started with the complexity of the factors influencing women's status in the novels and reality. In generating themes, we also noticed Sultana narrates common suffrage shared by other women in the novel stories. We interpreted the thematic data as we were compiling different themes. In this way, we began a simultaneous process of analysis and interpretation, although, for clarification reasons, we answered the central questions of the current study in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 3, we will describe the images of women in *Princess Sultana's Daughters*. Although we focus on the protagonists, we reference other women's stories that emerged from their stories.

Chapter Three

The Representation of Arab Muslim Women in Princess Sultana's Daughters

3.1. Introduction

Princess Sultana's Daughters is entitled *Daughters of Arabia* in the U.K. In this novel, Sasson and Sultana Sspotlight Sultana's children, mainly her two teenage daughters: Amani and Maha. These second-generation royals who grow up in the most luxurious castles of Arabia are stifled with patriarchy and Saudi local customs and traditions. Through their detailed stories of hardship, Sultana unfolds the unbearable injustices Arabic society and culture levels against women and shows her admiration for the freedom lucky women in the West have.

At the novel's beginning, Sultana expresses her anger toward Saudi Arabia's rulers, who have not been an example of good husbands, fathers, and sons for Saudi men. She admitted that the king had no choice but to ensure unity and peace among the divided Saudi society that shelters the religious fundamentalists who call for returning to the past. The well-educated middle-class demands cut off the old traditions that stifle their lives, and the Bedouin tribes struggle against enticement given to abandon their old ways and yield against the lure of the cities, members of royal families who demand wealth and more wealth. These conflicted classes and the kings' failure to ensure peace create the most negative attention for deprived women in Saudi Arabia. Patriarchy and injustices in society that did not exclude royal females have deeply affected Amani and Maha, although differently but equally in desperate ways. Maha, who resembles her mother, revolts against patriarchy and traditional customs that oppress women. Her goal is to liberate women from all chains. In comparison, Amani was also aware of women's oppression aimed at protecting stray and chained animals. Amani revolted against religious transgressions.

3.2. Maha, the Revolutionist

Maha is a young attractive teenage girl with a seductive personality. She resembles her

mother, Sultana, in tormenting her brother Abdullah and little sister Amani. She confronted the restrictions posed on women since her childhood. Her mother describes her as a revolutionary seeking a cause' and a volcano that would one day erupt. Unlike Sultana's father's admiration of his only son Ali, Sultana's husband, Kareem, loves his daughters Amani and Maha the way he loves his son Abdullah to avoid any resentments that his wife Sultana had endured as a child. However, Saudi Arabian society's makeup pours attention and affection on male children and ignores female children. Thus, Abdullah is more likely to receive more attention outside the home. Such as accompanying his father on more occasions that require male presence. Maha could not tolerate being less worthy than her brother, and as revenge, she sets fire to her brother Abdullah's thobe.

Another incident in Maha's life was her grandfather's admiration of her brother and his indifference and ignorance toward her and her all-female granddaughters. Maha could not bear such indifference as a reaction. She insults and curses her grandfather. This incident brings back the memories of the sorrowful childhood of Sultana, who justify her daughter's response, "Though humiliated, I had the quick thought that Maha had expressed to my father his manifest due." (Sasson, 1994, p. 545).

Many Western journalists were permitted to visit Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. The king scorned "the most aggressive band" of moral police for harassing Western guests. The men of the ruling family knew it would be better for the Western journalists not to view life as it is in Saudi Arabia. So, women benefited from this royal order.

> The absence of sharp-eyed religious police patrolling Saudi Arabia cities, searching for uncovered women to strike with their sticks, or spray with red paint, was too good to be t r u e . This policy endured no longer than the war, but we Saudi

> women enjoyed a welcome respite from probing eyes for a few months. During this heady period, there was a universal call for Saudi Arabia women to take their proper place in society, and we foolishly thought the favorable situation would continue forever. (p.464)

As illustrated in the above quotation, Westerners' presence had given strength for women to regain their position in society. They were happy with the absence of the roving band of religious police and enjoyed short liberty that ended up with the war ending. Educated women were planning to undertake the battle for their rights. Sultana declared,

> When our veiled plight piqued the curiosity of numerous foreign journalists, many educated women of my land began to plan for the day when they could burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and steer their wheels on automobiles. (p. 570- 571)

This quote indicates Saudi women's hatred of what is imposed on them, whether religious or cultural, and they consider Western visitors saviors. As far as religion is concerned, the veil or Hijab is not only placing a black fabric on one's face or body, but it represents the Muslim woman's faith; it is their identity. Although it is disputed among religious scholars about the covering of the face, it is based on one's self-conviction and obedience to Allah.

During that short period of liberty, some women had proved the correctness of Laozi, saying, "The more prohibitions you have, the less virtuous people will be." TAO TE CHING (quoted in Sasson,1995, p.445). Women were indulged in prohibitions. "For some women, too much freedom given too quickly proved disastrous. Our men were disappointed that all women did not behave like saints without understanding the confusion caused by the

contradictions in our lives." This quote illustrates irony; men are disappointed because women are no more saints. Women should be obedient to both religious teachings and men. Women's rebellions against these rules and men's oppression is a crucial issue in Saudi Arabian society that is repeated throughout the trilogy. In contrast, men had given themselves absolute freedom to torture women and jaywalk all religious norms. Among these prohibitions committed is a marriage of pleasure.

3.2.1. Marriage of Pleasure

During the Gulf war, Sultana's daughter Maha had worked in a hospital where she befriended Aisha, who, unlike Saudi Arabian girls, was given more freedom. Aisha's father was engaged in a marriage of pleasure. Sultana explained that Aisha's father did not desire to take full responsibility for supporting four legal wives and their children permanently. Therefore, he preferred temporary marriages (*Mutaa'*) with virginal girls brought from impoverished families in nearby countries such as Yemen, Jordan, and Bahrain to satisfy his sole pleasure of sex. Moreover, he justified his transgressions with the Quranic verses: "*And you are allowed to seek out wives with your wealth indecorous conduct, but not in fornication, but give them their reward for what you have enjoyed of them in keeping with your promise." (4:24)*

Since no man is to be blamed for his business, "Still, no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement." (p.454) Aisha's mother, the only legal wife of her father, a religious lady, was engaged in a never-ending dispute with her husband over the advantages he took of the 'a little-used Arab custom called muta.' Aisha's mother complained about her husband's desperate deed to his family; however, the family can alter nothing to convict their son of the immoral act. Their advice was to pray for her husband's soul. Aisha sometimes befriended these young girls, her father's temporary wives, and shared

their horror stories with Maha. Among the horror stories was the story of Reema, a beautiful thirteen-year-old girl from Yemen who was purchased by Aisha's father and brought to Saudi Arabia for a few nights of horror and then offered to another man as a second wife. Reema had endured many hardships in her life,

> Her father had only one wife but twenty-three children, seventeen girls. Even though Reema's mother was now shriveled and bent from childbearing and hard work, she had once been a lovely girl and had given birth to seventeen beautiful daughters. (p.523)

As indicated in the above quote, Reema's family's poverty and the sickness of her cripple brothers and weak mother convinced her to accept the arranged marriage for her family's support and help. Reema's father 'strove to sell his sought-after daughters to the highest bidder.' Reema confessed that she was tested by the marriage agent the same way her father tested camels and sheep in the market for purchase. At first, her father did not know that his daughter was sent for a temporary union. He was told after he spent half of the dowry. He had no choice but to ask the Saudi Arabian agent to find another husband for his daughter. Furthermore, the agent agreed that he would do his best to find her another husband; otherwise, Reema would work in his house as a servant,

> Reema's father relented, admitting that he had already spent a portion of that sum. Ashamed, he turned his face to the ground and told Reema that she must go with the man, that it was God's will. Reema's father asked the Saudi man to find Reema a permanent husband in Saudi Arabia since many Yemeni laborers were working in that rich country […] (p.528).

Here also, another irony is used 'Ashamed, he turned his face to the ground and told Reema that she must go with the man, that it was God's will.' Relating every misdeed to God's will is a way to prove men's actions against deprived women. Islam forbids many used Arabic customs, such as the temporary marriage that treated women as tools and property for men and declared that women should not be married against their will or purchased as property.

However, some customs resisted fading or are still practiced in some closed Arabic societies. For instance, divorced women or girls who lost their virginity in the Arabic communities are less worthy than virgin or married women when it comes to finding a husband. They are considered spoiled or less honored women. Therefore, it is hard for Reema to find another husband after losing her chastity. She will be regarded as low status, less honored second wife. The following illustration reflects how Reema would be treated after the temporary union,

> Reema first learned the terrible truth that the marriage would not be honorable, that it was a marriage of muta'a, a temporary union. Her father became angry, for his honor was at stake; his daughter should not be treated poorly. He pleaded with the man from Arabia, saying it would be difficult to find another husband for his daughter, who would no longer be considered fresh and clean. He might be forced to provide for Reema for many years while seeking a man who would accept her as a second, less honored wife. (p.527)

Finally, the agent has found a Yemeni guy who works as a tea server in their offices, who would take Reema as a second wife to serve him and cook his meals since his first wife is far back in Yemen. Moreover, this is the story of the miserable thirteen years old Reema had ended. Her story greatly impacted Maha's character and raised her hatred for all men without

exception, and led her to a same-sex relationship. During the gulf war, Maha and Aisha worked in a hospital, and both were armed with pistols they had stolen fromAisha's father's arms collections. Their aim as teenagers was to protect themselves from men and enemies during the war and from religious police after the war. This incident affected Sultana and Kareem, who discussed the issue with Aisha's family, and both girls were asked to break up their relationship. Maha was so attached to Aisha, and she refused to give up on her. Maha shouted,

> I will not do as you say! Aisha and I will leave this land we hate and make our home elsewhere. We hate it here! We hate it! To be a woman in this awful country, you must defile your life with tremendous injustices. (p. 538)

Maha hates Arabian land, men, and culture. She denounces the injustices inflicted on women in Saudi Arabia. She committed blasphemy in depression and anger: "If a girl lives modestly, she is a fool. If she lives normally, she is a hypocrite. If she believes there is a God, she is an imbecile!" When her father accused her of blasphemy, Maha continued, "Blaspheme? What is there to blasphemy? There is no God!" Maha's declaration of blasphemy had choked the two families, for such a deed cost a life in the law of Saudi Arabia.

Sultana confronted and transgressed many laws yet did not expect her daughter to blaspheme against God. Aisha's father, a molester of young girls as Sultana describes him, shouted out at Sultana's family to remove their unbelieving daughter from his home. His reaction provokes readers, for he had spoiled the life and happiness of many young girls.

Maha ended up in a psychiatric clinic in London for treatment, where she confessed her love secrets of black magic and homosexuality to her doctor and parents. Thanks to her caring parents, it took her a long time to recover from depression and anxiety. Afraid of what might happen to her daughter, Sultana recalls many stories of women's hardship in her country's flight

to London. Among the interesting stories was princess Mashail who was killed as a punishment for adultery. The death of Mashaal has angered the world's public opinion, mainly after the film Death of a Princess, which generates more hostility and cruelty to Arab and Islamic Sharia Law. Sultana felt very sad for her cousin, who was killed for unsanctioned love. The word unsanctioned was used instead of adultery to polish the crime of adultery and accused Muslims of honor killings that rarely happened.

3.2.2. Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation is a pagan custom practiced in Africa for a long time. Many women have suffered the complications of this ridiculous practice. In the novel, three of Sultana's sisters suffer from genital mutilation. Sultana noted that her sister 'Nura had been made to a woman,' this is what female genital mutilation was called in Saudi society in the past. Hopefully, this practice is no more performed in Saudi Arabia after King Abdulaziz Al Saud forbade this horrific practice. However, in some societies, this practice is still lingering.

Fatma informed Sultana that her granddaughter Alhaan was about to be circumcised. Fatma helplessly invited Sultana to visit her daughter Elham's family to save Alhaan from the horrific rite. Although Sultana had secretly called the family and tried to persuade Alhaan's mother about the long-lasting pain and suffrage caused by circumcision, her attempts were unsuccessful. Elham was a firm believer in female mutilation. She admitted that although female circumcision was not mentioned in the Quran, Prophet Mohamed's peace and blessing be upon him had "one day told Um Attiya, a matron who was excising a girl, "Reduce but do not destroy." (p.755) Based on this hadith, Elham and her husband undergo the custom of female circumcision on all their other four daughters when they come to a proper age. Therefore, Sultana knew that there was nothing she can to alter their decision.

3.3. Amani, the Extremist

"In Saudi Arabia? What can a female do to make a difference in this country**?"** (p.547)

As a child, Amani was calm and lovely, unlike her sister Maha who brought many turbulences. Amani was passionate about reading and learning the language. Although keeping a dog pet is not favored in Arabic and Islamic culture, Amani devoted her time to saving stray animals such as dogs and cats. Many stray dogs were fed fresh, gourmet Australian meat, and the cats were dining with fresh fish from the red sea. Besides, Amani was purchasing expensive caged birds to set them free.

In an incident, during a visit to her uncle Ali who happened to kick off one of Amani's dogs and was attacked by Amani. Kareem, a caring father who employed two guys from Thailand to clean after, disinfect and train Amani's animals, angrily told his daughter after the incident, "Saving animals is nothing more than a pampered passion of rich Europeans and Americans," Keeping dogs' pets at home is not favored except for guarding or herding. Whereas saving animals is a mission of every human being.

In the text, the word choice saving had negative interpretations for readers. In the Islamic culture, Muslims are taught not to keep dogs pets only for the three cases mentioned earlier. Although it is wrongly mentioned, "In the Muslim faith, a dog is considered impure." what is considered impure is the dog's saliva and not the dog as a creature. Sultana further explained the cruelty of Arabic society with injured animals.

> Most Arabs, unlike many Westerners, feel little devotion for animals, and starving and injured cats and dogs run wild on our city streets. Since the early 1980s, there has been an active government policy in Saudi Arabia of collecting strays and abandoning these creatures in the desert to die slow and painful deaths. (p.614)

Unlike her sister, who likes everything American and European, Amani is a religious girl who revolts against spiritual teachings' transgressions and vows to save animals from man. The event of Haj had a change in Amani's life. Sultana describes the influence of Haj, A journey made with such virtuous thought and the desire to praise God for the return of my eldest daughter's lucidity would have long-lasting significance for my youngest child, Amani, and enduringly disastrous consequences for her mother and father. (p. 610).

As mentioned in the above quotation, the Haj trip was offered after the recovery of Maha from mantel disorder; Amani devoted all her time to prayers, weeping before God, and asked his help and support for all humanity. Sultana noted,

> I saw that Amani was weeping. Through her cries, I heard her ask God to assist her in divorcing herself from the world of royal luxuries, to help her be better equipped to stamp out human wickedness. She pleaded with God to swallow up all the sins of humanity and cure the ills of the world. Amani had a religious experience. (p.633)

Sultana was afraid that her daughters' actions might lead her to extremism. Although these chapters had gone far in exaggerating Amani's embracing of Islamic beliefs and solitary meditations as if Amani is a new convergent to Islam.

Amani was considered an extremist and compared to her cousin Lawand. As a result, Lawand was sent abroad for schooling. In Geneva, Lawand was involved in sexual relations and drug addiction. Her family was called to collect their wayward child when the school discovered her. After six months of treatment in a Swiss drug rehabilitation center, Lawand was back in Saudi Arabia, where she was confined for some time until her family was satisfied with the repentance of her reckless offense.

During her confinement, Lawand developed a wrong understanding of religion and

became more aggressive with people. Lawand became restless with the luxuries of royals' life; she would threaten her mother and sibling for their immodest clothing of believing Muslims. "Lawand was fortunate her father was not the unfeeling sort who could confine his daughter to life imprisonment, or death by stoning,"(p.562) this passage by Sultana had a misinterpretation of the sharia law as if stoning is happening as often as afternoon tea. In contrast, stoning is the punishment for adulterers only.

In the text, there were many other exaggerations in describing religious events. For instance, Amani was considered an extremist when she refused her sisters to throw or step on journals containing Allah's name. Sultana is weakened by an alcoholic who stands by her daughter Maha who threatens her sister, tearing up the Quran. Sultana's reaction indicates a lack of awareness of how to guide her daughters regarding culture and religion. Not using or stepping or any writings containing Allah's name show respect to Allah. It is an attitude of every Muslim and part of Islamic education.

3.4. Thoughtless Divorce

In *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, men can easily divorce their wives by saying, 'I divorce you' or 'you are divorced.' They also can re-marry their second, third, and fourth without the consent of their first wives. They can also have concubines under the status of muta'a marriage. The incident of Sultana's father who divorced his second wife because of not giving birth to male children, "My father took another, younger wife for giving him more precious sons. The new wife of promise presented him with three sons, all stillborn before he divorced her." (p.44). He always threatened Sultana's mother with divorce.

Another incident is Sultana's brother Ali who thoughtlessly divorced his wives at least one to two times for each wife. Ali is known for his high-tempered character; he often divorces his wives and resumes the marriage when his temper is cooled. Ali benefits from

divorcing and resuming the marriage as there are no problems in the household. In Islam, men can do such matters twice. Then, if it is done the third time, the men cannot resume the marriage anymore because other requirements must be fulfilled (Sasson, 2001). Nada, Ali had been divorced twice. She would be pleased if Ali divorced her; however, the fear of losing custody of her three daughters does not disturb her because female children are less worthy for Ali, so he allows Nada to take them (Sasson, 2001).

Similarly, ordinary people also practice thoughtless divorce. This attitude and decisions are capriciously performed without the consent of wives. Men take it as an authority granted by customs and culture to control women. In the novel, the incident of Yousif's marriage relationship is explained in Yousif's words, "he had married and divorced one woman, who had given him two sons and had married a second woman, fathering five sons in that union. The man delighted in boasting about the joys of having seven sons."(p. 661)Yousif is Kareem's Egyptian friend who was a member of the Islamic sect (Jamaa Islamia) that wanted to overthrow the system in Egypt, as stated in the novel. He and Kareem were studying together in London. Since their last meeting, Yousif married twice and divorced both wives, although they had given him male children.

Yousif expresses his joy of being blessed with sons to Kareem,

> His greatest blessing from God was that neither of his marriages had been cursed with the birth of daughters and that women were the source of all sin. If a man had to waste his energies in guarding women, Yousif said, he had little time for performing other, more critical duties in life. (p. 662)

Yousif's words are too harsh. Kareem felt very angry that a devoted Muslim might think in such an evil way. Daughters are considered a curse to Yousif, whereas boys are

blessings from God. Women are also viewed as a source of all sin; taking care of and guarding women is losing one's energy. Yousif cannot be taken as a symbol of Arab man or a representative of Arabic culture, as stated in the literature. Kareem is also an Arab man, but his love for his children is uncountable; he cares much about their needs and gives them all the support in their life.

Yousif represents the dark evil side of insane people who explained their words and thoughts following the prophet's example. The Prophet and Islam are innocent of such thoughts. Although divorce is detestable in the sight of Allah, it is permitted when it is difficult for couples to live together; Ibn Umar reported that the prophet said, "of all the lawful acts, the most detestable to Allah, the Almighty, is divorce."

Nevertheless, Sultana accused Islam of granting men thoughtless divorce. Whereas women are not allowed to divorce when they are mistreated and brutally tortured by their husbands, "Islam gives the right of divorce to men, without any question of motive. Yet it is complicated for a woman to divorce her husband." (p.116- 117) The thoughtless divorce granted men the power to rule over women. They can obtain divorces quickly and often divorce capriciously.

3.5. The Death of Princess Misha'il

"On that hot day in July of 1977, my cousin Misha'il was blindfolded and forced to kneel before a pile of dirt. A firing squad shot her." (p.550) The death of a royal member was an overwhelming tragedy that was even adopted in a movie. Sultana recalls many stories of women's hardship on her country's flight to London. However, princess Misha'il who was killed as a punishment for adultery, affected sultana and her sisters. The death of Misha'il has angered the world's public opinion, mainly after the film Death of a Princess, which generates more hostility and cruelty to Arab and Islamic Sharia Law. Sultana felt very sad for her

cousin, who was killed for unsanctioned love. The word unsanctioned was used instead of adultery to polish the crime of adultery and accused Muslims of honor killings that rarely happened.

3.6. *The Representation of Arab Men in* Princess Sultana's Daughters

In the trilogy's second novel, Sultana detailed Ali's characteristics as "No man has been haughtier with women than Ali" (p.719). Ali's sexual desires were uncontrolled. As a child, Ali treated his sisters with contempt. As a young man living in America, he has bedded and casually discarded hundreds of Western women. As a husband, Ali treated his wives as enslaved people; Ali had chosen young virgin girls with no background in man's nature. He had taken many concubines. As a father, Ali never cared for his female children, and he instead showed affection to his male children. No wonder Ali's character greatly influenced his son Majed, who grew into a sadistic youth and considered all women to be no more than sexual objects (p.719). Ali's behaviors moved on to kick her. Sultana and her sisters begged the mother to beat Ali with a stick. The mother sadly responded why a child who resembled his father in behavior and character beat was? So, Majed was the exact image of Ali. Ali believed that women cause all disruption and troubles in life. Ali used the money to handle all his and his sons' fallacies (p.737).

Unlike Ali and his father and son, Fouad was a Saudi man who loved his only wife, Samira, and was a proud father of three sons and a daughter. He loves his sons the way he loves his daughter. Fouad is an example of many Saudi men who dearly loves and cares for their families. Based on these examples, we cannot overgeneralize and conclude that all Arab men are evil. Sultana, attracted by the character of Fouad, explains,

> Fouad was a Saudi man who adored his one and only wife and was the proud father of three sons and one daughter. However, in one of the stranger quirks of nature, Fouad, a plain-faced man, and Samia, a woman who was pitied for her appearance, produced the most dazzling offspring. Their three sons were strikingly handsome, while their only daughter was a ravishing beauty (P.760).

3.6.1. Men as Sexual Abusers

Sultana's sister Sara had suffered tragically after marrying three times older than her father. Sara was an example of an innocent girl who knew nothing of man's nature and who was forced handed to a sexual abuser. Sara's husband "subjected her to the cruelest sexual bondage and abuse" (p.763).

Sultana's daughter Maha had worked in a hospital where she befriended Aisha, who, unlike Saudi Arabian girls, was given more freedom. Aisha's father was engaged in a marriage of pleasure. Sultana explained that Aisha's father did not desire to take full responsibility for supporting four legal wives and their children permanently. Therefore, he preferred temporary marriages (*Mutaa'*) with virginal girls brought from impoverished families in nearby countries such as Yemen, Jordan, and Bahrain to satisfy his sole pleasure of sex. Moreover, he justified his transgressions with the Quranic verses: "*And you are allowed to seek out wives with your wealth indecorous conduct, but not in fornication, but give them their reward for what you have enjoyed of them in keeping with your promise." (4:24)*

Since no man is to be blamed for his business, "Still, no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement." Aisha's mother, the only legal wife of her father, a religious lady, was engaged in a never-ending dispute with her husband over the advantages he took of the 'a little-used Arab custom called muta.' Aisha's mother complained about her

husband's desperate deed to his family; however, the family can alter nothing to convict their son of the immoral act. Their advice was to pray for her husband's soul. Aisha sometimes befriended these young girls, her father's temporary wives, and shared their horror stories with Maha. Among the horror stories was the story of Reema, a beautiful thirteen-year-old girl from Yemen who was purchased by Aisha's father and brought to Saudi Arabia for a few nights of horror and then offered to another man as a second wife.

Reema had endured many hardships in her life. Since men do what they wish and desire, no member of the royal family interfered to save Reema; Sultana reported, "Since our father and brother thought that a man should be allowed to do as he wished with the females in his family, they would be of no assistance to Reema." (p.900). Therefore, the sad story of Reema is one of many stories of young virgin girls who were brought to serve the desires of women's abusers, such as Aicha's father, and went unsaved.

3.6.2. Men as Transgressors of Sharia Law

Sultana's fifth sister Reema saw her husband flirting and abusing servants, and she secretly wrote to the imam to ask his opinion on her husband's deeds. The imam's message was that Islam does not always sanction what happens in actual life. Cases like forcing a servant to yield to her master's wishes and exploiting her inferior position to "get cheap fulfillment of carnal desire" were not allowed in Islam. The imam firmly declared that Islam forbade such a relationship. And that sexual intercourse can only happen after a legal marriage relationship,

> The imam ruled that such a relationship was illicit and led to the three evils expressly forbidden by Islam. The evils of which she spoke are: "Any relationship which adversely affects the moral fabric of society, or leads to promiscuity, or affects the

> rights of any individual. Therefore, in Islam, the only lawful way to have sexual intercourse is through marriage (p.893).

Another fortification Reema's husband committed was assaulting his wife during her monthly period, which caused her severe injuries. Ali and his father were told the true story Saleem confessed to the physician, was that Islam does not always sanction what happens in actual life. Cases like forcing a servant to yield to her master's wishes and exploiting her inferior position to "get cheap fulfillment of carnal desire" were not allowed in Islam. The imam firmly declared that Islam forbade such a relationship. And that sexual intercourse can only happen after a legal marriage relationship,

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Another fortification Reema's husband committed was assaulting his wife during her monthly period, which caused her severe injuries. Ali and his father were told the true story Saleem confessed to the physician,

> Saleem had just returned from a short trip to Bangkok and smuggled in pornographic videotapes. After a night of drinking and viewing the tapes, Saleem wanted to have sex with his wife, although he had not displayed affectionate interest in Reema for some time. When Saleem awakened Reema in

> the middle of the night for sex, he was told she had her monthly period. (p.795)

Although Reema was a royal princess, Saleem's conduct was forbidden, for it is not allowed in Islam to approach a wife during a menstrual circle; Saleem went unpunished. Such an act is considered a man's business. Sultana's brother and father "have directed that this is a personal matter between Reema and Saleem and that no one of our family is to interfere." (P.897/898)

3.6.3. Child Custody

Sultana explained how in a matter of divorce in Saudi Arabia, the mother has all the rights to claim her children if they are still suckling. In most cases, the mother maintains the custody of female children until they reach puberty; in the case of male children, the boy is allowed to stay with his mother till seven. When reaching this age, the boy is given the option to choose between father or mother. However, in Saudi Arabia,

> Generally, it is accepted that the father would have his sons at age seven. A son must go with his father at puberty, regardless of the child's wishes. Often, in the case of male children, fathers will not allow the mother to retain custody, no matter the child's age. I have personally known women who have lost custody of their children at young ages, never again seeing those to whom they gave birth. Unfortunately, if a father seizes the initiative and takes his children, no authority will force him to return them to their mother (p. 889)

As illustrated in the quotation, men have all right to claim for their male sons at the age of seven, regardless of their wishes. At the same time, female children are usually kept with their mothers. In many cases, women have been deprived of their children's custody as

soon as there are divorced, and none of those women win the custody of their children. The law in Saudi Arabia stands beside men, and authority cannot stop men from gaining custody of their children. For situation of Reema, after all, that had happened, she could not ask for divorce for the risk of losing her children. Both her daughters have reached puberty, and her two sons were of eight and nine ages. Saleem has all the right to take them from their mother, and he has already threatened her with her loss. A woman like Reema would prefer to die than be separated from her loved ones.

3.6.4. Divorce as a Threat

In *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, men can easily divorce their wives by saying, 'I divorce you' or 'you are divorced.' They also can re-marry their second, third, and fourth without the consent of their first wives. They can also have concubines under the status of muta'a marriage. The incident of Sultana's father who divorced his second wife because of not giving birth to male children, "My father took another, younger wife for giving him more precious sons. The new wife of promise presented him with three sons, all stillborn before he divorced her." (p.44). He always threatened Sultana's mother with divorce.

Another incident is Sultana's brother Ali who thoughtlessly divorced his wives at least one to two times for each wife. Ali is known for his high-tempered character; he often divorces his wives and resumes the marriage when his temper is cooled. Ali benefits from divorcing and resuming the marriage as there are no problems in the household. In Islam, men can do such matters twice. Then, if it is done the third time, the men cannot resume the marriage anymore because other requirements must be fulfilled (Sasson, 2001). Nada, Ali had been divorced twice. She would be pleased if Ali divorced her; however, the fear of losing custody of her three daughters does not disturb her because female children are less worthy for Ali, so he allows Nada to take them (Sasson, 2001).

Similarly, ordinary people also practice thoughtless divorce. This attitude and decisions are capriciously performed without the consent of wives. Men take it as an authority granted by customs and culture to control women. In the novel, the incident of Yousif's marriage relationship is explained in Yousif's words, "he had married and divorced one woman, who had given him two sons and had married a second woman, fathering five sons in that union. The man delighted in boasting about the joys of having seven sons" (p. 661).

Yousif is Kareem's Egyptian friend who was a member of the Islamic sect (Jamaa Islamia) that wanted to overthrow the system in Egypt, as stated in the novel. He and Kareem were studying together in London. Since their last meeting, Yousif married twice and divorced both wives, although they had given him male children. Yousif expresses his joy of being blessed with sons to Kareem,

> His greatest blessing from God was that neither of his marriages had been cursed with daughters' birth and that women were the source of all sin. If a man had to waste his energies in guarding women, Yousif said, he had little time for performing other, more critical duties in life. (p. 662)

Yousif's words are too harsh. Kareem felt very angry that a devoted Muslim might think in such an evil way. Daughters are considered a curse to Yousif, whereas boys are blessings from God. Women are also viewed as a source of all sin; taking care of and guarding women is losing one's energy. Yousif cannot be taken as a symbol of Arab man or a representative of Arabic culture, as stated in the literature. Kareem is also an Arab man, but his love for his children is uncountable; he cares much about their needs and gives them all the support in their life. Yousif represents the dark evil side of insane people who explained their words and thoughts following the prophet's example. The Prophet and Islam are innocent of such thoughts. Although divorce is detestable in the sight of Allah, it is permitted when it is

difficult for couples to live together; Ibn Umar reported that the prophet said, "of all the lawful acts, the most detestable to Allah, the Almighty, is divorce."

Nevertheless, Sultana accused Islam of granting men thoughtless divorce. Whereas women are not allowed to divorce when they are mistreated and brutally tortured by their husbands, "Islam gives the right of divorce to men, without any question of motive. Yet it is complicated for a woman to divorce her husband." (p.116- 117) The thoughtless divorce granted men the power to rule over women. They can obtain divorces quickly and often divorce capriciously. Arab men are also depicted as sensitive and tempered, evil being, donkeys of man—the incident of Fatma's granddaughter Alhaan who was forced to undergo the suffrage of female genital mutilation. Being desperate for not saving her precious Alhaan, Fatma expresses her anger towards her daughter's husband Nasser "Her father is an evil being, a donkey of a man, that Nasser! I would kill him with my bare hands if my daughter allowed it support in their life." (p.841). Yousif represents the dark evil side of insane people who explained their words and thoughts following the prophet's example. The Prophet and Islam are innocent of such thoughts. Although divorce is detestable in the sight of Allah, it is permitted when it is difficult for couples to live together; Ibn Umar reported that the prophet said, "of all the lawful acts, the most detestable to Allah, the Almighty, is divorce."

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3.7. The Abuse of Foreign Workers

Since no law protects foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, especially females, foreigners endure miserable lives. The story of Veena represents the harsh exploitation of foreign females brought to serve the royal prince's desires. Another incident was of a hospitalized foreign woman assaulted by Sultana's nephew Majed, Ali's son. Sultana's daughter Amani narrated the tragic story of the American lady attacked by her cousin Abdullah in the hospital,

> One evening Majed attended a party at one of the Western compounds […] he met an American woman who took an interest in the fact that he was of the royal family. As the evening went on, Majed became drunk, and the woman thought better of her promise to go with him to a friend's apartment. When Majed understood that he had wasted his evening and that there would be no sex that night, he left the compound in an angry mood. On the way to his home, he visited a friend in a hospital with minor injuries from a car accident. While at this hospital, Majed became angrier, and in his drunken condition, he slipped from room to room searching for a blonde or foreign woman whom he could coax or pay to have sex […] Majed had sex with a woman in the hospital who was a patient, a woman who had been seriously injured and was not conscious. (p.728/729)

Majed's case was dropped as soon as his father, Ali, managed to pay the witness, a Pakistani physician who saw Majed leaving the woman's room. Ali had made the Pakistani man rich. The man invested his money in Canada and sooner moved with Ali's assistance. Therefore, Ali told Sultana's Husband, Kareem, the "family would hear no more from that troublemaker, Ali declared. Shaking his head in bafflement, he told Kareem, "All this disruption, for a woman" (p.730). according to Ali, who considered women as the property of men, women are a source of troubles and disruptions," For Ali, women were a man's property, possessions whose feelings and well-being never need enter his realm of thinking." (p. 1060)

Neither the hospital nor the family of the woman being raped by Majed was aware of their daughter's matters and that the response was a royal prince. As a punishment, Majed was sent to the West to finish school. Moreover, the assaulted lady was pregnant. Wealth had absolved the family responsibility for crimes committed, "In Saudi Arabia, liability for public disorder falls upon the foreigner, never upon a Saudi." (p.777)

3.8. Contrasting Saudi Arabia and America

This second novel depicts America as a place where crimes are not committed. A land of rights and law. In the incident of Fayza and Jaffer, who escaped as a couple to fulfill their dreams of being united and not separated by Fayza's arranged marriage, Kareem responded to Sultana when Fayza and her lover were located and restricted that Jaffer was not Murdered since they were in America, "looked at Kareem and announced with certainty, "Jafer is dead!" "Nonsense. They were in America" (p.786)

3.8.1. Western Saviors

In the case of the custom of female genital mutilation, many women in Saudi Arabia were subjugated to the cruel custom. Three of Sultana's sisters were prone to such horrification. However, the rest of the women in Sultana's family were saved due to the

attempt and intervention of a Western physician,

> The remainder of the women in our family had been spared the rite of circumcision due to the intervention of a Western physician and my father's insistence to my mother that circumcision of females was nothing more than a pagan practice that must be stopped (p.847).

According to the illustration, the Western physician, along with Sultana's father's support, the pagan practice was stopped.

3.9. Luxurious Life of Princesses

In the novel, we can distinguish many classes of women; although women are oppressed, they are incredibly wealthy. We can distinguish between royal princesses, Middle-class women, and maidens. Princesses and middle-class women, usually from families close to royals, were wealthy, although oppressed. However, maidens, usually foreign servants' men and women, endured a miserable life. Sasson presented a gallery of the affluent lifestyle of royal families. They have highly majestic villas in three to more countries in the world.

They arrange opulent ceremonies and rich celebrations where accessories and furniture are collected from the world's most famous expensive brands. They often travel abroad for healing and enjoy holidays. They are dressed in unique jewelry collections, costumes, and luxuries ofthe world's most expensive collections. Ride the most expensive cars brand in the world, Mercedes & Limousines. They have varied household-a wide range of professionals, including catering, housekeeping, accountancy, secretarial, art curator, world-class medical help, and expert pilots. All are the consumption patterns that exhibit royal status. Sasson has portrayed her royal princesses, sisters, cousins, and friends of her in Princess Sultana's

Daughters and Princess Sultana's Daughters. Sasson exquisitely records the portrayal of Sultana, the protagonist of the princess trilogy, in a significant way, "Sultana was unlike any royal I had met. She was young and beautiful […] Dressed in expensive clothes and decorated with eye-catching jewels, Sultana captured the undivided attention of everyone around her." (p. 956- 957).

Although Sultana accumulated the title of direct princess and presented a costly lifestyle, the freedom she and the women in her country yearned for still needs to be achieved. The novels detailed the luxurious lifestyle of royals. Sultana describes her Villa in Cairo as "the walkway took us to the Turkish bath area. Our home in Cairo had such a room, and I had requested the Italian designer to study that design and duplicate it at our palace in Jeddah." (p.694) Sasson gives every detail about the palace's walls, which were made of special tinted glass, the stone pathways in the gardens and carved stones, precious fountains,

> The walls were made of special tinted glass, but the greenery was so abundant and dense that it shaded us from the sun's hot rays. A stone pathway carved with the faces of various wild animals led around the waterfall. I felt sad as I walked on the face of a giraffe, for I remembered that Kareem had had the stones specially carved for Amani to surprise our animal-worshiping child (p.711).

Moreover, Sultana's family owns private planes. They travel to France and London for dentistry, treatments, vacations, and shopping. The villas they hired internationally are usually costly; Sultana describes one of their hired villas as,

> Asad had arranged for three limousines to meet our plane and transport our family and baggage from the airport to the villa. Actually, at one time, the villa had been a palace belonging to a French

> aristocrat and had over sixty rooms, so there was more than enough space for our combined families. However, none of my sisters was married to a man who had taken more than one wife, so our group of eight adults and sixteen children was tiny for an Arab gathering of four families. (p.879).

Sultana's brother, Prince Ali's wife, Nada, is depicted as a royal princess in Sultana's Daughters, Nada swept into the room wearing a fashionable hairdo, a haughty expression, and a bulging bosom crammed into a blinding gold lamé dress. It required little imagination to understand how our brother had been infatuated with his most beautiful wife. Nada had achieved fame in our family through her daring fashions and her will to battle with a man who had met little resistance from women throughout his life. (p.920)

The above illustration explains Ali's beautiful wife, Nada's hardship and disputes with her husband, Ali. The description of the fashionable princesses and the luxurious lives they live might change readers' attitudes of sympathy towards them. The stories of hardship are not explained in these materialistic descriptions. Sasson vividly describes Munira's wedding ceremony with a royal show in Princess Sultana's Daughter. Sultana confesses clearly,

> Although Prince Ali did not love his eldest daughter, his position as a high-ranking prince ensured that Munira's wedding would be grandiose. The celebration and wedding were to occur at King Faisal Hall, a large building in Riyadh where many Saudi royal weddings have been staged. (p.1006)

Furthermore, Sasson describes that on the wedding night, limousines wove their way to the hall's entrance, discharging flocks of veiled women. Women were gathering at King's

Faisal Hall; men were congregating at Ali's Riyadh Palace.' (p.1006). Ali, Munira's father, arranged decorators from Egypt. About the royal decorations, Sasson describes,

> The room was steeped with light, while garish vessels overflowed with gold- foil wrapped candy. Velvet swags with no apparent purpose hung from the ceiling. Grand cascades of floral arrangements were suspended from gold-painted columns […] Red roses were bunched with yellow daises, while lilac orchids were linked with blue carnations. The garishly decorated platform where Hadi and Munira would view, and be viewed by the wedding guests, was covered with blinking green and red lights. (p.1010)

As illustrated in the quotation, the expensive decorations Ali brought for Munira's wedding were mainly to please the guests who would speak generously of his daughter's marriage. However, Munira, a golden gilded bird, was forced to wed a man who was three times older than him, she was his fourth wife, and besides his age and wives, Hadi was a cruel man often called a 'son of the devil' by his other wives.

3.10. Conclusion

Princess Sultana's Daughter sheds light on Sultana Al Saud's treatment of her daughters Maha and Amani, her cause in liberating subjugated women. Many themes and sub-themes emerged from the analyses of the novels. Themes like the marriage of pleasure and female genital mutilation were related to the stories of injustices against women in the Arab World. In addition, it reflects the treatment of Arab women by Arabic societies that use culture and religion to support and back up their behaviors. Sultana was anxious about her teenage daughters' future in a country that dominates women; although her husband Kareem was an exception, his tolerance of female rights and support for his wife and daughters was an

example of a good husband and father. Sultana blamed herself for not supporting her daughters as a parent in developing their identities. Maha's divergence from homosexuality and Amani's convergence to fundamentalism was deemed a failure of Sultana's parenting.

Maha and Amani resembled their mother in being rebellious. Maha is much similar to her mother in her cause for liberating women, whereas Amani, although aware of women's oppression, devoted herself to religion. Amani hated the luxurious life of the Al Saud royals and their transgression of Islamic teachings. Amani is considered a fanatic; Sultana fears Amani, for she would not hesitate to confront her mother when religious norms are transgressed. Both Amani and Maha were symbols of two opposing views. First, Maha, like Sultana, was impressed with Western liberty and women. Their liberation of women includes the discharge from veiling. Simultaneously, Amani represents every Muslim woman who wants women's liberation concerning their religion and culture.

In Chapter 4, we will discuss the themes that emerged from the analyses of stories of injustices in *Princess Sultana's Circle* and how Sultana overcame her failures by forming a circle against all wicked men and cruel cultural customs that oppress women.

Chapter Four

The Representation of Arab Muslim Women in Princess Sultana's Circle

4.1. Introduction

The fight against women's oppression in Saudi Arabia continues with the third book of *Princess Sultana Circle*. After her mother visits in her dreams, Sultana thinks deeply about her cause of liberating deprived women in her country, mainly her close ones, such as her niece Munira. Her discovery of cousin Feddal's harems, the letter of Munira, the tale of Veena, and the trip to the desert representing the return to Bedouins' ancestral life had strengthened Sultana to support women fighting for their liberty and rights in all Muslim countries. Sultana and her sisters form a circle against every wicked man who takes advantage of women. This chapter focuses on many women's stories that inspire Sultana to undertake her cause for women's liberation.

4.2. The Subjugated Munira

The hadith of Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him) at the start of this chapter, "There is no one among you whose sitting place is not written by God, whether in fire or paradise,"(p.847) is not fully understood by Sultana. She argues, "This fatalism creates a dignified resignation to life's hardships for my life, and I cannot accept the tragic lives lived by so many Saudi women as the preordained will of Allah." (p.847). However, Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him) asks the Sahaba and all Muslims not to rely upon the evil and the good Allah predestined. Instead, they should do what they are commanded to do and refrain from what they are forbidden; indeed, paradise and hell are attained by people' deeds.

The male characters in this novel interpret Prophet's hadith according to their whims. Ali, Sultana's brother and the father of Munira, had forced his daughter to marry his friend Hadi "A pure evil,"(p.854) as Sultana describes him; Sultana had known Hadi since childhood; she came close to Hadi during their trip to Cairo. At that time, Hadi was a student of religion in an institute that trained, Mutawwas, men to be part of the Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice

committee. Hadi hated all women in the world; to him, women are on earth for three purposes: to please the men sexually, serve them, and bear their children. The image that weakened Sultana was that of Hadi and Ali sexually assaulting a girl who was no more than eight years old. Sultana could not imagine that one of her flesh and blood, 'Munira,' would be the wife of such an evil man.

Hadi in Arabic means someone who guides people to the straight path; it is one of Allah's ninety-nine names. In the text Hadi is an ironic man of religion; instead of acting as a guide and example, he tragically transgresses all religious taboos. His wives secretly named him Satan's most favored son. Since childhood, Munira has tried hard to win the love of an unloving father. When she was sixteen, she informed her mother that she wished to stay celibate. Unlike the Saudi girls who spend much of their youth perfecting methods to keep their future husbands content," Munira was trained to be a social worker to support the people with special needs in Saudi Arabian society. Sultana tried to save her niece from such an arrangement by convincing her husband Kareem and her brothers-in-law to discuss it with her brother Ali. However, Ali cynically misused Prophet Mohamed's (Peace and blessing be upon him) hadith about the girl's silence as an indication of marriage approval. Ali asked,

> Munira, child, the man Hadi has asked that you become an adored wife. You are aware of his friendship with this family and his ability to provide for you and any children you might have. I have sought permission from the Almighty God to give you in wed-lock to Hadi. Tell me now, Munira, if you approve. (p.989)

This quotation illustrates how the heartless father Ali controls his daughter and all the women in his household using Allah's and Prophet Mohamed's words. After he expresses the closure and friendship of Hadi, the future husband of Munira, to the family and his wealth, and how God permits the arrangement, he finally asks his daughter's opinion. Furthermore, he

considered his daughter's silence as approval of marriage. Based on Prophet Mohamed, Peace and blessing be upon him hadith about his daughter Fatima's wedding to Imam Ali. May Allah be pleased with them. However, the two cases of marriage are not identical. For Fatima accepted the marriage and was timid to say. Her modesty was interpreted as approval. However, Ali threatened to beat both Munira and her mother if Munira refused engagement to Hadi before the family members. Sultana explains how " religion forbids the forcing of females in a union, not of their liking, but like so many things, much that is good in our Islamic faith is misinterpreted or simply ignored."(p.856)

Tammam, Munira's mother, was a hopeless woman who had never seen smiling since the day she got married to Ali, and her daughters were cheerless as their mother. She is controlled by her husband, who confesses to his sisters that he married her solely for sexual pleasure. Moreover, her unhappiness is due to his displeasure. Tammam's reaction to Munira's marriage arrangement was neutral; she was neither surprised nor upset. She was scared to speak up and voice her opinion. She comforted her sisters-in-law when they wept for Munira's future with a heatless husband. During the marriage ceremony, Munira looks fearless, staring at her husband Hadi while her eyes flash a terrible pain. Munira is compared to an animal that had been trapped and had no hope for release; she was looking courageously determined to maintain her dignity.

4.3. Faddel's Paradise Harem

During her visit to a cousin named Faddel, Sultana discovered a hidden harem pavilion in Faddel's paradise palace. Faddel spent a lot constructing his earthly paradise and surrounding gardens to make it as similar in likeliness as the heavenly paradise described in the Quran. To accomplish his residence in heaven, Feddel had also purchased '*houris*' seductive virgin girls solely for his sexual pleasures and kept them in a separate place called Stallions Pavilion. The *houris* mentioned in the Quran represent Allah's reward promised to

the pious and devoted Muslim men.

The narrative voice in the novel sometimes represents Princess Sultana, and sometimes the author who questions the prize given to men in paradise and not given to women; she states,

> For a Muslim man, fortunate enough to reach heaven, yet another reward awaits him. Seductively beautiful virgins, never yet touched by another man, will attend to his every need and fulfill his sexual desire. Each man will possess seventy-two of these lovely virgins […] Pious women will also enter paradise. It is said that these women will receive the greatest joy from reciting the Koran and experiencing the supreme ecstasy of beholding Allah's face. All around, these women will be children who never grow old. Of course, since Muslim women do not have any sexual desires, there will be no sexual partners awaiting them in paradise. (p.1080)

The above quote questions God's authority; it is ironic when the author doubts, "…Since Muslim women do not have any sexual desires, there will be no sexual partners awaiting them in paradise." The expression Muslim women have no sexual desires is ironic for a person who is ignorant of Islam. The Quran declared that Muslim women also are granted what they love in life and more. Their partners in Janna would be the partners they loved in life, and there are many details on the Muslim woman who marries two more men in life. That she will be given a choice to choose the one close to her heart in hereafter. For those who died unmarried, Allah will grant them what they desire and more. It is a misrepresentation of Muslim women because a Muslim submits totally to Allah's command. Some things are lawful for people's benefit, and others are unlawful again. A believing man/woman does not question

things kept far from their knowledge for divine wisdom that only Allah knows.

Khadija, Faddel's wife, had only sons, so she was admired and envied. Khadija knew that her husband owned *harems* in one of the pavilions, but she told Sultana and her daughters that the pavilion was for stallions, and since horses were man's domain, they were not allowed to check. Only when Amani insisted on seeing the horses, Khadija, who feared her husband was anxious and strangely misled her guests. When Amani suddenly locates many cages filled with birds, she goes for their rescue. Although her mother warns her, "Amani, a savior of deprived and stray animals," cannot stand watching. She asks Khadija about their plight. Khadija repeatedly said, "There are paradise birds." Khadija's reaction distracted the guest's intention to the presence of birds in paradise. Amani responded that paradise birds fly freely.

Moreover, the birds they kept in cages had not enough water, and some birds were dead. Khadija, blindly loyal and obedient to her husband, is represented as a devastated, weak woman. Sultana noted that Khadija was attracted to the wealth of her husband. Khadija fainted when Amani told her that she would never be the natural paradise for her poor birds' confinement. Amani managed to empty the palace's caged birds with two servants' help, while Maha discovered the girls' prisoners' pavilion and promised to come back for their rescue.

Amani rescues the caged songbirds with her father, Kareem; Maha cannot save the poor girls, although she is very eager to rescue them. Maha shared many features with her mother, Sultana, who had been once a flame with an overwhelming desire to save all deprived women. However, as Sultana stated, "It is not an easy matter to come between men and their sexual desires," (p.988). Stallions Pavilion holds twenty-five girls. Some of them were no more than thirteen or twelve years. Dressed in attractive lingerie, each had her own sad story of traveling from their homelands to Saudi Arabia. Some were hired to work as housemaids or nurses and chokingly discovered after their arrival to Saudi Arabia that their service was to please the prince, his six sons, and other men's companions. Others

were purchased at auctions by the highest bidders or brothels for marriage or to be prostitutes in the case of low-income families.

Although the pavilion was not locked, their escape was not easy since their documents and passports were with Faddel, and no woman in Saudi Arabia was allowed to travel without her male guardian's permission. However, some escaped but were cruelly punished, returned to their masters, or sent back to their countries. The law of Saudi Arabia, as declared by Sultana, does not support strangers, "Few people will risk imprisonment for the sake of a stranger, and the men of my family often take revenge upon people who expose the dark side of life in Saudi Arabia."(p.992). The twenty-five harems were guarded by a eunuch from Sudan named Omar, who shared his tragic story with Sultana and her husband, Kareem.

Maha and her mother, Sultana, failed to rescue the girls because 'Saudi Arabia's law had no provisions to help foreign girls.' When discovered by her cousin Feddal and his wife, Khadija, Maha scorned Faddel as 'a wild beast', and Sultana blamed them, mainly his wife Khadija, who kept silent at her husband's brutality toward helpless young girls. Khadija considered her husband's deeds as a man's business. Although threatened by Faddel not to interfere in his matters, Sultana and Maha succeeded in saving Omar, the eunuch, from Faddel's anger. Sultana pleaded in desperation,

> Oh, Allah! What a land! What a people! We are so wealthy that we give no thought to exchanging expensive real estate for a nest of motley birds that will satisfy the crazy whims of our children. Yet, we are so morally corrupt that young women are routinely held captive as sex slaves, and incredibly, I felt hot with shame for my country and my countrymen. (p.1151)

In the above quote, Sultana cried to Allah about the injustices in her country. She

painfully admitted in the plural 'we' referring to Al-Saud who can exchange their wealth with a nest of colorful songbirds to please their children. Although saving birds' lives are as important as human lives in Islamic and Arabic cultures. However, it is not their concern regarding women captives as sex slaves. Because their culture considers men's relation to women as man's private business, and government law has no provision for foreign women captives. Therefore, this contradiction in behavior dismantles Saudi royals' image as caring much about their personal affairs and using wealth to please their vile whims, neglecting both religious and governmental laws.

4.4. Omar, the Suffering of a Man

Ages ago, several nations were engaged with the system of eunuch where eunuchs are men served as *harem* protectors and spies for rulers of ancient's kingdoms, for ottoman empire eunuchs were black African men brought from Sudan, Zanzibar, and Ethiopia to work as palace menials, *harem* protectors, and spies for rulers.

Omar's story reflects the past, the hardship of both men and women, slavery, and the *harem*. Omar, the eunuch Sultana saved from her cousin Faddel's paradise palace, had brought all the hardship he endured to memory. Omar, who came from Sudan, unfolded his horrifying story to Sultana and Kareem. Being kidnaped from his tribe at seven years of age to his castration by kidnappers, and his trip to Turkey to work for a Turkish trader who brought him to Mecca, and there he passed away, leaving Omar in Mecca.

In Mecca, Omar was given to Faddel's father, who, unlike his son, had treated him fairly. Omar's lifelong mission was the protection of his masters' women. Reacting to the horrifying stories of Omar's castration, Kareem gasped loudly, "Surely, Allah's word was mocked by those men and their cruel actions!" Kareem's words reflect how those engaged in castrating males had violated Islamic teaching. The author reported that in Islam, the castration of men was forbidden but owning those castrated known as eunuch as slaves are not prohibited in

Islam, "Although the Islamic faith forbids Muslims to castrate young boys themselves, Muslims were not forbidden from owning eunuchs as slaves." (p.994).

The word slave is different from a nation to another; slaves or eunuchs who lived during the Ottoman empire under Muslim rulers were treated differently. Brookes (2008), in his book: *The Concubine, the Princess, and the Teacher: Voices from the Ottoman Harem*, reported that the harem and eunuch in the Ottoman empire, although considered slaves, accumulated an immense fortune and many titles in Ottoman court.

The institution of the *harem* represented a mysterious world for both the East and the West for its privacy. The word *harem* carries the meaning of 'forbidden, sacred, prohibited, in its origin in the Arabic language. Therefore, the word slave in English does not serve historians to convey *harems* and eunuch real estate in the Ottoman empire. The word slave in English displays an image of a person without power, one who is entirely subservient to a dominating influence; however, *harem* and eunuch,

> […] in the Ottoman case, this purchased individual, if male, could serve as chief aide to the head of state, accumulate a vast fortune, and oversee a range of influential foundations. Ministers, generals, and wealthy men curried his favor. Or, as our schoolteacher makes clear, if female, she might similarly manage a complex organization at the center of state power, accumulate riches, and supervise her retinue of servants. Unhappily, however, unlike Turkish, the English language lacks words that connote this status as owned indeed by master or mistress, yet wielding power, overseeing wealth, and commanding respect. Hence, we are left with the unsatisfactory word *slave*. (Brookes, 2008, p. 6)

4.5. Sultana and Transgression

Sultana finds refuge from the failure to support deprived women in alcoholic drinks prohibited in Islam and Saudi Arabian society, mainly known for its strict Sharia Law enforcement. In Saudi Arabia, many Saudi or foreigners are expected to be imprisoned for purchasing or consuming alcohol each year. However, this law is not applied to royal members. Sultana noted that purchasing alcohol was never difficult for the Al Saud family, and every palace has its drinking bar, usually for men with all kinds of alcoholic beverages purchased from their sources in the West. However, royal women were secretly drinking alcohol and treated privately. As a result, many princesses were treated in a special clinic for alcoholic addiction. Sultana revealed that,

> In the Al Saud family, I am not alone in this sin. Alcohol has taken a shocking toll on the lives of many of my royal cousins. To speak truthfully, I must say if these cousins are not buying or selling alcohol, they are drinking it. Moreover, they do this regardless of both religious taboos and the law. (p. 997)

Sultana's consumption of alcohol leads her to the violation of the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. Although she reported that she could not abide by the fasting requirements since childhood. Sultana noted that her mother warned her about all intoxicating spirits that were all prohibited in Islamic teachings,

> I still remember my mother telling me that Prophet Mohammed had cursed many men in connection with liquor. Mother said that our great Prophet cursed the man who squeezed it, the one who carried it, the one whom it was carried, the one who served it, the one who drank it, the one who dealt in it, the one who devoured its price, the one who purchased it, and the one from whom it was purchased. None were to be spared! (p. 997)

The above quote from Sultana's mother represents Prophet Mohamed's (Peace and blessing be upon him) hadith about the punishment for the ten people in connection with alcohol, "The wine-presser, the one who has it pressed, the one who drinks it, the one who conveys it, the one to whom it is conveyed, the one who serves it, the one who sells it, the one who benefits from the price paid for it, the one who buys it, and the one for whom it is bought." [Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah]. (Book 11- Hadith 18).

This hadeeth is clear to all Muslims, and no believing Muslim would question Prophet Mohamed's authority even when committing sins. However, the exclamation at the end of the quotation, 'None were to be spared!' represents an irony from the author's narrative voice, who is unknowledgeable about the hadith.

4.6. Muslims Had Defamed Prophet Mohamed

Sultana questions how the maligned image of Prophet Mohamed, peace and blessing be upon him, angered many Muslims who, at the same time, do defame Prophet Mohamed's peace and blessings be upon him by twisting and misinterpreting his words. Well, both are defaming, but the author considered maligning Mohamed's image less critical than the defaming of his words by Muslim men and women. Therefore, in this part, I analyzed different stories of women's reactions to the denigration of the Prophet (Peace and blessing be upon him.)

4.6.1. Story of Mysa

Mysa, the wife of Naïf Al Saud, accompanied Sultana and her sister Sara on their journey to the United States. Mysa very educated Palestinian woman and her love and marriage with prince Naïf refute the previous claim in the novel that Saudi Arabian hate Palestinians. Mysa narrated a story about the defamed of Prophet Mohamed, (Peace and blessing be upon him) in the city of Alkhalil; the author prefers to name Hebron, where a

Zionist woman posted many posters on the walls that display the images that portray Prophet Mohamed on a picture of a pig. Maysa blamed herself for getting out that day with her mom for a walk, "There had been unrest for several weeks, and I did not want to take a chance that a wayward stone might strike my dear mother!"(p.1032). The expression of being stoned instead of being shot by Israeli soldiers represents the author's standpoint. Those who are known for throwing stones at colonizers are Palestinians.

Moreover, the author explained why the pig vexed Muslims, "The Islamic religion does not allow Muslims to make any contact with pig flesh. A Muslim believes that merely touching the flesh of a pig would keep him or her from entering paradise."(p.1035) This quote explains that touching a pig withholds a Muslim from entering paradise. This asinine thought was invented by those ignorant of Islam and the haters of his followers. A Muslim is banned from eating pork only. Nothing is intoxicating in pigs that prevent Muslims from touching them.

The women's reaction to the posters was exaggerated, Mysa's mother swooned after seeing the signs, and she was hospitalized while Mysa was having nightmares of the Prophet depicted as a pig, and since that time, she prevented herself from having a deep sleep to avoid the blasphemous dream.

4.6.2. Story of Afaf

Afaf, a refugee from Afghanistan, escaped the war that cost the murder of her family and her only brother. Afaf had joined Sultana and her sister in the United States. Her reaction to the Prophet Mohamed's defaming was exceptional; she grieved when she remembered how the Prophet had been defamed on many occasions and in many ways, whether by Muslims or non- Muslims, how Prophet's words have been used as a weapon for revenge and evil. Afaf, who escaped 'the dictatorship of the Taliban regime' that twisted into

a force that assaults women while trying to take hold of the sharia law, "In the Taliban's drive to restore Islamic purity, they had launched a horrifying assault on their women."(p.1037)

Afaf 's younger sister received fifty lashes as a punishment by the committee for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice when discovered talking to a former neighbor, merely asking him about his elderly parents. And since women are not allowed to hospitals under the Taliban regime, Afaf had helplessly seen her sister dying in her arms.

Therefore, women in Afghanistan were dominated by men and forced to cover in a burqa that was worse than those used in Saudi Arabia. Sultana described the burqa as a thick, tent-like garment even more awkward and uncomfortable than the Saudi *abaya* and veil." Besides, Afghan women were not allowed to talk loudly or laugh in public, and they were also banned from schooling, working to feed their families, watching TV and videos, playing with toys and games, listening to music, and reading books; all were prohibited. The author reported more on the prohibition imposed on Afghan women, including cutting hair which was considered a crime. Sultana criticizes the way fanatical Muslim men twisted the meaning of the Prophet's words meaning to destroy every woman's life.

4.6.3. The story of Hussah

Hussah was a friend of Maha at school. She had lived in Egypt since she was three years of age, where her family stayed for ten years. Unlike the intolerance for female liberty in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt, Hussah enjoyed freedom and independence. She was very interested in swimming and many sports activities. When the family returned to Saudi Arabia, Hussah was accustomed to Saudi culture. She wore a veil and *abaya* in public spaces and abode by all the restrictions imposed on women.' In the confinement of her family compound Hussah "was a normal modern girl. She wore jeans and T-shirts, chatted for long hours on the telephone, swam in the swimming pool." However, she cannot participate in the Olympics or

competitions, for women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to compete. Hussah discovered the power men use over women in the name of religion in Saudi Arabia.

Hussah's tragedy started when the next-door family's son Fadi caught sight of Hussah in her swimming suit, "Unfortunately for Hussah, the family living the next door to her home were Islamic fundamentalists. Her life was forever changed when the family's eldest son saw the sexy Hussah in her skimpy swimsuit." (p.1042)

Fadi was learning to be a man of religion '*Mutawaa'* after seeing Hussah; he purchased a long-sense camera and secretly took many photographs of Hussah as she swam in her family's private pool. Fadi complained to the local religious authorities that Hussah was a sinner. He fabricated a story that Hussah had intentionally exposed her breasts to him. In his fervor, he falsely claimed that,

> Hussah's eyes had met his and that she had smiled invitingly just before lowering her swimming costume! He further declared that Hussah's act had caused him to sin by dreaming of naked vixens. He demanded that Hussah be stoned to death to recover his former state of purity! (p.1193)

The above quote lets people doubt the authenticity of the story. Assuming that this story is true, Fadi represents the hypocrisy of a man of religion whose aim is not to promote virtue and present vice. This story is hard to swallow; a committee formed to prevent Vice is encouraging Vice. This quote's last sentence is wrongly put, indicating that stoning to death is for all women sinners. It might also represent the author's voice, who is ignorant of Sharia law. A Muslim is not allowed to peep at others and take personal photos without the people's consent.

> *O, believers! Avoid any suspicions; ˹for˺, indeed, some suspicions are sinful. And do not spy nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of their dead brother? You would despise*

> *that! And fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is ˹the˺ Accepter of Repentance, Most Merciful. (49:12)*

Hassan's father was pressured to believe that his daughter held a lousy character and that she had been influenced by the freedom and liberty of the years spent abroad. The men of religion, according to Sultana, believed that education and learning hobbies for women led to the decay of Saudi society. Hussah's mother-in-law stands by the side of religious men, blames Hussah for her wrong behaviors, and persuades her husband to accept the marriage of Hussah to an older man recommended by the ministerial committee. Besides, Hussah was removed from school and obliged to abandon swimming and marry within a month. In contrast, Fadi was never blamed for his wrong deeds.

4.7. The Western Woman as a Norm

Sultana is impressed with the U.S. shopping centers and the 'fortunate' Western woman on her visit to the U.S. Seeing women driving confidently through the city's heavy traffic, wearing beautiful revealing clothes, fearless of any man or religious police, lifted the spirits of Sultana, who compared them to the woman in Saudi Arabia. She reported, "Surely, while visiting such a country as the United States, I could finally forget about the misfortunes that plague so many females. I could take immediate pleasure in the freedom for women I saw all around me."(p.1049). She noted that some people treated their camels better than their wives and how women are secluded so much of their lives, so when they arrive in the U.S, they make sure not to miss the opportunity to live freely for some time. Sultana expressed her feeling of irritation about the 'ridiculous custom' of veiling,

> On trips abroad, I always gratefully discard the despised black coverings, but in Saudi Arabia, they were a hated part of my everyday life. After looking at the world minus a black screen and breathing fresh air with our fabric filter, the veil

> always feels like the weight of the world falling around my body, although it is made of thin, gauzy cloth. (p.1315)

Sultana asserts that she felt exuberant and happy to show her face, display her attractive clothes, and wander the streets of a large city like New York without a male escort. What pleases Sultana most is the glances of several men staring at her; this makes her feel more feminine and pretty.

4.8. Bedouin Life and Sultana's Circle

Sultana compared city Arabs and Bedouin Arabs, who might be considered similar to non- Arabian people; however, there have been considerable differences and never-ending conflicts between the two Arabs. City Arabs mock the simple-minded foolishness of Bedouins, while Bedouins consider city Arabs as moral sinners. Sultana compared the luxurious lives of royals in palaces and the lives of poor Bedouins who lived in stinky tents in the deserts and suffered a high infant mortality rate. The Bedouins refused all the Saudi government's attempts to move them to cities and change their lifestyles, and they are very proud of their heritage. Their wealth is measured by the size and quality of the camel herds. Bedouin women are described by Sultana as,

> Indeed, in every class of Saudi Arabian life, women are looked down upon as naturally and irrevocably inferior to men, but life for Bedouin women is burdened with wealth to relieve their harsh lives. Bedouin women are burdened by hard physical labor. Besides waiting on their husbands and taking care of many children, their nomadic responsibilities even include setting up and dismantling the camp! (p.1178)

Through the above illustration, we realize Bedouin women's hardship who, unlike city

Arab women, endure a lot. They are unschooled, suffer infant mortality, and bear many children who are left uneducated, unwashed and run barefoot in the camps. After visiting the Bedouin chief, Sultana thanks God that her family Al Saud had abandoned the Bedouins' miserable lifestyle.

4.8.1. The Letter from Munira

When returning a book, she landed from her aunt Sara, Munira left a note for her aunt, a poem where she lamented her miserable life, childhood with a heartless father to unwanted marriage with 'the son of devil' Hadi. In this poem, Munira revealed all her physical assaults and blamed the loved ones who did not rescue her. Instead, they helped in burying her alive. The following are some verses from her long poem, 'Buried Alive.'

> I have lived and known what it is to smile.
>
> I have lived the life of a young girl with a hopeful promise.
>
> I have lived the life of a young girl who felt the warmth of womanhood.
>
> I have lived the feeling of longing for the love of a good man.
>
> I have lived only to endure nightly rapes.
>
> I have lived to be buried while still alive.
>
> I have lived to wonder why those who claim to love me helped to bury me.
>
> I have lived through all these things and am not yet twenty-five. (p.1206)

Sultana and Sara were deeply affected by the words of Munira, who had been buried alive and forgotten by her beloved ones. Sultana and Sara blamed themselves for not helping Munira to escape the country. Munira's words had opened up all the injuries of all oppressed women that Sultana failed to save. Nevertheless, these words inspired her to save the lives of deprived women, starting with the rescue of Veena. Sultana reported, "I told Sara as we walked

back into camp. "Never will I remain silent in the face of cruelty and maltreatment to any woman."(p.1210)

4.8.2. The Story of Veena

One of Sultana's sisters, Dunia, is described as a woman with a lazy mind was caring much about herself, her beauty, and her leisure. Getting wrinkles was what worried Dunia in life. She was known for "filling her days with eating, sleeping, undergoing beauty treatments,"(p.1158). Besides, Dunia did not read books or magazines or had any interest in life stories outside her palace. Dunia's son Shadi had brought with him Veena to the desert camp. Veena was purchased from Pakistan for pleasure. In the camp, Veena is sexually attacked by three royals, Taher, Rashed, and Shadi; when discovered by the rest of the family, Sultana and her sisters confront their husbands, and the whole family to punish the boys. However, much to her surprise, when they all learned that Shadi twenty years old boy owned Veena, they decided not to interfere in his business.

Furthermore, his mother, Dunia, and men stand by his side. She was leaving Sultana and her other sisters in a surprise. Although the boys had committed an evil act against Veena, they were asked to apologize for shoving their aunts. No one cares about Veena's feelings about injuries. Asad, Sara's husband, stands firmly by Sultana and her other sisters, who support Veena. After Veena's recovery, she joined Sara's family to care for her children. Veena was the first girl that Sultana and her circle successfully saved.

4.9. The Representation of Arab Men in Princess Sultana's Circle

Arab men are represented as cruel-tempered and are ready to execute their daughters when their honor is at stake. Sultana's unhappy childhood experiences with her cruel father and dominating brother profoundly influenced her character; she became a rebellious woman against her country's "harsh" system. However, when she realized that one

of her friends had been executed by her father for committing sexual misconduct, Sultana learned in this horrifying manner that rebellion against mainly religious norms might cost women's lives. Although it is not typical for a Muslim woman that commits sexual misconduct is forbidden, there is a tendency to normalization of crimes such as sexual misconduct. In reporting the incident of the crime of sexual misconduct, she says, " Nevertheless, she learned most horrifyingly that rebellion against the harsh system of her country could only lead to disaster when one of her friends was executed by her father for the "crime" of sexual misconduct. " (p.959) In the illustration above, the author placed the word crime between inverted commas, indicating the impossibility of classifying sexual misconduct as a crime. The execution in this story was not based on religious law. It was instead a result of a tempered father. Yet it is taken as an excuse to blame Islam for oppressing women.

4.9.1. Evil Arab Men

In this part of the trilogy, Ali is described as a pure evil who fails to recognize his misdeeds. After a long stony look, Ali whispered to Sultana, "I have no harm. I have been an excellent father to my children, a good husband to my wives, an obedient son to my father, and a supportive brother to my sisters. What is there to apologize for? (p. 1198).

Ali had forgotten all what he had done to his daughters and wives. To Sultana, Ali said nonsense. He failed to think like a normal human being.

> I could only stare at my brother in despair. Did he truly believe the words he spoke? I quickly decided that my brother was helpless when recognizing his evil! Quite simply, Ali could not think like a normal human being. (p.1371)

4.9.2. Sensitive Arab Men and Cruel Government Laws

Sultana recalls the story of Abdullah Al'Hadhaif, who was only 33 of age and a father of six children when executed by the Saudi government. Abdullah, his brothers, and his elderly father were arrested for a political crime. In Saudi Arabia, the government banned acts or personal conduct that offended the government, such as political protests, speaking in mosques, and distributing leaflets or audio tapes; when arrested for the second time, Abdullah Al'Hadhaif was brutally tortured by Saudi authorities for confession. Reports said, Abdullah.

> He had been dipped in a corrosive liquid to revenge the policeman he had attacked. His bowels were inflated through his anus, and his dear mother and precious wife were threatened with being sexually violated in his presence. (p.1250)

As illustrated above, Abdullah had been tragically tortured by the authorities and threatened by sexual attacks on his female family members, mother, and wife.

4.9.3. Arrogant Arab Men

Arab men depicted in the novel are arrogant, domineering unjust men who care only for their wealth and sexual desires. They are very unjust to their wives when asking for male sons and neglecting their female daughters. In the case of Ali, his marriage to Tammam produces two daughters and a son. The two daughters were sad and cheerless like their mother, whereas the son was a perfect duplicate of his arrogant father.

4.9.4. Greedy Arab Men

Arab men are also depicted as cowardly thugs and greedy business people, and this famous stereotype is laid out through media. The depth of Hollywood stereotypes towards Arabs is bigotry and revolting. Moreover, in the trilogy, all the stereotypes were repeated.

Faddel, Sultana's relative, is depicted as a greedy man who thinks only about satisfying his desires while miserably dealing with others. Sultana reported,

Faddel would pay his staff meager wages, I guessed, and would happily grind the faces of the poor into the desert sand without remorse. Such a man would surely demand the return of the birds his money had purchased. (p.1106)

4.9.5. Conceptualizing Female Purity

Sultana reported that women are impure by some Muslim men. Moreover, if "they touch even a palm of a woman not legally bound to them, they will suffer red-hot embers applied to their palms on judgment day." (p.963). This quote falsely considers women as impure. It is provocative for non- Muslim readers. Based on particular hadith related to the prophet Mohamed, (Peace and Blessing be Upon Him)

Many fundamentalist Muslim men believe that all women are impure and that if they touch even the palm of a woman not legally bound to them, they will suffer red-hot embers applied to their palms on Judgment Day (p.10101)

The prophet refused to touch any woman who did not belong to him. He did not consider women impure. Sultana narrated the hadith, "A praying man may interrupt his prayers if one of three things should pass in front of him: a black dog, a woman, or an ass." (p. 963)

Although the likening of a woman to a black dog and a donkey is not mentioned, the slander is evidenced by the hate for the holy prophet. Sultana's father often says that a pig would instead splash him than brush against the elbow of a woman whom he did not know. The following quote by Sultana is meant to touch a dog but not a woman. For a dog, saliva prevents ablution.

Even though I am aware that the Koran warns that if a man touches a strange

woman and cannot find water to wash, he should find "clean" soil and rub away the pollution of that woman, I was still offended. (p. 10101)

In the illustration, Sultana expressed how she felt infuriated by the reaction of the workers, and she grabbed my arms to lead them to help Faddel's wife, Kholoud.

4.9.6. Corrupted Religious Men

Many religious men in the trilogy are corrupted. They care more about their desires and use religion for their egoism. For example, Fadi was a young man studying to become *Mutawaa*. He once peeped at neighboring houses and suddenly recognized a beautiful girl Hussah in her swimsuit. So, he became incensed that he purchased a long-lens camera and took many photos of the beautiful young Hussah without her consent in the privacy of her pool. One day while filming her in the swimming pool, Hussah's bikini top accidentally loosened; he recorded her naked.

> Filled with the venom that only the self-righteous possess, Fadi complained to the local religious authorities that Hussah was a wicked sinner who had intentionally exposed her breasts to him. In his fervor, he falsely claimed that Hussah's eyes had met his and that she had smiled invitingly just before lowering her swimming costume! He further declared that Hussah's act had caused him to sin by dreaming of naked vixens. In order to recover his former state of purity, he demanded that Hussah be stoned to death! (p.1193-1194)

In the above quotation, Fadi could convince the committee of Hussah's sin. Furthermore, the men of religion believed his incredible story, although he is the one who filmed a woman in her privacy. It is hard to believe such a story. Nevertheless, Hussah's father was a modern-thinking man who sent his daughter abroad to pursue her career. The committee

pressured him to arrange the marriage of Hussah with Fadi's father as a punishment for her misconduct. Furthermore, Fadi was rewarded for reporting the incident. If the local authorities agreed with Fadi's suggestion, Hussah would be stoned to death.

4.10. The Exploitation of Foreign Workers

Filipinos usually worked as housemaids in Saudi Arabia, besides serving men as sex slaves. The "Young Filipino women hired as housemaids still serve our men as sex slaves, in addition to their household duties" (p. 1131-1132). Sultana remembered an incident in history when the president of the Philippines, Cory Aquino, learned about the exploitation of Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia. She wanted to save the women of her country from such a burden. Therefore, she passed a law to forbid Filipino female workers from traveling to Saudi Arabia. However, the Philippines' economy relied much on the money exported by Filipino workers in oil-rich countries. When King Fahd learned about the president's decision, he forbade every Filipino male and female from entering Saudi Arabia. Soon, Aquino changed her mind and allowed the migration of labor.

Similarly, young Pakistani virgins are brought to serve as housemaids, but as soon as they arrive in Saudi Arabia, they are turned into sex slaves. The incident of Veena, whom Shadi purchased. Sultana reported on Veena's fears,

> Veena finally came face-to-face with Shadi several days before leaving Lahore. The seller of young girls had taken her to a coffee shop where Shadi could give final approval for his purchase. The meeting was so fleeting that Veena did not exchange words with her new owner. She was disappointed to see that; indeed, he was a young, strong man. She remembered what the other girls had said about the sexual appetites of young (p.1411).

4.11. Child Custody

The divorce resulted in the custody of the children by the mother. For female children till they reach puberty. For male children till the age of seven or eight. Usually, in Saudi Arabia, the father is not exempt from custody if he asks for his children. He has all the right to gain custody of his children even before their age. Sultana reported,

> If a Saudi Arabian man should claim custody of his sons or daughters at any age, the mother has no legal recourse. If the children live in another country, Arab fathers later often steal their children and bring them back to their country. Few Arab governments will interfere on the mother's behalf when an Arab man has custody of his children (p.1216).

As illustrated above, Saudi fathers married to foreign women usually stole their children and brought them back to Saudi Arabia. Local authorities do not intervene in men and their personal decisions or sexual desires. It is called man's own business. The incident of the girl Heidi from a Saudi father, Abdelbaset, and an American Mother, Margaret, explained how Arab fathers are given all the right to gain custody of their children. The couple met in the U.S. married, and had Heidi. After lengthy disputes, they divorced after the child's birth, "Although Abdelbaset often threatened that he would never allow his daughter to be raised in America, he was still attending school in this country. Therefore, temporarily, Heidi was safe. Alternatively, so Margaret thought." (p.1216)

During a visitation to his daughter, Abdelbaset refused to bring Heidi back to her mother. After a long time of investigation and research. Finally, Abdelbaset decided to call his ex-wife and tell her about her daughter's whereabouts. Sultana felt very sad that Heidi's future was dark in a country like Saudi Arabia,

> From what I read about Heidi's Saudi father, I knew the poor girl would be raised in the strictest Muslim homes. Within a short time, she would be compelled to don the veil, for in my country, many Muslim girls are forced to veil before puberty. Following her veiling, Heidi would undoubtedly be coerced into an arranged marriage to a man she would not know until the first shocking night in the marriage bed. (p.1229-1230)

4.12. The Luxurious Lives of Saudi Royals

In the novel, Sasson detailed the luxurious life of royal princesses; villas, palaces, drivers, servants, private planes, and properties in the world's most expensive streets. Sultana reported the generosity of her husband Kareem, who sent the most trusted Lebanese employee in a private plane to Paris to get Sultana's gift. Kareem was a caring husband who wanted to distract his wife from her sadness about her niece Munira. Kareem purchased a ten-tiered diamond choker for his Sultana. The description of very expensive wedding parties, and ceremonies, were detailed in the trilogy. During the incidence of Munira's wedding, the royals dressed in an appealing lavish way,

> Maha was arrayed in a lovely burgundy silk dress draped loosely off her shoulders. A diamond and pearl necklace shaped in the form of simple teardrops covered the smooth flesh of her neckline. While selecting her jewelry, Maha had whispered that she thought it appropriate that even her jewels appeared to weep for her dear cousin. Amani was fitted out in a dark blue gown with a matching jacket. In keeping with her strict religious beliefs, […]" (p.1007-1008)

Amani was a pious daughter who respected the rules of religion. She always reminds her mother of the religious norms.

> I had reminded my pious daughter of what she already knew— other than Hadi, his attendant, her Uncle Ali, and a man of religion, and no men would be present at our gathering. Once she agreed that her faith did permit her to wear precious stones free of guilt, Amani selected a charming ruby and diamond necklace which had been cleverly fashioned to resemble a cluster of sparkling flowers. (p.1008)

4.13. Conclusion

In the final chapter of the trilogy, Sultana comes to a profound realization that the advancement of women's rights can only be achieved through collective action and group work. Through their journey into the desert and their reconnection with their former Bedouin lifestyle, Sultana feels a deep sense of nostalgia and a stronger bond with her mother and the traditions of their past. It is through her dreams of her mother that Sultana finds the motivation and strength to persevere despite her numerous setbacks.

The letter from Munira, a young girl seeking guidance and support, and the physical assault experienced by Veena, a fellow woman, serve as catalysts for Sultana's determination to continue her fight for women's liberation. These incidents highlight the urgent need to address the plight of women who are often victimized by oppressive and exploitative men. Inspired by these events, Sultana's sisters band together to form a group called 'Sultana's Circle.' This group is dedicated to standing alongside and advocating for all women who have been deprived of their rights and who suffer at the hands of wicked men who take advantage of them. Sultana's Circle becomes a support system and a platform for women to share their stories, seek guidance, and collectively work towards their liberation.

In Chapter 5, we will compare the three novels within the study framework and the existing literature on women's plight. The focus will be on identifying and addressing the root causes of the challenges faced by women in the narratives. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the various factors that contribute to the oppression and marginalization of women, drawing on both the fictional works and the broader scholarly discourse on gender inequality.

Through this comparative analysis, we will examine the common themes, patterns, and underlying societal structures that perpetuate the subjugation of women. By delving into the literature on women's rights, feminist theory, and post-colonial analysis, we will provide a deeper understanding of the issues faced by women and the sources of their struggles.

Chapter 5 will serve as an important bridge between the fictional narratives and the broader theoretical framework. It will offer a critical analysis of the literature, highlighting the significance of the trilogy's portrayal of women's plight within the context of existing scholarship. By examining these connections, this chapter will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women and the potential avenues for change and empowerment.

Chapter Five

A Comparative Analysis of the Novels

5.1. Introduction

In Chapters 2-4, we discussed the images of women characters and how they thrive to survive in a society ruled by men and religion. We also discussed emerging themes of women's characteristics as depicted in the novels. However, we went beyond identifying the role of religion, faith, and theology in forming women's identities. In this Chapter, we will analyze unifying themes among women of the trilogy, considering the post-colonial feminist perspective presented in Chapter two. Themes are: Representation of Arab women in the trilogy as; oppressed/rebellious Arab Muslim women, the representation of Arab Muslim men, third world difference, eurocentrism and Western women as the norm, representation versus self-representation, the veil as a symbol of oppression. These representations should not be taken for granted through these patterns and themes because any representation should be interrogated at the level of ideological context. As stated in the central research question, Arab Muslim women can be understood through their social, cultural, economic, and contextual aspects that might influence their experiences and situation in any society. However, these non- fictional works cannot give us a deep understanding of how the situation of Arab women is simultaneously determined by culture or religion.

5.2. Representation of Arab Muslim Women in the Novels

Throughout history, Arab people and culture have been a callous representation by Western historians and orientalists (Said, 1978). Since then, Arab people, culture, and Western representations have never changed. Thus, Arab people and culture are misrepresented in media, film production, T.V., magazines, and orientalists' scholarship in literature, history, poetry, reports, and paintings. Western feminist discourses focus on Arab Muslim women and portray them as dominated, oppressed, and voiceless. In the *Princess* trilogy, Sultana and other women are depicted as voiceless, subordinated, and controlled by their cultures, men, and religious and governmental laws. Their stories are filled with the

misogynistic treatment they endure in their lives. Women are represented as dependent on both men and Western saviors. Women cannot act without men's permission, the male guardians.

For instance, upon the coming of American troops, Sultana was happy about the changing of events; in her opinion, the American presence in her country was a spark of life for Saudi feminists' dreams (Sasson, 1992, p. 270). She argues: "the American presence was going to alter our lives in a wonderful, wonderful way" (Sasson, 1992, p. 273). This illustration by Sultana indicates how Arab women, at least in the novels, feel of Western presence in their territories. Her attitude must be one of the skeptical points about Sultana's identity; it maneuvers the author into a unique position as an American 'Savior.'

5.2.1. Rebellious Women

Not all women in the novels are depicted as rebellious. Many of them are submissive to the will of men. However, Sultana and her daughters are represented as rebels against all sources of oppression and patriarchy. Sultana opposes her family members who subordinate women at an early age, starting from her father, brother, and husband, Kareem. Sultana vows to challenge all men. She forms a circle with her sisters against any wicked man who takes advantage of women. She is considered a troublemaker for she has done many tricks to get her brother Ali annoyed as revenge for his mistreatment of them,

> I created havoc in our household. I was the one who poured sand into the motor of Ali's new Mercedes; I pinched money out of my father's wallet; I buried Ali's gold coin collection in the backyard; I released green snakes and ugly lizards from jars into the family pool as Ali lay sleeping on his float (Sasson, 1992, p. 57).

Princess Sultana's rebellion is against the corrupted implementation of Islamic rules in society that protect royals and close friends engaged in law-breaking. Sultana reports

many incidents, among them the story of her brother-in-law Muneer, who is transporting alcohol to the kingdom. Muneer went unpunished by the ministerial committee because Sultana's father and other princes downplayed the incident as foolish behavior by a young prince who is influenced by the West. On the contrary, Muneer regained his business and was sent to a new city with a new business and granted considerable rewards from the government, and he wed a young girl, and his happiness increased.

In *Princess Sultana's Daughters,* Sultana recalls other stories of law violations. Men in Saudi Arabia, such as Aicha's father, Maha's friend, engaged in the marriage of pleasure were not accused by government law because "no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement." Trafficking in sex was considered a man business. Moreover, Sultana's cousin Feddal was not accused of exploiting girls brought from many countries as a *harem*. The trilogy, in general, discusses many stories of foreign males and females whom Saudi people mistreated because the law in Saudi Arabia has no provision for protecting their rights.

Furthermore, there are many contradictions about the Islamic faith in the trilogy. For example, at the beginning of Princess, Sultana blames her country's customs and traditions on women's plight, "it is wrong, however, to blame our Muslim faith for the lowly position of women in our society […], our Prophet Muhammad taught only kindness and fairness toward those of my sex" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). Then contradicts her words by stating that "The Koran does state that women are secondary to men, much in the same way the bible authorizes men over women" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). This quote indicates that both Islam and Christianity consider women inferior to men. Indeed, religion as a threat to women's liberty is the basic tenet of Western feminism.

Therefore, the Sharia Law was interpreted as being cruel to Arab women. Sultana contradicts the punishment of Princess Mashaal, who was murdered for adultery. Moreover, the death of Mashaal angered the World's public opinion, mainly after the British film*: Death*

of a Princess, which generated more hostility and cruelty to Arab and Islamic Sharia Law. In *Princess Sultana's Circle,* Sultana argues that her cousin Mashaal was killed for 'unsanctioned love.' The word unsanctioned love was used instead of adultery to polish the crime of adultery and accused Muslims of honor killings that were an aberration that rarely happened. Indeed, Islam does not tolerate adultery; the punishment is stoning to death. However, many conditions regulate its application.

Furthermore, Sultana finds refuge from the failure to support deprived women in alcoholic drinks prohibited in Islam and Saudi Arabian society, mainly known for its strict Sharia Law enforcement. Thus, Sultana's consumption of alcohol leads her to violate the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. She reported that she could not abide by the fasting requirements since childhood.

Another transgression of religion is the misstatement of the veil, *and Hijab,* which cannot belong to a Muslim woman. Veiling to a Muslim woman is a symbol of heritage, ethnic pride, identity and a mean of protecting their modesty according to cultural requirements, yet for non-Muslim women, the veil symbolizes repression and discrimination.

Sultana expressed her veiling experience as a threat and danger. Besides, she considered the veil a way to prevent her from seeing the blue sky. She asserts, "My heart plunged to my stomach when I realized that, from that moment, outside my own home, I would not experience life as it is in all its colors. The world suddenly seemed a dull place" (Sasson, 1992, p.111). Likewise, Sultana's daughter Maha, an admirer of Western culture, develops hate for the veil upon the coming of Western journalists who undertook the plight of Arab women as an agenda for human rights. Sultana states,

> When our veiled plight piqued the curiosity of numerous foreign journalists, many educated women of my land began to plan for the day when they

> could burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and steer their wheels on automobiles. (p.570- 571)

Although in her forward words, Jean Sasson keeps reminding readers that she knows the difference between Arabic 'primitive culture' and Islamic religion and that her aim is not to demean the Islamic religion. Nevertheless, the novels' incidents and interpretations read the opposite. Sultana's daughter, Amani, was calm and lovely, a devoted girl who revolts against spiritual teachings' transgressions and vows to ‘save animals from man.’ She was passionate about reading and learning the language. Although keeping a dog pet is not favored in Arabic and Islamic culture, Amani devoted her time to saving stray animals such as dogs and cats. Besides, Amani was purchasing expensive caged birds to set them free.

In an incident, during a visit to her uncle Ali who happened to kick off one of Amani's dogs and was attacked by Amani. Kareem, a caring father who employed two guys from Thailand to clean after, disinfect and train Amani's animals, angrily told his daughter after the incident, "Saving animals is nothing more than a pampered passion of rich Europeans and Americans,” (p. 546).

In the text, the word choice saving had negative interpretations for readers. In the Islamic culture, Muslims are taught not to keep dogs pets only for the three cases mentioned earlier. Although it is wrongly mentioned, "In the Muslim faith, a dog is considered impure." what is considered impure is the dog's saliva and not the dog as a creature. Sultana further explained the cruelty of Arabic society with injured animals. Unlike her sister, who likes everything American and European, Amani is a religious girl who revolts against spiritual teachings' transgressions. Sultana was afraid that her daughters' actions might lead her to extremism. Although these chapters had gone far in exaggerating Amani's embracing of Islamic beliefs and solitary meditations as if Amani is a new convergent to Islam. Amani was

considered an extremist and compared to her cousin Lawand. Lawand was sent abroad for schooling. In Geneva, she was involved in sexual relations and was a drug addict when the school discovered her. Her family was called to collect their wayward daughter. After six months of treatment in a Swiss Drug Rehabilitation Center, Lawand was back in Saudi Arabia, where she was confined for some time until her family was satisfied with the repentance of her reckless offense.

During her confinement, Lawand developed a wrong understanding of religion and became more aggressive with people. Lawand became restless with the luxuries of royals' life; she would threaten her mother and sibling for their immodest clothing of believing Muslims. "Lawand was fortunate her father was not the unfeeling sort who could confine his daughter to life imprisonment, or death by stoning,"(p.562). This passage by Sultana had a misinterpretation of the sharia law as if stoning is happening as often as afternoon tea. In contrast, stoning is the punishment for adulterers only.

In the text, there were many other exaggerations in describing religious events. For instance, Amani was considered an extremist when she refused her sisters to throw or step on journals containing Allah's name. Sultana is weakened by an alcoholic who stands by her daughter Maha who threatens her sister, tearing up the Quran. Sultana's reaction indicates a lack of awareness of how to guide her daughters regarding culture and religion. Not using or stepping on any writings containing Allah's name show respect to Allah. It is an attitude of every Muslim and part of Islamic education.

The ideal Muslim women are in many ways like her male counterpart; pious, modest and caring for her family. However, Islam provides various rights to be; educated, inherit, choose her husband, and divorce...etc. Among those, she looks up to as her ideals are: The Prophet's wives, such as Khadija, Ayesha, and his daughter Fatima.

Chapter one emphasizes the pre-eminent position of women in the early days of Islam

and the hadith of Prophet Muhammad that how a person may best locate paradise is, at one, a comment on the role of women in society and Islamic ideology. Islam has raised woman's status from below the earth so high that paradise lies at her feet.

In *Princess* trilogy, there are many contradictions in the Islamic faith. At the novel's opening, Sultana blames her country's customs and traditions for women's plight. She asserts, "It is wrong, however, to blame our Muslim faith for the lowly position of women in our society […] our Prophet Muhammad taught only kindness and fairness toward those of my sex" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). Those to be blamed are "The men who came behind the Prophet Muhammad have chosen to follow the customs and traditions of the dark ages rather than to follow Muhammad's words and example." (Sasson, 1992,p.43) However, then, Sultana contradicts her words by stating that: "the Koran does state that women are secondary to men, much in the same way the bible authorizes men over women" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). Thus, in this novel, we can realize two different voices, one of Sultana and the other of the author.

Another incident or contradiction is when Sultana recalls her mother's words about the prohibition of Alcoholism. She asserts,

> I still remember my mother telling me that Prophet Mohammed had cursed many men in connection with liquor. Mother said that our great Prophet cursed the man who squeezed it, the one who carried it, the one whom it was carried, the one who served it, the one who drank it, the one who dealt in it, the one who devoured its price, the one who purchased it, and the one from whom it was purchased. None were to be spared! (p.873)

The above quote, from Sultana's mother, represents Prophet Mohamed's (Peace and blessing be upon him) hadith about the punishment for the ten people in connection with alcohol: "The wine-presser, the one who has it pressed, the one who drinks it, the one who conveys it, the one to whom it is conveyed, the one who serves it, the one who sells it, the one who benefits from the price paid for it, the one who buys it, and the one for whom it is bought." [Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah] (Book 11. Hadith18).

This hadeeth is clear to all Muslims, and no believing Muslim would question Prophet Mohamed's authority even when committing sins. However, the exclamation at the end of the quotation, 'None were to be spared!' represents an irony from the author's narrative voice, who is unknowledgeable about the hadith.

Unlike Armani, Sultana's daughter Maha, a volcano that would one day erupt' as depicted by her mother, resembles her mother in tormenting her brother Abdullah and little sister Amani. Maha confronted the restrictions posed on women since her childhood.

Unlike Sultana's father's admiration of his only son Ali, Sultana's husband, Kareem, loves his daughters Amani and Maha the way he loves his son Abdullah. Saudi Arabian society's makeup pours attention and affection on male children and ignores female children. Thus, Abdullah is more likely to receive more attention outside the home. Such as accompanying his father on more occasions that require male presence. Maha could not tolerate being less worthy than her brother, and as revenge, she sets fire to her brother Abdullah's thobe.

Another incident in Maha's life was her grandfather's admiration of her brother and his indifference and ignorance toward her and his all-female granddaughters. Maha could not bear such indifference as a reaction. She insults and curses her grandfather. This incident brings back the memories of Sultana's sorrowful childhood, who justify her daughter's response, "Though humiliated, I had the quick thought that Maha had expressed to my father his manifest

due." (Sasson, 1994, p. 545).

5.3. The Representation of Arab Muslim Men

The hadith of Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him), "There is no one among you whose sitting place is not written by God, whether in fire or paradise,"(p.847) is not fully understood by Sultana. She noted, "This fatalism creates a dignified resignation to life's hardships for my life, and I cannot accept the tragic lives lived by so many Saudi women as the preordained will of Allah."(p.847) However, The Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) emphasized the importance of personal effort and responsibility in one's actions and choices. He advised people not to rely solely on Allah's predestined outcomes of good and evil, but rather to actively engage in fulfilling their obligations and refraining from forbidden actions. The Prophet taught that Paradise and Hell are attained through the deeds of individuals. Those who perform the righteous deeds of the people of Paradise will enter Paradise, while those who engage in the deeds of the people of Hell will enter Hell.

While Allah's decree has a role in determining one's ultimate destiny, individuals possess free will and are accountable for their choices. Each person will find it easier to perform actions aligned with their destined outcome, whether good or evil. If someone is destined to be among the prosperous, Allah will guide them to perform the deeds of the prosperous. Similarly, if someone is destined to be among the wretched, Allah will guide them towards actions that reflect their wretched state.

The male characters in these novels interpret Prophet's hadith according to their whims. Ali, Sultana's brother and the father of Munira had forced his daughter to marry his friend Hadi as the preordained will of Allah. Hadi is "a pure evil," as Sultana describes him; Sultana had known Hadi since childhood; she came close to Hadi during their trip to Cairo. At that time, Hadi was a student of religion in an institute that trained *Mutawas* men (men of religion) to be

part of Promoting Virtue and Preventing Committee Vice. Hadi hated all women in the World; to him, women are on earth for three purposes: to please the men sexually, serve them, and bear their children. According to Sasson, Hadi's thoughts represent how Arab men think about women.

In Arabic, "Hadi" is a name that signifies someone who guides people to the straight path. It is also one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. However, in the given context, "Hadi" is used as a symbol of irony. Rather than fulfilling the role of a guide and setting an example, this individual tragically violates all religious taboos. His wives even go to the extent of secretly naming him "Satan's most favored son."

This portrayal suggests a stark contrast between the intended meaning of the name "Hadi" and the actions and character of this particular individual. It serves as a cautionary reminder of the potential for hypocrisy and deviation from the righteous path, even among those who may be associated with religious titles or names. According to Sultana, Hadi represents the hypocrisy of religious committee members who use religion to satisfy their desires." Hadi serves as a symbol in this context to represent the hypocrisy displayed by certain individuals who hold positions within religious committees. These individuals manipulate religious teachings and principles to fulfill their personal desires instead of genuinely adhering to the values they are supposed to uphold.

In the given scenario, Sultana, the protagonist, attempts to intervene and protect her niece from an unwanted marriage. She urges her husband Kareem and her brothers-in-law to discuss the matter with her brother Ali, seeking a resolution. However, Ali cynically misuses a statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). He distorts the Prophet's words, suggesting that the girl's silence implies her consent to the marriage.

This manipulation of religious teachings highlights the abuse of power and the hypocrisy displayed by Ali, who uses religion to justify his actions and further his own interests. The inclusion of Hadi in this narrative serves to emphasize the contrast between the true meaning of guiding others toward righteousness and the misuse of religious authority for personal gain. Ali asked his daughter,

> Munira, child, the man Hadi has asked that you become an adored wife. You are aware of his friendship with this family and his ability to provide for you and any children you might have. Therefore, I have sought permission from the Almighty God to give you in wedlock to Hadi. Tell me now, Munira, if you approve. (p.866)

This quotation illustrates how the heartless father Ali controls his daughter and all the women in his household using Allah's and Prophet Mohamed's words. After he expresses the closure and friendship of Hadi, the future husband of Munira, to the family and his wealth, and how God permits the arrangement, he finally asks his daughter's opinion. Furthermore, he considered his daughter's silence as approval of marriage. Therefore, based on Prophet Mohamed, Peace and blessing be upon him hadith about his daughter Fatima's wedding to Imam Ali. May Allah be pleased with them. However, the two cases of marriage are not identical. For Fatima accepted the marriage and was timid to say. Her modesty was interpreted as approval, Munira was threatened and pressured to give her consent upon Hadi.

The images of Arab men "as wild, cruel, savage, or larcenous, in greater or lesser in degrees" (Suleiman, 1989, p.257-258) never changed. The themes of sex and violence have been related to Arabs since ancient explorers and travelers to the Middle East. This bleaker image had been transmitted from Western European reports and early journeys.

For instance, in the third novel, Sultana explained that Aisha's father did not desire to

take full responsibility for supporting four legal wives and their children permanently, therefore, he preferred temporary marriages with virginal girls brought from the impoverished families of nearby countries such as Yemen, Jordan, and Bahrain to satisfy his sole pleasure of sex. Moreover, he justified his transgressions with the Quranic verses: *"And you are allowed to seek out wives with your wealth indecorous conduct, but not in fornication, but give them their reward for what you have enjoyed of them in keeping with your promise." (4:24)*

Since no man is to be blamed for his business, "Still, no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement." (p.454) Aisha's mother, the only legal wife of her father, a religious lady, was engaged in a never-ending dispute with her husband over the advantages he took of the 'a little-used Arab custom called mut'a.' Aisha's mother complained about her husband's desperate deed to his family; however, the family can alter nothing to convict their son of the immoral act. Their advice was to pray for her husband's soul. Aisha sometimes befriended these young girls, her father's temporary wives, and shared their horror stories with Maha. Among the horror stories was the story of Reema.

Omar's story reflects the past, the hardship of both men and women, slavery, and the harem. Omar, the eunuch Sultana saved from her cousin Fadel's paradise palace, had brought all the hardship he endured to memory. Omar, who came from Sudan, unfolded his horrifying story to Sultana and Kareem. After being kidnaped from his tribe at seven years of age, his castration by kidnappers, and his trip to Turkey to work for a Turkish trader who brought him to Mecca, he passed away, leaving Omar in Mecca.

In Mecca, Omar was given to Fadel's father, who, unlike his son, had treated him fairly. Omar's lifelong mission was the protection of his masters' women. Reacting to the horrifying stories of Omar's castration, Kareem gasped loudly, "Surely, Allah's word was mocked by those men and their cruel actions!" Kareem's words reflect how those engaged in castrating males had violated Islamic teaching. The author reported that in Islam, the castration of men

was forbidden but owning those castrated, known as the eunuch, as enslaved people were not prohibited in Islam, "Although the Islamic faith forbids Muslims to castrate young boys themselves, Muslims were not forbidden from owning eunuchs as slaves."(p.994).

The word slave is different from nation to another; slaves or eunuchs who lived during the Ottoman empire under Muslim rulers were treated differently. Brookes (2008) in his book: *The Concubine, the Princess, and the Teacher: Voices from the Ottoman Harem*, reported that the harem and eunuch in the Ottoman empire, although considered slaves, accumulated an immense fortune and many titles in Ottoman court.

In the same way, the *harem* is perceived as a mysterious world by both the East and the West for its privacy. The word harem carries the meaning of 'forbidden, sacred, prohibited, in its origin in the Arabic language. Therefore, the word slave in English does not serve historians to convey harems and eunuch real estate in the Ottoman empire. The word slave in English displays an image of a person without power, one who is entirely subservient to a dominating influence; however, harem and eunuch,

> […] in the Ottoman case, this purchased individual, if male, could serve as chief aide to the head of state, accumulate a vast fortune, and oversee a range of influential foundations. Ministers, generals, and wealthy men curried his favor. Alternatively, as our schoolteacher makes clear, if female, she might similarly manage a complex organization at the center of state power, accumulate riches, and supervise her retinue of servants. Unhappily, however, unlike Turkish, the English language lacks words that connote this status as owned indeed by master or mistress, yet wielding power, overseeing wealth, and commanding respect. Hence, we are left with the unsatisfactory word *slave*. (p. 6)

The quote discusses the practices within the Ottoman Empire where individuals, who were acquired through various means including purchase, could hold positions of power and accumulate wealth under the patronage of the head of state. These individuals, if male, could serve as chief aides to the head of state, amass fortunes, and oversee influential foundations. Similarly, if female, they could manage complex organizations, accumulate wealth, and have their own retinue of servants.

The quote points out that the English language lacks specific words that convey the nuanced status of these individuals who were owned by their masters or mistresses, yet held positions of power, controlled wealth, and commanded respect. The term "slave" is used to describe this situation in English, but it is acknowledged as an unsatisfactory term due to its limitations in capturing the full complexity of the status and roles these individuals held within the Ottoman Empire.

The quote highlights the inherent challenge of translation and the limitations of language in capturing the nuances and intricacies of social, cultural, and historical contexts. It underscores the importance of understanding the specific historical and cultural contexts when discussing such topics and the need to acknowledge the shortcomings of language in conveying the entirety of those contexts.

5.4. Post-colonial Feminist Perspectives

5.4.1. Representation Versus Discursive-self Representation

As a Western feminist, Sasson represents a third-world Arab Muslim woman from her positionality as the norm and reverent for Arab women. Taking the Western values and liberated women in the West as an example compared to the so-called oppressed Arab Muslim women reflects the ideology of power unrevealed clearly but displayed in the difference between Western civilized and Eastern uncivilized and need Western savings.

In the trilogy, Sasson declares that Sultana elects her as a representative of her voice and all Arab woman in her country; however, what might strike us about this trilogy is Sasson's way of renouncing any direct representation of her views. As the author, Sasson narrates the events using her words only but not her voice; she lets Sultana do all the talking. However, readers encounter an overlapping of two voices, defending Islam and attacking Sharia Law which is a parcel of Islamic teachings.

Thus, the notion that privileges Western liberation and progress and portrays third-world women as victims of ignorance and religion are contested by post-colonial feminist critics. Plain (2007) argues in "Under Western Eyes" how 'Western feminists writing about third-world women colonize these women's historical and cultural backgrounds.' Moreover, Western feminists cannot avoid the challenge of situating themselves and examining their role in such a global economic and political framework. Moreover, Plain points out how many feminists ignored the complex interconnections between first and third-world economies and their effect on women's lives in third-world countries. Western feminists' scholarship on third-world women is to be considered in the Western media hegemony of Western media, publications, novels, and books. The political effects and implications of Western representations of Arab women go beyond the feminists and the targeted audience to a political agenda of articulating women's rights to prove the indirect intervention in third-world countries.

The question arises as to whether Sasson's representation accurately reflects the perspectives and experiences of Arab women or if it is influenced by her own Western viewpoint. Critics argue that Western feminists writing about third-world women may inadvertently impose their own cultural and historical backgrounds on these women, thereby colonizing their narratives.

Discursive self-representation, on the other hand, allows individuals to speak for themselves and shape their own stories. It gives agency to the individuals being represented

and challenges the notion of a single, monolithic narrative. Within the trilogy, Sultana's voice can be seen as a form of discursive self-representation, as she shares her personal experiences and challenges societal norms and structures.

However, the complex interplay between representation and discursive self-representation is present. While Sultana's voice represents her lived experiences, it is still mediated through Sasson's writing and interpretation. This raises questions about whose voice is ultimately being heard and whose perspectives are being privileged.

In summary, the Jean Sasson trilogy raises important considerations about representation and discursive self-representation. It prompts us to critically examine whose voices are being represented, who has the power to shape narratives, and how different perspectives and experiences are portrayed within the context of Arab women's lives.

5.4.2. Eurocentrism

Many Western journalists were permitted to visit Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. The king scorned "the most aggressive band" of moral police for harassing Western guests. The men of the rolling family knew it would be better for the Western journalists not to view life as it is in Saudi Arabia. So, women benefited from this royal order.

> Thre absence of sharp-eyed religious police patrolling Saudi Arabia cities, searching for uncovered women to strike with their sticks, or spray with red paint, was too good to be true. This policy endured no longer than the war, but we Saudi women enjoyed a welcome respite from probing eyes for a few months. During this heady period, there was a universal call for Saudi Arabia women to take their proper place in society, and we foolishly thought the favorable situation would continue forever. (p.464)

As illustrated in the above quotation, Westerners' presence had given strength for women to regain their position in society. They were happy with the absence of the roving band of religious police and enjoyed short liberty that ended up with the war ending. Educated women were planning to undertake the battle for their rights. Sultana declared,

When our veiled plight piqued the curiosity of numerous foreign journalists, many educated women of my land began to plan for the day when they could burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and steer their wheels on automobiles. (p. 570- 571)

This quote indicates Saudi women's hatred of what is imposed on them, whether religious or cultural, and they consider Western visitors saviors. As far as religion is concerned, the veil or Hijab is not only placing a black fabric on one's face or body, but it represents the Muslim woman's faith; it is their identity. Although it is disputed among religious scholars about the covering of the face, it is based on one's self-conviction and obedience to Allah.

During the limited period of freedom, certain women demonstrated the wisdom of Laozi's words: "The more restrictions there are, the poorer the people become in character." This notion resonated with the experiences of women who found themselves burdened by excessive prohibitions. However, it is important to note that not all women were able to navigate newfound freedom successfully. Some men were disillusioned when not all women conformed to their idealized image of saints, failing to recognize the complexities and contradictions that shaped women's lives. Sultana explained, " For some women, too much freedom given too quickly proved disastrous. Our men were disappointed that all women did not behave like saints without understanding the confusion caused by the contradictions in our lives." (p.465). This quote highlights an ironic situation where women faced negative consequences due to the sudden influx of freedom. Men, expecting women to conform to a saintly ideal, expressed disappointment when this expectation was not met. This expectation implies that women should be obedient to religious teachings and subservient to

men. Throughout the trilogy, women's resistance against these oppressive norms and men's abuse of power is a significant theme in Saudi Arabian society.

Interestingly, while women were expected to adhere strictly to societal prohibitions, men enjoyed absolute freedom, often disregarding religious norms. One example of these transgressions is engaging in pleasure marriages, which goes against established rules and restrictions. The quote sheds light on the complex dynamics and contradictions within Saudi Arabian society, particularly concerning gender roles and expectations. It emphasizes the double standards imposed on women while men exploit their own freedoms and engage in behaviors that challenge religious and cultural norms.

5.4.3. The Western Woman as a Norm

Sultana is impressed with the U.S. shopping centers and the 'fortunate' Western woman on her visit to the U.S. Seeing women driving confidently through the city's heavy traffic, wearing beautiful revealing clothes, fearless of any man or religious police, lifted the spirits of Sultana, who compared them to women in Saudi Arabia. She reported, "Surely while visiting such a country as the United States, I could finally forget about the misfortunes that plague so many females. I could take immediate pleasure in the freedom for women I saw all around me." (p. 1049). She noted that some people treated their camels better than their wives and how women are secluded so much of their lives, so when they arrive in the U.S., they make sure not to miss the opportunity to live freely for some time. Sultana expressed her feeling of irritation about the 'ridiculous custom' of veiling,

> On trips abroad, I always gratefully discard the despised black coverings, but in Saudi Arabia, they were a hated part of my everyday life. After looking at the World minus a black screen and breathing fresh air with our fabric filter, the veil always feels like the weight of the World falling

around my body, although it is made of thin, gauzy cloth. (p.1149)

In the quote Sultana expresses her delight and joy in being able to reveal her face, wear attractive clothing, and freely roam the streets of a bustling city like New York without the need for a male escort. However, what brings Sultana the greatest satisfaction is the attention she receives from several men who gaze at her, as it makes her feel more feminine and beautiful. Furthermore, the quote touches upon the desire for attention and validation that Sultana experiences when she removes the veil in a Western context. This may indicate a yearning for the liberation to be seen as an individual, to receive positive attention, and to feel feminine in a way that is often restricted within a society like Saudi Arabia. It suggests that Arab women may face additional challenges in asserting their femininity or receiving external validation due to cultural and societal expectations.

Overall, the quote highlights the contrasting experiences and perspectives of Western women, who often enjoy greater individual freedoms, and Arab women, who contend with societal expectations and restrictions that can impact their sense of self-expression and identity.

5.4.4. Third-World Difference

Mohanty argues that the Western feminists writing about ‘other’ women use the term ‘Third World woman’ as a monolithic subject for their analysis regardless of the differences and complexities between women of different countries. Through the production of the 'Third World difference' that Mohanty critically examined in her influential essay ‘under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. Mohanty argues against the homogenization and essentialization of women in the so-called "Third World" by Western feminist scholarship. She defines the concept of ‘Third World Difference’ as,

> […]"third a stable, a historical something that oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. Furthermore, it is in the production of this World Difference" that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races, and castes in these countries. (Mohanty,1984 p. 53-54)

In the above quotation Mohanty criticizes Western feminisms for constructing a simplified and universal notion of "Third World Difference" that oppresses women in Third World countries. Mohanty argues that this essentialization overlooks the diversity and complexities of women's experiences within these regions, erases their agency, and appropriates their struggles. She contends that Western feminisms, by positioning themselves as saviors and perpetuating colonial power dynamics, fail to recognize the intersecting factors of class, religion, culture, race, and caste that shape women's lives. Mohanty calls for a nuanced and context-specific understanding that centers the voices and agency of Third World women, challenging the homogenization and colonization of their experiences.

In the *Princess* trilogy, Sultana makes generalizations about women's experiences of physical assaults, male domination, and religious restrictions in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Yemen, and Egypt. However, this broad generalization assumes a universality of women's struggles that disregards the complexities of race, location, culture, class, history, ideology, and religion. Many critics and feminists, including Nawal El Saadawi, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and others, refute the notion that all women across the world can be seen as a homogeneous group facing the same challenges. They argue against relating the experiences of Saudi Arabian women to those of Yemeni, Palestinian, Afghani, and Pakistani women as if they all form a cohesive and unified group. The diversity

and distinctiveness of women's experiences across different contexts should be acknowledged and respected.

As discussed in the literature, a distinction exists between first-world feminists and third-world feminists, particularly between white Western feminism and Islamic feminism. Western feminism is rooted in Western values, ideologies, and thought systems that may differ from those of Islam and Arab culture. Western feminists' criticism of religion within their movement can be a sensitive issue for Arab Muslim feminists. Muslim women often view Islam's teachings as a source of support and empowerment rather than an adversary, as some Western feminists may perceive it. The directives found in the Quran embody the ideals that Muslim women seek to promote and uphold, rather than denounce.

The distinctions and comparisons are made based on the privileged Western women, considered a norm and reference for third-world women. In the texts, Sultana admires Western women's life and freedom compared to her miserable life as a royal. In her quest for women's rights and breaking the chains of oppression and patriarchy, Sultana seeks to adopt different Western norms for Muslim women and refute them in the Islamic and Arabic cultures. The pleasure Sultana finds in the U.S. liberty and freedom of women revealing their bodies and not wearing veils and abayas serves the Western ideology of "the veil is an oppression to Muslim women." This same discourse represents the Western feminist ideology that fighting for women's rights starts with opposing all forms of oppression, including the Islamic dress.

Moreover, the author represented third-world women through Sultana Al Saud's character as family-oriented, sexually constrained, uneducated, ignorant, poor, and controlled by traditions, religions, and customs. Whereas implicitly self-represents herself and Western women as liberated, educated, modern women who gain control over their bodies and sexualities and are free to make life decisions (Mohanty,1984). Therefore, the dichotomy

between liberated Western women versus oppressed Eastern women brings back the discourse of civilized West and uncivilized 'Other,' the core and the periphery, the West's superiority over the 'Other' detailed in the works of oriental writers.

5.4.5. The Veil and Oppression

Hijab to Muslim women is a symbol of heritage, ethnic pride, identity, and a mean of protecting their modesty according to cultural requirements, yet for Western women, the Hijab may symbolize repression and discrimination. In the novels, there is a misstatement about the Hijab that cannot belong to a Muslim woman. Sultana expressed her individual perception and the sense of confinement she associates with the hijab. It is important to note that Sultana's viewpoint represents her own experience and should not be generalized to all Muslim women who wear the hijab. She asserts:

> The sky was no longer blue, the glow of the sun had dimmed; my heart plunged to my stomach when I realized that, from that moment, outside my own home, I would not experience life as it is in all its colors. The World suddenly seemed dull (Sasson, 1992, p. 111).

Another illustration of the burden women endures while fastening their black veil is when Sultana asserts upon the visit to the U.S. troops and Western journalists who undertook the plight of Arab women as an agenda for human rights. Sultana states,

> When our veiled plight piqued the curiosity of numerous foreign journalists, many educated women of my land began to plan for the day when they could burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and steer their wheels on automobiles. (p.570- 571)

Sultana reflects on the impact of foreign journalists showing interest in the veiled plight

of Arab women. This attention sparked curiosity among educated women in her community, leading them to envision a future where they could liberate themselves from the constraints of veiling and traditional clothing. Sultana describes their aspirations to burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and embrace the freedom symbolized by driving automobiles.

This quote highlights the role of external attention and awareness in triggering the desire for change among some women in Sultana's community. The presence of foreign journalists, who may have approached the issue from a human rights perspective, brought visibility to the struggles faced by Arab women. This visibility, in turn, inspired a sense of empowerment and the belief that change was possible. The passage suggests that exposure to different ideas and experiences can challenge long-held traditions and norms, prompting individuals to envision alternative futures.

It's important to note that this quote represents Sultana's perspective and the experiences of a specific group of educated women in her community. While it reflects the potential for external attention to influence internal discussions and aspirations, it does not necessarily represent the views or experiences of all Arab women or the entire region.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on identifying and examining the unifying themes among the women depicted in the trilogy, taking into account the post-colonial feminist perspective presented in Chapter one. Through the analysis, several significant themes emerged, shedding light on the representation of Arab women within the trilogy. One prominent theme that emerged was the representation of Arab Muslim women as either oppressed or rebellious Muslim women. The trilogy depicted Arab women grappling with societal expectations and the limitations imposed upon them by patriarchal structures. Some women were shown as actively challenging these constraints and seeking personal liberation, while others were depicted as succumbing to societal pressures. We also explored the representation of Arab

Muslim men within the trilogy. The author depicted a range of male characters, each with their own attitudes and behaviors towards women. Some men were shown as perpetuating oppressive norms, while others were portrayed as supportive and empowering figures. This portrayal aimed to highlight the diversity of experiences and perspectives among Arab Muslim men.

The concept of Third World difference was also present in the trilogy. The texts portrayed Arab societies as distinct from the Western world, emphasizing cultural, social, and economic disparities. This theme served to challenge Eurocentric perspectives and highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of different cultural contexts. Another critical theme we examined was eurocentrism and the normalization of Western women as the norm. The trilogy depicted Western women as symbols of liberation and freedom, juxtaposed against the perceived oppression of Arab women. This Eurocentric lens reinforced Western superiority and undermined the agency and diversity of Arab women's experiences. we also delved into the theme of representation versus self-representation. The trilogy raised questions about who has the power to represent Arab women and how these representations may shape perceptions and understanding. It highlighted the importance of allowing Arab women to represent themselves and challenge prevailing narratives.

The veil as a symbol of oppression was a recurring motif in the trilogy. The author presented the veil as a restrictive garment that limited women's freedom and agency. However, it is essential to note that the veil holds various meanings for different women and cannot be universally categorized as oppressive. The complex relationship between culture, religion, and personal choice regarding the veil was not fully explored within the non-fictional works.

Throughout this analysis, we argued that representations should not be accepted uncritically. Instead, they should be interrogated within their ideological context. Arab

Muslim women's experiences should be understood by considering their social, cultural, economic, and contextual aspects. We acknowledged that the non-fictional works examined in the trilogy had limitations in providing a deep understanding of how the situation of Arab women is simultaneously shaped by culture and religion.

As we concluded the chapter, we set the stage for further discussions and reflections on the research findings. We emphasized the need for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Arab women's experiences, acknowledging the diversity and complexity that exists within Arab societies. By critically examining the themes and representations, this chapter contributed to a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding Arab women's lives. In Chapter 6, we engaged in further discussions to critically reflect on these research findings. This may involve exploring alternative sources and perspectives that can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Arab women's experiences. Additionally, we may consider the implications of the research for feminist theory, post-colonial analysis, and future studies on Arab women. By examining the research conclusions in depth, this offered a comprehensive and insightful culmination to the study.

Chapter Six

Discussions and Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

In this study, we have attempted to analyze Arab Muslim women's images in the trilogy of Jean Sasson's *Princess* to explore how women are represented in American popular literature mainly non-fiction. The objective was to explore how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture.

The following research questions were a magnifying lens for this study; **1)** Can non-fiction enable us to have a deeper understanding of how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture! **2)** How Western literature shapes perceptions of Arab Muslim women's status, and why is it essential for Western audiences and feminists to understand the status of Arab Muslim women? Through an analytic study of Jean Sasson's trilogy: *Princess*, *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, and *Princess Sultana's Circle* as primary resources for the study and other recourses such as feminist theories and Arab Muslim women's position in Islam to further understand how the representation of Arab Muslim women is formed in Western literature.

In this chapter, we compared women's representation in the three novels, then interpreted and discussed the main themes emerged in the findings using a post-colonial feminist lens. Moreover, we related the analysis to the study's theoretical framework and previous literature. Furthermore, this chapter summarized the findings and their implications for understanding Arab Muslim women's societal position. Some limitations were identified. This study also referred to the effectiveness of theories of post-colonial feminism and cultural representation in understanding the Western literature on Arab Muslim women.

6.2. Summary

As we analyzed Arab Muslim women's representation in the trilogy, we discovered that Sasson, the claimed voice of Arab women, depicts Arab culture and people in a fictional,

sarcastic style similar to first orientalists and travelers to the mysterious world of harem. The texts were charged with sexual abuses and assaults that portrayed horrifying ghost stories of evil characters. There were many repetitions in the events and overgeneralizations of all Muslim women's plight regardless of their experiences, class, places, and local custom, besides the detailed description of luxurious, opulent people and palaces turned the style of the trilogy into a record of adventures in the horrifying World of wealthy Arabs, sex, harem, and fantasy, leaving readers with a complex toward the Arab race.

The overgeneralization of women's experiences with oppression, regardless of their culture, history, geography, class, and race, questions the author's authenticity. Although the Arab World has about 22 countries, each has its' culture, geography, history, colonialism, economy, politics, religion, and anthropology. These factors have differently formed the culture of people and shaped the status of its women. Therefore, the trilogy does not read like non-fictional novels of women's hardship like the *Forbidden Woman* by Malika Mokeddem that portrays women's lives during the Civil War in Algeria that had created unfavorable positions for women in the society due to the spread of fundamentalism, instead it reads more like orientalist novels of the sexual harem, veil, and fantasy.

In this chapter, the themes that emerged from the comparison of the novels were related to Mohanty's concept of third-world difference and its influences on representing Arab Muslim women in Western literature**.** Based on the analyses, Arab people and culture are depicted as a primitive, violent culture that places women under the control of the patriarchy of both men and Islamic religion. The author's self-representation of a liberated Western woman sets the reverence of liberation that Arab women should resemble in their fight for liberty. Therefore, the West's superiority over the East represents both hegemony and Eurocentrism that proved Western political ideology and power dynamics in the East throughout history.

Q1- Can non-fiction give us a deeper understanding of how the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture?

Non-fiction cannot give us a clear understanding of whether women's position is determined by culture or religion, but it complicates the situation and image of Arab Muslim women in society. In the trilogy, the author attacked Islam through the misinterpretations and misdeeds of some people that can neither be related to culture nor religion; it sometimes represents the nature of human beings as selfish and greedy. Although supporting women's rights, Islam is considered a source of oppression, mainly the veil. Cruel customs like female genital mutilation and male castration are related to Arab culture, although history indicates that these customs have been performed in many nations throughout history. However, since the Arab culture is targeted in a context charged with Islamophobia and the war against terrorism upon the 9/11 attack, the perceptions of much literature about Arab Muslim women are harmful, and all the cruel customs, stereotypes, and prejudice are related to Arab people.

As we mentioned earlier, not all non-fictions are read similarly; some truly represent the hardship of women and relate it to different sources based on these women's social, economic, and political situations and contexts. Separating the texts from their micro and macro political, social, and economic contexts affects the interpretation and the authenticity of Western discourses about so called Third-World woman.

Q2- a) How Western literature shapes perceptions of Arab Muslim women's status? **b**) why is it essential to Western audiences and feminists in particular to understand the status of Arab Muslim women? **C)** Is it their task to liberate Arab Muslim women? **D)** Do Arab Muslim women need their liberation?

It is important to acknowledge that overgeneralizing the portrayal of Arab Muslim women in Western literature throughout history is not accurate, as there have been diverse representations and perspectives within this body of work. However, when examining

historical Western perceptions, it is evident that certain trends and biases have emerged. In her work, Kahf highlights that Western perspectives on Arab Muslim women have been influenced by various factors, including references to ancient Western civilizations such as Romans and Greeks, as well as the colonial powers of Britain, France, and later the United States in the 19th century.

The formation of these perceptions can be attributed to the influence of orientalism, which is the study and representation of the East (including the Middle East) by Western scholars, explorers, and journalists. Orientalism often opposes Islam and considers it a threat to Western existence. As a result, Muslim women are commonly portrayed as victims, subjected to the control of both Eastern men and the broader Eastern culture, including Islamic religion.

As orientalists traveled and recorded their adventures in the Middle East, their works contributed to the construction of a narrative that perpetuated stereotypes and reinforced the perception of Muslim women as oppressed. These representations were shaped by cultural biases, misunderstandings, and a lack of nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences and agency of Arab Muslim women. It is crucial to approach these historical portrayals critically and recognize the limitations of such representations. They do not capture the full complexity and diversity of Arab Muslim women's lives, as they often overlook the agency, resilience, and contributions of these women within their own societies. Moreover, these portrayals tend to reflect the lens of Western observers rather than providing an accurate reflection of lived experiences.

Some Western audiences may have limited or no direct contact with Muslim women or their faith. As a result, their perceptions and understanding of Muslim women are often shaped by the images and representations they encounter in popular literature, media, and other forms of cultural production. Therefore, popular literature and media play a significant

role in shaping public opinion and perception. These mediums have the power to influence and reinforce stereotypes, as well as perpetuate certain narratives about Muslim women. Due to the limited exposure and lack of personal interaction, audiences may rely heavily on these portrayals to form their opinions and beliefs.

Unfortunately, media representations of Muslim women have often been simplistic, sensationalized, or based on prevailing stereotypes. Such portrayals tend to focus on the most visible and extreme examples, thereby creating a distorted image that does not reflect the diversity and complexity of Muslim women's experiences and beliefs. This can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases.

Indeed, it is important to note that not all Western feminists perpetuate negative stereotypes or misrepresentations of Muslim women. There are Western feminists who have traveled to the Middle East and engaged directly with Muslim women, leading to a more nuanced and diverse portrayal of their experiences and perspectives. These Western feminists who have personal interactions and experiences with Muslim women can offer valuable insights and challenge prevailing stereotypes. Through their travel and engagement, they gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of Muslim women's lives, their agency, and the intersections of gender, culture, and religion.

Authors like Elizabeth Fernea has written in her book In *Search of Islamic Feminism* (1998) about her travel to Saudi Arabia and how she discovered a different image of Saudi women described in popular literature and media as passive creatures. She notices that women are not passive as depicted in the media and ghost-written novels and memoirs, but they are taking advantage of their educational opportunities and control of their inherited wealth (as declared by Islam's law). They worked to improve themselves and their families and help in the development of their cities, and some were generously donating to a charitable organization as mandated by the Islamic faith (Fernea, 1998, p. 342).

The task Western feminist undergoing to liberate Muslim women from their culture and religion through the call for unveiling the oppressed women is not accepted by Muslim women, for Islam is the supporter of women's freedom and rights, and Muslim women and feminists consider Islam as their companion, not an enemy. Many Islamic feminists fight for the right of women within the Islamic religion and culture. Therefore, Muslim women do not need the savings of Western feminists who champion women's rights and liberation; in reality, they serve a new-imperial invasion of the former colonized Third World. The example of the liberation of Afghani Muslim women has paved the way to the invasion and destruction of a whole country and the bombing of cities where Afghani women live.

6.3. Discussions

6.3.1. The Representation of Arab Muslim Women

Throughout history, Arab people and culture have been a callous representation by Western historians and orientalists (Said, 1978). Since then, Arab people, culture, and Western representations have not changed. Thus, Arab people and culture are misrepresented inmedia, film production, TV, magazines, and orientalists' scholarship in literature, history, poetry, reports, and paintings. Western feminist discourses focus on Arab Muslim women and portray them as dominated, oppressed, and voiceless. In the *Princess* trilogy, Sasson maneuvers herself into a unique position, a voice of Arab women and a defender of Islam, and at the same time, attacks the veil and the Sharia law. Sasson's positionality as a Western feminist voicing Arab women are challenged and criticized by many Arab/ Muslim feminists and scholars for the incompatibility of the two cultures and ideologies. Befriended many Saudi women and royals, namely princess Sultana Al Saud, whose story is based on her 12 years of experience in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, Sasson told in the trilogy. Sultana and other women in the trilogy are depicted as voiceless, subordinated, and controlled by their cultures, men, and religious and governmental laws. Their stories are filled with the

misogynistic treatment they endure in their lives. However, the representations of women should not be taken for granted by readers and feminists (Mohanty, 1984). The images should be interrogated for their ideological content, for no presentation can be truly real or objective (Said, 1978). These constructed images of Arab women and culture directed to Western readers have created hatred and assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices of Arab people and culture in the past and present and will do for the coming generations.

In her *Arab Women Between Defiance and Restraint* (1996), Sabbagh considers *the Princess* trilogy as a form of attack on Arab values and culture under the guise of supporting women's rights. She declares that Sasson's book *Princess* gives the impression that honor killing is happening as often as afternoon teas and that families discuss the murdering of their daughters who get in the way of family honor. She criticized Sasson for collecting assumptions and prosperous lies about Arab culture and values. Besides, Ahmad (2009), in *Not Yet Beyondthe Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature*, reported that Arab women in Western literature are depicted as "veiled, subjugated, indomitable in spirit, but still in need of rescue from an enlightened West." Ahmed pointed out that these kinds of writings referring to Sasson's trilogy and other famous memoirs in American literature attract American audiences and allow them "simultaneously to sympathize with, and also to distance themselves from, the political processes that bring anti-female regimes into being" (p,106).

6.3.1.1. Dependent Women

Women's dependency has many contexts. The trilogy has two types of dependencies: dependency on men and dependency on the Western saviors. In a country that still chanted patriarchy like Saudi Arabia, women are dependent on men; fathers, brothers, and husbands. Whatever women want to do in their life, they need the permission of a male guardian. Women cannot travel alone or make choices over their sexuality or other life choices; they are also

financially dependent. The Arabic Muslim society places man as a guardian for the women, provider, protector, and supporter. However, men use their power to control and harm women. The trilogy depicted how Arab women are considered properties who moved from their fathers' ownership to their husbands. For instance, 12 years of age is wed to a man five times older than her without her permission. Moreover, young virgin girls are transported from neighboring countries for marriages that last a few horror nights. Thus, women are victims of men's physical oppression.

In a note for her second trilogy book, Sasson differentiates the treatment of women in some Arab countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Qatar, Yemen, Bahrain, and other Arab countries (Sasson, 1995, p. 12-25). For instance, the treatment of women in Yemen was, "Tragically, the women of Yemen face violence and discrimination in their lives. Women are not free to choose their husbands; in many cases, girls as young as eight years old are married against their will." For gaining her freedom and freedom for all women in her country, Sultana was happy about the changing of events upon the coming of the American troops to Saudi Arabia. In her opinion, the American presence in her country is a spark of life for the Saudi feminists' dreams (Sasson, 1992, p. 270).

6.3.1.2. Chained Women

Sultana criticizes the family system in the Arab World that considers males as superior and that the head of the family has given them the power to subjugate. The female is considered shameful, for she might bring dishonor to the family. Family and kinship in Arabic society are crucial for Arab people, and loyalty and honor represent family reputation.

The preference for male over female children was a custom in Arabic culture before the coming of Islam. In the age of ignorance, females were buried alive for fear of the shame they might bring to the family. With the advent of Islam, this custom was banned, and women's position was elevated and protected against all violent customs. Still, some practices of

eljahiliya (age of ignorance) persist in some societies.

In the trilogy, Sultana, as a wealthy royal, has money and family influence, and no other man could threaten or harm her; however, the threat comes from inside the family. Her father and brother threatened her life and, to a certain extent, her husband Kareem, who was engaged in alcoholism and prostitution.

6.3.1.3. Rebellious Women

Sultana and her daughters in the trilogy are represented as rebels against all sources of oppression and patriarchy. Sultana opposes her family members who subordinate women at an early age, starting from her father, brother, and husband, Kareem. Sultana vows to challenge all men. Sultana and her sisters form a circle against any wicked man who takes advantage of women. *Princess* Sultana's rebellion is against the corrupted implementation of Islamic rules in society that protect royals and close friends engaged in law-breaking. Sultana reports many incidents, among them the story of her brother-in-law Muneer who was engaged in transporting alcohol to the kingdom. Muneer went unpunished by the ministerial committee because Sultana's father and other princes downplayed the incident as foolish behavior by a young prince influenced by the West. On the contrary, Muneer regained his business and was sent to a new city with a new business and granted considerable rewards from the government, and he wed a young girl, and his happiness increased.

In *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, Sultana recalls other stories of law violations. Men in Saudi Arabia, such as Aicha's father, Maha's friend, engaged in the marriage of pleasure were not accused by government law because “no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement.” Trafficking in sex was considered a man business. Moreover, Sultana's cousin Feddal was not accused of exploiting girls brought from many countries as harem. The trilogy, in general, discusses many stories of foreign males and females whom Saudi people mistreated because the law in Saudi Arabia has no provision for protecting foreign rights.

Furthermore, there are many contradictions about the Islamic faith in the trilogy. At the beginning of Princess, Sultana blames the customs and traditions of her country for women's plight, "it is wrong, however, to blame our Muslim faith for the lowly position of women in our society […], our Prophet Muhammad taught only kindness and fairness toward those of my sex" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28), Then contradicts her words by stating that, "The Koran does state that women are secondary to men, much in the same way the bible authorizes men over women" (Sasson, 1992, p. 28). This quote indicates that both Islam and Christianity consider women inferior to men. Indeed, religion as a threat to women's liberty is the basic tenet of Western feminism. Therefore, the Sharia Law was interpreted as being cruel to Arab women. Sultana contradicts the punishment of Princess Mashaal, who was murdered for adultery. Moreover, the death of Mashaal angered the world's public opinion, mainly after the British film: *Death of Princess,* which generated more hostility and cruelty to Arab and Islamic Sharia Law. In *Princess Sultana's Circle,* Sultana argues that her cousin Mashaal was killed for 'unsanctioned love.' The word unsanctioned love was used instead of adultery to polish the crime of adultery and accused Muslims of honor killings that were an aberration that rarely happened. Indeed, Islam does not tolerate adultery; the punishment is stoning to death. However, many conditions regulate its application.

Furthermore, Sultana finds refuge from the failure to support deprived women in alcoholic drinks prohibited in Islam and Saudi Arabian society, mainly known for its strict Sharia Law enforcement. Thus, Sultana's consumption of alcohol leads her to violate the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. She reported that she could not abide by the fasting requirements since childhood. Another transgression of religion is the misstatement of the veil, *and hijab,* which cannot belong to a Muslim woman. Veiling to a Muslim woman is a symbol of heritage, ethnic pride, identity, and a mean of protecting their modesty according to cultural requirements, yet for non-Muslim women, the veil symbolizes repression and

discrimination.

Sultana expressed her veiling experience as a threat and danger. Besides, she considered the veil a way to prevent her from seeing the blue sky. She asserts, "My heart plunged to my stomach when I realized that, from that moment, outside my own home, I would not experience life as it is in all its colors. The world suddenly seemed a dull place" (Sasson, 1992, p.111). Likewise, Sultana's daughter Maha, an admirer of Western culture, develops hate for the veil upon the coming of Western journalists who undertook the plight of Arab women as an agenda for human rights.

Sultana states,

> When our veiled plight piqued the curiosity of numerous foreign journalists, many educated women of my land began to plan for the day when they could burn their veils, discard their heavy black abayas, and steer their wheels on automobiles. (p.570- 571)

The literature has differently interpreted the criticism of Islamic Sharia in Sasson's trilogy. First, critics with Islamic backgrounds had differentiated between Islam as a religion and the Arabic culture and traditions. They differentiate between Islam which has elevated Muslim women's position and status in society, and some Arabic traditions and customs that oppress Arab Muslim women. For instance, Sifana (2018) describes how customs dating back to the pre-Islamic era still perform in Saudi Arabia, like; female genital mutilation, temporary marriage (mut'ah), and thoughtless divorce, by using the valid law of divorce in Islam. These practices, according to Sifana, are influenced by culture and not by religion. She explains that, Although the men use Islamic teachings as the basis of their treatment towards women,

> […] Arabian life describes that the concept of honor

> and shame gives different treatment towards men and women. The women often get sufferings and pain caused by men's authority. On the contrary, men often get benefits from treating them arbitrarily. This culture becomes the main trigger for women to struggle for their rights in life continuously. Thus, the ways of treating Arab women described above are not implementing the rules based on Islamic teachings but it is influences of the culture. (p.24)

Second, critics with non-Islamic backgrounds blame Islam and Sharia Law for women's oppression. Thakur (2018) describes how the Sharia Law in Saudi Arabia has transformed women into tools in men's hands; he argues that 'since the Sharia Law is an unchallenged constitution run by Allah and Islam, women are deprived of their fundamental human rights and are considered as silenced sexual objects put under men's control.' Therefore, Thakur's understanding of Sharia Law is based on his interpretation of the trilogy. However, in her Forward words, Jean Sasson keeps reminding readers that she knows the difference between Arabic 'primitive culture' and Islamic religion and that her aim is not to demean the Islamic religion. Nevertheless, the novels' incidents and interpretations read the opposite.

6.3.1.4. The Representation of Arab Muslim Men

The hadith of Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him), "There is no one among you whose sitting place is not written by God, whether in fire or paradise," is not fully understood by Sultana. She noted, "This fatalism creates a dignified resignation to life's hardships for my life, and I cannot accept the tragic lives lived by so many Saudi women as the preordained will of Allah." However, Prophet Mohamed (Peace and blessing be upon him) asks the Sahaba and all Muslims not to rely on good and evil that Allah predestined. Instead, they should do what they are commanded to do and refrain from

what they are forbidden; indeed, paradise and hell are attained by people's deeds.

The male characters in these novels interpret Prophet's hadith according to their whims. Ali, Sultana's brother and the father of Munira had forced his daughter to marry his friend Hadi as the preordained will of Allah. Hadi is "a pure evil," as Sultana describes him; Sultana had known Hadi since childhood; she came close to Hadi during their trip to Cairo. At that time, Hadi was a student of religion in an institute that trained Mutawas men (men of religion) to be part of Promoting Virtue and Preventing Committee Vice. Hadi hated all women in the World; to him, women are on earth for three purposes: to please the men sexually, serve them, and bear their children. Hadi's thoughts represent how Arab men think about women.

Hadi in Arabic means someone who guides people to the straight path; it is one of Allah's ninety-nine names. In the text, Hadi is a symbol of an ironic man of religion; instead ofacting as a guide and example, he tragically transgresses all religious taboos. His wives secretly named him "Satan's most favored son." According to Sultana, Hadi represents the hypocrisy of religious committee members who use religion to satisfy their desires. To save her niece, Sultana tried to convince her husband Kareem and her brothers-in-law to discuss it with herbrother Ali. However, Ali cynically misused the Prophet Mohamed's (Peace and blessing be upon him) about the girl's silence as an indication of marriage approval. Ali asked,

> Munira, child, the man Hadi has asked that you become an adored wife. You are aware of his friendship with this family and his ability to provide for you and any children you might have. Therefore, I have sought permission from the Almighty God to give you in wedlock to Hadi. Tell me now, Munira, if you approve. (p.989)

This quotation illustrates how the heartless father Ali controls his daughter and all the

women in his household using Allah's and Prophet Mohamed's words. After he expresses the closure and friendship of Hadi, the future husband of Munira, to the family and his wealth, and how God permits the arrangement, he finally asks his daughter's opinion. Furthermore, he considered his daughter's silence as approval of marriage. Therefore, based on Prophet Mohamed, Peace and blessing be upon him hadith about his daughter Fatima's wedding to Imam Ali. May Allah be pleased with them. However, the two cases of marriage are not identical. For Fatima accepted the marriage and was timid to say. Her modesty was interpreted as approval.

The images of Arab men "as wild, cruel, savage, or larcenous, in greater or lesser in degrees" (Suleiman, 1989, p.257-258) never changed. The themes of sex and violence have been related to Arabs since ancient explorers and travelers to the Middle East. This bleaker image had been transmitted from Western European reports and early journeys.

For instance, in the third novel, Sultana explained that Aisha's father did not desire to take full responsibility for supporting four legal wives and their children permanently. Therefore, he preferred temporary marriages with virginal girls brought from the impoverished families of nearby countries such as Yemen, Jordan, and Bahrain to satisfy his sole pleasure of sex. Moreover, he justified his transgressions with the Quranic verses: *"And you are allowed to seek out wives with your wealth indecorous conduct, but not in fornication, but give them their reward for what you have enjoyed of them in keeping with your promise." (4:24)*

Since no man is to be blamed for his business, "Still, no legal authority would deny a man the right to such an arrangement." Aisha's mother, the only legal wife of her father, a religious lady, was engaged in a never-ending dispute with her husband over the advantages he took of the 'a little-used Arab custom called muta.' Aisha's mother complained about her husband's desperate deed to his family; however, the family can alter nothing to convict their son of the immoral act. Their advice was to pray for her husband's soul. Aisha sometimes

befriended these young girls, her father's temporary wives, and shared their horror stories with Maha. Among the horror stories was the story of Reema.

Omar's story reflects the past, the hardship of both men and women, slavery, and the harem. Omar, the eunuch Sultana saved from her cousin Fadel's paradise palace, had brought all the hardship he endured to memory. Omar, who came from Sudan, unfolded his horrifying story to Sultana and Kareem. After being kidnaped from his tribe at seven years of age, his castration by kidnappers, and his trip to Turkey to work for a Turkish trader who brought him to Mecca, he passed away, leaving Omar in Mecca.

In Mecca, Omar was given to Fadel's father, who, unlike his son, had treated him fairly. Omar's lifelong mission was the protection of his masters' women. Reacting to the horrifyingstories of Omar's castration, Kareem gasped loudly, “Surely, Allah’s word was mocked by those men and their cruel actions!” Kareem’s words reflect how those engaged in castrating males had violated Islamic teaching. The author reported that in Islam, the castration of men was forbidden but owning those castrated, known as the eunuch, as enslaved people were not prohibited in Islam, "Although the Islamic faith forbids Muslims to castrate young boys themselves, Muslims were not forbidden from owning eunuchs as slaves."

The word slave is different from nation to nation; slaves or eunuchs who lived during the Ottoman empire under Muslim rulers were treated differently. Brookes, in his book: *The Concubine, the Princess, and the Teacher: Voices from the Ottoman Harem*, reported that the harem and eunuch in the Ottoman empire, although considered slaves, accumulated an immense fortune and many titles in Ottoman court.

In the same way, the harem is perceived as a mysterious world by both the East and the West for its privacy. The word harem carries the meaning of 'forbidden, sacred, prohibited, in its origin in the Arabic language. Therefore, the word slave in English does not serve historians

to convey harems and eunuch real estate in the Ottoman empire. The word slave in English displays an image of a person without power, one who is entirely subservient to a dominating influence; however, harem and eunuch,

> […] in the Ottoman case, this purchased individual, if male, could serve as chief aide to the head of state, accumulate a vast fortune, and oversee a range of influential foundations. Ministers, generals, and wealthy men curried his favor. Alternatively, as our schoolteacher makes clear, if female, she might similarly manage a complex organization at the center of state power, accumulate riches, and supervise her retinue of servants. Unhappily, however, unlike Turkish, the English language lacks words that connote this status as owned indeed by master or mistress, yet wielding power, overseeing wealth, and commanding respect. Hence, we are left with the unsatisfactory word *slave*. (p. 6)

6.3.1.5. Third-World Difference

Mohanty argues that the Western feminists writing about ‘other’ women use the term ‘Third World woman’ as a monolithic subject for their analysis regardless of the differences and complexities between women of different countries. Through the production of the 'Third World difference' that Mohanty defines as,

> […] a stable, ahistorical something that oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. Furthermore, it is in the production of this "third World Difference" that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions,

cultures, races, and castes in these countries (p.63).

In the texts, Sultana generalizes women's physical assaults, male domination, and religious restrictions in other parts of the World like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Yemen, and Egypt. This overgeneralization of women's suffrage shows women's universality regardless of their race, location, or culture.

Thus, the assumption that all women of the world are a homogeneous group with the same struggle regardless of their classes, histories, cultures, races, ideologies, and religions is false. Relating Saudi Arabian women to Yemeni, Palestinian, Afghani, and Pakistani women as if all these women formed a sizeable coherent group is refuted by most critics and feminists like Nawal Elssadawi, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and others.

As indicated earlier in the literature, there is a difference between first-world feminists and third-world feminists. More precisely, between white Western feminism and Islamic feminism. Western feminism is based on Western values, thoughts, and ideologies that differ from Islam and Arab culture. For instance, Western feminists attacking religion in their movement is a sore subject among Arab Muslim feminists. Muslim women see Islam's teaching as their best friend and supporter rather than enemy as the Western feminists do. The Quran's directive embodies the ideal Muslim women want to encourage, not denounce.

The distinctions and comparisons are made based on the privileged Western women, who are considered a norm and referent for third-world women. In the texts, Sultana admires Western women's life and freedom compared to her miserable life as a royal. In her quest for women's rights and breaking the chains of oppression and patriarchy, Sultana seeks to adopt different Western norms for Muslim women and refute them in the Islamic and Arabic cultures. The pleasure Sultana finds in the U.S liberty and freedom of women revealing their bodies and not wearing veils and abayas serves the Western ideology of "the veil is an oppression to Muslim women." This same discourse represents the Western feminist ideology that fighting

for women's rights starts with opposing all forms of oppression including the Islamic dress.

Moreover, the author represented Third-World women through Sultana Al Saud's character as family-oriented, sexually constrained, uneducated, ignorant, poor, and controlled by traditions, religions, and customs. Whereas implicitly self-represents herself and Western women as liberated, educated, modern women who gain control over their bodies and sexualities and are free to make life decisions (Mohanty,1984). Therefore, the dichotomy between liberated Western women versus oppressed Eastern women brings back the discourse of civilized West and uncivilized 'Other,' the core and the periphery, the West's superiority over the 'Other' detailed in the works of oriental writers.

6.3.1.6. Representation Versus Discursive-Self Representation

As a Western feminist, Sasson represents a third-world Arab Muslim woman from her positionality as the norm and reverent for Arab women. Taking the Western values and liberated women in the West as an example compared to the so-called oppressed Arab Muslim women reflects the ideology of power unrevealed clearly but displayed in the difference between Western civilized and Eastern uncivilized and need Western savings. In the trilogy, Sasson declares that Sultana elects her as a representative of her voice and all Arab woman in her country; however, what might strike us about this trilogy is Sasson's way of renouncing any direct representation of her views. As the author, Sasson narrates the events using her words only but not her voice; she lets Sultana do all the talking. However, readers encounter an overlapping of two voices, defending Islam and attacking Sharia Law which is a parcel of Islamic teachings.

Thus, the notion that privileges Western liberation and progress and portrays third-world women as victims of ignorance and religion are contested by post-colonial feminist critics. Plain (2007) argues in "Under Western Eyes" how ‘Western feminists writing about third-world women colonize these women's historical and cultural backgrounds.’ Moreover, Western

feminists cannot avoid the challenge of situating themselves and examining their role in such a global economic and political framework. Moreover, Plain points out how many feminists ignored the complex interconnections between first and third-world economies and their effect on women's lives in third-world countries. Western feminists' scholarship on third-world women is to be considered in the context of the hegemony of Western media, publications, novels, and books. The political effects and implications of Western representations of Arab women go beyond the feminists and the targeted audience to a political agenda of articulating women's rights to prove the indirect intervention in third-world countries.

6.3.1.7. Eurocentrism

Upon the coming of American troops and journalists to Saudi Arabia, Sultana considered their presence as a hope for women feminists, "The American presence was going to alter our lives in a wonderful, wonderful way" (Sasson, 1992, p. 273). The idea of considering Western troops and invaders by Sultana as saviors are one of the skeptical points in Sultana's identity because no reasonable man/ woman would welcome his/ her colonizers the way Sultana did. Therefore, the notion of Eurocentrism and saving oppressed others brings back the clash of civilizations Western colonizers pretended to come for the sole purpose of civilizing the East and liberating Eastern women. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, American culture replaced the ancient French and British colonizers in their mission in the East. In explaining how the saving of women has been the tendency of colonial power throughout history, Spivak (1999) has cynically put it: "White men saving brown women from brown men." (p. 287). This quotation explains the historical division between the civilized West and the barbaric East. It also shows Western attitudes toward oriental people, which justify their moral imperative to invade Eastern territories to save women.

6.3.2. The Plight of Arab Muslim Women

Many Westerners believe that Islam has produced a culture of anti-Western terrorists. Indeed, Al Qaeda and other terrorists profess to kill in the name of Islam. Around the World, these terrorist actions have caused a far-reaching disservice to Muslims and Arab Muslims in particular by creating a climate of fear. Worse still, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed since September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, these actions of fanatics are not an accurate representation of Islam. The diversity of the majority of 1 3 billion Muslims all over the World represents the truth about Islam, a peace-seeking religion that condemns terrorism of any kind. The Quran makes it clear. It repeatedly urges forgiveness and restraint and warns believers not to "transgress" or become "oppressors."

The Quran says:

> *kills a soul unless for a soul or corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain humanity entirely. Moreover, whoever saves one is as if he had saved humanity entirely. Moreover, our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proof. So then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors. (5: 32)*

Gallup's world poll (Esposito, John L & Dalia Mogahed, 2007) has discovered that in the Middle East and Africa, government policies and actions are not usually indicative of true Muslim beliefs or the interest of mainstream Muslims. After all, the word Islam as it refers to in Arabic word origins comes from "silm" or "salaam," which means peace. However, the West, particularly America, judges Muslims and Islam on the actions of an extremist minority that does not necessarily representative of pious, practicing Muslims.

The West's role regarding Arab women is often obscured. Western colonial powers have historically shed crocodile tears over the plight of Muslim women and have vilified Islam for its role in this oppression. Nevertheless, ironically, in medieval times, Christian polemicists attacked Islam for being too tolerant in social and sexual matters.

Western treatment of Arab Muslim women has been hypocritical at best. Leila Ahmed (Ahmed, 1992), who published a study of women and gender in the Islamic World, called the Western attitude "colonial feminism." According to Ahmed, colonial feminism refers to the tendency among colonial officers to champion Arab Muslim women's rights while simultaneously opposing women's rights in their own countries. Thus, the status of women in the Arab Muslim World was used merely to denigrate Islam and the region's culture. The legacy of colonial feminism persists, yet feminism in the Arab World is often discredited, by governments and by local enemies of feminism, because it is associated with the sequels of colonialism.

6.3.3. The Veil and Oppression

The Western feminists' misrepresentation of Arab Muslim women's position in the Arab Muslim World lies in their misunderstanding of Muslim women's dress, what they call veiled women. The word veil is so laden with a negative stereotype. Part of the whole problem of the West's focus on the veil is precisely the simplification that the phrase veil entails: as if there is only one type of veil that Muslim women have ever worn. This is a travesty that argues the problem of the negative stereotype. The word veil in English usually is "a covering of fragile transparent material worn, especially by women, to protect or hide the face, or as part of a hat. " This word veil corresponds to the Arabic "niqab," the veil with which women cover their faces. As a word to convey the Islamic notion of hijab, it is inadequate.

The word hijab is from the Arabic root "*hajaba*," meaning to cover, conceal, and hide. It is a complex notion encompassing both action and apparel, and it can conclude covering the face. Wearing a hijab requires lowering the gaze with the opposite sex, which also applies to men, who must lower their gaze and cover from the navel to the knee. Over the centuries, and in different places, how women should cover varies enormously on what part must cover, which materials to use, and so on. The Quran has made it clear that Allah says:

> *And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear. Therefore, they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or the enslaved people they possess, or male servants who are free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of shame of sex (24: 31).*

The veil has been the focus of 19th century orientalist writers, travelers, and explorers obsessed with what Arab Muslim women might hide behind the veil. Therefore, the veil in Western literature is associated with the harem, fantasy, and seduction and consider a symbol of oppression. The European subject gives reasons for their obsession with veiled Muslim women as civilizing, modernizing, and then liberating veiled women and oriental people from their 'backwardness' and making them voiced. This political ideology of unveiling the Oriental other was the basis for the colonization of the orient.

As a symbol of oppression, the veil is orchestrated in many campaigns to champion Arab women's rights and attack Islamic teachings. History is full of savings cases; for instance, in British-ruled Egypt, Lord Cromer attacked the Muslim Veiling, which he considered a symbol of oppression for Muslim women; however, he did not support women and girls' education.

According to French colonial ideology in Algeria, the destruction of the Algerian society and its capacity for resistance relies on Algerian women's concurrence. This political ideology reflects how Algerian women are seen as essential resistance sources at the core of Algerian society. The only way to destroy a society is through unveiling its women (Fanon, 1965). Fanon's writings have inspired the masses in Algeria to protect their identity and women.

Veiled women also participated in the liberation of Algeria. As expressed by Fanon, Egypt Lord Cromer and the French interest in Algeria are all backed by military troops to save Arab women.

Similarly, Western media had criticized the Iranian revolution for being reactionary in imposing the veil on women, which is considered an attempt to deprive women of their fundamental rights (Elsaadawi, 1980). In 1979, middle-class Iranian women veiled themselves in support of their sisters in the working-class due to the Westernization of Muslim women and the rule of the Shah (Mohanty, 1984).

6.3.4. Dismantling the Veils of Western Literature

The *Princess trilogy reads* like fictional novels, the way the chapters are structured, and the horrifying crimes committed by the males in the story. The Arab males are portrayed as heartless idiots. The protagonist's ideas are unavoidable American feminists' views of the things happening in her country. After analyzing the novels and other sources of Saudi Arabian culture, I agree with most reviews' assessment that the author claims her novel to be a true-life story. Nevertheless, again, it reads like a fictional novel. If we compar**e** *the Princesses* trilogy with *The Forbidden Woman* and other books written on the hardships faced in the Arab world, we can immediately find differences in the writings. Those books of hardships do not read like entertaining sensational novels, they read like true stories of women's hardships, and their covers and blurbs do not read fiction books. *The Forbidden Woman,* for instance, depicts a difficult period in the history of Algeria, where both men and women were victims.

Through the cover and blurbs of *Princess,* one can see the detailed abuses and suffering of not only Sultana but also Arab women in general. Under an assumed identity of Sultana and a Western mediator of her perspective, these fictional novels draw the curiosity of the international audience to the choking culture of not only Saudi Arabia but also Arab in

general. Whether the story is authentic or an amalgamation of stories the author gathered during staying in Saudi Arabia, this novel is full of contradictions and stereotypes about the Arabs and their culture. It is painfully apparent that this novel is written to depict the rooted clash between the east and the West, what Palestinian author Edward summed up in *Orientalism* (Said, 1994)

So far, in history, the Arab land has formed a mysterious space for the West with which prejudices, stereotypes, and superstitions were associated. Westerners see their culture to be superior to the Arab culture. In her book In Search of Islamic Feminism (1998), Elizabeth Fernea, after a visit to Saudi Arabia, noticed that:

> We found that Saudi women are not all idle passive creatures portrayedin media accounts, ghost-written novels, and memoirs. Within the limited spaces available to them, many, if not most Saudi women were taking advantage of the opportunity for education of control of their inherited ranted wealth (rights granted by Islamic law). They were working to improve themselves and their families, and those who were able gave generously to charitable projects (as mandated by Islam). They were also investing their capital in future development. (Fernea, 1998, p.342)

Those ghost-written novels like *Princess* mainly done in the form of championing Arab women's rights as a means to attack Arab culture. These novels contain preposterous lies about Arab values. It gives the impression that Arab women are docile, passive, and silenced. However, the majority of women in the Arab world do not see their oppression as overwhelming as portrayed by Western feminists, and they might view women in other cultures as less fortunate than themselves. Arab women do not regard their world as "disgusting" or "humiliating." Why can we not see articles or books from real Arab writers

who are stable in their countries and understand their religion and issues instead of overnight experts who do not even understand Arabic?

6.3.5. Harem and Eunuch

The institution of the harem has long held a fascination for both Eastern and Western cultures due to its perceived aura of secrecy and privacy. The term "harem," originating from the Arabic language, carries connotations of prohibition, sacredness, and the forbidden. It is associated with Arab culture and Islam, which has piqued the interest of orientalist writers.

Historically, Western explorers to the Middle East, unable to access the inner workings of the harem, relied on their imagination and stereotypes to describe and understand it. This leap of imagination gave rise to portrayals that depicted the harem as a realm of women's sexuality, caged and inaccessible to Western men. These constructed images were often sensationalized and served to reinforce preconceived notions and biases. (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p.502). Western scholarship and literature relied on revealing Muslim women's lives based on this leap of imagination. In the trilogy, women are depicted as slaves who were purchased to be playthings for men's sexuality. However, these constructed images cloud the understanding of Muslim women's social experiences and role in Middle Eastern societies.

Regarding slavery, Sasson reported that in Islam, the castration of men was forbidden but owning those castrated, known as eunuchs, as slaves are not prohibited in Islam, "Although the Islamic faith forbids Muslims to castrate young boys themselves, Muslims were not forbidden from owning eunuchs as slaves." Nevertheless, the eunuch and harem who lived during the Ottoman empire under Muslim rulers were treated differently. Brookes, in his book: *The Concubine, the Princess, and the Teacher: Voices from the Ottoman Harem,* reported that the word slave is not the correct word for addressing harem and eunuch in the Ottoman empire, who, although considered enslaved people, accumulated an immense fortune and many titles in Ottoman court.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledged several limitations due to its design. First, the study focused only on scholarship and literature written in English by Arab and foreign scholars. Therefore, the literature in the Arabic Language about the representation of Arab women is not covered in this study. Second, this study focused on Jean Sasson's works; the analysis of the works concerning post-colonial feminism studies represented my understanding and perspective. Third, it is essential to note that researching the representation of Arab Muslim women in Western literature requires an extensive analysis of works written by both insiders and outsiders to analyze and compare how Arab Muslim women are perceived in the literature.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The representation of Arab Muslim women in Western literature has been a long-lasting theme that attracts Orientals, Western/non-Western feminists, and Western and non-Western readers throughout history. This study aimed to analyze Jean

Sasson's trilogy: *Princess*, *Princess Sultana's Daughters*, and *Princess Sultana's Circle* as feminist works to test whether non-fiction enables us to have a deeper understanding of the situation of Arab Muslim women is simultaneously determined by religion or culture.

This study undertook an analytic method by drawing on a framework that positions the representation of Arab Muslim women at the center of cultural and post-colonial feminist theories of representation, culture, and religion. The results revealed that these novels are filled with contradictions and stereotypes about Arab Muslim people and culture. They read more like fictional novels in the way the chapters are structured and the horrifying crimes committed by males in the story. All give the impression that women in the Arab world are docile, passive, and silenced. The results also indicated that Sasson represents a third-world Arab Muslim woman from her positionality as the norm and reverent for this woman. She is taking the Western values and liberated women in the West as an example compared to the so-called oppressed Arab Muslim women, which reflects the ideology of power unrevealed clearly but displayed in the difference between Western civilized and Eastern uncivilized and the need for Western savings.

This study concluded that Sasson's trilogy gives a far more detailed image of Arab Muslim women's position to Western readers, who end up relating women's plight to Islam as a religion. This latter has an obscure image dating back to the first orientalist, explorers, and travelers to the East and their stories of the different beliefs and the glamorous lives of the harem. However, novels and books about women's hardships do not read like entertaining

sensational novels, they read like true stories of hardships faced by women, and their covers and blurbs do not read fiction books. Through the cover and blurbs of *Princess* trilogy, one can see the detailed abuses and suffering of Sultana and Arab women in general. Under an assumed identity of Sultana and a Western mediator of her perspective, the trilogy draws the curiosity of the international audience to the choking culture of not only Saudi Arabia but also Arab countries. Whether the story is authentic or rather a staycation of stories, the author gathered during her staying in Saudi Arabia, and these novels are full of contradictions and stereotypes about the Arabs and their culture. It is painfully apparent that these novels are written to depict the rooted clash between the East and the West, what is known by the Palestinian-American author Edward Said as *Orientalism* (Said, 1994)

So far, in history, the Arab land has formed a mysterious space for the West with which prejudices, stereotypes, and superstitions were associated. The Westerners see their culture to be superior to the Arab culture. In her book In Search of Islamic Feminism (1998), Elizabeth Fernea, after a visit to Saudi Arabia, noticed that:

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values. It gives the impression that Arab women are docile, passive, and silenced. However, most women in the Arab World do not see their oppression as overwhelming as portrayed by Western feminists, and they might view women in other cultures as less fortunate than themselves. Arab women do not regard their world as "disgusting" or "humiliating." Why can we not see articles or books from real Arab writers who are stable in their countries and understand their religion and issues instead of overnight experts who do not even understand Arabic? For a better understanding and careful study of religion and culture in Arab Muslim daily life, one must be an "insider" who lives all his or her life in the Arab Muslim world and experiences norms, traditions, historical and colonization background, religion and culture of the Arab Muslims. As an insider, we preferred to study the representation of Arab women because of the West's interest in Arab Muslim studies and culture. In using the post-colonial perspectives, an effort was made to present the complexities and factors that might influence the status and position of Arab Muslim women to Western feminists.

The colonization of third-world women that post-colonial feminists refer to in their works is new imperialism in the form of championing third World women's rights. This change in the form of colonialism aims to put the third world under the control of Western powers. Arab women are part of what Western feminists call the "Third World." Western feminists have misrepresented Arab women in their works as being voiceless and passive. Therefore, a struggle is made to shatter these misrepresentations and correct their misunderstanding by declaring the actual status of Arab Muslim women in the Arab World.

Ultimately, an Arab Muslim woman is understood through their religion and culture. The attempt at Arab-bashing is not a work of literature; it is instead a way to demean the culture and religion and raise hatred, misunderstanding, prejudices, and stereotypes of other people and nations. Here comes the severe need for bridging the gap between Western feminists and third-world feminists. This bridging will assess the women of the world to

reach a reconciliation that can bring women of the world, whether first, second, or third to a better status and to enjoy the best of all worlds.

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