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AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE SAUDI 2030 MODERNIST REFORM ON WOMEN IN JEDDAH FROM A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of the Saudi 2030 Vision through ethnographic research of Saudi women living in the urban centre of Jeddah. In addition to determining the influence of the modernist reform on the social mobility and positions of women, this paper probes to deconstruct binary discourse on Muslim women by highlighting their intrapersonal identity formations, agentic choices and coping mechanisms. Through a transnational feminist lens, the influence and interaction with discourse and well as local realities are included. The findings nuance the perceived top-down reform on Saudi women. Moreover, societal pressure and negotiations have enabled women to achieve social mobility, prior to the Vision. The modernising project has legally recognized women and granted them a status of equality, next to their male counterparts. Nonetheless, the socio-cultural transformations have left the population divided on the limits of modernisation and cultural authenticity. The research demonstrates how Saudi women cope with and resist familial influence and patriarchy. Overall, the modernisation process has resulted in a complex, intrapersonal and group identity negotiation whereby Saudi women balance and interconnect their national, religious and gendered identities. Finally, the influence of Western discourse is included, tackling the scholarly practice of labelling Saudi women between modernism and conservatism.

ABSTRACT

Deze studie is gebaseerd op etnografisch onderzoek naar Saoedische vrouwen, in de stadskern van Jeddah teneinde de impact van de modernistische hervormingen te bestuderen, samengevat onder de noemer van de 'Saudi 2030 Vision'. Naast het bepalen van de invloed van de modernistische hervorming op de sociale mobiliteit en posities van vrouwen, peilt deze studie naar de circulatie van binaire discoursen over moslimvrouwen door hun identiteitsformaties, autonomie en copingmechanismen te benadrukken. Teneinde het voorgenoemde te kunnen bestuderen, omvat deze studie een transnationaal feministisch theoretisch kader om zowel globale socio-politieke processen als lokale realiteiten te schetsen. Hierbij nuanceren de bevindingen de invloed van de staatshervormingen op Saoedische vrouwen. Maatschappelijke druk en sociale onderhandelingen creëerden mogelijkheden tot sociale mobiliteit en gelijkheid, voor de moderniseringsprocessen. Hierbij wordt bevestigd dat vrouwen een zekere autonomie bezitten in hun omgevingen. Niettemin, heeft het moderniseringsproject vrouwen een legaal statuut van gelijkheid verleend. Echter hebben de sociaal-culturele transformaties de bevolking verdeeld wat betreft de grenzen van modernisering en culturele authenticiteit. Het onderzoek toont aan hoe Saoedische vrouwen omgaan met- en weerstand bieden aan familiale invloeden en de patriarchale samenleving. Daarnaast heeft het moderniseringsproces geleid tot een complexe, intra-persoonlijke en groepsidentiteitsonderhandeling, waarbij Saoedische vrouwen hun nationale, religieuze en genderidentiteiten in evenwicht brengen en hervormen. Ten slotte wordt de invloed van het westerse discours en haar invloed op de Saoedische vrouwen in beeld gebracht.

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Amongst international political debates, corporate media and according to human rights advocates, Saudi Arabia has been the epitome of a neopatriarchal society and countless of human rights violations (Dixon, 2018). Women in Saudi Arabia are internationally exhibited as a yardstick to evaluate domestic development and levels of patriarchy elsewhere. As a dynastic theocracy, Saudi Arabia is built upon the allegiance of the House of Saud and the Wahhabis religious scholars (Doumato, 1992). For decades, technological and material development has been countered by religious fractions to decrease Western influence. These conservative backlashes have institutionally segregated women and generally excluded Saudi women from the public sphere. Until recently, women in Saudi Arabia have been entirely dependent on their guardians whom legally represent them and determine their familial and social influences (Mansyuroh, 2019).

In 2016, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) appeared on the global scene as a young moderniser, ready to reform the static religious monarchy into a diversified and inclusive nation, that is characterized by strong roots, foundations embracing a moderate Islam, national pride and the Saudi heritage (Abbas, 2020). The objective of the 'Saudi 2030 Vision' is threefold (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.). Firstly, the Crown induced a socio-cultural transformation investing in domestic leisure activities and seeking to attract international (non-religious) tourism in addition to hosting millions of Islamic pilgrims across the globe. Furthermore, the Saudi 2030 Vision aspires to transform the population into productive consumers as the decade long dependence on oil is to be replaced by an efficient and world-leading knowledge economy through the inclusion of Saudi nationals and especially Saudi women (Abbas, 2020). Finally, Saudi aspires to enable and govern the nation through standards of transparency, accountability and social responsibility (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.).

The top-down modernist reform has fundamentally altered women's positions and the structure of the Saudi society. The Saudi 2030 Vision depicts a newly established emphasized femininity, including – young, dynamic, successful and entrepreneurial – Saudi women. '*Under the Abaya'*, that functions as the inspiration of the title of this dissertation, is based on a non-profit initiative that enables female empowerment and deconstructs stereotypes about the lives of Saudi women (Mcarthur, 2018). Marriam Mossalli is an ambitious achiever in Saudi luxury fashion and represents the face of the new generation, actively promoting her nation. Her book

'under the abaya' illustrates the local street style gathered through social media and rewards them with academic scholarships based on the profits (Under the Abaya, n.d.). The 'women supporting women' initiative tackles domestic taboos and aims at challenging the image of the Saudi woman as *"black figures you see on Fox News walking five feet behind her mahram*[1]*"* *(*Mcarthur, 2018, para. 10).

In Islamic feminism, scholars have been concerned with the representation of Muslim women in feminist literature. Western discourse has projected liberal readings of empowerment on Muslim women, basing their otherness on the perceived exclusion from the public sphere, familial and institutional patriarchy and the politics of the veil (Deeb, 2009). A similar narrative is used by Abu-Lughod (1998) whom contested Western stereotypes and gendered Orientalism in her critical analysis of the dialectic relationship between women and the state. She described how women symbolize modernity as well as national integrity through mobilizing political projects of state formation (Deeb, 2009). Mahmood (2001) warned liberalist feminists to refrain from engaging in hegemonic assumptions of women in neopatriarchal states, representing a so-called homogenous category, unified through their collective status of repression.

(Inter)national discourse has been imperative to the ways by which women's rights, reform and Islam have been discussed in the contemporary world (Deeb, 2009). Structures of dominance and patriarchy should complement and give room to notions of individual agency and coping mechanisms. The lens of transnational feminism incorporates both, through the inclusion of individual narratives and macro socio-political occurrences. Therefore, to deconstruct binary assumptions and reciprocate Saudi women's agency, this dissertation will study the impact of the Saudi 2030 vision on women through a transnational feminist lens.

Subsequently, the research question of this study can be formed as followed: "*What is the impact of the modernising reform realized through the Saudi 2030 vision on women in Jeddah?".* In order to evaluate the foregoing, four sub-questions were formulated. The first question elaborates on the position of women as mediators of state and cultural authenticity, following Kandiyoti (1998). *"To what extent does the 2030 Vision mobilize Saudi women within a political project of reform and what alternative identities are (de)constructed?".* The second sub-question on the gendered reality of Saudi women within the neopatriarchal state, reads as followed: *"How are existing gender relations and gendered social norms altered within the*

[1] A *mahram* is the Arabic term for a legal (male) guardian in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Mansyuroh, 2019).

modernising project?". The third question is based on international discourse and wider socio-political processes*: "How do women negotiate with globalisation and Western discourse? How does the internalized discourse differ from Western stereotypes and conceptions?*". Finally, the last question involves specific notions of agency that entails negotiating relations of dominance and coping mechanisms.

Based on six weeks of fieldwork, which combined informal in-depth interviews and observations, this dissertation shall probe to formulate coherent answers on the proposed questions. The research was conducted in the city centre of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia from January until mid-February, 2020. This study includes ethnographic cases of mostly middle- and high-class women living in Jeddah between the ages of 20 and 72. The paper is structured into 5 sections The literature review reveals the theoretical foundations and elucidates employed concepts. It shall contextualize the socio-political history of Saudi Arabia as well as contemporary events. An overview of the research questions and objective of the study is ultimately formulated in the second section. The third unfolds the methodological strategies, research design and the process of data analysis. The fourth section shall discuss the findings and alignments with the literature. Finally, the conclusion encompasses a comprehensive synthesis of the results as a response to the research question, accompanied by possible areas for future research and the limitations of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Perspective

1.1. Transnational and Islamic feminism

The first wave of feminism, which is often described as Western or liberalist feminism, has been challenged over the course of history by Black feminism and Third World feminism (El Guindi, 2005; Mohanty, 2003). *Under Western Eyes* by Mohanty (1984), critiques binary categorisations and Eurocentric methodologies that serves the interest of Western institutions by globalizing and generalizing women's struggles. Third world women are often portrayed as a homogenous and universal powerless group, victimized by a global socio-economic system of capitalist patriarchy. This constructed unity is inherently ahistorical and is based on a binary division of power. Orientalist imagery and vocabulary are used to describe non-Western women whereby the micro-politics of context and macro-politics of global political or economic systems are entirely disregarded. Mohanty (1984) accuses Western feminists of engaging in a direct political practice by defining and reinforcing a colonialist discourse.

In 2003, Mohanty revisits her original work and claims that people belonging to the Third World not only live under Western eyes, but also within them (Mohanty, 2003, p. 516). The shift in focus denotes a change in context and in concepts. More specifically, postcolonisation gave way to a newly determined hegemonic neoliberal global system which accommodates universal capitalism and recolonizes women's bodies and labour. Mohanty (2003) advocates for a global feminist solidarity by distinguishing gendered contexts and wider transnational structures, determining collective or individual experiences of oppression. Comparative feminist studies should aim to identify dialectical relations of power and demystifying capitalist objectives to determine local and global phenomena that reinforce one another. By acknowledging difference, unequal power relations and discourse, feminist scholars can create profound solidarity that form the foundation of a prolonged alliance. Scholars such as Mohanty (2003) paved the way for other transnational feminists to de-essentialize non-Western women, contest orientalist views and rethink the white women's burden.

Transnational feminism positions itself within the aforementioned deconstruction of globally defined struggles, connecting First and Third world feminists (Mendoza, 2002). Transnational feminism does not refer to geographical borders or comparisons between nations (Deeb, 2009). Veritably, transnationalism attends to collective and individual negotiations with

hegemony and discourse that appear out of a transnational context of power, capitalism and modernist reform (Deeb, 2009). By integrating local realities into a broader structure of contemporary struggle and dominance, it allows scholars to fully grasp complex ideas surrounding models of womanhood, gender norms, modernity and conservatism in the relation between Islamic states and their women. As stated by Deeb (2009), a transnational discourse is imperative for three reasons. Firstly, circulations of transnational discourse and knowledge urges scholars to challenge and rethink notions of agency and religion, decoupling feminism from secularism. Secondly, dichotomies based on gender, religion and patriarchy have been used as justifications for Western meddling and global interventions into the lives of Muslims. Finally, it draws attention to the construction of ideal womanhood within local relations, nation-states and the transnational discourse.

Islamic feminists can be considered as a specific extension of transnational feminism, questioning institutional patriarchy, transnational discourse and emphasizing agency within Muslim majority societies (Al-bakr, Bruce, Davidson, Schlaffer & Kropiunigg, 2017). In the West, Muslim women's otherness is based on their public participation outside of the domestic realm and the politics of the veil (Deeb, 2009, p.113). As described by Kynsiletho (2008), Islamic feminism *"entangles the controversies between the labelling practices and the positionalities of those who seek to resist the given labels".* Islamic feminism negotiates positionality, gender norms, agency, patriarchy and resistance, stemming from an appropriated reading of Islamic texts, practices and beliefs (Al-bakr et al., 2017). Whilst Islamic feminists oppose institutional patriarchy and strive for equality, scholars aim to emphasize choice and agency rather than referring to Western notions of freedoms and liberties. Moreover, the agentic choice with regards to veiling, presence in the public sphere and all the aspects of social lives of Muslim women that have been under siege are imperative. Especially since liberal conceptions often tend to push women within Western dichotomies as inherently oppressive and patriarchal structures (Al-bakr, et al., 2017; Badran, 2001).

Abu-Lughod (2013), criticizes the selective myth of the repressed and veiled Muslim woman whom is deprived of her civil rights and legal position. Women's rights as a Western value-laden concept, legitimizes foreign involvement and consolidates existing global power relations. The dichotomous reality is materialized through concepts as 'freedom', 'choice', 'women's rights', and so on. These conceptions are based on gendered orientalist views in which stereotypical representations are used to essentialize Muslim women. Instead, Abu-Lughod (2013) aims to deconstruct the presupposed category of Muslim women and aspires to research how concepts materially produce certain transformations. Mahmood (2001) tackles

the vexed relationship between feminism and religious traditions as a manifest discussions of Islam (Mahmood, 2001, p. 203). In her anthropological research, the author aims to refrain from reductionism when discussing pious movements and feminism. A desire for freedom of domination is assumed as natural and universal in secular societies. By examining a women's mosque movement, she uncovers the dialectic relationship between oppression and agency in an essentially male-dominated space. Mahmood (2001) differentiates illiberal agency from the normative liberal elements. By studying the politics of piety in their socio-historical surroundings, Mahmood (2001) was able to identify gendered resistance in a dogmatic setting that is often assumed to exert relations of subordination.

Le Renard & Rundell (2010), researched the presence of Islamic feminism in Saudi Arabia and how it is appropriated by women to promote a certain rhetoric that enables women's rights within Islam. Moreover, female religious institutions alter dominant gender roles and allow for public debate which contributes to changing power relations between women, the state and their family members. In a context economic liberalisation and reform, women have been able to legitimize urban lifestyles and presence in the public sphere through female employment or sociability, based on Islamic readings highlighting personal development. Furthermore, young women in cities such as Riyadh or Jeddah, negotiate their rights in their daily lives towards their families and immediate surroundings based on written evidence. By doing so, they have been able to convince their circle in obtaining the permission to work, study or travel and have so achieved greater social mobility than their mothers.

Due to the historical context of Saudi Arabia, the integration of both wider transnational feminism and Islamic feminism are the appropriate theoretical frameworks. Firstly, the influence of Western discourse within the structural formation of the Saudi state and the impact on social norms and gender relations will become apparent in what follows. Moreover, the question of positionality and internalized discourse is undeniable and omnipresent within the interaction of a Belgian researcher and Muslim Saudi women. Moreover, the ethnographic nature of the study includes the possibility to incorporate Islamic feminism and non-Western interpretations of localities, within their social reality and their interconnectedness with wider socio-political systems. Saudi Arabia as a religious monarchy has actively incorporated pious forms of Islam into its institutions and exalts a religious public sphere.

1.2. Women and Modernity in Neopatriarchal Societies

1.2.1. Neopatriarchal Bargain

Patriarchy finds its origins in historical precapitalist social-political structures and has varied significantly with regards to geography and social formation (Moghadam, 2004). In classical patriarchal systems, elder men had authority over the family unit, whereas women were subjected to different forms of domination. As a political concept, patriarchy in modern industrial societies has been widely overused and undertheorized (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274). Nowadays, it encompasses the private sphere through the extended family as a patriarchal unit and the public sphere through patrilineal institutions and state policy (Benstead, 2016). Naturally, the manifestation of patriarchy is culturally specific and depends on the national context and gender ideology (Alwedinani, 2017).

Sharabi (1988) developed the concept of neopatriarchal societies, based on the inclusion of modernity within paternalistic frameworks of contemporary Arab societies with an oil-based economy. Sharabi (1988) differentiates socio-political structures in the Middle East from classical patriarchy due to its collision with material modernity. Modernisation is expressed in materialized aspects – dress, food, leisure activities; in institutions – schools, theatres, state; and in literature and science (Sharabi, 1988, p.22). The enforced modernisation processes sparked an automatic rejection due to the assumption of underdevelopment. Therefore, the transformation to modernity that occurred outside of Europe was not autonomous or authentic. Western influence has resulted in a religious or cultural backlash that exist in some Arab states today, such as Saudi Arabia (Moghadam, 2004). An example is the laws on women's dress and behaviour, enforced by the religious police in Saudi Arabia, legitimatizing patriarchy in the private and public sphere.

Bargaining with Patriarchy by Kandiyoti (1988), has altered feminist scholarship according to Kynsiletho (2008). Rather than positioning women under patriarchal systems, she nuances the concept by referring to a patriarchal bargain that varies depending on class, national context and ethnicity, in public and private spaces. The coercive nature of the patriarchal society enables women to strategically negotiate areas of autonomy. Similar to Mahmood's (2001) argument, women's positions are created through negotiations and require a conceptualization of agency. The intersectional approach of the patriarchal bargain entails several useful elements (Kynsiletho, 2008, p. 11). Firstly, the constant renegotiation of the bargain ensures the analysis of both local differences and international trends, such as the influence of globalisation and discourse. Secondly, it allows us to differentiate dimensions of patriarchy

with various outcomes and causes. Finally, the use of the bargain-approach shall assess the correlation between gender-based inequalities and authoritarian resilience, which enables a state to ensure political stability based on the resistance and mediation of opposition (Hinnebusch, 2014; Kynsiletho 2008)

1.2.2. Modernist Reform

Social change and modernist reform are usually caused by technological innovations, political action, class conflict or international interference (Moghadam, 2003). Feminists in the Middle East have widely debated the appearance of modernising projects and their implications for women (Abu-Lughod, 1998). The women's question emerged as a terrain for ideological debate in which women either represent secular liberal modernisation or embody cultural authenticity (Carlier & Schäfers, 2019). The familiar dichotomy of modernity as opposed to tradition, has aided in the reproduction of labelling women in the public sphere as well as the domestic realm (Abu-Lughod, 1998). The process of remaking women within a mobilizing political project has so easily been associated with emancipation or repression. Therefore, scholars have argued to investigate the dialectic relationship of transnational influence, Western imperialism and conservative backlashes that create new gender norms and politicize gender as a polyvalent marker of class, culture and modernity (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 284).

Kandiyoti (1991) and her co-authors critically assessed the role of women in state formation and the construction of gender norms and identities to legitimize a mobilizing political project or confirm the role of Shariah[2] law in state institutions. In addition, the international cry for Muslim women's emancipation has been masked under a civilizing project with capitalistic intent. At the same time, women have expressed their cultural authenticity and conservatism as a means to contradict corrupted Westernized elite (Carlier & Schäfers, 2019). In essence, women have been central to expressing both the integrity of the nation and of Islam (Kandiyoti, 1991). The female body has become a symbol for the association between feminism and cultural imperialism as an expression of antagonisms. Therefore, attempts to adjust Muslim Family law or women's position must be considered within the context of power struggles on a subnational and international level.

[2] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

1.3. Identity and Gender

Social identity theory considers one's identity to be constructed out of multiple identities through social group memberships which define the affective attachment, salience of an identity and overall code of conduct (Tajfel, 1974). Identities are thus constructed within interaction and intersect with other identities, which define our everyday realities. Each identity requires an accordance with socially defined roles. In return, gendered identities cannot be considered without considering national, religious and ethnic identities (Meisenbach, 2010). Processes of conflict, reform or long-term transition fundamentally alter the perception and social base of an identity, whereas an individual must renegotiate the terms and foundation of the identity, within the new environment or social networks (Ethier & Deaux, 1994).

On the macro-level, identity and gender have been mobilized in policies of state modernisation, prioritizing and highlighting the presupposed and dominant femininities and masculinities. Connell (1987) elucidates the gendered binary of favoured as opposed to subordinated masculinities and femininities in temporal or spatial settings. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a dominant type of masculine conduct which is exalted by religious institutions, narrated by mass media and encouraged by the state whereas disparaging men within that socio-political context are subordinated (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). The emphasized femininity embodies the ideal type of womanhood which is eulogized and held as a standard for the female population whilst the devalued femininity constitutes a residual gender category for all those women whom do not correspond with the hegemonic ideals (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, p. 396). In Saudi Arabia, emphasized femininities and hegemonic masculinities are not static yet rather subjected to socio-political fluctuations, international influences and societal transformations.

In contemporary literature, the research on the identity formation of Saudi women is limited. Nonetheless, some scholars have succeeded in describing the overall impact on gendered and religious identities of Saudi women (Altorki, 1977; Le Renard, 2008; van Geel, 2016). Rapid urbanisation, liberalisation and technological advancements have transformed the Saudi society and has positioned it between liberalist and conservatist kings and ulama. Alshoaibi (2018) uses the identity negotiation theory to analyse the internal and in-group conflict that arises out of conflicting identities and social roles. This includes balancing work-family conflicts whereas women entering the workforce, often struggle to cope with their traditional gender roles as mothers or wives. Moreover, she concludes that Saudi women participating in newly negotiated roles overcome contradiction, thus positively evaluating the sense of self, based on the newly established in-group subculture of entrepreneurial and

participant women. Le Renard (2011), elaborates on the dilemmas for Saudi women in mixed-gender working spaces. Social norms stem from an inherent interconnectedness between the national, religious and gendered identity of working women and Saudi men. Therefore, the dominant gender ideas emphasize modern and unveiled displays of women whilst being considered as offensive or unrespectable by male colleagues and relatives, excluding some women from jobs.

2. Historical Overview of the Kingdom

2.1. The Oil Allegiance

The House of Saud, as one of the longest surviving monarchies, has been ruling Saudi Arabia since the birth of the state in 1932 (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The dynasty was achieved by uniting fragmented tribes, threatened by the geopolitical context and neighbouring power struggles (Pharaon, 2004). Built by an allegiance with a Wahhabis[3] Islamic movement, Saudi Arabia is an Islamic theocracy that derives its rule of law, politics and social life from the Shariah. As one of few nations without a constitution, the basic law of Saudi Arabia was adopted by royal decree in 1992 by which the king must comply with Shariah Law (Nurunnabi, 2017, p. 539). For Muslims worldwide, Saudi Arabia is known as 'the land of the Holy Mosques', hosting over 1.5 million pilgrimages annually. The Saudi responsibility of welcoming pilgrims for the Hajj[4] secures the nation as the most prominent spiritual pinnacle in the entire Middle East (Long & Long, 1979). Pilgrims were responsible for the vast majority of the Kingdom's revenue. This changed altogether with the American discovery of oil on Saudi Arabian soil in 1939, hereby introducing the Kingdom to the most imminent source of power in the 20th century (Vassiliev, 2013; van Geel, 2016).

The public oil company Aramco is undoubtedly the world's largest oil producer. The former Arabian-American Oil company had a profound influence on the industrial development of the Saudi Arabian society. The company required accommodating infrastructure, fundamentally transforming the population into a skilled workforce and enabling social development (Vassiliev, 2013). The oil era had brought forth the dissolvent of the tribal economy of indigenous nomadic Bedouins. It constructed a centralized state with a population that was able to consume and participate in the Saudi economy, after seeking independence from the

[3] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[4] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

American shareholders. The urbanisation and infrastructural development in Saudi Arabia has inherently transformed the sociological fabric and demography of the country (Pharaon, 2004).

Saudi Aramco generates over 85% of Saudi exports and plus 90% of government revenue, thus qualifying Saudi as a rentier state that derives its income form external rents (Nurunnabi, 2017). Additionally, the profits are allocated and redistributed to the state and the population since the government has complete ownership of the national oil enterprise (Permuy, 2016). The rentier state achieves political stability through an implicit social contract whereby the government funds its citizens and ensures welfare in exchange for unconditional political support and loyalty (Permuy, 2016, p. 45). The mutual relationship of sustainability is based on Saudi citizenship and pertaining to the country ensures one of livelihood, schooling and a elaborate variety of other benefits.

Although the oil revenue succeeded in creating a welfare economy, the general Saudi population remained largely unskilled or uneducated. Consequently, the Kingdom remained dependent on expensive foreign labour (Pharaon, 2004). For decades, the societal structure that denotes Saudi Arabia has been based on a hierarchy of elites that are founded through government revenues and access to social services (Nurunnabi, 2017; Permuy, 2016). In sum, Saudi Arabia managed to ensure rapid social change and urbanisation through economic and technological development. Due to the discovery of oil and petroleum in the 1930's, it managed to take its place on the global market and developed as a state through techno-economic evolution.

2.2. Religion and Governance

Before the creation of the third Saudi Sate in 1932, Muhammad Al Saud and Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had formed a dynastic allegiance in 1744, to unite the Bedouin tribes under a vast Wahhabis monarchy (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019). The Sharia Law, corresponding hadith[5] texts and the fatwas[6] enforce social norms upon the ummah[7] that are overseen by the ulama[8] to ensure the integrity of the Qur'an (Alshoaibi, 2018). Al-Atawneh (2009) explains historical Wahhabis perceptions on governance through two core elements; sovereignty and authority. Wahhabis followers believe that the ultimate and comprehensive sovereignty lies with God. Ergo, Wahhabism political theory assumes that a temporary autocratic leader must be installed to dictate the religious obligations to the ummah and uphold the religious authority by

[5] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[6] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[7] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[8] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

consulting the ulama whom interpret God's word based on the Qur'an. Throughout Saudi history, the religious fraction and the Al-Saud dynasty have clashed based on an ongoing friction and contradiction between religious and state authority (Al-Atawneh, 2009, p.733).

Scholars often assume that the legacy entails a separation of responsibilities, whereby the House of Saud exerts absolute political leadership and the Al-Wahhab successors protect the integrity of Islam. The founder of Saudi Arabia (King Abd al-Aziz Al Saud) and his lineage succeeded in mobilizing religion as an instrument of authority and as a source of legitimacy, by applying a strategy of co-optation that kept final responsibility for policy firmly within Al Saud control in pressing times (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019, p.2). The oil era and the massive urbanization brought forth a first conflict between the two fractions. Abd al-Aziz Al Saud had mobilized the Bedouin tribes in securing territory and uniting the tribes under a Wahhabi regime. These fighters or *Ikhwan* later rebelled against the modernist reform and Western technological evolution of Abd al-Aziz's moderate policy. Since the rebellion formed a threat to the Al Saud centralization and consolidation of power, the King swiftly ended the movement with the help of the British and obedient clerics in 1929 (Permuy, 2016, p. 30).

The second half of the twentieth century noted a significant change for the ulama as they were incorporated into the state administration (Al-Atawneh, 2009). Thereafter, they ceased to consist of an autonomous religious body consulting to the royal family. In 1979, Al Saud was confronted with an ideological threat and Islamic opposition during the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca (Permuy, 2016; Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019). Over 300 religious militants occupied the Grand Mosque for a period of two weeks, expressing their malcontent related to the brisk modernisation process including incorporating Western innovation, such as television and women's education (Permuy, 2016). After the execution of the perpetrators and instigators, the regime decided to comply with the demands of the rebellion (and ulama) through measures that enabled political space of Islamic activism and delayed the process of liberalization (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019).

In the 1980's, the conservatism would only be strengthened through *"an increase in funding for religious universities, expansion the remit and size of the religious police* (Mutaween), *and further support for pan-Islamic organizations and causes, such as the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan"* (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019, p.3). The Mutaween[9] or moral police, uphold the public order to the religious standard that is approved by ulama (Otterbeck, 2012*)*. The

[9] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

Mutaween rigorously sought to discipline and punish female secretaries working in offices, unmarried couples eating in restaurants or riding in cars, and improperly dressed women (Doumato, 1992, p. 41). In 1982, the government reversed the decision to reward scholarships for women studying abroad without a legal guardian (Pharaon, 2004). Thus, social mobility possibilities shrunk and gender segregation was enforced amongst the expat community. The Mutaween removed beauty salons, stuffed animals and dolls from shops, ordered changing rooms in clothing stores closed, and pressed the state on removing Muslim school children from international schools (Doumato, 1992).

Over the course of the 90's, the Gulf war would prove to have a significant impact and far-reaching consequences for the domestic political stability in the Kingdom. Upon the permission of King Fahd, American troops stationed in the Kingdom (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019). The Saudi-American alignment against Iraq sparked outrage amongst the religious community. The presence and support for the US military tore the religious elites and divided them into an estranged Salafi movement (Sahwa[10]). Opposition and activists were imprisoned in a salafi crackdown in 1994. The endorsement of *"controversial steps taken by the government, the Wahhabi scholars left a wide space for radical Wahhabis that opposed the pragmatic attitudes of the official ulama*" (Permuy, 2016, p.32). Some authors claim that the ulama is apolitical and exerts limited influence on domestic or foreign policy (Al-Atawneh, 2009). Nonetheless, the sociological influences in creating religious norms and institutions as well as reinforcing the monarchy, cannot be overlooked. The monarchy, official ulama and Wahhabis followers constantly engage in conflicting or cooperative relations, based on the socio-economic development of the nation, actively constructing periods of progression and conservative backlashed.

3. Masculine State Governing Women

3.1. Constituting a Patriarchal System

The gendered segregation and guardianship system in the Saudi public domain have become figureheads of institutional patriarchy in Western discourse. As van Geel (2016) argued, these patriarchal systems must be reviewed within the context of governmental discourse and socio-political transformations such as discovery and exploitation of oil, the process of urbanisation and the rise of the Sahwa.

[10] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

3.1.1. Segregated Institutions

Before the creation of the Saudi state and the establishment of a national identity, Bedouin women actively participated in the rural economy (Le Renard, 2008). The enormous national revenue that was deducted from the oil industry, ensured the establishment of a welfare economy which relieved women from industrial labour in the city. The gendered ideology which inscribed the role of women, expressed women as the basic unity of society and the cornerstone of the Saudi family educating and socializing the future generation (Doumato, 1992). Excluding women from production, protected and morally differentiated them from the foreign female worker. During modernist reform in the 1950's and 1960's, the appraised King Faisal debated with the ulama on the benefits of education within an Islamic framework for Saudi girls across the Kingdom. Contradictory enough, the first segregated institution actually increased women's development and mobility through segregated schools (van Geel, 2016). Gradually, the segregation norm spread amongst other societal fields including mixed workplaces which were relinquished in 1969. The Sahwa uprising in the late 1970's as well as the oil crisis in 1973, sparked rapid social change and a renewed attempt to purify the Saudi society and eliminate Western influence (van Geel, 2016).

After the 1979 Mecca uprising, the monarchy complied with the religious demands and abolished the presence of women in the workspace, music, cinema, sports and all matters considered Western. The consequences of 'the return to conservatism' were widespread as fear of Western contamination increased. Doumato (2009) concluded that Saudi women and expats 'covered-up' with the niqab[11], abaya[12], gloves and stockings. They disappeared from the public space, TV, radio and all aspects of social life. Beauty salons were extinct, and all the international schools were compelled to refuse admission of Saudi children who returned to segregated national schools. King Fadh had issued a reminder stating that women were not permitted in mixed workspaces and are required to cover within the public sphere, further domesticating Saudi women.

This conservative backlash further consolidated public gender segregation through the creation of women-only spaces, alienating men from women for the last decades (van Geel, 2016). The controversy surrounding the Gulf war in the early 90's, heightened the women's question. Islamic female institutions, or female sections within male institutions, opened and structurally segregated urban spaces into a family and single section[13]. A legitimate, feared

[11] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[12] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)
[13] Throughout the public space (restaurants, hospitals, mosques, etc.) the facilities were divided based on the distinction between 'singles' and 'families'. In se, single refers to unmarried men or men whom are not accompanied by their wives (van Geel, 2016).

and excessively funded Mutaween exerted unseen social control with the ability to imprison and punish perpetrators in the aftermath of the Gulf war (Doumato, 1992). Meijer (2010) points out that gender segregation is not inherent to the Saudi Arabian culture or tradition. Amid domestic struggle between liberals and conservatists, it was actively promoted in the 80's and 90's by the state, the revivalist Sahwa movement, conservative ulama and the Mutaween.

Van Geel (2016) demonstrated the consensual aspect of gender segregation through the creation of women-only spaces. In her research, some women were in favour of the status quo and laws on sex segregation since it enabled them to engage in legitimate women-only divisions in the public sphere where they feel more 'relaxed' for personal (no dispute with family) or religious reasons (being able to remove the niqab/hijab[14]/abaya among women). In addition, the segregation and Islamic morality justified the opening of banks and hospitals operated by and for women without religious contestation (Doumato, 1992). Similarly, the protection of the emphasized femininity of the pious and educated Islamic mother in the labour laws, have provided the rationale to secure progressive policies benefiting working women (e.g. maternity leave, medical coverage, paid leave…).

3.1.2. Guardianship System

Since the establishment of the Saudi state, the monarchy and clerics uphold what can be viewed as the "*the Islamic moral value of protecting women within the family under the guardianship of men*" (Doumato, 1992, p.33). In Saudi Arabia, women are entirely dependent on their male counterparts for their social participation and civil rights. The guardianship system required assistance of the mahram that is usually a relative or husband. Religious fatwas, social norms and female domesticity were integrated in the public policy ensuring female-male dependence. These policies are the foundation of the social fabric and stem from gendered ideology with regards to female honour, integrity and safety (Mansyuroh, 2019). The female restrictions accompanying the mahram system are evident in various fields such as women's mobility, education and work opportunities, political participation, health, etc. (Tønnessen, 2016).

Firstly, since 2001 women have the ability to obtain an ID-card with the written consent of the guardian. Albeit that the aforementioned requirement was abolished in 2013, women made up only 22% of registered voters for the 2015 municipal elections, due to lack of identification, means of transportation and proof of residence (Tønnessen, 2016). Moreover, until 2018,

[14] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

Saudi women needed written consent when requesting travel documents, issuing record (birth and death certificates) and release of national institutions (hospitals). Until 2019, women were prohibited from entering restaurants, hotels or travel without the guardian (Mansyuroh, 2019).

In 2004, women were encouraged to engage in the labour market and increase female participation. Paradoxically, male employers needed the permission of the male guardian to ensure employment (ECDHR, 2018). Women have limited access to the legal justice system, hence possessing no legal rights base. The mahram must always accompany a woman in court, whom functions as a legal representative (Doumato, 1992; Mansyuroh, 2019). All legal matter with regards to family and criminal law are entrusted to the guardian. For decades, the guardianship system has excluded women from the civil society and taking part in the public sphere. The ideology of the ideal Saudi woman has been reiterated in royal edicts, policy statements and official regulations (Doumato, 1992, p.34). This section encompasses only few of the societal fields on which the guardianship system was enforced and demonstrates the extent of patriarchy that is rooted in the Saudi Arabian legal framework. Nonetheless, it should not be concluded that Saudi women are a unified category of powerless victims, simply undergoing a patriarchal system (Tønnessen, 2016).

3.1.3. Emphasized Femininities in Saudi Arabia

Doumato (1992) has described the gender analogy embedded within the national identity as the portrayal of the 'ideal Islamic woman'. The imagined national identity is based on the influx of welfare, intertwinement of Wahhabis politics and the Al Saud dynasty. The Saudi woman and her femininity thus symbolize and represent a patriarchal system and the family unit. Therefore, it can be assumed that the construction of the emphasized femininity consists of a state-led feminism which underpins the stability of the regime (Connell, 1978). The separated and uplifted Saudi women are protected by their state and mahram as she protects the intrinsic moral values of Islam and the uniqueness of the Saudi society. The hegemonic masculinity is represented by the state and the pious Saudi male whom provides for his family (Doumato, 1992; Moghadam, 2004). The heterogeneous population of Saudi Arabia is seemingly united under the 'ideal Muslim woman' as a legitimizing and instrumental ideal type in securing both progressive and restrictive policies (Doumato, 1992). The regime's compliance with conservative backlash and reforms on the women's position has demonstrated the prominence of the emphasized femininity.

The abaya and niqab are inherent to the construction of the ideal type and have varied depending on international influence and domestic struggle. Rajkhan & Dana (2014) denoted

that import of Western expat families influenced the aforementioned ideal type. Altorki (1977) concluded that Saudi women had picked up new trends through international travel that replaced the traditional dress. Abroad, Saudi women wore long coats, a substitute scarf to cover their hair or left the scarf at home. The Mecca uprising of 1979 ended the negotiation of the traditional dress. The abaya is not inherent to the Saudi women as she wears it only to pass through public spaces (Le Renard, 2008). Moreover, it is a recently invented tradition encompassing the national identity based on a specific implementation of Islam and the unique development of the Saudi Arabian state (Le Renard, 2008, p. 616)

The aforesaid emphasizes that femininity is equally constituted by Western discourse and mass media (Le Renard, 2014). Saudi women have been portrayed as repressed and submissive entities. Attention is given to those openly critical of religious institutions and the state, supporting their collective struggle. Le Renard (2019) denotes that these narratives are constructed by liberal visions of women's emancipation. European and North American media are complicit in constructing the binary division between the enlightened and veiled women. Especially those wearing the niqab are considered as passive, submissive and excluded from agentic choice (Le Renard, 2014). This imagery is omnipresent in constructing ideal womanhood in international and national discourse, excluding women by the unanimous division of female fractions.

3.2. Agents Contesting a Patriarchal System

According to Le Renard (2008), Saudi women have been essentialized in a unified universal category in which they are legally discriminated and spatially segregated. To assume that Saudi women have no agency would be misleading. Authors have demonstrated the presence of Saudi women in the public sphere, pressing for change and negotiating social norms (Le Renard, 2008; Pharaon, 2004; Tønnessen, 2016; van Geel, 2016). Islamic feminists have elucidated various ways in which women are able to express their agency in patriarchal systems (Kandiyoti, 1988, Moghadam, 2003). Women can challenge the relations of dominance through opposition and activism or create coping mechanisms to gain influence or improve their position (Alwedinani, 2017, p.12).

3.2.1. Bargaining with the Mahram

Saudi Arabian women form the cornerstone of the (extended) family, maintain family continuity through reproductive qualities and ensure the socialization of the future generation (Pharaon, 2004). As described by Moghadam (2004), neopatriarchal states formalize a gender contract in which patrilineal relations are preferred over female independence through Muslim family law and personal legal status. Therefore, men are able to prevent female mobility and

opportunities through their martial or patriarchal authority in the private sphere. These structures that have legitimized states through laws and norms on the extended Saudi family, have been challenged by socioeconomic developments, political action and individual agency. Upon her legal guardian's agreement, women have broken out of the domestic sphere and entered a public female sphere (Le Renard, 2008, p.617).

In the late 70's, Altorki (1977) researched agency within the kinship-structured organisation of the Saudi Arabian nuclear family. Due to education and foreign influences during the modernisation process of the 1960's, women could exercise considerable power and agentic choice in the household. Women were able to assert legal rights and privileges as well as property through the appropriation of an individual status instead of a collective based status. Networking and friendships provided women with access to prominent information, influencing their male counterparts during important decision-making processes. Though it was common in Saudi Arabia to commit to an arranged marriage, young women in elitist surroundings could negotiate marriage terms (Altorki, 1986; Alwedinani, 2017). Moreover, women had a mediating role within intergenerational disputes within the families, oversaw interpersonal relations and possessed large chunks of the financial means within the family structure.

The education of women has played a significant role and has altered gender relations (Moghadam, 2004, p.152). Access to education constitutes the Saudi female as an autonomous persona and diversifies the perception of their gender roles, social mobility possibilities and contribution to society. Moreover, the prominent determinant of the age of marriage has been the degree of education. Alwedinani (2017) elaborated on coping mechanisms of young Saudi women to resist patriarchy through delaying marriage to circumvent the 'family-education' conflict. In addition, women would refrain from marriage by travelling abroad and exploring the international scene. Altorki (1977) explained that prolonged residence in other Arab countries exposed Saudi women to alternative lifestyles and sparked awareness towards different gender roles, possibilities and responsibilities. Finally, female inclusion and economic empowerment have tripled between 1992 and 2010 with a large concentration in teaching, nursing and administration jobs (Al-bakr, et al., 2017). Moreover, these jobs are created within women-only institutions. Actively participating in the economy has aided women's self-confidence, professional skills and financial independence. Studies have proven that financial independence ensure enhanced participation of women in the family and in communal affairs. Entry into the labour market increases the chance of social mobility as well as political and legal awareness (Al-bakr & et al., 2017, p.54).

The blossoming of the internet and social media has granted Saudi women an anonymous entry into the world wide web (Guta & Karolak, 2015). The internet enables interaction with those outside of the family. Hence, it can be described as a new public sphere with equal access and voices where Saudi women can act as agents of change. In their research Guta & Karolak (2015), revealed that the honour of a collective based kinship in Saudi Arabia is reflected by its female family members. In return, the Saudi women measure the honour or shame for the entire family. The internet provides a safe space where women can de-attach and redefine their individual identities and status.

3.2.2. Negotiating State and Ulama

Saudi citizens are forbidden to engage in public gatherings to debate societal matters or political issues (Raphaeli, 2005). In the past, Saudi women have transformed public activism in communicative petitions addressed to the royal family. In November 1990, women in Riyadh had gathered to protest the driving ban. The presence of American soldiers on Saudi soil had sparked hope amongst the Saudi women whom had been incited and encouraged by King Fahd to volunteer in civil defence and medical service (Doumato, 1992). The unofficial driving ban was then made official along with a ban on political activism after the Mutaween had intervened and specifically listed the names of those whom "*advocate for corruption on the earth*" (Doumato, 2009, p.31). Many activists were made unemployed, publicly humiliated and disciplined for tackling the regime.

In 2003, the terrorist attacks in Riyadh along with the global aftermath of 9/11, pressured the royal family to enact on reform and widen the societal debate to ease national tension and international attention (Le Renard, 2008). In January, Crown Prince Abdullah[15] had received a petition from over 100 Saudi intellectuals, urging reform with regards to civil and political rights for men and women (Raphaeli, 2005). Soon after, a national dialogue was held with the reformists in Riyadh discussing the roles of women, religious radicalism and social reform. Crown Prince Abdullah held another national dialogue specifically for women on women's rights and duties; education and position in society (Le Renard, 2008, p. 618). The impact of the negotiations turned out to be limited as women had no legal or political status to engage in national politics. Nonetheless, these national debates marked the institutionalization of women as a civic category with concerns and complaints, voiced by state-integrated elite Saudi women. A selective group of Saudi women pertained to the Consultative Council representing Saudi women as recognized citizens within state institutions to appease international critique (Le Renard, 2008).

[15] Definition in glossary: appendix, table 1 (p.68-69)

Over a decade later, in addition to various petitions on the driving ban and the 'Women2Drive' campaign, an initiative tackling the mahram-system ("Treat Us Like Adult Citizens—Or We'll Leave the Country") was launched by a Saudi women's rights activist, Al-Huweidar (Tønnessen, 2016, p.20). Along with religious opposition - claiming female independence would burden the Saudi woman and dismiss the protection of her mahram - , the campaign was countered by the 'My Guardian Knows What's Best For Me' initiative launched by Saudi women whom opposed the Westernization of Saudi principles. Thus demonstrating the female political polarization.

Hence, a final coping technique exists in appropriating Islamic teachings which is regarded as the legitimate language by clerics and male peers (Rajkhan & Dana, 2014). The gender segregation excludes women from mosques and the ulama has advised women to pray from the privacy of their homes (Le Renard, 2008). Islamic female institutions opened at the beginning of the 1990's enabling women to engage in conferences or teachings with female priests, pray outside of the home, educate themselves on Islamic teaching and participate in leisure activities such as English courses (Le Renard, 2008). Though these women do not necessarily contest the monarchy or the ulama, the women-only spaces within male-dominated institutions create means to develop *"religiosity, sociability and in their image, redefine the pious to assert themselves as subjects and to claim rights — even limited ones — in a context where religious language, to a great extent, monopolizes debates"* (Le Renard, 2008, p. 624).

3.3. Identities and Gender Norms in Saudi Arabia

Ethnographic research and qualitative studies on gender identities and roles have elaborated on the nuanced and local realities of women in Saudi Arabia. Though not as influential as the current modernising reforms, women have been subjected to alternative representations of womanhood and possibilities to participate, work or obtain an education. For decades, the role of women has been central to maintaining the structure of the family and symbolizes the Saudi national identity (Rajkhan & Dana, 2014). Song (2019), concluded that Saudi women aspire to confirm to some aspects of the sociably defined gender roles whereas being shy or fearing judgment exceeds their will to actively participate in mixed-gender lectures. Moreover, women often used religious justifications to base their (non)participation either claiming that these characteristics are irrelevant or are prescribed by Islam.

As mentioned throughout this paper, women have been creative in adopting coping mechanisms to defer from patriarchy and familial influences. An ethnographic study on Saudi doctors, elaborated on the work-family conflict and cooperation with male doctors and patients (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). Women highlight the double burden when balancing their careers and families as their husbands expect the doctors to uphold their household. In contrast, Guta & Karolak (2015) found that some women prefer to be compliant with traditional gender roles considering their identities as mothers and wives as salient. In addition, familial values are upheld since the fear of rejection or public shame is prominent in the Saudi Arabian family unit (Guta & Karolak, 2015). To represent oneself ultimately leads to the representation of the family. Social control is thus exerted through social norms.

Research on male gender roles is lacking in contemporary literature. Nonetheless, scholars have researched Saudi male attitudes. (Guta & Karolak, 2015; Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). The emergence of social media and the internet has significantly aided in the renegotiation of gender roles. A study on new social landscapes has confirmed that online male-female interactions has developed self-confidence and constructive dialogue with the opposite gender (Al-Saggaf, 2004). Men in this sample have claimed to (re)evaluate their positions and take on an 'open-minded' stance with regards to women's positions. Nonetheless, the male role of the main breadwinner and protector of the family cannot be overlooked. In the same study, Guta & Karolak (2015) found that only 15% of male respondents agree with female visibility in politics, state and leadership roles. Finally, female students were more optimistic towards modernisation and changing gender roles than men (Al-bakr, et al., 2017). Thus for some women, gendered identities are based on feminine characteristics such as being pious, vulnerable, dependent, shy, respectable and modest. Others consider their professionalism, independence and education to be salient and therefore negotiate with their surroundings to cope with the mentioned contradictions.

4. Saudi 2030 Vision

King Salman and his son Mohammed Bin Salman launched the 2030 Vision in 2016 (Hvidt, 2018). The ambitious national and modernist reform embedded in Saudi 2030 is a developmental blueprint to diversify the oil-economy in favour of a knowledge-based economy. This section will expand on MBS's reform in the domestic and international scene as well as unfold the implications of the Saudi 2030 Vision.

4.1. A House in Distress

Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (MBS), the Crown Prince of the Kingdom, is the de facto ruler of the Kingdom. In order to consolidate and centralize power, MBS diminished large corporates such as Saudi BinLadin construction Group. In addition to burnt business relations, MBS arrested hundreds of Al Saud Royals, clerics, government officials and business billionaires during an anti-corruption purge (De Luce, Dilanian & Windrem, 2018). The prisoners were released after redeeming their debts and penalties relating to corruption. Whereas in the past, the political authority was based on recruiting Al Saud dynasty into the government, MBS had triumphed in accumulating and centralizing unprecedented power in the modern history of the Saudi state (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019).

Hvidt (2018, p.4) claims that political analysts have witnessed a relaxation of the religious hold on society to ensure societal and economic development. The Crown Prince claimed to insert a moderate Islam whilst remaining a symbolic pillar for the international ummah (Eum, 2019). The curtailment of the Mutaween provided Saudi citizens with breathing space to engage in domestic development as productive members, recreating their society. On a critical note, Ulrichsen & Sheline (2019) have expressed that the religious reform induced by MBS, is purely symbolical, as the Mutaween is now integrated in the institutions and regular police body. During the 2017-purge, MBS ignored clerics that represent the heart of the institutional religious establishment. Instead, the crackdown was aimed at diminishing the impact of individual dissidents such as followers from the Sahwa movement. Ulrichsen & Sheline (2019) signify the uniform Al Saud strategy of mobilizing ulama to issue supportive fatwas whom fear personal prosecution of the state.

4.2. The Vision

4.2.1. Knowledge-based economy and Saudization

Dramatic drops in oil prices and a steep increase of the population have challenged the rentier state model that underlined Saudi Arabia (Hvidt, 2018). For decades, the rents from the energy resources sufficed to subsidize the Saudi population. In partnership with McKinsey consulting, the Saudi 2030 vision is based on a 2-trillion dollar investment programme, doubling the national GDP by 2030 (Hilal, 2017). The economic aspect of the Vision is based on neoliberal privatization of government services, diminishing foreign labour, increasing Saudization and diversifying the oil-based economy. Through the encouragement of qualitative national education and boosting SME's contribution from 20% to 35%, the government aspires to unburden the public sector and suppress the job unemployment rate from 11.6% to 7% (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.). The concept of Saudization aims to disassociate from foreign

know-how and expertise by incorporating the Saudi citizens – and especially Saudi women – into the workforce.

4.2.2. Socio-Cultural Transformations

The growing intergenerational gap between millennials – which make up for two-thirds of the population- and the ageing conservative constituency has the Saudi youth feeling disconnected from their national identity (Boghani, 2019; Cerioli, 2019, p.54). MBS symbolizes the thriving youth as the first Saudi leader to relax social life, shake hands with women and encourage leisure activities. In addition to nationalistic motives, Riyadh requires social reform to increase attractiveness for foreign investment and international tourism to diversify the economy in imitation of other Gulf states. Saudi promotes national tourism in the Northern and Eastern province by investing in regional entertainment and infrastructure to increase household expenses.

MBS opened movie theatres and invited international musicians to enter the stage after decades of narrowing cultural life to piousness of Islamic tradition (Boghani, 2019). From Comic-con festivals to football games, hiking tours and mixed-gender café's, MBS and his General Entertainment Authority have realized unprecedented socio-cultural reform (Shaneen, 2018; Zavis, 2018). Notwithstanding, the top-down reform aspires to maintain the importance of Islam and cultural heritage in the Saudi 2030 Vision. In a conference, MBS announced the transformation to a moderate interpretation of Islam as opposed to ultraconservative fundamentalism (Boghani, 2019). The social reforms have not been without controversy. In 2019, a non-segregated dance club was opened overnight and abruptly shut down after clerical critique claimed boundaries were being overstepped (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019).

4.2.3. For and From Saudi Nationals

Rather than reform based on humanity and equity, the main driver of the inclusion of women is financial distress (Eum, 2019). MBS has requested the public sector and encouraged the private sector to create jobs or substitute expatriates with Saudi women (Hvidt, 2018). An absolvent of the driving ban installed by an official fatwa in the 1980's, resulted in the possibility for women to participate in the economy. Not only does it increase female productivity, Saudi women are now active consumers based on their status of independence and achieved social benefits (Eum, 2019). The granted mobility outsteps the national borders as the guardianship system regulations have softened (Van Wagtendonk, 2019). Any woman above the age of 21 can now issue a passport and travel abroad without the permission of the mahram. Further, last year marked the civil independence of Saudi women permitting them to issue the birth of

their child, a death of a relative, divorce their husband as co-head of a household and demand child support (Eum, 2019).

The gender segregation system is partially discontinued. The government no longer mandates that restaurants or cafés separate families and singles (Turak, 2019). Some new restaurants had quietly dismissed the separate cabins, entrances and seating before the official statement. The strict segregation is equally lifted in the workspace, requiring only a separate restrooms, adequate security and a women-only prayer room (Eum, 2019). Finally, with the support of an official Saudi cleric, MBS stated that the abaya – as the hallmark of conservative Islamic dress- was no longer necessary by which women could choose their personal attire as long as it was 'decent and respectful' (Eum, 2019, p. 125). To protect women amid process of social reform, the Council of Ministers passed the first-anti harassment law encompassing large fines up to SAR 300.000 and 5 years in prison.

Some scholars claim that the Saudi 2030 vision promotes a new nationalism that is disconnected from the Islamic ethos and is an inherent manifestation of autocratic liberalisation (Cerioli, 2019, p.52; Eum, 2019). Similar to Kandiyoti's (1998) analysis of women as markers of integrity and modernity within neopatriarchal states, Cerioli (2019) considers these 'liberties' as instrumental to receive international recognition whilst MBS is consolidating power through the constructed emancipation of women. By evoking women's nationalism, MBS maximizes their economic potential without granting them political influence (Cerioli, 2019). In extension, Saudi men are still considered the main breadwinners and protectors of the family (Alshoaibi, 2018). The Saudi 2030 vision expects young men to create valuable careers; achieving national development through the efforts of independent Saudi's and ultimately decreasing dependence on expatriate workers (Thompson, 2017). High educational standards, public health and other socio-cultural expectancies aspire to establish successful and engaging young men.

Finally, Le Renard (2014) specifies the contemporary construction of the ideal womanhood and the paradoxical politics of unveiling Saudi women by the surveillance state. In national media and Western liberal politics, exceptional and successful Saudi women are openly displayed and contrasted against backwards, conservative, fully covered and repressed women. The surveillance state probes to further increase its control on the population by forcing Saudi women to unveil in order to physically identify dissident Saudi citizens. Western politics reinforce the framework of collective victimhood and accommodate liberal visions of

women’s empowerment as the ultimate measuring stick, marginalizing the perceived illiberal women whom appraise their public anonymity.

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature review has probed to demonstrate elaborate findings and developed frameworks on modernist reform in patriarchal states. Transnational and Islamic feminist scholars have urged to differentiate grand masculine systems of oppression and highlight the emphasized femininities in their socio-political surroundings in addition to local realities (Connell, 1978; Kandiyoti, 1998; Moghadam, 2004). Though Saudi Arabia has been subjected to various frameworks and reforms, the literature gap presents itself within the uniqueness of the Saudi 2030 reform. The current Saudi socio-political climate is rapidly changing and amid extensive processes of social change. The Saudi 2030 vision can be described as an inchoate modernisation project with unknown consequences and procedures. Therefore, fields with limited existent academic research require new insights that stem from exploratory studies (Mortelmans, 2013). Explorative qualitative research provides the ideal methodology to examine the structures and processes encompassing social change whilst accentuating agency and respecting diversity.

In order to grasp the foregoing, in-depth interviews and a series of (non)participant observations were conducted in the city centre of Jeddah over a time frame of six weeks. The research question of this study can be formed as followed: "*What is the impact of the modernising reform realized through the Saudi 2030 vision on women in Jeddah?".* The overall research question can be translated into four sub-questions elaborating on different sensitizing concepts that were retrieved from the literature review. The first sub-question expands on the position of women as mediators of state and cultural authenticity, following Kandiyoti (1998). *"To what extent does the 2030 Vision mobilize Saudi women within a political project of reform and what alternative identities are (de)constructed?".* The second sub-question on the gendered reality of Saudi women within the neopatriarchal state, reads as follows: *"How are existing gender relations and gendered social norms altered within the modernising project?".* The third question is formed as: *"How do Saudi women negotiate with globalisation and Western discourse? How does the internalized discourse differ from liberal conceptions and ideologies?".* The final question aligns with feminist authors such as Kandiyoti (1988) and Mahmood (2001) and is based on a specific notion of agency that entails relations with dominance and enables the destruction of classic liberalist dichotomies. Therefore, the final question researches different forms of agency can be retrieved from the daily lives of Saudi women within relations of dominance.

METHODS AND STRATEGY

In what follows the methodological aspect of this dissertation will be further explained. Within this section, the theoretical frame as well as the research design will be clarified. The data processing and analysis will undergo an assessment of quality.

1. Theoretical Frame

Ethnography can be defined as a distinct form of (non-)participant observation where the researcher spends a significant amount of time observing and interacting with a social group (Herbert, 2000). The objective lies in defining relations, cultural constructions and the wider societal context. Though the definition and methodology of ethnography is subjected to quite some controversy, authors agree that it is based on two main principles (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Herbert, 2000). Firstly, the field is entered without predefined analytical categories. Social action and meaning are created by the respondents through the analysis unstructured data. Secondly, though the typology of observation varies significantly, researchers tend to observe and live amongst those being studied in their natural environment. Due to the political sensitivity of the current climate of Saudi Arabia, an ethnographical approach seemed crucial to distinguish between words and behaviours (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Herbert, 2000).

Nonetheless, no method is without limitation. The positivist stream regards the social reality as statistically measurable through rigorous testing of static societal structures (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). Therefore, common critique assumes that ethnographic research is subjective and inhabits the internalized discourse of the researcher. Herbert (2000) makes interestingly remarks that the question of interpretation is not unique to qualitative studies. Thus, it forces qualitative researchers to determine their subjectivity and justify their findings. In addition, the limited amount of case-studies requires caution with regards to generalizations (Brewer, 2000). The specific findings are only applicable in a certain historical moment, and from a particular perspective towards a determined audience. This study can therefore only probe to add to existing debate in all modesty (Herbert, 2000).

2. Ethics

Ethical issues must be taken under consideration when performing qualitative research. Obtaining informed consent, is a crucial ethical principle (Mortelmans, 2013). Naturally, the process of observation violates this principle, since it is impossible to inform all the observed of the research purpose. To guarantee the anonymity, privacy and safety of the studied, no

names, places or detailed descriptions shall be present in this dissertation. According to Herbert (2000), it is of utmost important to be straight-forward with respondents and audience. In this dissertation, the status of the researcher as actively gathering data, was shared with the respondents in all group and/or individual activities. In addition, it was clearly mentioned that the respondents could determine non-negotiable topics. This ensured a comfortable entry into and exit from the field in order to safeguard future research. The citations used in to contextualize the findings, stem from the notebook whereas the selected passages were written down.

3. Positionality

Qualitative research is never without pre-assumptions and can influence the interpretation of the produced knowledge. Therefore, I have chosen to depart from the transnational framework as a means of recognizing the influence of my Western internalizations and person which determined the course of the interactions with the respondents. Following Pepicelli (2008), I do not consider myself an Islamic feminist, nor a Saudi citizen. Through the recognition and inclusion of Islamic feminist perspectives, I aspire to voice and pass on stories of Saudi women based on their personal experiences, interpretations, struggles and agentic choices. Even though I do not identify with a nationalist or religious identity, I believe that non-Muslims can describe and interpret ideas and practices of Islamic feminism and modernising reform (Pepicelli, 2008).

Being born in Jeddah provided me with the background knowledge and cultural habit of communicating and connecting with Saudi women. This whilst allowing me to fully experience contemporary evolutions and affairs since my departure in 2005. Nonetheless, my position as a Western woman undoubtedly marked the course of this dissertation. Firstly, I have internalized discourse relevant within my everyday surroundings. Therefore, my assumptions and conceptions on personal and family relations, social mobility, religion and nation-states are relevant within an European liberal democracy. Moreover, the influence of European identity politics and my (implicit) contribution in binary thought has been pointed out and disputed throughout the data gathering process. This includes a focus on religious symbolism (such as the niqab or abaya) and profound articulation of patriarchal structures (relations with state, fathers or husbands). Saudi women have defended their positions, surroundings and networks towards my Westernized self throughout our daily interactions.

The mentioned debate aided in the construction of a reflexive and entrusted relation between the respondents and myself. The goal of this dissertation is to de-essentialize women in Saudi

Arabia by passing along their stories whereby difference is emphasized, and similarities are considered empowering. As a result, debating our positionalities is crucial to deconstruct the power relations marking our interactions. Finally, I struggled with the chosen terminology of the respondents to distinguish Saudi women. Progressive vs. conservative, liberal vs. traditional, open-minded vs. closed-minded, are descriptions used by respondents to divide the population. Paradoxically, this dissertation is based on the idea of deconstructing binary narratives whilst rendering it almost infeasible not to fall back on binary terminology to name social groups during interviews. Consequently, I probed to adjust to the narratives used by the respondents in each specific interview and asked open and neutral questions. In sum, this dissertation does not aspire to reveal generalized and all-encompassing truths. As I researched, studied and lived amongst Saudi's for weeks, the objective consists of translating voices and contributing to the development of transnational and Islamic feminism, as a Western woman.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Context

This research took place in the city of Jeddah, bordering the Red Sea (Future Saudi Cities Programme, 2018). In 2016, the population grew to 4.1 million inhabitants, with an annual growth rate of 3.8%. This makes Jeddah the youngest and fastest growing city, with 41% of the total population is younger than 24. Only 40% of the population living in Jeddah is considered a Saudi national, making it a divers and multicultural hotspot. Moreover, Jeddah is the touristic and commercial capital with its crucial opportunities in industry and transport. As an absolute monarchy, the King is the ultimate governing power and appoints the centralized national government. Notwithstanding, since 2014 women have been able to monitor and stand for municipal elections (Mandeli, 2016). However, this has resulted in little effective change and has left the local public administration in isolation. Being dictated appropriate bureaucratic solutions by central authorities still serves as the norm, thus preventing local authorities from solving their own problems and posing their own questions (Mandeli, 2016, p. 121).

4.2. Population and Sampling Method

This research is based on 6 weeks of qualitative field research in the city centre of Jeddah. The study was conducted in a time frame from the beginning of January until mid-February 2020. For the purpose of this research, 20 respondents were included and several group activities were attended. The sampling method varied and was based on three main methods. As I had limited personal connections, I came in contact with several respondents through a

snowball sampling based important criteria such as; being an English-speaking Saudi female willing to discuss certain socio-political topics. To avoid homogenous social networks in the sample, I approached some respondents that were randomly selected when present on certain networking events. Finally, my respondents shared networking Facebook groups [16] that functioned as a site of random sampling based on the explained criteria.

4.3. In-depth Interviews and Observations

The empirical data for this study is constructed upon (informal) in-depth interviews with 20 respondents. The interviews were not structured and based on a limited topic list [17] that developed further along the course of data gathering. A topic list enables a natural conversation with spontaneous open questioning led by insertions of the respondents (Mortelmans, 2013). Since I conducted the interviews, I was able to limit nuances between respondents. Naturally, depending on the respondents and the relation of trust, the content of the interviews may vary. Due to practical difficulties, the frequency and length of interviews varies consistently, whereas some respondents were interviewed many times for multiple hours and others were limited to a single interview. To ensure a high standard of communication, all interviews were conducted in either French or English.

The table 2 in Appendix (p.70) reveals the demographic descriptions of each respondent. The population consists of a wide range of women and men living in Jeddah between the ages of 20 and 72. In total, 15 women and 5 men were included in the study. Most of the women are educated higher- and middle-class. In some situations, husbands and male friends joined the conversation leading to interesting data collection. Therefore, these interviews are included as additional information in the study. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents, no documentation or recordings were made. Hence, all the names of respondents and organisations mentioned in this dissertation are pseudonyms. In addition to in-depth interviews, the research in this dissertation includes two forms of observations. As a participatory-observer, I accompanied respondents in their social gatherings and engaged in their local activities. Upon agreement of the executives, I accompanied three social organisations. The table (3) in Appendix (p.70) describes the attended meetings and the course of their activities. The organisation names have been replaced with pseudonyms to respect the privacy of the respondents. Finally, I acted in the field as a non-participating

[16] The aforementioned Facebook Groups serve several social purposes such as; networking, trading, offering services, debating, etc. In this dissertation, a public call for respondents was announced on 'SusieOfArabia / BlueAbaya', 'Ladies in Jeddah', 'JeDdAh YOuth' and 'JLC'. These are private groups which require admission from the moderator and administrator.
[17] Enclosed in Annex: Table 5 (p.74-75)

observer. These observations mainly serve as situating background knowledge and personal observations.

5. Data Processing and Analysis

5.1. Data Processing

One of the difficulties that arises with qualitative data is the accurate processing of the presented information where the amount of observations and information exceeds the personal capacity of the researcher (Mortelmans, 2013; Roose & Meuleman, 2017). Therefore, the data processing followed three stages during the general data collection phase (Vermeiren & Zemni, 2011). At first, during the interviews and observations, keywords and citations were written in a logbook. The same day, the logbook was used to transcribe the interviews and observations and classify them based on the dates and respondents into structured reports. Due to the lack of recordings, the transcriptions were not literally coded based on the original words of the respondents but stemmed from the logbook and personal memory. Secondly, the reports were written in the form of a storytelling without any interpretation or linkage to any prior concepts, to present a distilled display of the respondent's experiences. Thereafter, a first interpretation was made through memos and the main findings were noted in order to prepare for the following day. Citations used in this thesis were noted in the logbook.

5.2. Data Analysis

In the second phase, the primary raw material was transformed into qualitative data. The nature of qualitative data collection and analysis can be described as a spiralling research approach, going back and forth between different research phases (Roose & Meuleman, 2017). Explorative qualitative research aims to provide the audience with a thick description of the studied social group or phenomenon. Ethnography refers to ways of studying, knowing and reporting about the world (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p.2). Moreover, the term also connotes a frame of mind or an intent to be open to everything unknown.

Another theory with pragmatist philosophical foundations, is the Grounded theory (GT) developed by Glaser & Strauss (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Mortelmans, 2013; Roose & Meuleman, 2017). Glaser & Strauss critiqued their colleagues based on the premise that social scientists were too often led by their defined concepts and rigid theories. The lack of analytic induction evolved to be the foundation for an empirical method that would create concepts and build theories stemming directly from the data. This method breaks large qualitative logs of data into smaller units that allow a cyclic process of con- and destruction in order to formulate more general theoretical insights (Roose & Meuleman, 2017). Though the literature assumes

GT and ethnographic data to be an unusual pair, as an analytic instrument GT can complement the process of theorizing ethnography. According to Charmaz & Mitchell (2001), ethnographic studies are problematic due to their unconnected data and unintegrated categories. GT provides researchers with the ability to compare, integrate and categorize data. More specifically, it provides a systematic approach that moves ethnographic data towards case comparison and the integrated analysis of concepts and theories.

To accommodate the analysis of this research, the online software program (NVivo) was used throughout the coding process. The data underwent three processes of coding after the data collection; initial, axial and selective coding. During the process of initial coding, data is thematically divided line-by-line through open labels that describe the content of the phrase. These labels serve as a first introduction with important concepts and categories. Subsequently, the process of axial coding integrates the open labels into meaningful concepts. Mortelmans (2013) described this phase as puzzling with codes in order to create refined concepts with relevant sub dimensions. The result enclosed a summary of all the relevant concepts and their sub dimensions in a systemic code scheme[18]. Finally, concepts are integrated into a wider theoretical frame enabling the researcher to deduct meaningful insights from the data. In this process, a case-by-case comparison was made between the respondents, reviewing their interpretation on different concepts and their sub-dimensions. Findings and conclusions for the reporting phase, are drawn from the selective analysis.

5.3. Quality of Study

5.3.1. Reliability

Reliability in social sciences can be described as the necessary precondition for valid findings and is widely contesting amongst qualitative researchers (Mortelmans, 2013). The constructivist intake of qualitative research contradicts the notion of reproducibility that is inscribed by the concept of internal and external reliability. The internal reliability encompasses two elements.

Firstly, it is assumed that different researchers would observe a similar reality by the same method of data collection (Mortelmans, 2013; Zemni & Vermeiren, 2011). Therefore, a structured process and detailed attention is necessary when processing data. Even though the interviews and the discussed topics vary, the researcher based the questions on a consistent topic list. Since the interviews were conducted by the same researcher, the questions

[18] Enclosed in Appendix: Figure 1 (p.71)

appeared systematic and neutral to bias. During the data processing, the grounded theory functioned as the systematic and standardized analysis of the data. The second element is based on the scientific access to the primary material and analyses, which will be made available upon request (with respect for the anonymity of the respondents) (Mortelmans, 2013).

In quantitative theory, the external reliability refers to replicable character of the methodology. Therefore, Mortelmans (2013) argues to review whether or not social change is indeed the consequence of genuine societal shifts. An audit trail can be described as a detailed prescription of data development that ensures the external reliability by proving the authenticity of the research and researcher. Decisions, struggles and altercations that occurred in the process of data collection are all inscribed in the memos and transcripts of the interviews. The aforementioned were categorized and analysed during the coding processes (Appendix Table 4, p.72).

5.3.2. Validity

Internal viability assesses the credibility of the research whereby the truthfulness of the research forms the starting point for this prerequisite (Mortelmans, 2013). Audit trails[19] and the depth of the analysis are excellent parameters to examine the credibility of the research. The total amount of six week spent in the field ensure the conformity and profundity of the analysis. External validity questions the generalizability with regards to alternative populations, context and theories (Mortelmans, 2013). Due to the fact that the research question in this dissertation acts upon a fairly specific context of the Saudi 2030 vision, it seems natural that not all aspects can be applied onto different contexts. Nevertheless, the amount of data and time frame ensures that a thick description can be provided to analyse difference and similarity when applied in new contexts of reform. Theoretical validity depends on the saturation of the data and providing a complete image of the social phenomenon (Vermeiren & Zemni, 2011, p.33). Whilst data collection in other regions could have yielded a completer and more divers image, it was concluded that the final interviews brought forth limited new data for the case study of Jeddah's city centre. It can be concluded that 22 interviews and 42 days in the field sufficed to establish theoretical validity.

[19] Enclosed in Appendix: Table 4 (p.72)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Resistance and Negotiations

The Vision has undoubtedly resulted in an immediate bolstering of women's positions. Though often assumed a top-down reform developed by state and external consultants, this section highlights the societal pressure for change and negotiations that emerged from societal resistance and agency, prior to the governmental reforms.

1.1. Fathers Resisting a Patriarchal System

In a stepwise manner, MBS gradually dissolved the guardianship system in 2016. The guardianship system rendered women entirely dependent on their male guardian as the hegemonic masculinity of the Saudi father or husband. The ethnographic findings have revealed a more nuanced narrative related to the static role of the guardian, disclosing the father as an enabler in the patriarchal system. Respondents used descriptions such as 'open-minded' or 'liberal' to refer to the progressive mindset of their fathers on female education, labor participation and presence in the public sphere. This enabling role is to be interpreted within the patriarchal, gender-segregated system.

The guardian alone possessed the legal power to enable or disable women. In the sample, all women, except for Yosra, were educated and legally permitted to study by their mahram. In some cases, the local universities did not include a female faculty, which led women to travel to other countries to obtain their education. Lema is now finishing her MSc through online distance learning at a British University. The permission to travel or study could be issued through an official government app by the registered mahram. Moreover, Nour stated that the abolishment of the guardianship system meant little except a reduction of administrative hassles. These findings are consistent with earlier research, confirming that women could obtain educations abroad when supported, financed and encouraged by the mahram (Alshoabi, 2018; Le Renard, 2008; Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004)

Within Saudi borders, the guardian has the authority to oppose critique from government officials. Nour was travelling with a male friend, which was legally prohibited without the supervision of the mahram. After being stopped by the police, the father was informed of her 'misconduct'. The father lied and explained that the man in question was an entrusted family friend. Aisha, Neha and Aliyah have experienced similar encounters with the Mutaween or the

government apparatus. In sum, these stories highlight the essential role of the enabling legal guardian in granting education, social mobility and male-female networks.

International influences, inter-ethnic marriages and education abroad have been essential factors in indirectly determining women's positions. Specifically, 12 of out 15 female respondents had resided abroad for longer periods of times (e.g. education) or had (a) parent(s) whom worked or studied internationally or possessed a different nationality. Respondents claim that Jeddah and its inhabitants are influenced by the presence of international trade and foreign labor (esp. from other Arab countries). According to these respondents, Jeddah is an "*experimental lab with open-minded citizens*". In her ethnographic study, Altorki (1977) mentions the influence of globalisation and travel in the family unit, long before the modernisation project. The middle-aged respondents excessively spoke off the construction of the Saudi society, as it is known in international media today. They remembered times where Wahhabism or institutionalized patriarchy was not as visible or dominant.

"On his deathbed my father told me not to worry.
This is not normal and everything that is not normal will not last, he said".
(Aliyah, Saudi, 30).

On the contrary, Samira, Amani, Yosra and Emna elaborated on the limitations of the guardianship system. In all four cases, this concerned the dependence on the husband. In situations of divorce, domestic violence or passing of the guardian, women were subjected to the goodwill of the ex-husband or relatives to travel, work or own property, rendering women socially and financially dependent. In some situations, the husband would disapprove of certain behaviour and prohibit women from engaging in gender mixing, determine religious dress, social life and productive labor. Naturally, the gender segregation system and the driving ban limited the opportunities for Saudi women to work. Two respondents reported domestic abuse and thus feared to act against or leave their husbands. Only with the support of the imam and two witnesses could the divorce be approved and socially accepted.

"Sometimes, my life has been depended on the good-will of men".
(Yosra, Saudi-American, 72)
"When women lose or leave a man, life becomes so much
more difficult ".
(Amani, Saudi, 49)

1.2. Women Pre-MBS

1.2.1. Going Underground

Disregarding the legal guardianship and disadvantage of women in the nuclear family, women had developed coping mechanisms to increase their presence in the decision-making processes. Naturally, the elder women in the sample, whom vividly experienced the guardianship system, were able to elaborate on the various fields where women could exercise power. For instance, respondents stated that a select group of young women and men were questioning the strict social norms and segregation systems. In certain private settings, 'underground gatherings' took place where (unmarried) men and women were organizing dinner parties and social activities amongst friends. Even though the Mutaween had the authority to invade the privacy of the home, youngsters would meet in remote places (e.g. a smaller village, a family basement, the desert) with an entrusted group.

The 35-year old Saudi entrepreneur, Leila, initiated her mixed-gender social gathering group years before the public gender segregation was lifted in 2019. In the city centre, a portion of the young population was no longer opposed to the idea of gender-mixing resulting in the confidence to organize discussion groups and activities amongst her male and female friends. Nowadays, the weekly gatherings have evolved into a structured organization with Saudi speakers and a mixed-gender speed-dating session. Iman, a 30-year old architect, aspired to launch her own company with a mixed-gender working environment, even with the disapproval of her parents. She received help from female friends whom provided her with a co-working space outside of the home. After countless of negotiations with her parents and years of passing, Iman's parents have become her biggest supporters.

1.2.2. Mothers as Guardians

> *" It's not like all women were weak before MBS came around. (…) "Women are forced to be witty, smart and creative in patriarchal societies (…). This is not actual freedom but more like relative power in the family hierarchy".*
> *(Yosra, Saudi American, 72)*

The abovementioned citation demonstrates the ability of women to take their place in the family unit. Even in conservative families, (grand)mothers controlled the social networks within the family structure. As a 72-year old Saudi, Yosra explains that she used to supervise and handle the financial means of the family before the passing of her husband. Altorki (1977) made similar conclusions distinguishing female power within familial and social networks. Moreover,

mothers often arranged the marriages in their social network, securing their social and financial status. These creative coping mechanisms often rendered women indispensable within their own family hierarchy. Consequently, women additionally have the ability to make decisions concerning their own social mobility, and those of their kin. Emna mediated between her husband and daughter concerning the choice of education and modest dress code by allowing her daughter to study under supervision of family in France.

Neha, a 30-year old Lebanese Saudi, claims Saudi women enable and enforce social norms. Women have appropriated the role of cultural bearers and guardians of social values (Kandiyoti, 1991). She explained that social control is ensured through the fear of societal rejection and shame. During family gatherings, women would gossip in the kitchen and discuss relatives defiant of the social norms. Female social control transcends the privacy of the home. Neha continues by stating that: *"women judge you more than men, especially in conservative regions"*, based on your dress, code of conduct and expressions in the everyday street setting. In another study, Guta & Karolak (2015) found that some Saudi women were critical towards working or liberal Saudi's whom chose their career over their wifely duties. Other respondents confirmed that women feel more comfortable expressing their concerns and critique towards other women in the public sphere.

Moreover, most of the respondents refer to the collective role of the parents, in being either considered progressive or more conservative. Preferred education and appropriate fields varied significantly depending on the gender segregation system and social norms. Teaching, nursing or care-work are considered to be female jobs that respect gender segregated boundaries. Respondents whom aspired to acquire male-dominated skills and professions (such as engineering, architecture, management) often faced critique or did not receive permission from their parents to obtain the degree. Hence, in some situations parents collectively decided on appropriate conduct, the approval of a spouse, education, labor participation and religious dress. In 2011, Le Renard researched femininity and appropriate dress in the workspace. Women with restrictive parents often disguised their activities in order to avoid work-related exclusion or familial rejection. Parents often disagreed with mixed gender working spaces and 'liberal' veiling, hereby women were forced to be creative and carefully depict shared information and manner of veiling between urban spaces.

1.3. The End of the Mutaween

The Mutaween gained excessive power in the 80's and 90's and ensured societal order based on the religious standards of the ulama and Wahhabi teachings (Doumato, 1992). Religion and

pious behaviour became a mechanism to maintain social control through the surveillance state. Aliyah, a 30-year old business owner, described the workings of the Mutaween. In addition to physical punishments, the Mutaween exerted religious authority through social control and public shaming. The Mutaween would call on misconduct in public and make a scene to dishonour defiant Saudi's. Another technique was to contact the legal guardian and require an appropriate punishment. According to Aliyah, the Mutaween lost credibility around 2015 due to various scandals, the upcoming presence of social media, international influences and the (re)negotiation of social norms by the younger population, enabled by their guardians. Aliyah stopped wearing an abaya in 2015, after living in London with her Lebanese husband. As many other respondents, she publicly defended her decision towards strangers and family based on a reinterpretation of the Qur'an, claiming that it does not refer to the necessity of veiling.

"*On the day of judgment, I stand before Allah*
so, nobody should worry if I go to heaven or not."
(Aliyah, Saudi, 30)

A second technique was to disregard, ignore or debate the Mutaween in the public sphere. In the citation below, Aisha left locks of hair out of the back of her hijab since the styles varied, and women were experimenting with the hijab as a fashionable trend. She explained that she simply did not care about the opinion of the Mutaween, due to their loss of power and credibility in the last decade. Finally, the legal guardians had the possibility to support their daughter's behaviour when scolded. It can be concluded that the Mutaween was losing ground long before MBS removed them from the quotidian street setting. Women supported by their community and family, exercised choice to discuss religious norms and the institutionalized religious authority.

"I hated them so much, I hated them! I was walking in the mall with my hair sticking out of my hijab. They screamed at me, cover your head! I was laughing, I told them my head is covered (…) can't you see?".
(Aisha, Saudi, 24)

2. The Vision

2.1. Preservation of Politics

Discussing politics in Saudi Arabia is a difficult undertaking where any critique on the Al Saud dynasty is essentially prohibited. Notwithstanding, this study shall discuss certain aspects of

the contemporary political reality of respondents whom agreed to voice their opinions. The modernisation project leaves the political powers of the Saud-family untouched as absolute rulers, excluding a political transformation. Amal, a 24-year old Saudi nurse, described the royal family as an inherent aspect of the Saudi state and creators of the nation.

In the contemporary opinion, MBS and his father King Salman, are held responsible for the progressive measures. MBS is praised and portrayed as a charismatic and legitimate moderniser, representing the youth of Saudi Arabia. The majority of the respondents described feelings of sincere gratitude for the cultural and social transformation. Saudi women felt thankful for the state-led initiatives to dissolve patriarchal systems and for granting women an equivalent social status and legal position, next to their male counterparts. This regarding to the right to travel, study, work, drive, partake in social life and enjoy the newly established domestic cultural activities. According to Aliyah, the right to drive was an essential prerequisite to ensure financial stability through female entrepreneurship and independent mobility. The lifting of the driving ban in 2017, set practices of female empowerment in motion.

> *"The ladies love him. Sometimes they even scream his name on concerts and big events like Jeddah Seasons".*
> (Ibrahim, Saudi, 32)

Due to the political sensitivity, some respondents refrained from voicing their opinions. These respondents stated that any critique can be considered slander towards the royal family and the King himself. In general, almost half of the female respondents referred to the elaborate state security apparatus, who screen the population for defiant and dissident attitudes. Lema explained that topics as such can only be discussed within the home. When Rabeb was conducting her research on harassment in the Saudi society, she claimed to be frightened to openly discuss and question social taboos. According to Le Renard (2014), Saudi Arabia can be characterized as a surveillance state since the beginning of the state formation. The surveillance state has targeted 'conservative' citizens, government opposition and activists since 9/11, due to the international pressure to launch an anti-terrorist crack-down.

> *"Nobody talks about the feminist round up that MBS had organized in 2016"*
> *(Neha, Saudi Lebanese, 30)*

Neha, Rabeb and Emna referred to the feminist round-up and interpreted it as a clear warning that women could do anything they pleased if it was inherently apolitical and respective

towards Islam. Nevertheless, the internet and especially social media apps such as Twitter and Snapchat provide a safe and anonymous space where women could out their critique and considerations under a fake profile and a VPN connection. Emna claimed that she always used the VPN connection on her mobile phone to ensure that the government would not retrieve access to her identity or personal conversations.

The third group struggled to take a specific position towards MBS. Despite feeling grateful for the progressive change, certain aspects of the vision were considered problematic. Critique came from two corners. Firstly, respondents with inter-ethnic parents opposed human rights violations. Secondly, an intergenerational conflict was noticeable: older respondents and parents of younger respondents, were opposed to the induced socio-cultural transformation, since it could destroy the Saudi social structure. Traditional Islamic values and norms are being replaced by Western-like festivals, music and cultural activities. Though economic prosperity and social mobility are desirable, most of the older respondents believe the cultural transformation is taken too far.

2.2. Saudization & Economic Liberalization

The rentier contract as maintained by the Saudi state, has become impossible to sustain (Eum, 2019; Hvidt, 2018). According to 7 of 20 respondents, Saudi Arabia is built upon an expatriate infrastructure and industries, since the instalment of Aramco. As reported by Aisha and Emna, the main driver of the Saudi 2030 vision entails the economic transformation towards a knowledge-based economy to diversify from the oil-industry through the inclusion of the Saudi (female) workforce and the reduction of foreign labour. The respondents describe this process as Saudization. This concept must be understood within a nationalistic economic project that is based on Saudi citizenship, that can only be passed on through a Saudi father. In essence, it prioritizes Saudi women and forces (inter)national companies to include Saudi nationals.

The abolishment of religious fatwas and laws on women, have been essential in ensuring the economic productivity of women as mutual necessary prerequisites. Most of the women in the sample were actively participating in the Saudi economy through entrepreneurship, wage labor or trade in women-only spaces (except for Lema, Emna and Rabna). According to Aisha and Khalid, it is easier to get a job as a woman in certain fields such as marketing, communications and public relations. The lift of the driving ban has enabled female entrepreneurs to successfully run their own business. Furthermore, legal rights and qualitative citizenship has ensured the possibility to possess financial capital as well as property and entitlements. Emna,

a 58-year old housewife explains the sense of pride, that is largely visible amongst the women in the sample.

> *"Saudi's have finally embraced their stance in the labour market. They are finally taking up their role in creating their own country".*
> (Emna, 58, Saudi)

Moreover, being a successful, educated and undertaking Saudi female underpins the newly established identity. Young men and women express their goals, ambitions and achievements through social media, hereby stimulating their personal network to engage in the project of country-building. Seven of the youngest Jeddawi's explained the importance of networking events, workshops and short-term educations to establish an entrepreneurial network, obtain hard/soft skills and express their involvement in the new societal order. Educational background and career-making have become salient in Saudi identities.

> *"Even Uber or Kareem drivers have to be Saudi. (…). But we don't want to do all of these low-waged jobs. (…) Educational status is important for us. "*
> (Neha, 30, Saudi Lebanese)

The process of Saudization is based on exclusive citizenship which is retrieved through the nationality of the father. According to Nour and Ayla, it is inherently impossible to become a Saudi citizen without the aforementioned criteria. Nour and Ayla are 4th generation immigrants as their ancestors moved to Jeddah from Yemen around the period of the formation of the Saudi state. Nonetheless, neither of them has ever set foot on Yemeni soil, speak the local dialect or have any direct ties to their so-called homeland. The lack of citizenship excludes them from the current perks and requires them to pay extra taxes, fund their own education, register a sponsor and work six days per week. All in all, the classification of a Saudi national is a rigid concept and excludes those that identify as a Saudi but do not possess the required lineage.

2.3. Women's Rights

This section shall elaborate on the women's rights, enabling the Saudi 2030 vision. Women's rights are often assumed to be a Western concept, where the influences of liberalist thoughts cannot be overlooked. Notwithstanding, this section shall probe to de-essentialize women's rights by including internalized predefined conceptual assumptions and the Saudi completion of women's rights, based on the ethnographic data.

2.3.1. Undoing Patriarchal institutions

Families and Singles

Gender segregation was enforced in all fragments of the Saudi society, until recent years. Restaurants, malls and mosques differentiated 'singles' and 'families' meaning that unmarried men and women were unable to meet. This resulted in a dependence on the family for their choice of spouse or male-female friendships. Nonetheless, young Jeddawi's engaged in various coping mechanisms to meet, either through underground activities or online (often anonymous) platforms. Rabeb claimed that gender roles were based on the premise of domesticated women, hence excluding them from the public sphere as the family often prohibited male-female friendships. As a school principal, Amani states that the family has the final word when it comes to segregation, where parents can decide to prohibit their children from engaging in mixed school activities. In other cases, parents enabled and encouraged these encounters or young women debated with their parents to persuade them into approval.

> *"When I was younger, there was nothing to do. I was not allowed to have male friends. The mentality was based on the idea that 'the girl has to be inside the home' ".*
>
> (Rabeb, 23, Saudi)

Nowadays, the familiar signs are fading, and new infrastructures are no longer accommodating gender segregation. In the urban centre of Jeddah, men and women are now able to dine, shop, book hotels and engage in the domestic tourism as unmarried couples or friends. As Ayla has described it: "*Now girl and boy friends can meet in the café, khalas no problem*". The attitude towards mixed-gender depends on various factors such as the family, education and experience with mixed-gender societies. When Yasmin left her gender segregated university and entered the labour market, she explained that it was difficult for her to interact with the opposite sex since her male interactions were based on internal family relations. To paraphrase her words, she claimed that male-female relations took time to evolve and friendships can only exist if the involved parties share the same ideology and gender norms.

Furthermore, respondents referred to the dangers of gender mixing and the enthusiastic socio-cultural reforms. The catastrophe of the MDL-beast festival, an international music festival in Riyadh hosting international DJ's and dancers, was the example used by Nour and Rabeb to elaborate on the downsides of the mixed-gender policy. According to Rabeb, national media kept quiet on the disastrous amount of sexual abuse or harassment complaints, consequently Saudi youngsters turned to Twitter with statements and hash tags. Nour and Rabeb both stated

that Saudi was not ready for these types of events claiming that "*Saudi men are not used to this*" and are "*going crazy*". Therefore, though gender mixing is applauded, opinions on the how and the why vary accordingly. In situations where women consider themselves vulnerable for example in gyms, mosques and crowded open spaces, a segment of the sample prefers women-only spaces or the company of an entrusted male. When activities require the removal of the hijab, niqab or abaya, women prefer to engage in gender-segregated spaces. According to van Geel (2016), gender segregation cannot be considered as traditionalism. Rather, it is an inherent aspect of the national modernity, encompassing the religious boundaries and enables women to commit to certain activities which would exclude them otherwise.

Mahram System

Through the process of Saudization, Saudi women have been widely encouraged to launch a business or participate in the economy. According to Saleh, Raghav and Hassan, women are prioritized oven Saudi men in the hiring process. Iman, Leila, Aliyah and Samira are female entrepreneurs in various businesses in the city centre of Jeddah. The abolishing of the mahram system is an essential condition to improve women's financial capital and mobility. Moreover, all the women in the sample agreed that their entrance into the labour market, acquired civil rights and freedom of movement, has been long overdue and are now indispensable. Regardless of the mahram's ability to enable women pre-MBS, the freedoms granted by the government render women's legal and civil position as equivalent to their male counterparts.

International media and various academic scholars have used the driving ban as the paragon to exhibit and display the lack of Saudi women's rights (Cerioli, 2019). Nonetheless, the presented data has nuanced the exaggerated devotion towards the 'right to drive'. The majority of the samples agree that the right to drive is essential, motivated by gender equality. The complete lack of public infrastructure and transport makes the commute by car the only possible means of transportation. Women have the possibility to either drive by themselves, hire a personal driver or use the taxi services of Kareem and Uber. Aliyah, Amani and Amal were the only women in the sample who drove by themselves. The entrepreneurs and women with jobs requiring them to be flexible viewed it as essential to uplift their career. Due to the hectic and dangerous traffic, other women were reluctant to drive as they feared for their safety and felt more at ease being driven. These findings contradict corporate Western media and the description of Cerioli (2019), as the right to drive to be the epitome of the gendered regime. Following van Geel (2016), these findings reveal that more attention is given towards the material modernity (e.g. education, work, financial independence). Finally, Aisha and Emna

highlighted the lack of governmental provisions and resources to provide Saudi women with the possibility to obtain a license.

"Not being able to drive is like not having legs. (…) Alhamdulillah [Thanks to Allah], then came MBS. He supports women into death."
(Aliyah, Saudi, 30, Married, Entrepreneur).

The abolishment of the mahram system is crucial to establish the freedom of (inter)national movement without accountability towards the government or mahram. The international influences, education and parents' upbringing rendered the upkeep of the patriarchal system impossible. Moreover, social media and the technological revolution has introduced Saudi women into the (anonymous) societal debate, according to Yasmin. In addition, civil rights (including the right to divorce, marry and issue children) have established Saudi women as independent and wholesome citizens. Nonetheless, these women's rights cannot be generalized to the entire female Saudi population. The underlying citation explains the debate in Saudi Arabia between privileged and excluded women when considering class and family surroundings.

"Women in Saudi are in their prime now. You can basically do anything you want". (Amani, 49, Saudi)
Yosra interfered and corrected Amani stating that a widowed woman without financial capital does not receive governmental aid and does not possess the same rights or equality.
(Personal notes).

2.3.2. The Abaya and the Veil

In Western corporate media and through European identity politics, the subordinate character of Muslim women is physically represented through the veil (Scott, 2009). Moreover, the veil is often used as an ethical justification to liberate women from patriarchal and oppressive influences. Islamic feminism has demonstrated the various functionalist interpretations of the veil; being an expression of self, a political and emancipatory statement or display of modesty (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Mahmood 2001). According to Nour, MBS and religious clerics have officially uplifted the dress code for foreign women and have stated that modest dress is now the norm. Women have probed to dissolve the Western view on the religious attire. Just as any line of fashion, the abaya and hijab follow specific trends and looks, based on the influence

of Saudi fashion industry and influential designers. Women in the sample experimented with abayas and adjusted it on occasion or style. To wear a black, sparkly, open or closed abaya, is based on personal choice and does not necessarily reflect ideological or conservative motivations.

> *"The first one was black, long and covered everything. Then the next month it was too long because it was trendy to show the ankles. Now everyone wears it open, like a colourful cardigan." (Lema, 24, Saudi-Pakistan)*

For some, the abaya appears to be cultural and a question of habit. Yasmin demonstrated the cultural aspect of the abaya by comparing it to "my situation". She and I were strolling in the old-city, Balad. She explained that she only wears the abaya and hijab in Saudi: *"You wear it <abaya> not because you are Muslim or trying to look Saudi, but just because it is custom here. So when I travel, I take it off just to adapt".* All of the women in the sample wore an abaya when exiting the home. According to Le Renard (2011) these adoptive tactics are situational, whereas (un)veiling varies depending on the perceived expectations in an urban setting. Moreover, it was often said that they enjoyed styling it or didn't want to stand out in the crowd. Aliyah, stopped wearing the abaya in 2015. She covers modestly with long jackets, trench coats and cardigans. In essence, the women in the sample highlighted the importance of modest and non-revealing dress, as a way of respecting social norms. Only one respondent, Emna, outlined being obliged by her husband to wear the simple black abaya, as a non-negotiable condition to leave the house.

A similar conclusion cannot be made for the choice to wear a hijab. The niqab was not present in the sample altogether. Firstly, 7 women out of 20 described individual and religious motives to cover the head. The hijab was then described as an inherent part of the self, as an important pillar underlining the religious identity. Colourful, patterned and enriched with local gems, the hijab represents modesty and piety as a salient self. Hence, women wearing the hijab explained that it was based on self-love and revealing their personal beauty is preserved for those considered worthy. In addition to a preserved loyalty, the hijab becomes relevant within gender relations. Emna was obliged by her husband to wear the black abaya. Since the meeting was conducted in the privacy of her home, she introduced herself without hijab since the gender relations do not apply to female interactions.

"When I was studying in Germany, they would ask me why I didn't take it off. This is Nour. This is me; you know? It is my body and it is not for everybody".
(Nour, 27, Yemeni)

The second group consists of two respondents whom considered the hijab to be a collective and cultural habit. For these respondents, the hijab does not represent their religious dedication or affiliation, rather the assimilation to social norms. Leaving Saudi soil meant to discard the hijab. The final group consists of six women whom considered the hijab to be an invented indicator of religiousness. All of the respondents referred to specific readings of the Qur'an or Islamic practices to elaborate on the freedom of women to choose how, when and why they should veil. These women highlight the politicization of the hijab in the (inter)national discourse to exert control on the female population. For these women, forcing women to wear the hijab is part of a patriarchal oppressive state. However, this does not entail that the women in the sample are opposed towards religious motivations for covering. All things considered, the motivations to cover, when and why are interpersonal motivations that stem from a religious or gendered identity. Finally, in some situations, women used the abaya and the niqab to be unrecognizable in situations which would provoke gossip and stigma.

"Never in the Kuran does it say that one should cover their face. When we go to Mecca, it's not even allowed to cover your face. These rules are based on politics and not on religion."
(Aliyah, 30, Saudi)
"Saudi and the rest of the world, have made the hijab religious. But me, as a Muslim, I do not feel obligated to wear it. When I'm travelling, I'll remove it and I like to style myself."
(Amani, 49, Saudi)

2.3.3. Social Control of the Excluded

In 2017, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Interior released an app called 'Kollona Amn', literally translating into "*everybody is the government*" (Government and Tech: Kollona Amn app registers half million reports, 2017). The app enables Saudi citizens to report people to the police through images, voice notes or videos. In the sample, 9 out of 15 female respondents had stated that they used the app. When being verbally or physically assaulted by a man or woman, a photo of the license plate would be enough evidence for the police to fine the perpetrators. Most of the women regard it as a means of protection from the conservative

population that would comment or insult their new dress and lifestyle. According to Rabeb, verbal and physical harassment towards women can lead up to jail sentences and fines amounting to 80 000 Saudi Arabian Riyal. Yasmin explained that women use the material solely to report them to the police and publishing them on social media is forbidden since it places Saudi Arabia under a negative light.

The emphasized femininity has transformed the pious and domesticated Saudi women into the hard working, educated, well-travelled and nationalistic moderate Muslim. The newly established (urban) Saudi woman has become the norm. The surveillance state has forced the population to make women visible and exhibits the successful and liberated Saudi women as national examples (Le Renard, 2014). According to Eric, the population was responsible for snitching deviant Saudi's to the Mutaween. In the contemporary society, the seemingly conservative citizens, commenting or publicly criticizing the state policy are now reported through an app to the state police. The aforementioned transformations and the complete content of these findings only apply to the high- and middle-class Saudi's in urban hotspots such as Jeddah or Riyadh. In sum, conservative and pious women who are excluded of the Saudi 2030 vision, are sociably divided from their progressive and elitist counterparts through a digitalized method of social control.

"The transformation had not yet reached these regions, girls there are still property".
(Rabeb, 23, Saudi)

2.4. Socio-Cultural Transformations

The Jeddawi's have witnessed a complete turnaround of the Saudi society in the last five years. Restaurants have been opening by the dozen, new infrastructures for leisure activities are becoming important markers of the cities, cultural activities and young talents are unfolding, thus entirely transforming the current atmosphere of the city. Ranging from barista's workshops, to festivals that last over 42 days (Jeddah Seasons) and art exhibitions, the cultural transformation has increased job opportunities and has maximized domestic household spending. Especially the young respondents (whom were approximately my age), invited me to join them in touristic activities, discover new restaurants and cafés and urged me to rediscover Saudi Arabia. During group activities (hiking, guided tour, etc), the members of Creative Evenings documented and shared the activities on social media, to promote and urge Saudi nationals and international tourists to discover Saudi Arabia. As described by 27-year old Khalid, the Vision brings forth the ability to redefine Saudi culture, heritage and Bedouin

tradition, as a significant part of Arab culture and history. Furthermore, it established and rebrands Saudi Arabia as a touristic destination.

> *"From the beginning (…) of the Saudi State, these Salafi religious people made all these rules that have nothing to do with Islam. Music, activities and theatre were forbidden. Now we have all these young people showing their talents and showing our beautiful Arabic culture."*
> *(Khalid, 27, Saudi)*

Nevertheless, cultural transformations are inextricably aligned with social transformations. However, the success of cultural transformation requires an adjustment in collective mentality. The top-bottom transformations are not without concern, where Jeddawi's find themselves in contradictory positions, moving forward and looking backward. Firstly, the data reveals an undeniable generational gap that underlines different values, positions and inherently divides the youth from elders as separate, counteracting societal fractions. Older respondents in the sample such as Emna, Yosra and Amani have described the transformation as completely disruptive and excessively rapid. Moreover, younger respondents elaborate on the struggles of their grand(parents) as they adjust to the new societal order. The older generation fears a loss of cultural authenticity, social norms and tradition as collective values are seemingly changing. The Vision has transformed the foundations, underlying the Saudi society including the existent social norms and familial structures.

> *"Saudi could never become a second Dubai, it's the birthplace of the holy mosque. Saudi is losing tradition and moral values. (…) Back in the day, souk keepers could leave out their gold when going to the mosque, now men on scooters grab purses from women. (…) It's like we want to catch up with the West in a super speed. "*
> *(Emna, 58, Saudi)*

Secondly, a select group of respondents has highlighted the problematic policy of prioritizing leisure infrastructures and investment possibilities over national welfare. In their opinions, equal access to education, health care, meaningful job creations, housing and women's rights for those outside of Jeddah and Riyadh, should be prioritized over (inter)national tourism and leisure activities.

My mom does not like all the parties, like the Jeddah festival. For 40 days, everyday there are fireworks and concerts. (…) She always asks what prosperity it will bring to the nation? They should make sure that we can drive instead."
(Aisha, Saudi, 24)

Finally, determining boundaries between cultural authenticity and modernisation has resulted into societal debate and internal conflicts. Saudi Arabia is considered the centre point for Islam, which forms a salient part of any Saudi identity. Therefore, Islamic values and teachings are embedded into all aspects of social life. The MDL-beast festival, had invited dancers and tourists from across the world, often dressed in revealing clothing inviting some Saudi girls to dress similarly. Nour witnessed promiscuous behaviours, revealing clothing and romantic male-female relations (kissing, hugging, close dancing). It appears the social-cultural transformations are encouraged as long as they respect requirements of; modest dress, public chastity, appropriate male-female relations and a general respect towards custom, tradition and especially religion.

"I saw people kissing and hugging. Girls were wearing revealing clothing. Why is this necessary? It is not respecting our religion and Saudi laws".
(Nour, 27, Yemeni)

3. Family and Gender

In Saudi Arabia, women have been entrusted with the task to raise and socialize future generations, as the cornerstone of the family and Saudi society (Doumato, 2009). Naturally, modernist reform and socio-economic consequences, impact the familial relations and gender norms.

3.1. Daughters of Change

As mentioned earlier, parents have had the ability to enable women long before the modernist reforms and liberalizations. Respondents described the engagement of their families as unique, lucky and open-minded. In the past, it was common for women to remain in the parental home until a suitable spouse was selected by the mother. 24-year old Lema and 72-year old Yosra were the only respondents with arranged marriages. Nine out of fifteen respondent moved out of their parental homes to live alone either for their work or education. This reinforces female independence and enables freedom of choice regarding career paths, friends and spouses. Hence, most of the respondents describe a positive and essential relationship with their families, as an important marker of their personal identities.

Nonetheless, the rapid transformations are reflected in contradictory debates, provoking family struggles on gender norms, taboos and familial expectations. Firstly, parents and in-laws engage in the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. This does not mean that parents fundamentally oppose the progressive stance on women's rights, it concerns a traditional interpretation of male-female relations, dress and priorities. More specifically, this includes being sceptical towards gender mixing and their friendly relations. Neha's mother is of the opinion that female incomes are subsidiary and that women should care for the children and raise them accordingly. Rabeb's mother tends to refer to the mahram system as an enabling prospect. Though mobility is encouraged, gender norms and expectations differ depending on the generation.

" 'Once you are married, you can travel anywhere, my mother said'. I had to explain to her that I didn't need a husband to travel."
(Rabeb, 23, Saudi)

Secondly, parents pass on moral values and traditions regarding to the religious expectations. As a precondition for most of the respondents, the parents required the spouse of choosing to be a Muslim, since the father determines the religion of the children. Thus, women who chose to adhere to modern dress or behaviours have received critique from the family. Social norms are reinforced through the establishment of taboos and spread of gossip that ensure shame on the entire family when women conduct themselves inappropriately (Guta & Karolak, 2015). Therefore, women deliberately conceal their involvements in perceived inappropriate behaviours, fearing social rejection. In some situations, women would use the niqab to cover their faces to ensure that they are unrecognizable or create separate social media accounts (for friends and families).

"We're not oppressed by religion, but by social norms. I would never tell them about my drinking or smoking. It would bring shame on my family here and in Lebanon. It's an Arab family thing, I guess … What would they think of our family if you did this or went out like that (…)".
(Neha, 30, Saudi Lebanese)

3.2. Relationships and Dating

The uplifting of the gender segregation system has ensured male-female encounters in the workspace, personal environment, in the university and the majority of the public sphere.

Therefore, the choice of spouse for young women is often one of their own making, through the ability to meet males with whom they are not related. In addition, the internet has created a safe space to be in contact with men without risking being seen together in public. Social media apps such as Snapchat, are widely used communication tools that guarantee privacy and anonymity of the conversation content and involved parties. In addition, social media apps transgress borders, giving Saudi women access to men from different countries. It provides women with the opportunity to engage in relations which are not approved or known by the immediate family. In the sample, one third of the respondents were/are committed in a steady relationship and effectively concealed their dating-life from family and friends. Motivations for not telling the family varied significantly but stemmed from an overall fear of social rejection or being out casted by relatives. Therefore, the relation would be made public when serious enough to announce an engagement.

Aisha, 24 year-old Saudi, has a boyfriend in Qatar for the last couple of years. The embargo installed in Qatar renders it impossible for them to meet in either of their home countries. Therefore, thrice a year, Aisha lies to her mother about travelling with friends to Dubai to be able to meet him. They're waiting for a political relaxation to announce their engagement to both their families. (Personal notes, paraphrasing Aisha)

Two of the respondents in the sample are engaged. Nour is engaged to a Saudi national and Rabeb to an Egyptian artist whom she met at their university. The engagement was a manner of confirming the exclusivity of the relationship and making it knowledgeable in their networks. Nour had been engaged for two years and she had no ambition of getting married in the first few years. The engagement was prolonged for Nour to complete her education and start her career. Rabeb had been engaged for the last year and planned on working in Riyadh before marrying and moving to Cairo. In the case of Amani's daughter, engaging an Arab-American served to flee from her father's expectations and establish a career as medical professional in the United States. Alwedinani (2017) suggested that Saudi women are faced with a family-education conflict and thus postpone their marriages to enhance their personal development. Since single women and spinsterhood are perceived negatively, completing the role of motherhood as a married woman is desirable in Saudi Arabia. By partaking in a higher education and postponing marriage, women actively resist patriarchy and diminish the husband's influence on their education.

"When my friend got married, she changed completely. She was fully covered and wasn't as outgoing as she used to be."
(Neha, 30, Saudi-Lebanese)

The aforementioned coping mechanisms are based on the idea that marriage and the newly established gender roles are inherently incompatible. More so, it is assumed that marriage with Saudi men changes or nullifies the obtained women's rights and possibilities. Yasmin, and Salma had no intention of getting married, fearing to lose their independence or careers. As Yasmin describes it: "Some *Saudi men pretend to be open-minded or liberal but as soon as you would date or get married, that would all change".* Based on the premise that Saudi men are more patriarchal or more conservative towards gender roles, these Saudi women opted to date, engage or marry Muslims from other countries. In the sample 8 of the 15 women were either dating, engaged or married to a non-Saudi, Arab Muslim. Aliyah and Neha believed that other Arab men were more open-minded and moderate towards working women, whilst having relatable backgrounds, religions, similar languages and a shared Arab identification. In contrast, Emna and Lema are married to Saudi nationals and confirmed the restrictions and difficulties that arose after marriage with regards to working and gender mixing.

> *"Saudi men can do whatever they want. They do not help their wives with chores or the children and come home when they please (…). Saudi men try to control women after marriage. They control who you are meeting and when you will get home. I could never call my Saudi husband and ask him where he is."*
> *(Aliyah, 30, Saudi).*

4. Negotiating Identities

Social identity theory assumes the layering of salient identities, constructing individual entities and group collectivisms (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Since social identities are created in and through social networks, a change in social context reorganizes and prioritizes salient selves where the social base and support must be renegotiated. This section shall demonstrate the intertwinement, reorganization and opposition of the Saudi women's social identities.

4.1. National Identities and Globalized Discourse

The Hazm nationality refers to the nationalistic identity that is supposed to be embedded within the Saudi 2030 vision (Cerioli, 2019). The prescribed Hazm womanhood can be considered

as the dominant state-led emphasized femininity in which the hard working, educated and enabled Saudi woman blossoms under King Salman and MBS. However, the reality in this study provides a more nuanced view within this all-encompassing Hazm identity. The process of economic Saudization and social mobility it inspires, has created a nationalistic self among the young females in the sample who are actively partaking and rebuilding their country. Nonetheless, the Saudi 2030 vision represents only a fraction of the population in Saudi Arabia. The vision excludes women lacking citizenship such as Nour and Amal, rural and lower-class women as well as the more conservative or traditional Saudi's. Opposition towards the Saudi 2030 vision, newly established gender norms and socio-cultural transformations have been described as a 'stupid' or 'backwards' by various respondents.

"There, I am the 'weird one'. People still wear the niqab
and sometimes follow me and harass me for wearing a pink abaya"
(Rabeb, 23, Saudi)

However, narratives such as 'Saudi traditions' and 'national culture', highlighting the prominence of a collective national identity, are used to define boundaries for the socio-cultural transformation. International music festivals, events and other touristic activities should respect and honour local customs and codes of conduct. To distinguish Western from Saudi values, respondents fall back on the collective identity of the entire Kingdom to establish boundaries. In addition, some respondents deem the urban identity as a Jeddawi citizen as salient, representing the most innovative, open-minded, yet culturally authentic city in Saudi Arabia. Respondents with an Arab spouse or parent often distinguish the national identity from an Arab identity, sharing a collective geopolitical history, cultural background and language. Children from inter-ethnic parents often feel torn with regards to their salient national or cultural identity. Finally, the question of citizenship, which is hard to obtain, excludes Bedouin and Yemeni Saudi's whom have lived on Saudi soil for generations.

These findings contradict the presupposed influence of the Hazm identity as described by Eum (2019) & Cerioli (2019). The social cohesion of Saudi Arabia has been challenged as the nationalistic reform represents only the high and middle-class, educated, literate and urban men and women of Saudi Arabia. Though the top-down femininity has impacted women, negotiations and agency determines the identification of Saudi's, depending on their personal experiences and situations. Nationalism has materialized the reform – through Saudization and women's inclusion – but does not include a decrease of the relevance of religious identities, ethnic identities or familial networks.

Western discourse has undoubtedly shaped the course of this dissertation. The prominence of the newly established Saudi national identity becomes even more relevant when interpreted in relation to Western discourse and thought. In one of the first minutes of my introduction with Neha, she sarcastically stated: *"So you must've thought that we're still oppressed?".* Therefore, respondents often assumed bias or stereotypes based on my Western position. In general, two significant justifications were made to counter the perceived negative reputation of Saudi Arabia. Firstly, comparisons were made to other authoritarian dogmatic regimes, especially Afghanistan and Iran. Moreover, descriptions were given on the possibilities for women, stories on sexual abuse and human rights violations in those countries. Nour brought Saudi into perspective through the following statement: "*we're not like Afghanistan*".

Secondly, narratives were used to deconstruct negative imagery of Islam on a global scale. Both Emna and Aliyah specifically referred to the women of Daesh and how Western media unifies a proportionally small fraction of extreme Islam, representing the wider scope of Muslims. Aliyah elaborated on the influence of Western media: *"If I lived in the West, I would hate Muslims too".* Emna explained that: *"Islam is about unity and humanity".* Respondents often gave elaborate explanations to justify their religious identities and compared similar stories from the Qur'an to the Bible (assuming I identified as a Christian). Contradictory enough, a similar binary narrative is used to describe those in favour of Wahhabis and conservative teachings, where the devalued femininities are portrayed within a framework of otherness.

> *"It's so typical for Saudi women to be represented as repressed, fully covered women. They have no idea what is going on in the Kingdom right now".*
> *(Amani, 49, Saudi)*

The most salient and influential social identities of Saudi women have been under scrutiny from all corners, since the beginning of the state formation. Their gendered and Islamic identities have been widely debated and rectified in (inter)national debates between liberalists and conservatists. Neha describes these generalizations as *"omnipresent and exhausting".* Yasmin prefers to remove her hijab when travelling in Europe, to keep a low profile, whereas Amal, as a black Muslim, refuses to apply for a European college altogether. Raghav explained that *"Islamophobia is a Western creation by the media"*. When travelling, almost half the respondents explained they have been subjected to stereotypes, discrimination and Islamophobic experiences. The controversy surrounding the hijab has transgressed the Western borders and is internalized within Saudi narratives. This became apparent when 72-

year old Yosra countered my question on the hijab and other religious wear: *"Why are you so focused on that hijab anyway?",* acknowledging my personal bias and irrelevant focus on religious attire.

4.2 Between Gendered Identities

The ethnographic research of Doumato (2009) revealed the interconnectedness and overlap of gendered ideologies and national identities. Maintaining gender norms, thus legitimizes myths of nationhood which funders the absolute monarchy. Women represent the state as either being the cornerstone of the patriarchal family or the agents of modernisation. Furthermore, what Doumato (2009) prescribed as a fear of Westernisation entails a conflicting position whereby Saudi women take an uncertain and anxious stance towards modernisation. Doubts regarding the transformation are based on increasing individuality, fear of secularisation and altering family dynamics. Contradiction and versatility regarding social identities has been constantly re-occurring. Moreover, in line with the presented findings of Song (2019), Saudi women find themselves struggling to successfully combine traditional views of womanhood and the 'modern and moderate' Saudi woman. It can be concluded that the interplay of national, religious and gender identities are constantly negotiated rather than purely categorized between modernity and conservatism.

Firstly, women struggle to uphold their parental roles and gender roles as Muslim wives whilst being involved in entrepreneurship and actively partaking in the local economy. The work-family balance includes the double burden where women still carry the main responsibility for care work. As a wife and student, Lema struggles to manage her assignments whilst preparing meals for her husband and cleaning the house. She explained that women are considered *"queens of the household"* and that she aspires to be *"a good and caring wife".* As a coping mechanism, she decided to hire a maid and a driver who aid in the household whilst she focuses on her studies. The complementary assistance of care workers has enabled Aliyah to combine her roles as a mother and entrepreneur. Notwithstanding, the changing gender roles of Muslim mothers and wives have met resistance and critique from other women in Saudi. The citation below elaborates on the natural duty of Muslim women to raise their children and maintain the family home.

> *"Maids have now been taking over the job that women were born to do. The younger generation is too arrogant and too busy with their looks or social media that they have forgotten the basic instincts of motherhood. (…) Can you believe*

that last week they turned a plane around because a Saudi had forgotten the baby and her maid in the airport lobby?"

(Emna, 58, Saudi)

Secondly, as described earlier young women often refrained from marriage or prolonged their engagement to establish a career or educational prospects. Nour, Amal, Aisha and Rabeb aspire to further expand their professional careers before settling down and maintaining the children. Furthermore, Yasmin and Neha believe that marriage changes the position of women. Finally, some women chose to engage in relationships with Arab men whom they perceive to be more 'open' or 'liberal' towards working women. Therefore, whilst assuming that female identities shift, some are of the opinion that masculine identities remain constant. Masculine gender identities are still often based on the premise of being the caretaker of the family. As Ibrahim describes, he takes pride in being the main breadwinner for his family. A conversation with Nour elucidated that she often conceals her male friendships, to refrain from upsetting her husband. Lema, Rabeb and Emna limited their gender mixing experiences, claiming it was inappropriate and unnecessary for committed women to develop friendly relations with men outside of the family circle.

"Saudi men love women so deeply, they want the girl to be his. (…) When we are married, the male friendships have to end. I'm lucky that he loves me so much, Ma'shallah."

(Nour, 27, Yemeni)

Gender ideology in Saudi Arabia encloses a significant religious component which partly determines the salience and expression of their identity. In general, it can be concluded that Saudi women are appropriating religious readings and teachings to re-evaluate the roles and expected behaviours for Muslim women. For some women, wearing the hijab is merely targeted towards the male population, seeing as they aspire to remain virtuous and respectable. These findings are complementary to Le Renard's (2011) study on appropriate dress in mixed-gender workspaces, where women struggle to balance their professionalism and virtuous display as a Saudi Muslim.

On the other hand, some women claim that the Qur'an does not expect Muslim women to cover their head. Whilst some gendered religious roles are negotiable, others are not. This includes refraining from sexual relations until wed, modest dress, refraining from substance and engaging in the core Islamic pillars. When renegotiating gender roles, contradiction often

occurs. As an example, Rabeb urged that Muslim women should not be forced to wear a hijab or niqab. Nonetheless, she explained that she would not associate herself with women whom do not cover with an abaya or wear body-shaped clothing, because she does not want her family or fiancé to associate her with the *"wrong crowd".* In sum, women embrace their newly established identities as participant, educated and working women in the public sphere. Nevertheless, uncertainty and doubts arise on appropriate gender roles as women fear social rejection or are afraid to be perceived as irreligious or Non-Saudi through their attitudes and code of conduct.

4.3. Religious Identities

Though MBS has pleaded for a moderate Islam and has curtailed the politicized presence of religious police and the ulama, the Saudi 2030 Vision makes no mention of secularisation or a reduction of Islam throughout the Saudi society. The religious identity is an inherent component of the national identity, binding Saudi's together. The international influences of inter-ethnic marriages and foreign labour solidify the collective Islamic identity. Whilst gender identities shift and national identities divides generations and land, the all-encompassing Islamic identity prevails. Saudi's are an important fragment of the global Ummah, as a religious people safeguarding the Holy sites of Mecca and Medina. Therefore, the presumed question of religious wear becomes somewhat irrelevant when discussing the Islamic pillars. The religious rituals including the Hajj and Ramadan unify and denote salient aspects of the collective Muslim identity. Even in contemporary society where women are actively working, creative methods are used to perform their religious duties by combining or stalling the salat throughout the day.

Within the national and gendered shift in identities formation, the interpretation of Islam varies accordingly. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, women have engaged in the reinterpretation of Islam, distancing politics from religion. The collective identity is supplemented with an intrinsic and interpersonal interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim, in addition to the fundamental global Islamic pillars. Neha captures Islam in Saudi as follows: "*Look, everyone thinks Islam is either about being liberal or being completely cloaked. It's the same religion, different politics. I like to think about it as a spectrum, with all shades of Islam".* Nour interprets her Muslim identity as *"being honest, giving to others, being good and hard working. The Hajj and daily prayer as well as being a good person are what makes you a good Muslim".* All in all, the core values differ based on background and personal interpretations. The personal relation with Allah has a profound impact on the daily lives of Saudi women.

Moreover, their Islamic beliefs provide them with courage, dedication and sincere gratitude throughout their everyday activities.

Islamic feminist thought is widely apparent in the Saudi society as they negotiate patriarchal readings of Islam and probe to reinterpret the Holy scripts to base their gendered and apolitical national identities (Morin, 2009). To summarize these individual interpretations, would be a detriment to the essence and core values of agentic Islamic feminism, as they depend on the intertwinement of locality and globalisation, identity formations and familial values. Nonetheless, following Mahmood (2001) and other influential transnational feminist scholars, Saudi women appropriate agency as they redefine or preserve their social identities through these collective and intrapersonal negotiations. Respondents would refer to the Prophet Mohammad or the Qur'an to defend their gendered identities, right to (un)veil towards their families and surroundings. Following Alshoaibi (2018), it can be assumed women negotiate their social identities as a complex intrapersonal and group process, conflicting, dividing and uniting Saudi men and women in their quotidian interactions, rather than groundlessly accepting an imposed state-led identity.

CONCLUSION

The overall objective of this paper is to study the impact of the Saudi 2030 Vision on women in Jeddah. Through the inclusion of the transnational feminist perspective, the presented local realities and identity formations provide a deeper understanding of modernist reform and the interconnectedness of women and the state. Following Kandiyoti (1988), this paper has probed to demonstrate how Saudi women bargain with neopatriarchal institutions, emphasized femininities and the family unit. The adoption of the transnational discourse is imperative to distinguish Saudi women's struggles, agency whilst emphasizing the socio-political surroundings, and interplay of Western influences (Deeb, 2009).

To assume that Saudi women were powerlessly undergoing a patriarchal system before 2015, would be misleading. The induced modernist reform of the Saudi 2030 vision, is an extension and formal endorsement of prolonged societal negotiations and informal transformations. Moreover, the guardianship system was often countered by the legal mahram, hereby enhancing women's opportunities and limiting the influence of the neopatriarchal state. In analogy, women expressed autonomy within the family by maintaining networks and negotiating parental authority. Though families in the sample expressed support for material and technological transformations (e.g. women's education, work), this does not necessarily entail liberalization or empowerment in a Western sense. Women are thus actively engaging in what Mahmood (2001) has described as illiberal agency, preferring their daughters to adhere with more traditional gender roles, female fields of study and gender segregation. Similar to the findings of van Geel (2016), women in Saudi Arabia were negotiating their own modernity within their appropriate social and religious framework, prior to the top-down reforms.

As an apolitical mobilizing project, the Vision has included Saudi nationals in the development of the knowledge-economy. The economic pillar underlining the modernist reform, has resulted in legal and social equality for Saudi women. As an extension and necessary perquisite, women have been granted access to the public sphere as wholesome citizens. Contrary to the findings of Cerioli (2019), economic empowerment and financial independence has generated change and positively affected women's sense of self, herewith further challenging male dominated structures. Notwithstanding, the opinions on the encompassing socio-cultural transformation are more complex and divisive. In general, younger respondents appreciated the appropriation of Saudi culture. However, the line between cultural authenticity and Westernization is drawn at irreligious behaviours, promiscuous dress and conduct that contradicts religious beliefs and collective national values. The fear of Westernization

prescribes anxiousness towards social transformations in a Western image, based on secular and individualized citizens (Doumato, 2009). Maintaining deep rooted collective values of modesty, family and religion are prioritized.

Whereas the aforementioned values are non-negotiable, the patriarchal institutions are subjected change and raise discussion. The socio-economic transformation has further solidified changing norms with regards to women's rights and patriarchy. Gender mixing is now widely apparent and is inherently necessary within the modernisation project. The local infrastructures are adapting towards the new mentalities, hosting young men and women within their social interactions. Nevertheless, similar to the findings of van Geel (2016), some women appropriate women-only spaces and deem it suitable for some activities. This mainly includes situations where women are considered vulnerable or are required to remove the hijab/abaya. The uplifting of the mahram system renders women mobile, independent and free from accountability regarding to their legal and civil status.

The family remains the heart of the Saudi society, with women being central within this role to uphold familial honour (Alshoaibi, 2018; Le Renard, 2008). The Saudi 2030 Vision thus generates opportunities for women, provided that the family is encouraging or at least partially supportive. I have mentioned the crucial role of parents, prior to the modernist reform. Besides granting support, the family often passes on traditional gender roles and moral perquisites with regards to wifely duties, appropriate dress and the choice of spouse. As a coping mechanism, women often conceal their activities and relationships. To reduce the influence of the husband, marriage is often postponed or consciously avoided to ensure personal development, as mentioned by Alwedinani (2017). To avoid work-family conflicts and the perceived continuation of national male identities, some women committed to Arab, Muslim non-Saudi's.

Within the context of reform, women are often represented as cultural bearers, underpinning the state (Kandiyoti, 1991). The mythical emphasized femininity embodying the Vision, is not appropriated as a comprehensive truth. A divided population uses the national identity within a globalized context, especially to protect collective values towards the West. Following Alshoaibi (2018), women constantly renegotiate and redefine their social identities based on their surroundings and situations in the urban space, amid a context of disruption and social change. National, religious and gendered identities persistently overlap and contradict one another. For instance, women struggle to combine their new national identities as working women, their gendered identities as mothers and use religious narratives to underpin and

defend both. Contradiction and versatility regarding social identities has been constantly occurring, whereas saliences of identities vary accordingly.

Whilst the Vision is a policy of inclusion, it ensures social exclusion of those struggling to adhere with the reforms. Similar to the findings of Le Renard (2008), a generational gap is noticeable, hereby marking the fear of a loss of cultural values and a misplaced focus on entertainment instead of welfare. In addition, the Vision represents an elitist fraction of the population, excluding rural, lower-class and Islamic fractions of society. The surveillance state has mobilized its population, appointing the Saudi role models as social controllers, parallel to the functioning of the Mutaween, yet targeting a different population. Binary thought is used to describe and distinguish more dogmatic or conservative Saudi's from the 'open-minded' and 'liberal' state of the new Saudi order. Finally, Western discourse and imagery thereto has undoubtedly shaped the identity formation of Saudi women. Internalized depictions and stigmatizations of Western discourse are contested and justified based on contemporary women's positions and pacific qualities of Islam. In opposition, awareness and personal experience with Eurocentric Islamophobia has paradoxically created a unified and binary category of the West, as an undesirable role model. These findings are complementary with the ethnographic case study on pious women in Iran, constructing a monolithic West (Deeb, 2009). This becomes especially relevant with regards to positionality and Western researchers, demonstrating the contribution of a transnational feminist lens.

To conclude, the transnational framework has demonstrated the influence of domestic discourse, technological advancements and modernist reform. It has included the Western trauma; ranging from conservative backlashes to international pressure, discourse and personal experiences with Islamophobia. Women continue to symbolize the state as markers of modernity and cultural authenticity, as described by Abu-Lughod (1998) and Kandiyoti (1991). Recognizing the collective and individual agency of Saudi women, demonstrates the dissociation of modernisation and Westernisation (Deeb, 2009; van Geel, 2016). Saudi women are amid the process of negotiating gender roles, position of women and the state. In fact, the Jeddawi's are materializing and conceptualizing their own course of modernity within the boundaries of Islam. They are defining and celebrating what it means to be a Saudi woman, anno 2020. Though the influence of the legal framework and social relaxation should not be denied, Saudi women are actively deciding which transformations to adopt, which to disregard and how to expand their autonomy within their newly defined social surroundings.

This paper has some limitations that will be briefly outlined in the following section. Firstly, due to parsimonious reasons, the sample was limited to the city centre of Jeddah. Nonetheless, the Saudi 2030 vision is a nationalistic modernisation project with widespread consequences and influx in the entire country. Therefore, it seems logical to include different cities, compare rural to urban areas in order to generalize conclusions and highlight difference. Sociological phenomena and social groups are highly concentrated in Jeddah, representing the wide range of diversity and therefore comparable to Riyadh. Notwithstanding, future research could compare the impact of the modernisation in remote and rural regions, hereby delivering a generalized view which encompasses marginalized areas in Saudi Arabia. This includes the generational gap concerning the modernisation.

My positionality as a Western researcher has excluded me from two important social groups in Saudi Arabia. Firstly, as a woman it would be challenging to question the male population and their view on the modernisation process. The men included in the sample, accompanied their wives or fiancés to our interviews. Though gender mixing is encouraged, as a woman it would be challenging to conduct intensive ethnographic research amongst the male population. Academic focus has been on Saudi women, often neglecting to include men (Thompson, 2017). Though widely unrepresented, I believe men would present a fuller picture of the dominant gender roles and patriarchal structures as well as dominant attitudes. In addition, as a non-Arabic speaker, I was obliged to exclude those whom are not educated or do not speak the English language. The lack of organisational provisions rendered it infeasible to include a translator.

In addition, the use of social media and the opening of a third space could research the polarization in Saudi Arabia, which is difficult to question through in-depth interviews. The anonymity of the internet can enable quantitative methods to research the attitudes and motivations of those opposed to modernisation project (Alshoaibi, 2017). Finally, the framework of transnational feminism enables Western researchers to study social phenomenon and their relation to non-Western women in their relevant contexts. Moreover, attention is drawn to global definitions on womanhood and how it relates to broader questions of liberalisation, capitalism and nationalism (Deeb, 2009). The transnationalist framework is applicable to other Muslim societies, undergoing a patriarchal system. Future research could determine other domains where Saudi women exercise agency or compare Saudi coping mechanisms in equivalent patriarchal states.

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APPENDIX

1. Table 1: Explanatory Glossary

Term	Definition
Abaya	A long garment, typically sleeved and full length, often brown or black and worn by Muslim women in Saudi Arabia (Alshoaibi, 2018). Nowadays, the abaya is often colourful, printed or enriched with gems.
Abd al-Aziz Al Saud	The first King of Saudi-Arabia of the third Saudi state and father of the Al-Saud monarchy (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019, p.2)
Fatwa	An Islamic term referring to a ruling or interpretation regarding a specific point of Islamic law, usually given as a response to an inquiry from a court or individual citizen (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiii).
Hajj	The Hajj or Great Pilgrimage is the fifth pillar of Islam. If feasible, every Muslim is supposed to travel to Mecca to perform the ritual of purification (Long & Long, 1979, p.3).
Hadith	A record of the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, held in high regard and respect, and serves as a critical source for Islamic religious laws. The hadith is superseded only by the Qur'an (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiii).
Haram	A practice, code of conduct or attitude that is considered to be forbidden by Allah (Alshoaibi, 2018, p.22). In Islamic societies, those committing haram are confronted with social rejection or critique.
Hazm	A nationalistic and state-led identity that underlines the modernist reform of the Saudi 2030 Vision. This femininity is based on the undertaking, liberal, nationalistic and hard-working Saudi woman (Cerioli, 2019; Eum, 2019).
Hijab	Wearing the hijab refers to the practice of veiling. According to some Islamic beliefs, women are to adorn the hijab by covering their hair, sometimes face and necks (Alshoaibi, 2018, p.21-22). The hijab ensures modesty and prevents insults or seduction.
House of Saud	The sons of Abd al-Aziz or the House of Saud refers to the Al Saud monarchy and its lineage (Doumato, 1992).
King Abdullah	King Abdullah ruled the Kingdom from 2005 until 2015. The reign of King Abdullah denotes various efforts to include women into the national dialogue, creating working opportunities and involve women into municipal elections. Each initiative was met with great resistance from the religious fraction (Alshoaibi, 2018; Le Renard, 2008).
King Fahd	King Fahd is the predecessor of King Abdullah. During the reign of King Fahd, the country witnessed a conservative backlash as a consequence of the Mecca uprising, the Gulf War and 9/11 (Doumato, 1992).
King Faisal	King Faisal is considered one of the most progressive Kings. Under his reign, education was made compulsory for women in Saudi Arabia during the 50's and 60's (Alwedani, 2017).
King Salman	The father of MBS and current King of Saudi Arabia. Under the reign of King Salman, the Saudi 2030 Vision is being implemented.
Mahram	The legal guardian of the Saudi woman, typically a male relative or husband (van Geel, 2016). The guardianship system rendered women entirely dependent on men.
Mohammed Bin Salman	The crown prince and de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia. MBS is a religious reformer working to degrade the influence of powerful forces in Saudi Arabia that have pushed Islam in a more conservative direction over the past (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019, p.1). MBS has induced a socio-economic transformation, formalized women's rights and centralized the Saudi state.

Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab	Abd al-Wahhab was the author of Kitab al-Tawhid (the Book of Monotheism), which aimed to take Islam back to its pure and unadulterated roots, thereby forming a core component of the Salafi movement and foundation of the Saudi State (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019, p.2).
Mutaween	The Mutaween is the moral police operating under the 'Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice', upholding the public order to the religious standard that is approved by *ulama* (Otterbeck, 2012). Distinguished from the state police, the Mutaween was used to exert social control and guide citizens to uphold religious standards, until various scandals undermined their authority.
Niqab	Usually a scarf that covers the face (except the eyes) when exiting the privacy of the home or in presence of men out of the familial setting. Wearing the niqab usually stems from religious reasons (van Geel, 2016).
Qur'an	The holy book and sacred scripture of the Islamic faith (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiv).
Sahwa	An emergent religious and political movement apparent in the late 1980's and 1990's (Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019). The 'Awakening' movement stemmed from Salafi interpretations and was opposed to liberalisations and Western influences.
Salat	One of the five pillars of Islam includes the salat. The salat is the mandatory prayer which occurs 5 times per day in the direction of Mecca. The first prayer is said at dawn, the second when the sun is at midpoint, the third when the sun begins its descent, the fourth at sunset, and the fifth when the night has fallen (Pharaon, 2004, p. 350). The salat is institutionalized in the quotidian setting of Saudi's whereas Saudi Muslims pause their activities when the Imam calls for prayer.
Shariah	A summary of the fundamental laws of Islam, represents Allah's commandments and instruction for Muslim society, and their required respective duties therein (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiv).
Ulama	The Ulama or Council of Senior Scholars, is the most influential religious body in the state apparatus. Under the chairmanship of the Grand Mufti, the Ulama interprets Wahhabis readings, issues fatwa's and assists the King on religious affairs (Al-Atawneh, 2009; Ulrichsen & Sheline, 2019).
Ummah	Refers to the collective community of Muslims, which are connected by their common beliefs and religion (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiv).
Wahhabism	Members of the Muslim reform movement, which reject any behaviour they identify as polytheistic, and seek to return to original Islamic teachings (Alshoaibi, 2018, p. xiv).

2. Table 2: Overview Respondents

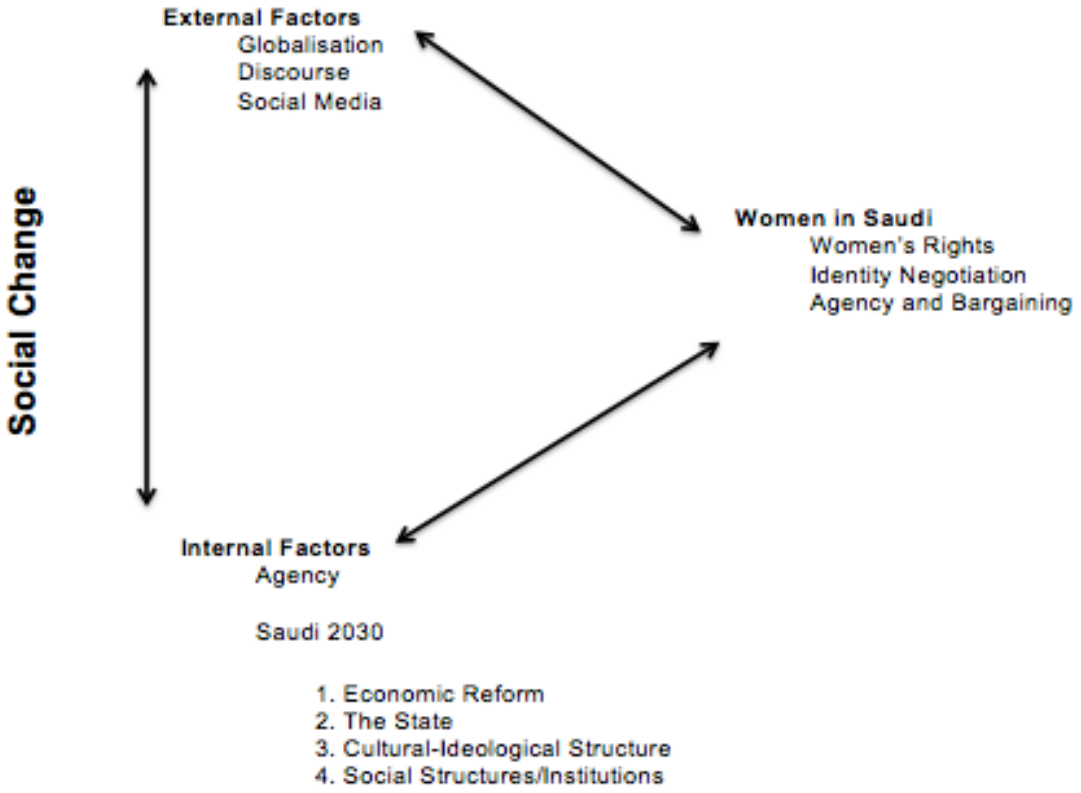
Table overview of demographic data respondents

Alias Resp.	Gender	Education	Employment	Nationality Mother	Nationality Father	Age	Marital Status
1. Nour	Female	Master	Student	Yemen	Yemen	27	Engaged
2. Yasmin	Female	Master	Sales	Saudi	Saudi	23	Single
3. Lema	Female	Bachelor	Student	Pakistan	Saudi	24	Married
4. Ayla	Female	High School	Fitness Coach	Saudi	Yemen	20	Single
5. Amal	Female	Bachelor	Nurse	Saudi	Saudi	24	Single
6. Emna	Female	Master	Housewife	Saudi	Saudi	58	Married
7. Iman	Female	Master	Architect	Saudi	Saudi	28	Single
8. Leila	Female	Master	Entrepreneur	Saudi	Saudi	35	Married
9. Neha	Female	Master	Teacher	Lebanon	Saudi	30	Single
10. Aliyah	Female	High School	Entrepreneur	Syria	Saudi	30	Married
11. Aisha	Female	Master	Marketing	Saudi	Saudi	24	Single
12. Rabeb	Female	Master	Public Relations	Saudi	Saudi	23	Engaged
13. Samira	Female	High School	Housewife	Moroccan	Moroccan	50	Married
14. Amani	Female	High school	School Principal	Saudi	Saudi	49	Divorced
15. Yosra	Female	None	Housewife	USA	Saudi	72	Widowed
16. Eric	Male	Master	Management	Belgium	Belgium	55	Married
17. Saleh	Male	Master	Student	Saudi	Saudi	25	Single
18. Khalid	Male	Master	Entrepreneur	Saudi	Saudi	27	Single
19.Raghav	Male	Bachelor	Life Coach	Saudi	Saudi	36	Single
20.Ibrahim	Male	Bachelor	Sales/Driver	Saudi	Saudi	32	Single

3. Table 3: Overview of Organisations

Name Organisation	Description
1.Monday Gatherings	This initiative was launched by one of the respondents in 2011. This social gathering invites a Saudi speaker on a weekly basis to elaborate on a topic of choice, ranging from professional experiences, struggles, taboos and so on. After the talk, an interactive mixed-gender speed date would take place for networking purposes.
2. Creative Evenings	Creative evenings hosted different activities and is a Saudi-youth led initiative. These activities consisted out of leisure activities and interactive debates. I accompanied a tour in the old city (Balad) with a female architect as well as a talk on social boundaries.
3. Expat Ladies	Every month, an organisation of expat ladies organizes a breakfast that donates to charity. During the events, local entrepreneurs and non-profit organisations would sell self-made merchants and demonstrate their cause.

4. Figure 1: Selective Analysis



5. Table 4: Methodological Considerations/Audit Trail

Methodological Difficulties	
1. Socially desirable responding (SDR)	After the first two interviews, I had noticed that respondents often contradicted themselves during the course of the interview and displayed SDR responses. Moreover, some respondents expressed feelings of fear when speaking about certain topics. Coping techniques involved: 1. Ensuring respondents of anonymity/refrain from taking notes, building trust 2. Note the contradictions and add memo to consider during analysis 3. Explicitly chose not to point out contradictions since they represent internal conflict. 4. Open questions and non-leading questions
2. Distrust	Researcher and respondent were often influenced by their own discourse. In some meetings and interviews, I felt as if the respondents were trying to deconstruct the idea of Saudi women being oppressed. Often there was an accusative tone, envisioning me as the Western 'other'. Therefore, they would try to justify their opinions towards my person. As a response, I tried to join the discussion and elaborate on my personal perceptions with regards to discourse. Highlighting the main purpose of this thesis to emphasize and de-essentialize Saudi women. In addition, some respondents had cancelled or did not show up to our meeting. I believe this is due to the fact that there was no viable prior contact between researcher and respondent.
3. Men	The original sample was based on English-speaking Saudi women. In some situations, the respondents had invited husbands, boyfriends, etc. Eventually, I chose to include them in the dissertation based on their enrichment to the findings.
4. Friendships	During the course of six weeks, I developed sincere friendships with some of the respondents since we were spending a lot of time together. Hence, fatigue and genuine friendly feelings often exceeded my position as a researcher. In some situations, information was shared within this friendship which I assume to be confidential. These blurring boundaries have often resulted in personal feelings of guilt when probing questions in personal conversations. Therefore, I shared the outcome of this dissertation with all the respondents to ensure transparency.
5. Politics	Some respondents were comfortable being vocal about politics whereas others were reluctant. This led to different data collection for the topic on politics. This was taken into account during the course of the analysis.
6. Practical	The practical dilemmas included language barriers and time management. I had underestimated the time needed to transcribe the data per meeting or interview. In addition, I had planned multiple meetings in the first few days of my arrival. It was impossible to combine multiple meetings as well as the data processing. Therefore, I decided to plan maximum two meetings per day in order to limit loss of data.
7. Discourse	Dealing with discourse has been challenging in the undertaking of this thesis. This became apparent in almost half of the interviews. During my second interview, a respondent stated that she visited Tomorrowland in Belgium. I assumed festivals and Islam to be somewhat incompatible. Moreover, my focus on religious wear rather than practice demonstrated my Western bias. Throughout the course of

	this dissertation, I have been made conscious of my internalized bias. Nonetheless, these dialogues have been constructive and demonstrated the relevance of the transnational paradigm.
8.Non-negotiable Topics	Some topics were inherently excluded from the dissertation. When discussing marriage or dating-life, I chose not to ask anything about sexuality or affection. In addition, I made the conscious decision not to talk about anything that is considered haram or illegal to safeguard my own position and guarantee the safety of the respondents.
9. Attire	The government had issued a press release stating that Western women were no longer required to wear an abaya. Upon my arrival, I decided to wear my abaya to keep a low profile. Some of the respondents explicitly repeated that I was no longer obliged to wear it. If I was in the privacy of the respondent's home (without any men present), I removed my abaya and wore it constantly in public. When travelling alone, I covered my head and removed my hijab when entering a restaurant, café or shopping mall with a respondent. In order to correspond with the modest expectations of the Saudi society, I always tied my hair in a tight bun when leaving the house. Even though I am no longer legally obliged to wear the hijab or abaya, I felt comfortable keeping a low profile and presenting a neutral appearance.

6. Table 5: Topic List

1. General Questions
    - Name
    - Age
    - Nationality (Mother/Father)
    - Education
    - Marital Status
    - Religious Identification
    - Employment

2. Saudi Before MBS
    - Family Structure
        - Mother/Father/Siblings/Husband
        - Role of women
    - Guardianship system
        - Influence
        - Possibilities
        - Contestation
    - Gender Segregation
        - Attitudes
        - Practices
    - Experience Mutaween
        - Social Control/Fear
        - General Attitudes
    - Social Life

3. Transformation
    - Salman/Al Saud
        - Critique
        - Charismatic modernizer
    - Cultural transformation
        - Tourism, festivals, domestic activities
        - Gender mixing
        - Cultural authenticity
        - Generational Gap
    - Social Transformation
        - (Hdod) Boundaries
        - Segregation
        - Gender norms/roles
        - Women's rights
        - Generational Gap
    - Economic Transformation
        - Economic Empowerment/consequences
        - Work-family conflict/coping
        - Saudization vs. Expats
        - Influence Family
    - Personal desirable course for Saudi Arabia: Prospects

4. Identities
    - How would you describe yourself?
    - What does it mean to be a Saudi Muslim woman?
    - Gendered identities

        - Expectations society/Family
        - Conflict/Reinforce other identities
        - How do men think about women and women about men?
    - National Identities
        - Regional, Arab identities
            - Perceived difference between Jeddah/Riyadh/rural areas
        - Citizenship – Iqama – Expats
        - National identity before and after MBS
        - Abaya
    - Religious identity
        - What does it mean to be a Muslim?
        - Veil/Abaya
        - Intrapersonal definitions vs. collective identity
    - Contradictions, negotiations identities
        - Islamic feminism

5. Role of family
    - Roles
        - Expectations, relationship father
        - Expectations, relationship husband/boyfriend/fiancé
        - Expectations, relationship mother
        - Dating - Gender Mixing
    - Generational differences
    - Importance of family and familial status
    - Support or discouragement - Depending on what boundaries?
    - Agency/Coping techniques

6. Discourse
    - How am I perceived? What do they think about me?
    - How are Saudi women perceived?
    - What does it mean to be a Muslim/ at home vs. when travelling?
    - Stereotypes
    - Experiences with Islamophobia
    - Agency/coping mechanisms