Saudi Women's Creative Expressions of Protest: From Poetry to Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Saudi women's creative expressions of protest in a number of genres: poetry, novels, memoir, blogs, interviews, videos, and the social media platform Twitter. The aim of this dissertation is to fill the glaring gaps in scholarship about Saudi women, specifically in areas of protesting and social change. I challenge the common or mainstream understanding of what it means to protest and how it fits both into Saudi women's lexicon and social contexts, specifically I attempt to expand the definition of "protest" to encompass Saudi women's realities. To place Saudi Arabian feminist protest in a theoretical framework, I treat these platforms as creative and powerful works in their own right. To theorize these expressions of protest, I draw upon their own internal conceptual frameworks. I use these texts to explore and understand the unique circumstances that have led Saudi women to produce a wide range of different creative expressions that use different types of written and verbal language. As this dissertation focuses on Saudi women's expressions of protest, I explore both the literary and linguistic features of creative expressions. Through these analyses I also shed light on cultural and legal barriers that face Saudi women, such as limited access to higher education, and religious demands to limit Saudi women's freedom, of movement as well as their right to work and study. My method focuses not only on protest only as a state of action, but also as creative forms of expression. I look closely at the works under study to determine the ways in which Saudi women manage to creatively break free from the constraints that limit them. By engaging in protest, they chip away at these constraints as a bit to ensure their own freedom.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse analyse les expressions de protestation des femmes saoudiennes dans un grand nombre de genres: poésie, romans, mémoires, blogs, interviews, vidéos et la plateforme de médias sociaux Twitter. L'objectif de cette thèse est de combler les lacunes flagrantes dans la recherche sur les femmes saoudiennes, en particulier dans les domaines de la protestation et du changement social. Je remets en question la compréhension commune ou dominante de ce que signifie protester et de la manière dont cela s'inscrit à la fois dans le lexique et les contextes sociaux des femmes saoudiennes, et je tente plus particulièrement d'élargir la définition de la " protestation " pour englober les réalités des femmes saoudiennes. Pour placer la protestation féministe saoudienne dans un cadre théorique, je considère ces plateformes comme étant des œuvres créatives et puissantes en elles-mêmes. Pour théoriser ces expressions de protestation, je m'appuie sur leurs propres cadres conceptuels internes. J'utilise ces textes pour explorer et comprendre les circonstances uniques qui ont conduit les femmes saoudiennes à produire ces différentes expressions qui offrent un emploi différent du langage écrit et verbal. Comme cette dissertation se concentre sur les expressions de protestation des femmes saoudiennes, je suis l'analyse littéraire et linguistique de ces expressions. Je mets également en lumière les barrières culturelles et juridiques, tels que l'accès limité à l'enseignement supérieur et les exigences religieuses concernant certaines dispositions relatives à la liberté de mouvement des femmes saoudiennes ainsi qu'à leur droit de travailler et d'étudier. Ma méthode, cependant, ne se concentre pas seulement sur la protestation en tant qu'état d'action, mais aussi en tant que forme d'expression créative. J'examine de près les œuvres étudiées afin de déterminer les moyens par lesquels les Saoudiennes parviennent à s'affranchir de manière créative des limites qui les entourent. En s'engageant dans la protestation, elles ébranlent ces limites et se rapprochent de la liberté dans toutes ses formes.

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NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation uses a simplified version of the transliteration system followed the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) system without dots and dashes to render names and places. The exception to this is in cases of commonly used words or those where a person uses a different spelling for their own name in translated or transliterated published works in print or on the internet such as on social media accounts. All translations from Arabic into English in this dissertation are my own translations unless otherwise noted.

PREFACE

This dissertation analyzes various genres of creative expressions of protest. Some of these are internet-based and more specifically social-media based. Because of this, many of the expressions of protest that I analyze here are in risk of being removed from the internet for various reasons—by the writer herself or someone else, including hackers or state authorities. During the writing of this dissertation, a number of the texts I studied disappeared. As I progressed through the research for this dissertation, I took screenshots of everything I studied that was posted on the internet.

In order to facilitate the ease of access to the materials I have included in the dissertation, I built a website (www.saudiwomen.ca) which contains all of the screenshots of these materials. I have listed them in as figures and labelled them clearly throughout the dissertation. On the website, I have ordered them as they appear in the dissertation. One figure is found in Chapter Two, the cover of the memoir written by Huda Aldaghfag, the remaining figures appear in Chapter Four. The website follows the same four divisions as the four subsections in the chapter, each devoted to one of the four main protests campaigns. Each campaign is associated with a page and contains all the figures that are analyzed in the dissertation. Moreover, each cited item is footnoted, and the figure number is listed there to index it to the screenshot. Further, I have provided the direct link to the website, as well as the original link to the tweet being cited on the Twitter website.

Introduction

نحن سعوديات من كل مدينة في هذا البلد من كل أطياف المجتمع من بدو ومن حضر من الشمال و من الجنوب ومن الشرق " ومن الحجاز ومن كل قراها ومدنها. باختلاف معاناتنا وخلفياتنا، جمعتنا معانات (معاناة) الولاية وألم قيدها ولن نصمت حتى "تسقط عنا ظلمها

> [We are Saudi women from every city in this country. From each section of Saudi society, Bedouins and city folks, from the north, south, east and Hejaz, from every village and town. We come from different backgrounds and different struggles, but the struggle around the male guardianship system and the suffering it causes unites us. We will not be silent until the oppression it causes ends]. - @Hayaalsobaieie (هيا السبيعي)

In 2018, Saudi woman Haya al-Sobaieie posted the tweet cited above on Twitter.[1] It calls plainly and directly for a country-wide protest against the regulation and control of Saudi women's movement under the male guardianship system. She claims that the opposition to the male guardianship system unites all women in Saudi Arabia regardless of class or ethnic background. Here, al-Sobaieie is speaking both as a Saudi woman and on behalf of all Saudi women within a regime that does not condone protest — a regime that is unaccustomed to people demanding their rights.

Indeed, Saudi society has been built on obeying authority rather than opposing or challenging it which makes any opposition or protest extremely difficult. This indoctrination of obedience begins in the family home where, generally speaking, children are raised to obey their parents without questioning or challenging their authority. Children are further socialized into silently obeying authority within the schooling system where teachers — as proxies for parents — prime children to accept and obey.[2] Following the formative years, this cycle of authority exists also in the workplace and beyond. As a Saudi citizen grows older, this circle of authority expands to include one's boss at work, local shaykhs or the chief of the tribe, as well as extended

[1] https://twitter.com/hayaalsobaieie/status/967845663819091970.

[2] Badriah Albeshr, [Najd Before Oil].بدرية البشر .دراسة سسيولوجية تحليلية للحكايات الشعبية :نجد قبل النفط . لبنان . جداول .. 2013: 81-82.

family. This then extends to the utmost authoritative figures in Saudi society--members of the royal family.[3] In Saudi Arabia, this cultural imperative to obey is rooted not only in local and regional Arab heritage, but also within Islam as a religion. A number of Hadiths that emphasize total obedience to a leader (الأمير-ولي الأمر) are understood and interpreted to mean, in the Saudi context, total obedience to the King and the royal family.[4] These Hadiths are frequently invoked in Saudi popular discourse.[5] This means that Saudis—both men and women—have, from their formative to adult years been primed, encouraged, and socialized to obey authority and to never question, challenge or oppose it.

The impetus to obey that is so deeply rooted in Saudi culture is also closely tied to a hesitancy toward embracing change—in fact, fear of change. Of course, this is a deliberate attempt to create a society that would rather preserve their current government and system — sometimes even actively praising and supporting it — for fear that change could be worse than the status quo. An example of the idea of an unchanging state, is a popular and ubiquitous Saudi saying: "الله لا يغيّر علينا" [May God not change our lives]. During the Arab Spring of 2011, it was common for Saudis to juxtapose images of countries where there were revolts and revolutions like Egypt and Tunisia with this slogan. The notion of "freedom" is kept deliberately vague in official discourse. The concept of freedom is frequently contrasted with the notion of chaos and represents security, safety, morality, family unity, and social cohesion. These are some of what

[3] This culture of obedience is one that is also shared within Arab culture. For example, one of the best-known Egyptian poets, Ahmad Shawqi has a very famous poem titled "the teacher", he says at the beginning: "قم للمعلم وفّه التبجيلا كاد المعلم أن يكون رسولا", ordering students to stand up for the teacher and pay him the respect since the teacher should be seen almost at the level of the prophet of Allah. See: https://www.aldiwan.net/poem15422.html

[4] See: Faid al-Alaywi: (الثقافة السياسية في السعودية) [The Political Culture in Saudi Arabia] (Lebanon: The Arabic Cultural Center, 2012): 89.

[5] The important part of this Hadith reads: [تسمعُ وتُطيعُ الأميرَ ، وإن ضرب ظهرَك ، وأخذ مالَك ، فاسمع وأطِعْ]. It should be noted that there is a debate about it and many specialists in Hadith refuse to recognize its authenticity as a true saying by the prophet Mohammed: https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/126776.

we might call cultural factors that have led Saudi society to be passive about change and to reject acts of protests that may call for change.[6]

Within this larger context of obedience and fear change, Saudi women have nonetheless operated in many different ways, both going along with and challenging these social norms. We know that throughout history many women from the Arabian Peninsula have expressed themselves, questioned their status, and protested injustices. Contemporary Saudi women are no exception and have often held up the legacies of Arab and Muslim women who historically advocated for their own rights. Indeed, women have always been agents of change; one such example can be taken from early Islamic times. During the era of the prophet Muhammad, a number of Muslim women reached out to him questioning the relative absence of Muslim women in the Qur'an given that they were told that they were equal to men in rights and responsibilities in Islam. As a response to their protest, a verse of the holy Qur'an was revealed to the prophet. This verse combines men and women in every phrase:

{إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا}[7]

> [(35) Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.][8]

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[6] See Faid al-Alaywi, (الثقافة السياسية في السعودية) [Political Culture in Saudi Arabia] (Lebanon: The Arabic Cultural Center, 2012): (83-85).

[7] القرآن الكريم. The Holy Quran: القران الكريم. سورة الأحزاب. الجزء ٢٢. الصفحة ٤٢٢. اية ٣٥. Fatima Mernissi discusses this verse and sees it as an early revolution by women in Islamic era. See: Fatima Mernissi. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub, 1991: (117-120).

[8] http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/translations/english/422.html .

Several Hadiths give reasons for the revelation of this verse (سبب النزول). There is consensus among Islamic scholars that this verse was a response to Muslim women's protests.[9] Where the interpretations of the verse differs is only in relation to who was protesting—some say it was the wife of the prophet and others say it was simply a group of Muslim women.[10] Still others claim that it was one specific person, a Muslim woman called Umm 'Imarah al-Ansariya (أم عمارة الأنصارية).[11] Arab Muslim women in the Arabian Peninsula and Saudi Arabia specifically look to this example as one way to show that they have been vocal about protesting unequal treatment with men for hundreds of years.

Despite these repressive cultural norms in Saudi Arabia, there is also religious legitimacy to be found in protest; this in turn has led to Saudis protesting certain policies or laws in various ways. Recent years have shown an increase in visible protest within various sections of society and about different issues. Throughout the years, Saudi women continued to protest and claim their rights, though over time, much of their agency was eroded and in the hands of others—including Saudi men, Arab and non-Arab women activists from outside Saudi Arabia, and human rights organizations. Indeed, many of these entities have spoken about or on behalf of

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[9] See: https://al-maktaba.org/book/32580/1397 and http://www.al-eman.com/الكتب/الحاوي%20في%20تفسير%20القرآن%20الكريم/i543&n18085&p1

قال الإمام أحمد: حدثنا عفان، حدثنا عبد الواحد بن زياد، حدثنا عثمان بن حكيم، حدثنا عبد الرحمن بن شيبة، سمعت أم قالت: قلم يرعني منه ذات يوم قلت للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: ما لنا لا نذكر في القرآن كما يذكر الرجال؟ :سلمة زوج النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم تقول إلا ونداؤه على المنبر، قالت، وأنا أسرح شعري، فلففت شعري، ثم خرجت إلى حجرة من حجر بيتي، فجعلت سمعي عند الجريد، فإذا هو يقول عند المنبر: " يا أيها الناس، إن الله يقول: (إن المسلمين والمسلمات والمؤمنين والمؤمنات " إلى آخر الآية.

Also: ، حديث آخر: قال ابن جرير: حدثنا أبو كريب قال: حدثنا سيار بن مظاهر العنزي حدثنا أبو كدينة يحيى بن المهلب ، عن قابوس بن أبي ظبيان فأنزل الله: (إن المسلمين والمسلمات) ؟ عن أبيه ، عن ابن عباس قال: قال النساء للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: ما له يذكر المؤمنين ولا يذكر المؤمنات الآية وحدثنا بشر حدثنا يزيد، حدثنا سعيد ; عن قتادة قال: دخل نساء على نساء النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقلن: قد ذكركن الله في القرآن، ولم نذكر بشيء، أما بشيء، أما فينا ما يذكر؟ فأنزل الله عز وجل: (إن المسلمين والمسلمات) الآية. https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura33-aya35.html

[10] This also refutes the Islamic element in the Saudi culture of obeying, where expressions like (صوت المرأة عورة) or (صوتك عورة) are used to silence women, appealing on the grounds of Islam that Muslim women should lower their voices and be quiet and obedient.

[11] روى الترمذي عن أم عمارة الأنصارية أنها أتت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقالت: ما أرى كل شيء إلا للرجال، وما أرى النساء يذكرن بشيء ! فنزلت هذه الآية: إن المسلمين والمسلمات والمؤمنين والمؤمنات الآية. See: https://surahquran.com/aya-tafsir-35-33.html#saadi

them to the rest of the world and the so-called human rights community. In recent years, Saudi women have also more forcefully taken back their agency and reclaimed the inheritance of their foremothers by protesting injustices that are imposed on them. Increasingly these protests are loud and clear. This dissertation explores Saudi women's implicit and explicit acts of protest which manifest in a number of different ways, through writing, multimedia, and social media.

Context and Development of the Project

This dissertation developed out of an initial research interest on the development of narrative techniques in Saudi women's fiction. I argued that Saudi women writers treated their practice of writing fiction as a process largely isolated from real life. As I expanded and developed my research into the novel and fiction more generally, I increasingly observed changes in how Saudi women used their fictional writing to formulate expressions of protest. At the same time, I became aware of and increasingly interested in the other genres women were using to express such protest. While women were still accessing the more traditional forms of written expression such as poetry, fiction, and memoir, to mount social protest, they were becoming even more prolific and adept in using new forms of expression including blogs, interviews, and social media sites like Twitter. As I researched this further, I saw many connections in the various genres and the way in which Saudi women used all of these to mount different kinds of creative protest.

For this reason, my dissertation charts a reading of Saudi women's literary expression of protest through these mediums of expression, starting with poetry, continuing with fiction and memoir, and working through main genres of the new media including blogs, interviews, and Twitter. The main objective of this dissertation is to provide contextual readings of Saudi

women's expressions of protest across varying genres. Though I cannot, of course, provide a comprehensive listing or inventory of all expressions of protest, this dissertation provides a tracking of different written protest expressions by Saudi women, contextualizing them within contemporary Saudi history, culture, and contexts. I argue in what follows for the centrality of women's protest to understanding Saudi Arabia, its history, culture, and society, from the point of view of Saudi women.

In this introductory chapter, I will lay out a contextualization of the complex sociocultural background of Saudi women in order to better understand Saudi women's literary expressions in general, and their protest writing more specifically. I have chosen three main points of entry from the second half of the twentieth century to develop this: the development of women's education in the country (which begins in 1960), the siege of Mecca (1979), and the advent of the internet (1999). I have chosen these as exemplary processes and moments that impacted Saudi women's lives in major ways and that ultimately accelerated their acts of protests.

Women's Education in Saudi Arabia

The first major moment I have identified that had a major impact in the lives of Saudi girls and women is gaining the right to a formal education in 1959 or 1960.[12] Before then, there was no official education for girls in the country with the exception of religious schools that taught girls how to recite the Qur'an (though most of the students in these schools were boys). Prior to the royal decree, there were demands to allow women access to education. One of these historically registered demands was made by the well-known Saudi writer and intellectual, Abdulkareem al-

[12] Many references, including the official government ones, date the royal decree to the year 1960 except Seddika Arebi who claims that was in 1959.

Juhaiman (1910-2011), who published an article under a penname in November 1955 questioning the delay of girls' education in Saudi Arabia and demanding that the Saudi government amend this. Al-Juhaiman was detained not as the author of the article but as the executive editor of the newspaper in which it was published.[13]

The advent of girl's schooling, however, did not go smoothly. Many Saudi citizens were against this decision and even took to the streets in September 1963, protesting against girls' education. King Faisal sent the National Guard to break up this demonstration in Buraydah, al-Qassim, one of the most conservative regions of Saudi Arabia, where much of the open opposition to girls' education was found at the time. The citizens of this town were forcibly restrained from demonstrating.[14] Another social group who took a stance against the education of women were the Bedouin communities. Eventually, King Faisal managed to convince tribal shaykhs from these communities of the importance of formal schooling for girls.[15]

Most accounts that document the beginning of formal education for girls attribute this change to King Faisal; however, historian of Saudi Arabia Robert Lacey points to two other people who worked behind the scenes to make this happen—Faisal's wife, Iffat al-Thunayan and his predecessor, King Saud. Robert Lacey writes: "Starting schools for girls was the special concern of Faisal's wife, Iffat al-Thunayan. King Saud had begun the process. It was one of the several positive achievements overshadowed by the less happy aspects of his reign, and Iffat continued the work."[16] Indeed, Iffat al-Thunayan pushed and advocated to include science,

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[13] The full story is found in the following article: (المقال الذي بسببه أوقفت صحيفة أخبار الظهران) [The Article that Caused the Newspaper to Shut Down]: https://www.aljuhaiman.com/art/s/30 .
[14] Robert Lacey. *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 363. See also, Amani Hamdan, "Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements," *International Education Journal* 6, no.1 (2005): 48.
[15] Amani Hamdan, 49.
[16] Robert Lacey, 364.

languages, and other secular subjects rather than limiting schooling to religious subjects exclusively.

Although Saudi Arabia was the last state in the Gulf region to introduce secular education—Iffat al-Thunayan's vision had come to fruition.[17] The general public was not in favour of the decree when the schools for girls first opened their doors, and fewer than 12,000 girls were initially enrolled.[18] Today, however, more female students than male students are enrolled in schools.[19] Many women are now formally educated and actively participate in society, in employment, and other places where such education is needed. Being just over sixty years old, the educational system for girls has made a major impact on society and has transformed the ways women participate in written and other expression(s) in the public sphere.

The Siege of Mecca

To contextualize contemporary forms of protest and expression by modern Saudi women, I will also highlight the siege of Mecca in 1979. Many historians argue that this siege was a turning point in Saudi Arabia. Rosie Bsheer, for example, states that "the religious establishments became once again a site of power and contestation as the ruling elites needed the support of religious leaders. In return for that renewed backing, Khalid's regime expanded even further the religious establishment's control over social life."[20] However, this support of religious ideology did not stop after King Khalid's death. For example, in 1984, the government in a

[17] Robert Lacey, 364.
[18] Louay Bahry. "The New Saudi Woman: Modernizing in an Islamic Framework." *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 4 (1982): 502.
[19] See the article published in Sabq (صحيفة سبق :إحصائية لـ"التعليم" عن عدد الطلبة والطالبات بالسعودية تكشف عن مفاجأة) Sabq Newspaper: https://sabq.org/saudia/zwxbkm.
[20] Rosie Basheer, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 14.

Royal Decree announced that women could not accept jobs that required them to fraternize with men.[21]

Madawi al-Rasheed dedicates part of her book on gender, power, and religion in Saudi Arabia to document the pre-Mecca siege and its impact on Saudi women's lives when the state encouraged its official Ulamas to issue the fatwas that limited Saudi women's mobility, marriage, etc.[22] Moreover, Naomi Sakr argues: "In fact, anyone caring to look back would find that 1979 had been a watershed year for the Saudi government's approach to media and women. That was the year when Juhayman ibn Mohammed al-Otaibi led a siege of the mosque in Makkah during the annual pilgrimage, in protest at what he and his followers described as the 'religious and moral laxity and degeneration' of Saudi rulers."[23]

This dramatic event impacted key spheres in the lives of Saudis, namely the social, political, and ideological spheres. Though ordinary people did feel the impact of this siege, it disproportionately affected the government. Sakr's article tracks the experience of Saudi women in the media both before and after the siege and she claims that this period was the "first wave of anti-woman activity."[24] Her study shows that women were present in several media outlets—press, radio, and television—before the siege and that after it, women were relegated to subsidiary roles. Scholar Seddika Arebi concurs with these findings in her own documentation of this event, noting that, "before the siege, in contrast, women's media presence had been established for many years. Their writing was to be found in the printed press since the 1950s."[25]

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[21] Rosie Basheer, 243.
[22] Madawi al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108-133.
[23] Naomi Sakr, "Women and Media in Saudi Arabia: Rhetoric, Reductionism and Realities," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 3, (2008): 385–404, p. 391.
[24] Naomi Sakr, 391.
[25] Saddeka Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 30-35.

Arebi's work, moreover, finds that Saudi women were publishing written work even before women had a right to formal education. These studies are crucial and lay the groundwork for being able to interpret the contexts of how women's creative expressions of protest as both new and not new. Other scholars have also documented the devastating impact of this incident on Saudi people and especially Saudi women. John Willoughby describes the following:

> During the 1970s, there was a movement of gender liberalism that included the rise of elite women's organizations, television news broadcasts by unveiled women, the loosening of restrictions on face veiling, and a rapid rise in female education. The crises of 1979 that included the Iranian revolution, violent demonstrations against Al Saud rule in eastern Arabia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and, most important, the seizure of the Grand Mosque by indigenous Islamic radicals led to the reversal of all of these trends *except female education*.[26]

In addition to these impacts on women emphasized by scholars, there were other repercussions of this siege as well. One of the most important direct consequences of this moment was the development of the male guardianship system and subsequent restrictions on women's movement.

The Internet

The third major moment in the late 20th century that I will highlight here as having a major impact on Saudi women's creative expression of protest is the advent of the internet in Saudi Arabia. In the year 1999 Saudi Arabia celebrated the digital era by allowing access to the internet for Saudi society in general. The delay experienced by the country was allegedly because "an

[26] John Willoughby, "Segmented Feminization and the Decline of Neopatriarchy in GCC Countries of the Persian Gulf." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28 no. 1 (2008): 195-196. Emphasis in the original.

elaborate national system had been established to filter out any inappropriate and unwanted content."[27]

The introduction of the internet to Saudis allowed ordinary people, particularly women, to experience a new sort of liberating experience. Accessing global information and having the opportunity to interact with women around the world made Saudi women more aware of the obstacles and limitations that they faced in their daily lives—challenges that the overwhelming majority of the world was not facing. This enabled Saudi women to shape their own views about human rights and women's rights specifically by exploring the differences between their status and those of women in other locations. It also helped Saudi women better understand how women navigate their rights around the world in different contexts.

In his study on Saudi women's experiences with technology and communication, Abdulrahman Al Lily argues that Saudi women crossed gender lines and discussed forbidden topics, such as love, more freely and easily because of the coming of the internet.[28] Many studies on Saudi Arabia focus on what is forbidden or taboo, especially in terms of relations between the genders. While those studies pay closer attention to the benefits that Saudi women gained from having access to the internet; I am proposing here that Saudi women actually gained more from understanding the status of women in other societies and interacting with them than they did in increasing interactions with men. Indeed, the internet facilitated their analysis and revealed the ways in which Saudi women's status in their society was being legitimized by state-sponsored propaganda.

[27] Abdulrahman Al Lily, "On Line and Under Veil: Technology-Facilitated Communication and Saudi Female Experience Within Academia," *Technology in Society* 33, no.1 (2011): 121.
[28] Abdulrahman Al Lily, 121.

As Miriam cooke argues in in *Women Claim Islam,* Arab women–including Saudis—fight for their own agency against the social and systemic patriarchal policies using the internet: "global interconnection and cultural intertwinement are becoming the norm. Even in the most conservative, sex-segregated society, women are now able to communicate transnationally and to exchange new understandings of religious and social norms and values."[29] Another example of this, in the Saudi context, is the infamous slogan "You are the Queen." "You are a protected pearl." (أنتِ درّة مصونة) (أنتِ ملكة) This slogan was used by outlets controlled by patriarchal Saudi systems of authority such as the state, society, and religious officials to manipulate Saudi women into silence. When Saudi women complained about laws that prohibited them from driving, Saudi systems of authority would respond by saying "You are a Queen! Have you ever seen a Queen drive her own car? A Queen has a driver." This disingenuous response is meant to silence and shut down conversations that challenge authority. However, Saudi women quipped back and would say: "Have you ever seen a Queen on the street in 50-degree heat looking for a taxi?" This propaganda is not only local, but also exported. [30]

The internet has been crucial not only for opening Saudi Arabia to the world and the many ways that Saudi women used it to develop their analyses but also in how they have formulated their written and verbal protests against many social injustices they face, as will be explored throughout the dissertation, and elaborated in much more detail in Chapter Four.[31]

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[29] miriam cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2000), xvii.

[30] For example, in an article, a religious clerk narrated a story to one of his friends in UK. He writes: " ولأختم مقالتي بقصة طريفة رواها لي أحد الاخوان الفضلاء الذين زاروا بريطانيا في هذا الصيف قال: جمعني مجلس ببعض مثقفي الانكليز وأثاروا ما يشاع في الإعلام الغربي أن المرأة مظلومة ولم تعط حقها من التحرر وأثاروا قضية قيادة المرأة للسيارة فقال لهم: هل ملكة بريطانيا تقود السيارة؟ فقالوا: لا لها سائق يخدمها في ذلك، فقال: نحن في السعودية نعامل المرأة كما تعاملون الملكة، فالزوج عندنا هو الذي يسوق بزوجته ويخدمها في ذلك، فتعجبوا وسكتوا!". https://www.alriyadh.com/192179

[31] Chapter Four below is titled, "Twitter as a Creative Site of Protest," see p. 192.

The Context for the Study of Saudi Women

Though the scholarly study of Arab and Muslim women has increased exponentially in the twenty first century, Saudi women—and especially Saudi women's writing and other artistic expression—remains seriously under-researched. Within the fields that cover Arab women's writing, there is relatively little on Saudi women's literary expression. Moreover, there is little scholarship on Saudi women's expression of protest, or indeed on Saudi women at all. There is also almost nothing written about Saudi women's online expression despite a recent increase in scholarly work on online expression(s) in the Arab world and beyond, which I will discuss below. In her book, *A Most Masculine State*, Saudi scholar Madawi al-Rasheed argues that that the researchers on Saudi women find limited knowledge "compared to other Muslim women, who have been the subject of much serious academic research in history and the social sciences, Saudi women's gender issues remain the least studied."[32] This lack of study of Saudi women, especially their literary work, points to the crucial need for more studies and analysis.

As a Saudi woman and a scholar, I felt compelled to undertake this study in order to address this missing element in the scholarship. It is one reason that I developed a study that is wide-ranging, covering a long period of time and range of genres, to study protest in Saudi women's writing. I chose to focus on protest because of the way that Saudi women are still often depicted and understood as being complacent and obedient rather than agents of change. In order to more fully think through what protest means in a society where obedience is the norm, I have opted to use a broad definition of "protest" and to look at it as both explicit and implicit acts or expressions. Furthermore, this allows me to probe the different styles and approaches taken by different people in different genres and contexts. It both draws attention to the act of protest itself

[32] Madawi al-Rasheed, 33.

and also reveals the courage of the women who express it, as well as the diverse means through which it is expressed. This dissertation depicts the ways Saudi women portray themselves through their literary and other creative expression as well as the ways in which they have challenged their depiction as victims in need of saving.

In order to ground this dissertation in scholarly literature, I have worked with the scholarship in English and Arabic, located in multiple fields that have produced work on women and gender in Saudi Arabia, as well as the Gulf more generally, including that on literature and other forms of creative expression from the same region. Although there is more Arabic scholarship in those fields than English, it also remains limited. It is nonetheless beneficial in acknowledging the background and history of the state and society. The methodology of most of the works falls into descriptive approach especially in the literary scholarship as I will explore later in this section. Moreover, there are a number of works in the Arabic scholarship that focus on brightening the image and the status of Saudi women in the human right and social context. What follows is a review of this research in three parts: Saudi women's lives, Saudi women's literature, and Saudi women in social media.

Saudi Women's Lives

The best-known early study of Saudi women's lives written in English is *Women in Saudi Arabia Ideology and Behavior Among the Elite* by Soraya Altorki, published in 1986.[33] Altorki's book explores the changes in women's lives over time among elite families in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and compares the behavior and ideology of three prominent families defined in relation to important historical events. This now classic study is important to the study of Saudi women

[33] Soraya Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior Among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

and is one of the first of its kind. It is important as a study that sets the groundwork for research and offers a strong insider perspective on Saudi society and culture, which attempts to highlight social and ideological changes in society. It does, however, also have limitations when trying to look at Saudi women's lives more generally, especially because it focuses on only one sociodemographic area in Saudi Arabia, the elites of the city of Jeddah.

There are a limited number of more recent works that picked up where Altorki left off in studying Saudi women's lives, social restrictions, and lack of rights. Perhaps the most important of these is Madawi al-Rasheed's, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (2013), which I have referred to above. Al- Rasheed's work provides a detailed study of Saudi women's social and economic lives, education, and participation in the domestic and public spheres. She discusses the obstacles that Saudi women face in their daily lives such as enforced veiling and dress codes, lack of mobility, gender segregation, and difficulties with the judicial system. Al-Rasheed not only examines Saudi women's struggles but also explores the differences in their living circumstances and achievements, specifically in academia and the workforce.

Al-Rasheed's book is also important because she is a historian, and her analyses are written with a historical lens. For example, she examines the first initiative to educate Saudi girls, including the establishment of the first Saudi girls' school and the social response to it in Saudi Arabia. She also discusses how Saudi girls' and women's education improved over time and how historical events impacted the educational sector in the country. Moreover, she goes into depth examining how Saudi women became an arena of conflict and how multiple actors fought to control Saudi women's lives, limiting their own choices. Her study is important in connecting

how education impacts Saudi women's lives in different ways including access to higher education, marriage, fitness centers, and travel.

Her book is particularly important to my dissertation, and I have specifically used Chapter Six, "Celebrity Women Novelists and the Cosmopolitan Fantasy," where she explores the new generation of Saudi women on the literary and intellectual scene and how they have challenged restrictions through their creative productions. In what follows in the dissertation, I engage with the ways in which she analyzes various Saudi women's novels by Badriah Albeshr, Raja al-Sanea, Samar al-Moqrin, and Warda 'Abd al-Malik. My own analyses of fiction and poetry build on some of the insights and analyses she puts forth in this book.

A third study of Saudi women's lives that I engage in this dissertation is Hend Al-Sudairy's *Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Rights, Challenges and Achievements* (2017). This book researches the position of Saudi women within their society from the 19th century until its publication in 2017.[34] Al-Sudairy investigates this important era in Saudi women's progress, especially their resistance to patriarchal society. Although she names and critiques patriarchy, however, al-Sudairy fails to explore a number of crucial issues to Saudi women. For example, she devotes one full chapter to exploring Saudi women's achievements over a period of fifty years in education, politics, sport, and the mass media in the face of persistent obstacles such as male guardianship, but she does not directly challenge these systems. A discussion of the male guardianship system and its impact on Saudi women's lives is conspicuously absent from her study.

Furthermore, al-Sudairy examines conservative practices that limit the ability of Saudi women, even educated Saudi women, to participate in Saudi Arabia's reforms. She documents

[34] Hend T. al-Sudairy, *Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Rights, Challenges and Achievements* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2017).

women's struggles to overcome these obstacles, which is helpful to my own analysis of women's protests and its various forms. Her book dedicates one chapter, Chapter Five, to the analysis of four Saudi women's novels, proposing that they reflect the real struggle of Saudi women, as a parallel to challenges and achievements discussed in other chapters. It argues that analyzing novels can reveal Saudi women's awareness of their own status and rights, as well as their struggle to resist the pressures they face. While I do not argue that novels are reflections of society in the same way, I have built on some of her arguments about literature and social change in my study.

Saudi Women's Literature

These three central works of scholarship on Saudi women all touch on literary works in different ways, but there is also a field of study—albeit a small one—that is devoted to the study of Saudi women's literary works. This is true in both English and Arabic. Here I will focus first on a review of the field in English, and then move to discuss works in Arabic, where there is a broader field of publishing on Saudi women's writing, though the approach used in most of these works is descriptive and often serves the function of listing and cataloguing works rather than analyzing and focusing on texts and ideas.

Like other subfields of Arabic literary study, scholarship on Saudi women's writing in English is largely focused on published formal writing, both creative works, like poetry and fiction and non-fiction, such as journalism, including newspaper columns. The most important full-length study of Saudi women's writing is Seddika Arebi's *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia* (1994). This is a relatively early study that traces Saudi women's poetry and journalism

back to as early as the 1900s.[35] This book is particularly useful in providing the background to much of what is happening in the literary world today, especially as there is so little research in the field.

While scholarly work has been sparse and relatively stagnant, the number of Saudi women novelists has increased in recent years. These writers have adopted the genre of the novel to explore not only themselves and their lives as individuals, but also to express what matters to them as a collective—women's rights, social and political restrictions, cultural and global explorations. This wider variation in writing by Saudi women's novelists has meant that the scholarship in the field has also begun to expand and become richer. The number of studies on Saudi women's fiction in Arabic has expanded with the increase in novels by Saudi women. Some of these studies focus on women's novels, while others address them in only one or two chapters with other works by men. In what follows, I discuss the most significant works focused on Saudi women's literary productions, starting with those in Arabic, followed by those written in other languages, and finally touching on some recent unpublished PhD theses.

The bulk of the scholarship on Saudi women's writing in Arabic focuses on literature in a way that is largely descriptive; they do not make interventions beyond documenting the works written and published, for example the studies by Khalid al-Rifai, Sami Jaridi, and Sami al-Jam'an. Sami Jaridi's (الرواية النسائية السعودية: خطاب المرأة وتشكيل السرد) [*Saudi Women's Novels: Women's Speech and Narrative*] (2008) and Khalid al-Rifai's (الرواية النسائية السعودية: قراءة في التاريخ والموضوع والقضية والفن) [*Saudi Women's Novels: A Reading of Issues, Topics, History, and Art*] (2009) are two of the most useful. These two books address Saudi women's novels from the

[35] Saddeka Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

beginning of its development to its more contemporary forms, which they consider to be the "revolutionary stage." Like most authors who study Saudi fiction, these authors are Saudis themselves and base their studies on their PhD dissertations.

Jaridi's book is useful in that it discusses the most significant elements of narrative formation in Saudi women's novelistic discourse from 1958 to 2008. His focus on language, events, settings, and characters allows him to highlight how women novelists explore particular issues in their fiction. Jaridi also notes the use of specific narrative techniques, such as monologue, to address the impact of political, social, psychological, and geographical issues on Saudi women's novels. In the second section of his book, Jaridi offers a breakdown of chronological stages to understand the development of Saudi women's writing. While his book is useful for laying out a background of Saudi women's writing, I find it problematic that he considers a number of historical events such as the Gulf wars and the Riyadh bombings of 2003 as being "political events." I argue that these events should be understood as human rights crises or terrorist events rather than described more neutrally as "political." This misconceptualization is shared by many Saudi literary critics, and recurs in the book by al-Rifai, as discussed below.

Khalid al-Rifai's book similarly focuses on the themes and stages of Saudi women's fiction. He isolates the issues that Saudi women novelists choose to narrate and how they do this. In the introduction to the book, al-Rifai states that limitations and shortcomings of his analysis are due to the wide variety of themes, issues, and artistic structures of so many novels published over a long period of time. This can also be seen in the broad way in which he chose to delimit his study as reflected in its subtitle: "A Reading of Issues, Topics, History, and Art." One of the

drawbacks of using his study is that it is so broad that at times it can be superficial in its analyses.

Some of the drawbacks of Rifai's study can be seen in his reading of "issues and topics," a chapter on the themes covered in Saudi women's writing. From the outset, he declares that he will only address very broad themes, which he defines as being contained in the categories of novels which he defines as: emotional, moral, social, Islamic, and rebellious. He affirms that Saudi women's novels can accommodate other large thematic umbrellas—political, historical, philosophical and adventure novels, for example—but he prefers to limit his study to investigating specific novels, according to a specific view. This is one limitation of his study. A further limitation is that he does not evenly distribute his analysis and only uses two novels by a single author to discuss "moral themes." Moreover, none of the novels he chose were published after September 11, 2001.

A further difficulty with al-Rifai's study is that, though he outlines a way to understand the stages of the Saudi women's novel, he does not distinguish between the issues and themes used within them. For example, he writes about emotion and love twice: in section one of Chapter One—on "The Emotional Novel"—and in another section on of love in the second chapter that is devoted to "Feminist Issues." This mixing of the themes of love and emotion creates confusion in differentiating between the two themes. He conflates issues and does not have a clear way to discuss women's issues and aspects of feminism. Therefore, although al-Rifai's book is useful in cataloguing Saudi women's novels, it is too broad and also too descriptive to be considered or treated as an analytical study.

Nonetheless, al-Rifai's study is one of the most important one in the field because it does provide a clear and broad overview of the most significant novels by Saudi women, touching on a range of various aspects contained within them, including history, and also talking about them in relation to a very broad scope of themes and issues. Because there have been so few studies of Saudi women's novels at all, a work like this with a chronological overview of what has been written is important and useful to scholars, and I have relied on it to be able to identify which works appeared over a long period of time and when they were published.

Appearing two years later, Samaher al-Damen's study, (نساء بلا أمهات: الذوات الأنثوية في الرواية النسائية السعودية) [*Women without Mothers: Female Selves in the Saudi Feminist Novel*] (2010) has also enriched the field in important ways.[36] This is one of the most significant works of scholarship written in Arabic on Saudi women's writing as it attempts to appraise and elucidate the development and transformation of women's self-consciousness within feminist discourse. It applies feminist criticism in order to analyze the core features, themes, and issues of Saudi women's literature. It is mainly concerned with the 1990s period onward, but al-Damin begins her examination of literary works in 1958, with the appearance of the first Saudi women's novel, in order to investigate the emergence of self-conscious feminist discourse in Saudi Arabia and to trace the transformations of such narratives throughout five decades.

The final book I will discuss here that treats Saudi women's literature in Arabic is Sami al-Jam'an's study, (خطاب الرواية النسائية السعودية وتحولاته) [*The Discourse of the Saudi Women's Novel and its Transformations*] (2013).[37] Al- Jam'an gives a descriptive account of Saudi women's

[36] Samaher al-Damen, (نساء بلا أمهات: الذوات الأنثوية في الرواية النسائية السعودية) [Women without Mothers: Female Selves in the Saudi Feminist Novel]. *(*Lebanon: Dar Alintishar, 2010).

[37] Sami al-Jam'an, (خطاب الرواية النسائية السعودية وتحولاته) [The Discourse of the Saudi Women's Novel and its Transformations] (Saudi Arabia: The Literary Club of Riyadh, 2013).

novels from 1958 to 2009. As with the other studies I have discussed above, al- Jam‘an divides Saudi women’s novels into three stages, which he defines as “the beginning,” “the search,” and “contemporary.” His study can be considered an important chronological survey of the transformation of Saudi women’s narratives over a period of more than fifty years.

Al- Jam‘an’s study is straightforward in how it explains the development of Saudi women’s novelistic discourse: he argues that Saudi women novelists benefited from political and social changes in the country. He does not, however, make any attempt to explain either these issues, or how they affect women’s feminist discourse. Al- Jam‘an argues that in the contemporary stage of women’s writing, which is his third stage of development, Saudi women novelists focus on exposing their “desires,” rather than their “issues.” He claims that this is a good opportunity for them to develop their novelistic discourse, but that they are stuck trying to escape an oppressive society by using openness and anger in their language. He claims that this is an “immature discourse.”

I have spent time discussing these works written in Arabic on Saudi women’s literature in some depth, despite their drawbacks, because they do give a broader and more comprehensive view of Saudi women’s creativity than can be found in the scholarship in other languages, including English. With the exception of Arebi’s book, mentioned above, there are no full-length studies of Saudi women’s literature written in English or French. Within journal articles, however, there are a range of ways that academics have studied literary works by Saudi women that add to the scholarship and have been helpful to this study. The majority of these works focus on fiction as the most popular genre Saudi women used to express themselves. Some examples

include Marilyn's Booth's study of the translation of Saudi women's fiction;[38] studies on how they challenge restrictions—by Madawi al-Rasheed, Mariwan Kanie, Hamad Al-Hazza, and Noura Algahtani[39] --and studies by Félix Lagrange and Xavier Luffin[40] on the expression of racism in works by Laila Aljohani and Zainab Hafni. All of these studies provide useful views into some of the issues and ideas covered in Saudi women's fiction and also develop reading methods. There are fewer articles on poetry, however. One important one—which I will engage in what follows—is a close reading of a poem by Hissa Hilal by Clive Holes, "A Saudi "Housewife" Goes to War" الفتاوى الشريرة" or "the Evil Fatwa."

Finally, there are a number of unpublished PhD theses that closely examine Saudi women's fiction. Below, I will give an overview of some of the most recent ones which take up issues related to the topic of this dissertation. In the same area as al- Jam'an's study, there is an unpublished PhD thesis titled: *Women's Novel in Saudi Arabia: Its Emergence and Development in a Changing Culture* by Abd Al-Rahman al-Wahhabi.[41] Al-Wahhabi discusses how Saudi women's fiction has moved forward as the position of women in Saudi society has advanced. Like the studies mentioned above, this thesis once again proposes a chronology of Saudi women's novels divided into periods: the beginning (1960-1980), the middle (1980-1991), and

[38] Marilyn Booth, "The Muslim Woman as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic: Girls of Riyadh Go on the Road," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 3, (2010) :149-82. And "Translator v. Author (2007): Girls of Riyadh Go to New York," *Translation Studies* 1, no. 2 (2008):197-211.
[39] Madawi al-Rasheed, "Deconstructing Nation and Religion," *Novel and Nation in the Muslim World*. Edited by Elisabeth Özdalga and Daniella Kuzmanovic, London, (2015): 133–151. Mariwan Kanie, "Young Saudi Women Novelists: Protesting Clericalism, Religious Fanaticism and Patriarchal Gender Order," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 7, no.2 (2017): 283-299. Hamad al-Hazza, "Social Marginalisation of Women in the Saudi Novel after the Gulf War in 1990," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 5, no.3 (2015): 241-247. Noura Algahtani, "Defying Convention: Saudi Women Writers and the Shift from Periphery to Centre," *Women's Studies International Forum* 59 (2016): 26-31.
[40] Frédéric Lagrange, "Arabies malheureuses: corps, désirs et plaisirs dans quelques romans saoudiens récents." *Revue de littérature comparée.* 333.1: (2010): 101-118. And Xavier Luffin, "Lettres saoudiennes: une littérature en devenir." *La Revue nouvelle*. 1 (janvier) (2009): 93-97.
[41] Abd Al-Rahman Al-Wahhabi, *Women's Novel in Saudi Arabia: Its Emergence and Development in a Changing Culture*. PhD. thesis, (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 2005).

after 1991. He claims that the importance of Saudi women's fiction on the Saudi literary scene became visible in the second period (1980-1991).

In his chronology, al-Wahhabi analyzes a number of Saudi women's novels by Samira Khashoggi, Safiyyah 'Anbar, Amal Shata, Raja' 'Alim, and Bahiyya Bu Subayt. He devotes one chapter to Saudi women's novels written after 1991 and finds that the changes in Saudi society after the Gulf War and September 11, 2001 have had an impact on Saudi literature in general and women's novels in particular. He proposes that the young novelists from newer generations take up new ideas, themes, and are more willing to expose social problems. Moreover, al-Wahhabi emphasizes the impact of historical and ideological developments on Saudi society, and highlights feminist themes and issues addressed by Saudi women novelists. Al-Wahhabi singles out how the oil boom of the 1960s and 1970s had a positive and dramatic impact on changing Saudi society as a whole. An important part of his analysis looks at the historical development of how Saudi women's status changed before and after September 11, 2001 especially their right to study and work.

Khalid Aldakheel's 2012 doctoral dissertation, *Development of Awareness: The Power of Society and Men in the Saudi Women's Novel* (1958–2011) adopts a Western feminist critique in its readings of Saudi women's fiction.[42] Developing his study from his reading of Elaine Showalter, he turns to the history of the novels and novelists on whom the study concentrates, tracing their techniques and characteristics through four stages of the novel that he identifies. The thesis focuses on two themes addressed by Saudi women novelists between 1958 and 2011, namely the power of society and the power of men. Aldakheel focuses on the development and

[42] Khalid Aldakheel, *Development of Awareness: The Power of Society and Men in the Saudi women's novel (1958–2011)*. PhD. thesis, (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 2012).

transformation of Saudi novelists' awareness of the effects of these two powers and on the development of stylistic features.

Because of the interdependence and similarities between notions that might fall under the broader term "patriarchy," Aldakheel divides his analysis between the power of society and the power of men, which overlapped in the novels representing each of the four stages. Like other Saudi critics, Aldakheel presents a schematic version of the development of the Saudi women's novel in four stages: works written between 1958-1979, between 1980-1989, between 1990-2001, and between 2001-2011. Aldakheel underlines the importance of the historical circumstances and events at the beginning of each stage. For example, he identifies the second Gulf War as the main factor prompting the increased number of Saudi women's novels published in the 1990s. As for the fourth stage, he considers the events of September 11, 2001 to be among the most significant factors in the development of the novel, because of media interest and the eagerness of readers to consume Saudi women's novels. This prospect is interesting, however, Aldakheel fails to propose why there is an increased output of Saudi women's novels as a phenomenon and/or how the second Gulf War and the events of 9/11 contributed to causing this phenomenon.

The final unpublished thesis I will discuss here is titled: *A Thematic Investigation of Saudi Women's Fiction, 1958-2016* by Ibrahem Almarhaby.[43] This study offers a thematic investigation of Saudi women's novels between 1958 and 2016, following the genetic structuralist approach developed by Lucien Goldmann in the 1960s. His approach establishes a

[43] Ibrahem Almarhaby, *A Thematic Investigation of Saudi Women's Fiction, 1958-2016*. PhD thesis, (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 2020).

nuanced understanding of two strong relationships—between the Saudi women's novel and Saudi society, an well as between the thematic development of the Saudi novel and the development of Saudi women's social status.

Having situated the selected works within their social, political, economic, cultural, and religious contexts, Almarhaby's study revolves around two main axes. It firstly investigates the thematic engagement of Saudi women's novels and secondly explores their thematic development along with the development of Saudi women's status in the social, economic, political, and cultural fields. Again, like the other studies, this thesis divides the development of Saudi women's fiction into three historical stages according to their worldviews as he identifies them: tragic (1958-1989), hopeless and bewildered (1990-2004), and critical (2005-2016). The analysis proposes that both the themes and the shared worldviews of the novels correlate with the social status and concerns of Saudi women of all social classes in each historical phase. Almarhaby argues that this is due to socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-religious factors. The thesis also demonstrates that the dominant visions of the internal structures of the chosen novels in each phase have a homologous relationship with the external social structures and the life histories of their authors, who reflect the consciousness of their social groups.

All of these studies have helped me to develop a global understanding of Saudi women's fiction from a variety of different standpoints, and to critically reflect upon how critics have approached it. They share a focus on documenting literary production and categorizing it, offering for the most part descriptive overviews. The focus on dividing the novel into periods of development and chronological tracking is typical of a still-emerging field of study. These studies have made it so that I have space, within my dissertation, to develop a different method

and approach. While I will contextualize the readings of the creative expressions of protest I study, I do not offer a chronology or a typology of Saudi women's literature or expressions of protest. Moreover, while I do cover both poetry and fiction, my analysis of creative expression also moves into other areas, especially social media which is the next scholarly literature I will review.

Saudi Women in Social Media

Scholarship on Saudi women and the so-called "new media" or "social media" while relatively limited is growing. There are a few recent works that speak about the presence of Saudi women on the internet and social media platforms, which I will review below. Most studies focus on the behavior of individuals and how they use social media and thus their methodologies are linked to this.

One recent study is *The Role of the Social Media in Empowering Saudi Women's Expression* by Hend Alsudairy (2020).[44] This book analyzes how journalism corresponds to social media in relation to freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it examines Saudi women writers who, at times, are represented on social media and in turn how it has affected their writing. Chapter Three "Saudi Women Activists on Twitter," is particularly relevant, though unlike my own study. While Alsudairy examines the work of a number of Saudi women writers on Twitter, none of them are active in Saudi women's protest movements. In my own dissertation, I ensure that the writers I focus on are also engaged in some form of protest. Alsudairy's study in fact avoids the main two Saudi women's rights campaigns which have been so prominent on Twitter—that against the male guardianship law and that in favour of women's

[44] Hend T. Alsudairy, *The Role of the Social Media in Empowering Saudi Women's Expression*, (Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2020).

right to drive. So while Alsudairy does provide valuable insights into social media as a platform wherein Saudi women writers express themselves, it avoids issues of social change and expressions of protests and/or opposition.

Yuce et al. (2013)[45] have also produced an important study on social media, which is focused on Saudi women's blogging. In it, they track how young Saudi women use social media for negotiating and expressing their identity. Through in-depth interviews with a sample of seven Saudi women aged 20 to 26, the research reveals that the internet, with its protection of individual privacy, provided the participants a space to negotiate the boundaries imposed on them by cultural and societal rules. Participants employed several tactics of negotiation such as using pseudonyms, concealing their personal images, and exclusively using first names in order not to be identified as they would be if they used their family names. Using multiple accounts is also popular among participants. The internet, with the absence of gatekeepers, offers new avenues of self-expression and identification among Saudi women, thus creating a safe space in which women can express themselves freely.

A second study by Yuce et al. titled, *Studying the Evolution of Online Collective Action: Saudi Arabian Women's 'Oct26Driving' Twitter Campaign* (2014),[46] uses Twitter hashtags to examine the evolution of collective action in the *Women2Drive* campaign. Unlike their previous study of blogs by Muslim women, this study includes Arabic as well as English content. They analyzed about 70,000 tweets from 116 countries and identified cross-cultural associations with

[45] Serpil Yuce, Nitin Agarwal, and Rolf T. Wigand, "Mapping Cyber-Collective Action Among Female Muslim Bloggers for the Women to Drive Movement," *Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling and Prediction.* Springer International Publishing, (2013): 331-340.
[46] Yuce, Serpil, Nitin Agarwal, Rolf T. Wigand, Merlyna Lim, and Rebecca S. Robinson. "Studying the Evolution of Online Collective Action: Saudi Arabian Women's 'Oct26Driving' Twitter Campaign," *Social Computing Behavioral-Culture Modeling and Predicting*. Springer International Publishing 8393, (2014): 413-420.

the hashtags' language choice (English or Arabic). They found that the Arabic hashtags were used more frequently and were associated with "local factors." These factors include Arabic content that address claims that have circulated, such as the effect of driving on women's ovaries. English hashtags, on the other hand, are associated with international contexts, and were used to help promote the campaign in international communities and organizations.

Another example of a study that examines social media as a site of protest is by Sanaa Askool, in an article titled, "The Use of Social Media in Arab Countries: A Case of Saudi Arabia."[47] This article examines the use of social media among individuals in Saudi Arabia employing a quantitative approach to investigate and understand the effect of cultural restrictions on individuals' motivations, users' attitudes, intention, behaviors and their actual use. While this is different from my own study, her examination of the broader use of Twitter by Saudi users has been helpful in formulating Chapter Four of this dissertation which is devoted to Saudi women's creative protest on Twitter.

Another work that helps to contextualize Twitter as a social platform used to express protest is Abdulsamad Sahly's unpublished Master's thesis titled, *Examining Presence and Influence of Linguistic Characteristics in the Twitter Discourse Surrounding the Women's Right to Drive Movement in Saudi Arabia.*[48] Sahly argues that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been popular tools for social and political movements in non-democratic societies in which traditional media outlets are under government control. As a result, activists in

[47] Sanaa Askool, ",The Use of Social Media in Arab Countries: A Case of Saudi Arabia." In: *Web Information Systems and Technologies: Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing* 140, edited by J. Cordeiro and KH Krempels. Heidelberg: Springer, 2013: 201- 219.
[48] Abdulsamad Sahly, *Examining Presence and Influence of Linguistic Characteristics in the Twitter Discourse Surrounding the Women's Right to Drive Movement in Saudi Arabia*. Master's thesis, (University of Central Florida, 2016).

Saudi Arabia, particularly women activists, have launched several campaigns through social media to demand the right to drive for women.

Sahly utilizes framing theory as the foundation for looking at how cognitive, emotional, religious, and/or moral language have been used to discuss this issue on Twitter. He analyzes the relationship between the way in which language is used on Twitter and retweeting behavior to understand how discourse relates to the potential influence of messages. From this analysis, he suggests that, within sociopolitical discussions on social media, intellectual language was expressed the most often—particularly the language of insight and causation. He also makes links between the retweet and the language of the tweet itself. He observes that tweets containing intellectual language are more likely to be retweeted than those with emotional language. Finally, Sahly concludes that Saudi women's tone on twitter is noticeably angry— something that I will explore in Chapter Four.

The final study I will discuss here is Abdullah Abalkhail's unpublished PhD thesis titled, *Cyberactivism in a Non-Democratic Context: Social Campaigning in Saudi Arabia.*[49] Abalkhail examines some of the existing assumptions around collective action, derived largely from experiences in democratic countries, by focusing on a country without a tradition of collective activism. His thesis analyzes two case studies from Saudi Arabia: the women's right to drive campaign (also known as the October 26th campaign), and the teachers' rights campaign.

Abalkhail's study examines the role of the internet in three areas: mobilizing support for campaigns, shaping the organizational structure of collective action, and challenging the systemic environment. In order to address these issues, the thesis draws on two types of data:

[49] Abalkhail Abdullah, *Cyberactivism in a Non-Democratic Context: Social Campaigning in Saudi Arabia*. PhD Thesis (University of Salford, 2016).

firstly, extensive interviews with campaigners and international journalists and secondly, social network analysis. The most important part of this thesis from the point of view of my work is Chapter 7, "'October 26th' Campaign, supporting Saudi women's right to drive," which is about the organized protests supporting Saudi women advocating for their right to drive. In this chapter, Abalkhail explores the role and impact of communication technologies in new media as he tracks the campaign from the beginning. Abalkhail's study concludes that internet technologies have helped to create new spaces in Saudi Arabia, allowing social campaigners to express themselves without significant disruption. He shows how they have achieved some of their goals through social media, though he reminds us that the social and political context plays an equally important role in shaping campaigns as technology.

Corpus of Works Studied

To study Saudi women's expressions of protest, from poetry to Twitter, I have identified a series of works that form my corpus of analysis. I begin with poetry, the genre most employed by Saudi women historically. I draw upon early protest poetry to ground the rest of my analysis, specifically to study the gradual change in the protest imagery within Saudi women's creative expression.

Following my discussion of poetry, the genres I have chosen to focus on for the remainder of the dissertation are: fiction, self-expression before social media (including memoir and blogs), expressions beyond letters (including interviews and videos), and finally social media. In the final chapter, I focus on Twitter, specifically, as a location where a considerable evolution of protest imagery and expression could be found. By exploring expressions of protest across these genres, I show the range of creative expressions of Saudi women and also reveal

some of the dynamics of protest shared across them. Moreover, by comparing genres through close readings, I identify different aesthetic practices that are linked to the art of protest. I narrowed down the corpus of works by identifying one or two women working in each creative genre whose output best expresses an aesthetic of protest in each genre. In this, I identified the kinds of protests that they mount in the works, but did not make my selection on that basis.

For poetry, I have selected two poems by two very different poets, who use different languages aimed at different audiences. I have chosen Hind al-Mutairi's poem, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [The Romantic Spring Protest] which challenges the concept of the tribe and its discrimination against women. Al-Mutairi is a university professor from one of the most well-known tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and her poem demonstrates the courage behind Saudi women's protest. The second poem is Hissa Hilal's (الفتاوى الشريرة) ["The Evil Fatwa"]. This well-known poem targets radical religious fatwas from a woman's point of view. This poem is written in the Saudi dialect (الشعر النبطي/الشعر العامي). This poem is particularly unique because most poetry that emerges from this region centers tribal pride, not protest. Additionally, I chose this poem because it nicely contrasts with al-Mutairi's fame; whereas the latter is an important figure in the literary scene, Hilal is not. Most of the Saudi literary and intellectual scene embraces modern standard Arabic in poetry, and does not have space or room for dialectical expression. Instead of opting for poems that are famous or mainstream in Saudi society, I felt it would be more insightful to read a poem that is uncommon both in its language and subject matter. Indeed, Hilal's poem is unique specifically because it is uncommon in Saudi Arabia to challenge or criticize religious shaykhs, especially when done by women. On the other hand, al-Mutairi's poem is also exceptional because it criticizes the tribal culture, the overregulation of women, and

how it negatively impacts Saudi women. This is especially important because the tribe in question is a distinguished one—not only in Saudi Arabia, but in other gulf states as well.

In terms of fictional works, I will be closely studying three novels all of which are engaged in creative protest, but each with unique themes. Two texts by Badriah Albeshr, (هند والعسكر) [Hind and the Soldier] and (غراميات شارع الأعشى) [Love Stories on Al-A'sha Street], and one by Laila Aljohani (جاهلية) [Days of Ignorance]. Badriah Albeshr's novels offer an example of how a novelist can utilize literary techniques to challenge the societal expectation to obey and how this expectation could often be enforced by matriarchal and patriarchal figures in the family or even in society more broadly. Likewise, Aljohani's novel is an important addition to Saudi women's creative expressions of protest because it exposes racism in Saudi society—a phenomenon that often goes unnoticed and/or ignored. While two of the three texts have been translated into English, all translations in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted [50]

Chapter Two is devoted to an analysis of self-expression, also called memoir or life writing. In this chapter, I work with a published text first, and then move on to digital blogs. The former is a memoir by Huda Aldaghfag, (أَشُقُّ البُرقُع..أرَى) [I Tear the Burqu'a, I See] because it is a pertinent example of how creative expression can include protest through one's personal life. Moreover, Aldaghfag is an important personality. As a poet and writer, she has herself analyzed protest culture within intellectual circles in Saudi Arabia. Her work has included a critique not only of the social restrictions but also of cultural events and within the ministry of culture. I follow this with a discussion of online blogs where I focus on two Saudi bloggers—Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjan—who utilize different writing styles, have different target

[50] Badriah Albeshr. *Hend and the Soldier: A Novel*. Translated by Sanna Dhahir. Austin TX: The University of Texas at Austin Press, 2017 and Laila Aljohani. *Days of Ignorance.* Translated by Nancy Roberts. Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2014.

audiences, and address different issues. I chose bloggers with distinct and contrasting styles, different usages of language, and different targets who focus on different issues in order to enrich my analyses by making them more comprehensive and inclusive. I explore the work of two Saudi bloggers, Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjan, because of the differences which lead to make the analysis more comprehensive and inclusive.

Chapter Three marks my shift from analyzing written expressions to unwritten ones, including creative protest through TV interviews and videos. I begin by studying TV interviews by Aziza al-Yousef, one of the most widely known and highly regarded Saudi activists who questions and challenges unjust laws and those who make them. I chose to analyze these interviews because al-Yousef presents her protest as a creative expression that combines education and analysis. Following this, I will analyze the expression of two other women activists, namely Loujain AlHathloul and Nuha al-Balawi. They each have a different ideology, presentation, and creative ways of protesting as I will examine in depth in my analysis.

The final chapter of the dissertation is devoted to Twitter which I've identified as being a digital space and central location for Saudi women's creative protest. In this chapter, I focus on specific protest campaigns in Saudi Arabia—two of which have been successful, namely the campaigns against the male guardianship system and the ban on women driving. The former is interesting because its history can be traced on Twitter and it also triggered similar campaigns across the Gulf. The latter is one of the longest running campaigns by Saudi women, dating to pre-Twitter days. I follow these two examples by analyzing the ways in which Saudi women have protested against unemployment. This is a crucial example because this campaign highlighted a collective struggle for all Saudis—both men and women—which can be interestingly juxtaposed with campaigns that focus on women's rights specifically.

Questions and Arguments

Currently, much attention is focused on protest culture in the Arab world in the forms of street protests, most notably the revolts and revolutions of the Arab Spring and continual street uprisings against Arab regimes, which are often met with violence. My dissertation has a somewhat sitinct focus in its understanding of protest. This is partly because of my focus on Saudi women and their creative expressions. I argue in this dissertation that the wide range of Saudi women's creative expressions of protest have gone largely unnoticed, yet they are powerful, expansive, and have only increased with time.

I have chosen this focus for several reasons. The first is to demonstrate the wide variety of forms of protest creatively expressed by Saudi women. Within this variety, I will explore and analyze the differences in their language, tone, style, and other artistic inscriptions within their protests. I also link these to the contexts in which they are produced, including the background and milieu of the creators, as well as the political moment in which they appear. Finally, and most importantly, I will explore the gradual and mostly underexplored development of Saudi women's protest over the years which have served to advance women's rights and social justice in Saudi Arabia.

This dissertation examines Saudi women's creative expression of protest from a number of angles. Within each of the genres of creative expression I have identified, I also examine differences and similarities in their protests -- focusing on how and why Saudi women use each of them. I ground these expressions within their local contexts, to see what larger discourses they contribute to. Through these close analyses, I ask what is the definition of the word "protest" and what is protest culture? Where can we locate protest potential in Saudi women's lexicon? How do Saudi women protest and in which space do they protest in? I also ask how and if these

expressions of protest are the same. Are there important differences within certain expressions of protest? Are the creative protests against the male guardianship system similar to the protests against unemployment, and in what ways? Finally, I am concerned with how creative expressions of protest by Saudi women have changed over time.

I bring in the question of protest over time because one of the important arguments of this dissertation is that Saudi women have been protesting for much longer than is acknowledged. Contrary to popular belief, Saudi women's expressions of protest did not begin with Twitter or even within new media. Despite social pressure and cultural conventions to obey authority, we know that Saudi women have protested their social conditions at various points in history. Often, implicit forms of protest are overlooked, or might not even be seen as part of conventional "protest culture" as we understand it today. Though I am not arguing for a linear progression of protest, I have organized the chapters of this dissertation to follow a rough evolution of genres that allows me to analyze expressions of Saudi women's protest, revealing a shift from being unheard, unknown, and expressing more implicit forms of protest to a gradually more explicit manifestation of protest culture.

The wide variety of expressive styles that Saudi women utilize in mounting their protests is one of the key elements of my analysis. I argue that diverse genres are suitable for different kinds of protests. For example, protesting on Twitter or on social media in general, allows Saudi women to engage with different audiences. Social media platforms create a space for discussion, negotiation, education, and advocacy. However, it also makes space for counter-protestors to attack or target online advocates, especially since it is much easier for counter-protestors to accuse protestors of being traitors. This is significantly different from published works like

novels. In this case, after the challenges of publishing and censorship, which impact circulation, the writer has more control over the narrative.

Based on my analyses in this dissertation, I contend that there is a strong relationship between the development of Saudi women's creative expressions of protest and Saudi society's openness to the world. This is partly linked to internet use and its impact on society. The internet has allowed Saudi society to connect to outsiders in ways they never did before. Saudi women's literary expressions of protest began before this, of course, and the kinds of changes and developments in Saudi women's lives were different. The scholarly literature on Saudi women's fiction, discussed in the section above, shows how protest in the form of writing has accelerated in more recent years. Earlier works tended to be more focused on depictions of social life without necessarily pairing them with a critical lens. The way protest works is both in raising awareness about the issues faced by Saudi women, and also in shaping this in creative expressions across genres. These generic expressions are suited to different kinds of protest, for example, the younger generations who use Twitter often employ brief, more aggressive, and sharper language and expose their identities even if this means risking their safety.

Central to my investigation are the various kinds of creative expressions used to protest or oppose norms or policies. For my dissertation, I expanded my corpus of work to include creative mediums and traditional medias in order to assess the broad spectrum of protesting. These varied kinds of creative expression are the centre of the investigations in this dissertation. I have chosen to focus on fiction and poetry, because creative expressions of protest are diverse and broad and aren't exclusively located within more conventional genres. I will also be examining the connections between various new media platforms and their interconnections. For example, as I analyze in Chapter Three, Loujain AlHathloul posts videos via Keek and YouTube,

then those videos are circulated via Twitter, Facebook, and other mediums. Nuha al-Balawi's videos were posted first on Snapchat before then being circulated on Twitter. As for television appearances or interviews, Aziza al-Yousef actually quotes something directly from Twitter. Hind al-Mutairi engages through Twitter to counter the backlash she received after criticizing her tribe. Finally, blogger Nouf Abdulaziz alternates expressing her protests between her personal blog and Twitter, as well as quoting herself and others in her blog.

Moreover, as I will argue further below, the expressions of protest in new media are artistic and creative and should be studied together with Saudi women's literary protest. I will examine various linguistic and literary features of these expressions that have gone unexplored. For example, Hind al-Mutairi criticizes the tribal system and their sexist attitudes and treatment of Saudi women by using creative linguistic play. She invokes specific evocative and provocative word choices—like (عار) (ويح), and (ثورة). Here, she builds a vocabulary to criticize the foundation of Saudi society, namely the tribal system, in a provocative but courageous way. Though al-Mutairi does not specify which tribe she is attacking, her critique led to a wider reaction that saw her banned from participating in poetry festivals in Saudi Arabia.

One important element of my analysis is recognizing and examining the limits and possibilities that come with utilizing specific genres to protest. For example, in published works like novels, protest is largely directed against the tribal system, radical religious fatwas, and social injustices more generally, with less emphasis on government policies and how they disproportionately harm Saudi women. For example, Hind, the protagonist in "هند والعسكر" [*Hind and the Soldiers*] by Badriah Albeshr involves a plot that allows her to challenge indirectly how government policies about male guardianship in hospitals lead to regulations about surgeries performed on women. This critique, however, does not show or discuss who is responsible for

this. The way in which a similar critique of the male guardianship system impacts women's health care is discussed in Chapter Four, where a range of Saudi women protest these policies on Twitter and direct this towards the government who is responsible for this abuse.

In contrast, the memoir "أشُقُّ البُرقُع..أرَى" by Huda Aldaghfag uses direct language to critique these policies in a number of passages. I analyze these in Chapter Two below. We see Aldaghfag names this abuse and identifies the government as being the source of this abuse, whereas in the novel Albeshr points at Saudi society, its society and traditions as being the culprit. This is more in line with how certain kinds of linguistic elements, especially transparent and direct language, play a significant role in Saudi women's critique of the male guardianship system in new media, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

All of these literary and linguistic expressions are crucial constituents of protest culture within Saudi women's expressions. With the exception of the 1991 driving convoy, there have been no street protests or collective action in public spaces led by Saudi women. In this dissertation, I argue that these unique features set apart Saudi women's creative expressions of protest from other protest cultures in the region. To follow the major protest movements led and participated in by Saudi women, it is important to follow the expressions of protest first and then the actions that follow. Often this begins online followed by offline protests. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, there have been a number of actions carried out by Saudi women, like that by Loujain AlHathloul. As I discuss below, these actions remain very different from protest cultures in the Arab region at large.

Saudi women's creative expression of protest is diverse in genre, style, and target audience; moreover, the women who protest are themselves not a homogenous group. I deliberately chose women from various backgrounds in order to take into account demographic

differences and how it affects the messaging of their protests. Some protesters come from more conservative, traditional, and/or strict families and others do not. Many of those who produce more conventional literary works hold degrees in higher education, but some of those on Twitter do not have high school degrees. Whatever their level of education or social positioning, all of the women have in common that they are protesting a norm or policy in some creative form. One of the features of social media is that you can have access to it, even if you have a more modest financial situation, a more restrictive family background, more or less educational opportunities. This variety is important in presenting a comprehensive view of Saudi women's creative protest.

Theory and Methodology

Saudi Arabian feminist protest is unlike other protest movements—feminist and otherwise. There are a few studies of feminism, in its many different manifestations, in the Gulf States. To place Saudi Arabian feminist protest in a theoretical framework, I use Saudi women's platforms of action and expression as my guide. One reason for this is that critical and theoretical works analysing expressions of protest in Arab media, for example, most often focus on these as tools utilized to connect protesters virtually to what is happening in actual street protests. I view these platforms, instead, as creative and powerful works in their own right. To theorize these expressions of protest, I draw upon their own internal conceptual frameworks. I use these texts to explore and understand the unique circumstances that have led Saudi women to produce these different expressions that provide varied employment of language (written and verbal) and platforms.

My method of analysis begins from close readings of the creative expressions I have

identified in the range of texts discussed above. Close readings of the literary texts reveal both the aesthetic practices used within them, differently in each genre, as well as how they are connected to their contexts and the protests they engage in. The kinds of feminist, close reading of texts I do draws on similar methods of literary analysis to those of Buthayna Sha'ban in, (مائة عام من الرواية النسائية العربية ١٩٨٨-١٩٩٩) [One Hundred Years of Arab Women's Writing 1899-1999] and Hoda Elsadda in *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008*. These two critics read literary texts to understand the features of feminism and analyze the stylistic and linguistic figures that writers employ to present their feminist protest. Sha'ban and Elsadda focus on the feminist perspective by bringing out and analyzing women's voices in literature that previously were hidden or ignored. Similarly to Sha'ban, I focus on texts by Saudi women that express breaking down obstacles that oppress women and present the notion of liberation in women's consciousness as a form of protest. In her book, Elsadda offers in-depth textual analyses that help to elucidate how protest can be linked to artistic expression. I draw upon her methods in my analysis.

After analyzing poetry, novels, and memoirs, I continue to draw upon these methods to analyze the other artistic expressions of protest. In addition, I use this same strategy of close reading in my analysis of memoir and blogs, keeping in mind the particularities of these genres. These works are helpful models for me to draw out a focus on power relations between languages and cultures. I also provide contextualized reading of all the material in this dissertation by examining the complexities of their political and cultural environments to present a better understanding of each one. My readings of interviews, videos, and Twitter are further informed by the methods used by Paolo Gerbaudo in *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. For the new media texts, in particular, I draw upon Gerbaudo's critical

approach, which sees their production similarly to literary works, by studying these expressions' features to understand the protest culture in social media. For example, I found that on Twitter, Saudi women who protest unemployment do not receive the same level of response as those who protest the driving ban or the male guardianship system. Moreover, in the video section, the difference between Loujain AlHathloul and Nuha al-Balawi is obvious where al-Balawi receives more respect and acceptance than AlHathloul in her videos because of her modest appearance as well as her wise tone.

I have also drawn from the work of Caroline Seymour-Jorn, particularly the analysis in her book on the new generation's expressions of protest in Egypt. *Creating Spaces of Hope: Young Artists and the New Imagination in Egypt* inspired my analysis with its inclusion of a wide variety of creative expressions. Seymour-Jorn argues that these allow for the creation of "spaces of hope" within a troubled society, as they afford a sustained experience. This is a parallel experience to the Saudi women whose works are explored in this dissertation, who invented their own ways to express themselves and to protest. This can be seen especially in the use of Twitter to express disagreement, anger, and rage, posting analysis, writing, videos, pictures, and cartoons on the platform. Similarly to Seymour-Jorn, I also link this wide variety of creative expression not only to a new generation of Twitter users but also to writers of poetry and fiction — which could be seen as a more traditional protest—as I propose in the first chapter.

As this dissertation focuses on Saudi women's expressions of protest, I follow the literary and linguistic analysis of the expressions and through analyzing those forms. I also shed light on cultural and legal barriers, limited access to higher education, and religious demands for certain provisions with regard to Saudi women's right to work, study, and movement. My method, however, does not focus on protest as only a state of action, but also on linguistic and literary

techniques and strategies. I look closely at the works under study to determine the ways in which Saudi women manage to creatively break free from boxes that have surrounded them. How they break out of these boxes means not only expressing themselves, and their desires, but freedom in its many shapes. My dissertation thus offers a literary and linguistic analysis of these expressions of protest, including how language can be used to hide from or challenge the authorities and/or the censors.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter of this dissertation examines expressions that are representative of various types of protest and provides a distinctive case study. The dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter focuses on literary expression, specifically poetry and fiction. In this chapter I argue that the ability of Saudi poets to protest aggressively yet not the state or the government policies. The poetry section analyzes two poems by Hissa Hilal and Hind al-Mutairi. The section sheds light on contemporary Saudi women's poetry and how those two poets protest the tribal system—specifically, the sexism prevalent within tribes—as well as the radical religious agenda. The linguistic and literary features of these poems are the main basis of analysis. Through this analysis I show how Saudi women are protesting different factors/abusers other than the regulations. Moreover, I connect poetry to fiction in the second section of the chapter by arguing that the literary space is equipped with the ability to creatively identify vried subjects and roles in Saudi society that advance inequality and sexism, namely the tribe, religious shaykhs, the society, and its base unit: the family. To do this I analyze three novels by Laila Aljohani and Badriah Albeshr. I analyze the literary features that have been utilized by these Saudi novelists to

protest, especially how they develop their narratives to include implicit protest through techniques such as monologue, dialogue, and creative titles.

Chapter Two is focused on self-expression including the literary genre of memoir and the online genre of blogs. I argue that although the memoir is a genre of literature, it expands what protest is to be more explicit in terms of highlighting the different abusive regulations against women that were not stressed in novels. In the first section of this chapter, I explore Huda Aldaghfag's published work in which she reflects on her life and protests against numerous Saudi regulations and social restrictions that she has fought against throughout. I analyze the literary and linguistic features of Aldaghfag's artistic protest connecting them to the analysis in the first chapter through the linguistic features. In the second section of Chapter Two, I examine two blogs by two different Saudi bloggers with different backgrounds, objectives, and writing styles. Nouf Abdulaziz's blog protests corruption in the country and Eman Al Nafjan's blog is more specifically focused on women's driving. I bring together a discussion of these three sets of creative expressions in order to show how Saudi women are expressing themselves and interacting with their problems through writing. I argue in this chapter that the self space has helped Saudi women to protest more freely and openly than protesting within literary products/works.

In Chapter Three, I have identified a number of ways that women use creative expressions in the form of "unwritten protests" and evaluate these. The first part of the chapter deals with multimedia including television interviews. Here, I first look at Aziza al-Yousef's critique of number of laws in Saudi Arabia that are unfair to women. I then move onto an analysis of other kinds of videos in the second section which are posted on channels and platforms including YouTube, Keek, and Snapchat. I argue here that Saudi women post-internet

have become more aware and active in the protest, and the videos and the TV interviews are proving this shift. As in the previous chapters, I examine their linguistic and artistic interventions and how they shape and are shaped by the messages they wish to convey.

Finally, all of these discussions come together in the arguments in Chapter Four where I examine in detail the new media platform of Twitter, used so effectively and extensively by Saudi women to protest. Twitter is a useful location to examine women's protest because it shows the length and breadth of their protest journey in the briefest form of expression—the Tweet, which is limited to 280 characters. This chapter is structured around an examination of the two most famous protest campaigns led by Saudi women: that against the male guardianship system and that in support of women driving. In order to put these into context, I also examine another campaign in which Saudi women participated but that was not exclusive to them or for them, the fight against unemployment. This allows for the ability to evaluate the contrast in expression but also the reception of the movement socially. In these chapters, my arguments focus on the differences between Saudi women's protest to other Arab women's protest and how the uniqueness of Saudi women's protest.

Chapter One:
Literary Expressions of Protest

Poetry

According to an Arab proverb, "poetry is the register of the Arabs" (الشعر ديوان العرب). This has been the case since the pre-Islamic era, a time when Arabs were already known for their use of poetry both as a tool to boast of individual or tribal achievements but also to attack other people or groups of people.[51] Poetry was a celebrated and widely practiced oral literary form in that period, and today the Arabian Peninsula still hosts a multitude of festivals where Arabs meet and sit together for the purpose of listening to poetry—assessing poems and poets against literary criteria.[52]w The most famous such festival, or *suq*, is Suq 'Ukaz (عكاظ).[53]

The annual Suq 'Ukaz festival is remarkable, not least for its mixed-gender attendance. Arab women have always been present at these poetic gatherings. In the pre-Islamic era, Arab women poets were renowned not only for their poetry but also for their powerful performances.[54] Saudi women have continued to follow in the tradition of their foremothers in producing poetry, often alongside male poets, in both Modern Standard Arabic (الفصيح/الفصحى) and the Saudi dialect (العامية). While Arab men and women have both produced poetry across various genres throughout the Islamic era, poems were always produced in one major form, the qasida—the classical Arabic poem.

However, more recently, Saudi women poets bravely changed the literary scene by using new techniques. In 1973, Poet Fowziyah Abukhalid began her protest against the tradition of

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[51] Two of the main genres (غرض شعري/أغراض شعرية) of classical Arabic poetry are satire (الهجاء) and dithyramb (الفخر).

[52] سعيد الأفغاني. أسواق العرب في الجاهلية والإسلام. دار الكتب العلمية . ٢٠٠٨. [Saeed al-Afghani, Arabs' Markets in Pre-Islam and Islam. (2008)], 125

[53] Saeed al-Afghani, (122–128).

[54] هبة جابر. دراسة نسوية.صورة المرأة في الشعر الجاهلي. مجلة الدراسات اللغوية والأدبية ديسمبر 2018. [Hibah Jabir, "The Image of Women in Pre-Islamic Poetry, Feminist Study," *Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies,* (2018)]:157.

classical poetry and the qasida (القصيدة), as well as the society that protects this tradition.[55] With her spirit of innovation and evolution, Abukhalid has written poetry in a revolutionary and modern way; this stand for modernity has cost Abukhalid dearly, and engaged her in a number of battles, both literary and social.[56] Most notably, Dr. 'Awadh al-Qarni launched a powerful critique against her and modernity in Saudi Arabia in general in his book *Modernity in the Scale of Islam*.[57]

Many male poets have written in similarly innovative ways; however, Abukhalid was more profoundly affected by such criticism than male poets have been.[58] Her writing itself is a form of protest in two ways. First, she expresses a modern method of composition by breaking the rules of the qasida, writing without the standard rhythms and verse endings of the classical Arabic poetic form. Second, Abukhalid focuses on the feminine, writing in protest and with a disregard for the rules by celebrating women in a spectacular manner.

Through her protest in language, Abukhalid has challenged social norms—by being a woman poet, writing her poems differently, and by emphasizing the power and beauty of women distinct from the feminine ideal that male poets asserted and maintained from the time of the most famous canonical poems of the pre-Islamic era: the Mu'allaqat (المعلقات).

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[55] Her first book (ديوان شعري) was published in Beirut 1973. عبدالله الغذامي. الجهنية: في لغة النساء وحكاياتهن [Abdullah al-Gathami, Aljuhaniyah: On Women's Language and Stories. (Lebanon: Dar al-Intiashar, 2012)], 39.

[56] "Abu Khalid became a writer at an early age, again in the seventies. Her free prose poems have stages politically rebellious connotations. She tends to experiment in her creative writing with new themes and forms. Her work has also evolved over time: from a young, radical revolutionary, romantic-with-an-edge poet; freedom fighter in the seventies; to a more mature, calm, rational woman in the eighties. At the same time, she is still maintaining her large scale battles using poetry and her unique choice in appearance, language and poetic forms." Hatoon Al Fasi, Saudi Women and Islamic Discourse, Selected Examples of Saudi Feminisms*, journal of women of the middle east and the Islamic world*, 14 (2016):195-200.

[57] This war of modernity includes the poet Huda Aldaghfag, as will be discussed in the "Memoir" section in Chapter Two: 108.

[58] Salma Jayyusi, (فوزية أبو خالد شاعرة شجاعة تقبض على الجمر وتعاكس التيار). Al-'Arab newspaper: https://alarab.co.uk/فوزية-أبو-خالد-شاعرة-شجاعة-تقبض-على-الجمر-وتعاكس-التيار .

In this section, I will analyze two approaches to protest in Saudi poetry by two women with different backgrounds, who have different targets, and use different methods. The first is Hind al-Mutairi, who protests the tribe (القبيلة) (al-qabilah) and the tribal patriarchal system in her 2015 poem, "The Romantic Spring Revolution" (ثورة الربيع القلبي). The second is Hissa Hilal, who protested radical religious shaykhs on the TV show: Million's Poet (شاعر المليون) in March 2010, with the poem "The Evil Fatwa."[59] Both poets have faced consequences for their work, which I will discuss later in this section. This is partly because they both presented their poems to large public audiences—Hilal on a popular TV show, and al-Mutairi live at the Jeddah International Book Fair, which was also broadcasted on TV.

Hissa Hilal attacked the shaykhs on television, her body fully covered, reciting a classical Arabic qasida (القصيدة), but using the Saudi dialect. Her poem was protesting the religious-extremist fatwas that call for the killing people who support gender mixing in Saudi Arabia. Hind al-Mutairi presented her poem at the Jeddah International Book Fair.[60] Her particularly strong criticism of the country's tribal system resulted in the region's governor, Prince Khalid Alfaisal, banning her from reciting her poetry locally.[61] After her poetry was banned, the poem "The Romantic Spring Revolution" (ثورة الربيع القلبي); became known as "Woe to the Tribe" (ويح القبيلة).[62] Al-Mutairi claims that the title was changed by the people who listened to it to make it feel more dramatic.[63] It is inspired by a real story of a wife and mother of five, Salma, who was forced into

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[59] For more about this show see: Katrien Vanpee, "Allegiance Performed: Waṭaniyyah Poetry on the Stage of the Shāʿir al-Milyūn Competition," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 50, no. 2 (2019): 173-196.

[60] الشاعرة هند المطيري والقصيدة الممنوعة "ويح القبيلة" كاملة. www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4wX5iq9nok.

[61] "ويح القبيلة" تبعد "هند المطيري" من فعاليات ومهرجانات مكة المكرمة" . Almanatiq news, 21 December 2015: https://almnatiq.net/ويح-القبيله-تبعد-هند-المطيري-من-فعالى/ .

[62] The poem with its original title was published in the Saudi newspaper *al-Medina* (www.al-madina.com/article/361999) and in her poetry collection *Aljawza* (2015): ديوان الجوزاء، هند المطيري. نادي الرياض الأدبي. [Hind al-Mutairi, *Aljawza collection*, (Riyadh: Literary Club,2015].

[63] شاعرة القصيدة الأزمة هند المطيري ل "سبق": ادعاءات "كاتب" غير صحيحة, Sabq News, 22 December 2015: https://sabq.org/saudia/6qpgde-2 .

divorcing her husband because of their unequal social status– her husband was not from a tribal family like hers.[64] Such cases are not unusual in Saudi Arabia.[65] In her poem, al-Mutairi uses a range of poetic and linguistic techniques to mount her attacks on the tribal system, its traditions, as well as the men who uphold it, as I will discuss in the section below.

Hind al-Mutairi, "The Romantic Spring Protest"

The two titles of Hind al-Mutairi's poem reflect its widespread appeal to people in Saudi Arabia and some of the contours of the depth of protest within it. Both the official and the popular title focus on protest, but with slightly different meanings. The title that the poem has come to be known by, and through which it became popular since going viral in 2015, for example, " ويح القبيلة" (Woe to the Tribe), focuses on her attack on the tribal system. It names the tribe right in the title itself—utilizing the word "ويح" where it is used generally to reprove or scold someone for doing something wrong. The "official" title under which it was first published focuses on the inspiration of the so-called Arab Spring protests (ثورة الربيع العربي) that swept through the region in 2011. This title simply replaces two letters, which results in the title (ثورة الربيع القلبي) so that the protests become those of the "Romantic Spring" or "Spring of the Heart." This official title emphasizes the revolution and links protest to love, marriage and assisting an emotional depth to it. It also begs certain questions, for example, by using the word "romantic," is she fighting for her right to be in love and/or to marry someone of her own choosing? She uses the topic of love as a pretext to take aim against the tribe's traditions.

[64] شاعرة القصيدة الأزمة هند المطيري ل "سبق": ادعاءات "كاتب" غير صحيحة, Sabq News, 22 December 2015: https://sabq.org/saudia/6qpgde-2 .

[65] Nadav Samin has shown more examples of what is called (تكافؤ النسب) in legal discourse. See "*Kafāʾa fī l-Nasab* in Saudi Arabia: Islamic Law, Tribal Custom, and Social Change," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 2 no.2 (2012): 112.

Hind al-Mutairi opens this poem by explaining that in school she learned that she is "shameful" (عار) and that the tribe neither accepts nor forgives people who act in ways that are outside its norms. She details that the tribe instead washes away such shame by fire, which is indicative of the aggressive treatment towards women in the tribe; first, by seeing women as "shameful" and second by insinuating that this shame must be washed away not with water but fire. The first and most obvious question to be posed here is: What does al-Mutairi mean when she describes herself as "shameful"? Is she referring simply to the fact she was a girl and is a woman? Is she referring to the old tribal traditions of the pre-Islamic era, when it is said that females were not accepted and were buried alive (wa'd) (وأد)? Perhaps she begins her poem in this manner to introduce the bloody history of tribal tradition before proceeding to describe how she became aware of the brainwashing of the tribal system and how it should be challenged.

From the very beginning, she links gender discrimination to tribal ideology before she explains in more depth how this ideology affects Saudi women who live within their tribes' traditions. As I mentioned above, Abukhalid's poetic style is a means of protest in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the two titles of this poem—both the official one and the popular one—can be read as an act of protest in and of themselves. Right from the opening lines, from which the poem's popular title was taken, Al-Mutairi opens fire on the tribe in all of its complexity. Her use of this term alone is itself a protest. She then enumerates the reasons for her attack on the tribe; she is protesting against injustice towards women and the tribes' double standards when it comes to tribesmen, because of how the whole system is based on the patriarchy.

Building a Poetic Language of Protest: Verbs, Vocabulary, and Repetition

One of the most striking elements about this poem is the rich poetic language that is built up throughout it, and how this develops into a language of protest. From the multiple meanings inscribed in the title to the descriptions throughout it, the poet works with a rich and varied vocabulary, shifts verb tenses in challenging ways, and makes strategic use of literary techniques like repetition. This can be seen immediately in the title, but also more specifically in the movement of the poem and how it emphasizes the shift from the poet blithely following the tribe's guidance in all things, to the poet being reborn as a rebel protesting against the very same tribe.

Some of the first and most obvious vocabulary items drawn upon and repeated in the poem I have already mentioned above, for example the word (عار) [shame]; the poet uses repetition of this word throughout the poem:

تعلمت في حجرة الدرس أني عار
وأن القبيلة لا تقبل العار
كلا
ولا تغفر العار
بل تغسل العار بالنار
تمحو الجريمة

[I have learned in the classroom that I am shame
and the tribe does not accept shame
No!
…does not forgive shame
Instead, it washes shame away with fire
… cleans up the crime.] [66]

The lines cited above, the author repeats the word (عار) [shame] in four of six lines, at the end of the line in all but one, where it is rhymed instead with the word (نار) [fire]. The way in which the

[66] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999 .

word shame is used and repeated has several effects. One is that it emphasizes the word and concept itself, drawing attention to it. This in turn is immediately linked to gender, we see that it is not a poem about shame per se but the shame of being a woman or girl. The movement in the poem is present here, because it takes the reader/listener of the poem to the classroom and a young girl learns not just about shame but that she *is* shameful. This in turn emphasizes how girls and women are not accepted within the tribe and the tribal system. In the second line of the poem, this reiteration is made even stronger by the use of the emphatic negative "كلا" in the third line.

The verb tenses then help the poem emphasize this point through movement by using several present tense verbs. The two verbs in the negative, "does not accept" (لا تقبل) and "does not forgive" (لا تغفر) are then followed by two more without the negative particle: "washes away" (تغسل) and "cleans up" (تمحو). The conjugation of the verbs—the feminine singular—also reveals a great deal: she does not associate injustice with a specific individual or even a group of tribesmen. Instead, she refers to the tribal system and blames the ways in which tribes were built from traditions, culture, and rules. However, negative and positive verbs aimed towards the same object (العار) here are ironic and sharp in both ways. In the negative verbs, the tribe neither accepts nor forgives the shame, where women are the shame. They are not accepted or forgiven, in either their being and existence or in their actions. The positive verbs then become more intense as the tribe's actions towards "shame" are directed at cleaning it up and washing it away. The poet shows with her words how aggressive the tribe is by using the verb "to cleanse" and linking it with fire rather than water. This verb attached to water has positive connotations, but when paired with fire it implies an aggressive and violent act. This linguistic usage by al-Mutairi is one location in which it is clear how the tribe as a structure is intolerant of women.

Beyond the concept of shame, al-Mutairi delves into a deeper discussion of other kinds of words that connect to the concept of fear, and even horror, that women experience in certain ways when living within the tribal system. One specific passage describes the feeling of being a woman living in fear of what the tribe is capable of should she fall in love. She has specified that this poem is about a woman who is married and has children with someone from outside the tribal system – a beloved husband whom the tribe forced her to divorce.[67] The use of multiple varied words to describe her situation is notable in this passage:

وصرت أهاب الخطيئة
أخاف اقتراف المحبة
وأخشى ولوج دروب الهوى
هيبة، خيبة، خشية، رهبة
وظنونا عقيمة

[I have become afraid of the sin
afraid of committing love
fear entering the paths of love
fear, disappointment, dread, horror
and futile doubts.] [68]

The English translation above does not capture the number of different words used to express the depth of meaning al-Mutairi expresses in relation to fear, dread, and horror. No word is repeated here—unlike the passage discussed above where repetition is used to emphasize her points. In this passage, her technique is in fact to display a range of vocabulary meaning "the same thing" to further enhance and underline the range of emotion that is connected to fear. One example of how she also expands meaning through her extensive use of vocabulary is to pair words and concepts

[67] أوضحت المطيري أنَّ "القصيدة نظمت قبل سنتين حين كانت سلمى "القبيلية" تُطلق من زوجها أحمد "غير القبيلي" بعد ١٣ عاماً من الزواج " شاعرة القصيدة الأزمة "وخمسة أبناء؛ بحجة عدم تكافؤ النسب، وكانت غايتها التعاطف مع موضوع إنساني بحت، يهم كلَّ مواطن على أرض وطني". هند المطيري, 22 December 2015. https://sabq.org/saudia/6qpgde-2 ل "سبق": ادعاءات "كاتب" غير صحيحة .

[68] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

in unusual ways. In the second line, for example, she uses the verb commit (اقتراف) to talk about practicing love or being in love, as you would talk about committing a crime. When she is afraid of "committing love" (أخاف اقتراف المحبة) she speaks about it as if it were a criminal act. This is a searing indictment of the kinds of ways the tribal system cultivates a culture wherein women are in fear of 'committing' a natural emotion.

She opens her poem by questioning herself as "shame" and reveals the fear that comes with living within a tribal system, that is actively upheld by men, in order to make the transition into two distinct stages: revelation and liberation. Indeed, after coming face to face with the 'fire' and the 'shame,' she transitions into the first stage of revelation. Here, she realizes the truth: that the tribe is just an illusion. The second stage—liberation—occurs when she finally wakes up from this illusion to rebel against the tribe and its men. Fighting, she goes on in the conclusion of the poem to declare war against the tribe and its men:

ولكنني بعد عمر طويل،
أفقت، تمردت،،
أعلنت ثورة عشق عظيمة،،
تدكّ جميع الحصون القديمة،،
وحررت من داخلي ألف ألف مقاتل،،
وجهزت خيلي بجنح الظلام،،
لتغزو القبيلة،

[After a long life,
I woke up, I rebelled,
I announced a great revolution of love
That demolished the ancient fortress
I liberated thousands and thousands of warriors inside me
And prepared my horses in the darkness
To invade the tribe] [69]

[69] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

All the verbs that refer to the poet here are in the past tense; those verbs are presenting the awakening of the poet after she was brainwashed. Verb choices here are strong and active, she is not only waking up from an illusory state, but she will also fight back by announcing a revolution. Along with this awakening, she is preparing for an invasion to demolish the "old fortress," a reference to outdated customs and traditions that she has been inculcated into since she was a child. When she speaks of the "many thousands of warriors liberated inside her" and "preparing her horses," she is indicating that she intends to start a new war and invade (لتغزو) the tribe.

Another way in which al-Mutairi constructs her poem to convey its expression of protest through form, is by using questions. Questions are often repeated in her poetry, recalling her repetition of other vocabulary items. In the section of the poem cited below, she uses the same question word (كيف), meaning "how?", three times in a row at the beginning of a line:

ويح القبيلة،
كيف تفسد أرواحنا
كيف تسرق أعمارنا
كيف تقسم أحلامنا كالغنيمة؟!

[Woe to the tribe,
How does it steal/ruin our souls?
How does it steal our lives?
How does it divide our dreams like spoils?!] [70]

The poet uses these three repeated questions to underline her accusation that the tribe brainwashes not only the men who are implicated in upholding its patriarchal system, but also its women. It ruins their souls and spirits, and also steals their lives and ruins their dreams. As in the

[70] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

previous example of repetition, this serves not only to underline her point but also to highlight the message—here a rhetorical and almost ironic questioning, as she clearly is not merely lamenting but also critiquing. In relation to lament, this series of four rhetorical questions is preceded by an address to the tribe itself which is the title of the poem. As noted above "ويح" is a word that can be translated "woe," as in "woe be to the tribe." This expression is very harsh and disrespectful in Arabic to be used towards anyone let alone towards someone older or in a higher social position such as the tribe.

It is relevant to note further here that the three questions are formed using the present continuous tense (فعل مضارع), rather than questions and statements in the past tense that are used in previous sections such as those quoted above. This indicates the persistence of these actions—they are still ongoing and not a mere thing of the past. Moreover, they could very well be happening right now. The use of expressed and implied pronouns is also important in a full analysis of the poem. As mentioned above, the word for tribe (القبيلة) is a feminine singular noun, so the accompanying question plus verb is framed in the third person, feminine singular and could be translated as "she" or "it." As mentioned above, the poet is referring to the tribe in the singular feminine with all its traditions and patriarchal rules that harm women. Further, the objects of each of these three verbs—the tribe is doing things to (تفسد، تسرق، تقسم) —are all expressed in the first-person plural. Rather than referring to herself then, the poet uses "us" to encompass herself and others. This raises additional questions about who this "us" is.

However, to give a further sense of the way in which this poem inscribes its protest message through the use of verb tenses, a fuller picture of the poem in relation to its use of verbs is needed. It is important to note that it opens with verbs used in the past: (آمنت، أذعنت، سلّمت، مارست، تعلمت) "I believed," "I accepted," "I practiced," "I learned," "I bowed," "I surrendered." It

is clearly marked, and also notable, that the verbs she opens with are ones that show her to be submissive, conformist, and part of a system that kept her passive. These are words also connected to her childhood as a girl. As she grows up, she still uses the past tense (كبرت، أدركت، امنت) "I realized," "I believed," "I grew up," however we see that the kinds of verbs used show her progression and coming of age—the more literal "I grew up" but how this is connected to having "realized" things. There is then the turning point when she shakes off what she sees as her ignorance and these verbs are still expressed in the past (أفقت، تمردت، أعلنت، حررت، جهزت، صبأت، كفرت، قررت) "I woke up," "I rebelled," "I announced," "I became free," "I decided," "I disbelieved," "I blasphemed." They not only show her rebellion and her self-expression, but also even more powerfully that she became free and even "blasphemed" or "disbelieved." The poem closes with the poet promising to continue what she started. In these lines, she changes tense and then writes in the future: (سأهجو، سيغدو كلامي، سأكتب) "I will satirize," "I will write," "my words will be…" This timeline of the verb tenses that the poet writes her poem through is showing how this protest has been built through al-Mutairi's timeline, where she was brainwashed then she realized the illusion of the tribe, and finally she decides that she will attack and invade the tribe.

All of Hind al-Mutairi's poetic strategies, the use of techniques of repetition, verb tense progression, vocabulary, and rhyme serve the poem's message of protest. It is clear from the outset, and becomes increasingly more so, that the protest is not just about men, but about the patriarchal system upheld by the traditional tribal system in Saudi Arabia. This contrasts with the way that women are treated, as men are not subject to the shame she describes at the opening of the poem. She notes that men are forgiven even if they practice all kinds of obscenity, while women are "shame" simply because of their gender.

One thing that made al-Mutairi's poem of protest against this tribal system so popular is that she focuses on showing a direct and specific image of men who uphold it. The tribe always protects its image, no matter what its male members do. Al-Mutairi shows here the double standard in the way in which the tribe judges and deals with its members depending on their gender. For example, in contrast to the verse cited above in which she realizes she is shame, in the following verse, she shows how the tribe ignores men's crimes:

وحين كبرت عرفت الحقيقة،،
وأدركت أن القبيلة وهمٌ،،
وأن رجال القبيلة كانوا
يدوسون أعرافها،،
يفعلون الفواحش والموبقات الذميمة.
وأن قوانينهم من قشور، وقش،
وأن حبال التقى عندهم
من خيوط رميمة.

[When I grew older, I learned the truth,
I realized that the tribe is an illusion,
And the tribesmen were smashing its tradition,
They committed obscenities and the ugliest sins…
I realized that their rules are nothing more than straw and empty shells
and their supposed piousness was built on shaky ground.] [71]

Here, al-Mutairi shows that though they control the tribal system and benefit from the patriarchy, men themselves do not respect the tribe's traditions and in fact dishonour the tribe by committing sins and being obscene. These verses refer to frequent stories one hears about tribes announcing the collection of donations to cover the costs of blood money, known as *diya* (الدية) owed by male members who commit murder. This is rarely less than 1 million riyals and sometimes can even

[71] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

reach 50 million.[72] While a man is in jail awaiting the verdict of *qisas*[73] for having killed someone, the tribe contacts the family of the victim, usually from another tribe, to propose a sum of *diya* to forgive the murderer, and thus withdraw the penalty in the court. In this common scenario between tribes, men know they can literally get away with murder because their tribe will cover for them. As a result, murder for trivial reasons has become common among tribes.

Even though murder is the ultimate act that goes against the piety that the tribal system claims to uphold and protect, it is still not treated as an act that should be "cleansed with fire" in the same way that being a woman does. For a woman, simple, minor actions such as marrying someone from outside of a tribal family can provoke the entire tribe's condemnation. Al-Mutairi makes this double standard clear in the poem. If a woman trends on social media for one reason or another, for example, she will shame her tribe. There are tribes that have already denounced women because of insignificant, daily actions like getting married to a man not from a tribal family, being shown dancing on social media, or speaking for herself on the internet.

Every time al-Mutairi attacks the tribal system, she also takes their leaders to task:

ويح القبيلة،
وكل طقوس القبيلة!
آمنت أن شيوخ القبيلة حمقى،
وأن رجال القبيلة حمقى

[Woe to the tribe,
and all tribal rituals!
I believed that all tribe's shaykhs are clowns
And the tribesmen are foolish][74]

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[72] *Diya* is a concept evolving from the custom of blood revenge practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia. The Qur'an authorizes *diya* as a kind of compensation for homicide, in lieu of *qisas*, in which the victim's family pardons the offender. See Ismail, S. Z, "The Modern Interpretation of the Diyat Formula for the Quantum of Damages: The Case of Homicide and Personal Injuries," *Arab Law Quarterly*, 26 no. 3(2012): 361–379; and: www.mohamah.net/law/بحث-قانوني-ودراسة-شاملة-حول-الدية-والت/.

[73] Qisas is a penalty in Islamic law. In the case of murder, *qisas* is the right to take the life of the murderer after court approval, unless the family of the victim forgives the murderer or accepts the *diya* and waives the penalty.

[74] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

ويح القبيلة،
وتبًا لكل رجال القبيلة"

[Woe to the tribe,
and damn all tribesmen][75]

سأهجو القبيلة،
وشيخ القبيلة،
وأهجو جميع رجال القبيلة

[I will satirize the tribe,
The tribe's shaykh
And all tribesmen] [76]

These three examples—taken from different locations within the poem—all show how al-Mutairi begins with a mention of the tribe—often her same repeated "woe be to the tribe" —and then specifically targets its leaders. The curses are varied, yet they add up to the same thing. In the final example above, she confirms that she will attack them all – again, referring to all the men of the tribe, I have translated (جميع رجال القبيلة) as tribesmen.

This raises the question as to why al-Mutairi focuses on the men of the tribe instead of more directly critiquing the traditions and customs of the system, or its reliance on patriarchy. She does call out the leaders, who are always men, but why does she continue to focus on the people rather than the system? Her critique remains more focused on people—male people—throughout the poem, rather than the system that she indicts through them. For example, she proposes that tribal traditions were created by what she calls sick minds (عقول سقيمة) and while the customs and traditions were developed a long time ago, they were all made by men. Her critique is aimed primarily at the men who continue to practice these traditions today:

[75] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.
[76] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.

وأن الطقوس التي كنت قدستُ
قد وضعتها عقول سقيمة.

[The rituals that I praised
were put in place by sick minds] [77]

Clearly, the protest in al-Mutairi's poem identifies the traditions of the tribe as responsible for the suffering of the tribe's women. "The Romantic Spring Protest" is a poem of protest against the tribal injustice against women, with Hind al-Mutairi concluding her poem with a promise of writing with the language of love. Yet it is not just about love or relationships, but goes beyond that, to criticize the foundations of the tribe and its patriarchal system that affects women's lives.

Hissa Hilal, "The Evil Fatwa"

In a different, but related, poetic protest, Hissa Hilal presented her poem "الفتاوى الشريرة" ("The Evil Fatwa") during the televised poetry competition "شاعر المليون" ("Million's Poet") in March 2019.[78] In the poem, Hilal protests a specific fatwa published by a very well-known shaykh, Abdul Rahman al-Barrak, against the mixing of genders and aiming at total gender segregation.[79] In this fatwa, he calls for the killing of individuals who practice gender mixing, and Hilal's poem is partly constructed around promoting the claim that such shaykhs like al-Barrak are misusing

[77] Hind al-Mutairi, (ثورة الربيع القلبي) [Spring of the Heart], Poem. Almadina newspaper, February 2015: https://www.al-madina.com/article/361999.
[78] شاعر المليون الموسم الرابع كامل الحلقة الحادية عشر, Season 4, Episode 11, 29 July 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bO6HQqHME (25:41–35:10).
[79] The fatwa was published on February 21st 2010 by the Shaykh Abdul Rahman al-Barrak in his official website. However, the fatwa was taken away. Here is more about it in Arabic from Al Arabiya news, (عبدالرحمن البراك يوجب قتل من يبيح الاختلاط في السعودية): https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010%2F02%2F24%2F101336.

their power. Similarly to Hind al-Mutairi, Hilal's poem protests linguistically another abusive force in the lives of Saudi women.

The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology was the first Saudi university to allow the mixing of genders on the campus. This new regulation applied only to this particular university, attended mostly by non-Saudi students. The news of breaking with strictly enforced gender segregation at a Saudi university provoked a strong reaction from various individuals, including religious figures, in 2009. One key reaction came from Dr. Sa'ad al-Shathri, a member of the *Senior Consul of Ulama* (هيئة كبار العلماء), who was asked in a televised fatwa broadcasted and aired in 2009 about the new regulation.[80] Although he started his fatwa by expressing gratitude to the king for his efforts in building up the country and its international role, al-Shathri disagreed with this mixing of genders and criticized the regulation with an invitation to the officials to include the shaykhs of the Sharia in this great project, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST). Afterwards, a number of articles and TV shows attacked al-Shathri and his point of view.[81] It is important, here, to emphasize that an attack on a member of the religious officialdom in Saudi Arabia cannot happen without permission from the authorities. Al-Shathri is not just a regular religious shaykh, he holds an important and prestigious official position. Thus, what was presented as a brave protest by Hilal in 2011 came two years after the media backlash against al-Shathri in 2009.

Hilal uses the Saudi dialect in her poem; however, as described below, she also uses fasih (فصيح) words, drawn from the lexicon of Modern Standard and Classical Arabic. She presented her poem on the TV show with an introduction in fasih Arabic. The introduction to the poem

[80] (المقطع الكامل لجواب الشيخ سعد الشثري عن اختلاط جامعة كاوست) 2009 YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMVWJsgA00s.
[81] See: الشثري يتعرض لهجوم بعد حديثه عن كاوست. صحيفة إيلاف ٤ أكتوبر 2009 . https://elaph.com/Web/ElaphGulf/2009/9/488581.html.

states that while most poets focus on their own problems and personal experiences in their work, she wanted to present the public with a cause that concerned them too. These include social causes and address a range of people including the members of various social, political, and intellectual circles.[82]

One of the things that makes Hilal's poetry stand out is her use of language. In addition to the mixing of spoken and written registers of Arabic, and her use of the dialect in particular, Hilal also borrows meanings and images from different environments and cultures. For example, she employs images and words drawn from the rural, desert, Bedouin lifestyle, at the same time as incorporating words and concepts drawn from religious texts, specifically the Hadith.

From the desert environment, Hilal draws upon imagery of various animals and uses them to allude to how radicals issue extreme and problematic fatwas. For example, in other lines and locations of the poem, she calls the shaykh in question a "monster," "vicious," "savage," "barbaric" and "a jackal," all terms related to life in the wilderness.

شر
مسخ
عاوي
يفترس
ضواري/ضاري
جارح

While both Hilal and al-Mutairi utilize vocabulary drawn from their environments, al-Mutairi employs lexical items drawn from the modern Arabic that she learned growing up, from school and elsewhere, whereas Hilal relates her poem to the desert, allowing her to show herself to be an accomplished poet of the Saudi dialect. Hilal emphasizes herself as an Arab Bedouin poet and

[82] شاعر المليون الموسم الرابع كامل الحلقة الحادية عشر, Season 4, Episode 11, 29 July 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bO6HQqHME (25:41–35:10).

draws on this in the poem to great effect, while al-Mutairi is from a famous Bedouin tribe, her poetry is modern in its style and vocabulary.

Hilal's use of direct and indirect animal imagery is not limited to her descriptions of people like the shaykh. She also compares the fatwas themselves to wild animals, ready to attack, eyes glinting with malice. This is apparent from the very opening verse, where she introduces a metaphor:

شفت شر يتوايق من عيون الفتاوي

[I saw evil glinting in the eyes of fatwas][83]

This metaphor illustrates the ability of a fatwa to kill – an image which recurs, as will be described below. Her references to the hostility of the wild environment of the Arabian Peninsula reflects Hilal's strong connection to the desert environment and the Bedouin lifestyle. Using this sort of desert animal imagery in poetry is one way of proving one's prowess as a poet, as evidenced in Arabic poetic criticism from the pre-Islamic period and beyond. [84]

It is not only specifically animal images and metaphors that Hilal uses to reference the Bedouin lifestyle, there are many other kinds of images in "The Evil Fatwa" that also stem from the context of distinctly desert-centered way of life. An exploration of some of these demonstrates the Bedouin lifestyle and manners that every Bedouin poet is proud to employ in their poetry. One of these features highlighted in such poetry is the value of showing generosity towards guests and travelers. In her address to the nation, which has now become famous, she

[83] شاعر المليون الموسم الرابع كامل الحلقة الحادية عشر, Season 4, Episode 11, 29 July 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bO6HQqHME (25:41–35:10).

[84] There is a wide scholarship in Arabic language about the Bedouin environment in the Arabic poetry in General and in Pre-Islamic poetry specifically, also the animals in the pre-Islamic pottery. See for example: جمعة حسين . سعد الصويان, الصحراء العربية: ثقافتها وشعرها عبر العصور-قراءة أنثروبولوجية. 2010. And الحيوان في الشعر الجاهلي... دار القلم. دمشق 2010. مكتبة الملك فهد الوطنية-الرياض

recited the following verse, which is a good example of how she expresses this Bedouin value using poetic language:

أمتي لاغديتي بين عاوي وهاوي
كن عيني تشوفك في شعيب الظلام
لاتشبين نار ولاحميتي جلاوي
ملبدة مارفعتي بالمواجيب هام

[You don't light a fire (for guests/travellers)
and you don't protect the escaped
you hide all alone, ignoring your duties.][85]

In this verse, we see Hilal uses certain expressions that reference Bedouin desert life. For example, "lighting a fire" (تشبين نار) which here means making food for guests and strangers travelling in the desert—a sacred duty for desert dwellers. The dereliction of these duties would be a major problem for Bedouin people and would bring shame on any tribe. Inviting travellers and strangers to food and shelter in the middle of the desert where there are limited resources indicates the generosity of the tribe in Bedouin culture.

The imagery referenced here is clear—this is not just about the tribe and its duties in a literal sense but is meant to represent and symbolize the nation, using Bedouin culture to stand in for the modern state. As Hilal's address is to the nation, she is thus indicating the nation's dereliction of its duties. In order to awaken the nation and prevent it from being stolen by the shaykhs, she implores the nation not to forget its duties and remember how it used to be before radical ideology took hold. Hilal calls this radical ideology (عاوي وهاوي) referring to wild animals. She indicates that they are the reason that the nation forgot its duties and was plunged into darkness.

[85] شاعر المليون الموسم الرابع كامل الحلقة الحادية عشر, Season 4, Episode 11, 29 July 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bO6HQqHME (25:41–35:10).

She explores the value of generosity and what it means to Bedouin people in another verse as well. Here, she references "the bowl" and uses it in the context of Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad.[86] The verse in Hilal's poem that references the Hadith addresses the nation as a "qas'a" (القصعة), a big bowl used for sharing a meal, usually made of wood:[87]

أنتي القصعة اللي تشبعين المقاوي

كل جارح وضاري فيك يلقى طعام

In the Hadith, Prophet Mohammed says to his companions: "the nations will be running towards you as those eating towards the bowl," meaning that nations will attack you quickly as hungry people will attack a bowl full of food. It is an image invoking the overwhelming desire to eat when hungry. In her metaphor, Hilal compares the nation to the qas'a to illustrate how the nation should provide welcome and shelter to all, in an embrace of the value of generosity. Here Hilal is using a local symbol of generosity in that the qas'a shows you can and will feed a great number of people. She confirms this with an allusion to the Hadith of the Prophet. In this, perhaps Hilal is trying to showcase her own religious devotion and how it is precisely this religious devotion that allows her to question the role of the shaykhs who hold the sole ability to dictate religion to people.[88]

The imagery used by Hilal in her poetic protest is creative in that it not only draws on desert values and religion but also on more contemporary symbols, for example the belt of the suicide bomber. In a verse Hilal writes:

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[86] The Hadith she references reads as follows:

حديث القصعة:

عن ثوبان مولى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: " يوشك أن تداعى عليكم الأمم كما تداعى الأكلة إلى قصعتها". فقال قائل: أومن قلة نحن يومئذ يا رسول الله؟ قال: "بل أنتم يومئذ كثير ولكنكم غثاء كغثاء السيل، ولينزعن الله من صدور عدوكم المهابة منكم، وليقذفن في قلوبكم الوهن". فقال قائل: يارسول الله ومالوهن؟ قال: "حب الدنيا وكراهية الموت". سنن أبي داوود وصححه الألباني.

[87] Almaany Dictionary: www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/القصعة/ .

[88] This is consistent with the argument I make below in Chapter Two about Aziza al-Yousef, in relation to her interviews. She is telling the religious professor, who was a co-guest with her in the TV show, that in Islam there is not one opinion or one person who holds agency.

وحشي الفكر ساخط بربري عماوي
لابس الموت لبس وشد فوقه حزام

[blind, barbaric, brutal ideology wears death like a dress,
with its belt cinched tightly around the waist] [89]

Hilal's use of imagery in this section imbues the inanimate article of clothing, a dress, with deep meaning in replacing it with the word "death." The ideology she speaks of is referenced as "wearing death" but the image is solidified when she says that it cinches its belt. One interpretation is that the death refers to al-Barrak's fatwas which condemn gender mixing. Further, while it remains ambiguous, the belt here seems perhaps to be the kind worn by suicide bombers. This is partly because the vocabulary items referred to in the poem are not the usual words used to refer to an average dress or piece of clothing. The word I have translated as "cinched" can also mean "tightened" in a more literal way, indicating that the belt being worn is one that had to be adjusted, perhaps in a deadly as well as utilitarian way, rather than "worn" like a more average piece of clothing. I am arguing here that the poem hints at the possibility that the issuing of extreme fatwas is similar to the way in which a bomber might adjust and tighten such a belt to wreak havoc on the lives of ordinary people.

One final way that Hilal's poem, "The Evil Fatwa," inscribes its poetic protest is through the use of specific verbs related to the senses, specifically vision. The clever manipulation of verbs and verb tenses recalls a similar technique used by al-Mutairi, though al-Mutairi's use of verb tenses to indicate a profound insight is utilized in the format of a chronological timeline. In the case of Hilal, she opens her poem with the verb "to see" (شفت); "I saw" is the very first word in the poem and it opens with the words: "I saw an evil." Then, she switches to the present when

[89] شاعر المليون الموسم الرابع كامل الحلقة الحادية عشر, Season 4, Episode 11, 29 July 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3bO6HQqHME (25:41–35:10).

she addresses the nation. Thus, Hilal's switch in verb tenses is one of the techniques that she uses to emphasize the danger of the radical fatwas on the nation and how the nation is not able to see that or simply ignores it.

The main way in which the poet identifies injustice is with her sense of sight. From the very opening word of the poem, vocabulary items related to eyes, seeing, sight, vision and so on continue to be prominent throughout the entire poem. Examples include:

> شفت/ عيون/عماوي/عيني تشوفك/ عينك/قل شوف
> I see/ eyes/ blind/ my eye is seeing you/ your eye/ your vision starts to decline

Sight and the ability to perceive is juxtaposed with blindness and the inability to perceive. Hilal uses this juxtaposition to express the (in)ability to distinguish good from evil. For example, she claims to see evil in the eyes of the fatwa (شفت شر يتوايق في عيون الفتاوي) and this is starkly juxtaposed by her claim that this hidden monster, referring to the radicals, is blind. This line implies that though she can see the monster, he cannot see her -- this is particularly clever because it positions the individual with the ability to see as having the real power over these extremist shaykhs.

She repeats the word "I see" again in in the sixth verse, even more directly referring to her eye this time, "my eye sees you, my nation in the valley of darkness" (كن عيني تشوفك في شعيب الظلام). Once again, the role of the poet is to see and take a stand, she has agency and the right and duty to speak out because she has vision. She can see that the nation is shrouded in darkness, even if it does not realize this itself. The role of the poet as protester becomes clear once again as the poet holds the gift of sight and perception. In his critique of this poem, Clive Holes suggests

that Hilal is applying the concept of the eye as an authoritative source.[90] This can be seen in how the poet tries to obtain authority over the situation in Saudi Arabia concerning the issuing of radical fatwas. Because she has the authority of the seeing eye, she empowers herself to attack and judge the religious shaykhs. Finally, the whole poem follows the same rhythm of the declining state of the nation, how it is weak and lost, and cannot stand for itself. Until the last verse, Hilal maintains hope that one day: "يجي يوم يبين فيه صدق الهواوي" [one day, it will come and everyone will show their true colours]. This means that she hopes that it will be known who has true and good intentions towards the nation, and who has betrayed it.

It is crucial to note that though Hilal was criticizing religious fatwas, she did not receive as harsh a treatment as al-Mutairi did for her protest against the tribe. Al-Mutairi was banned from presenting her poetry at any cultural event in the country; such a ban was never given to Hilal. She did however face criticism and she even claims to have received a death threat for having written it.[91] The question is, what makes this poem special? Is it the poet's sharp criticism of a religious taboo? Or is it simply because it was written by a woman? She also received angry poems in reply to hers, from those with opposite views including a religious professor. Although many see this poem as an outspoken and brave protest, it was still composed in the specific context of the issuing of a radical religious fatwa that was criticized by many individuals in Saudi Arabia.

Above, I highlighted how Hilal's poem was controversial when (or perhaps because) it was performed on the television program, The Million's Poet. The attention that the poem

[90] Clive Holes, "A Saudi 'housewife' goes to War الفتاوى الشريرة or 'the evil fatwa'," Gelder, G. J. H. van. *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy: Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan Van Gelder*. Edited by Adam Talib et al., (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 270.

[91] سعودية في "شاعر المليون" تتحدى التهديد بالقتل. BBC 2010: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2010/03/100324_hissa_hilal_tc2 .

received means that it has been scrutinized not only for its message but also as an artistic expression. Like the work of so many women artists—writers, poets, among others—it has been argued that she is successful only because she is a woman, and /or because she touches on taboos. The reaction to and reception of the poem is not the focus of this section, but it is relevant because it shows how such a poem that is both popular and formal, can also touch on a sensitive and important topic for women and men in Saudi society.[92] What concerns me here is how her work can be understood in its context—the issuing of a radical fatwa against gender mixing, which was criticized by many people in Saudi Arabia, and how she uses poetry to do this, managing to draw a great deal of attention to the issue. As a protest, Hilal's poem challenges radical ideologies and despite the wave of criticism she received she remained steady in her message. These literary productions are unique because of al-Mutairi and Hilal's usage of linguistic features to draw a picture of war and use poetry to fight the shaykhs and the tribal system's extremism.

Novels

Whereas poetry is the most respected traditional genre of literary expression in Saudi Arabia, novels have been gaining ground as important on the literary scene, as I will discuss in more detail below. Novels by Saudi women writers have over time mounted protests by highlighting problems related to gender, especially social and political barriers that impact women who are differently situated, across all social classes and backgrounds. In this section, I examine three Saudi women's novels as creative expressions of protest against the systematic injustice that

[92] Katrien Vanpee discusses Hilal and and her poem's popularity in her article about the TV show, The Million's Poet, see: Katrien Vanpee, "Allegiance Performed: Waṭaniyyah Poetry on the Stage of the Shāʿir Al-Milyūn Competition," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 50, no. 2 (2019): 177-178.

Saudi women face: Badriah Albeshr's novels [غراميات شارع الأعشى] *Love Stories on al-Asha Street* (2013)[93] and [هند والعسكر] *Hind and the Soldiers* (2005),[94] and [جاهلية] *Days of Ignorance* (2007) by Laila Aljohani.[95]

To better situate the work of Laila Aljohani and Badriah Albeshr, I will provide a brief background into the history and development of fictional works, the novel in particular, written by Saudi Arabian women. A relatively important genre of writing, fiction by women authors only began to emerge as a phenomenon at the very end of the 1950s. The popularity of Saudi women's fiction has grown steadily but gradually from the publication of the first novel by a female writer, [ودّعت آمالي] [I Bade my Hopes Farewell] by Samira Khashoggi in 1959. With the beginning of the twenty-first century, some critics have dubbed the works produced by women writers a "مرحلة الثورة النسائية الروائية" "revolution in Saudi feminist fiction."[96] The innovative narratives and extensive use of progressive language that is pushing for social reforms in these works are the reason for the appellation. From the year 2000 forward, Saudi women's fiction has shifted by challenging terms that are taught to all Saudi females as crucial in their upbringing– dishonour (انعدام الشرف), shame (العيب), *haram* (الحرام), family honor (شرف العائلة), and so on. The positive reception of the works of Saudi women novelists by male and female Saudi critics has further encouraged the production of more fiction by women. Despite the improvement in their

[93] بدرية البشر. غراميات شارع الأعشى. دار الساقي. لبنان ٢٠١٣[Badriah Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, (Lebanon: Dar al-Saqi, 2013)].

[94] بدرية البشر. هند والعسكر. دار الاداب. لبنان ٢٠٠٦ [Badriah Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers,* (Lebanon: Dar al-Adab, 2006)].

[95] ليلى الجهني. جاهلية. دار الاداب. بيروت ٢٠٠٧ [Laila Aljohani, *Jahiliyya*. (Beirut: Dar Al-Adab, 2007)]; *Days of Ignorance*. (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2014).

[96] سامي جريدي. الرواية النسائية السعودية: خطاب المرأة وتشكيل السرد. دار الانتشار العربي. لبنان ط١ ٢٠٠٨ [Sami Jaridi, *Saudi Women's Novel: The Discourse of Woman*. (Lebanon: Arab Diffusion Company, 2008)], 19; خالد الرفاعي. الرواية النسائية السعودية. قراءة في التاريخ والموضوع والقضية والفن. نادي الرياض الأدبي. الرياض ٢٠٠٩. [Khalid al-Rifai, *Saudi Women's Novel*. (Riyadh: Literature Club of Riyadh, 2009)], 50.

attitude towards women's writing, Saudi critics have not received Saudi women's literature with the same positive reception they have shown writing by Saudi men.[97]

In his study of Saudi fiction, Sami Jaridi poses the question: Why are Saudi social issues that are not related directly to women – for example, drug use, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and so on – not more present in Saudi women's novels?[98] The absence of such concerns in women's writing generally is used as evidence of the novelists' focus on feminist issues, with other social issues being left for male novelists to deal with. Saudi women novelists writing between 1959 and around the year 2000 did highlight many basic social issues in their narratives, demonstrating significant differences between their perspectives on social issues and those of male novelists. The issues addressed by women writers more recently have undergone a shift by focusing less on the basic societal concerns and more on issue that are pertinent to women specifically, or which could be called feminist. These include, for example, forced marriage, sexism, divorce, and custody rights. This change has come with the wave of Saudi women's awareness of their social position from the second half of the twentieth century onward which coincides with the rise of women's novels in Saudi Arabia.

Many writers use fiction to confront social issues in indirect ways, as Madawi al-Rasheed puts it, "the novel is less confrontational than poetry, as an author can always hide behind an imaginary world, created out of fragments of reality, personalities, and historical moments. Saudi women novelists can also claim that their novels are simply fiction rather than autobiography to escape condemnation for daring language and senses, both of which have become regular features of the new literature."[99] Saudi women novelists are aware of the censors; when their

[97] Khalid al-Rifai, 37.
[98] Sami Jaridi, 322.
[99] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia,* 176–177.

narratives strongly criticize political and social structures, women novelists often publish under pen names, for example. Samira Khashoggi published her novel under the pen name " سميرة بنت الجزيرة" (Samira al-Jazeera, the surname meaning "daughter of the Arabian Peninsula") in order to avoid the attacks she expected as a result of being the first Saudi woman to publish a novel. Numerous Saudi women novelists continue to publish their novels under pen names today to protect themselves from censors, society, and the government. However, all these novels published under pen names are banned across the Gulf countries due to the tone of their critique and their strong advocacy for women's rights.[100] Like many other Saudi feminist novelists, Albeshr and Aljohani are known for novels in which, " تعلو فيها نبرة التحدي والاحتجاج والصدام مع الثقافة السائدة" [there is a significant amount of protest and confrontation with the surrounding culture.] [101] In what follows, I focus on how their creative expression of protest in fiction engages with the other means of protest in this dissertation.

Three Narratives of Protest against Injustice: The Novels of Badriah Albeshr and Laila Aljohani

One important novel, Badriah Albeshr's 2013 novel *Love Stories on al-Asha Street* (غراميات شارع الأعشى), writes its protest by addressing different aspects of family life and relationships between neighbors and relatives. Set in the Saudi capital Riyadh in the 1980s, these complex interpersonal relationships reflect gender relations at home, on the street, and at work, as well as Saudi society more generally. In her depictions of these relationships and various events both within the family setting and outside of it, Albeshr protests social injustice and systematic inequalities.

[100] "The Saudi literary scene is particularly effected by legislation ad restrictive practices imposed across the kingdom […] many Saudi writers tend to publish their books in Cairo and Beirut in order to by-pass this issue and improve distribution," Noura Algahtani: 27.
[101] Samaher Al-Dhamen, 213.

Love Stories on al-Asha Street features three main characters, all of whom are women. Each woman has her own stories and struggles, successes and failures. Two of these characters — ‘Azizah and ‘Atwa—are particularly relevant to the topic of this dissertation, because they protest and challenge social norms and they are victims of social injustices in various ways. ‘Azizah is a high school girl whose love of Egyptian films inspires her to dream about a romantic life with an Egyptian doctor in Riyadh. Such a relationship with a man outside of marriage is forbidden within the Saudi social norms of the novel’s setting, but a relationship with a non-Saudi man is even worse—and perhaps even impossible. Failing to realize this forbidden romance, ‘Azizah eventually ends up divorced from an oppressive marriage to an old Saudi man.

‘Atwa also has her own struggles: she has suffered through a tragic childhood due to her inappropriate stepfather. Her character represents the difficulties that daughters face when their parents’ marriages collapse. ‘Atwa’s stepfather attempts to dispose of her, by trying to force her to marry a man he has chosen, thereby absolving himself of any responsibility toward her after her mother’s death. Wearing boys’ clothes as a disguise, ‘Atwa runs away from her stepfather and her village, to avoid questions about why she has no male guardian. Her borrowed masculinity saves her from society and its judgment.[102]

Like ‘Atwa, the main character of Badriah Albeshr’s *Hind and the Soldiers* (هند والعسكر), is also a young, educated Saudi girl who lives in the small city of Laila. She later moved to the Saudi capital Riyadh. The novel follows its eponymous protagonist, Hind, from elementary school until she is a divorced, single mother. A rebel, Hind faces the problems in her society head on, which are played out through the social relationships between men and women in her

[102] There are a number of studies and reviews of this novel, for example, see: https://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2014/1/16/غراميات-شارع-الأعشى-أرواح-متمردة , https://alarab.co.uk/غراميات-شارع-الأعشى-علاقة-ملحمية-بين-الناس-والمدينة and https://raseef22.net/article/2402--رواية-من-السعودية-غراميات-شارع-الأعشى .

own family, as well as and among her neighbors and colleagues. Despite the difficulty of her life in her family home and the extremely different treatment that she receives from her mother and father, Hind is a positive character and a symbol of the rebellious girl. Albeshr continually highlights Hind's perspective of standing against the social injustice as she receives it from her own mother then her husband and gradually from the extended family until the systematic abuse of women as Hind observes and challenges it through being a writer and a worker in a hospital.

Like Hind, the female protagonist in Laila Aljohani's *Days of Ignorance* (جاهلية), Leen, has a name that does not contain a feminine marker, one of the features of the new Saudi women's fiction. Like Hind, Leen is a well-educated Saudi woman. The story is set in the Saudi city of Medina, and follows both Leen and her beloved boyfriend Malek, a Black man who is Saudi-born but nonetheless cannot attain Saudi citizenship. Much of the novel is about Malek's search for citizenship and the papers he feels will "absolve" him of the problem of being born Black, and the difficulties of their inter-racial relationship in their conservative society. Their love story serves as the pivot around which issues of sexism and racism are treated in the novel. *Jahiliyya* / *Days of Ignorance* uses the comparison between Leen, who is also the novel's narrator, and her brother Hashem within their family context level and examines how this is reflected more generally on the societal level in Saudi Arabia. This allows Aljohani to make a larger commentary on race and gender and how they are interrelated. Hashem's privileges within the family, especially his superior treatment by their mother, because he is a man, is paralleled by the sexism and racism Leen and Malek face within society more generally. Aljohani protests with her narrative the sexism and racism mainly in Saudi society and this kind of protest is important in fiction because it undresses the society in its depth.

In what follows, I will explore these three novels in order better to understand how they use this genre to write protest into their works by exploring first the language used in the texts and then moving on to compare how they treat themes related to women's protest in society, family relations, sexism and patriarchy, government policy and abuse of law, as well as marriage and divorce.

Language

Shared among these three novels is their use of language as a powerful tool to protest or critique. Some examples of how these two novelists use language as features of their literary protest include the novels' title, subtitles, and divisions. Another important way that they manipulate language to encode protest can be located within dialogues and various characters' internal monologues within the novels.

In terms of titles, all three novels operate differently, but use powerful symbols, imagery, and language to encode their protest messages. Titles are important to literary works in how they over code the texts with layers of meaning.[103] The title "Hind and the Soldiers," [هند والعسكر] for example, is a bold title with a woman's name as the first word—and one without a feminine ending as mentioned above. It is relevant that Hind is the name of a well-known figure in the history of the early days of Islam—Hind bint 'Utbah; she was one of the people who initially opposed the Prophet Muhammad's message and later was one of the first converts.[104] Among the

[103] There are several Arabic studies analyzing the titles in Arabic fiction, Arab women fiction, and Saudi women Fiction, see for example: عزوز علي. and عبدالمالك اشهبون. العنوان في الرواية العربية. الناي للدراسات والنشر والتوزيع. سوريا ٢٠١١. إسماعيل، عتبات النص في الرواية العربية، دراسة سيميولوجية سردية، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، القاهرة

[104] Nawal El Saadawi pointed to Hind as one if the strongest Arabian women in her time, not only by fighting with men on the battlefield, but also with her rebellious soul, from within her family house, when she asked her father to not arrange her marriage without consulting her "أنا امرأة قد ملكت أمري فلا تزوّجني رجلاً حتى تعرضه علي" to the public by debating with the Prophet Mohammad. See: نوال السعداوي. الوجه العاري للمرأة العربية. هنداوي، بريطانيا. 2017, 45-46.

possibly apocryphal stories about Hind bint ‘Utbah is one that after a battle, she ate the liver of the Prophet’s uncle Hamza. Thus, the reference to the soldiers, who in the novel are those people who control, oppress, and imprison the protagonist, but not from the military, is laden with symbolism and imagery overlaying this novel with deeper meanings.

Though the soldiers of the title refer to all of the characters who oppress Hind, not necessarily those in the military, there are two military characters in the novel– Hind’s father and her ex-husband. There is an important contrast in the novel between these two men and the “social soldiers.” The latter fight against Hind’s freedom, and include her own mother, who imposes restrictive rules, and her younger brother, who makes sure his radical beliefs are not only his own but also acted out within the family home.

To support this, Albeshr described how Hind was forced to accept marrying Mansour. Hind states that her mother is a soldier, “the soldier of the house” while she describes the management of her home after she failed to win the marriage battle:

> عرفت أن ما بقي في بيت أهلي هو هزيمة عسكرية ماحقة. يبدو أن أبي الضعيف قد سلّم أمي أسلحته العسكرية الصارمة فأصبحت هي عسكري البيت

> [I knew there was nothing left for me in my family home except a crushing military defeat. It seems that my father had given up all his powerful weapons of war to my mother, and she then became the soldier at home.] [105]

She has never felt her mother’s love, and indeed her mother constantly favours her brothers over her. Hind compares her life to Cinderella’s, even going so far as to imagine herself as motherless:

> كنت أتخيل نفسي مثل سندريلا، يتيمة من دون أم. كنت أرى في زوجة أبيها الظالمة صورة أمي التي تضربني وتكلفني بالأعمال الشاقة في المنزل.

[105] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers,* 127.

> [I was imagining myself as Cinderella, a motherless orphan. I see Cinderella's stepmother in my own mother who beats me and forces me to do the most difficult housework.] [106]

Albeshr emphasizes this mother-daughter relationship through both the dialogue between them and Hind's interior monologues throughout the novel which questions her mother's love as will be shown in more detail below. Critic Rasool Muhammed Rasool identifies this harmful mother-daughter relationship as a reason for Hind to search for a space outside the house, specifically in the world of men thinking that the world is safer than her house and away from mother's punishments.[107] Rasool claims that Hind's hatred of her mother pushes her to play only with the boys in the street. He believes that Hind does this on purpose to take revenge on her mother who pushes her away from children of the same sex. It is clear to Hind, however, that she is playing with the boys because their mothers do not force them to go back home early or limit their time outside, as girls' mothers do. This is why she prefers to play with boys:[108]

الأمهات في حارتنا، عادة، لا يهتممن بغياب الأولاد عن البيت، ولا يحرصن على إدخالهم باكرًا. من هنا نشأت العلاقة بيني وبين أولاد الحارة، وصرت صديقة لهم، فأنا لم أجد سوى الأولاد يتمتّعون مثلي بوقت فائض من اللعب مع فارق أنهم لا يدفعون الثمن غاليًا مثلي

[Normally, the mothers in our neighbourhood usually don't care about their sons not being home and aren't concerned with them coming back particularly early. This is how I developed a relationship with the boys in our neighbourhood and I became friends with them. I was friends with only boys, because they enjoyed playing in their free time like I did—the only difference between us being that they didn't pay the same price for this that I did.] [109]

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[106] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 32.
[107] دار التنوير-لبنان. الأنوثة الساردة: قراءات سيمائية في الرواية الخليجية. رسول محمد رسول . Rasool Muhammed Rasool, (2013), 71.
[108] Rasool, 71. "فكرهها لوالدتها جعلها تنأى عن اللعب مع الفتيات ليأخذها الحنين إلى عالم الذكورة المختلف"
[109] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 37.

In this description of Hind, her mother once again appears as the "soldier of the house" who keeps her inside and punishes her every time she is outside longer than she is permitted to be.[110]

Likewise, the dialogues between the other female characters in *Hind and the Soldiers* indicate this problem. When Hind tells her sister that she could not sleep well the previous night because of a nightmare that she was in a prison, her sister laughs and says: "Wow! Where are we then, my sister?! We are in a huge prison."[111] This is an example of how Saudi women novelists express criticism or protest societal conditions by using fictional characters' dialogues.

Unlike the translation, "Hind and the Soldiers" for [هند والعسكر], the English language title, "Days of Ignorance," for Laila Aljohani's [جاهلية] requires more unpacking. The title is clearly a reference to how the specific era of history before Islam is referred to in Arabic, Al-Jahiliyya. It is clear within this novel, however, that the term "ignorance" is not used to mark the pre-Islamic period; rather, it is a multi-layered meaning that points to the current state of the times as being one of ignorance. This meaning is encoded within the narrative and the novel itself. It is relevant that she does not include the "al" in conjunction with "jahiliyya." It is therefore made obvious that Aljohani did not give the novel this name to point to that specific era. In this way, she is making an important commentary on how the current period—which chronologically speaking, is meant to be the end of ignorance—is in fact another manifestation of ignorance marked by racism and sexism.[112] Thus, she uses "jahilyya" as both a theme and an adjective to refer to an age of inhuman treatment.[113]

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[110] Albeshr. *Hind and the Soldiers*, 36. "لكن أمي تضربني كلما دخلت إلى المنزل لأنني أتأخر دائما في العودة"

[111] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 109-110.

[112] " كلمة الجاهلية لا تعني القيم البائدة فالروائية لم تأخذ من العصر الجاهلي سوى العصبية القبلية المتحددة بالنسب والتعصب للون والصراع غير المبرر إنسانيا، أي الجاهلية في الإطار المفهومي كمرحلة كانت قبل الإسلام ، دون التعرض للقيم الأخلاقية التي كانت سائدة في تلك المرحلة، لأن الكاتبة أرادت أن تستبطن دلالات محددة تشكل خلفية دلالية لنصها الروائي، ودلالاته، لتسقطه على الواقع المعاصر، بجاهليته الجديدة" بهيجة مصري إدلبي. العتبات النصية في الرواية النسائية السعودية- تخصيب الرؤية: https://thakafamag.com/?p=2255

[113] Sabri Hafez sees: "عتبة العنوان الأولى التي تعيد لنا أطياف الجاهلية الأولى من خلال التنكير الذي هو كعتبة خير من التعريف في هذا المجال" in his study of this novel. See: صبري حافظ / تراكب السرد الروائي وكشف سوءات الواقع/ قراءة في رواية ليلى الجهني «جاهلية».

Although Aljohani's narrative occurs in the modern era, this title suggests that most of her characters remain trapped in archaic prejudiced beliefs and customs toward women and racialized people. This goes beyond her usage of the title; in fact, Aljohani documents events in the novel, interspersing newspaper reporting on various current events, particularly those related to the US war on Iraq, throughout the text. She uses subtitles and chapter headings that invoke obscure and unused ancient, pre-Islamic names of the days and months of the year.[114] She juxtaposes these with descriptions of events in the war in Iraq, thus blending ancient and modern times in the novel as a narrative technique. Alluding to this pre-Islamic dating system, Aljohani narrates in the last chapter of the novel:

للحظات رأت الأيام والأشهر وهي تخلع أقنعتها أمام عينيها، وتعود إلى وجوهها القديمة

> [For a few moments she saw the days and months removing their masks before her very eyes and revealing their old faces.][115]

Aljohani's use of these ancient names instead of the modern Arabic names of days and months suggests that, for her, modernity is only a thin cover for an ignorant society. Scholar of Saudi literature, Muhammad al- 'Abbas states that Saudi novels including *Days of Ignorance* have exposed sacred society; he points out that the title (جاهلية) is referring to a society that is at a distance from modernity as Aljohani denounces the strict racism in Saudi society.[116]

Albeshr and Aljohani have effectively used linguistic techniques to express and describe protest in their novels. In what follows, I will move on to discuss and analyze shared themes of

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[114] Michelle Hartman emphasizes how titles add richness to the novel in her analysis of, *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan al-Shaykh: "The existence of chapter and section titles in English is not only a translational intervention, but also shapes the production of knowledge around the novel itself." See: Michelle Hartman "Zahra's Uncle, or Where Are Men in Women's War Stories?" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 51 (2020): 95.

[115] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 179.

[116] ومن ذات المنزع الإنساني أدانت ليلى الجهني السياج العنصري المنصوب بصرامة بين الألوان والأجناس والأعراق، خلافًا لمبادئ الدين والتسالم الاجتماعي المرفوعة كلافتات، حيث يحيل عنوان روايتها (جاهلية) إلى مجتمع منزوع الآدمية، وأبعد ما يكون عن حسّ ومتطلبات المدينة". Muhammed al-Abbas, 23-24. ٢٠٠٩ محمد العباس. مدينة الحياة: جدل في الفضاء الثقافي للرواية السعودية- دراسة نقدية. دار نينوى- سوريا

protest encoded in the three novels: (1) family relations, including preference for sons and parents' relationships; (2) sexism and government policies towards women; and (3) abuse of the law, especially as related to marriage divorce and custody.

Family relations: Sexism and Patriarchy

Inside the family homes portrayed in these three novels, sexism appears most prominently in the familial and normalized preference of the male child over the female. All three novels both display this preference and critique it in varying levels of protest against the patriarchy.

In *Hind and the Soldiers*, the first and most obvious example of favouring sons over daughters occurs when Hind is divorced by her husband, Mansur, because her first child is a daughter and not a son. Mansur had been expecting a boy and had dreamt of this son from the time he knew Hind was pregnant:

> يوم عرفت إني حامل ابتهج زوجي منصور كثيرًا. عرفت النتيجة في البيت، لكنه أصرّ على أن يتأكد من حملي في عيادة الطبيب مساء اليوم نفسه. أظهرت نتيجة تحليل الدم بعد ساعتين أنني حامل، فسأل الطبيبة: ألا يظهر تحليل الدم جنس الجنين؟-
>
> [When I found out that I was pregnant, my husband Mansur was extremely happy; he asked the doctor: 'is it possible to know the baby's sex by a blood test?'] [117]

That was the only question he asked the doctor. Hind continues to narrate her pregnancy in the novel and describes her husband's reaction to knowing the baby would be a girl when her pregnancy reaches the fourth month. Upon hearing the news from the doctor, Mansur's face becomes dark with sadness and anger:

> رجاء، تأكدي يادكتورة
> قلت لك ولد، واسمه سعد، سامعة لا أريد كثرة حكي

[117] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 49.

[Please doctor, check it again! This baby must be a boy. I will name him Sa'ad." He then turns to Hind: "Do you hear me?! No more words!][118]

By the time Hind gives birth to her daughter, she no longer sees her husband:

ذهب منصور ليشرب الكحول وينسى خيبة أمله لأن بكره ليس ولدًا، فقد سمح لنفسه بكل شيء لأن الله لم يحقق حلمه الكبير بأن يصبح أبا سعد

[Mansur starts drinking alcohol[119] to forget the hopelessness of the moment he discovered that his first child would not be a boy. He allows himself everything because God has not granted his dream, to be the father of a boy.][120]

Throughout Hind's narration, we learn that her giving birth to a daughter is far from her first experience of facing sexism and that Mansur is not the first person to express a preference for sons over daughters. We also learn that she experienced sexism within her own family from a young age. Beyond the issue of not providing a male child to her husband, the story of sexism continues in the narrative in the relations between the siblings within their family home. As the older sister, she cares for her brother Ibrahim throughout his childhood, but years later Ibrahim has more power than his older sister, simply because he is a boy. One day, after Hind has made a joke about Ibrahim, she narrates:

نهض إبراهيم بسرعة واتجه نحوي، أمسكني وجرّني من شعري، فصرخت:
-أبي ... الحق بي!
قالت أمي: تستاهلين يا أم لسان طويل.
وصل أبي إلينا، نزع يد إبراهيم من شعري، ودفعه بقوة فارتطم بالجدار. ثار إبراهيم غاضبًا و صاح في وجه ...
أبي: - تضربني من أجلها! تضربني وأنا رجل البيت!
-لو كنت رجلاً ما مددت يدك على امرأة ضعيفة! هذه أختك، بدلاً من أن تردّ عنها الظلم تضربها؟

[Ibrahim stands and runs towards me. He catches me and pulls my hair. I scream: "Dad! Help me!"
My mom says: "You deserved that!"

[118] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 50–51.
[119] She uses the verb [سمح] ("allow") because alcohol is forbidden for Muslims.
[120] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 53.

> My father approaches to us, frees me from Ibrahim, and then hits him. Ibrahim screams, complaining: "You hit me for her!! How come you hit me while I am the man of the house?"
> "If you were a real man, you wouldn't hit a girl! This is your sister, instead of protecting her, you're hitting her?!][121]

This is only one example of how Albeshr uses lively dialogues to deeply embed recurrent questions about sexism within the structure and feel of the novel and she allows them to be voiced by her strong female characters. Another example in *Hind and the Soldiers*, is where Hind asks her mother a simple question, laden with meaning:

> بم يختلف عني فهد أو إبراهيم؟-
> هؤلاء رجال، وأنت امرأة. هل تفهمين؟-
> "لكني لا أفهم معنى "امرأة-
> .أسألها: هل يعني هذا أن المرأة بلا روح
> تردّ: هكذا هو الحال، ستقبلينه كما قبلناه قبلك، شئت أم أبيت.

> ["What makes my brothers Fahad and Ibrahim different than me?"
> "They are men and you're a woman. Do you understand?"
> "But I do not know what 'woman' means!" I ask her again. "Does that mean woman does not have a soul?"
> "This is the situation; you will accept it as we accepted it. Either you do or don't want to do so.][122]

We see a similar theme emerge clearly within Aljohani's *Days of Ignorance*. In this novel, she features the character of a mother who clearly prefers her son over her daughter. In this case, beyond simply preferring him over his sister, Leen's mother worships her son. Leen and her younger brother Hashim parallel Hind and her younger brother Ibrahim. Leen is a dutiful daughter: the narrative depicts her studying hard, reading, writing articles, and visiting the holy

[121] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 83–85.
[122] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 131.

mosque of Medina with her mother. Yet all of these virtues in a daughter do not earn Leen a place in her mother's heart. On the contrary, she prefers her son Hashim despite the fact that he failed to complete his high school education and harasses girls in the mall. Hashem remains the favourite even with all his flaws. Hashim's father tries to find a job for him, as he does not even have his high school diploma; Hashim demonstrates his irresponsibility as he does not even bother to search for a job himself. When Hashim starts a job that his father has found for him in a store, he is fired because of his behavior toward the clients, where he takes advantage of his position to flirt with female customers.

The way the characters of the mothers are written by Aljohani and Albeshr are extremely similar and can be read in parallel: Leen and Hind's mothers both declare that they wish their daughters had never been born. In fact, Leen's mother wishes for it aloud and explicitly:

يا ريتني مت ولا خلّفتك

[I'd rather have died than had you.][123]

In contrast, both state that they would die if something happened to their sons, whereas, for example, Hind's mother curses her daughter, wishing Hind not to live even one more day – "الله لايعيشك يوم واحد"[124] – and goes further in praying for the entire female gender to disappear: " الله يقطع البنات".[125] These internalized sexist and misogynistic views are expressed explicitly in the text, showing how mothers hate their daughters as extensions of their own gendered selves. But this is not only about treating their daughters strictly, this issue runs much deeper.

Tracing the stories of women within the novels we learn that both mothers were themselves treated badly because of their gender. Hind's mother was forced to get married.

[123] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 74.
[124] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 41.
[125] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 158.

Leen's mother was treated badly by other mothers her own age who had given birth to sons; they excluded her from friendship until she gave birth to a son:

وظلّ هاشم هاشمَ أمها: حلمها الأول والأخير؛ جنينها الذي مرّت على أبواب كثيرة قبل أن يجيء، ظلّ فزعها وأمنها؛ مفتاحها الذي فتح لها أبواب الفردوس النسوي. كانت سلمى، فصارت أم هاشم، انقطعت ألسنة لمزت غيبتها ونعتتها ب "مسكينة"، صار لديها من تحلف بحياته وقربه وبعده وغيابه وحضوره، ولم تحلف مرّة بموته. اكتسب وجودها شرعيّته أخيرًا.

[Hashim remained her mother's Hashim. He was her first and only dream, he was the baby who she'd tried so hard to have, he was the source of all of her security and insecurity, he was the key that would allow her, as a woman, to enter through heaven's door. She started off just as Salma, then she became Umm Hashim, Hashim's mother. This alone silenced the wagging tongues of the gossips. No longer would anyone feel sorry for her. She had someone now to rely on, whose life she could cherish whether he was near or far, present or absent. As long as he was alive, she was. His existence had finally given her own life legitimacy and meaning.] [126]

Hind's mother is clearly a victim of a society and she replicates the hatred she received in her dealings with other women, including her own daughter and granddaughter. The novel poignantly and starkly portrays an extremist mother who displays hatred towards all women, because of the gendered trauma she experienced.

The two novels have other parallels in their depiction of sexism as well, beyond the mothers' preferences for their sons. In both texts, the protagonists' brothers also end up as murderers. Hashim attacks Leen's lover and leaves him hovering between life and death in the hospital, while Ibrahim participates in a terrorist attack in Riyadh.[127] I am arguing here that the way the familial relationships are depicted in these two novels in parallel are a powerful example

[126] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 92.

[127] Sanna Dhahir analyses the character of Ibrahim in her article *From Flat to Round Men: Male Characters in Saudi Women's Fiction* "*In Hind wa-l-ʿaskar* al-Bishr investigates the forces that push a young man to become a suicide bomber. Ibrahim is a middle child in a big family where the mother threatens her children with hellfire for the slightest misdemeanor and who views her relatively tolerant husband as a weak father of weak men. In the mosque Ibrahim learns of his importance as a male marginalized in a society that expects him to be the 'man of the house.' The shaykhs commend his 'astute' religious habits and involve him in an endless cycle of religious training in an effort to mold him into their vision of the 'true' Islamist. Ibrahim develops austere ideas of Islam and eventually renounces this life for the after world. His sisters' 'Western' trends and their defiance of gender socialization at home further fuel his pent-up anger not only against all women, whom he sees as fitna (temptation), but also against the 'infidel West'," 39-40.

of how Saudi women novelists protest sexism within traditional households. The exaggerated role of the mothers' preferences, the negative portrayals of the brothers, and the brilliant girls who are overlooked are all demonstrations of sexism that are completed by using narration, dialogue, and internal monologues.

Another way in which family-based sexism is depicted in fiction can be found in the third novel discussed here, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*. In this text, due to the severe sexism that the protagonist 'Atwa experiences, she not only expresses her wish to be a man, she even crossdresses as a man in order to finally achieve an equal status in society. In *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 'Atwa's stepfather openly wishes that 'Atwa had been born a boy which leads him to dressing 'Atwa in boys' clothes and takes her to work with him in his shop. Later, this same disguise helps 'Atwa to better her circumstances when she flees:

وإن ما أنقذها هو غرابتها وثياب الصبي التي كانت تلبسها

[What rescued her when she'd decided to run away was the boys' clothes she was wearing.][128]

Without disguising herself as a boy, and the greater mobility that comes with appearing as a man, 'Atwa would never have gained her freedom. The novel reflects a strategy used by Saudi girls in real life to gain access to places and spaces forbidden to them. For example, in 2015, there was a well-publicized story about a Saudi girl who wore male clothes to work as a driver to help her family financially, until people noticed and stopped her.[129] Moreover, this kind

[128] Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 182.
[129] مواطنة تتنكّر بزي رجالي وتعمل سائق حافلة في عسير.. والحناء تكشف أمرها Akhbaar 24 News, http://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/128173.

of cross-dressing sometimes happens for fun in sport stadiums or when women attend men's parties.[130]

The parents in all three novels discussed in this section play significant roles in the narratives and in the lives of the main characters. Below, I will offer a short analysis that compares mother and father figures in the novels. As discussed above, for example, Hind describes how her stubborn and cold-hearted mother never showed her children love and kindness; and further that she never liked her daughter Hind, or girls in general. Hind's mother clearly prefers her son over her daughter—this preference is felt by Hind from her girlhood to her adulthood when she moves back home after her divorce. Albeshr illustrates their complex mother–daughter relationship through events, dialogues, and monologues. On the other hand, Hind's father is presented as a contrast to her mother's coldness. Although not the perfect example of a father, he never treats her as her mother does; he does not hit, shout at, or curse her. Moreover, he rescues Hind when he appears during a clash between her and her brother Ibrahim.

Setting her narrative in another region in Saudi Arabia at a different time, Aljohani also describes opposing parental figures. While Leen can neither see nor feel her mother's care, she receives both love and compassion from her father, perhaps compensating for what her mother lacks. The juxtaposition here is even more profound in Aljohani's novel than in *Hind and the Soldiers*. Leen's father plays an active role in her life that is more than simply protecting her from sibling infighting, as in the case of Hind and her father. He supports her choice of lifestyle, which her mother and brother disapprove of. In fact, he does protect her from her brother—but not in the context of a mere children's squabble—he acts as a wall of protection when her

[130] Saudi Arabia allowed women to attend sporting matches in 2018, however, before that date it might have cost a woman her freedom. See: https://www.sayidaty.net/node/251626/أسرة-ومجتمع/أخبار-أسرة-ومجتمع/إحالة-الفتاة-المتنكرة-بزي-شبابي-في-ملعب-الجوهرة-إلى-دار-الفتيات and https://www.alaraby.co.uk/اعترافات-مثيرة-للمشجعة-التي-اقتحمت-المدرجات-السعودية

brother attempts to harm her. Leen's father does not allow his son to disrupt her privacy—effectively refusing to give him the power that boys enjoy in many Saudi families.

We see Leen's mother overjoyed when she finally gives birth to a son after years of praying; she tried desperately to have a son, as she believes that her son is the real investment in life – one that cannot be provided by a daughter: "لين ليست لنا" [Leen is not ours.][131] She gives her son authority over her daughter's life from the time of his birth, as Aljohani narrates when she returns from the hospital after his birth:

وعندما عادت من المستشفى تحمله على ساعدها، شعّ وجهها بفرح غامر. أدنته منها وهي تقول:
قبّلي رأس سندك

> [When she came home from the hospital holding him in her arms, her face radiated an overwhelming joy. Bringing him up close to Leen, she had said, "Kiss the head of your supporter.] [132]

In the vicissitudes of the relationship between Leen and Malek, Leen's father has a significant impact on his daughter:

ثم أدركت أنها تحب أباها، ليس لأنه أبوها فحسب، بل لأنه يحبها بهذه الطريقة المختلفة، ولأنه لا يدّعي الفهم بل يحياه.

> [Then she realized that she loved her father, not only because he was her father, but also because he loved her in a different way, because he does not just claim to love her but lives it.][133]

Leen recognizes what her father offers her and appreciates her father's understanding and support.

In another scene, Leen wants to stay with Malek in the hospital, where he ends up due to her brother's vicious attack. The contrasting reactions of her parents to the news of his

[131] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 89.
[132] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 90.
[133] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 66.

hospitalization show their differences clearly. Her father tries to allow her to stay, at least to expiate her brother's sin. Her father does what other men cannot do, as Leen puts it.[134] However, Leen's mother disagrees with her father, as is to be expected for a woman who so strongly favours one of her children.

There is a striking similarity between the characters of the mothers in both *Days of Ignorance* and *Hind and the Soldiers*; both favour their sons over their daughters, and both believe that the female gender is a curse and a punishment. Leen's mother herself felt excluded from society when she experienced difficulty in becoming pregnant again. Hind's mother was the victim of an arranged marriage when she herself was still no more than a child. This is something that was later revealed to Hind by a maid. Prior to this discovery Hind, could not excuse her mother's coldness. However, when the main revealed to Hind what happened to her mother on her wedding night and how she was raped by her husband, Hind's compassion for her mother grew. As a child, her mother had been plucked from the streets of her town where she was playing with other children her age and was forcibly prepared for her wedding ceremony and subsequent wedding night with no warning.

Aljohani and Albeshr, in *Days of Ignorance*, *Hind and the Soldiers*, and *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, explore the histories and backgrounds of their mother figures to show how their characters were victims of their own society and shaped by their circumstances. Do the authors excuse the mothers in their treatment of their daughters, and do their fathers provide their daughters with escape? Is that how Saudi society functions – with mothers preferring their sons over their daughters and fathers being their daughters' only refuge? In his study of a number of Saudi novels by both men and women, Hamad Alhazza claims that "mothers in Saudi Arabia

[134] Aljohani, *Days of Ignorance*, 71.

teach their sons and daughters that there is a difference between them… men are raised to believe that women's demands for equal rights are not acceptable, especially when the women are the ones making the demands."[135] His analysis of Saudi novels enables him to claim this but he does not take it further.[136]

What I would highlight in my analysis of these three novels is not a direct answer to these questions but to shift the focus to how these depictions of the internal dynamics of Saudi families reveal some common threads in social critique. I have chosen these novels, and analyzed their plots and character development, to highlight how two Saudi women novelists commence their protest by revealing the internal dynamics of the basic Saudi family unit upon which society at large is built. On the one hand this may seem an easy target for a novel of protest, but I propose here that such a powerful and damning critique of Saudi mothers and motherhood, implicating them in patriarchal structural violence against girls and women, is in fact brave. The motherly figure is a sacred one in Saudi and Arab culture at large. By exposing how mothers demonstrate sexism towards their daughters, these novelists openly take on a subject most often left untouched.

Sexism, Government Policy, and Abuses of Law

In addition to depicting and challenging sexism in the family home, Saudi women's novels also address the sexism supported by government policy at various levels. One of the most famous examples of Saudi state sexism is the driving ban for women; however, there are many other examples of systemic sexism built into the state, governmental, and legal apparatuses. The

[135] Hamad Alhazza, 243

[136] He also contradicts himself saying: "some novelists portray issues as they see them rather than exactly as they occurred." This is an unfair argument. However, it does offer a good example of how some Saudi men react to Saudi women's literary protest.

sexism inherent to the educational system is evident in the limited access for women to certain university majors and specializations, such as engineering, political science, and information security, which are open only to male students. In fact, the study of law has only recently been opened to female students. King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, one of the most important and best funded universities in the country, has only been accepting female applicants since September 2019. To this day, female students are only accepted into graduate programs and not in petroleum or engineering majors. They are allowed to study in fields open to women in other universities, for example, mathematics, computer science, and business administration.[137]

A further issue, and one challenged frequently in literary texts, is the law about male guardianship of women and the various privileges that it assigns to men over women. The legislative policy of male guardianship prohibits Saudi females from studying, working, traveling, and so on, without the approval of a male guardian, who may be a woman's father, brother, husband, or sometimes even her son depending on her status and specific legal circumstances.[138] One example of this is how, under the guardianship law, a woman cannot go alone to a police station to report a male family member's domestic violence against her; the police would send her away and ask her to return with her male guardian (or any male relative) to co-sign and thus validate her claim—despite the fact that often the perpetrator of this violence may indeed be the male guardian himself. Likewise, when a woman completes a prison sentence, regardless of her age, she will not be released until her male guardian comes to retrieve her in person and makes a formal declaration that she is in his custody.

[137] KFUPM, Female Education Department, "The 1st Female Graduate Batch Enrolled at KFUPM", www.kfupm.edu.sa/departments/fed/Default.aspx

[138] This law is discussed in depth in Chapters Four, see p. 192.

This sexist law is challenged powerfully in Badriah Albeshr's novels. There is an important scene depicting its impact in the novel *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*. In this example, 'Azizah, the novel's main character, is risking her young life for the freedom to travel. Having fallen in love with an Egyptian doctor, she has the impossible dream of marrying him. In order to bypass this rule, 'Azizah accepts a marriage to a 60-year-old man who has proposed, because she knows that with a wedding comes a honeymoon abroad, and for this she will be issued with a passport. She convinces her husband to travel with her to Egypt on their honeymoon so she can then escape to her beloved. 'Azizah puts herself in this high-risk situation to attain one of her rights—the freedom of movement and the freedom to travel. A Saudi woman cannot apply for or renew a passport and travel internationally without a signature on the application from her male guardian.[139] However, in *Love Stories on al-Asha Street* Albeshr emphasizes the courage of her protagonist by contrasting it with the reaction of 'Azizah's beloved. Visiting him in his clinic, she declares:

لقد تزوجت البارحة كي أحصل على جواز سفر

[I got married last night to obtain a passport.][140]

For fear of what will happen to him in this adventure, he refuses to be a part of the plan. In this scene, Albeshr emphasizes that it is not Saudi society that prevents women's freedom to travel, but rather the legal policy that does not allow them to even obtain a passport without authorization from their male guardian.

This plot and example of a scene demonstrates the revolution and change in Saudi women's literary expression. If we look back to the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi women poets and

[139] These regulations were abolished in August 2019.
[140] Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 278.

journalists such as Fowziyah Abukhalid and Khayriah Alsaggaf were both celebrated because of their challenge to and criticism of the patriarchal oppression of women by Saudi society, without addressing the state or its laws. At that time, the challenge to the patriarchy was daring and indeed heroic. Traditional Arab culture and the huge value it places on heritage in Saudi Arabia, cannot easily be challenged in the country, especially concerning its treatment of women.[141] But here I am underlining that there were few direct challenges to the state, government, and laws in literary or other creative works. This is a major change that happened in later literary expression, as in the three novels discussed in this section.

In addition to restrictions on female travel, Albeshr narrates another abusive law against Saudi women through the character of Hind, in *Hind and the Soldiers*. The author's indirect protest demonstrates one possible way of raising her voice without gaining the censors' attention. In her job as a social worker at the hospital, Hind faces a problem with a woman who is admitted for an urgent surgery. The nurses try to call her husband, but he doesn't answer. Under the male guardianship law, a Saudi woman cannot undergo surgery without authorization from her male guardian. Thus, the nurses continue to try to reach the husband, but he still does not answer. In an act of protest, Hind stands up and signs the approval for the surgery, forced to withstand as a result the objections of a male employee of the hospital:

قال لي موظف الملفات الذي يقف بجانب الطاولة
الموافقة يجب أن تكون من وليّ أمرها.-
لكنه لا يرد و قد تتضاعف حالتها، ثم إنها في الأربعين، ألا تستطيع أن تتحمل مسؤولية -
قرارها هي؟
أعرف، لكن من يتحمل المسؤولية في ما لو جاء زوجها و لم يعجبه الموقف؟-

[The registration clerk sitting next to me said: the consent form must be signed by her male guardian.

[141] Saddeka Arebi, 35–36.

> -But he is not answering and her health may worsen. She is in her forties, why can't she be responsible for making her own decision?
> --I know. But who is going to take responsibility if her husband comes and doesn't agree?] [142]

Hind herself replies to the man's objections by asserting that the female patient is in her forties and therefore shouldn't need anyone's approval but her own. This scene, complete with its awkward dialogue, is a good example of how Saudi women protest through fiction. Here, Albeshr demonstrates a method of highlighting women's voices and objections to the system within a narrative, away from the control of the censors. The story is presented directly and without adornment, and Hind narrates it as such. But within this, she also dwells on the importance of standing up for women who are patients in hospital and therefore for all Saudi women.

This scene and the novel as a whole are pertinent examples of the kinds of messages that Badriah Albeshr promotes, as an author and intellectual on the Saudi literary scene. She has argued that the struggle for women's rights in Saudi Arabia runs deeper than the right to drive a car. During a talk in Germany about the driving ban, she stated: "Today, I realize this is the surface of the problems, not the essence. We need a strategy, but the government does not give us easy solutions […] in fact we have many rights that we must understand how to get."[143] Albeshr is exemplary of this major change in Saudi women's fiction; she considers a wide range of problems and addresses them in her narratives in direct and challenging way, referring

[142] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 182.
[143] " اليوم أدرك أن هذا هو سطح المشكلات لا عمقها. نريد استراتيجية، والحكومة لم تقدم لنا حلولاً سهلة وهي تنتظر أن يفعل المجتمع ذلك. والواقع أن لدينا حزمة من الحقوق يجب أن نعرف كيفية الحصول عليها" بدرية البشر: قضية المرأة أعمق من قيادة السيارة wonews.net/ar/index.php?act=post&id=11740.

through them to the real source of oppression—it might be the mother, or the husband, policies and laws or in fact the entire system itself.

Marriage and Divorce

It is not only the law on guardianship that is challenged directly as protest in fiction. A powerful depiction of the unfairness of marriage, divorce, and custody laws is present in all three of the novels discussed in this chapter, as well. In *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, Um Jazza‘ has her own story of suffering from her divorce. Having been married at 13 years old, she cannot continue in her marriage, and asks her husband for a divorce after giving birth to their first child. Her husband is granted custody of the child and punishes Um Jazza‘ by permanently denying her access to her son. After the divorce, she never sees her son again.[144] Albeshr emphasizes this emotional crisis in the death of Um Jazza‘. When she is dying at the hospital, she hears the voice of a friend’s son in her room at the hospital; she asks immediately: [Whose is that voice? Is it my son, Jazza‘?] “صوت من هذا: جزّاع؟” Due to the half-conscious state that Um Jazza‘ is in before she passes away, her friend gives her the hope she had been waiting for since she left her husband: [Yes, it is Jazza‘, he came to see you!][145] “نعم، هذا جزّاع، جاء يزورك” This tragedy presents the distress felt by divorced women who are denied custody of their children. This narrative which shows the cruelty of denying a mother access to her own son is a covert protest of divorce laws. Since family courts used to be aggressive in applying custody laws favouring men in Saudi Arabia, some Saudi men were able to take advantage of this. They used custody of their children

[144] Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 42–44.
[145] Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 174.

to battle their ex-wives in divorce cases, and frequently would win. Albeshr protests the policies that allowed men to abuse their ex-wives in this way.

Hind does not enjoy any rights after her divorce in Albeshr's other novel, *Hind and the Solders*. Her husband Mansur does not agree to her leaving him and threatens to refuse her a divorce. This would leave her in a state of being neither married nor divorced, because he knows that she has no recourse against him in this situation. While there are laws that were written to protect women's rights after divorce, they are rarely applied. Thus, men can easily abandon their responsibilities toward their children and ex-wives after a divorce. Mansour does not even see his daughter,[146] let alone cover her expenses, thus mirroring the similarly abusive behavior of Um Jazza''s ex-husband in *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*.

Saudi women novelists also address issues related to marriage itself, such as child marriage, and the inability to marry non-Saudi or a man of a different race. Marriage to a man of a different nationality or race can be a source of some of the greatest hardship in a Saudi woman's life, with such a decision having complex effects in both social and legal contexts. A Saudi woman cannot marry a non-Saudi man without permission from the government, a process which takes years and does not necessarily end in approval. Furthermore, the structure of society makes it more difficult for a Saudi woman to marry a non-Saudi than for a Saudi man to marry a non-Saudi woman—another example of contradictory standards between men and women.[147]

As mentioned above, in *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 'Aziza fosters the impossible dream of marrying an Egyptian doctor. Albeshr does not mention the laws surrounding marriage to a non-Saudi in 'Aziza's case, focusing instead on the social issues surrounding this potential

[146] Albeshr, *Hind and the Soldiers*, 85 - 113 - 114.
[147] Neither gender may marry a non-Saudi without this permission. Even Saudi students who receive sponsorship to study abroad sign a declaration that they will not do so, or the sponsorship will be stopped.

marriage. In the same novel, Mizna, a Bedouin girl, falls in love with a Saudi man; yet, due to his Palestinian roots, her family rejects him as her husband, and the two decide to run away together. After finding out about Mizna's plan, Mizna's mother helps her daughter make the marriage a possibility in order to avoid the greater scandal that would ensue if she attempted to run away.[148]

Tackling the same concept in *Days of Ignorance*, Leen falls in love with Malek, who, while Saudi-born, has Black African roots.[149] Aljohani in this episode explains the dilemma of marriage between different races through two sets of dialogues: one between Leen and her father[150] who refuses the marriage, and the other between her father and Malek.[151] The author reveals a lot through a monologue carried out by Leen's father, in which he weighs up his love for his daughter, his desire for her to be happy, and his fears of her being punished by society.[152]

Aljohani supplements her analysis of these ethical dilemmas through Leen's father's recollection of an incident that happened during his work at the court, when two young men kidnapped their female cousin and her husband at gunpoint. They demanded that the husband divorce their cousin because he was of a different race; when the husband refused to do so, they killed him in front of his wife.[153] Aljohani not only uses Leen's father's recollection of this story to illustrate a social dilemma, but also utilizes a story from then courts to highlight legal questions around the same issue. Indeed, she reveals the racist attitudes imbued in the Saudi legal

[148] Albeshr, *Love Stories on al-Asha Street*, 150–156.
[149] Xavier Luffin recalls in his article "Lettre saoudiennes: une littérature en devenir" the American film "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" (1967) as a similar story of a Black man wants to marry a white woman, as Luffin believes the reaction of Leen's father with its meaning is similar to the star's father. This is because Leen's father was not against Malek or his race, nor was he being overtly racist but rather it was "pour éviter à sa fille le regard réprobateur de la société" (96) [to spare his daughter society's reproachful gaze.] Luffin's explanation offers us something but does not address how deep this issue runs in Saudi society. Leen in fact could face consequences including the forceable dissolution of her marriage by the court. This is implied in the novel though Aljohani does not state it openly.
[150] "قال لها: يا ابنتي، لا أقدر. سيؤذونك، ولن أحتمل" Aljohani, 123.
[151] Aljohani,129, 130.
[152] Aljohani, 124-125- 126-131- 132.
[153] Aljohani, 125.

system, specifically in the case where a Saudi woman wishes to marry a Black man and tries to obtain permission from the courts though this breach social rules and norms and is in opposition to her father's refusal. The judges take the woman aside and interrogate her, asking her why she wants to marry this man and if he is threatening her in some way. They even ask the woman if the pair have had sexual relations that might have led to a certain pressure to marry. This questioning from the judges illustrates the unwillingness to accept such a marriage, not just socially but also in the context of the law. How can the judges justify their investigation of this relationship on such an intimate level?

Aljohani presents these stories as monologues by Leen's father, without any direct authorial questioning or judgment of the events. She lets the readers decide for themselves. What Leen and Malek face is not something new or rare. Through her use of dialogue and monologue, Aljohani demonstrates that this issue is bigger than the two lovers and Leen's father, which is complicated not only by social norms but also by the judicial system.[154]

Conclusions

Fiction is a genre of literature in which Saudi women protest differently than they do in poetry. Both fiction and poetry also differ in their representation of protest compared to the other genres of creative expression which I will explore in more depth in the rest of this dissertation. The two novelists whose works are presented here, Badriah Albeshr and Laila Aljohani both protest injustice within society on multiple levels. They take on sexism in the family, social and legal constraints around marriage, divorce, and child custody, as well as issues women face when being admitted to the hospital, when they wish to travel, and others. In this section I have

[154] This protest is similar to Hind al-Mutairi's protest in poetry section, when Hind was inspired by her friend's story (Salma) who was divorced by the court due the difference of the tribe. See page: 60 in the dissertation.

discussed in some detail the problematic relationship women have with social, political, governmental, and legal systems and policies in Saudi Arabia.

In poetry and fiction, as the above examples have shown, Saudi women use multiple literary techniques and devices to further their expressions of protest. A variety of literary and linguistic tools are implemented by women to express their thoughts, analyses, and disagreements. It is clear as well that this kind of literary protest can be extremely different depending on the genre. The works in this chapter demonstrate, for example, that Saudi women poets have focused more on criticizing and protesting an abusive society, tribe, and the shaykhs that uphold patriarchal systems, and less on challenging the state and its regulations that harm. In contrast, novels often protest specific laws, regulations, and/or customs directly. The kind of language that is employed in Saudi women's fiction, as these two novelists' work indicates, of often stronger, more direct, and targets a law, rule, or regulation directly. This is a theme that will emerge in upcoming chapters that treat other genres of creative expression.

Chapter Two:
Spaces for Self-Expression

As the previous chapter outlines, in the last twenty years, Saudi women writers have used both poetry and fiction as an outlet for social critique and protest. These creative expressions are a part of the region's long poetic tradition and also engage the newer and popular genre of the novel. While not as popular as fiction in the Saudi literary scene, the memoir—as a genre—has started being used by Saudi women writers as a space for self-expression and is therefore also a form of protest. Self-expression and life writing can take many different forms. One of these is the memoir, which is often a written autobiography focused on a life or a part of a life story. This is one genre that Saudi women have increasingly worked within as both a location of creative protest and of self-expression.

Together with an analysis of one traditionally published, printed memoir in this chapter, I will also look at blogs as a newer, online form of life writing that works similarly as a space of self-expression and protest. In what follows I will first discuss one memoir, and then move on to analyze two blogs which are both presented as a kind of life writing that recount events and stories that happened to their authors as a means of creative expression. I will argue through these analyses that Saudi women can be more explicit in their form and method of protest as publishing spaces allocate them more freedom. Moreover, this chapter also offers an analysis showing a contrast between this self-expression in spaces where works are published in traditional print form and where they are published online, as blogs. Although both of these forms of life writing make their engagement as protest more explicit than the examples of poetry and fiction discussed in Chapter One above, the blogs published on the internet provide more space for their authors to express their creative protest with strength and intensity.

Published Memoirs, Creating Space for Protest in Narrating the Self

The work I have chosen to analyze as a memoir by a Saudi woman to creatively express protest is one of the most daring written texts by a Saudi woman.[155] In what follows, I will analyze in detail (أَشُقُّ البُرْقُعَ أرَى) [*I Tear the Burqu'a, I See*][156] by Huda Aldaghfag.[157] Aldaghfag is both a poet and a prose writer who powerfully describes her life and the experiences of women in Saudi Arabia through a mix of linguistic styles from the direct and expository to the rhetorical and metaphorical.

Aldaghfag divides her memoir into short chapters, each devoted to a particular subject, ranging from her own personal story to Saudi women's shared experiences. She avoids telling her tale in chronological order, and as a result *I Tear the Burqu'a, I See* is not a traditional or typical autobiographical work, but rather a challenging piece of life writing which uses a variety of creative literary techniques to advance its goals. From the cover to the title, subtitles, and intelligent wordplay, Aldaghfag employs language as both art form and to convey meaning in her rebellious writing, which reflects the remarkable poetry for which she was renowned before publishing this work.

Paratextual Interventions: The Cover

As Figure (2-1)[158] in the appendix shows, the cover of *I Tear the Burqu'a, I See* depicts a garment through which only the eyes of the woman who wears it can be seen. However, while

[155] صالح الغامدي. كتابة الذات: دراسات في السيرة الذاتية. المركز الثقافي العربي. بيروت ٢٠١٣. [Salih al-Ghamdi, *Writing the Self*. Beirut: Arabic Cultural Center, 2013], 145–146. And [Badr al-Miqbil, "Women's Autobiographies in Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Arabic and Human Science*,] 7: 3.

[156] هدى الدغفق. أشُقُّ البرقُع أرى. دار جداول-لبنان ٢٠١١.. [Huda Aldaghfag, *I Tear the Burqu'a, I See*. Beirut: Dar Jadawel, 2011].

[157] I have used Aldaghfag as this is her name as she spells it on her Facebook account: https://www.facebook.com/huda.Aldaghfag.7 . However, please note in her translated published works, her name is spelled (Al-Daghfaq) :https://www.alriyadh.com/272884.

[158] Figure (2-1): https://saudiwomen.ca/memoir.

the burqu‘a worn by many Saudi women is commonly black, the burqu‘a on Aldaghfag’s cover is extremely colourful. Thus, the rainbow colours of Aldaghfag’s burqu‘a subvert the customary style of Saudi women’s dress. The combination of the cover image with the language of the title is creative in two ways. First, Aldaghfag’s use of the word (أَشُقُّ), meaning “tear” rather than another word, “take off” or “remove,” for example, refers to rebellion and anger, since the taking off of clothing is carried out on a regular basis, yet the tearing of clothes is a disobedient action. Second, while wearing a burqu‘a, a woman can essentially see, since the purpose of the burqu‘a is to cover all of the face except the eyes, leaving the wearer capable of seeing. Thus, a woman can see more easily while wearing the burqu‘a than if she were to cover her entire face. Aldaghfag’s expression “I tear the burqu‘a, I see,” is not referring to physical vision as such, but to a metaphorical tearing of the burqu‘a, a piece of cloth that is figuratively blocking her inner vision. Moreover, the memoir’s title grammatically speaking needs a link between the two verbs: (أَشُقُّ) and (أَرَى) to know exactly what the writer is saying, what tearing her burqu‘a means in this context, and what the outcome of this action is. However, this title leaves its meaning open to the reader’s interpretation.

In her memoir, Aldaghfag uses expressions with strong and evocative connotations as well as argumentative language. As she is also a poet, Aldaghfag also draws upon a repertoire of poetic language in her chapter titles and subtitles, as well as throughout the narrative. For example, Aldaghfag’s choice of chapter titles and subtitles carefully balances between sarcasm and pain. For example, the chapter title below is a good example of how Aldaghfag does this:

الخروج من الخيمة

[Getting out of/ leaving the tent][159]

[159] I am offering two translations of the word “الخروج” because there is a double meaning implied in this word, and which one it means at a given time depends on the context and intention of the author. This could mean that a person is simply “getting out” as opposed to “going in” or it could mean that she is leaving the tent because she cannot stand the tent and its traditions.

This metaphorical title allows the author to express how her Arab heritage has impacted her life. The tent as the family house is both a concept and a reality rooted in the ancient customs of Arab desert culture, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. The tent in this context is the centre of the tribe, and as such also symbolizes its rules and patriarchal system. Keeping this in mind, "getting out of" or "leaving" this tent can have various meanings. First, there is the idea that she might be referring to an actual, physical tent, which is a house. However, few people in Saudi Arabia live in tents these days. A second meaning is that the tent could serve here as a symbol directly referring to the patriarchal family system and the larger society in Saudi Arabia. A further meaning is that the tent is a symbol of this larger, ancient tradition that the author is trying to leave behind in order to live a modern, liberated life. Above all, this title makes clear that Aldaghfag is "leaving" the tent of her own will and that this memoir documents this movement as one of rebellion.

This interpretation of the chapter title is further supported how she writes the chapter, for example, she clarifies:

> فكّرت أولا، أن أفتتح هذا البوح بعبارة "المرأة تخرج من الخيمة"، ولكن هل خرجت المرأة السعودية من خيمتها حقًا، أم أن وتد التقاليد الصارمة أعاق خطواتها المتعثّرة نحو حريتها
>
> [I was about to start this chapter with the sentence: "Women are getting out of/leaving the tents." But do Saudi women really get out/leave their tents? Or do the pegs of strict tradition block their distressed steps toward freedom?][160]

Here, she confirms directly that the tent is a symbol related to strict traditions as the tent is tightened with the "وتد التقاليد الصارمة" [pegs of strict tradition].

[160] Aldaghfag, 21.

Another example of a chapter title that operates similarly, using provocative and symbolic language to express a challenging idea is:

إجحاف متوارث

[Inherited injustice][161]

This chapter title is used to describe how injustice toward Saudi women is not a new phenomenon. The author uses the phrase "inherited injustice" to insist that Saudi women pass down their suffering as an inheritance from generation to generation—a theme that is very much present in the fictional works of Saudi women as well, as I showed in the previous chapter. This injustice is inherited as part of the problematic traditions that Aldaghfag claims is responsible for the oppression of Saudi women. When using the word injustice as the title of this chapter, she refers to various laws, "بعض القوانين الخاصة بالأحوال الشخصية" It is clear here that she is relating injustice to women's lack of mobility under the laws, including those related to male guardianship over women.

A third chapter title example that shows Aldaghfag's linguistic play similarly is:

القضاء على المرأة

[Elimination of the woman/ women][162]

"Elimination of the woman" is a literal translation, the woman referring to "women" as a general category. It is important to note here that the word meaning "elimination" in Arabic is the same word, spelled identically, to the word meaning "judicial system." When she uses the word (القضاء)[163], she suggests that the justice system is--in its constant opposition to women--"eliminating" them in various ways. We can extrapolate that she is trying to propose through her

[161] Aldaghfag, 21.
[162] Aldaghfag, 35.
[163] There are two different meanings to this word: 1) from the term (Judicial system) (القضاء), and 2) is from (قضى، يقضي، قضاء) which means to eliminate. See: https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/قضى/ .

use of language that the judicial system is eliminating women. In this chapter, we read how she protests the judicial system, especially cases related to marriage and how Saudi women are badly treated by judges and thus typically the weaker party in marriage and divorce cases. This third title choice, as the previous two, are only several examples of many more in which Aldaghfag exploits her command of language to expose the abuse and injustice that she and other women have experienced, when trying to "get out of the tent."

Lexical Contradictions

Among the rhetorical strategies that Aldaghfag employs in her memoir, she uses lexical contradictions and contrasts. An example of this is how she uses the colours black and white as a focal point in her titles. She parallels this contrast of colours with a contrast between genders—this is a contrast between herself as a woman and men, an anonymous male's whiteness against her blackness. She retains blackness for herself, raising the question: What is her blackness? Why does she keep it for herself? The first and most evident example is how this colour contrast relates to the customary Saudi clothing of the black burqu'a and 'abaya for women and the white thobe for men. Two further chapter titles show this use of language:

سوادي وبياضه

[My blackness and his whiteness][164]

سواد وجهي.. بياض وجهه

[The blackness of my face, the whiteness of his face][165]

[164] Aldaghfag, 57.
[165] Aldaghfag, 65.

This blackness that Aldaghfag relates to herself as a woman and women in general and whiteness to "him," and men in general, goes further than merely the sartorial. Perhaps the 'abaya, representing "blackness," also here refers to the shame of being a woman, and therefore a victim, in Saudi Arabia. This means then that whiteness goes beyond simply the thobe, and it is also about power and privilege.

Aldaghfag goes even further than this, to remark upon the face as the most important part of the human body and a person's identity. She takes the metaphor of colour contrast further in this case, to refer to the blackness of her own face, and to the whiteness of the anonymous, generic man's face, the entire black/white binary becoming a reference to the fundamental inequality between genders. With the binary of blackness and whiteness, Aldaghfag is extending the racism exposer within the Saudi society that was analyzed in Chapter One, in Aljohani's novel *Days of Ignorance*. By showing blackness as the less fortunate gender, Aldaghfag refers to the skin colour either she writes it with the intention to expose this racism, or she writes it without this intention which means it is just an outcome of the deep cultural effect.

These contrasting concepts are reiterated in a varied way in another chapter title:

حرامهم حلالي

[Their forbidden is my unforbidden.][166]

Above, the author relates what is *haram* ("forbidden") to something that they possess or control, using the male, third person possessive pronominal suffix "hum", and *halal* ("the unforbidden" or "permissible") to herself, using the same suffix in the first person. What "they" judge as *haram*, she judges as *halal*. This is a direct provocation and can be read as a clear act of rebellion. But who are "they"? Saudi men, her family, her critics, or the members of society in

[166] Aldaghfag, 133.

general? Only men or people across both genders? I suggest that "they" refers to whoever points at her in criticism of her literary works or the rebellious acts of her daily life since the writer in her memoir writes about the judgments that she received from her family members and society at large.

Aldaghfag uses another chapter title primarily to express her solidarity with other women. This is:

كلما شققت برقعها.. وسعني الكون
[Whenever she tears her burqu'a, the universe holds her.] [167]

The ambiguity of referring both to herself and to any Saudi woman who wears the burqu'a, either as a physical or as a metaphorical symbol of veiling, demonstrates Aldaghfag's support for and solidarity with women who choose their way of life, as well as to rebel – with the tearing of the burqu'a itself being an act of rebellion. More than that, the word (وسعني) is a form of expansion, using the root for widen which leads to her to say that the burqu'a is a symbol of limitation (تقييد).

The Language of the Memoir

In addition to the clever use of chapter titles and subtitles to convey criticism, Aldaghfag also uses eloquent and erudite language throughout the text, as demonstrated in the following passage.

أستيقظ كل يوم على شمس مطفأة، وأبواب مغلقة، وشوارع لا أعرفها. أزهاري ذابلة، وبرقعي يكبل حركة جسدي أتساءل أحيانا بما يشبه الحلم المستحيل: هل سيأتي يوم، وأستعيد أجنحتي المقصوصة، لأحلق خارج جدران عزلتي؟ أن أستعيد "جمع المؤنث السالم"، أم سأبقى الضمير الغائب والمغيّب قسرا، بسطوة القيم المتوارثة؟

[167] Aldaghfag, 144.

> [Every day, I wake up to a dim sun, closed doors, and unknown streets/paths. My flowers are rotten and my burqu‘a is tightening/ constraining the movement of my body. I wonder, sometimes, as an impossible dream: is the day coming when I will get back my cut wings to fly out of the walls of my isolation? to get back to the (feminine plural pronoun) or I will stay the (hidden pronoun) that is forced to be hidden by customs we have inherited.] [168]

This passage contains many allusions to Aldaghfag's metaphors of being hidden, of being controlled, and all of this being against her will. She wakes up to a "dim" sun that does not provide enough light by which she can walk her path. Do the "closed doors" imprison her, so that she lacks freedom? Is she a prisoner behind these doors, or are these doors closed on her so that she cannot find what she seeks? Her reference to "unknown streets" clearly suggests that she is lost, but by writing that her "flowers are rotten," does the author suggest that she has no future, or that her youth has been taken away? Perhaps she is arguing that youth cannot withstand the circumstances in which she finds herself. As has been stated, the burqu‘a is clothing worn over the face; therefore, the burqu‘a does not physically restrict the movement of the whole body. Yet, for Aldaghfag, the metaphorical burqu‘a is "tightening" her entire being as she attempts to overcome the obstacles of her journey.

Aldaghfag utilizes the image and metaphor of wings here, and in various other places throughout the memoir, both in her narrative and in her choice of titles. I will draw out some meaning from the author's use of this metaphor through examining the different facets and interpretations of the word. Aldaghfag employs the word "wings" (أجنحة) as a central metaphor in her memoir, to point toward freedom and as a symbol of it. When something happens to her

[168] Aldaghfag,13–14.

wings, it is an allusion to how her freedom is affected. We can therefore read the wings as being representative of the concept of freedom throughout the memoir.

كان جناحاها قد توقفا عن الطيران

[Her wings have stopped flying.][169]

أول أجنحتي (تقصد ديوانها الشعري الأول)

[My first wings.][170]

Above, "my first wings" is a reference to Aldaghfag's first public book signing event which was for her second collection of poems.[171] These first wings provided her with the first chance to move toward freedom. Trapped by "isolation's walls," the wings represent her "first" mechanism of escape.

أستعيد أجنحتي المقصوصة، لأحلق خارج جدران عزلتي؟

[I will take back my cut-off wings to fly out of my … walls?][172]

In a statement about the oppression she has suffered, the author refers to the cutting of wings to represent how her freedom has been taken from her. Through her own actions, however, she will liberate herself and fly out of her jail. This takes place both physically, as will be seen regarding the restriction of women's travel in certain passages, below, and also as a metaphor of personal as well as the general imprisonment of Saudi women. In Aldaghfag's memoir, wings are a tool of women's freedom. While using wings as a symbol is popular in Arabic literary works to represent freedom, Aldaghfag reserves it to refer to freedom for women, specifically as

[169] Aldaghfag, 69.
[170] Aldaghfag, 161.
[171] Huda Aldaghfag. (لهفة جديدة) [New Eagerness]. Dar al-Mufradat. Riyadh 2006.
[172] Aldaghfag, 13.

she expresses in the previous quotations.[173] In this way, Aldaghfag's wings contrast with the burqu'a as a symbol of oppression.

Avoiding Political Criticism: Society's Responsibility

A Saudi woman living within Saudi Arabia and publishing under her own name, Huda Aldaghfag risks being accused of violating the laws and norms of the state by standing up for her rights and protesting. She also risks spending time in jail. This may be one important reason why Aldaghfag consistently points toward society, and not the government, as the cause of her complaints. The reader never knows whether she agrees with the Saudi government or not, as she consistently exposes society as the structure that is to blame, as illustrated by the following examples.

On pages 21, 41, 61, and 68 of *I Tear the Burqu'a, I See*, Aldaghfag avoids using the term "politically," in her critiques of life for women in Saudi Arabia instead opts to use "socially." This avoidance of blaming the government in her protest serves to protect the author from repercussions by the state, by shifting responsibility to the vague and intangible "social structure." In the following paragraphs, I will return to the specific examples of how she does this, using chapter titles, as well as evocative and poetic language.

Under the chapter title, [Which citizenship do I want?][174] (أي مواطَنة أريد؟) Aldaghfag discusses Saudi women's status as second-class citizens, subordinate to Saudi men. While identifying this political division, she does not use the word deriving from the root meaning "politics" in her criticism (سياسي/سياسة); instead, she restricts the level of her criticism to social

[173] See for example: الطير في الشعر الجاهلي، عبدالقادر الرباعي . المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر . لبنان 2010. And الطير ودلالته في البنية الفنية والموضوعية للشعر العربي قبل الإسلام. كامل الجبوري. دار الينابيع سوريا.

[174] Aldaghfag, 41.

norms and customs by using the word (مجتمع/اجتماعي). Further, she similarly avoids interaction with political questions on various subjects throughout her memoir which I have divided below into three subsections: the male guardianship law, sexism in the workplace, and lack of mobility.

Aldaghfag refers to the law on male guardianship, a wide-ranging law that impacts millions of Saudi women and has caused global controversy as discussed briefly in Chapter One, as a social dilemma. In her text, she blames the male guardians themselves for their abuses of power. She notes that the government has handed this power to them, without directly pointing at the policymakers—the creators of the law itself. Instead, she calls this law a cancer (ورم خبيث) that does not fit with modernity in the country—once more blaming social norms for the abuses of women's rights, shifting the blame away from policy makers.[175] She recounts different cases where male guardians abuse the power of this law.

Another criticism of Saudi women's status is Aldaghfag's documentation of women's experiences in the workplace. However, while she narrates the injustice that she has faced in her own work and describes the country's systematic and systemic sexism, she does not relate the problem to the state and its regulations, once again pointing the finger at society. For example, when describing the injustices that Saudi women face within cultural institutions, she identifies this as a form of social discrimination. Thus, instead of blaming government-based institutions, she indicates that this as an outgrowth and continuation of society and social discrimination:

توصيف لما تعيشه اجتماعيا

[Women's lived experiences must be described as social].[176]

[175] Aldaghfag, 43.
[176] Aldaghfag, 63.

A third area in which Aldaghfag critiques the social system rather than assigning responsibility to the state is in her criticism of the difficulties that Saudi women face in accessing passports and obtaining permission to travel. While it is the state that issues travel documents and permissions, Aldaghfag complains of how male guardians deprive women of the opportunities to apply for official government services.[177]

> ولا يستخرج للمرأة السعودية محرمها جواز سفر، او قد يتحكم في التصريح لها بالسفر، او ربما حرمها... ولابد لها من الحصول على موافقته من الجوازات الحكومية الرسمية حسب الأنظمة والقوانين التي يسيّرها النظام الاجتماعي.
> حسب الأنظمة والقوانين التي يسيّرها النظام الاجتماعي.

> [A Saudi woman cannot be issued a passport without her male guardian, and he can control her permission to travel, or even forbid her to travel. She also must obtain his permission and present it to the government's passport service, as a regulation that is controlled by the social system].[178]

She repeats this expression in other locations in her memoir [as a regulation that is controlled by the social system.][179]

While this issue does exist as a social problem, and male guardians do often abuse their privilege in preventing women from applying for passports, these men are practicing their right of guardianship over women which was given to them by law and enforced by the Saudi state. Aldaghfag recounts a story about a woman who, after getting a divorce, asked her father to issue her a passport. He refused, saying: "Wait until you get married and ask your husband." She did not give up and used her connections to eventually obtain a passport.[180] This situation is created and governed by the law, which does not give women the right to apply for and obtain their own passports. Therefore, if a woman wants to travel, she can do so only by breaking the law, in order

[177] Aldaghfag, 29–30- 68.
[178] Aldaghfag, 30.
[179] Aldaghfag, 68.
[180] Aldaghfag, 70.

to fight for her right to obtain her own passport. It is difficult to see how this would not be a political matter, as it has relatively little to do with social norms but is in fact connected to and created by the state and its authorities.

Maliha Alshehab argues in her book that those regulations point to the state's policies with a clear accusation. In her writing, when criticizing the male guardianship policies in Saudi women's work, she states:

> لم الدولة تتعامل مع تعليم المرأة كما يتصرف مغامر؟ فلم لا تتعاطى مع تعليم المرأة كاستثمار؟ ... العديد من المهتمين يؤكدون على أن مشكلة المرأة هنا، هو أنه يتم التعاطي معها من خلال منظور اجتماعي (وليس ديني)، قائم على أن المرأة عورة يجب سترها، وناقصة عقل و دين، وبالتالي فهي كائن ثانوي لا يعوّل عليه في التنمية. ويبدو أن هذا المنظور هو نفسه الذي تعمل به السلطة السياسية عند سنّها للتشريعات المتعلقة بالمرأة، ولا أدلّ على ذلك من أن الدولة تصرف المبالغ الطائلة في سبيل تعليم المرأة، ويبغ المخصص لتعليمها نحو ٥٥ في المئة، ومن ثم ينتهي الأمر بها إلى البيت دون أن يرفّ جفن القلق من قبل الحكومة على الأموال التي صرفتها.

> [Why does the state treat women's education as if it is some kind of adventure or exploration? Why not treat women's education as an investment? Many people underline that women's issues here are dealt with from a social rather than a religious perspective—one based on the notion that women are '*awrah*, they must be covered up, and that their minds and religion are weak and lacking. Moreover, they are viewed secondary to men, who will not reliably be able to develop. This perspective is seemingly the same one used in the political system when it comes to enacting legislation related to women. This is obviously the case when the state spends huge sums on women's education--about 55 percent is allotted to this—but at the end of the day she just stays home and the government doesn't even bat an eyelid over this, even to be concerned about all the money they spent.] [181]

More specifically, AlShehab states that this regulation is not a social issue but rather a political one:

> هذا ليس نمط تفكير اجتماعي يمكن السكوت عنه بل هو تشريع وقانون تقوم عليه مؤسسات الحكومة في تعاطيها مع المرأة، وهو نظام يحكم تحركات المرأة ويشلّ حركتها ويقعدها عن الحصول على أبسط حقوقها.

[181] [Maliha Alshehab, *Saudi Woman: Sound and Image*. London: Towa, 2010], 109-110. لندن طوى . المرأة السعودية صوت وصورة . مليحة الشهاب

> [This pattern of social thinking cannot be tolerated. Government bodies deal with women by making legislation and enacting laws that control women's movements, and hinders her from achieving her basic, fundamental rights.] [182]

It may seem that society is responsible for ruling the country as Aldaghfag claims, along with a number of other officials and members of the royal family as I discuss below in Chapter Three. However, these regulations derive from a royal decree as I discuss in depth below in relation to the male guardianship system and the interior ministry's regulations which are supported by royal decree, as seen in the recent change in regulating passports for women.[183]

My reading of Aldaghfag's critique here is that she is not only avoiding political protest, but also excusing the state for its control over women's travel by blaming Saudi society instead. She is recalling the fear of her friend losing her passport and consent of travel:

> فلقد كانت تخشى كثيرا أن يضيعا وتبدأ دوامة أخرى مع إدارة الجوازات في مدينتها التي لا تنتهي دوامة إجراءاتها النظامية مع المرأة بشكل خاص. ولا لوم على ذلك لأن القانون محكوم بالتعامل مع مجتمع تقليدي محافظ، فلكل عائلة سعودية إجراءات خاصة بها وترتبط بآراء وأمزجة ذكورها (أولي أمر الإناث) المتشددة مع الأنثى دون الذكر.

> [She was very afraid that they would be lost then she will have to start again with the Passport Department in her city, which has a never ending cycle of procedures for women in particular. And they are not to blame because this law is made for a traditional conservative society. Each Saudi family has its own procedures, linked to both the strict opinions and also the varying moods of its male guardians in how they deal with women.][184]

This opinion is entirely consistent with her criticism of the male guardianship law. Aldaghfag never points to policymakers, the state, or the government as to blame for the issues faced by Saudi women. She instead protests against society for abusive actions against women that occur

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[182] Maliha Alshehab, 135.
[183] It is important to state that Saudi government changed the regulation of Saudi women obtaining their passports or travelling abroad without permission of the male guardians. See: إدارات الجوازات تبدأ في تنفيذ نظام وثائق السفر المُعدل, Saudi Press Agency https://www.spa.gov.sa/1960556 .
[184] Aldaghfag, 70–71.

in government offices. She implies that the laws against women are in effect because Saudi society is traditional and closed, thereby suggesting that society rules the government. This is not the case, because though Saudi Arabia has a tribal structure it also functions as a state, with the apparatus of a state. It is obvious, however, that Aldaghfag chooses not to risk pointing out the responsibility of the authorities in women's suffering, in order to protect herself. Instead, it seems like she exonerates the state of bearing responsibility and places the blame entirely on a vague social structure, ignoring the fact that the social structure is propped up by the state. Thus, Aldaghfag states a number of times in her memoir that Saudi society—who is indeed responsible, though partially—is to blame for those abusive laws regarding Saudi women.

Throughout her memoir, Aldaghfag discusses the lack of freedom of movement that Saudi women deal with on a daily basis. Although she is considered by Saudi critics to be a brave writer and poet—who has chosen to use the genre of memoir to express her critique, instead of shielding herself through the more indirect genre of fiction—she stops short of crossing what is viewed by many in Saudi Arabia as an uncrossable line.[185] She avoids naming the Saudi state and its policymakers as the reason for women's oppression in relation to key issues: their limited access to travel, their lack of choice in marriage, and their inability to work without the permission of their male guardian. The quotation below shows this clearly:

> وتبدأ دوامة أخرى مع إدارة الجوازات في مدينتها التي لا تنتهي إجراءاتها النظامية مع المرأة بشكل خاص. ولا لوم على ذلك لأن القانون محكوم بالتعامل مع مجتمع تقليدي محافظ.
>
> [These governmental passport services keep their unfair regulations especially for women, and they are not to blame because this law is made for a traditional, conservative society.] [186]

[185] Many studies concur with this, including al-Miqbil, see: إصالح الغامدي. السيرة الذاتية النسائية في المملكة العربية السعودية: http://www.arabicmagazine.com/arabic/articleDetails.aspx?Id=5939 .
Aldaghfag did this also in cultural activities, See: (الدغفق تعتلي منصة الرجال) Okaz newspaper 2011: https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/650255 .
[186] Aldaghfag, 70–71.

In the example above, she begins her descriptions of these problems using incisive language, for example the word (دوامة). She switches to criticizing the social system of the country as the root cause of the problems. She then excuses the law with softer language, for example, when she states (ولا لوم على ذلك لأن القانون محكوم بالتعامل مع مجتمع تقليدي محافظ) [they are not to blame because this law is made for a traditional, conservative society]. She is not only saying that society is the cause of these laws, but also excuses lawmakers and the state for having to make laws for this society. She is claiming that they have no choice in applying such regulations because of societal demands.

She further states that Saudi civil laws are based upon outdated, unjust customs and have not been invented by policymakers. This is not true. For example, the law which forces a woman to obtain a document signed by her male guardian and the police if she wants to rent a hotel room or an apartment under her own name, was not something present within ancient customs or traditions. But while such a regulation was clearly designed and is now implemented by the modern, Saudi state, Aldaghfag refers again to customs as a way to explain it:

> لكن المرأة السعودية ماتزال خاضعة لسطوة بعض القوانين الخاصة بالأحوال الشخصية التي استمدت أنظمتها من العادات وتقاليد الأجداد المجحفة بحق المرأة والمبالغة في إعطاء الرجل حق التصرّف بشؤونها، فهي لا تملك حق التنقل والترحال في بلادها ولايمكنها الإقامة في فندق أو شقة أو بيت مؤجّر إلا إذا أبرزت ورقة موقّعة من ولي أمرها، ومن الشرطة، ومصدّقة من عمدة الحي الذي تسكن فيه في مدينتها ومقرّ إقامتها.

> [Saudi women still suffer under the various regulations that have been taken from the ancient customs against women, which are derived from the unfair customs and traditions of the ancestors. They give men much too much leeway in their rights to act on women's behalf. She does not have the right to move or travel within the country, nor stay in a hotel, apartment or rented house without showing a paper that is signed by her

male guardian, the police, and then certified by the mayor of the neighborhood in which she lives in her city and place of residence.] [187]

As these passages show, this explicit protest in Aldaghfag's language uses direct and brave language, however, she does not manage to find a culprit for all of these abusive regulations other than to mention that they were derived from the old customs.

The Difference in Marriage Laws for Men and Women

Another issue taken up by Aldaghfag is the difference in how laws surrounding marriage and inheritance affect men and women. For example, Saudi men can pass their nationality to non-Saudi wives, but Saudi women cannot pass their nationality to either their non-Saudi husbands or their children.

يمنح السعودي حق الزواج بغير السعودية وتحصل زوجته على الجنسية
بعد زواجهما وإقامتها في السعودية، ولا يمنح ذلك الحق للسعودية ... ومن المجحف استلاب حق
المرأة السعودية في اختيار الزوج الصالح سواء كان سعوديا أو غير سعودي.

[A Saudi man has the right to marry a non-Saudi woman. His wife can obtain Saudi citizenship after five years of marriage and residence in Saudi Arabia. The same right is not given to Saudi women. It is unfair to take away a Saudi woman's right to choose her husband, whether he is Saudi or non-Saudi.] [188]

In addition to the strict restrictions on the freedom of Saudi women which is derived from both social and political sources, Aldaghfag documents how the behavior and comments of religious clerics affects Saudi women. She identifies this as affecting a range of activities including

[187] Aldaghfag, 21.
[188] Aldaghfag, 30-31.

writing and participation in cultural events. In her memoir, Aldaghfag recounts an occasion on which she was heavily criticized by a cleric named ‘Awadh al-Qarni. Al-Qarni published a column mocking Aldaghfag’s poem that was published in the official newspaper *Okaz*, (اشتعالات فرح مُثقل) “Flames of a Heavy Joy.” He wrote:

> كتبت هدى الدغفق تحت عنوان (اشتعالات فرح مثقل)... وانظر التناقض، فرح له اشتعالات، وأيضا مثقل. قالت هدى هذه من ضمن قصيدة حداثية طويلة، لا أريد أن أثقل عليكم بها كلها، ولكن أسمعكم منها ... أهذا كلام العقلاء فضلا عن أن يكون كلام الأدباء أو كما يسمونهم: المبدعين والمتميزين؟!

> [Look at the contrast, joy with flames, this is also a heavy joy!! … Is this a mature speech, rather than a poet’s, or, as they call them, talented and extraordinary writers?!][189]

Al-Qarni is himself neither a literary critic nor a poet. His attack on Aldaghfag’s poetry, however, affected her in a number of ways from her workplace to her family life as she states in her memoir.[190] Aldaghfag’s modern style of poetry has faced significant criticism for its innovative deviation from traditional Arabic poetry. Al-Qarni went further than just one column, however, and followed up on his attack on Aldaghfag in his book *Modernity in the Islamic Scale*.[191] In this book, he linked modern poets—including Aldaghfag—with atheism, querying their belief in Islam and essentially accusing them of blasphemy.[192] This criticism in particular has affected Aldaghfag in both her work and social life as she reports in the memoir.[193]

The Importance of Parents

In literature written by women in Saudi Arabia, the theme of how parents influence the lives of Saudi women is evident. This influence is represented as both positive and negative, but in

[189] الحداثة في ميزان الإسلام. عوض القرني. هجر- مصر1988. [‘Awadh al-Qarni, *Modernity in the Islamic Scale,* (Egypt: Hajr 1988)], 36-37. See also the writer mentioned the critique, Aldaghfag, 100.
[190] Aldaghfag, 101.
[191] الحداثة في ميزان الإسلام عوض القرني.. هجر- مصر1988. ‘Awadh al-Qarni.
[192] Awadh al-Qarni, (26-30).
[193] Aldaghfag,121- 122.

Aldaghfag's memoir it remains consistently positive. Her father was a friend to her before becoming her supporter in becoming a professional writer. He allowed and encouraged her to have contact with the world outside of her family, which was unusual in their social milieu in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s. She made these contacts by mail, with her father's full knowledge. Aldaghfag documents these moments in the memoir as a great opportunity that her father provided her.[194] She would not have been able to contact literary magazines and other Arab writers by mail without his support. Furthermore, he was by her side as she read those letters, after having collected them for her from the post office. Aldaghfag emphasizes the fact that he neither controlled nor censored her letters and she always invited him to read them with her, later discussing the senders and their cultural differences with her.[195] As a result of Aldaghfag having introduced her father to the benefits of having a mailbox, he started sending letters to his own friends who lived in Saudi Arabia for a visit or work then return to their homes. In the same section of the memoir, Aldaghfag describes how Saudi women's lives rely on the openness and generosity of their fathers and guardians.

Huda Aldaghfag's father was not only there to support her in achieving her dreams; he also defended her when her brothers exploited their power as men over her in a misogynistic way. [196] In her descriptions of her family life, Aldaghfag points to her position in relation to her siblings and her preference to spend time in her brothers' circles more than her sisters', despite her brothers being annoyed by her presence.[197] As she puts it,

> وإذا لعب إخوتي أقبلت إليهم وشاركتهم اللعب في دور لاعبة دفاع أو حارسة مرمى. وبالرغم من الضربات المبرّحة لم أكفّ عن مشاركة أخوتي في اللعب.

[194] Mona Alharbi also sees this relationship between Aldaghfag and her father as a basis of her relationships with other men. See Mona Alharbi, *Listening to Saudi Women's Voices in Their Life Writing*, Master's thesis, (Windsor, ON: University of Windsor, 2019), 62.
[195] Aldaghfag, 91.
[196] Aldaghfag, 86- 91.
[197] Aldaghfag, 83.

> [When my brothers are playing football, I love to join them, either in defense or as the goalkeeper. Even getting severely banged up does not stop me from joining them.][198]

She explains her father's role in daily routines as well. Aldaghfag's family had their meals at two different tables separated by gender. She used to eat with the males of the family in their separate room. In response to this, one brother would always yell at her to leave:

> اذهبي إلى مجلس (الحريم) هذا مجلس الرجال.
> [Go to the *hareem* room! This is the men's room.] [199]

Nonetheless, her father would defend her and support her against her brother's assaults.

From her memoir, it is clear how Aldaghfag's father empowered her firstly at the family level then in her active participation in the Saudi cultural atmosphere and her writing. And this recalls the discussion of fiction in previous chapters, where the father's role is positive in Saudi women's lives. In *Hind and the Soldiers* [هند والعسكر] by Badriah Albeshr and *Days of Ignorance* [جاهلية] by Laila Aljohani, the protagonists Hind and Leen have their fathers' support in their families against their mothers and brothers first and then against society itself. We will see further evidence of this in Chapter Three, in which I discuss how Loujain AlHathloul was recorded and supported by her father while she is driving in Riyadh to protest the ban against women driving. It is important to underline the crucial role of the father figure in many Saudi women's protests and also their expressions of protest which emphasize this positive role.

In contrast, one of the first Saudi women's memoirs was written by Sultanah al-Sudairy, who started writing in *Alyamamh* magazine in 1989 until she was forced to discontinue her

[198] Aldaghfag, 83.
[199] Aldaghfag, 83.

writing by her family.[200] This confirms the importance of the family—and the father especially—in Saudi women's protest specifically and writing in general.

As a space of self-expression, published, print, memoir is one location where Saudi women have protested more freely than others. In online spaces, they have even more unrestricted scope to broaden and deepen their protest. Thanks to the advent of the internet, not only are women able to express themselves free of censorship, they can also widen their audiences—from local Saudi citizens to other Arabs and people throughout the world. This is particularly relevant when assessing the role of personal blogs in the creative expression of protest.

Blogs: Spaces for the Self on the Internet

Relative to offline writing, Saudi women have found great relief from constant criticism, attacks, and incessant censorship in using the internet. As scholars have pointed out, "The development of Web 2.0 and the implementation of tools for blogging in Arabic in 2004 gave a democratic boost to Arabic digital expression."[201] From its inception, blogging has provided a breathable space for writers around the world and Saudi women are no exception. In almost every Arab country there are bloggers who criticize the system and a range of political and social circumstances—some of whom have achieved great societal stature, becoming locally and internationally famous. This has attracted the attention of scholars who have for the past decade identified online writing as a public site of debate, critique, and protest: "Arab media scholars

[200] " أما المحاولة الأولى التي قامت بها سلطانة السديري عام 1989، فيبدو أنها لم تنجح، فقد أجبرت الكاتبة بضغط من أسرتها على التخلي عن مواصلة كتابة سيرتها التي كانت قد بدأتها على شكل حلقات نشرت في مجلة اليمامة تحت عنوان (مذكرات امرأة سعودية)." See: [Salih al-Ghamdi, Women's Autobiography in Saudi Arabia, Arabic Magazine], 2017: http://www.arabicmagazine.com/arabic/articleDetails.aspx?Id=5939.

[201] Teresa Pepe, *Blogging from Egypt: Digital Literature, 2005-2016*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 205.

see digital and satellite media as tools for new voices raising controversial issues or prompting public debate of existing political, religious, and economic power structures."[202] In the case of Saudi Arabia specifically, and Saudi women's protest, the freedom from censorship means that their blog posts are often framed more strongly in both tone and intensity. Moreover, Saudi women bloggers have used digital spaces to advance their self-expression and write their life stories.

While censorship of Saudi blogs has not been particularly intense, since the beginning of the movement to use blogging in the country which began in around 2005, various bloggers have nonetheless faced the consequences of highly critical online writing. One of these writers is Fouad AlFarhan, who is known as the "dean" of Saudi bloggers.[203] In addition to his criticism of governmental services, AlFarhan has also used his blog to defend prisoners of conscience (معتقلو الرأي)—a brave act considering he publishes under his real name and identity which is rare. Indeed, AlFarhan was arrested for demanding the release of ten political prisoners in December 2007. He was eventually released in April 2008 with the strangely broad charge of "violation of non-security regulations."[204] This was a critical moment in the history of Saudi blogging as a form of protest. Prior to his arrest, he had written an entry on his blog titled: " لا أريد أن أُنسى في السجن". [I do not want to be forgotten in prison.][205] -- which was taken down after he was apprehended by the authorities.[206]

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[202] Kristina Riegert, "Understanding Popular Arab Bloggers: From Public Spheres to Cultural Citizens." *International Journal of Communication* 9, (2015): 416.
[203] Center of the Protection of Freedom of Journalists: https://cdfj.org/عميد-التدوين-السعودي-يعتقل-في-ظروف-غام/.
[204] Amira Al Hussaini, "Saudi Blogger Fouad Al Farhan Arrested in Jedda," Global Voices, December 23 2007. https://globalvoices.org/2007/12/23/saudi-blogger-fouad-al-farhan-arrested-in-jeddah/; and Sami Ben Gharbia, "Saudi Arabia: Blogger Fouad Alfarhan Released." Global Voices, April 26, 2008: https://advox.globalvoices.org/2008/04/26/saudi-arabia-blogger-fouad-alfarhan-released/.
[205] See Essam Alzamel's blog, www.essamalzamel.com/?p=16.
[206] The first blog was available at www.alfarhan.org. After his release, he ceased blogging for two years, then in 2010 he started another blog at www.alfarhan.ws, where, at the time of writing, he continues to publish new entries.

Although it was a shocking event in the country's blogging movement, AlFarhan's arrest did not stop writers in Saudi Arabia, as throughout the region more generally, from continuing to write and express their words in this new space. Blogging has since grown enormously in terms of both the topics it covers and the geographical extent of the movement. In the Arabic-language blogosphere, Saudi Arabia produces the second-largest amount of digital blogging material after Egypt. The content of Saudi blogs focuses most heavily on personal blogging and technology, and less on political topics; and Saudi women have occupied almost half of the blogosphere (46%) according to a 2009 study.[207]

Saudi Women's Blogs

During the blogging boom in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women bloggers also started to publish under their real names and write their life stories, despite the arrest of Fouad AlFarhan. Two such bloggers are Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjan; I will focus on an analysis of their blogs in the section that follows. Surveying Abdulaziz's blog (which ran from 2008 to 2010), it is clear that the focus is not only on matters concerning the nation, but also on raising awareness of feminist issues, including arranged marriage, male guardianship, and child marriage.

Nouf Abdulaziz stopped blogging in 2010 after receiving a threat from the Saudi government which also extended to her family (though she resumed writing on social media in 2016). On June 6, 2018, during her imprisonment, her friend Mayya Al-Zahrani published a letter from the blogger which she had left to Al-Zahrani in the case of her arrest. In the letter, she states that she is: "just a good citizen, I love my country and I only want what's best for it."[208] Al

[207] Bruce Etling, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey. "Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture, and Dissent." *Berkman Center Research Publication*, no. 2009-06: 24.
[208] "Can't Stop My Tears: Saudi Arabia Arrests Woman for Sympathising with Feminist Activists." The New Arab. June 10 2018: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/6/10/saudi-arabia-arrests-woman-for-sympathising-

Nafjan stopped blogging in 2017, when she was detained along with other Saudi women's rights activists a month before the lifting of the women's driving ban.

These blogs are written by entirely different people with distinct styles of writing, in different languages, and with different target audiences. Abdulaziz's blog تنفّس لا أكثر ("Just Breath")[209] was written in Arabic while Al Nafjan's blog, "Saudiwoman's Weblog," was written in English[210]. I will explore a range of issues that the two bloggers focus on, specifically Al Nafjan's focus on Saudi women's rights especially protesting the driving ban, and Abdulaziz's protest for Saudi citizens' rights more generally.

Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjan

Nouf Abdualziz was known only by her first name and the nickname "Noufah"[211] until she was detained by the Saudi authorities in June 2018, when—in order to seek justice for her—her family released her full name: نوف عبدالعزيز الجريوي; Nouf Abdulaziz Aljerawi.[212] Publishing under only a first name online is similar to publishing anonymously in Saudi Arabia, as it reveals very little about the writer's identity. She wrote in Arabic, specifically in the Saudi dialect, as her blog was aimed at a specific audience: local Saudis and Arabs in the greater Gulf region. Nouf had a unique style of writing where she utilized her wit and sense of humor to criticize the state by mocking it. The blog "تنفس لا أكثر" was divided into various sections, ranging from the personal to the political, as follows:

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with-feminist-activists; see also the Alqst Organization's twitter account: https://twitter.com/alqst_org/status/1005311524859203584?s=21.

[209] In this study, I am using the archived version of the blog, since the original was hacked and taken down after Nouf Abdulaziz's detention: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102074612/http://nofah.com/wordpress/.

[210] Saudiwoman's Weblog, https://saudiwoman.me.

[211] "About," Just Breath, https://web.archive.org/web/20110102083232/http://nofah.com/wordpress/about.

[212] For the rest of this chapter, I will refer to Nouf Abdulaziz by her first name, as this was the name under which she maintained her blog.

أنفاس إنسانية/ أنفاس التطوير / / أنفاس اللقاءات/ أنفاس تكنولوجية/ أنفاس حقوق الإنسان/ أنفاس سياسية/ /Quotes أنفاس أنفاس عامة/ ثرثرة مواطن مطحون/ ملتميديا

> ["Quote Breaths," "Humanitarian Breaths," "Development Breaths," "Interview Breaths," "Technology Breaths," "General Breaths," "Political Breaths," "Human Rights Breaths," "Rattle of the Oppressed Citizen" and "Multimedia."]

Aside from the sections on issues around humanitarianism, human rights, politics, and the oppression of citizens, the other sections were mostly personal and autobiographical writing. I have not included them in the analysis here, since my scope is limited to issues that relate to protest.

In contrast, Eman Al Nafjan's blog was written in English and was aimed at a starkly different audience: a mainly non-Saudi, non-Arab, English-speaking one. Al Nafjan started her blog while campaigning with the group Women2Drive which sought to lift the driving ban for Saudi women. Her early writings focused almost exclusively on this campaign; however, her blog later expanded to touch on many other issues related to Saudi women and Saudi society at large as well as broader human rights violations such as prisons and the Palestinian struggle for liberation. She also included various of her journalistic works and interviews in English-speaking media on the blog. Al Nafjan began the *Saudiwoman's Weblog* on February 1, 2008 and maintained it until September 27, 2017, when she moved to Twitter.

Al Nafjan and Abdulaziz's blogs differ in many ways. Though they both share similar analyses and viewpoints on a wide range of local and international issues, their styles of writing are very different. Since Al Nafjan targets non-Arab speakers, her writing about Palestine, for example, takes on a more aggressive and accusatory tone. She directs her message to Westerners who have been indoctrinated to normalize Zionism and directly attacks Zionism and its supporters. On the other hand, Nouf writes about Palestine to an Arab audience and her language

reflects that. She draws on a language of moral responsibility, sympathy, and the Arab duty to support and fight for Palestinian liberation. She engages in a "calling in" behavior as opposed to Al-Nafjan's tone which could be classified as "calling out."

Indeed, Al-Nafjan's audience being mostly international and/or English-speaking means that her writing is aimed at raising awareness about the condition of Saudi women's rights, particularly as it relates to the campaign against the driving ban. However, her blog is not limited to this campaign and also includes other Saudi women's issues like the male guardianship law, child marriage, child abuse and she also advocates for both male and female prisoners. On the other hand, Nouf writes mostly on topics local to Saudi Arabia or to the Arab region at large since her audience is very local. In fact, she targets Saudis first and Arabs second. This is clear in her use of language where she sometimes writes in a Saudi dialect when addressing a topic that shouldn't necessarily be discussed with a broader audience.

In what follows, I will examine Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman al-Nafjan's blogs by analysing how they write about the same themes. I have identified the following categories to examine: critique and mocking of the Saudi government and government officials, fighting poverty and unemployment, education on human rights, advocating for Palestine and the people of Gaza, and advocating for both Saudi and non-Saudi prisoners of conscience.[213]

Criticism of the Corruption of Government Officials

One of Nouf Abdulaziz's focuses in her blog is protesting various forms of state corruption. She criticizes statements and actions of government officials, poverty, government-awarded construction contracts, and the behavior of members of the Shura (the Saudi parliament). The

[213] Please note that only Nouf Abdulaziz's blog utilizes distinctive categories; therefore, I will be placing Al Nafjan's blog posts within those categories.

different perception of her style of protest will be examined via a selection of her articles that are clearly focused on protest.

In an article titled "ارحموا عقولنا يامسؤولين" [Officials, Have Mercy on Our Brains],[214] Nouf mocks Dr Hisham Nazrah, a health official in the region of Riyadh, with the opening phrase: "I have read the news in [the newspaper *Alyawm*] and I do not want you to miss the joy of laughter." She then goes on to quote the newspaper story about how Nazrah had visited the Shaqra Hospital, located in that region, surprising the health workers there by pretending that he was an unknown patient suffering from a heart attack in order to assess their performance. The story in *Alyawm* included photos of the event, which Nouf used alongside language mocking the official:

أنا أبي أفهم نقطة صغننة أوي يعني هو متخفي الكاميرا بعد متخفية معه
أرحمونا من النصب و اللي يرحم أمكم
و اللي دبل كبدي أكثر أن الدكتور أول كان جاي على جنب شكل ناضرة قال بتسد
الكاميرا عني تعال على جنب عشان تطلع الصورة حلوه
بس ياني قفشتهم بالجرم المشهود لاحظوا الدكتور لما كان مسوي نفسه يكشف على ناضرة و حاط
السماعة على قلبة ما ركبها زين حاطها على رقبته يعني الحركتين اللي مسويها عشان بس التصوير يعني
لا تخفي ولا خرابيط هههههه
يا الله من جد هالمسؤولين حالتهم صعبة بس أحسن شي في الخبر اني ضحكت و الأطباء يقولون الضحك يطيل العمر
صباحكم ضحك و أستخفاف بالعقول .

> [I want to understand a very tiny point; the manager (Dr. Nazrah) was hiding his identity, we got it. Was the camera also hidden with him?! What disguised him even more was that the physician was standing against the camera, first between it and the manager, and then he moved away so the manager could be seen in the photo. You notice the physician when he pretends that he is checking the manager. He places the stethoscope on his neck instead of his heart! Oh my God! Our officials are a disaster! The best thing about this story is how it made me laugh, and the doctors say laughing makes you live longer.] [215]

[214] Nouf, ارحموا عقولنا يا مسؤولين: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/-أرحموا-عقولنا-يا-مسؤولين.
[215] Nouf, ارحموا عقولنا يا مسؤولين: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/-أرحموا-عقولنا-يا-مسؤولين .

In this article, Nouf attempts to expose the foibles of one of the most important government officials in Saudi Arabia. The events described in *Alyawm* happened as a result of the repeated criticism of the health service in Saudi Arabia, especially in hospitals outside of the major cities—Shaqra is 185 km from the Saudi capital. Health officials and the manager Nazrah had intended to achieve two things with this visit and the propaganda around it– first, to improve Nazrah's image among the people of the region and second, to promote the government as consisting of conscientious officials who care about the citizens. In addition to the sarcastic language of her article, Nouf uses emojis to express emotion, in this case laughter. This kind of protest against government officials—which is prohibited by state regulations—would not be possible in published works, even in the self-expressive space of the memoir. In a blog format, Saudi women like Nouf can enjoy an additional space of freedom to express their opinion about state officials with anger, sarcasm, and/or wit.

Criticism of the Women's Driving Ban

The issue of the Saudi ban on female drivers is prominent in Al Nafjan's blog[216] and is thus crucial to this study. In fact, it was the main subject of the Saudiwoman's Weblog. The blogger's writing on this took on various forms, from covering stories of women protesting the ban by driving to exposing the daily restraints on Saudi women's movements, finances, social lives, and more.[217] For example, Al Nafjan shows how the driving ban affects the unemployment rate of

[216] A number of studies covering the campaign for driving rights for Saudi women refer to Al Nafjan as a reliable source on the matter. See, for example, Susana Galán, "Cautious Enactments: Interstitial Space of Gender Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Freedom without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, edited by Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2016).
[217] Eman Al Nafjan, "Saudi Shewolf." Saudiwoman's Weblog, October 31 2009. https://saudiwoman.me/2009/10/31/saudi-shewolf/.

women; many Saudi women can neither afford a private driver—the cost of which would typically consume more than half of a woman's salary—nor do they necessarily have a relative who could reliably drive them to work. This has severely affected the average Saudi woman's ability to obtain financial independence and has pushed women to give up their jobs entirely.

Al Nafjan often provides coverage of recent news, especially related to the driving ban for women. For example, she offered regular updates on the case of Manal Al-Sharif, who was jailed for driving her car. In 2013, she also covered the case of Loujain AlHalthloul, a Saudi woman who attended school in Canada and returned to Saudi Arabia after graduating that year. At the time, the Women2Drive campaign was in search of a Saudi woman with a large social media following willing to use her platform to mobilize others against the driving ban. Most women were not willing to show overt solidarity with the campaign out of a fear of backlash or of losing online followers and fans. Al Nafjan describes in her blog how Loujain AlHathloul was an exception, "Instead of backing down and staying in Canada where she was studying, Loujain booked a flight home to Riyadh and then drove herself from the airport while her father filmed her. Then she posted the video. It drove the opposers crazy! So crazy that the Ministry of the Interior called her father in and made him sign a pledge to not allow her to drive again."[218] I will examine AlHathloul's videos more closely in Chapter Three.

Al Nafjan's blog is significant in how it raised awareness about the Saudi driving ban on an international level. Previously, people around the world could access information or news about Saudi Arabia only through official state channels that were heavily monitored and censored. In fact, during the campaign, state media claimed that Saudi society was not ready for

[218] Eman Al Nafjan, "Loujain Al Hathloul." Saudiwoman's Weblog, November 9 2013. https://saudiwoman.me/2013/11/09/loujain-al-hathloul/.

women driving and that, "Saudi society will determine whether women will be allowed to drive cars."[219] Al Najfan's blog successfully provided an alternative narrative to the official one.

A comprehensive example of her writing can be found in a post titled, "The Iniquity of Imposing a Ban and Fees."[220] In this post, Al Nafjan states that the root of the ban is not, as the official propaganda always claims, societal in nature. She explains the dilemma of ordinary Saudi people, showing the consequences that Saudis of both genders have faced for opposing the ban. In addition, she translates an article by a financial analyst listing the advantages and benefits accrued by the Saudi government through the ban, which amount to billions of US dollars. This came from diverse sources ranging from drivers' visas and insurance, to taxes paid by taxi companies, recruitment agencies, and airlines. As she so incisively points out: "It's no wonder that the Interior Ministry is not overly enthusiastic about the idea of lifting the ban and is firm and strong against women who attempt to exercise their right to drive."[221]

Challenging Poverty and Unemployment

Although Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjans use different approaches, targets and audiences, they both tackle the issues of poverty and unemployment—two of the biggest problems in Saudi society. In what follows, I will explore how Nouf's expressions of protest are mostly aimed at exposing Saudi government officials' refusal to acknowledge these issues whereas English-

[219] Jess Staufenberg, "Saudi Arabia is 'Not Ready' for Women Drivers, Says Deputy Crown Prince." *The Independent*, April 28 2016: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-not-ready-women-drivers-says-deputy-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-a7004611.html; TRT World, "Prince Says Saudi Society Will Decide Women's Driving Rights." April 25 2016: www.trtworld.com/life/prince-says-saudi-society-will-decide-womens-driving-issue-93848 .

[220] Eman Al Nafjan, "The Iniquity of Imposing a Ban and Fees." Saudiwoman's Weblog, September 26 2016. https://saudiwoman.me/2015/09/26/the-iniquity-of-imposing-a-ban-and-fees/.

[221] Eman Al Nafjan, "The Iniquity of Imposing a Ban and Fees." Saudiwoman's Weblog, September 26 2016. https://saudiwoman.me/2015/09/26/the-iniquity-of-imposing-a-ban-and-fees/.

language blogger Al Nafjan attempts to dismantle the stereotype that depicts all Saudis as rich by exposing the issues of poverty and unemployment for a non-Saudi, English speaking audience.

Ranging between sarcastic and angry language, Nouf's article "لايوجد فقراء في بلادنا" [There Are No Poor Citizens in Our Country], criticizes government officials directly. It is filed in her blog under the category, "Rattle of the Oppressed Citizen." Her anger is evident in her language. She dissects the statements of one specific government official, whose aim is to improve the image of the Saudi government internationally. She cleverly uses this clearly false statement as a title to catch her audience's attention. In the article, she explains that her title is a direct quote from a conversation she had with a non-Saudi Arab. She refers to a conversation between herself and an Iraqi friend:

لا يوجد فقراء في بلدنا ..!!!!!
هذا ما نطق به أحد الأخوة العراقيين .. عندما سألته : من قال هذا ؟؟!!
أجاب : من تصريح سمعته في التلفاز لأحد مسؤوليكم يذكر بأن كل مواطن سعودي لديه مالا يقل عن مليون ريال رصيدا في البنك وبيت ملك وسياره

> [No poor people in our country!!! This is what one of my Iraqi friends said. When I asked him, 'Who said this?!' He answered: this is a statement by one of your government officials on the television. [The official had claimed] that every Saudi citizen has at least 1 million riyals in his bank account and owns a house and a car.][222]

Included with the article on the blog is a picture of a shanty house with the sarcastic caption: "Villa of a poor citizen in Arar."[223]

Nouf"s blog entries raise her readers' level of awareness about various national problems in Saudi Arabia, including poverty. While her language is full of emotion which she accentuates

[222] Nouf, "لايوجد فقراء في بلادنا" : https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/-لا-يوجد-فقراء-في-بلادنا.

[223] Arar is a city in the northern region of Saudi Arabia in which many families live below the poverty line.

with her clever use of emojis, her writing is supported by facts and statistics. In "لا يوجد فقراء في بلادنا" [There Are No Poor Citizens in Our Country,] Nouf includes the latest figures from the United Nations regarding poverty in Saudi Arabia:

> رغبت في الضحك على هذه النكتة الطريفة ولكن البسمة غادرتني عندما تذكرت حقائق مثبته يشيب لها الرأس ولا يعرفها الكثير حيث تبين في آخر إحصائية للأمم المتحدة أن:
> عدد المواطنين تحت خط الفقر في بلدنا يبلغ 4% و هذا يعني بأن مدخولهم اليومي يبلغ دولار في اليوم (أي ما يعادل ثلاثة ريالات ونصف)
>
> [I wanted to laugh at this joke, but my smile left my face when I remembered hard facts that would turn your hair grey. Many do not know the latest statistics from the United Nations: the proportion of citizens living under the poverty line in our country is 4%, and that means their daily income is 1 dollar, 3.50 riyals.][224]

In these articles, Nouf writes for local readers and criticizes the false image that Saudi officials have intentionally broadcasted to the international community. Al Nafjan discusses the issue of poverty to her international audience by challenging stereotypes:

> For people who have never been to Saudi Arabia, the fact that we are one of the biggest producers of oil often gives the impression of affluence. And in major tourist attractions around the world, every Saudi tourist is thought to be a member of royalty. That's why I believe it's important to show that that privilege and extravagance is only true for a very small and shrinking faction of Saudi society. Some of the rest are well-off as a middle-class. And then we have the majority; people living from paycheck to paycheck or some who can't find jobs.[225]

While she aims at countering the false international image of Saudis, Nouf cites a Saudi official that enforces this stereotype. Al Nafjan insists on correcting that image with another post, which includes a cartoon showing the effects of rising oil prices on the poverty level in Saudi Arabia:

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[224] Nouf, "لايوجد فقراء في بلادنا" : https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/-لا-يوجد-فقراء-في-بلادنا.

[225] Eman Al Nafjan, "Poverty in KSA." Saudiwoman's Weblog, November 12 2009: https://saudiwoman.me/2009/11/12/poverty-in-ksa/.

> I thought I might share it here to help wipe out the misconception that Saudis are gaining anything from the rise in oil prices. It pretty much speaks for itself but for those of you who are gullible enough to think that oil money goes directly to Saudi pockets I'll explain. The rise in oil means a rise in transportation, food prices and the majority of all industries. And we like all the rest of the human race use these on a daily basis. So we are having our own little inflation party just like everywhere else.[226]

In connection with the issue of poverty in Saudi, Al Nafjan also writes about the high rate of unemployment in the country in general, and specifically for women.

These posts by Nouf Abdulaziz and Eman Al Nafjan are linked indirectly to one another, although they are not engaging with the same sources. It is important to mention that criticism of government officials is illegal in Saudi Arabia, as is criticism of the government itself, having been enshrined in a recent law with the penalty of both a fine and imprisonment.[227] Criticizing poverty or government services, for example, is not permitted at all in the public sphere. It is for these very reasons—coupled with ones that I outlined in the introduction—that I categorize the use of blogs by Saudi women to criticize the state as an act of protest.

Writing about Censorship

Censorship and freedom of speech are popular and controversial topics in Saudi writing, both on and offline. While most traditional publishing channels cannot openly discuss the censorship they regularly face, online writers can not only demonstrate their awareness of censorship but also protest it. This was seen in the case of Fouad AlFarhan, the first Saudi blogger who was arrested. The AlFarhan case—along with other cases of Saudi publishers, writers, or performers

[226] Eman Al Nafjan, "Al Watan Newspaper Oil Prices Cartoon." Saudiwoman's Weblog, May 25 2008: https://saudiwoman.me/2008/05/25/al-watan-newspaper-oil-prices-cartoon/.
[227] "'Decade in Jail' for Criticizing Saudi King or Crown Prince, Death Penalty for 'Terrorists'." The New Arab. November 5 2017. https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/11/5/decade-in-jail-for-criticising-saudi-crown-prince.

who were censored or banned from expressing themselves publicly—were frequently discussed by various bloggers, including Al Najfan.[228]

One of Al Najfan's posts concerns a spokesperson from the Ministry of Administration and Culture who announced that a bill would be introduced to monitor the online sphere.[229] The Ministry later confirmed that the statement she was reporting on was wrong and Al Nafjan updated her post with this information.[230] Al Nafjan, moreover, covers various other stories regarding online censorship, discussing the topic by providing the source, showing its causes, and following through by considering the ways in which Saudis—who she describes as a tech-savvy mass of people—find their way around the blocking of websites and applications.[231] Nouf Abdulaziz's blog writing takes a similar approach, as will be explored below in the context of her attempt to publish a newspaper article advocating for a prisoner of conscience.

Advocating for Prisoners of Conscience

Both blogs regularly advocate on behalf of prisoners of conscience, and both bloggers discuss the cases of prisoners of various backgrounds and nationalities. While Al Nafjan focuses on the cases of individuals who have been incarcerated in relation to the women's driving ban, such as Manal Alsharif, she also writes about other female prisoners who are neither in her circle nor do

[228] Eman Al Nafjan, "Suspensions and Censorship." Saudiwoman's Weblog, November 2 2010: https://saudiwoman.me/2010/11/02/suspensions-and-censorship/; "Censored in KSA." Saudiwoman's Weblog, March 24 2010: https://saudiwoman.me/2010/03/24/censored-in-ksa/.

[229] Eman Al Nafjan, "Ministry of Culture and Information Puts a Damper on National Day." Saudiwoman's Weblog, September 23 2010: https://saudiwoman.me/2010/09/23/ministry-of-culture-and-information-puts-a-damper-on-national-day/ .

[230] "Update 25 September: In case you missed it in the news, AFP contacted the ministry the very next day and the ministry denied that it will there will be any form of registration required from bloggers and forum owners. They claim that the spokesperson Al Haza'a was misunderstood": https://saudiwoman.me/2010/09/23/ministry-of-culture-and-information-puts-a-damper-on-national-day .

[231] Eman Al Nafjan, "CITC Blocking Games." Saudiwoman's Weblog, June 11 2013: https://saudiwoman.me/2013/06/11/citc-blocking-wars/.

they hold the same ideas as Alsharif, namely Hailah al-Qusayer and Wafa al-Yahya. In the case of these two women, very few facts are known except for the claim by Saudi authorities that they are linked to Al-Qaida. Al Nafjan follows their stories closely, putting together information from various sources including official government channels and social media, as well as covering the protests of their families and supporters.

Al Nafjan does not, however, write exclusively about female prisoners. Like Nouf Abdulaziz, she also reports on male political prisoners—or as they are called in Saudi Arabia, prisoners of conscience (معتقلو الرأي). She composed posts, for example, dedicated to both Waleed Abu Al-Khair and Matrouk al-Falih. Al Nafjan's feminist perspective is reflected in her post titled, "Saudi men who have gone to prison for helping Saudi women."[232] In this entry, she describes how three Saudi men of different generations helped Saudi women assert their rights. She also mentions Abdulkareem al-Juhaiman, who wrote about the need for girls' education before it was authorized by a royal decree in 1960. Al-Juaiman was detained and forbidden to publish his writing by the Saudi authorities. She also tells the stories of Salih al-'Azzaz, who was jailed for documenting the historical protest of Saudi women for the right to drive in 1991, and Tariq al-Mubarak, who was jailed for helping Saudi women in a virtual driving campaign in 2013. While none of these men were activists, Al Nafjan celebrates their roles in the history of Saudi women's fight for their rights—specifically in the driving campaign and in the fight for equal education.

On the other hand, when it comes to the same topic of political prisoners, Nouf Abdulaziz takes a different approach, as might be expected. Nouf is known for her support of political

[232] Eman Al Nafjan, "Saudi Men Who Have Gone to Prison for Helping Saudi Women". Saudiwoman's Weblog, November 2 2013: https://saudiwoman.me/2013/11/02/saudi-men-who-have-gone-to-prison-for-helping-saudi-women/.

prisoners; in fact, one charge that she is currently facing in her present detainment is related to her advocacy for prisoners of conscience.[233] In addition to advocating for them on her blog, she has also campaigned on their behalf on both Facebook and Twitter. She advocated boldly for both Saudi and non-Saudi political prisoners, by publishing long and comprehensive articles covering their cases. She campaigned on behalf of Saud Mukhtar,[234] a doctor who had already been jailed before being put on trial and eventually receiving a 30-year sentence. Nouf Abdulaziz, like many Saudis, believes Mukhtar to be an innocent man, who faced unjust charges and a trial that was an affront to justice. Nouf's blog has two articles concerning his case, one published alongside a video of Mukhtar's 90-year-old mother demanding justice for her son.

The second article about Mukhtar, titled, "Our Free Press and the Political Prisoners,"[235] begins with a quotation from Dr Mukhtar himself: "الحرية أرغب إليها مهما كان الثمن" [I want freedom, whatever it costs.] Nouf goes on to recount a personal story about her own attempt to publish an article in the press, narrating how she had heard about Dr Mukhtar and his hunger strike in response to the physical and psychological torture he received at the hands of the authorities. She wrote an article aiming to raise awareness about his case in an attempt to influence public opinion. Nouf submitted her article to a renowned newspaper for publication,[236] but it was rejected. This was not because it was of low quality, but because it allegedly broke state protocol and rules of publishing. When Nouf asked for more information about those rules, she was told:

لأن الخبر سياسي و هناك قوانين مفروضه على الصحافة و لا يمكنهم تجاوزها و خصوصاً أخبار معتقلي الرأي السياسيين

[233] السعودية: اعتقال المدونة نوف عبد العزيز الجريوي. مراسلون بلاحدود. June 2018: https://web.archive.org/web/20190331192809/https://rsf.org/ar/news/-62.

[234] Dr Mukhtar was one of ten academics detained simultaneously over their movements towards reform in Saudi Arabia. They have been dubbed "The Ten Reformers."

[235] Nouf Abdulaziz, "صحافتنا الحرة ومعتقلي الرأي السياسيين" June 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102081427/http://nofah.com/wordpress/صحافتنا-الحرة-و-معتقلي-الرأي-السياسيين/ .

[236] It is unclear whether Nouf believed that the article might be published, or if she submitted it knowing it would be refused simply to illustrate the situation regarding freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia, where the official news media are controlled by the government.

[This story is political, and there are rules applied to the press that cannot be crossed, especially regarding prisoners of conscience.][237]

Surprised by this answer, Nouf makes a comparison between the treatment of prisoners of conscience, on one hand, and terrorists, on the other, to illustrate the double standard applied in the official treatment of the two. She confronts the government:

تعجبت صراحة ما الأخطر برأيكم الإرهابي أم سجين الرأي طبعاً الإرهابي لأنه يقتل و يفجر و سجين الرأي سلمي

فلماذا نرى المعاملة السيئة لسجناء الرأي رغم أنهم لم يقتلوا و ييتموا و معاملة رائعه جداً للإرهابيين ..؟!!

[Honestly, I was surprised. Who is the most dangerous in your opinion? The terrorist or the prisoner of conscience? Of course, the terrorist who kills and bombs, while the prisoner of conscience is peaceful. Why, then, do we see such horrible treatment towards those prisoners, and wonderful treatment of terrorists?][238]

Nouf makes this comparison again in her second article on Dr Mukhtar, where she highlights how the basis of the double standard is the government's fear of political prisoners. Further, in recognition of the many other political detainees in Saudi Arabia, Nouf discusses the cases of both Dr Mohammed Abdulkareem and Dr Mubarak al-Zuair, for whom she leads solidarity campaigns on social media. She also mentions the Syrian female activist Tal al-Malouhy.[239]

Nouf's style of writing about prisoners of conscience focuses on presenting them as individuals. She provides a narrative about their life, sharing their work, thoughts, and ideas in order to confront the government's persecution of these citizens and intellectuals and build solidarity in public opinion. For such important thinkers and upstanding citizens to be put behind bars does not make sense to Nouf; it is an act of injustice. Al Nafjan writes her stories as a

[237] Nouf Abdulaziz, "صحافتنا الحرة ومعتقلي الرأي السياسيين", June 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102081427/http://nofah.com/wordpress/صحافتنا-الحرة-و-معتقلي-الرأي-السياسيي/.

[238] Nouf Abdulaziz, "صحافتنا الحرة ومعتقلي الرأي السياسيين", June 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102081427/http://nofah.com/wordpress/صحافتنا-الحرة-و-معتقلي-الرأي-السياسيي/.

[239] Nouf Abdulaziz, "طل الملوحي حرة أبية", September 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102131418/http://nofah.com/wordpress/طل-الملوحي/.

journalist. She doesn't argue against authority or the state and she also doesn't use an emotional tone; instead, she provides a life narrative and facts of the case.

An example of how Nouf Abdulaziz approaches her subject can be seen in her article: "Mubarak al-Zuair, Biography of a Good Citizen."[240] and "Freedom for Dr Muhammed Abdulkareem."[241] The language of the titles is clear and direct. She takes the opportunity in her article on Dr al-Zuair to track the violence of the Saudi government against the activist, creating a sort of archive of the events surrounding his arrest. For example, she describes Dr al-Zuair's father's arrest and detention for nine years with neither trial nor charge, his own previous arrest and detention for 10 months without a trial, his work against government corruption, his advocacy, alongside other professors and activists, for a civil society organization association system, and his participation in a march for Saudi solidarity with Gaza and Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 2006. Both demands were refused by the government and all group members ended up in jail.

The Question of Palestine

The Saudi women bloggers discussed in this study not only attempt to defend and support both Saudi and non-Saudi individuals in Saudi Arabia, they also engage with the issue of Palestine and the right of Palestinians to their land. The Palestinian struggle is an important one for Saudis, especially given the state's official relationship with the Zionist occupiers and the conspicuous absence of criticism against the occupation in official Saudi news channels and social media. Both blogs have various articles on this matter, including about the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, a

[240] The post is deleted in Nouf's blog, but it can be found here with the source of the original blog of Nouf: " مدونة فيحان العتيبي": http://faihan1.blogspot.com/2013/05/blog-post_20.html.
[241] Nouf Abdulaziz, "الحرية للدكتور محمد العبدالكريم" December 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102093608/http://nofah.com/wordpress/الحرية-للعبدالكريم.

fleet of six civilian ships led by human rights activists that carried humanitarian aid and construction materials to Gaza.[242] In an article published before the intervention by the Israeli Army, Nouf Abdulaziz records her disappointment in not being able to participate. Shaming herself and other Saudis for sharing Arab blood with the people of Gaza yet not assisting them enough. She says she and her fellow citizens, have "hearts of stone": " لا أعلم لماذا تحولنا إلى آلات لا تملك إحساسًا ولا مشاعر بإخواننا وقضاياهم". [I do not know why we became machines without any feelings towards our brothers and their issues.][243] Another of Nouf's articles focuses on Rachel Corrie, an American activist killed in Gaza by the Israeli military.[244]

Furthermore, her blog also attempts to provide financial help to Palestinians, for example, in the article titled, "أخونا الفلسطيني يستنجد بنا فهل من منقذ" [Our Palestinian Brother is Seeking Us Out, Is Anyone Ready to Help?][245] Nouf describes here how she received an email from a young Palestinian man explaining his family's difficult financial situation and asking for help in finding a remote job for him. Before quoting from the email in her article, she asks her readers to help this young man:

> رسالة وصلتني على الإيميل أدمت قلبي بشدة حان وقت تنفيذ كلامنا كلنا نقول أن علينا واجب مساعدتهم
> فها قد أتت الفرصه ويجب أن نثبت كلامنا
> تحدثت مع أخي محمد وقد تأكدت من حالته ولدي ما يثبت تقارير وشهادات.
>
> [I have received an email that made my heart bleed. It is time to do what we always say: "we have to help them". Here is the chance; we must

[242] Nouf Abdulaziz, "قافلة الحرية أظهري عوراتنا وزيدينا عريًا", May 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102090344/http://nofah.com/wordpress/قافلة-الحرية-أظهري-عوراتنا-وزيدينا-عر/ .
[243] Nouf Abdulaziz, "قافلة الحرية أظهري عوراتنا وزيدينا عريًا", May 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102090344/http://nofah.com/wordpress/قافلة-الحرية-أظهري-عوراتنا-وزيدينا-عر/ .
[244] Nouf Abulaziz, "ويلٌ للعرب من قلب قد اخترب", February 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102081715/http://nofah.com/wordpress/ويل-للعرب-من-قلب-قد-إخترب/ .
[245] Nouf AbdulAziz, "أخونا الفلسطيني يستنجد فهل من منقذ؟", February 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102093035/http://nofah.com/wordpress/أخونا-الفلسطيني-يستنجد-بنا-فهل-من-منقذ/ .

> make good on our words. I spoke with my brother Muhammad to confirm his family's situation.][246]

Nouf Abdulaziz not only does her part as a blogger by simply writing about his situation, but she also started a fundraising campaign for the family.

The solidarity in Nouf's writing is clear in her coverage of many cases locally and abroad. As explored above, her writing is not limited to Saudi matters; her solidarity and protest extends to many other issues that concern Arabs and Muslims, including the question of Palestine. Through her evocative writing she targets her audience's emotions, while also including facts and statistics in her reports. In contrast to Nouf Abdulaziz's evocative language, Eman Al Nafjan's journalistic style shows less emotion, even when writing about difficult subjects such as the struggle for Palestinian liberation and/or political prisoners. Her writing is full of facts and information, especially in the articles about Palestine. The Saudiwoman's Weblog often covers what is occurring on the ground in Palestine by providing information and facts about the fight against Zionists and spreading awareness about the political and humanitarian situation in occupied Palestine. Because Al Nafjan's target audience is English speakers, presumably outside Saudi Arabia, this means her articles about Palestine are often written as introductions to issues and topics. In contrast to her avoiding the usage of harsh or explicitly accusatory tone when writing about the campaign to lift the driving ban, Al Nafjan strongly condemns Israeli officials and their Western supporters:

> The west calls Arabs terrorists and all the real terror started when western countries supported a bunch of radical Zionist in creating a Jewish state out of thin air … They stole, tricked and terrorized people off the land.[247]

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[246] Nouf Abdulaziz, "أخونا الفلسطيني يستنجد فهل من منقذ؟", February 2010: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102093035/http://nofah.com/wordpress/أخونا-الفلسطيني-يستنجد-بنا-فهل-من-منقذ/.

[247] Eman Al Nafjan, "The Biggest Irony." Saudiwoman's Weblog, January 2009. https://saudiwoman.me/2009/01/09/the-biggest-irony/.

In these examples, it is evident that the scope of Saudi women's protest expands to various issues. This is not only true in blog format; Saudi women have often advocated for Palestinian liberation in various ways. In the upcoming chapter, I will be exploring specifically Saudi women's opposition to state normalization with Israel.

Saudi National Day

Nouf Abdulaziz's blog is a creative expression of protest in relation to many issues: the crackdown on activists and writers, poverty, the mistreatment of prisoners of conscience, government corruption, and the Palestinian struggle for liberation. The National Day of Saudi Arabia provides her with a further occasion to raise her voice in protest, complaining that such a celebration is not appropriate while serious social, political, and economic problems persist. Two important articles about Saudi National Day appear on her blog in the years 2010 and 2011. I discuss them below in order to show her protest and disagreement with the government.[248]

In her article titled, 'Oh My Nation, Continue on the Path of Betrayal,"[249] she borrows the word "nation" to frame her protest. In the article,"في اليوم الوطني يا وطني" [Oh My Nation, On Your Day],[250] she takes this further and begins with a statement that only few have the courage to say in public:

أملك الجرأة أكثر من كثير غيري لأعلنها بملأ فمي أكره اليوم الوطني يا وطني ☹
أكره يوماً يتراقص فيه الناس على خيباتهم و على جراح غيرهم ممن هضمت حقوقهم..!!
يوماً لا يضاف فيه أي قرارات تخدم الشعب .. يوماً عندما أتأمل فيه الوطن أرى الظلم يزداد و الحق يتخاذل ..!!
و الأغنياء يزدادون غنى و الفقراء يزدادون فقراً و جوعاً..!!

[248] To read more about this mix up between the government and the nation in Saudi society, see: Faid al-Alaywi, 97-98.
[249] Nouf Abdulaziz, "يا بلادي واصلي في درب خذلاني واصلي". September 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102081715/http://nofah.com/wordpress/يا-بلادي-واصلي-في-درب-خذلاني-واصلي .
[250] Nouf Abdulaziz, "في اليوم الوطني يا وطني", September 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/في-اليوم-الوطني-يا-وطني .

> [I am braver than many when I announce that I hate National Day, Oh National Day ☹ I hate a day on which people celebrate at the cost of other peoples' disappointments and pain, those people whose rights are abused!! It's day that's never made any governmental decisions in favour of the people. It's a day on which, when I observe the nation, I see injustice growing and justice disappearing, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and hungrier!!][251]

Explaining her reasons further, she states: "I hate, I hate, I hate to think only of myself and forget others … I belong to the nation of the oppressed people." Maintaining her signature style, Nouf utilizes emojis to emphasize the feelings expressed in the article, also underlining her sarcastic tone.

Furthermore, the header of Nouf's blog contains a subtitle with a strong statement, highlighting the word "nation" (مصدر كلمة وطن):

> مُوَاطِنَة تَفْتَقِدُ لِلْمُوَاطَنَة تعيش في مَنْفَى الوَطَنَ وتَبْحثُ عن وَطَنِ المَنْفَى
>
> [A citizen who misses having citizenship, lives in exile in the nation, and searches for a nation of exile.]

In contrast to Nouf Abdulaziz's animosity towards Saudi National Day, Eman Al Nafjan rejoices in it, using her journalistic skills to cover the celebrations of regular Saudis on the streets. This different viewpoint of the two bloggers towards National Day celebrations makes an interesting point of comparison. While Nouf refuses to celebrate the holiday because of the government's flaws, Al Nafjan separates the government and its actions from the nation. She celebrates the national day in her blog under a post titles: "It's Saudi Arabia's Birthday"[252] where

[251] Nouf Abdulaziz, "في اليوم الوطني ياوطني", September 2009: https://web.archive.org/web/20110102195450/http://nofah.com/wordpress/في-اليوم-الوطني-يا-وطني/.
[252] Eman Al Nafjan, "It is Saudi Arabia's Birthday", Saudiwoman's Weblog , September 2010: https://saudiwoman.me/2010/09/22/its-saudi-arabias-birthday/.

she celebrated by including some national songs.

Conclusions

Through the examples discussed above, it is evident that these two Saudi women bloggers have their own individual writing styles, language, and focus; however, we can also read their work together in how they creatively use these to perform acts of protest. While they do take different approaches, they both share the same goals of advocating for women's rights and criticizing the voices of authority who harm the general public by ignoring or exacerbating issues of poverty or weak public infrastructure. They both also expand their critiques to express sympathy and solidarity with struggles of people in other Arab and Muslim countries.

Through these blogs, together with the memoir by Huda Aldaghfag discussed earlier in this chapter, I analyze how Saudi women are aware not only of their own rights and local issues that affect them, but are also just as informed about international issues. This awareness has surely expanded thanks to the internet and its important role in Saudi society. It is not only their awareness that crosses borders; the target of their opposition and protest will also often expand to international locations. I will explore this concept more closely when examining other genres through which Saudi women express their creative protest, moving on to interviews in Chapter Three and finally Twitter, in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three:
Expression Beyond Letters

Saudi women express themselves in spaces that do not belong to them, both through the production of literary works like novels and poetry, as I discuss in Chapter One, as well as memoirs, and in digital spaces with blogs, as I discuss in Chapter Two. Occupying the public sphere, through the use of media, is another way Saudi women perform acts of protest. Some examples of the varied platforms they use include broadcast media, television, and radio, as well as in print media such as newspapers and magazines. As emphasized in previous chapters, each platform has its own freedoms and limitations and therefore allows for a specific kind of creative production. This section is divided into two sections. The first singles out a form that may not always be thought of as creative —the interview. In it, I examine interviews as a format that enables acts of protest, in a context where protest actions are very limited. I will show the importance of interviews and how they are a unique platform that allows for a more in-depth exploration of social issues. In the second section, I focus on the creation of short videos which circulate on digital interview platforms especially YouTube and the now defunct Keek, as well as briefly touching on Twitter videos. My analysis of interviews and videos is done through a close examination of the interviewer or creator, her vocabulary, tone of voice, appearance, and body language.

In order to show the ways in which interviews function as art and protest, I have singled out one person who has given numerous interviews to analyze here. In what follows, I will analyze interviews with Aziza al-Yousef, a retired professor at King Saud University in Riyadh who has a long history with protesting for Saudi women's rights. She was one of the first activists in Saudi Arabia to master the form of the interview. Al-Yousef is an important figure in

the Saudi women's protest movement and her interviews have given a great deal of explanation to political campaigns about feminist issues as I will return to in Chapter Four in relation to Twitter. She was actively involved in protesting against male guardianship laws and the driving ban, as a member of both campaigns. Her hard work in building the foundations of Saudi women's rights has without a doubt benefitted the current generation. While many Saudi women have witnessed a limiting of their rights, al-Yousef has not stayed silent, she worked in different groups with religious scholars to define the way in which male guardianship is viewed within Islam as a religion. After the discussion of Al-Yousef's interviews, the second part of this chapter will cover short videos, with a focus on the productions of the well-known social media activist Loujain AlHathloul as well as the less-known figure, Nuha al-Balawi.

Interviews: Raising Awareness

In this first section of the chapter, I will focus on the interviews given by Aziza al-Yousef that are available online. While one of al-Yousef's goals when engaging in these acts of protest is to raise awareness about the illegitimacy of such laws, she has been prevented from speaking and censored by the state at multiple points. As she has said: "I am not allowed to give any talk or workshop about male guardianship in any school.[253] She blames the government not only for preventing her from speaking, but also for failing to fulfill its function to society. She claims that it is the responsibility of the state to raise awareness about issues in society. The following pages take Aziza al-Yousef as a case study of a Saudi woman activist who protests against unfair practices in Saudi society through the creative medium of recorded video interviews. Similarly to

[253] إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة," YouTube, user خليجية, October 31, 2016 at 15:14. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w .

the analysis that have preceded this chapter, this section will discuss al-Yousef's artistic creativity in the interviews and how they relate to her protest for women's rights: her use of language, expressions and tone of voice, as well as her appearance.

Public education and raising social awareness are some of the major motivations of al-Yousef's work. Before starting the campaign against male guardianship, she used to lead workshops about the male guardianship system to help people understand the law behind it and its relationship to Islam.[254] These workshops were by definition informal, since, as al-Yousef expresses in the citation above, the government had failed in its own job of raising awareness about this law and did not officially allow citizens to arrange such educational events themselves.[255] This approach by al-Yousef is evident in each of the interviews analyzed in this section, wherein she emphasizes the importance of taking consistent action, including the demand for knowledge and information as well as the importance in sharing this knowledge with society.

Al-Yousef has a methodical approach to her campaigns which translates to the way she conducts herself and the way she presents her analyses in interviews. Indeed, she will often offer clear steps and a comprehensive timeline of socio-political campaigns. As a thorough intellectual who believes, as indicated from the above citation, that education is at the core of any action, she will often seek out other experts in the field to make informed public statements. In the case of the male guardianship law, she approached a well-known law firm to commission a study about the role of male guardianship in Islam. She explains that to effectively formulate demands that

[254] Leila Ettachfini, "The Saudi Women Fighting Their Country's Sexist 'Guardian' System," *Vice*, September 30, 2016. www.vice.com/en/article/bjgxad/the-saudi-women-fighting-their-countrys-sexist-guardian-system .
[255] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة" at 6:26 : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w .

oppose the law, it is important to understand its context.[256] After commissioning this study, al-Yousef launched her protest. It was not done on the streets, on the internet, or in any other public space. Instead, she targeted official channels by presenting a petition signed by fifteen Saudi women, to the Council of 'Ulama, King Abdullah, the Shura Council, and the Saudi Royal Court, among others. This kind of protest is different from the others covered in this dissertation. Some writers pursue their protest in publications across various literary forms, and others create and use their own digital spaces of self-expression by blogging or using social media. Al-Yousef develops her own unique approach, however, that draws on techniques of explaining, debating, and educating.

Her preparation of a legal basis for her protest ensured that she would be offering something more than simply her opinion and she made appearances on the Saudi sponsored Rotana Khalijia television channel to present her work. She remains proud of what she has done which is important to inspire the young generation who are currently protesting on Twitter as will be analysed in Chapter Four.[257] In discussing her campaign to abolish the male guardianship law, she documents the steps she took in working towards demanding this, which first and foremost required a re-framing the question as a human right issue. She explains how she ensured that her protest would be based on historical and legal facts. Likewise, in campaigning against the driving ban, she took the unique approach of driving in Riyadh between 2011 and 2013, recording herself and publishing the footage on YouTube as proof of her protest. Her carefully systematic methods of building her protest have made al-Yousef's creative expression all the more impactful. This impact can be traced, first to other Saudi women who are inspired by

[256] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة" at 6:30: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w .

[257] Not only herself, but also the men in her family are proud of her and her protest. See Leila Ettachfini: https://www.vice.com/en/article/bjgxad/the-saudi-women-fighting-their-countrys-sexist-guardian-system .

her work and replicate her protest and, second, to the general image of Saudi women's protest as a mature and educated one. The second point is extremely important and marks a shift in public discourse as opposition to the campaign would often label Saudi women's protest as centered on immature demands from either teenagers or women with western agendas.

A feature of the way in which al-Yousef expresses her protest through her use of language and expression is to present her demands directly and clearly. She presents these rights for women as something that should be demanded without wavering. Some Saudis would prefer that women not have the rights that al-Yousef is demanding, and do not approve of her public appearances in mainstream media to make her case. This means that, at times, there have been calls for example to survey the Saudi public to determine general sentiment towards granting or denying these rights. Al-Yousef's answer is always the same: these are human rights, and these rights ought not be surveyed or questioned.

أنا أريد مطالبة الحكومة... توجهي هو الحكومة وليس بحسب أصوات مؤيدة

> [I want to make demands on the government, my target is the government and does not depend on more voices.][258]

Her insistence and unwavering stance are characteristic of her expression and how she chooses to make her arguments and points in public. My analysis will focus on how al-Yousef is willing to make it plain that her protest is explicitly targeting the state.

Consistent with my claim above that the interview itself can be a form of creative expression, I will read three interviews that al-Yousef gave using techniques of literary analusis in what follows. I have chosen three specific interviews—two of them from television shows and

[258] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة" at 10:30: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w .

one published in a newspaper—to analyze. I chose these specific three works because, in addition to displaying clear acts of protest advocating for Saudi women's rights, she also presents a thorough background behind *why* she is protesting. In the interview on the Yahala show for example, she was a guest along with a conservative professor who stood against the Saudi women's protest movement. In this interview, al-Yousef protests not only regulations, but she speaks with the opposition directly by debating them in good faith for the world to see. In her written interview that she gave to *The Arab Weekly*, she explains the state of women's rights in Saudi society to an English-speaking audience. These three interviews provide rich and useful information about these campaigns while also including a narrative and history of their movements. Moreover, they display a unique approach to performing acts of protests; hence why I am choosing to analyse them as creative expressions.

The first television interview that I will be analysing occurred on October 30, 2016 on "Etijahat" (إتجاهات)—a talk show broadcasted by the channel Rotana Khalijiah (روتانا خليجية) -- and was published on YouTube the very same day.[259] The interview is titled " هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية" [Hashtag: Saudi Women Are Demanding to End Male Guardianship]. It took the form of a one-on-one conversation with the presenter Nadine al-Bedir and discussed the male guardianship campaign on Twitter.[260] However, al-Yousef also took the opportunity to present the background of this campaign before it started on social media, especially Twitter, and described her role in the campaign.

The second interview, "أكاديميات وناشطات حقوقيات يطالبن بإلغاء الولاية المطلقة على المرأة" [Academics and Human Rights Activists are Demanding to End Male Guardianship over

[259] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة," YouTube, user خليجية, October 31, 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w .
[260] See Chapter Four of this dissertation for a more in-depth discussion of this Twitter campaign.

Women][261] was broadcasted on the TV show "Yahala" (يا هلا) on the Rotana Khalijia channel. It aired on March 2, 2014. This interview took the form of a panel with another guest, Dr Salih al-Osaimi, who was presented in opposition to al-Yousef. [262] In addition to the two television interviews, "A Conversation with Saudi Women's Rights Advocate Aziza al-Yousef" was published in *The Arab Weekly* newspaper on November 6, 2016.[263] This interview is different to the television interviews in that it was published in English for an international audience, as opposed to in Arabic for a regional audience.

Physical Appearance

In all three interviews al-Yousef appeared wearing a black veil covering her hair, a black abaya, and without makeup. Her quiet, subdued look complemented the tone of her speech and approach to discussion on the television broadcasts, including in her debate with Dr Salih al-Osaimi on "Yahala." Al-Yousef's physical appearance in the interviews is important in this particular context, since most criticism of Saudi women's rights activists claims that they are overly affected by Western life and media, that they have adopted Western feminism, and that they have suspicious connections with foreign agendas.[264] However, al-Yousef's cultivated and subdued modesty as well as her Saudi style of dress helped her challenge this type of criticism and ultimately aided in her campaigns for Saudi women's rights. Her demeanor, body language,

[261] "أكاديميات وناشطات حقوقيات يطالبن بإلغاء "الولاية المطلقة على المرأة #برنامج_ياهلا" YouTube, user برنامج ياهلا برنامج ياهلا, March 2, 2014. www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNOwzjSDMCw .
[262] A professor of Islamic Ideology at Imam Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, he is famous for issuing a fatwa condemning the demonstration against male guardianship (المظاهرات).
[263] Rob L. Wagner, "A Conversation with Saudi Women's Rights Advocate Aziza al-Yousef," *The Arab Weekly*, November 6, 2016. https://thearabweekly.com/conversation-saudi-womens-rights-advocate-aziza-al-yousef.
[264] One such accusation has been that Saudi women's driving activists have had "suspicious contact with foreign parties"; see "Saudis Detain Women's Advocates Ahead of Driving Ban Lift," Arabian Business, May 20, 2018: www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/396889-saudis-detain-womens-advocates-ahead-of-driving-ban-lift .

and arguments are all calculated, careful, and calm. This gives her an upper hand as she constantly reminds the audience that her demands are not based on opinions, but on research, proof and examples. The sections that follow outline the major arguments and issues that al-Yousef presents through her interviews, in her protest for women's rights. The questions she interrogates include whether society is ready for women drivers; whether male guardianship is rooted in Islam; whether society in general should be consulted about any and all rights for women; and the various causes of domestic violence.

"Our Society is Not Ready for Women Drivers"

In her interviews, al-Yousef argues against the famous cliché that Saudi society is not ready for women drivers. This argument circulated widely in Saudi society from the 1990s—when Saudi women openly protested the driving ban in the streets—to the day the ban was lifted in June 2018. The argument suggests that most ordinary people in Saudi Arabia would not accept seeing women behind the wheel of a car, and that women might be harmed or attacked by unaccepting Saudi men were they to start driving.

In her interview on "Etijahat," al-Yousef refutes this clichéd argument that is regularly raised not only in the context of the driving ban.[265] The claim that Saudi society is not ready for these changes is not limited to local circulation in Saudi Arabia or just in Arabic-language media but is often also presented in Western media and to international audiences as well. Saudi

[265] In her protest, al-Yousef also documented herself driving a car and showing Saudi men and women either supporting her with their hand waving at her and smiling--or not showing any reaction--yet not attacking her, even with a look. See one of her YouTube videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHTJtBpEx0E

officials, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman himself, often use this claim as an answer to the question of when Saudi women will be allowed to drive cars.[266]

Al-Yousef shifts the focus in her critique from the issue of Saudi society's "readiness" to an analysis of Saudi society more generally. She proposes that "society" is not one monolith, but instead includes various groups and different ideologies. It is not appropriate to treat society as a homogenous mass and to decide on behalf of such a diverse society what they are or aren't "ready for." She proposes that it is therefore illogical to reject women's rights by claiming that society at large is not ready. Furthermore, she provides the example of Saudi society in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was no male guardianship system, and recalls the time when girls and women were allowed to pursue formal education in 1960. In this period parents could choose for their daughters to be educated and enroll in school, but no one was forced to do so.[267]

"Etijahat" presenter Nadine al-Bedir states the following in her introduction to the show, reminding people about the history of male guardianship regulations.

في السبعينات والستينات وماقبل كانت المرأة السعودية تسافر وتركب الطيارة بدون ولي أمر

[In the 1960s and 1970s, Saudi women travelled without a male guardian.]

This recalling of the historical events surrounding Saudi women's rights is repeated in various interviews given by Aziza al-Yousef. It is used to provide evidence of how recently the Saudi government's regulations were put in place—reminding people that not so long ago, women held the very rights for which the campaigns are now advocating. The same points are repeated in an English language article published by *Vice*, "The Saudi Women Fighting Their Country's Sexist

[266] "السعودية تسمح للمرأة بالقيادة.. هل تذكرون ما قاله الأمير محمد بن سلمان؟" CNN Arabic September 2017: https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/2017/09/27/women-driving-saudi-mohammed-bin-salman-previous-statement .
[267] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة", YouTube, user خليجية, October 31, 2016, at 14:21. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w.

'Guardian' System." This article tracks the infamous hashtag developed by the campaign fighting the male guardianship system on Twitter[268] and recognizes al-Yousef's contribution. It also focuses on the historical context, as she frames it:

> Unlike the younger generation of Saudi feminists who started the hashtag, al-Yousef can remember a time in her country when the guardianship system did not exist. "These laws were not in Saudi Arabia before the '80s … I am old enough to know that." Al-Yousef wants women today to have agency over their decisions as she recalls having in her youth. "I went to college in 1977. I attended King Saud University, and I didn't need to get permission from anybody."[269]

Al-Yousef reminds us of protests against girls' education which forced King Faisal bin Abdulaziz to concede that it was optional, not mandatory, to send girls to school and that the father had the right to decide whether or not he wanted his daughter to attend. Al-Yousef uses these examples to prove her point: when the state issues legislation even those who oppose or disagree with it will eventually abide by it. When, in relation to lifting the driving ban, the presenter asked her, "طيب، ماذا ينتظر المسؤول اليوم؟" [So, what are officials waiting for today?], al-Yousef replied: "والله لو عندي الإجابة ما لقيتيني هنا" [If I had the answer to that, I wouldn't be here]. Both she and the presenter laugh at that moment.

Al-Yousef's act of laughter speaks louder than words—in the moment when she and the interviewer realize that they cannot speak directly and concretely against the government officials, they simply laugh. In this sense, their laughter is a stand-in for critique and opposition. Although there is more space for freedom of expression on Rotana than on official Saudi TV

[268] The article refers to the infamous hashtag: #IAmMyOwnGuardian and #سعوديات_نطالب_باسقاط_الولايه. I analyze and discuss the Twitter campaign of male guardianship with its hashtags in Chapter Four of this study.
[269] Leila Ettachfini, "The Saudi Women Fighting Their Country's Sexist 'Guardian' System," *Vice*, September 30, 2016. www.vice.com/en/article/bjgxad/the-saudi-women-fighting-their-countrys-sexist-guardian-system .

channels, it is still state-funded media, and it is understood by both the presenter and the guest that they cannot take this discussion further, for example by criticizing the King.

Another example of Al-Yousef's strategy is how she not only argues against this false cliché about society not being ready for women's rights, but also proves it wrong with her own stories of driving a car. As a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University, al-Yousef obtained her own driver's licence, issued in the United States of America, when she was studying there in 1981. She states on "Etijahat" that since she started driving around the city of Riyadh back in 2011, she has never been bothered by any Saudi man or woman; on the contrary, she talks about how she has felt welcome on Riyadh's streets as a driver. She documented this and published videos on YouTube, showing her driving around different parts of Riyadh, including in some conservative areas, without being stopped or harassed. However, al-Yousef only continued to drive and record herself until 2013 when she was eventually pulled over by police officers and taken to the police department, where she was forced to sign a pledge to not drive her car again.[270] With this story, al-Yousef demonstrates the inaccuracy of the claim that society is the reason why Saudi women should not be allowed to drive.

Al-Yousef's expression of her protest is straightforward:

من ٢٠١١ حتى ٢٠١٣ قدت سيارتي عشرات المرات في أحياء متعددة في الرياض، بعضها متشددة ومحافظة. ماضايقني أحد، وهذا موثق. من وقفني؟ الشرطة هي اللي أوقفتني وأُخذ علي تعهد

> [From 2011 to 2013, I have driven my car dozens of times in many different neighborhoods in Riyadh, some of them conservative, and no one bothered me. Who stopped me? The police.][271]

[270] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة", at 15:44 to 17:40: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w.

[271] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة"., at 15:44 and 16:50: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w.

In parallel with her use of different channels of expression – one of which is interviews – she also takes action. Her approach demonstrates that the systematic, state oppression of Saudi women is not rooted in society. Recalling her journeys on the Riyadh streets, her eyes brighten with pride in her actions—not only as a protest, but also as a proof against the cliché that has been circulated widely about Saudi society "not being ready." In talking about these experiences, al-Yousef raises her voice and sharpens her tone slightly when speaking about the police. She maintains a gently mocking smile on her face. This emphasizes her point that society is not the culprit of gender injustice or regulation: the state and its officials are.

The Issue is Political, Not Social

Al-Yousef's refusal to let the state use "society" as a scapegoat for ongoing gender injustices is shared by other women who engage in similar campaigns or protests. As described in Chapter Two, for example, I discuss how Huda Aldaghfag's memoir, *I Tear the Burqu'a, I See*, avoids putting blame on the state by instead pointing to social causes for women's lack of rights. In contrast, however, al-Yousef explicitly claims that the violation of Saudi women's rights is a direct result of laws conceived and approved by the Saudi state.

ما يحصل للمرأة السعودية الآن هو نتاج قوانين حكومية وافق عليها المسؤول

> [What is happening to Saudi women now is a result of governmental laws approved by their officials.][272]

مشكلتنا الآن أن قوة القانون هي التي تفرض علينا وتحرم المباح، وليس رجل الدين أو التشدد

[272] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة"., at 21:28: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w.

> [Our problem currently is that the power of the law imposes some things on us and prohibits us from others … it's not down to not religious men or the conservatives.][273]

What al-Yousef expresses in these short, pithy commentaries is that these are not in fact social norms. Abusive laws are not rooted in Saudi society's customs – a claim discussed in Chapters One and Two in relation to Badriah Albeshr's novels and Huda Aldaghfag's memoir. In the same interview, al-Yousef recalls how as a registering student at King Saud University in Riyadh in the 1980s, she didn't need her father's permission. When enrolling at the same university in 2001, however, her daughter was required to obtain her father's signature on the permission slip to complete her registration.[274] She clearly states that these are government verdicts: "We are just asking to remove the government rule that affects our daily lives."[275]

One of the techniques that al-Yousef uses throughout her interviews is to rely upon her own personal story. The use of personal stories to highlight a point closely resembles the strategic value of the memoir as seen with Aldaghfag's life writing in Chapter Two, though her protest is aimed at a different target. There is also a resemblance to Loujain AlHathloul's strategy which was to film herself driving. In doing so, these women make themselves an element of protest.

It's not the Regulation of Islam

Another common argument that al-Yousef counters is the claim that Islam is the fundamental cause of Saudi women's oppression and unfair laws that violate their rights. In fact, she argues

[273] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة"., at 23:17: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w.
[274] Rob L. Wagner, "A Conversation with Saudi Women's Rights Advocate Aziza al-Yousef," *The Arab Weekly*, November 6, 2016: https://thearabweekly.com/conversation-saudi-womens-rights-advocate-aziza-al-yousef.
[275] Rob L. Wagner, "A Conversation with Saudi Women's Rights Advocate Aziza al-Yousef".

that these laws have no religious credibility. In a discussion about male guardianship, she highlights the historical roots of the laws governing this practice, raising the point that they were only issued and implemented after 1980. It is surprising to many people, as al-Yousef shows, that after the regulations were introduced in that year they were gradually expanded. Eventually, laws that require women to rely on their male guardians spread to different sectors and constituencies across the country, including education, health care, the labour market and so on. If these laws are religious in nature, al-Yousef poses a rhetorical question: does that mean that Saudi Arabia only became a Muslim country when the laws were passed in 1980? What does that make of Saudi Arabia from its inception up to 1980? [276] These rhetorical questions push the public to think about the absurdity of the claims that these laws are Islamic or that the sexist laws and regulations are what make the nation "Islamic."

A pertinent example of how al-Yousef phrases and frames this issue is in her appearance as a guest alongside Dr Salih al-Osaimi on "Yahala." The host asks: " أنت تتحدثين وسط مجتمع محافظ يستمد قوانينه من القرآن والسنة" [Are you not in a society that has taken its laws from the Qur'an and the Hadith?] to which al-Yousef responds: " ونحن نستمد خطواتنا من القرآن والسنة. نحن مسلمين مثلنا مثل غيرنا، ونراعي الله في كل خطواتنا" [We are, too; we have also taken our steps from the Qur'an and the Hadith. We are Muslims, just as much as other people are, and we respect Allah in everything we do.][277] Al-Yousef responds in this way to balance her position in relation to the other guest on the show who presents himself as a defender of Islam and its rules. This is what compels al-Yousef to confirm not only that she follows the Qur'an and Hadith but also prompts her to

[276] "إتجاهات 30 اكتوبر 2016-هاشتاق سعوديات يطالبن بإسقاط الولاية مع د.عزيزة اليوسف و نسيمة السادة" YouTube, user خليجية, October 31, 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHWEGWsll1w , at 20:00.
[277] "أكاديميات وناشطات حقوقيات يطالبن بإلغاء "الولاية المطلقة على المرأة #برنامج_ياهلا" YouTube, user برنامج ياهلا برنامج ياهلا, March 2, 2014 , at 2:00: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNOwzjSDMCw.

continue by saying "we are Muslims just as much as other people are." She is using this opportunity to remind the other guest on the show that she is an equal, and that he does not have more of a prerogative than she does to speak on behalf of Islam.

Al-Yousef does not end her response there, she follows up by highlighting the contradictions of this law. She specifically refutes the claim that women needing a male guardianship has Islamic legitimacy. She cites the example of Khadija Bint Khuwaylid, the first wife of the prophet Muhammad, al-Yousef asks:

> خديجة بنت خويلد، التاجرة. هل احتاجت أحد يتولاها ويوقع لها أي أوراق أو أي تدخل؟ لا. الآن معرّف! توقيع الأوراق الرسمية مستحدثة ليست من الشرع.

> [Khadija Bint Khuwaylid, the businesswoman. Did she need a man to be her guardian and sign papers for her? No. Nowadays, a woman needs a male guardian. The signing of official papers is something invented, not something from Islam.][278]

During the same televised interview, al-Yousef's comments upset her fellow guest, Salih al-Osaimi. To give his position legitimacy, he claimed that that the studies leading to these regulations were conducted by officials chosen by the government, under the authority of the Council of 'Ulama. He expresses that he feels thankful this is the case and that they were not taken from a law firm. However, al-Yousef disagrees with him: "Are we becoming like a church? Having only one reference point?"[279] While al-Osaimi claims that opinions based on fiqh and fatwas are necessarily correct and consistent because they are written by great Muslim

[278] "أكاديميات وناشطات حقوقيات يطالبن بإلغاء "الولاية المطلقة على المرأة #برنامج_ياهلا, at 3:44: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNOwzjSDMCw.
[279] "أكاديميات وناشطات حقوقيات يطالبن بإلغاء "الولاية المطلقة على المرأة #برنامج_ياهلا, at 10:30: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNOwzjSDMCw.

clerics, al-Yousef argues against him. She states that following such guidance and rulings is not an inherent part of Islam; Islamic decisions are not based on one single opinion or interpretation.

Here, Al-Yousef once again illustrates that the issue of male guardianship is one that cannot be assigned to society's inability to embrace change or on religious legitimacy. Rather, she proposes, the issue is with the state and its controlling laws that oppress women. The debate on the show gets heated, and al-Osaimi starts to raise his voice, accusing al-Yousef of lying. She then shifts her tone from the calm one she begins with to cut him off and raise her voice in turn, to be able to explain her point. This somewhat turbulent interview sees her tone change rapidly compared to the first one discussed above where she appeared on al-Bedir's show, and the two of them share a laugh. This is true not only of the tone but also in the mocking look in her eyes and the smile on her face, especially when the guest starts to shout to prove her wrong. This combination of her clear and direct way of expressing herself in words and her facial expressions, using her mouth and eyes, add more depth to her expression of protest and Saudi women's protest movements.

She touches on the major, important points in the long battle between Saudi women's rights activists and the conservative clerics—the latter have controlled the way Islam is legislated through legal decisions like fatwas, limiting the right of interpretation to specific clerics and excluding others whose disagree with them. Therefore, Saudi women are not only protesting for their rights and demanding reform, they also explain, educate, and debate through specific forms of expression that allow for this, such as the interviews discussed above. The subsequent section and chapter show how other forms of expression also do this, through Twitter and videos.

Domestic Violence

In order to further confront the problem with male guardianship laws and regulations and argue

for why they should be abolished, Aziza al-Yousef gives the crucial example of domestic violence. These laws and regulations, as discussed above, give a male guardian extensive power over the women in his family, be they his daughter/s, wife, or mother. There is no way for women to report him if he abuses his power as a guardian. A woman experiencing domestic violence cannot report her abuser to the authorities unless she is accompanied by her male guardian, which can possibly be the abuser himself. The result is that domestic violence often leads to either silence on the part of the victim, or a cycle of further violence when the victim attempts to take action.

In most of the interviews analysed here, al-Yousef remains calm and composed – yet not when she is required to discuss domestic violence Saudi Arabia. On "Yahala," she states the following.

عزيزة: وضع المرأة في المملكة العربية السعودية مزري من ناحية العنف الأسري.
المذيع: أليست هذه مبالغة بقولك مزري؟
عزيزة: لا. مزري!
المذيع: ما سمعتيه (د.صالح) يقول حالات فردية؟
عزيزة: وأن كانت فردية. لما تكون حادثة فردية تروح فيها أرواح. هل لازم يروح مئات وآلاف النساء عشان القضية تكون قضية رأي عام؟ قضية الأب اللي علق بناته بسلاسل، ماتت وحدة وثنتين في حالات خطرة. حالة لمى، وغيرها. هل تريدون إحصائيات؟ نجيب لكم.

[Al-Yousef:	The woman's situation in Saudi Arabia is shameful regarding domestic violence.
Presenter:	Is it not exaggeration to say "shameful"?
Al-Yousef:	No! It is shameful.
Presenter:	You did not hear him [her fellow guest al-Osaimi] say there are only isolated cases?
Al-Yousef:	Even if they were isolated, it still would be! Even if there was only one isolated case… lives are wasted as a result. Must hundreds or thousands of lives be lost in order for it to matter in the public opinion?

She continues on, giving examples,

Al-Yousef: The case of the father who hung his daughters by chains: one of them died and the other two were in critical condition. Lama's case,[280] and more. Do you need statistics? We will provide you with them.]

Although domestic violence has only recently begun to be taken seriously, al-Yousef is one of the few Saudi women who have consistently openly spoken about it and protested against it. In this interview, her choice of language is sharp when she describes the situation (مزري) and she repeats it to confirm when the presenter asked her if this is not exaggeration. It is not only her language, but also her tone and facial expressions that are sharp and she seems annoyed. Using the techniques of logical debating style, al-Yousef challenges the presenter and the guest with clear and direct language about specific cases of domestic violence.

Language, Speech Dynamics, and Circumstances

It is clear that Aziza al-Yousef carefully chooses her words and statements with the intention of clarifying misunderstandings and misconceptions held by Saudis about two campaigns—the one against male guardianship and the other against the driving ban. In her November 6, 2016 *Arab Weekly* interview, she aims to elucidate and clarify the complex issues surrounding Saudi women's rights and the campaigns that she is part of, in her explanation of women's status in Islam and, she says: "In Islam the man should be the breadwinner and the woman who gets pregnant and takes care of the household is not responsible for money," al-Yousef said. "Islam does not say that women should not work or study but that she is responsible for her own actions

[280] This refers to a young girl Lama al-Ghamdi, who was five years old when she was raped and killed by her father. Al-Yousef led a nationwide campaign for justice for Lama, bringing the story and the voice of Lama's mother to an international audience, seeking a harsher penalty for the father, and demanding a law to protect children and females from domestic violence. For more information, see: Hamida Ghafour, "Saudi Women Fight for Justice for 5-Year-Old Girl Allegedly Beaten, Raped by Father," *Toronto Star*, February 14, 2013: www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/02/14/saudi_women_fight_for_justice_for_5yearold_girl_allegedly_beaten_raped_by_father.html .

and if she has a debt, she is responsible for that debt."[281] She tries to clarify how the circumstances of women in Saudi Arabia are not inherently derived from Islam. Likewise, in all interviews analyzed in this chapter, her words are carefully chosen to express both the journey of seeking rights for women in Saudi Arabia, and also the justifications for working on those campaigns.

Unlike the literary works of Badriah Albeshr and Huda Aldaghfag discussed above, Aziza al-Yousef's interviews maintain a deep respect for Saudi society, religion, and religious officials. In contrast to the novelist and memoirist—who might be considered modernists willing to change Saudi customs and society—al-Yousef prefers to fight for change while preserving religion and tradition. When pointing towards the state as the source of many problems, her choice of words is measured and polite. This is true not only on an institutional level, but also while debating with people with different views, as, for example, her fellow guest on "Yahala," with whom she seriously disagreed. One example of this, which contrasts with the way other protesters speak to their opponents is that she constantly refers to Dr Salih al-Osaimi on Yahala as (شيخنا) [our shaykh], which is a respectful word and shows a deference one might not expect from a "protester."

It is not only her choice of words that makes al-Yousef's interviews stand out as an artistic expression of protest but also how she expresses those words in her speech. In the televised interviews, analyzed in this section, al-Yousef utilizes different tones by raising and lowering her voice, allowing her to shift between different speech dynamics. She slowly and calmly takes her battle to her opponents, including the government, drawing them in, by using

[281] Rob L. Wagner, "A Conversation with Saudi Women's Rights Advocate Aziza al-Yousef," *The Arab Weekly*, November 6, 2016: https://thearabweekly.com/conversation-saudi-womens-rights-advocate-aziza-al-yousef.

the expression "شيخنا" [our shaykh]. She also utilizes a direct comparison between the situation today –contemporary Saudi Arabia and its modernism existing alongside a decline in women's freedoms– and the society of the past which saw more rights and freedom for women. She uses the same approach in her argument concerning the basis of both male guardianship and the driving ban in Islam, in both her discussion with Dr. Salih al-Osaimi on "Yahala" and in her interview with *The Arab Weekly*.

Another factor that influences how al-Yousef creates her interview style has to do with the circumstances and context of the interview itself. The way in which she chooses her words and expressions, as well as her manner of speech are impacted by these contexts. For example, the gender of al-Yousef's interlocutor in media appearances is extremely important to how she presents herself. This is as true of television presenter/s, other guests, as it is of print journalists.

The presenter of "Yahala" is male. Although he often seemed to agree with al-Yousef on the show, perhaps even supporting her campaign, he repeatedly interrupts her and challenges her while she is speaking. This approach to discussion is not only limited to the presenter; her fellow guest Dr. Salih al-Osaimi, chosen for his opposing views, exhibits similar behaviour. As a result, al-Yousef is forced into a defensive position, which is then expressed in her language, her tone, her body language, and the formulation of her arguments.

In contrast, when al-Yousef is interviewed alone by a female presenter during the first part of the "Etijahat" show, her tone is more subdued and her arguments are less defensive and more explanatory. This is partly because the presenter also appears to hold the same point of view as al-Yousef, creating an atmosphere that allows more explanation and discussion of al-Yousef's approach to activism. This is interesting when comparing this interview to the previous one with the male presenter, when she is backed into a corner and she must explain and defend

her points. Despite the fact that the presenter seemed to agree with her, he kept challenging her with his questions.

Likewise, the audience of a particular form of media is a determining factor in al-Yousef's approach to an interview. Unlike the aforementioned TV interviews, conducted in Arabic and aimed towards local audiences, *The Arab Weekly* interview is written in English and aimed at English speakers around the world. This interview focuses on educating and raising awareness about women's rights in Saudi Arabia and that is why she focuses on assessing the status of Saudi women and its relation to Islam. This is a contrast to her TV interviews where the bulk of the discussion interrogates al-Yousef and her colleagues in their campaigns: what they did and how they did it—forcing her into a defensive position. It is important to note that she is able to successfully defend those campaigns and is able to directly address her opponents and their interrogations. In *The Arab Weekly*, al-Yousef explains in detail the relationship between the male guardianship law and both Islam and society through in-depth information, the terminology of fiqh, and the use of examples. She does so to prove that these regulations are issued by and rooted in the ideology of the state, despite the propaganda that has been circulating in English-language media to whitewash the image of Saudi women's rights in the country.

From Writing to Facing the Camera

Thanks to the advent of the internet and the increase of digital spaces, Saudi women have made ample use of many different forms of expression of protest. These are not limited to writing, both on paper and online, or interviews as discussed above, but also extends to other visual realms. Some of the diverse media that Saudi women use to express protest include photos, paintings, and other visual art. Another one is the spread of short videos via the internet.

This section focuses on how Saudi women use this creative form—in particular short videos uploaded to social media platforms--as a space for protest. Many of the videos that I will explore are posted or have been reposted on Twitter, however, they originated on different platforms, including the now-defunct platform Keek, as well as YouTube and Snapchat. For this reason, I will discuss these videos in relation to the campaigns and, in the following chapter, I will focus on non-video tweets. In what follows, I will analyze short videos made by two Saudi women, documenting their different areas of protest. I have identified a range of areas for study here, overlapping and engaging with some of the same areas that they target in other media. I will thus begin by analysing the videos in relation to the driving ban and the male guardianship system. I will then move on to campaigns that affect Saudis of all genders—specifically, the issue of taxation—as well as Arabs at large—specifically, state normalization with Israel.

Challenging the Ban on Women's Driving: Early Videos of Loujain AlHathloul

The ban on driving for Saudi women has been the subject of long and controversial debates, both within Saudi society and beyond it as well.[282] The Saudi debate about the ban took place not only online and on social media platforms, but also offline in many circles—homes, schools, mosques, especially during Juma'a prayers on Fridays, as well as in educational and cultural panels, lectures, and events. It was the subject of many television programs, including those that would invite guests from different sides of the issue to make their own arguments, presenting pros and cons in a debate format.[283] Many Saudis were aware that this was a tactic designed to keep people busy debating and discussing, thereby distracting them from protesting

[282] See: (كيف تطور قانون السماح للمرأة بقيادة السارة في السعودية) Arabs Auto September 2017 : https://www.arabsauto.com/تطور-قانون-سماح-مرأة-قيادة-سعودية/.

[283] (نجلاء حريري تقود السيارة برفقة برنامج «صباح الخير يا عرب» في جدة) Riyadh Newspaper September 2011: https://www.alriyadh.com/667374 .

other issues. By opening up this issue for debate within larger Saudi society, and doing surveys from time to time, the authorities could monitor the pulse of Saudi society to see if and when it might be socially acceptable for women to begin having the right to drive. It is relevant to mention here that the order which lifted the ban on Saudi women driving was decreed by King Salman on June 24, 2018, and this did not come about as the result of a survey of Saudi citizens, society or anything of the sort.[284]

To better understand some of the dynamics of the ban on Saudi women driving, and the eventual lifting of this ban, it is also important to recall that it was kept in place through legal rulings, or fatwas. The official and unofficial fatwas about women driving changed a great deal during the ban and after it was lifted. Before the lifting of the ban, most fatwas against women driving cited reasons such as physical damage, or an "affront to Islamic values."[285] Once the ban was lifted, fatwas then changed to welcome the change and praise King Salman for observing and responding to his citizens' needs. Most shaykhs released statements congratulating the country for this move and expressing how it would accelerate the Saudi economy.

The most important protests against this ban took place in 1991. This was called the convoy protest. In this year, Saudi women took to the street, and faced harsh repression by both the government and society, including the religious wing of the government system.

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[284] Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi former minister of Global Affairs, said in a Western media interview: https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/141376 and https://www.alittihad.ae/wejhatarticle/32233/-سعود-الفيصل-وحق-المرأة-في-القيادة . Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz also said locally: " على ضوء حديث صاحب السمو الملكي الأمير سلطان بن عبد العزيز ولي العهد نائب رئيس مجلس الوزراء وزير الدفاع والطيران والمفتش العام خلال المؤتمر الصحفي الذي عقد مساء السبت للجنة الاختيار لجائزة الملك فيصل العالمية لخدمة الإسلام لعام 1426ه/2006م حيث أكد سموه أن قيادة المرأة للسيارة مسألة تتم بطلب شعبي.". نورة الحويتي "قيادة المرأة للسيارة يتحول إلى قرار شعبي" جريدة الرياض.: https://www.alriyadh.com/118992 .

[285] The fatwas by Saudi shaykhs banned women from driving cars for various reasons. Some said that the outcomes of women driving would be that they would go out more often, affecting family unity and cohesion, Others argued that driving would lead women to take off the hijab. One particularly outlandish one from the shaykh Salih al-Luhaidan, said that driving a car affected women's bodies, including their wombs and pelvis, which could lead them to birth sick babies! This fatwa went viral because it was recognized as so far-fetched: https://www.alhurra.com/saudi-arabia/2013/09/30/رجل-دين-سعودي-قيادة-المرأة-للسيارة-تؤذي-المبايض-والحوض .

Subsequently, there were few organized attempts to protest the ban in public, despite the fact that there were many protests against it and demands to overturn it. An example of this of course can be seen on Eman Al Najfan's blog, examined in Chapter Two. However, actual protests in the streets would occur when individual Saudi women would drive in defiance of the law and would document their courageous action on videos, and post them online. Women concealed their identities because they knew that their videos might go viral on YouTube where most of them were posted. As such, they would often cover their faces to avoid being recognized, and thus coming into conflict with society and being identifiable by the government. An example of this is Aziza al-Yousef whose videos show her covering her face though she does not normally wear a face covering.[286]

Contrary to this practice of anonymous protest, another Saudi woman activist began posting videos of herself driving in 2013. Loujain AlHathloul covered neither her face nor her hair in open defiance of these customs. Today well-known internationally for her many protests, including against the driving ban, AlHathloul first became known for her driving posts on the social media platform Keek.[287] She responded to Saudis who commented on her Keeks asking her to cover her hair out of respect for Saudi society's customs and values. It was not, however, only her appearance that challenged Saudi society in her Keeks, but also AlHathloul's attitude and the language she used in her videos.

I have chosen to analyze AlHathloul's videos to draw out the complexity and diversity in expressions of protest by Saudi women and how they creatively employ different platforms, spaces, and expressions to protest society, its customs, and its policies. In this section, I will

[286] السيدة عزيزة اليوسف تقود سيارتها #قيادة26اكتوبر #قيادة31نوفمبر YouTube, Nov 1 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHTJtBpEx0E .

[287] Keek was a social media platform founded in 2011 and dissolved in 2016. See more about the platform in Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keek.

discuss how Loujain AlHathloul prefers to protest differently by broadcasting her protest not as a pre-recorded video but with a live feature which allowed people to follow her and wait to see the outcome of her action, as I will discuss in what follows.

Loujain AlHathloul joined her efforts to support the larger campaign for women's driving on the 26th of October 2014. Because she was a resident of the United Arab Emirates, she had a driver's license issued in Abu Dhabi. According to an agreement signed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, residents of the signatory countries have the right to drive across each other's borders with the driver's license issued in their country of residence. This prompted AlHathloul to take the decision to drive across the Emirati-Saudi border. Because of this agreement, and the fact that there were no written regulations against a Saudi woman driving at the time, she interpreted that she would be acting according to the law.[288]

When she was not allowed to cross by Saudi border officials, she stopped her car in the lane and blocked traffic as a protest so that she would be allowed to enter. Several hours later, her friend and journalist, Maysa al-Amoudi also drove to her side, bringing her things she needed to stay there. Al-Amoudi also possessed an Emirati driver's license. The protest and standoff ended up with both of them in detention, and their cars impounded for a long time.[289] AlHathloul was held in a so-called "correctional center" (Dar Alriyah) because she was under 30 years old and al-Amoudi was held in the women's prison in Alahsa City. They were released from prison after more than two months of detention, a full seventy-two days.[290] When the Saudi government

[288] In Saudi law, there is no written regulation against women driving or even issuing a woman a driver's license. The Saudi former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Khalid al-Jubair has said that there is no law forbidding women to drive in Saudi Arabia: https://www.alhurra.com/choice-alhurra/2016/11/15/-حديث-الجبير-قيادة-السعوديات-للسيارة-يثير-جدلا-تويتر .

[289] See for more details: https://arabic.cnn.com/entertainment/2014/12/02/saudi-lujain-woman-driving and https://www.noonpost.com/content/4517.

[290] AlAhsa News February 2015: (الإفراج عن لجين الهذلول وميساء العمودي بعد شهرين ونصف من إيقافهما) https://www.hasanews.com/6261000.html , and (العربي الجديد, إطلاق ناشطتين سعوديتين بعد 72 يوماً من الاعتقال) , February 2015: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/إطلاق-ناشطتين-سعوديتين-بعد-72-يوماً-من-الاعتقال .

announced the lifting of the driving ban in September of 2017, AlHathloul posted a picture on Twitter of her dusty, impounded car, adding a crown emoji to it.[291]

The first video posted by Loujain AlHathloul in her driving protest was two years before her more famous videos.[292] In this video, she shows herself driving in Riyadh from the King Khalid Airport to her family's house, her father in the passenger seat recording her. This video was recorded and posted on October 23, 2013. After AlHathloul's graduation from the University of British Columbia, her father met her at the airport in Riyadh after her plane arrived from Canada. He did not drive her home, instead she drove her father home with him filming the short video and her commenting along with it.

AlHathloul drives wearing a black 'abaya and hijab. As in most of her videos, she has a big smile on her face. We can hear not only her narration, but also her father's voice narrating in the video, though we cannot see him because he is holding the camera. Even without seeing him, the viewer can hear in his voice that he is proud of his daughter. It is not only clear from the words he pronounces but also his tone of voice that he speaks with a mix of pride and scorn for those who oppose women's driving. For example, at the end of the video we hear AlHathloul's father say,

إن شاء الله الصورة هذي بعد عشر سنوات نبي نبدأ نضحك عليها

[in 10 years, we will watch and laugh at this image]

[291] Her Twitter account: https://twitter.com/AlhathloulHathloul/status/913375271256027136 .
[292] https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2013/10/25/الأمن-السعودي-يستدعي-والد-لجين-الهذلول The video was published on Keek, where AlHathloul used to post her videos, but the platform itself was dissolved in 2016. See more about her use of Keek: https://arabic.cnn.com/entertainment/2014/12/02/saudi-lujain-woman-driving .

In response to her father's words, she looks at him with a wide smile on her face and we can hear her laugh as well. He offers her his support in several ways: he documents her drive, lets her publish the video, and speaks with pride in his voice.

This particular video stands out from the others that AlHathloul uploaded and posted on social media, because of her father's presence. It is for this reason, as well, that it received such a huge response after being originally posted on Keek. The presence of Loujain AlHathloul's father elicited many reactions from Saudis, some of them very pronounced. The first reaction was an official one by the Saudi authorities. AlHathloul's father was called in by the Saudi government to investigate the video. He was required to sign a pledge stating that Loujain AlHathloul would not drive again and he signed it.[293] After a very well-publicized social media flurry and rumours about AlHathloul herself and what the official reaction would be, state officials spoke about it through 'al-Arabiya Net', the Saudi funded news outlet. News outlets reported at the time that AlHathloul had not detained "as the rumors claim." [294] She continued protesting through Twitter and Keek until she took the famous trip between Emirati and Saudi borders.

AlHathloul's famous journey of protest consists of two brief videos, posted on YouTube.[295] They offer the option of turning on English subtitles and appear on the well-known channel maintained by the Saudi women's campaign for the right to drive (حملة ٢٦ أكتوبر).[296] In the first video, she is heading towards the border and in the second one she has just crossed

[293] العربية نت. 25 October 2013: الأمن السعودي لم يعتقل "لجين".. واستدعى والدها للتحقيق. https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2013/10/25/الأمن-السعودي-يستدعي-والد-لجين-الهذلول .

[294] According to the official who spoke to al-Arabiya Net.

[295] لجين الهذلول في طريقها للحدود السعودية وهي تقود بنفسها! #أسوق_بنفسي #قيادة26اكتوبر #هو_لها" [Loujain AlHathloul on her way to the Saudi border driving by herself], YouTube, dated: 30 November 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7r-p7FHxqo .

[296] The channel of the campaign on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/c/oct26driving .

through the Emirati side of the Emirates-Saudi Arabia border on her way to the Saudi checkpoint.

Both videos are filmed inside AlHathloul's car, which is registered under her name, as she lets the viewer know. Though she does not usually cover her head, in both videos AlHathloul is wearing a hijab and a black 'abaya. She is also wearing sunglasses that cover more than half of her face and obscure her eyes and her facial expressions. The camera is located just in front of her, inside the car, and is recording her as she drives. In both videos, AlHathloul speaks calmly and casually with a measured tone, using somewhat formal language. She has a smile on her face. It seems that she has chosen to match her appearance and tone in order to profess respect for Saudi society and values, most likely to gain as much acceptance and support for her protest as possible.

Language

In order to better understand the strategy of these protest videos, we must analyze the way Loujain AlHathloul uses language in conjunction with her appearance to formulate her protest action. Using clear and direct words, AlHathloul explains what she is doing. She opens by presenting herself very simply: "معاكم لجين الهذلول" [I am Loujain AlHathloul]. She then calmly and clearly states what she is doing and why: "في محاولة لاستمرار حملة قيادة المرأة للسيارة" [it's an attempt to continue the campaign for women's driving]. She insists that she is acting according to the rights accorded to her by the GCC. She gives some details of her protest action in the video itself and accompanies this with more details and updates that she posts on her Twitter account.

AlHathloul confirms the purpose of her action and states that it is within her right to cross the UAE/Saudi Arabia border. She explains that she holds a legal Emirati driver's licence and is driving her own car. She insists on clarifying with simple and understandable language that what she is doing is legal and that she isn't in violation of any Saudi law—a reference to the unwritten law banning women from driving in Saudi Arabia. She concludes the first video saying: " ونشوف وش يصير" [we will see what's going to happen]. Though the tone of the video itself is calm and collected, there is an element of suspense and drama that makes the audience anticipate the next post.

The second video of her live documentation of her protest trip is also brief.[297] Filming herself driving, she announces to the audience when she passes through the Emirati border: "أهلا.. توني معدّية الجمارك الإماراتية، والحين متوجهة للجمارك السعودية.. نشوف عاد وش يصير" [Hello, I just passed the Emirati customs and now I'm heading to the Saudi side. We'll see what's going to happen]. She states this once again with a big smile on her face. Despite the similar cheerful tone and look, it is clear from AlHathloul's tone and facial expressions that this second video is slightly different. Her voice already sounds slightly nervous, and she is clearly less comfortable. AlHathloul is engaging in a form of street protest that is different from her previous ones as she isn't accompanied by her father and the recording is happening live. This leaves her viewers, who could be located anywhere in the world, eagerly awaiting the state response to her attempts to cross the border.

[297] لجين الهذلول عدت جمارك الإمارات #أسوق_بنفسي#قيادة26اكتوبر , YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Z0NMgYHm2P8 .

Protesting Male Guardianship Laws

Loujain AlHathloul is known for her protests against the driving ban, however, it is not the only issue of Saudi women's rights that she has stood for. Another important campaign that she has participated in are the protests to abolish the male guardianship system. This campaign is discussed in detail in different sections in this dissertation, in Chapter Two in relation to Eman Al Nafjan's blog, and below in Chapter Four when examining Twitter as a platform for protest. Just as was the case with the ban on women's driving, AlHathloul used her Twitter account to support the campaign against male guardianship laws, though her hashtag was not the one eventually used in the famous Twitter campaign.[298] Her videos, however, were important to this campaign and by analyzing them we can see that they share a similar strategy to her protest against the driving ban. Unlike the driving videos that were live and connected to concrete action, this video was prepared in advance as was its setting. The video she made protesting male guardianship regulations is important not only to the campaign, but also to expose more of AlHathloul's creative ways of protesting.

The video used for this campaign was posted on YouTube by AlHathloul herself, and there are subtitles in both Arabic and English. She, in fact, used a variety of social media platforms to broadcast her message about the campaign against male guardianship laws. For example, AlHathloul announced on her personal Instagram account in July 2017 (loujainhathloul) that she had created a Twitter account called, Arab Feminists (@ArFeminists) and that she would post everything related to the male guardianship campaign there.[299] Although this video was posted on YouTube, AlHathloul was promoting and sharing it on Twitter using the new account called "Arab Feminists." The YouTube channel under which she posted had the

[298] AlHathloul's Twitter account: https://twitter.com/AlhathloulHathloul/status/855817009455652864.
[299] AlHathloul's Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/p/BWuVWvJABDK/ .

same name as her twitter account, Arab Feminist.[300] To this day, it only has one video associated with it.

These accounts were created in July 2017 in coordination with the larger campaign challenging the male guardianship laws. The video that AlHathloul created is focused and short underlining the message: (إسقاط الولاية) [Abolishing the guardianship system.] It also outlines the principal demands of the campaign. It is crucial here that the campaign followed the Saudi government's announcement of a Royal Decree by King Salman in April 2017 that there would be a period of time during which the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia would be under review. More specifically, it was decided that the review would study which things a woman might need a male guardian's consent for and which things she would not. During this period of three months, the whole system would be under study and it would determine how and if it was obstructing Saudi women's freedom and movement.[301] This royal decree received a great deal of support from Saudis—especially Saudi women—as well as in formal and official news outlets.[302] The campaign took off after the three month period came to an end, and this is when AlHathloul created the Arab Feminists Twitter account and the accompanying YouTube channel.[303] It is clear that in this video AlHathloul is using a different style and tactic, more aligned with the government's objectives. She is less directly challenging and appears to be projecting an image of moderation and cooperation.

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[300] The Arab Feminist channel on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCabjmjk0MBuLKJIysBPdKMA/featured .

[301] أمر ملكي: تمكين المرأة من الخدمات دون موافقة ولي أمرها العربية. Alarabiya Net, 4 May 2017: https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2017/05/04/الملك-سلمان-يوجه-بإتاحة-الخدمات-للمرأة-دون-موافقة-ولي-الأمر .

[302] Many articles were published in Saudi newspapers after King Salman announced the new decree celebrating this move. For example, see two articles by Saudi women writers: Fawziya al-Bakr, " رفع الولاية عن المرأة: تمكين المرأة ومعضلة المساواة" 18 May 2017: https://www.al-jazirah.com/2017/20170518/ar2.htm and Salma al-Shehri " الأمر السامي رقم 33322"8 August 2020: https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/1052895 .

[303] Arab Feminist Twitter account: https://twitter.com/ArFeminists/status/887572952052625410 .

Comparing the Campaigns

A comparison of the videos AlHathloul made to protest the driving ban as well as the guardianship system reveals a change not only in tactics but also in the image of protest that she is projecting. First of all, in the case of guardianship laws, the video is made only after the time period in which the Saudi government formally announced that it would be studying the system and intimated that it would be changing it. She appears to be assisting the government in modifying the system in favour of Saudi women rather than challenging it.

This is a more conciliatory approach which can be seen in the way it is designed and the image it projects. The video is planned and set up as opposed to being a simple documentation of her protest. She is shown sitting in a beige chair, against a simple white background with only a plant appearing with her. She is dressed in a short-sleeved blouse and does not cover her hair, which falls to her shoulders. This is the same look AlHathloul has adopted since she began filming through Keek and living in British Columbia, Canada. Her appearance confirms to viewers that wearing the ‘abaya in her previous videos was simply done out of respect for the typical dress code worn by women in Saudi Arabia outside of their homes. Moreover, the way she speaks and holds herself is much more formal than in the previous videos protesting the driving ban. She speaks formal Arabic and also uses a professional tone. There is no broad smile or chatting with her viewers. Her facial expressions are controlled and neutral.

As in the driving videos, she explains the campaign clearly and directly. She stresses that the Royal Decree was made and the time for decisions has arisen. She then moves on to explain the campaign’s demands and also explain and challenge the Royal Decree.[304] She argues that the system must be modified in favour of Saudi women as the current laws harm women and hold

[304] For example, setting an age of consent for women that is the same for men.

them back. This video gives the impression that she is acting as some kind of consultant hired to help the government identify the changes they need to make, and which sectors should be targeted. Unlike the videos of her driving where she was actively challenging the government, here, AlHathloul speaks in a calm and calculated way. She explains that the King gave several government sectors three months to evaluate the regulations pertaining to male guardianship. While both campaigns are important and in some ways are even similar, Saudi women have utilized different approaches to perform acts of protest for each campaign. In the next section, I will explore different strategies in producing short views, specifically in protesting taxation and normalization with Israel.

The Campaign against Taxation without Representation: Nuha al-Balawi

The third campaign that used videos is the one about taxation without representation. This is a protest campaign which is not exclusive to Saudi women. Nuha al-Balawi is one of the many activists whose videos on this campaign, as well as the campaign against normalization with Israel, have been circulated on Twitter as well as Snapchat, and other platforms. Before being suspended and then taken over by someone else, the account used by al-Balawi was (@i_noha9).[305]

Because of her social media activities including protest videos, Nuha al-Balawi was summoned and arbitrarily detained by the Saudi government on January 23, 2018. This led to mass support for her on social media and beyond, with hashtags being developed to share news about her situation.[306] Al-Balawi's videos do not show where she is located or how she is sitting.

[305] This twitter account belonged to Nuha al-Balawi until it was suspended then taken down, then it is up again with someone else: https://twitter.com/i_noha9 .

[306] ما قصة هاشتاغ "#الحريه_لنهى_البلوي" الذي انتشر بين مغردين في السعودية؟ [What is the story of the hashtag: "Freedom for Nuha al-Balawi"?] BBC, February 10, 2018: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/43017009 .

Her head takes up most of the screen—her face is covered by a black niqab and ‘abaya, so you can see only her eyes. It is important to note that unlike Loujain AlHathloul, al-Balawi is not a prominent figure, but an ordinary Saudi who used Twitter and Snapchat to post her opinion on a variety of matters, including the two that I have identified as her primary protest targets: taxation and normalization.

The no taxation without representation campaign (لا ضرائب بدون تمثيل) had a long run on Saudi protest Twitter.[307] The campaign generated its own hashtags and was popular among men and women in Saudi Arabia alike. The campaign’s official hashtag (#لاضرائب بدون تمثيل) also used the counting system, described in Chapter Four, and reached 200 days. The campaign was launched because of a new regulation enforcing sales tax in Saudi Arabia on January 1st 2018. It started with 5% sale tax then increased in June 2020 to a 15% sale tax.[308] In the context of this larger campaign, Nuha al-Balawi participated in a video that went viral explaining in depth why taxation without representation is not acceptable.[309]

In this video, Nuha is protesting these new regulations by presenting her thoughts about why it is wrong to enforce the taxation system in Saudi Arabia. This short video merges two videos into one that is 2 minutes and 12 seconds long. She opens with a greeting (السلام عليكم) and then directly discussed her subject by saying (بخصوص حملة لا ضرائب بدون تمثيل). The tone is relaxed and informative. This is different from the example coming next where the tension in her voice is palpable. Though she is protesting, her voice remains calm and undisturbed. In the first part of the video, she clarifies that she is specifically demanding political representation with taxation.

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[307] The campaign’s account in Twitter: https://twitter.com/notaxsaudi .
[308] For more information in taxation in Saudi Arabia see: https://zatca.gov.sa/ar/RulesRegulations/VAT/Pages/About_Vat.aspx .
[309] ترجمة لسنابات نهى البلوي وإعتقالها بسبب التعبير عن رأيها - Nuha Al-Balawi is Arrested - In English. Feb 9, 2018 YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ83vvtMugs.

And the second part, which is originally another video that was also merged, she points the six reasons for her demand:

أولا: حتى ينتهي الاستئثار المطلق في السلطة، يكون للشعب رأي وصوت وكلمة، ونوّاب حقيقيين يمثلون رأيهم.
ثانيا: يكون لنا حق الرقابة الشعبية على كل ثرواتنا الوطنية. نتأكد من أن ثرواتنا لا تُستخدم فيما لا نرتضيه.
ثالثا: هو حق الاستجواب. كل عضو أو وزير أو مسؤول نرى تقصيره الفعلي في عمله، لنا حق استدعائه واستجوابه ومحاسبته.
رابعا: يكون للشعب صوت حقيقي يوصل مطالبهم بعيدا عن المناشدات والاستجداء.
خامسا حقنا في معرفة كل هللة تدفع إلى الدولة كضريبة، أين تذهب وأين تُصرف.

[First, the absolute monopoly in power must end, so people can have a word, an opinion, and a voice, with real representatives who represent their opinion.
Second, we should have the right to control our national wealth. We must make sure that our wealth is not used for what we don't accept.
Third, we have the right of to question authority. We have the right to summon, question, and hold accountable every minister or official whose negligence in his duties we witness.
Fourth, citizens should have a real voice that communicates their demands without pleading and begging.
Fifth, we have the right to know every *halala* that is paid to the state as tax—where it goes and where it is spent.][310]

The way in which al-Balawi formulates her argument is to first speak about the notion that taxation is forbidden in Islam. As the government is enforcing what people see as unfair taxation, she argues that people must protest the government for this reason. She states this simply and directly " اذا كنت تختلف مع الحملة فقط لاختلافك في حكم الضريبة في الشرع فأنت تستطيع توجيه كلامك للحكومة وليس للشعب" [If you disagree with this campaign only because of the status of taxation in Islam, you can direct your words to the government not to the people]. She then goes on to say, " رفضك للحملة بسبب الحكم الشرعي الذي تراه للضريبة لا يعني ان الضرائب لن تُفرض. هي فُرضت سواء كان الحكم حلال أم حرام" [Your rejection of the campaign because of Islamic discourse does not mean it will not be enforced. It is already enforced whether it is halal or haram]. In this protest, Al-Balawi focuses

[310] ترجمة لسنابات نهى البلوي وإعتقالها بسبب التعبير عن رأيها - Nuha Al-Balawi is Arrested - In English. Feb 9, 2018 YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ83vvtMugs.

on explaining her point to other protesters who don't believe in taxation for Islamic reasons. She explains her reason for protesting taxation and what her demands are in clear words.

In her language usage, al-Balawi focuses on the use of repetition as a technique to highlight several significant words. The first is "right" "حق". She insists that actions like voting, knowing, and questioning are the rights of the citizens: "حق استدعاء" "حق الاستجواب" "حق الرقابة الشعبية"and "حقنا في معرفة". This is how al-Balawi expresses her demand that her rights to question authority be recognized. Other repeated words she uses include: "الشعبية" "الشعب", referring "the people" or specifically the citizens, underlining that her concern is ordinary people—the masses—and not necessarily that this should be a category recognized because of their adherent to the state as other similar words might be. This combines effectively with her usage of the plural pronoun "we" and "our": "حقنا" ,"ثرواتنا الوطنية" ,"لنا" and "نرتضيه". These linguistic techniques confirm that al-Balawi is not protesting on behalf of herself or her own interests alone, but rather implies that her protest is within the best interest of all Saudis who would be forced to pay taxes without representation. It should also be noted that her tone in this campaign is neutral and professional – a stark difference to the tone she employs when protesting state normalization with Israel as will be analysed in the section below.

Against Normalization with Israel: Nuha al-Balawi

Normalization with Israel is second campaign that Nuha al-Balawi's videos touch upon. This of course goes well beyond local Saudi issues and implicates the Arab region at large. This campaign started when the news broke that some Arab governments would begin having bilateral official relationships with Israel. Many Saudi men and women—alongside others in the Gulf and the Arab region more generally—actively protested this normalization process and

protested any kind of relationship being built with those who occupy historical Palestine. These protests were prominent on a range of social media platforms, especially Twitter.

Nuha al-Balawi participated in this campaign with short videos on the Snapchat platform called snaps. She then collected them in a longer video which was posted on Twitter in April 2017. In her videos, al-Balawi speaks in a strong, clear language using a firm tone. She denounces Israel as an occupier and therefore an enemy. She states that it cannot and should not be treated as an ordinary "country" and that normalization is unacceptable. In the videos she explains that having relationships with such an occupying force is not something that Arabs should accept. Her analysis does not simply state a protest against Israel, she also explains that normalization will prove to be dangerous to the Arab region and only serve to benefit Israel's strategy of military rule.

Language and Tone

The tone of the videos is didactic; she speaks in the tone of a disapproving teacher: posing a question and then answering it. In this way, her videos seem logical in their protest. Like AlHathloul's video against male guardianship, al-Balawi's videos use clear, formal—fasih (فصيح/فصحى)—language. This use of language helps her videos reach more people, within and beyond Saudi Arabia as well. She also uses some further specific strategies of speech and language in her videos that help advance her messages in different ways.

The first example of this is how she switches from first-person singular "I" to the first-person plural "we." In this video, we see that she speaks on behalf of a group larger than just herself in the singular (أنا), when she says (نعترف-كلفنا). More concretely, in this example we can see she begins speaking about herself: (أنا آسفة وأعتذر إني أقول شيء من البديهيات) [I'm sorry, I must

apologize for simply speaking from common sense][311] and then switches to the plural: (لن نعترف بإسرائيل ولو كلفنا هذا ما كلفنا) [we will not recognize/accept Israel no matter the cost to us].[312] This change from singular to plural includes the whole Arab population, and she accomplishes this smoothly with the shift in pronouns.

At the end of the video, she shifts to the singular once again, specifically when apologizing for the length of the video. She again repeats, (أعتذر) [I apologize]. The shift back to the singular only serves to reinforce the plural in the other locations which also points to the way in which the Arab collective has an active say in the forming of relationship and normalization with Israel.

Moreover, al-Balawi uses further linguistic tools to reinforce her messages about official relationships with Israel. She uses powerfully evocative words to describe Israel in order to remind all Arabs who may have forgotten what Israel represents. Examples of this include words she uses to refer to Israel, specifically (شوكة عصيّة) (كائن) (عدوة) (المحتل الصهيوني) (الكيان الغاصب) [The invading entity/ the Zionist occupier/the enemy/the entity/ the thorn in our side]. All of these words are powerful and invoke anger. She recalls that Arabs have been raised to know the meanings of these words in relation to an occupying military force. Moreover, al-Balawi talks about herself and the plural "us," meaning all Arabs, as (بيننا) (الشعوب العربية) الشارع العربي [the Arab Street/ Arab peoples/ us] and in doing so she implies that her point of view is not individual, or limited to Saudis, but shared by the population of the Arab world (الشارع العربي/الشعوب العربية) [the Arab Street/ Arab peoples].

Another rhetorical technique employed by al-Balawi is to repeat the provocative words many times, especially those used to describe Israel. The words (معتدي) (محتلّ) (غاصب) (كيان) [enemy, occupation, invader, entity] are used four times each in this short videos. This reinforces her lack

[311] Nuha al-Balawi. Against Normalizing with Israel: https://youtu.be/Bv6gIsL4d7E.
[312] Nuha al-Balawi. Against Normalizing with Israel: https://youtu.be/Bv6gIsL4d7E.

of patience both for Israel itself but also for Arab people who are calling for normalization or making it easier to carry out. This is especially common on Twitter where there are trolls who bother the protesters and make fun of them and the Palestinian cause more generally.

It is crucial to note that al-Balawi also makes use of words that are derived from a common root, to reinforce meanings and provide rhetorical and sonic coherence to her video. The root word (رفض) (reject) is used in multiple forms, for example: ((ماترفضه الشعوب العربية) ((التطبيع مرفوض) (لماذا ترفض الشعوب العربية) (كل من يرفض فكرة وجود إسرائيل) (الشعوب العربية...رافضة By inscribing the word and concept of rejection into her video in a variety of different linguistic forms, Nuha al-Balawi is reinforcing that Arab people should not accept Israel as a state.

The final rhetorical device I will mention here is how Nuha al-Balawi uses polite language and excuses herself multiple times. It is an significant and interesting rhetorical move to use extremely harsh and direct language to speak about Israel, while presenting herself as exceedingly polite. Her two apologies come at the beginning and at the end of the video. At the beginning, she apologizes for repeating something that she assumes her audience will recognize as common sense, and at the very end, she apologizes for the length of her—rather short—video. She presents herself in this overtly polite manner which creates a stark contrast to her sharp criticism of Israel where she uses provocative and even inflammatory language to talk about Israel.

A further point that she raises in her discussion is a critique of how other Arabs have treated Palestinian people harshly, as the idea of limited nationalism is on the rise and larger pan-Arab nationalism has waned. Al-Balawi does not ignore this matter in her video: " حبك كعربي أو كرهك لأهل فلسطين هذا لا يغيّر شيء من حقيقة النزاع العربي الإسرائيلي على الأرض" [Whether you love or hate Palestinians, this doesn't change anything about the reality of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the

ground.][313] Al-Balawi thus removes personal feelings of animus from the conversation, underlining how personal opinion should not take away from the reality of the situation. As a non-famous protester, al-Balawi became a hero on Twitter for her unique protest in these videos, especially in relation to complicated matters such as normalization and taxation which are not as commonly protested as the driving ban or male guardianship. Although she was not very active on Twitter, before being suspended, these videos had gone viral and were circulated all over Twitter—calling on the Saudi government to release her.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation thus far, we can see how Saudi women are able to perform important acts of protest not only through the written word, but in visual and audio forms. They have taken advantage of the potential of online platforms and multimedia. Interviews and videos are methods that Saudi women have used, in combination with other means, to advance their messages of protest creatively. They express their ideas, thoughts, and analysis and have launched campaigns for rights that are specific to Saudi women—the right to drive or abolish the male guardianship system—as well as rights that are general to all Saudi citizens—challenging unfair tax laws and normalization with Israel.

Nuha al-Balawi, for example, used tweets to express some of her political protest, but also moved on to recording her voice and posting voice notes on Snapchat and then YouTube. Dressed in modest clothing, with a niqab covering all but her eyes, she was able to analyze and challenge normalization and taxation in Saudi Arabia by filming herself. This is a different approach than the one Loujain AlHathloul used. AlHathloul used videos to show herself directly

[313] Nuha al-Balawi. Against Normalizing with Israel: https://youtu.be/Bv6gIsL4d7E.

challenging the ban by driving her car across the border in a documentary style. She also portrays herself as an expert and consultant to the government in posting a formal talk on YouTube deconstructing what is wrong with the male guardianship system. This is a contrast to Nuha al-Balawi's approach in which her videos are short and brief and very much reflect an everyday person's protest. These examples join those in the previous two chapters to show the breadth of techniques used to protest creatively, a wide range of linguistic, rhetorical, and visual devices to express and protest different policies, laws, and regulations. Those expressions signify how Saudi women are utilizing various ways to express themselves and protest the policies and the movement that they are against clearly and loudly.

Chapter Four:
Twitter as a Creative Site of Protest

Whereas Saudi women have made creative and important use of diverse new media platforms, nowhere have they protested more and more effectively than on Twitter. To understand Twitter as a site of protest for Saudi women, it is important to first place it in the context of internet usage in Saudi Arabia more generally. While the internet was used in Saudi Arabia even before the year 1999; it slowly became open for public use in the relatively conservative and closed country in that year. A study of Saudi internet use in 2001 confirms that "Saudi Arabia [was] linked to the internet for several years, but public access was not widely available until January 1999. Internet connectivity was launched in many universities and some government agencies in February 1999."[314] I, myself, remember how at that time the sound of the internet connecting was both a mark of privilege but also potentially a source of shame that needed to be concealed within a conservative family. With these slow beginnings, later studies showed the rapid update in internet usage in the beginning of the twentieth century:

> Although the Internet was only made available in 1999, Saudi Arabia has grown greatly in this area, especially in terms of connectivity. There has been a notable increase in the number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the total number of Internet subscribers in Saudi Arabia increased dramatically from 100000 internet users in 1999 to one million internet users in 2001. At the end of 2013, that number reached 16.5 million Internet users, representing 55.1 % of the country's total population.[315]

By 2019, it is reported that the number of internet users in Saudi Arabia had increased to more than 30.26 million users, including 23 million social media users.[316]

[314] Khalid Al-Tawil M. "The Internet in Saudi Arabia," *Telecommunications Policy* 25, no. 8–9 (2001): 625.
[315] Hamed Al-Shahrani, "A Brief History of the Internet in Saudi Arabia," *TechTrends* 60, (2016): 19–20.
[316] Simon Kimp, Digital 2019: Saudi Arabia. *Kepios*: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-saudi-arabia .

In the country, the internet boom of the twenty-first century was hastened by access to devices such as smartphones. Social media was also a helpful tool for Saudis to discover the world beyond the literal and metaphorical walls erected by and within Saudi society, including Saudi cultural and religious values. Despite many concerns about the negative effects of the internet generally, and social media specifically, might have on these values, the population of Saudi Arabia—including but not limited to the younger generations—are some of the most prominent and frequent users of social media in the world.[317] Founded in the United States in 2006, Twitter came of age and became prolific in the Arab world around 2011. Of the social media platforms, it is one of the most popular and widespread in Saudi Arabia, ranking 9th globally for the number of active users, with at least 14.5 million active, registered users.[318] Both Saudi men and women have used Twitter as a refuge to express their thoughts, solidarity, and protest. In the early days of Saudis' access to the platform in 2012, many used to jokingly call Twitter "the parliament."[319]

This chapter will focus on Saudi women's use of Twitter as a platform for their creative expression of protest. This is a logical extension to my examinations of poetry, memoirs, novels, blogs, and videos as sites of protests. As a medium of expression, Twitter works differently than the longer form writing of blog posts which has more in common with prose writing, and even journalism in terms of style and form. Twitter as a medium demands a particular and limited format for expression. An individual tweet originally could only be composed of 140 characters

[317] Twitter Statistics and Trend, Datareportal: https://datareportal.com/essential-twitter-stats?utm_source=DataReportal&utm_medium=Country_Article_Hyperlink&utm_campaign=Digital_2022&utm_term=Saudi_Arabia&utm_content=Facebook_Stats_Link .

[318] Based on Twitter's potential advertising reach, this may not correlate with the platform's total number of daily or monthly active users. Twitter Statistics and Trends. *Kepios*: https://datareportal.com/essential-twitter-stats?utm_source=DataReportal&utm_medium=Country_Article_Hyperlink&utm_campaign=Digital_2022&utm_term=Saudi_Arabia&utm_content=Facebook_Stats_Link .

[319] "حر برلمان سياسي.. السعودية" تويتر. Aljazeera net. 13 January 2012. https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2012/1/31/حر-سياسي-برلمان-السعودية-تويتر .

and this was later expanded to 280 characters, in November 2017. Similarly to blog posts, tweets are materials that are organized informally on the platform through search engines, algorithms, and hashtags. Because the format of writing in tweets is so restricted, they often are also accompanied by multimedia—photos, paintings, and videos, among others. This allows for tweets to connect with other forms of creative expression and protest, including written and visual forms.

In what follows, I will argue that Saudi women have used the platform of Twitter extensively to advance their messages of protest through creative expression since 2011 and to this very day. Though the Saudi government is accused of interfering with Twitter through various agencies, it has been, and to some extent remains, a vibrant source of protest.[320] The analysis of Saudi women's Twitter below is divided thematically into four sections, which represent major areas of protest, which I have identified as: the male guardianship system, the ban on women's driving, so-called "correction centers" for women, and unemployment. While these are obviously not the only areas of Saudi women's protest on Twitter, reading tweets and hashtags related to these four areas can help reveal some of the dynamics of women's creative expression of protest. My analysis below focuses on the messages of the campaigns through their use of style, tone, and language of expression.

Male Guardianship Laws

The campaign to abolish the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, and the laws that govern and reinforce it, is one of the best-known online protest movements on social media in the region. This campaign spread widely and rapidly through social media platforms, inspiring

[320] Saudi government runs a cyber center called (اعتدال) which was accused of being home to many Saudi trolls that attack critical tweet by and about Saudis.

and connecting to women in other Gulf countries, who live under similar systems, for example Qatar and the UAE.[321] To give a bit more context about what the campaign is fighting against, the male guardianship system is a series of laws and regulations limiting the movement and mobility of women. The regulations include, but are not limited to, education, travel, work, healthcare, and marriage. As expressed in a study of Saudi women's experiences in academia, the system ensures that,

> By law and custom, men are responsible for women. Consequently, a Saudi woman is required to gain permission from her male guardian to perform many daily activities, including enrolling at university, having a job, travelling outside the country and filing a court case. Since this mechanism is embedded in the national culture, officials "may ask women for their guardian's consent even where no law or guideline requires such consent." A recent report by Human Rights Watch is part of an attempt to dismantle this hierarchical structure, arguing that the "Saudi authorities essentially treat adult women like legal minors who are entitled to little authority over their own lives and well-being.[322]

This article goes on to talk about education, how Saudi women cannot enroll in higher education at all without the agreement of their male guardian, nor can they leave their school or university without his consent. If for example, a woman wishes to leave school at a certain time, this man must sign a specific form giving his written consent.[323]

Although the national narrative purports that this system started in the seventies and continued to expand gradually, there is no exact date that can be located for when the law of male guardianship was established in Saudi Arabia. In the popular national imagination, however, two stories are proposed to be the reasons behind the law and regulations. The first is

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[321] See HRW report about Qatari women: https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/29/qatar-male-guardianship-severely-curtails-womens-rights .and also Figure no. (4-1) where Emirati women engaged with Saudi women in the same protest (tweet by Haya): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/.
[322] Abdulrahman Al-Lily: 120.
[323] المرأة ونظام ولاية الرجل في السعودية. Human Rights Watch. 16 July 2016: https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2016/07/16/291781.

the Makkah siege in 1979 and the second is the death of Princess Mashael in 1977, when she attempted to travel abroad with her lover against the King's will and knowledge, betraying the royal family.[324] After these incidents, the Saudi government issued restrictions on women's travel, accompanied by many regulations meant to stop women's freedom of movement.[325] One of the reasons it is difficult to put a time frame on this system, is that the law not only consists of written rules for how it is practiced, but it is implemented forcefully by the state in many ways. For example, for Saudi women to complete their enrolment in institutions of higher education, they must attach a signed form from their male guardians allowing them to be accepted; this extends to other basic rights such as the right to be issued a passport or even traveling abroad with a passport if you already have one.[326]

The Twitter Campaign

The campaign led by Saudi women to put an end to the official and unofficial implementation of male guardianship system and its accompanying laws and restrictions was launched in earnest in 2016. This campaign was active and vibrant for years, with daily postings until the Saudi government officially engaged by lifting the law gradually in 2019.[327] As Aziza

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[324] The princess Mashael was a granddaughter of the oldest brother (Mohammed) of the King (Khalid). Mark Weston wrote about the story of the princess and the outcomes of the incident, see: Mark Weston, *Prophets and Princes: Saudi Arabia from Muhammad to the Present*. (N.J: Hoboken, Wiley, 2008): 239-240. There is also a British film titled, *Death of a Princess* documenting the incident. Here is the interview of Frontline with the director, Antony Thomas: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/princess/interviews/thomas.html And the aftermath the film: Thomas White and Gladys Ganley. *The* "Death of a Princess" *Controversy*. Program on Information Resources Policy. Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1983: http://pirp.harvard.edu/pubs_pdf/white/white-p83-9.pdf . Also see: https://www.ozy.com/true-and-stories/the-mysterious-murder-of-a-saudi-princess-and-her-lover/94274/ and the story of the nanny inside the royal family who first exposed the story: https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/08/books/a-nanny-in-arabia.html.

[325] According to some Saudis, pre-1977 Saudi women had more freedom than after 1977, as I explained in the Introduction.

[326] Abdulrahman Al-Lily, 120.

[327] (بعد التعديلات الجديدة.. ست نقاط مهمة للمرأة السعودية), Alarabiya Net, August 2019: https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2019/08/02/بعد-التعديلات-الجديدة-6-نقاط-مهمة-للمرأة-السعودية .

al-Yousef said in her interview, which I analyzed in Chapter Three above, this campaign was not the first time Saudi women protested the male guardianship system. [328] Indeed, it engaged and built on earlier efforts both on Facebook and in offline locations, for example, petitions made to different sectors of the government including to King Abdullah. The Twitter campaign, which I will analyze through specific tweets in what follows, is partly famous for its consistency; the campaigners were committed to using new hashtags daily. Observers not just in Saudi Arabia and within the Gulf region, but around the world were drawn to this powerful campaign that consistently and regularly used new hashtags every day.[329] Moreover, the creative expression of protest by Saudi women in these tweets was unfiltered, direct, and powerful, using a style and tone that make these tweets an excellent location for analysis.

As a large, coordinated social media campaign, this consistent movement against the male guardianship system—with its large output and new daily hashtags—received both much support as well as severe criticism and attacks. The most notable and serious attack on the campaign was launched against the coordinators. A story published by the Saudi official media outlet, *Okaz*, two years into the campaign talks about its longevity, criticizing it and claiming that a police operation had "finally" captured seven people who were now facing charges of humiliating the country and its policies.[330] The campaign was perhaps so threatening—and effective—as it powerfully presented educational tweets produced by a range of different Saudi women right from its very first day. It is relevant to note, in contrast to other tweets that I will discuss in more depth below, that the language used in these early, educational tweets differs

[328] In Chapter Three, I present the basis of the protest against the male guardianship system through interviews with Aziza al-Yousef: 154.
[329] See: (وسم "سعوديات نطالب بإسقاط الولاية" يجتاح تويتر.. والمنيع يعلق: لا ولاية على المرأة إلا في الزواج), CNN Arabia September 2016: https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/09/09/saudi-hashtag-women-male-guardianship.
[330] (بعد ولادة غير شرعية على بوابة «تويتر» 680 يوماً.. فضحت هاشتاق «إسقاط الولاية» صحيفة عكاظ). Okaz Newspaper, May 2018: https://www.okaz.com.sa/local/na/1642828.

from later ones in invoking a wise, calm, and didactic tone that is careful not to sarcastically mock or fight openly against the system and/or its supporters. Right from the beginning, the campaign's tweets were mostly composed in Arabic; however, some were also written in English, using both English and Arabic hashtags. The "counted hashtags" saw a number added each day, starting from the official beginning of the campaign. The participants renewed the hashtag daily adding the next number on: they started with number "one" and continued until they reached one thousand. These counted hashtags are empowering in and of themselves as they show the consistency and longevity of Saudi women's protest.

Educational Tweets: clear language, neutral tones

To give a contextualization of how this Twitter campaign against the male guardianship law worked, this section will analyze a selection of the tweets by both protesters and their opponents. Here, I have chosen to focus on those tweets that make a general protest against the system and its laws and regulations and focus specifically on how Saudi women should be equal to Saudi men. Many of the early tweets were not accompanied by a multimedia file such as an image or video. These early tweets, which did continue throughout the campaign, aimed to keep the hashtags associated with the campaign alive. The goal of tweeting prolifically with particular hashtags was to try to make this issue become a trend, which in turn would expose more people worldwide to the campaign and its messages.

I have divided the tweets in this campaign into two main categories. First are those tweets I discussed above that I have called "educational," which uses a calm tone of mediation. The patient tone of these tweets presents measured arguments against the system. The second category presents the more specific complaints against the male guardianship system and its

impact on women's lives. These tweets, which I will examine in more detail in the subsection below, protest laws and regulations with an angry, aggressive, and/or sarcastic tone and style. Here I will continue with an in-depth analysis of the first category: educational tweets.

The first tweet I will discuss is composed in English, under the Twitter handle, (@Damajez). Using the Arabic hashtag (#٦٠٠الولايه-اسقاط-نطالب-سعوديات), the tweet explains the long list of male guardians under whom every Saudi woman must be controlled:

> Here is the list of male guardians that have authority over a Saudi woman.
> No matter who old she gets, she will simply pass from one guardian to the next.
> She is never allowed to have complete control over her own life.[331]

These words are followed by a list of possible guardians, from the father, husband, cousin, until the chief and the ruler. In this tweet, @Damajez calmly explains the facts of the regulations about male guardianship.[332]

This tweet uses clear and simple language to present the order to male guardians, "over Saudi women," beginning with her father, continuing to her son, then uncles and the governor, ending with a guardian chosen by the woman herself. She lists the number of male guardians as twenty, though she herself, "is never allowed to have complete control over her own life." The tone of this educational tweet, like most others in this category, uses plain and not particularly emotive language; it is neither angry nor weak. It describes this system with a neutral tone and no additional commentary.

Another good example of this style of tweet, is a direct response to a government survey by the well-known activist discussed in Chapter Three above, Loujain AlHathloul, who was an

[331] See: Figure (4-2): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/.
[332] In Islamic law, male guardianship is indicated in relation to marriage for women who need a male guardian to complete the marriage contract process. In her first marriage, a Muslim woman must be accompanied by and have the approval of her male guardian. الولاية في الزواج .

active participant in the campaign using her twitter handle, @LoujainHathloul. The Saudi Passport Services took to Twitter for a survey, asking Saudi citizens what services to add to the Absher, or renewal system, for passports, ID cards and so on.[333] They asked:

ماهي الخدمة التي تودّ طرحها ضمن خدمات الجوازات الإلكترونية في #أبشر؟ في عدم وجود الخدمة ضمن الخيارات، يرجى الرد على هذه التغريدة.

[What service do you want added to the Absher system? If your choice is not listed, please reply to this tweet].

AlHathloul replies by quote-tweeting them directly with a clear and direct tone:

الخدمة التي أريد إضافتها: تمكين المرأة من تجديد جوازها بنفسها وإلغاء تصريح ولي الأمر

[The service that I want to be added is allowing women to renew their passport and cancelling the need for a male guardian's permission].[334]

She ends with one of the hashtags for the campaign: (#سعوديات نطلب إسقاط الولاية170). Though the larger campaign and protest is intense and critical, and as we will see later, is known for its sharp and even sarcastic language, AlHathloul here employs this contrasting style of clear and forthright messaging simply asking for a specific right. She directs her tweet to a government agency—one asking for feedback—and explains her point by making the point seem obvious.

Another example of such an educational tweet uses a similar tone but is accompanied by a video message. Rana al-Daknan, the Saudi lawyer, tweets a video of herself explaining why the system should be abolished, from her account @RanaAldaknan. She points out the ways in which it was taken advantage of by Saudi men, acting in their roles as male guardians. She talks

[333] Absher (أبشر) is the government service system where the citizens and residents can issue and renew their identification documents, including passports, work permits, travel documents and more. https://www.absher.sa/portal/landing.html .

[334] Figure (4-3): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/. And the original: https://twitter.com/LoujainHathloul/status/812193572799778816

about how she has witnessed in courtrooms how Saudi women have been disadvantaged by this system, summing up,

هذا ردي لكل من يدّعي عدم اشتراط موافقة ولي الأمر أو الدراسة

> [This is my response to everyone who claims that there is no male guardian's approval to apply for a job or to attend a school].[335]

She attaches one of the campaign's hashtags, (#الولايه_باسقاط_نطالب_سعوديات15).

The video that al-Daknan posts within her tweet shows herself explaining the kind of situation, from the legal point of view, that occurs when a male guardian does not agree for the woman under his control—be it his wife, sister, or daughter—to attend a certain school or work in a certain workplace, or otherwise acts against his will. She confirms that because of this system, a male guardian can easily report this woman to the police as (بلاغ تغيّب/بلاغ هروب), meaning an absentee or a runaway. If he files such a report, it allows the police to remove her from school or workplace by force. She can then be criminally charged and even taken to prison, or to a so-called correction centre (دار الرعاية).[336]

Using only a few words to caption her video, al-Daknan then puts herself in front of the camera, wearing her niqab and talking about a specific scenario that has happened to real women many times. She uses her experience and analysis as a experienced lawyer to explain what happens behind courtroom doors. Many, if not most, Saudis do not know about such proceedings or the dark reality behind the system. She presents one case of a male guardian controlling and even destroying a woman's life if she does not agree to live by his values and orders. Al-Daknan emphasizes that not all Saudi men are good people and not all of them act with honour. Thus, if

[335] Figure (4-4): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship, https://youtu.be/2RlPTu1WeJQ . And the original: https://twitter.com/RanaAldaknan/status/762253587103752193.
[336] These centres are discussed later in this chapter in detail.

there is an unethical male who is someone's father, brother, husband, or even an uncle, and wants to take advantage of a woman or force her to follow his beliefs, there is nothing in the law that can stop him. She explains, for example, that if he wants to take some of her salary and she refuses, he can refuse her the right to work by reporting her as "absentee." As al-Daknan explains in her tweet, she has seen cases like this multiple times in her career as a lawyer, but people may not know this. I propose that al-Daknan's tweet is crucial to understanding the breadth of this campaign for two reasons. First, she spreads awareness through concrete legal knowledge. Second, she tweets a video that reveals her appearance wearing her face cover. Since one of the main criticisms of the campaign was that its participants and supporters were all Westernized, working against Islamic and Saudi culture, al-Daknan's appearance as a conservatively dressed Muslim woman is important.

Ramping up Pressure: Harsher Attacks, Harsher Language

In contrast to the tweets that I have identified as "educational"— using calm and neutral tones to clearly explain the problems with the male guardianship system—the second category ramps up the pressure by launching an attack on it. Saudi women will strategically use specific words, expressions, and phrases to mount their attacks. There is a concentrated use of specific words and expressions to describe people who are against the campaign or find it harmful. Saudi women turn the tables on men who are trying to control women by invoking a problematically gendered language to attack women in a way that sarcastically undermines them.

A specific example of this is the way in which the Saudi women's protest tweets use the word (ذكر سعودي/ ذكر), meaning in direct translation "male/ Saudi male." In a certain context, this is a neutral word that just indicates gender—for example in grammar describing a male or female

noun. But in a particular context, using this word (ذكر) to describe a man has a layered implied meaning that a man is only "male" in gender, but not a "full man"—meaning that he is not masculine, wounding his gendered pride. Many Saudi women started using this word on Twitter during this campaign when they referred to Saudi men, knowing that it would be perceived as a pride wounding insult. Therefore, often when one would expect, in everyday speech, to see men referred to as (رجل/رجال), within this campaign the word (ذكر / ذكور) is repeated frequently.

To give a specific example of this use of language, I will examine a Saudi woman tweeting under the username (f_a_t_m_a-1114) (@fatma_s_al) who mocks those who believe that abolishing the system will have a negative effect, so she asserts sarcastically:

"واضح من كلامها ان ذكر سعودي مفهّمها ان إسقاط الولاية هو انها تتخلى عن أهلها وهي من شدة غبائها صدقته"

> [It appears from her words that a Saudi male (ذكر سعودي) has taught her that abolishing the male guardianship system means she will give up her family and she believed him because of her extreme stupidity.][337]

This tweet includes a number of different words that need to be analyzed: "تتخلى عن أهلها", " ذكر سعودي", and "من شدّة غبائها صدّقته". These expressions demonstrate how some Saudi women who are against the campaign believe that it preserves the unity of the family, and if it is abolished, they will be forced to give up their families, their fathers specifically, since the fathers are most commonly the guardians of women. In this tweet, Fatma states that this woman's belief is a consequence of her "extreme stupidity" (من شدّة غبائها صدّقته). She uses this language to provoke Saudi women who still "blindly" believe Saudi men, including those who are pro-government and pro-tradition, and do not understand either the system or the religious clerics who aggressively fight this campaign and its promoters. Thus, this tweet tries to educate those women

[337] Figure (4-5): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/. And the original: https://twitter.com/FATMA_S_AL/status/968869391139004416 .

who believe that this system is keeping the family united by showing them that they are wrong in a dramatic way.

Another tweet that uses the term (ذكر) to humiliate Saudi men is twitter user: (@Fattom909). She invokes the word "male" not to mock a man or provoke other women, but rather to reclaim her own rights:

"حق ولاية نفسي حق إنساني أصيل سُلب منا وأصبح مصير المرأة وقراراتها واختياراتها بحياتها تحت مزاجية ذكر"

This tweet protests the male guardianship system by asserting that women should have basic and fundamental rights. Stating that, "a woman's fate, her decisions, and her choices in her life are controlled by the mood of a male."[338] Here, she specifies that Saudi women's lives are not even controlled by men, but simply by "a male." Also a critique of the male guardianship system, this tweet has a different purpose and a different tone in its use of the word (ذكر) "male" to refer to men. This tweet uses the word sarcastically as well but does not take an angry tone, it simply acknowledges women's rights. The number attached to this hashtag is 77, showing the longevity of this campaign.

The Impact of Guardianship on Education

Another way that protesters in the Twitter campaign express and present the negative impact of the male guardianship system is by critiquing its impact not only on larger systems like freedom of Saudi women's movement to work and travel, but also how it has begun to seep into the educational arena. Regulations limit female students at university so that they cannot leave the campus until noon, even if they have no classes, without her male guardian filling in a specific approval form together with her class schedule. Saudi women have protested the

[338] Figure (4-6): https://twitter.com/FATMA_S_AL/status/968869391139004416 . And the original: https://twitter.com/Fattom9o9/status/1032686200493166592 .

problems that arise from issuing such regulations—problems that vary from being inconvenient to life-risking. For example, the Twitter user Queen of Pink (@queenof_pink1) shows how this system puts female students' lives at risk. Queen of Pink includes a school form from her school, which asks the male guardian if he gives permission to the school for the female student under his guardianship to be taken to the hospital should the need arise: (في حال حدوث أمر طارئ للطالبة في المدرسة هل تسمحون بنقلها إلى المستشفى؟ ( )نعم ( )لا). [In case of a medical emergency, do you consent to the student being taken to the hospital? Yes ( ) No ( )]. It asks additionally for his signature. Queen of Pink then makes the comment:

> حلو. يعني لما البنت تنصاب او يُغمى عليها يروحون يدورون ملفها يشوفون ولي أمرها موافق يودونها اسعاف او لا
>
> [Nice! It means if a student has an emergency the school will first check her file to see if her male guardian has agreed for an ambulance to be able to take her to hospital or not.][339]

Similarly to al-Daknan, Queen of Pink shows how women's health, safety, and well-being are put at risk by the system of male guardianship. She links the system specifically to the fact that men are asked to sign such forms giving "permission" to help save a woman's life. Here, unlike al-Daknan, her commentary is biting and sarcastic and is closer in tone to the tweets that use the term "male." This contrasts with the serious, calm, and measured tones of al-Daknan's explanations of the law in her video.

"We are Real": From the Virtual World to the Real World

In this subsection, I will analyse several kinds of tweets in this campaign that strategically position themselves as "real" and part of the "real world" as a strategy to confront

[339] Figure (4-7): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/.

the male guardianship system from multiple different perspectives. Some of these tweets include actual photos that Saudi women protesters posted of their Saudi national ID cards to prove that they are "real" authentic Saudis, as opposed to Western plants or outsiders as they are often accused to be. These tweets that published proof of ID cards came after multiple accusations and insinuations that the tweets using the hashtags that were counted each day as part of the organized campaign against the male guardianship system were not being posted by Saudi women, but rather people from outside of the country who had an agenda against the Saudi government. Blocking their actual ID numbers, and their faces, they also did not show their full names but only part of their names. This strategy is a courageous move by Saudi women, who were often targeted and trolled for participating in the campaign, with people trying to find out their true identities, even when they only posted a nickname or popular first name like Amal or Sarah. Often, they confirmed their tribal ancestry by showing their last name / affiliation, which is a confirmation of Saudi authenticity and liable to backfire on people accusing them of not being "real Saudi women." Saudi women posted images of these cards as proof of their authenticity, a further strategy—specific to Twitter—designed as a way to protest in the virtual world.

In the following section, I analyze the words which Saudi women protesters on Twitter used in combination with pictures of their national ID cards. The campaign's opposition attempted to shame these protesters using specific hashtags by denouncing them as faking their Saudi citizenship, both to divide Saudi men and women and also to demonize the women who engaged in this campaign. The most common oppositional response was: "لستم سعوديات" or [You are not Saudi women and do not speak on our behalf …].

An example of one of these tweets was used as the epigraph to the Introduction of this dissertation. A Saudi woman named, (هيا السبيعي) Haya al-Sobaieie, registered on Twitter as @Hayaalsobaieie posted the following tweet with her ID card attached:

نحن سعوديات من كل مدينة في هذا البلد من كل أطياف المجتمع من بدو ومن حضر من الشمال و من الجنوب ومن الشرق ومن الحجاز ومن كل قراها ومدنها. باختلاف معاناتنا وخلفيتنا، جمعتنا معانات (معاناة) الولاية وألم قيدها ولن نصمت حتى تسقط عنا ظلمها

> [We are Saudi women from every city in this country. From each section of Saudi society, Bedouins and city folks, from the north, south, east and Hejaz, from every village and town. We come from different backgrounds and different struggles. But the struggle around the male guardianship system, the suffering it causes—we will not be silent until the oppression it causes ends.][340]

In this tweet, al-Sobaieie not only presents an image of her national ID card but also explicitly insists that the tweets in this campaign are genuine, from real Saudi women who have suffered under this system of oppression.

Another national ID card was posted on twitter under the handle (@amalremy) -- displaying only her first name (Amal) and her last name (al-Ahmadi) to prove her tribal affiliation but covering her photo and middle names.[341] Amal's twitter handle shows only her first name (@amalremy), while the photo of her ID card also shows her family name. In contrast, other posts show only the family or tribal name without the first name, which reduces a greater risk of being captured. For example, the account (@1DSuzy) posts her national ID card, covering everything except her family name: (العنزي). The writer is afraid that she will be identified by someone in her family or tribe, although this is very unlikely because her tribe is extremely large

[340] Figure (4-8): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/. And the original : https://twitter.com/hayaalsobaieie/status/967845663819091970.

[341] Saudi National Identification cards contain a photo and a person's full name which includes the names of their father and grandfather (الاسم الرباعي).

and spread throughout the Arab world, including in Gulf countries with some located as far as Syria.

Some women used a similar strategy but opted to display their passports. An important intervention by the twitter account using the handle, (@ahlam98_), depicts a photo montage of Saudi women holding their passports up. These images are posted with the campaign's hashtags on day 200, combined with the words in English, "These women are taking a stand against male control in Saudi Arabia."[342] The striking images in this montage contrast the green Saudi passport with the black clothes worn by the women, all of whom are obscured in the photos, and most of whom are holding handwritten signs with their messages written in green or black ink. However, since the Twitter account under which the video was posted did not reveal any details about the account's owner, critics leveled more accusations about the account not being controlled by a Saudi woman—with some even speculating that a man is behind the account.

This campaign of tweets was particularly brave and risky, especially as protestors' identities were at risk of being revealed. Not only does the Saudi government not tolerate protest and strongly disapproves of the campaign neither do the women's families and tribes—specifically these women's male guardians. While some women's families and male relatives were supportive of their protest, many were not, which put them in potential danger, especially if the identities they attempted to conceal were made public.

The threats against Twitter protesters were neither theoretical nor short-lived. After a long stretch of daily tweets with a number attached to the hashtags every day, Saudi women in the campaign against the male guardianship system faced waves of attacks questioning their patriotism and accusing them of lying and betrayal (تكذيب و تخوين). These attacks were not the

[342] Figure (4-9): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/. And the original : https://twitter.com/Ahlam98__/status/823091386622812164.

first of their kind and reflect other kinds of online attacks and trolling.[343] Women tweeters in the campaign continued to receive comments from other twitter accounts that opposed them as well as from conventional mainstream and online media sources. The accusations varied from the protesters being inauthentic and promoting false victimhood stories, not being Saudi or Saudi women living abroad, and/or having an agenda against the Saudi government. These kinds of accusations led the campaigners to move their protest to the street anonymously to prove both that they are Saudi women and also that they live inside the country and are not all immigrants or refugees in western countries. This led to many protesters and other supporters posting photos on Twitter showing visible landmarks in numerous Saudi cities and towns. The protests thus moved from the virtual world to the streets, parks, and schools—and back again.

In this way, this protest campaign by Saudi women on Twitter is unlike other social media protests in the Arab world, especially when analyzing it side-by-side with the infamous protests during the 2011 Arab Spring. In those cases, protests began on the street and were then documented online. Here, Saudi women began protesting virtually on Twitter, before moving their protests to the street. As scholar Paolo Gerbaudo states: "The most evident manifestation of this stress on unity has been the tactic of the mass sit-in, the physical occupation of public space which often evolves into a semi-permanent protest camp. This has led some to refer to the

[343] In 2009, there was a campaign against an important public figure, Mazen 'Abduljawad, because he exposed flaws in the Saudi-funded Lebanese TV channel, LBC. Abduljawad faced a major campaign against him called: "Don't compromise your nation: "A number of journalists launched an online campaign titled Lā tusāwim 'ala waṭanik [Do Not Compromise Your Nation] protesting television programs that sensationalized Saudi issues to boost ratings. Saudi authorities first blocked 'Abduljawad's excerpt of BRL on YouTube after the video attracted more than 300,000 hits within one week (Mahdi, 2009, August 3). It then shut down the LBC offices in Jeddah and Riyadh, the country's capital. In the meantime, prosecutors pressed charges against LBC and its "Sex Braggart." Approximately two months later, on October 7, 2009, despite a public apology and expression of contrition, 'Abduljawad, was sentenced to 1000 lashes and five years in prison" in "Saudi Arabia and the people" by Marwan M. Kraidy & Sara Mourad "Crossing the Red Line: Public Intimacy and National Reputation in Saudi Arabia," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no.5, (2014): 381.

contemporary forms of protest as 'take the square movement'"[344] or using the internet to set a meeting point or a mobilisation vehicle like using Facebook to create an event in the square for example or any real point of gathering to protest.[345] The scenes broadcasted around the world showed Arab protesters in different countries standing their ground and using the virtual world of social media to document their motives and reasons for protesting while also encouraging others to join them. On the other hand, Saudi women relied on street mobilizations in order to spread the message of the campaign happening virtually.[346] In fact, they have taken almost the opposite approach to protesting—beginning online through social media, and then moving in the opposite direction to get support offline afterwards.

In this stage of the campaign people prepared posters and stickers with words and hashtags supporting this campaign and others. The posters were then printed and hung in various places throughout the streets of many cities and towns in Saudi Arabia—in schools, parks, and on walls.[347] This proof of "authenticity" was then captured either by photos taken by campaigners who then posted them, or simply by other people who happened to find them in Saudi streets. This was a powerful way to demonstrate that the tweets with their daily updated hashtags were real, and being done by real people, in Saudi Arabia, not by trolls or bots. An example of this is the poster and sticker of the now famous drawing that was used alongside the hashtags in both languages: (#Iammyownguardian) (#أنا-ولية-أمري).[348] It depicts a woman wearing

[344] Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 11.
[345] See Gerbaudo's analysis of the Facebook Youth group in the Egyptian uprising 2011in his book, especially page 49.
[346] Aziza al-Yousef said in an interview that there were many gathering and teaching related to the male guardianship law in Islam and various activity such as writing letters to the government; however, she confirmed that she and the other members of this offline activity are not related in any way to the Twitter campaign. See more about her in Chapter Three: 164.
[347] See examples of those figures number (4-10), (4-11), (4-12), (4-13), (4-14) and (4-15): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/.
[348] See examples of those in figures number (4-16-), (4-17) (4-18): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/.

a traditional Saudi head covering (شماغ/غترة) (shimagh), her mouth covered with the hashtag.[349] This powerful message—printed in many colours and widespread in Saudi Arabia during the campaign—is symbolic and captures the message of the protest.

Women's Right to Drive

The second major campaign for women's rights in Saudi Arabia that I will discuss in this chapter is women's right to drive a car. This can be understood as the cornerstone of the women's struggles throughout modern Saudi history. The ban on Saudi women driving was one of the defining issues of the country in relation to women worldwide—distinguishing Saudi Arabia from other countries, as it was the only country in the world where women were banned from driving until only a few years ago in June 2018, when the Saudi government finally lifted the ban.[350]

The beginning of the extended campaign can be located in 1990, when a number of Saudi women got behind the wheels of their cars during the Gulf War to protest the ban.[351] From that moment on, the government was harsh in its crackdown on Saudi women protesters. Some women were even fired from their jobs and persecuted by the religious wing of the government in other ways by ensuring that fatwas were issued against both participants and their husbands.[352] It is important to recall here that Saudi women were protesting this driving ban long before the internet came to Saudi Arabia or social media platforms even existed. This was a major rights issue for Saudi women and protesters documented and struggled against the ban's negative

[349] Figure (4-19): https://saudiwomen.ca/male-guardianship/. And the original: https://twitter.com/wagingnv/status/781522985693962240.
[350] Saudi Press Agency dated 26.9.2017: https://www.spa.gov.sa/1671323
[351] عائشة المانع وحصة آل الشيخ,1990 قيادة السيارة وقيادة المرأة-نوفمبر من السادس. بيروت-جداول . [Aysha Almani and Hissa al-Shaykh, *The Sixth of November* (Beirut: Jadawil, 2013)], 4.
[352] Aysha Almani and Hissa al-Shaykh, 93-100.

impact on Saudi women's daily life through written platforms, such as novels and newspaper articles.

Saudi women's protests against the driving ban demonstrate a gradual growth of the movement over time. At the beginning, many Saudis questioned the ban, particularly in the 1980s, when these men and women returned to the country after having studied abroad in Western countries. Following this, was the notable event of November 1990, when Saudi women actually sat behind the wheel, protesting the ban in a public convoy.[353] Despite harsh penalties issued against the protesters, Saudi women continued their protest in many ways over the following years. The issue was present in media outlets, mainstream press, on TV and was somewhat of a hot topic in Saudi gatherings of different kinds. Despite this, the discussions and protests against the ban were dwelling with the occasional article in the newspaper or a brief mention in a novel. It is undeniable that with the advent of social media platforms and as they became more widespread within the country, protesters were able to ramp up their claims and once again encourage each other to take their protest to the street once more, as they did in 1990.

The Twitter Campaign

Even on Twitter, the campaign itself stretched over a long period of time and went through different stages—each of which used different hashtags. In the discussions below, I will examine tweets in the different periods that protest the ban on Saudi women driving, showing

[353] See the details about preparing the convoy, the day of the protest, the government reaction to the protest, the testimony of several participants in the convoy in the book: (عائشة المانع وحصة آل الشيخ. السادس من نوفمبر-المرأة وقيادة السيارة 1990 2013). There is also a coverage on Western television stations of this protest. From the beginning of the clip to 2:42 in the following YouTube video, you can see the Saudi Women Driving initiative 1990: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUyYks_844I&t=9s .

their different purposes and writing styles, while focusing on their shared goal of reversing the ban. The hashtags I study include:

#women2drive 2013 (26-10)
قيادة٢٦أكتوبر# 26-10-2013
#أسوق ـ بنفسي 27-10-2014 / 25-1-2016
28-9-2014 / 7-11-2015 قيادة المرأة للسيارة#

The Twitter campaign for women's right to drive began long before the campaign against male guardianship. Moreover, this campaign took a different approach and had a different timeline. This campaign also distinguished itself in the context of Saudi Arabia by having significantly more Saudi men as supporters than the campaign against male guardianship did. It is notable that the language used by the Saudi women leading this campaign can generally be characterized as less aggressive, as I will show in the following section.

This campaign on Twitter used tweets referencing the iconic convoy demonstration of 1990. These tweets were diverse, varying between some that demanded the right to drive by explaining the negative impact of the ban on Saudi women's daily lives, and others that presented facts about the financial damage of the ban to Saudi women. Tweets also showed documentary videos and photos of Saudi women driving on Saudi streets, photos of physical proof of posted letters they sent to the royal court, and other images of themselves holding up posters and papers demanding the right to drive. While this part of the campaign has some similarities to the campaign against male guardianship, proving authenticity and realness was different. Saudi women from each region of the country supported the campaign not only by holding or hanging up signs, posters, and stickers in public spaces but by recording themselves driving cars through Saudi streets and posting these videos on Twitter, as well as on YouTube.

Language of Protest

Much of the language of protest in this campaign against the women's driving ban can be characterized as neutral. One location where this can be seen is in the press. An example of this is found in an article published in the Aleqtisadiah newspaper, on 26 October 2013—the same day as the campaign saw women take to the streets behind the wheels of their cars. The article uses a neutral tone in its title: "قيادة المرأة للسيارة بين مؤيد ومعارض" [Women Driving Cars: Supporters and Opponents].[354] This story circulated on Twitter with the hashtag (#قيادة_26 أكتوبر). In the article, the author was calling on Saudi women to engage in the same kinds of protest that their predecessors had in 1990. While in 1990 the primary method of protesting was collective, in creating the convoy; in modern times, the protests occurred individually either with women driving in their cars or men accompanying women or teaching them how to drive. [355]

Another example of this element of language use in the protest can be seen in a reply to King Salman's first official tweet from his account when he ascended to the throne in 2015 (@KingSalman). Publishing under the twitter handle @shehanah_FQ, Shehanah quipped: " عاد نبي نسوق الله لا يهينك" [So, we want to drive may Allah not humiliate you[356]]. She uses informal language, words that you might not even use to speak to your parents, let alone the King, she sounds as if she is speaking to a friend (الله لا يهينك). Not asking or begging, as we will see in examples below in the case of protests against unemployment, or fighting and demanding rights with anger, Shehanah simply states a fact. However, the account under which she posted this tweet disappeared. It is unclear if it was taken down, suspended, or if the woman herself deleted

[354] محمد السقا , "قيادة المرأة للسيارة بين مؤيد ومعارض" October 2013. الاقتصادية https://www.aleqt.com/2013/10/26/article_795447.html.

[355] see examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hh1aDD0QLdI , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2ASOc26h8Q , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhqb1Cwanos .

[356] (الله لا يهينك) [May Allah not humiliate you] is a phrase can be used informally. Locally this is a common expression that someone uses to ask someone to do something they are supposed to do. For example, it is used to ask for something basic like for a cup of water, (الله لايهينك عطني الكاس اللي جنبك). As it is used here it is mocking.

it. This tweet can be tracked as a quote tweet from another twitter account from the account (@angienasser.)[357]

In a similar vein, moreover, this protest on Twitter often employed language that can be understood as straightforward, calm, and reasonable in its explanations of its negative impact on Saudi women. For example, the following tweet by Maysa al-Shamik (@msalshamikh) reads:

بالإضافة لراتب السائق المرتفع أنت مسؤول عن سكنه و أكله و تكاليف معيشته وعلاجه!!
#أسوق_بنفسي

> [In addition to your driver's high salary, you are responsible for subsidizing his accommodation, living expenses, and health care!!] [358]

Enumerating the economic damage that the driving ban has on Saudi women in plain terms was one of the main strategies they used to protest the ban. It is notable that al-Shamik's language here speaks directly and factually about the costs of this ban without referring to controversy, or angry protesters and counter protesters.

At the same time, however, not all language used to protest the driving ban can be characterized as neutral; an important number of tweets invoke emotive and poetic language to convey their message. The Twitter user, al-Mostanerah (المستنيرة) @saudi_woman1), for example, describes, how many Saudi working women lay awake at night, worrying about their future that depends on someone who might be a reckless driver:

ليلة الدوام كم من عين سهيرة أقلقها وأقض مضجعها مستقبلها يهدده سائق هارب أو مضرب عن العمل وآخر يتململ ويتشكى ويريد زيادة الراتب" #أسوق_بنفسي

[357] Figure (4-20): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/angienassar/status/559150563276099584.
[358] Figure (4-21): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/malshamikh/status/523456625089073154 See

> [How many sleepless nights, after a long day of work, has she lay in fear and worry about her future, which could be threatened by a reckless driver, one who refuses to work, or yet another who is restless or demands a pay rise.][359]

The twitter handle, al-Mostanerah, employs a feminine noun referring to someone who illuminates or is aware and this reflects within the name of account itself the role its user is trying to play. This is reinforced by her descriptions of the psychological effect of the extreme worry and anxiety that Saudi women workers face daily because of the driving ban. This tweet, moreover, shows an often-forgotten side of the hardships of a Saudi working woman's life, rather than the more commonly recognized impact on her financial situation. The psychological impact cannot be untangled from the financial impact.

The way al-Mostanerah uses language in her tweets serves to reinforce the horror and fear that Saudi women often face regarding their careers and thus their futures. This woman must constantly feel her career is under threat as it entirely depends on a driver — meaning that her job security lies within not only the driver's skills but also his mood and willingness to work. For example, she uses the phrase: (كم من عين سهيرة) to emphasise that Saudi women will often feel as though their job security is at the mercy of their driver. She uses the expression (أقضّ مضجعها) to highlight the relentless anxiety that accompanies this feeling—an anxiety that often leads to sleepless nights. The language in this tweet is not particularly matter of fact, instead she opts for more symbolic or hyperbolic language in order to emphasize the psychological impact that the driving ban has on working women. This tweet stands out partly because this kind of poetic language not commonly used by Saudi women when protesting on Twitter.

[359] Figure (4-22): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/Saudi_woman1/status/526111695446364160.

No Woman, No Drive: Counter Protest

As in any social movement in Saudi Arabia, there were many people who disagreed with the protest against the driving ban for reasons that were traditional, religious, and/ or political among others. Similar to those who support the male guardianship system, tweets attacking the protest against the driving ban also used accusations of being inauthentic, non-Saudi, and working against the Saudi government and Saudi society to destroy the traditional, Islamic structure of society and the family.

In addition to the more common types of attacks on protesters and their protest, the movement against driving ban also elicited attacks that used their own slogans against them. One of the most recognizable phrases used by protesters at the time was: "No woman, no drive." Their opponents, the counter protesters, in turn used this phrase to mock the campaign and the campaigners. This slogan was inspired by Bob Marley's iconic song, "No Woman, No Cry.[360] In 2013, YouTuber Hisham Fageeh's video in support of the protests against the driving ban—where he parodied Bob Marley's song with new lyrics—had gone viral.[361] Although he was supporting the campaign by publishing his video on the same day the campaign launched, his slogan was taken up by opponents mocking the campaigners.[362]

This was not the only way that counter protesters attacked the movement in support of the driving ban. In the following section, I will discuss some of the counter protest tweets by Saudi women. The majority of these tweets were written by Saudi women who considered

[360] Bob Marley. No Woman No Cry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHlSE9j5FGY Dated, 21 May 2012.
[361] No Woman, No Drive. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZMbTFNp4wI Dated, 26 October 2013. On his website, Fageeh says, "In the Middle East, he's most known for his video "No Woman, No Drive," which went viral in 2013. The video remains a hilarious satire on the debates over whether or not Saudi Arabia would let women drive (they eventually did in 2018), and Fageeh's video was a momentous critical injection. This is part of his pointed charm, Fageeh uses comedy to highlight social issues, by turning them on their head. Using comedic tools, Fageeh questions cultural norms, even the most ubiquitous ones." https://www.hisham.tv/new-page
[362] Figure (4-23): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/.

driving to be a sin within Islam as it allegedly prompts women to stray from modesty. A number of the counter protesters on Twitter who criticized the driving campaign also considered themselves to be patriots defending their nation. They also developed their own hashtags for their counter protest, for example, (#لن_تقودي_لن_تقودي), (#بنات_الوطن_ضد_قيادة_26).

One such counter protester is twitter user (@aanoood501) who expressed her disagreement with the pro-driving protest and supported the government's ban on women driving. Her tweet even included the government official's statement against the campaign:

#"بنات_الوطن_ضد_قيادة_26

وبقووه ونقول #لن_تقودي_لن_تقودي #قيادة26اكتوبر #لجين_على_الحدود #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة

This first hashtag can be translated as "#daughters of the nation against driving 26" and the later one, mockingly states, "we say forcefully: #you won't drive, you won't drive."[363] Her tweet is an example of a counter protest which attests to how not all Saudi women were in support of overturning the driving ban. She frames her counter protest as being a collective initiative by crafting a tweet made up solely of five hashtags against the campaign, and also by employing infographic-style images attached to the post.

Other twitter users joined this counter-movement by claiming the overturning of the driving ban would undermine the nation of Saudi Arabia. One reply by twitter user @shjn200 (نبض وطن), claims that authentic Saudi women would not support a campaign that would allow a foreign agenda to harm the nation:

> بنات الوطن الأصيلات لا يخترقن الأنظمة ولا يتصرفن برعونة ولا يجعلن من أنفسهن مطية لمخططات تهدف للنيل من قوة البلد.

[363] Figure (4-24): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/aanoood501/status/540394078324547584.

> [Authentic Saudi daughters of the nation would never break rules, act recklessly or allow themselves to be used for the schemes which might undermine the country's power.] [364]

One of the tools counter protesters use is describing campaigners and protesters as not being good citizens. Indeed, they insinuate that any Saudi woman who supports the campaign against the driving ban is serving a liberal Western agenda and is contributing to the destruction of the Saudi nation. This accusation is leveraged as a fear tactic to silence ongoing campaigners and supporters by cultivating a threatening atmosphere that would make Saudis fearful of protesting.

The tweet reveals an interesting use of language as well. Firstly, it describes "authentic daughters" of the nation using emotive and loaded terms (أصيلات) and (بنات)—rather than the more straightforward (النساء السعوديات) "Saudi women" or (المواطنات السعوديات) "Saudi women citizens." It purports to prove that if you protest, you cannot be considered (البنات الأصيلات) "authentic daughters" of the country. It manipulates Saudi women by using charged language to challenge their identities as Saudi citizens. Secondly, the writer uses the label "authentic daughters" of the nation to insinuate that to be considered a legitimate citizen there are certain things you can and cannot do—any deviation from that is grounds to be considered an illegitimate citizen. It is important to note that the tweet does not directly or clearly refer to the protest itself. Rather, it claims that any disobedient behavior is considered to go against the nation's best interests and advances a foreign agenda. The tweet refers to such people—namely protestors— is (مطيّة). The closest translation for this word is "being used;" however, this word comes from a specific context. It is an Arabic noun that refers to an animal that transports

[364] Figure (4-25): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/shjn200/status/540431958841372672.

travellers—usually horses or camels.[365] This term is often used locally to mock the person and describe him as a vehicle for others or even as a vehicle for other people's agendas.

One issue that was continuously raised on Twitter and by protestors more largely was the question of economic gain: who is benefiting from the driving ban and why does this have to come at the expense of the everyday Saudi citizen's economic security? As previously argued, there is a financial strain imposed on working Saudi women who must finance a driver and whose job security relies on the availability of their driver. If the driving ban were to be overturned, many Saudis in both the government and the private sectors would lose a substantial amount of income. For example, the Saudi government was collecting approximately two billion riyals annually from foreign drivers' work permits and accommodations.[366] Using several different hashtags, including (#أسوق بنفسي), Lubna Shawly لبنى شاولي (@lshawly) presented numbers indicating significant financial gains for the government and major companies because of the ban. She presents the numbers she has uncovered simply, with no comments attached, except the hashtags protesting the ban (#oct26driving # اسوق_بنفسي #قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة #قيادة_26اكتوبر).[367]

Section Three: Social Correction Centers (دار الرعاية الاجتماعية)

Just as Saudi women have protested systematic injustice in the case of their campaigns against the male guardianship system and the ban on women's driving, they are also fighting violence against women—domestic violence and systematic social violence—both which are ignored by

[365] (معجم المعاني), Almaany Dictionary: https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/مطية/ .
[366] تكلفة السائقين بلغة الأرقام. راشد الفوزان , [Rashid al-Fawzan, al-Riyadh Newspaper, 25 April 2016: https://www.alriyadh.com/1149796.
[367] Figure(4-26): https://saudiwomen.ca/womens-right-to-drive/. And the original: https://twitter.com/lshawly/status/521687163952721922.

the government. Following the other two successful campaigns on Twitter, Saudi women have understood the power they are able to harness using the internet. Twitter has been used by Saudi women as a location to bring attention to victims and survivors of domestic violence, whose cases come to light either from personal experience, stories disseminated on various news outlets, or from Twitter itself. This campaign has used a hashtag or two for each victim to bring her case into the public eye. It has also been designed to publicly name and shame men who abuse women, particularly those who are often women's male guardians and/or relatives. In some rare cases this has been their mothers.

The Twitter Campaign

In this section, I will discuss two sets of tweets, those protesting domestic violence in Saudi Arabia more generally, and more specifically those tweets addressing the systemic violence imposed on women by the so-called "correction centers." Below, I will discuss the language and tone of the tweets used in these protests, particularly how they reflect the rage of those who tweet about it. In this protest campaign, many of the tweets are accompanied by a symbol of support, as in attaching some image of a white ribbon. The white ribbon campaign is an international movement, which Saudi women joined, to raise awareness about gender-based violence and domestic violence specifically (#SaudiWhiteRibbon).[368] More specifically, Saudi women protesters linked their Twitter campaign to one of the most problematic institutions in Saudi Arabia, [correction centers] (دار الرعاية),[369] discussed in detail in the subsection below.

[368] The White Saudi Ribbon in Saudi Arabia follows the international white ribbon campaign to support the victims of domestic violence. The hashtags of the campaign are flooded with picture of individual Saudi women as well as groups of Saudi women wearing white ribbons on their wrists.
[369] In this section, I will maintain the official language, referring to these as "correction centers," though I take the point that many stories and statements about it describe the conditions as more similar to prisons.

The Establishment of Correction Centers (دار الرعاية)[370]

For years, Saudi women have protested the violence and injustice in one of the most fraught institutions in the country, Dar al-Ri'aya (دار الرعاية), or "correction center/s." Although the government established these institutions supposedly to be safe havens for young women—similar to women's shelters—the stories that have emerged from them are harrowing. These centers are meant to be a "safe place" that Saudi and non-Saudi women can be brought to for a number of reasons: they committed a crime, were victims of domestic violence, or were admitted because of a false report made by her male guardian i.e. absence report (تغيّب /) or (عقوق). If they are brought and admitted, they remain there until their male guardian comes to release them. If he does not, a woman can theoretically stay there forever. They can be admitted up until the age of 30. The regulations that govern them and the poor treatment that young Saudi women face when brought to them demonstrate that far from helping women who have faced domestic violence, they in fact harm women by isolating them further and punishing them for being victims.[371]

The campaign against correction centers uses a number of hashtags to address a number of the issues these centers are connected to. One of these is: (#سجينات منسيات) [forgotten women prisoners], which labels the women detained in these centers as prisoners explicitly. It sheds light on the fact that while inside they are often forgotten, and it is not known when they will be released. The reason for this, most often, is that a female prisoner's male guardian has not agreed to secure her release (لا يريد استلامها), as I explain in more detail in what follows. In a number of cases, a woman's male guardian will prefer to let her stay inside indefinitely because of the

[370] The singular is (دار الرعاية) a correction center and the plural is (دور الرعاية) correction centers.
[371] For more stories from those centers, see: Raseef. 12 November 2019: https://raseef22.net/article/1075967--خرجن-عن-صمت-الأمهات-والجدات-سعوديات-يفضحن-تفاصيل-مرعبة-عن-دار-الرعاية.

shame that her detention is thought to have brought upon him and their family in the first place. Such a detention usually happens with the cooperation of either the regular police or the religious police.[372] The detainee will be admitted to one of these centers on the basis of a police report which states the incident that led to her detainment.

Closing Correction Centers

In this campaign, Saudi women target both the guardians who have left their female relatives in these centers and the government policies that restrict women prisoners from leaving the centers after serving their sentences.[373] One of the more recent hashtags used in this campaign is:

#اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب

[Saudi women demand the closure of correction centers]. [374]

This straightforward hashtag is a protest against the unfair regulations and inhuman treatment of women prisoners within the institution.

There are many stories that have emerged from these correction centers which recount horrific tales of what happens behind closed doors. The towering, windowless walls of these centers contain not only terrible treatment but also corruption. In one tweet, for example, 'Tofa (@alolian_a) writes:

خلود بارعيدة تتحدث عن محاولة انتحار سجينة اثناء تواجدها بمؤسسة رعاية الفتيات بالفترة التي كانت خلود سجينة بها، هذا المقطع من عام 2017 - 2018 ومتأكده ان الحالات موجوده نفسها للحين بدون اي تعديل وممكن تتغير للاسوء
"ولا حياة لمن تنادي' ما تغير ولاشي فعلا'

[372] The religious police in Saudi Arabia (هيئة الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر) used to have a great deal of power until it was limited in 2016. A large number of detainees were brought to correction centers by the religious police because they were found with a man either in a public space i.e. a coffee shop, or in a private space or even a car.
[373] Not every woman in these centers is guilty of committing a crime. Many women are run aways who have fled their male guardians for different reasons, including but not limited to, sexual harassment, abuse, forced marriage, or domestic violence.
[374] Figure (4-27): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/hashtag/اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب?src=hashtag_click.

#اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب

> [Khulud Bara'ida talks about a suicide attempt by a female prisoner while held in a correctional institution for young women when she was also a prisoner inside it. This clip dates from the period from 2017-2018 and I am sure that there are still many such attempts today, with nothing improving and changes for the worse. "If you speak up, you may lose your life.' Nothing has changed at all.]

The tweet is accompanied by a video clip from the DW channel, depicting a Saudi woman talking to a journalist about witnessing this suicide attempt. The final sentence of this tweet quotes her words.[375] The tweet explains that the woman in the video was filmed between 2017-2018, and the Twitter user states that although the video is not new, she is sure that people inside are still attempting suicide and indeed that the situation is probably worse than before. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, Saudi women don't use Twitter as a platform only to convey their opinions, they also use it to document and offer evidence of the harmful consequences of various policies or regulations. This makes their online protests educational as well. Moreover, in recalling this memory, the interviewee's tone and body language are uneasy and even angry.

Another anonymous twitter user with the Twitter handle (@000rfa1) states that 9% of women prisoners in correction centers are victims of domestic violence. She uses sharp and sarcastic language in her attack on them, specifically words and expressions such as ((مجرمين) (الذكوريين)). She sees these centers as a symptom of a corrupt patriarchal system: (مجتمع ذكوري قذر

٩٪ من اللي فى دار الرعايه ضحايا عنف او اغتصاب او ظروف سيئة يوم انكم 24 تاقات فكو رقبة فلان وفكو رقبة زعيطان وتنخون القبائل عشان مجرمين سبحان الله بس الذكوريين مايشوفون اغلاطهم ليه لان المجتمع والعائله والقبيله تساندهم مجتمع ذكوري قذر.

#اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب

> [9% of the prisoners are victims of violence, rape, or difficult social circumstances. You have 24 hashtags to free so and so or this and that tyrant and who have betrayed their

[375] Figure (4-28): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/alolian_a/status/1282737341296254977.

tribes because they are criminals, praise God, but males don't see their own errors. Why? Because a disgusting patriarchal society supports society, the family, and the tribe!] [376]

This tweet is an important example of the contrast in language between the Twitter protest against correction centers and that of Saudi women against the driving ban. Using angry words to support its sharp analysis, this anonymous Twitter user explicitly compares how society and "the tribe" treat people differently according to their gender. She points out that the tribes utilize Twitter to help free their men who have murdered others, by promoting calls to collect funds to pay their *diya*, (دية), or fine of blood money, so they can be released from the prison, and of course avoid execution which would otherwise be their punishment. The same tribes and society at large, she points out, have no problem that their girls and women are thrown into these correction centers whether or not they have committed crimes, even if they themselves were the victims of violence or simply even just subject to the erratic mood of their male guardian.[377]

Further, it is interesting to compare this particular tweet to the poem by Hind al-Mutairi, analyzed above in Chapter One, Literary Expressions of Protest. In this poem, she attacks the tribe and the double standards of how daughters and sons are treated within these structures. Saudi women are protesting in these multiple locations the horrific treatment and misuse of extended family structures like the tribe, as well as the government establishments like correction centers, to assault women meant to be under their protection.

This is another example of the double standard that has been used by society and especially the tribe: the tribe pay *diya* after the men murder so they can be released and pardoned

[376] Figure (4-29): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/000rfa1/status/1282730633467502592.

[377] As discussed above, a male guardian has the right to report a woman under his guardianship to the police if she stays out, works, or studies against his will. (تهمة العقوق – تهمة التغيّب) are white cards that male guardians can use against the women in their charge.

for their crime. The tribe in this case is doing the maximum to collect the *diya* money, which is usually is millions of riyals, and asking the high-profile officials, princes, or shaykhs to convince the victims' families to accept the money. In contrast, women of tribal backgrounds face this treatment *because* of the tribe.

Photos as Evidence

As in the examples from the driving ban protests cited above, photographs are often a tool Saudi women Twitter protesters have used to provide evidence for their claims, and this is true in relation to correction centers as well. The following tweet by Sarah (@sera8_) was posted together with a picture of a correction center in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, near the northern border of the country. The image shows how the windows of the center are completely blocked, with no access to light. Further, the photo shows how the roof is blocked by tin plates both to obstruct any light and also any attempt someone might make to break out:

#"اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب
انتو بس شوفو الصوره تجيب الضيم والكتمة هذا مو دار رعاية هذا دار تعذيب وظلم حتى قوانينه تخوف ويقشعر لها البدن
حسبي الله عليكم لعبتو بنفسية البنات جلدتوهم وبعضهم ابرياء تطلب منكم حمايتها من اخذ شرفها وبالاخير تجازونها كذا حسبي الله عليكم الله لايوفقكم

> [You saw the pictures you replied with silence and darkness. This is not a correction center but a torture and injustice center. Even its laws are frightening—it gives a person the chills. May God not forgive you. You played around with girls' minds. You whipped them and some of them are innocent—She asked you for protection from someone who stole her honour, and in the end this is how you treat her? May God not bless you.] [378]

Further, Sarah (@sera8_) mentions that some of the women being detained are innocent victims. This is a powerful reply used by Saudi women in this protest against supporters of these

[378] Figure (4-30): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/sera8_/status/1282641226420883463.

correction centers, who often say that the women deserve to be in these prisons, blaming them for the crimes leveled against them. Sarah's tweet uses dramatic language which invokes women's pain. For example, she uses words like (لعبتوا بنفسية البنات) (دار تعذيب وظلم) (الكتمة) (الضيم) (جلدتوهم وبعضهم أبرياء). All of these are words that are strongly emotive. For example, (الضيم) is stronger than (الظلم) which means injustice in Arabic. Also, she refers to the center as a one of torture and injustice as opposed to correction. She even curses people working there who cause these young women so much pain: (حسبي الله عليكم، الله لايوفقكم). I translated this as, "May God not bless you," but the meaning here is even stronger because this phrase comes after the writer explains how innocent women were raped or sexually assaulted and asked for help yet they ended up in those correction centers which is affecting their mental health (لعبتوا بنفسية البنات) as well as physical health when they were being beaten (جلدتوهم).

Another hashtag (#الحرية_لفتيات_دار_الرعاية) reveals a tweet with a photographic image of another correction center. Ghadah (@Gadaa_12) includes in her tweet two different images, one of the correction center in Makkah and the other of MBN's "advising and care center" which admits jihadists after they've served prison sentences. The words accompanying these two contrasting photos are:

مكان الارهابيين ومكان فتيات دار الرعاية الصورة تتحدث

> [Where terrorists are held, the correction center for young women, the pictures speak for themselves.] [379]

This tweet explicitly compares these two kinds of centers, by using photographic evidence. She does not write much in her tweet—no analysis or commentary—instead stating

[379] Figure (4-31): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/Gadaa_12/status/818540797016608768.

only that "the pictures speak for themselves." Through this, she once again demonstrates how men with criminal records who have been in prison as terrorists are forgiven, treated well, and welcomed into society again after a stay in hotel-like accommodations. She shows by contrast that Saudi women are treated worse than dangerous criminals, forced to stay in prisons euphemistically called "correction centers."

Comparisons as a Strategy

Confirming this tweet, the journalist, Eman al-Homood (@imankais1) uses Twitter to reassert this comparison drawing on her own experiences in Saudi Arabia:

> زرت مركز الامير محمد بن نايف للمناصحة فوجدته مجهزاً بكل سبل الراحة
> وعندما سألت إذا كان بإمكاني زيارة دار لرعاية الفتيات لم أتلقى اي إجابة
>
> [I visited the MBN Counselling Center and found it well equipped and as comfortable as could be. When I asked if I could also visit a women's correctional center, I never received a reply.] [380]

Al-Homood's description uses a direct comparison between how she was granted access to the very comfortable center for men in 2017, but could not even get a reply to her request to visit a women's correctional center. This comparison, like the others, does the work of showing the double standard in treatment of men and women on the levels of the family, the tribe, and society at large. The two previous tweets show how the government is treating women differently than men regardless of the crime. On one hand, men who have committed serious crimes such as homicide or who have belonged to extremist / terrorist groups are pardoned and held in comfortable facilities. On the other, women who have often committed no crime at all are held in terrible conditions in correction centers.

[380] Figure (4-32): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/imankais1/status/886606746000781312?lang=en.

In a similar comparison tweet, Haya (@hayaalnafjan) demonstrates the government's double standards in the treatment of prisoners. An example she focuses on is that while male prisoners can be pardoned, the same is not true for females. She affirms this in a tweet that reads:

العفو عن من سجنوا لجرائم ارتكبوها، ونسيان من سُجنت هرباً من جرائم ترتكب في حقها.

> [Pardons for those imprisoned for the crimes they committed, while forgetting people who were imprisoned for escaping the crimes committed against them]. [381]

Moreover, the Twitter account of the news outlet (صحيفة عاجل) (@ajlnews) states that: "According to royal pardon, releasing 287 prisoners from the prisons of Makkah and Jeddah." As with many tweets on Saudi women's protest Twitter, a number of different hashtags are used in order to more widely disseminate them and in different kinds of spaces. As this example shows, the governmental double standard towards women means that there is a program of pardoning male prisoners every year, a privilege that is not offered to Saudi women. Indeed, the only way that a Saudi woman could leave a correction center is if their male guardians allow them to leave by signing a receipt that I analyze in the upcoming tweet.

A Receipt? Other Means of Protest against Correction Centers

There are other hashtags attached to posts seeking justice for these women held in the so-called correction centers: (#العداله_لسجينات_دار_الرعايه سجينات_منسيات). There are also other lines of analysis and critique employed by the posts. For example, the user (شاهي أخضر) (@_wow_wow2) includes a picture of an official form that is used by such centers to release and discharge a

[381] Figure (4-33): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/Hayaalnafjan/status/868915990649860096 .

female prisoner. This form is titled with the words (سند استلام نزيلة), which can be translated as "receipt":[382]

سند استلام نزيله؟
استلام انسانه عاقله راشده بالغه بكامل قواها العقليه ؟ هذي بضاعه من جولي شيك والله مو انسانه

> [A receipt? A receipt for a fully sentient, mentally sound adult woman? This is something you get when you buy from Jolly Chic, not for a human being.] [383]

In this tweet, the user denounces the kind of official and dehumanizing language used in correction centers for women. The fact that women can only be released with discharge papers called "receipts" emphasizes not only that they are not seen as full people, but also that a woman can only leave such a facility with the approval and consent of a male guardian-- regardless of her age. If this male member of her family cannot or will not come to the prison to sign for this receipt—no matter the reason—the woman who is held prisoner could potentially be forced to remain there until her death.

This confirmed in another tweet by a user called Jamelah (@Gigiii_Al) who tags her posts with many hashtags including (#سجينات_منسيات):

وجود سجينات لمجرد أن اوليائهم رفضوهم هو عار علينا

> [The presence of women remaining in prison simply because their male guardians refuse to release them brings great shame on us.] [384]

[382] Figure (4-34): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/_wow_wow2/status/1008619975257583616.
[383] Jolly Chic is an online store that sells average to bad quality goods (https://www.jollychic.com). Saudis use this brand's name to indicate or mock bad quality of something or someone. For example, what is this place? Is it Jolly chic? Where did you get that? Jolly Chic?
[384] Figure (4-35): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/Gigiii_Al/status/801935196438274049.

With these frank words, Jamelah includes a newspaper clipping quoting a statement from Muhammad al-Zahrani, the head of the government committee for prisoners and released prisoners. This photo of the article shows a quote from him stating that: "annually, there are on average forty female prisoners who are discharged and free to leave but because their male guardians refuse to sign off on their release, they are then transferred to another establishment (دار الضيافة)." The article itself is powerful and proves the point of the protest, but Jamelah's tweet invokes the emotive Islamic notion of a particular kind of shame, (عار), to criticize the situation. Moreover, she does not attribute this shame to others—the state, men, society, the state—but rather to "us," women, including herself. Here, however, shame is deployed differently, to refer to women for being silent and accepting this situation year after year, because as the article mentioned this treatment has been ongoing for a long period of time. She also shames society, including the men who abandon these women, as well as the state for its unjust policies which allow this harm to occur in the first place. Thus, the short and sharp words (عار علينا) (shame on us) are used in this tweet as a powerful and evocative protest.

Another tweet that uses the same technique of mixing the tweeter's words with journalism was composed by the Saudi writer Hamsa al-Sonosi (@hamsasonosi). Using the hashtag (إغلاق دار الرعاية مطلب), she tweeted against the closure of these prisons, referring to an article she wrote in 2018 to document their establishment:

لا ارى #اغلاق_دار_الرعايه_مطلب صحيح..بل
.رفع جودته/١
.محاسبة المتجاوزين فيه/٢
.عدم إرغام الفتاة ع البقاء فيه مادامت بالغة راشدة ليس عليها حكم قضائي وتستطيع إعالة نفسها خارجه/٣
أن يحترم كرامة وحقوق من تضطر للبقاء فيه لسبب ما، مع العمل ع توفير سبل الدراسة أو الكسب الحلال لها/٤

[I don't see closing correction centers as a correct demand, however:
1) improve their quality
2) hold perpetrators accountable

3) as long as a young woman is of sound mind and can look after herself on the outside she shouldn't be forced to stay
4) preserve the rights and dignity of those who are compelled to stay for some reason, they should be able to provide the means for them to study or earn a lawful wage.] [385]

Thus, al-Sonosi emphasizes in her tweet that women have a need for shelters, simply demanding that such centers be closed does not solve the problem. She recalls in her tweet the purpose of founding them in the first place, with an article she published in the Saudi newspaper, *Al-Watan* in 2018.[386] She quotes from the official documents that ordered the establishment of these shelters, in order to emphasize the reason that they were needed—to provide shelter not punishment.

She goes on to point out in her article that a more accurate name for these institutions should be something like "welcoming homes" not correction centers or prisons. While she disagrees with elements of the campaign, however, she provides an alternative solution.[387]

تنشأ دار خاصة لاستضافة النساء والفتيات اللواتي يتعذر إطلاق سراحهن لرفض أولياء أمورهن استلامهن بعد انتهاء محكومياتهن، أو رفض كفالتهن لإطلاق سراحهن حتى انتهاء إجراء قضاياهن، أو رفضهن الخروج مع أولياء أمورهن خوفا على حياتهن، وتكون هذه الدور تابعة لوزارة العمل والتنمية الاجتماعية، وتتكون من قسمين أحدهما للنساء والأخرى للفتيات بإدارة واحدة، وتتولى هذه الدار تأهيل ورعاية اللاتي يلحقن بها، دينيا وتعليميا واجتماعيا ونفسيا، والتركيز على التواصل بينهن وأسرهن، ويراعى في الدار المقترحة للنزيلات أن تكون بعيدة عن المؤسسات العقابية، وألا تدار بنفس أسلوبها، وأن تكون دار ضيافة وتربية وتعليم لا دار عقوبة، ويُبحث إمكانية تزويج نزيلات هذه الدار بعد موافقتهن وموافقة أولياء أمورهن.

[Special shelters shall be established for women and girls whose male guardians refuse to receive them when their sentences are finished or refuse to guarantee their release until the completion of their trial, or the women themselves refuse to leave with their guardians of fear for their lives. These shelters should be managed by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and divided into two sections—one for

[385] Figure (4-36): https://saudiwomen.ca/the-establishment-of-correction-centers/. And the original: https://twitter.com/hamsasonosi/status/1282603220083388417.
[386] همسة السنوسي. "عن دور الضيافة أتحدث". صحيفة الوطن . Hamsa al-Sonousi, Alwatan Newspaper, 29 May 2018: https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/37062 .
[387] As Hatoon al-Fasi also discusses this dilemma specifically that the institutions do not allow women to leave without their male guardian. She labels sending women back to their guardians even though it is known that most of them are the main reason why women are there, "recycling." If the prisoner refuses to leave with her guardian, she could then be stuck as a prisoner forever. Hatoon Al-Fasi. هتون الفاسي. استلام السجينة أم السلعة؟ دار فتيات مكة المكرمة مثالاً. صحيفة الرياض. العدد 15217. 21 February 2010: https://www.alriyadh.com/500363 .

> women and the other for girls, but under the same management. These shelters look after and rehabilitate those who join them, religiously, educationally, socially, and psychologically. They should focus on communication between the women and their families. The proposed home for female inmates should be far from institutions of punishment and should not be run in like this. They should rather be homes offering hospitality and education, not punishment. There should also be a possibility of the women living in these homes to be married if they give their consent and have the approval of their guardians.][388]

After this statement was published, it became increasingly clear that in locations all around Saudi Arabia these centers are home to terrible things. For example, despite many suicide attempts by young women prisoners, the Saudi government has yet to take any action. [389]

Moreover, when an employee in the correction center in Riyadh had the courage to be a guest on a television program, on the Rotana Khalijia channel, documenting this issue and exposing the prison's unethical management and inhuman treatment of prisoners, the person responsible for the prison roundly rejected the employee's claims. She then attacked this employee in return, accusing her of being unethical herself and launching an investigation into her negative work habits, including being late to work.[390]

As seen in this section, Saudi women use creative expressions of protest on Twitter by different means, including incorporating their own words with external elements such as articles, news items, and images. Moreover, the tone and content of their language varies between calm explanations and angry cursing. Indeed, Twitter has become a space that allows Saudi women to

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[388] Hamsa al-Sonousi: https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/37062.

[389] There are many stories exposing how corrections centers are dangerous and have high suicide rates over the years. Two newspaper articles from 2015 document this well:
(..دار فتيات مكة: محاولات الانتحار ظاهرة.. والعاملات يتداركنها) https://akhbaar24.argaam.com/article/detail/231844
(إنتحار نزيلة عشرينية في دار رعاية الفتيات في #مكة_المكرمة و(زوايا) تفتح ملف الدار) http://zawaayaaa.blogspot.com/2015/08/blog-post_527.html See also this story from 2017 where officials said that they would investigate the reasons for this:
(النزيلات يثرن الفوضى وإيداع 9 منهن السجن .. «حقوق الإنسان» تنتقد الأوضاع المأساوية في دار الفتيات)
https://www.okaz.com.sa/local/na/1558893 .

[390] مشرفة دار رعاية الفتيات بالرياض تكشف تفاصيل جديدة حول واقعة التعرية. صحيفة صدى الإلكترونية:
https://slaati.com/2017/04/28/p762335.html.

not only express themselves but to collectively flesh out their protest and demands. That being said, this is not the case for all campaigns, specifically the one against unemployment as I will discuss in the upcoming section.

Unemployment

The final section of this chapter will be devoted to Saudi women's protest on Twitter against unemployment. Saudi women stand alongside Saudi men in suffering from the unemployment crisis. In both the public and private sectors, there are more job seekers than work vacancies. The rate of unemployment seemed to hit a peak in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic, but even today, it has continued to fluctuate dramatically and has a negative impact on Saudis. According to the Saudi General Authority for Statistics, the unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2019 was 12%--4.9% for Saudi men and 30.8% for women.[391] The peak came in the second quarter of 2020, which was 15.4% in total: 8.1% for men and 31.4% for women.[392] Finally, the published rate in the fourth quarter of 2021 was 11% in total: 5.2% for males and 22.5% for females.[393] The huge gender disparity in these numbers reveals that social issues that affect all Saudis disproportionately impacts women. This unbalanced unemployment rate between the genders is part of what led Saudi women to protest unemployment in a series of different campaigns, using a number of hashtags.

[391]Labor Market Q4,2019: https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/lm_2019_q4_press_release_en_0.pdf .
[392] Labor Market Statistic Q2, 2020: https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/LM_2Q2020%20%28Press%20release_EN%20%29_2.pdf .
[393] Labor Market Statistic Q4, 2021: https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/LMS%20Q042021E.pdf .

Twitter Campaigns

The twitter campaigns against unemployment differ from the three analyzed above in their gendered dynamics. Unemployment has traditionally been deemed to be more of a male-dominated issue, despite its effect on women. Many elements of these campaigns, therefore, are shared by both Saudi women and men. For example, many of the hashtags used are general and used by and for both genders. The most popular of these is a hashtag that counts each day as did the campaign against the male guardianship system: (#تجمع العاطلين السعوديين). Though this hashtag added a number each day, it did not last as long as the one that was used in protest against the male guardianship system. That being said, there were also hashtags developed specifically to and for Saudi women. For example, some hashtags include: (#خريجات_قديمات_عاطلات) [old unemployed women graduates] (ظلم خريجات المكتبات) [oppressing women graduates of the library] and (البديلات المستثنيات) [temporary women replacements].[394]

In the analyses below, I will examine elements of the campaign on Twitter against unemployment by looking both at how Saudi women work with men on it and also how they protest differently. I will also explore the gendered dynamics of these engagements, given that Saudi women have organized and protested on Twitter far longer and more extensively than men have. I will then look specifically at some of the strategies Saudi women protesters used such as posting photos of their certification in specific majors, their diplomas, their transcripts with high marks, and comparing this to Saudi men's protests.

An example of strategically utilizing photos to accompany tweets, Twitter user, Sarah Alshomari (@saraalshomari) includes a cartoon in her tweet, depicting an official sitting in his

[394] Temporary replacements refer to temporary workers who previously worked for the government on a short-term basis but with a promise of it leading to a permanent job, which later was denied to them new job appointments were made.

office, offering a new graduate a job as a cashier.[395] The graduate stands there with shock on his face. The graduate's arm is open, displaying his degrees and diplomas he earned studying abroad. The cartoon is captioned with the words:

#تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين9
لمن أشكو معاناتي شهاداتي شهاداتي
ونهاية الابتعاث وتعب السنين تكون هكذا

> [To whom should I complain about my suffering my diplomas my diplomas. This is what happens after studying abroad and years of exhaustion.] [396]

Sara appears to be one of the protesters who was studying abroad. She includes in her tweet a cartoon mocking the future of university graduates who have gone abroad to study and travel back to their country hoping to have employment and a productive future. As one of these returning students, Sara protests showing her disappointment.

In a similar vein, the user (@i_kwek) posted her diploma from her bachelor's degree at one of the government-funded universities in Riyadh, showing all the information that she thinks prove that she is qualified for a good job:

#تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين #دعم_طيار_ركن9
هذي شهادتي ي ابو ذباب ولكل هطف قاعد يصدقه وللحين عاطلة بهالمعدل وتعب السنين ورضينا بالهم القطاع الخاص ولا رضى فينا بس شنقول النار ماتحرق الا رجل واطيها ي القطيع الغبي بس يدعم من غير مايشوف !!

> [To the father of the trolls, and anyone who believes him, this is my certificate and I am still unemployed. With this GPA and years of hard work, we accept the private sector but it did not accept us. What we can say, fire burns only people who stand on it. You are groups of sheep who support things without understanding.] [397]

[395] Figure (4-37): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original: https://twitter.com/saraalshomari/status/1186244227623260161.
[396] Figure (4-37): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original: https://twitter.com/saraalshomari/status/1186244227623260161
[397] Figure (4-38): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original: https://twitter.com/i_kwek/status/1185873516647866368.

The user (@i_kwek) uses an angry tone to stand up to the trolls who reject the campaign and its supporters for allegedly spreading false information about unemployment in the country. She attaches the proof of her academic qualifications which have not helped her land a job either in the more preferable and secure government sector, or in the less desirable private sector where it is easier to land a job.

Another statement from the user Aseel (@AseelAlsham) similarly states:

الوضيفه {الوظيفة} حق من حقوقنا #تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين ٩

[Employment is a right.] [398]

Without any cushioning or words to contextualize it, this tweet sends a clear message. Aseel asserts that everyone has the right to hold a job. This statement is succinct and does not utilize some of the other more common strategies such as asking for specific demands or imploring the state to help in this crisis.

Another tweet from Lodika (@Billevya) whose biographical sketch on Twitter identifies her as an environmental specialist says:

اول شي راح اكتب واطالب حتى لو مافي احد التفتلنا يعني إلى متى يطلعلي هذا الشي كل ماجيت اقدم على جداره. العمر ضاع
💔ترا لاااازم تشوفولنا حل مو معقول الي جالس يصير
تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين٢#

[First thing I will write and demand even if no one listens to us. Until when I will see this message every time I apply on *jadara*? Life is short and passes quickly, you need to find a solution for us, it's unbelievable what's happening]. [399]

[398] Figure (4-39): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original: https://twitter.com/AseelAlsham/status/1186299462999773188.
[399] Figure (4-40): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original: https://twitter.com/billevya/status/1184684523197489153.

In her tweet, she includes a screenshot of the system showing a message: " لا توجد وظائف تناسب درجتك العلمية أو تخصصك" [there are no jobs available for someone with your degree or specialty.] Using desperate language, Lodika's message confirms that even if no one cares, she will continue to demand employment. She also includes proof of the difficulty she has had finding a job. This is not an isolated message but is one that is repeated message as the previous tweets using this hashtag show a certificate or confirmation that they are graduates from a university abroad.

Unlike any other campaigns discussed thus far in this chapter, many campaigners of both genders direct their messages and tweets to the King and/or the Crown Prince, asking and even begging them for a solution. Malak (@Ward1426), for example, who sees this high rate of unemployment as abnormal, believes it happened on purpose. She asks both the King and the Crown Prince to pursue an investigation into her claim:

تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين٢#
ياملكنا الغالي وياولي العهد الأمين
عطالتنا مفتعلة وغير منطقية لان الحلول ممكنة ومواتية ولكن لاتفعل لأسباب مجهولة وغير معروفة لدى المواطنين
نرجوكم الوقوف على الأسباب وإيقاف المفسدين

> [Our beloved King, our honest Crown Prince,
> Unemployment here for us is purposeful and illogical, because there are solutions but they are not being used, for unknown reasons. Please, find these reasons and put an end to corruption.] [400]

[400] Figure (4-41) : https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/.

Calling the King and Prince both heroes, she asks them to rescue graduates. This tweet from another user who named herself: (خريجة عام ١٤٢٣ عاطلة) (@92222mn) includes a hashtag that translated reads: "Oh Muhammed Bin Salman, rescue the female graduates"[401]:

أنقذ_الخريجات_يامحمد_بن_سلمان#
#خريجات_قديمات_عاطلات. الي متي ونحن عاطلات

As we can see in these examples, there are different ways to protest employment in Saudi Arabia. There are some who demand and directly ask the King and Crown Prince to address the problem whereas others prefer to stick to facts, statements, or statistics. Also, the hashtags used on the posts are mixed. Moreover, as in the case of the tweet which speaks directly to the Crown Prince—"O Mohammed bin Salman, rescue the graduates"—the account's username itself is dedicated to the situation, the translation is: "Unemployed Graduate 1423." It indicates that though she graduated in the Islamic year 1423, she is still unemployed.

In the same category, there is a tweet that directs its demand to the government, in which Mnoo (@Mn0o55Mnoo) begs the Crown Prince to find a solution to the unemployment problem:

حصر_وتوظيف_خريجات_التربيه#
مالنا بعد الله الا سيدي ولي العهد
[We have no one except you my Highness the Crown Prince]. [402]

In her tweet, she includes a stylized picture that shows many Saudi women in the background, holding green files showing that they are seeking jobs, with a picture of Muhammed Bin Salman at the center of the image, waving. Her words are addressed to him (تكفى يا ولي العهد أنت لها.. عاطلات أكثر من عشر سنوات).

[401] Figure (4-42) : https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/.
[402] Figure (4-43): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original : https://twitter.com/Mn0o55Mnoo/status/1486448386324770823.

Another tweet uses a similar strategy of including a montage of pictures of women job seekers, though a different group of Saudi women. She uses a nickname (أجراس الأمل) which means, "the bells of hope" (@ajras_f) and writes attaching multiple hashtags:

ظلم_خريجات_المكتبات #البديلات_المستثنيات #حملة_مناصرة_الكليات_المتوسطة #خريجات_قديمات_عاطلات# لن نستسلم ابداً

[We will never give up.] [403]

This tweet is a good example of how the protest against unemployment is different from other campaigns in this study. While the others focus on specific subjects and make uses of a limited number of specific hashtags, the efforts in the unemployment campaign are not as organized. The campaigners here are more desperate to find jobs and do not focus their protest within particular circles or in particular ways. Instead, they tweet as much as possible and use a wide variety of hashtags.

Much as with the other campaigns analyzed in this chapter, Saudi women's protests against unemployment also demonstrate a certain sense of humor; the strategy of using mocking tone in critiquing the unemployment crisis is frequently used. An example of this can be seen when Shomokh Alabdullah (@SH_Al_Abullah) posts a picture of an elderly woman with her laptop and the caption reads:

تم اختيارك يرجى مراجعة الخدمة لمطابقة الشهادة ٢٠٧٠م

[You have been selected for the national employment program (*Jadara*) 2070.] [404]

This means that she will wait until 2070 to be selected for a job through the government

[403] Figure (4-44): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original : https://twitter.com/ajras_f/status/257064174511878146.
[404] Figure (4-45): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original : https://twitter.com/SH_Al_Abdullah/status/778968065409187840.

portal, called *Jadara*.[405] The protest, as we can see here, does not always or necessarily use an angry tone or sharp words, as was the case with the campaigns against the guardianship system and the correction centers. Rather, they use things like cartoons and other caricatures to support their statements. Most of the tweets are moderate in tone and often direct their demands to the government without attacking or clashing with them, but rather by asking or imploring the King and Crown Prince to take action.

A second example in this context is seen in a tweet by (مي) May (@8i80i) that includes a picture of a skeleton standing and waving to people in a car, with the caption:

تجمع_العاطلين_السعوديين٢#"
متخرجين جدد
هيكل عاطل:

[A skeleton of unemployed.][406]

The comment being made here is that the skeleton is a person who was still unemployed at such an advanced age that he died while waiting for the chance at actually being employed, while the people in the car are fresh graduates joining a job seekers' line.

In this campaign, a large number of Saudi women participated alongside Saudi men in demanding that the government provide them with jobs. In Saudi Arabia, the government is responsible for providing citizens with employment opportunities, and the blame for unemployment is therefore always directed towards them, even when what is being discussed are jobs in the private sector. Unlike other campaigns, the unemployment hashtags do not contain tweets written in English. Although this campaign is more general than others because

[405] Jadara is a service enabling job applicants, who are Saudi citizens, to register their personal data, qualifications, and work experience, with the necessary documents attached. It also enables beneficiaries to provide an electronic application service for vacancies that are announced by government agencies. See: https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/servicesDirectory/servicedetails/6046 .
[406] Figure (4-46): https://saudiwomen.ca/unemployment/. And the original : https://twitter.com/8i80i/status/1184702816834801664.

unemployment is a shared concern of both genders, its demands, the language used, and the tone are not as powerful as in the other cases. This leads me to argue that the campaigns for women's rights generally use stronger and more powerful language. Moreover, the protesters in this last campaign are asking and sometimes imploring the government—the King and the Crown Prince—for employment opportunities whereas the other campaigns are more focused on criticizing not asking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Saudi women's Twitter is a rich source of protest material on a wide range of issues and campaigns, as well as a location in which to find a breadth of language and creative expression. In this chapter, I have isolated and investigated a range of protest tweets and hashtags, and from this I focused on a range of campaigns that worked through them. In the campaigns and hashtags, men and women share in the protests, though in the chapter I have continued with my focus on women's creative expression of protest. Whether issues benefit women only or all citizens, Saudi women Twitter users have shown a commitment to struggle and protest through powerful and creative language—both in tone and style. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Saudi women have worked tirelessly to defend their rights, with patience, humour, and creative use of language.

Saudi women protesting on Twitter in English is unlike any other protest platform discussed in this dissertation. It is remarkable how women express themselves on Twitter as compared to other platforms that I discussed in previous chapters, including blogs, videos, and interviews for example. If we look at the use of language in Saudi women's blogging, for example, we can recall how Eman Al Nafjan used English—though she was one of the only

Saudi women bloggers to do so. Within Saudi women's Twitter protests, there is a trend for twitter users to use English more frequently, though not always exclusively. On this platform, people can and do switch between languages easily. Many tweets in the various campaigns were written in English. This might be to target an English-reading audience and/or to avoid the more conservative Saudi Twitter users who do not access or engage with English material. The English language is often used not only in the tweets themselves, but also the hashtags attached to them. This flexibility in switching between languages has given Saudi women the possibility to access and reach international audiences.

Moreover, another feature of Saudi women's protest using Twitter as a platform is in relation to the tone and style of language—in Arabic as well as in English. The ironic, sarcastic, angry, and defiant tone, and style evoked by many users is much more prominent on Twitter than elsewhere. This is not the case to such a degree in any of the literature analyzed in the dissertation, including poetry, memoir, and the novel, nor for example within later, internet-based protests, like blogs. The open access and the ability to be anonymous on Twitter help to shift the language and the tone of the protest.

A final feature of Saudi women's protest on Twitter is the way that visual images, especially photographs, work together with words to promote their messages. In the tweets I have analyzed here, a significant number combine words with images. These photos are at times used as documentary evidence to support what is being argued in the tweet—as in the photo of the detention center showing its lack of windows—to demonstrate support for a particular campaign—for example, to prove the existence of Saudi women protester with the images of Saudi national identification cards—or even just to include a visual image that itself can be powerful without any words at all.

In conclusion, Twitter has been a platform in which Saudi women have found refuge and the space to express themselves freely and moreover to protest their rights in an open space away from government censorship and the shaming by tribal and societal forces. Moreover, the journey of Saudi women's creative expression of protest is able to be seen so well on Twitter as it is a free and open space for protest, one of the reasons that it is so popular even today.

Conclusion

When I was ten years old, long before the Arab Spring, my sister and I once participated in our own form of protest. Because of his busy schedule one weekend, my father made a unilateral decision not to take us to our family's farm—a place we enjoyed because we loved nature and the freedom to roam around. We got to work and prepared our posters, writing: " لا للدكتاتورية" [No for the Dictatorship]. We stood in front of the door to my parents' bedroom and started to shout "تسقط الدكتاتورية" [Down with the Dictatorship]. I remember this protest as a formative moment— not because I was protesting an insurmountable injustice; after all this was concerning a simple weekend activity, but because protesting felt like a natural or organic response to a perceived injustice. I remember when I was a bit older, my friend was being beaten up by her father after she received a marriage proposal from a man that her father had suggested. He hurt her not because she had protested her father's support of this proposal, but because she responded to it questioning the match, because she was a university lecturer and an academic whereas the man in question had little education or interest in education, holding neither a high school degree nor a job. My friend, unfortunately, ended up marrying this man. The outcome of these two anecdotes is that my friend unfortunately got married to this man and I ended up going went with my family to the farm the next weekend after my "protest."

These two anecdotes exemplify the diversity and breadth of Saudi women's experience, while the story that the world hears about Saudi women and their protest movements, both regionally and internationally, is extremely limited and has mostly focused on the driving ban. But while this was a large and effective campaign, most Saudi women's protest is not limited to this one issue. What this dissertation has shown is that Saudi women have been protesting a great

number of issues for a long time in multiple ways, and have asserted themselves and their authority through them.

In this dissertation, I have examined Saudi women's creative expressions of protest, arguing that this extremely wide range of creative expression has gone virtually unnoticed both in scholarship on Arab women and Arab protest, as well as within the Arab protest scene itself. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the kinds of protests expressed by Saudi women have increased and become more visible through time both within writing in various forms as well as in other kinds of expression, using different methods. Saudi women have always protested; this has been more implicit where they used literary techniques in different ways to encode messages in poetry and prose. Other forms of self-expression are clearer, more direct, and explicit. As I show in Chapter Four, for example, explicit, direct protest reached new levels for Saudi women using Twitter, where they express and present their analyses, critiques, and demands in these ways.

Though this was not a major focus of the dissertation, throughout my analyses I have grappled with the question of what the word "protest" means and how I might think about "protest culture" in a society where these notions are explicitly guarded against at many levels, from the child in the family, the pupil at school, all the way through the life cycle, as I highlighted in the opening to my introduction. What does protest mean locally, within Saudi women's lexicon? I have spent quite some time thinking about how some of what I categorized as phenomenal and brave acts of protests by Saudi women would not be considered as revolutionary in a place like Montreal where I am currently writing this dissertation. I have considered a number of elements in the works I studied here to be protest including: explicitly

confirming self-esteem, opinions that are out of the norm in one's context, identifying oneself as existing outside of the group, society, culture, family, and/or tribe and nation.

Although the creative expressions I have identified and studied in the dissertation are different in genre and targets for protest, I am reading them as related to each other in how they form a larger picture of how and what Saudi women protest against. In my analysis of these diverse forms of expression, I find that the women protesters combine bravery and creativity to produce an angry and effective protest voice. My dissertation responds to the emergence of increased and increasing feminist self-representation among Saudi women. Within the twenty-first century, and with the coming of the internet this has been more widespread and social critique has been much more visible. As writers, bloggers, and other social media users have started to garner more national, regional, and international attention, they are able to air their critiques more freely and safely. I have focused not only on these protests here, but also on those that have often gone unnoticed.

My aim in this dissertation has been to use multiple genres to provide contextual readings of Saudi women's expressions of protest. I have thus shown how Saudi women's creative expressions of protest work differently in these different forms. The literary genres that I analyzed in Chapter One, poetry and fiction, have been used to protest many things. One theme I focused on was how they expose the family structure and certain roles--specifically mothers and the ways mothers treat daughters differently within sexist, patriarchal family structures. These works also protest racism in Saudi society, extremist fatwas, and the sexism of the tribal system that structures society. As I point out, most of these protests are encoded within more and less sophisticated literary techniques, so the messages must be teased out more carefully. In my analyses, I found that in writing published in print, most expressions of protest avoid mentioning

government policies directly and instead protest what are identified as "social norms." This can include things that are more clearly "social issues" as well as others such as the male guardianship system, which has roots in policy making not in "society." Targeting society has been a method that Saudi women have used to avoid the censors and get their work in print and thus they have protested the tribal system, familial sexism, and social injustices.

This implicit style of protest makes way for a more explicit kind of expression in Chapter Two, focused on women writing directly about their lives autobiographically. In these works, Saudi women focus on their local spaces and widen the targets of their protest. Some of the targets of their critique that I focus on in Chapter Two include social regulations that work against women, including the ban on women driving, and direct criticism of government officials. In the discussion in Chapter Three I focus on expressions that became possible after the internet became accessible to more Saudi women. The coming of the internet has amplified the voices of Saudi women and they are able in these works to bravely protest government regulations against them including the driving ban for women and the male guardianship system. In the analysis of the works in this chapter I show how they analyze and confront issues. It is important to note here that Saudi women do not limit their protests to targeting only their abusers or demanding rights for Saudi women alone. It is crucial here to note how they protest other important national issues like poverty, normalization with Israel, unemployment, and again extremist fatwas. The focus is not always local or national, but as we see Saudi women have used internet protests internationally, for example, in solidarity with Palestine.

In the case studies examined in the four chapters, I have paid particular attention also to the language/s of Saudi women's protest. I discovered that many different factors influenced the ways in which women formulated their language/s of creative expression. These most

importantly include: the literary forms they used, if their works are published in print or in virtual forms, if they are written or spoken. Moreover, language is combined with other creative expressions in new ways within social media platforms, allowing for a greater range of ways for Saudi women to exploit their creativity in courageous protests. For example, they make ample use of pictures, cartoons, videos, and other artistic forms to make their point. One can think of the example from Chapter Four where women used photos of their identity cards in relation to their messages to cleverly protest those who claimed they were not true or authentic Saudis.

This study has highlighted the work of Saudi women in creative expressions, shedding light on how they are struggling to achieve liberation in their own contexts. It explores how they challenge policies that limit Saudi women's movement and expression. It also amplifies the voices of the relatively limited number of Saudi women protesters who express their disagreement with different ideologies, policies, and customs within Saudi Arabia. By exploring features of Saudi women's creative expressions protest, this dissertation gives insight into them and calls for more studies of Saudi women's literature, Saudi women's creative expressions more generally, their contribution to protest culture/s, and moreover the study of Saudi women and their gendered experiences as well.

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