INTRODUCTION

> These days . . . one rarely finds a woman in her home. She goes out almost every day to walk around the mall, whether to stroll, buy things or exchange what she has bought . . . and then she goes out to visit the neighbor, her friends, to attend parties, and so on, and through this, she leads her religion, her generation and her family to ruin. . . . It has gotten to the point where going out has become normal, and staying home exceptional.
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> From a book published in Riyadh entitled "Lost Young Women: Stories of Young Women Who Deviated from the Proper Path"

EVERY DAY, thirty-year-old Arij sets out for the Mamlaka, one of Riyadh's most popular shopping malls. She is not there to shop—she works as a security guard on the mall's women-only floor. Although weekdays are quiet, Arij appreciates the weekend atmosphere, when friends meet for coffee or stroll around the oval-shaped shopping arcade. Twenty-two-year-old Aliyya is often among them. A student at King Saud University living nearby in northern Riyadh, she often has her father drop her off at the mall to meet her classmates. Twenty-eight-year-old Abir visits the Mamlaka Mall only occasionally, and then only for professional assignments. She is a journalist, and though her father and stepmother severely restrict her nonprofessional activities, they consider that the prestige of this profession compensates for the degrading aspects of a young woman going out alone. While at the Mamlaka, she tries to combine business and pleasure, squeezing in visits with friends between her journalistic activities. Layla, a secondary school teacher, often hires a driver to take her to the Mamlaka on Thursday mornings—the weekend in Saudi Arabia—while her husband is still asleep, having stayed up late with his own friends. She and her husband have different rhythms, she explains, and she is used to leading her own life. Not all young women, however, enjoy the Mamlaka. Twenty-two-year old Amal, also a student at King Saud University, avoids this popular mall: "I find it a horrible place, all those little cliques of girls with their fancy makeup and hairdos. I'm okay with openness [*infitah*], but not in such a stupid form!" Amal prefers another shopping mall where,

she says, the visitors are less inclined to what she describes as showing off. She goes there whenever her brother is available to drop her off.

Because they are face-covered in "mixed" (*mukhtalat*)[1] spaces, like the vast majority of Saudi women in Riyadh, Arij, Aliyya, Abir, Layla, and Amal are invisible in Western media accounts of Saudi women, which usually focus on women who more clearly resemble stereotypes of emancipation. Arij, Aliyya, Abir, Layla, and Amal do not consider themselves activists. Their daily activities do not confront the driving restrictions for women, nor the general policy of gender segregation that marks the Saudi capital. These five young women from various social, family, and regional backgrounds nonetheless adopt lifestyles characterized by access to a growing number of public, nondomestic spaces, among which some are forbidden to men. Their lifestyles, which include access to what I call an "archipelago of public spaces" (closed, securitized) involve unprecedented sociabilities with unknown women. Such practices shed new light on shifting power relations, social hierarchies, and gender norms in Saudi Arabia during a time of declared economic and social reform.

Space, Gender, and Reform: Shifting Models of Femininity

Saudi women are usually portrayed as secluded. This is generally interpreted as a consequence of religion, traditions (tribal, bedouin . . .), or the conservatism of Saudi society. There are two problems with these interpretations. First, they neglect the role of the state, urbanization, and capitalist globalization, which have shaped and are shaping the modalities of Saudi women's access to public spaces. Second, the focus only on what Saudi women lack fails to consider the specific organization of spaces, lifestyles, and gender norms produced by the particular limits placed on mobility. Women's mobility and access to public spaces are the subject of ongoing, lively debate in Saudi Arabia. In 1990, during the first Gulf War, forty-seven women got behind the wheel in Riyadh to demand the right to drive.[2] The ensuing highly conflictual controversy furthered the rift between liberals and Islamists. The latter linked the forty-seven women's initiative to the influence of the United States in Saudi Arabia.[3] More recently, in spring 2011, several young Saudi women launched the Women2Drive campaign, calling on women to drive themselves to their daily destinations. The campaign was repressed by the police—as is every form of collective action in Saudi Arabia, where demonstrations and political parties are forbidden.

Women's mobility in Saudi Arabia is political, in the sense that it is at the center of controversies, tensions and repression. It is also political in a broader

sense: beyond the debate on women's driving, changing practices are widely observable in the city, as are the economic, social, and political transformations that influence—and are influenced by—these practices. They signify shifting power relations and ways of governing (governmentalities) in the sense that Foucault defines power as "a mode of action upon the actions of others."[4] The increasing access of some urban Saudi women to public spaces in Riyadh and their increasing visibility are embedded in the government's normative project of reform that notably targets Saudi women.[5] This project is spatialized: it relies on a specific spatial economy (or organization) that opens and closes spaces to different categories of people based on gender (along with class, nationality, ethnicity, and age).

In the 2000s, notably after 9/11, the word "reform" (*islah*) was one of the leitmotivs of declarations made by the Saudi government and the current sovereign, King Abdullah,[6] consecrated reformer.[7] It concerned various changes: official reform discourse mentioned the struggle against terrorism, along with a call for tolerance, moderation, and dialogue between religions; the development of the private sector; the nationalization of jobs (that is, the replacement of foreign workers with Saudis through quotas); and the "enhancement of women's role in society."[8] This rhetoric of reform is not new in the history of the Saudi state. It was abundantly used by King Faysal, head of state from 1964 to 1975, who is presented by official Saudi history—and by official U.S. discourse[9]—as one of the great figures of reform, notably for having opened the first public schools for girls. Several elements of continuity can be identified between the current discourse of reform and modernization and the former staging of the king as an enlightened modernist attempting to persuade a backward society to accept changes. Representations of the relation between state and society in Saudi Arabia continue to be influenced by this image. Other elements are new, such as the inclusion of private-sector entrepreneurs as central reform figures.

Here, the phrase "reform discourse" designates more than rhetoric: it is a set of institutional actions, official declarations, lectures, decrees, regulations, reports, and measures. In promoting women's participation in society and women's rights in Islam, reform discourse formulates a normative project shaping the possibilities, opportunities and spaces accessible to Saudi women. It defines a particular model of femininity based on expectations regarding behaviors and activities of "*the* Saudi woman." In some ways, these expectations recall what may be called a liberal ideal of femininity that promotes professional

work for women as a way to enhance their autonomy and sense of self. While I don't consider a priori this normative project to be necessarily emancipatory for women, I am interested in the ways in which it is co-constructed through various practices and spatialized; how it participates in shaping new norms, subjectivities, and boundaries of belonging and exclusion in Riyadh. My contention is that this period of Saudi history combines particular discourses and practices that reconfigure power relations and have resulted in the emergence of young urban Saudi women as a central group in the reform project.

My perspective is inspired by postcolonial and poststructural gender studies that view gender as produced and reproduced within situated historical configurations of power relations, as opposed to a universalization inherent to concepts such as patriarchy or women's oppression.[10] In particular, specialists in these fields have analyzed how modernizing projects have been both regulatory and emancipatory. They have produced new subjectivations (processes through which subjection to constraining norms produces new ways to be subjects). Gender is defined as a socially constructed difference and hierarchy between men and women, which implies specific gender norms, meaning characteristics and behaviors attributed to men and women respectively. These norms are constructed and specific to situated contexts, but also inhabited, negotiated, and resignified in multiple ways, beyond fixed categories of identity.[11]

Following such approaches, gender norms trace boundaries, not only between men and women, but also among those classified as women. Based on work with three generations of women in China, contrasting the Maoist period with contemporary neoliberalism, Lisa Rofel suggests that distinct models of femininity are produced according to historical periods and political configurations. She highlights the absence of homogeneity in the category of women in terms of desires, aspirations, representations, and lifestyles, and shows how the experience of a subaltern position differs according to the generation of women involved.[12]

The model of femininity promoted in the context of reform in Saudi Arabia targets Saudi women, as opposed to female foreign residents: a key aspect in a country where one-fourth of the population is nonnational, and one-third lives in big cities like Riyadh. Most specifically, it targets young, educated, urban Saudi women. The 2000s have been marked not only by colossal oil revenues but also by increased internationalization and financialization of Saudi capitalism.[13] Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organization in 2005, following more than a decade of negotiations. In this context, certain sectors of the Saudi

state have taken up vogues such as privatization of public services and trade liberalization. The adoption of such policies, far from limiting itself to a simple adaptation of the state to international injunctions,[14] is inseparable from the will to change the image of the Saudi nation in the eyes of other countries and of Saudis themselves. Even though the measures are implemented in various ways, and sometimes not implemented at all, notably due to corruption,[15] reform discourse promotes new narratives and imaginings of what it means to be Saudi.[16] Young Saudis are increasingly shown as individuals who must take charge of their own lives to succeed, gain education and become highly qualified, build careers in the private sector, and thus participate in the country's development. Young Saudi women are included in this discourse: they are encouraged to participate in the job market, including in the private sector. They are expected to participate in the nationalization of jobs, replacing non-Saudis by nationals. Because of this very strong national/nonnational divide, institutionalized by various state policies, I focus on the practices of Saudi women, as opposed to non-Saudis. That said, it is impossible to understand the constraints and limits imposed on Saudi women's mobility while ignoring the spectrum of these other women, who fall into distinct categories through interactions with institutions and people.

In some regards, reform discourse contradicts another model of femininity, which I call Islamic, since it is grounded in a rigorist interpretation of Islamic precepts, promoted for decades by certain state institutions responsible for the implementation of gender segregation. The young Saudi women on whom this book is based were brought up in a context where religious references were omnipresent in their socialization and daily routines. For the most part they do not reject these, although their lifestyles tend to stand in opposition to some official Islamic rules, founded on the interpretation of religious precepts by the Council of Senior 'Ulama (religious scholars),[17] a state board that issues fatwas (juridical opinions founded on the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition). Some of these are applied with or without being codified as rules and regulations, for instance by the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), a sort of religious police,[18] or even by the city police. The all-male staffs of these institutions are civil servants, Islam having been a source of legitimacy for the Saudi state since its foundation. When I speak of official Islamic rules or of an Islamic model of femininity, it is with reference to this religious mode of legitimation. I make no judgment as to whether the content does or does not truly correspond to Islam.

This book explores young Saudi women's practices within public spaces in relation to various—and sometimes contradictory—normative projects defining national femininity. These projects present specifications for what women should do; how they should act in order to be considered good, respectable Saudi women; what *places* they should occupy (literally and figuratively).

Public Spaces, Interactions, and Performances

Dividing a population into assigned places, hence gender segregation, involves disciplinary practice and translates power relations. It means forbidding women's access to certain spaces and homogenizing their way of dressing in mixed public spaces. It produces two social worlds, of which one is subordinate to the other. These two dimensions of constraint and hierarchy are why I speak of segregation rather than separation. At the same time, this spatial organization of gender results in the development, outside of domestic spaces, of separate and protected spaces wherein the presence of women is considered totally legitimate: this differs from a public/private divide. My chosen goal is to analyze, not only what gender segregation represses, but also what it *produces* in terms of spaces, sociabilities, regroupings, and identifications.[19] I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork in an archipelago of spaces that can be classified in four categories: women's campus, women's and mixed workplaces, religious spaces, and shopping centers. These are neither administratively public (except for the campus) nor accessible to all: each of them is delimited by a particular type of boundaries. At the same time, they are not community spaces and even less private ones, since they put people in the presence of those they do not know. I refer to these as public spaces in order to call attention to the sociological and interactional dimensions of this concept.

On this note, I must specify my use of the concept of public space, which has many different meanings, of which we can distinguish three main angles.[20] As delineated by Jürgen Habermas,[21] a public space is a space of debate, exchange, and confrontation of points of view; examples are cafés, newspapers, and the Internet. The second approach concerns legal status: a public space is a space that belongs to the state or to public organizations, a definition that includes streets, squares, parks and gardens, or even a public campus, but not a shopping mall. This dimension is often used in research critical of contemporary dynamics of privatization, concerning the hypersecuritization of urban spaces, the development of gated communities and the "ecology of fear."[22] However, the focus on legal status often neglects inequalities in access to spaces that *are* administratively

public, *in theory* open to everyone. The gendered dimension in feelings of insecurity and in self-exclusion from spaces "open to everyone" is often ignored.[23] This book identifies a specific link between gender, class, nationality, feeling of insecurity, and the preference for securitized spaces.[24] I qualify the spaces I studied as public in reference to the third dimension of the concept: publicity can be conceived of as a *quality in construction* in spaces accessible to everyone, or at least in which people unknown to each other are able to meet. Here, meetings are socially organized by rituals of exposition or avoidance. This dimension is elaborated by Isaac Joseph, an urban sociologist focusing on public spaces, inspired by the work of interactionist Erving Goffman, who studied relations in public and behaviors adopted by people unknown to each other in situations of co-presence.[25] Everyone attempts to control the impression given to others.

I found it very stimulating to combine Goffman and Joseph's approaches on interaction rituals in public spaces (that are either completely gender-blind, or not focused on gender) with queer feminist developments on performing femininity (and masculinity).[26] Interaction rituals imply specific performances of masculinity and femininity. Most often, these correspond to dominant norms defining behavior acceptable for women and for men. Following this idea, I paid much attention to the ways in which young urban Saudi women qualified each other as "feminine," "respectable," "deviant," "masculinized," or "dirty" depending on self-presentations, ways of interacting, and reputations. I decided to analyze the strong connection between negotiations of gender norms and interactions in public spaces. Inspired by Goffman's analysis, I considered the spaces frequented by young urban women to be like theatrical stages, on which each woman is simultaneously actress and spectator. My interest in gender performances began with reading the queer feminist theorist Judith Butler. As a sociologist, however, I adopted an interactionist rather than a linguistic approach. Goffman's dramaturgical use of the concept of performance allows for analysis of judgments formulated on others in various situations of interaction, as well as consideration of people's reflection on their own public behavior.[27] It also allows for taking into account people's different behaviors in various situations and the ways in which they experience these as contradictory or not. According to Goffman, the "self" is held in tension between the desire for unity and coherence and the fragmentation due to different statuses, either mobilized when faced with others or attributed by them.

The spaces in which young urban women gather are sites of transforming sociabilities and gender norms. They bring unknown women into one another's

presence. This contrasts with the relative confinement of the previous generation of urbanized women to the domestic spaces and sociabilities of the extended family. I am interested in how these sociabilities, whether ephemeral or more lasting, may contribute to shaping shared identifications. Additionally, I explore how these gatherings between young women in public spaces, and the way they judge the conduct of others in these spaces, contribute to renegotiating norms of femininity. Transformations in lifestyles and norms, particularly behaviors considered as permissible, appropriate, or acceptable in public, depend on interactions between these young women who are unknown to one another, as well as between them, their families, and various state entities. Practices considered normal are in perpetual redefinition.

Frequenting public spaces with young urban women and observing how they categorize their peers allows for understanding "from below" the negotiation of new forms and norms of femininity. The practices I observed influence the range of behaviors regarded as acceptable in public *as Saudi women*, and involve the redefinition of national norms of femininity.[28] These practices may correspond to models of femininity promoted by the government, the Council of Senior 'Ulama, or other public entities. Alternatively, they may question these. Previously uncategorized transgressive or subversive behaviors require (re)definition, which may transform public behaviors regarded as acceptable for women, and thus gender norms. However, it may also be that such behaviors are labeled as deviant, which tends rather to reaffirm dominant norms,[29] although it may also participate in displacing them, as we shall see.

Young urban women adopt lifestyles that are above all *styles*: ways of negotiating a self-image in public. "Lifestyle" can be understood in two ways throughout this book. The first focuses on the imbrication of politico-economic transformations and quotidian behaviors,[30] such as professional activity and consumer, leisure, and cultural practices. The second focuses on the stylization of self, the way in which adopting a lifestyle implies a specific situated discourse and conception of self,[31] embodied and performed in relation to others, and in front of them. This dimension soon appeared central to me while I participated in the spaces and gatherings accessible to women, observing public self-presentations and hearing comments and classifications about others' self-presentations. In women-only spaces, where young women do not wear the niqab, everyone is in sight of everyone else. These are spaces of imitation, emulation, transgression, and conformation to groups of peers. Here, young Saudi women subject themselves to requirements in terms of appearance, behavior, and self-presentation:

these imply particular practices of consumerism. Although young urban women emancipate themselves from certain constraints and project themselves in new imaginings through the lifestyles that they adopt, they nonetheless submit themselves to other constraints. Thus it is important not to idealize the process of autonomization regarding the most obvious and most visible forms of control: when women adopt new forms of consumerism, of dressing, and so on, they submit to new norms, even while having access to new possibilities.[32]

How do these young urban women's public interactions relate to reform discourse? Some writers on public spaces use the concept of the disciplining and individualizing "gaze of power." In the context of Turkey, Alev Çinar conceptualizes a "public gaze," in this case secularist, that determines practices and self-presentations in urban spaces.[33] Women wearing the veil subvert this order and question the categorization on which it is based. In Riyadh, it would be difficult to identify a singular "gaze" exercising an influence on the conduct of young urban women, given the complex imbrications/intertwining of multiple and heterogeneous power relations. The lifestyles adopted by young urban women are influenced by the reform discourse, application of official Islamic rules, constraints imposed by families, or even private-sector initiatives. In Foucault's definition, they constitute relations of power that intertwine, confront one another, and either converge or, conversely, oppose one another.[34] Various elements open or close spaces and possibilities for action for young urban women, which contribute to fashioning their lifestyles. At the same time, focusing on interactions, with ethnographic methodology, is an effective means for studying power relations in action, in precise situations. The focus on daily activities and ordinary life of Saudi women allows for in-situation understanding of political and social transformations that are remaking Riyadh's society.

Transforming Categories, Classifications, and Hierarchies

Not all women in Riyadh have the same access to the city. This book questions how social divisions condition Saudi women's access to urban public spaces. It also explores how uses of these spaces, and the interactions that take place therein, contribute to reinforcing or recomposing interlocked hierarchies of gender, class, race, nationality, age, and origin—such as they are defined in this particular society.[35] Among Saudi women in Riyadh, the most mobile are those who study or hold a salaried position. The lifestyles they adopt trace boundaries and recompose social hierarchies. It is not pertinent to speak of Saudi women in

general.[36] Young urban women with mobile lifestyles are a historically produced category. The following analysis will shed light on the specificity of contexts and power relations, the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the "work of regrouping" that shape it.[37] At the time of my study, between 2005 and 2009, the interviewees were generally between twenty and thirty years old. Their mothers were often born in very modest circumstances, even in privation, before the impact of the rise in oil revenues was felt. They had generally experienced nomadic or village life and, for the most part, only arrived in the city at the time of their marriage. The daughters, on the other hand, grew up in the context of the "era of opulence" of the 1970s and 1980s. The majority were born in the city, and would for nothing in the world go live in their parents' native villages, which they only visit occasionally for family celebrations. Secondly, their coming of age took place under very different conditions: the mothers received only a cursory education. They rarely worked for a salary, but those who were educated and wanted to found a job fairly easily, generally in the public sector as elementary school teachers. This was a well-paid job with a schedule compatible with the role of wife and mother. For the generation of their daughters, higher study has become the norm. Whereas many would like to become professionals, there are no longer any public sector jobs, and the rate of unemployment for women is even higher than for men: according to the Central Department of Statistics, the unemployment rate in 2013—apparently much underestimated—was around 34 percent for Saudi women and 6 percent for Saudi men, or 12 percent for "active" Saudis overall.[38]

The generation gap is also apparent in the experience of life's stages: for the young women I met, youth existed as a passage in the cycle of life, yet it was practically nonexistent for their mothers' generation.[39] The latter often got married at fourteen or fifteen; they generally did not go to school, and the majority of them are illiterate. Many of them had seven or eight children.[40] The interviewees, on the contrary, pursue higher studies and generally marry only after graduating.[41] It is necessary to add here that many marriages do not last long and it is common to divorce after a few days, a few weeks or a few months, as some statistics published by the Ministry of Justice in 2011 showed: accordingly, 66 percent of divorces occur in the first year after marriage.[42] The frequency of divorces and remarriages is not new,[43] although today the rate of divorce is considered a public problem. Many Saudi women seek employment, before or after their marriage and/or divorce. For those who are married, the unrestricted, over-the-counter sale of contraceptives in all of the

country's pharmacies facilitates the pursuit of studies or the exercise of salaried employment.[44]

Young men and young women generally have very different social experiences. My informants and interviewees generally spoke of themselves as "young women" (*fatayat*), rather than as "young people" (*shabab*), which in Riyadh is most often used in speaking about young men. Their separated lives lead male and female Saudi youth to form two distinct categories. Because of gender segregation, they frequent different places, have different social networks, and pursue different activities. The social norms concerning professional activity and marriage differ according to gender. Thus, in general, young men *must* hold a paid professional job, while many young women have to negotiate their access to this with their families. Whereas young women are not pressured about getting married unless a credible suitor presents himself, young men *must* save money to get married. Moreover, young Saudi women are up against legal and familial constraints that are theirs alone.

Gender and generation are not exclusive of other statuses mobilized during interactions. In the course of my fieldwork, I was interested in the ways in which the women I spent time with "did difference," to use Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker's phrase,[45] in discussions we had and interactions with various people; that is, how they asserted their own belonging, distanced themselves from those they identified as other, and assigned social status. I use the term "typification" in order to designate the statuses that are assigned to someone by others, in terms of gender, class, family belonging, regional origin, race, ethnicity, or nationality. Rather than imposing my own categories on the situations I analyzed, I often chose to borrow the words I heard in Riyadh and translate them literally. To understand the ways in which the interactions that take place in public spaces both reveal transformations of gender norms and social hierarchies and contribute to them, it is necessary to analyze which categories the interviewees mobilize according to the contexts in which they speak, which status they assign to others according to situations, and which divides they formulate to describe their society.

The categories in circulation among the groups that I studied are numerous and fluid. They intersect and can be assigned to the same people in different situations. Here, I would like to introduce the principal categories mobilized during discussions and interviews. Most of the interviewees referred to different social classes (*tabaqat ijtima'iyya*) in Saudi society—in general, they did not include nonnational residents in such classifications. They considered their own

family as belonging to the middle class as opposed to the upper class—which would include the royal family, senior civil servants, and large entrepreneurial families—on the one hand, and the "poor," on the other.[46] During informal discussions around the best seller *Banat al-Riyad* (*Girls of Riyadh*),[47] for example, several young women said that the book was about the "velvet class" of Saudi society, a class to which they did not consider themselves as belonging. Such classifications are nonetheless highly unstable in a context where certain families have become wealthy quite rapidly following the oil boom in 1973, without regard to a high level of education or a prestigious family history. Additionally, Saudi Arabia, a state founded in its current boundaries in 1932, has not known any class mobilization, with the exception of demonstrations—suppressed and absent from official history—by the Saudi employees of Aramco (then a U.S. oil company, but now wholly owned by the Saudi government) in the early 1950s.[48]

The women I met also referred to the categories (*shara'ih*) of bedouin (*badu*) and sedentaries (*hadar*); to people of the south, of the east, and of the Hijaz (Saudi Arabia's western province, where Mecca, Medina, and Jiddah are located); to blacks (*sud*), often descendants of slaves, and sometimes designated as such (*'abid*), although this is considered insulting; and to village people (*garawa*; sedentarized bedouin in some cases), a term with pejorative connotations. They also spoke about "tribal" (*qabili*) as opposed to "without tribal ascendancy" (*khadiri*).[49] They often used the word "background" (*khalfiyya*) in speaking of these social, geographical, and family origins. These categories are socially and historically constructed, of course, and their boundaries are never perfectly clear. Other categories employed by the interviewees included "open-minded" (*mutafattihat*), "free, or liberated" (*mutaharrirat*), "rigorists" (*mutashaddidat*), and "committed to Islam" (*multazimat*)—a term I prefer to "Islamist," "Islamic," "Salafist," "Wahhabi," and other adjectives that risk misinterpretation because of their diverse connotations. Generally speaking, "engagement" (*iltizam*) designates a Muslim's accomplishment of all the Islamic duties—often maximally interpreted in Saudi Arabia as conforming to the fatwas of the Council of Senior 'Ulama. The fact of being "committed to Islam" does not imply criticism of the government or militancy, although some *multazimat* see it as their duty to preach Islamic maximalism. Some are clearly politicized and opposed to the pro-Western orientation of the government; others regard their commitment to Islam as a strictly personal religious choice and espouse the currently dominant Saudi discourse of tolerance and moderation.