

Women in the Saudi Press

By

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Summary

This PhD explores the experience of female journalists working in the Saudi Arabian press. It looks at the difficulties they face as women journalists, their motives for working in this area and their writings. The research discusses how the culture gender segregation in Saudi Arabia impacts upon Saudi media representations of gender stereotypes and the role of print media (the press) in exposing women's issues to the public and forming public opinion. I utilised a media studies' approach adopting an Islamic feminist perspective. I generated data from in-depth interviews with seven Saudi female journalists working in Saudi press, who discuss female-related topics as well as content analysis of related press articles. The analysis indicated that the Saudi culture of extreme gender segregation has impacted on the experience of female journalists, particularly on their ability to compete with male journalists. As my analysis argues, my participants report experiencing female segregation and discrimination mainly affecting their pay, job opportunities, promotion, availability and access to information. My findings further suggest that the media in Saudi Arabia is the most direct venue for women to express their views and discuss their issues. In accordance with previous studies in the field, my study reveals that Saudi Arabian women interpret feminism within the boundaries of their specific culture and Islamic standpoint. Lastly, I discuss how current political, social and economic reforms in the region, which influence women's status in the public arena, are reflected in the Saudi press.

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Chapter One: Women in the Saudi Press: An Introduction

Saudi Arabia comprises about 80 per cent of the Arabian Peninsula. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a population of well over 28 million people, including at least 5.5 million foreign nationals. About 90 per cent of the Saudis are of Arab ethnicity, the rest being Afro-Asian. Traditionally, Saudi Arabia is a tribal, nomadic society. Following the discovery of oil in 1930s, especially over the last fifty years, it has become more urbanised. The migrant workers come from all over the world, with most from South and Southeast Asia, and neighbouring Arab countries. The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic (Bartleby, 2010). Saudi Arabia was founded by King AbdulAziz bin AbdulRahman Al Saud in 1932. The Koran/ Qur'an and the *sunnah* (ways and practices) of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) are the constitution of the country. It is important to acknowledge that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is unique among Islamic states. As it contains the two holiest of sites within Islam in Makkah and Madina, it is the location of the world's largest pilgrimage (the *hajj*), and is governed according to *Shari'a* (Islamic law). The current Saudi monarch has “inherited a kingdom in which devotion to Islam and to himself as the rightly guided Islamic ruler is the glue that holds his kingdom together” (U.S. Library of Congress, 2003a).

The monarch is both Prime Minister and King, there are no elections, and the cabinet is appointed by the monarch and contains many royal family members. There is a consultative council (*Shura*) and women were represented 2009 (Salith, 2003). As a political unit, Saudi Arabia started as an alliance: “Saudi Arabia’s origins lie within the puritanical Wahhabi movement that gained the allegiance of the powerful Al Saud royal family” (Jamjoom, 2010: p548). This agreement between the political and religious parties is the basis of the doctrine of the current Saudi Arabian state; it also “shapes the social, cultural, and political norms, attitudes, behaviour and environment of the nation” (Jamjoom, 2010: p.548). Throughout the

history of Saudi Arabia, the development of its legal system has been influenced by the different approaches of the traditionalist and modernist movements.

Background to the Period Covered by this Research (2009-2014):

There have been many important developments in the Arab world during the research period of this thesis. First there is the Arab Spring that started in 2010, which affected many countries in the Middle East such as Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia and Libya. Saudi Arabia was not affected directly by the uprisings in the other countries in the Middle East, the troubled situation in its neighbouring Arab world has not affected Saudi Arabia. Secondly, in 2011, the campaign “women’s right to drive” was launched in Saudi Arabia. Manal Al Shariff filmed herself driving in Al Khobar city in Saudi Arabia, and posted the video online. This campaign marks the second attempt by a women’s movement in Saudi Arabia to demand the right to drive. The first right to drive movement was in 1990 in the capital Riyadh. Thirdly, King Abdulla appointed 30 women to the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia also known as *Majlis as-Shura* or *Shura Council*, which is the formal advisory body of Saudi Arabia. The *Majlis al-Shura* is a legislative body that advises the King on issues that are important to Saudi Arabia (*Majlis Al-Shura* [Consultative Council], 2013). It also has the power to propose new laws. The Consultative Council currently consists of 150 members appointed by the King for a four-year renewable term. On September 25th 2011, King Abdullah confirmed in a speech addressed to the nation that there will be political reforms for women. He also has announced that women will be participating in the next round of elections for municipal council seats in the year 2015. He announced, “First, the participation of women in the *Majlis Al-Shura* as members from next session in accordance with the *Shari’a* guidelines. Secondly, as of the next session, women will have the right to nominate themselves for membership of Municipal Councils and also

have the right to participate in the nomination of candidates with the Islamic guidelines” (Suris, 2013). The appointment of 30 women to the *Majlis Shura* is considered to be a major milestone in the political empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. It ensured that King Abdullah’s women’s reforms will grant Saudi women more rights and responsibilities and, in the process, allow fundamental transformation of the country.

I consider these events very crucial to this thesis because the media in Saudi Arabia especially the press have been largely affected by them and have divided public opinion as suggested by the data of this study. Additionally I found that as more women felt the need to express gratitude to the king as they decided to contribute by writing their opinion in the press or online. This can be seen for example in the writings of Asma’a Al Mohammed (2011) and Jaheer Al Mosaeed (2011). Their articles will be analysed in chapter five of this thesis.

Censorship

Western Media specialists have questioned the freedom of the press in Arab countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. For example, *Reporters Without Borders* (2004) announced in the third annual worldwide index of press freedom that the freedom of the press is examined most in East Asia (with North Korea comes last in the list at 167th place, followed by Burma 165th, China 162nd, Vietnam 161st and Laos 153rd) and the Middle East (Saudi Arabia 159th, Iran 158th, Syria 155th, Iraq 148th). In these countries, the report argues that: “independent media either does not exist or journalists are censored on a daily basis. Freedom of information in these countries is not guaranteed” (Reporters Without Borders, 2004). In his book *What’s Really Wrong with the Middle East*, Brian Whitaker argues that the root problem in the Arab world is the lack of freedom (Whitaker, 2009). According to them, there is no free press in Saudi Arabia; political and controversial issues are subject to censorship in the Saudi

Arabian press. This chapter aims to justify censorship as it is needed in Saudi. The media in Saudi including the press will not allow any form of criticism of the government and the royal family or accept the questioning of religious tenets. However my research suggests that government censorship seems to be decreasing especially since the spread of terrorism after 2001. Following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington of 1th September 2001, it was established that fifteen of the nineteen terrorists directly responsible for these attacks were Saudi Arabians. In addition to this, the 2003 suicide bombers suspected of having links with al-Qaeda carried out several terrorist attacks in the Saudi capital Riyadh, and as a result political topics dominated the Saudi Arabian media. Following the spread of terrorism and the linking of Al Qaeda to Saudi Arabia, there was a continuous pressure from the outside to reform Saudi Arabia. Because of these events terrorism became the subject of intense public debate. Pictures of terrorists were on the front pages of every newspaper in Saudi Arabia. In addition to this, journalists have since 2001, been calling for unity. They are also showing more patriotism as it is important in these difficult time and troubling incidents in the neighbouring countries to not allow any call for unrest. This is why censorship is needed in some cases especially when it leads to security and unity.

While it has been argued in an article written for the *Guardian* newspaper that the press may be regulated "in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary" (O'Neill, 2012). It is also suggested earlier in this chapter that a free press is a signature institution in developed democracies but in times of war, it can be a dangerous idea. O'Neill suggests that by a free press, "our social, cultural and political life needs media communication that is not only accessible and intelligible but can be assessed for its reliability and provenance" (O'Neill,

2012).

The Basic Law of Saudi Arabia provides general guidelines for the press in article 39.

According to this:

All means of information, publication and expression shall abide by the “good word” and observe the laws of the State; they shall contribute to the education and support the unity of the nation. Anything that leads to sedition, divisiveness or is prejudicial to the nation’s security and public relations, or is detrimental to human dignity and right are strictly prohibited. Specific laws set down relevant provisions (The New Constitution, 1993).

Journalists are also controlled on an individual level. All journalists must register with the Ministry of Information. In addition to that, the ministry of information apply certain visa obstacles to foreign journalists and restrictions on their movement. The Ministry also “controls the Saudi Journalists Association's governing board by allowing only approved candidates to run in its elections” (Freedom of the Press, 2008).

Sometimes journalists apply self-censorship. Khazen and other Saudi journalists are advised what not to write about. In this process “the author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (Foucault, 1969: p.110). Saudi Arabian journalists must in general be sensitive to the political realities prevailing in the country.

One issue that female journalist face that it is very difficult for women journalists to contact editors of newspapers and ask them about the reasons why their writings were censored.

Because of segregation, women cannot follow up with editing and publishing which is executed at men’s sections of the newspapers. Journalist Nora Ahoiti talked of the effect of segregation on the quality of work:

We women journalists are treated like the readers in the sense that we write our articles

and lose contact with them until after publication when we first set eyes on them like any other person reading the newspaper. We are unable to follow production or editing stages done at the men journalists section. We are shocked sometimes with how our articles were changed after publication, such as changing the headline or deleting some interviews made with some sources. Such changes break the trust between us and our sources (Abdelaziz, 2006).

In addition to the censoring of the press, censorship in Saudi Arabia applies to the Internet. A content filtering was introduced by Council of Ministers (*Majlis Alwuzzar'a*) on 12 February 2001 (Whitaker, 2001). According to a study of Saudi Media, which was carried out in 2004 by the Open Net Initiative, "the most censorship focused on pornography, drug use, gambling, religious conversion of Muslims, and filtering circumvention tools." Which of course tries to save young Muslim men and women in Saudi Arabia. According to the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), Saudi Arabia operates an advanced filtering system which is run by the Internet services unit at King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) in the capital Riyadh. Saudi Arabia was the last country on the Arabian Peninsula to offer a public access to the Internet service. In early 1999, the Internet Service Unit (ISU) of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology officially opened its network to licensed commercial ISPs. In that same year public access also started. Two years later, in 2001, Saudi Arabia's Council of Ministers issued "a decree regulating Internet use that prohibits users from accessing or publishing certain forbidden content" (Mosaic Group, 1999). As of the end of 2003, 1.6 million Saudis were counted as Internet users out of a population of over 21 million (Mosaic Group, 1999).

According to Black, there are two main targets for online blocking in Saudi Arabia: "one the suppression of 'immoral' (mostly pornographic) sites; the other based on directions from a security committee run by the Ministry of Interior. Citizens are encouraged to actively report 'immoral' sites for blocking, with hundreds of requests made every week" (Black, 2009).

Websites that include content which does not apply with the religious and conservative culture of Saudi Arabia such as pornography, homosexuality and abortion, are blocked (Zittrain and Edelman, 2008). In 2011 the Saudi government introduced new Internet rules and regulations that require all online newspapers and bloggers to obtain a license from the Ministry of Culture and Information. The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) is responsible for regulating the Internet and for hosting a firewall which blocks access to thousands of websites, mainly due to sexual and political content. "The Internet is one of the most heavily censored areas in Saudi Arabia. Journalists however are obliged to support censorship: "What the Minister did was right, for who said that freedom comes without responsibility? Don't they say that the field of publishing is a door wide open?" says Tariq Alhomayed, editor in chief of *Asharaq Alawasat*. He continues:

Whoever wants to write, be published, and criticize others, must do so with credibility, and a firm stance, rather than hiding behind a computer screen in order to defame someone, spread ugly rumours, or promote social division under a false name and then they have the audacity to say: let me exercise my freedom! (Woollacott, 2011).

Extremist groups like al-Qaeda have used the Internet in Saudi Arabia to promote their agenda and spread its ideas to gather more members. Therefore many Saudi Arabians writer supports censorship and think of it as necessity. A study conducted by Wetmore concludes that Saudi citizens can access blocked sites using proxies or satellite connections. His study also shows that there is a growth among Saudis in writing blogs.

Censorship in Saudi Arabia does not stop with local newspapers and magazines. Foreign newspapers and magazines also are subjected to censorship especially in the case of content of sexual nature, for example, nudity, pornography, sodomy or homosexuality. Advertising for driving sessions for women is also banned, in keeping with the ban in the kingdom. Ultimately, there is wide opinion that this might affect the press and have a negative

effect on journalistic ethics, investigative reporting, and balanced coverage and providing substantial information to the public about issues that are relevant to the country.

Women and their Current Status in the Press

The period of the 1960s saw a visible increase in the mass production of newsprint in Saudi Arabia. The Al Yamama press establishment first published *Al Riyadh* newspaper on 1965. This was the first newspaper in the city of Riyadh (Info, Al Yamama, 2011). The expansion of newspapers has created mass markets for the press and widespread interest in public opinion ever since then. In 1990, *Al Riyadh* newspaper established a section for women, and appointed Dr. Haya Al Manee to be editor-in-chief (Al Yamama, 2011), which makes her one of the early women to hold powerful positions in the media in Saudi Arabia. However, it was not until 2004 that Journalism schools for girls emerged in the city of Makkah, leading to an increase in the number of qualified female journalists that can report for each section of the newspapers.

There is a growth of liberal female writers, in both the English and Arabic languages, in the press in Saudi Arabia. This can play a significant role in gradual social change. As of one of the findings of Westmore, (2008) study states that English blogging is believed to be more liberal in general. The growth can be interpreted as an indicator of the bloggers' desire for more press freedom and to be more involved in public debates. Female journalists in Saudi Arabia initially entered the field of journalism to fill the gap caused by the male journalists' inability to cover women's activities and issues especially in educational institutions. In Saudi Arabia, gender segregation is a cultural norm that is apparent in almost every public and private institution. For example, Education institutions, including schools and universities, ministries, banks and most places of entertainment, forbid the mixing of the genders (AlMunajjed, 1997; Mayer, 2000). However, it was very difficult for female journalists to cover stories that are not

restricted to women's pages in the newspapers. They aimed to write for other sections in the newspapers such as politics and economy. Female journalists face a lot of difficulties in reporting an event from Saudi Arabia. These difficulties vary from transport to family oppositions and will be analyzed in further details in chapter four. However many female journalists had expressed the positive change that has emerged in the country. Especially when it comes to women's status.

The process of change is manifest in the ways in which, in recent years, women's issues and position have been subject to more debates and dissection than any other social group in the press. Within this broader context the status of Saudi women journalists has been a subject of controversy, especially among the conservative parties. Several Saudi clerics have called on Saudi Minister of Culture and Media 'Abd Al-'Aziz Khouja to ban women from appearing in the media. Their request to the minister came after Saudi King 'Abdallah Bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz announced the series of reforms in 2009 in the political system which aimed to establish a more modern and liberal face of Saudi. In a recently dated communique which took place in 2005, 35 Saudi clerics called on the country's culture and information minister to "improve the "moral" standards of the Saudi media. The clerics' main complaint was that the visibility of women in the media breached *shari'a* as well as Saudi law. They also complained that the media was contaminating Saudi society with secular and "perverted" ideas" (Tamimi, 2010: p.6). The clerics hold a very powerful position in Saudi, they include the justice officials and academics from different universities in the country, and they occupy an important position in the politics of Saudi Arabia. Their active position in changing the politics of Saudi Arabia can be dated back to King Abdulaziz bin Saud the founder of the present Saudi State, when he "conceded jurisdiction over the capital Riyadh's moral and legal development to the clerics" (Joel, 2006). The modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was founded in 1932, continues the political bargain: "the Al-Saud wield political power, guarantee security, and uphold the

country's Islamic character while the Wahhabi clergy provide spiritual authority and lend legitimacy to the Al-Saud's rule” (Joel, 2006). Saudi Arabia’s position as the location of the two holiest shrines of Islam has led to the heightened symbolic significance of this country not only for Saudi Arabians but for all Muslims around the world. As Doumato argues:

In Saudi Arabia, the ideology undergirding the monarchy defines the legitimate ruler as one who will enforce standards of Islamic conduct upon the individual for the good of the community as a whole. The ruler's responsibility is to assure that the people know God's laws and live in conformity with them. Because of the ideological relationship between religion and state, it is crucial that the monarch rule in partnership with the *ulama*, and engage them in forming public policy (Doumato, 1991:p.35).

The communiqué, which appeared in the Saudi press in 2009 was addressed to the culture and information minister, 'Abd Al-'Aziz Khoja, stated:

[Minister Khoja,] we have high hopes that you will reform the media in accordance with Allah's will. We have become aware of a deviant tendency that has taken root in the culture ministry, [and which is apparent] in TV, radio and the press, in literary conferences and at book fairs: the culture ministry is promoting a campaign of Westernizing the Saudi woman, [encouraging her] to remove her veil, wear jewellery, and mingle with men, and is [generally] opening the door to liberal ideas. [The ministry permits the airing of] music and songs and the publishing of images of women. It is also training women and female singers, and making an effort to allow men and women to mingle in the ministry building [itself]. In addition, it permits the circulation of licentious papers and magazines, which contain perverted ideas and [present] sensuous pictures of women on their pages and covers (*MEMRI*, 2009).

As this communique suggests there is a conflict between the conservatives and the reformists in Saudi Arabia. The differences in their opinion are reflected in newspapers articles, social

media, TV and Radio. For example, there are liberal Saudi Arabians like Sami Jassem Al-Khalifa who have also written to the minister:

We want women to be prominent in the media. We want [to see] women news anchors alongside the men, and women news agency reporters. We want women to head communications departments [at the universities], and we want women to talk to men, and vice versa, without restriction, fear, or apprehension. We want male and female anchors to treat each other with respect, [as required by] Islamic [law] - and not to be separated by barriers of stone or wood. We want women to be editors of newspapers, magazines, and satellite channels, instead of having these [media outlets] monopolized by men... We want pluralism in the media... We want women in the media [in order to hear] their ideas, not [in order to] see their bodies, which is how the reactionary [forces] regard them. We want women whose ideas and civilized [nature] will bring pride [to Saudi Arabia] throughout the world.

Mr. Minister... we want papers and [TV] channels that engage in dialogue with the other. We want religious and cultural dialogue. [We want] our media to open up to other [nations] - their cultures, customs, and beliefs - [for] media has no value unless it introduces [us] to new ideas and cultures and expands our knowledge (*MEMRI*, 2009).

In recent years, there have been more debates and discussion about women's rights and issues in Saudi Arabia compared to how they were discussed in the past. It can be argued that the media have problematised gender issues in Saudi Arabia:

[...] in the various discussions on the role of civil society, the position of women and human rights, one is often confronted with divergent views and discourses. Therefore the question arises as to what are the different debates in Saudi society on the concepts of civil society, (human) rights and the position of women. What are the venues of these debates, and how are they disseminated and communicated? (Meijer & Aarts, 2012:

p.10).

In the year 2000, the Government introduced new press laws in Saudi Arabia. For example, it permits the creation of professional journalism societies and the publication of foreign newspapers in the country. The laws also implied that censorship of the content of the newspapers will only be used in emergencies to protect free expression of opinion; however, censorship will be applied to any content that defames Islam and harms the interests of the state or the "ethics of the people." Implementation of the law has not significantly changed current practices regarding freedom of expression. There were also new laws introduced which addressed minimum wages, benefits, relations with management, job security, and other benefits for journalists in Saudi Arabia (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2002).

The Daily Newspapers in Saudi Arabia

The newspaper industry in Saudi Arabia publishes around 300 million items a year, of which an estimated 70 per cent are daily newspapers in the Arabic, English and Urdu languages, with the remainder being magazines and commercial print items (Shoult, 2006: p.273-274). The Saudi press was created in 1932, and the first daily newspaper is *Al-Bilad* which was published in Arabic, and at that time was circulated from the city of Makkah in the Western Province of Saudi Arabia. There is also *Al-Riyadh* newspaper which is the daily newspaper of the capital Riyadh, which can be considered as the official newspaper of the government. Economic news is relayed by the daily newspaper *Al-Iqtisadiyya*, while sports are treated by *Al-Riyadhiyya*. All these newspapers are printed in the Arabic language. The daily newspaper circulated from the city of Jeddah and known as more "liberal" is *Okaz* which is also available in Arabic, the other daily newspaper of the Hijaz region, is *Al-Watan* which is the daily newspaper of Abha. These

two newspapers are considered liberal but their journalists apply self-censorship. The daily newspapers known as more "Islamic" are: *Al-Jazira* ("the peninsula") available in Arabic; the daily newspaper of Qasim, *Al-Madina*, also available in Arabic; the daily newspaper of Madina, *Al-Yaum* ("the day"), the daily newspaper of Dammam; and finally *Shams* (Sun) newspaper, the daily newspaper of information addressed to young people: *Shams* ("sun") (*Censorship in Saudi Arabia*). All these newspapers are controlled by the government.

The main newspapers I focus on in this thesis are *Al-Jazirah*, *Ar-Riyadh*, *Al-Madinah*, and *Okaz*, all published in Arabic. There are also some Saudi Arabian dailies that post in the English language, such as: *Arab News*, *Riyadh Daily* and *Saudi Gazette*. My research focuses on Saudi Arabian newspapers from two different regions of Saudi Arabia: Najd and Hijaz.¹ In my analysis of the four newspapers, I will look first at *Okaz* newspaper which is published by the Saudi *Okaz* publishing house. This newspaper covers national and international news and opinions. It was awarded the Media Distinction Shield, the highest prize to be awarded for best media coverage of the *Haj*. *Okaz* publishes inside Saudi Arabia and in the other Arab countries. The reason I have chosen this newspaper is that it publishes from the city of Jeddah in Al Hijaz region. The city of Jeddah unlike the capital Riyadh has changed significantly throughout recent years and shown that it is more culturally diverse than any other city in Saudi Arabia. Another reason that attracts me is that one of the well-known female journalists and feminist activists in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Aziza Al Manee, writes for *Okaz* newspaper about Saudi women and their issues in Saudi Arabian society.

The second newspaper I have chosen to analyse is *Al Jazirah*, published from Riyadh by the *Al Jazirah* Corporation, which has been the leading newspaper and magazine publisher in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 1960. *Al-Jazirah* was the first Saudi Newspaper to go

¹ Najd or Nejd is the central region of Saudi Arabia. The capital Riyadh is the main city in Najd. Hijaz is the Western region of Saudi Arabia. The main city of Al Hijaz is Jeddah. It also includes the two religious cities: Makkah and Madinah.

online in 1996 (Al Jazirah, 2010). The average number of hits has reached more than 120,000 per day (<http://www.al-jazirah.com>). *Al Jazirah* has won many prestigious media awards in printing, editorial and publishing. They include: “Best in Print 2007”, awarded by IFRA (a World Leading Association of Newspaper and Media Publishing Companies); "Digital Excellence Award 2007" awarded by Ministry of Communications & Information Technology in the best website in the E-media category; the "King Abdullah Award" for sponsoring research chairs in Saudi universities in 2008; "Best in IT reporting 2007" – Dubai; “Best Kids Pages” in 2007 awarded by Arab Media Award – Dubai; and finally “Best Economic Pages” in 2006 awarded by Arab Media Award – Dubai (Al Jazirah, 2010). In addition, one of the things that interests me about *Al Jazirah* is that the same day newspaper edition has been available in 126 cities worldwide since 1999, which makes it well known even internationally.

Al Jazirah was the first Saudi newspaper to offer Saudi females journalists more job opportunities in media sectors such as photography. Other newspapers have women as editors, sub-editors, journalists and reporter, but according to *Al-Jazirah* editor in chief Khaled Al-Malik, that is not enough. He suggests: “Women should work in all journalist-related jobs, and there are not many women who are specialized in areas such as sub-editing and photography”. he continues to argue: “All that is provided to male journalists and reporters is also provided to women,” says Al-Malik, stressing that the newspaper’s aim is to offer women the opportunity to become active members and partners in the development of the Kingdom. He concludes by arguing that: “Fifty years have passed since the establishment of media institutions in the Kingdom, and women are still working only as reporters covering news. It is about time they became more involved in the whole process of newspaper production” (Hawari, 2010).

Another newspaper that I will be focusing on is *Al Madina*. It is the daily newspaper of *Al Madina* city, a very religious city in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia. *Al Madina* focuses on

local, educational and religious topics. Although *Al Madina* has a number of female journalists, they are not allowed to discuss gender-related issues openly. Female journalists, such as Dr. Majah A. Al Zahar, Ebteesam Al Mubark and Dr. Suhila Hamad, cover domestic violence, women's health, society news and education. However, there are restrictions on the type of topics they cover.

The fourth newspaper in my research is *Al Riyadh*, which is published from the capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh city. *Al Riyadh* newspaper covers major events in Saudi Arabia and internationally. It focuses on global news, local news, business news and political news. *Al Riyadh* is one of the leading newspaper titles in Saudi Arabia. The reason I chose this newspaper is that I want to compare the press of the two regions of Saudi, Al Hijaz and Najd. Riyadh is the main city in Najd, and this newspaper reflects the news and social opinions of the people living in Riyadh. One of the writers who cover gender issues in this paper is Dr. Haya Al Manee. She is one of the very few Saudi female journalists who write about political and controversial topics.

There are some newspapers in Saudi Arabia that publish in the English language. The most popular ones are the *Saudi Gazette* and the *Arab News* newspaper. *Arab News* was the first English daily newspaper in Saudi Arabia. It publishes from Jeddah, Riyadh and Dhahran. Since its initiation, this newspaper has been serving the interests of both the Saudis and non-Arab communities living inside Saudi Arabia. This newspaper targets the different cultural communities that make up the diverse population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It publishes in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Near East, North Africa, Europe and USA. It is important to include this newspaper in my research because of the diversity among its readership, and the size of these readerships. A readership profile for this newspaper in 1997 showed that 86% of the readers are males, yet it still covers a wide range of gender related topics. The *Arab News* is the largest circulation English language

newspaper in the region. It has published articles such as “Lifting Ban on Women Driving Will Bring Economic Windfall: Experts say,” which argued against the ban on women drivers by pointing out the advantages to the economy if women drove, (Abdullah, 2008), and “Shattering Glass Ceiling at Lingerie Shops,” which criticized a law to hire women in lingerie shops that was not being implemented (Alosaimi, 2008). I will be looking in particular at articles by Omaila Al-Fardan. Omaila is a Saudi female journalist working for *Arab News*. In her article, “Saudis debate controversial question of media freedom” (Al-Fardan, 2009), she questions the freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia. This article followed the case of the Saudi woman journalist who was sentenced to 60 lashes for her involvement in the LBC program “Bold Red Line” aired in mid-July 2009. The other journalist I will be looking at is Maha Akeel, a Saudi feminist, writer and journalist who discusses women’s rights in Saudi Arabia openly.

The other Saudi newspaper published in English is the *Saudi Gazette*. The *Saudi Gazette* is part of the *Okaz* family. This publication is known to be very rich in its diversity of people and communities. *Okaz* serves readers through operations within Saudi Arabia, as well as the Arab world. Saudi woman journalist Sameera Aziz is a senior editor in the *Saudi Gazette*. She is the only Saudi woman working in a senior post for this newspaper. Another female journalist, Fatin Jiffery, is the editor in-charge of *Fun Times Magazines*. Having women appointed in senior positions is what makes this newspaper beneficial to my analysis.

Newspaper	Type	Language	Format	Circulation
Arab New	Daily	English	Broadsheet	110,000
Asharq Al-Awsat	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet/pan-Arab	235,000
Okaz	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	110,000
Al Madinah	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	25,000
Al Watan	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	n/a
AL Nadwah	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	8,000

Al Riyadh	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	150,000
Al Jazirah	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	110,000
Saudi Gazette	Daily	English	Broadsheet	15,000
Al Yaum	Daily	Arabic	Broadsheet	20,000

Table 1 Main Newspaper Titles, Formats and Circulation Data (Shoult, 2006)

The following tables show data that was collected by Maha Akeel in 2010. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of Saudi female staff and collaborators in Saudi newspapers according to the women's department in each of these institutions or the human resources department if there is no women's department:

The following table shows statistics of the main newspapers in Saudi Arabia:

Publication Co.	# of employees	# of female employees	Percentage
Saudi Research & Publishing Co. (Jeddah office)	185	13	7.03
Okaz & Saudi Gazette	500	30	6
Al-Madinah	520	13	2.5
Al-Nadwah	N/A	3	N/A
Al-Riyadh	N/A	38	N/A
Al-Jazirah	580	25	4.31
Al-Watan (Jeddah office)	22	4	18.18
Al-Yaum	520	17	3.27

Table 2 Percentage of Saudi Female Employees in Saudi Newspapers

Newspaper	Female staff	Female collaborators	Comments

Arab News	6	4	In all the offices in Saudi Arabia. Head office in Jeddah
Asharq Al-Awsat	2	2	In Jeddah & Riyadh offices. Head office in London
Okaz	13	14	In all the offices in Saudi Arabia. Head office in Jeddah
Al-Madinah	5	9	In all the offices in Saudi Arabia. Head office in Jeddah
Al-Watan	1	3	In Jeddah office. No women's dept. at head office in Abha
Al-Nadwah		3	No women's dept. at head office in Makkah
Al-Riyadh	8	30	In all the offices in Saudi Arabia. Head office in Riyadh
Al-Jazirah		25	No women's dept. at head office in Riyadh
Saudi Gazette	3	1	In Jeddah office. Head office in Jeddah
Al-Yaum		17	Head office in Dammam

Table 3 Number of Saudi Female Staff and Collaborators in Saudi Newspapers

Overview of the Literature on Saudi Female Journalists

Many different aspects of the Arab media have been discussed and examined in the literature (Ashtiany, J., & Jamil, 1993; Etling, B., Kelly, J., Faris, R., & Palfrey, J. 2010; Rugh, W. 2004). Most of this literature is focused on the *Aljazeera* TV Channel (Zayani, 2005), and the Arab Spring (Lotan, G., Graeff, E., Ananny, M., Gaffney, D., & Pearce, 2011; Harb, 2011). There are very few studies that focus on Arab women in the Arab media (Malki, 2013). After reviewing the relevant literature, it appears that only a few studies exist about the Saudi media and most of these were conducted in Arabic and did not explore Saudi women journalists' experiences (Reda, 2008). According to Shaw:

This lack of early research may be due to historical factors . . . Saudi Arabia was characterized by isolationism, and a significant percentage of its population was nomadic Bedouins . . . Oil money . . . dramatically changed Saudi Arabia's deeply traditional society. The nation opened its doors to outside influence and began sending its students abroad a decade later (Shaw, 2009: p. 49).

Very few researchers have attempted to study the Saudi Arabian woman. One of the noticeable researchers I came across is the Saudi anthropologist Suraya Al Turki, who has conducted studies that focused on women in Saudi Arabia. Her writings include: *Women's Development and Employment in Saudi Arabia* (Al Turki, 1992), *The Ideology and Behaviour of Privileged Saudi Women* (1986) and on *Family Organisation and Women's Power in Saudi Urban Society*. In *Family Organization and Women's Power in Urban Saudi Arabian Society* (1977), Altorki, explored the dynamics of gender and class in Saudi Arabia based on her ethnographic fieldwork. The findings of her study show how "women have always exercised significant control over the decisions of their male agnates relating to the arrangement of marriages" (Altorki, 1977: p.277), focusing more on presenting an accurate depiction of women in contrast to circulating dominant ideas of submissiveness. Another example of research which studied Saudi women is Almunajjed (1997) who conducted one hundred interviews with women of different classes and backgrounds for her study. Her interpretation of these interviews as well as a substantial part of her bibliography rely heavily on Western sources. What makes Almunajjed's publication credible is her insight as a Saudi woman. Both of these works focused on women's status in Saudi Arabia. They do not study women writers or women journalists.

Nevertheless there are few studies which have been written about women writers in Saudi Arabia. In *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (1994), Saddeka Arebi, for example, examines the work of several Saudi Arabian women writers

whose work contributes to ongoing debates of women status in the country. Their writings challenge the cultural and the religious aspects of society, by offering different interpretations to religion, gender and culture. In addition to Arebi, Maha Akeel (2010) has published a book about Saudi women journalists. She has examined Saudi women's status in the national media, and the barriers they face in her book, *Saudi Women in the Media*, which was published in 2010 in Arabic.

This thesis is an original contribution to the field. Previous attempts or studies that have dealt with Saudi Arabia or the Middle East have either dealt with the representation of conditions in earlier centuries, or applied a Western feminist perspective, which has proved distorting. The status of women in Islam has generated many publications, however, with few exceptions (Al Munajjed, 1997, Altorki, 1986 and Doumato, 2000), published work on the current status of women in Saudi Arabia is almost non-existent. There is still a lack of studies that deal with contemporary Saudi women adopting an Islamic feminist perspective.

This thesis then aims to contribute to this under-researched topic by focusing on women journalists and to enable comparison. In order to understand women's status in Saudi Arabia, my aim in this thesis is to consider the historical, socio-economic and the political conditions in Saudi Arabia. There is limited research around female journalists in Saudi Arabia. Therefore an exploratory approach was deemed appropriate. Absence of detailed knowledge of this subject supported my decision to utilise a qualitative methodology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I avoided setting up a clear concept of what was to be studied and did not formulate any hypotheses in the beginning of this research to test them. Rather than following bluntly a specific theoretical framework that could potentially limit my openness to emerging insights, I developed research questions, from which the aim and the focus of this study emerged and expanded (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The aim of this study is to examine the way Saudi women are being presented in the daily press; to understand the reasons behind the existence

of gender stereotypes in the press in Saudi Arabia; and to look at Saudi women's voices as they speak their opinions on these matters. In conducting this feminist research, I had to keep asking myself who is representing women in the Saudi press? How are they being represented? And how many articles are there about women? These are the questions that I will be exploring in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Feminism in Saudi Arabia

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Almighty is the most righteous of you. And Almighty has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (Qur'an 49:13).

This chapter attempts to answer the following questions. How do Saudi women view feminism? What form of feminism is most appropriate in Saudi Arabia? How can Saudi women increase their freedom of expression while maintaining a significant connection with their religion and their culture?

Feminism has been defined as "the theoretical study of women's oppression and the strategical and political ways that all of us, building on that theoretical and historical knowledge, can work to end that oppression" (Valdivia, 1995: p.8). The definition stated above supports the notion that when studying feminism and women's oppression in a particular culture, one should take into consideration the political and historical context of that particular area. In other words, it is suggested that we should learn about the society's history and present in order to understand it fully. Women's oppression can take different forms depending on the women's class, race, ethnicity, country, religion etc.. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in *Le Deuxieme Sexe*, for instance, argues that historical and cultural factors can be very important in the construction of gender, saying that femininity is not innate or essential, but primarily culturally determined (Visser, 2002). The complex politics, social dynamics, and diversity of lives of women in the Arab countries cannot be reduced to Islam. The feminist critics must also take account of the fact that even though Muslim societies may be similar in some aspects, it is crucial to distinguish between them historically and in the present, economically, politically, and culturally. Politically, it is simplistic to suggest one form of Islamic feminist movement

for all Muslim or Islamic countries. So in order to start this discussion of feminist movements in Saudi Arabia, it is important to distinguish the differences between Saudi feminist movements, Western feminisms and forms of Islamic feminism.

Just as there is no single or agreed upon definition of feminism in Western research, so Arab researchers have failed to agree on one term in the Arab language that can define a feminist movement. This reflects social, political and ideological differences in the Arabic countries. There have been many attempts by Arab women to find alternative terminology for the term feminism whether they prefer to label themselves *unthawiyath*, *nassawiyat* (Al- Ali, 1997: p.174), “womanists” (Zuhur, 1993: p.32), or “ remakers of women” (Abdu Lughod, 1998: p.5-6). Western categories do not fit feminist activism in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, rather than trying to define and label Saudi feminists as liberal or radical or post-modernist, etc., I will consider their approaches to gender politics from a broad feminist point of view that focuses on their responses to oppressive measures and lack of equal career opportunity and representation. As a feminist researcher, I will also need to look at the local context and cultural aspects of Saudi society and history.

Although there has been no real feminist movement in Saudi Arabia as in the other Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan, the general concepts of equality, representation, and oppression were discussed and debated by women and men in Saudi Arabia shortly following the first Saudi women attempt to drive in Riyadh in 1990. Compared with other Arab countries and the West, feminism is understood and approached differently in Saudi Arabia; therefore it is necessary to identify the specific social and the cultural conditions of this particular Muslim society where Western definitions of feminism are not always helpful. In this chapter I aim to investigate the reasons why Saudi women refuse to be associated with the term feminism, and also to explain why Western feminism can be quite problematic for a Muslim society such as Saudi Arabia. This chapter will also identify an alternative Saudi

feminist movement that derives its ideologies from the Qur'an by analysing verses of the Qur'an that advocate women's rights, and their equality to men. Furthermore, I wish to establish a connection between the rise of feminism in Saudi Arabia and the debates in the media. I will also use examples from feminist theorists such as Margot Badran and Van Zonnen.

The focus of this chapter is very relevant to the present since many young Saudi women are using the media to demand equal rights. Good examples of these women are Maha Akeel, and Manal Al Shariff, who are spreading their ideas using all forms of media whether in the press, the television, the radio, or the social Internet websites such as Twitter and Facebook. One of the aims of this chapter then is to develop a cultural understanding of the relation between gender, power and media in Saudi Arabia. This chapter provides an alternative feminist approach that can be used in Saudi Arabia, in addition to showing how the Qur'an has been interpreted to subordinate women in the kingdom. It is fundamental for this research that women's issues are not characterised as universal, and that it is not assumed that particular issues are resolved simply by progress and modernisation (Basu & McGrory, 1995: p.263). Because there are struggles between various feminisms in Saudi Arabia as well as a cultural backlash against feminism in general, it can be argued that Saudi feminism is a movement that desires difference. The study of women in Islam is ideologically charged and tense. Researchers and feminists have faced difficulties over how to deal with this field. Their studies were full of misconceptions and mistakes. Kaddie argues:

One group denies that Muslim women are any more oppressed than non-Muslim women or argue that in key respects they have been less oppressed. A second says that oppression is real but extrinsic to Islam; the Qur'an, they say, intended gender equality, but this was undermined by foreign importations. An opposing group blames Islam for being irrevocably gender in egalitarian. There are also those who adopt intermediate

positions, as well as those who tend to avoid these controversies by sticking to monographic or limited studies that do not confront such issues. Some scholars favour shifting emphasis away from Islam to economic and social forces (Bullock, 2002: p.1-2).

Before I give more details about Islamic feminism, I want to draw a distinction between the terms “Muslim” and “Islamic”, as many readers might confuse the two. Also I will provide reasons why Saudi feminism is best described as a form of Islamic feminism and not Muslim feminism. According to Miriam Cooke:

Islamic feminist performances and practices are situated somewhere on a continuum between the extremes of an ascribed identity of “Muslim” and an achieved identity of “Islamist”. To be a Muslim is to be born into a particular religious community, to carry an identity card that checks “Muslim” next to the category “Religious Identity”(Cooke, 2001: p.60).

Therefore it can be argued that those who have Muslim identities can participate in a Muslim culture without necessarily accepting all of its norms and values. Cooke explains:

Muslims might be secular, occasionally observing some ritual, such as fasting for the month of Ramadan, while not necessarily praying regularly. Islamists, on the other hand, achieve their sometimes militant identity by devoting their lives to the establishment of an Islamic state. The Islamic identification connotes another form of archived identity, which is highly volatile and contingent (Cooke, 2001: p.60).

In *Women Claim Islam*, Cooke uses the term “feminist” to refer to women who think and do something about changing expectations of women’s social roles and responsibilities. She does that despite widespread resistance in the Middle East to the term as connoting Western women’s activism and radical political movements. She argues that the reason why she uses the term “feminism” is that she does not believe that “its meaning should be restricted to a

narrow notion of public action, nor accept the judgment that it is a culturally specific term” (Cooke, 2001: p. ix).

When looking at the press in Saudi Arabia I noticed three types of activists. The first represents the majority of Saudi women activists writing about women’s issues and rights in the Saudi press. These activists reject the term “feminist” to describe what they are doing. For example, Asma’a Al Mohammed, who writes for *Okaz* newspaper, is interested in Saudi women’s issues, and their contribution to the economy. Secondly, there is a type of writers who act as feminists even if they do not use the term. An example would be Jaheer Al Mossaed, who writes mainly for *Okaz* newspaper and few other newspapers. Her articles focus on Saudi women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. Thirdly, there are women activists who are happy to call themselves feminists such as Wajeeha Al Huwaider. Wajeeha’s writings were banned and removed from newspapers and online blogs in Saudi Arabia. Her writings were censored because of their nature which is not acceptable in Saudi Arabia. Wajeeha Al Huwaider has joined both demonstrations about women right to drive in Saudi Arabia. I will analyse examples of these women’s writings later in the content analysis chapter of this thesis.

According to the research done by Farida Allaghi and Aisha Almana (1984), the difficulties facing working women in Saudi Arabia include: family restrictions, lack of transportation (women are not allowed to drive), fear of rumours (if the woman has to work with men), less opportunities, lack of child-care facilities, lack of economic incentives (because Islam requires the men in the family to take care of the women financially and some families do not need the extra income), and a cultural heritage that insists on the division of labour between the sexes (Allaghi & Almana, 1984: p.25-26). Nevertheless all these issues are becoming less now with the age of transformation. Most Saudi women have witnessed the changes and have expressed their satisfaction in writing for the press articles. These are the main issues that Saudi Arabian journalists focus on when they write about women in the press.

In general, women exercise informal power in Arab society, particularly within elite families, although *Bedouin* (nomad) women are more mobile and assertive than their urban counterparts. Still, “Gulf women do not feel that they are given opportunities to contribute equally to their countries' development” (Allaghi & Almana, 1984: p.31).

Although modernisation has improved the lives of Saudi women, there are still many restrictions and limitations on where women can work. There are a lot of misconceptions that women in Saudi face especially from the west. One argument is that there are social limitations and perceptions that hinder women's advancement. According to Sandra Mackey, “A woman in Saudi Arabia waits to be married; then she waits for the next time she will have a sexual union with her husband; then she waits for her next child to be born; and finally she waits for old age, when relieved of her childbearing duties, she assumes a place of honor within her family” (Mackey, 2002: p.144). However these are not true, as the content analysis chapter will prove that many women in Saudi hold important positions and contribute a lot for their societies. Women have to ask difficult questions about women's new roles and responsibilities, their questions shape the debate about how economic, social and political survival can be managed without sacrificing traditional and religious norms. It is possible for Saudi women to achieve professional success and satisfaction; however, they do face particular constraints. One of the most difficult challenges working women had faced in the past in Saudi Arabia is the society's expectations of women. The idealized woman in Saudi Arabia is a wife and mother. Her place is within the family, “the basic unit of society”, and men are her protectors. According to traditionalists in Saudi, women should stay at home and educate their children. This is because these women are considered the reproducers of traditional values. As the mother of future generations, the idealized woman is in effect the partner of the Saudi state, which is dedicated to protecting the family and guarding “traditional values” and “Islamic morality” (Doumato, 1992).

However as more and more Saudi women go to work, Saudi society is itself adopting to change.

This brings us to the issue of representation, which is an important point of contention for contemporary feminism both in and outside Saudi Arabia and particularly in feminist media studies. Feminists claim that "We need to question representation both as a political and as an epistemological problem" (Ganguly, 1992: p.61). Keya Ganguly argues that feminists should always question who is representing women? And how? How are they represented in politics, in media, and in society? These questions apply even when women are studying other women of a different race, social class or culture. She argues that feminists should not depend on relative comparisons between one culture and another as a basis for intelligently conducted research and analysis and urges them to examine the assumptions, categories, and effects of their conclusions (Ganguly, 1992: p.65). Representation has always been an important battleground for Saudi women's movements. The women's movement is not only engaged in a material struggle about equal right and opportunities for women, but also in a symbolic conflict about definitions of femininity. This is well illustrated by Maha Akeel's studies on feminism in Saudi. Saudi women feminists are still struggling to find their identities. The problem of identity becomes a question of distinctiveness or oppositionality, i.e. that which makes them as a group of feminists distinctive from other groups or that which make them oppositional to others. Rapoport argues that ultimately

All forms of identity, whether ethnic, religious, individual or whatever, depend on setting up a contrast with those who are different, i.e. have a different identity. These differences both separate and distinguish these social units and also lead to various forms of interaction or communication (Rapoport, 1981: p.12).

A Saudi feminist movement is neither necessarily compatible with nor opposed to other feminist movements. Rather it is a movement that contains elements of Western feminist critiques of sexual abuse, power structures and inequality of all forms, while it also

acknowledges and makes use of religion as a source of identity, critique and empowerment. However there is a debate about whether the feminist movement in Saudi Arabia represents an alternative feminist paradigm, or whether it is a re-articulation of *Qur'anically* mandated gender equality (Moghadam, 2002, Wadud-Muhin, 1992 and Webb, 1999).

Islamic Feminism

The reason why I do not focus on Islamic feminism in the other Islamic countries in this study is because there is extensive literature on this movement by theorists, for example Nawal Al Saadawi. I will, however, give a brief introduction to the history of Islamic feminism because the women's movement in Saudi Arabia is relatively new, and it has drawn much of its theory from the Islamic feminist movement in the other Arab countries. Islamic feminism started in the other Islamic countries in the early 80s. In 1994, Afsaneh Najmabdi gave a speech at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her speech proposed a reform movement "Islamic feminism" that aims to bridge the gap between religious and secular feminists. There are different debates about the term "Islamic feminism" as it transcends secular and non-secular, and categories such as East and West, modern and traditional (Badran, 2001). It also includes concepts of progress and modernity (Abu-Lughod, 1998), and post-modern feminism (Moghissi, 1999).

As Saudi feminist activists calling for women's rights in Saudi Arabia were inspired by Islamic feminists from Egypt, Tunisia and the other Arab countries, they did not only try to distinguish themselves from Western feminism, but also from Islamic feminism practised in other countries in the Middle East. The argument is that they need a movement that addresses their issues directly, for example transport, which is not an issue for women in other Islamic countries. The agendas of other feminist movements, in their opinion, would distract Saudi

society from the real issues facing women in Saudi Arabia. But in order for Saudi women to find an audience in such a conservative society, they have to be sensitive to religion. One way forward for Saudi women activists is to find a balanced approach to feminism “by juxtaposing religious texts of all sorts with Western feminist writings” (Cooke, 2001: p.xii) since in doing so they are able to confuse the “comforting categories of Islamic and secular and are making West and East speak in a new combined tongue in dialogue with rather than negating of each other” (Najmabdadi, 1998: p.77). Livingstone (1998) describes this binary argument of *self* and *other* as the “being-true-to-myself syndrome” (Livingstone, 1998: p. 15). He argues that social and individual identity is a subjective dialectic of differences and alienation. Differences, however, are not enough to bring about an acknowledgment let alone an acceptance of equality. Livingstone describes this as “the subjectivism of equal values” (Livingstone, 1998: p.16). He concludes by arguing that what is important is not the “truth” about the *other*, but rather *authenticity*. Livingstone recognizes that subjectivity is unavoidable, but he also argues that “although society creates subjective representations of specific forms of subjectivity, it does not implicate hegemonic stereotypes and reactions from these representations” (Livingstone, 1998: p.17).

If authenticity is to be true to yourself, then values are relative. They will be seen as objective in the context of their own society based on the experiences of those who belong to it; they will be seen as subjective outside of their context, in relation to the relative experiences of another. This however does not eliminate the capacity of these values to inform ideologies that govern the actions of the state, government, or people towards a perceived *other* (Dahlan, 2011: p.41).

The Saudi Women’s Movement and the Use of the Qur’an

A large group of the Islamic feminists are positioned between the leftist secular feminists and the conservative Islamists. These women claim that Islam is a central part of their politics and identity. Islamic feminists have heavily criticised the male dominated hierarchy of most Islamic societies and "advocate for equal rights for women through religion (Morin, 2009: p.387). A Saudi-Islamic feminist movement, similarly to the Islamist movement, does not rely on Western feminism. Saudi women feminists contend "That a Saudi-led feminist movement must include the rights accorded women in the Qur'an and specifically in *Sharia*" (Wagner, 2011: p. 8). The Saudi-Islamic feminist seeks to work within the system and does not seek democratic reforms. Many of these women reject the label feminist (Cooke, 2001: p. 9). The reasons for their rejection of being associated with feminism will be discussed in this chapter.

Women in Saudi Arabia need a feminist movement which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, and which seeks rights and justice for women. For example, many women apply verses from the Qur'an or the Hadith² to support their arguments about women's rights. Saudi feminists targeted the *ayaat* (verses) of the Qur'an that seem to declare male/female equality. One example is Al- Hujurat quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Essentially, according to the Qur'an, "all human beings are equal; they are only distinguished among themselves on the basis of their rightful practice or implementation of the fundamental Qur'anic principle of justice" (Badraan, 2002).

Islamic feminists in Saudi Arabia argue that Islam was never the cause of suffering for women in Saudi Arabia. Indeed they point out that, 1400 years ago, Islam gave women rights that Western women have only acquired in the last 100 years. These rights include a woman's right to inherit, to divorce her husband, to own property, to run her own business, to hold official authority and many other rights. Therefore, the aim for any feminist or woman demanding equal rights for women in Saudi Arabia should be differentiating which laws are

² Hadith is the Prophet Mohammed's, peace be upon him, sayings.

religious and which are cultural. The basic methodologies of this Islamic feminism then are the classic Islamic methodologies of *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources) and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) (Badraan, 2002). Margot Badraan suggests the use of a feminist hermeneutics.

A feminist hermeneutics would focus on gender equality in Qur'anic verses such as: "I shall not lose sight of the labour of any of you who labours in my way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other" (Qur'an, 3: p.195). Use of verses from the Qur'an and quoting the verses as they are allows Islamic feminists to argue that equality between men and women is fundamental to Islam.

Another approach which Islamic feminists advocate is offering alternative interpretations of some verses that have previously been misinterpreted to serve men's power. One such example is the use of word *qiwama* in the verse: "... Men are (qawamon) the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others..." (Qur'an 4:34) *Qiwama* which some assume means "male superiority" in fact refers to the financial support that men must provide to their women, a reading which is clear from the verse that follows {*bema anfko*}. The term *qiwama* is mentioned in the Qur'an in chapter 4: 34. Naseef interprets this verse as follows: "men are the maintainers of women because of what Allah has given one over the other, and because they spend to support them from their means" (1999: p.198). Dr. Fatima, on the other hand, defines *qiwama* as maintenance and protection of the wife because she is a mother, not because she is a woman (Badraan, 2002). Badraan argues that in feminist readings *qiwama* is about responsibility and it is not a privilege which undermines women's rights as many have come to believe. Instead it is based on the *Shari'a* principle of benefits in accordance with the scale of responsibility (Badraan, 2002). *Al-Qayyim* (maintainer) is ascribed to men to maintain the well-being of the family initially and to society as a whole. Thus men maintain women by the means in which they can protect them, not as an object of possession.

Many feminists through the years have contributed their understandings of this verse which they believe does not imply that men excel over women or visa-versa, indicating that each sex has their own unique attributes and strengths that the other lacks.

According to Margot Badran, Feminist hermeneutics has taken three approaches. These are:

- 1) Revisiting *ayaat* (verses) of the Qur'an to correct false stories in common circulation, such as the accounts of creation and of events in the Garden of Eden that have shored up claims of male superiority;
- 2) Citing *ayaat* (verses) that unequivocally enunciate the equality of women and men;
- 3) Deconstructing *ayaat* (verses) attentive to male and female difference that have been commonly interpreted in ways that justify male domination (Badran, 2002).

Women must be educated about their rights; they must also be educated about the Qur'an interpretations. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Islam has granted women all their rights from the early age.

Our government, thank God, is known for its deference to the *Shar'iah* law and its enforcement of it on its subjects and this is part of God's favour on it and the reason for its survival, glory, and God's siding with it. May God stay it on the right path, reform its men, and help it to protect His religion, His Book, and the Sunnah of His Prophet from the mockery of the mockers, the atheism of the atheists and the scorning of criminals (Al-Baadi, 1982: p.133-134).

Women in Saudi Arabia are supposed to be granted their rights, but the media often fails to inform its audiences about this fact. It is difficult for many Muslim women who do not have proper background knowledge about the *Tafseer*, which is the knowledge of interpreting the Qur'an to challenge male cultural authority when the women themselves do not know the

difference between cultural customs and actual Islamic law. Feminists in Saudi Arabia can use verses from the Holy Qur'an to educate women about the rights that Islam intended for them. They also have to be explicit about the fact that there is no contradiction between being a Saudi feminist and being a Muslim. One way to do that is to define feminism as an "awareness of constraints placed upon women because of gender, a rejection of such limitations placed on women, and efforts to construct and implement a more equitable gender system" (Badraan, 2002). Feminists in Saudi Arabia also have to challenge the misinterpretations of Islamic laws which have been used to hinder women's advancement over the years. Starting from the Saudi education system at all levels. According to Maha Akeel, "At a very young age, a Saudi boy learns he is privileged simply for being born male. But a young girl is ingrained with the belief she is the lesser because she is female". She goes on to say that we need a new curriculum:

A religious and Islamic history curriculum that highlights women's roles and contributions, as well as their rights in accordance with Islam, would raise awareness and instil better attitudes and treatment of women. A comprehensive awareness campaign on equal rights, based on *shari'a* (Islamic principles of jurisprudence), is also crucial. Educating society about the rights of women concerning education, marriage, child custody, inheritance, ownership, business and other things is key to creating a society that can truly claim it adheres to Islamic principles (Akeel, 2011).

Feminism and Media in Saudi Arabia

The media can be described as practising technologies of gender. As Van Zoonen has argued these technologies include "accommodating, modifying, reconstructing, producing and disciplining contradictory renditions of sexual differences" (Van Zoonen, 1994: p.66). The

media provides a public outlet for women to discuss their achievements, their concerns and the barriers that they face and address their issues from their point of view. Therefore it is important for women to participate in the media. Van Zoonen identifies another key issue in feminist studies and that is “the relation between male dominance among media professionals and masculine discourse in media texts” (Van Zoonen, 1994: p.7). The argument here is that the dominance of male broadcasters and journalists in the industry gives them the power to define and interpret society’s values according to their own standards, which remain largely unchallenged. Van Zoonen points out that “this analysis is disputed because research has failed to show a clear causal relation between media exposure and sexist attitudes. Instead, there are other variables such as age, class and education that affect the media’s influence on social values” (Van Zoonen, 1994: p.34). Although women in Saudi Arabia now are more educated about their rights, and have managed to publish articles and books about women’s rights and issues in Saudi Arabia, the media are still dominated by men. It can be argued that an increase in the number of female journalists would result in a more balanced and less sexist way of reporting. The relation between male dominance among media professionals and masculine discourse in media texts is an enduring issue in feminist media theory (Van Zoonen, 1994: p.7). Tables in the content analysis chapter will show statistics of number of women working in the press as opposed to the number of men working in the press. The number of male journalists is very high compared to the number of female journalists and that is one of the main reasons that can contribute to the nature of the press in Saudi Arabia. Tables in content analysis also shows that there even fewer female journalists in cities such as Madinah in comparisons to the number of female journalists working in larger cities such as Jeddah or Riyadh. This has contributed to the fact that the society in Madinah does not approve of the Saudi women’s movement that calls for women’s rights such as driving or traveling without *Mahram*. Women in Saudi Arabia are hardly visible in the news. Saudi women’s pictures are not allowed in any

newspapers in Saudi Arabia. Some women even fear using their real names when writing articles or being mentioned in the daily news because their families consider it as a source of great shame. Saudi media often portray women as interested only in domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and raising children. This dominant mode of representation has become a feminist issue for Saudi women and they have argued that it is crucial for women themselves to participate in producing media content in order to reduce those stereotypes. It is within this context that “behind the veil”, silently, women in Saudi Arabia are revolutionizing their status (Al Munajjed, 1997).

Media theorist Haque argued that the mass media are both a force for integration and for dispersion and individuation in society (Haque & Hossain, 2012: p.4). Certainly the question of what are the most wide-ranging consequences that follow from the nature of media in Saudi Arabia also raises the questions of individual and group motivation and use. Fatin Haque raises the question of the extent to which Saudi women are “simple hostages at the hands of the media” (Haque & Hossain, 2012: p.4). Feminists in Saudi Arabia argue that Saudis are being “managed, manipulated, massaged and brainwashed by the media” (Haque & Hossain, 2012: p.4). She argues the men controlling the media in Saudi Arabia, who can be biased, often become propagandists of their personal opinion, using the media as their vehicle. This view can be described as extreme. Especially that women are slowly entering the field and contributing to it. More than ever now you can see Saudi women represented in the media in general.

Saudi female journalists need to challenge the media and change the stereotypical content of the media in Saudi Arabia, whether in TV, Radio, press or magazines. In addition, with the use of narratives, where women share their stories and experiences, “women begin to see how their personal stories are actually cultural productions shaped by dominant discourses” (Gallant, 2008: p. 198), thus creating awareness, resistance and emancipation while

maintaining Islamic and cultural norms (Gallant, 2008). In the second half of this chapter I will focus on three approaches Saudi feminists have used to be more visible in the media.

1. Saudi Feminists' Use of Local Media

A crucial part of the new feminist movement in Saudi Arabia involves writing about women's experiences and accomplishments. Women in Saudi today are recording Saudi women's history, articulating their experience themselves, rather than being constantly written and talked about. This approach is very important because when Western feminism and global media write about Saudi women, they represent them to audiences as victims. Many Saudi women journalists believe that it is their job to write about women in the local media in ways that are far from the biased Western views or the sexist Saudi male oriented local news. This is also important because women are underrepresented in the local Saudi media. Therefore the main concern of Saudi feminist women and the biggest headline until recently in the Saudi Arabian press is not about women being active or passive, oppressed or valued, it is about them being unseen. The media have become important targets of the Saudi women's movement. Many local newspapers and Internet websites have been challenged by women's groups because of their sexist representation of women and their neglect of women's issues. They fail to represent a majority of women in Saudi Arabia who are active participants in the labour force of the Saudi Arabian economy. Saudi feminists argue that Saudi society must adapt to the rapid social change and must be prepared to adapt to the changes in gender roles. What could be better, they argue, than the media when it comes to introducing wider Saudi society to the changes that are happening in the labour force in Saudi Arabia? Saudi feminists endorse Tuchman's views that: "Media reflect society's dominant social values and symbolically denigrate women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles. The models that

media offer are restrictive and endanger the development of girls and women into complete human beings and socially valuable workers” (Tuchman, 1978).

An important issue for feminists in Saudi Arabia is their struggle to find common grounds on what is realistic and what is not for Saudi women. Many female activists who call for women’s rights in Saudi Arabia, have criticized the local press for focusing on showing women in stereotypical roles of housewives and mothers. For example, Nahid Saeed, in her article *Who will write about women’s achievements in Saudi Arabia?* (Saeed, 2007), criticizes the tendency of the press in Saudi to focus on men’s achievements and only represent women in Saudi as passive. There are different aspects of women experiences which should be reflected in the media. Many more women work than the media suggest. Writings of Western societies, Brunsdon argues that: “For feminists to call for more realistic images of women is to engage in the struggle to define what is meant by realistic, rather than to offer easily available alternative images. Arguing for more realistic images is always an argument for the representation of your version of reality” (Brunsdon, 1988: p.149).

2. Saudi Feminists’ Use of Global Media

Saudi feminists are turning to the global media to bring attention to women’s issues. For example, Manal Al Sharif still defends women’s rights in Saudi Arabia even after her police arrest in 2011. She was arrested after she filmed herself driving in Saudi Arabia. There has been a spate of empirical studies showing that Arab women and Arabs in general are represented in negative ways in the Western media. Nevertheless some Saudi Arabian feminists argue that it is crucial for women in Saudi Arabia to be visible in the global media. Maha Akeel argues that:

Western media’s coverage of Saudi women is a double-edged sword. Although Western

media tend to be stereotypical and superficial in their coverage of Saudi women – primarily covering the driving ban, veiling and gender segregation – they also bring international attention to women’s issue (Akeel, 2011).

This can be the case in many high-profile cases, such as the woman who even though was happily married with two children, was forced to divorce her husband and imprisoned. The reason given by the press in Saudi was “ancestral incompatibility”. This news was covered by national and international media. After two years in jail, she was granted a royal pardon and returned to her husband (Akeel, 2011). Marshall McLuhan called the media an important vehicle. In his book, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964) he coined a phrase – the medium is the message- to explain the influence of mass media on the readers and audiences. In Saudi Arabia, the decade of the Arab spring, which started in 2010, has become the age of the media. It is an age of communication technology and information revolution. At this stage in development of Saudi Arabia, the mass media are more pervasive than ever before. The media have virtually turned the world into a global village of communication (McLuhan, 1964: p.4), in the Saudi context, this idea is only now being fully realised.

Nevertheless, according to Dahlan (2011), “global media play an important role in decontextualizing Saudi women’s experiences, failing to engage with their values, independent and with due reference to Saudi social relations”. She also suggests that global media cannot “be the ‘vessel’ of freedom through which a real and ‘authentic’ Saudi woman’s “voice” can be heard”. She gives the example of decontextualization which often occurs in the comparisons between Western and Saudi values. The conditions of people’s lives are not specified as they would be if cultures were reversed, and there are problems with the framework of credibility given to “insiders” (Dahlan, 2011: p. 79).

There are also articles in the global media that give examples of active women in Saudi Arabia. One story reported that a new Saudi channel, *Al- Ikhbariya*, “is trying to change false

Western perceptions” of the role of women, allowing Saudi’s first female news anchor to report on the day’s news and, as the article described, dressed “modestly in a black head scarf and white jacket” (Evans, 2004, Jan 13). These types of articles have “a high concentration of presenting ‘firsts’ for Saudi women, which defy the patriarchal norm, including the first Saudi film, starring a first ‘silver-screen’ Saudi actress” (“Hooray for Saudiwood” 2006, Mar 24). Dahlan (2011) suggests that there are many articles in global media that focus on Saudi women ‘firsts’. Examples of these articles are on the first “risque” fashion designer (Vallis, 2004, April 29), the first women-exclusive auto showroom (“All-female showroom launches”, 2006, Dec 9), the first Saudi beauty pageant (“The Eye of the beholder”, 2004, Aug 9), the first Saudi female pilot, hired by a company. (“Mattar”, 2005, Jun 17; *National Post*, 2004, Nov 24); and the seven women who ran in the elections for the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Saudi women to be allowed ..., 2005, Sept 15)—to list but a few.

3. Saudi Feminists’ Use of the New Media (the Social Network)

The Internet is a media platform that has the specific aspects of interactivity and essential for democracy. Dutton prophesized:

We are witnessing the emergence of the Fifth Estate through the emerging powerful networks which can act independently from traditional media. Social networks will move across, undermine, and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutes, and become an alternative source of news, as well as providing another option for politicians and other public figures, to bypass these boundaries and take their unmediated messages (Dutton, 2007).

According to Maha Akeel, new social media as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have many advantages in Saudi Arabia. They have forced the traditional media (the press) to look at issues

they would not have addressed otherwise mainly women's issues. Maha Akeel argues that “as traditional media outlets grow increasingly concerned about readership and impact, they are under pressure to keep up with people's demands for freer and bolder platforms” (Akeel, 2011). Now more media outlets such as press publications and TV are looking to new media to gauge opinions and highlight topics important to their readers (Akeel, 2011). Saudi women have used social networks, such as Twitter, to debate women’s issues such as driving, women careers, domestic violence and women’s presence in *Shurra* council.

In January 2014, the hashtag #Why_did_Twitter_succeed_in_Saudi_Arabia was trending. Many Saudis argue that Twitter has given them freedom to express their views in an otherwise restricted nation. Since it started, there have been more than 10,000 tweets using this hashtag. Saudis are among the world's heaviest Twitter users, "Because we are able to say what we couldn't say in real life. The tweets continue in a similar vein (Hebblethwaite, 2014).

According to the *Social Platforms Adoption report* featuring data for the year 2012, it has been confirmed that Saudi Arabia was among the fastest-growing Twitter markets in the world. According to the report, active Twitter users have grown by a staggering 56% from GWI.5 (Q2 2011) to GWI.7 (Q2 2012) in Saudi Arabia (Mari, 2012).

Khaled Aburas told *Arab News* in 2013 that: “Saudi women, especially university graduates, are using Twitter and other social media outlets to mobilize support for their rights. Many of them have been waiting for years to get employed. They have formed a group now on Twitter to make their voice heard by officials.” He argues that, for Saudi women, social media is an ideal platform through which to join forces and take up their issues: “They face the problem of immobility. It is not possible for women in different regions in a vast country like Saudi Arabia to come together in one place to raise their voices for their rights” (Ghafour, 2013).

Women use Twitter to discuss the current issues that they face in Saudi Arabia such as

the lack of employment opportunities for young women. “We have lost our youth and age searching for jobs,” said one Saudi woman graduate in her Twitter message. Many of these jobless graduates complain that they were side-lined because they did not have connections or know someone who could take up their case with the powers that be. Another woman, who specialized in Sharia education, says that she has been seeking a job for 23 years. “We are disappointed with the failed system,” said another woman, urging authorities to find jobs for all women who graduated several years ago and have solid educational backgrounds (Ghafour, 2013).

No one can deny the role of the Internet in democratizing the Saudi sphere and empowering women.

Western Feminism

The new feminist movement in Saudi Arabia shares similarities with Western feminist movements in the way they both apply feminist theories to the ways in which media works in order to talk about women issues. However, there are a lot of differences. For example, early Western feminists criticized the media in the West for what they call “the beauty myth”. In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan accused the media of installing insecurity, fear and frustration in ordinary women (Friedan, 1963). More recently Western feminist Naomi Wolf, in her book *The Beauty Myth* (1992), blamed the media for women’s powerlessness and sufferings. Wolf’s basic thesis, which still has relevance more than 20 years later, suggests that there is a relationship between female liberation and female beauty:

The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us. During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose

exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing specialty. Pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers" (Wolf, 1992: p.10).

Women in the West have achieved relative political and economical power. However feminists in the West now are concerned with other matters such as sexual identities and lesbianism. One of their most important concerns is the woman's body. In contrast, for Saudi Arabian women, the body is unseen. The main concern for women in Saudi Arabia is to demand equal rights in economics and politics. The debates between post-structuralist and essentialist feminisms in the West about the construction of gender (Annandale & Clark, 1996; De Lauretis, 1987) will hardly speak to women in a society where bodies are seen in private, covered in public. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has no cinema, and censorship is widespread. The Saudi state acts to limit the availability of images of women (Roald, 2001). It is very difficult for Western societies to understand the complexities of these women who live in Saudi Arabia. Roald points to the complex reality of Islamic cultures and argues that most of the literature relates female Islamic dress in terms of its socio-political implications, ignoring the fact that most Muslim women cover because of their commitment to their religion (Roald, 2001).

There are different feminist movements that are not related to Western feminism (Afshar, 1996; Afshar, 1998; Basu & McGrory, 1995; Jayawardena, 1986; Moghadam, 1994; Raju, 2002). Some of these movements are Islamic (Gole, 1997; Yamani, 1996). Many studies support the notion that human rights are not contradictory to Islam (Afkhami, 1995; Mir-

Hosseini, 1999). Some studies attempted to show how Western feminists have at times misjudged the status of women in Islam (Ahmed, 1992; Haddad & Esposito, 1998; Hymowitz, 2003; Jawad & Benn, 2003)

In this study Western feminism proved inadequate because feminism, particularly Western definitions of feminism, is rejected by Saudi society, and most Saudi women writing about women's issues and equality do not call themselves feminists. Their opinions and ideologies do not relate directly to most of the basic assumptions of Western feminist theory. An important reason why Saudi women wish to distinguish themselves from Western feminist movements is the negative image they have about feminism being linked to lesbianism, abortion, aggressiveness or sexual freedom. According to Odum and Gilliam, (1991), the issue for women in developing countries is "gaining basic economic and political power, which is tied to socioeconomic change" (Odum and Gilliam, 1991). Articles in the Saudi press also show women's desire to have equal opportunities with men in the workplace and education.

Another reason why Western feminist concepts can be problematic in this study is because, according to Chandra T. Mohanty, Western feminisms have "a tendency to appropriate and colonize the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in "Third World" countries" (Mohanty, 2003: p19). She also argues that it is "in this process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the 'Third World' that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse"(Mohanty, 2003: p20). Western feminism assumes that women in the Islamic world all share the same oppression, and are weak, passive housewives, and are essentially victims. Mohanty identifies some analytic presuppositions which she finds problematic in Western feminist scholarship (Mohanty, 2003). For example, she argues that Western scholarship tends to constitute "third world women" as an ahistorical group similar in class, ethnicity, religion geographical location, etc. Despite their idealistic

goals, the frameworks of research used by Western feminists are heavily criticized by feminists from other cultures, especially by feminists from “underdeveloped” or “third world countries”. She argues: “What is problematical about this kind of use of ‘women’ as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination” (Mohanty, 2003: p.31).

Similarly, Saudi feminist would require Western feminists to respect different cultures and allow the women of those cultures to speak for themselves and about what they consider are important to them. As Odum argues: "While it is clear that sexual egalitarianism is a major goal on which all feminists can agree, gender discrimination is neither the sole nor perhaps the primary locus of the oppression of Third World women" (Odum, 1991: p.315). For the Saudi women feminists, struggles against racism, equal pay, and representations are a priority and part of their struggle as feminists. However, because these women lack the power to participate in defining feminism and setting its agenda on the international stage, their concerns are not adequately portrayed and they themselves are not well represented. This is because, in many cases, Western feminists assume they are speaking for all women (Odum, 1991). It is Western women who can more easily gain access to the international public sphere. There is a tendency in Western feminism to assume that women’s issues are universal, and that their goals are similar. However “Women in Islam” is a very complex category. As Edward Said explained, “Islam is a world of many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures, and countries that cannot be simplified into a single unmitigated derogatory rendition” (Said, 2002: p.70).

In an interview Nawal Al Saadawi, who is a well-known Egyptian activist, gives an answer to the question of how you explain the decline in interest in feminism worldwide. “There are differences between feminism in Muslim countries and feminism in Western countries. Western feminists are more concerned with class, race and gender oppression but

they have a different outlook for one important reason: they were never colonized. They do not link feminism to colonialism”. She adds: “There has been a backlash against feminism over recent years as a result of the rise of right-wing politics. There is a direct connection. The defeat of socialism is also responsible but so is the connection between right-wing groups and religious fundamentalists” (Al Saadawi, 2008). While Al Saadawi’s analysis may be appropriate to the developing countries, Saudi Arabia (unlike the other countries in the Middle East) has never been under colonialism, and has had no direct contact with any Western movement. This is another reason why any feminist movement in Saudi Arabia is likely to be distinctive and different from the other Arab or Islamic feminist movements spreading in the Middle East.

There are mutual misunderstandings between both worlds: the Islamic world and the Western world. Muslim women in Saudi Arabia mistake Western feminism as being limited to a sexual movement that primarily aims to bring sexual freedom for women. For example, Third Wave feminism³ using visual and printed media to call for sexual liberation. Third Wave feminism has celebrated a woman’s right to pleasure, at times ignoring or misrepresenting pro-sex feminisms of the second wave; the third wave has stressed its innovation by celebrating a “new” feminist (hetero) sexuality, one that is being posited in generational terms (Henry, 2000: p.14). Saudi Arabian women were exposed to popular forms of third wave feminism through media such as sitcoms and blockbusters films, for example, *Sex and the City* or *Bridget Jones’s Diary* which portray the idea of sexual freedom. Sexuality is a private issue for a society such as Saudi Arabia. Saudi society, especially in the case of women, religion and traditions have a great impact on the relationship between men and women and on all aspect of their lives.

Western feminists have a tendency to blame Islam for all the wrongdoings against

³ Third Wave feminism is a movement that is associated with Rebecca Walker. **Third wave feminists define** themselves as a member-driven multiracial, multicultural, multi-sexuality national non-profit organization devoted to feminist and youth activism for change.

women in Saudi Arabia. Their understanding of the restrictions imposed on women as related to Islam and that Islam gave men power over women are inaccurate. Tradition and culture have a great impact in forming gender roles in Saudi Arabia. Men in Saudi work outside of the home and are the only breadwinners, while women must stay at home, looking after the family, and educating the children. These roles of gender have been part of the Saudi tradition and are not to be confused with Islamic principles (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; AlMunajjed, 1997; Fanjar, 1987; Zant, 2002). Alhazmi (2010) suggests such a traditional worldview often creates a masculine society in which gender separation is prominent and there are quite different roles for the sexes (Marcus, 2005); authority and domination are assigned to men (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). Feminists in Saudi Arabia claim that in the early days of Islam women played a significant role in supporting the Prophet Muhammad. They were very active spreading the prophet's message and educating people about Islam. One of these women was the prophet's wife Khadija, who was a successful business woman at that time and the first person to believe in his message. Many other well-respected women have had prominent roles in government, politics and society throughout Islamic history.

Chapter Three: The Representation of Muslim Women in Global Media

This chapter aims to look at how people's understandings of Islam were influenced by the media in the period that followed the events of 11th September 2001. It offered a way of beginning to understand how those representations shape Western readers' understanding of Islam and Muslims, and how these representations can be challenged. This research does not cover all of the media; it only looks at newspaper coverage of Muslims and does not consider representations in the broadcast media.

Western media accuse Islam of being the reason behind women's sexual oppression in Saudi Arabia. Edward Said's book, *Covering Islam* (1997), describes how the media determines how we see the rest of the world. He notes that:

Today, Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few decades, especially since events in Iran from 1979 onwards caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analysed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material.

In many instances Said argues that coverage of Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, and deep yet paradoxically free floating hostility (Said, 1997: p.9). Saudi women, according to the West, are oppressed and need to be rescued (Abu-Lughod, 2002). It can be argued that representations of these women are more pictorial than verbal in the Western media (Alloula, 1987; Brown, 1988). Western scholars also have rendered these women as still-lives (Wilkins, 1995); in a survey of all photographs of Muslims in the American press, three-quarters (73%) of the

women were depicted in passive roles, compared with less than one-sixth (15%) of the men. In photographs of the Middle East, women were six times (42%) more likely to be portrayed as victims than were men (7%) (Esposito & Mogahed, 2008: p.101). In other words, “the use of the terms (Islam) and the (West) may infer opposition, embody mutual misconceptions about both cultures, and may assume both are homogeneous” (Roald, 2001: p. 8). Western feminism and the West in general have misconceptions of Islam, clearly visible in the media. “Islamophobia” has expanded post 9/11, with the global media’s role in the rise of a new global threat. “In the aftermath of these attacks and with the rise of religious militancy, Islam has been the focus of much scrutiny” (Haque & Hossain, 2012: p.3). Islam was represented in media as being the source of violence and terror. Islam has been accused of many things; only one is being oppressive to women. Although many Muslims have attempted to distinguish themselves from extremist groups that in reality do not represent the 1.4 billion Muslims dispersed around the world (Haque & Hossain, 2012: p3), the majority of Muslims continue to face the repercussions and blame of these isolated terrorist acts. In addition to its often biased representations of conflicts and terrorism, the Western media’s coverage of the human rights of women in Islam, such as the veiling of women, is disproportionate. Also the media in the West represents Islam as a male-dominated religion, and men as having complete authority over women. However, Islamic feminists argue that these misrepresentations of women in Islam are inaccurate since they rely on distortions, and that the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) was a reformer for women (Hague & Hossain, 2012).

Saudi feminists argue that when Islam was established in 610 in Makkah, it improved the status of women. Women were allowed to be educated and to participate in political, economic, and social activities in their communities. This created upward social mobility. Khaddūrī describes women’s lives in the early years of Islam:

Women were also given the right to vote, something the U.S. denied women until 1919.

Women were given the right to inherit property and take charge of their possessions. While most of these rights are denied to Muslim women today as a result of cultural tradition, one should not associate this with Islam, because they do not correlate with it (Khaddūrī, 2002: pp.19-20).

As will be seen in the chapter that follows, Islamic values and Saudi Arabian customs and traditions have major effects on the relationships between men and women in Saudi Arabia, and on all aspect of their private and their public lives in general. Other crucial factors that can affect Saudi society and women's roles include education, politics and economics.

The media in the West as “an instrument of public ideology demonizes Islam, portraying it as a threat to Western interests, thus reproducing, producing and sustaining the ideology necessary to subjugate Muslims both internationally and domestically” (Poole, 2002: p.17). There is a strong link between the Western media reporting of Islam and the spread of Islamophobia in Western societies. Stories viewing Saudi and Muslim women as victims can fuel Islamophobic stereotypes by creating stories that fit with dominant islamphobic discourses, depending on the basis for the judgments and views of Muslim women in play, and of Saudi women specifically.

Islamophobia

The Dutch have defined Islamophobia as:

Any ideology or pattern of thought and/or behaviour in which [Muslims] are excluded from positions, rights, possibilities in (parts of) society because of their believed or actual Islamic background. [Muslims] are positioned and treated as (imagined/real) representatives of Islam in general or (imagined/real) Islamic groups instead of their capacities as individuals (Allen, 2010: p. 132).

Halliday has suggested that we call such attitudes anti-Muslim instead of Anti-Islamic. He concludes that

Islam as religion was the enemy in the past-in the Crusades of *Reconquista*. It is not the enemy now... the attack now is against not Islam as a faith but against Muslims as people... the term 'Islamophobia' is... misleading. The rhetoric is 'anti-Muslim' rather than 'anti-Islamic'. The rhetoric is against people, not religion (Halliday, 2002:p. 128).

Islamophobia gained political recognition in the UK after the highly influential report entitled *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all: report of Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* (1997). With the publication of this report, the ways in which Islamophobia was understood significantly changed. According to this report, Islamophobia was coined because there was a new reality that needed naming, more crucially, so that it could be identified and acted against (Runnymede Trust, 1997a: p.4). Within the first few paragraphs of the Runnymede Report, the definition of Islamophobia was transformed from the "shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam- and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" to "the recurring characteristic of closed views". The report identifies Islamophobia as a new and specifically contemporary phenomenon: a new reality that needed naming (Runnymede Trust, 1997a: p.4). However, Maussen argues that Islamophobia still has different ranges and therefore it is difficult to define in any simple way:

"Islamophobia" groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is a 'fear' or a 'phobia' of Islam. However, we should distinguish between different kinds of discourse, for instance between academic discussions on the relations between Islam and modernity, public discussions on whether Islam recognises the principles of separation of state and church, public outcries about Islam as 'backward religion' or a 'violent religion', and the forms of hate speech one can find on Internet forums and in

newspapers. It may well be that these different kinds of discourse and speech are related and feed into one another, but we cannot simply equate them all and treat them as comparable illustrations of a core ideology named “Islamophobia” (Maussen, 2006: p.100).

Islamophobia is a problematic phenomenon because of the fact that it is highly changeable, continually reinventing, and reinterpreting media representations of Islam and Muslims as different to and incompatible with the West. What becomes normative is that acceptance of Muslims and Islam as inherently and oppositely different. This process then homogenises Muslims and Islam as an undifferentiated “Other” while believing that the “self” is both superior and authoritative. By default, the other will be evaluated negatively. An example is how the *Hijab* is seen as a symbol of oppression and weakness in women who wear it.

In recent years, there has been a shift in global media reporting of issues relating to women in Saudi Arabia with coverage shifting from politics to religion. This trend has resulted in the widespread application of generalisations and negative stereotypes. Today’s media is more pervasive and more persuasive than ever (Posetti 2006:p.2). Julie Posetti argues that the literature indicates that “negative stereotyping and reactionary reporting have historically typified coverage of Islam and Muslims. Muslim women are almost invariably portrayed as oppressed and veiled, a terrorist threat or exotic, sexualised beings” (Posetti, 2006:p.3). This is related to Said’s theory of Orientalism (Said, 1978), which contends that the Muslim world and its inhabitants are considered backward, barbaric and outsiders to Western society (Said, 1978). Posetti also argues that this “othering” of Muslims is notable in the media in terms of the coverage of Muslim women. Most representations of Muslim women involve them wearing traditional Islamic clothing such as the *hijab*, and their role in the media is generally limited to commentary on issues such as the veil” (Posetti, 2006: p.4). Another problem with much of the Western media is that it makes little effort to make readers understand the difference between

Islam, “Islamism” and “Islamist terrorism”. Moreover, the media in the West seldom mentions the role the United States in initiating terrorism and how Bin Laden himself is an American product.

Despite the failings of the term Islamophobia, and the lack of clarity that exists, it would appear that Islamophobia is a serious phenomenon and a social reality. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said shows how Western writers constructed an ideology of Eastern cultures as alien and to be defined in terms of opposition to Western culture and values. Furthermore a study of representations of Islam by the Commission on British Muslims (1978) draws attention to the portrayal of Islam in an undifferentiated way, ignoring differences within Islam and changes over time (Said, 1978). Another research carried by Poole (2002) shows how Islam is represented in very limited ways and that the stories are selected to fit news agendas and reported in ways that “confirm existing ways of thinking” (p.2). Poole also argues that “Islam is demonized, presented as a threat to ‘us’” and that the terms “The West” and “Islam” are defined as “opposites, propagating the idea of confrontation. Events are interpreted to fit the majority view”. Poole also shows how media reporting influences perceptions. (Poole, 2002: p.2). Elizabeth Poole also investigated the representation of British Muslims in the two British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Times*. The findings of her study show that the two papers tended to cover the exact same range of issues related to Islam. The study also shows that Muslims were rarely treated as part of British society and that they rarely appeared in “normal” news stories. Quite often the coverage of news related to Muslims in Britain fitted the assumptions about Muslims. Poole gives an example of the reporting of marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims (such as Jemima Goldsmith to Imran Khan). Articles which covered the news focused on cultural differences. Another example she gives is the reporting of the election of a Muslim MP, Mohammed Sarwar, which focused on allegations of vote-rigging (Poole, 2002).

As discussed above, the media in the West tend to report Islam as “monolithic and static; as other and separate from the West; as inferior; as enemy; as manipulative; as discriminated against; as having its criticism of the West rejected” (Allen, 2007:p. 6). In specific consequence Islamophobia was becoming increasingly naturalised. All of these points are useful in identifying Islamophobia in certain institutions, for example, in the media (Sayed, 2009: p.52). As Allen has argued, this view then sees Islam as “a single monolithic bloc where Muslim diversity is overlooked both in terms of difference between Muslims and also between Muslims and non-Muslims” (Allen, 2009: p.69). The report on Islamophobia also suggests that Muslims are seen to be “static and unresponsive to new realities and challenges” (Runnymede Trust, 1997). According to Allen (2009) these are “sweeping generalisations that insist that the negative attributes and characteristics of a few become projected onto all Muslims without differentiation (Allen, 2009: p.69). The report also indicates that: “Any episode in which an individual Muslim is judged to have behaved badly is used as an illustrative example to condemn all Muslims without exception” (Runnymede Trust, 1997).

The Veil

Over the past decade, the topic of the veil which is worn by many Muslim women, and also known as the *hijab*, has been the focus of often fierce media debates (Posetti, 2006: p.1). The *hijab* has divided the feminist movement with conflicting claims that it is a symbol of both “oppression and freedom of expression” (Posetti, 2006: p.1).

The veil is one of the topics that have been always of interests to feminists in the West. It is thought of as a harsh custom that Islam requires of women. Although much of the Western media criticizes the veil and finds it oppressive to Muslim women, according to various studies (Scott, 2007 Bullock, 2002), it is in fact meant to protect women and help them interact easily

with men. Critics of the Western discourse of the veil point out that the Western focus on the veil has been obsessive. According to Bullock, Muslim women who cover find it unacceptable that their own positive experience of covering is denied, and they are annoyed that other aspects of their identity are ignored (Bullock, 2002). Islam requires women to wear a veil for their own safety, but if a woman chooses not to wear it, it is her personal choice, and this freedom of choice should be respected. One aim of contemporary Muslim feminists, such as Fatima Mernissi, is to direct arguments at challenging the popular culture. According to Bullock, they also seek to challenge liberal feminists' understanding of the oppressive nature of veiling (Bullock, 2002:p.XVII).

Most Western scholars associate veiling with tradition as opposed to modernity. They see veiled women as backwards, but studies show that veiling became more widespread in the Middle East after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, and increased during European occupation of the Middle East (1830-1956). Cole writes:

In an Orientalist corollary to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the intrusive presence of Westerners appears to have helped produce the phenomenon [widespread veiling] that they observed. In short, the notion of tradition as a stable foil for the dynamism of modernity has been demolished, as the diversity and volatility of pre-modern extra- European specifics has come to be better appreciated (Cole, 1994: p. 13).

The issue of the veil has been central to many in Western feminist movements. Much Western feminism believes that the *Hijab* is oppressive to women. The topic of the veil has been discussed widely by feminists in many countries. For example in *The Politics of the Veil*, J.W. Scott, explores why the veil was seen as a symbol of oppression in the West. Why did the West seem to malign Islam? How could Muslim women deal with the conflict with non-Muslim society around them? And finally why did people not know the Muslim feminists

version of Islam and the scarf? Katherine Bullock argues that:

The perception that the veil is a symbol of Islam's oppression of women has different adherents who embody different assumptions and different levels of sophistication. On the one hand there is the mainstream, pop-culture view: Muslim women are completely and utterly subjected by men, and the veil is a symbol of that. This version is the most simplistic and unsophisticated view of the veil. It is underpinned by an unconscious adherence to liberalism and modernization theory, compounded by an ignorance of any actual details about Muslim women's lives (Bullock, 1999: p.3).

She also outlines the opposing view: "A more sophisticated view is that of one school of feminists both Muslim and non-Muslim. They argue that any patriarchal religion, subordinates women. Unlike the pop culture version, these feminists are often very knowledgeable about Islamic history and practice" (Scott, 2007: p. xvi). Early Western feminists understood covering as implying shame and disgrace for women, but more recently different feminisms have asserted that the veil allows women an active role in public space (Yamani, 1996: p. 201). In Saudi Arabia, women cover in black wearing the *abaya* and the *niqab* (or *burga*). Men cover in a white gown also known as (*Thob*). Whereas in the other Islamic countries, colours may vary and are not restricted to either black or white (Duval, 1998). In many cases, particularly in the past two decades, "Arab women have begun wearing the *hijab* (veil) not just because it is a religious and traditional norm, but also as 'a symbol of defiance against Western policies in the region'" (Sabbagh, 1996:p. xxiv). This makes *hijab* a political choice and not a form of oppression. Another example is the segregation between the sexes in Saudi Arabia. Most Western feminists would regard it as repressive to women; many Saudi Arabian women on the other hand believe that segregation gives them freedom to work and study. From within this perspective, the segregation of the sexes in Saudi Arabia is not part of the Islamic laws (Al-Hariri, 1987). It is a cultural rather than religious practice.

As seen in the press, Islam and Muslims are regularly presented in the media in terms of being a problem through discourses of violence, terrorism, misogyny and so on. This is clearly identifiable across the West. Tevanian shows how the media helped construct the problem of the *Hijab* by deciding which voices should be included in the debate. All social scientists, feminists, teachers and civil actors not opposed to the *Hijab* were excluded. “This left the ensuing debate being played out through the media as one between bearded foreign stereotypical Muslim men defending the *Hijab* with women who had chosen not to wear it, supported by a number of secular male intellectuals” (Caeiro, 2006: p. 208).

The veil is one of the most controversial topics when discussing women’s rights in Islam. Veiled Saudi women are often represented in Western media as victimized and oppressed. However, most Muslim women think of the veil as a source of power and identity. The founder of the social movement Saudi Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, writes:

I am happy to be a voice for all the women who feel that the *burqa* is a source of oppression. Just as I am happy to stand by the women for whom it is the biggest sign of their faith, the very backbone of their beliefs. I am happy to do both because my say doesn't count unless I am the one wearing the *burqa*. The West has a misplaced notion of being the freedom-giver of all the world's oppressed. Just as Islamic nations have a misplaced notion that only tradition without innovation and change will carry them into the future. What we need is the best of both worlds. Nobody is above anyone else, however different the view on the other side may be (Saudi Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, 2008).

Chapter Four: Challenges and Motives

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, considered a reformer, declared on Sunday 25th September 2011 that women would be allowed to vote and participate in the local elections in the year 2015. The king also announced that women would be appointed to the *Shura* Council (*Majlis Al shura*), which until recently included only men. It was founded in 1993 to offer advice to the king on matters that are related to the Kingdom.⁴ Many Saudis were surprised to witness these reforms as many activists both men and women were too busy asking for the right to drive and to travel without permission from male guardians. As columnist Jamal Khashoggi argues: "It will be odd that women who enjoy parliamentary immunity as members of the council are unable to drive their cars or travel without permission." He added: "The climate is more suited to these changes now – the force of history, moral pressure and the changes taking place around us" (Akeel, 2007). These reforms are of great impact for Saudi women, especially working women in Saudi Arabia. Since 2001, the Saudi Arabian press has become more critical, more open and more diverse; especially expressive to these changes. In 2001, the Council of Ministers approved the new system regulating the press. It included 30 items on licensing procedures, rules for board membership (which do not include any woman on the board of any of the newspapers), and appointing the general manager and editor in chief (again, no women are included, except in magazines published abroad) (Ammar, 2011). The new press system also includes an item on establishing a journalists' association that would be independent. This association is concerned with journalists' affairs and rights. The committee for the Saudi

⁴ The jurisdictions of the council were formulated in seven articles that included regulating all affairs in courts, municipalities, endowments, education, security, and commerce in addition to forming permanent committees to solve the problems related to the social traditions that did not contradict Shariah. <http://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/ShuraEn/Internet/Historical+BG/>.

Journalists' Association held another meeting in 2003 but it did not include women. However it does address the concerns of both male and female journalists. Although that women were eliminated from the decision-making process and, as I will go on to demonstrate, the status for Saudi Arabian women journalists and Saudi Arabian women in general will change for the better.

There are different arguments put forward by commentators on the press to explain the change in women's status in the Saudi media. According to *Arab News*, it started in 2004, when two women participated in the journalists' association committee and, as a result, women's status in the Saudi press improved (Ammar, 2011). As a result, several publications and companies in Saudi Arabia started to hire more and more Saudi women. Journalism has become a more favourable career choice for Saudi women for various reasons. This chapter aims to investigate the reasons and the motives behind Saudi women's choices to become journalists.

Both male and female journalists acknowledge that the media has changed in Saudi Arabia. Female journalists, however, are more likely to acknowledge this change. Journalism has offered independence to women, social status, an entrée into people's homes and hearts, but most importantly it allows them to empower other women in their society by addressing gender issues, raising their awareness about their rights and presenting solutions and alternatives. There are many struggles and restrictions that Saudi Arabian women face working as female journalists. And even though there has been an increase in the number of women working in media in general, and the press in particular, media is still a male oriented profession in Saudi Arabia. In an interview that I conducted with Sabria Al Jawhar, a female journalist who writes for *Arab News*, she describes working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia as follows:

During my early years as a journalist at the *Saudi Gazette*, there were few women working as hard news journalists. This was a period, between 2003 and 2006, of great turmoil in Saudi Arabia due to terrorist activities. I was the only woman working in the

English-language press to cover breaking news of these events. It put me on the fast-track towards recognition and respect among my Arab and expatriate journalist colleagues. I developed a strong network of sources that I admit was due to the novelty of me being a rare female Saudi journalist working in a male-dominated field. But I exploited that novelty to develop strong coverage of events during a very sensitive time. Of course, I owe some of my success during these early years to my male supervisors and mentors who supported my work (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2010).

In this chapter I will begin by looking at the different challenges and difficulties female journalists in Saudi Arabia face. I will also discuss the factors behind the changes in the Saudi Arabian media today. Finally, I will investigate the reasons that Saudi women give for their choice to be journalists. In order to do that, I have conducted a number of interviews with Saudi female journalists who work for national newspapers. Most of the data in this chapter was generated through in-depth interviews with current Saudi Arabian female journalists. These journalists have different positions; they work either as reporters, columnists or occasional writers. Three of the interviews were conducted under conditions of confidentiality and anonymity. I therefore will use pseudonyms when quoting them. However, the other four wished for their names to be included. These female journalists are Maha Akeel, Hayat Justinia, Sabria Al Jawhar and Asmaa Al Mohammed. In this chapter, I chose to use qualitative research by conducting interviews. Denzin and Lincoln explain that:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the word. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: p.3).

In my position, as a researcher, I wanted to quote as directly as possible and to be careful as regards re-interpretation or inference. I therefore attempt to represent these women's views in the way they were expressed. I have not reinterpreted their motives. The potential tensions they face will be discussed in relation to Islamic feminism. However, the main part of the chapter is intended to allow the voice of these women to be heard as it is not possible to speak universally of an Islamic culture (Marcotte, 2003).

I have limited this study to women journalists because in such a conservative culture as Saudi Arabia it would be difficult for a female researcher like myself to interview male journalists and interact with them. Another important reason is that female journalists in Saudi Arabia are under-studied, and there is hardly any mention of them in the literature. A few examples of research conducted on Saudi women are Suraya Al Torki who had conducted a study on women's power in Saudi society (1977) and Arebi (1994) who has also conducted a research focusing on women in Saudi Arabia through her analysis of Saudi women writers and political discourse. I have mentioned a few other examples of studies that focused on women in Saudi Arabia in Chapter One.

The purpose of this study is to describe the current difficulties and challenges women working in the press in Saudi Arabia can face. It is fundamental for this research that women's issues are not characterised as universal. Also this study does not imply that women's issues in Saudi Arabia would be resolved simply by progress and modernisation (Basu & McGrory, 1995). I have had some difficulties with conducting these interviews. First I had to educate myself on the issue of translation from my first language (Arabic) to a second (English) because four of the interviews were conducted in the Arabic language. A second challenge that I have faced was that I had to travel to Saudi Arabia very often in order to conduct these interviews.

However the most difficult challenge I faced was gaining the cooperation of women journalists themselves. A lot of women journalists declined to be interviewed. Given the reasons above, I could have only conducted seven interviews. All seven participants had signed consent forms (See Appendix II).

The difficulties that female journalists face in Saudi Arabia differ according to their position in the newspapers. By that I mean whether they are columnists or reporters, old or new journalists. They also differ according to the city and the culture they live in. There are many restrictions and limitations on where women can work and what positions they can hold that are unique to Saudi policies. There are also some social limitations and perceptions that can hinder their advancement. Women journalists in Saudi Arabia just like other working women in Saudi have to deal with the issue of segregation (*ikhtilat*). In this country gender segregation exists at work, at school, in waiting rooms and in other public places. We have to take into account the position of women in an Islamic state, such as Saudi Arabia. The many challenges that Saudi women face can be attributed to the country's *Wahhabi* heritage, which has ensured that "their position has become emblematic of the kingdom's character as an Islamic state in the eyes of conservative *Wahhabis* and, moreover, can relatively easily be controlled" (Doumato, 1992). The segregation in Saudi makes working easier for women. As they can go outside and work without jeopardizing their culture or their religion.

Female Journalists' Personal Profiles

In this section I wish to give a brief biography of the four female journalists who I interviewed and who wanted their names to be revealed.

1. Maha Akeel: has been chosen by the Islamic world organization to be the editor

in chief of “*OIC Journal*” which is published in English. She was the first woman to occupy such a position in 30 years. Maha Akeel has made countless efforts to defend women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. Before that, she worked as a journalist for five years. She also participated in countless conferences and workshops on women’s rights and the role of the media. Akeel has published a book about women in the Saudi media. She also wrote many opinion articles about Saudi women’s rights. She has been interviewed by several regional and international newspapers and broadcast channels including the *Wall Street Journal*, *BBC World* and *Sky News*. Akeel has an undergraduate degree from the US and has an MBA and an MA in Communications and Cultural Studies from Canada.

2. Sabria Al Jawhar: is a remarkable Saudi figure who has contributed to developing and planning the *Saudi Gazette*, a daily newspaper that is published in English. She writes a weekly column called “out of the box” where she discusses women’s issues. She also writes about women and society. She graduated from King Abdul Aziz University and has a master’s degree in linguistics from Umm Al Qurra University. Sabria has received a fellowship from the Communication Institute in North Korea. She goes beyond the traditional and conventional with coverage of events related to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Prince Saud Al Faisal and United Nation’s secretary general Kofi Anan. Sabria was chosen as a spokeswoman in one of the UN conferences under the title “*The Role of the Neighbouring Countries in the Middle East Peace Process*” (Reda, 2008: p.40).

3. Hayat Justiniya: is a female journalist who has worked for two of the major newspapers in Saudi Arabia. She started her career writing for *Okaz* newspaper. After

years of working for *Okaz*, Hayat moved to work for *Al Nadwa* newspaper, the main newspaper in the religious city of Makkah. Hayat had covered important events such as Al Hajj (Pilgrimage), at a time when very few female journalists managed to do so. During the years 1997 to 2000, when it was very difficult for female journalists to get hold of stories, she succeeded in reporting from girls' schools, hospitals, fire departments, universities and even public office. Her skills in the English language and communication had enabled her to interview well-known figures such as Cat Stevens (Youssef Islam) and to report on his visit to Makkah. Hayat has a degree in Media Studies from California, USA.

4. Asma'a Almohammed: Asma'a currently writes for *Okaz* Newspaper. Asma'a has an interest in women issues, women and economy, and even politics. Her articles are a great contribution to the history of women in Saudi Arabia as she documents every achievement of women in Saudi Arabia. Asma'a studied advertising and economy for her undergraduate degree. (I give a detailed profile and examples of her writings in the opinion section of Chapter five of this thesis: the Content Analysis Chapter).

Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Female Journalists in Saudi Arabia

Saudi female journalists face many challenges and difficulties working as journalists. These challenges are exclusive to women, as Saudi male journalists do not face the same challenges. In an interview I conducted with Asma'a Al Mohammed, she argues that the difficulties she has to face are as follows:

Transport is an issue for all women in Saudi Arabia in all jobs; however it might be extensive in the case of female journalists because we need to follow stories everywhere. Also the social pressure. A women needs to do more to prove herself, because the society is male oriented, though there are men who support women, but this is not enough. The challenge, of course, is big when it comes to accessing training opportunities, and there are no “creativity incubators”, and this is what allows the cadres of journalism and the media to penetrate the media sector (Asma’a Almohammed interview, 2012).

Saudi female journalists face many difficulties such as transport, including not being allowed to drive cars. Few Saudi men allow their wives to use public transport even though buses are usually segregated. The only alternatives are to hire a driver, use taxis, or have a male relative to drive her to work. There is no basis in Islam for claiming a ban on driving for women; nothing under Islamic law or the *Shari’a* can justify the ban. In addition, women in other Islamic countries are allowed to drive their cars. Furthermore in the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) time, women rode their horses and camels. The problems are structural and deep-rooted. Many Saudis fear that men, especially the young, will harass or chase female drivers. In November 2009, the foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, told Britain's Channel 4 news that there was no Saudi law prohibiting women from driving. "Myself, I think they should drive," he said, but added: "For us, it is not a political issue, it is a social issue. We believe that this is something for the families to decide, for the people to decide and not to be forced by the government, either to drive or not to drive" (Ambah, 2008). A founding member of the Committee of Advocates of Women's Right to Drive Cars, Fawzia al-Oyouni, said an electronic petition would highlight what many Saudi men and women consider a "stolen right". In an interview with Associates Press she argues: "We would like to remind officials that this is, as

many have said, a social and not religious or political issue," she continued "Since it's a social issue, we have the right to lobby for it." Then she concluded: "This is a right that has been delayed for too long" (*BBC News*, 2007). Driving has been a debated topic in the Saudi Arabian press over the years, and there is a clear tension in Saudi society when it comes to the subject of driving between those who want a revolution and those who want to retain the Wahabi heritage. Not to mention that women driving will contradict what most Saudis call "The ideal Islamic woman". In her article *Gender, Monarchy, and National Identity in Saudi Arabia*, Eleanor A. Doumato defines the term "ideal Islamic woman" as follows:

It is an ideology that has been expressed in official government statements, state policy decisions, and religious opinions issued by the state-supported religious scholars (*Ulama*) since the late 1950s, when women's roles first became a focus of contention over the question of public education for girls. The idealized woman is a wife and mother. Her place is within the family, "the basic unit of society", and men are her protectors. Women who remain at home are the educators of children and the reproducers of traditional values. As the mother of future generations, the idealized woman is in effect the partner of the Saudi state, which is dedicated to protecting the family and guarding "traditional value" and "Islamic morality" (Doumato, 1992: p.33).

When I asked Maha Akeel about the difficulties she had faced working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia, she describes how:

There is the problem of transportation because I cannot drive and there is no public transportation and I have to rely on the availability of a driver; a problem in accessing information (accurate, up-to-date, reliable sources) and official cooperation (timely, complete, and entering government offices as a women); and the problem of career advancement as there are limited job opportunities as a full-time woman journalists and getting promoted (Maha Akeel interview, 2013).

Another challenge that women journalists in Saudi Arabia encounter is the difficulties of attending press conferences. The press in Saudi Arabia is male-dominated; the percentage of male journalists is very high compared to the percentage of Saudi female journalists. Sabria Al Jawhar who was until recently the editor-in-chief of the daily *Saudi Gazette*, describes a typical incident that many Saudi female journalists face during their job: "I was on my way to attend a press conference by the Saudi Foreign ministry when a guard refused to let me in because I'm a woman. Therefore, I said that I was not a woman but a journalist coming to officially represent the newspaper. Nevertheless, he insisted and kept repeating, 'We don't allow women in.'" In the end, Al Jawhar was forced to contact the manager of the conference who ordered the guard to let her in. The minister then allowed her to ask the first and the last question of the press conference, an unheard of privilege (Al Khamri, 2008). In an interview I conducted with Sabria Al Jawhar, she said "It takes experience, courage and a bit of conversational talent to work around this and still have these men remain your source. Also female journalists are discriminated against with regard to salary. They are also not allowed to be in the newsroom like their male counterparts" (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2013).

The female journalists that I interviewed also described the challenge of competing with male journalists to reach to the top. In all publications in Saudi Arabia, for example *Al Yamama*, which is one of the most successful publications in Saudi, men occupy all the primary roles, and they are promoted to higher positions in their jobs; men even run women's magazines. A very few selected female journalists are allowed to cover political or critical topics; most of the interesting topics in the Saudi news are covered by male journalists. Another female journalist Amjad Mahmoud Rida, recounts how:

One day, about ten years ago, I was informed of my promotion to vice editor-in-chief. After receiving the compliments of the colleagues, the news suddenly took another turn. My nomination was frozen, or to use a better term, it evaporated due to the threats of

resignation of the male officials at the newspaper if I were to take this position. (Al Khamri, 2008).

Rida was the first woman ever to be appointed vice editor-in-chief of a Saudi newspaper. She was also the only Muslim woman from the Arabian Gulf to cover the Russian war in Afghanistan (Al Khamri, 2008).

Another problem facing female journalists in Saudi Arabia is that they earn lower salaries than men do, though they do the same job. They also hold lower positions. Journalist Loubna al-Tahlawi addressed these issues faced by women, she argues that: "women are considered the sisters of men. Working in the media means that they are realizing the special gift of intelligence that God gave women." Nevertheless, much of Saudi society has yet to catch up with Article Ten. When I asked Asma'a Al Mohammed if there is any discrimination between men and women working in journalism in Saudi Arabia, she suggested that:

Yes, there is in positions and job titles. It is easy for a man to approach influential men and establish relationships with them and tap them as sources of information, whereas a female journalist is restricted to within a limited social coverage. Financial support is generally limited for female journalists, and for the female graduates of journalism and media as well (Asma'a Al Mohammed interview, 2012).

Another female journalist adds when answering the same question: "Yes, there is discrimination in salaries, bonuses, training and career advancement; harassment at the work place and outside in the field; problems covering issues other than women's and social issues; being allowed to participate in the decision-making process" (Maha Akeel interview, 2013).

In her book *Unequal Opportunities: The Case of Women in the Media'* (1981), Gallagher examined the different patterns of distribution and access to the media between men and women in several countries around the world. She found that "aspects of the mass media's relationship to women in terms of portrayal and employment transcend cultural and class

boundaries” (Gallagher, 1987: p.28). Women are almost completely absent from technical jobs and in senior media management, but there is a huge presence of women in presentation and announcing. This is referred to as vertical discrimination. There is also horizontal discrimination in the segregation of program making, where more women are given responsibility for educational and children's programs than for news and current affairs (Gallagher, 1987: p.13). Even “the legislative requirements of the various countries in relation to equal pay and equal treatment of women and men... hide a whole range of attitudes, beliefs and organizational procedures, which amount to indirect discrimination against women” (Gallagher, 1987: p.14). She concludes that discrimination begins in men's minds: “invisible barriers – the attitudes, biases and presumptions, which even women themselves often do not recognize as discrimination, are what stands in women's way” (Gallagher, 1987: p.15). Therefore, it is not enough to just open the doors of media employment to women and expect the problems to be resolved, it is necessary to also change men’s attitude and to change women’s own self-perception. Also most Saudi women journalists are “forced to write on fashion, social issues, cooking and style just because they are women, while political and economic issues are given to male journalists” said Samirah Turkestani, the former head of women’s section of Al-Eqtisadiah newspaper and a presenter on Saudi TV’s Channel 1 in an interview with Al Jassem (Al-Jassem, 2010).

One of the major issues related to Saudi female journalists is that almost none of them have a diploma in journalism because none of the universities for women offered a media studies program, as this was considered an inappropriate career choice for women in Saudi Arabia. As a result, these women were majoring in other degrees and relied on practice in order to learn the job. In addition, they were not allowed into the training programs. Therefore, many Saudi female journalists are considered inexperienced unlike male journalists. However, since 2004 Saudi universities such as *Umm Al Qura* University in the city of Makkah have started

teaching Media Studies for females. Departments of Journalism and Media Studies did not exist at all until the early 21st century in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, this can be viewed as a promising start for a change for the better for Saudi female journalists, and especially for the young ones. In one of the interviews I conducted with Saudi female journalists, one journalist argued that:

There are still difficulties for women journalists. Many of these women are restricted to covering only a specific range of topics. In my opinion, we need more experienced women journalists, but this cannot be achieved if the editors of the newspapers will not provide these women with the opportunities (A.J. interview, 2010).

In 2010, Nadia Al Sheikh, general manger of the public relations department at the Abdul Latif Jameel Community Services Programs and co-founder of the first public relations company in Saudi Arabia, called on women journalists to continue fighting for their rights. She explained that: “In the beginning of the 90s, it was very difficult to work in journalism or PR... it was later that Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah established a communications college. This was considered the first step forward in supporting female journalists,” (Al-Jassem, 2010). Abdul Rahman Al-Hazza’a, assistant undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture and Information also commented on the educational position for journalists saying “It is unfortunate that Saudi press associations are uninterested in launching training courses for journalists” (Al-Jassem, 2010). Samira Turkestani has commented that: “Both male and female journalists can write in many fields. They just need to be trained in developing their writing skills. The art of reporting requires skills beyond simple writing. It is not easy to write a proper news report or even come up with story ideas. Journalists must have the skills and background to properly convey news” said Samirah Turkestani (Al-Jassem, 2010).

This issue of educating women in the media has subsequently been taken up by the State. In 2007, Dr. Abdullah Al Jasser, former minister of Culture and Information, referred to

the need of establishing training programs and workshops to help journalists both males and females in Saudi Arabia. He argued: “I think it is the right time to face the shortage and absence of training sessions, especially for women, by all those who are mainly concerned with media affairs” (Rida, 2008: p.13). The World Islamic Media Organization has established media training centres for women to graduate Saudi professional broadcasters. The organization reported that 40 media practitioners graduated from the first session of media training centre (25 males and 15 females) which revealed the need for training centres to improve the performance of media women enabling them to achieve their goals (Rida, 2008).

Another obstacle for women journalists in Saudi Arabia is that many of them use pseudonyms in order to avoid harassment from people who still consider it a cause of great shame for a woman's name to appear in print. The use of real names in the print might not be a problem anymore in Al Hijaz, but Bedouin (more conservative) women especially from Najd still suffer from this problem. In one of the interviews I conducted, I asked this female journalist about the difficulties she faced working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia. She mentions four difficulties:

1. A lack of support or refusal by the families for their daughters' wish to work in this field because of the reporters' names appearing in the newspapers.
2. Mixing with males.
3. It is sometimes difficult for women to cover all types of events or some occasions that might be considered dangerous or put female journalists in a jeopardizing situation.
4. Spending a lot of time writing and covering events on a daily basis (H.H. interview, 2010).

Another important challenge that faces female journalists and journalists in general in Saudi Arabia is that their rights are not protected. There were no laws in Saudi Arabia that protect journalists. In my interview with Asma'a Al Mohammed, she argues that problems are caused by: “Absence of material employment stability and other things. A journalist's value is not

recognized by journalist organizations themselves: a Saudi Journalists' Association has not yet been activated; and there are no associations that can make female and male journalists feel they are protected by law and can provide them with representatives" (Asma'a Al Mohammed interview, 2012). However new laws has been recently introduced as mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis, and therefore I can argue that female journalists will have more rights.

Lastly, there is the problem of censorship which I discussed in more details in the introduction to the thesis. When I asked Sabria Al Jawhar about the difficulties she had, she argued:

I have been fortunate to overcome most obstacles and have a great source network. I am not ignored by my sources or readers because I am a woman. On the contrary, I have had a relatively easy time getting the work I want to do get done. Having said that, I self censor like any Saudi journalist, or for that matter any Western journalist (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2013).

In another interview, a different journalist explained: "It depends on the nature of her job in the publication; if she was a reporter then she would face different types of difficulties that I cannot talk about since I am a columnist. The biggest challenge I had with my job was censorship" (S.Z. interview, 2012).

Most of the issues that female journalists talked about in their interviews are subject to change as there are new rules and regulations introduced in the ministry of information for male and female journalists.

Since there have been significant improvements in women's status in Saudi Arabia, especially within education since the year 2000, the universities and colleges for women have continued to be built throughout the nation.

Reasons Female Journalists Give for their Careers Choices

In this section I look at the reasons that my interviewees shared for becoming female journalists in Saudi Arabia. Female journalists choose journalism as a profession for many reasons. Perhaps one of the most important factors is the flexibility of this job. Hayat Justinia makes this point in an interview where she says “Working as a journalist in the city of Makkah, I had to follow up stories, respond to events and meet deadlines. However, I did not have to spend long hours at work especially since I was a single mother with three children at home” (Hayat Justinia interview, 2010). Journalists in Saudi Arabia can select where and when to do their writing. Some women may prefer to do their writing late at night, while others prefer to work with their children in their sight during the day. Wherever and whenever they produce their best work is their choice every day. In addition, some families do not allow their daughters to be in a workplace where they would mix with men, so journalism can be a very suitable job for them, as they do not need to stay in an office all day long. Journalists determine their own hours. According to Fatima Mernissi (1987) a leading feminist sociologist from Morocco, the reasons behind these families’ fear of mixed working environments is their beliefs that female sexuality is active while male sexuality is passive. As a result, she argues, controlling women’s sexuality is essential for social order because giving free reign to women’s sexual desires brings *fitna* (meaning discord) upon Muslim societies. Other views completely contradict what Mernissi argues, they suggest the opposite and that women provoke men desires, and by separating men and women, the government is protecting women in the workplace from men (Qassem, 2008).

Another factor that encouraged Saudi women to become journalists is their desire to change the media in Saudi Arabia and to influence Saudi Arabian society. The media should be a tool that allows women to shape the ideas of the new age and the new generation of young girls in Saudi Arabia. With education, skills and motivation, many women today see

themselves an essential element in the revitalization of Saudi Arabia. When asked about the influence of the media on Saudi Arabian society, another journalist argues: “There is a huge impact whether this influence is positive or negative. The media reflect Saudi Arabian society, and keep it updated with the outside world news” (A.J. interview, 2010). Another journalist agrees, as she describes how the media in Saudi Arabia affect society: “The media has a significant effect on society. It exposes current issues and offers solutions to social problems. The media also highlights advancements, reports people’s news, and other societies' news. Of course this affects the traditions, the education and the morals of Saudi Arabian society” (H.H. Interview, 2010). One of the important missions of working as a female journalist in Saudi Arabia is to educate other women in society about their rights. Badriya Al Wadhi, a well-known lawyer from Kuwait, argues that the problem women in Saudi Arabia, or the Arab countries in general, have is their lack of knowledge of their rights. Therefore, one of the duties that educated Saudi Arabian female journalists have is to raise awareness about their rights in the press. She explains that:

The problem of women in the Arab world is that we don’t know our legal rights and that is very dangerous. If you don’t know your rights you can’t protect yourself. One reason why women don’t know their rights is because they have not participated in the process of making law or enacting legislation. Argues Badriya Al wadhi (Kuwaiti lawyer) (Hijab, 1988).

The interviews that I conducted suggest that these women became journalists because they want to contribute to Saudi Arabian society, and add to the press more gender-related topics such as polygamy and domestic violence. The issues that journalists cover can be clearly seen to be gender-specific. Women journalists aim to raise awareness about the issues that concern women in Saudi Arabian society today. Fawziah Al Naeem, May Abdul Alaziz, Samar

Almogren⁵ are examples of women journalists writing about women issues in Saudi Arabia. While working on my content analysis of four different Saudi newspapers [*Okaz*, *Al Jazira*, *Al Riyadh*, and *Al Madina*] I noticed the increased use of “soft” news stories among women, such as entertainment, human interest, and lifestyle, as opposed to the “hard” news stories that male journalists cover in Saudi Arabia like politics and business, economy and sport. Nevertheless, a few female journalists have used the press to challenge men’s views, and to participate more in covering controversial topics. Saudi female journalists are hoping to change the stereotyping of Saudi women in the media. My analyses of the Saudi Arabian press demonstrated how gender bias exists in the content, language and illustrations of a large number of the local newspapers. This bias may be seen in the stories the media presents about passive domestic female figures. Heroic figures, sport champions, scientists, politicians, and soldiers are all males. Their stories dominate most of the headlines in the newspapers in Saudi Arabia. Many newspapers reflect stereotypes of masculine and feminine roles. Females are rarely presented as active and assertive in the news. Likewise, women have always been represented in the press as satisfied with their minor position in society. Since women are the products of a culture that values the activities and achievements of men, most Saudi females are portrayed as doing almost nothing to improve their domestic, economic and political position within it. As a result, women in society are expected to be kind-hearted mothers, obedient housewives, or traditional young women whose main concerns are finding appropriate male suitors. Even when women are depicted as employed, they are often employed in low paid jobs, with few chances of promotion. The underrepresentation of women is potentially significant. First, this underrepresentation in media coverage strengthens the perception that international crises are “no place for women”. Margaret Gallagher argues that “The power to define public and media agendas is still mainly a male privilege.” She further asserts that media

⁵ These three journalists work for *Aljazira* Newspaper.

content “reflects a masculine vision of the world and of what is important” (Gallagher, 2005: p. 7). Her argument can be applied to the media in Saudi Arabia and how it influences Saudi society. For instance, Saudi women who read the papers only see events from male points of view. When there is a story or an article covered by a male journalist about gender-related issues, such as women driving or travelling without guardians, the objectivity of the male authors can be questioned as I will demonstrate later when I analyse articles from the press in chapter five. Therefore, it is important to have female journalists covering gender-related issues in order for readers to see stories from different perspectives. There are some women journalists nowadays who cover gender-related topics from their point of view such as Asma’a Al Mohammed. They also aim to change these stereotypes, and to prove to readers that there are many active, influential Saudi women who have succeeded in science, sports, and the arts. I will give a more detailed analysis of these role models in chapter five of this thesis.

Several women that I interviewed expressed views about how journalism helps Saudi Arabian women to claim social status and an empowering identity. When I asked what was the motive behind choosing to be a journalist, one Saudi female journalist said “I wanted to investigate Saudi Arabian women’s issues, and help to improve their status. In addition, I wanted to prove myself as an active independent woman in the city of Makkah” (A.J. interview, 2010). Another female journalist, Asma’a Al Mohammed, has made similar arguments: “Journalism is a rich, interesting, and enriching field of business which develops our senses and socializes relationships with the different classes of the society” (Asma’a Al Mohammed interview, 2012).

Many female journalists suggest that dealing with influential people in social situations is a more comfortable experience because of the increased confidence that their role as a journalist gives them. Thus for many women their identity as female journalists makes them feel more confident. This role also allows women to be more active in the society. Some

families in Saudi Arabia, especially in Nejd region⁶, think of women journalists as a great shame to their families, as their work requires them work outside the home. Nevertheless, many female journalists I interviewed, expressed the sense of power, and the respect that journalism has offered to them. When I asked one of the interviewees, Hayat Justinia, if she would advise her own daughter to work as a journalist, she answered, “Yes, because I loved and enjoyed working as a journalist. I influenced the lives of many and helped in changing social beliefs. This job allows women to access large social networks and improve their social status a lot” (Hayat Justinia interview, 2010). Another female journalist, Sabria Al Jawhar, made similar arguments:

I wanted to do something different with my future other than following in the traditional footsteps of Saudi women into fields like social welfare and teaching. While I teach today, I wanted a well-rounded education in another profession that showed me a side of Saudi society that I, as a Saudi woman, would not normally be exposed to. Journalism gave me access to influential men and women in high positions, who could provide me with insight to their success and failures in their professions and allow me to see how other people go about their business (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2013).

Journalism offers Saudi women excitement and adventure, something new and different to their everyday lives. It also provides them with an opportunity to meet different people every day, and interact with them. In other words, it gives them a sense of community, as they become aware of other people’s worlds, and more confidence in dealing with the wide world beyond the home. In one of the interviews I conducted, a female journalist who works for *Okaz* newspaper describes the motive behind her choice to work as a journalist in Saudi Arabia, as follows. She says:

At first, ten years ago, I thought when I was in my fourth year at college about what I

⁶ Nejd is located in the central region of the Arabian Peninsula. Riyadh is the largest city in Nejd.

would do after I graduate, especially since work opportunities for females in our society were very limited to teaching and healthcare. Naturally, the situation has now changed. At that time I had been thinking about other work options that suited me other than teaching; something I could find myself in and then I thought of journalism because I saw this profession had everything new and exciting as opposed to other professions” (H.H. interview, 2010).

Another journalist who works for *Al Madina* newspaper shares a similar reason for choosing journalism as a career: “I consider myself a very social person, and I have always been keen on discussing other people issues. Journalism allows me to keep up with society’s latest news. It also allows me to be part of the news, and live the events” (A.J. interview, 2010).

Other women that I interviewed desired to be journalists for different reasons. For some, writing was a hobby and, therefore, journalism was an opportunity to let them express their thoughts and ideas, and share them with the society. Curiosity is a vital ingredient for any journalist. Many young Saudi women enter the profession with the desire to know more about the world about them without needing to specialise in limited fields of study. When I asked what motives were behind her choice to work in journalism, Hayat Justinia said:

My desire to be a reporter started when I was in primary school. I used to write speeches for my school. I have always been curious about what happens around me. When I finished school, I studied speech communication in college. After that I returned to Saudi Arabia from the United States to be one of the earliest women journalists in the country (Hayat Justinia interview, 2010).

Another female journalist, Maha Akeel, adds: “I love to write and explore; perhaps that was why I chose to major in communications. I also wanted to contribute toward the development of my society by writing about its problems in order to find solutions. I believe in the power of words that they can change things” (Maha Akeel, 2013). Other factors that

motivate Saudi women to work in journalism include the fact that until recently, no qualifications were needed to apply for this job and you do not have to study journalism in order to be a writer or a reporter in the press in Saudi Arabia. Most of the women I interviewed did not have degrees or certificates in Media Studies or even any training for this job. In the future, however this might change because recent advancements in university curricula in Saudi Arabia have shifted towards offering Media Studies courses and degrees.

Asma'a Al Mohammed summarizes the interesting aspects of working as a female journalist in Saudi Arabia. She describes how:

I was an investor in finance and business, in the fashion and cosmetics sectors. I changed careers due to my literary preference and my interests in public opinion. Actually I wanted to create media campaigns which express women's views and encourage women's movements. That has indeed happened, and a lot has currently been achieved as we planned. Media is a sector that creates change. We used pressure and were successful in opening opportunities for the Saudi women in law, and to study media. This was for the new generations who are supposed to acquire their rights to higher education and to be specialized in media science. We exercised a lot of pressure through the media, and actually have witnessed success and it has become a fact (Asma'a Al Mohammed interview, 2012).

The Factors that Changed the Media in Saudi Arabia

In almost all the interviewees I conducted, my interviewees agree that there has been a change in the status of Saudi female journalists and that they have become more active than ever in the history of Saudi Arabia. They know more about their profession, their rights and the challenges they will face. Compared to some Muslim societies, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, these

women come from a different culture. Yet they have managed to develop their status as female journalists in Saudi Arabia. Change in Saudi Arabia was slow mainly because the people of Saudi Arabia have historically been “habituated to a system within which change is rare and most individuals choose to remain within the realm of the familiar, thus buttressing and perpetuating a ubiquitous belief in accurate knowledge and indisputable truths” (Jamjoom, 2010: p.548). Even though this change has been slow, universities in Saudi Arabia now teach Media and Journalism to females in the main cities, hoping that those young girls will bring a change in the future of journalism in Saudi Arabia. When I asked Hayat Justinia about the change in the Saudi media, she argued:

In the meantime, they teach Media and Communication in universities and colleges all over Saudi Arabia unlike before. In addition, publications use technology and computers, which make working much easier. Journalism is no longer exclusive to men, as more women are being hired. Before, pictures of women were not allowed to be posted in Saudi papers, now, however, it is normal to see pictures of women in the news. Finally, the range of topics women can cover has grown wider and is no longer so constrained (Hayat Justinia interview, 2010).

In an interview that I conducted with Maha Akeel, she describes the changes in the Saudi press. She argues:

It has changed in a good way in that it has become more courageous in covering issues considered taboo, less censorship, more diversity in views but not enough, and more transparency but not up to international standards. It changed in a bad way in that with the decrease in censorship it has become sensational, especially in covering sensitive and taboo issues, and in allowing below standard writers and arguments to fill the pages. It has not become more professional despite the opportunity to do so because there is no interest by management in training and setting a high standard of recruiting or of

reporting (Maha Akeel interview, 2013).

Another female journalist, Asma'a Al Mohammed argues that:

Yes, to some extent the media in Saudi Arabia has changed. Activists, intellectuals and article writers have started to lead a freedom of expression process. The press is where people contribute as partners through opinion pages on which both women and men write. Mass media publish things that show a negative society image, and whatever needs discussion and focus (Asma'a Al Mohammed interview, 2012).

In order to understand the developments of media in Saudi Arabia which my interviewees refer to, it is important to look at both the political and social events that have contributed to Saudi women's position in their society. First and foremost, the discovery of oil in 1930s was a major event in the country. The oil-generated revenue in the early 1970s introduced large scale change, including the opening of education to both boys and girls (Hamdan, 2002: p.34). The economic upheaval arising from the increased income from oil gave rise to a trend towards education abroad, and a change in lifestyle, and these two changes affected the whole structure of society (Yamani, 1996: p.265). According to Hamadan, "oil and its resulting wealth had an unimaginable impact on Saudi Arabia in an extremely compressed period this context the media in Saudi Arabia has also seen a remarkable change in the ways that news is produced. This change has encouraged Saudi women to become journalists. In her book, *Introduction to Critical Readings: Media and Gender*, Cynthia Carter argues that:

The global media industry has undergone dramatic changes during the past 30 years. In that time, at a structural level, new technologies have emerged that change the way that 'news' is produced, delivered, consumed and understood. Desktop computers, the Internet, mobile phones, satellite television, video recorders (and digital cameras) have shaped a new era of journalism (Carter and Steiner, 2004: p. 4).

Technology makes it easier for women journalists to work. For example some Saudi

women journalists, especially those who come from conservative families, find it difficult to be around men, however because of the advancement of technology, they now can conduct their interviews, or ask for reports using mobile phones or emails without having to deal with men face to face. Without technological advancements it would be difficult to report as efficiently as journalists do today. Technology also has affected the way audiences read news. It is true that the technology that has flooded Saudi Arabia is mostly the consumer kind. However, “it is a cultural instrument, mediation between the individual and the world, a way of ordering the world. It presents the Saudis with alternative modes or paradigms of perception and action that challenge their own indigenous, traditional cultural norms” (Elmusa, 1997: p. 346).

While technology is an important factor that has had a great effect on the Saudi Arabian media, there are others factors that have enabled change to the advantage of women journalists. These include, for example: higher education, which has improved a lot over the last decade, as there are more majors for Saudi students to choose from which meet their interests. Education is an important part of Islam. A Muslim philosophy of education is a philosophy of lifetime learning based on literacy, and education is not only a requirement but a priority, so highly valued that “an hour of learning is worth more than a year of prayer” (Feng, Byram, & Fleming, 2009: p. 173).

Now there are departments that teach digital media, journalism, advertising, and literary studies to girls. A major objective for education for girls in Saudi Arabia has been to “develop general education to deal with technological changes and rapid developments in the social and economic fields” (Bahry, 1982). Public Education for women in Saudi Arabia began not so long ago. In 1960/1961 when government schools for girls first opened their doors, fewer than 12000 girls were enrolled, whereas by mid the 1980s an estimated half a million female students were enrolled in all educational levels, according to a study carried by Louay Bahry

(Bahry, 1982). The aim of educating women in Saudi Arabia at first was to prepare women to become good housewives, good mothers, and better Muslims. As Alireza puts it: “The purpose of educating a girl is to bring her up in a proper Islamic way so as to perform her duty in life, be an ideal and successful housewife and a good mother, prepared to do things which suit her nature, like teaching, nursing and giving medical treatment” (Al-Zaid, 1981, p.56).

The policy of sex-segregation at all levels of education was also used to justify the closing of certain university courses to women in the 80s, such as engineering, geology and meteorology, media and politics which might have led to employment in male-dominated fields. However, since the education policies in Saudi Arabia have changed totally, and women can now study politics, media or geology etc. in the universities. Education in Saudi Arabia is making a huge step forward now, due to the opening of Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University in the city of Riyadh (the largest women’s university in the world). Princess Al-Jawhara said the university campus, which boasts the first green campus in the Kingdom, will have “several unique features as a world-class centre of academic excellence and scientific research. It is part of the government’s serious drive to realize the empowerment of Saudi women” (Khan, 2008). According to the university’s official website, one of the main objectives and missions of Princess Nora University is to prepare female students to think logically, laterally and independently to be culturally and technologically engaged thinkers, writers, researchers, mothers, and citizens (Vission. Mission, and Objectives, 2011). According to Mona AlMunajjed in her book, *Women in Saudi Arabia Today*, (1997):

The fact that the government has been actively supporting women’s education is evident in the hundreds of schools for girls and the women’s campuses at almost all universities. The government has not restricted its efforts to the younger generation. Literacy courses are being offered to older women. The government supports these classes financially, administratively and technically (Hamdan, 2002: p.52).

The content of education is one of the main sectors that require change in Saudi Arabia. Current research on Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia focuses on reforming the “official curriculum” and school textbooks. However such change can be very difficult. Despite this resistance to change, Fernea points out that women are entering and succeeding in occupations that were previously closed to them, such as medicine, law, engineering, journalism, TV and advertising. “Education has been, and continues to be, the spur to women's activism and participation in the public sphere, combined with the economic need for new kinds of skilled labor” (Fernea, 2000: p.189). Other important factors for change are social media and education abroad. In an interview that I conducted with Sabria Al Jawhar, she argues that:

Social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook have had a tremendous impact on Saudi youth between the ages of 18 and 34, which makes up more than half of Saudi society. Mainstream Arabic and English media, such as newspapers and radio, not so much. As I have said, Saudis are now being exposed to the world via these social media outlets. The impact is profound. I also might add that King Abdullah's university scholarship program has also had a tremendous impact on young Saudis. About 44,000 young Saudis are attending universities in the United States. When they return to Saudi Arabia, I predict big changes in the private sector, especially for women in the workplace (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2013).

Many Saudis have recognized the need for educational reform. However, most Saudis have responded by defending their school system, and Saudi officials have rejected claims that there are connection between education in Saudi and extremism. The Saudi Minister of Education, for instance, responded to these claims: “is unfair, as it has been promoted by enemies' poisonous propaganda” and that “Saudi Arabia will never allow anyone to impose changes in its national educational curricula” (*Gulf News*, 2002). Furthermore, the Saudi foreign minister indicated that “the Saudi education system could not be considered a “breeder

of terrorism”, and indicated that the government is working to remove the objectionable messages” (Prokop, 2003: p.82). There are also demands to change the teaching methods, and to use modern methods that can encourage individualism and independent thinking. Despite these pressures for change. Most feminists agree that the best way to improve women’s status in Saudi Arabia is to provide them with education. “Modern education for women in the Arab world is of relatively recent origin. The first modern schools were opened in Egypt (1829), Lebanon (1835) and Iraq (1898). In other countries like Kuwait, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, modern education for women is a product of the 20th century” (Al-Qazzat, 1997). Many commentators have argued that one of the most important forces for change in Saudi Arabia is education. Youssef (1974) argued that the strongest factor in the raising status of women in the Muslim Arab world has been the growing acceptance of their rights to equal educational opportunities.

When it comes to education it can be argued that what contributed most to the development of women’s abilities in media is the opening of Media Studies for girls in *Umm Al Qura University*, and the decision of *Al Imam Mohammed Bin Saud University* in 2006 to accept 60 students for postgraduate studies in the Department of Media Studies. In addition to education, the overseas scholarship programs in Saudi Arabia are another important factor that is helping transforming the society. The scholarship programs have sent thousands of Saudi Arabian students overseas to study for their degrees, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Not only do these scholarships give students educational opportunities, but also they allow these students to live amongst other societies and cultures, opening their minds to different lifestyles. One of the goals of the scholarship program is to expose young Saudi men and women to different cultures and societies and vice versa. The scholarship program started in 1984, when figures show that approximately 10,000 students were studying abroad. However, with the expansion of the universities systems in Saudi Arabia, the kingdom limited the financial

support for study abroad. Few Saudi were pleased with such restrictions because they feared the new lifestyle of living abroad would have a negative effect on Saudi youth. The number of Saudi students going abroad to study has decreased severely in the late 1980s. In the years 1991-92, only 5,000 students were reported studying abroad; there were slightly more than 4,000 the previous year, with half of those studying in the United States (U.S. Library of Congress). These figures contrasted with the approximately 10,000 students studying abroad in 1984. Currently due to the King Abdullah scholarship programs, the number of Saudi men and women studying abroad has increased more than ever. There are about 30,000 Saudi students studying in the United States alone (Al Omar, 2011). The number of Saudi women studying abroad is less than the number of Saudi men because of the guardian rule which states that Saudi women must be accompanied by a male guardian to be eligible for the scholarship. Women going abroad to study were a particular concern for the conservative party in the Department of Religious Research, Missionary Activities, and Guidance. Less women were given scholarships to study abroad in the year 1982/ Enforcement of the *mahram* rule, whereby women were not allowed to travel without a male guardian, discouraged many students from studying abroad. In 1990 there were almost three times as many men studying abroad on government scholarships, as there were women, whereas in 1984 more than half were women (U.S. Library of Congress). Nevertheless, exposing Saudi men and women to the outside world and to different lifestyles remains of great influence on these students. In addition, it has a significant impact on the media in Saudi Arabia, not only on producers of the news, but also on the people receiving the news. “The scholarship program of King Abdullah was established by the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia in 2010. Since the start of this program the number of Saudi international students has increased significantly” (Alhazmi, 2010). The year (2010) has seen more than 80,500 Saudi students studying abroad (Deputyship for Planning and Information, 2010). The number of Saudi students studying abroad is expected

to increase to more than 140,000 by 2015 (Mahboob, 2010) due to a recent decision to extend King Abdullah's scholarship program for another five years starting from 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Consequently, the number of Saudi international students has increased in Australian educational institutions too, in 2010, approximately 12,500 Saudi Students (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010). Female education was established on the basis of preparing women for "little more than running household and becoming accomplished at tasks such as sewing and cooking; however, it must be acknowledged that the provision of basic education in literacy and numeracy for girls in Saudi Arabia was a great step forward at a time when most Saudi women were illiterate" (Al-Rawaf & Simmons, 1991: p. 290).

Even though there has been a change in the press in Saudi Arabia, Saudi female journalists are still suffering from discrimination. When I asked my interviewees about whether female journalists are discriminated against in Saudi Arabia compared with male journalists, Sabria Al Jawhar answered:

Of course. With some exceptions, Saudi female journalists are ignored. It hasn't changed much since I entered the profession in 2003, but women are more educated today than 10 years ago. They are more aggressive, more sure of what they want and are not willing to take any crap from anybody. They have seen the world and they want a piece. They are standing up to male journalists and making demands, but they have a long way to go (Sabria Al Jawhar interview, 2013).

The Saudi press now includes articles about women and gender-related issues. These topics did not begin to emerge until the 1980s. In the introduction to her book, Saddeka Arebi explains:

In the early 1980s, when I started reading Saudi newspapers and magazines regularly,

I became aware of an unmistakable preoccupation in this Arabian society with the subject of women, their education, their work, their mobility. Women apparently were a matter of great concern to the various forces in society to warrant this dramatic collective theorizing in which they were a key image almost an obsession of the entire society (Arebi, 1994: p.1).

However, now there is even more focus on the gender-related topics such as driving, women's careers, and travelling without male guardians. King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz's decision to allow women for the first time in Saudi Arabian history to vote and run in local elections had an impact on the press. There are many articles discussing this change, and expressing how that decision has benefited the country.

This chapter has presented an initial attempt to analyse the motivation and purposes of Saudi female journalists who work for the Saudi press in the two main cities of Saudi Arabia: Jeddah and Riyadh. The interviews that I conducted with female journalists suggest that there are many reasons motivating women in Saudi Arabia to become journalists, and there are many types of journalists to become. It is a career with many challenges and rewards. Female journalists in Saudi Arabia choose to become journalist for the many reasons that are outlined in this chapter. Journalism gives Saudi women unique identities. It also provides them with power to change other people beliefs, to be able to approach and question other people.

Chapter Five: Content Analysis of the Press in Saudi Arabia

This chapter provides a content analysis of the newspapers used in the present study. The aim of the chapter is to establish what female journalists in Saudi Arabia write, and how they write about specific topics. I use content analysis to determine the presence of gender-related subjects in the press in Saudi Arabia, and also to analyse Saudi women's contribution to the press. In this chapter I also use content analysis as a tool that quantifies and analyses the presence, meanings and relationships of articles in the Saudi Arabian press. I analyse and draw conclusions about these texts and the journalist(s), the audience, and the culture and time in which news articles occurred. The reason I am using content analysis is because it is a simple, effective means of comparing male journalists to female journalists working in the press in Saudi Arabia and to note who does what in the press. In other words, content analysis shows, in raw numbers, the number of Saudi female journalists compared to the number of male journalists. It will also show the coverage in the Saudi press of gender-related issues, and representations of women in the media. In order to conduct this content analysis of the chosen newspapers, I have coded the papers, and broken down content into manageable categories such as number of articles written by male journalists, number of articles written by female journalists, in every section of the newspaper: politics, economy, sport, literary articles, local interest stories and religion using a quantitative approach. I then analyse the content using qualitative newspaper analysis (Richardson, 2007) by using what Klaus Krippendorff refers to as "categorical distinctions". Krippendorff writes: "Categorical distinctions define units by their membership in a class or category by their having something in common. A common reference is typical: any character string that refers to a particular object, event, person, act, country, or idea" (Krippendorff, 2004: p. 105). The common reference point in my content analysis is based on gender (male/ female). On the basis of the quantitative analysis this research aims to

develop a qualitative variable approach to measuring production of the news. This has the benefit of not only providing a conceptually richer dependent variable, but also one that reveals data about the news in a more descriptively interpretable way.

One of the strengths of the qualitative approach to newspaper analysis is that it can produce a rich, detailed description of the social setting being investigated. Also, by choosing qualitative research, I had the opportunity to read articles written by the journalists I am interested in, which enabled me to study their approach to culture and discover information shared by them in their writings. I chose to read other articles written by some female journalists because I wanted to learn more about their background even though some of their articles do not necessarily relate to gender issues. Having access to the newspapers' online archives was crucial to my research, as it enabled me to access all the articles written by the female journalists I am interested in. In the process I was able to gain access to the ways in which female journalists experience and write for the Saudi press. Finally, I will give examples of women journalists who contribute to the press in Saudi Arabia. I will examine a few of the influential Saudi women journalists and present examples of their writing based on selected interviews with them and the textual analyses of their works.

Sampling Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

The sampling strategies in this study are described in order to make the interpretation of the findings easier. The type of sampling used in this study at first was random sampling or probability sampling which means that units are selected by chance, and that every unit of a population has an equal chance of being selected (Decon, Golding & Pickering, 2007). I initially formed a list of more than twenty five women journalists I identified as regular participants in the field for at least the past two years. Then as I became more aware of the

press in Saudi Arabia, I narrowed down the list to seven female journalists who I believe were more persistent in the field and stirred more controversy by their writings. The sample reflected a balanced distribution in terms of genre, regional affiliation and spectrum of ideological orientation. My target population was female journalists who are writing for four newspapers: two newspapers from the Hijaz⁷ region, *Okaz* and *Al Madina*, and two newspapers from Nejd⁸ region, *Al Riyadh* and *Al jazirah*. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, there are several reasons why I chose these 4 newspapers:

- They are the most popular newspapers in Saudi Arabia.
- They have the biggest circulations in the country.
- These four newspapers have Internet access which is important for me because it allows me to use the archive, and also it enables me to access these newspapers from the United Kingdom.
- More women write for these newspapers than any for other newspapers in Saudi Arabia.

During the early stages of this study, I decided that my sample would include one week only every month for four month. The content analysis covers the following period of time:

- From 07/11/2009 to 13/11/2009
- From 20/01/2010 to 26/01/2010
- From 22/02/2010 to 28/02/2010
- From 01-05-2011 to 07-05-2011

It must be mentioned, that the selection of the timeframe above was random and the

⁷ Al Hijaz is a region in the West of Saudi Arabia. Defined primarily by its Western border on the Red Sea, its main city is Jeddah, but it is probably better known for the Islamic holy cities of Makkah and Medina.

⁸ Najd is the central region of the Arabian Peninsula. Riyadh, the country's capital and major city, is located there.

results are likely to be similar to any other period of time in the Saudi press. My aim was to achieve richness of data and thick description that could lead to an in-depth understanding of female journalists' reality. Another aim of my sampling strategy was to reflect diversity and to provide as much potential for comparison as possible.

I have excluded articles that were written by non-Saudi female journalists reporting from other countries because they do not face the challenges that Saudi female journalists confront every day in reporting the news. They report from their countries, for example, there were a few female journalists reporting from Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. I present and analyze the writings of seven of the most influential contemporary Saudi Arabian women journalists, representing a variety of genres, themes, styles, and ideological orientation. These women are for the local section: Hayat Al Ghamdi, Noora Al Shawmr and Abeer Ibraheem; for the opinion articles: Asmaa Al Mohammed and Jaheer Al Mosaeed; and for moving beyond boundaries: Nahid Saeed and Wajeeha Al Huwaider.

Why Contemporary Saudi Women Journalists?

My background in literature, in addition to my being a native speaker and writer in Arabic who also is equipped with the technical knowledge of the literary tradition, has proved to be most valuable in conducting this research. This background was especially helpful in preparing me to trace the cultural influences on style, imagery and themes. The materials I have collected extend from 2009 to 2012. This period seemed an ideal one on which to focus mainly because the material written at this time was easily available to me, and the writers themselves were accessible. Moreover, this era is distinguishable from what preceded it with the emergence of the uprisings in the Middle East and all the political, social and historical implications of 2011. In addition it is marked by King Abdullah's decision to allow Saudi women to vote and to join Majles Al shurra which I will talk about in further details later in this chapter. In 2011 Saudi

Arabia witnessed a major cultural shock when Manal Al Shariff posted a video of her driving in Saudi Arabia. This incident had a great influence on news articles in Saudi Arabia and stirred quite a battle in the press between columnists. My hope is that this study, by documenting the social and intellectual history of this period will furnish a basis for future comparative research.

Content Analysis

Content analysis allows the researcher to produce systematic descriptions of what documentary sources contain. By counting how often particular topics, themes or actors are mentioned, how much space and prominence they command, and in what contexts they are presented, content analysis provides an overview of patterns of attention. It tells us what is highlighted and what is ignored (David, Golding, and Pickering, 2007). The analysis was conducted as follows: first, each section of each newspaper was analyzed; secondly, the number of topics covered by male versus female journalists was counted. The central focus of the data generation methods was to gather all the articles written by female journalists in the periods of time mentioned above, and then determine how many female journalists have written in the local section, sport section, political section, opinion articles, and economic section of the newspapers. I also counted the number of gender related articles written by both female and male journalists in the same period of time, then analyzed these gender-related articles, and compared them. The level of measurement used in this study is the nominal level which is the most basic level of measurement and covers those occasions when numbers are used simply to label a particular quality or feature. In doing so, content analysis then allowed me to see what topics were not covered by female journalists in other words, what they not write about. Drawing on this, I aim to investigate the reasons behind the exclusivity of some topics to male journalists rather than female journalists.

This study's objective is to understand the extent to which women contribute to the

production of various forms of thought in their society by providing their own interpretations of religion, culture, history, values, ideas and meaning formed in society. In this chapter I hope to answer several important questions: How do women themselves use the press as a means to counter the language of power and as a political strategy to alter concepts that are used to control them? In what manner do women journalists present their struggles or their accomplishments to the reader? Who's who in the Saudi Arabian press, and who is the targeted audience?

Findings

The following charts represent the number of male journalists and the number of female journalists writing for the four different newspapers I am interested in:

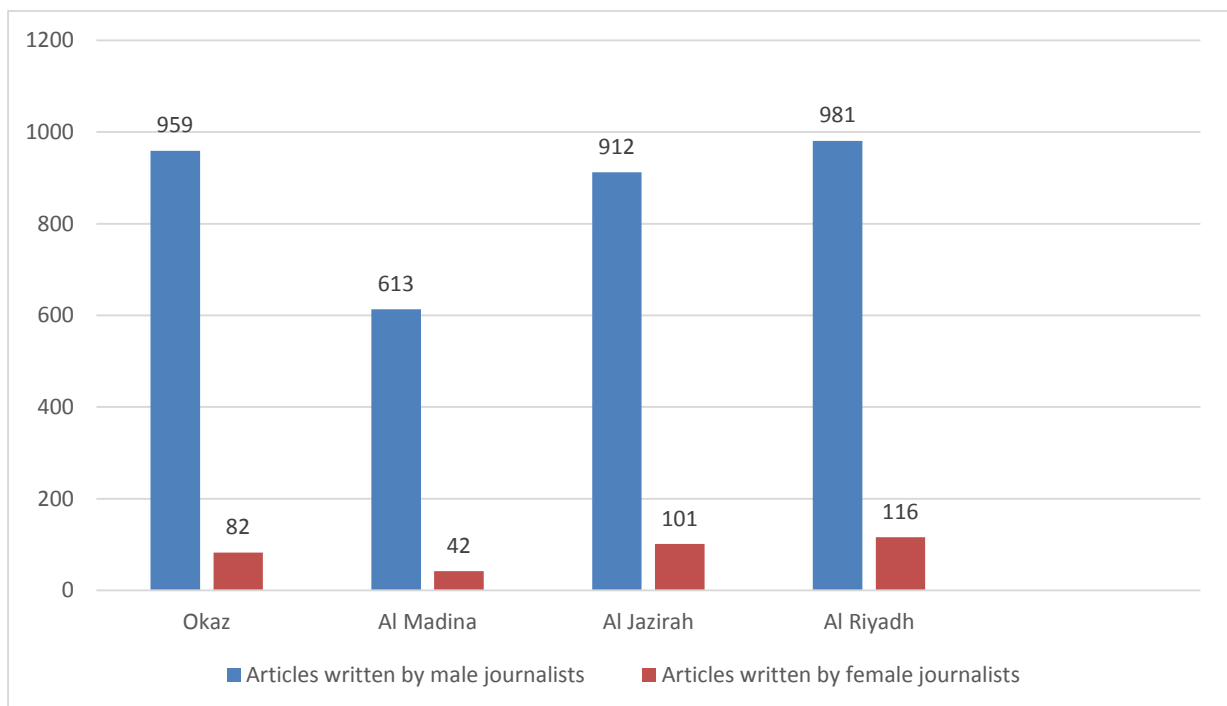


Table 4 Content Analysis of the period from (01/05/2011) to (07/05/2011)

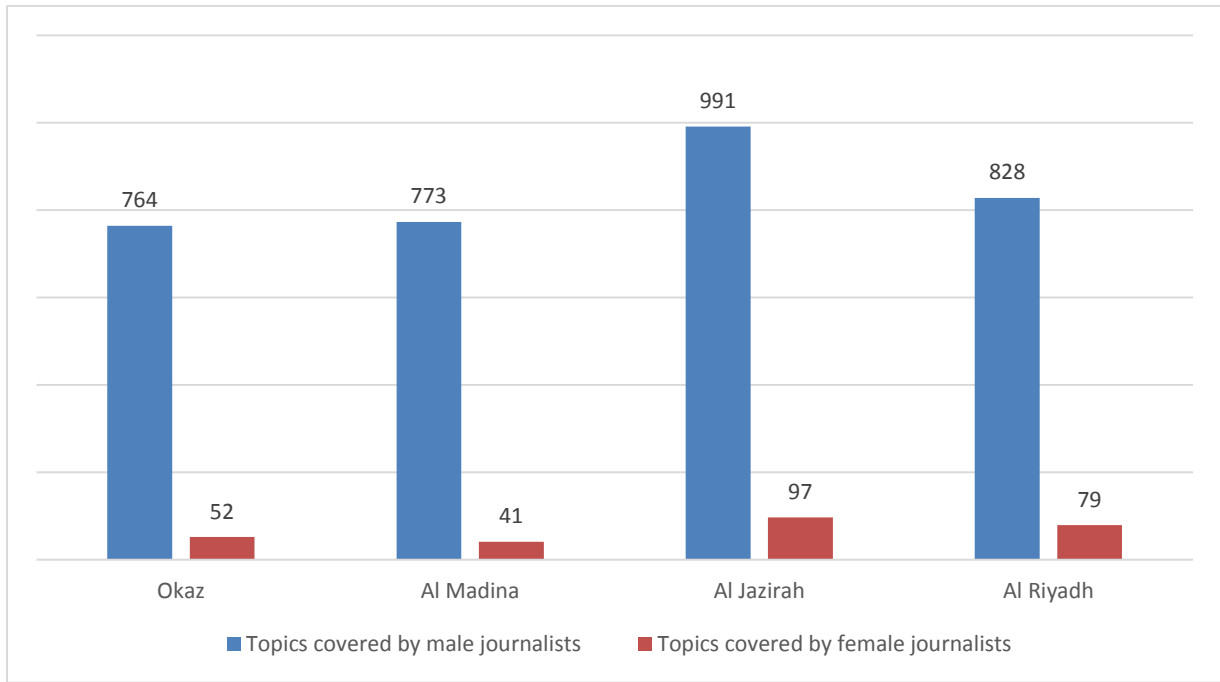


Table 5 Content Analysis of the Period from (22/02/2010) to (28/02/2010)

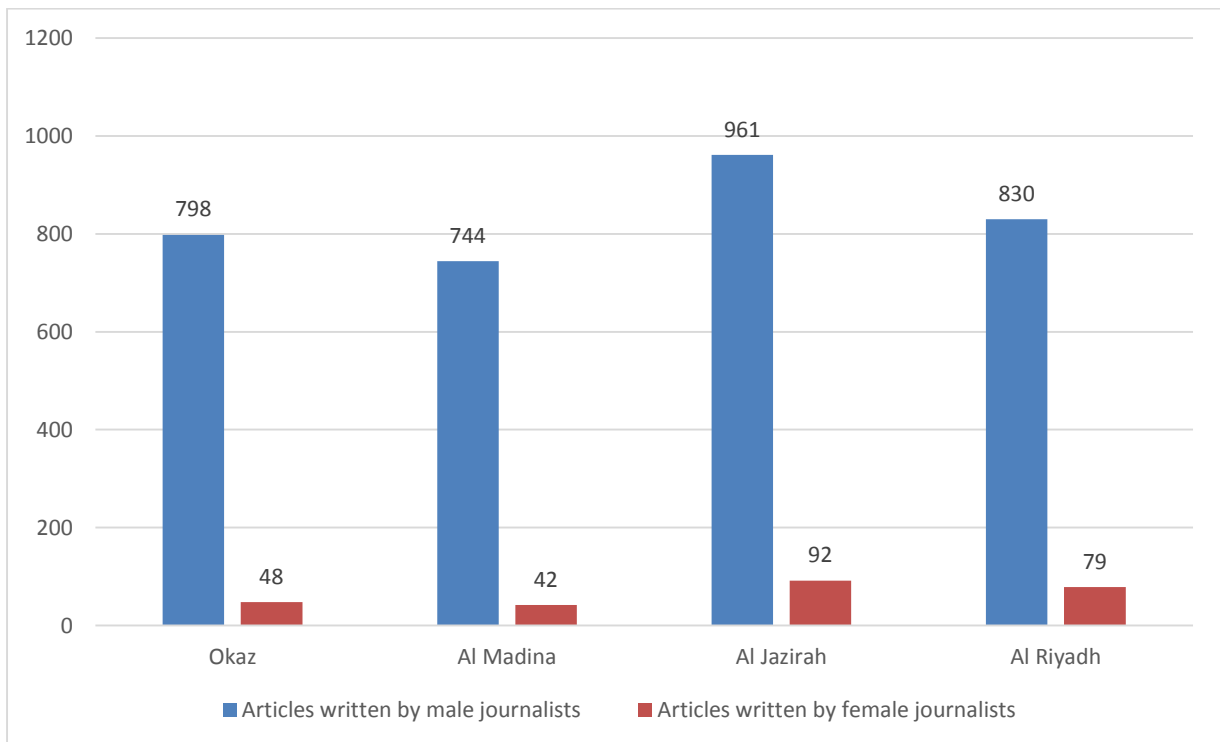


Table 6 Content Analysis of the period from (20/01/2010) to (26/01/2010)

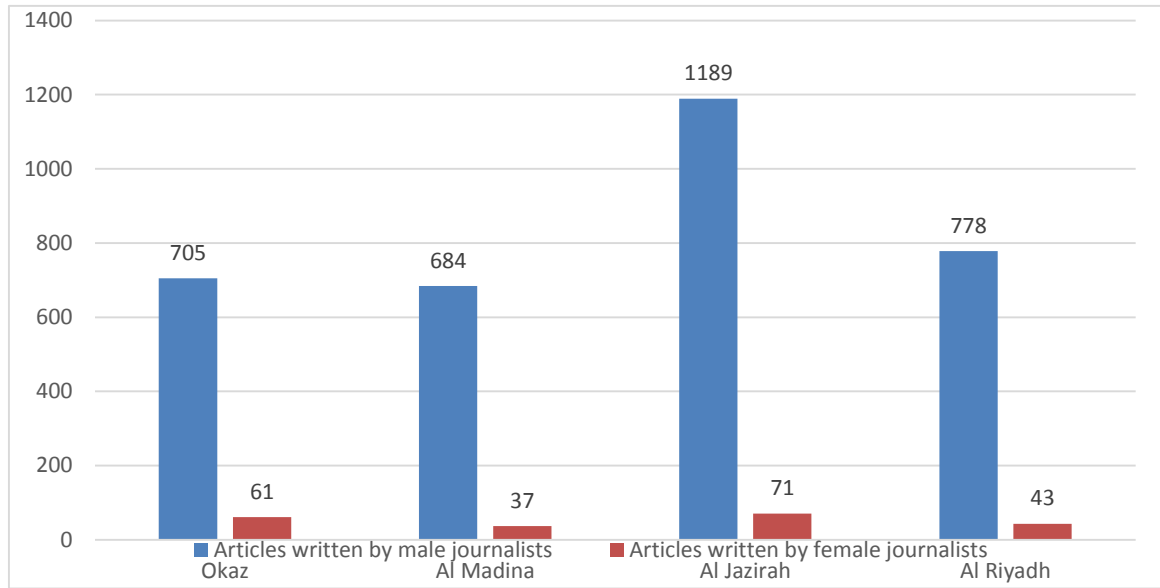


Table 7 Content Analysis of the period from (07/11/2009) to (13/11/2009)

The

number of topics covered by female journalists is very low compared to the number of topics covered by male journalists, as the charts 1, 2, 3 and 4 show. It was recently revealed that only 5% of full time staff on the Kingdom's 12 newspapers is female. The statistics were disclosed at a symposium organized by the Princess Jawaher bin Naif Centre for Women's Research and Development in the city of Al khobar (Al Jassem, 2010). What the charts do not present are the topics and stories which female journalists are covering in Saudi Arabia. Therefore the second part of this chapter will focus on a qualitative approach to the content analysis which will give details of the nature of topics covered by female journalists in each section of the four daily newspapers in the two cities of Jeddah and Riyadh.

The Local Section

The articles that were covered by female journalists were mainly in the local section of the newspapers. There are 573 articles in this section that were written by female journalists in the

4 weeks in which I looked at the newspapers which is more than the number of articles writing by women in any other section in newspapers. In this section, female journalists discussed: women's issues, cultural events and role models.

A: Issues that Speak to and about Women:

The issues covered included women's education, women's work and careers, domestic violence, and so forth. The predominant topic in this section is education in girls' schools. The reason behind the female journalists' interests in reporting stories from girls' schools or universities is that male journalists are not able to report from girls' schools because of the segregation system that exists in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, female journalists find it easier to do their jobs without competing with men. No matter how marginal or insignificant the topics are, there are many topics about girls' education everyday in the four newspapers that I looked at. The ways in which female journalists in this section dealt with women issues is inflated with sensational rhetoric. In other words, some female journalists tend to focus on stories that victimise women. They report stories about women's issues at home, at work or at school. For example: there are investigations about women doctors who cannot find husbands or how is it difficult for Saudi women to find a balance between their family and their jobs. Another example is stories about how some Saudi women deal with domestic violence. I will provide three examples of the type of articles women journalists write about in the local section. I aim to first give a summary of the article and then provide a textual analysis to each text.

Examples of Articles in this section

- 1- *Women Get the Approval of their Guardians for their Work. "How Much Do you Want"* by Hayat Al Ghamdi. 1 May 2011. *Al Riyadh* Newspaper (Al Ghamdi, 2011).

تجحن في «ترويض الوصاية» بـ «قوة المال» و«وجاهة الحضور المشرق»
سيدات يتترعن موافقة أولياء أمورهن على عملهن.. «كم تبي آخر الشهر»؟



Figure 1

In this article, Hayat investigates stories of three women who would do anything to keep their jobs in Saudi Arabia. Hayat starts the article arguing that Saudi women choose to work not only to improve their financial status, but to gain social status in a society that distinguishes working women in Saudi Arabia from stay-at-home women. Hayat gives examples of three women. First, there is Fatma who works in a small village in Aseer, far from her parent's house. When her family refused to drive her to work, she suggested paying her brother 1500 Saudi Riyals (400 US \$) a month to drive her there.⁹ The second story is about a woman called Nadia, who when her husband refused to drive her to her work, and refused to let her go alone with a driver, offered to pay her younger brother 1000 Saudi Riyals a month (266 US \$), just to accompany her everyday so she would not be alone with a non-related male driver. The third

⁹ Aseer is a province of Saudi Arabia located in the southwest of the country.

story Hayat tells is about a woman called Noora. Noora's father did not allow her to work as a nurse because he feared she would be mixing with males. She suggested paying her father 2000 Saudi Arabian Riyals (533 US \$) and her mother 500 Saudi Riyals which is 133 US \$ as monthly allowances. Noora says that now her father does not only let her work, but also he is very supportive of her work. He even allows her to travel alone and to attend conferences. In this article, Hayat argues that one of the reasons husbands will not let their wives work is that they fear that their wives will not be good parents to their children or good housewives. She suggests that society must be educated about women's rights. Because of the social norms that treat women as weak and dependent, there are no rights for women when it comes to their money, their careers, or their future. This article by Hayat Al Ghamdi is an example of what female journalists report on in the local section of the newspapers in Saudi Arabia. The writer of this article uses symbolism, irony and sarcasm in narrating the stories of these different women. Work here is a symbol of independence and freedom for Saudi women; therefore, they do not mind paying their guardians from their own money for their freedom. Money is a symbol of power; after years of feeling powerless, Saudi women have finally found a way to claim power. She also uses metaphor when she describes going to work as like committing a crime in Saudi Arabia for some conservative families, and how it causes great shame to the families if their daughters decide to work.

Hayat indirectly suggests that driving is a major issue for most of these women. At a time when most of the articles in Saudi press focussed on Manal Al Shariff and driving for women, Hayat wrote about the actual problems that face women as a result of not driving by having to pay their males relatives to drive them to work and back every day. Hayat describes the paradox of Saudi Arabian society, in the way in which these guardians would not allow women to work because of mixing with males, but when money was offered to them they did not mind it, indeed some became very keen on the idea. To Saudi Arabian society, women's

entering the workforce means the abandonment of women's primary task of homemaking and instability for the "Islamic family" and for society as a whole. However, for a smaller but growing numbers of other Saudis, especially modernists, working means more income, strengthening of nuclear families and independence from the extended family.

2- *Our Girls are Looking for Majors at Bahrain's Universities in Journalism, Fashion, Interior Design and Languages* by Noora Al Shawmr. 21 January 2010. *Al Riyadh* newspaper (Al Shawmr, 2010).



Figure 2

Noora starts her investigation for this story by listing the reasons why some Saudi Arabian girls might be interested in studying in Bahrain instead of Saudi Arabia. Some girls find it easier to

find acceptance in Bahrian. In addition, there are so many majors to choose from in Bahrain's universities: for example, journalism, fashion design, interior design, and languages. Also she suggests that many Saudi girls are willing to be independent and live on their own.

For the article, Noora interviewed some Saudi Arabian girls studying in Bahrain. She asked them about the reasons behind their choices to study in Bahrain, the problems they face, and how their families reacted to their decisions. The first interview was with Wafa Al yosif, who she describes as not being able to drive between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain every weekend when she wishes to visit her family. The second interview was with Muneera Khalid who is studying medicine in Bahrain. One of the problems she faces is that the university is far from where she lives in Bahrain, and she does not know how to drive. Therefore she hires a private driver and this is costing her a lot of money. The third interview was with Noora Almajdooe. Her main difficulty is her brothers' opposition to the idea of her living alone in Bahrain. However, she says that her father has been very supportive, and that he takes her to Bahrain every week, and brings her back every weekend to Saudi Arabia to visit her family.

Other interviews were with Muneera Al Saif and Muna Mohammed who decided to study in Bahrain because they could not find the majors they wanted in their cities in Saudi Arabia. Muneera is studying journalism, while Muna is studying fashion design. Both of their families supported their decisions. Lastly, Sara Almsaad is studying in Bahrain because no university in Saudi Arabia has accepted her high school grade, and she says she is having problems with commuting every day to Bahrain and back. In this particular story, Noora is describing girls' problems after high school in Saudi Arabia. Most universities in Saudi Arabia offer limited places for girls which leave thousands of girls every year at home. Even if they were accepted there are not a lot of majors to choose from, unless they apply for universities in the big cities such as Jeddah or Riyadh. Until recently universities in Saudi offered to girls very few majors, such as Religious Studies, English, History, Science and Medicine. Girls who

have interests in fashion design, political sciences, media and journalism had to seek places outside Saudi Arabia. Luckily for some girls, Bahrain universities are very close, and offer what they are looking for. Another problem raised by Noora in this article is driving. The theme of driving again occurs in this story as many girls expressed great difficulties when it comes to commuting from Bahrain to Saudi Arabia or the other way around. It is difficult to find someone to drive them; it is also difficult for them to have permission from their families to hire private drivers, and this is not to mention the huge amount of money they have to pay for private drivers.

3- *Women Suffering from Ex-husbands Chasing their New Lives and Distorting their Images* by Abeer Ibrahim. 6 May 2011. *Al Riyadh* Newspaper (Ibrahim, 2011).

Abeer tells a story of Jawaher who was a victim of an abusive husband. After suffering constant beating from her husband, Jawaher finally asked for a divorce, despite her family's warnings. This story is an example of domestic violence in Saudi Arabia. Jawaher's family is similar to many families in Saudi Arabia that believe that society does not respect divorced women, and always put the blame on them for the failure of marriage. Jawaher's attempt to forget her past has failed as she was shocked to know her ex-husband is spreading rumours to neighbours and friends that Jawaher was not loyal to him during their marriage and that was what caused the divorce.

Abeer argues that it is easier for Saudi society to blame women when it comes to divorces. Also society does not sympathize with divorced women no matter how much they suffer during their marriages. Abeer continues her investigation with another story of Jihan Abdul Al Rahman who also is a victim of an abusive husband and constant beating. Jihan claims that she tried everything to make their marriage work such as quitting her job working

as a school teacher. Society is still judging Jihan and believe what her ex-husband said about her having mental problems even after 5 years of being divorced. Abeer gives examples of more women suffering false accusations by their ex-husbands. Because of these false accusations these women are still single and being judged negatively by their societies. Abeer goes on to describe them as prisoners of their societies. This story did not include the other side of the story. The author did not interview any of the husbands. It is very difficult for female journalists to communicate with men, and ask for their side of the story. This story is an example of the domestic abuse that women can face in Saudi Arabia. It also describes the unfortunate status of divorced women.

Women in this section use words as means to counter the power of society. This is the place where they can express their oppositions to some of society's norms. Their writings about women's issues are crucial to their role in cultural politics. They can contribute their own understanding of religion, gender, and politics. Saddeka Arebi, however, disagrees with this approach of victimizing women. She argues that in Saudi Arabia "journalism concentrates on the woman as she goes to school and gets an education, as she works, as she eats, as she gets married, as she brings up her children, as she gives birth, and so on... The woman becomes the "creator" of journalism and also its victim" (Arebi, 1994: p.186).

The realities of social life that these women journalists depict in their stories reveal a mode of representation in which the women in the stories appear as victims. The collections of stories written by female journalists in the local sections of the news deal with a variety of topics and experiences, such as marriage, polygamy, divorce and society. Most of the women in these stories are portrayed as victims with whom the reader should sympathize. They are victimized by either a man (i.e., husband, brother, father); by society (i.e., arranged marriage) or by the combination of the two.

B: Cultural Events

Under the local sections, women journalists also seem interested in cultural events. They cover expeditions, openings and activities carried out by noted Saudi women in society such as Princess Hessa. The stories in this section cover the participation of women in events, and social activities. Many of these events are presided over by princesses. Their activities are numerous and diverse, including the opening of female libraries, the collection of donations for the needy, and the presentation of books and fine arts exhibitions. This section of the newspaper also covers cultural events such as seminars and public lectures by noted women of society. Because of the existence of the segregation of the sexes in Saudi Arabia, men are not allowed to attend these events which are carried out by women. As a result, it is very difficult for male journalists to report on these events. Saudi female journalists use these cultural events as symbols of Saudi women's power. They show women participating in society whether their contributions are to science, art, or sport. The language used in these stories is often descriptive, and stories tend to be shorter than in the articles in other sections of the newspapers.

An example of these articles is Princess Lulwa al-Faisal's directing and opening of the proceedings of the international contest for jewellery's' designs, reported by Laila Awad, 03/05/2011 in *Okaz* Newspaper. In this article, Laila covers the contest of designing jewellery between 15 Saudi women contestants. In this story, Princess Lulwa also speaks about plans to establish an academy for jewellery design in Saudi Arabia. This contest between girls in jewellery design is considered to be the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia (Awad, 2011). In another story, Haya Al Abeed who writes for *Al Jazirah* newspaper covers an event carried out by Princess Jawaher bint Naif. The exhibition which is called "Al Faisal Shahed wa Shaheed" is a tribute to King Faisal (may God rest his soul in peace). Among the participants are the daughter and grand-daughters of King Faisal. This expedition celebrates the accomplishments

of King Faisal, and the many victories he had in his reign of ruling Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ Articles in this section contribute to the heritage of Saudi Arabia. For example they define the history, the art, the tradition, the religion and language of this country (Al Abeed, 2011).

C: Role Models and Trendsetters

When I looked at different articles in the press about women in Saudi Arabia, I asked myself the question of which women are the best role models for young girls in Saudi Arabia. What do you expect to find in a role model for a country such as Saudi Arabia? For Saudi women to be considered a successful role model, does that mean they must be conservative? Or reformers? The Saudi press must keep in mind all readers by maintaining a delicate balance between those who want modernization and an Islamic society, and those who want modernization and a particular kind of Islamic society. Will other women in society find it easier to relate to conservative women who wish to preserve their cultural values or are young girls in society looking for revolutionary women who are not afraid to oppose certain aspects of Saudi society? The list of women trendsetters included in the following paragraphs show that journalists suggest that the perfect role models for Saudi women should find a balance and hold on to their traditions and culture. Also they must be educated and independent women in that they have demonstrated they can make their own decisions and choices. Women journalists write about role models and influential women in Saudi society. They write about their accomplishments whether in science or sport or education. Mostly they are women who were the first Saudi Arabian women to do something: for example, the first Saudi Arabian female pilot, or the first Saudi Arabian female diver, or the first Saudi female film director. A sense of pride is often found in these articles, and the authors' main goals are to encourage other women

¹⁰ Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud (1906 – March 25, 1975) was King of Saudi Arabia from 1964 to 1975. He successfully stabilized the kingdom's bureaucracy and his reign had significant popularity among Saudis. In 1975, he was assassinated by his nephew Faisal bin Musaid.

in the country to follow the lead of these role models. In the process of cultural trendsetting, the discourse patterning of precedent-setting is most prevalent, it is a discourse of “firsts”. It includes a trove of phrasal variations on first (first ever to, first time to, first person to) and when applied to women (first woman to), and particularly Saudi women (first Saudi women to), it suggests the start of a new sequence (Kaufer & Al-Malki, 2009).

Examples of Saudi Women Role Models

In 2009, Nora Al Fayeze was the first woman to be selected deputy education minister for women's affairs, which is the highest position reached by a female in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The press was filled with articles about her. There were also short biographies, and interviews. Female journalists believed that she would encourage other women to contribute more to society, and she is presented as a perfect role model for young Saudi women.

Another example is Muna Abu Sulayman who is the Executive Director of the Kingdom Foundation. In addition to this prestigious position she is also a UN Goodwill Ambassador, Muna was elected a Young Global Leader. In addition to her full time job as a TV presenter and a host on MBC channel.¹¹ She is also a single parent which can be difficult sometimes, but many women consider her as a powerful woman who does not need a man to be successful.

A third example of female role models in the Saudi Arabian press is Rajaa al-Sanie. Rajaa published the novel, *The Girls of Riyadh*, which gained instant global recognition. In this novel, Rajaa writes about how Saudi women and men meet up in the conservative Saudi Arabia. Although writing about such topics are considered taboo in Saudi Arabia, the novel was a success and a top seller. This novel and its characters are a work of fiction, but appear to be based on real life stories of Saudi meeting up and starting relationships. To some, Rajaa is

¹¹ The Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) Group is the first private free-to-air satellite broadcasting company in the Arab World which was launched in London in 1991 and later moved to its headquarters in Dubai in 2002. It is one of the most popular TV channels in the Middle East.

viewed as a creative young women who can address women in her society, but to some others, she is hated for promoting anti-Islamic practices.

Another example is Hanadi Zakariya Hindi, the first accredited female Saudi pilot to fly planes in Saudi Arabia hired by Prince Al Waleed bin Talal. Prince Alwaleed is quoted as saying:

I see the hiring of this female pilot to work on Kingdom Holding's fleet of private jets as a historic move for Saudi ladies. The move transcends the traditional role of Saudi women previously confined to working in the health, education and philanthropic sectors. I am in full support of Saudi ladies working in all fields (Vines, 2008).

Alwaleed added: "The hiring of a female Saudi pilot is the first of its kind." Asked how she nurtured this dream of becoming a pilot despite gender bias, Captain Hanadi said: "It was a dream I had since I was a child and was waiting to be fulfilled. My mother and father were very supportive and they were always behind me." She added that "some of my friends were in favour; some were against the career I chose."

There is an increase of stories about women's accomplishments and success in education, careers, and science in the Saudi Arabian press. Some female journalists such as Asmaa Al Mohammed, who I will write about in further details in my section on moving beyond boundaries, believe that it is important for every nation to write about women's accomplishments and success stories because it means writing the current history of women and society. It must be mentioned that there is a gap in the history of women in literature. In contrast, media and literature in Arabia highlighted the personal histories and contributions of men such as kings, religious leaders, and other successful men. The last record of the history of women dates back to the first half century of Islam. The idealization of that period is so great that it led to men and women of that era being perceived as sacred. It was the golden era for women, who are presented as very educated, independent and strong. They are shown to have

made important contributions to the Islamic state.

Ruqayya Ash-shabib, who wrote in various local newspapers such as *Al Jazeera*, *Al Yamama* and *Ash-shaqul-Awsat*, expressed how contemporary women's connection to the history of their predecessors is blurred:

It is as if women's history were a page that was eaten by historians. It has almost been forgotten that the Arab woman has a history. People tend to forget that Islam was built on women's shoulders. They freely embraced Islam, they were financiers of the movement, and they were its first believers and martyrs. They were courageous soldiers who fought for it. We do have a fund of models from our glorious history on which contemporary women can draw. They were strong women who took matters in to their own hands, whether to determine their faith, finance, marriage, or ownership. These women wrote their history not by being passive. I would like my writing to serve as a reminder (Personal communication, 1989).

The Economy and Sport Sections

As the above quantitative tables show, there are 14 articles written by female journalists in the sport section of the newspapers in the timeframe within which I looked at the press. This is compared to 2634 articles written by male journalists in the sport section during the same periods of time. While there are 61 articles written by female journalists in the economy section of the newspapers in the same timeframe mentioned above, there are 1275 articles written in the economy's section by male journalists in that same period of time in the same newspapers. Samirah Turkestani argues that "Most Saudi women journalists are advised to write on fashion, social issues, cooking and style just because they are women, while political and economic

issues are given to male journalists” (Al Jassem, 2010). Turkestani, is the former head of the women’s section of *Al-Eqtisadiyah* newspaper and a presenter on Saudi TV’s Channel 1. Female journalists are not represented as interested in political news, sport, or economy. However things are different now for Saudi women as more and more women are writing for opinion articles and important issues. I think one of the reasons that women may not be interested in reporting sport in Saudi Arabia, is because they are not allowed to attend sports events. They are not allowed in stadiums or sports courts to watch games, and therefore it is difficult for them to report on sports events. The reason is that women are protected and there is a fear for women to be mixed with men in sport venues. The articles written by female journalists in the sport sections are often related to women’s basketball or football teams inside girls’ universities. While men focus on sport news from the stadiums, the results, the goals, the transfers, the after match interviews, and the different sports debates, women, on the other hand, focus on very specific issues, for example they cover stories about children with special needs and their contribution to football.

I have to mention that during the time in which I conducted this content analysis, the sport sections rarely mentioned women’s activities in sport. However, a year later, in July 2012 to be exact, the sport section was filled with topics about the two Saudi Arabian women who participated in the London Olympics. For the first time, Saudi Arabia sent two women to the Olympics: Wojdan Shaherkani and Sarah Attar, who competed in judo and track and field (CNN, 2012). Prince Nawaf al-Faisal, allowing the two women to join the Saudi delegation was considered as a great move for Saudi women. Facebook and Twitter were filled with photos of Sarah Attar on the running track from her university website in California. The pictures were blurred because she was dressed in shorts. There were attacks on Attar for not wearing hijab. Meanwhile, judo competitor Wojdan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim Shahrkhani's father received insults that included racial abuse and comments questioning his manhood, his honour and even his

citizenship. Both of the women competitors were featured under an Arabic Twitter hashtag that translates as "Olympic whores" (Al Nafjan, 2012). Several issues were raised in the media regarding their participation. For example, there were some concerns that Shaherkani would not be able to compete that year. Because the president of the International Federation of Judo declared that women wearing headscarves would not be allowed to participate for fear of choking and injury. The issue was resolved and she participated in a form of headgear that complies with Saudi's strict Islamic dress codes for women. The second Saudi participant was runner Attar who had been training in the United States. "A big inspiration for participating in the Olympic Games is being one of the first women for Saudi Arabia to be going," the 17-year-old said at her San Diego base. "It's such a huge honor and I hope that it can really make some big strides for women over there to get more involved in sport" (CNN, 2012).

Following Shaherkani and Attar's participation in the Olympics, there was and still is a dispute in the press in Saudi Arabia as to whether girls should be allowed to participate in sport. On the other hand, Eman Al Nafjan has published an article in which she argues that the inclusion of Saudi female competitors in the Olympic team is a victory for the world. She writes: "No matter who wins a medal or loses in the London 2012 Olympics the whole world is a winner. Thanks to human rights organisations, the IOC and the bravery of Attar and Shahrkhani, for the first time in history, all 204 countries participating in the Olympics have sent delegations that include women" (Al Nafjan, 2012).

Moving Beyond Boundaries

The media can be a very powerful tool for women to claim and use in order to ask for their rights. It enables them to expose their issues to the public, and make their voices heard. Many Saudi feminists have used their writings to demand equality between men and women in Saudi

Arabia. This is similar, in a way, to what Western feminists have called “feminist media” when they have used media to talk about women’s position within society, women’s movements and feminism, and Saudi Arabian women are following this lead. Some of the more outspoken Saudi women are clearly looking forward to writing about politics, for example Nahid Saed and Wajeeha Al Huwaider. In this section I will focus on certain works by these two journalists.

Nahid Saed writes for *Al Jazirah*, and although her articles are often found in the features and opinion sections, her writings contain political messages. For example, in one of her articles, she addresses the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia also known as *Majlis as-Shura* or Shura Council. It is the formal advisory body of Saudi Arabia (The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Homepage, 2011). In her article “Women and *Majlis as-Sura*”, Nahid addresses the Shura Council members with many questions. Firstly, why are female journalists not allowed in their meetings? Secondly, she asks why there is not a mention of the 12 women who are members of the Shura Council alongside the male members and why their biographies do not appear on the council website. She always starts her article with famous sayings whether in the Arabic language or translated from other languages. She also asks a lot of questions in her writings in order to engage the audience and the officials. Nahid is an example of a woman journalist who is moving beyond boundaries. Nahid Saed shows no fear in engaging the readers to her debates. After she posted her article “Women and *Majlis as-Sura*” online on the *Al Arabia news* website, a lot of readers responded negatively, and the public, mostly men, attacked her. Among the comments, there were arguments that women should stay at home and not be part of the religious council (Saeed, 2013).

In another article, “Husbands Threaten their Wives with Marrying Another”, Nahid Saeed speaks of a social issue in Saudi Arabia. It is about husbands who are threatening their wives with marrying other women. Nahid then describes the negative results these threats have on their marriage as the wife loses her sense of security which is one of the most important

needs for women in Saudi society (Saeed, 2007). This article gives examples of a different type of abuse that exists in Saudi Arabia which can be found in the husband's background as maybe it is normal for the men in his family to have more than one wife or perhaps he is from an environment that teaches men that it is a form of manhood to have more than one wife. These articles show that some men in Saudi Arabia are ignorant and they believe that these threats will teach wives their duties at home. Nahid then describes the psychological reasons which lead men in Saudi Arabia to this behaviour. Some men have a lack of confidence and may be feeling unaccepted by their wives because they have certain defects and as a result they threaten their wives as a way of proving to them that there are still wanted by other women. Nahid Saed writes that: "in my personal opinion marriage is a fine institution where one should not humiliate or show contempt for the other." Her article both challenges bad practice and call for a positive image of marriage.

Nahid Saeed is an example of a woman journalist who covers the different issues that Saudi women face in their everyday life. For example, in "The Scholarship problems" (Saeed, 2007) she focuses on Saudi girls problems outside the kingdom. The first theme that Nahdi discusses is that female students outside the kingdom have few majors to choose from. The other theme is the guardian issue. In order to get the scholarship to study outside (Australia, USA, UK, and Canada) every Saudi girl must be accompanied by a related male guardian (father/husband/brother/uncle/son). This requirement has led many girls to consider marriage just because they need male guardians to accompany them while studying abroad. Nahid includes a survey from the higher education ministry in Saudi Arabia. The survey shows that 79% of the 387 girls who participated in this survey favour the guardian role. Some reasons for this high figure are suggested below. The same survey shows that 20.93% of girls would agree to get married just for the purpose of having guardians to accompany them. Imposing the male guardianship policy over women protects Saudi women more than any other policy in Saudi

Arabia. This practice is derived from a verse in the Qur'an. The verse is in *Sura 4* verse 34 of the Qur'an and states "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means" (Ahmad: p.15).¹²

Nahid Saeed was not the only journalist interested in the topic of the male guardianship. This topic has been widely discussed and analysed in the press articles in Saudi. Some female Saudis consider male guardianship one of their "rights". In a 2010 interview with the *New York Times*, Noura Abdulrahman, a female employee of the Saudi Ministry of Education, defended male guardianship as providing protection and love.

In Saudi culture, women have their integrity and a special life that is separate from men. As a Saudi woman, I demand to have a guardian. My work requires me to go to different regions of Saudi Arabia, and during my business trips I always bring my husband or my brother. They ask nothing in return-they only want to be with me.

The image in the West is that we are dominated by men, but they always forget the aspect of love. People who aren't familiar with *Shari'ah* often have the wrong idea. If you want stability and safety in your life, if you want a husband who takes care of you, you won't find it except in Islam (New York Times, 2010).

In 2008, Rowdha Yousef and other Saudi women launched a petition "My Guardian Knows What's Best for Me," which gathered over 5,000 signatures. The petition, which was led by Princess Jawaher, defended the status quo and requested punishment for activists demanding "equality between men and women, [and] mingling between men and women in mixed environments" (Admon, 2009). These Saudi women are afraid of change and they believe that reformers will jeopardise the stability of the country of Saudi Arabia. They argue that they only

¹² Ahmad Atif Ahmad, "Women's Freedom and limitations of Guardians' Authority: Based on the Sources of Hanbali Law and Other Sources of Islamic Law," p. 15 (on file with Human Rights Watch). This paper was commissioned by Human Rights Watch.

wish to protect Islamic values in their culture, and to protect women from abuse. Saudi believe that it has basis in the Islam. Even some of the well-known Saudi feminists have defended the guardianship. Sabria Al Jawhar argues:

A battle is brewing among Saudi women over the touchy issue of male guardianship. Pressure from outside Saudi Arabia has been building to abolish guardianship laws, and a number of women who fashion themselves as activists have led the charge. Perhaps the most visible is Wajeha Al-Huweidar, a Saudi who does a little showboating by being driven in a taxi to the border checkpoint to enter Bahrain without permission from a male guardian. She's always turned away by Saudi authorities and told to go home. She is the darling of Western conservatives who think this public demonstration will further the cause of Saudi women. It's silly. Public acts of defiance are unseemly in Saudi society and few women want to give up their dignity when letter-writing and petition campaigns are more effective. (Admon, 2009)

A key question here is what about Saudi girls who do not have brothers or husbands? And if they do, what about girls who have male relatives who will not agree to leave their studies, or their careers back home just to accompany her throughout her study years? In her article, Nahid asks Saudi to be more supportive of women's ambitions, arguing that they should look for solutions to this problem which is preventing many girls from achieving their dreams.

Nahid also writes about "Women and Terrorism", a topic that has not been talked about much in the Saudi Arabian press. She argues that in May 2006 Dr. Abdul Al ziz Al ghareeb wrote in *Middle East* newspaper about the absence of the wives of the terrorists. He also noted that most families teach their daughters to completely obey their husbands, and agree with all his behaviour without questioning it, especially if husbands were related to them beyond marriage. The fact that these girls are not educated or working contributes to their complete

support of their husbands no matter whether they are right or wrong. Nahid suggest that the factors which can lead some women to be part of a terrorist group are:

1. Arranged marriages especially to relatives without women's consent.
2. The negativity of some women, and their complete dependency on the man.
3. Lack of education.
4. Not practising any job.

All these factors cause insecurities in women which make them an easy target for any terrorist. A woman in this situation would easily be influenced by them, and she would not be able to see the harm intended toward innocent people. She argues that it is important for families to teach their girls independence and self-worth. Women are the centre of the society. They will raise the next generation and they will play an important role in their children's future.

The other journalist who offers a bad example to women in moving beyond borders is Wajeeha Al Howaider. A Saudi-born writer and journalist Wajeha Al-Huwaider is one of the Arab world's most prominent campaigners for human rights, particularly women's rights. She used to write for *Al Watan* Newspaper. She is a co-founder of the Association for the Protection and Defence of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia. In August 2003, all her writings were banned and removed from the Saudi media by the Saudi Interior Ministry; since then she has published her articles on reformist Arabic websites, and has gained international recognition. In November 2004, she was awarded the 2004 PEN/NOVIB Free Expression Award at The Hague for her work for freedom of expression and her contribution to women's rights campaigns. In 2008, she posted a video of herself driving in Saudi Arabia on YouTube. In 2011 she was the one filming Manal Al Shariff driving her car in Al Khobar, and then they posted the video on YouTube, which led to Al Shariff's arrest. She has written articles such as: "The Vital Pathfinding Arab Elite is Persecuted and Cannot Advance Arab Society" (Al Huwaider, 2006),

“Better to Be an Old Maid than to Marry an Arab Man”(Al Huwaidar, 2004), “Discrimination Against Arab Women Begins in the Womb” (Elaph, 2006), “Arab Women Are Worse Off Than the Prisoners in Guantanamo” (Rezgar, 2006), “Saudi Women Must Act Now - The ‘Right’ Time for Demanding Their Rights Will Never Come” (Al Huwaidar, 2006), and “The Heart of the Problem: Women Are Not Protected By Law” (Elaph, 2005). However, most of her articles have been banned, and censored unless they were published in unofficial blogs online.

Wajeeha use of strong language is shown in all her articles. Her Arabic writing is emotive and descriptive. Living in the US had a strong influence on Wajeeha’s thinking, and she is one the most liberal writers in the Middle East. She does not only criticize society, but also the politics of the Arabs countries. In her article “The Vital Path finding Arab Elite is Persecuted and Cannot Advance Arab Society” (July 2006) Wajeeha Al Huwaidar wrote a warning to the Arab leaders who she called “the wise pathfinders”.

Wajeeha’s choice of writing her latest collection of articles in English clearly reflects her wish to address Western readers, not only because she has given up on finding a listening ear in the Arab World, but also because, by writing in English, she is aspiring to belong to the domain of accepted theorists. She focuses on the victimization of Arab women and societies in general, while failing to describe the complicity of people in the Arab world. She also does not write about Arab women’s achievements as she is generalising in suggesting that all women are victims and weak in Arab societies. These factors, I believe, make her writings unreliable to an Arab reader. I believe that Wajeeha Al Huwaidar angry writings and repeated criticism of the Saudi society has alienated her. Saudi women do not wish to be associated with the like of Wajeeha Al Huwaidar.

The female journalists also have to be careful not to alienate readers. Some female journalists in Saudi Arabia become very angry in their writings so that they forget that they have to win the reader sympathy. This leads some of the male audience and also conservative

women in Saudi Arabia to find it very difficult to identify or sympathize with the stories women cover in the Saudi Arabia press. This is the problem I noticed in Al Huwaider writings. Her articles are less likely to invoke sympathy among male readers because she sounds like an angry woman. Anger is not only a culturally undesirable attribute but also projects an image of strength that is not particularly desirable in a woman in Saudi Arabia.

Al Huwaider has faced many forms of criticisms over the years, and one of these is that she is an infidel. As a solution Saudi women have to make obvious in their writings what is religious and what is social. Such distinctions are crucial to women's status in Saudi Arabian society. Women have to play an essential role in the process of the ideological formation in their society. Saudi women however reflect an understanding of what Foucault calls "regime of power/ knowledge" and "instances of discursive production" of power that are based on silence, prohibition, and the circulation of systematic misconceptions (Foucault, 1988: p. 12). If female journalists wish to establish a connection between themselves and the reader, they have to be sensitive to cultural values, and they have to be careful not to compromise either cultural standards or religion.

Opinion Articles

Articles written in this section do not just look at literary articles, or lifestyle, but at topics that can be seen as far more serious. This section expresses public opinion on controversial issues such as women driving, education, and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice¹³, also known as "the religious police".

It can be argued that Saudi journalists and writers in recent years enjoy more freedom of expression. This freedom has enabled them to write about education, gender, religious

¹³ The Saudi Arabian government department employing "religious police" or mutaween (مطوعين romanized in English) to enforce Sharia Law within that Islamic nation.

practices, education system, and other sensitive matters which they could not have addressed before. It is in the articles and opinion pages of the papers that one can note the battle of the sexes in Saudi Arabia. Women use these sections to write freely about their issues and their rights. Topics in this section are often opinionated and subjective since every journalist writes their opinions on all sorts of matters and defends them. As Louay Bahry argues,

In Saudi Arabia, the main link between the man's and woman's world is the press. Daily newspapers are replete with debates on public affairs and long articles are written by both sexes about national issues in general and their own problems in particular. Women express their opinions, sometimes virulently, in a variety of publications on such topics as working women and their problems, the role women in the development process, relationships between the sexes, and family problems (Bahry, 1982: p. 504).

In this section I will focus on two female journalists, Asma'a Al Mohammed and Jaheer Al Mosaeed, who are known mainly as columnists, writing for *Okaz* newspaper. Both of these writers', participation in the press provides them with the opportunity to share their views on local and global news. They are very good examples of contemporary Saudi women writers who have opted for more than having a voice; they are concerned about transforming the cultural discourse. The inclusion of these two women was dictated by the literary quality of their work and the nature of topics they discussed.

Examples of journalists writing in this section:

1. Asma'a Al Mohammed. *Okza* Newspaper:

An example of women writing in the opinion section is Asma'a Al Mohammed, who writes for *Okaz* daily newspaper. Asma'a has written more than 600 articles for *Okaz* newspaper since

2010. She has the art of asking the right questions in relation to the local discourse on women and their place in society. The hundreds of articles Asma'a has written during the past 10 years reflect a broad interest in "women's issues", addressing especially such issues as women and the economy, working women, domestic violence, marriages and rape. But she also tackles problems of public services (e.g. of medical centres, schools, courts, and airports), especially in the city of Jeddah. Asma'a writes on behalf of every woman in Saudi Arabia, and a lot of women relate to her articles because she does not portray women in Saudi Arabia as weak or passive. The topics she addresses vary from terrorism to breast cancer. She has no problems addressing officials directly and demanding solutions. Asma'a tends to critique the practices of men, women, in her writings. Asma'a studied advertising and economy in her undergraduate degree. Her background knowledge of the economy can be seen in her writings. For example, in one of her articles, she encourages women to talk about their experiences with poverty and to stop being silent about it. Asma'a also writes about hundreds of Saudi girls who have degrees, but are still struggling to find jobs. It is not common for Saudi women journalists to write about economic topics; nevertheless, she writes many articles about women and the economy in Saudi Arabia.

One of the themes that reoccurs in Asma'a writings is the issue of divorce in Saudi Arabia. In "Women Divorced without their Knowing", (Al Mohammed, 2011a), she addresses a very unusual issue for Saudi women which, according to this article, has existed for years now. Asma'a tells stories of women whom their husbands divorce in courts without their knowing. They, however, combined this with having intercourse with them. Asma'a argues that abusing divorced women in Saudi Arabia is not a new issue, but there has been silence about it. In her opinion, these are crimes against women, and legal actions should be considered. In another article, "Wrong Picture of Divorced Women", Asma'a criticises the stereotypical caricatures in the press about divorced women. She refuses to accept that some

women be identified with titles such as divorced. She draws from personal experience in this article arguing that she is divorced but she works, travels, plans and thinks. She works very hard just like thousands of other divorced Saudi women. Asma'a wonders why the media in Saudi Arabia ignores their accomplishments as hard working women and focuses on identifying these women as divorced. (Al Mohammed, 2011b)

Asma'a often writes about the accomplishments of Saudi women. For example, in her article *Writing History for Saudi Women*, she argues that Saudi women are strong and that they have survived a lot of misfortunes, but Saudi society and media still focus on the negative sides of Saudi women. She believes that media personalities and writers should present good examples of Saudi women, and not the opposite. This is crucial because this is the material from which others will write history. Women of older generations were only presented as victims of journalism and media and as a result there is no record of any achievements or positive experiences for Saudi women (Al Mohammed, 2011).

Asma'a Al Mohammed also shows interests in economy, and women's contribution to the Saudi Arabian market. As I mentioned above the reason behind her choosing to write about the economy is likely to be that Asma'a had a BA in economics. I believe that the targeted audience of these articles are business men and business women in Saudi Arabia. She speaks of working women's issues as she addresses matters like maternity leave, job opportunities for women, and training programs for women.

Asma'a enjoys a good reputation and is respected by both modernists and traditionalists. Although she sometimes criticizes social institutions, she tends to be careful in her writing, in order not to upset the traditionalists or undermine loyalty to the culture. The reason for her popularity is her sensitivity to cultural values. Asma'a establishes in her writing that, despite religious, cultural and political constraints, Saudi women journalists can contribute to the definition and understanding of gender roles, culture, and religion. She is an

example of women journalists who pose a strong challenge to the powerful ideological forces in their society. Asma'a and some other Saudi women journalists such as Aziza Al Manee do not necessarily adapt Western feminists' approaches. Saudi women writers have chosen a discourse of their own, adopting a form of resistance that is distinct and based on their Islamic backgrounds (Arebi, 1994). Asma's writings demonstrate how this chosen form of resistance has enabled her and other Saudi female journalists to create a place for women in the intellectual life of their society and, to influence essential transformations in the politics of cultural discourse Saudi Arabia.

2. Jaheer Al Mosaeed. *Okaz* Newspaper:

Another example of a prominent female journalist writing in the opinion section is Jaheer Al Mosaeed who writes for *Okaz* daily newspaper. She has written hundreds of articles about women's rights in Saudi Arabia over recent years. Her interest in politics, sport and lifestyle is quite visible in her writings. For example in one of her articles, "They are not a 'Revolution', they are 'Treasure'" (01/05/2011), published in *Okaz* newspaper, she writes about the uprisings in the Middle East that took place in 2011. She uses this occasion to criticize the education system in Saudi Arabia, accusing it of not creating enough programmes and clubs for the youth. She argues that, with the exception of football, young people in Saudi Arabia have no leisure activities. Secondly, she argues that students are not given the chance to argue with their teachers. There is no discussion during classes and therefore students are not giving the chance to think independently. In the same article she criticizes the football teams in Saudi Arabia for recruiting too many foreigners to play for local clubs. She claims that depending on this foreign force has affected the performance of the Saudi national team. In her writings, she tries to engage the reader by the use of rhetorical questions. For example she asks who else but the

foreign player can score? Who else can help us win? She is trying to affect the readers, but she is not given enough space for her articles. Jaheer is one of the very few female journalists who show interests in sport (Al Mossaed, 2011).

In another article, “Hello, Minister” (3/12/2011), published in *Okaz* newspaper, she calls for ministers to go to the public ministries as ordinary citizens without revealing their identities, in order to experience the same treatment as the public. One of the themes I noticed in Jaheer’s articles is her use of comparisons. She compares Saudi Arabia to other countries. For example, in this article she notes that only in Saudi Arabia do the ministries (the ministry of education, the ministry of health.. etc.) use telephones for the purpose of decoration only. She also goes on to say that Saudi Arabia is the only country where it is very difficult for the people to use transport, unlike in other countries, and she gives the example of the United Kingdom, where people depend on trains, undergrounds, buses and taxies (Al Moaseed, 2011).

One of the most important themes in Jaheer’s writings is Saudi women’s desire to be separated from men. She describes Saudi women asking for hospitals for women only and shopping malls for women only. In her article “Only for Women”, she explains what women in Saudi Arabia fear in men, and why they consider them dangerous. She strongly disagrees with these women, arguing that women can be a source of danger as well. She gives examples of women drug dealers and women who hurt other women. She suggests that in a country such as Saudi Arabia, women will always be dependent on men. She asks “What if they opened hospitals and shopping malls for women only, who will drive them there?”

Journalists like Asma’a and Jaheer have writing styles that are very daring. They write about sensitive matters in the Saudi press which can be very dangerous for journalists. Not only do they have to be careful about political articles, but also they have to make sure they do not make other people in society angry. For example, in the summer of 2003, Saudi Arabian columnist Hussein Shobokshi penned an article in which he fantasized about the liberalization

of the kingdom, challenging the stance of conservatives on women, human rights and sectarian differences (Associated Press, 2013). He wrote about a future in which his daughter drives and practices law, a future where she can vote and attend human rights conferences. The public response to the article was mixed. While some found it courageous, Shoboshki also received death threats. One e-mail warned him to "know your limits or you will be punished by God and by his followers on earth". This reaction confirmed the fact that "our whole society does not have experience in dealing with different points of view" (Suleiman Al-Hattlan, a research associate at Harvard's Centre for Middle Eastern Studies). He continued "People in general resist change and feel nervous that the article will change the social structure overnight." Shobokshi commented: "Saudi Arabia has been talking the talk, people are now anxious to walk the walk" (Jones, 2003).

The Case of Driving:

The issue of women and driving is not a new phenomenon in Saudi Arabia, but one which had been publicly addressed many times in the past, through newspaper articles, meetings at women's clubs, and private overtures to government officials. "Women met at a car park. Fifteen of them – those with international driving licenses – dismissed their drivers and got behind the wheel as the other women piled into the cars" (Abu Nasr, 2008).

The protest occurred in the capital Riyadh. The fifty women drove their cars in tandem through the streets of Riyadh, defying publicly the unofficial but strictly observed ban on women's driving (Doumato, 1991). In response to the driving demonstration, the Supreme Council of Islamic Research backed the Interior Ministry's ruling by issuing a fatwa stating that "women should not be allowed to drive motor vehicles as the Shari'a instructs that things that degrade or harm the dignity of women must be prevented" (Doumato, 1991).

The car protest was followed up 18 years later with a video protest broadcast on the link. The protest did not have many participants and was dealt with quickly and severely, but it was evidence that women do want more rights and will risk moderate protest to get them. The second major move to confront the law took place in May 2011, when a group of Saudi women set up a right-to-drive campaign on Facebook, with a launch date of 17 June 2011. One of its members, the 32 years old, Manal al-Sharif, took to the streets of Khobar and drove a car. She was accompanied by Wajeeda Al Huwaider, the well-known Saudi activist and Wajeeda and Manal filmed their trip and posted it on YouTube. Manal Al Shariff was arrested on Sunday 22 May.

This driving demonstration was widely viewed as revolutionary, and women and driving has become the dominant women's news item in the Saudi press since the Arab spring. The Saudi news is filled with articles by both sexes about this new rebellion of women in Saudi Arabia. There are some Saudi journalists who oppose the idea, but the majority of the press support it. For example, Khalid Al Suliman, who writes for *Okaz* newspaper, argues that: "it is only a matter of time; before women drive their cars in Saudi Arabia." He continues: "Its opponents should devote their time to creating the appropriate conditions, and better systems to make driving possible for women instead of fighting it" (Al Suliman, 2011). Ahmad al Towayan, who also writes for *Okaz* newspaper, argues in relation to the driving issue, that: "We suffer from the problem of social division and extremism" (Al Towayan, 2011). In some articles journalists use Islam to support their arguments such as the former Minister of Information, Muhammad Abdu Yamani, who has written a number of articles on the injustice done to women, and warned men of mistreating women as it is against Islam. He points out the contradiction in not allowing a woman to drive her own car but at the same time permitting a woman to travel in a car with a driver who is not related to her, which is considered against Islamic beliefs. While there is no Sharia' text to support the ban, there are texts that can be used

to prove the unlawfulness of traveling alone with an unrelated man (Fitaihi, 2011). The way Yamani links the ban to religion is the best way to capture the readership's attention. Other journalists handled the issue from a legal point of view. They argue that Article 38 of the Basic Law states that there should be no personal or criminal punishment that is not based on a religious or official decree and since the issue of women driving is a violation of neither an official law nor a religious law, then women should not be arrested for driving their cars. Similar challenge have been made to the policy, which prescribes sex-segregation at all levels of education, and also justifies the closing of certain university courses to women, such as engineering, geology and meteorology, which might lead to employment in male-dominated fields.

However pervasive this ideology, it does not define policy. It is rather the idiom through which policies regarding women's issues are articulated.

In an interview on a weekly discussion show, Suad Al Shammari, a leading Saudi women's rights activist presented the following statistics: only 45000 Saudi women have licenses which they can only acquire from abroad, 40% of cars purchased in Saudi are purchased by women and that there are currently over a million and two hundred thousand foreign men brought into this country for the sole purpose of driving our cars instead of the women owners. The Saudi population is 27,140,000 a third of which are foreign workers (Saudi Women Driving Movement, 2012).

There are many articles in both the local and global media that address the topic of women driving in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women activists who participated in the movement right2drive were upset that they had to resort to Western media to present their case because local media did not give these women a platform. One activist argues:

The day following June 17, 2011 our newspapers completely ignored the issue except for one report in one paper, *Okaz*, where the traffic police denied that there were any

cases of women driving. This was despite the fact that traffic police issued a ticket to a woman, Maha Al Qahtani, for driving without a Saudi license on the very same day they claimed that there were no women drivers (Saudi Women Driving Movement, 2012).

In its coverage of the issue the Saudi press has considered the advantages and the disadvantages of women driving cars, publishing lots of articles about driving cars. These are some examples are described below.

1. Driven to Despair by Sameera Aziz. 30 May 2011. Saudi Gazette (Aziz, 2011).

This article was written by Sameera Aziz, a female journalist and international editor who writes for *Saudi Gazette*.¹⁴ This article is an opinion article that favours women driving cars. It uses a subjective approach, using the pronouns (“I” and “My”) to raise substantial issues. The author demonstrates familiarity with the political circumstances surrounding the issue of driving, and the article starts with a quote from King Abdullah Al Saud¹⁵ from an interview with Barbra Walters, saying that the issue of women driving cars in Saudi Arabia requires patience and that, in time, it will be possible. The interview took place five years previously. Sameera then asks the question: “When women could be allowed to drive?”

The method used in this article is to point to causes and effects. Sameera Aziz writes about the disadvantages of not allowing women to drive cars. Firstly, it is a financial issue for many women, who cannot afford to hire a driver in Saudi Arabia. Secondly, it conflicts with religion because in Islam women are not allowed to be accompanied by a non-

¹⁴ Saudi Gazette is a daily newspaper published by *Okaz*, the Organization for Press and Publication.

¹⁵ The current ruler of Saudi Arabia

mahrams.¹⁶Thirdly, it is a practical issue for working women. Transportation is a key factor for women in enabling them to pursue successful careers. Fourthly, it is a sexual issue. Sameera sensationalizes the serious risks of women being alone with a strange man in the car where she might “meet the roving eye of her limousine driver or the lecherous taxi driver who makes unnecessary conversation”. Lastly, it is presented as an ethical issue in which women are simply asking for their rights. She describes the confusion that resulted from the arrest of Manal Al Sharif. The police in Saudi Arabia justified her arrest finally as a traffic violation. Sameera carefully tailors her arguments for her audience. Thus, for example, later in the article she warns against the uprisings and protests that are taking place in the other Arab countries and she gives example of a Saudi woman who was inspired by the protests. Sameera also warns against the Western media perception of Saudi women as dependent, and how this is an issue in the global arena.

By using an emotional and sometimes angry tone, Sameera tries in this article to influence society; she uses religion and politics to support her arguments. She also uses quotes from other women in the society to describe their struggle with being dependent on drivers all of the time. In doing so she is giving a voice to concerns shared by all the Saudi women who do not want to depend on drivers anymore. She uses driving as a symbol of violation of rights, and as an excuse to voice her opinions about women’s positions in Saudi Arabian society. She believes that there is a hope for change because people in Saudi Arabia are now open to discussing the idea women driving. The time in which this article was published is critical taking into account that this article was written on 2 June 2011, less than two weeks after Manal Al Sharif was arrested for driving in Al khobar on 21 May 2011. Also, it was published at the time of the protests in some of the Arab countries. This is important because people in Saudi

¹⁶ Mahram is a husband or an unmarriageable kin with whom sexual intercourse would be considered incestuous like father, brother or son.

were curious about what happened to Manal Al Sharif and thus it might have been the best time to motivate women in Saudi Arabia to ask for their rights.

2. *Manal AL Sharif Released by Siraj Wahabi. 31 May 2011, Arab News (Wahabi, 2011).*

Manal Al-Sharif released



Author: SIRAJ WAHAB | ARAB NEWS
Tuesday 31 May 2011

Figure 3

This article was written by Siraj Wahabi, a male journalist who writes for *Arab News*. The article begins by stating the facts of Manal Al Sharif's arrest. Siraj Wahabi notes the influence this incident has had on middle class Saudi families. This reference to class in Wahabi's article is significant because Al Sheif's plight only served to stir a growing mood of rebellion within Saudi Arabia's female middle class. Then goes on to mention the impact she has had on the global media. Unlike female journalists reporting the same story, Wahabi remains objective in his article. He does not take sides, and he is not emotional in his style in reporting it. He states facts and reports what is being said by the lawyers or the police involved. Another difference is that Siraj mentions in this article that Manal Al Sharif is a divorced woman. Why is marital position important in this article? And what is the connection that Siraj is trying to make? Most

of Saudi Arabian society does not sympathize with the divorced women, and, therefore; maybe Wahabi is indirectly implying to his readers that Manal Al Sharif is not a good example to follow. Wahabi ends this article emphasising that driving is a social issue rather than a legal one. This concern with the position taken by Sameera in her article.

3. A Saudi Activist, in Her Own Words by Robert Mackey, 31 May 2011. New York Times (Mackey, 2011).

This article was written by Robert Mackey, who writes for the *New York Times*. He reports the facts about the video and the social media statistics. Mackey does not aim to voice his opinion in this article rather he stays objective throughout the article and leaves opinions to his readers. Mackey writes about the resistance of Saudi women. He writes: “After Ms. Shariff’s arrest, the YouTube video, filmed as she drove through the streets of Khobar on May 17, was removed from the Web, along with all other traces of her online campaign. Her supporters, however, made copies of the video and uploaded it to other YouTube channels, so that it could still be seen inside Saudi Arabia”. He also relates how they subtitled copies of the video with English subtitles to ensure global media would have access to it. Robert Mackey later mentions that the video has been viewed nearly 100,000 times. This article shows how the media can play a crucial role in this case and, for this reason, However, there is a resistance from Saudi female journalists who are still writing about driving, and defending their rights to drive. The difference between this article and the other articles written by Saudi women journalists is that Mackey’s tone of writing is emotionless because he tries to stay objective throughout the article.

4. Saudi Woman Driver Freed After Agreeing to Quit Campaign by Robert Booth, 31 May

2011. *The Guardian* (Booth, 2011).

Another example of an article on women driving in Saudi Arabia is an article written by Robert Booth, who writes for the *Guardian*. This article is again objective and reports facts. Booth writes about the political aspects of the case, and connects it to the demonstrations that are taking place in the Middle East. There are several quotes in this article from Manal Al Shariff and Wajeeha Al Huwaider, the women's rights campaigner who is a friend of Al Sharif. Wajeeha argues that Sharif was told to drop the issue as a condition of her release. Since, as mentioned above, Wajeeha Al huwaider's writings are banned from the press in Saudi Arabia, there is no mention of her writings about women's issues in the Saudi Arabian press. Booth is one of the very few journalists who focuses on Al Huwaider when reporting this particular story.

5. *Driving Cars for Women* by Rokaya Suliman, 24 January 2010. *Al Jazirah Newspaper* (Suliman, 2010)

This article was written by the female journalists Rokaya Suliman, in the Arabic language. She starts the article providing background information about women's education in Saudi Arabia, and she connects it to driving arguing that both issues need time in order for society to accept them. When women started seeking education in Saudi Arabia, they faced a lot of challenges and opposition. Then like many female journalists, she describes the disadvantages that women suffer in dealing with males drivers. She describes these disadvantages in a detailed descriptive language (e.g. providing facts about the financial problems that women can face, and the difficulties in communication with the drivers, as many of them do not speak the Arabic language). Rokaya argues that women are so helpless that they do not even have the right to turn their own cars left or right. They have to ask the driver, and as the result this allows the driver to disrespect them. She uses a lot of metaphors for example, describing education as "a

light to women's future".

6. *Saudi Man Divorces Wife for Driving, 14 May 2014. Arab News (Arab News, 2014).*

This article published in *Arab News* tells a story of a Saudi man who divorces his wife for driving. This story also points out that this man received a lot of support from society. One man, Tarek, explained the husband's decision, asserting "His wife not only drove the car but also took video of her driving and published it through YouTube without her husband's knowledge or permission," he pointed out". This article was published in May 2014 which means that a few years after Manal Al Shariff's YouTube clip, the Saudi press is still seeking stories about women driving in Saudi Arabia.

7. *More than a Metaphor: Saudi Women's Drive for Independence by Alaa Alghamdi, 15 October 2014. Arab News (Alghamdi, 2014).*

This article was written by Dr. Alaa Alghamdi, assistant professor at Taibah University. Dr. Alaa looks into the significance of the word driving which in his opinion is a metaphor which indicates mobility, action, will, ambition, autonomy. "Taking the wheel" is figuratively as well as literally an act of taking control. Yet there is a real danger in overstating these (admittedly powerful) symbolic associations with driving. He believes that "Hiring a driver is an economic hardship for most Saudi women: The ability to get around becomes a matter of class and privilege, and that, surely, is coherent with no one's moral code. Women are made more vulnerable rather than better protected by the ban on driving". Then he describes the contradictory nature of the ban itself. He argues:

Then there is the fact that tradition and custom itself has been selectively misinterpreted with regard to this issue. Saudi women in rural areas are allowed to drive, but not those residing in urban centers. Moreover, women in Aramco can drive, but once out of that

area, the right is revoked.

He ends this article by suggesting that the Saudi ban on women's driving is an avoidable and unnecessary impediment, and having the courage to remove it may yield unexpected benefits and enable Saudi women to more effectively contribute to the fabric of society. Dr. Alaa Al ghamdi is an example of men in Saudi Arabia writing in the press who are against the driving ban.

8. The Veil behind the Wheel in Saudi Arabia by Amena Baker, 28 January, 2011.

REUTERS (Baker, 2011).

The veil behind the wheel in Saudi Arabia

Tue, Jun 28 2011

By [Amena Bakr](#)

RIYADH (Reuters) - As Umm Ibrahim takes the wheel of her husband's white Hyundai, beads of sweat form beneath the black veil that covers her face and body.

Nervously turning the ignition, shifting into drive and easing her foot off the brake, she knows she's risking arrest. The simple act of driving for a woman is banned in Saudi Arabia.

"The day I get my driving licence, I will open a driving school for women and I'll be one of the instructors, that's my dream," said Umm Ibrahim.

Last week, on the same day the 25 year-old mother of two chose to make a statement by taking her husband's car out for a spin, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly supported "brave" Saudi women demanding the right to drive.



Figure 4

This article tells the story of Umm Ibrahim, a woman who claims that she has been driving for years and that her husband, an imam at a mosque, was the one who taught her how to drive. "I've been driving for three years," she says, "My husband taught me, but until now I only drove on the outskirts of town." As can be seen from the picture Umm Ibrahim is fully covered in black; in addition, she is married to an imam. This suggests that they come from a very conservative background. Driving then is not only a dream for liberal women in Saudi Arabia,

but it also is a dream for some conservative women: "The day I get my driving licence, I will open a driving school for women and I'll be one of the instructors, that is my dream," said Umm Ibrahim. Amena Baker then writes that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly supported "brave" Saudi women who are demanding the right to drive: "What these women are doing is brave and what they are seeking is right, but the effort belongs to them. I am moved by it and I support them," Clinton said, responding to a letter sent by the activist group, Saudi Women for Driving. This article concludes with a quote by Umm Ibrahim: "We can't be this dependant on men anymore, we want our basic rights and driving is one of them. Then we don't want to be accompanied by male guardians all the time." Umm Ibrahim is part of a growing movement of women challenging the driving ban, inspired in part by the protests that began in 2011 in the Arab world, resulting in the toppling of the rulers of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.

Chapter six: Conclusion

The press in Saudi Arabia could be seen as a symbol of the segregation of sexes that exists in Saudi Arabia. Looking at the newspapers in this country, you can see that segregation very clearly by just reading the headlines. Most of the female journalists in the kingdom report on stories that are about women. They investigate women's issues, women's contribution to society, women participation in sport or science or economy, women's role models and women's interest in general whether these stories are located inside women's homes, women's centres, or women's schools. This study and other studies show that women in Saudi Arabia in general do suffer gender discrimination (Black, 2008; Al-Mohamed, 2008: p. 45-51; Alsayyed, 2010; Lobe, 2008). The discrimination against women is apparent on every level including all media outlets (Zawawi, 2007a; Al Arabiya Net., 2009).

It is crucial to have female journalists in the Saudi Arabian society because women journalists have come to fill a gap in the Saudi press, especially since Saudi Arabian society separates males and females and, as a result, it is difficult for men to cover stories about women. Most of the articles written by female journalists in the four weeks that I conducted the content analysis were stories about girls' education, and women's activities or accomplishments. Furthermore, women in these four weeks covered some gender-related topics such as: domestic violence, divorce, the spread of homosexuality in girls' schools, and many more. An important question to ask is to what extent had these news articles in the press in Saudi Arabia influence on society? While there are more stories about gender in Saudi Arabia than ever before, it remains unclear to what degree these stories in the press are able to affect social hierarchy in Saudi Arabia. This requires substantial empirical research that is not within the limit of this particular research project.

One of the issues that I found in my research into Saudi female journalists writing for

the press is that they tend to neglect Saudi women achievements and focus on their problems. Another issue is that even when they discuss women's issues or problems, they do not involve women in their discussions. My research implied that there is a relationship between the gaps in women's representation and the coverage of women's issues in the media (Rhode, 1995). Hence, there is also likely to be a connection between the inadequate representation of women in media decision-making and the media's inadequate representation of women's issues and concerns. The analysis in this thesis shows that the Saudi media influence the role and perception of women in society both by what they omit and by their emphasis on biased and stereotyped images of them. The problem of gender stereotypes and the under-representation of women is a problem in all the Arab media. The Arab media in general tends to devote little attention to women despite all their achievements, and instead focus on stories that reinforce traditional stereotypes (Ayish, 2001: p.127). The interviews with journalists and content analysis conducted in this thesis highlight three important goals that female journalists in Saudi Arabia wanted to achieve by writing in the press. First, they believe that women issues need to be exposed. Secondly, they feel that Saudi women must be educated about their rights and stories about their mistreatment serve that function better than stories about their successes; thus they are unafraid of running headline stories about rape, domestic violence, driving, and divorces. Thirdly, they believe that women need a platform to express and share with other women their achievements and success stories.

One of the main issues that face journalists in Saudi Arabia is censorship on a daily basis. Criticism of the state and religion is not tolerated. Nudity and sexual topics are also prohibited in the media in Saudi Arabia. Saddeka Arebi argues that "These women use words to reach a level of consciousness. They find salvation in words, in letters, and at times in centres of learning (schools). ... they take refuge in the warmth of their words after they discover their power, both the said and unsaid. To take refuge in the warmth of my words is fantastic. To

choose silence as a defensive means is even more terrific!” (Arebi, 1994: p. 170). Female journalists, like male journalists in Saudi Arabia, apply self-censorship to protect themselves, their country, their cultures and their writings.

This study has aimed to show how some contemporary Saudi women journalists use their writings as a way in which to gain power over the rules of cultural discourse in their society. In conclusion, women journalists, especially in the two major cities (Riyadh and Jeddah) in Saudi Arabia, use the media as a powerful tool to influence other people in their societies. Their main target is the younger generation of Saudi Arabians, and Saudi women. They believe that the best journalists should recognise their role as educators of women, and as the interpreters of events. Also they have to recognize their influence, and use it when they write about women’s status. These women journalists are ready to expose corruption and abuses through their stories, and columns in the daily newspapers. In addition, women’s roles in visual media have been challenged too. For example a news Saudi channel, Al-Ikhbariya, “is trying to change false Western perceptions” of the role of women, allowing Saudi’s first female news anchor to report on the day’s news and, as the article described, dressed “modestly in a black head scarf and white jacket” (Evans, 2004).

In Saudi Arabia there is a struggle between two movements: the Traditionalists and the Modernists. Modernists consist of academics, professionals and lawyers who are affected by Western advancements:

They believe that Saudi Arabia has to pay more attention to the practical demands for growth and survival in a complex, commercial world. They argue that the impact of globalization and international trade and relations will not allow Saudi Arabia to remain isolated from the rest of the world by relying only on traditional ideas; therefore, it is necessary to issue laws dealing with such critical issues. One of their core ideas is to codify all aspects of the legal structure relating to all aspects of life (Classen, 2012).

From the modernists' standpoint, contemporary conditions of living have changed and we can no longer apply early Islamic laws to keep up with the outside world. It is crucial for Saudi Arabia to create a balance between the strong demand for traditional adherence to religious principles and the practical demand for growth and survival in a complex commercial world. Nevertheless borrowing from other legal systems may lead to the conflict between the rules of Sharia' and the borrowed laws.

The Reforms

King Abdullah was the driving force behind the reforms of the last decade. In 2003, for example, he had founded the 'King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue', an institute tasked with the organisation of national conferences at which religious leaders of the different Muslim sects, academics, and other prominent opinion leaders could discuss various contemporary topics. Within its first two years of operation, the institute organised five national dialogue sessions, where the conferees openly discussed issues related to reform in education, religious pluralism, the role of women in a modern Islamic state, and political participation of citizens (Van Eijk, 2010: p.154).

In contrast to the article by Fulford, Amnesty International published a report on the state of women's rights in Saudi Arabia in 2006. This report states that Saudi Arabia is witnessing reforms. It gives example of the judicial reforms that King Abdullah had initiated to improve rights for women. Another example is the ban of forcing women to marry, issued by the Grand Mufti himself. In recent years women have gained access to more education and more jobs. However women are still denied a political right in Saudi Arabia. Officials confirmed in 2008

that women would participate in the 2009 elections (Ghattas, 2005). Women are favourable to democratic change because they see it as a way to gain basic rights, such as to drive. Domestic abuse and restrictions in the workplace are also on the feminists activists' agenda. "The political backing to accomplish this is small, but the women have wealth involved as a group that they have received from inheritance and are making more progress in education than their male counterparts, which is a recipe for greater participation in the government" (Power, 2008).

From the mainstream Saudi Arabian press it must be assumed that women feel that they are living in the golden period that have witnessed a lot of reforms to women's status in the country. "*This year is the Saudi woman's year*" is a phrase that has been repeated in the newspapers in Saudi Arabia since 2011. The journalism by Saudi women suggests otherwise. In the past few years, it was difficult at first for some female journalists to cover the developments and changes that have taken place in Saudi society. Increasingly, women journalists have started to reflect their thoughts on these changes and developments using their writings. Newspapers blogs have become a home in which to display women's achievements, opinions, experiences, sufferings and aspirations. This change offered a golden opportunity for women to play an active role and energetically double their participation in the process of development and reform. King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz is considered by many to be a great reformer of women's conditions in Saudi Arabia. He has asserted on many occasions that: "the leadership of this country will never allow anyone to belittle a woman or marginalize her effective role in the service of her religion and country" (Reda, 2008: p.33). Support for change in Saudi Arabia has also been driven by other factors. For example, the General Assembly of the Gulf Journalism Union was held in Riyadh in May 2006 and was headed by Dr. Turki Al Sidiri. It reviewed and discussed many topics such as holding training sessions concerning all journalists as to promote the journalists abilities, launching a web-site for the union, strengthen the cooperation for the countries of the gulf. The training opportunities are not aimed to help

journalists only but also for broadcasters who complained of the absence of such training which had negative influence on their performance. These training sessions are one of the priorities to improve and develop the performance of the Saudi media women (Reda, 2008: p.12).

In the meeting of Foreign Media Officials of Gulf Countries Council (GCC) which took place in Riyadh on the 14th of April 2007, several issues that were related to the media were discussed. The political, economic and cultural role of woman in the council was one of the top issues on its agenda. The countries of the Arabian Gulf, among them Saudi Arabia, have ratified different international conventions and human rights agreements committing them to secure equal rights for women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In all the Gulf countries women hold ministerial positions. These include Sheikha Lubna alQasimi, as an economics and planning minister. Dr. Masuma Al Mubarak was appointed as a minister of planning and administrative development in Kuwait. Sheikha Ahmad Al-Mahmoud, took office as the Minister of Education in Qatar. Dr Nada Haffadh was Bahrain's first ever female cabinet minister when she was appointed Minister of Health in 2004. Dr Fatima Al Balooshi, Minister of Social Affairs in Bahrain. Several women have been appointed as assistant undersecretaries in Saudi Arabia. In all the Gulf countries there are women in the Banks Board of Directors. For example, the general assembly of the Saudi-Dutch Bank elected Mrs. Lubna Al-Alyyan as a member of the Bank's Board of Directors on December 1st, 2004. She is the chief executive officer of Olayan Corporation and a member of the Arab Business Council. Above all, Saudis are becoming far readier to talk about many reforms issues, including women's status (Al-Yousef, 2013).

In the last three decades, there has been a change in the approach to women's issues in Saudi Arabia from welfare to development. Women's empowerment in the workplace has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The Saudi government has

introduced many reforms that will see women less as passive members of society and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation. Of course the first step is to ensure that women access education, employment and ownership of business. Saudi Arabia's priority in educating its citizens is reflected in the share of GDP devoted to education, which according to a study conducted by Al- Yousef, has increased more than three-fold over the last thirty years, rising from 3.5% to 9.8% between 1970 and 2002. The main challenge that faces Saudi Arabia is to “ensure educational excellence and to equip its youth with necessary skills, enabling them to find gainful employment in an increasingly integrated and competitive global economy” (Al- Yousef, 2013). Al-Yousef’s study suggest that: From the year 1975 to 2000, female combined enrolment ratios increased from 36% to 94.5% for primary education; from 4.9% to 88.2% for secondary education; and from 2.5% to 58.0% for tertiary education. These increases in female enrolment ratios are among the highest in the world (Al-Yousef, 2013).

Furthermore, the change has been great and even though the people of Saudi Arabia have been living within a culture in which change is rare, and most individuals seem to prefer to live the familiar, women did witness the change and the importivment. This exemplifies the theory of Taba and Til (1945) that “Homogenous cultures are largely conservative: change comes slowly and the core of the culture is preserved intact” (Taba, and Till, 1945: p. 62).

This transformation has led women to become more vocal about their role in society. This was particularly evident in the 2004 National Dialogue Forum at which women debated many issues regarding women’s education in the Kingdom, such as the introduction of physical education for girls, which was previously banned (Prokop, 2005).

The ministry of Culture and Information has established the National Media Centre which uses updated tools for communication and information technology, and stresses the importance of having centres of media watch as part of the Ministry of Culture and Information. This centre will conduct studies with regard to the media inside and outside the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia. Consequently, this may improve the Saudi women's position in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Culture and Information, led by Khoja, also had launched a fifth TV channel which is dedicated to the *Shura* Council, National Dialogue and local government municipal affairs, this channel will offer vacancies to Saudi males and females to work in media (Reda, 2008: p.11).

However, Maha Akeel, who is considered as to be a well-known female activist in Saudi Arabia believes that we need another type of change, a change in the way women think, and not the change that it is driven out of economic necessity. She argues that:

There are important currents of change and signs of hope for improved women's rights in Saudi Arabia, however, reform driven by economic necessity and legislative change is not enough. Saudi Arabia requires a shift in the way people think about women (Akeel, 2011).

She believes that women must not only participate in the workforce but also in the decision making process taking the example of the prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, as he used to council his wife Khadiga before making important decisions. She continues:

The announcement by the Saudi king two years ago that reforms – such as codifying and standardising laws, establishing family courts and giving female lawyers the right to represent female clients – would be implemented in the justice system is encouraging.

Islam has given women many rights, which lead us to conclude that in Islam the sexes are complementary to one another and to fulfil their purpose in life there needs to be cooperation and harmony.

It can be argued that Saudi Arabia has been able to accommodate the increasing demand for girls' education at all levels. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia is undergoing a positive transformation and women status has been progressing over the years. The western media has

a lot of misconception about Islam and Saudi Arabia, and it is increasing due to the spread of Islamophobia. Saudi women journalists wish to write more about women accomplishment, success and triumphs is one of the most important insights of this research.

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Appendix I

Interviews

Name: Maha Akeel

Job: Writer, editor, human rights activist and columnist.

Education: MA in Communications and Cultural Studies

Q1. Describe how you became a woman journalist.

My BA degree from the US is in Communications as well as my MA from Canada in Communications and Cultural Studies. After I finished my degrees, I returned to Jeddah and applied to *Arab News* as a journalist and was hired immediately. I had already been freelancing for *Arab News* when I was studying in Canada. I'm currently Managing Editor of OIC Journal, a quarterly magazine published by the Organization of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) in English and Arabic.

Q2. Describe your experience of working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia.

Working at *Arab News* as a journalist was an interesting experience. I learned a lot about the job and about the society. By covering a variety of issues, I became aware about the problems in society and the problems in the profession of journalism itself and the media in Saudi Arabia. It was a frustrating experience at times but overall it was rewarding.

Q3. Why did you choose to become a journalist?

I love to write and explore; perhaps that was why I have chosen to major in communications. I also wanted to contribute toward the development of my society by writing about its problems in order to find solutions. I believe in the power of words, that they can change things.

Q4. Have the Saudi Media changed in the recent years? If yes, then how?

Yes, definitely, in a good and a bad way. It has changed in a good way in that it has become more courageous in covering issues that are considered taboo in Saudi Arabia, less censorship, more diversity in views but not and more transparency but not up to international standards. It changed in a bad way in that with the decrease in censorship, it has become sensational,

especially in covering sensitive and taboo issues, and in allowing below standard writers and arguments to fill the pages. It has not become more professional despite the opportunity to do so because there is no interest by management in training and setting a high standard of recruiting or of reporting.

Q5. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

Most of the topics discussed are social issues such as poverty, women and family problems, employment, health, education; there is not much discussion of economic issues or political analysis.

Q6. What do you report on?

In *Arab News* I started with social issues including women, human rights, education and health; then I covered economic issues and some political. Now in OIC I cover almost everything because of the nature of the OIC and the magazine.

Q7. As a journalist, what are the difficulties you face?

There is the problem of transportation because I cannot drive and there is no public transportation and I have to rely on the availability of a driver; a problem in accessing information (accurate, up-to-date, reliable sources) and official cooperation (timely, complete, and entering government offices as a women); and the problem of career advancement as there are limited job opportunities as a full-time woman journalist and getting promoted is difficult.

Q8. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

Yes.

Q9. What difficulties can Saudi women can face working as journalists?

Discrimination in salaries, bonuses, training and career advancement; harassment at the work place and outside in the field; covering issues other than women and social topics; participating in the decision-making process.

Q10. Do you think that women journalists still suffer from discrimination working in Saudi Arabia?

Yes.

Q11. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

People rely on the media for news and information but I think they also believe rumors a lot and maybe that's because they don't think the media is telling them the truth or the whole truth; meaning, there is a problem with credibility.

Q12. Do women and men read the same papers?

Yes, but not the same pages.

Q13. Can you give some examples of gender-related topics discussed in the Saudi press?

Family abuse issues, employment, mixing of the genders from a religious perspective, women's rights.

Name: H. H.

Current Job: Arabic Language Teacher

Age: 30

Education: Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language

Q1. Describe how you became a woman journalist.

I joined work in journalism after my graduation from college (the Arabic Language Department) in 1420h. I also worked with my aunt, the journalist Hayat Mohammed Justinia at *Okaz* Newspaper.

Q2. Describe your experience of working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia

It was a great experience. I learned a lot from it and useful things about life. Journalism was my starting point in the field of work and my first experience in going out to a social setting besides my educational setting and the college; getting acquainted with different personalities in all fields. That experience was filled with hard work and rushing to discuss our Saudi society's crucial issues and seeking suitable solutions for them. And to highlight this country's achievements for all people of all social classes.

Q3. What was the motive behind your choosing to become a journalist?

At first, ten years ago, I thought when I was in my fourth year at college about what I would do after I graduate, especially since work opportunities for females in our society were very limited to teaching and healthcare. Naturally, the situation has now changed. At that time I had been thinking about other work options that suited me other than teaching; something I could find myself in and then I thought of journalism because I saw this profession had everything new and exciting as opposed to other professions. My desire to become a journalist grew when my aunt suggested I become her assistant; then I dreamt of becoming a successful journalist.

Q5. Have the Saudi Media changed in recent years? If yes, then how?

Yes, and it has changed drastically. Journalism is no longer limited to television and radio. It now has an important position in all forms of media and the Internet, and journalism has become an important part of peoples' lives. This is why we find that Saudi journalism has become more attuned to Saudi culture, its needs and issues. Furthermore, Saudi society is in a

constant process of improvement and development. Moreover, the Saudi media considers each individual's emotional, social, political, economic, entertainment and educational needs amongst many others. This is very noticeable these days in the case of many people.

Q5. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

I find that newspapers discuss all political, social, economic, and educational issues, however I see a focus on our society's issues and world news are the dominant issues in the headlines.

Q6. What do you report on?

In most of my writing, I discuss social issues and I lean somewhat towards literary writing and some literary articles.

Q7. As a journalist, what are the difficulties you face?

There weren't any difficulties except for my father's opposing my work in this field, but after convincing him he agreed on the condition that I do not use my real name in any articles I write. I found that difficult in the beginning, but then I got used to it.

Q8. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

I disagree and take the opposite view that Saudi newspapers discuss political issues freely and without restraint.

Q9. What difficulties can Saudi women face working as journalists?

There aren't many, and I find the difficulties mainly in:

a. lack of support or refusal from the families for their daughters to work in this field because of the reporters' names in the newspapers.

b. Mixing with males.

c. It is sometimes difficult for women to cover all types of events or some occasions that might be considered dangerous or put female journalists in a jeopardizing situation.

d. Spending a lot of time writing and covering events and in this day and age.

I think there are solutions to most of these difficulties. For (a) a pseudonym can be used. For (b) it is possible to work with men remotely through email, or fax or any other form of remote communication. As for (c) it is possible to cover social issues and for (d) time management can be arranged and with time and experience writing and reviewing can become easier and faster.

Q10. Do you think that women journalists still suffer from discrimination at work in Saudi Arabia?

No, I do not believe there is any. This discrimination may have been evident in the past, but now I don't see any difference.

Q11. How does the Saudi society perceive Saudi female journalists?

Saudi society has accepted them because of the crucial need for Saudi women to work. The same way society is in need of male physicians, there is a similar need for female physicians and female teachers and female journalists and other professions. Women are now able to compete with men in all fields and even exceed in some.

Q12. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

The media has a significant effect on society. It exposes current issues and offers solutions to social problems. The media also highlights advancements, reports people's news, and other societies' news. Of course this affects the traditions, the education and the morals of Saudi Arabian society.

Q13. Do women and men read the same papers?

No, each of them has their own reading and I find that women read more than men.

Q14. Would you advise your own daughter to become a journalist? If so why. If not why not?

Yes, and this pleases me very much because she would be a viable member of society.

Name: Sabria Salama Jawhar

Job: Saudi Arabia National Guard, Assistant Professor of Applied and Educational Linguistics. Newspaper columnist for *Arab News*, an English-language daily newspaper based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Age: 39

Education: Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia. PhD in Applied and Educational Linguistics, Newcastle University, Newcastle, England.

Q1. Describe how you became a woman journalist.

I took a training course in 2003, which was sponsored by the *Saudi Gazette*, an English-language newspaper based in Jeddah. Following the completion of my studies and my receiving a certificate, I was hired as a full-time reporter. I was promoted to Jeddah bureau chief and became a columnist. I also studied some journalism course in Al Nahar institution, Lebanon and had some online courses in the London School of Journalism. I left the *Saudi Gazette* in 2007 to pursue my doctorate in England. Upon my return in 2012 I became a columnist for *Arab News*.

Q2. Describe your experience of working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia.

During my early years as a journalist at the *Saudi Gazette*, there were few women working as hard news journalists. This is a period, between 2003 and 2006, of great turmoil in Saudi Arabia due to terrorist activities. I was the only woman working in the English-language press to cover breaking news of these events. It put me on the fast-track towards recognition and respects among my Arab and expatriate journalists colleagues. I developed a strong source network that I admit was due to the novelty of me being a rare female Saudi journalist working in a male-dominated field. But I exploited that novelty to develop strong coverage of events during a very sensitive time. Of course, I owe some of my success during these early years to my male supervisors and mentors who supported my work.

Q3. What was the motive behind you choosing to become a journalist?

I wanted to do something different with my future other than following in the traditional footsteps of Saudi women into fields like social welfare and teaching. While I teach today, I wanted a well-rounded education in another profession that showed me a side of Saudi society

that I, as a Saudi woman, would not normally be exposed to. Journalism gave me access to influential men and women in high positions, who could provide me with insight to their success and failures in their professions and allow me to see how other people go about their business.

Q4. Have the Saudi Media changed in the last recent years? If yes, then how?

When I first got into Saudi journalism, it was, in retrospect, a golden era because we had more freedoms to cover news than we do now. We covered many social issues, which were up until then taboo. We covered terrorism with very few restrictions. We were aggressive in our coverage and we reported these events accurately and fairly. This, of course, was in English. The Arabic press is a different animal altogether and does not employ the same standards as the English-language press. Since about 2007, more and more restrictions have been applied due to the government's concern over security issues and the proliferation of social media. While we have made great progress in furthering our journalist standards and having the freedom to cover many news events, we have somewhat stalled in our progress. I'd say we have been at a standstill since 2007 with little advancement in furthering journalism as a profession and source of information to the Saudi population.

Q5. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

Syria, Egypt and Lebanon. Although the Arabic press can be very sensational in its coverage of social issues and crime, sadly domestic issues such as corruption, women's rights, criticism of government policies continue to be largely ignored unless a big event occurs. Saudi journalists are more comfortable writing about external issues than internal ones.

Q6. What do you report on?

I am a columnist, so I write about anything. I have a reputation, though, for focusing on women's rights and socio-political topics.

Q7. As a journalist, what are the difficulties you face?

I have been fortunate to overcome most obstacles and have a great source network. I am not ignored by my sources or readers because I am a woman. On the contrary, I have had a relatively easy time getting the work I want to do get done. Having said that, I self-censor like any Saudi journalist, or for that matter any Western journalist.

Q8. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in the Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

Yes, see above.

Q9. What difficulties can Saudi women face working as journalists?

We live in a patriarchal society. Men can be very condescending to women. They often mix personal with professional. It's not unusual to be asked out on a date. They often don't know or ignore professional boundaries. It can be a problem. I know this happens in the West, but probably less so. It's much more common here. It takes experience, courage and a bit of conversational talent to work around this and still have these men remain your source. Also female journalists are discriminated against with regard to salary. They are also not allowed to be in the newsroom like their male counterparts. (I gave a speech under this title in a conference in Riyadh)

Q10. Do you think that women journalists still suffer from discrimination at work in Saudi Arabia?

Of course. However, there are some exceptions, Saudi female journalists are ignored. It hasn't changed much since I entered the profession in 2003, but women are more educated today than 10 years ago. They are more aggressive, more sure of what they want and are not willing to take any crap from anybody. They have seen the world and they want a piece. They are standing up to male journalists and making demands, but they have a long way to go.

Q11. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

Social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook have had a tremendous impact on Saudi youth between the ages of 18 and 34, which makes up more than half of Saudi society. Mainstream Arabic and English media, such as newspapers and radio, not so much. As I have said, Saudis are now being exposed to the world via these social media outlets. The impact is profound. I also might add that King Abdullah's university scholarship program has also had a tremendous impact on young Saudis. About 44,000 young Saudis are attending universities in the United States. When they return to Saudi Arabia, I predict big changes in the private sector, especially for women in the workplace

Q12. Do women and men read the same papers?

I don't know. They read the same social media, though.

Q13. Is there any women's movement in Saudi Arabia? And do you label yourself as "Feminist"?

I will leave labels to other people. I just want my rights guaranteed to me in Islam. The closest thing we have to a women's movement is the driving issue, but the people who are involved tread lightly and don't organize so much as a movement, but work individually toward the same goal. It's the Saudi way that is slow, but will eventually accomplish its goal.

Q14. There are many Saudi female journalists who use the press to demand women's rights in Saudi Arabia. In your opinion what are some of the women-related issues that need to be addressed in the Saudi press?

Yes, of course, Saudi female journalists use the media to demand women's rights. Driving, of course, is a primary issue, but perhaps more important to Saudi women today is equal rights in domestic law courts for alimony, divorce and custody. Making sure that Saudi women of foreign husbands are allowed to have their children become citizens and gaining the full rights owed to them in Saudi society. The right to leave the country without a legal guardian, etc.

Name: Hayat Justinia

Education: Speech Communication

Job: Former news reporter for *Okaz* and *Al Nadwa* Newspapers.

Q1. Describe how you became a woman journalist?

My desire to be a reporter started when I was in primary school. I used to write speeches for my school. I have always been curious about what happens around me. When I finished school, I studied speech communication in college. After that I returned to Saudi Arabia from the United States to be one of the earliest women journalists in the country.

Q2. Describe the publications that you have worked for

I worked for *Okaz* daily news. Many Saudis consider it as the most successful newspaper in the country and especially in the city of Jeddah. Shortly before retirement, I worked for *Al Nadwa*, in Makkah.

Q3. Describe your experience of working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia?

I expected being a journalist in Saudi Arabia to be very difficult because society is very conservative. And I feared fieldwork and mixing up with men. However, to my surprise, my job was enjoyable and exciting. I had a lot of respect from my co-workers and editors. I received many awards from several people and organizations in gratitude for my work. I believe the reason behind that was the fact that I am woman. Working as a journalist in the city of Makkah, I had to follow up stories, respond to events and meet deadlines. However, I did not have to spend long hours at work especially since I was a single mother with three children at home.

Q4. What was the motive behind you choosing to become a journalist?

A hobby that I had since childhood.

Q5. Have the Saudi Media changed in the last recent years?

Yes there are a lot of changes.

Q6. If yes, then how?

In the meantime, they teach Media and Communication in universities and colleges all over Saudi Arabia unlike before. In addition, publications use technology and computers, which make working much easier. Journalism is no longer exclusive to men, as more women are being hired. Before, pictures of women were not allowed to be posted in Saudi papers, now, however, it is normal to see pictures of women in the news. Finally, the range of topics women can cover has grown wider and is no longer so constrained.

Q7. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

Sport, economics, education, religious, social and political topics. Some topics are controversial but overall there is diversity in the nature of the topics discussed.

Q8. What do you report on?

I am not restricted to one area. Mostly I write about local and social news. I did, however, work on some political articles.

Q9. As a journalist, what are the difficulties you face?

Jealousy from co-workers and the absence of team work. In addition, there are difficulties of getting hold of the news and delivering it.

Q10. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

Political topics are considered sensitive in Saudi Arabia and must be presented to a special board before they are allowed to be published.

Q11. What difficulties can Saudi women can face working as journalists?

Families play an important role. Most of Saudi families would not allow their daughters to become journalists.

Q12. Do you think that women journalists still suffer from discrimination work in Saudi Arabia?

Discrimination did exist until the recent past. It is not like before but there is discrimination. For example, there are a lot of men in editors-in-chief positions while there is only one woman to win that position in Saudi Arabia.

Q13. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

The media plays a very important role in the Saudi Arabian society's daily lives. It gives a picture of our society and makes it connected to the outside world.

Q14. Do women and men read the same papers?

Some papers are preferred but not due to gender but rather it is a regional preference.

Q15. Would you advise your own daughter to become a journalist? If so, why? If not, why not?

Yes, because I loved and enjoyed working as a journalist. I influenced the lives of many and helped in changing social beliefs. This job allows women to access large social networks and improve their social status a lot.

Name: Asma'a Al Mohammed.

Job: Columnist in *Okaz* Newspaper.

Education: BA in Advertising and Economy.

Q1. Describe your experience working as a journalist in Saudi.

My experience in working as a journalist in the Saudi media is amazing and promising. Through it, I learned many creative methods and techniques to express myself. It was a great opportunity to exercise my literary talent. I also had the chance to travel across the country, and follow stories. In the meantime I have managed to launch a media network, which is the first of its kind, called "Network of Patriots for Media & Training, to enhance development and enlightenment", a national project which was adopted from the Business Incubator: BADER, one of King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology's Projects, to support investment in technology and to offer women employment and cultural opportunities. My task in "*WATANIYAT*" is to help organize campaigns for women, through cultural schemes, particularly designed to organize training programs for the disabled females, and to extend bridges of communication with media, and carry their messages. We serve different social classes, and travel to any area.

I have included these details to emphasize the positive task of the media, and how it inspires large numbers of people to do lots of deeds. As you know, our social environment is conservative, and there are women and young girls who do not like to mix with males, and accordingly there is a need to have professional & skilled females involved in the media business to offer training opportunities and be involved in the new media sectors.

Q2. Why did you choose to work in this profession?

I was an investor in finance and business, in the fashion and cosmetics sectors. I changed careers due to my literary preference and my interests in public opinion. Actually I wanted to create media campaigns which express women's views and encourage women's movements. That has indeed happened, and a lot has currently been achieved as we planned. Media is a sector that creates change. We used pressure and were successful in opening opportunities for Saudi women in law, and to study media. This was for the new generations who are supposed to acquire their rights to higher education and to be specialized in media science. We exercised a lot of pressure through the media, and actually have witnessed success and it has become a fact.

Q3. Has the Saudi media changed lately? And how?

Yes, to some extent the media in Saudi Arabia has changed. Activists, intellectuals and article writers have started to lead a freedom of expression process. The press is where people contribute as partners through opinion pages on which both women and men write. Mass media publish things that show a negative social image, and whatever needs discussion and focus.

Q4. What is the nature of topics being discussed in Saudi newspapers these days?

Corruption, unemployment, developments, crime rate, rights, etc. The press also focuses on urgent issues, especially social issues and poverty.

Q5. What do you report on?

Everything relating to rights and enlightenment.

Q6. What are the difficulties encountered by female journalists in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

Absence of material employment stability and other things. Journalists are not being appreciated or recognized by publications. A Saudi Journalists' Association has not yet been activated; and there are no associations that can make female and male journalists feel they are protected by law and can provide them with representatives.

Q7. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

Yes, I could notice that, because I observe developments in the Gulf Region, including culture and mass media. I noticed that these limits are strongest in Saudi and Kuwaiti papers on the Arab World level. However, there is more freedom when writing about politics in electronic media.

Q8. What are the difficulties encountered by the Saudi women in Saudi journalism & media?

Transport is an issue for all women in Saudi Arabia in all jobs; however it might be extensive in the case of female journalists because we need to follow stories everywhere. Also, the social pressure. A women needs to do more to prove herself, because the society is male oriented, though there are men who support women, but this is not enough. The challenge, of course, is big when it comes to accessing training opportunities, and there are no "creativness incubators", and this is what allows the cadres of journalism and the media to penetrate the

media sector. Several creative faces have the expertise and the talent that settle in the mass media sector because of pressures.

Q9. Do you believe that there is discrimination between man and woman in Saudi media?

Yes, there is in positions and job titles. It is easy for a man to approach influential men and establish relationships with them and tap them as sources of information, whereas a female journalist is restricted to within a limited area of social coverage. Financial support is generally limited for female journalists and for the female graduates of journalism and media as well.

Q10. How do the media influence in Saudi society?

Journalism reflects people's lives and looks at real issues in society. The media is the most important method of expression in the country.

Q11. Do men and women in Saudi Society read the same newspapers?

Women prefer magazine & electronic-press. We have no method to measure the quality or the size of the gender of readers. However I believe that people prefer their local newspapers; for example, *Okaz* daily is being read most likely by the people of the western region, whereas *Al-Yom Daily* is being read by the people of the eastern region, and both papers *Al-Riyadh* & *Al-Jazeera* are being read by the people of the central region, and so on.

Q12. Would you advice your own daughter to work as a female journalist? And why?

Yes, because Journalism is a rich, interesting, and enriching field of business, which develops our senses and link us with different classes of the society.

Name: A J.

Job Position: Business woman.

Age: 38.

Q1. Describe how you became a woman journalist?

I consider myself a very social person, and I have always been keen on discussing other people issues. Journalism allows me to keep up with society's latest news. It also allows me to be part of the news, and live the events.

Q2. Describe the publications that you have worked for?

Almadeenah daily news is a very strong and well-known Saudi newspaper. It is considered to be the third most read in the city of Makkah. Nevertheless, the management needs some improvement, and it must establish teamwork between the journalists.

Q3. Describe your experience of working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia?

Working as a journalist was enjoyable because there is a new story every day. It also provided me with great experience. I covered a wide range of topics and events that kept me busy most of the time.

Q4. What was the motive behind you choosing to become a journalist?

I wanted to investigate Saudi Arabian women's issues, and help to improve their status. In addition, I wanted to prove myself as an active independent woman in the city of Makkah.

Q5. Have the Saudi Media changed in the last recent years?

True.

Q6. If yes, then how?

Yes. However, it needs more improvement. There are still difficulties for women journalists. Many of these women are restricted to covering only a specific range of topics. In my opinion,

we need more experienced women journalists, but this cannot be achieved if the editors of the newspapers will not provide these women with the opportunities.

Q7. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

Mostly about the financial crisis, the spread of some disease, social problems, sport and politics.

Q8. What do you report on?

I used to comment on education and the academic issues. I used to investigate the problems that face teachers and students. I also dealt with violence, polygamy and teenagers problems.

Q9. As a journalist, what are the difficulties you face?

One of the difficulties was the society's reaction of Saudi women working outside alongside males. There are misconceptions associated with these women as being against traditions just because they work in the field, this however is not true because women can still respect their traditions and religion while doing their jobs. In addition, there are difficulties with communicating with editors especially given that I had to report from a different city.

Q10. There is an impression in the West that political discussion in Saudi media is very limited, from your experience would you say that is true?

The situation is very sensitive in Saudi especially after the spread of terrorism. There is some restriction when it comes to politics.

Q11. What difficulties would Saudi women face working as journalists?

Working in the field is a problem for Saudi women because the society does not approve the concept of women and men working together. However, there are some cities in Saudi where it is much easier for women to work as journalists as in the city of Jeddah. .

Q12. Do you think that women journalists still suffer from discrimination in the workplace in Saudi Arabia?

There are inequalities in the salaries as men make more than women do. Also men find it much easier to get hold of the news first as they do not have problems with transportation i.e. driving cars.

Q13. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

There is a huge influence whether this influence is positive or negative. The media reflect Saudi Arabian society, and keep it updated with the outside world news.

Q14. Do women and men read the same papers?

Business women do read the same papers as men. They are interested in the market as men are. In general, though women prefer to read papers that focus on domesticity.

Q15. Would you advise your own daughter to become a journalist? If so why. If not why not?

With such circumstances, I would not advise her to become a journalist. I believe she will not be given her rights and she will find it very difficult to work outside in the street.

Name: S.Z.

Job: Human's Rights Activists

Age: 50

Q1. What is the nature of topics usually discussed in the Saudi newspapers nowadays?

Saudi press focus on reporting the uprisings in the Middle East, the protests, terrorism, and women's roles in society. The press also focus on cultural issues such as domestic violence.

Q2. Do women journalists suffer from discrimination at work in Saudi Arabia?

The press in Saudi is interested in topics that stir public opinions, and therefore journalists both females or males try to contribute to this topic. There is no discrimination in that regard. However, male journalists are able to publish their articles directly. In contrast, female journalists don't enjoy this privilege. Their articles must go to editors before publishing and might get censored.

Q3. How does the media influence Saudi Arabian society?

It has a huge impact on our society. The press has shed light on problems that society didn't know about in Saudi Arabia. For example: forcing girls to marry at a young age, girl's problems at school, medical mistakes, frauds, the women right to drive movement.

Q4. What difficulties can Saudi women face working as journalists?

It depends on her position in the newspaper. If she is a reporter then she will face a different type of difficulties that I can't talk about. I am a columnist so the most difficulty I had with my job was censorship. Most often it depends on the editor-in-chief's preferences.

Q5. Would you advise your own daughter to become a journalist? If so why. If not why not?

Working as a journalist in Saudi Arabia is looking for trouble, but if she is willing to, to follow stories, and report incidents with objectivity then I will not stand in her way.

Appendix II

All interviewees signed this consent form but some wish to remain anonymous. Where interviews are named in the text it is because they gave permission to be identified. In all other cases anonymity has been respected.

Consent Form Template 1

Adapt this template appropriately for the study. If a person with parental responsibility is providing consent, use Template 2

Consent Form

Women in the Saudi Press

- I understand that my participation in this project will involve [*provide brief description of what is required, e.g. ...completing two questionnaires about my attitudes toward controversial issues, and that it will require approximately 20 minutes of my time*].
- I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason [*and without loss of payment (course credit)*] (*delete if not applicable*).
- I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with [*name*].

[DELETE EITHER a or b below]

- a) I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the Experimenter and [*name(s) of other researchers where applicable*] can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for up to [*state amount of time data will be held*] when it will be deleted/destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time.
- b) I understand that the information provided by me will be held totally anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that this information may be retained indefinitely.
- I understand that information provided by me for this study, including my own words, may be used in the research report, but that all such information and/or quotes will be anonymised.
- I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback.

I, _____ (PRINT NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by [*Eiman Kurdi, School of English, Communication & Philosophy, Cardiff University*].

Signed:

Date:

