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PRINCESS SULTANA: A REFLECTION  
OF SAUDI SOCIETY

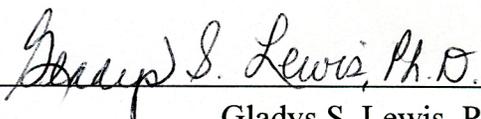
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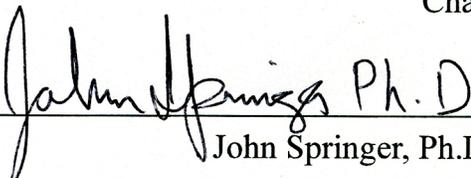
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PRINCESS SULTANA: A REFLECTION  
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A THESIS  
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The story of “Sultana” in *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia*, written by Jean Sasson, proposes an autobiography of a woman in the royal family in Saudi Arabia. Assuming the voice of a woman who cannot tell her own story, Sasson, as an amanuensis, recounts Sultana's autobiography. Sultana's life experiences come from journals she has kept since she was eleven years old. A study of the book, according to the genre and theories of autobiography, will reveal whether or not the opinions told can be viewed as valid. Through this thesis and its research, another argument rises from another autobiographical dimension, that of this thesis writer and researcher, a Saudi female. The conclusion of the study will show if the text matches the reality of the claims in the book about Saudi society. Through the narrative, “Sultana” says that her situation is similar to the rest of the Saudi female population. “Sultana” claims that her comments are true for all Saudi women. Since the story she tells is true according to her claims, she assumes that they are true for all of Saudi women. For verification of that claim, this study will examine gender roles, social conditions, and women's rights in response to Sultana's comments upon them. It will also provide the history of the state of feminism in the Arabian Peninsula, which influences the status of women in Saudi Arabia. A deliberative reliance on feminist criticism will constitute part of the thesis. As a conclusion, analysis of the text provides understanding of this exotic society, for someone who is outside of this society, and the role played by its women. Further, it reveals the gender complexity which exists between men and women in Saudi Arabia.

To my Grandmother, who is always happy and patient

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## Introduction

Saudi Arabia has global significance in three respects: political, economical, and religious. It is the largest oil-producing country for the world, and this alone gives it economical and political importance. In addition, it has religious significance. The Arabian Peninsula is the cradle of one of the largest religions in the world, Islam. Saudi Arabia contains the two important holy cities for Muslims, which have made this desert a place to visit for centuries. People from different parts of the globe have come to this land, both in the past and in the present, from the east and the west, to visit it for many different reasons. Although it sounds like a busy place, it could be the most secluded place in the world. For many years the large desert was isolated without the presence of people living there to disturb it in any way. After the 9/11 tragedy in the United States, the land attracted more external attention, and with the long history associated with the Arabian Peninsula the more became confusing to understand the land. The Arabian Peninsula does not contain a simple historic and social structure within it. Its history is as ancient as the land itself.

Sultana, the protagonist of *Princess*, is one of the princesses of the large monarchical

family of Saudi Arabia, the house of Saud. She is trying to explain through her personal life that her story can be generalized to all Saudi females, whether they are princesses or not. Although the story takes a personal direction by detailing incidents that reflect unfortunate events specific to individuals, Sultana does mention some opinions that can be generalized as social phenomena. Sultana does not focus in her autobiography on matters connected to the economy or politics, but rather she tells a story about social matters and human subjects. She brings examples from her personal life experiences and those problems in her close family that could have developed as a result of dominant social roles and paradigms. As the Saudi society focuses on quietness and avoiding distractions, many individual problems take root without solutions. This is what Sultana means when she speaks of a society full of secrets. Sultana exposes how she is touched by these problems in her life experience, and through this exposure, she relates social ideas that make these problems deeper due to the passive silence.

Sultana is looking through three layers of perspectives: the limited circle of her close family, the big family she is coming from, and the the society of her origin. In the process, she discovers a fourth and highlights it later as the global perspective. Sultana as an individual is a witty person and has an enlightened attitude, even though she did not receive an intensive education when she was young. She is a person who is learning from her own experiences and observations to try to gain a universal mind. She could be a philosopher or historian given the way she is directing her mind. She writes about her opinions, although she faces resistance from

her close family members as she wants to prove that a woman can be intellectual like any man.

I would like to analyze Sultana's story from a feminist perspective in the context of a wider picture of the life of the women in Saudi Arabia to see if what she says is a fiction or true or something between the two. *Princess* will be studied also as an autobiographical, historical and social narrative to investigate the elements that make Sultana's story an autobiography. The examination will determine whether Sultana's close family case is an exception or whether it reflects the Saudi society in general. Is this story an exception or a reflection of the static quality of Sultana's life and her society. Is this society progressing or retreating with time passing? This question will be examined through the thesis.

The research consists of three chapters. The first chapter discusses whether *Princess* is an autobiography or biography, because it is categorized as biography on the cover page. Another examination shows that this book is in fact an autobiography and explores the confusion of who is the original writer, Jean Sasson or the main character, Sultana. This chapter presents some autobiographical theories, especially theories that are related to a women's way of writing. The chapter ends by discussing the style of writing using the first-person voice in connection with the confusion of the writer and the author.

The second chapter shifts into historical and social studies of feminism in the Arabian Peninsula in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. Is the concept "feminism" known in the Arabian Peninsula either in the past or in the present, or is it a new concept? The study starts

from the pre-Islamic period and ends in contemporary times. The chapter lists some important events in the modern history of Saudi Arabia and their effect on feminist ideas.

The third chapter highlights the autobiography itself using direct quotations from the author of the autobiography. It is a contemporary study of the social conditions in Saudi Arabia, especially those that concern women and feminism. This chapter is a direct analysis of what Sultana has said in the autobiography, with the addition of explanations about marriage, gender problems and the uniqueness of Saudi society in general.

The conclusion provides an assessment of *Princess* as autobiography that proposes an inside view of the isolated life of the Saudi women with a judgment of *Princess's* validity by this thesis writer, a Saudi woman.

## CHAPTER I

## Sultana's Autobiography

## A Biography or an Autobiography:

In nonfiction narration, there are three major techniques for describing true stories of individuals. They are biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs. Memoirs are extensions of autobiographies, but biographies stand alone as a genre. Biography involves someone documenting a story about someone else. Autobiography involves the individual documenting his or her own story. There is a slight difference between the autobiography and the memoir. In memoir, the individual is documenting his or her own story, but the story is for “earlier experiences, especially those involving unusual people, places, or events” (Baldick 202).

Jean Sasson's *Princess* is categorized as a biography on the last cover page, which is an erroneous categorization by the publisher. The reader of the book, from the first chapter, will realize that this book is not a biography by definition. In a biography, the author is writing someone else's story, but here, Sasson is not writing for her main character, Sultana. Sultana's is the voice that communicates from the first page of the book to the last one. The entire book is

narrated in first person, which indicates Sultana is speaking in her own words. Sasson's voice does not interfere through the narration of the story. Sultana says in the introduction of the book that this is her own story that she collected from journals she started to write when she was eleven years old, which makes the work an autobiography.

Sasson can be considered the editor of Sultana's autobiography. She took these journals from her friend, Sultana, and organized and translated them. Sultana and Jean Sasson had their own conversations about writing the book, but those communications could be considered part of an editing process. In an earlier edition of the book in 1992, which is different from the one in 2004, Sasson said in her introductory acknowledgments that she spent a lot of time organizing the journals with the help of some of her friends in America. Sasson said also in the same acknowledgment, "I read and reread Sultana's notes and diaries that she entrusted to me" (9). But the entire acknowledgment was deleted in the later edition without Sasson explaining the reason.

*Princess* should be categorized as an autobiography rather than biography, because the autobiographer "cannot recount her or his own death, whereas a biographer will almost always offer an account of the subject's life to the very end" (Baldick 29). The book does not end with Sultana's death; rather, the ending of *Princess* is open and Sultana is looking toward the future by finishing the book in the chapter, "The Great White Hope." Sasson also never announced that Sultana died, and an update from Sultana was added in the 2004 edition, which is different from the 1992 edition.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, notes that, “Not all autobiographies are actually written by their subjects. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* ( 1964 ), for instance, was written by Alex Haley on the basis of taped interviews” and the dictionary calls this kind of author a “ghost-writer” (Baldick 30). In such cases, the book is considered as an autobiography rather than biography. In the pre-introduction of the book Sasson says, “While the words are those of the author, the story is that of the princess” (16). “The author” can have two meanings. It can mean that it is Sasson or Sultana herself. Because the sentence is written in passive voice there is no specific subject in the sentence, so Sasson may have left the text open for the readers to understand it the way they want. In the 1992 edition of the book, Sasson said in a more direct way, “The words are mine, but the story is hers” (9). Because Sasson emphasizes the idea that she is the author of the book and not an editor, she can be considered a ghost-writer, or substitute-writer, making *Princess* an autobiography.

Another question raised about the categorization of this work is whether it is an autobiography or a memoir. There are great similarities between the two categories, and many readers get confused when trying to distinguish between them. The differences between them, according to Chris Baldick,<sup>1</sup> are:

a memoir is commonly distinguished from an autobiography by its greater emphasis on other people or upon events such as war and travel experienced in common with others, and sometimes by its more episodic structure, which does not need to be tied to the personal development of the narrator. (202)

Autobiography differs from memoirs in that an autobiography “focus[es] upon the self rather than on notable people and events that the author has encountered,” and it differs from “the journal or diary in its attempt to produce a connected retrospective account (29). In Sultana's story, elements of both the autobiography and the memoir are present. She tells her story from journals she wrote. Sultana focuses on herself, and at the same time she emphasizes other people's stories. She mentions her experience with a war and traveling abroad. The story is episodic in structure, but it is tied to her personal development.

*Princess* is based originally on journals. *Princess* that is published in the name of Jean Sasson can be categorized also as a journal. There are different definitions for the term “journal.” In *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000*, a journal is “substantially the same thing as a diary ... the word ‘journal’ has tended to be reserved for more formal types of diary involving more extended description or narrative” (Beal). Another definition for journals is “a form of autobiographical writing including a day-by-day account of events and a record of personal impressions. It is usually less intimate than a diary and more obviously chronological than autobiography” (Harmon 281). Journals also are applied “to any periodical that contains news or deals with matters of current interest in any particular sphere ... some learned and literary periodicals prefer journal to magazine” (281). Journals can indicate the meaning of diaries, autobiographies and periodicals. They all indicate the meaning of personal, real story, but there are slight differences between these terms. *Princess* is organized chronologically, but inside this

organization there are shifts inside the major incidents to be either side stories from the past or to be other people's stories, other than the story of the main character. Sultana can be regarded as a journalist who is reporting the incidents she witnessed to wide audiences. Whether it is an autobiography, or a journal, the book *Princess* is definitely not a biography.

Why does this confusion exist in categorizing this book?

The issue of categorizing the book is obvious through even a superficial look at the book. But what creates the complexity that surrounds the book is that the main character, Sultana, is unknown. The real identity of the main character is never revealed to the the readers. This anonymous identity of the narrating character can reduce the integrity of a book. Sasson justifies this secrecy about the author for security reasons. She says that Sultana cannot reveal her real name because she fears the consequences that she might face if she did so; her life could be put into jeopardy, or also the lives of the people named in the book.

Some current American autobiographers use this method, like changing some characters' real names inside the story to avoid upsetting people and risking lawsuits, but the autobiographer still wants to say what he or she chooses to say, which is why the autobiographer hides some real names. This kind of hidden identity, however, puts the information in the text under a question of trustworthiness. Can the readers trust what is said in the text if they do not know the identity of the writer or if the writer does exist? This kind of hiding of identity can raise the element of

suspense for the readers and make them wonder what made this woman hide her real identity when she would be famous if she revealed who she is. But the lack of self-disclosure creates a sense in the reader of the serious situation in which the writer is living.

The integrity of the book should be questioned as a normal process of studying a book in an academic way, and there are other ways to know whether this character is real or not, and whether these events are true or not. We look to Sasson herself, the holder of the authority of the book *Princess*. Sasson, as she says in the book *Princess*, lived and worked in Saudi Arabia at different times starting in 1978. She met the main character, Sultana, in the year 1983, but the book was not published until 1992, and Sasson herself left Saudi Arabia permanently in 1991.

Sasson is an American writer whose main works revolve around the Middle East and especially Middle Eastern women and their feminist rights. *Princess* was not the first book Sasson produced. She published *The Rape of Kuwait* as her first book in the year 1991, based on “interviews with Kuwaitis who had fled to Cairo, Saudi Arabia, London and Washington, D.C” (Cox).

In the next year, she published her second book, *Princess*, and it is based on the journals of a real princess. In 1994, Sasson published a sequel titled, *Princess Sultana's Daughters*. Six years later, in 2000, Sasson published a third book about the princess, which is a side story and not a sequel and is titled *Princess Sultana's Circle*<sup>2</sup> which both deals with Saudi women's life.

Sasson has also published other books that deal with women from different countries from

the Middle East, but the most notable one in recent years connected to Saudi Arabia is the book *Growing Up Bin Laden*, published in 2009. The full title of the book is *Growing Up Bin Laden: Osama's Wife and Son Take Us Inside their Secret World*. It is a cooperative book between Sasson and the characters inside the book, Najwa and Omar. Omar Bin Laden did not hide his real identity, and he revealed himself to the media. He said he worked with Sasson to write the book, but that was many years after *Princess*.

Sasson's common habit in publishing a book is always to have someone as a single source who provides her with information. Because of this habit, Sasson does not publish many fictional works. She wrote *Ester's Child* in 2001 as a historical fictional work, and this is her only publicized fiction until this date. This methodology adds integrity to Jean Sasson's *Princess*, underscoring that it is not a fictional work.

*Princess* gained international recognition, and it was translated into multiple languages. According to Jean Sasson's website and the cover of the 2004 edition, *Princess* is "A New York Times bestseller named as 'one of the best 500 books written by women since the year 1300'" (Sasson). Based on this kind of bibliography and recognition, Jean Sasson's works can be considered reliable, at least regarding the transmission of information from her main sources.

Sultana's real identity raises so many questions. Who is she really? Sasson could not possibly provide such small details if the work were fiction. Many details and social observations are present that only a person who grew up in the society could know and reflect in his or her

own writing. So the possibility that Sasson has fabricated the book in the name of a Saudi female princess is unlikely.

Skeptics may claim that the protagonist is not a real princess, and it is more likely that this woman Sultana could be an Arab woman who is familiar with the environment of the Saudi Royal Family and their way of living and who claimed that this story is a Royal Saudi story. Another possibility is that this book was written by a Saudi woman who could be from a high class, or even from a middle class, who has connections with the Royal Family. The textual story convinces the readers that she is a real princess from the Royal Family, but from which class inside the Royal Family itself is not obvious. Through the text, she mentions no special traits about her own family that made them unique from the other Royal Family members, except that she is descended from the first generation.

Ranks inside the royal families make differences with respect to royal succession, and that is how the classes are set. The closer the male is in lineage to the first king, the greater are his chances for succession to the throne. In the Saudi Royal Family at the present time, the lineage goes through the elder brother of the original sons of the first king. According to the Royal Family's tradition, the closer the individual royal to the throne, the more important he is. Sultana is claiming an importance for herself by mentioning her rank inside the Royal Family in her autobiography. It could be an indication from her that she is not a princess who is looking for fame. Readers and analysts stick to the information that Sasson, or Sultana, provides us with in

the text: that Sultana is a close descendant from the Royal Family's main house. Sultana is in the position she describes for herself inside the text, as readers trust Sasson on the basis of other books she has published.

If readers consider that Sultana is a real princess from the Royal Family, why did she write about her own society in such an unflattering manner? Can she be considered disloyal to her own country or to her own family? Does she fight her own people? These are the kinds of ethical questions that every person confronts who criticizes his or her own society and culture. This criticism is necessary to every society, because there is no perfect society and claiming the opposite is a matter of prejudice; but of course, Sultana's case is extreme. Sultana is making social observations about what was going on in the time she was growing up. She is reporting what the people did and said and what has happened, adding her own personal commentary. Sultana is striving for social justice for women inside her society. She wants the rights every human must have, either a woman or a man.

Why didn't Sultana, then and now, address Saudi women directly instead of relying on other writers of other countries, especially when Saudi women in recent years have more freedom to express their own thoughts to the public? Sultana, through the book, does praise the middle-class Saudi females for standing for their own rights, like refusing the veil and the harassment of the religious police, even if the effort fell short and the result was humble. For example, she says that “middle-class Saudi women threw down their shackles. They faced the fundamentalists head

on” (238). In another passage she says, “We royals would never be allowed such freedom” (188). The question is, what is her role as a princess? She has more authority and protection than the other females. Instead of praising the middle-class women, why does she not participate as she sees that these ordinary women did not suffer severe social exile as a result of their resistance? Sultana repeats throughout the book that she will be the messiah of Arabian women, and she describes herself as a stubborn woman and a Spartan warrior who reacts naturally and is willing to fight for her rights. Many times throughout the book, she promises that she will free all Saudi women. For example, she says, “Only we modern, educated women could change the course of women's lives” (139). In the same passage, she says, “It would be my sons and daughters who remodel Arabia into a country worthy of all its citizens, both male and female” (139). She says further, “The new beginning of women in Arabia could start with my own blood”(173). But what she does is handle her own private problems only, either by fighting with people around her, or by continually spending her money as a way to distract herself.

Her voice, until now, did not reach ordinary Saudi female citizens. It was available only for non-Saudi readers, as the book is not published in Arabic. Her voice should be spoken to the inside more than to the outside. She asserts her good intentions to change Saudi society but without working openly to accomplish that result. If she wants to speak what she thinks is right, she should support Saudi feminist rights in public instead of veiling herself inside the society, the veiling which means avoiding, the avoidance she refused it all her life.

A final question concerning the integrity of the book is whether we trust the events inside the book fully in each detail given. Theories about the authenticity of narration say that many details change through the process of narration and writing according to the structure of the language and its grammar and expressions. The narrator's abilities to memorize and recall play a part in reporting past incidents. Is there a degree of unintentional fiction inside of the text? The autobiographer can never express the reality as it happened precisely. *Princess*, although it is carefully written and organized for publication's sake, is a book full of incidents that are narrated in an abbreviated matter, and only the gist is mentioned. Also, the organization of the material for publication can affect the degree of realism in each story. The modification and translation from one language to another can also interfere with and change the real details of what happened.

What did Sultana select and what did she leave out? Most of the stories that are reported in the text were told orally and nothing is documented by another eyewitness, and in no way can a person trace physical evidences to discover whether these stories happened, especially since no real names are mentioned, and even the crimes she talks about she heard of second-hand. Of course, the book's total purpose is to collect these hidden and secretive stories to tell, because either they were ignored, buried by other people, or forgotten, intentionally or not. An autobiography is a part of history; the hidden stories that are not told in the official newspapers could be lost in time. As Margo Cully says about women's autobiography, "Historical sources [contain] a kind of 'truth' about women's lives not found in other places" (217). But Sultana,

throughout the book, does not emphasize the stories themselves as much as she emphasizes her own thoughts about these stories and her own social commentary. The book is full of her opinions and her personal emotional reactions to the way women were treated and the way men treated them. Many of these stories of the other people she mentions are considered side stories, and the dominant parts of the book describe her own life and her private matters, so what she tells from details from her own private life can be considered true because she is the eyewitness of her own life. Whether the stories are true, a psychological, historical and social study will be made depending on Sultana's own narration and opinions to show the reality of what has been said.

#### Women's Autobiographical Theories:

Autobiography theorists say that women write their autobiographies differently from men both in writing style and in expressions. These theories come as a result of the social conditions that women writers grow in, especially those from patriarchal societies. These autobiographical theories examine women's writing from previous centuries. In the western cultures before the feminist movement, women through the centuries faced discrimination by their male contemporaries. That social paradigm came as a result of the influence of religious interpretations of women's way of life and some traditions that separated the roles of each gender. As a result of that practice, women had certain psychological patterns, such as being self-suppressors, and they manifested them in their writing in both fiction and non-fiction works.

Women's interest in writing has been stereotyped as centering on domestic life and the role of maternity. As for the style itself, women are recognized also as self-suppressors who cannot express themselves freely and avoid self-exposure. They did not have the ability to speak directly. Patricia Spacks comments on the style of some women writers from the eighteenth century. She says that these women, "when they write about their own actions, thoughts, or feelings, worry about seeming too self-involved; often they deprecate the activities they report" (233). She writes that eighteenth-century letters by women "reflect and elucidate the conflict between the desire for self-assertion and the need for self-suppression, and they demonstrate strategies of deflection" (232). This way of writing came from inner psychological conflict about what women were taught to do and what they desired to do. European women were taught in the previous centuries to be silent, especially in the presence of a male authority figure, because that was the ideal behavior for a respectful woman. They were taught also the absolute obedience to male authority without discussion of his opinions and his orders, because that was courtesy and a sign of chastity of a woman. These psychological traits still exist in contemporary patriarchal cultures such as the culture which Sultana grew up in.

Margaret Hannay reports, in her essay about the social attitudes of women in the Tudor period, that Thomas Bentley, in the *Monument of Matrones*, says of women, "There is nothing that becommeth a maid better than sobernes, silence, shamefastnes, and chastitie, both of bodie and mind. For these things being once lost, she is no more a maid, but a strumpet in the sight of

God" (4). If a woman wrote a work, it would be credited to a man because "it was more than a woman's skill to express the sense so right as she hath done in her verse" (2). As a result women became objects to do and not think, which left them no space for mental development or any kind of mental creativity. Women shared these psychological traits in the way of their thinking and their writing. The woman was deprived of her right to education because that education would lead her to be a "tattling, impertinent, vain, and conceited creature" (Spacks 235).

Some scholars who create theories associated with women's autobiography are James Olney, Sidonie Smith, Louis Renza, and Nancy Chodorow. Their theories about women writers and women's autobiography deal with the results of the special tendencies of style of writing. Women's knowledge did not reach the required level to compete with the men for a long time. This slow progression in women's way of writing resulted from the continuous social restrictions that they inherited through the generations, as women were denied educational opportunities.

James Olney's principal idea about autobiography states that the metaphors of the self are dominant in writing: "I study myself. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics" (Nester). Olney's theory says that "the writer establishes a specific image that she then fashions to represent herself," so the metaphor of self is the image that the female writer uses to present herself (Israel 2). Sidonie Smith contradicts Olney and claims that society imposes patriarchy on women, so they do not have an image of themselves. Smith also says, however, that women tend to be silent inside their text and that "what women do not say is sometimes more significant that

what they do say” (Israel 3). Louis Renza states that a female writer must suppress part of herself to be a public self. The female author must keep some level of privacy for herself. This kind of duality between the public and the private “causes the writer to commit to a narrative design that she uses to determine what to include and what to leave out” (4).

Nancy Chodorow writes that “feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does. That is, in psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated than men and have more flexible ego boundaries” (Smith 17). The female “comes to develop more fluid ego boundaries than a boy because she does not have to resist her early identification with the mother or undergo a rupture. Therefore, she develops less of a desire to sense her difference from the mother.” So, according to Nancy Chodorow, women define themselves through relationships, especially with their mothers, or any person with “whom [they have] been more involved. It is continuous with her early childhood identifications and attachments” (17).

When applying these theories to Sultana's *Princess*, we find that Sultana does have this metaphor of the self that James Olney describes. Sultana is creating an image for herself, and she emphasizes that she is a victimized royal. She also emphasizes that she has her own unique character that is different from the other characters in the autobiography, and Sultana does emphasize her individuality. In her autobiography, we do not see a character similar to her or with her attitude.

Sidonie Smith says that women do not have an image of themselves because of the imposition of the patriarchal society, but Sultana's autobiography negates that claim. Sultana here is resisting the patriarchal society and trying to establish her own individuality in that society. Sultana is defying the traditional pattern of the society. Smith says that women tend towards silence in their autobiography and the silent parts are more significant than what they expose. In Sultana's autobiography the case is different. Sultana exposes everything she can, from sexual scandals and social mockery to self-confessions and personal guilts and errors. The entire book is a series of confessions, so it is the opposite of being silent and secret.

The same can be said in regard to Louis Renza's claim that women writers keep a public self and a private self. Here however, we cannot use this measurement of the public and the private because Sultana, from the beginning, does not expose her real identity. Sultana causes a confusion of traditional autobiographical theories as they apply to her autobiography. Yes, she confesses everything, and she says everything she wants to say in her autobiography, but the primary idea to apply any theory was absent from the beginning, because she hides the most important thing, her identity. A new theory can be established concerning people in similar situations where they expose everything but they keep their identity hidden because of the terror they might face, especially if they are women.

Renza says women writers use a special "narrative design" so the authors' stories can be narrated. Sultana's original narrative design cannot be determined because this work is built from

a translation of scripts from another language, and much can be lost through the process of translation and editing. The narrative design here is not spontaneous, which could be the case for some autobiographies that are written directly by the subject. For example, Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography does not follow the traditional way of writing for the publication process. Instead, she wrote everything in her mind in her own unique structure and organization. The narrative design in *Princess* is well organized that moves in one pattern and direction.

*Princess* confounds Nancy Chodorow's theory that women are less individual than men and define themselves through their relationships. Chodorow claims that she developed her theory through her work in her field, which is studying ego psychology. She ignored, as she said, the differences within communities, and she studied the differences between a “universal boy” and a “universal girl” and also “the women's social roles within a patriarchy” (Smith 17). A male is not a female, nor is a female a male. But this difference does not make them dissimilar. There is no special psychology for a man and special psychology for a woman.<sup>3</sup> For example, a man can be narcissistic in the same way as a woman can be. The social background, the kind of education, and what the individual learns through his or her life play a larger part than gender in shaping their psychology. It is not a matter of genes and biological structure only, but it is intellectual matter.<sup>4</sup> Men also define themselves through other relationships. The male can define himself through his own father, if not through his mother. The mother's influence is expected, because the mother is the constant figure in the child's life, whether the child is male or female, as her biology

from having a womb and feeding the infant by the breast make the social role emphasizes the maternity on the mother. Through the mother, the child acquires his or her primary knowledge. Stable humans in general are social beings who cannot live without relationships and cannot live as individuals isolated from any kind of society or any human communication. Chodorow's attempt to set up such an autobiographical theory is vague and impotent. As for the connection of this theory to Sultana's autobiography, we can say that Sultana adheres to other relationships, especially with her sister. Sultana was one of a large group of children, either from the same mother or half-brothers and sisters from other step-mothers. Her relationship with her mother is present in the text; a complete chapter is devoted to talking about her. Her mother did not play a major role in shaping her personality, except, ironically, to contradict her desires and ideas. Sultana criticizes the passivity and vulnerability of her mother's situation, and Sultana did not take her as an example to follow, as Chodorow would claim. The mother, and even her passive, but close sister, did not influence her in the normal direction of her culture. They led Sultana to go in the other direction, toward full resistance to the passivity of the people very close to her. If we want to prove Chodorow's theory somehow, we can say that Sultana did learn from her mother and her sister, but not to be like them, which made Sultana unleash the other extreme and contradictory personality. Sultana, in the text, is a complete individual who avoids dependence on others. The "other" is always to her either an obstacle or a threat, especially in the close relationships of an isolated environment of her childhood.

Sultana always resorts to self-reliant and individuality to gain her own strength and psychological stability. This proves that a woman is an individual like a man. After all, all women are not the same, just as all men are not. It is an individual matter to develop one's metaphor for self.

#### The Psychology of Writing:

Margo Culley says, in describing the process of writing an autobiography from diaries, that “the act of autobiographical writing, particularly that which occurs in a periodic structure, involves the writer in complex literary as well as psychological process” (217). Culley emphasizes that diaries and autobiographies are literary works. Beyond that, this literary work, which is writing about the self and presenting the metaphors of the self, reflects the author's psychology. A number of psychological theories result from associating the psychology of the author with writing. Some of these theorists are Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan.

*Princess* is written in first-person narration. The “I” is the dominant pronoun in the text. The “I” usage in the text, or any text that uses first person narration, does not usually indicate one voice or one meaning. In *Princess* there are three Sultanans in the text, and they shift as the reader moves chronology through the narration. We have Sultana the writer, Sultana the child, Sultana the adult, and they make three voices in the text. The last two could be considered as one and represent the voice of Sultana as a character, but they all represent one person. Sultana the

character starts from the childhood that Sultana the writer points out for the reader, and this Sultana grows up through the text until she reaches adulthood and stops at the last word on the last page. For a general dominant voice, we have Sultana, author of the journals; as a second writer, we have Sasson, amanuensis and editor of the final text.

These shifting and different voices appear throughout the text with changes of meaning and indications inside each paragraph. For example, Sultana says about her dialogue with one of the characters in the story, "I remember our conversation as well as if it were yesterday. Our exchanges are clear in my mind. I can see her earnest face before me now" (Sasson 108). This intervention expression confuses the reader because this "I" can be understood in many ways. Was this "I" when the journals were being written? Or is it Sultana as a character who is addressing her reader? Or is it just an expression that Sasson added for the narration's sake. This, in turn, leads us to the argument concerning the level of fiction inside the text. The usage of the word "now" makes the reader wonder which "now" she means. Sultana says, in the young voice of Sultana about forming a women's club, "As long as Saudi women accepted their authority, men would rule. We surmised that it was the responsibility of each individual woman to ferment desire for control of her life and other female lives within her small circle" (91). Is this one of the principles of the circles, or is it the opinion of the grown-up Sultana? It can have the combined meaning, but Sasson through additional editing could have made the reference more clear. This shifting between the mentality of young Sultana and the writer Sultana inside the same paragraph

confuses the reader about the narrative flow and how the text is constructed. The reader expects the text to move in chronological order, but some pronouns and commentary make the reader wonder whether the voice that is speaking is the writer Sultana or the young character Sultana. The analysis of the “I” references is important to understand a text.

Jacques Lacan posited a theory to understand the meaning of this “I.” Lacan's theory primarily applies to fictional texts in literary study, and to apply it to study in an autobiography makes it more interesting because of the level of the reality inside the text. Lacan's theory emphasizes the analysis of the “I” of the subject and the ego. He talks about the idea of the self and the image in the mirror, and says that the “I” in the mirror is different from the “I” of the self (Israel 7). It is the same in a literary text, where we can find two images inside the text, one the author, the self, and the second image, in the mirror, is the character herself inside the text. For that reason, we can interpret many of the uses of “I” inside Sultana's *Princess* in different ways, especially inside some certain paragraphs where the meaning of the “I” is hazy.

Speaking of the self and the ego, Sultana's *Princess* surely demonstrates these two ideas. Sultana does have high self esteem which can lead her to be a narcissistic character. Narcissism has two manifestations. One of them is the healthy narcissism which is socially accepted. Healthy narcissism is the self-esteem that every individual must have, and what Sultana complains about in her text is that her own self-esteem and narcissism were attacked and violated by the “other,” who could be a male or the rigid social system in which she grew up.

*Princess* is an autobiography based on the definitions and the comparison between what is an autobiography and a biography. The possibility that *Princess* could be a form of journalistic work can be applied. The integrity of the writer and the real identity of Sultana is tested to prove that this story is not fiction and not fabrication. Through using different autobiographical theories this helped in adding more understanding to the text by approving or negating these theories. The influence of the author's psychology in the way of writing is present also in *Princess*. To define the usage of the "I" as a voice for the writer and the main character, Sultana, is analyzed by using Lacan's psychological theory in writing.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Chris Baldick is a professor of English at Goldsmith's College in University of London. He edited *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* and is the author of *The Oxford English Literary History*. He also authored and edited other works associated with literary criticism and literary history.

<sup>2</sup> These titles are taken from the Library of Congress database.

<sup>3</sup> Study of the psychological differences between sexes has proven that there are minor psychological differences between men and women. According to Michael Conner, these differences are in problem solving, ways of thinking, memory and sensitivity. These differences do not exist only between sexes but also on an individual level. These experiments are done on average men and women. Minor differences in the psychology or the mental process should not lead to sharp sexism and cause women to lose their civil rights and their social status. Both genders share the psychological diseases even if the percentage of the occurrence differ. This difference in percentage is due to environmental and social circumstances. There is no psychological disease that occurs in females but not in males, and that goes vice-versa.

<sup>4</sup> Neuro-Linguistic Programming, is a branch of psychology that contains:  
set of rules and techniques proposed for modifying behavior in achieving self improvement, self management, and more effective interpersonal communications. Based on certain assumptions about how language and movements of eyes and body affect brain, neurological, functions, NLP is similar to self-hypnosis. Its basic premise is that to achieve any kind of success one must create rich imagery of the goal, and must imitate, model, and internalize the appropriate behavioral patterns. Its name is derived from how senses filter and process experience before storing it in brain, neuro, how one uses words and symbols to create mental pictures, linguistic, and how desired habits and attitudes become ingrained, programming. (Neuro-linguistic)

## CHAPTER II

### Feminism in the Arabian Peninsula

#### Historical Background:

Through history, women were a global problem, disturbing the mind of their men.

Women's bodies, vaginas, breasts and wombs, were always subjects for debate over how to solve the problems connected with the creature possessing these organs. Women were objects to display or to be hidden. Because of this special difference that men lacked or did not understand, women suffered in many societies. As a result of this difference, women were controlled and ill-treated to the extent that if a husband died, his wife should be burned with him.<sup>1</sup> In other cultures, if the woman kept alive, she must calculate or be calculated for every reaction she made.<sup>2</sup>

To understand why Sultana and the women of Arabia were put into such a social situation, one must consider the historical background. Sultana is calling for a feminist movement, and all the ideas that she is talking about in her autobiography indicate this. Sultana's autobiography is rife with complaints about women's conditions in her land. The main themes she focuses on are subjects that concern women that go with sex, marriages, polygamy, adultery, laws, social

attitudes and feminist rights, all of which are connected to traditions and religion that are driven by males and patriarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The current Saudi Arabia was established in the year 1932, because there were two other Saudi dynasties before the current one in the Arabian peninsula. The third dynasty started with its founder King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud. The kingdom has entered different phases through the years, and many social changes have occurred in the country. Quick shifts within a short time have their natural impact in the society.

If we want to calculate Sultana's age at the time of important events, using the information that is available in the *Princess* text, we will find that in the year 1955, Sultana was born. In the year 1966, she started to write her journal, when she was eleven years old. She wed at the age of seventeen, in 1972. Sultana's age in 2011 is estimated to be fifty-six. Knowing the estimated age of Sultana will help readers to know the scope of the setting and the historical shifting inside the text.

The absence of the description of settings where events take place create problems for readers. Without the exact dates of each incident, it is difficult for the reader to imagine the characters' surrounding environment, as each place in Saudi Arabia has its own characteristics. The characteristics would shift from old to modern, past to present, poor to rich, and that according to time, era, or place. Mostly, Sultana in her narration focuses on stating her own opinions and personal impulses. She sometimes describes elements of some setting, but not

an entire image. For example, in the chapter titled “Girl Friends,” where the events take place in the market called *souq* in the native language, she gives hints to the reader that it is only a market for obtaining goods, but she leaves the reader with little or no sense of the complexity of the conditions of this *souq*. Is it a market that is built from wood and mud? Or, is it a modern concrete market? These are necessary details for the readers to know where the character is and to imagine the incidents that are taking place in the narration. Such details are also significant because Sultana was growing up during the time of the narration in an important transitional time in Saudi Arabian history, which naturally affected the social growth of the entire society, and this information helps the reader to understand some social behaviors at that time in particular places.

According to the dates provided, the *souq* incident took place before the year 1972, which means it occurred during the sixties, after Sultana left her childhood and started to wear the veil. The major shift in the Saudi civil structure started in the seventies with the beginning of the building of modern Saudi Arabia and the abandonment of the traditional old houses that were made from wood and mud by the majority of the Saudi populations. Beginning in the fifties, modern buildings were available in the kingdom, but not in as organized way as in the seventies. But what was the impact of this architectural development to the Saudi society, especially to women?

### Feminism in Pre-Saud Era:

The way women were treated in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era, fourteen centuries ago, was unique. This era is recorded in Arab history as The First Era of Ignorance. Some women in that era had their position depending upon which family they came from or their wealth, but mostly the social condition for the females was cruel. Many Arab tribes practiced infanticide when females were born. The father felt a complete shame if his infant was a female. The father would commit infanticide immediately after her birth and bury her alive. Also, the adult woman had no rights to inherit or to own anything; only the male had these rights. Women were treated like cattle which could be inherited. If the husband died, his wife would be owned by the son. He could make her marry anyone he chose for her, and he was the controller of her future. A husband could marry two sisters at the same time, and he could be a polygamist for an endless number of women at the same time. If a woman was a slave to a man, he could make her a prostitute so that he could get rich by her prostitution. In general, the woman was treated as an object who had no right to speak, to claim her rights, or to express her feelings. The women “were considered to be a social burden” and they had no social status” (Utku). The woman drifted the way her male guardian wanted. It was a total darkness to be a woman.

After this First Era of Ignorance, Islam emerged in the culture in the seventh century and changed the social system of the Arabian Peninsula. It gave civil rights to females, and it protected them from the assault of the social system. As for polygamy, in Islam, a man could

have a maximum of four wives, but he was required to give each wife twenty-four hours within period of every fourth day. She could not be with him again until each had her day. He was not permitted to show partiality.

After the fourteenth century, following the introduction of Islam and before the Saud era, the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were mostly Arab tribes who originated from the Arabian Peninsula itself. Some other inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula came from the nearby Arab countries or from other distant countries in which Islam had become a major religion. The population was divided into groups, the people of the city and the nomads. The people of the city were either from the Arabian tribes or they came from countries outside the Arabian Peninsula. The nomads were mostly Arabian tribes. The pilgrimage that the Muslims must perform led to some racial diversity inside the Arabian peninsula, and with time, these pilgrims also belonged to the Arabian Peninsula through settlement. In addition, the conquest and wars that took place during these long centuries helped to increase the racial diversity inside the Arabian Peninsula. Marriages with the pilgrims, immigrants, or war slaves gave the Arabian lineage diversity. Therefore, the Arabian Peninsula has different colors and races. But still, there are some current Arabian tribes who try to keep their lineage intact and far from foreign presence by the practice of the marriage of cousins. In the Arabian Peninsula, whether race differs or not, the social structure through these long centuries was mostly the same; the traditional ways of men are to be the providers and women are to be housekeepers.

The Arabian Peninsula was under Ottoman control in its major parts during the sixteenth century until the early twentieth century. Most of the time the Ottoman empire kept their leaders in the Arabian Peninsula from the Turkish race away from the Arabs. This kind of racism that the Arabs faced caused the Arabs' revolt<sup>4</sup> against the foreign influence, and non-Arab colonization ended. With long civil wars inside the Arabian Peninsula between the nomadic tribes, the Saud lineage, which came from Najd, controlled the entire Arabian Peninsula except some parts of it, as shown in the contemporary maps (appendix A).

In the pre-Saud era, women's role did not progress, and there was no change in their traditional way of life because industrialism and modernization had not begun. Nikki Keddie says as a commentary about the importance of these two factors in making changes inside the societies; "It was only modern changes in economy, politics, and society that made these structures [in Europe] less functional and called them into question" (7). The structure of the society changes due to factors like economics and politics. Scientific development plays a major part in changing social structures, as happened in western society during the Victorian age when all elements of culture came under question starting from traditions and religion. With world wars, dramatic changes happened inside western societies.

The Arabian Peninsula was completely different from any other land that surrounded it, like Egypt, or the Fertile Crescent. Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, especially in the early and the mid-twentieth century, witnessed modernization and industrialization. The Arabian peninsula for

a long time stayed as it was without big changes, except in some cities where pilgrims came and brought some of their culture with them, such as in the two Islamic capitals of Makkah and Madinnah.

Progress for women comes with the progress of their men and with the social conditions as a whole. Women's conditions in the Middle East in general rose and fell, depending on the religious interpretations, the political system, and the most dominant creeds in the society. The colonization that was waged by European empires in the countries where the Islamic religion ruled also had an effect on women's roles.

Many traditions that came as a result of the social conditions of the time were synthesized to be part of the religion and became a religion itself to enforce compliance of women. The excuse of veiling, segregation, and confinement resulted from patriarchy and males' paranoia about women's infidelity. Women gradually started to lose their social positions and their rights. They became prisoners in their home and were deemed guilty for belonging to the female sex. Keddie says about the existence of patriarchy and Islam, "As Islamic society became more like societies around it in stratification and patriarchy, it was natural to adopt their ways" (7). She refers to the First Era of Islam and its teachings as people mingled with new societies such as the Persians and the Romans, and was influenced by the way of patriarchy that functioned in most parts of the world. Societies where Islam became a major religion preserved their traditional social systems, and they kept the patriarchal system. Islamic teaching did not prevent them from

maintaining patriarchy, thus the traditional system remained. Women's education also was affected by social changes; the more ignorant women were, the more easily they could be controlled.

Veiling of women at some times in the Middle East was enforced as a measure of protection. Keddie says, "The need to guard women from the stares of the traditional Christian enemy has been documented since the French came to Egypt with Napoleon, and veiling increased as a reaction to their presence" (13). Whether it was the stares of blue-eyed French or black-eyed Egyptian, women were forced to hide themselves behind a veil.

Feminism in the new world:

The feminist movement advanced in the west in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly in Europe, in reaction against the interpretation of Christianity that was produced by some groups that opposed equality for women. The ideas that opposed equality were promoted mostly by males' interpretations. As the feminist movement flourished there, these feminist ideas emerged also in other countries. In the countries that were near the Arabian Peninsula, such as Egypt and Lebanon, because of the colonization or the commercial communication and education, the feminist movement increased in a distinguishable manner. The feminist movement never advanced into the Arabian peninsula, because the Arabian peninsula was always isolated due to the harsh environment. If we want to take into account the groups who performed the

pilgrimage and came from countries that contributed to the feminist movement, we have to bear in mind that the pilgrims were mostly traditionalists who maintained the teachings of the traditional interpretation of the religion.

According to Sandra Mackey, the intellectual creativity of Islamic thinking, especially from the side “of the legal system,” has ceased from the thirteenth century, as a result of the Mongol invasion (269). Later Mackey says that this blunting of creativity could be because of the “repressive domination of the Ottomans,” and with the “fall of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of European rule throughout much of the Arab world, Islamic law began to imitate rather than instruct the West” (269). Besides that, transportation at that time, and before the Saud era, was difficult so that pilgrims came in small numbers, having little effect in unconnected society, and in most cases, they would return to the place from which they came. The Ottomans controlled primarily the western side of the Arabian Peninsula. How should their social contribution to Arabian society be evaluated? Did they neglect the progression of the rest of Arabian Peninsula? Or did the rest of the Arabian Peninsula not care for its own progress? The Ottoman Empire, in their headquarters in Istanbul, was moving toward modernization found in the nearby European countries. Some westernized women talked about women's rights in some parts of the Ottoman Empire, and “two eighteenth-century English-women wrote admiringly of the lives and freedom enjoyed by Ottoman ladies” (Keddie 12). The Ottoman Empire neglected **that part** of Arabia and focused more on conquering the other green lands to share the European

gluttony for expanding lands. The irony is that the Arabian Peninsula contains the two holy mosques for Muslims, yet the Ottoman Turks did not give major importance to these places to make them advanced like Istanbul.

The Arabian feminism that flourished in the Middle East was led by people who were considered secular or non-religious, and they were rejected by the groups who considered themselves as the keepers and followers of the true religion. This kind of resistance and rejection made diversity inside the societies. These ideas appeared as foreign ideas coming from nowhere, which created additional inner social conflict. This reaction contributed to already existent conflicts about traditional ideologies such as the political, class, and intellectual creeds conflicts.

The Arabian peninsula remained insulated from all kinds of social changes and conflicts because the Arabian peninsula was not colonized by a foreign country for a long time. Only the Ottoman Empire focused on some areas of the Arabian peninsula to bring progress. The rest of the land was occupied by either traditional craftsmen or scattered nomads. Most men worked outside, like merchants, shepherds, farmers, or practitioners of any other kind of traditional craft. Women in the same way led their traditional lives, staying at home and taking care of it. But women also participated in the crafts, and they worked as merchants, shepherds or any job that required them to be outside the house. The conflicts that existed inside the Arabian peninsula were either the inner tribal nomadic conflicts, or the tribes' conflicts with foreign powers.

Nomadic Females in the “Arabian Deserta”:

In the early part of the twentieth century, some British and American travelers went to the Arabian Peninsula to spend some years among the nomads of Arabia. They wrote autobiographies about their adventures. One of these travelers was the British author Carl Reinhard Raswan who wrote *Black Tents of Arabia: My Life Among the Beduins*, published in 1935. Another was Wilfred Thesiger who wrote *Arabian Sands* in 1959. *Travels in Arabia Deserta* written by Charles Montagu Doughty tells about the Arabian nomads. Another book was written by the American author William Buehler Seabrook, who wrote *Adventures in Arabia among the Bedouins*, which was published in 1927.

Carl Reinhard Raswan wrote about his adventure in Arabia in poetic tone. He romanticized his adventures in the desert among the nomads, and he described the traditions in a story form. He included information about the women of the Rula tribe with whom he lived. William Seabrook reported his experiences in essays, also describing the women of the tribe with whom he stayed. He uses a comic manner, saying a male Arab of a tribe could be considered as “an aristocrat of a type which ardent feminists would scarcely find sympathetic” (70). Most of these writers shared informative tendencies to describe the women of the nomads. The women's conditions differ from one nomadic tribe to another, as the nomadic life of women also differs from the women of the city (Seabrook 70). Condition of life also depended on the geographical area of the tribe, for each one had its own traditions for the treatment of its women. The nomadic

women enjoyed more freedom than women of the city, as there was no building for female confinement. Wilfred Thesiger said:

... the general belief among English people that Arab women are kept shut up is true of many of the women in the towns, but not among tribes. Not only is it impossible for a man to shut up his wife when he is living under a tree, or in a tent which is always open on one side, but he requires her to work, to fetch water and firewood, and to herd the goats. (177)

Women of the cities and the nomads shared some religious teaching and some traditions.

Polygamy in the nomadic life existed, as did a sort of veiling. The tradition of the private quarter of women “the hareem,” even if it was just as a symbol to be only a “goat's hair partition,” was there (Seabrook 70).

Polygamy was a necessity of the nomadic life as a way for surviving, as the power of each nomadic tribe depended on the ability of members to protect the tribe from any danger it might face. The nomadic life was required for most inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, as the harsh environment required them to move from one place to another to find water and food for themselves and their animals. Tribal survival required a woman to bear many children for her husband. According to William Seabrook, the wife of the chief of the tribe he was traveling with was urging her husband to take a second wife to bear children for him instead of her. She did not want to have more children so she could maintain her youth and beauty and not grow old quickly, because pregnancy in the harsh environment is life-consuming (68). In addition, she wanted a

second wife for companionship, an equal, so as not to have just servant women around her (69). This way of thinking as justification for polygamy was connected to the harsh environmental conditions of that time. Nowadays, polygamy would become unnecessary and only a male luxury, because the nomadic life has disappeared from the Arabian Peninsula and the harsh environment is tamed by modernization. But nomadic women, through the narration of these stories, enjoyed freedom of speech even in front of different men, and some even had the ability to control men and impose their opinions openly. The photographs taken by these authors show that nomadic women did not cover their faces. Some adult women had their own hair exposed. Also the nomadic women rode camels and horses like their dominant men. Some women were hunters; the men of the tribe praised them openly for their skill, and made celebrations for them (Raswan 99), an attitude that a contemporary Saudi woman cannot imagine.

#### The King and the Females:

When King Abdul-Aziz united the whole of the Arabian peninsula under his rule, he insisted on uniting the tribes inside Arabia. The tribal conflicts inside Arabia were similar to the First Era of Ignorance. Racism between the tribes was intense, and every tribal leader wanted to be the dominant one, either inside his tribe or above another tribe. Chaos resulted from this mentality. But when Abdul-Aziz became king, he knew this flaw inside the structure of his land and wanted to unite all tribes. As a method to unite the tribes, he married women from different

tribes so they had a kinship with the king. Officially, King Abdul-Aziz had twenty-two wives through his life. Simon Henderson writes, "Ibn Saud, which is another nickname for King Abdul-Aziz, had thirty four sons who survived him, born to seventeen of his twenty-two wives." In Sasson's book, the main character, Sultana, says that King Abdul-Aziz had "more than three hundred women,"but no official source has confirmed this number (18).

Stories of the king himself show how he treated women. Robert Lacey, the British author of the book *The Kingdom*, describes the intimate life of King Abdul-Aziz, his wives, and his relationship with them. As the king was known to have many women in his household, especially after his settlement in his capital Riyadh, he had his own compassionate way of treating them. No detailed story remains about his relationship with his first wife, because she died after six months of their marriage due to the harshness of life that Abdul-Aziz suffered while he was in exile.

Lacey mentions the King's personal sentimental relationship with one of his wives called Johara, which means the Jewel, and the way he grieved deeply upon her death. She died from the great Spanish influenza epidemic in the year 1919. Although the custom for men dictates that they do not show their sentimental feelings to the public, an eyewitness said that the king could not, thirteen years after her death, speak of Johara's name without a catch in his throat and tears starting to well up in his eyes (152).

King Abdul-Aziz had a passion for women, and he showed that to his followers proudly. Lacey says, "Abdul-Aziz's potency was to become a core element in the identity that inspired his

followers' loyalty—a master of the desert, a servant of God, and a Caesar of the bed chamber” (32). Although this is the legend that grew about him, the relationship was “beyond sensuality” as Robert Lacey said, and he continued to say that in his private place he liked to “relax, sip coffee, [and] play with his children” (91). King Abdul-Aziz showed an opposite attitude when he was with his wives from when he was with his men, as he was strict with men. His charismatic appeal for women showed his masculinity. One of King Abdul Aziz's sons asked his mother, Um Talal, how she could have stayed so long with him. She laughed at him and said, “You do not know your own father. He is a different man with us from the man that you see” (90). Reputedly, his best friend was his sister, Nura, who was a year older than he. He also was a poet and wrote many love poems to his beloved Johara when she was alive (92). This was the kingdom-founder's relationship with women.

Contemporary Saudi females:

The conditions of the pre-Saud era were mostly similar to the conditions before fourteen centuries ago: dusty, empty desert, no fancy architecture, and nomadic life that was isolated from the modernization in the outer world. But when oil was discovered, everything changed, and an entire land was transformed in a short period of time.

When Saudi Arabia was established, the land was completely isolated from any foreign interaction. When the Saud became the masters of the land, there was no recorded social history

to trace the widespread nomadic life. They started anew. Civil and city lives, such as in Egypt, Europe or Turkey, were not there. But the British and American ambassadors, especially the Americans, helped to contribute in shaping this new land away from the complexity of the wars of the old world<sup>5</sup> and its conflicts. They brought their machines to discover the oil, and they brought modernity with them. Today's modern architectural structures, such as roads, can be seen as an American contribution.

The errors of the past were continued in the new world. A clash occurred between tradition and the modernization that came with sudden changes in the routine of the daily way of life and progressed rapidly with the emergence of the new technology. There was no gradual growth of technological development, only alien objects out of nowhere that suddenly appeared in the land. This sharp transformation had its effect on daily social life, and the gap between two generations was enormous. This does not mean that the population did not tolerate these new inventions, but to educate an entire population required a long time.

Most aspects of life that came from the western world, such as architecture, science, and machines, were welcomed by the society as an aspect of development. The only side that did not witness any development was the religion, which continued to be defined by the elders and the older generation who saw there was no connection between religion and modernization. There was no development, and worse, they saw machines and modernization as the enemy of religion and henceforth of humanity, so they fought them.

Saudi Arabia has had six kings. King Abdul-Aziz, was followed by his elder son King Saud, then King Faisal, King Khalid, King Fahad, and King Abdu-Allah, who is the current king of Saudi Arabia. Sultana, according to her autobiography, witnessed all the kings except her grandfather the establisher, the first king. She was born two years after his death. She lived all the critical moments in the history of the kingdom, and she records some of them in the autobiography, *Princess*. Her autobiography has significance, because these moments are narrated from a woman's point of view inside the royal circle, which is a rare perspective to find in written texts. She does not go into the details as much in the first chapters, which deal with her childhood and include events which many did not know about, for example, the incidents where the princes were talking about selecting a new king. But Sultana moves away from the narration of the royal family matters to more personal issues, especially the intimate inner domestic life, and focuses on negative aspects of sexual abuse. Not everything about the normal domestic life of the royal family is exposed, but talking about these matters at all has a significance because the narrator is a female living inside a royal family. She can be considered the first royal woman in her situation to talk in public about her life. To read a female point of view about matters usually spoken of only from the point of view of a man makes a difference, especially when the speaker is a woman who was brought up in such a traditional paradigm. Her comments reflect a different perspective from a male of equal status brought up in the same environment. But she emphasizes in this autobiography the sexual abuses more than anything else, which makes it a semi-tabloid.

Sultana mentions important events in the Kingdom that affected women's rights. Scattered through the autobiography with her own time line, they provide progression in the story. Women's rights in Saudi Arabia ebb and flow with changes through the decades in the civil laws, the economic status of the country, the political conditions, the religious permissions<sup>6</sup>, and the ruling of the king. All affected the social life. Some significant dates exist for the feminist rights in Saudi Arabia, but in general, the situation for women in the Arabian Peninsula has progressed in the current Saud dynasty with the entire historic modern transformation, especially with King Faisal's decisions for reforms.

#### Feminist Incidents:

In the era of King Saud ( 1953-64 ), the second king of the kingdom, major changes occurred related to the education of women. With the effort of Iffat, one of the wives of his brothers and successor King Faisal, the official education of women started during the 1960s. Robert Lacey says about this effort, "King Saud himself had developed a college for his daughters, [because] he favored Iffat's idea" (366). King Saud's "school for girls in Riyadh was operating several years before Iffat's [school in] Dar Al Hanan," was established (Lacey 379). Iffat's school for girls was established in 1956 (365).

Male education preceded female education by decades, but the policy has changed with the new king and the new ideas that were brought into the kingdom. Female education

started with the close female circle inside the royal family, including slaves, because there was a public refusal from the zealots for more widespread female education, especially in the central region. King Saud developed schools for girls anyway and “introduced a female *majlis* [reception] once a week where women could bring their grievances to him” (311).

In 1962, slavery for both genders was officially abolished by the government through the efforts of Crown Prince Faisal (345). Before that, King Saud also had “committees working on the abolition of slavery,” but Faisal put the action into practice (379). When Faisal became the king of Saudi Arabia, he made major reforms in the women's situation with the help of his wife Iffat. King Faisal reigned between the years 1964 to 1975. Iffat's family originated from the Arabian Peninsula, but she was raised in Turkey. She became Faisal's wife when he was a prince. She and her husband educated their daughters and sons with the same curriculum (243). They sent their children to western universities and had an English nanny to care for their small children (242). Iffat became active in advocating for female education before she became a queen. She encouraged building schools for females in spite of the resistance of religious people. It is worthy to note that Iffat “was, and is, the only one ever to be popularly known as 'queen,' though that title does not officially exist in the kingdom” (242). When the plan for women's education became operational, steps were calculated carefully to avoid upsetting the religious zealots and to please everyone. Iffat took these steps deliberately. Robert Lacey writes, “Jeddah's first female academy should be veiled with the same protective camouflage that had worked so

well in Taif” (365). In the 1940s, in an official manner, Iffat had modeled her own private school where her children were taught in the remote mountains of Taif city. There was no announcement of this school, as the pupils were carefully chosen to prevent attracting the attention of the public who were refusing the teaching of modern schools. Iffat waited until a general acceptance of modern education happened within the community, and then she expanded her school and moved it to different city, Jeddah (364). The authors of the educational curriculum made some changes in the female curriculum to include some subjects to prepare women “to be better mothers and home-makers,” and to facilitate the acceptance of women's education by religion representatives (365).

In opposition to opening a school for educating women, in September 1963, some religious groups protested to King Faisal:

... [he] sent the National Guard to break up demonstrations in Buraydah. The citizens of that Qaseem town had had to be forcibly restrained from assaulting a building in which, they suspected, the ultimate wickedness was about to be committed, for Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz, they had heard, had laid plans to educate women. (363-364)

Iffat's impact on Sultana's life is mentioned in *Princess* in the chapter, “Family,” which also recounts her father's and her mother's reaction to female education. Sultana, in the autobiography, calls Iffat in an intimate way, “Auntie,” and she also said “Auntie Iffat ... changed the lives of so many Saudi women” (Sasson 37).

International scholarships, especially to Europe and America, flourished during the sixties and more so during the seventies and the eighties in Saudi Arabia. Although they were mainly directed to male Saudi citizens, some women shared the benefits of scholarship program. Those women mostly married, but these limited female contributions effected women's status in Saudi Arabia. By then, Saudi Arabia for the first time had women with advanced educations who worked in different new jobs instead of the traditional role and instead of having a weak education or being totally uneducated, as the previous generation of women had been.

In 1975, King Khalid became the ruler of Saudi Arabia. He reigned until 1982. During those years, significant incidents happened that damaged and changed women's situation in the kingdom. In 1979, the Holy Mosque for the Muslims in Makkah was taken under siege by Islamic religious zealots. The excuse for their rage was that the Kingdom was witnessing extreme vice. One of their reactions was to reject the appearance of women on the television, which was already a forbidden machine in their belief, and singing while their heads and faces were exposed. According to their view, that was evil by itself. The religious claims in their demands, besides the political ones, would deprive women of every right. After this incident, the government took some measures and changed some policies to pacify the country, as the government policy for developing the country proceeded by caution. In addition, there was the Khomeini revolution in Iran, but the zealots in Makkah had a different ideology from Khomeini's, and the Kingdom would not tolerate a threat for chaos (482). The people in the Kingdom who

shared these zealots' attitudes were not obvious because they were dressed up in the same fashion<sup>7</sup> as those who called themselves the followers of the religion, so the government decided to take a middle position. Women, especially the ordinary ones who were not royals or conservative, were the victims in this incident. Thus, a more conservative social life in the Kingdom were established, as one of the main targets of the zealots was always women.

In 1977, the government issued a law that banned women from travel alone without their male guardians' company or their permission. This act could be explained based on one of the religious interpretations for preventing women from traveling alone, the interpretation of which is still under debate. Another explanation of this law is connected to another incident that occurred in the same year. A princess was executed in public on charge of adultery with a man other than her husband. The details of the incident, which may have been contrived, remain mysterious and unsettled, but it created a controversy in the western media, especially in Britain. The execution of that princess may have inspired Princess Sultana to publish her story, and it could have been a motive for her writing, even if her autobiography came a decade and a half after the execution.

The Aftermath:

After these incidents, the situation of women remained static and unchanged. Many women have been highly educated, and many are university and college graduates. According to *Time* magazine, "Women make up 58% of the university population" (Baker). Despite this

significant progress in education, the daily social life based on the traditions impedes development, which creates a social contradiction between the two principles. The tradition of the segregation between the two genders within the home was brought not only into education with its different levels but also in every civil institution built in the country. In the past, there were no special governmental ministries or institutions in the Arabian Peninsula, as these concepts were fairly new to the land. So when they started in the new history of the kingdom, and according to the existing religious interpretations, everything was segregated, so a new kind of a “hareem” was shaped. Sandra Mackey, a journalist who lived in Saudi Arabia with her husband from 1978 to 1984, said about this kind of contradiction between the modernity of the architecture and the traditional structure of the society: "Education, banking, access to public transportation, and job opportunities are still rooted in strong traditional values" (136).

Despite the governmental effort to improve the situation of women in the Arabian Peninsula, why is the situation for the female still markedly unique? Mackey writes, “Even if the house of Saud wanted to alter significantly the position of women, it is almost powerless to do so. In the Saudi political system, public policy is, like women, hamstrung by tradition” (137). It is all the result of the historical effects of a nearly paralyzed society through long centuries. It is rooted in centuries of traditions and hard to be changed instantly, especially since most of the traditions are inherited from generation to generation, and most of it became part of faith. If changes are not considered as consistent religious faith itself, they are not enacted. The errors should be

corrected.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Example of this act is Sati, where the widow is burned alive with her husband's dead body. It was practiced in India until it was outlawed.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Victorian women's social code of conduct which was strict, like the way they speak, act or respond, especially for those women of middle and upper classes.

<sup>3</sup> Patriarchy means, “a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it” (“Patriarchy”).

<sup>4</sup> Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks started in 1916 and ended in 1918.

<sup>5</sup> “Old world” indicates the meaning of the old continents: Asia, Europe and Africa.

<sup>6</sup> In Saudi Arabia, there is a religious council where official statements are issued to the local people with matters that are connected to the religion.

<sup>7</sup> According to the beliefs of the local Islamic teachers, good Muslim men must dress in a certain manner. Their garment is cut short above the ankles; they have long beards and clipped mustaches. Many of the local citizens follow this kind of dress believing that they are achieving piety in that manner. So, it is difficult to distinguish between a zealot and a person who is not.

## CHAPTER III

### From Sultana's Observations

#### Unique Society:

Sultana's goal in writing this book was to criticize men, and especially the men of her country, starting with the circle of men who surrounded her. She was raised in difficult family circumstances, beginning with her brother's ill treatment of her, and the list goes on. According to the narration, nearly every man around her made her miserable, and the harsh circle of men widened as she grew. This put a spotlight on the clash between the females and males inside Saudi Arabia, as each gender lives in its separate environment as if they were coming from two different planets. This lifestyle created social and psychological consequences. This specialized type of segregation has increased, especially in the last decades, where the new innovations of buildings have come. These buildings were adapted to suit this kind of lifestyle by making special sections for women and others for men.

The Saudi woman is unique in that she can be considered different even from the women of neighboring countries in the rest of the Middle East. The Saudi woman is raised in a unique environment. From the time she is born, she encounters the gender-segregated world, the act of

confinement inside the house, and surely the discriminatory treatment of daughters in comparison to the male siblings. Of course, the female goes along with this kind of treatment as she sees herself, in comparison to the male with whom she grows up, as different physically. On the basis of that apparent difference she would submit to any kind of discrimination, not knowing that this difference is not a cause to be treated unequally.

Saudi society is different from any other society in the world because it is the most radically gender-segregated society in the world. The segregation occurs in nearly every aspect of life, starting from the civil life that is outside the domestic realm and extending to domestic life itself. This segregation, which already existed, is invading domestic life and increasing to abnormal levels. It has become a very sensitive matter to the family members. The domestic realm is a “harem” that no foreign male can enter or trespass upon, and not for the sake of privacy only. It would be a source of extreme shame if a foreign man had a glimpse of a female in the house. Sultana mentions such social behavior in the text, as she speaks about the arrival of foreign men in the house, “Omar, my father’s driver, burst into the garden with a manner of great importance and shouted for the women to go upstairs. He waved his hands at us as if he were exorcising the house of beasts and literally herded us up the stairwell” (Sasson 29).

The social segregation between genders produces social alienation within the close relationships between the family members, for example, married couples. The only time that married couples can be together is inside the domestic realm; otherwise they are mostly separate.

This creates some kind of affectional alienation. If there is a social gathering, the women will be in a separate place from their spouses. In school celebrations, only one parent will attend rather than both parents. This also leads to alienation between the children and their parents. The daughter cannot recognize her father on a social level except the domestic life. The presence of a father with his daughter in the public is not a usual scene, as the mother accompanies her daughter in every social task. Relationships between couples, fathers and daughters are seen as unnecessary indulgence is sentimentality. These relationships can be neglected for larger benefits, which is protecting the society from sexual chaos.

The extreme veiling that a female must wear also makes the Kingdom unique from the rest of the world. It is a custom that grew into a social law that all women must wear the black cloak called “Abayah” in the Arabic language. The shape and the look of this black cloak will vary according to the degree of the conservative intellectual thinking of every family group, whether by the individual guardian or by the female herself. This shape of cloak is controlled also by the region or the city from which the female comes, as some cities are more open than others. In addition to the black cloak, the full covering of the face became a backbone tradition in the society. Many believed that this was a religious act, and it is from the religious duty that a woman should cover her own body with this “abayah,” starting with the face with a black cloth, either thick or thin. Later, many Islamic scholars discovered that this act is not part of the religion,<sup>1</sup> but it was too late as it became a tradition that is hard to break. Many people still believe that it is a

sign of virtue, that a woman must be completely unexposed from head to toe. Some females go to the extent of hiding everything and wear long black gloves and socks to be in a total pitched black color so that nothing appears of her body, even if she wears them in extreme heat. Besides this kind of covering of the skin, most women also avoid speaking in public. By this, they would reach the maximum of virtue. Sultana comments about this matter of veiling by saying, "I was seeing life through a thick screen. How could women see through veils made of thicker fabric? The sky was no longer blue, the glow of the sun had dimmed ... Outside my own home, I would not experience life as it really is in all its color" (95).

Women mostly spend their lives inside their houses without leaving them, depending on the woman's family degree of conservative belief. It has become mostly a social custom that a woman does not leave the house, and she cannot do so without the permission of the guardian of the house, even if she is an adult woman. She does not own the right to freedom of movement, as she, according to the society, is a sexual temptation for men, and it is going to be dangerous to her and to the society for her to roam freely the way she might prefer. This is the intellectual excuse for such a social custom. Due to this intellectual idea, two social stigmas are still practiced; a woman cannot travel without her guardian or without his permission, and she cannot drive. Those two come along with the restriction against leaving the house. Sultana in the text mentions the two stigmas in different episodes. This intellectual idea gradually leads to the act of confining, which became a social custom in many families. Although it is obviously an unnatural

act, no large public objection was made.

Women in Saudi Arabia, unlike women in the rest of world, are not allowed to drive.

Driving for a long time has been considered a masculine job that only the male has the right to do. Beside the masculine consideration, for a long time it was considered religiously forbidden, and a civil ban and restriction still hover over it. Religiously, driving is forbidden because by doing so the woman would be able to have the freedom of movement, and by this evil would become as a source of temptation, and sexual chaos would result. As driving is a masculine act, if a woman practiced it, she would be considered a man, and if a woman neglected her femininity, she would not be considered a female anymore. This is why driving is forbidden. Later, some of the local religious teachers realized that cars, or any automobile machines, are in the degree of horses and camels, and Muslim women in earlier ages rode these animals. By that reasoning, no religious restriction is valid. Many local teachers are aggressively against the idea of driving as they cannot make a connection between the benefits of women driving the car and the harm that they claim that this practice will bring. Because of the religious teachers and many people who follow them, this national social refusal is still widespread, so the Saudi woman's quest to drive is still a cold case.

The problem of women driving is related to the early history of the current Saudi Arabia.

When the kingdom was established, cars had not conquered the world yet. Driving followed modernization and machine problems,<sup>2</sup> together with the television, radio, and the telephone. The

car, also, was a matter of luxury; not just anyone could pay the price of the automobile when it first came, and not everyone had the ability to drive one. So there was no specific rule or vision among the public at that time about women driving cars. It started with men driving the cars, and it became a tradition. There was no civil law, but it was social law, and in Saudi Arabia, it continues to be so.

In civil and governmental matters, a Saudi woman cannot complete any legal documents without the permission, approval, or the signature of a male guardian. The adult woman cannot be independent in any governmental process without facing this kind of obstacle, and sometimes it becomes a tremendous problem. In the worst case scenario the woman will be under the fragile interest of her male guardian and shepherd. The presence of the male guardian, is referred to in the Arabic language as “ma'hram,” which means male relative guardian. It is used in every governmental process which became in time a word that holds negative connotation to women who seek independence. In Sultana's text this word is not mentioned directly as she, in her story, does not deal with civil institutions, but what she narrates is an extension of this paradigm.

These paradigms are generalized to all women inside Saudi Arabia, and these elements, of course, make unique psychological characteristics inside the society. Each gender is trying to avoid the other as if the other did not exist.

### A Second Ignorance Era:

What caused women's situation to deteriorate to that extent? It is not that men are evil by nature and the women are feeble; rather these ideas echo inside the society, either in a contemporary sense or by inheritance through generations. These ideas could be misinterpretations of the Islamic religion or unsuitable traditions made up by the individuals or the society.

In the First Ignorance Era, women were victims of infanticide or were ill-treated because they belonged to the female sex, but with the coming of Islam the act of infanticide became forbidden as a grave sin. Nowadays, a new kind of infanticide<sup>3</sup> has been revived, which is the act of confining women in their houses. Confining became an act of infanticide because it kills the female psychologically, which leads at the same time to physical decay. In the worst cases, women of all ages are totally isolated from other spaces than the one where they are born. If the family is rigid, the female will not leave the house until she gets married. Some old Islamic preachers said that a woman should not leave her house but in two cases, to go to her husband's house and from there, to her grave.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, with the modern schools, these women have the opportunity to leave their houses to get an education, which gives them some space of freedom, but other than this, they are not allowed to be outside. As a result of this kind of modern infanticide, the women, beside their deprivation of the outer world and enjoyment of the open air, have to suffer the physical illness that is associated with the lack of movement, such as bone

illness which occurs in high rates among women, young or old.

The act of extreme veiling, also, is also a kind of modern infanticide. With the amount of heavy black wrapping on the woman covering her main navigator, her eyes, she will have impediment in movement that either oppresses her desire to be outside her domestic realm or makes her suffer psychologically.

In *Princess* we see many signs of this new ignorant era, where the male characters clearly detest the existence of the females. If a female is born, the head of the family will say that “God had cursed [the] home with daughters” (Sasson 19). The female became a curse, a burden, to her family as the social structure put her in that position. Society became obsessed that each family needed to have a son. Sultana's story is full of complains about this matter, as she narrates her personal story and the stories of friends who were in similar positions, and she says about her friend Wafa's story, “Her mother was never allowed out of the house; she was a virtual prisoner, enslaved by a man of God ... Her father was so disappointed that he had a girl-child” (92). In another paragraph Sultana says, “From the age of seven, Wafa was forced to wear an Abaya and to cover her hair” (93). Cursing the birth of a female was revived again, as Sultana narrates the old story of her mother's father, and says, “When other men of the tribe sulked at the birth of their daughters, Grandfather laughed and told them to praise God for the blessing of a tender touch in their home” (82).

## Marriages:

In her autobiography, Sultana criticizes how the marriage process takes place in her land. The text focuses on the stories of miserable marriages and relationships between the husbands and wives. Starting with a glimpse of the marriage story of her mother, she writes an entire chapter about the incident of her sister's first marriage to an old man. It is the usual story of "May and December" where the old man marries the young girl. Besides this, she was the third wife. We clearly see the psychological panic that her sister went through, causing dramatic reactions and creating a marriage phobia. Sara's story, who is Sultana's older sister, shows a side of the marriage crisis and the melodramas in the marriages inside Saudi Arabia.

In such a totally segregated society, marriages are arranged marriages. Polygamy is widespread in the society, because the female is totally ignorant of what marriage is, what sex is, and what the male is as a whole. These subjects are socially taboo to talk about or to discuss in an open manner, especially in front of young girls. The reality of marriage and the responsibilities that come with it, like bearing children, are not well known by the woman, and she, in many cases, does not realize the weight of it. Giving birth to many children is a habit in Saudi Arabia, but the woman does not realize the effort needed to raise this number of children. Child rearing usually is an effort done alone, without the help of the male partner.

This ignorance about the matter causes marriage phobia for many women. Panic before marriage can be common in many different societies and in individuals, but its level increases

among Saudi females individuals. The woman does not realize what marriage is, and she is completely without knowledge of it. This state of ignorance would make the woman accept any immediate suitor, as she is not familiar with the males' presence because of the segregation between the two genders. The psychological pressure doubles, which leads to many health problems, either physically or psychologically, such as extreme anxiety or weight problems, and the female or the whole family succumbs to a full state of emergency.

Regarding the polygamous marriage, the woman's awareness of it should be increased. Women whose husbands are marrying other women should be aware of this matter, but the other women who agree to enter into a polygamous marriage should be aware as well. A woman must refuse to participate in polygamy, and she should not accept a man with another wife. The Islamic teaching does not forbid polygamy, but it does not encourage it. In one of the verses, the Qura'n said that a man can take a second, a third, and a fourth wife but with the condition of treating them equally, and if he fears that he cannot, then he should marry one (An-Nisa' 3). In another verse from the same chapter, the Qura'n says that husbands can never treat women equally (129). Islamic scholars say that polygamy did not become forbidden because it will prevent men from taking a mistress, having sex, fathering illegal children. By a legal marriage, those children will have the right of recognition, lineage, and inheritance.

Nowadays, men are taking this act of polygamy as a spiritual and religious right to have more than one wife, saying the man is obliged to do so as a kind of social appearance. For the

sake of social appearance, the man must fulfill the number of wives to the maximum. The woman, in the same way, thinks that it is a spiritual duty to accept being a second, third, or a fourth wife. She believes that she must accept a man with another wife instead of marrying a single man. A woman cannot be forced to get married to anyone if she does not accept the marriage, even if her father tries to make her do so. If the woman is forced to get married without her permission, according to the Islamic teaching, she has the right to appeal to the court to stop this kind of marriage. Due to social consequences and social embarrassment, most women who are a victim of forced marriages avoid appealing to the court to take their right. They do not realize that no one can force them to have undesirable relationships. Blind marriages help also in the quick acceptance of the partners whether polygamist or not, and mostly it will be a matter of chance whether they get along or not.

#### Female against Female:

This woman-to-woman environment can lead to a unique social and psychological behavior inside this closed circle as a woman will “[draw] her strength from other women,” and great clashes may happen between female family members so the woman finds “her place in the family” and with the male master (Mackey 128). She will become completely dependent on the source of comfort instead of being emotionally independent. The relationship will be not mutually satisfying as the relationship will turn instead into an appeasing relationship, a

relationship all about pleasing one partner. That impulse to please will be directed toward the controlling person, mainly the male in this case. While the woman is engaged in providing this pleasing relationship, she will eliminate any possible threat that might sabotage this kind of relationship.

A woman might suffer from another woman more than from another man, as the males are always away from the direct circle and direct contact with females. As the women are confined at home in small spaces, mostly with nothing to do other than to meet requirements of domestic life, there is no changing of the atmosphere, and there is no psychological refreshment. So, close encounters and conflicts between the women of the household will be very common. The conflicts and clashes between women are a form of psychological venting resulting from a boring life, and this mostly because the women do not take the spare time as an opportunity to develop themselves. As social restrictions do not allow women to explore new spaces in their life, such as going out of the domestic life to see different sets of experiences, this way of life increases the number of domestic conflicts.

Sultana mentions this struggle in the chapter "Married Life," where a dramatic clash occurs between her and her mother-in-law. Sultana says, "Since I had spent my childhood mistreated by the men of my family, I was in no mood to spend the second part of my life abused by women" (Sasson 153). The struggle is the fight over the man and who can win him. Her mother-in-law developed all kinds of plots to draw the attention of her son away from his wife,

even using “voodoo.” The mentality of the mother-in-law clearly reflects an uneducated, illiterate woman, which is the worst conflict that the other party might face, as the mother-in-law in this case will use any kind of harmful method to maintain her place in the family.

#### Anti-male Attitude:

Sultana was searching for a man whom she could depend upon through her life, the ideal picture of a male hero. Although she married, she later criticized her husband for being irresponsible and childish. She wanted to understand the men outside the circle of her family and especially in her childhood wished to see men other than her overly-controlling father and brother. She says as a confession about her feelings in dealing and being with men, “Sadly, I was fearful of my father, and I detested Ali and my half-brothers” (Sasson 56). Sandra Mackey notes about the phenomenon in which women struggle as a result of strict family system:

The man’s absolute authority over the women in his family is maintained through fear—the fear of physical brutality, the fear of economic insecurity, and, above all, the fear of being alone, severed from the security of the family. Girls are brought up to fear their fathers. When they marry they fear their husbands. If they are widowed or divorced, they fear their brothers, brothers-in-law, or sons. There is always a man to fear and the fear is real. (129)

Sultana’s search for the male hero is dissolved through the progression of her life. She is disappointed by her father, her brother and, sometimes, her husband. The gender crisis for Sultana is deep, because she grew up in a totally female realm, and the only males with whom

she came in contact, especially in her childhood, were sources of her torture. Sultana's gender crisis arises from the limitation of the female society. She was kept away from social patterns other than the closed domestic life and away from what was going on in the male world, the outside world. This kind of social life limits the woman's social mentality and, as a result, there is no room for social maturity. Women who are raised in similar social conditions are deprived of the normal social life.

Through the narration of the book, Sultana can be considered as anti-men, as one who hates men. Her opinion varies at the beginning of the chapters, but later she emphasizes the idea that she hates men. It might be her first natural impression as a response to the sexual abuses toward the women around her. For example, she says, "I had my first thoughts that all-All-men are wicked [sic]" (Sasson 79). In another paragraph from the same chapter she says, "His hypocrisy was to me the essence of the evil nature of men" (80). In these two lines, we see again the problem of voices. Readers wonder whether this is the voice of the writer, Sultana, or the voice of the child, Sultana, as these emotions came from the young Sultana objecting to what happened when her teenage cousin raped a small girl with the help of her brother.

Sultana does carry a grudge against men, especially the men of her country, but she shows some sympathy for them, although they can change their unequal treatment of the women in their lives. Sultana says, with compassion for them, "True, their lives are bliss compared with that of women; still, much is lacking, and the young men of Arabia spend many languid hours longing

for stimulation” (154).

This kind of compassion is seen also in Sandra Mackey's point of view, that as a result of this severe segregation and controlling of women's freedom of movement, men must take the burden of the life outside the domestic realm, and she says about the matter, “The paradox is that in policing the freedom of women in their families, men impose an enormously heavy burden on themselves” (131). She says, by that, the men will throw the problem of logistics upon themselves. The man will take the burden to be the only mediator for meeting every need of the female family members, whether this need be trivial or big. He is going to be the only connection with the outer world. However, Mackey says, “It is the psychic energy that is expended to uphold tradition and to protect a man's image among his peers that so drains the energies of Saudi men” (131). As a result of this drainage of the man's energy, he avoids performing what are supposed to be his responsibilities, so the woman must endure this ignorance of her needs. The woman will be the victim of this restriction of the freedom of movement, and she will face the consequences alone, as the man who is supposed to be her aid will abandon her.

This reflects some of the severe conditions between the women and men inside Saudi Arabia. This situation is increasing with the passage of time as domestic problems are increasing with lack of adjustment and the slow progression of social maturity. The social gap between the two genders is growing because of the lack of proper communication. If they get mixed accidentally, huge confusion and tension will result. Neither gender has any clue how to treat

and deal with the other. The only general view that is implicit inside the mind of each gender is that the relationship based on sexuality only, unless they are from the same family. The biological differences between opposite sex in the general understanding of the public in the society is only for sex and breeding. Other than the normal relationship between genders inside the family, the only relationship between them in the society is in marriage, and to have a normal relationship outside the marriage contract is quite restricted. Due to this kind of mentality, the initial thought of marriage is that marriage is all about sex. Men started to be obsessed with marriage and polygamy, leaving aside the other meanings like having a companion, a family and stable life. Because of this kind of mentality, when members outside of the same family from the opposite sex mix accidentally, and for confusion and anxiety, the immediate result will be total ignore from both sides, as if the “other” does not exist. The “other's” intention is always in question, whether there is a sexual interest or not. Based on that, the decision to avoid contact with the other gender will be made to avoid social scandal.

The heavy duty of thinking about the consequences of talking to the opposite sex usually falls upon the female, as she has a reputation to protect, and protecting her honor is her duty and her guardian's. The man, who wants to be considered an honorable man and to avoid social scandals, will not consider talking to any woman even in simple greeting. As for the theme of compassion, in an analysis of Sultana's character against men, we can see contradictions in some of Sultana's attitudes. Her hatred for men, which became part of Sultana's personality and

mentality, leads her to abuse her husband or mistreat him. As she observes herself, her husband is different from any man of his background in the text. He could be the most compassionate, comparing him to the other men in Sultana's close family. She might turn him into the cushion she could hit that represented all the abusive men that she hated. She starts to take indirect revenge on him, not minding the kind of environment in which both of them grew up. From the text, her husband can be analyzed as a childish man, as reflected by his exaggerated attitude when he received his first male baby. Her husband is a character with a personality that is easily controlled. He is drawn by the power of his mother, his wife, and his peers from his society. Compared to the other men in the text, he gives a space of relief to his wife. According to Sultana, he is an open-minded man who gives her the rights she deserves and treats her as an equal. Her husband's attitude at the end of the book, in taking another wife, could be derived from the encouragement of his male peers, as the habit for most men in the society. If a woman gets sick, the man will take another wife. Changing his mind in taking a second wife after a fight with Sultana could show that the idea was not his; otherwise, he would have done so without telling Sultana. Her husband lives inside a dilemma himself, but Sultana unleashes her anger and aggressive attitude towards him. Sultana does confess many times that she is selfish, but it is the only way to maintain the relationship in such conditions.

In one of the big fights with her husband when she is pregnant with her first child, Sultana is still a teenager, and rationality and maturity are not hers. Sultana says, "I, by my very

aggressiveness, could have better dealt with an abusive husband, for bullies tend to be less forceful in the face of someone who will stand up to them. Sara, with her peaceful soul and gentle spirit, had been an easy target” (Sasson 167). Sultana is like a barbaric warrior who can lose her temper quickly if someone makes her angry by treating her unjustly. This could be considered irrational. She lives inside the intellectual struggle between her compassion for immediate justice and what is wise to do which is patience.

The Boogie-men:

In Sultana’s life, besides the harsh father and the tyrant brother, there are different groups of men that made her life miserable. These groups are outside of her family members. The first one was the “mutaw’een” group. Mutaw’een means volunteers in English. It is the plural word for volunteers in the native language, and the singular is “mutawa,” as Sasson spells it in the text. They represent the religious police in Saudi Arabia, and they are responsible for keeping vice out of the land. They are the shadow that citizens fear if they think of indulging any vice. They are not the civil police who prevent crimes like murders and thievery and maintain peace, but they are the kind of police who harass people in the name of protecting virtue. According to them, the normal people, who represent the rest of the population other than themselves, do not have the common sense to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, so they are there to show them the right method. By their account, they are there to protect the citizens from themselves,

using any available means to do so. In Sultana's text, they appear in different chapters in different events, but they are always there. They are implicit in the mind so the individual must be cautious and aware. In other words, they are the buried godly fear, but they are physically there to do what they think is God's judgment. To them, everyone is criminal, sinful, until proven innocent, and that innocence is measured by external appearance and behaviors. Because of the expanded authority that is given to them, this group started to act as a fascist religious group by forcing the people to submit to their expectations, as no one can supervise them because they are the highest supervisors. This group represents a radical religious group that claims that their brutal actions are taken directly from God. They can be considered as the Puritans<sup>5</sup> of Saudi Arabia, besides being a religious group coming from dark ages.

The ironic male villain here, who could not be found in any other literary work or in any other culture, is the male driver. No feminist criticism has explored this role of the villain male driver who controls the life of the entire female family members. This male villain is unique who has a dominant role in the society from which Sultana comes. Normally the male villain inside a female story is a father, brother, or a husband. But such a character is unique. Sultana assigns an importance to this villain from the beginning of the chapters of her childhood. She declares clearly that he made her inferior because she was a female, compared to her brother. She shows his hypocrisy and his emotionless attitude toward her. Women, whether adult or child, is controlled by every male, as in Sultana's mother's case. Sultana talks about how her mother hated

this attitude. She says, “Mother must have hated the way Omar [the family driver] bossed her children and she looked defiantly” (Sasson 66). In Sultana’s story, the male driver's role is to be the housekeeper and the guardian of the house, but his real role is to be the controller of the most vulnerable members, who are mostly the women, and to be the jailer of the house, as he is assigned to do by the dominant male. The first figure that the driver should fear is the dominant male, then the rest of males in the house.

The male driver is not always a villain, or even a villain by nature, but within a static environment he becomes a villain by circumstances, which are the social paradigms that give the opportunity for every man to be superior compared to the women, even if there are class differences. This is ironic, because even with the class struggle that can be found in any society between individuals is absent here because of the social ideas that are imposed to suppress the females. Women should be submissive naturally according to the society, and with this intellectual idea embedded in the women's mind, this reaction comes into play automatically with every man she will encounter. This situation produces unique psychological traits. The male driver will practice his own kind of dictatorship in the space that he is allowed. This dictatorship is directed mostly toward the female family members, even if she is his employer. The Saudi female is controlled by her own driver due to her high need for him, as the ban on female driving insures.

The Male as a god:

Sultana says, “I prayed to my six-year-old brother, Ali. I thought he was a god. If my brother was not a god, why was he treated like one?” (Sasson 19). Sultana starts the autobiography from the early pages with this kind of expression that deals with the dogma and the psyche. A form of paganism has been constructed inside her psychology by the discriminatory treatment that she has seen since the first glimmer of consciousness arose inside her mind. It, also, could result from the terror and the horror that Sultana was taught to expect if she made this god-symbol angry or mad, and incurring the wrath of this god, in Sultana's case, was a punishment either from her father or from the driver of the house.

Women are brought up to fear their men or men in general, as these men have the ability to do them physical harm. Mackey says, “Saudi women are victims of a set of rigid traditions that celebrate a godlike superiority of men and hold women responsible for their mystical honor” (123). As a result of patriarchal society, the orders and opinions of the men should not be challenged. Some of the religious scholars inside Saudi Arabia believe and teach that it is the religious right of a husband, and unconsciously every male figure who is like a father figure, to be worshiped and to receive prostrations. This teaching derives from the idea that the wife should submit to her husband. Extreme submission leads to the act of worship, either willingly or unwillingly. If the woman disagrees with the man she will be considered as a villain and evil. These ideas in some cases become part of the psychology and are hard to be broken, as the

female will not take the risk of disobeying.

Submission comes from the concept of obedience, the rejection of rebellion and constant conflict for the sake of order. But the concept of obedience has been abused and turned into the concept of submission and control. Men have used this concept to put themselves near the level of God. According to the Islamic religion, if some human associated himself with God, it would be a grave sin, yet all these men think, consciously or unconsciously, that they are superiors to be next to God. Every individual beneath that man, whether their wives or children, should submit to him. The concept of God in Islam is that of a being to be worshiped, loved, and feared, and people must have absolute submission to Him. According to the men's interpretations, the male should be submitted to and feared to the extent of terror, which leads to being worshiped. The satisfaction of God is from the satisfaction of the husband as they say. Every man who controls a group of women and children is analogous to a cruel master who owns these members as feeble slaves. Mostly, these ideas are not talked about publicly but they are taught and practiced in actions through the individual's life until they condition the behaviors in the family members. When children see how the father and the master of the house treats his wife in that manner, the male children will start to imitate his example. The male sibling will start to boss his female sisters or even his mother. Some mothers encourage this in their male children and open the space for them to practice this circle of dominance, as the male offspring has the natural right to do.

A relationship that is based on willed agreement and willed obedience does not come into

being this way. The feeble individual always submits to the act of force and without regard to his or her slighted opinion. It is a submission without rationality and thinking. It is a blind submission where thinking and having a critical mind become a crime. Sultana says, "It was 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. This was something new to think about" (56).

#### Counter Attitudes:

Intellectually, the Saudi society divides into two groups: liberals and reactionaries. The reactionaries claim that they are the followers of religion. They refuse modernity and reject other opinions and other interpretations either for religion or any intellectual ideas. Nowadays, these reactionaries' core problem is women's rights, the way women are trying to seek the evil called "women's rights." They say that a woman is an important member in the society, so that's why they are trying to protect her from the vices of the outside world. But in reality they use this ideology to suppress women.

The liberals are the educated and modernized intellectual group. Their main concern is for women's rights and feminism in Saudi Arabia. For this reason, they are the worst enemy to the reactionaries. Today, the liberals' main concern is women's right to drive, and for this they are greatly scorned by the reactionaries as people who are seeking the greatest vice in the Kingdom.

Segregation and veiling are matters out of bounds to be debated with the reactionaries, as the society itself, also, has no idea how the society would be without these practices.

The reactionaries in public call themselves the Islamists. They scorn the other party for being liberals, as the word holds a negative meaning in the reactionaries' account. Those reactionaries, by using the Islamization plea, gain the support of the majority of the masses, as these reactionaries claim that they are saying the words of God. The liberals nowadays are opposing the other party by using different interpretations of Islamic teaching which are modern and match the human rights concepts.

Nowadays in the Kingdom, the intellectual tendencies that the liberal holds are supported by the current King, Abdu-Allah Bin Saud. The space for women to appear in public has expanded with the new reforms that King Abdu-Allah is performing, especially with respect to what is associated with women's rights. King Abdu-Allah's national reform includes civil, educational and religious reforms inside the kingdom. This plan is well known, as the American magazine *The Economist* printed: "A far bigger slice of the population that has been kept to the margins of society, namely women, also got a boost with the appointment of a female deputy minister, the highest-level government post yet to be filled by a woman" ("Saudi Arabia"). Nora al-Fayez became the first woman to run the girls' section of the ministry of education in Saudi Arabia.

King Abdu-Allah also started the scholarship program in the year 2005. It included

provision for both genders to study in different academic fields around the globe. This scholarship program can be regarded as an important opportunity for ordinary Saudi women to expand their skills both intellectually and socially. On September 25, 2011, King Abdu-Allah announced that women have the right to vote and participate in municipal elections. In the same announcement, he said that Saudi women have the right to membership in the consultative council, known as Al-Shura (Bukhara). A council known since its establishment for being exclusively for men.

Many job opportunities for women are found in the media so they can appear on national television. Now, different varieties of programs are dealing with women's subjects. In the past, nearly every subject that is feminine was omitted, as it was considered to be no value and a waste of time. This transformation in the national media's policy means that women have gained recognition and attention for their taste. Also, women's participation in huge mixed conferences is something that never before has happened in the history of Saudi Arabia.

Social activists these days are working for women's causes in the Kingdom. They are trying to achieve a balance inside the society, as women realize that they must have equal opportunities with their peers, the men.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Covering the face historically is a nomadic tradition which is mixed with the religion. The Islamic thinker Ahmad Al-Kobisy said that covering the face cannot be forced upon people in the name of the religion because it is not from it (“*Ahmad Al-Kobisy*”).

<sup>2</sup> Electronic inventions such as television, radio and telephone were forbidden by the local religious committee, as they saw these machines will bring evil to the people. Television will expose uncovered women to the eyes of the public. Radio will produce women's voices speaking or singing. Telephone will allow unmarried men and women to talk to each other without surveillance. All this strictness that surrounded the modern inventions caused the “machine problems.”

<sup>3</sup> Infanticide is used here figuratively. Infanticide means in English the act of killing an infant. Infanticide is used as a word to parallel with the “wa'ad” in Arabic language, which means in this context: burying the female infant alive under soil because of the fear of shame or poverty.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase is used in an Arabic article written by an Arabian intellectual, Ali Lahroshi. He describes the use of this phrase by some preachers who teach the illiterate people this concept of confinement, and he condemns this kind of thinking and calls the preacher the head of the ignorant.

<sup>5</sup> “Puritans” is used to describe this religious group because there are intellectual similarities between them and the Puritans of the seventeenth century England. They are calling for purifying the religion from vices by force. As the English Puritans closed theaters and were the reason for the failure of drama at that time, these reactionaries from the Arabian Peninsula forbade literature, music, drama, and theaters, or in the contemporary sense, movie theaters, as all form of arts and entertainments are forbidden religiously.

### Conclusion

Sultana as a literary character cannot be considered an ideal heroine. In the traditional literary stories where the heroine is the victim of circumstances, she is stoic, surrenders, and reacts primarily at the end of the story as a way of achieving resolution of her situation. Another possibility in traditional literary stories is that a male hero comes and helps the victimized heroine. Sultana's story, which reflects the late twentieth-century idea and the projection of the twentieth first century, presents a different kind of heroine. Sultana is the individual woman who is struggling with her life on her own. In her story, there is no male to help or to save her.

Sultana is a character who is always inflamed and awake. She is also a provocative character who pulls pranks and is full of mockery and criticism. She is not the angelic, traditional female protagonist, which is contrary to the requirements of her traditional society, but she is the warrior protagonist who can be sometimes tiring. But this adds to the realism of the entire work. Sultana is a real human character who does right and wrong.

Sultana is looking forward to goals that are beyond the individual's capacity to effect in the social range, but there is no harm in hoping and trying. Sultana in *Princess* does not

anticipate change only in the individual or the local spheres. She also has global expectations, and that to insure women's rights in different countries where they are needed. She shifts between these moods, the individual, local and the global, through her autobiography. She is connecting her individual life with the local one and looking forward to a universal bond.

Sultana and Sasson are engaged with women's status and humanitarian causes in general that are in turn connected to global modernity. To some, globalization<sup>1</sup> has ended with the twenty first century, but for others globalization is just beginning. To others, globalization means global peace, and to Sultana it means peace, relief, and stability.

In the end, feminist criticism deals with a vast but unavoidable area that is concerned with “women's social roles in relation to men and to each other, to the way women as a group intersect with lines of power in social and political struggle” (Davis 570). Three intellectual attitudes exist in feminist studies: that “women's psychic life [is] essentially identical to men's”; that “women in their nature are wholly and inherently different from men”; or the attitude that “refuses the question of gender construction as such and, instead, [focus] exclusively on ideology.” According to the first position, both genders share the same paradigms, which means equality. According to the second position, the position of radical feminists, proponents want to maintain a “separate cultural sphere” for women (570). This kind of thinking suits the people who want to make complete segregation between the two genders, whether they are categorized as feminist or anti-feminist. The third intellectual notion is searching for similarities and differences between

genders in their ideas and their way of thinking rather than their physiology. Either what scholars are searching for is feminist criticism or gender criticism; it is not about the struggle for power or domination. The case is about equality and tranquility.

Does Sultana speak the truth? Is her print autobiography a realistic reflection of Saudi society? Despite all the generalizations and sometimes emotional exaggerations, as a Saudi woman I can say yes. It reflects the reality from her own perspective, but it also reflects the society. With the intellectual search for equality and tranquility I hope, with Sultana, for a time when Saudi women can exercise open freedom to gain free personhood in keeping with global modernity.

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Globalization means the global relationship between societies, cultures and economics.

Appendix A



(Saudi Arabian Large Color Map)

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