

Girls of riyadh



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Discuss in what ways Girls of Riyadh demystified or confirmed your gender perceptions of the quintessential Muslim society that Saudi Arabia is meant to represent. Girls of Riyadh is the poignant delineation of Saudi Arabia's secluded society where young women who silently cherish westernized aspirations are weaved within the strict conventional web of the Arab law.

Alsanea challenges the dictatorial and Islamist regimes of Saudi Arabia by contentiously incorporating prohibited issues such as homosexuality, the quest of love, sexuality and subjugation of the women in her work. She generally attempts to demonstrate “ that a Western code of life in an Arab society is more preferable and suitable than the Islamic one” (Mubarak, 2011). Subsequently, she reiterates, between Muslims and the West, the existing chasm which is grounded on the latter's perception of Islam as an obstruction to the Arab woman and her struggle for independence.

This paper accordingly elucidates the various ways this novel demystifies gender perceptions in the typical Muslim society that Saudi Arabia is meant to represent. The characterization of the four protagonists namely Gamrah, Sadeem, Michelle and Lamees condemns Islamist fundamentalism as misogynist and calls for autonomous and secular political legal frameworks. The text simultaneously divulges the prevailing inconsistency between the opposite sexes in the Saudi society.

While Doumato (1992) articulates in her work that Arab women are prohibited to travel without their ' mahram' or male guardian, Abdulla (1981) further exposes the prevailing sex segregation in Arab countries where the Muslim girl is anticipated to learn how to become an ideal housewife to her husband and a successful mother to her children instead of looking forward

to join competitive fields such as geology, meteorology and so on which are explicitly for the men.

Alsanea, by applying western tints to her novel, defies the conservative Arab society with the emergence of her four female characters who confront the political culture of Saudi Arabia as a social force. With the proliferation of technology in the 21st century, Alsanea uses the Internet as a medium to communicate to her readers. By so doing, she connects both male and female readers in a country where “ integration of the sexes, at least in public, is still non-existent” and where “ veiling is enforced” (Bahry, 1982).

The virtual interaction between Lamees and the other masculine cyber users remarkably contradicts the Arab society where such crossing point is out of question. The internet, “ the narrative topological main figure” (Ghadeer, 2006), becomes also a space where the narrator and her virtual female characters (“ I’ve decided to change all the names of the people I will write about”) interact with the youth culture anonymously to expose the horrendous principles of the Arab society. It additionally acts as a prominent tool in shaping the feminine’s individualism.

Lamees, for instance, teaches Gamrah how to make use of the internet which helps her to isolate herself from the bitter memories of Rashid’s betrayal: “ With the help of Lamees, Gamrah got to know the world of chatting”. Alsanea provokes the conventional Saudi community as Lamees plunges in the virtual world to such an extent that she can even figure out the dissimilarities between men in Riyadh and those of the eastern and western provinces: “ guys from Riyadh are a little different than the eastern

province boys, and they're different from the western province and so it goes".

Virtual communication hence reconstructs the existence of the wired Saudi girl beneath her abaya into an inquisitive connection of primitive culture and technology. Digital technology appropriates the reality of the Arab feminine personality as it enables her to show that she also has a voice. As such, this Arab feminine struggle broadens democratic space in the society as a whole (Esfandiari, 2004). At the same time as the author connects orality with the internet, she deliberately underlines the real and the fictional.

According to Ghadeer, this new mode of writing does not signify that Alsanea is discarding the " old form of narration or suggesting its loss" but she uses this writing style to unveil the undeniable social taboos. This is evidenced as cyberspace readers respond to the prohibited subjects brought forward by Alsanea. The taboo issues as such become overtly discussed concerns. Um Nuwayyir, for example, is thunderstruck when she is informed that her son is " defining his sexual identity" because unlike in the West to be homosexual in the Arab countries signals " an utter calamity, an illness worse than cancer. The author dismantles the hypocritical attitudes toward homosexuality which she attests is a normal behaviour that should be accepted in any society and by so doing her work becomes a driving force against the traditional Arab community (Mubarak, 2011). In this way Alsanea thoroughly condemns the Islamic Arab communities and distinguishes them with Western civilization. Michelle, as evidence, perpetually laments about Riyadh for not being a city like the West where " Everyone was minding his own business. However as Nuwayyir ultimately identifies his masculinity the

author unconsciously emphasizes that homosexuality has no place in a country like Riyadh where gender representation remains constantly stereotyped. It is likewise outrageous as Alsanea depicts the persistence of constraints on the binary interaction between the two sexes in Riyadh even when they are out of country. To escape from her grief Sadeem leaves for London where she becomes acquainted to Firas to whom she has to prove continuously that she is not of loose character since she does not wear the abaya and interacts openly with men.

Alsanea henceforth demonstrates that the severe conservative Arab rules exceed geography as well. To some extent the Saudi girl is not really liberated even if she is far from her native land. This feminine narration consequently stirs the whole media as it overtly discusses how the girls impersonate the opposite sex by travelling without any male guardian and flourish sexual desires instead of confining “ their bodies to foggy corridors of old traditions and patriarchal taboos” (Ghadeer).

In short, it does not completely share the view that “ woman is to man as butter is to sun. ” The novel also highlights issues which the society rejects and alleges that both sexes are prejudiced, thus protesting that Saudi Arabia “ is a fruit cocktail of social classes where no class ever mixes with another. ” Michelle, the half-American and half-Saudi girl, besides, cannot marry the man of her life as Faisal’s mother, who declares this relationship fruitless, rejects her. Similarly Rashid is forced by his family to marry a Saudi girl instead of his Japanese girlfriend.

Nevertheless by leaving the former for his girlfriend suggests a courageous move on the part of Rashid since unlike Faisal he draws criticism in a nation

whereby people are not authorized to date until married. Lamee likewise has to split her friendship with Fatimah simply because the Arab society does not favour Sunni-Shi'a interaction. The character of Um Nuwayyir in view of that is used as a pawn to the liberation of the young lovers. Her house becomes a space where the “ hapless lovers” transcends the regulation denying the mixing of unmarried people: “ Um Nuwayyir’s place was the safe haven par excellence for sweethearts. It is noteworthy that, until the subject of marriage crops up, the respective relationship of Michelle-Faisal and Lamees-Firas remains secured. In other words, the author portrays wedding as a theme, which communicates the message that practically behind every matrimony, lies the trend of incomplete lost love. As a result, at the end of the novel Sadeem marries her cousin Tariq not because she loves him but to avenge the two previous men who almost devastated her. Faisal as well marries out of compulsion while Michelle and Gamrah remain single and the experiences of her friends guide Lamees to make the right choice in her life.

Among the four girls she is the apparently the only one whose married life blossoms. As a matter of fact, as Clark in the work of Fiske (2005) explicates, the woman cannot fit choices to herself and the only option left to her is agreement, hence enunciating her conforming nature. Gamrah, divorced and left with a child, has to face the hurdles of her society, “ shrinking, secretly and silently” since the norms of the society does not permit her a second marriage. Clark hence stipulates, “ like the kitten ... her eye cannot help but follow the kaleidoscopic movement of the objects surrounding her. Like all the Saudi girls, the female characters must content themselves with their culture’s contradictory stances. Girls of Riyadh moreover reinforces the

Orientalist stereotypes of the Arab women, either as the overtly eroticized, just like Sadeem whose erotic conduct is apparent as she “strewed across the sofa, the candles placed here and there ... the black nightgown that revealed more of her body than it concealed”, or as intensely subjugated women in the male dominated world, like Gamrah who has to live under the patriarchal rules.

As the novel unravels, Alsanea nonetheless obliterates this orientalist perspective as she stresses that the Riyadh woman is not “a sexual symbol” or “closeted in the palace’s women’s quarters”(Mubarak). This is demystified as Michelle confronts Faisal by attending his wedding which depicts she is strong enough to resist his betrayal and is not in need of his ‘manly’ support. Similarly, Lamees weds someone of her own academic position which again delineates that she is not the ‘Other’.

Ultimately this proves that the hetero image of the women perceived by Orientalism is falsified as Fanon (1965) clarifies, “It was the colonialist’s frenzy ... his gamble ... to bring this woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession.” Throughout this essay, it is significant that the rules the Arab law transmits do not utterly correspond to the Islamic teachings which, Shands (2008) makes clear, have been misinterpreted as “media generally tend to judge Islam in the light of the behaviour and actions of some Muslims. Likewise while the Riyadh society surrounds the woman in its suffocating grip, Islam conversely advocates the protection of woman on men’s part. Esfandiari, in regard to this, articulates that the Islam practised in Nigeria or Saudi Arabia may not necessarily reciprocate to the Islam in Indonesia. Significantly the roles and privileges of women in any nation “are

the product of its particularly history, culture, and political character. ” As illustration, despite being literate the Riyadh woman is not supposed to sign: “ The sheikh says fingerprint, not signature.

The men are the only ones who sign their names. ” This does not however means the same in other Arab countries like Egypt. This paper demonstrates that although Riyadh is compacted with severe regulations concerning the women, Alsanea overtly fights against them to reveal that her girls have the potential to enrich the society. Subsequently after confronting much obstacles the female characters identify their own individuality which push them to construct their advancement. They become the channel through which any Saudi girl can modify the cultural and social circumstances of any woman.

In addition, the author reveals that the misrepresentation of the Arab woman is due to the failure of the Western literature to comprehend her. Literature should henceforth be adopted as a means to approach “ different cultures through the similarities and not differences” (Shaheen, 2001). Bibliography
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