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The Changing Saudi Woman:

Media, Language and Identity

Annotated Bibliography

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Abstract

This paper aims at searching, summarizing and reflecting on the available journal articles to compose an annotated bibliography for my intended research subject. My aim for the study is to acquire a better understanding of how a second language, specifically English, plays a role in changing the Saudi females' basic values and beliefs. I am also interested in how the media, with a focus on Western media in particular, influences changes in these women's social role. In this paper, I focus on articles concerning Saudi women's education, English language learning, work opportunities and roles, modernization and technology in Saudi Arabia, and feminism as used in the Arab world. My research questions are; what is the role of English as a second language in Saudi Arabia, specifically for the Saudi female? How has learning English influenced these women's views of their role as a Saudi female and their ability to negotiate that role? What changes have taken place in Saudi Arabia over the last 10 years? And how have they influenced the roles of the Saudi females?

Annotated Bibliography

Al-Hariri, R. (1987). Islam's point of view on women's education in Saudi Arabia.

Comparative Education, 23 (1), 51-57.

This article starts off by stating that Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country, the family is an integral part of society and represents customs and habits, and education gives a central role to Islamic doctrines which also stresses the family unit. Education in Islam is a right bestowed to both sexes, and Islam has given women many rights, leaving the author to conclude that in Islam the sexes are complementary to one another and to fulfil their purpose in life there needs to be cooperation and harmony.

The issue of how a Muslim woman is to dress and mingle with in society is discussed next, focusing on Islam's perspective of keeping women safe by laying down certain lines for both sexes. Thus, the total segregation of the sexes is not prescribed by Islam, which never forbids women from participating in social, economic or political activities.

A quick summery of education in Islam is given, where the author emphasises the status and value of education in Islam for all in all avenues, stating that the prophet Mohammad himself used to hold classes for women. She concludes the introduction by stating that Islam has no specific statement for separating men and women in education or labour, but insists on the importance of the stability of the family life.

Next the author takes about education in Saudi Arabia specifically, stating that it is free at all levels, not compulsory but the government does work hard on encouraging people to get educated. The aim of education is the correct understandings of Islam and imparting different types of knowledge to ensure the development of society. Some aspects of education policy are stated (eight in all) which focus on Islamic teachings for creating productive citizens in both sexes and harmonizing with science and technology.

In 1977 the first international conference for Islamic education was held in Saudi Arabia, where the “recommendations insisted that girl’s education should be separated from boy’s and suggested a special system for girl’s education based on scientific thought, and with consideration of the nature of women and what society needs from women’s services” (p. 53). Thus, the main points of this conference were the forbidding of coeducation and taking into consideration the difference between sexes when applying it to teaching courses.

A brief history of female education in Saudi Arabia is given, beginning in 1960 when the first female school was opened under the control of the General Presidency of Girl’s Education, headed by a male religious figure that was responsible to the king. In the 1970’s girls education extended to the university levels, but there was a lack of female teachers. There was great resistance to this from some Islamic scholars and other conservatives; however the government reassured them that female education will be compatible with the countries religious positions and Arabic traditions.

In 1983-4 the Saudi government began to increase the amount of money spent on expanding and improving education, and the progress made can be measured in the number of enrolment, the growth in educational institutes and teaching staff, better teacher trainings and increase in student enrolment.

The author states that it was believed that education increases the marriageability of a girl, however, most if not all, were in the fields of humanities because it was seen as suitable to the nature of a Saudi woman. There is a rapid growth in the field of female education due to the government’s ability to provide both a male and female arena, people’s attitudes towards education is now more positive, and more women are working towards their PhDs in a hope to replace the foreigners occupying many of the jobs.

Reflection

Although this article is a very important one in my opinion, as I am currently looking into Islamic feminism, I find it to be choppy and lacking flow in the beginning. In the introduction and throughout, many interesting quotes from the Quran and Islamic sayings were used as strong arguments for the case of the Muslim woman; however, the paragraphs were short (sometimes one sentence long) and moved quickly to cover many topics from dress, movement, to inheritance; or from percentages and numbers of money spent and enrolment, to talking about rural schools (which was not clear at all).

During the first Islamic education conference, it was concluded that there was a need to separate the sexes and focus on teachings that considered 'the nature of women in society', but it is not clear who defined the nature of women and what types of teachings were suitable. If Islam stressed the importance of education for all in order to better society, shouldn't the individual choose how he/she wants to participate in that goal? It always frustrates me to hear that the most objections to women's education came from religious figures when it has been made clear many times over the high value Islam places on education and the important role it plays in developing society.

I am saddened to think that in the twenty two years since this article was published, the move for women's education in Saudi Arabia has only moved a few inches. There are still many more women in the fields of humanities as it is seen as more suitable, education does play an important role in the marriageability of a girl, and there is a need for more Saudi women with PhDs. The good news is that there has been a move, albeit a small one, nonetheless, more women are applying into fields including law, economics marketing...etc, and many more woman are applying for and receiving scholarships to obtain PhDs.

Al-Rawaf, H. S., Simmons, C. (1991). The education of women in Saudi Arabia.

Comparative Education, 27 (3), 287-295.

The article begins by giving a brief introduction about education in Saudi Arabia, listing the number of students in schools, graduating and in the work field. It stresses the small number of women in the work field in comparison to those educated due to the belief that a woman's place is the home, and that society does not encourage a public role for women. The article then delves into a history of education, specifically for females, in Saudi Arabia. Education, for both sexes, began only for the rich. However, many did learn to read for the sake of reading and understanding the Quran. It seemed that many were not interested in educating their daughters; although, the foundation of schools for girls suggested that a spur was all that was needed. Establishing girls' education under the governance of the religious scholars was an important step that helped many accept this new development. Having the explicit intention to educate girls' in religious and domestic studies, people became very accepting of educating their daughters and school numbers as well as enrolments increased. However, there were still those who were unenthusiastic about this new situation.

Although female education was established on the basis of preparing women for "little more than running household and becoming accomplished at tasks such as sewing and cooking; but it must be acknowledged that the provision of basic education in literacy and numeracy for girls in Saudi Arabia was a great step forward at a time when most Saudi women were illiterate" (p. 290). With the increase in oil money, Saudi Arabia was able to accommodate for the increasing demand for girls' education at all levels. However, this did not mean the disappearance of traditional attitudes, which is clear in the elementary

textbooks for girls which emphasized that “traditional values in society were upheld and that the freedoms of foreign women were not presented as admirable” (p. 291).

The article then moves on to discuss higher education for women, discussing colleges, junior colleges, and universities. The first government funded college for females was established in 1970 and was for the purpose of training teachers for intermediate and secondary schools. In 1979 the first GPGE opened with the aim of educating in principles of Islam, preparing for motherhood, and participating in society. Universities began in 1971 and opened its doors to all fields available to men (excluding engineering, architecture and planning, physical education, training of judges and Islamic economics).

The article concludes by stating that the difficulties facing Saudi women may be unique, however, women all over the world face the same troubles with equality and opportunity. What sets Saudi women apart is trying to overcome difficulties in “the face of widely held conservative attitudes coupled with the belief that a woman’s natural place is in the home and aggravated by a number of restrictions placed upon women’s education” (p. 294), all of which are influenced more by traditions and not Islam alone.

Reflection

What I enjoyed about this article was that it was written in 1991. At first that was a reason to dismiss it, however, upon reading, it helped me realize the small movements that Saudi women have made. One interesting aspect that arouse is the belief that a woman’s place is in the home, which may not be as dominant today but it is still one many struggle with almost 20 years later. Another point that caught my eye were the examples of textbook quotes from girl’s elementary schools which emphasis the gender roles. I have grown up reading those textbooks, and am currently pondering the affect it had on me. I vividly remember reading

those in class but never feeling ‘underpowered’. Then again I went to a private school, both my parents were educated and working outside the home and I have lived parts of my life outside the country. How has my life situation and exposure helped me understand those quotes?

As for the higher education mentioned in this article, it is still the same. The colleges and universities available for females have not changed much, except in the addition of private colleges. What caught my eye were the restrictions mentioned in the conclusion to women’s education that are still the same today. These include the limited availability of felids, the fact that less money is spent on women’s education (equipping libraries and labs), transportation hardships, lack of qualified teachers, and job availability upon graduation.

The interesting part for me was when the authors suggested that a spur was all that was needed to get people interested in educating their daughters, and I see that this is kind of where we are today, there might be an interest, and all it needs is a push.

Calvert, J. R, Al-Shetaiwi, A. S. (2002). Exploring the mismatch between skills and jobs for women in Saudi Arabia in technical and vocational areas: The view of Saudi Arabian private sector business managers. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 6 (2), 112-124.

In this article the authors surveyed 800 business managers (220 replied) in four large cities in Saudi Arabia as part of a comprehensive study concerning the factors affecting women’s employment in the private sector to see what factors they felt were important. They found that main factors affecting women’s employment were those relating to Technical and Vocational Education (TEVT) in Saudi Arabia rather than women’s preferences in the work field or cultural pressures.

The article starts by describing the development of education for women in Saudi Arabia. Beginning in 1960, education was not compulsory, free and many incentives were offered to both male and females. The number of women jumped from 5,200 in 1960 to over two million in 1999, however large numbers of females joined education or humanities courses. This could be due to the female's preference, cultural desires, the structure of TEVT, or the types of jobs available in education. One thing is known, in order to improve TEVT more female teachers are needed to help more female TEVT graduate and find employment.

Next, the article discusses efforts made by other industrial and semi-industrial countries to bridge the gap between the educational output and the employment market needs. They discuss efforts made in Europe, Australia, Japan, China, and Malaysia and points out the different successful policies implemented with one similarity, which is the government's determination to increase the participation of women in the work field. When compared to the Islamic countries it becomes clear that women's education is structured around Islamic law and thus not all procedures mentioned earlier are appropriate in these settings. However, this still does not compare to the rate of Saudi females entering into the TEVT (5% in Saudi as compared to 25% in other Islamic countries). The Authors are hopeful that the number of women in TEVT can be increased without compromising Islamic principles; yet the question remains of what will it take?

A history of TEVT in Saudi Arabia is given, focusing on the females. Before 1973, TEVT for females was focused on skills believed to be useful for a wife and a mother. In 1991 the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE) became the centre for TEVT and set out to ensure that women are able to meet the needs of the work field. The GPGE took many steps to develop women's TEVT such as forming committees, set up private institutes, and a

program of cooperation between the male and female education. The government also made an effort in changing the public's view on TEVT for women by holding seminars and appointing certain well known figures. However the authors wonder how these steps work in practice.

The article moves on to discuss women in education, showing that the numbers of females has quickly increased and in some cases surpassed that of males. However most female graduates are in social sciences, education, humanities and religious studies, and are thus only employed in those occupations that correspond to their fields, this shows the importance of education in determining the labour field.

One interesting aspect discussed by the article is that fact that many women with higher degrees are not finding employment as compared to women with lower degrees who work in more mundane jobs. They believe this is due to the factor that women's education lacks the specialization needed by private sectors. As the government is trying to place the 54,000 (2001) women in employment, it faced bumps as either reluctance for women to work far from where they reside, or the lack of relevance between their studies and job. However the largest bump is the educational output of women.

The article concludes by discussing the reasons provided by those surveyed as to what factors are affecting Saudi women's employment and why TEVT was not delivering. The number one reason was the lack of qualified females, followed by a mismatch between TEVT output and the private sector needs, a lack of cooperation between the private sector and education, a shortage of facilities in the institutions for women, and a lack of planning in the TEVT policy for women. They concluded by making three suggestions based on Al-Muslemani's criteria of investigating the relationship between the TEVT output and the

labour market needs. First there needs to be an expansion in the breadth of subjects offered in institutions; the current system does not have the proper staff, therefore a training of the staff is needed; and finally, more cooperation between the private sector and educational institutions need to take place.

Reflections

This article touches upon the mismatch between Saudi women's education and the private work field which many women are heading to because there is an economic need. This move to the private sector is also a part of the change taking place in Saudi as many of these jobs require working alongside male co-workers. As the article discusses the Saudi women coming into these jobs lack the requirements and education needed. Although the government has made efforts in widening the educational opportunities it really did not solve the problem. However, I do feel that today, many Saudis (myself included) are getting educated abroad by the request and help of King Abdulla's scholarship program, and many females are participating in it. Thus, the King and the Saudis are trying to bring education and qualification to Saudi Arabia. This was one of the main problems for females, that there were not enough qualified Saudi females to teach and produce qualified workers.

One interesting point made was that as the government made a great effort in expanding the availability for Saudi women to be educated, what it has really done is increased the number of women qualified to join the workforce rather than increasing the depth of the TEVT study since there was not a widespread need for highly qualified women. I cannot wrap my head around this statement. If I understand it correctly, there is a need for women in the workforce, but not for highly qualified ones. Thus, it really has not helped women move very

far from where they started. I think I am looking at this from a feminist perspective, as if the women are being used as numbers, I feel like this is a form of affirmative action.

Clarke, K. (2007). A modernization paradox: Saudi Arabia's divided society. *Harvard International Review: Cambridge*, 29 (3), p. 30.

This article discusses the tension that Saudi Arabia faces between modernization and tradition, and states that this tension is clearly seen in its regard to laws towards women but can also be found in virtually every branch of Saudi society. There is a contradiction between the ever developing 'modern economic institutions and rigid political and social systems'. Modernization in Saudi Arabia really does not go beyond the economic sphere; in fact "today the kingdom stands at the forefront of developing nations in terms of wealth and infrastructure, but close to last with regard to political openness" (p. 31).

The article moves on to discuss the unification of the Arab state by King Abdul-Aziz in the 1930's, and the discovery of oil in 1938, which helped this desert country transform into a thriving modern society lined with skyscrapers, grand shopping centres, highways and airports. However, the article states that there is still a large gap between its rapid economic growth and the social, legal and political structures that have remained consistent, usually justified by on the basis of protecting the Islamic heritage.

Clarke poses an interesting question, "as Saudi Arabia's populace has become richer, better educated, and more diversely opinionated, there has been almost no internal pressure for political liberalization" (p. 32). He believes that this lies in the fact that the Saudi government does not impose taxes on its people, and that it funds not only public projects but a kind of welfare program (public handouts). As long as these are maintained, the people ask

no questions, the author believes; and as Saudi Arabia gets richer, the ruling family gets stronger.

Reflections

An interesting aspect was made here, that I have not looked at before, why the educated Saudi people remain silent. As long as the government is providing the peoples basic needs like free education, free healthcare, cheap gas and no taxes, the people remain quite. As long as the government is spending 'its' money and not 'the peoples' money, citizens feel they don't have much of a say. It is an interesting scenario in Saudi unlike any other state, where once the middle class thrives and develops it creates internal pressures for reform. In fact, the only times there was any kind of movement from the people was during economic crisis. When I think about it, I really do believe that is how I have gone through life with no complains, I get what I need and thus I must be happy, but I never thought about who decided on what I need.

I must mention that this is an article written from a Western point of view, I felt it was trying to remain neutral in its tone but bent towards negativity sometimes, especially when discussing the political aspect of Saudi Arabia. That is why I believe it is important to have more Saudi voices hear so as to show things from a different perspective, and most importantly from the perspective of those living it.

Doumato, E. A. (1996). Women and work in Saudi Arabia: How flexible are Islamic margins? *Middle East Journal*, 53 (4), 568-583.

This article discusses how the keeping of Saudi women economically marginalized are in the government's interest. First, because "the kind of conservative gender ideology promoted by the state and the state-funded Council of Senior 'Ulama' has broad public appeal, and

second, that gender is an indispensable tool for the state in dealing with political challenges, and a useful one for dealing with persistent economic problems” (p.569). However since the end of the Gulf war in 1991, women have been moving steadily into occupations considered ‘unacceptable’ just a generation before. The public sector still remains the largest employer of women in Saudi because it employs in sex segregated areas that ‘suitable to women’s nature’ including education and healthcare.

This desire for work was feed by the expansion of women’s education and education in general; however, it is the economy that is providing an even more immediate incentive for all. That is due to the dramatic incline in oil revenues (i.e. the oil boom faded out), the reduction of the national budget deficit, and decline of the average per capita gross domestic product (GDP) from \$18,800 in 1981 to \$6,700 in 1995. The Saudi government has taken some steps to provide work for its people, for example it has begun to privatize major public industries but has had limited success. It has also begun the process of ‘Saudiazation’, where foreign workers are replaced by Saudis. However, “the employment participation rate has not increased in the last five years, but has remained flat at about 30 percent” (p. 571). It is the women that remain lost in this process because, as the author explains, women are squeezed between so called ‘Islamic’ margins that are not appropriate for today’s aspirations and abilities. The government also needs to shift its attention away from the success stories and the educating of women in general, and focus on who is being educated, what they are studying and in what direction they are heading. It will then be clear that many are not getting past middle school, are unable to join the work field successfully and are increasingly becoming more conservative.

Saudi Arabia is becoming increasingly polarized in its cultural orientation, and in the same breath, increasingly conservative when it comes to gender. That is due to both education and the development process. As more rural families move to big cities their traditional and core tribal values are also transferred. And with mass education there is a new group of 'have-nots', who have little hope of moving forward and have little to nothing in common with the urban elites. The focus of education in Saudi is usually on religious studies, "with over nine hours of religion and nine of Arabic with the Qur'an as the model for Grammar and style... at the elementary level" (p.573), and many continue to study religious subjects in universities (one third of students). Television is another polarizing factor being the biggest pastime due to the lack of other activities. People are watching different things, from the local program which is state controlled, to the abundant satellite dishes which bring shows and information from all over the world.

Islam has become the symbol of identity in the state, "as a by-product of its Wahhabi foundation, the monarchy legitimates itself by its support for public policy that can be called 'Islamic', and by showing its willingness to enforce 'Islamic' behaviour on individuals for the higher goal of creating a community that upholds God's laws" (p.574). As a by product, women have been used as the national symbol of this culture, that is because the sex-segregation and the veiling of women are the only truly visible and easily controlled symbols of control and conformity. The author notes that even feminist and those for women's rights "adopt the dominant conservative Islamist discourse on gender so that the religious establishment and government officials will be willing to hear what they have to say" (p. 576).

there is a partnership between religion and the state, and they work together to uphold

both religion and public policy, “because hadith is always used selectively and the Qur’an is an elastic document which, on many issues, can be interpreted according to inclination or the needs of the state, theoretically it is possible for the ‘ulama’ to re-define gender to accommodate a more public, economically productive role for women, if the state should wish it to be so” (p. 577). However, gender roles and definitions have been incorporated into public policy; from their education, to the labour laws, there are many restrictions placed on a woman. Women have been defined as nurturers, and whose sexuality must be hidden, and this has been consistent and validated over time by the opinions issued by the ‘Ulama’.

The author concludes by wondering what the future holds, and knows that it is going to be hard to undermine those in charge by asking for equal rights for the sexes. It is in the voices of those Western oriented elite minority that change can be heard, “Saudi Arabia’s holding pattern when it comes to women is reflected in a growing number of young Saudi expatriates who live with one foot in the United States. In major university communities from California to New England there are Saudi women who are searching for ways to invest in their own future at home in Saudi Arabia. These are people trying to find a way in which they can help shape the future of their country so that they can return one day to live there as productive citizens” (p. 583).

Reflection

This article is one that I find very daring and bold. The author is not reluctant about saying as it is. Women in Saudi Arabia are marginalized and there is no way around it. What I do applaud is her reasons for why women are that way and why they have remained that way for so long, it has become a part of cultural identity, a part of the system and politics which have become so strong, that great change alone will not be able to move it.

With the mass education of women (still under those marginalizing laws), there has become a widespread of women who wish to join the work field. As the article mentions both education and economic reasons as the drive for women to work, I would also like to add the feeling of empowerment and voice, and finding a place for themselves. Many older female family members of mine are unwilling to retire because they say they need the money, want to feel important and have something to do, and I am sure this is a sentiment shared by many Saudi females.

One interesting aspect the author made to get the attention of all women and members of the Saudi community to create change is to have a shift in focus from the so called success stories to the realities facing women in the work field. Jobs are not readily available, the environment might be deemed un-Islamic, and even if one is lucky enough to find one, there are many restraints to getting there (mainly transportation). These points need to become prominent; however, they are actually pushed back if not made even more complicated as the need arises even more. In the late 90's, the article states that the Ulama forbid women from riding alone with a foreign male driver and from riding in taxis alone stating that it could lead to sins. What upsets me the most is the time and effort spent on restricting and hiding women for fear of sin, when more time should be spent on educating the male members as not seeing women as a sin.

The idea that women are used as a national Islamic symbol is not new, yet it is one that is extremely interesting and always a shock, as I am a Saudi female and do not think of myself as a symbol and yet I have been brought up to represent my country more prominently than my male counterparts; and I believe this can be part of an answer to the question I was asked by the ELI instructor who found that the Saudi females were more reserved and serious than

their male classmates. It is really something for me to look into. The author goes on to say that women's role in society is so upheld and goes on to discuss the government's failure to control other aspects of Islamic law (alcohol, drugs, banking, prayer in the mosques) as they are not as wildly visible, and not so much a part of the culture. It is true, in Saudi people can get away with almost anything, but women cannot get away from being 'immodest' (as per the Saudi definition).

I am glad that this article mentions the role of television as a polarizing factor, and how the difference is between the local stations (Arabic, and heavily censored) and the satellite dishes which bring in shows from all over the world (the author mentions CNN, BBC, the History Channel, Hollywood films and Baywatch, all English language programs). To me this indicates that my research questions have a base! It is reassuring to see that there was a distinction made between Arabic and English language media and how it affects those who watch it, even though that was not the author's intention here.

Overall I really did enjoy Doumato's work on Saudi Arabia, and appreciate her forwardness and courage in stating what I have been thinking but didn't know all along. I have found that she has written many articles on Saudi Arabia and I am interested in reading more of her work.

Elmusa, S. S. (1997). Faust without the devil? The interplay of technology and culture in Saudi Arabia. *Middle East Journal*, 51 (3), 345-357.

This article argues with those who believe that modern technology has not profoundly changed the Saudi traditional culture. It is true that the technology that has flooded Saudi is mostly the consumer kind, however, "it is a cultural instrument, a mediation between the individual and the world, a way of ordering the world. It presents the Saudis with alternative

modes or paradigms of perception and action that challenge their own indigenous, traditional cultural norms” (p. 346).

This article is an exploration of the affects of technology on a culture like Saudi Arabia, one that has received little attention in research, which the author believes can be remedied by looking through the rich literary texts of that region. Many of the writings grapple with the issue of modernity on such an indigenous culture, specifically written by the younger generation. Here, the belief is that literature offers an insider lens to the true voices and thought of the people experiencing the events.

To begin discussing technology, the author first distinguished between science and technology, and technologies relationship to society. Science describes the workings of nature, while technology is more bound to history, culture and society. Although science and technology are well depended on each other, in a context like Saudi, where technology is imported, it is easy to separate the two. Technology is described as ‘ambiguous’, that is, “the same end can be accomplished by different technologies, or that a given technology... bears more than one reading and can be interpreted differently by different cultures... technology is not one-dimensional” (p. 348).

There needs to be a reference to the Saudi’s the maintenance of the Wahhabi tradition in order to examine technology in that culture. There is an ascetic way of life that was practiced by the prophet. This was well and easy to maintain before the abundant wealth accumulated by oil money. However, history has shown that Islam is very tolerant of many things that are now deemed inappropriate and un-Islamic in this Wahhabi Tradition.

The Saudi government was able to see the importance that technology will have on its state both inwards and internationally, and was able to work out both the religious and political

aspects that contradict their way of life. “The government and the Ulama thus have had continually to interpret and rewrite the technological text in tandem with their own interests and perceptions of what Saudi politics and culture ought to be like... their wish is to have technology without social change, the tree of knowledge without the temptation, Faust without the Devil” (p. 350).

Here the author turns to writing to showcase the new relationship between culture and technology. He focuses on three aspects of technology featured in writings; the car, clock-time, and the modern city. When the car first appeared, it was greeted with awe, fascination and fear; it had replaced the beloved camel. It is stated that the Saudis reaction to the car was more dramatic than the Europeans to the railway because they transcended from the camel not the wheel. Its introduction changed by shrinking distances, altered the landscape, and introduced new types of behaviour. He concludes by stating that more research is needed.

Western technology credits the industrial revolution to timekeeping by the clock, which ‘organizes social time and mechanized the rhythm of life’. This mechanism of time has been uneven in the Saudi society, which might use the clock to base the patterns of public affairs, however, punctuality is not a value fully internalized. Next, the author discusses the modern city. In the Arabic culture it is described as wasteland; an image not different than the Western one. However, “the feeling of hostility to the city seems to take on a greater poignancy in Saudi writing. This feeling is rarely tempered by a celebration of the city’s alluring features, perhaps because there are so few in Saudi cities owing to the stringent restrictions on social intercourse, art and culture, and politics” (p. 355).

Saudi Arabia was not culturally prepared for the massive import of technology, and thus technology was viewed through a traditional cultural lens resulting in a uniquely Saudi view

of the encounter of modern technology and its indigenous culture. “The discipline that industrialization has imparted to people in industrialized countries has not been diffused in Saudi Arabia, for the technology in that country is largely of the consumer type, and not enough time has elapsed for the mechanical and clock-time to supplant, psychologically, the rhythms of rural and nomadic life” (p. 356).

Reflections

This article is divided into short sections of topics that are all important to the understanding of the topic of technology as the author believes. It is an easy read, however, it does move from one idea to the next quite quickly but it does get the point across. I think it does touch on the important topics like the difference between science and technology. Although the author does not go into detail about such topics, he does point our direction to an important (sometimes over looked) point. By introducing short segments that cover a wide range of topics, the author managed to raise and discuss important angels of the phenomena.

It is very interesting how the author describes the different roles of technology and how it is read by different cultures. The examples given (gunpowder in china for celebration was used as warfare when it moved to the West), shows how the same form of technology was interpreted in different contexts. The author places Saudi Arabia as a country that is both overpowered by technology and trying to adapt to parts of it. It has not gone through the same experiences and events that many of the industrial countries have gone through, and yet it has tried to adapt its technologies; herein lies the dilemma. The author goes back to the simplest forms of modernization and technology and describes the introduction of the car, clock time and the modern city, all of which are the simplest form of technology when we think of it today. Yet when we deconstruct these things we see the true struggle between

tradition and technology. The car, for example, is only driven by males because religious scholars felt it was un-Islamic for women to drive, yet women rode camels and travelled on their own since the beginning of the Islamic civilization. Clock time is another interesting aspect; although public life is run by clock time, life itself is not. For example, prayer time is always run by sun position; meetings never begin without having coffee and tea. There are a lot of cultural aspects that might clash with technologies introduced as is to the culture, and as the author explains, the Saudi people did not have the time nor discipline to understand these new introductions.

To have the tree of knowledge without temptation is a juxtaposition and I find it explains the Saudi situation, which only an insider can understand! Today, with the introduction of the internet and the censorship of all that is deemed inappropriate, shows the continuation of this metaphor. We want the technology, but we don't want it all.

Elyas, T. (2008). The attitude and the impact of the American English as a global language within the Saudi education system. *Novitas-Royal*, 2 (1), pp.28-48.

In this Article Elyas discusses the issues of educational reform in Saudi Arabia after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. He divides his paper into five sections; the first section discusses the pressures felt by Saudi Arabia to re-evaluate its curriculums and educational system. The second section discusses the Saudi officials' attitudes on the many claims made on its educational system; here Elyas presents different perspectives and opposing sides with strong arguments for each. Section three, looks at the claims mentioned above and analyses their accuracy within Saudi Arabia. In section four he highlights the impact of the 9/11 events on the Saudi educational system, and particularly on the teaching of English as a second language, and the phenomena and debate on 'more English less Islam'. Finally,

section five presents a case study of 65 Saudi freshmen students studying English at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia using a 12- point questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (however, only 47 were returned and used for this study).

Elyas found that although many (59%) of students found some of the information presented in English to be alien or taboo, 83% find that it is necessary to learn about the English culture while learning the language, and 68% believe that this will not harm their Islamic identity. He concludes that “The demand for English is always going to be there, stronger than ever with increasing globalization” and ends with an interesting thought provoking statement “English is here to stay, but the people are reshaping, remoulding, and adjusting it to suit them best. Hence, it will be interesting to see whether the Arab world will adapt its own version of the English language, or embrace the present one together with its cultural and social norms”(p.45)

Reflections

I had a lot of hope for this article on Saudi Arabia and the impact of English. It discusses post- 9/11 which I think is rare in education journals, or at least as far as my search. It also discusses the change in the curriculum, specifically in English and the culture it carries. I am a big believer in that every language carries a culture and yet each person can adapt the language to his/her needs, and this paper presents this idea in its findings. The students questioned did find some topics to be taboo or offensive but they did not necessarily reject the language; in fact, they saw that learning English as important.

This article presented a wonderful case for the point made above, both in its literature review and study. It referenced a few articles on the impact of English on Muslims and Arabs arguing that the experience of learning about a different language and culture can be a very

positive experience, and does not cause ‘de-Islamization’. They also argue that learners have a mind of their own, and also that learners create their own English. To me these are important points to be made in the argument for the learning of English, and I extend this to the opportunities it offers in a country like Saudi Arabia, for example, the bending of cultures and being more of a global person.

However, I found a few low points in this article. First, there were very strong bias statements, the author was trying to make a point and used news paper articles to do so. I felt that they were very bias in their descriptions specifically page 7 when they quote a sheik as saying that it is a language of infidels. This is an extreme opinion and only represents a small group of people and I do not think it can be used as a good argument. It should be noted that the author does present both sides of the argument with strong resources and quotes leaving it to the reader to decide, but it is quite clear what the author favours. Although, in the questionnaire the author presents both sides of the argument in a neutral manner and it is up to the participant to decide, and I believe that I can benefit from his questions and results, however, I believe I would use more open ended questions to understand why participants gave such answers.

Gallant, M. (2008). The Application of feminism in the Arab world: Research perspectives.

Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues, 1 (3), pp.193-199.

In this Article the Author attempts to answer the question “how do Arab women view feminism? What form of feminism is most appropriate in the Arab world? How can Arab women increase their freedom of choice while maintaining a significant connection with their culture?” (p.193). She begins by describing three tiers of feminism as described by Davies (1990), liberal, radical and post-structural feminism, than expands further on each. She

moves on to discuss feminism in the Arab world, noting that the world 'feminism' is usually associated with the Western world, and that any discussion of feminism in the Arab world must also consider religion.

The discussion moves to discussing three schools of thought on women's rights in Islam. The first claiming that women have many rights under Islamic law, the second blames the subordination of women on the miss-interpretation of Islam by men, and the third calls for a reinterpretation of Islam from a feminist viewpoint. She then further discusses the equity approach, which states that "under Islam, the sexes are seen as complementary with important roles defined for each gender based on their particular strengths and weaknesses" (p. 195). Adding to that, Gallant discusses the importance of Communitarianism in the Arabic society (where the family and community have priority over the individual), thus needs to be realized in Islamic feminism.

One way of uniting the definition of feminism is to look at it as a way to move towards freedom and equality, as a way of trying to emancipate women based on their religious, cultural or other factors unique to their life. In order for this to be achieved, Gallant believes that their needs to be an awareness of the power relationships in place that may limit freedom. In addition the use of narratives, where women share their stories and experiences, "women begin to see how their personal stories are actually cultural productions shaped by dominant discourses" (p. 198), thus creating awareness, resistance and emancipation while maintain Islamic and cultural norms.

Reflections

After reading this article, I have become interested in learning more of Islamic or Arabic feminism, as I am beginning to feel a strong connection to it. The idea that there needs to be

a re-interpretation of the Quran and sayings of the prophet from a female's perspective are ones I strongly agree with. I believe that looking into feminism at this point may help me in creating a balance between what the Saudi culture wants and the needs of the Saudi females in today's society. By having the religious aspect backing me and others up, I can see how a balance can be created. Thus, the cultural lines are bent but not broken.

However, from this article alone I did not grasp what feminism means in a Muslim Arab world. Many points are made but arguments are also presented. I understand that the author was attempting to let the reader decide and dig deeper into the issues of narration, but I feel the conclusion left me hanging. At the same time it gave me hope that I am on the right track, by trying to interview and question women, I am trying to make their stories heard to help create change.

Hamdan, A. (2005). Women and education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and achievements.

International Education Journal, 6 (1), 42-64.

After a brief introduction on the geographical context of Saudi Arabia and the importance of education specifically shown through the increase in literacy, the topic of the position of women in society is discussed. The author believes that in order to truly understand women's positions in Saudi Arabia, a closer look need to be made at the political and social event that have taken place. First and foremost was the discovery of oil, the wealth that was brought in had a role in the changing of lifestyles which affected the whole structure of society. The presence of foreigners on the Saudi soil, who came to work in the oil industry, had Saudi people asking for some of the same right. Next, the Shi'a revelation in Iran strengthened the religious leadership in Saudi Arabia. The uprising in Mecca, the first and second golf war and the war between Iraq and the United States all affected women and

challenged the Saudi society. "Saudi Arabia arrived in the 1980s with a more complex society, eager to enjoy the fruits of advancement on all social and economic levels. At the same time there was a determination to preserve the country's religious and social traditions... This balance between the two has been difficult to maintain, especially with regards to women's professional space" (p.43).

The author's goal in this paper is to explain the "consequences of excluding women from public life and constraining their educational choices" (p.45). Women's issues are institutionalised; the inequality is traditionally structured in the Saudi society, and it gained force by being associated with Islamic teachings. The uniqueness of their situation is derived from their presence yet absence from public life, "girls were taught enough to buy into an assigned role, but not enough to challenge it" (p. 45). Discussions of women issues, especially freedom, were seen as 'western ideas' by religious groups. And although universities and colleges are continually being built for women, there was great pressures from religious scholars as well as from the general public, who believed the Saudi woman's place is her home. In order to confront the status quo, the author suggests women use the 'legitimate language', or religious language, by reinterpreting the Quran and Islamic sayings and applying it to women's issues.

The author moves on and gives a detailed account of females' education in Saudi Arabia, stating the great resistants it faced and the many barriers women had to overcome. However, there has been an upward movement, and the enrolment of girls in schools was almost equal to boys by 1981. When girls schooling first began, it attracted the daughters of those who have lived abroad and initially only high class women had the opportunities to be educated.

These “disparities in educational achievements between females ran along class lines slightly more than was the case for boys” (p.51).

Women’s education still faces many challenges. It does not share the same budget opportunities as their male equals; it is only 18 % of that. Women do not receive the same quality of education since only 3% of those who teach at women’s universities hold doctorates compared to 34% in male universities. In addition, women do not enjoy full access to the over 200 libraries associated with schools, universities and religious institutions.

The author moves to discuss women and education in Islam, stating that Islamic teachings express great respect towards women, “women in Islamic societies have reached political heights unparalleled in the most advanced Western nations” (p.53), citing examples of woman during the prophet Mohamed’s time who led armies, discussed political issues, managed commercial endeavours...etc; it is the “cultural customs that deny women equality [and] have become entrenched in the Muslim culture to the point where they are often accepted as Islamic rules” (p.54).

The author believes that technology is helping the education of women; for those who cannot travel for education like the upper classes, through technology the world comes to them. Today with the number of educated women, illiteracy is decreasing; however, the work field remains the same. The main problem for women, the author stress, “is tradition and above all conservative views on women’s participation in national building” (p.57). However, Saudi women are gaining more freedom using this legitimate language that cannot be challenged by Islamic ideologies. If women are to be segregated, than they need more women only spaces, thus creating job opportunities for women.

The author concludes by summarizing the issues with female education in Saudi Arabia, and states that Saudi women will always be a hot topic because they guarantee the author a high publishing rate and that is why it has become a dominant subject in Western media. Furthermore, women's issues will always be the centre of conflict between modernity and tradition.

Reflection

This article is one of the more recent articles on the issue of women's education in Saudi Arabia. It has more history and details, which I found to be very helpful. The introduction with the social and political events described here are very rare to read about and bring in an interesting perspective to some of the reasons women's issues are the way they are. The great detail shows that the author did massive research, and this article provides me with a thorough reference list. However, there is a great deal of repetition that made this article hard to follow at some points.

One of the issues discussed here that was discussed elsewhere was the fire that caused the death of 15 girls due to the interference of religious men. However, more detail is given here and I finally see the reaction that has taken place. People were upset, the issue was widely discussed in Saudi as well as foreign press, and there was a loud and clear outcry, thus changes were made. In 2002, Girls education was no longer under the influences of religious scholars, but merged with the boys' education under the Ministry of Education. Thus again, this article provides more details than others I have read.

Another important point mentioned here, but rarely elsewhere, is the issue that girls education receives less funding than that of the males. It was really eye opening for me as I have lived it, but never questioned it. Females were placed in the old worn out buildings over

used by males, who have moved to the newer more technologically advanced buildings. It is clear that preferences went to male education. As the article mentions more funding and resources are available to the males' than females' education. Yet what is interesting is that females are outperforming males in dropout rates.

Women's situation in Saudi Arabia is 'Traditionally structured by society' may be my favourite quote in this paper because it explains it all. Throughout the article there were many indicators of how this is so. As King Abdul Aziz unified Saudi Arabia, women's roles remained the same, they were the carriers of the family honour, within them lied the family name. This also explains some of the opposition towards women's education, having there women leave their homes on a daily basis and walk the streets to a school may have been too much for some, not because it was un-Islamic but because it was un-traditional. Schools maintained these traditional ideals, and as stated in the article, girls were taught enough to accept but not challenge roles.

Pharaon, N. A. (2004). Saudi women and the Muslim state in the twenty-first century. *Sex Roles*, 5/6, 349-366.

This article discusses the challenges facing a developing Saudi Arabia as it moves into the twenty first century, most notably the statues of Muslim women. The article begins by discussing the birth of Islam in the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and how it was able to unify the Arabs. Islam has become an integral part of contemporary daily life, a part of the law, and made the country the focal point for Muslims all over the world.

The article moves on to discuss the oil revenue and what it has done to Saudi Arabia, taking it from a desert to a modernized country in all possible sectors of the economy. "However, Saudi Arabia is facing many challenges... the significant growth in its young

population, a substantial decrease in its per capita oil wealth, and excessive reliance on foreign labour... and torn between admitting the desire to progress and emancipate its women and defending its failure to do so” (p. 351). It also discusses the problem of the failing education system, failing both its males and females, and making them unemployable.

The term development is then tackled, stating that Saudi Arabia began to talk about the need to integrate women in development, yet will do so under “the heritage of the Arab-Islamic civilization”. This has resulted in what Pharaon calls a ‘schizophrenic approach’ “which both encourages women to join in the process of development as equal partners and holds them back in their place as secondary actors within family context” (p. 353). Pharaon believes that this dilemma is very difficult to tackle in Saudi Arabia because the debate on women is caught up in the debate on religion. Another dilemma to development is the exclusion of the majority of the people in the decision making process, “thus, those who argue that the opportunity for education and work in the modern sector will of itself liberate women’s capacities ignore the fact that the capacity of Saudi society as a whole is largely unliberated” (p.353).

The article then moves to discuss the concept of gender equality in Islam and states that Quran “gives a place of great honor to the whole of humanity” (p. 353), and due to the many interpretation of the Quran “the traditional Ulama sometimes ignore the context and select certain versus from the Quran to prove their point of view” (p.354) she moves on to say that “all sorts of pre-Islamic and non-Islamic influences had affected the thinking of Muslim jurists” (p.354). However, in order “to build God’s society on earth required women’s integration into the community, and it is for this reason that the Quran legislated for equality of the sexes in moral citizenship of the Umma” (p.355).

Muslim personal and family laws are discussed next; here the emphasis is on the rights given to a woman in the Quran concerning family living, earnings and inheritance. However, they were ‘miss-interpreted’ or all together ignored making the woman seem like the weaker or lesser sex. When it comes to the Islamic movement, Pharaon believes that the Saudi women are seen as the “bearers of their culture’s authenticity and are made to serve as boundary makers” (p.356). Thus, these enforcements of ‘Islamic law’ are really an attempt at social control, that is because when ‘laws’ are presented as Islamic, they appear stronger and more authoritarian.

Pharaon moves on to talk about the changes that have taken place since 1960 when public education for girls began. Now we find that girls have excelled academically over boys, and can be found in all sectors of society from banks, television and radio programming to some ministries. Many women are willing to work in mixed settings and the internet has helped many business women work online without having to meet with men. However, as women have been making progress there has been a “cultural and political backlash in the form of conservative Islamist movement” (p. 360) has taken place and targeted them.

The article concludes by stating that there is a need and a want for change in Saudi Arabia, and that for women it came in the form of education; however this created a conservative backlash in the form of Islamist movement. That is because education was able to reach more and was a more important variable than employment for change in the female movement. Another important vehicle for change was the introduction of the internet, “the internet has opened up an entirely new arena for gathering information and for socializing, and one does not have to leave the house in order to do this” (p.365). In closing, education, employment,

global mass media, and literature on and by Saudi women will be the challenge and force of change for Saudi women.

Reflections

This article touches on many important subjects, and is one I struggled with while trying to summarize. One of the most prominent quotes in my opinion really touched upon the frustrations of the Saudi female, “having started in second place, Saudi women have further to go to catch up, but fewer opportunities to do so” (p. 353). This quote conjures up strong feelings in me. I feel angry and upset, and at the same time I feel a sense of relief that it is out there for others to read and digest. Saudi women are seen as second class citizens and now it is out there for all to read. It also links to the point made in the article about women being bearers of their culture; it is one that hit home for me. Tradition, I believe, is one of the strongest forces that stand against women’s advancement in Saudi Arabia. However, as discussed in the article, using religion as a catapult and not a hindrance is one way of development for women, and education is the strongest form of reform in this case.

This article also states that mass media is an important factor in female development, all of which re-emphasises my research interests and intentions. By focusing on educational opportunities, mass media and the work field dynamics, one can see the slow progress of females. In addition, there needs to be an emphasis on the role of English, and this is where I see my research heading.

Prokop, M. (2003). Saudi Arabia: The politics of education. *International Affairs*, 79 (1), 77-89.

This article discusses the role of education within the Saudi political system; particularly it asks how religion, politics and socioeconomic factors shape education? What could be

undermining the current educational system? What are the side effects of religious teachings? And what links are there between the educational system and the messages propagated? Education in and founded by Saudi is concerned with preserving the 'religious foundations of the regime'. Religion and religious figures seems to be the focus point and gain power during periods of political sensitivity. Religion is particularly strong when it comes to the education and role of women. Women's education was resisted at first, but the government placed their education on the guidance of the religious figures called the 'General Presidency of Girls Education'.

Next, the author discusses the Saudi educational curriculum focusing on the role of religion in education. It is one of the main and heavily taught subjects in all levels of education starting from elementary through higher education. Obedience to authority is another important dominant issue emphasized in Saudi textbooks as long as it is in line with Islamic law. History studies focus on the government's goal of unifying the Saudi People and creating an identity.

The teaching methods used revolve heavily on rote learning which creates "passivity, dependence, an a priori respect for authority and an unquestioning attitude" (p. 80) the author continues to discuss the textbooks which are heavily influenced by the *Wahhabi* ideology, giving one example after the other of how even though Islam emphasises peace, it discusses *jihad* (holy war), denouncing the other (non- Wahhabi), and discussing bid'a (dangerous innovations of religion). Jews were also blamed for many historical events, and the Americans' relationship is also discussed in textbooks, causing what the author believes, "religious intolerance and extremist positions" (p.82).

Formal education is not the only aspect that shapes perspectives, and the author notes that there are differences in private versus public education, home life, area of residence... etc. In addition, learning experiences are modified by access to foreign material, including mass media and travel, all of which opened new doors “giving many debates a transnational dimension” (p.83). However, it is seen here as a way of spreading the Wahabbi ideology to many parts of the world, and it was funded by the Saudi oil money (the money was used as a form of charity in building schools and mosques, and helping those in need).

The author states that there is a need for a change in the educational system, that even the people of Saudi Arabia feel, a need due to the lack of job opportunities and the desire by the people to become a developed country. Thus, academic performances and technical skills are important, and with fierce competition and the markedly clear preference in the recruitment of those educated in private schools or abroad, feelings of resentment emerge within those taught using a ‘traditional’ education. There needs to be a match between the demands of employers with the skills of graduates which required a ‘qualitative improvement’, and increasing the number of native Saudis in the workforce. The Saudi government is becoming very aware of the need to change the educational system for its economic survival. However, there is ‘status, prestige and tradition associated with government position’, there seems to be distaste by Saudis for certain kinds of jobs, a lower productivity by Saudis and a large wage difference between Saudis and non-Saudis. There is also the issue of women in the work field, which still faces resistance from the religious figures. These women are becoming increasingly educated and are pressing for employment, but must face hurdles such as the resistance mentioned above, transportation, and segregation issues.

Resistance to change, specifically curriculum changes, can be seen as something positive the author believes because it can provide a starting point for discussion and dialogue that can be important in respect to curriculum development and the emergence of an active society. It can also trigger discussions on identity, politics and a relationship between the government, the religious figures and the people.

Reflection

The power of religion and its role in Saudi Arabia is a clearly shown in this article, one story that particularly touches upon this is the incident that took place in 2002 at a girl's school in Mecca where 15 girls lost their life during a fire because the religious police did not allow the fire-fighters to enter the girls school where many of the females were not in their full cover 'Abaya'. I have heard this story but cannot comprehend it from any perspective; it saddens and sickens me because it has no bases in Islam or in the Saudi culture, yet the religious police saw no wrong in what they were doing. I just don't understand the power those figures must have, the silent obedient voices of those females that remained in the burning building, and the obedience of the fire-fighters.

The whole idea of a need for change in the educational system in Saudi Arabia is one I agree with; although I may not agree with the way it was described in this article. I do believe there is a current trend of meeting the new demands the Saudi people face by increasing the number of private school and universities, opening new fields of study, offering scholarships to most. However as the article states, there still is resistance from the religious figures and from the people. I especially believe in that it is hard for many to break the habits or traditions that they have gotten use to, but due to economic needs this is a must

(in reference to people wanting government jobs due to prestige, and the distaste for other types of jobs).

After reading this article, it is clear to me that the author is very 'anti-Saudi' for a lack of better words. Emphasis is placed on what the author perceives to be negative aspects of the education, never giving the whole story or different perspectives. It is not a two sided story; however, it does give me a different perspective, one I can use to make my argument stronger that Saudi does not totally teach hate and intolerance. However, I do agree with the author on the conclusion where it is stated that there needs to be a dialogue between the people the government and the religious figures. But, I believe, this will not be easy and will take a long time.

Qadir, R. A, Al-Jazairi, I. El-Yassir, N., Georgis, D., and Kawaja, J. (1994). Identity of our own making: We are seduced by Western discourse and begin to assume our countries are more oppressive than the West, that our cultures are more sexist (A Conversation among 5 women). *Canadian Women Studies*. 14 (2), p.19

This article is a collection of conversations between five Arab American women residing in the West, Specifically Toronto Canada. In their discussion the women cover many subjects including the 'war' they feel within them between two cultures and how they feel like they are viewed as going to the 'other' side by family and community members. They also touch on their experience as Arabs in a Western culture and the many negative aspects they felt (for example being called a 'dirty Arab' by young children, associating sexism with their Arabness and internalized racism), yet feeling "warmth and comfort" from being with other Arabs. They touch upon religion and being women of colour, and then move to talk about the

standards of beauty and how they fit into that puzzle. They conclude by stating that they are a 'patchwork' and are working for change.

Reflections

This discussion between friends is the casual yet informative type of information I would like to solicit from my participants in my interviews. I believe that this data though small in length does give a lot of information and shed light on many topics. One of the most prominent quotes in my opinion was one discussed by Reem who shares a dream her mother had of her sleeping in a church and being comfortable there. To me this signifies the struggles many fear with English and the culture it may carry with it, showing a strong relationship between English as a language and Christianity, and thus, a de-Islamization as discussed above. It also sheds the light on the culture of dreams, a strong concept in the Arab/Muslim cultures.

Discussing the issues of colour was one relevant subject to me, as Arabs are classified as 'white' but do not fit in the white description created or known by the West culture. So the question remains where do these Arab Americans fit? This question touches on my interest in the dual identity created by many Saudi women learning English, where do they belong?

Teitelbaum, J. (2002). Dueling for Da'wa: State vs. Society on the Saudi internet. *Middle East Journal*, 56 (2), 222-239.

This article addresses the struggle that Saudi Arabia faces with the want for modernization through the use of the internet, and trying to prevent globalization from affecting its traditional society. Saudi Arabia is a country built on Islamic values and beliefs and run entirely by Islamic law; and at the same time it is a modern country. The author sees the internet as a blessing and a curse. A blessing because it offers great possibilities for

education, business, and information; however, this requires an openness of society. The internet also has a 'homogenizing' affect, which many have come to believe is 'Americanizing' and are thus opposed to the cultural domination. Therefore, it is natural to have a desire to reap its benefits and yet fear the affect this free flow of information might have on a society.

There was a discussion of the introduction of the internet for public use at around mid-1997, to kind of test the waters. It many were cautious of its introduction as clear in the debates that took place in the press following this announcement. Those who opposed believed it to be an attempted at Westernization. Others who were for it saw it as an important advancement in communication. The government set out the introduction of a test trial of the internet to the public in the March of 1997. However, it set one solitary node for all internet traffic in Saudi Arabia and was preparing to censor all objectionable websites and monitor all access. Their goal was to study the negative aspects of the internet before fully introducing it to the people. But "soon they discovered that reality was stronger than their technology" (p.225). After setting conditions by which people must abide, public internet access began in the Kingdom in late January 1999 (p.225).

Now there are new public arenas which cannot be controlled; many opponents to the way Islam is run in Saudi Arabia and to the ruling family, began creating websites and spreading their ideas and bypassing all the walls and proxies set up by the government. "The regime had no intention of abandoning the internet arena to its Islamist opponents, just as it had not abandoned the arena of satellite and print media. It joined the domain battle" (p. 228). There was a hope that the internet, while containing negative aspects, would be a helpful tool in informing the world about Islam in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi government is concerned about its people accessing sites that are deemed inappropriate, “it wishes to protect its monopoly on information, and many citizens expect the regime to protect them from untoward influences” (p. 229). The author explains the different forms of censorship that have taken place. First, is what the author calls self-censorship, that is, people are unlikely to access sites that will bring them to the attention of the authorities. There is also the local Internet Service Provider (ISP) where all traffic goes through its main proxy, which can lose its licensing if it allows access to forbidden sites. Users who try to access banned sites find a bilingual message that states that they are trying to access a blocked page, but are welcome to fill out a form if they believe it should not be blocked, or add other pages they feel should be. It receives about 500 daily requests to ban sites and 100 requests to open them. Another censoring factor is the poor infrastructure and high pricing.

One of the largest groups of Saudi internet users are women and the author believes it is due to their restrictive role in society. The internet seems to play an important and liberating role for them opening up a new arena for gathering information and socializing. Anonymity in chat rooms encourages frankness in discussions about issues that might be difficult under normal circumstances. Women use the internet for business, entertainment and even dating, not political opposition.

The Saudi government wants to modernize by introducing the internet, it wants to lower prices and improve their infrastructure. In May of 2000 the then prince Abdullah put in a large sum of money into the introduction of computing and the internet to schools to provide e-mails links to educational sites as well as networking of Saudi schools. Thus, he was able to perform a balancing act between modernization and conserving Islam. Also in 2000 there

was a 45% price cut, however the problem of reliability remained since all traffic came to one place. “Its micromanagement, high prices, and poor services were certainly economic disincentives” (p.236).

Saudi Arabia will continue to struggle with its desire for globalization and tradition, “here, in essence we have a state that continues to be interested in the centralization of Islam and information, arrayed against a medium- the Internet- which by its very nature is decentralized” (p. 237). The author sees this as a struggle that will continue to plague the Saudi regime, who wishes to centralize and monopolize Islam in the Kingdom, but it does create a level playing field.

Reflection

This article discusses the conflict that Saudi Arabia faces with its desire to hold on to traditions and the vast oil money that is helping to push it into the future. There is a desire, I believe, in the Kingdom to keep its traditions; however, modernization does not mean the loss of that. I believe it is only natural to move forward and Saudi Arabia has done so in the past without losing on ‘tradition’. I believe there is more to this than simply the traditional values, and I think the article touches on this a little; it is the power of control and keeping people in order. However that is too political and is not my intention at all.

One important issue discussed here that was a concern of mine is censorship. Why does the government feel that it is its job to protect people? One of the most prominent quotes in this article, and one that has given me an ‘aha’ moment states: “There needs to be more education and less banning of sites because they can easily be bypassed. People need to become aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the internet and learn responsibility when using it” (231), this is true for the whole world I believe, but particularly for Saudi. Self

censorship is a right that should be given to the people, and if there is a worry that the people are not ready then time should be spent on educating the people, instead of wasting time and money on an almost impossible type of censorship.

Discussing women's use of the internet is a very important aspect in this article. Given the females' role in Saudi, many times escape comes in the form of logging on to the internet. Although for my research I want to look out how that escape has changed her role for the better, the article does focus on dating and contacting the other sex. Here lies the problem in Saudi Arabia; any new introduction always revolves around the opposite sexes mingling. Instead of focusing on the privileges such as education and business opportunities, it becomes a discussion of 'dating'. For example, many of the discussions on banning women from driving revolve around her mingling with the opposite sex or being taken advantage off by the opposite sex, instead of focusing on the advantages. I believe that is due to the fact that people are so 'protected' by the society, that any opportunity is taken, however as mentioned in the article, education is the key. I guess it is up to us today to educate the new generation as to eradicate, to some degree, these problems.

Wetmore, C. (2008). Blogging in Saudi Arabia: An agent of social change? SAIS: the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, the Johns Hopkins University-Bologna Center.

This paper focuses on the growth of a liberal blogosphere, predominantly in English, and how that plays a role in gradual social change. The growth can be an indicator of the new generations' desire for more personal freedom, individualism and political accountability and reform. The paper draws heavily on interviews conducted via email between February and

May of 2008 with bloggers living in Saudi Arabia. The interviews were conducted in English, although some participants blogged solely in Arabic.

One of the findings states that English blogging is believed to be more liberal in general. The blogs cover a variety of topics covering issues of a domestic nature, family and friends, sports...etc. however it is also important to note what issues are not discussed including political and religious figures, or the direct criticism of Islam. The author claims that there are “certain red lines that are not to be crossed, but for the most part, it seems bloggers say what they want to” (p.4). However, there are some limitations on the Saudi blogosphere where people have been detained for expressing pro-reform opinions (the story of Fouad Al-Farhan).

The question of why people are blogging conjured up many answers including the discussion of many social norms, sometimes in a negative manner, as well as to organize demonstrations or boycotts; others use it to share personal stories or promote business. Many write because they want to be heard, “others find blogging an escape from a restrictive culture, for which anonymity is key” (p.5). One must note that there is a large segment of Saudi blogging that is attuned to political and social issues.

Next the question of why anonymity and why English are tackled. Anonymity is clearly a cultural and social phenomenon, it allows them to write freely without the fear of becoming outcasts, and the internet becomes an escape from a society where individualism is condemned. Females especially have an added incentive for anonymity because they not only represent themselves but her family. Another reason for remaining anonymous is the fear of government monitoring. It is also believed that writing in English can result in less monitoring for the simple fact that many government workers do not speak English. English

blogs can also attract international media which could be a double sword in that political blogs need to be closely monitored, and that English blogs can reach a wider audience and change some of the stereotypes about Saudi Arabia.

Censorship is another important issue tackled by the author. The internet in Saudi Arabia is filtered using commercial software, however, it only block websites accessed in Saudi Arabia. Also with technology's rapid growth and accessibility, Saudi citizens can access blocked sites using proxies or satellite connections. However the bigger issue tackled by the author is why the Saudi regime is allowing the blogosphere to grow. There were many hypothesis stated by the participants including a way to remind citizens of who is in complete control, by allowing the field to develop but punishing those who cross the line. Others believe that monitoring every blog is too time consuming and may also look bad on an international level.

The final question posed by the author is if the Saudi bloggers will play a role in the liberalization of their country. It is clear that the younger generation is exposed to more world views, opinions and information than that of their parents or grandparents, and this will slowly change politics. Still others believe that the internet can either be good for the people by helping in their development, or introduce new powerful tools used by the government to track people and widen the gap between the knowledgeable and the impoverished. The article concludes by stating that the phenomenon of blogging in Saudi Arabia is one that needs further research.

Reflections

This article, by far, was one I really enjoyed because I happened to stumble upon it on a blog written by a Western woman living in Saudi Arabia. I contacted her and she was kind

enough to send me the whole article. It does touch about many of the topics I am interested in like freedom of speech online, anonymity and censorship. However, it was written from the point of view of a non-Saudi on the phenomenon of blogging in Saudi Arabia, again, I feel there needs to be the Saudi voice heard in order to better understand this phenomenon. I think that is because there is a better understanding of the unwritten rules and some insight into why certain things are done or not. For example, I was completely able to understand the reasons for anonymity and can see that now with FaceBook (which is something I want to get into in my research), where faces are never really apart of one's profile.

I have always felt that the internet was a form of movement and change. It gives a voice to those who were voiceless before, yet it comes with so many unwritten rules. However, the conclusions in this study are mixed and no real answers are given, yet it does raise some interesting points. One problem is that it is not clear how many participated, how the study was conducted or what was asked. This article actually runs more like a blog, but I could not let it pass.