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Original Article

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PRINCESS OF ZANZIBAR AND ANTHROPOLOGY OF KINSHIP AND GENDER

The article focuses on the analysis and publication history of “Memoirs of an Arabian Princess” by Emily Ruete, born Salme bint Said Al-BuSaid (1844–1924), the daughter of the Sultan-Imam of Oman and Zanzibar, Sayyid Said. Published in Germany in 1886, the work was the first autobiographical research ever written by an Arab Muslim woman. Besides ethnographically valuable insights and discourse on social structures and the position of women in Arab-Muslim societies, traditional Arab-Swahili family, kinship system and inheritance rules in Zanzibar, the author suggested and criticized the concept of Western bias in the perception and interpretation of the East, which later was labeled “orientalism.” The book provided a typical description of the culture and kinship systems ‘from the native’s point of view’, which led to some critical attitude to the author of the book and her literary contribution in the post-colonial period.

Keywords: Salme bint Said Al-BuSaid, Emily Ruete, Zanzibar, anthropology of kinship, gender studies

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