International Journal of Language and Literary Studies
Volume 6, Issue 2, 2024
Homepage : http://ijlls.org/index.php/ijlls

Reimagining Feminism and Gender Relations in Saudi Arabia: A New Theoretical Framework

Adel Musaylih Almuthaybiri
Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Department of the Arabic Language, College of Arts, Taif University, Saudi Arabia.
Adel.m@tu.edu.sa

DOI: http://doi.org/ 10.36892/ijlls.v6i2.1634
APA Citation: Almuthaybiri, A.M.. (2024). Reimagining Feminism and Gender Relations in Saudi Arabia: A New Theoretical Framework. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies.* 6(2).117-136. http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i2.1643

Received: *13/03/2024*

Accepted: *26/04/2024*

Keywords: *Feminism, gender, theoretical framework, universalisation, homogenisation, Saudi women.*

Abstract

This article seeks a deeper understanding of the issues Arab women face in the Arab world and their rights. It is set in a framework that considers the context of these rights and issues. Whilst women throughout the Arab world often share similar experiences, there is variation, and this article focuses mainly on the experience of Saudi women. Theoretical feminist and interdisciplinary approaches analyse and highlight diverse perspectives in seeking a more profound understanding of women's rights, roles, status, challenges, and achievements. They also expose the various feminist paradigms underlying the theoretical framework. The study emphasises the importance of recognising the unique experiences of Arab women, respecting cultural differences, and avoiding universalisation and homogenisation of gender. It highlights the value of integrating feminist and postcolonial theoretical perspectives to comprehend better the complexities surrounding Saudi women's study. It also emphasises the contextualisation of literary works within local environments to provide a deep understanding of women's evolving roles, rights, and status contributions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Ultimately, the study aims to bridge the academic gap between English and Arabic scholarship in the representation of Saudi women.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to provide a feminist theoretical framework to extend the understanding of Arab women's issues and rights in the Arab world. It also aims to serve as a starting point for researchers who want to engage with the issues of Arab women, in a critical, gender-specific and feminist way. The article discusses women, feminism, Islam, and patriarchy in a broader context. Whilst women throughout the Arab world often share similar experiences, there is variation, and this article focuses mainly on the experience of Saudi women. I argue for the necessity of contextualising the experience of Arab women and the possibility of creating a framework that includes concerns about feminism whilst considering local understandings of culture and social policy in their context. This theoretical framework will allow us to read Arab works, particularly those from KSA, with an awareness of their context in order to understand and interpret them from a perspective that is conscious of the specific circumstances of Arab societies. It will help us avoid imposing a particular feminist framework onto future academic studies in this field.

1.1.Importance of the study

Saudi women are often depicted as lacking a voice, passive victims of their religion and a conservative society. Saudi society has often been perceived as “seemingly… unchangeable” (Salhi, 2017, p. 973), while KSA itself is portrayed in many pieces of research as a typical

example of a society defined by patriarchal hegemony, gender essentialisation and the oppression of women(Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). The socio-political systems and the patriarchal norms and values in KSA, whereby some women continue to be marginalised and oppressed, have led, in varying degrees, to the generally negative perception of Saudi women(Salhi, 2024). This type of obscuration or (mis)representation of Saudi women often predominates in regional media and much of the Middle Eastern sociological and anthropological literature, as well as dominating the Western common wisdom and popular media. The reality is much more nuanced than this picture suggests. Therefore, a feminist theoretical framework is required that considers the Saudi context to contribute to resistance against the (mis)representation of, and obscurity surrounding, Saudi women. It is also essential to resist the essentialist and Westernised understanding and representation of Saudi women. Saudi literature is valuable in this quest, but it remains a far less well-discovered field of research into women's issues and themes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research here necessitates adopting a feminist framework that is in harmony with the Saudi context, considers local understandings of culture, and resists universalising women's experiences. This, in turn, will provide a more thorough analysis of women's issues and themes in Saudi Arabia to provide valuable insights and perspectives for our understanding and knowledge. For this purpose, the theoretical framework presented here necessitates an interdisciplinary approach based on historical, cultural, gender, postcolonial, socio-political and anthropological studies. These disciplines are helpful in thoroughly understanding the various socio-cultural realities pertaining to Saudi women that are expressed in literary and non-literary texts and their complex interactions. It has been argued that using diverse methods of analysis and interpretation rather than a single disciplinary approach can provide a deeper understanding of and insights into texts which address complex issues (Repko et al., 2017). Majaj et al. (2002, p. xvii) suggest that this type of methodology can also be used to open "critical avenues of discussion in social, political, and cultural arenas". Waïl S. Hassan (2002) explains how interdisciplinary investigation and new theoretical frameworks could enrich studies of Arab literature while at the same time engaging theoretical paradigms and affecting them. He suggests that "[p]ostcolonial studies can add valuable dimensions to Arabic literary scholarship– interdisciplinary inquiry, theoretical sophistication, and historical contextualization"(p. 59). Similarly, Anastasia Valassopoulos (2008) contends that "[p]ostcolonial studies' commitment to interdisciplinarity and its refusal to compartmentalise cultural production based on ideas of low or high culture" and will "provide a workable model for those scholars looking to place Arab literary studies within a broader framework" (pp. 25–26). Likewise, Khalid Alqadi (2023) highlights the significance of interdisciplinary investigations and a theoretical framework in understanding literary issues in the modern era. Salhi (2024) emphasises that to understand the condition of women in KSA, it is necessary to consider historical, religious, political and economic perspectives on the formation of Saudi society.

3. Theoretical Framework: General Introduction: Sex vs Gender

In this article, gender is understood to be socially rather than biologically determined. This idea is most simply and succinctly formulated in the much-quoted words of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p. 301). The French feminist asserted that there is no such thing as a female essence and although she accepted that there were biological differences between men and women, she was completely opposed to using these differences to justify women's oppression. Similarly, Valerie Bryson (2007) points out that "many of the existing differences between women and men are a socially produced matter of gender rather than a natural quality of sex; as such, they

are open to challenge and change" (p. 52). Majstorović and Lassen (2011) note that this has also shifted the emphasis in the research agenda: "Biological sex is no longer of main interest; instead gender researchers are more interested in studying the formation of 'men' and 'women' in social and cultural processes" (p. 4). Many Arab studies on feminism argue that gender is a social construct, embodying cultural notions of masculinity and femininity and that it differs from biological sex (Almuthaybiri, 2020; El-Said et al., 2015; Kandiyoti et al., 2021; Makdisi et al., 2014; Pollard & Russell, 2023).

If we accept the views of theorists like de Beauvoir, this implies that the roles of women and men within their culture and society are the result of social construction rather than being caused by innate differences between females and males. Thus, culture plays a key role in gender construction. With regard to culture, Majstorović and Lassen (2011) argue that "culture should be understood in a broad sense to incorporate both culture at national levels and values and beliefs that influence our behaviour at different levels of society"(p. 4).

3.1. Terminological Difficulties in Arabic

In English, the term 'gender' can be used to connote cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity as distinct from 'sex' as a biological category. According to Margot Badran (2009), finding an appropriate Arabic word equating to 'gender' is problematic and, since naming and meaning are interconnected, this complicates discussion of the concept of gender itself for Arabic speakers. The term 'gender' can be translated in Arabic texts as *al-nawʿ al-ʾijtimāʿi* which translates literally in English as 'social type'. In her account of the development of how the discipline of 'Gender Studies' was understood in Arab culture and translated into Arabic, Samia Mehrez (2008) notes this term "can be confused with studies of biological kind, species, sort or nature" (p. 111). Other translations include *jins/al-jins* (sex) or *jinusa/junusa* (sexuality) (Massad, 2015, p. 159), but Mehrez (2008, p. 111) points out that this "can be confounded with studies of sex [and] sexuality".

In Arabic, the concept of 'gender' may carry negative connotations, as it may be associated with "pre-marital or illegitimate sex, abortion and homosexuality" (Al-Ali, 2000, p. 176). Mehrez (2008) notes:

> in 1999 the journal Alif decided not to Arabize the term 'gender' by giving it an Arabic pronunciation and script, but rather to derive a new word from the root janasa [sexuality] that would correspond to the etymological significance of 'gender'. Hence, Alif proposed the neologism junusa, which corresponds morphologically to unutha (femininity) and dhukura (masculinity) […] the merit of this translation lies in the fact that it recognizes 'gender' as a dynamic process rather than a static essence (pp. 110–111).

Both Badran (2009) and Mehrez (2008) note that the linguistic problems posed by translating 'gender' in the Arab world reflect more deep-seated social, religious and political beliefs, indicating that the use of the term is seen by some as representing a 'Western invasion' that is perceived to be threatening to traditional Arab cultural values. In this context, many feminists in the Arab world such as Fatima Mernissi (1996), Mehrez (2007) and Nawal el Saadawi (2007) have attempted to investigate the misconceptions about gender and the cultural and social attitudes that impact on women's rights and gender equality. Even though their work was not underpinned by any particular theoretical framework, their efforts have been recognised as

important attempts to establish new approaches towards the study of gender in the Arab world by understanding this within an Arab and Islamic paradigm.

3.2.Arab Women and the West

The history of the representation of Arab women in the West is long, complex, and largely connected with hostilities towards Islam and colonialism. Amal Amireh (1996) argues that:

> [W]e need to look at the long and complex history of [Arab women's] reception in the West. Historically, the West's interest in Arab women is part of its interest in and hostility to Islam. This hostility was central to the colonialist project, which cast women as victims to be rescued from Muslim male violence. The fixation on the veil, the harem, excision, and polygamy made Arab women symbols of a region and a religion that were at once exotic, violent and inferior. (para. 10)

The concepts of inferior position and victimisation of women in the Arab and Muslim world were fundamental to the history of this debate. The position of women in Arab Muslim societies has often been emphasised by Westerners because they feel certain of their societal superiority and on this basis contend that Muslim women really need liberation or salvation (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In this context, Nikki R. Keddie (2007) emphasises that "Muslim women were widely seen as little better than slaves, either totally repressed or erotic objects, and as needing Western control or tutelage to gain any rights" (p. 253). The unfortunate situation of women in the Arab Muslim world was seen by many Westerners "as stemming directly from Islam" (Keddie, 2007, p. 253). It was argued that such representations corresponded to the colonialist goals of using oriental women "to subvert the social system while pretending to liberate them from their own men" (Moghissi, 2005, p. 120). Juliet Mabro claims "feminists [in the West] were as guilty of Eurocentric and colonialist attitudes as anyone else, and when Arab women began to be involved in nationalist struggles European women were often quick to point out how wrong they were" (Moghissi, 2005, p. 121). Leila Ahmed formulates her criticism of what she calls "colonial feminism" in the cultural sense. She argues that the colonists wanted to undermine the local culture, with Abu-Lughod (1998, p. 14) saying that this term expresses "the resemblances she perceives between the colonial discourses and the discourses of some Western feminists of today,... [who] devalue local cultures by presuming that there is only one path for emancipating women - adopting Western models"

In fact, colonised societies - India, the Islamic world and sub-Saharan Africa - were similar in that they were inferior, but differed in their specific inferiority as perceived by many Western feminists (Ahmed, 1992). Feminism, colonial or otherwise, often reduces all women in the Third World, particularly Arab Muslim women, to a homogeneous group, ignoring the immense diversity among them. In particular, the fact that not all Arab women are Muslim is ignored (Elsadda, 2012). This colonial legacy of feminism and Western attitudes towards women in the Middle East was anchored in the early history of Orientalism, western colonialism and fiction, as well as in travel accounts in the area (Kabbani, 1986; Keddie, 2007; Massad, 2007; Said, 2003). However, many recent events, for instance, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Gulf War in 1991 and, above all, the events and aftermath of 9/11 have stimulated a greater interest in the culture of Islamic societies, particularly as they relate to women (Elsadda, 2012). In this context, Amireh and Hassan (2010) argue that these events and the subsequent 'War on Terror' in the region have "breathed life into old stereotypes that demonize

Arabs and Muslims" (p. 413). Thus, the idea of emancipating or saving women in the Muslim and Arab world has recently been used again to justify a military intervention that is indeed very reminiscent of colonialism (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Consequently, I argue alongside Rami F. Mustafa and Salah Troudi (2019) that:

> a Western feminist framework for understanding Muslim women is inadequate, and Anglo-American Western models of feminism should not be used for considering Western views or studies of Muslim women in general, or the issues of Saudi women in particular (p. 137).

As I shall illustrate below, this history's influence now has a lasting effect both on the West's scholarship of Arab women and their perceptions and on Western readers' reactions towards these representations.

3.3. Development of Feminism in the Arab World and Attitudes Towards it

Feminism is generally viewed by scholars such as Ahmed (1992) Mehrez (2007) and Badran (2009) to be a Western import which has spread to Arab countries as a result of colonialism since the early twentieth century, and for that reason, this term and related ideologies still provoke negative responses in the Arab Muslim world. Feminism is a disparate set of political and social movements, appearing in the UK in the late 1770s and in America in the early 1800s (Humm, 2013). It has been defined as "a social movement whose basic goal is equality between women and men" (Lorber, 2010, p. 1). Its goals in these societies were the elimination of patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism, and seeking equal rights. Feminist activities and related social movements later developed in continental Europe, and then spread to Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, often due to colonial influence (Humm, 2013). Thus, in the twentieth century, feminism took shape as an international movement which was interpreted differently by writers across the world (Badran, 2009).

Some argue that feminism in the Arab world is a comparatively recent phenomenon which did not become firmly established there until the 1970s, as noted in Badran's pioneering work on the women's movement in Egypt in the twentieth century (Badran, 2009). Others claim that is it older. Qasim Amin's works *Taḥrir al-Marʾa* (The Liberation of Women, 1899) and *al-Marʾa al-Jadida* (The New Woman, 1900) are considered the earliest attempts to highlight the importance of the role of women in the Arab world and defend their rights (Ziadeh, 1964). Amin's call for women's education, alongside the call for liberation from British colonialism has led to him being considered the father of feminism in Arab culture (Oyster et al., 2011), even though his approach to women's rights was shaped by stereotypical gender conceptions, for instance in his assertion that women need education to become good mothers.

Shortly after the publication of Amin's works, in the first decade of the twentieth century, a new generation of female activists appeared in the Arab world. The term '*al-Nisaʾiyat'* (referring to something by or about women's issues) first emerged in 1909 in Malak Nasif's book *Bahithat al-Badiyah* (Women Researchers of the Desert) where it was used in reference to interest in Arab women's lives and advocating for their rights (Talhami, 2013). During that period, the term '*al-Nisaʾiyat'* was linked to feminist objectives such as improving women's social status and understanding that their right to education and work opportunities was guaranteed by Islamic traditions (Badran & Cooke, 1990). Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) is viewed as one of the earliest advocates of Arab women's rights (Quawas, 2006). In 1923, she formed *al-Ittihād al-Nisaʾi al-Misri* (The Egyptian Feminist Union) which promoted women's

rights by focusing on gender equality in social welfare and education. In the same year, she also attended a meeting of the International Alliance of Women (IAW) in Rome (Talhami, 2013). She spent most of her life fighting for women's liberation in the Arab world (Quawas, 2006).

In their analysis of contemporary Arab feminist writing entitled *Opening the Gates,* Badran and Cooke (1990) found that women writers neither called themselves feminists nor saw their works as being linked to feminism. Nawar Golley (2004) argues that Arab feminist awareness evolved hand-in-hand with national consciousness in the Arab world. Feminism was rejected and considered to be alien to Arab culture as a result of European colonialism which created antagonistic relations between the Arab world and the West. Others have argued that following the promulgation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, there was increased awareness of women's issues in connection with universal rights in the Arab world. It has been argued that when women's rights became intertwined with secular modernisation and Western (colonial) feminism in the Arab world, this impacted negatively on women's demands for maintaining their independence from patriarchal traditions and cultures (El-Said et al., 2015). Feminism was viewed as an alien concept that aimed to Westernise Arab culture and society. Moreover, "it is seen as an excuse for Western feminists to interfere in Islamic societies through various United Nations and other organizations, a perception that has led to the isolation of [Arab] feminists from the general public" (Grami, 2013, pp. 103–104).

Golley (2004) and Almuthaybiri (2020) also point out that many feminists in the Arab world continue to refuse to engage with Western feminist paradigms for this reason. As a result, Arab feminists have sought an indigenous approach, grounded in Islamic principles and adapted to Arab culture, to work with.

3.4.Feminism in the Arab World

It is important to highlight that since 'feminism' appeared in the Middle East, its definition has varied among researchers because "feminists do not all think in the same way or even about the same kinds of problems" (Yamani & Allen, 1996, p. 1). A number of different studies (Badran, 2009; Makdisi et al., 2014; Treacher, 2003) suggested that feminists in the Arab Muslim world can be divided into two main types on the basis of their opinions concerning the relationship between Islamic and feminist paradigms, and their ideological and religious backgrounds. Thus, there are distinct strands of feminism. One, linked to universal human rights, is called 'secular feminism', while the other is linked to Islam and known as 'Islamic feminism' (Badran, 2009).

Western feminism was not initially supported by a religious paradigm and took the form of a secular anti-religious movement. Scholars in the field of feminism in the Middle East emphasise that Islam is not incompatible with gender equality, which is considered the principal objective of feminism (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Badran, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2000; Yamani & Allen, 1996). Nevertheless, some scholars who are interested in women's rights in this region prefer not to describe themselves as 'feminist', to avoid being regarded as agents of Westernisation and enemies of Islam (Rhouni, 2010).

Contemporary Arab Muslim scholars including Ahmed (1992), Yamani and Allen (1996) and Wadud (1999), began to use the term 'Islamic feminism' in the 1990s. Later, Miriam Cooke (2001), Anitta Kynsilehto (2008) and Badran (2009) also labelled themselves 'Islamic

feminists', arguing that Islam and feminism are not incompatible. However, there is no clear and precise single definition of 'Islamic feminism' agreed upon by feminists in the Arab and wider Muslim world and there are various attitudes towards this concept (Makdisi et al., 2014). According to Treacher (2003), Islamic feminists "claim that liberation for men and women lies in following the Islamic faith and it is Islam that provides the best protection for women" (p. 59). Kynsilehto (2008) argues that Islamic feminism calls for gender equality between men and women and social justice through Islam and its teachings, as well as seeking rights for both men and women in the private and public sphere. Badran (2009) offers a useful definition of Islamic feminism:

A feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qurʾan and seeks rights and justice within the framework of equality of women and men in the totality of their existence as part and parcel of the Qurʾanic notion of equality of all human beings (p. 324). However, some Muslim women reject the Islamic feminism label, including Arab Muslim women such as Heba Raouf Ezzat and Safinaz Kazem (Makdisi et al., 2014) who agree with the claim by Wadud and Asma Barlas that "the motivation for their gender affirmative analysis is faith and not feminism" (Seedat, 2013, p. 415). They consider feminism to be "a contradiction of religion" (Makdisi et al., 2014, p. 420). Wadud (2006) describes her struggle for gender equality and her philosophical framework thus:

> It is no longer possible to construct Third World and all other specified articulations and philosophical developments of feminism without due reference to the Western origins of feminism. That is why I still describe my position as pro-faith, pro-feminist. Despite how others may categorize me, my work is certainly feminist, but I still refuse to self-designate as feminist, even with 'Muslim' put in front of it, because my emphasis on faith and the sacred prioritize my motivations in feminist methodologies. (p. 79)

Other Muslim feminists from the Arab world such as Omaima Abou-Bakr and Amani Saleh together with Kecia Ali and Mir-Hosseini (Abou-Bakr, 2013) embrace the idea of convergence between Islam and feminism, and claim that they have "become part of Islamic intellectual tradition and, in doing so, have begun to push at its boundaries and reshape its contours" (Ali, 2006, p. 195).

As a result of differences among Muslim women in how to define 'Islamic feminism', a global movement for equality and justice in Muslim family law known as '*musawah'* (equality) has emerged, appealing to Muslim women throughout the world ('Wanted Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family', 2009). Some of its Arab feminist adherents include Moroccan feminists Mernissi and Asma Lamarabet and the Egyptian-American feminist, Mona Eltahawy. This type of feminism emerged among women who "are seeking to reclaim Islam and the Koran [Qurʾan] for themselves" (Sergan, 2013, p. 1). *Musawah*'s aim is justice and equality between men and women in Islamic and universal frameworks (Sergan, 2013).

Other works focusing on Middle Eastern women, for example, Treacher (2003), Ahmed-Ghosh (2008), Badran (2009), Rhouni (2010) and Makdisi et al. (2014) have explored the meaning and use of the term 'secular feminism' in the context of both historical and contemporary women's movements in the Arab world, including secular nationalism and Islamic feminism. During the twentieth century, Islamic modernist, secular nationalist and humanist discourses were used by secular feminists in the Arab world to improve women's

rights to work, education and gender equality in the public and private sphere (Kynsilehto, 2008). Treacher (2003) states that secular feminists in the Arab world "argue for the separation of religion from civil society and the State" (p. 59). Badran (2009) uses the term 'secular feminism' to refer to "a composite of intersecting secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, and humanitarian (later human rights) discourses" (p. 3).

Secular feminists are influenced by the discourse of Western feminism and human rights. They are opposed to Islam, viewing it as being anti-gender equality, and believe religion should be an individual rather than a public issue (Makdisi et al., 2014). Zeenath Kausar, Haideh Moghiss and others conceive of Islam and feminism as being mutually exclusive (Cooke, 2001). According to Moghiss (1999), women in the Arab and the wider Muslim world "cannot believe in both the Islamic and the feminist concepts of equality; the two notions of equality are incompatible" (p. 142). Furthermore, she contends that "the shariʿa is not compatible with the principles of equality of human beings" (p. 141).

Islamic and secular feminism adopt different approaches towards gender equality; the former seeks to achieve equality and parity between men and women across the public and private spheres of life grounded in an Islamic framework, while the latter argues for full gender equality by engaging in Islam and secular nationalist and humanist discourses by focusing on the public sphere (Kynsilehto, 2008). These links with Western modernity make it difficult for feminists to successfully reform those patriarchal beliefs and practices which are ingrained in Arab Muslim socio-cultural structures (Kynsilehto, 2008).

Some Islamic feminist writers criticise Western feminism as failing to understand, and/or misrepresenting, Muslim Arab women and their needs. Many hold the view that Western feminists represent Arab Muslim women as victims of patriarchal religion. In 1988, Mohanty Chandra criticised Western liberal feminist approaches to the study of women in the Middle East and South Africa (Chandra, 1988). More recent studies of Middle Eastern women by Barlas (2002), Badran (2009), and Kaltham al-Ghanim (2013) have shown that Arab women still need to relate to Islamic frameworks and that feminists in the Arab world cannot ignore this. This means that even those feminists who choose to reject Islam as being incapable of eliminating patriarchal values must still respond and engage with its socio-cultural influences in Arab countries. As Golley (2004) notes, "religion cannot and should not be seen independently of the socioeconomic and political context within which it unfolds" (p. 522). She believes that gender roles and relations must be addressed within a religious framework in which religion is viewed as a conceptualisation of a specific socio-cultural, political and economic context. Women in the Islamic and Arab world seek to 'save' themselves from the socio-cultural and traditional constructions imposed by patriarchal values rather than the precepts of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Recently, post-colonial theory and its related principles have contributed significantly to broadening the perspective from which the writings about women in the Arab world are examined. As Valassopoulos (2008) reminds us: "postcolonial theory has made it possible to examine Arab women's writing [and their representations] from a wider perspective that does not give prominence to any one means of influence (such as religion, politics, ethnicity, etc.)" (p. 22). This is in contrast to portraying Arab women through their history of oppression, gender inequality and sexuality or simply attributing their unfortunate situation to a so-called monolithic religion and a backward society. Postcolonial feminist theory is now aware that western feminist theory has often generalised 'Third World' women by assuming their

homogeneity despite it clearly consisting of very different groups of women, and according to Lewis & Mills, (2003, p. 9) "has relied on the tokenistic inclusion of [one or fewer women] as representatives of all Third World women". Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, in their introduction to *Postcolonial Feminist Theory* (2003), observe that with the rise of postcolonialism, the generalisation of extremely heterogeneous groups of women in the 'Third World', a prevalent and persistent trope in the theory of western feminism, has been widely criticised within feminism itself. Another important contribution of feminist postcolonial theory to women in the Third World, in particular with regard to the 'woman question' in the Arab world, is the recognition of indigenous cultures as well as the local circumstances and complexities and cultural peculiarities that have often led to clashes between western feminism and these cultures. One could therefore argue that criticism of western feminism has helped rethink certain issues and strengthen the field of feminist or women's research in different cultures and disciplines. Thus, I agree with Shadi Hamid (2006) who "believes that because the notions of freedom, equality and women's rights are universal, they can be re-interpreted and articulated in ways that recognize the importance of cultural context" (p. 91).

However, some shortcomings remain in postcolonial feminist theory, although there have been several important developments in approaching the literature of the Arab world. Hassan (2002) argues that although postcolonial theory highlights the shortcomings and ongoing hegemonies of discourses and thus is a healthy reminder of the presence of other worlds beyond Western modes of thought and representation, it mainly focuses on texts written in European languages – in English and French particularly – at the cost of an incredibly diverse literature written in non-European languages. Hassan also highlights that postcolonial theory is often limited to problems of "writing back" as a defining feature of the postcolonial state: diaspora, migration, crossing borders, "in-betweenness" and hybridity. Even if these are important topics, they are remarkably limited compared to the general experience of the respective literature and can be irrelevant for "the vast majority of the African and Asian populations are not Diasporic, migrants, or bilingual, and may, indeed, have never even traveled beyond the borders of their native countries" (Hassan, 2002, p. 60). That is to say, the expansion of the scope of post-colonial studies, and thus the review of literary texts that are not written only in English (or any other European language), as well as the review of other relevant questions, could improve our understanding of these literatures within social-cultural contexts. This in turn can lead to a broadening of our perspective and enriching the field. For example, it can reveal more about Arab writers' experiences, without being limited to a few authors or problems. Amireh emphasises the significance of translating more Arabic texts into English in discussions about the reception of the writings of Arab women in the West; "the more Arabic books made available in English, the better. The complexity and diversity of the Arab world and its literatures can be represented best by a wide range of works" (Amireh, 1996, para. 20).

Such views emphasise the importance of examining more Arab writers rather than limiting them to specific perspectives or questions based on their availability in English or to a Western feminist paradigm that does not sufficiently consider the context of these texts. Rejecting these restrictions would likely result in the rejection of stereotypes of Arab women and a tendency towards their homogenisation, at the same time emphasising their complexity and diversity. This study can contribute to this area by providing a theoretical feminist framework for analysing Arabic texts representing various experiences.

3.5.Diversity of Saudi Women, Feminism and Westernisation

Given the several theoretical approaches to women in the Arab world highlighted above, I would like to continue the debate, focusing on feminist questions, particularly regarding Saudi women. To begin with, we need to understand that, in the context of the Muslim and the Arab world in general, the term 'feminism' is generally problematic and pregnant with historical, economic, religious and political ramifications. It is, therefore, essential to note that for Saudi women, the path of secular feminism is not possible, and the approach taken by Islamic feminism is more suitable, although the Saudi writers themselves might not refer to themselves as feminists.

The focus now shifts to feminism and gender in the Saudi context, exploring how Saudi writers have engaged with feminism in their work to identify specifically Saudi approaches adopted to address gender relations and women's issues. It is essential to understand the range of perspectives on gender and feminism found in the dynamics of Saudi literary space to provide a theoretical framework that considers the local understandings of culture and social policy in the Saudi context.

For the most part, Islamic feminists in KSA can be divided into two groups: the conservative Islamic feminists and the liberal/secular feminists (Al-Sudairy, 2017; El-Fassi, 2016; Yamani & Allen, 1996). For liberals, the 'strict' interpretation of Islam is the source of the plight of Saudi women. In contrast, for conservative Islamists, the source is the tribal and social heritage and conservatism of the society, and they attribute the roots of gender discrimination to the culture of the society rather than to the religious paradigm. Both claim that their politics and identity is based on Islam. Saudi feminists contend that "a Saudi-led feminist movement must include the rights accorded women in the Qurʾan and specifically in shariʿa (Islamic law). A codified gender-neutral shariʿa in the Saudi judicial system could give women the rights [for which] they yearn" (Wagner, 2011, p. 1) .Women's demands in KSA are based on the Qurʾan and the Sunna, applying verses of the Qurʾan that are considered to provide evidence of gender equality in Islam. One much quoted example from the Qurʾan states:

> People, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware. (*The Qur'an*, 2005)

It is clear that according to the Qurʾan, "all human beings are equal; they are only distinguished among themselves based on their rightful practice or implementation of the fundamental Qurʾanic principle of justice" (Badran, 2002, p. 1). Qurʾanic verses have been used by both Saudi conservatives and liberal reformers to argue that women's rights and male and female equality are fundamental to Islam.

Many recent studies, such as al-Ḍāmin (2010), el-Fassi (2014) and Mustafa and Troudi (2019) hold the view that in KSA, western feminists misunderstand Islam and tend to blame it for all the difficulties faced by Muslim Arab women. Western feminists are additionally viewed as believing that the limitations imposed on Saudi women by their religion and the lack of equality they face in gender relations are also related to Islam, which is inaccurate, according to feminist activists in KSA. Many works focusing on women in KSA emphasise that Islam is not contradictory to human rights and gender equality (Almuthaybiri, 2020; Al-Nahedh & Al-Sheikh, 2018; Al-Sudairy, 2017; Al-Twīlʿaī, 2016). In reality, socio-cultural traditions have

heavily influenced the construction of gender roles and the status of women in Saudi society, as these authors argue.

Western feminism has been largely rejected by Saudi society, and it would be true to say that most Saudi women who choose to write about women's issues and gender equality would not refer to themselves as feminists. The opinions that they hold and the ideologies that underpin their work are not directly related to what might be considered many of the core tenets of the theory developed by Western feminists (Al-Twīlʿaī, 2016; El-Fassi, 2014). Many Saudi women link Western feminist ideas with abortion, lesbianism, aggressiveness or sexual freedom and feel it is important to distance themselves from what they perceive as negative attitudes towards sexuality (Al-Ḍāmin, 2010; El-Fassi, 2016).

As is the case with many other developing nations, Saudi women's struggles, rights, roles and condition must be understood in a culturally specific national context and "[w]hile it is clear that sexual egalitarianism is a major goal on which all feminists can agree, gender discrimination is neither the sole nor perhaps the primary locus of the oppression of Third World women" (Johnson-Odim, 1991, p. 315). Even though women in the 'Third World' have different cultures, religions, races, classes and traditions, Western feminism has commonly assumed that women's issues are universal meaning that they all share the same goals and aspirations (Mohanty, 2003). In the same way, Muslim women form a very complex category because, as Edward Said (2002) observed, "Islam is a world of many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures, and countries that cannot be simplified into a single unmitigated derogatory rendition" (p. 70).

Joseph Zeidan (1995) criticises the application of Western feminist theories to Arabic literature, arguing that this discourse developed in the historical and cultural context of the West. Western feminist representations of Arab and Muslim women have been challenged on the grounds that Islam was originally much more egalitarian with regard to gender than is often assumed (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Chandra, 1988). It could be viewed as contentious to employ Western variants of feminism as a framework for understanding gender roles in Saudi culture since they fail to account for the religious, political, socio-cultural and historical specificities of KSA which have been shaped by Islamic religious precepts and Arab socio-cultural norms (Alghamdi, 2020; El-Fassi, 2016; Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). Therefore, when analysing works written on Saudi Arabia, particularly regarding the status of Saudi women, this theoretical framework will be appropriate to consider local experience, recognition of cultural differences and resistance to the universalisation, essentialisation and homogenisation of gender and women's accounts, while realising the importance of and benefiting from feminist and postcolonial theorists' theoretical reflections, concerns, and critical tools in analysing these works, thereby offering more perceptive views on women's representation, rights and roles in Saudi society.

Although all women in the Gulf States and elsewhere in the Arab world face a patriarchal, tribal society, Saudi women have vital differences from their counterparts in the region in terms of freedom and equality (Abu-Khalid, 2013). It can be argued that the modernisation process in KSA, where there has been neither a secular nationalist movement nor anti-colonial struggle, can only be pursued by relying on constructing legitimacy based on the Islamic shariʿa. The fact that KSA is the birthplace of Islam and its Prophet, Muhammad, gives it a unique role within the Islamic world. It is home to two of Islam's holiest sites, the

mosques in Mecca and Medina, and Saudis see themselves as custodians of the Islamic tradition (AlMunajjed, 1997). In addition, KSA's constitution is based wholly on the *shariʿa* (Niblock & Malik, 2007).

3.6.Feminism, Gender, and Literature in the Saudi Context

This section explores how Saudi writers understand the label 'feminist literature'. According to el-Fassi (2014), the term 'feminism' is generally unknown and considered a foreign idea, both in Saudi society and within academic studies in KSA. El-Fassi (2014) notes that "not a single Saudi university has a department of feminist studies, women's studies or women's history" (p. 121). Even the term 'gender' is generally perceived negatively as a Western concept by Saudi conservatives who contrast discussions of gender with Islamic values and principles.

Since Saudi literature emerged in the 1930s, women's issues have been addressed by both male and female writers and critics without drawing any overt connections to Western feminism, even though there is evidence of awareness of women's concerns about gender equality and fighting patriarchal traditions and customs in Saudi society and culture before that. Interestingly, although the term 'Islamic feminism' is not generally acknowledged in KSA, in reality its ideology and the values it espouses are practised. Thus, Saudi women do draw on Islamic discourse to justify the need for social progress, although they may choose not to label their approach as Islamic feminism (El-Fassi, 2014).

As Western feminists did before them, al-Rifāʿī (2009) Samāher al-Ḍāmin (2010) and al-Ghadhāmī (2017) all draw a distinction between the term 'gender', referring to a socially and culturally constructed differences, and 'sex' meaning the biological categories of male and female. This distinction is significant when examining literary works as it allows for an exploration of the representation of women, gender roles, and how socio-cultural processes shape them.

Many literary critics and academics such as al-Ghadhāmī (2006), Ḥasan al-Nuʿmī (2013) and al-Twīlʿaī (2016) hold the view that women's issues in KSA should be viewed from a religious perspective, seeing socio-cultural traditions as the enemy of women's rights, not Islam itself. In fact, many literary critics and academics believe that Islamic discourses in KSA would be effective in addressing women's rights and their demands, arguing that gender inequality and discrimination against women are the result of particular interpretations of the Qurʾan and the Sunna (Prophetic traditions) and have been distorted by socio-cultural and tribal traditions (Al-Nahedh & Al-Sheikh, 2018; Al-Sudairy, 2017; El-Fassi, 2016).

Thematically, much of Saudi literary works discuss women's issues and offer a range of perspectives on women's roles and gender ()equality (Al-Ḍāmin, 2010). Currently, Saudi literary critics are analysing traditional Arab literature and culture and identifying the images of women represented there in order to explore the connections between these historical female stereotypes and women's contemporary status (Abu-Khaled, 2014). Al-Ghadhāmī's books (2005, 2006) respectively fall into this category, since he highlights the negative images of women created by pre-Islamic Arab narrators and poets when representing their communities. Al-Ghadhāmī argues that Arab culture is biased against women, seeing them as marginal within society, and therefore views this cultural heritage as a major source of negative discourse about women in the contemporary Arab world. Similarly, Fawzia (Abu-Khaled, 2014) claims that

these negative stereotypical images of women still persist in Arab literature despite attempts by contemporary female writers to challenge them in their work.

Suʿad al-Mana's work on women in Arab cultural and literary heritage is considered to mark the beginning of Saudi feminist criticism (Al-Shatwī, 2017), since it provides a reading of the image of women in Arab literary heritage which contrasts to that offered by al-Ghadhāmi. Al-Mana's analysis emphasises the positive roles played by women in early Islamic culture and pre-Islamic Arab literature and disagrees with Saudi critics such as al-Ghadhāmi (2006), Abu-Khaled (2014) and others who argue that Arab culture and its discourse are biased against women's rights per se (Al-Mana, 1997, pp. 27–109). Ibrahim Al-Shatwī (2017) argues that although al-Mana provides examples of positive images of women's roles and position in Arab literary heritage, it is not possible to ignore the sheer volume of negative representations of women which can be found in Arab literature and culture (Al-Shatwī, 2017, pp. 108–112). In her article, Abu-Khaled (2014) concludes that these stereotypical images of women are deep-rooted in "the collective emotional memory" which is part of Arab patriarchal culture, including Saudi culture (p. 108).

When analysing women's rights and gender roles in Saudi literature, it is necessary to remember that these discourses have developed within the historical, and socio-cultural context of KSA and its religious specificity. This theoretical framework allows us to understand the historical background to women's status, roles, education and work in Saudi society to consider how the socio-cultural, religious and political context of KSA has shaped the representation of women's issues and gender relations in Saudi literary works.

Generally, Saudi writers agree on the need to condemn socio-cultural practices that support male privilege over women and discriminate against females and have attempted to counter the circulation of stereotypes about women and their roles, but they do this in different ways. Some writers adopt a more conservative 'Islamic approach', defending women's rights and gender equality within an Islamic framework that views women as being of great value and worthy of respect. This attitude tends to focus on the complementarity of the sexes in all spheres of life as well as the elimination of social discrimination against females that involves cultural and traditional values which are shaped by the 'wrong interpretation' of Islam; however, it rejects a Western model of gender equality. Others prefer to employ a 'liberal/secular approach' which highlights the limitations women face in Saudi society regarding their rights and roles, combining the discourses of Islamic modernism, secular nationalism and humanism.

3.7.The Consciousness of Women's Rights and Revolution in the Saudi Literature

Concern with women's issues and themes has increased in Saudi literature written by both male and female authors since 2000. Some Saudi literary studies such as (Algahtani, 2016; Almarhaby, 2023; al-Owein, 2009; al-Sudairy, 2017) argue that this revolution in reading and writing novels in general occurred due to sociocultural, political and economic transformations in many sectors of KSA. For example, in 2000, KSA became a signatory to CEDAW, insofar as its concepts are not seen to conflict with the precepts of shariʿa (as the primary foundation of Saudi law). The Saudi government made progress in reforms, establishing the National Society for Human Rights in 2004, and the Human Rights Commission in 2005.

Moreover, in the post-9/11 period, religious, political and gender issues in Saudi media and literature began to be more freely discussed. The internet played a vital role in encouraging

both male and female writers to express their personal views and allowed them to share their writings within the public sphere. In addition, a new generation of Saudi male and female authors published works that discussed previously taboo issues (Algahtani, 2016). Al-Jamʿān (2013) notes that in the opening decade of the twenty-first century, the novels ceased to be solely the domain of the Saudi elites and became a popular mainstream vehicle of expression for discussing public issues, particularly women's status and role in Saudi society.

According to Dhahir (2014), since 9/11, Saudi literature in KSA has highlighted various aspects of women's social problems, including lack of freedom, arranged marriage, and social, patriarchal and family oppression. There is a growing awareness of the role of literary texts within Saudi society. The paramount Saudi writer Badriyya al-Bishr, for example, emphasises that she aims to challenge patriarchal society, gender inequality and demand women's rights in the public and private sphere, posing questions and addressing feminist themes in her work as a means of raising awareness of the plight of Saudi women in society and how they could help to change matters (Dhahir, 2014).

Historically, the first Saudi literary work by a woman was Samīra Khāshūqjī's *Dhikrayāt Dāmīʿa* (Tearful Memories). It was published in Beirut in 1960, some three decades after the first Saudi literary work written by a man: *al-Tawʾaman* (The Twins) by ʿAbd al-Qaddūs al-Anṣārī(Al-Wahhābī, 2005). This delay in the emergence of women's fiction in KSA has been attributed to the powerful socio-cultural and tribal traditions that inhibited developments in women's writing. It should also be remembered that state education for girls did not begin in KSA until 1960 (Al-Dakhil, 2012; Alḥasoun, 2008; Almarhaby, 2023).

Since then, many female Saudi writers have used their works as a weapon for fighting against socio-cultural, religious and patriarchal traditions that restricted women's role, status and mobility in Saudi society. It is argued here that women's works have been used to respond to and rebel against a society that restricted and marginalised them (Al-Jamʿān, 2013). Almarhaby (2023), al-Sudairy (2017), and Salhi and Alfraih (2020) argue that women's writings have played a key role in reflecting how socio-cultural, religious and political transformations and progress in Saudi society have impacted women's rights and gender issues, in particular over the past two decades.

Yamani and Allen (1996), Badran (2009) and Almuthaybiri (2020) confirm that the significance of Islam in all aspects of women's lives, work, education and position, and consequently in any debate, makes any discourse outside the Islamic framework unacceptable. In this context, this study emphasises that advocacy for women's rights and gender equality under an Islamic framework are appropriate within the Saudi context, as Yamani asserts that Islam has become the "vehicle for the expression of feminist tendencies" (Yamani & Allen, 1996, p. 263). For achieving women's demands and gender equality in KSA, Saudi women "have, in an alluring way, sought their sense of power, their sense of identity, their freedom, and their equality with men through the basic precepts of Islam" (Yamani & Allen, 1996, p. 236).

According to Al-Ḍāmin (2010)and Salhi and Alfraih (2020), the discourse of women's rights is varied in KSA. Although there are some similarities in women's themes that are presented in Saudi literature by writers, each of them has their own perspective. This article argues that although Saudi writers may have their own distinctive perspectives on gender issues, there might be similarities in their discourse because they belong to the same society

and have shared the same historical and social circumstances and events. A further significant issue concerns the analysis of the literary texts. Hoda Elsadda (2012) argues that the broader political context has led to a scenario in which texts concerned with women and gender issues are read as anthropological case studies of 'other' cultures, essentially different from the Western 'self' (p. xxviii). In the Saudi case, some studies on Saudi literary works such as (al-Ejīrī & al-Shwīqī, 2008; Zawbʿa, 2012) consider narrative texts that deal with themes related to gender equality, in particular women's work, to be sociological treatises or scandalous documents that aim to Westernise Saudi society and eliminate its principles and values. In this context, Amireh and Majaj (2000) illustrate this problematic relationship between literature and society/reality, commenting that "instead of being received and read as literature, and assessed on literary grounds, Third World women's literary texts have been viewed primarily as sociological treatises granting Western readers a glimpse into the 'oppression' of Third World women" (p. 7). Although Saudi writers offer alternative perspectives through their fictional texts, it is essential to recognise that these works do not represent the ultimate reality or 'truth' of Saudi society.

4. CONCLUSION

The article provided an in-depth analysis of feminism in the Arab world. It presented a theoretical framework that outlined the various approaches to women's rights and gender issues within Islamic feminist thought. This study has significantly contributed to the ongoing discourse on women's rights and gender roles, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. By laying a foundation for future research on feminist issues and gender issues, especially in the context of Saudi Arabia, it provides a comprehensive overview of the subject. Furthermore, the article underscored the value of employing feminist theoretical approaches in examining the challenges faced by Arab women, with a particular focus on the Saudi context. It stressed the need to consider their unique local experiences, acknowledge cultural distinctions, and steer clear of the universalisation, essentialism, and homogenisation of gender. By adopting this approach, we can gain a deeper understanding of Saudi women's rights and issues expressed in works of Saudi literature.

Through study and analysis, the significance of recognising and integrating the theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches of feminist and postcolonial scholars is revealed in comprehending the complexities surrounding Saudi women. This has led to the developing a framework that aligns with feminist principles while considering the cultural and identity perspectives unique to the local Saudi context.

For future studies, this theoretical framework can provide a deep understanding of women's changing roles, rights, status, and literary contributions in KSA by situating the literary works within the local contexts in which they were produced. In addition, it can highlight the contribution of these works to the resistance against and defiance of the (mis)representations of Saudi women and the ambiguity of "Westernised" understanding and depiction of them, acting as a response to the dearth of representations of them and their obscurity. In the end, we hope this framework contributes to addressing the academic gap in representations of Saudi women, both in English and Arabic scholarship

REFERENCES

Abou-Bakr, O. (Ed.). (2013). *Feminist and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform*. Women and Memory Forum.

Abu-Khaled, F. (2014). The Creative Arab Women: Opposing the Stereotypical Image and Dismantling the Prevalent Discourse. In J. S. Makdisi, N. Bayyumi, & R. Sidawy (Eds.), *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle East* (pp. 108–120). I. B. Tauris.

Abu-Khalid, F. (2013). Is there a Saudi Spring on the Sidelines of the Arab Spring and What Place Does the 'Feminist Question' Occupy Within the Context? In O. Abou-Bakr (Ed.), *Feminist and Islamic Perspectives New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform* (pp. 27–42). The Women and Memory Forum.

Abu-Lughod, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Vol. 5). Princeton University Press.

Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist*, *104*(3), 783–790.

Ahmed, L. (1992). Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate. Yale University Press.

Ahmed-Ghosh, H. (2008). Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *9*(3), 99–116.

Al-Ali, N. S. (2000). Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement. Cambridge University Press.

Al-Dakhil, K. (2012). Development of Awareness: The Power of Society and Men in the Saudi Women's Novel 1958-2011. unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Exeter.

Al-Ḍāmin, S. (2010). Nisāʾ Bilāʾ Ummahāt: Al-Dhawāt al-Anthawiyya fī al-Riwāya al-Nisāʾiyya al-Saʿūdiyya (Women without Mothers: Female Selves in the Saudi Feminist Novel). Arab Diffusion Company.

Al-Ejīrī, A., & Al-Shwīqī, B. (2008). Min Abath Al-Riwāya: Nzarāt Min Wāqi'a Al-Riwāya Al-Sa'ūdiyya (On the Futility of the Novel:Sights of the Reality of the Saudi Novel).

Algahtani, N. (2016). Defying convention: Saudi women writers and the shift from peripheryto centre. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *59*, 26–31.

Al-Ghadhāmī, ʿAbd Allāh. (2005). Tʾnīth Al-Qaṣīda wa-Al-Qārʾ Al-Mukhtalf (The Feminisation of the Poem, and the Different Reader). al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-Arabi.

Al-Ghadhāmī, ʿAbd Allāh. (2006). *Al-Marʾa wa-l-Lugha (Woman and Language)*. al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-Arabi.

Al-Ghadhāmī, ʿAbd Allāh. (2017). *Al-Jinusa Al-Nasaqiyya*. al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-Arabi.

Alghamdi, S. (2020). Orientalism and its Challenges: Feminist Critiques of Orientalist Knowledge Production [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. York University.

Al-Ghanim, K. (2013). The intellectual frameworks and theoretical limits of Arab feminist thought. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, *6*(1), 82–90.

Alḥasoun, M. (2008). *Social Criticism in the Saudi Novel 1990-present day*. unpublished doctoral thesis,The University of Exeter.

Ali, K. (2006). Sexual ethics and Islam: Feminist reflections on Qur'an, hadith, and jurisprudence. Oneworld.

Al-Jamʿān, S. (2013). Khitāb Al-Riwāya Al-Nisāʾiyya Al-Saʿūdiyya Wa Tahawwūlatih (The Discourse of the Saudi Women's Novel and its Transformations. The Literary Club.

Al-Mana, S. (1997, March). 'Feminist Literary Criticism in the West and its Reflections in Contemporary Arab Criticism'. *Al-Majala al-Arabiyya al-Thaqafah (March)*, 72–109.

Almarhaby, I. (2023). Rethinking the critical reception by male critics in Saudi Arabia of Saudi women's pre-1980 novels. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *50*(3), 734–748.

AlMunajjed, M. (1997). *Women in Saudi Arabia Today*. Springer.

Almuthaybiri, A. (2020). *Gender in contemporary Saudi novels* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Birmingham.

Al-Nahedh, M., & Al-Sheikh, H. (2018). *A Voice Unsilenced: Saudi Women Advocating Their Rights, 1990-2017*. Center for Women's Global Leadership.

Al-Nuʿmī, Ḥasan. (2013). B'ad Al-t'awil: Mqārbāt fī khitābāt Al-Sard (Some Interpretations: Approaches in Narrative discourses). The Literary Club.

Al-Owein, M. (2009). *Qdāīā Al-Mr'a Al-Sa'ūdiyya (Saudi women's isses)*. Riyadh: The Literary Club.

Alqadi, K. H. (2023). Interdisciplinary Approach to Literary Narrative and Visual Storytelling. *Migration Letters*, *20*(S3), Article S3. https://doi.org/10.59670/ml.v20iS3.3781

Al-Rifāʿī, K. (2009). Al-Riwāya Al-Nisāʾiyya Al-Saʿūdiyya: Qirāʾa fī al-Tārīkh wa-l- Mawḍūʿ wa-l-Fann :1958-2008 (The Saudi Female Novel: Readings in its History, Theme, Issue and Form: 1958-2008, 2009). The Literary Club.

Al-Shatwī, I. (2017). Dirāsāt fī Al-A'dab wa-Al-Naqd (Studies in Literature and Criticism). The Literary Club.

Al-Sudairy, H. (2017). Modern Women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Rights, Challenges and Achievements. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Al-Twīlʿaī, H. (2016). Talqī Al-Riwāya Al-Nisā'iyya Al-Sa'ūdiyya (the Reception of the Saudi Women's Novel). King Saud University.

Al-Wahhābī, ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān. (2005). *Women's Novel in Saudi Arabia: Its Emergence and Development in Changing Culture*. unpublished doctoral thesis,The University of Manchester.

Amireh, A. (1996). *Publishing in the West: Problems and Prospects for Arab Women Writers*. Al Jadid. https://www.aljadid.com/content/publishing-west-problems-and-prospects-arab-women-writers

Amireh, A., & Hassan, W. S. (2010). Introduction. *Comparative Literature Studies*, *47*(4), 413–416.

Amireh, A., & Majaj, L. S. (Eds.). (2000). Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers. Garland Publishing.

Badran, M. (2002). *Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?* The Feminist eZine. http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/international/Islamic-Feminism-01.html

Badran, M. (2009). Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences. One World Publications.

Badran, M., & Cooke, M. (1990). *Opening the gates: A century of Arab feminist writing*. Indiana University Press.

Barlas, A. (2002). ' Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. University of Texas Press.

Bryson, V. (2007). Gender and the politics of time: Feminist theory and contemporary debates. The Policy Press.

Chandra, M. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, *30*, 61–88.

Cooke, M. (2001). Women Claim Islam; Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature. Routledge.

De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex* (C. Borde & S. M. Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage Books.

Dhahir, S. (2014). Turning Oppression into Challenges: Women in Badriyya l-Bišr's Hind wa-l-ʿaskar. *Arabica*, *61*(1–2), 69–88.

El Saadawi, N. (2007). The hidden face of Eve: Women in the Arab world (Second). Zed Books.

El-Fassi, H. A. (2014). Does Saudi Feminism Exist? In J. S. Makdisi, N. Bayyumi, & R. Sidawy (Eds.), *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle East* (pp. 121–131). I. B. Tauris.

El-Fassi, H. A. (2016). Saudi women and Islamic discourse, selected examples of Saudi feminisms. *Hawwa*, *14*(2), 187–206.

Elsadda, H. (2012). Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008. Edinburgh University Press.

El-Said, M., Meari, L., & Pratt, N. (Eds.). (2015). Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World. Zed Books.

Golley, N. A. H. (2004). Is feminism relevant to Arab women? *Third World Quarterly*, *25*(3), 521–536.

Grami, A. (2013). Islamic Feminism: A new feminist movement or a strategy by women for acquiring rights? *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, *6*(1), 102–113.

Hamid, S. (2006). Between orientalism and postmodernism: The changing nature of western feminist thought towards the middle east. *Hawwa*, *4*(1), 76–82.

Hassan, W. (2002). Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, *33*(1), 45–64.

Humm, M. (2013). *Feminisms: A Reader*. Routledge.

Johnson-Odim, C. (1991). Common Themes, Different Contexts. In C. T. Mohanty, A. Russo, & L. Torres (Eds.), *Third World Women and The Politics of Feminism* (pp. 314–327). Indiana University Press.

Kabbani, R. (1986). Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule.

Kandiyoti, D., Al-Ali, N., & Poots, K. S. (2021). *Gender, Governance and Islam*. Edinburgh University Press.

Keddie, N. R. (2007). *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press.

Kynsilehto, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives*. University of Tampere.

Lewis, R., & Mills, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Routledge.

Lorber, J. (2010). Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics. Oxford University Press.

Majaj, L. S., Sunderman, P. W., & Saliba, T. (Eds.). (2002). *Intersections: Gender, nation, and community in Arab women's novels*. Syracuse University Press.

Majstorović, D., & Lassen, I. (2011). Living with patriarchy: Discursive constructions of gendered subjects across cultures. John Benjamins.

Makdisi, J. S., Bayyumi, N., & Sidawi, R. R. (Eds.). (2014). *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*. I. B. Tauris.

Massad, J. A. (2007). *Desiring Arabs*. University of Chicago Press.

Massad, J. A. (2015). *Islam in Liberalism*. The University of Chicago.

Mehrez, S. (2007). Translating Gender. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *3*(1), 106–127.

Mehrez, Samia. (2008). Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice. Routledge.

Mernissi, Fatima. (1996). *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. Zed Books.

Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2000). Islam and gender: The religious debate in contemporary Iran. I.B.Tauris.

Moghiss, H. (1999). Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis. Zed Books.

Moghissi, H. (Ed.). (2005). *Women and Islam: Images and realities* (Vol. 1). Taylor & Francis.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity. Duke University Press Books.

Mustafa, R. F., & Troudi, S. (2019). Saudi Arabia and Saudi Women in Research Literature: A Critical Look. *Asian Social Science*, *15*(2), 133.

Niblock, T., & Malik, M. (2007). *The political economy of Saudi Arabia*. Routledge.
Oyster, C. K., Stange, M. Z., & Sloan, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World, Volume 1*. SAGE Publications.
Pollard, L., & Russell, M. L. (2023). History, Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East: From Orientalism to the Arab Spring. Taylor & Francis.
Quawas, R. B. (2006). 'A Sea Captain in Her Own Right' Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *8*(1), 199–215.
Repko, A. F., Szostak, R., & Buchberger, M. P. (2017). *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. SAGE Publications.
Rhouni, R. (2010). Secular and Islamic feminist critiques in the work of Fatima Mernissi. Brill.
Said, E. (2002, July). Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified. *Harpers's Magazine (July)*, 69–74.
Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books.
Salhi, Z. S. (2017). Withstanding the Winds of Change? Literary Representations of the Gulf War and Its Impacts on Saudi Society. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *39*(4), 973–996.
Salhi, Z. S. (2024). Striving for autonomy and feminism: What possibilities for Saudi Women? *Diogenes*, 1–13.
Salhi, Z. S., & Alfraih, I. (2020). Sexuality and the politics of the body in Zainab Hifni's Features. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *29*(8), 911–925.
Seedat, F. (2013). When Islam and Feminism Converge. *Muslim World*, *103*(3), 404–420.
Sergan, E. (2013, December 4). *The Rise of the Islamic Feminists*. The Nation. https://www.thenation.com/article/rise-islamic-feminists/
Talhami, G. (2013). Historical dictionary of women in the Middle East and North Africa. Scarecrow Press.
The Qur'an (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Trans.). (2005). Oxford University Press.
Treacher, A. (2003). Reading the Other: Women, Feminism, and Islam. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, *4*(1), 59–71.
Valassopoulos, A. (2008). Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context. Routledge.
Wadud, A. (1999). Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective. University of London.
Wadud, A. (2006). Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam. One world Publications.
Wagner, R. L. (2011). *Saudi-Islamic Feminist Movement: A Struggle for Male Allies and the Right Female Voice* [Monitor]. Peace and Conflict Monitor Special Report. http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=789
Wanted Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family. (2009). In Z. Anwar (Ed.), *Musawah*. Musawah.
Yamani, M., & Allen, A. (1996). *Feminism and Islam: Legal and literary Perspectives*. New York University Press.
Zawbʿa, K. (2012). Al- ʾInḥirāfāt Al-Sharʿaiyya Wa Al-Akhlāqiyya fī Al-Riwāya Al-Saʿūdiyya Al-Nisāʾiyya (Legal and moral deviations in the Saudi women's novel). al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Dirāsāt al-Insāniyya.
Zeidan, J. T. (1995). *Arab Women Novelists: The formative years and beyond*. State University of New York Press.
Ziadeh, F. J. (1964). *A Reader in Modern Literary Arabic*. Princeton Legacy Library.