"Unveiling the Veiled" in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Persepolis 2 and Rajaa Alsanea's Girls of Riyadh: A Revolutionary Perspective(*)

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Abstract

This article explores the various "power" structures (epitomized in governmental institutions, state policies, patriarchal hierarchical relationships and inherited cultural norms) inflicted upon Muslim women in two dictatorial regimes: Islamic Republic of Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and the various tactics and maneuvers Muslim women in these two countries resort to as a means of circumventing these multi-directional sources of "power" and hegemony. The first section of the article, which is expository, is devoted to elucidating the notion of "power" in the Foucauldian context; and its interdependent and consolidated relationship with "resistance." As Foucault contends: "Where there is power, there is resistance;" and this is the main trope and thrust of this article. Then, the paper securitizes and expounds in detail two feminist-oriented novels written by two contemporary Middle Eastern female writers: Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003) and Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2004) by the Iranian-French graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi and Banat Al-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh (2007) by the Saudi writer Rajaa Alsanea. In these two texts, both Satrapi and Alsanea provide new images of outspoken, revolutionary Muslim female characters who resist state enforcement mechanisms and existing cultural practices in their countries; and Western circulations about them as well–thereby subverting the "gaze" imprisoning

(*) Unveiling the Veiled" in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Persepolis 2 and Rajaa Alsanea's Girls of Riyadh: A Revolutionary Perspective Vol. 7, Issue No.4, Oct. 2018, pp.9-56.

women in fixed stereotypical images of passivity and submissiveness, and voicing the victimized and the voiceless. It is a non-ceasing process of "power" and "resistance."

Keywords:
Iran, Saudi Arabia, "Power," "Resistance," Women's "body"

الملخص :

يتناول البحث صورة المرأة المسلمة والأشكال المختلفة للأنظمة الديكتاتورية والهيمنة التي تتمثل في المؤسسات الحكومية والمواريث الثقافية والاجتماعية التي تفرض قيودا علي المرأة في نظامين ديكتاتوريين: الجمهورية الإسلامية الإيرانية والمملكة العربية السعودية، وذلك من خلال اتباع المنهج التحليلي والمقارن ما بين روايتين معاصرتين:الأولي، الرواية المصورة برسيبوليس بجزئيها برسيبوليس: قصة الطفولة (٢٠٠٣) و برسيبوليس٢: قصة العودة (٢٠٠٤) للكاتبة الإيرانية الفرنسية مرجان ساترابي والثانية، بنات الرياض (٢٠٠٧) للكتابة السعودية رجاء الصانع، وذلك في ضوء بعض المفاهيم النقدية المختارة للكاتب والفيلسوف الفرنسي ميشل فوكو: "القوة" و"المقاومة."

ينقسم البحث إلى ثلاثة أجزاء بالإضافة للخاتمة: يتناول الجزء الأول نظرية "القوة" و"المقاومة" لفوكو والعلاقة المترابطة بين المفهومين، يتناول الجزء الثاني والثالث تحليلاً تفصيليًا للروايتين: برسيبوليس وبنات الرياض، وبالرغم من اختلاف طرائق السرد والحكاية في كلتا الروايتين إلا أنهما تشتركان في تسليط الضوء علي نماذج مختلفة للمرأة الإيرانية والسعودية التي تقاوم كل أشكال "القوة" والهيمنة. ومن هنا تتضح العلاقة بين "القوة" و"المقاومة،" وأخيرا الخاتمة تحتوي علي ملخص البحث وأهم النتائج.

الكلمات الدالة: ايران، السعودية، "القوة،" "المقاومه،" جسد المرأة.

This article interprets and looks closely at two feminist-oriented texts written by two contemporary Middle Eastern female writers: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* (2004) by the Iranian-French graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi and *Banat Al-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh* (2007) by the Saudi writer Rajaa Alsanea in the light of the Foucauldian classical notions: "Power" and "Resistance." Both novels shed light on diverse forms of "disciplinary power" (including restrictions on attire, education, travelling and marriage) exerted over women's "body" and presence in Islamic Republic of Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and the various tactics and maneuvers women in these two countries resort to as a means of circumventing different forms of surveillance over them. In succinct words, the intertwined relationship between "power" and "resistance" is the main thematic thread that draws the two texts at hand together; and from here comes my conviction and contention to read them side-by-side via a Foucauldian lens.

Foucauldian Conception of "Power" and "Resistance"

> Where there is *power*, there is *resistance*, and yet, or rather consequently, this *resistance* is never in position of exteriority in relation to *power*.
>
> (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 93)

The relationship between "power" and "resistance" has always been a controversial issue and heated debate among cultural theorists, literary critics and political thinkers since ages. Michele Foucault (1926-1984)–one of the most influential French thinkers and philosophical critics–examines from a historical and critical viewpoint the various forms of "power" in society starting from "sovereign power" and ending with the "power" ordinary people exert over one another in numerous books and essays. To expound, in his classical momentous work *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison/Discipline and Punish* (1979) Foucault unveils the brutality and violence of "sovereign power" and penalty systems in the West during the eighteenth century and the early parts of the nineteenth century. He illustrates how "power" has always been strongly intertwined and intersected with the institution of the "body" which is its main target throughout different periods of history. And even when "the punishment-body relation is not the same as it was in the torture during public

executions . . .;" Foucault explains, "[t]he body, . . ., is [still] caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 11). In the Foucauldian context, even if the "body" is no longer a direct object of torment or oppression as it was in the past, it is the "soul" inside the "body" that is, nonetheless, tortured and oppressed. It is a non-corporal punishment; it is the deprivation of liberty and confinement–as Foucault puts it: "since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations" (16) of the individual. This outlines why the first chapter in *Discipline and Punish* is entitled "Torture: The body of the condemned" and why the prison in this book is not just a concrete object or a place of incarceration; rather, it has multiple implications in the sense that "power" has "mastery" over both the "body" and the "soul" (30). This image is thoroughly and vividly epitomized in both Satrapi's two volume graphic memoir *Persepolis* and Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* as the reader will notice later how the female protagonists as well as other characters in both novels (for instance, the protesters in the early chapters of *Persepolis* during both the Shah's regime and Khomeini's governance; and Michelle in the chapter entitled "The Migrating Bird" in *Girls of Riyadh*) are imprisoned in paradoxical worlds. Some characters are confined physically, whereas others are circumscribed psychologically but all are under the encompassing notion of "power" in the two texts at hand.

Furthermore, Foucault deconstructs and transforms the traditional perception of "power" adopted by most Marxist thinkers (such as Karl Marks and Louis Althusser). He argues that "power" is discursive penetrating all types of relationships. It is not entirely possessed or inherited by the "sovereign;" on the contrary, "it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 93). He contends: "[P]ower is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26). To him, "power" is omnipresent; "it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 93).

It is "both at the top and at the bottom" (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 249) levels of society. It is decentralized reverberating through all domains of life. In this respect, "he, who is *dominant* in one situation. . .is, in a different situation, *subject*. . .;"(Cisney and Morar 3) consequently, "power relations" are neither fixed nor inevitable because they are often challenged and altered by various modes of "resistance." These various forms of "power" at both "micro-" and "macro-levels" of society; and diverse tactics of "resistance" are vividly depicted in Satrapi's *Persepolis*: Marji's schoolteacher who always threatens her because of her outspokenness, Marji's mother who is threatened because of protesting in the street without the "veil," the various means of media which denigrate the image of unveiled women, et cetera. In all these instances, the characters always create and deploy devices to counter the "power" mechanisms exercised over them. Similarly, in *Girls of Riyadh* the absolute "power" and suppressive force that Gamrah's uncle exercises over her after being divorced from her husband Rashid is manifestly noticed. Though he is having the absolute "power" over her on most occasions, Gamrah succeeds in undoing the fastened bars and gripping the "power" in her hand by the end of the novel. Accordingly, it is not the "power" exercised by sovereign or regime over individuals but also the control placed by individuals over one another in the context of culturally-defined roles in hierarchical societies. It is a non-ceasing process of "power" and "resistance."

In exploring "power relations" in the Foucauldian sense, it is necessary to expound and highlight the concept of "biopower"–a notion that has caused many debates in the literary and cultural landscape; and has drawn the attention of many literary and cultural critics. The notion of "biopower" was coined and illuminated by Foucault in his book *Histoire de la Sexualité/The History of Sexuality* (1990) and was thoroughly elucidated in his lectures at the Collège de France, which were later compiled in a book entitled *Society Must Be Defended* 1975-76 (2003). Foucault outlines what comes to be known as bipolar diagram of "power" or a triangle of "power" whereby "biopolitics;" known as "*a bio-politics of the population,*" comes to be perceived as one of the poles of "biopower" and the other pole is the

"disciplinary power;" referred to as "anatomo-politics of human body" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 139). According to Foucault, "biopower" is a concept that encompasses in its roots both the "biopolitics" and the "disciplinary power." Regarding the "disciplinary power" (a concept that is the main thrust of this article), it entails all sorts of constant surveillance, disciplines and modes of operation set by the state over the "body" and the mind of the individual; its main attribute is the docility of the "body." It is forcibly implanted by the state in various institutions and social networks as schools, universities, hospitals and police stations.[1] As for "biopolitics," it is basically concerned with improving and controlling the life of the man as "species" (139) and not as an individual. Though both types of "power" operate by different mechanisms and devices of application, both set unquestioning control over the "body," mind, inclinations and the life of the individual.

Actually, the trope of "power" and "resistance" has recurred in numerous works of art by many Middle Eastern feminist writers such as Latifa Al-Zayyat's Bāb al-maftūh/*The Open Door* (1960), Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), Saher Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997), Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003) and *Persepolis 2* (2004), Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat Al-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh* (2007), et cetera–literary works which have emerged either because of nationalist movements in the societies of the protagonists; or social pressures and limitations driving rising generations, particularly women, to endeavor to flee from the discursive modes of "disciplinary power" entrenched either in their male-centered communities or dictated by the totalitarian regimes in their countries. To explain further, Al-Zayyat's "coming-of-age" *The Open Door* epitomizes the aspirations of Egyptian girls at the time preceding 1952 Revolution in a manner that is both "individualized" and "representative" via the character of Layla–the middle-class Egyptian girl who resists "parental and class pressures" (Kahf 227) embedded in the Egyptian cultural landscape at that time. She attempts to achieve freedom and maintain her self-dignity in an exclusively male-centered society. Though Layla faces

many challenges and complexities; particularly on the part of her family, she succeeds at the end in breaking the inherited patriarchal shackles; thereby representing the concerns and thoughts of a younger generation of Egyptian females at that time. Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* is a "semi-autobiographical tale of a young girl who grows up in a Moroccan hareem during the 1940s" (Gershman 49). The child reflects "an untainted picture of the lives of women inside hare" (49) and raises significant questions regarding gender separation, and the age-long norms dictated over women. She presents images of women who yearn for unfastening the iron gates of harem to escape from suppression dictated over their feminine gender. It is also worth to mention that despite many comparisons drawn between Satrapi's graphic memoir and Azhar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) which tackles similar pressing debates regarding radical changes in Iran after the 1979 Revolution; and state enforcement mechanisms and hegemony over women, I would like to argue that Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* also echoes many parallel feminist issues to those explored in Satrapi's *Persepolis* (as it will be illustrated in the subsequent parts). Succinctly speaking, these texts and others as above-mentioned mark a long history in the Middle Eastern women writing that extensively addresses different forms of "disciplinary power" exercised over women particularly and various modes of "resistance" on their part.

Satrapi and Alsanea: "Voicing Resistance"

Both the Iranian-born French graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi and the Saudi writer Rajaa Alsanea were brought up and lived most of their formative years in their homelands: Iran and Saudi Arabia. Despite the competing relationships between these two countries and the differences between them on the religious, ideological and political level, they both share many features regarding the long-lived history of rigidness and patriarchal control over women's "body" and appearance in public realm. These limitations are at the level of both the state and the society; and are mostly manipulated by the state religious guardians and the male guardians

in the females' families. In *Persepolis* and *Girls of Riyadh*, both Satrapi and Alsanea situate issues and complexities facing women in Iran and Saudi Arabia within the historical, political and social context of their communities. Both utilize personal narratives and individual memories to make room for new voices who endeavor to resist "power" and dictatorship imposed on females in their countries; and rectify Western perception imprisoning Middle Eastern women in fixed stereotypical images of passivity and submissiveness. Both provide a window into the lives, aspirations and thoughts of secular female elites. After writing *Persepolis*, Satrapi admits: "If *Persepolis* opens people's eyes, I feel successful" ("A Graphic Novel Memoir" 11). Likewise, Alsanea proclaims in the "Author's Note" to *Girls in Riyadh*: "[C]oming from a family that values other cultures and nations, and being the proud Saudi I am, I felt it was my duty to reveal another side of the Saudi life to the Western world" (vii). Both novels were banned by the Iranian and the Saudi authorities in their countries accusing their authors of denigrating the true image of their people, mainly women. It is important to highlight that *Persepolis* was precluded not only in Iran but in some other countries (for instance, United States of America and Tunisia) as well; and up till now the novel has not been translated into the Persian language. On the contrary, though *Girls of Riyadh* was banned from sale in Saudi Arabia after its publication, it has later been "approved for sale" by "the Ministry of information" (Fischer 56); hence, marking a transformation on the part of the Saudi authorities to provide more space for resistant voices. Both works of art were published, avidly read and have garnered great critical acclaim from global readers and critics despite all these forms of censorship.

Additionally, the novel writing form of Satrapi's two volume graphic memoirs *Persepolis* and Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* add much to the Foucauldian discourse of "power" and "resistance" as they both revolutionize and "challenge textual authority and prescriptive paradigms" (Davis 264) of writing novel. Being greatly influenced by Art Spiegelman's classical *Maus* (1986-1991); chiefly in his creation of realistic "[storyworld]" reflected artistically via "emphatic characters, immersive

physical spaces, . . . as well as panel separation, arrangement and juxtaposition" (Beckler 7), Satrapi utilizes the avant-garde "autographic" form in the graphic memoir–therefore, resisting "the conventions of the autobiography as a linear, singular first-person, prose genre via utilizing her imagination to convey realism and memory with images" (Rader 127). Satrapi "skillfully addresses difficult subjects through an iconic visual style" (Nabizadeh 152) fusing both stark black and white childlike images and words to epitomize the challenging times her nation has experienced during the new regime; and to approach crucial issues regarding Muslim women's lives and status in totalitarian regimes. In other words, Satrapi succeeds in presenting the "almost-unrepresentable experiences" (Knowles 84) via the white and black images of the oppressed Iranian women in particular and her nation in general. Likewise, Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* is written in an innovative form of long, gossipy emails. Literally speaking, the anonymous narrator's subscribing group on the internet takes the form of weekly postings on the World Wide Web after Friday Muslim prayers. It is through the anonymous narrator's constructed website and weekly emails that Alsanea exposes the concealed site of the Saudi women's lives under the oppressive regime and unveils the Saudi patriarchal community at large which seeks all the time to set "power" over women's lives, minds and choices. Each chapter opens with some extracted lines either from a verse from the Holy Qur'an, Hadith of the Prophet, quotes by famous writers, or epigraphs by philosophers like Socrates or poets as Khalil Gibran; thereby "[charting] the protagonists' outlooks on life" (Booth, "Translator v. Author" 198) and making the novel "anchored in a hybrid space that invokes multiple layers of meaning and experience" (Al-Rasheed, "Deconstructing Nation and Religion" 143). Furthermore, the narrative language of the novel which entails various Arabic dialects such as Kuwaiti, Egyptian, Lebanese and Saudi in novel's Arabic version; and encompasses Arabianized English words such as "*abaya*" and "*shoufa"* in the translated English version actualize and concretize the various female models presented in the text and the different backgrounds they come from. Commenting on the creative structure of the novel, Marilyn Booth writes: "If *Banat al-Riyadh* is the first

Arabic novel to fully exploit an email listserv format, it is also bold in its use of not one but multiple vernacular (in a situation of diglossia where spoken Arabic varies markedly from place to place as well as from the 'learned' or 'literary' language)" ("Translator v. Author" 198). Concisely, in employing powerful, experimental tools which disrupt boundaries either set by traditional literary writers or by theocratic regimes embedded in the countries of the two authors, both Satrapi and Alsanea struggle against narratives of sameness to embrace narratives of differences.

Marjane Satrapi: "Unveiling The Veiled" In *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*

As contended by the Iranian-American scholar Farzaneh Milani in *Words Not Swords*,

> The 1979 Islamic Revolution in its early days–the Taliban in Afghanistan, the military junta in Sudan, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, and the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia–wanted to "purify" public space in the name of Islam by clearing out women. Thousands of women were. . .forced into exile. Women were segregated in . . .schools, universities, . . ., and buses. . .Women's place, it was argued, was not public but private, not out in the streets but inside the home. (1)

In a long, highly expressive prologue to *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003), Marjane Satrapi recites a detailed account of the history, civilization and struggles of her country. She narrates the history of Iran pre- and post-Cultural Revolution, the economic pressures exercised over her country by the West, the eruption of Islamic fundamentalists 'protests which have altered the culture and identity of the Iranian people, and the arrested representations constituted and perpetuated about her people because of the theocratic regime. She relates the events in her country from an Iranian perspective emphasizing the importance of remembering those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of a better future. She says that "this old and great civilization has been discussed mostly in connection with *fundamentalism, fanaticism, terrorism.* As an Iranian who has lived more

than half of my life in Iran, . . .I believe that an entire nation should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists" (Introduction n.pag). She is attempting to explore a naked reality that is unknown to the Western reader. Analogously, in the "Author's Note" to *Girls of Riyadh* Alsanea offers an unprecedented glimpse into a community hidden from view. She writes: "[T]he Western world still perceives us either romantically, as the land of the Arabian Nights, . . ., the land where women are dressed in black from head to toe. . .I hope that by the time you finish this book, you will say to yourself: . . .The women there do live under male dominance. But they are full of hopes and plans and determination and dreams" (vii-viii). Both Satrapi and Alsanea attempt to provide a comprehensive and realistic image of their people, particularly women. They both reveal the challenges and the complexities that their nations confront not only in repressive regimes like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan but also within the Western mindset and consciousness which insist on molding them in unchanging, degenerate images.

In her first trip to the United States of America in 2003, Satrapi reiterates the aforementioned words which were published in *New York Times* (2005) under the title "Defending My Country": "I had . . .to try to explain to people what Iran was really like. That not every woman in Iran looked like a black bird. That the axis of evil also included people like myself" (n.pag.). It is worth mentioning that Satrapi's graphic memoir was written and published in a time "when France was struggling with the debate over veiled Muslim girls in secular public schools and when the US expanded [and unleashed] its 'War on Terror' against the Taliban in Afghanistan to Iraq" (Costantino 433). This elucidates how the question of "power" and the everlasting struggle between the Western tendencies and the Eastern values have always been linked to Islamic fundamentalism, and the institution of Muslim women's "body" and appearance in public arena. Through introducing young and adolescent Marji and her Marxist family to the international reader, Satrapi's *Persepolis* re-constructs an understanding of the image of Muslim women amidst this cultural, ideological and political unrest. Firouzeh Dianat remarks that Marjane in *Persepolis*

resembles the revised model of "Shahrazād" in *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*/*One Thousand and One Nights* in the sense that both female characters "attempt to liberate nations from misjudgments," and endeavor to re-configure women's image and status via "their narratives" (Dianat 112) and storytelling. Satrapi provides a new image of Muslim woman who endeavors to secure a place in the public realm and not in an enclosed private space via the account of her own memoir and stories of her friends. Similarly, Alsanea endows the marginalized Saudi women with a voice to reveal an obscure reality and express their views via the narrator's account of her girlfriends' stories and experiences.

Through black and white expressive graphs, black and white shading, dramatic style and bold-lined words, Satrapi in the two volumes of *Persepolis* unravels the painful experiences of Iranian people; mainly women, within different dictatorial regimes–both the Shah's reign and the Khomeini's rule. She is an eyewitness to all the terrible traumatic events that have changed the identity of modern Iran and the image of liberal Iranian woman which was formulated and modernized during the Shah's governance to rigid conservatism and extreme fundamentalism. Though it is an autobiography, Satrapi breaks the traditional form of the first-person narration making the reader learn about these turbulent events not only through Marji's "eyes" but also via multiple voices such as her parents, "her grandmother," "her uncle Anoosh" (Basu 6), her neighbors and her friend. The first volume of *Persepolis* ends with Marji travelling to Austria, where she can have better education and emancipation from the repressive atmosphere dominating the newly-constructed Iran. Her parents are afraid that her questioning of the prevailing ideology might lead her into frequent troubles: she is once expelled from school; and on another occasion, she is threatened after disclosing the truth of the rigid regime to her mullah by boldly telling her about her uncle who has been detained in the Shah's time and has been brutally executed at the hands of the rigid hardliners.[2] In *Persepolis 2*, Satrapi delineates how Marji is not only crossing the Iranian boundaries physically but also psychologically, culturally and ideologically. She is attempting to get involved into the Western culture and conform to its

standards but on many occasions, she is rejected by the Western people. She suffers from psychological burden in Austria because of her Iranian identity which has been looked down upon after Khomeini's governance; and this is evident in the way the nun at the convent humiliates her: "It's true what they say about Iranians. They have no education" (Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 23) after seeing her having her lunch while watching television, and in the cruel treatment of her lover's mother who describes her as "a witch" and accuses her of "taking advantage" of her son Markus "to obtain an Austrian passport" (66). In poignant touching words, Marji herself admits: "I should say at that time, Iran was the epitome of evil and to be Iranian was a heavy burden to bear" (41). However, the more she tries to assimilate Translator into the host culture, "the more" she feels that she is "distancing [herself] from [her] culture, betraying [her] parents and [her] origins" (39). In fact, she navigates two antithetical worlds; none of which accepts her and each of them dictates different forms of "power" over her either physically or psychologically. Her trip to Austria is an embodiment of the Western cultural and ideological "gaze" of the East and its people. Hence, as the question of the body is crucial to unveil the subjugation of women in *Persepolis,* the question of location and space is also pivotal to disclose how both young and adolescent Marji situates "herself vis-à-vis dominant discourses of both Western and Iranian culture" (Miller 38). Miller comments on Marj's oscillation between two competing cultures as follows: "Iran" is not only "the space of home but also that of devastating personal and political events, and Austria [is] the place of exile" (39)–a "location" where she is impelled on many occasions to disassociate herself from her Iranian identity; and "to make her past disappear" (Satrapi, *Persepolis* 2 40) as a means of securing a protective shield in the Western culture.

The first volume of *Persepolis*: *The Story of a Childhood* opens in the 1980 post-Islamic Revolution which makes devastating changes to the lives of the Iranian women regarding the obliteration of the modern identity of Iranian woman and the imposition of "veil" over them. As argued by Grassian, "[i]n Western discourse, perhaps no feature has been so discussed and vilified as an emblem of supposed traditional Islamic oppression of

women as the veil" (29). It is one of the central tenets that the novel revolves around. This explains why Satrapi has chosen to open her graphic memoir with a chapter entitled "The Veil" attracting the reader's attention to an enduring controversial issue which has always been politicized in Iran (either in the past or in the present) and has often been linked to the political, cultural and social objectification of women in successive oppressive Iranian regimes. She intensifies this vision by the eye icon preceding the black title bar which implies her project of being a witness of all political events that have changed the Iranian modern face. It is important to mention that Satrapi acknowledges well the significance of the "veil" in Islam and that it is an emblem of religiousness, chastity and purity but she criticizes the various disciplines and tactics the dictatorial governances adopt to enforce women into both coerced veiling and unveiling; and this is manifested when she strongly opposes the banning of "veil" in France though she expresses her dissent against the enforcement of veil in *Persepolis*. She writes in the *Guardian*: "I know what it felt like to be pushed into being religious, so I know what it must be like to be pushed into being secular." The Iranian writer Azar Nafisi sustains this point by elucidating how "veil" in Iran "no longer" stands for "religion" but for the ruling regime and how many Iranian women regard it as "a political symbol" rather than a "religious expression of faith" (5).[3]

In the first panel of the opening chapter of *Persepolis*, Marji is portrayed veiled in a black costume–an identical image to the one on the front cover of the book; however, it is in black and white colors only implicating the gloomy atmosphere that hovers over the graphic memoir. As noted by Gillian Whitlock, the "garment" in this graph is "a highly iconic" representing "the newly-veiled Marji" after "the first experiences of the Revolution" (976). The image "[draws the reader] into the specific context of Marji's life. This is the context of a radical otherness, symbolized by the veil" (Naghibi and Malley 231). In reading further the political and historical conditions in Iran at that time, it is the era when the enforcement of the "veil" becomes an essential "part of the regime's agenda to institutionalize and exploit the female identity espoused by the [1970s]

authenticity movement" (Zahedi 259); and to eliminate entirely the westernized Iranian identity constituted during the Shah's rule. Commenting on the opening chapter of *Persepolis,* Priya Sharma says: "[Marjane's] sole decision to open the novel with the title 'The Veil' reveals her identity as a novelist who offers diverse understandings of the meanings attached to it. . . For the young Marji, the 'veil' becomes a symbol of oppression that radically transforms her life" (4). Alongside Marji's image, there is another panel including four named veiled girls; they are her classmates. Her position in this panel is peripheral and incomplete; only her left-hand side of the "veil" appears.

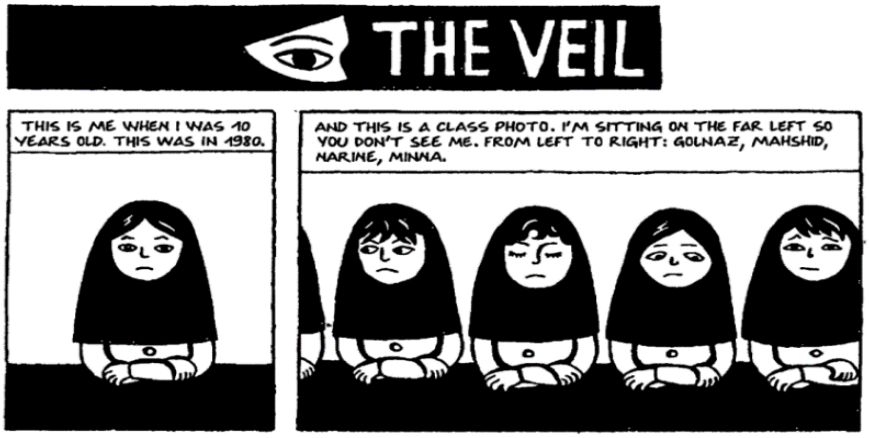

Fig. 1: Satrapi, *Persepolis* 3.

Many critics have given due attention to these two panels; for they are strongly intertwined connoting both the distinctiveness of Marji as an Iranian girl; and the four girls' unutterable sadness and collective "resistance" to the deleterious impact of the newly created form of "disciplinary power" exercised over their "bodies" and physical appearance in public domains. As Monica Chiu puts it,

> The two panels work relationally to complete the missing self in the second panel, representing Marji as both an individual and a member of her class. Along with her class, Marji is subjected to veil. But despite the institutionalized constraints of subjects who must wear it,

> the girls' varied facial expressions depict individuality. Marji is visually and elementally a member of a class of Iranian girls who collectively constitute the educational institution. She is also separate from them as an individual Iranian girl. (102)

By drawing Marji in a separate panel to emphasize her individuality, Satrapi unveils an image of a resistant girl who will not only rail against the arbitraries set by the fundamentalist regime over Iranian women but also against the Western circulating discourses which seek to "reduce Middle Eastern women to the veil they wear" (Costantino 439); thereby suggesting "different personalities" and rejecting the idea of the monolith race. Moreover, the girls' distinguishing physical features in the second panel "(open or closed eyes, the direction of a gaze, the angle of a mouth [in the shape of a frown], the few hair strands [which peak from their head cover]" (439) obliquely suggest their deep sadness regarding new "power" mechanisms set on them and their fear of an odd, unknown Iran. They feel that their modern Iranian identity has been stripped of them, "a loss of the self. . .and a loss of the known world as the force of the Islamic fundamentalism was registered fully and forcefully on the bodies of Muslim girls and women" (Whitlock 971). Even if the girls in the panel could not proclaim their "resistance" openly, it is strongly validated via their facial expressions and manifestly "registered" in the way they wear the "veil."

One more point worth noting is that these two highly expressive graphs encapsulate what Foucault repeatedly emphasizes and refers to as the exercise of "power" rather than possession. To Foucault, power is practiced via numerous tactics and mechanisms; that is to say, "the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation,' but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26). In *Persepolis*, the reader can read the mechanisms of "disciplinary power" in the imposition of the "veil," limitation of women's appearance and mobility in public arena, abolition of bilingual mixed schools and mixed parties and

capitalization on media to justify the abuse of "power"–as it will be explored later. All these compulsions are "nothing more than a law of prohibition" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 84), a "law" of nonexistence. From this perspective, it is obvious that the novel situates the women's "body" question in closed communities in a wider context rather than the religious one. It is an ideological and cultural confinement.

In delving deep into the incidents of the graphic memoir, Satrapi's text-images play a pivotal role in epitomizing the intertwined connection between "power" and "resistance." This is strongly traced in the way Satrapi utilizes physical objects which have become compulsory in everyday life to disclose the "disciplinary power" exercised over women's "bodies" in the newly constructed Iran and their fluctuation between two contradictory cultures: the old modern Iran and the re-constructed traditional one. In a wide-frame panel, Satrapi draws young school girls resisting the "power" imposed on them by taking off the headscarves, playing with them as skipping ropes, hide and seek, and making them as collars. All these are different forms of civil opposition.

Fig. 2: Satrapi, *Persepolis* 3.

In a preceding panel, Satrapi depicts a conservative school teacher who in a rigid manner handles the children the "veil" to wear. In caption, the narrative text reads: "They came 1980: The year it became obligatory to wear the veil at school" (3)–therefore, "reinforcing the idea that [women's] body must be rendered invisible within the public sphere" (Sichani 21).

Also, it is highly explicit here how "[d]isciplines. . .dealt with individuals and their bodies in practical terms" (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 245); and how "in every society, the body [is] in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 136). It is an ideological, physical and psychological incarceration. Despite all these restrictions and means of immobilizations, women usually find means of railing against all forms of "power" in an unnoticeable way; in doing so, the Foucauldian conception of the consolidated relationship between "power" and "resistance" is manifested.

In one of the most critically addressed graphic images, Satrapi juxtaposes a complicated graph which deeply highlights the entangled relationship between "power" and "resistance." Satrapi draws women from diverse political and cultural backgrounds: on the left-hand side, the reader sees conservative women who wear black chador and have closed eyes call for "veil" and on the right-hand side, others with white clothing and open eyes scream for "freedom" refusing curtailment of their rights and all forms of oppression dictated over them by the new regime. As argued by Omar Kutbi, the "closed" eyes and the black dressing of the women suggest that they are "close minded" having fake consciousness and blind vision; and that is why they are incapable of predicating the dull destiny and miserable status they are driving their nation into, whereas others with "open eyes" and white dressing stand for their openness and future insights (125).

Fig. 3: Satrapi, *Persepolis* 5.

The anger against the enforcement of veil in Iran at that time turned into a galvanizing force as many Iranian women marched into streets crying: "'Freedom is neither Eastern nor Western; it is global' and 'Down with the reactionaries! Tyranny in any form is condemned'" (Nafsi 4-5). Milani emphasizes this point saying that Khomeini's veiling ordinance fails "to maintain" and manipulate its ideological, "sociocultural" dominance and mastery over women's "body" and presence in all domains of life as many Iranian women (despite being forced to wear the veil) strongly counter"[t]he conventional equation: veiled/silent/ absent" attempting to be "voiced and ever so present in the public scene" (*Veils and Words* 38). They refused to be "relegated to the domain of the private" (38). To sum up, it is a warlike struggle between two forces: resistant subjects in opposition to powerful objects.

As previously mentioned, Satrapi's increasingly feeling of marginalization in Austria; and her unfulfilled relationship and break from her lover Marcus who is the fundamental source of her emotional support drive her into returning to her homeland. Unexpectedly, after returning she discovers that there are no longer demonstrations in the streets as if earlier outspokenness and enthusiasm for transformation in "power forces" begin to wear off and vanish; however, people, particularly women, start to challenge "disciplinary" mechanisms imposed on them by the oppressive regime via countless subtle actions. Marji depicts the diverse ways of women's veil wearing in Iran starting from conservative "veil" to modernized head covering. She illustrates how their tight-fitting clothes which seem to reveal the "shape" of their "bodies" rather than conceal them and how their "vidualized hairstyles" represent a mode of "resistance" to the enforced dressing codes inflicted upon them. Reflecting on the Iranian women's various "veiling" forms, Zahedi writes: "Compulsory concealing of the hair has led many women to create different styles of hair coverings. . .[They] have fashioned new scarves and different ways of wearing them. Women's creativity in Islamic attire is a manifestation of the desire for self-expression and their quest for a new identity and image" (260). Nafisi also elucidates how Iranian women decide to "re-create themselves and rescue their own

confiscated [modern] identity" by adopting numerous "creative ways" (7). Satrapi illuminates the Iranian women's "resistance" to coercive measures dictated over their appearance in public realms:

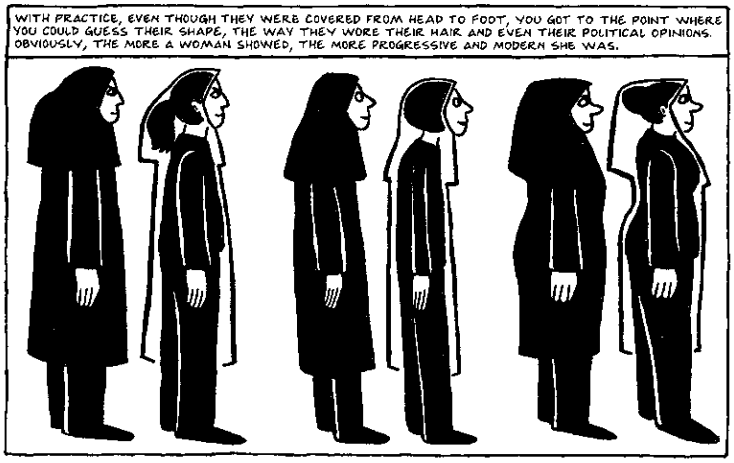

Fig. 4: Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 145.

Furthermore, Costantino argues that these varied ways of dressing and "veil" exemplify how "women can actually manipulate the ways in which they wear to make political statements" (440), to express both their rejection and "resistance" to the hegemonic practices of the totalitarian regime. Strictly speaking, Satrapi's drawings consolidate the idea that "Middle Eastern women, like Western women, [are capable of making] diverse and independent choices about their appearance, identities, and political, religious, and cultural beliefs" (441) despite social and ideological restrictions imposed on them; they are not silent, passive figures. Her black and white drawings actualize and concertize women's inner thoughts and feelings towards the dictates of the new regime.

Another instance of the charged act of countering "power" is graphically and significantly portrayed in the way Marji draws a set of consecutive panels in one of the most important chapters in the graphic memoir entitled "The Socks." She outlines how she "[spends] an entire day at the committee because of a pair of red socks" (Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 148) and how she and her friends "[hinge] on the little details" such as improper

"veiling" (148) putting on makeup and wearing colored socks as a subtle strategy of countering the despotic regime. She, also, vividly portrays how she and her friends make parties every night which are not only restricted to women but also encompass men. As pointed out by Milani, "[g]ender apartheid, . . ., is more than a religious ordinance. It is related to such mundane matters as power, domination, and exclusion. If not sanctified in the name of religion, then it has relied on . . .chastity, safety, beauty. . .to restrict women's mobility" (*Words, Not Swords* 3). As a means of challenging prescriptions dictated by the regime, both sexes in these parties break all compulsory measures and enforced disciplines regarding dressing, inherited traditions, behavioral patterns and gender-segregation policies mightily settled by the dictatorial regime; they convert the controlled, docile "bodies" into action both visually and verbally as exemplified in the following graph:

Fig. 5: Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 152.

Apparently, it is validated from the narrative voiceover that "power relations"

are neither fixed nor eternal as they are always contested by various modes of "resistance." These forms repeatedly threaten the stability of "power relations" even if they are not overt, even if they are in a private, interior space and even if they are against the socially and culturally accepted

standards of community. In a broader sense, in such a prevailing fundamentalist culture which glamorizes sex-segregation policies and violence against women, both sexes yearn for railing against regime's manipulations and defeating the fear that immobilizes them. Totalitarianism and conservatism impelled by regime are demonstrably obliterated here. In a similar vein, Alsanea in *Girls of Riyadh* outlines how the Saudi liberal Michelle finds a way of resisting the conservativeness of law in Saudi Arabia that deprives women of the right to drive a car. Michelle who has an international driver's license since she was living in America, rents a car with "dark-tinted windows. . . under the name of her family's male Ethiopian driver" (16). She subtly subverts the laws of the only country in the world that violates the female's mobility rights. Within these contexts, it is demonstrated that the more pressure exerted over women, the more indirect, discrete paths they follow to challenge the arbitraries inflicted upon them; and as "power" is applied in practical means, "resistance" is also practiced in both unnoticeable and practical ways via countless approaches and means.

The few examples provided above illustrate that the consolidated relationship between "power" and "resistance" is nested within each of Satrapi's pictorial graphs which vividly and intensely denote her resistant, revolutionary spirit. One last point to conclude with is that in the final scene of both the first and second volume of *Persepolis*, we see Marji leaving her country to the West after being separated from her husband Reza. In the first volume, she leaves for Austria and in the second she leaves for France where she will join the school of "Decorative Arts" to have better education. To her, education is the most important, effective means that could assist her in being emancipated from the coercive measures inflicted upon her gender by the new regime. As a resistant intellectual, she proclaims: "Not having been able to build anything in my own country, I prepared to leave it once again" (Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 185). However, the departure in the second time is "less painful" than the first time as she has grown up, become more mature and more conscious of the path she would follow in her future life. Satrapi closes the second volume of the graphic memoir with a chapter

entitled "The End" with no icon beside the title bar "precisely marking the end of her visual-verbal testimony" (Chute 165); for she would no longer be capable of being a witness to narrate any events regarding her country. Marji's last words "Freedom had a price" (Satrapi, *Persepolis 2* 187) insinuate and evince her refusal to be locked in dogmas, confined by the judgmental rigid views and practices of new regime. As maintained by Lopamurda Basu in his article "Crossing Cultures/Crossing Genres", "Satrapi's project in the graphic memoirs" seems as "a counter-narrative about the status of Iranian women, a narrative which deconstructs mainstream media and even tendencies in western feminism that cast Iranian women and other groups of third world women as unmitigated victims; (8); incapable of liberating themselves from the constraints of "power" and re-shaping their lives.

Rajaa Alsanea: Breaking The Bars In *Girls Of Riyadh*

Like Satrapi when she left Iran to live in France seeking emancipation from the firm grip on her either in school, street or marriage, Rajaa Alsanea moved to Chicago after the publication of her first and only novel *Banat al-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh* (2007). The novel was originally published in Arabic in 2005 and was translated into English in 2007 by its author and the translator of Arabic Literature Marilyn Booth. Despite the scarcity of literary criticism written on *Girls of Riyadh*, the novel is considered one of the most debatable and "best-selling" novels in both the Arab and Western world exemplifying the emergence of young Saudi feminist writers who write in innovative literary styles bringing into light many of the challenges facing Muslim women in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Alsanea's "best-selling" novel grants a hearing to the marginalized, dissident voices and unspeakable thoughts. On the back cover of the book, it is written in the *New Statesman* that *Girls of Riyadh* approaches "one of the world's most secretive societies." A quote from *Financial Times* on the back cover echoes similar refrain: "A novel that captures it all. . .a revealing study of: "Will tell you more about one of the world's oddest and most closed societies than a library of books . . ."Also, Ghazi Al-Qusaibi–the Saudi Arabian liberal

politician, diplomat and poet–comments on Alsanea's novel as follows: "When the curtain is removed, the scene is exposed to us with all its funny and sad elements, with all the details unknown to those outside this enchanted world" (qtd. in *Asharq Al-Awsat*: n.pag.). *Girls of Riyadh* contributes to unveiling the various forms of "disciplinary power" dictated over women's physical appearance, behavior and choices in one of the most closed communities in the Arab world: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also underlines the gender-segregation policy and patriarchal control deeply embedded in the Saudi cultural, social, ideological and political landscape. As maintained by Madawi Al-Rasheed in *A Most Masculine State*, these countless set of policies and regulations are

> manifested in the endless signs separating men and women in public sphere, . . .; the regulation of marriage to foreigners, subject to the requirement of obtaining permission from the Ministry of Interior; the guardianship system imposed on women, and many other legal restrictions, at the heart of which is the regulation of the body and its desires, in addition to family and marriage. (223)

Significantly, the text explores that besides the state-sanctioned disciplines and tactics exercised over women in Iran, there are other multi-directional sources of hegemony and "power" inflicted upon Saudi women's lives and choices in Saudi Arabia. These are internalized in familial relationships, patriarchal hierarchies, ideological confinements, social limitations; and Western misrepresentations as well–thereby contending the Foucauldian conception regarding the reverberating nature of "power." As Foucault put it, "[power] relations go right down into the depths of society, that they are not [only] localized in the relations between the state and its citizen or on the frontier between classes" (*Discipline and Punish* 27); however, they dominate all social levels. Moreover, the text explicates the various indiscrete paths these women adopt and follow for circumventing these various hierarchical power structures. In an interview–entitled "Sex and the Saudi girl"–conducted with the author of *Girls of Riyadh* on July 8,

2007 by Lesley Thomas who introduces Alsanea as "a new minister for women," Alsanea admits that when she wrote *Girls of Riyadh*, her main intention is to offer an alternative reading of the culturally accepted stereotypes of Saudi women as passive and subordinate to men: "I wanted to describe how people find ways to get around some traditions. . .I feel I have to prove that a Muslim woman. . . can do anything that another girl can do" (6).

Literary critics and reviewers (like Wenche Ommundsen, Moneera Al-Ghadeer and Marilyn Booth) argue that Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* "inaugurates [the British and North American] Chick Lit narrative" (Al-Ghadeer 296) introduced by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey Deshell in their anthology *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995) *and Chick-Lit 2: No Chick-Vics* (1996)–a postfeminist narrative approach intending in a "light, chatty, first-person, confessional" and collectively storytelling tone which is close to language of "everyday life" (Booth, "Translator v. Author" 198)[4] to challenge the "old frivolous or coquettish image of women" (Mazza 18) as seekers of sexual freedom and erotic relationships. In addition, it addresses "many of the issues facing contemporary women and contemporary culture–issues of identity, of race, of class, of femininity and feminism, of consumerism and self-image" (2-3); as pointed out by Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young in their anthology *Chick lit*. Elucidating the affinity between *Girls of Riyadh* and "Chick-Lit" narrative, Jean Kane–in her recently published article "Sex and the City of Riyadh"–draws a profound thematic analogy between Alsanea's novel and the American romantic series *Sex and the City* which are based on a collection of "Chick-Lit" classical essays (under the same title) written by the Candace Bushnell in 1997:

> *Banat* imitates the television series *Sex and the City* by presenting four female protagonists of the "velvet class" seeking compassionate. . .union and a balance between marriage and career. Social strictures on marriage partnership generate a major obstacle to woman's fulfillment. Banat renders the young women's world

> through Arabic literary and cultural as well as pop "global" references, with an emphasis on youth culture. (116)

As Satrapi in *Persepolis* has been greatly influenced by the thematic and novel graphic images deployed by Spiegelman in *Maus,* Alsanea in *Girls of Riyadh* intensely exploits the innovative narrative techniques and thematic concerns of "chick lit" genre–therefore, both novelists reinforce the idea of "resistance" within their female communities thematically and structurally. In a narrative style that alludes to females' "resistance" to geo-political forces and cultural constraints governing and controlling their "bodies," minds and lives, *Girls of Riyadh* chronicles the daily personal life events of four economically privileged Saudi girls of Riyadh: Gamrah Al-Qusmanji, Sadeem Al-Horaimli, Mashael Al-Abdulrahman or Michelle as her girlfriends call her and Lamees Jeddawi. Instead of presenting the coquettish images of Arab females who are always suppressed and passive, Alsanea vividly and adeptly portrays Saudi girls who are empowered and determined refusing to be lodged behind the closed doors of harem. They challenge the institutional and familial structures seeking to monitor their lives and choices. Like Marji in *Persepolis*, the lives of the four girls of Riyadh are full of paradoxical emotions and shrouded experiences: aspirations and disappointments, marriage and divorce, total independence and absolute commitment, individualism and totalitarianism. They crave for occupying an "in-between" zone between the cosmopolitan Western countries where they can achieve love, liberation and fulfillment denied at their homeland and the conservative community they are originally attributed to; however, they are rejected and excluded by both worlds on many occasions.

Girls of Riyadh opens with the anonymous narrator "seerehwenfadha7et," a protected screen name, who is the fifth of other four girls and who forms a subscription discussion group on the World Wide Web: "seerehwenfadha7et@yahoogroups.com." Reflecting on the choice of the narrator's group name on the internet, Al-Ghadeer points out that "Rajaa al-Sani creates a text that opens with a parody of an email address of a

popular TV show, '*Sira w-infathat'* which airs weakly on the Lebanese channel, Future. However, Rajaa al-Sani changes the name of the show from *'Sira w-infathat'* which means in the Lebanese dialect. . . 'let's talk about it,' to '*Sira w-infadahat*''' (Al-Ghadeer 297); thereby suggesting an intrusion into the hidden part of the Saudi women's lives. Tarek El-Ariss also elucidates how "Alsanea" alters "Zaven Kouyoumjian's *Sireh w-infatahit* [open talk], transforming it into *Sireh w-infadahit* [scandal talk], thereby accentuating the process of scandal and unveiling" (518-19). Moreover, Hoda Elsadda enlightens how "[c]yberspace as a forum for expression, mobilization, dissent, and the organization of alternative social and political networks has [lately] been a key feature of the new global order" (312)–thus, formulating new spaces to the marginalized and "creating new platforms" (313) for free expression to the weaker. Succinctly speaking, by talking in such a bold and critical way about her society via social networking sites, Alsanea's narrator tactically challenges and transcends "beyond feminine domestic circuits of family that are supposed to contain her speech;" hence, contesting both "familial and political patriarchal hierarchies" (Booth, "Translator v. Author" 200), and disclosing an unapproachable part in Saudi women's social lives.

It is worth highlighting that Alsanea's unnamed narrator is an archetype of the "Shahrazād" model–the iconic cultural storyteller of *Alf Laylah wa Laylah/One Thousand and One Nights*. The Shahrazād pattern has been recently re-visited, appropriated and evoked by Arab women writers–such as Assia Djebar's *Ombre Sultane/A Sister to Shahrazād* (1987) and Mohja Kahf's *Emails from Shahrazād* (2003)–to counter the negative stereotypical image of the submissive, passive Oriental women portrayed and perpetuated in literary works by Western writers. They reclaim and re-cast her role as an outspoken female who epitomizes "resistance," empowerment and self-fulfillment. Fadia Suyoufie argues that "Shahrazād. . .figures as the communal ancestor of Arab-women story-tellers. She becomes a spokeswoman for the feminist agenda. Instead of sufficing herself with placating the monstrosities of Shahrayār, the contemporary Shahrazād explores the issues of female creativity and women's solidarity"

(Suyoufie 238). Similarly, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley remarks that modern Shahrazād is associated with "different images and takes various shapes. . . She is no longer the poor girl who had to tell entertaining stories to save her life, but a woman who makes her life by telling, or writing, on a wider, more multicultural platform than that offered to her in the original story"(184). Following the contemporary Shahrazād prototype in the Arab women's revisionary writings, Alsanea presents this image of modern Shahrazād via her unknown narrator in *Girls of Riyadh*. Through her weekly emails and the fictionalized stories of her girlfriends which constitute the main texture of the narrative, the empowered narrator succeeds in unveiling the coercive measures and compulsory disciplines exerted over Saudi women by the sanctioned-state practices and compulsory hierarchical structures. Like Satrapi's Marji when she was a witness to the Iranian women's struggle against oppression and restrictions inflicted upon them in Islamic Republic of Iran, Alsanea's narrator explores new images of Saudi women who have strong will and great determination to break the iron gates imprisoning them in homogenized images and prescribed roles; thereby giving voice to the underrepresented and victimized subjects.

Alsanea's narrator opens up her first email by inviting the readers "to join . . .a new world, a world closer to you than you might imagine. We all live in this world but do not really experience it, seeing only what we can tolerate and ignoring the rest" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 1). The narrator's opening words bring to light the fallacies of the conservative Saudi community which can be traced in its inability to admit courageously the new challenges emerged at the hands of resistant, rising generation of women who stand against all the arbitrary patterns and permanent hierarchical structures embedded in their society; and who insist on re-configuring their peripheral status in the community at all levels. Wagner-Lawlor remarks that the narrator "suggests here that the world represented in this virtual medium is in some ways *more real* than the one in which many actually live. But because of her anonymity, she can make visible, rather than 'ignore,' the ways in which double standards and taboos damage women" (181; emphasis in original). She "[creates] a virtual arena without

walls and doors, for the exposure–even publicity–of the clash of traditional gender expectations with the modern aspirations of contemporary women" (182). In other words, it is only in this uncontrolled, unguarded cyberspace that the women break the bars imprisoning them in restricted "space;" and enjoy freedom of expression and mobility.

To accentuate the long-lived traditions and age-long cultural norms forcibly entrenched in a suffocating culture, the unidentified narrator proceeds by reciting a verse written by the contemporary Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani:

I shall write of my girlfriends,
for in each one's tale
I see my story and self prevail,
a tragedy of my own life speaks.
. . .
Of desires slain in their cradles I'll write,
. . .
of thousands, thousands of martyrs, all female,
buried stripped of their names
in the graveyard of traditions.
. . .
I shall write of my friends,
of the chains twisted bloody around the ankles of beauties,
. . .
and desires buried in pillows, in silence.
(Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 3; emphasis in original)

Like Marji who is incarnated in the rigid practices of the new theocratic regime, the Saudi girls are detained behind the bars of a conservative community. They unceasingly attempt to deconstruct the arbitrary dualisms settled in the Saudi cultural, ideological and political territory since ages: male/female, center/peripheral, permitted/prohibited, alien/familiar and public domain/private sphere.

The first story the narrator relates is the marriage ceremony of Gamrah, whose origins are from Qasim and who is engaged to Rashid Al-Tanbal–a rich Saudi man who is supposed to head for Chicago after their marriage ceremony. Unlike Marji who is a diligent student and a knowledge seeker, Gamrah decides to "withdraw the college in order to devote herself full-time to planning the wedding" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 12). Like Satrapi, Alsanea gives a meticulous description of the way the "bodies" of women in Saudi wedding parties are regarded as controlled objects, governed by prevailing cultural norms such as fitnah and shame; in this respect, Um Nuwayyir–thirty-nine years old woman who is a stand-in mother for the four girls of Riyadh–recites the following strict cultural codes to the girls in a firm, decisive tone: "At weddings, receptions and social gatherings. . you must follow this strategy to the letter: you *barely* walk, you *barely* talk, you *barely* smile, you *barely* dance, . . ., you always think before you act, you measure your words carefully before you speak" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 6-7; emphasis in original). Um Nuwayyir's remarks coincide what Frédéric Gros has mentioned regarding the process through which the "disciplinary power" operates in various networks: "Disciplinary power functions through norms: it is a matter of controlling the totality of the subject's life so as to obtain *specific behavior* and *complete docility*" (Gros 261; my emphasis). The "body" of the women here is considered the locus to which the "disciplinary power" is exercised and implemented–hence, attempting to get hold of it, and maintain its entire obedience and submissiveness.

This image of conservative women who perform similar role to the one carried out by the state religious agencies and the male guardians in Saudi Arabia is echoed in many situations in the novel. Alsanea delineates in detail how these women even in the shopping malls keep surveilling young girls: "A girl can't stroll about in the malls under the protection of God without being checked out thoroughly by everyone, especially her own kind, from her *abaya* to the covering over her hair to the way she walks" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 18; emphasis in original). In *Girls of Riyadh*, Alsanea supersedes the limits of binary thought which has been for years

confined to the male/female struggle by encompassing the old traditional women in opposition to the younger modern females. Explicitly, it is not only the religious or male guardians who block women's path to liberation, but also conservative women who stand as a guard baring the way to women's freedom and self-fulfillment. Despite discursive forms of control and relentless scrutiny in these shopping malls either from the security guards at the mall entrance or from old conservative women, Alsanea's girls of Riyadh succeed in breaking the sanctioned-state disciplines and fleeing from the older women's intruding gazes by allowing Faisal Al-Batran–the Saudi politician who will later fall in love with Michelle–to accompany them as if he is one of their relatives. As the narrator puts it:

> At the mall entrance the girls got out. Behind them appeared a rush of young men, but they all came to stop uncertainly in front of the security guard. It was their job to keep all unmarried men from entering the mall. . .The guy asked Michelle if she would allow him to go in with them as a member of the family. . .she accepted the deal without delay, and she and her friends surged forward beside him as if he were one of their group. (17)

Michelle's daring act reinforces the entangled relationship between "power" and "resistance": as "power" tactics are applied and employed via numerous discursive techniques, "resistance" strategies are also executed via a lot of subtle ways. Foucault contends that the "existence" of "power relations" rely on "a multiplicity of points of resistance; these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. [They] are present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 95). In a similar vein, Mernissi emphasizes that the social boundaries and limitations are constructed and erected to clearly set clear-cut divisions between those who have "power" and those who do not; and any intrusions on those social and cultural dividing lines represent "an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power" (8). And from here, I would like to argue that the fixity in "force relations" can always be deconstructed, re-negotiated and re-shaped by a strong, determined act of "resistance."

Unlike Marji's family who has always been a strong source of emotional support to her during the formative stages of her life (namely, in her decision to get divorced from her husband Reza and in her determination to travel abroad), Gamrah's family drives her into becoming like an obedient, submissive doll to her husband Rashid–an image that is sculptured in both the Eastern mentality and the Western deep consciousness. When Rashid poorly treats, abandons and then divorces her, she "suffers" from a sense of "social stigma and is seen [as a source of] disgrace" (Shihada 64) in her family's eyes. Her uncle Abu Musa'ed considers her a threat to the future of his daughters and starts making a second arranged marriage for her with an old brutal Bedouin man called Abu Fahad who divorces his wife because of his own infertility and is not welcoming Gamrah's son. In a humiliating offensive manner, her uncle says to her mother: "And we all know that leaving her here to sit around without a man to shield and protect her isn't a good thing. People are always talking, sister, and besides we have other girls in the family that should not pay for what people say about your divorced daughter" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 206). According to the norms of Saudi society, divorce is perceived as a "crime"– a disgraceful, shameful act that the woman would be harshly blamed and condemned for. Alsanea's outspoken narrator addresses this point:

> Is divorce a major crime committed by the woman only? Why doesn't our society harass the divorced man the way it crushes the divorced woman. . .We should defend. . .Gamrah and other divorcees. Women like them don't deserve to be looked down on by society, which only condescends from time to time to throw them a few bones and expects them to be happy with that. (185)

Suffering from grave consequences of both arranged marriage and acrimonious divorce, Gamrah is forced to be blocked, outcast and masked. Fischer argues that "[i]n Saudi Arabia, Gamrah struggles to find her place: as a divorced woman with a child, she feels restrained, rarely leaving her family home and despairing of ever finding another husband" (Fischer 54). Offended by her uncle's hurtful remarks and by the way she is looked down

by the society, Gamrah resorts to online secret chat rooms as a means of transcending her feelings of failure in marriage and circumventing the constraints dictated over her. As tight-fitting clothes, various shapes of hair covering and secret mixed parties are means of resisting "power" imposed by the guardians of the Iranian regime over Iranian women, virtual technology, secret night calls and tinted cars in *Girls of Riyadh* play a pivotal role in improvising ways for Saudi women around the restrictions of a conservative community governed by tribal traditions and stringent inherited norms. Commenting on the powerful impact of technology in Saudi women's life, Ommundsen states:

> [M]odern communication technology takes on new functions and acquires new meanings as Saudi women discover its potential to overcome some of the restrictions imposed on them. . .E-mail and mobile phones open up a world of romantic entanglement to lovers who are otherwise not allowed to meet in a private prior to marriage. (120)

Gamrah finds in her online chat with Sultan (a twenty-five-year Saudi man) a healing of her wounded soul, a restoration of her self-confidence and dignity, and "a refuge from the watchful eyes of disciplinary control" (Nourie-Simone 135)[5] that set an arbitrary control over her life; thereby resisting the enclosed space designated for her as a divorced woman within the context of Saudi cultural codes and defying the stability of the "force relations."

As the narrative develops, Alsanea skillfully elaborates the arbitrary social disciplines forcibly entrenched in the Saudi social and cultural territory by bringing to light a profound image of conservative Saudi women–Um Faisal who represents the older generation rigidly sticking to outdated norms. Michelle–the Saudi-American liberated girl whose father is Saudi and her mother is American–falls in love with Faisal and their passionate relationship continues for almost a year or more; however, Um Faisal refuses her son's idea of getting married to Michelle because of not being his family's choice and because of her American origins. To her,

"[t]he family of that girl was not of their sort" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 102). Faisal could not stand against the dictates and hegemony inflicted over him by his mother. He abruptly breaks up with Michelle and marries a woman of his family's choice–as explained by Al-Ghadeer: "young [Saudi] men fail to confront traditional practices and appear passive in front of their constraints, turning into inept individuals" (Al-Ghadeer 299). Shocked by Faisal's passivity and submissiveness to the will and "power" of his mother, Michelle says in an intensely moving tone: "Was *this* the Faisal who had dazzled her with his open-mindedness? Was he seriously letting her go of as easily as because his mother wanted to marry him to a girl from their own social circles?" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 120). She decides to leave this fenced-off territory that is "riddled with hypocrisy, drugged by contradictions" (122) and embarks to San Francisco where she can pursue her studies and get liberated from all forms of coercions. In relating the "power" structures exercised over Saudi women by both the state religious guardians and men in their families to the "power" practiced and manipulated by the older, conservative women over younger, liberal females, Alsanea unmasks new "power" pattern–an image that is lodged only in conservative, closed communities. To conclude, Alsanea's weaving of two different competing generations side-by-side in most parts of the novel adds a merit to her text; thereby reinforcing the never-ending cycle of "power" and "resistance" not only on an institutional level but also on familial and generational levels.

In reading closely the character of Michelle, it is noticed that she resembles Marji in many respects: her courageous and revolutionary spirit, strong determination and solidarity. As remarked by Shihada, "Michelle serves as Alsanea's mouthpiece in her criticism of the Saudi Arabian society with its degrading attitude towards love, suppressive traditions and conventions, [and] lack of women's rights" (64). Like Marji when she is rejected by her lover's mother Markus in Austria and when she takes the decision of leaving one time to Austria and another time to France to flee all forms of "disciplinary power," Michelle is despised by Faisal's mother. In an overtly defiant way, she decides to "bundle up her belongings and turn

her back on a country where people were governed–or herded–like animals" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 123); thereby expressing her condemnation of such confinements, re-creating her own destiny and defying the everlasting Western circulations of Arab women's submissiveness and fragility. The narrator courageously proclaims: "It was her life, only hers, and she was going to live it the way she wanted, for herself and herself only" (123). Only at this epiphanic moment, she is truly liberated from the clutches of unfulfilled, painful relationship and from the outdated traditions governing her life. Manifestly, the navigations of both Marji and Michelle are not only geographically but also culturally and ideologically. Both decide to cross the defined spaces for them; both epitomize the perceptive female voices that seek liberation from arbitrary disciplines deeply rooted in both the Iranian and the Saudi terrains.

Similarly, Sadeem is abandoned by Firas Al-Sharqawi–a well-known diplomat and politician who falls in love with Sadeem after being separated from her fiancé Waleed Al-Shari who deserted and divorced her because she mistakably succumbed to his sexual desires before the actual marriage ceremony. Worried and stressed that his status and his family's position in the social and political circles might be affected by marring a divorcee, Firas marries a girl of his family's choice while proposing to keep his secret relationship with Sadeem who vehemently refuses even to answer his calls.[6] It is obvious from this situation and the afore-mentioned example the multifaceted nature of "power"–as Foucault defines it: "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither it is a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 93). Within this context, it is Um Fasial representing the oppressive Saudi culture in *Girls of Riyadh* that considers Michelle the inferior "Other;" it is the Saudi's community's conservative unfair view of the divorced woman which hinders Faisal's engagement to Sadeem; and it is the Markus' mother epitomizing the West's stereotypical perception of the East besides the totalitarian regime in Islamic Republic of Iran that suppress and outcast Marji. However, the three female characters stand against all forces of

oppression. Booth argues that by presenting new images of Muslim women who are resistant and revolutionary, Alsanea succeeds in "sparking discussion on those uneven and inaccurate binaries familiar from Orientalist tradition and today's public sphere: 'East' and 'West,' "Muslim women' versus 'Western women,' 'modern' and 'medieval'" (Booth, "'The Muslim Woman'" 166). Succinctly speaking, the "power" in Alsanea's text is not only restricted to the state-sanctioned disciplines or prevailing gendered hierarchies but its maneuvers and tactics also encompass even individuals of the same gender: older women/ younger women, Western women/ Eastern women–hence; contending the Foucauldian conception of "power" from "everywhere" and at all levels.

To expound the excessive manipulation of gender segregation policies and curtailment of women rights in public realms, Alsanea gives a thorough description and account of the ruthless, inhuman treatment both Lamees and Ali have been exposed to at the hands of the Religious police. She writes: "One day, as Lamees and Ali sat together in a café. . ., a band of men from Al-Hai'ah swooped down on them and led the pair off swiftly to two separate SUVs. . . The senior officers contacted Lamees's father. . . [making him] sign a promise that his daughter would never again engage in such an immoral act" (Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* 150-51). Ali–a student in the fourth grade at the Faculty of Medicine–is the brother of Lamees's closest friend Fatimah. Being "smitten with [Lamees]" after seeing "her photo framed in his sister's room," he grasps any opportunity to meet her "within the *confines* of the hospital at first and later outside in one of the nearby coffee shops" (149). This manifests the idea of how "love [is] treated like an unwelcome visitor" (63) in Saudi Arabia. Like the guardians of Revolution who castigate Marji for wearing "red socks," the religious police in Saudi Arabia catch and punish Lamees and Ali because of sitting together with no mahram (woman's husband, father, uncle, or brother). Fischer points out that in Saudi Arabia "a single man and women together in public is enough cause for arrest" (55). Actually, these various forms of "disciplinary power" which could be either state "power," ideological "power" or familial "power" reinforce the Foucauldian thoughts regarding the prevailing nature

of "power": "there is no escaping from power, that it is always-already present constituting the very thing which one attempts to counter it with" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 82). They often "seek to implant a mode of conduct into body and its correlate soul" (Rabinow and Rose 300); and therefore, confining both the "body" and the soul of the individual in a non-stopping chain of disciplines and arbitraries.

As Satrapi closes her novel with no icon beside title bar and a bitter critique of the Iranian dictatorship over women's "bodies" and souls, Alsanea also ends her novel with no email form style but with a chapter entitled "Between You and Me" in which she proceeds in denouncing the repressive cultural environment of the Saudi community by reiterating the words of Ghazi Al-Qusaibi: "I do not claim that I have uttered all of the truth here, but I hope that everything I have said is true" (Alsanea *Girls of Riyadh* 299). It is necessary to elucidate that despite the oppressive atmosphere hovering over the narrative, Alsanea mentions and emphasizes in an interview conducted with her by Mariam Abdullah on October 20, 2011–after the eruption of the Arab Spring Revolutions–that she entirely believes that her country is now "on the reform track, most notably through the recent participation of women in the Shura Council and the municipal councils." Though she claims that "[w]e [in Saudi Arabia] have nothing to revolt against like neighboring countries," she sincerely expresses her hope that all human, civil and constitutional "rights are restored to all those who are deprived" (n.pag.) from them. Undeniably, after the Arab Spring Revolutions, newly formulated "power relations" are recently taking place in the Middle East at large–hence, marking and reinforcing the inevitability and unavoidability of transformation in "force relations" in favor of the marginalized, voiceless "Other."

One last point to argue is that the trope of "power" and resistance" is obviously and deeply sensed in the two texts at hand. In delineating the life stories of both Marji and the four girls of Riyadh, and their struggles against state-sanctioned disciplines and existing cultural patterns, both Satrapi and Alsanea draw the curtains and unveil what is veiled behind them both to their theocratic societies, and to the West as well. Both reveal a naked truth

exploring new images of Muslim women who are icons of "resistance," empowerment and solidarity. Both Marji and the four girls of Riyadh question their status, revolt against arbitrary disciplines deeply implanted in their societies and call for drastic changes. To encapsulate, in employing innovative narrative powers as a tool of "resistance" and in centralizing female perspectives, both Satrapi and Alsanea emphasize the Middle Eastern women's significant role in re-negotiating their own destiny, re-shaping their lives and presenting new images for themselves within both the Eastern and the Western mindset.

Conclusion

In dissecting and comparing these two texts side-by-side, the paper has attempted to explore how both the Foucauldian conception of "power" and "resistance" has contributed to reading Satrapi and Alsanea via the depiction of rebellious female characters. Despite different forms of "power" imposed on each of them, both the Iranian Marji and the four Saudi girls create and deploy various means and tactics of countering these various hegemonic practices; thereby reinforcing the longstanding, inseparable relationship between "power" and "resistance". They all argue against the sanctioned practices of unfair regimes and strict traditions exercised over them. They all succeed in accessing forbidden territories: Satapi's resistant soul appears in her struggle against different mechanisms of state "power;" either overtly or subtly, and her insistence to travel abroad again to pursue her studies and build up her future away from the constraints of a repressive political regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and Alsanea's girls carve out their ways in a society controlled by strict traditions and rigid norms (Sadeem becomes a famous party planner in Khobar; Gamrah assists her in planning for more parties in Riyadh, Michelle becomes a successful television producer, and Lamees joins the Faculty of Medicine and has a successful marriage based on love and respect). The lives of the female characters in both novels are fraught with difficulties and complexities; however, they all succeed in standing against the conservative worlds they have inherited. They succeed in breaking the shackles of social, cultural and

assumed religious ideologies; and transcending their limitations. They represent the rising feminist consciousness among both the Iranian and the Saudi women who believe that the journey to female emancipation should keep continue. Through portrayal of these various images of revolutionary female characters, both Satrapi and Alsanea succeed in unveiling and re-configuring the image of Muslim women–a picture that is far away from what is etched in the mentality of the fundamentalist regimes and in the Western mindset as well. They succeed in heightening the social and political issues shared by women in two of the most conservative countries in the Middle East: Iran and Saudi Arabia. They turn the unvoiced into voiced and by doing so, they both succeed in re-defining the status of Muslim women on the social, cultural, ideological and political level. What is worth finalizing this paper with is Wagner-Lawlor's words that "[t]the possibility of revising traditional social identities and social contracts is not only 'on the horizon' but, as such, always in the here and now" (184). Through different modes of "resistance," the unseen is seen, the voiceless is voiced and the veiled is unveiled.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Fulbright Commission in Egypt for offering me the "Visiting Scholar Grant" which enabled me to carry out research for this article in the Near Eastern Studies Department at UC, Berkeley from 2016 to early 2017. I am profoundly indebted to Prof. Wali Ahmadi–Professor of Persian Literature at UC, Berkeley–for his sincere academic and spiritual support, insightful remarks and constructive suggestions that assisted me in shaping this article. Many of the ideas presented in this article are the result of many influential, productive discussions with Prof. Ahmadi. I would also like to acknowledge the insights, worthy guidance and assistance of Prof. Mohamed M. Enani, Prof. Mustafa Riad and Prof. Ghada M. Abdelhafeez which brought this work to light.

Notes

1. For an insightful discussion on this point, see pp. 245-49 in Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended.*
2. See Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 144.
3. For a comprehensive understanding of "the 1970s-authenticity movement," see Zahedi, "Concealing and Revealing Female Hair*"* in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, pp. 250-66, 257-59.
4. In this article, Booth elaborates the ideas regarding *Girls of Riyadh* as an example of "chick lit" genre explored by Al-Ghadeer in her article "Girls of Riyadh."
5. Though Nourie-Simone handles in this chapter the status of Iranian women in Iran, the reader can notice the analogy between various forms of arbitraries exercised over Iranian women by either state or male guardians and those practiced over Saudi women in Saudi Arabia.
6. For reading more about the relationship between Firas and Sadeem, see, *Girls of Riyadh* 152-58, 223-28.

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