

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Fiction deals with something imaginary. Novel is one of the genres that embody various elements including those of extrinsic elements in fiction. In the *Dictionary of World Literature*, a novel is described as follows:

the most protean of literary forms, is the least amenable to formal definition. At various stages of its development, it has assimilated the characteristics of other ways of writing essays and letters, memoirs and histories, religious tracts and revolutionary manifestoes, sketches of travel and books of etiquette, all the popular varieties of prose (Shipley, 1960, p.283).

Thus, a novel is a kind of literary form that may deal with history, religion, or travel. There are many kinds of novels and one of them is *Girls of Riyadh*. This is an interesting novel because when it was published in 2005 for the first time, this novel became a controversy in Saudi.

The book was first published in Lebanon in 2005 and in English in 2007 and is unconventional for its use of emails to tell the story. Her book caused a lot of controversy when it was first published, and was banned by the government in Saudi (2010, ¶.2).

The government in Saudi disagrees with the story of the novel. It is because the novel tells about the lives of young women who did not follow the Moslem regulations in Saudi. The government thinks that it can make a bad impression about Saudi when the readers read it. Therefore, when the first time this novel was published, it was banned by the government.

*Girls of Riyadh*, was written by Rajaa Alsanea who grew up in Riyadh. The story is about four girls who live in Riyadh, a city of culturally strict Islamic tradition. They are Gamrah, Sadeem, Michele, and Lamees. In this novel Gamrah has a problem with her husband. Sadeem is a little too willing to please her fiancé. Michele is a half-American and the wrong class for her boyfriend, Faisal. Since Michele's mother is an American, Faisal's mother refuses to consent the relation between Michele and her son. Lamees works hard with little time for love. It is because Lamees mostly focuses on her study, so she has a little time to search for love. Gamrah, Sadeem, Michele and Lamees come from rich families. From the examples above, it could be said that they want to choose modern lives that may deal with modern culture in strict cultural traditions of Riyadh.

Saudi is a part of Arab which has cultural tradition and is influenced by norms and religion, Islam

The religion of Islam is closely associated with Arab identity because of the origin of Islam in the Arabian peninsula and the fact that the language of Arabic is the sacred language of the Holy Qur'an (Health Research Unit,1999, p.15)

On the other hand, America deals with western culture. America has a culture which is more modern than Saudi. American culture is always changing, whereas in the Arab culture it is not changed. It is because Arab culture is governed by norms and religion. Because there are no strict rules on American culture, then this condition makes the American people can do whatever they want to do. The American people are always also claiming that what was done by them is the best. Edward C. Stewart and Milton J. Bennet say: "From an early age, American children are encouraged to believe that they themselves are the best judges of what they want and what they should do." (1991, p.63) This stereotype can make Americans more advanced or more modern than the other. "Americans are very modern people, of course" (Stewart&Bennet, 1991, p 100)

From the explanation above, it could be concluded that Arab culture is so different and contrast from the American culture. Therefore, this could become an interesting phenomenon that all of the girls in the novel want to choose their lives to different cultures although living in a very strict Islamic environment.

In this study the writer deals with the character of Michele as one of the main characters who has an interesting side to discuss. Her full name is Masha'el Al-Abdulrahman but she is always called Michele by her family. She is a Moslem because her father is a native of Riyadh but her mother is an American. Born as a half-American and a half-Arab who lives in Riyadh, she tries to search for her cultural identity. Two different cultures are not easy to be embodied because there is one culture that becomes a dominant culture and the other become less cultured. In this case a dominant culture is equal with being a colonizer and lesser culture is equal with the colonized.

To analyze Michele (Masha'el)'s experiences, post colonialism approach is used because it offers an insight to Orientalism theory. In post colonialism approach there is a connection with Orientalism theory. Therefore, that theory will help the analysis of which culture is more dominant for Michele's life. Michele's experiences, thoughts, beliefs, lifestyle and behavior can be described from a Post Colonialism perspective. With that approach the writer expects to find which culture will give more influence to Michele's life later on. This is why the writer chooses a character of Michele as an object of the study and gives the title "Girls of Riyadh: The Arab-American Michele's Search for a Cultural Identity" for her thesis.

## 1.2 Field of the Study

The field of this study is literature.

## 1.3 Scope of the Study

The paper will only be focused on one of the main characters, Michele (Masha'el) and her experiences that have a connection with her struggle as a half-American and a half-Arab who is living as a Moslem in Arab. In this study, her experiences will be analyzed by using Post Colonialism approach.

## 1.4 Problem Formulation

Based on the background, the problem formulations of this study are:

1. Why does Michele search for her cultural identity?
2. How can the Post Colonialism approach may be of help in explaining what Michele actually experiences?

### 1.5 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the reason why Michele (Masha'el) searches for her cultural identity.
2. To explain what Michele's experiences are from Post Colonialism approach.

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

This paper can give different view points to the readers about young Moslems in Saudi Arabia. Besides that, this paper can also give a chance for scholars such as students of Faculty of Letters to analyze this novel using Post-Colonialism approach.

### 1.7 Definition of Terms

There are some terms throughout the study which must be known firstly to more to understand more about the issues that will be discussed in this paper, such as:

- a. **Cultural identity:** The identity of a group or culture or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (2010, ¶ 3).

b. **The Oriental:** The person represented by such thinking. The man is depicted as feminine, weak, yet strangely dangerous because he poses a threat to the white, Western women. The woman is both eager to be dominated and strikingly exotic. The Oriental is a single image, a sweeping generalization, a stereotype that crosses countless cultural and national boundaries (2010, ¶ 4).

c. **The Orient:** The idea that has an history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West (Said, 1995, p 5).

d. **Latent Orientalism** is the unconscious, untouchable certainty about what the Orient is. Its basic content is static and unanimous. The Orient is seen as separate, eccentric, backward, silently different, sensual, and passive. It has a tendency towards despotism and away from progress. It displays feminine penetrability and supine malleability. Its progress and value are judged in terms of, and in comparison to, the West, so it is always the Other, the conquerable, and the inferior (2010, ¶ 5).

e. **Manifest Orientalism** is what is spoken and acted upon. It includes information and changes in knowledge about the Orient as well as policy decisions founded in Orientalist thinking. It is the expression in words and actions of Latent Orientalism (2010, ¶ 6).