Chapter 8
Female Activism, Tribalism, and Shame in the Arabian Gulf

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Abstract Shame and guilt have been two dominant disciplining practices against female activists in the Middle East in general and the Arabian Gulf in particular. The violation of women's bodies including sexual harassment, allegations of rape, police detention, and imprisonment has a disturbing effect on the female activists, their families, relatives, and direct communities that are still dominated by tribal connections and deep-seated sexist traditions and practices. Nevertheless, the post-Arab Spring era has witnessed crucial change in the familial and communal reception and celebration of female activism in public spaces in the Arabian Gulf. For instance, when Saudi activist Loujain al-Hathloul was imprisoned, her family contacted local and international media announcing that al-Hathloul was tortured, harassed, and threatened of rape. Likewise, Bahraini Hajer Mansoor was tortured and assaulted during the 2011 protests. This chapter examines how Gulf female activists turn shame and guilt into positive acts of resistance. It specifically investigates how they motivate and utilize cultural and social changes in their countries and in the region in general to promote and address women's real needs and causes, thus getting communal and public support and influence.

Keywords Gender facets of shame · Shame · Gender facets · Female activism · Tribalism · Resistance · Change

1 Introduction: Shame and the Female Body in Gulf and Muslim Societies in the Twentieth Century

Unlike their counterparts in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia or their neighboring Lebanon who have got wide access to university education and work since the 1950s, the real development of the sociocultural conditions and the status of Gulf

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women has started in the 1970s. Although Bahrain opened the first state school for girls in 1938, and the Kuwaiti and Omani women had their schools in the 1940s and 1950s, expansive access to female education and work in the Gulf is related to oil production. The emergence of oil industries and the subsequent widescale processes of urbanization, modernizations, and political stability of the Arabian Gulf specifically during the 1970s have developed women's social rights. After long decades of seclusion, Gulf women joined schools and universities and gradually got access to work and public spaces (Chatty, 1996; Limbert, 2010; Al-Torki, 1986; Le Renard, 2008). Strict tribal and Islamic moral codes and traditions, however, have a great effect on the pace and form of the development of Gulf women's rights. For example, school and universities in the Gulf have been gender-segregated and Gulf women have been legally, financially, and socially dependent on their male guardians such as fathers, brothers, and husbands (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Wikan, 1982; Al-Rasheed, 2013). The first two Gulf States with a traced female political and anti-colonial activism were Oman, where women in Dhofar were part of the armed resistance movement, and Bahrain where women joined the nationalist movement (Chatty, 1996; Wikan, 1982; Barth, 1983). Oman was also the first Gulf state to allow women to vote and run for election in 1997, then followed by Qatar in 1998. Up until the 2000s, other Gulf women were not allowed to discuss or take part in public affairs (Al-Kitbi, 2008; Cole, 2020; Peterson, 1989).

This chapter will apply a feminist analysis to examine the relationship between the changing uses of the concept of shame within Gulf cultures on the one side and the historical developments of feminist awareness and activism in the Gulf on the other side. Since feminism entails critical methods that both highlight the causes of the inequalities between the men and women and between different classes, ethnicities, and socioeconomic groups, the chapter argues feminism is very relevant to understand the nature and politics of domineering essentialist divisions in the Gulf. It regards male superiority over the female, similar to other hierarchical and colonial divisions including white versus nonwhite, civilized versus uncivilized, rich versus poor, etc., as discriminatory universal practices. These discriminatory practices feed on exclusive categories, bigoted norms, and essentialist traits to serve hierarchical and patriarchal power structures. The chapter further examines feminist fight against essentialist categories, with a particular focus on the concept of shame, anti-political oppression, and inequality in the Gulf area.

To begin with, throughout the twentieth century, the sexual, personal, and marital rights of Arab women in general and Gulf women in particular are largely marginalized and repressed. For example, women have to fight deep-seated essentialist ideas and gender stereotypes, including the idea that the main role of women in society is to be wives and mothers. In "Arab Women," Magida Salman explains that:

> The role of the woman in the Arab-Muslim family does not allow for nuances; she is a mother, a sister or a wife. A woman can never be a friend or a lover. She lives in a society where gender never mix ... only when she produces males does the Arab woman acquire a value in the family or social setting. The rate of divorce of a sterile woman or mothers of girls is high in the Arab society. (1987, p. 8)

Salman highlights a critical issue when it comes to women's rights in the Gulf area, and in many Arab countries as well, that is the role of patriarchal thinking in determining how men and women perceive their prescribed roles within society. Being bound to repressive cultures and strict, sexist interpretations of the *Koran*, women are seen as sexual and biological agents, who have to abide by the values of female segregation and veiling. In relation to this, marriage for women in the highly religious Gulf societies and cultures is "the only acceptable context for sexual activity and parenthood and provides the primary framework for the expression of masculinity and femininity and the fulfilment of gender roles" (Hoodfar, 52). In addition to this, female sexuality and morality are of great importance in the tribal Gulf areas. A woman's honor is connected with the honor and reputation of her family, relatives, tribe, and community (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Layne, 1994). Female honor expands to include their sexual reputation, their public image, their obedience to their customs and norms, and their respect to the hierarchy of authorities inside their communities. In tribal societies, leaders are always men while women are secluded and are considered to be under the control of men. Although many members of Gulf tribes claim that female seclusion and veiling are procedures to protect women, and in some cases women are the leaders of their families, tribal systems are obviously discriminating against the majority of women and limit their personal freedom (Liu, 2012). While some women have a great ability to influence their husbands' decisions, patriarchal family orders are highly respected within different tribes. Seen this way, the surveillance, seclusion, and gender separation are not only seen as necessary measures to defend women's honor and safety, but to protect the honor and status of their tribes as well.

Patriarchal tribal norms and sexist religious interpretations continue to affect Gulf women throughout the first half of the twentieth century while Arab women in North Africa, supported by progressive men, have started serious efforts to dissociate Islam from cultural and tribal oppression of women. For example, Egyptian religious scholar, judge, and Islamic thinker Qasim Amin defended Islam against the oppression of women. In *The Liberation of Women* (1899), Amin defended women's rights for education, work, and public appearance. He argues that "God established equality between men and women regarding their obligations and privileges. God did not divide the universe, making one part of it to be enjoyed by women alone another to be enjoyed by men, working in it segregated from women. In fact, He created the burdens of life to be shared and controlled by both men and women" (p. 40). For Amin, a woman should enjoy all the pleasures, feelings, and power that God created for her. Women's segregation and oppression are "undoubtedly, Amin continues, is not what the Shari'a meant, and it should not be allowed by either law or reason" (p. 41). Almost 75 years later and in *Beyond the Veil* (1972), Islamic feminist Fatima Mernissi directly criticizes dominant interpretations of women's roles and rights in the *Koran* as sexist and biased. She identifies two dominant sexist narratives that interpret female sexuality in Islam and directly affect Muslim women's social orders. Firstly, female sexuality is active, and women needs sexual gratification and satisfaction. Secondly, female sexuality is passive, and they are the

primary targets of active, vicious male sexuality. Whether female sexuality is active or passive, women are dangerous sexual entities. Mernissi explains further that

> The entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defense against, the disruptive power of female sexuality. Women are a dangerous distraction that must be used for the specific purpose of providing the Muslim nation with offspring and quenching the tensions of the sexual instinct. But in no way should women be an object of emotional investment or the focus of attention, which should be devoted to Allah (God) alone. (p. 42)

To protect women from sexual seduction or adultery, women in dominantly religious and tribal societies are constrained, secluded, and segregated from men. The fear of female sexuality is a fear of, Mernissi continues, "female self-determination that is closely linked to fear of *fitna and zina,* or chaos, seduction and adultery" (p. 57). These sexist attitudes toward the female body and female sexuality are space-oriented as well. Mernissi explains further that:

> Muslim sexuality is territorial: its regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict allocation of space to each sex and an elaborate ritual for resolving the contradictions arising from the inevitable intersections of spaces. Apart from the ritualized trespasses of women into public spaces (which are, by definition, male spaces), there are no accepted patterns for interactions between unrelated men and women. Such interactions violate the spatial rules that are the pillars of the Muslim sexual order. (p. 111)

Public spaces in Gulf countries are masculinized and exclusive to men. If women appear in public, they have to adhere to "female modesty code" where respectable and religious women have to wear the "veil" (Abasa, p. 11). Radical feminist, physician, and political activist Nawal El-Saadawi argues that the dominance of the sexist interpretations of female sexuality in Islam has played a major role in justifying and normalizing sexual, gendered, and public violence against Muslim women. In *Women and Sex* (1972), El-Saadawi refers specifically to the prevalence of private and public violent practices against women such as female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM), honor killings, marital rape, sexual harassment, polygamy, female psychosis, infertility and pregnancy, and pressure on women to have many (male) children (p. 18). El-Saadawi explains how Arab and Gulf women are brought up, educated, and instructed to hate their sexual instincts and feel ashamed about the female body (p. 22). Islam forbids honor killings that are mainly tolerated due to cultural traditions falsely and intentionally attributed to Islam to confuse and control men's and women's roles and behavior.

Although there was some cultural, feminist, and literary production in the Gulf during the 1930s through 1960s, female writers and feminists were largely marginalized and repressed. For example, early female novelist in the Gulf area such as Saudi Samira Khashoggi and Hind Baghaffar published their novels in Egypt, Lebanon, or Iraq. Moreover, although these early female writers discuss issues of women's oppression, love, and inequality, they avoid direct political and religious criticism and condemnation through writing under pen names as Khashoggi did or set their novels outside their homelands as Baghaffar did in her famous novel *Lost Innocence* (1971) that was set in Egypt (Michalak-Pikulska, 2016; Fromherz, 2018). Even though early female writers and novelists in the Gulf come from affluent and

open-minded families and received university education in neighboring countries such as Egypt and Beirut, they are largely conquered by fear of openly challenging deep-seated patriarchal cultural norms and sexist interpretations of the *Koran*, which inform the legal rights of Gulf women. For instance, the shaming of women who defy established moral and social codes is reinforced through sexist laws such as arbitrary divorce and honor killings (Abu-Odeh, 1996; Mir-Hosseini, 2013; Wadud, 2006). Other obvious examples of the discriminatory legal procedures against Gulf women are the male guardianship system and the personal status laws that impede and control Gulf women's right to marriage, travel, and custody to varying degrees in each Gulf state. According to the Saudi guardianship system, all women must get their male guardians' permission to travel, marry, be released from prison or a governmental institution, or get their personal identity cards (Al-Humaidi, 2018; Lazreg, 2020; Skaf, 2013).

In a similar way, the personal status law in Qatar allows male guardians to divorce their daughters from their husbands if he decides they are incompatible, even if women object. Qatari women also need to obtain their guardian's consent for employment and cannot travel without his permission unless they are over 25 years of age. Under the Kuwaiti personal status law, women need male guardians' consent to marry, and a Kuwaiti man can prohibit his wife from working if he decides it negatively affects her family (Aldosari, 2016; Al-Ghanim, 2009). These diverse, legalized discriminations constitute women as minors, unequal access to divorce, and child guardianship. Women are permanently dependent on men, and it gives men the green light to psychologically, socially, and financially abuse their women. For instance, a man can claim his wife's work hinders her familial duties out of envy of her career success or to abuse her to give him money. Restricting women's personal freedom and controlling her sexual rights after a divorce is another prejudice against Gulf women. For example, in Oman, a mother loses custody of her children if she remarries, while her ex-husband can marry and continue to have guardianship of the children. Omani women cannot give their nationality to their children (HRW, 2019).

Gulf and Arab women in public spaces are seen by men as vulnerable and unprotected first because the dominant sexist cultural and moral codes deny and disgrace women's public appearances as a source of "chaos and seduction." Moreover, phallocentric tribal, religious, and power structures affect the legal systems in the Gulf that do not criminalize different forms of domestic and public sexual and gendered violence (Nazar & Kouzekanani, 2007, Al-Ghanim, 2009). Here, religion, patriarchal cultural norms, and tribal traditions confuse so that women are oppressed in the name of Sharia and religion, when gendered prejudice stems from patriarchal and masculinist cultural and tribal norms. An obvious example of the internalization of female inferiority and subordination is the widespread phenomena of wife beating and intimate partner violence (IPV) in Gulf countries. Mojahed et al. state that the legal protection of women "is dependent on the legislative and judiciary organs of the respective state—in the case of the modern Arab state, dependent on patriarchal institutions—making, for example, the definition of violence against women (VAW) and its types based on the prevalent and dominant political climate" (Mojahed et al.,

2022, p. 393). In tribal and religious Gulf States, women fear to be abandoned by their families in case they report domestic or sexual violence. Premarital sex and victims of rape choose to marry their rapists than to be dishonored and killed by their families (Haddad, 2016). In all Gulf States, the regulations regarding sexual mistreatment do not explicitly make marital rape a crime (Tonnessen, 2016).

The following parts of the chapter discuss the political construction of the concept of female shame in public spaces as a tool of political oppression. Then, it traces the emergence of organized feminist movements in the Gulf countries and their attempts at challenging and transforming the above-mentioned deep-seated forms of female shaming in their countries. I specifically focus on feminism in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain for two reasons. First, although Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain have been steadily progressing on socioeconomic and cultural levels with reasonable political stability since 1970–1971, feminist and political dissent has persisted, but taken different forms. Thus, the comparative focus on the three Gulf states shows significant variations in how feminist activism and political/religious authorities are exercised, regulated, and changed over time. Second, Arab Spring revolutions have remarkable but different effects on the development of women's rights and feminist activism in the three states.

1.1 Political Construction of Shame in the Gulf

Although many scholars approach prevalent essentialist and sexist attitudes that shame, control, and punish Arab and Gulf women in public and private spaces as religiously, culturally, or socially motivated (Fakhro 1996; Barlas 2002), this chapter argues the concepts of female shame are politically oriented. Shaming the female body is a planned strategy developed by religious and political elites in the Gulf and the Arab countries to manipulate and utilize women's rights and needs to keep their advantaged, hierarchical, and corrupt orders. For instance, throughout the twentieth century, authorities in Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, Emirates, and Qatar have targeted female and male human and women's rights activists for promoting women rights in their societies and communities and have been defamed accusing them of threatening state security or treason by partnering with foreign authorities. Detained or arrested female activists and their families have been defamed by sexual violations and harassment (Amnesty International, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2013, 2019). In the post-independence eras, Arab countries, including the Gulf states, establish and strengthen what is called "the security state" that propagates "the primacy to the protection of national borders, physical assets, and core values largely through military means" (Ripsman & Paul, 2010, 10). A major tool to specifically shame and defame females in public, protest, and activist spaces is religious fundamentalism. The propaganda of the religious and moral bases of the conservative public roles of women not only dominate in the Gulf but also affect more liberal Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria. Leila Ahmed explains that:

> The wealth of the oil-producing countries was itself regarded as a sign of God's favor to Muslims, and in particular to Muslims who followed the strictest forms of Islam, including wearing hijab. Other Muslims would do well to adopt those conservative practices, many thought, so that they too could receive God's bounty and blessings (Ahmed, p. 101).

As the Gulf countries receive increasing numbers of immigrants coming to work in the oil industries and to satisfy the needs of the high welfare systems, religion is used to silence incoming liberal voices and to stop developed ideas from changing the deep-seated tribal and patriarchal orders. Saudi Arabia specifically succeeds in transferring Wahhabism to all Muslim and Arab countries as the only true form of Islamic values. Wahhabism denies women's equality with men, legalizes and naturalizes women's inferiority and dependency on their male guardians, and reduces women to the biological roles of mothers and wives (Otto, 2010; Bramsen, 2007). Even though many Muslim and Arab female and male immigrants to the Gulf follow the strict religious rules concerning women's dress, public appearance, and family roles as out of economic necessity, many others believe that Wahhabism stemming from the sacred places of Hajj is the right Islam. Here, this chapter argues that Gulf countries intentionally propagate and impose their strict and extremist moral and religious values on immigrants to control their influence. Saudi Arabia specifically has wider goals to "Wahhabize Islam," thereby reducing the "multitude of voices within the religion" to the "single creed" of Saudi Arabia. Simultaneously, Saudis "reach out and spread Wahhabism across the Muslim world and into the heart of the West where Muslim immigrant populations," promoting "a new identity that emphasized religious commonality while downplaying differences of language, ethnicity, and nationality" (Kepel, p. 82). The emergence and spread of the Saudi-funded satellite TV in the 1990s and 2000s participates in spreading Wahhabism all over the Arab and Islamic countries through religious channels such as Iqraa (1991), Al Resalah (2006), and Al-Nas (2006) and other religious channels with Saudi funding. TV presenters in these channels are veiled, endorsing conservative image of Arab women (Khalil & Kraidy, 2009).

Political violence developed by Gulf regimes and their well-funded media activities and institutional powers that meant to restrain progressive and liberal schools of Islamic thoughts directly and intentionally strengthen strict Islamic movements. The collapse of the socialist systems in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq, and Algeria in the 1970s along with the civil war in Lebanon (1975–1990) further weakened liberal and secular thinking and organizations that have also been targeted by the brutal military rulers and religious fundamentalists in these countries (Ahmed 2011; Zdanowski 2014; Dawisha 2016). As socialist regimes withdraw from the public spaces and services, specifically their support of women's work and public roles, Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafists dominate the public scene and impose their extremist, excluding, and fundamentalist ideas (Zakarriya, 2014, 2019; Ahmed, 2014). Like Wahhabists, Salafists are strict Muslim schools of thought that spread all over Arab countries in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, and many Gulf states. Armed Islamist movements such as al-Qaeda and the Islamist Jama (Islamist Group) have emerged and started a series of terrorist attacks inside different Arab countries to establish the Islamic State (Dawisha 2016). The most

famous and organized political Islam movement, however, is the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt as a religious institution of Dawa (spreading Islamic values). Gradually, the Muslim Brotherhood joined the anti-colonial nationalist movement and later became the first organized political Islam organization in the majority of Arab countries including Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Emirates, Syria, and Sudan (Solomon & Tausch, 2020). Like Wahhabists, Salafists, and armed Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood aspires to establish an Islamic State but has strong political ties with Western powers and proposes itself as progressive and substitute to Arab dictatorial rulers.

Similar to oppressive Arab rulers, Salafists, Wahhabists, armed Islamist groups, and the Muslim Brotherhood use different forms of violence to silence democratic and liberal political movements, terrorize progressive religious voices, and intolerantly suppress female activists and feminists. For instance, progressive Egyptian Islamic thinker Farage Fouda and Egyptian Minister of Culture and novelist Yusuf Sabaa were assassinated by Islamists in 1992 and 1978, respectively. In 1962, Egyptian novelist and Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz was accused by Al-Zahar's religious scholars including Mohamed Ghazali and Sayed Sabek of apostasy and heresy for the *Children of Gebelawi* that was published in the newspaper al-Ahram, and in 1994, Mahfouz was stabbed in his arm by an illiterate Islamist. In 1989, Omar Abdul Rahman, the Mufti of the Islamic Group of Egypt, issued a fatwa that Naguib Mahfouz and Salman Rushdie deserve to be killed. Islamists justify the murder of Palestinian poet Musa Hawamda for his book *Shajaray Aala* due to its anti-Islamic values. In 1983, Syrian novelist Haidar Haidar was accused of disrespecting in his novel *A Banquet for Seaweed* that was banned in all Arab countries. In 2006, Islamist Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi issued a fatwa against the Tunisian poet Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr Awlād Aḥmad. Islamists terrorize female writers as well. Feminists and activists Nawal El-Saadawi and Moroccan Fatima Mernissi face death threats from Islamists and extremists. Algerian liberal feminist and novelist Aicha Lemsine was forced to leave Algeria in 1978 for her novel *La Chrysalide* that Islamist militants regarded as insulting Islam. Libyan novelist Wafa Albueise faced death fatwas for her novel *Hunger Has Other Faces* in 2008 and was exiled. Iraqi novelist and journalist Iqbal al-Qazwini was exiled and her life threatened for her liberal ideas. Kuwaiti Journalist and feminist Hidaya Sultan al-Salem was assassinated in 2001.

In this sense, Wahhabism does not only represent the Saudi Arabian political attitude toward women's rights and roles in society; it also denotes equally serious sets of patriarchal and hierarchical orders. Wahhabism is a religious tool to silence and marginalize the political activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Saudi Kingdom. In Saudi Arabia, the royal family empowers their trustworthy and loyal Wahhabis whose religious ideology subjugates all Saudi people to the absolute authority of the royal family and a small class of elites of businessmen and religious figures (Shahi, 2013). While the Saudi regime utilizes Wahhabism to silence dissent, other Gulf states use religion and tribalism in different forms. For instance, the Kuwaiti royal family has developed mutual interests and power agreements with the Muslim Brotherhood to fight the strong post-independence liberal trends. The Sunni

ruling royal family in Bahrain systematically oppresses, silences, and criminalizes political dissent and freedom fighters, particularly female activists and feminists claiming the Shia minority in the country have connections to Iran and threaten the kingdom's stability and unity (Diwan, 2021; Hafidh & Mehmood, 2019). Division of power among royal elites and tribes and the use of police violence to silence dissent have been the working strategy in Oman and the United Arab Emirates with the result that women are the prime victims of Islamists and strict Islamic trends (Stewart, 2013; Jones & Ridout, 2015). The use of violence against political activists, freedom fighters, feminists, and the opponents of the regimes in almost all Arab countries and in the Gulf has been common (Bakr, 1996; Albertsen & de Soysa, 2018). Such political violence is securitized and legalized as defending national interests and security.

In a similar way, Alfonso Gonzales argues convincingly that "security state from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century could not be separated from the authoritarian turn in civil society; that is a cultural and ideological tendency to support the use of violence and repression to deal with dissent and social problems writ large" (Gonzales, p. 80). In this sense, Arab and Gulf ruling regimes manipulate the concept of national security and national values to silence dissent. Arrested and imprisoned feminists and female political and opinion prisoners are shamed as immoral, deviant, irresponsible, particularly if they are mothers, sexualized, or foreign agents (Booth, 1987; Mahmood, 2019). The dominant culture of patriarchy and hypermasculinity further facilitates the violation and shaming of the bodies and reputations of feminists and female activists through allowing exerting gender discipline against the non-conforming women to direct repression from state security forces, or/and withholding state protection and thereby making women vulnerable to other forms of domestic and public violence.

In this way, Gulf and Arab women have to deconstruct different and interdependent forces of patriarchy, violence, and sexism in their societies. Religion and culture are politicized and securitized tools of oppressing and shaming women and upholding orders of essentialist and fundamentalist hierarchies. Despite widespread dictatorship and violent political Islam, Gulf and Arab women continue their activism with impressive outcomes, which is discussed in the following sections of the chapter.

2 Gulf Women Challenge the Cultural Politics of Shame

In the following analysis, I specifically trace how feminist struggles, developments, and changes in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman inform and are informed by historic changes in the political and religious power relations in the three countries. Organized feminist institutions started in the Gulf around the 1950s, decades after the establishment of Women's Feminist Organization in Egypt in 1924. Bahrain and Kuwait have led feminist movements in the Gulf. As a good number of native and foreign female teachers and educated women, particularly from Egypt, have worked

in Bahraini and Kuwaiti schools and because of the strong liberal nationalist movements in the two states, women in Kuwait and Bahrain organize to change their repressive conditions. The Bahrain Women's Society (1953), Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society (1955), and the Child and Mothers' Welfare Society in Bahrain (1960) are early attempts of Bahraini elite and educated women to organize charity events, to help poor families, and to educate and raise awareness among women of all classes. The Awal Women's Society (AWS, 1970) is the first feminist organization led by newly educated middle-class Bahraini women who also became engaged with the nationalist movement. The Al-Rifa' Cultural and Charitable Society (1970) and the Women's International Association (1974) followed AWS in calling for a real integration of Bahraini women within the political, social, and economic institutions (Al-Najjar, 2003).

Similar to Bahraini women, Omani women, particularly in Dhofar, joined nationalist, armed, and political organizations such as the Zafar Liberation Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf. In 1970, Omani Women's Society was founded offering educational, economic, and social services to Omani women. In Saudi Arabia, princesses Latifa and Sara el Faisal and writer Samira Khashoggi founded Women's Emancipation Organization (1962) and al Jazeera Girls' Cultural Club (1963) that promoted women's education and rights (Al-Najjar, 2003; Chatty, 1996). Bahraini, Saudi, and Omani feminist movements, however, are negatively influenced by the stable, deep-seated hierarchical, tribal political and religious structures in their countries that criminalize public and political activities. Consequently, feminists and activists in these Gulf states have to find alternative and new means of affecting public opinions, and raising awareness among women to mobilize for real change.

The use of classrooms as a means of raising awareness has been efficient, yet limited. Many pioneering Gulf feminists are university professors and teachers who have attempted to introduce progressive views on women's rights and to resurrect neglected history of women in Islam but faced administrative and ideological resistance. In 1994, the Sunday Women Group (SWG) was established in Riyadh by a group of academics from King Saud University (KSU), mainly from the History Department to raise awareness and organize efforts to develop and integrate Saudi women into the political arenas. SWG now includes professors from all Saudi universities (Al-Fassi, 2015). Nour Almazidi explains that gender studies as a legitimate academic discipline in the Gulf region is missed, leaving out monolithic representation and othering discourses on Arab women (2019, par. 7). Moreover, liberal and progressive feminists and university professors are countered by conservative religious men, traditional intellectuals, and conventional feminists and professors who attacked them as liberal, Westernized, immoral, sexualized, and anti-religious. Saudi writer Raeda al-Sabe criticizes the inability of feminists and liberal professors in improving the educational policies in her country explaining that "where are feminist studies in the school curricula, curricula that consecrate social contempt for women, to be passed on from generation to generation?" (Al-Badawi, para. 14). Dr. Wafaa Alaradi, an assistant professor at the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University, partly agrees with al-Sabe that academic

curriculum and traditions restrict women's ambitions and rights. Alaradi says "some of the more sensitive topics that I have picked as research themes have sometimes been rejected because they would be addressed by a woman" (Bianco, para. 6). Alaradi sees some positive changes in academia: "the situation 20 years ago whereby only 2-3 faculty members were women. Today we see increasingly an equal ratio of the two genders. Some of my students have moved on to become part of the diplomatic corp, others are continuing with their graduate and post-graduate studies" (Bianco, para. 6–7). Islamic feminist and political activist Hatoon al Fassi argues that academic divisions among conservative and liberal professors and the marginalization of gender studies hinder collective mobilization for academic development. Nonetheless, al Fassi continues that the emergence of different feminist trends such as Islamic, liberal, radical, and conservative feminists, despite their antagonism toward each other, enriches and diversifies calls for changing women's conditions (2016, p. 188).

Another influential alternative tool of feminist activism in Gulf countries is writing. Literature and emerging feminist journalism fight rigid sexist and essentialist mental fallacies, stereotypes, and fears women have been internalizing and unconsciously practice about their roles, abilities, and potential in life. Saudi journalist Najwa Hashim is one of the leading Gulf feminist journalists. Egyptian feminist, political activist, and radical thinker Nawal El-Saadawi indicates that since the 1970s, Arab and Muslim women have been fighting a war on their minds symbolized in a revived religious fundamentalism hiding in the cloak of Islam. El-Saadawi explains further that "this was a war on the mind of people, a campaign launched to control and domesticate their thinking, a religious brainwashing required to facilitate and hide what capital was planning to do with their land, with their life" (2008, p. 27). Gulf feminist writings and feminist literature since the 1980s have played a major role in deconstructing this growing religious fundamentalism through representing women's oppression and inequalities as stemming from different, interdependent factors entrenched within political, economic, and sociocultural structures rather than as a religious factor. Ishaq Tijani explains how Gulf female writers such as Hidaya al-Salem, Badriyya al-Rasheed, and Layla al Jahni adopted the notion of sisterhood as central to express the authentic realities of their societies and to raise women's consciousness about the poisoning ideas they have been receiving about their roles in life (2019, p. 146).

In addition to this, psychological, historical, and gothic feminist writings have been forces of cultural enlightening and progress in Gulf countries. Writers such as Raja Alem, Fawziya Rashid, and Jokha al Harthi have been honest in exposing and fighting the cultural and social roots of gender stereotypes, superstition, and the psychological effects of oppression on women (Hanna, 2016; Helie-Lucas, 2004; Douglas, 2021). As Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, and all other Gulf kingdoms have embraced cosmopolitan and multicultural atmospheres, feminists in the these kingdoms have cohered and focused on women's internal issues and laws while engaging with international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979). In 2007, feminists Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al Oyouni co-founded the Association for the

Protection and Defense of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia. Gulf women activists and feminists have found substitutes to the state-controlled public spaces. Taking advantage of their educational and socioeconomic welfare benefits, large numbers of Gulf women have access to online and Internet spaces earlier than, for example, their counterparts in impoverished North-African Arab countries. For example, in 1998, Saudi feminist Wajeha al-Huwaider used YouTube to call Saudi women to mobilize for the right to drive, and in 2008, Saudi feminist Manal Al Sharif filmed herself driving in Saudi Arabia (Soukaina, 2018).

2.1 Shaming Oppressive Authority: Gulf Feminist Activists Practicing "the Personal is the Political"

As explained in the second part of this chapter, mobilizing Gulf women to take solid, unified activism against their inferior status and undermined rights has been a highly challenging and elusive task. Yet, the Arab Spring protests that swept Arab countries since 2011 have a historic influence on Gulf women. Male and female protesters asking for comprehensive political, socioeconomic, cultural, and legal reform spread all over the Gulf states. For the first time in decades, Gulf women participate in public protests and activities. Starting as online protests and mobilization that transform on the ground in public spaces, the Internet, social media, and online spaces become an effective and safe tool of pressuring for change and of exposing the huge numbers of Gulf women objecting to their marginalization and legal subordination. Gulf male and female protesters in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar, among others, invaded public spaces asking for social and economic equalities and cultural reform. Public dissent, where women took great part, has been more visible and ongoing in Oman (Chay et al., 2021; Al Talei, 2021; Valeri, 2015). Likewise, Saudi women took part in political protests in 2011 asking for equality, freedom, and fight against corruption (Abdulla, 2012; Mayhew, 2015). Unlike Oman and Saudi Arabia, Bahraini protests in 2011 are the most violent in the Gulf states, with women, Shia, and political activists being the main targets of police forces (ADHRB, 2016; Diwan, 2021; Hafidh & Mehmood, 2019). Bahraini female protesters are sexually abused in public spaces to shame them and their families and to stop other women from participating in the protests (BCHR, 2013; GADHRB, 2016).

The spread of police violence within different protesting and revolutionary contexts during the Arab Spring has a great effect on the deep-rooted and sexist bases of the security mentality in the region. Women's bodies in revolutionary Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Bahrain, and Syria, among others, have been used as tools of tribal and ethnic superiority and revenge (Al-Ali, 2012; Hafez, 2012; Khalil, 2016; Zakarriya, 2019). As women talk "true to power" and have real physical presence in public spaces, walls of fear are broken. The use of sexual violence in protest spaces exposes the brutality of authoritarian Arab regimes. Public

violence makes hidden practices, rumors about police torture, and accounts of violations in prisons and police stations visible realities and facts seen by all people worldwide. Nonetheless, violence does not stop Gulf women from protesting and asking for real change in their social, legal, and political rights. After 2011, feminists from Saudi Arabia (e.g., Noha al-Balawi, Aziza al-Yousef, and Loujain al-Hathloul), Bahrain (e.g., Hajer Mansoor, Fadhila Al Mubarak, and Ghada Jamsheer), and Oman (e.g., Maryam M, Mawada Rashed, Kauther Al-Busaidy, and Buthaina AlYani) have been highly active but have also been exposed to arrests, imprisonment, torture, exile, and defamation (Batrawy, 2019; Dahan, 2018; OCHR-Oman, 2021; Karak, 2021; Al-Azri, 2013). The families of many Saudi feminists and activists such as Loujain al-Hathloul break silence on the sexual violations she faces while in detention (Aratani, 2019; Ghoussoub, 2018). Likewise, Hajer Mansoor, Ghada Jamsheer, and many common women are attacked, sexually harassed, and arrested in Pearl Roundabout in Manama, Bahrain, but their families did not hide and told about these sexual violations (Jones, 2013; Mansoor & Ali, 2019). Omani feminists and political activists such as Basma Al-Keumy, Basma Al-Rajehy, and other common women are detained and attacked, but their families and supporters defended them (Oman, 2012; HRW, 2013).

For the first time in modern history, the cultural stigma surrounding Gulf women's bodies, sexual harassment, sexual violations, and rape is broken, first through breaking the silence and second through denouncing the self-condemnation, shame, and dishonor that always follow the female victims as a result of their behavior. Revolutionary Arab women and Gulf women specifically found the courage to come forward with their accounts, testimonies, and stories that made it possible to document their role in change. The long-established religious and cultural stigma attached to sexual violence and the exposition or violation of women's bodies is challenged. Sexual violence in protest spaces is political. The personal and private feelings of female shame, fear, and vulnerability turn into acts of female honor, strength, and action through familial, social, and digital media celebration of these women's courage, sacrifice, and defense of human values of equality, freedom, and dignity. The shame is felt by the authoritarian regimes that commit such public crimes against their populations.

Shame is always seen as an instrument of emotional and social disciplining. Visualizing the sexualization and abuse of women's bodies in protest spaces is meant to make these women invalid on the moral, social, and political levels. Violent regimes and oppressors expect violated women to be discarded by their families and communities and to be isolated and silenced. Moreover, in tribal and conservative contexts, honor crimes are attempts to "cleanse" the shame that befalls male members of families and relatives when their female subjects do not adhere to moral and cultural conventions and rules that are expected to govern a woman's proper public behavior. Nonetheless, the publicization of police violence during the Arab Spring produces shame as an abhorred form of political narcissism and disciplining. Noam Chomsky argues that political and cultural narcissism in the USA and worldwide dominates "by instigating violence or its direct exercise, and by other means of intimidation and harassment" (2008, p. 267). Instead of silencing and marginalizing

dissident movements and women, through spreading spatial and social insecurity, tribal norms, and bigoted propaganda, violent regimes appear weak and lack control.

Organized feminist activism for the reform and mobilization of the Sharia-based laws in the Gulf has persisted in the Gulf and all the Arab countries following the Arab Spring. Feminist activism in Saudi Arabia becomes more vocal and public against the guardianship system, familial violence, and women's rights to drive and access public spaces. These heated feminist and legal debates in post-Arab Spring Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrain affirm that women's activism, public influence, and political impact have existed. Women in Oman express continuous dissent against the unequal nationality and marriage laws and access to workplace. The suicide of university student Zuwaina Al Hinai in 2021 due to family oppression caused angry responses among Omani women (Al-Azri, 2013; Hussein & Goldsmith, 2020; Karadsheh et al., 2019; Chay et al., 2021; OCHR-Oman, 2021). In response to 2011 protests, both countries have been offering generous social, economic, and legal benefits, particularly to women (Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Hallward & Bekdash-Muellers, 2019; Forster, 2017). Women in the Gulf have been pioneers in using digital and online media and spaces to promote their needs and rights. For instance, the Saudi women's right to drive and the reform of the guardianship campaigns have started online. #I Am My Own Guardian أنا ولية أمري and #Women to Drive Movement قيادة المرأة في السعودية in Saudi Arabia succeed in mobilizing for a historical, legal reform of Saudi women's rights. In 2018, the guardianship system is reformed, and in 2019, almost 70,000 Saudi women had driving licenses (Specia, 2019). Likewise, # no harassment campaign لا تتحرش and # no gender discrimination in Oman invade public and online spaces and social media calling for women's equal access to work opportunities and breaking silence and shame on sexual harassment in the country.

Despite the fact that Arab Spring revolutions do not transform into the aspired democratic orders protesters dream of, there is a real change concerning Arab and Gulf women's public roles and positions in society. Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Emirates issue new legislations to deal with cases of sexual harassment and rape, while Algeria and Lebanon abolish a shameful law that allows the rapist to marry his victim to avoid imprisonment (Johansson-Nogués, 2013; Khalil, 2016; Al Bunni et al., 2018). Traditional social media and film industry in the Gulf area openly discuss taboo issues concerning women's public roles, socioeconomic inequalities, gendered domestic and public violence, forced marriage, honor killings, and biased inheritance and divorce laws. Famous examples are Saudi program "al-Thamina ma Dawood" and first female director Haifa al Mansour whose film *Wadjda* that presents domestic sexual violence and incest in Saudi society (O'Neill, 2012; Aloisi, 2012). Gulf women challenge the stereotypical image of being oppressed or marginalized. Rather, they express agency, knowledge, and power to defend their rights. The collapse of political Islam in Egypt and then in Tunisia along with the eruption of ethnic-religious oriented civil wars in Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Iraq definitely affects the religious-political power equations in the Gulf states. For example, the silence of Wahhabis and conservative religious men in Oman and Bahrain concerning the growing role of women in public and

decision-making spaces reflects a remarkable decline in their cultural and political power. Although Gulf women seize the Arab Spring chance to publicly mobilize and voice their demands, they have been working for decades to raise awareness and change a deep-seated culture of female shaming, vulnerability, and disciplining.

3 Conclusion

Gulf women's access to educational and later work opportunities along with the development of their personal and public rights depend greatly on the ability of Gulf activists and feminists to mobilize for change and their efforts to raise awareness. As public spaces are masculinized and securitized and the establishment of political and feminist organizations is banned, feminist and female activists in the Gulf use alternative and innovative means of mobilizing and change. Classrooms, feminist journalism, and literature have succeeded in changing deep-seated mental and psychological shame and fears and internalized sexist ideas in their societies. Gulf women have pioneered the use of digital and online spaces to spread their ideas and to publicize their causes. Yet, the collective mobilization for change has started in post-2011 revolutions. Gulf women invade public and protest spaces and pressure to successfully gain their rights. Saudi, Bahraini, and Omani women have succeeded in getting access to work benefits, and Saudi guardianship system was reformed in 2018.

Studies on the emergence and development of feminist organizations and movements in the Arabian Gulf are still lacking. Although scholarship has contributed important analyses of feminist struggles in the Middle East and North Africa, the genealogies and forms of feminist and women's movements in the Gulf states such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, among others, are under-observed. Moreover, scholarship has ignored and historicized the multiplicity, plurality, and richness of feminism in the region.

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