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9 Saudi women

Modernity and change

Hatoon Aijwad al-Fassi

Introduction

The oil boom of the 1970s affected the Gulf countries immensely in terms of social structure as well as political and economic formations. In Saudi Arabia, modernity came at a remarkably fast pace, and industrialization became the declared goal of the country, with change and development that had not been known before in both society and government. Najd, the country's central and most conservative area, was able to exercise an influence on the rest of Arabia and the Gulf through its new oil wealth.

Saudi women were particularly affected by the shift in the country's economic fortunes. In just three decades, female literacy rates rose sharply, and today female students outnumber male students. This jump in the number of educated women generated a demand for work outside the home, though the workplace was not developed enough to receive women. Segregation, a practice less strictly followed before modernization,¹ was gradually institutionalized until it became a new reality. Thus the main challenges occupying conservatives in Saudi Arabia have been how to maintain and regulate the veil and how to prevent women from working alongside men.

Technology provided this traditional community with ways to solve those problems. To preserve women's privacy and separation from men without preventing them from studying or working, the country adopted closed-circuit television (CCTV) and modern communication facilities. CCTV allowed women to observe male teachers on television without being observed in return, and an internal telephone made communication possible between the two sides. This process of securing segregation is a key element in understanding and assessing the development of Saudi women's social and economic life in the past three decades.

Modernity

The increased revenue brought in by the oil boom allowed more schools and universities to open, but it also whetted appetites for modern luxuries. Signs of modernity proliferated, as Saudis began to see and experience more cars, bigger and better houses, and advanced communication systems, including television stations.

Projects mushroomed everywhere. Multinational companies, foreign workers, diplomats, and politicians from around the world became interested in Saudi Arabia. Studies have been exhaustive in this area, and books about Saudi Arabia were bestsellers in many countries for years. The government also embarked on a renewable five-year development plan in 1970 to expand the civil service and through which all governmental sectors were modernized and entered into international agreements, among other activities.

As Saudi Arabia entered the third millennium, the lifestyles of its citizens became even more globalized through such conveniences as satellite television, the Internet, and mobile phones. Such an environment was conducive to CCTV and technologized segregation.

Education

King Saud (1953–1964), who was under the constant demands of intellectuals and notables, issued a declaration for women's education in October 1959. Two years later, some 20 years after the development of men's schools, Saudi women's education expanded from a limited number of private schools to a wide array of public regular schools. Launching this project was not easy. Society and religious leaders, especially in central Saudi Arabia, fiercely resisted the initiative. As a compromise, the government entrusted women's education to the clergy, who justified it by making its main objective the training of good mothers and obedient housewives. Religious leaders also preserved the proper segregated study environment for girls in conformity with local traditions and narrowly interpreted Islamic rules (al-Bakr 1997: 14–15).

Segregation and proper clothing for women were maintained through a completely separate system of education for them. This system, called "The General Presidency for Girls' Education," ran women's education facilities from primary school to the university level between 1961 and 2003. The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, ran boys' and men's education, which followed a different curriculum and different policies.²

As a result of King Saud's policies, in 1970 there were only 378 elementary schools for girls, but by the end of 1975, 881 elementary schools for girls were in operation—an increase of 133 percent (al-Bakr 1997: 48). The gap between boys and girls was narrowing. In 2006, there were 6,714 public and private elementary schools for girls in the Kingdom, compared to 6,603 public and private elementary schools for boys (Saudi Ministry of Education 2006). In addition, the percentage of women enrolled in higher education rose from 47.5 percent in 1990 to 66 percent in 2002 (Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005–2009: 430), exceeding that of male students. Female graduates now outnumber male graduates, representing 56.5 percent of the total graduates in higher education (diploma, college, and graduate schools) (Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005–2009: 360).

One can argue that technology such as CCTV helped women's education expand through its maintenance of segregation, which prompted more families to

allow their daughters to pursue their studies all the way up to higher education. Indeed, some scholars attribute the rapid growth in women's education to the fact that the standards of education and curriculum content are consistent with Saudi society's deeply rooted values, making education appealing to parents. They also point out that women find in education an area of self-realization that improves their social status, while men prefer to work rather than study (al-Bakr 2005).

However, modern Saudi society is still not at peace with the changes its women have experienced, as women are considered guardians of tradition and the first line of defense against a Western "intellectual invasion." Although technology has helped increase the number of women joining schools and universities, which has resulted in changing and elevating their social status, it has also helped to endorse traditional norms that preserve the isolation and invisibility of women as much as possible.

This can be seen in the prevention of female students from enrolling in certain subjects that allow them to mix with the other sex later in life, such as engineering, architecture, archaeology, geology, politics, and journalism. Indeed, the Ministry of Education's 1999 report indicates that, out of a total of 174,876 female students who joined the universities in the same year, 44 percent of them were admitted to the College of Education, 5.8 percent to the College of Arts & Humanities, 2.7 percent to Islamic studies departments, 1 percent to medical science specialties, and none to engineering, while the distribution of 129,889 men who were admitted in the same year showed more balance among the different specialties (Saudi Ministry of Education 1999: 133). In similar fashion, in 2007 the female students registered in the humanities at King Saud University (KSU), a public women's university in Riyadh and the largest in the Kingdom, numbered around 17,000 students, whereas only 4,000 female students were enrolled in the sciences.

In 2005 King Saud University established a law school, though some private colleges had already opened law departments for women that had produced a few graduates.³ However, the law students of KSU who will soon graduate are concerned, as their future career and where they will work have not yet been settled by the Ministry of Justice, which regulates legal practice.

Vocational education was also closed to women for a long time. It was only in 2007 that a women's institute was established within the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), and four branches began to accept female students in limited numbers (fewer than 1,000 women). This endeavor will expand to 23 institutes in the coming years. To that effect, the TVTC has accepted 1,886 female students out of a total of 22,354 applicants for the 2008–2009 academic year (Technical and Vocational Training Corporation 2008).

In looking at the disciplines offered to women students in Saudi colleges and universities, it is clear that the emphasis is on theoretical subjects, which is exactly the opposite of what the labor market needs. This limitation has affected women's job opportunities, and has led to high rates of female unemployment.

Work

Article 160 of Saudi Arabia's 1969 labor law states that "women should not, by any means, mix with men in workplaces or its utilities, or any other place (Government of Saudi Arabia 1969)." This article, which is based on a strict reading of gender relations in Islam (Zaid 2000: 81–87) shaped the formation of women's participation in the labor market. What work women do, where they do it, and how they do it were major issues that needed to be settled before women could work with the permission of their families. The article was wholly implemented in the governmental sector and to a lesser degree in the private sector. Since 1969, certain authorities have monitored and reinforced this rule, including the General Presidency of Promotion of Virtues and Prohibition of Vices (i.e., the religious police).

For 35 years, Article 160 and its tenet on segregation shaped women's work. It also reflected the social attitude towards women working outside the home and was a hot topic for debate in Saudi society and media of the 1960s and 1970s. A return to this debate also took place from the 1990s through the new millennium in regard to school textbooks (Dounato *et al.* 2003: 247) and university books (al-Fassi 2003), where references to the value of women staying at home and rearing children as opposed to working outside the home and mixing with men abounded. Today, the religious movement's very conservative position regarding women's work outside the home is experiencing a revival, and what was thought to be a settled matter is again unresolved (Zaid 2000: 78–80).

In September 2005, the Ministry of Labor replaced Article 160 with Article 4, which states: "When implementing the provisions of this Law, the employer and the worker shall adhere to the provisions of *shari'a*" (Saudi Ministry of Labor 2005). This article, which refers to the private sector only,⁴ does not single out women in the observation of *shari'a*; rather, it commands both men and women to adhere to its provisions, thus slightly loosening the tight segregation law. Strangely, this innovation was not taken up by the media or by women's groups, and it was not publicly implemented at its inception. The following two examples demonstrate how segregation continues to be implemented at women's expense and show the contradiction between law and practice in the Kingdom.

The first instance occurred in June 2007, when female bank professionals were scrutinized in their work environment. Segregation rules were strictly enforced by creating different entrances, elevators, and even buildings for women, thus preventing them from participating in daily meetings and limiting communication to telephones and email. These measures have made women vulnerable to the loss of leadership positions, which are then filled by men (Associated Press 2007; Reuters 2007).

The second instance took place in January 2008. The Grand Mufti, Shaykh Abdelaziz Al-Sheikh, was reported to have insisted in a keynote conference speech on the necessity of preventing male doctors from mixing with female doctors in hospitals, which are both public and private in Saudi Arabia. He then asked for reports of any such incidents (*Al-Khaleej* 2008). His comments had a

very strong impact, and such ideals often determine the Kingdom's male/female relationships.⁵

However, powerful princes in the royal family have delicately challenged some of these ideals. Prince Khalid Al Faisal Al Saud, the governor of Makkah, issued a circular that was published in the local papers in April 2008 highlighting Article 4 and naming the Ministry of Labor as the only reference for women's terms of work (e.g., al-Zayed 2008). He sent a copy of his order to the General Presidency of Promotion of Virtues and Prohibition of Vices. The implementation of this law is now taking place in the Makkah governorate, which includes Jeddah and Taif. No changes have been noted in Riyadh yet, and it is still too early to assess the law's impact.

Despite such changes, working outside the home is still a challenge for Saudi women. Yet they continue to do so—albeit in small numbers—and technologies such as CCTV allow such work by maintaining a segregated education and a subsequent work environment separate from men. How did CCTV come about, and what are the implications of segregated education and work?

Closed-circuit television (CCTV)

When CCTV was introduced in Saudi Arabia, it was given a different function from its original uses, which included distance learning, surveillance, and entertainment. King Saud University first used CCTV in the late 1970s under the direction of Rector Abdulaziz al Fadda (1973–1979). The faculty of education introduced the technology through their department of educational methodology, and later, in the mid-1980s, a more official department called the Audio & Video Distribution Center was established.

The system became a medium through which women would learn under men by observing male teachers on television without being observed by them. Communication occurs between the sexes through an internal telephone. The teacher sits in a small studio furnished with a television camera aimed at his face, a white board, a light projector, and the telephone. Other supervision rooms take care of monitoring the studios and fixing any technical problems with sound, image, or light (King Saud University 1999: 436–437). The teacher is dependent on a female supervisor to tell him when the women are present and ready for him to start. The supervisor also keeps order in the class and proctors exams.⁶

In its first iterations, the system was not very efficient. When it failed to work, the teacher would come to the class and give his lecture face to face with the female students. This was especially true in the science departments (Anonymous KSU professor 2008; Samarkandy 2008). It was also hard to maintain CCTV between male and female campuses because of constant financial challenges due to the expense of doubly installing the technology. But the system improved little by little via the newest technology available on the market, and it eventually guaranteed a maximum degree of segregation and efficiency. And despite financial setbacks, Saudi Arabia's economic affluence has helped this happen in a permanent, institutionalized way.

CCTV's main positive outcome has been its social acceptability. Because women needed a male guardian's permission to study and work outside the home, conditions for doing so must be acceptable to him. CCTV thus paved the way for more women to enter into the public sphere—albeit in a segregated way. Segregation did not solely rely on CCTV, however; universities implemented “softer” segregation techniques, such as a dark glass partition. Women would sit in a minimally lit room with phones on one side of the partition, and the professor would teach in a well-lit room with a phone on the other side of the partition.

Segregation is strictly maintained in the colleges run by the religious establishments and in many parts of other universities. KSU completely conformed to the system in 1995, when it began to require its female graduate students to use CCTV to defend their M.A. and Ph.D. theses. Prior to 1995, graduate women studied and defended their dissertations face to face with their professors.

Fowziyah Abu Khalid, a sociologist and KSU staff member who wrote one of the first academic studies about gender and power relations on KSU's campus, considers education through CCTV to be the first officially recognized instance in Saudi Arabia's conservative area of Najd in which female students interacted with male professors in an academic setting. It also fosters communication between male and female staff members there. Abu Khalid calls the practice a “penetrative potentiality” (Abu Khalid 2001).⁷

Today, the complex system of CCTV that includes a sound system, wired and wireless types of communication, and the latest mobile phones, has helped to empower women who either welcome or critique segregation, and has allowed them a relative degree of participation in meetings, conferences, and lectures.

Criticism of CCTV has been evident, though not widespread. The media has not been quick to censure the technology, and it has thus remained a sanctioned means of maintaining segregation. A few student publications have expressed negative views of it, particularly *Hiwār* magazine, in which male and female undergraduates debated equality between the sexes, the limits of mixing and Islam's role in it, and other relevant issues (al-Hamlawi and al-Rayyis 1983: 11–13). The views expressed ranged from conservative to less conservative, but the magazine was suspended in 1984 when it grew too critical (*Hiwār* 1981–1984). Such publications of the 1980s, in addition to public criticism in general, highlighted how the system controls communication and enforces women's public exclusion. In later decades, public criticism became more directed at how the use of CCTV in conferences and public lectures denies women an equal voice. In such environments, men control the technology, which they use to favor male audience members over physically absent female ones (al-Fassi 2004).

Recently, an academic critique has questioned the excessive use of this technology. Badr al-Salih, a professor of education at King Saud University, calls CCTV a means by which education “hangs,” or rests, its flaws. He points to the importance of full interaction for learning via CCTV to be successful, and considers video conferencing that shows only the male speaker to be misleading and inefficient (B. al-Salih 2006; 2008: 70–72).

Saudi women have also shown resistance to women's “public exclusion” (Women for Reform 2008) by wearing the veil to guarantee their participation in the public domain. As Abu Khalid writes

This invisible presence was the female students' own way to encounter the social pressure that was launched against their public presence in the attempt to deprive them of one of their basic human rights. Medical female students who kept the full face cover have chosen to penetrate the existing system of gender relations by trying to find a new mechanism in facing this uneven power struggle in an attempt to develop a new scale of power relations inside the newly established institution of higher education.

(Abu Khalid 2001: 186–187)

Female students have also challenged the gender apartheid they experience in the educational system by joining fields that are traditionally exclusively male, such as medicine and pharmacy. In addition, an Islamist female writer and activist recently rejected the assumption of an Islamic order of segregation of the sexes in many articles and interviews.

(H. al-Salih 2007; al-Abdeen 2008a and 2008b)

The expansion of education in the 1990s has resulted in a new class of qualified women who join their predecessors in demanding that the government promote a higher level of women's participation in economic, social, political, and religious arenas, despite the fact that criticizing segregation remains a difficult and taboo act of resistance.

Implications of segregation

These forms of resistance demonstrate that while segregated work environments, such as those fostered by CCTV, have expanded women's choices, they have also limited them. By preventing women from getting the required qualifications for the market, segregated school and work spaces hinder women from joining many sectors. This has raised the rate of unemployment among women, impoverished and weakened them, minimized their rate of economic participation, and raised the cost of work and education for them.

Specifically, limiting the fields of study for women in universities and vocational institutes has led to the rise in unemployment among female university graduates. The majority of graduates are trained in the educational and health sectors and, as a result, the Saudi education and health ministries (particularly education) are the main employers of women. Most of the job opportunities in the country, however, are in different sectors that require technical and communication skills unavailable to women through their schooling. Thus, women's specialties do not fulfill the demands of the labor market.

Even female university graduates from fields such as computer science and accounting remain unemployed, primarily because these professions cannot be conducted in an environment separate from the rest of the work team. Policies preventing women from working such jobs have become more widespread, often leading to a closed labor market for women, which simultaneously opens itself up to foreign male labor, which has increased from 6 percent of labor in 1979 to 52 percent in 2003. Seven percent of this labor is female.⁸

Also, adhering to Article 160 by duplicating every institution is obviously expensive, and only a small part of the private sector, such as banks, can afford to do so. The public sector has thus been the one to take on segregation requirements and provide them as needed. As a result, women join the public sector at higher rates than they join the private sector.⁹

As such, segregation has allowed for the creation of many jobs for women in government ministries, such as the aforementioned ministries of education and health. Furthermore, the number of women working in the education field as teachers has increased from 113 teachers in 1962 (al-Bakr 1997: 47, plan 5) to 190,641 elementary, intermediate, and secondary level teachers in 2006, compared to 160,711 male teachers for boys' private and public schools at all levels in the same year (Saudi Ministry of Education 2006). These figures show the vast difference in attitude towards work for women, especially in those areas in which women are completely segregated from men.

Yet, because of the glut of women trained in the education sector, high unemployment rates occur for women in the field. Recent statistics show the excess: 83.4 percent of women working outside the home worked in education in 2003, while 5.4 percent worked in health fields (Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005–2009: 353).

According to official estimations by the Public Statistics Division, the rate of unemployment for both men and women in Saudi Arabia was 8.34 percent in 2003, and it increased to 16 percent in 2004.¹⁰ The 2005–2009 five-year development plan estimated an unemployment rate for women at 21.7 percent (Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005–2009: 372), and recently the Deputy Minister of Labor submitted a rate of 24.7 percent (al-Morky 2008). Other unofficial sources estimate it at 32 percent. This is one of the highest rates in the world, given that seven million jobs are available to foreign workers and that the high percentage of unemployed women includes many that are highly qualified. Indeed, according to the plan, 76 percent of unemployed women are university graduates, and 22 percent are high school graduates (Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005–2009: 193).

Furthermore, the population of Saudi Arabia is 16 million, with approximately 3.5 million women of working age. According to statistics from the Ministry of Labor in August 2007, the number of working women in both the public and private sectors is only 502,456, leaving three million at home. This constitutes a participation rate of 5.5 percent, the lowest in the world. Again, this waste is usually compensated for by the presence of foreign labor, whether male or female, and mostly unqualified.

The number of women in need who are not allowed to work is thus increasing. Many such women experience hardship due to the difficulty of executing family law verdicts found in their favor (al-Shubaiki 2004: 17–20). Instead of working, they beg in the streets or wait for social security, if they can prove their need with or without a male supporter. But even once women receive social security, it is never enough.

Women can also become impoverished through guardianship. Because a woman must avoid mixing with men, she cannot represent herself in government agencies and other public places freely. If she does not have a male guardian, or if she is a businesswoman in the private sector, she has to assign a male “authorized representative” who officially and legally conducts business on her behalf. This has led to many cases of financial loss and fraud. Luckily, the recent campaign to contest that rule—led by businesswomen and activists from Jeddah, Riyadh, and Eastern Province, was fruitful, and the condition was removed—to a point. Women whose businesses are completely segregated are exempt from having a male legal representative, but if the environment is not entirely segregated, a woman must assign a male manager. This new position has less authority than the previous one, but it can still cause issues for the female owner.¹¹

Indeed, in the May 2003 Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) report on “the obstacles to the female investment businesses in Saudi Arabia,” the authors find that one of the major roadblocks facing women is that, because of this system of male representation, they do not have direct access to the sectors necessary for their businesses to run and prosper. It can be very difficult for a woman to find a trustworthy man to represent her business in the government and deal officially with other businesses run by men and foreign investors (SAGIA 2003: 68–69, 72–73). Another problem is that of importing male labor for their businesses, because women are not allowed in the male labor import offices (SAGIA 2003: 74).

In addition, using a male representative prevents women from gaining the experience and skills needed to run and develop their businesses (Ba-Isa 2007). It also goes without saying that a segregated woman cannot represent herself or her business on any leading boards or decision-making committees. She is not allowed to be a public figure in a leading position or sit in the Cabinet or on the Shura Council. According to businesswoman M. al-Ajrourah

Segregation of men and women in Saudi society cuts women off from the most well established leaders in the business community. It makes it difficult for women-owned businesses to enter into affiliations with other firms and to cooperate as contractors on major projects. The most successful businesswomen tend to come from families where there is a strong business background. These women capitalize on their families' networks and connections to succeed. Such a situation is not helpful to society in general. Success in business should be determined by ability, not gender.

(Ba-Isa 2007)

Thus, although there are thousands of women willing to work and in need, the reasons outlined above demonstrate how they are often prevented from joining the labor force. Because of some of these same reasons, economic waste in the government is substantial.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, the government spent 25.9 billion Saudi riyals on girls' education in 2004, one and a half billion more than the amount of money spent on boys' education that year. Wastes include the following:

- Money spent on schools and teachers for women who will not use their education for work outside the home.
- Building duplicate departments, offices, libraries, labs, etc.
- The handicapping of half of society, replacing them with seven million foreign workers who transfer over 40 billion dollars out of the country a year.

All of this has resulted in the rise of a labor market with abnormal characteristics: on the one hand, women's participation in education is greater than ever. On the other hand, another (foreign) labor market has risen that does not follow the well-known market laws of supply and demand.

Update: a co-ed university

On 23 September 2009, King Abdullah inaugurated the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in the city of Thuwal in western Saudi Arabia. KAUST is the first co-ed university in the Kingdom, and as such is a revolutionary step. It has evoked an intense debate about the mixing of the sexes, and what is forbidden (*ḥarām*) or allowed (*ḥalāl*) in Saudi society.

Many in the religious establishment are unhappy with the founding of KAUST. One such figure, Shaykh al-Shathri, expressed his views on the Islamist satellite television station Al-Majd, saying that gender mixing is forbidden in Islam and that the university should change its policy (al-Shathri 2009). Shortly after, the Shaykh was dismissed from his position on the Council of Senior Scholars; since then, critics of KAUST have been careful in how they express their opinions.

On the other hand, many religious scholars have begun to give new interpretations of gender segregation and have concluded that it is allowed. These scholars emphasize the difference between mixing (*ikhtilāl*) and being alone with a stranger (*khuḥwah*), allowing the former and forbidding the latter. Major Islamic figures, such as Justice Minister Muhammad al-Issa, have supported this interpretation (*Al-Riyadh* 2009).

This new position has brought about a great deal of confusion. Men and women are questioning the credibility of religious scholars and the meaning of *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl*, as well as asking themselves about their lifelong effort to remain segregated. What opportunities of marriage, experience, and work have been missed, they ask, in order to meet the obligation of segregation? Hundreds, if not

thousands, of articles have been posted on the Internet both in agreement with and opposed to these new societal interpretations. One example of those opposed are the fatwas issued on Ana al Muslim website (Ana al Muslim 2009).

No other university in Saudi Arabia has attempted to become co-ed, though some private schools in Jeddah, such as Effat University, allow a semi-mixed setting during official events. At these events, speaking panels are mixed, and men and women sit together in the audience with a partition between them. Other institutions, depending on the courage of their leadership, offer symbolic gestures such as mixing men and women at official openings or conferences or decreasing the level of segregation in a particular space.¹²

Conclusion

In light of these developments, the future may bring new norms and standards in regard to the rules of segregation in Saudi society. In the meantime, methods like CCTV will continue to be used. The use of this technology to facilitate segregation has to an extent helped expand the areas of work available to women. For example, the percentage of women working as teachers is very high; around 85 percent of Saudi working women are employed in this manner.

Still, the total percentage of Saudi women who are employed is one of the lowest in the world. This is not because they do not want to work or because they are not qualified. Rather, it is because segregation techniques limit women to certain jobs, such as teaching and clerical work. Jobs in such fields as engineering, law, or retail cannot be totally segregated, and are therefore closed to women. Until norms change or science and technology advance to the point of allowing women to work in such sectors while remaining segregated, strong forces in society will continue to bar women from these opportunities.

Industrialization has thus brought two contradictory effects to the women of Saudi Arabia. It has strengthened and institutionalized the local customs that prefer to hide and protect women through segregation, while at the same time allowing women to enroll in schools and colleges at record numbers and to work in a secluded environment.

Notes

- 1 In the pre-boom period, gender relations were different. Women in central Arabia who were totally or partially veiled sat and talked with men and sold their wares in the market, whereas in such areas as the Aseer region, they did so with an exposed face.
- 2 In 2003, girls' education came under the supervision of the Ministry of Education as well. Many efforts are trying to bring about equal curricula for both sexes, but they are not yet realized. In 2006, the 102 Girls' Colleges, which were formerly part of the General Presidency for Girls' Education that accredited women with M.A.s and Ph.D.s, merged with universities in different cities. In Riyadh, they form the nucleus of Riyadh University for Girls, recently renamed Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University and headed for the first time by a woman.
- 3 One woman lawyer has broken the ice in Jeddah. She is a graduate of the Effat Private College of Law program and was trained under the lawyer Omar al-Khooly. She has

- been able to litigate in favor of some women even without a license. The story was reported by *Arabian Business* on 7 June 2008, and is available at www.arabianbusiness.com/arabic/521323.
- 4 The public sector, which includes schools and universities, continues to adhere to the more traditional laws regarding gender mixing.
 - 5 Usually the religious authorities enforce their own understanding of regulations based on religious interpretation if the official law is not on their side, as is seen in this example.
 - 6 I played this role when I was a professor's assistant as part of my duties in the history department of KSU from 1989 to 1992. I was then the director of CCTV at the women's campus in 2002.
 - 7 Male/female staff communication did not occur through CCTV during the first decade of women's university education at KSU, that is, from 1976 through 1986. See Abu Khalid 2001: 179–182.
 - 8 See al-Rashid 2003; the article relates how 400 Saudi women who were discharged from a dairy products factory after one day of being appointed out of fear they were not sufficiently segregated. See also the long debate on feminizing the lingerie shops between the Ministry of Labor and the conservatives, who won the battle and kept the industry in the hands of foreign men instead of Saudi women for fear of not observing complete segregation (Women for Reform 2008: 9–10, 45–46). Dr. Abdelaziz Abu Hamad Aluwaisheg, Director General of International Economic Relations for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), also shed light on this topic in a personal interview in Riyadh on 1 July 2008.
 - 9 However, quality in women's workplaces in this sector has not been guaranteed, as most women's sections and departments are situated in the old buildings of the institution previously occupied by men. Constructing new buildings for women from scratch is rare. Examples include the campuses of the all-female King Saud University and Imam Muhammad bin Saud University as well as the women's departments of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior, all in Riyadh.
 - 10 These rates, however, are imprecise due to the methodology the Division of Statistics follows. A study dated August 2007 that was later omitted from the site showed that the number of unemployed women had reached 164,787. This figure included only the number of women who had applied for jobs and did not succeed in obtaining one.
 - 11 I was the representative of the above campaign in the Riyadh region, and wrote many articles on the issue. The leader of the campaign was Ms. Alia Banajah, a businesswoman from Jeddah who was forced to close her company until the condition was removed on 3 May 2009. See al-Fassi 2009; Mokhtar 2009; al-Shareef 2009.
 - 12 For example, the opening of the Institute of Public Administrations' Jubilee Celebration at the Intercontinental Hotel in Riyadh, 1 November 2009.

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10 The role of women in industrialization in the Gulf

The case of Bahrain

Munira Fakhro

The changing role of women in the GCC countries

The changing role of women has recently received more attention on the local, regional, and global level, especially from the UN and human rights organizations. International conferences now focus on women's empowerment and gender equality. This topic takes a prime position in the Gulf region, as its societies have recently modernized, particularly since the advent of oil in the 1940s and 1950s. Some attribute this modernization to an earlier time, though rapid development did not occur until after the discovery of oil.

In the early years of the last century, Gulf women lived a traditional life dominated by old practices. In Bahrain, for example, one scholar classifies the pre-oil society as consisting of two main socioeconomic groups dominated by men, the first being the elite made up of the ruling family, the land owners, the pearl merchants, and the traders, and the second comprised mainly of the majority who lived at a subsistence level, whether they were fishermen, peasants, or pearl divers (al-Rumaihi 1984: 163). The discovery of oil and its exploitation contributed to the development of education and employment, which strengthened family and society. All Gulf states transformed from traditional beginnings to societies with varying levels of openness to new concepts.

With the flow of oil and the new opportunity of work for both sexes, an increasing number of women joined the workforce for an income. However, while men's traditional role has inevitably shifted, women still manage domestic responsibilities. Moreover, though some laws have changed in favor of a more equitable relationship between men and women, societal norms have not changed with them.

The most important legislation that supports women's new roles and achievements is the Personal Status Law, or family law, which regulates and promotes equality in affairs such as betrothal, marriage, dowry, and spousal rights, as well as separation and divorce. Gulf states such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have yet to pass such legislation, though other states have instituted the law in varying degrees of application. The challenge is that these laws must derive from both the essence of *shari'a* and Islamic jurisprudence as well as the laws issued by international and human rights organizations, such as the UN charter. All Gulf states,