Saudi Vision 2030: The Harbinger of a Seismic Culture Shiftfor Saudi Women

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Article Info	Abstract
	The research aims at highlighting on the status of women and the power they have in Saudi Arabia. Further, this study explores the role of Vision 2030 in destabilising gender structure in Saudi Arabia through eliminating discrimination against women thus leading to a cultural shift in the country. In order to fulfil such aim, this study adopted qualitative research design and after collecting data from 16 interviewed women, thematic analysis was done so as to underline the themes. Two themes were identified (Theme one: Vision 2030 visibly supports women's education, and Vision 2030 invisibly raises aspirations of girls and their parents). Theme one of Vision 2030 visibly supports women's education indicates that there are (i.e. vision 2030 does work on reducing gender differences in conducting social activities, vision 2030 works on cultural shift in the way in which Saudi society differentially treat of men and women, and reducing the imbalance of authority and power towards men through increasing social status of women in society in comparing to men). Theme Two of Vision 2030 invisibly raises aspirations of girls and their parents suggests that (i.e. women have awareness of any laws, adopted by Saudi government to empower women, Saudi government promulgate legislations that increase the empowerment of women, and interviewees have positive thoughts about role of Vision 2030, in empowering women).

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia has been perceived as a conservative society in which roles of Sharia and society are interpreted in favour of men (Albejaidi, and Nair, 2019). Rights of women in Saudi Arabia have been strictly curtailed, especially in contrast to women's rights in other neighboring states, due to the stringent application of Sharia law(Pharaon, 2004). However, this began to change in the early 2010s, with strategies to empower women were at the foreground of the government's policy, most notably with the implementation of Vision 2030 (Vision 2030, 2013).

Aside from the significant strides made in education, whereby there were more female graduates that male graduates in further and higher education and female literacy has increased to 91% (Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 2011), there have been other areas that have affected. Arguably, the most radical aim of Vision 2030 was levering the position of women so as to maximise their role as human capital assets allowing them to actively contribute to the general wellbeing of the country.

Subsequently, Saudi women are now free to travel, drive, and attend public events without a male guardian (Stevenson &Revesz, 2018). As such, Saudi women now have resources, facilities and options to available to them that were previously unheard of; including pursuing careers in engineering, law, research, and thearts (Style Iqbal, and Khan, 2019). Suffice to say that Vision 2030 has been the catalyst for change in Saudi Arabia and this study will look at the social and cultural impact of Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia.

This paper aims to investigate the role of Vision 2030 in eliminating discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia through women empowerment, which is laying the ground for cultural shift within Saudi conservative society.

II.Literature Review

2.1.Gender Structure: a stable or a changing concept

Gender role indicates to the roles, activities, behaviours that are socially constructed in a given society (Martin, 2004). Such roles delineate what is good for men and what is appropriate for women. This; in turn, would create a gender structure within a given society and the severity of gender structure depends on the clear cuts in the roles of each gender (Risman and Davis, 2013). According to Eagly and Karau (2002), all societies have their gender structure; however, the extremity of such gender structure differs amongst societies based on personal,personal, interactional and macro elements (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

The personal element, in the context of gender structure, refers to the physiological and psychological differences between males and females (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Arguably, it lays the foundation for the idea that the two sexes have different interests, strengths and intelligences (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Given that it is based on tangible features, the personal element lends itself to a gender structure that is rigid and unchangeable (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The gravity of personal element appears in different facets (Risman, 2017). For instance, unifying the clothes of women and men such as allowing both genders to wear same clothes would minimise the effectiveness of such element and; hence, reduce the severity of gender structure in a given society (Santoro et al., 2018). Interestingly, in Saudi Arabia society, there is clear cut way of dressing for both men and women which would maintain the vividness of personal element in the gender role. Moreover, another facet that contributes in buttressing the existence of personal facet is the issue of make-up for women and being hairy in men. That is to say, in societies when men are allowed to add make-up (e.g. South Korea) and men to remove hair from their entire bodies, there can be seen a reducing in the omnipresence of personal element (Momsen, 2019; Moon et al., 2016). Additional manifestation of the personal element is the sexual role of men and women is clear and definitive. However, in societies that struggle to define themselves by gender role, it can be noticed an intermingle for the sexual role of men and women. In other words, there can be seen a sliding from men to do sexual activities that have been defined historically as women's activities. This might be common in some secular countries such as United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Nevertheless, even within the context of eastern Islamic communities and countries that acknowledge the personal element in gender structure such as Saudi Arabia, there are recurrent incessant indications about diminishing of the line between men and women physically and psychologically. For instance, BBC Arabic showed Saudi man who was educating other men about the ways of adding make-up to his face (BBC Trending. 2020). Thus, it can be deduced that personal element of gender structure is not carved in stone rather it is changeable element and the speed of such change in this element differs amongst societies.

The interactional element refers to the gender structures that are produced and reinforced through the daily interactions between people (Eagly and Karau, 2002). For instance, casual remarks, even if intended to be humorous, can have an indelible impact on gender structures (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Statements such as _women are sensitive', _fragile like glass' and _the male is the pillar of house' craft a subliminal and subconscious belief that divides men and women, determining that men are stronger and superior and women are weak and inferior. Therefore, the interactional element is subject to slow-paced change, whereby if a more conscious effort is made to speak with consideration and sensitivity, it can change the gender structures forged under the paradigm. Indeed, there are incidences about a change in the interactional elements in many countries around the world even in so called conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia. As such, on the international level, there are new remarks (on CNN, BBC, and the Telegraph) that counties with women's leadership such as Germany and New Zealand have shown sophisticated successful response in dealing with Corona epidemic while countries of macho leaders such as USA, UK, Italy, Russia and Brazil have competed each other on the worst place in responding to the epidemic (Rigby, 2020). Also, within conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia, there are growing voices that declare that women do not differ from men, and the woman is as strong as man when it comes to economic activities.

The macro element is signified by external factors, such as economic development, state policies, female participation in the labor force, and welfare regimes (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Similar to the interactional element, the macro element can reproduce, reassert or replace gender structure (Eagly and Karau, 2002). A good example would be Britain, as in the aftermath of World War II, the male population had significantly decreased, in addition to which, many of the men who survived experienced mental health issues that prevented them from resuming work. Consequently, women took on the mantle of both breadwinner and homemaker, leading to an increased number of women in the workforce and change in state policies, which, after years, finally culminated in women having equal status to men. Change at the macro level requires a state altering event and manifests itself gradually, resulting in changes to the gender structure (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

These three elements can not only impact one another to influence changes in gender norms (Charrad, 2011) but they can alsomanifest changein gender structure via cultural and material factors (Eagly and Wood, 2011). Cultural factors include changing social ideology through either research or laws and legislation, whereas material factors are changes that are a by-product of a significant development, such as war and technology (Scarborough, Risman and Meola, 2017). Changes to gender structure via cultural factors can be over an extensive period, which is in contrast to material factor where the gender structure can change in a significantly shorter time frame (Eagly and Wood, 2011).

It is also important to consider that change in gender structures is symbiosis of the personal, interactional and macro elements as well as the cultural and material factors. For instance, the focus is on the gendered bodies, identities and other world views are determined by the expectations placed on the personal elements that lead to incorrect expectations, material inequalities and adherence to archetypes. The interactional element then normalises the gender ideals, which then seep into various organizational structures, allowing for these values to manifest themselves at a macro level, whereby legislation and laws can reinforce it on a personal level, thus

perpetuating a permanent cycle.Consequently,the ascribed gender structure then imbues itself in the multifarious cultural and material processes, which can be enforced both formally and informally.

Ultimately, change in gender structures is never brought on by one isolated aspect but is rather the product of the interlink between the cultural and material factors and the personal, interactional and macro elements. As such, it can be argued that thatgender structure is not stable, permanent or autonomous process but rather constantly in flux (Risman and Davis, 2013). Therefore, archetypal gender structures can be challenged and overcome if all the requisite elements align. This study would consider the role of Saudi government in triggering a change in gender structure.

2.2.Vision 2030

It has been argued that governmental authorities in any country have the capacity to challenge and ultimately dismantle existing gender structures (O'Hagan, 2015). It typical actualises when the existing structures are unable to meet the country's goals, leading to a change in political agenda (Hagan et al, 2015). In such events, the government is able to implement material processes, such as legislations, regulations and initiatives, on a macro level, thus motivating the positive human-based activities. Vision 2030 exemplifies this.

Until recently, Saudi Arabia'slegal and social structures encouraged and supported male domination with the existence of the male guardianship system that rendered women invisible and dependent (Charrad, 2011).Women were previously excluded from the decision-making as they were limited to the private sphere, responsible only for household activities such as cooking and taking care of husbands, children, and siblings (Keddie, 2012). This cultural attitude served as one of major obstacles to women's education and women were often left vulnerable to physical and sexual assaults due to the prevalence of male dominance in the culture (Sidanius and Pratto, 2011).

The aims for Saudi women in Vision 2030 address the aforementioned on a macro level, applying it through material processes. Vison 2030 offers Saudi women legislative support that finally gives them a voice and visibility in society, thus also protecting them from male dominance. To encourage and protect their voices, several programs (e.g. car driving licenses, and studying abroad) and policies have been developed thus highlighting on focusing on meeting the basic foundation of women, which ranges from acquiring driving licenses, personal identity cards to opportunities to study abroad and access an array of vocations.

The inclusion of women into the public space helps with the development of a stronger nation. Saudi Arabia wants to move forward, especially with consideration to economy, general development and their labor force as the former system prevented nearly half the country from contributing to economy and the general well-being of the country (Charrad, 2011). Saudi Arabia has focused almost singularly on the empowerment of women, with the view that they are in fact the human capital force and can contribute to the political vision for the country (Acker, 2014). To expedite matters, there has been a promulgation of laws that challenge the established gender structures, with the understanding that it will find itself through being enforced within the interactional paradigm through cultural processes.

1. Methodology

Qualitative research design was selected for this investigation because the topic requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural changes taking place in Saudi Arabia, especially those which are not immediately visible. Qualitative research is better suited for in-depth discussions of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990), as it allows the participants to give carefully considered responses that aid better understanding of the subject (Kumar, 2005). This study also adheres to interpretivism, as research focuses on a social phenomenon from which the researcher cannot be separated.

Semi-structured interviews, this research's primary data instruments, provided a wealth of textual data necessary for this kind of research (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005). Detailed and thorough responses allow for a more holistic approach to the research and subsequent discussion (Zikmund,Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2003). The interviewing process consisted of distributing the information sheet and getting consent form from each participant, followed by a face-to-face non-structured interview that each ranged from 30 to 45 minutes (Miller, Birch, Mauthner and Jessop, 2012). This timeframe allowed to for gathering sufficient data without exhausting the participants. The data in the interviews was thematically analysed until common threads emerged(Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2018).

Purposive sampling was used to determine the selection process, given how subjective this investigation is and therefore the most suitable place, actors, event, and process had to be chosen (Creswell, 2006). The main criteria for the sample of this study were that the participants had to be: Saudi; female; and either undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Sixteen participants were selected, which is sufficient to achieve data saturation for this kind of study (Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger, 2005; Cochran, 2003). The criterion included Saudi females who were still in education as they would better reflect the current values and cultural norms as they have been raised with Vision 2030 in full effectand therefore the would better exemplify the changing times as emblems of modern Saudi womanhood.

The participants will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and as this is not a quantitative study, this study will not tally their responses in charts or quantifiable figures. This would be counterproductive to the purpose of the study, which is to explore in depth the experiences of change that Saudi women are experiencing since Vision 2030 came into place.

3.1 Areas of Focus & Discussion

Semi-structured interviews took place in the autumn of 2019, and the questions were divided into two categories:

Gender Structure and Inequality in Saudi Arabia
1. How are social activities conducted differently between men and women?
2. Does Saudi society treat men and women differently when it comes to social activities? If so, could you please give some examples?
3. Does the imbalance of authority and power towards men contribute in diminishing Saudi women's status, especially in comparison to men?

Saudi Government and Empowered Women
1. Are you aware of any laws, regulation or procedures that have been put in place by the Saudi government to empower women in their society? If so, could you please give some examples?
2. What do you think the Saudi government can do to further improve female empowerment in society?
3. Do you think that the laws promulgated by the government; mainly, Vision 2030, have increased opportunities for education and work and open communicationfor women? If so, could you please share some examples?

3.2 Reliability & Validity

This qualitative research applied the four criteria of Credibility, dependability Transferability and Confirmability in order to assert research' quality and trustworthiness (validity and reliability) (Morrow, 2005). In regard to credibility criterion, which indicates to the believability and value of the findings, the researcher asserted credibility through embracing a reflexivity approach (Connelly, 2016). Through doing such reflexivity, the researcher examined her contribution during the research process so as to limit any personal bias (Shenton, 2004). As such, the I underlined my interest in the topic of study as well as my previous experience and the ways in which my views and perceptions influenced my study in its entirety. In other words, I reflected on my beliefs from the first step of this study till the last step of writing the conclusion including the steps of collecting and analysing the data. In addition, I underlined and highlighted multifarious cases in the findings and analysis chapter where distinctive opinions of the interviewees are outlined. This is done through recording all interviews on a digital recorder (Neuman, 2010; Howitt and Cramer, 2005). This also proved to be helpful when interviews had to be revisited for verification of meaning to remain true to the participants' accounts and statements.

Dependability criterion which usually compared to the reliability concept in the quantitative study indicates to the level to which the data is stable (Healy and Perry, 2000). Such criterion will be implemented by establishing an audit trail in the project. Such audit trail would enable altering decisions and change the iterative process based on circumstances that occur during the research (Carcary, 2009). This research utilised ―member checking‖ validity (Rager, 2005), and ―verification‖ (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002) in order to determine the accuracy of statements given, truth, and ensure credibility of the recorded interviews (Stiles, 1993). Therefore, each interviewee was asked to review and verify their responses to ensure accuracy of the recording process and whether the statement given was what the interviewee meant. This process also provided scope to address any misunderstanding, correct any errors and re-confirm certain points of discussion (Stiles, 1993).

Confirmability indicates to the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). The principle of confirmability will be embraced in this study when discussing the themes and codes in the result and discussion chapter in the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As such, the researcher will conduct a review and comparing of the whole findings with other research peer-reviewed papers.

Transferability indicates to whether or not specific outcomes can be transferred to another similar situation, scope or context, while still keeping the meanings and inferences from the whole research (Amankwaa, 2016). Indeed, achieving transferability can be considered as the responsibility of the reader. However, for empowering the reader from doing such judgement, the researcher will provide sufficient information about the context of the study without undermining the principles of anonymity and confidentiality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). That is to say, the way and the place in which this research is conducted will be highlighted. Moreover, the research has given details about the current situation of gender structure within the context of Saudi Arabia.

This research does have its limitations and cannot be considered definitive or reflective of all Saudi society. Firstly, the Hawthorne Effect should be taken into consideration (Leurent, Reyburn, Mbakilwa and Schellenberg, 2016). That is to say, participants might be compelled to change their real views and experienced when questioned by the researcher (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014). Moreover, the number of participants for this study is not in any way reflective of the general population's consensus in Saudi Arabia nor

does it account for values and beliefs informed by demographics; hence, the findings cannot be generalized reliably to the whole population (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016). Furthermore, the sample size is limited to women, thus there is no masculine perspective to provide an alternative view, which could add value to the discussion of masculinity in Saudi Arabia and remove implications of bias.

2. Findings

4.1. General Observation

Even before the interviews, there was evidence of a significant cultural shift in Saudi society. Within 10 years, there is a distinct change in the attitudes, behaviours and values of Saudi women, best exemplified by the participants selected for this study. Before the official implementation of Vision 2030 in 2013, the Saudi government had begun to lay the foundation for it about 8 or so years prior (Hamdan, 2005; Abouammoh, Smith &Duwais, 2014). This included encouraging women to pursue higher education and introducing scholarship programmes that encouraged enrolment. However, there is a stark difference between the cultural mindset towards female education in 2009 and 2019, and it manifests itself in the female student population itself.

Saudi Female Student in 2009

The average age of the female student upon enrolment at university ranged from 18 to 19, with some being slightly older. In most cases, women were married and already had children. Saudi families at the time considered the marriage to be tantamount to preserving and protecting a woman's honour because she was considered incapable of doing so herself. They also wanted to ensure that women did not make _morally reprehensible mistakes' and marriage was seen as the infallibility of temptation. Moreover, many families wanted to free themselves of the responsibility for their daughters.

The few women, who were not married, were in enviable positions as some of their married counterparts subconsciously wanted to be single and independent. However, the prevailing attitude placed heavy emphasis on marriage. Most family opted to get their daughters married either during or immediately after high school and that higher education was optional and contingent on the girl's partner and his family. At the time, even the girls considered marriage of utmost priority, and more often than not education was merely to increase their viability in finding better suitors. Many people also viewed higher education for women as a way to while away the time until they were fully responsible for their families. This perception was so common that it lead to the cultural idiom that _degrees were meant to be filed in the kitchen'. As such, it was even rarer for a woman to pursue postgraduate education.

The few women that did pursue higher education for the purposes of building careers were limited still as not all fields of study were made available to them. Saudi women were previously only allowed to study subjects like Arabic Studies, Linguistics, Islamic Studies, Sociology, Psychology and Social Studies, whilediscipline such as law, engineering and traditional sciences were out of bounds for Saudi women.Medicine was an exception, however, despite the subject being available to Saudi women, the families often posed an obstacle as they did not want their daughters to study medicine as it involved interacting with the opposite gender, which would affect their reputation and in the long run, their marriage prospects.

Saudi Female Student in 2019

While the average age of Saudi female students at enrolment is the same as it was 10 years ago, ranging from 18-19, their circumstances are significantly different. The way families and women view education has completely changed, in some ways a 180 degree turn. Education is now seen as armour for women, protecting her from calamities and difficulties that she is likely to encounter later in life; particularly, if she has a difficult marriage or income becomes an issue. Many Saudi women and families are increasingly prioritising education and subsequent employment after marriage.

The Saudi students in this study were a departure from their counterparts a decade ago; they now dream of being educated, highly qualified, independent, financially solvent and self-sufficient. Marriage is no longer a primary objective, it is often a secondary or even a tertiary consideration because they have seen the benefits of education in their predecessors or conversely the disadvantages of having limited education.

Based on the participants' comments, women are pursuing as much education as they can complete to the point they become specialists and experts in their field. They are aiming for the highest positions in the workplace, not just because it guarantees financial security but they are ambitious for themselves and the fields of study they have selected. Education is now just as much about personal fulfillment as it is about professional aspirations. Most Saudi girls are now envisioning themselves as leaders and pioneers who will play an essential role in taking their area of expertise and country forward.

Moreover, courtesy of Vision 2030, more disciplines are now available to women and with increase in options, more women are pursuing higher education because now they can work in the fields that are of interest to them and are better suited to their personalities. While the Saudi culture in the past favored submissiveness and obedience in women, these girls are looking at the newly availed options as an opportunity to pursue careers that align with their personalities, strength of character and ambition, with many choosing to become engineers (a field that is still dominated by men world over), lawyers, doctors and entrepreneurs. Saudi women are also

aspiring to previously male-dominated positions in the government, military, aviation and design too, all with the intent of bettering themselves and representing their country in a positive light on the global stage.

4.2. Theme I: The Visible Change

In the last few years, Saudi women have becoming increasingly visible, from seats on the Shoura Council to having their own identity cards to freedom of mobility. It was the presence of the women on the Shoura Council that paved the way for such a rapid structural change that gave women equal status and, at least on a macro level, removed obstacles to empowerment, including the male guardianship system,

When the participants were asked about Saudi women's increasing parity to men, all of them agreed Vision 2030 had been successful in achieving its aims to a significant degree. They noted how legislation and laws are empowering women in the political, social, academic and economic spheres.

Political

According to Mariam, one of the most significant developments for women in the political realm, after finding a voice in parliament, has been that women are now working as Notary Publics, an occupation that is not only public but also overlaps with the legal profession, which was previously inaccessible to women.

Wafaobserved that Saudi women have started to represent their country all over, a role which was previously exclusive only to men. Saudi women are not only playing a significant role in parliament, such as having positions on the Shoura Council,but also are actively partaking in the diplomatic and international arena. For instance, she cited the example of Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, who was appointed the ambassador for Saudi Arabia to the United States. In the past, this would have been unheard, where a Saudi woman represented her country on an international and such a significant political platform. As per Wafa, there are now female representatives for the country across embassies and councils across the world.

Social

One of the most significant developments has been addressing the male guardianship system that restricted women in every way possible but especially with regard to mobility and social experience. Vision 2030 has worked towards ensuring that Saudi women are able to conduct their daily lives without the need of a male guardian.

Hind stated that —Saudi women can now travel abroad without a custodian‖, which was previously not the case. Not only that, but as Reem points out that —before, it was not possible for me to renew my passport without the attendance of my guardian who is my husband' but, now following Vision 2030, I am able to renew my passport without the need of my husband beside me‖. In addition to this, the Saudi state has promulgated new laws that allow women to divorce and apply for official documents without the needing a male guardian's permission.

Moreover, Vision 2030 has worked on supporting working women by accommodating her personal duties, including parenting. For instance, a recent initiative, *Qara*, is providing free day care for working women, so they know that their children are safe and they can focus on their jobs.

Another initiative called *Wosol*helps women in the workplace by providing free transportation to those who have limited mobility and options. This also serves as incentive because it removes all impediments to the pursuit of careers and financial independence. In addition to this, as Naglaa commented excitedly, is the Saudi government's decision to finally permit women to legally drive. She added that decisions like these increasewomen's autonomy and independence.

There are also significant strides being made with regard to women's safety, as Ola explained the new law that stipulates anyone caught harassing a woman would automatically face a jail sentence of between 2-5 years and a financial penalty equivalent to US$26,000. Moreover, Vision 2030 refers that Saudi women should be represented by herself without a need to male guardian during her daily life.

Academic

The academic field is the area where the most visible change has occurred. As per Reem, the focus on encouraging women to pursue higher education has prepared women for the workplace and has broadened their perspectives. She adds that, one of the biggest boons of Vision 2030 has been the increase in suitable educational centres almost exclusively for women. Moreover, women are now able to apply for scholarships and to study abroad, which was previously exclusive to men, and in recent years there has been an equal number of men and women succeeding in the academic field, winning scholarships and being accepted to study abroad.

Furthemore, segregation between the genders is becoming less frequent. Darren, who works at a university explained that despite the separate male and female campuses, workshops, meetings, seminars and training have now become co-ed because it is increasingly believed that it is important women to share their experiences, expertise and put forth alternative opinions and perspectives, which leads to providing a more holistic solution to problems.

Professional

Awatfexplained that Vision 2030 has been supporting women to pursue professional opportunities to the extent that fields, such as engineering, publishing, journalism, military, law, tourism and transport, which were exclusive to men,now have a substantially increased female labor force. There is also a change in the way

women are allowed to work, as highlighted by Amira. Amira explained that in laboratories, only men were assigned the night shift but since the implementation of Vision 2030, there has been an increase in the number of women working on night shifts because they have proven they are more than capable of handling professional and personal tasks simultaneously. Women are also being given economic opportunities even if they aren't highly qualified, as more and more women are seen working as cashiers and in customer service, roles that were also previously male dominated.

Through these different areas, it is easy to observe the changes occurring in Saudi Arabia. Slowly but surely, Saudi authorities are working on dismantling the male guardianship system that has been used to confine and subjugate Saudi women, only allowing them a narrow scope and assigning a very specific and gender biased role, which marginalized her (Alhejji, Ng, Garawan and Carberry, 2018). Decisions such as the one outlined in the above section reflect the way in Saudi state's decisions are creating cultural drift, which has the potential to changefabric of Saudi society, particularly with regard to gender structure and within that the role of women (Barres, 2006).

4.3. Theme II: The Invisible Change

As Vision 2030 has now been in effect for nearly 7 years, there is also an invisible change taking place that has changed the way women see themselves and the way they want to be perceived by the world. It has affected family structure and traditional gender dynamics because women are now more confident taking a stand knowing that there are options and recourses available to them, which was not the case before. All of the participants were able to give examples of changes that included the invisible cultural shift.

Dependent to Independent

In the past, marriage was a point of contention for women. More often than not, women did not put forward their wishes and requests because the social structure was such that they felt they were likely to be denied. However, this has begun to change as explained that women are forthcoming with their requests and expectation in marriage, such as completing education, being free to work and driving the car. If her conditions are not met and the suitor does not consent, then women refuse the marriage. Only if the conditions are accepted and promises are fulfilled, does the marriage take place. Darren commented that the way Saudi girl's envision their future has changed, because their primary focus is education, gainful employment and career, and social and economic independence field and only then does she consider marriage, which is in stark contrast to the past, when a Saudi women's first and last aspiration was marriage.

This newfound independence in Saudi women extends beyond negotiations and taking stances. For instance, Mona mentioned that Saudi women are increasingly opting to live alone either because they are divorced or studying because they are no longer dependent on male guardians and know that they are perfectly capable of providing for theselves.. This type of female independency is used to be abnormal and social unacceptable within Saudi Arabia before Vision 2030.

Fearful to Fearless

In the past, Saudi women operated under a culture of fear. Fear of retribution, scrutiny, criticism and disappointed. However, as women are becoming increasingly educated and independent, their sense of fear has also diminished and emboldened to make decisions for themselves. In one example, Hana cited her friend who hails from a conservative family who consider the veil obligatory, even though it is a custom and not a religious requirement. Hana's friend does not agree with this practice and argued with her family until they reached a compromise, where she discarded the veil but maintained the hijab. In previous generations, Saudi women would not even consider broaching a topic such as this let alone argue about it. Hana believes this is the impact of education and critical learning that allows women to handle potentially volatile situations with grace and determination.

Another participant, Samira, talked about her friend who was being blackmailed by a hackerwho threatened to expose her private photos to the public and her family in hopes of extorting her. However, Samira's friend did not succumb to blackmail and called the police file her complaint and then proceeded to tell her family. Samira notes that in the past, a woman in such a situation would have been a lifelong victim of the perpetrator because she would have fear societal condemnation more. In a similar vein, Hind narrated the story of a student who was sexually harassed but rather than tolerating it in silence for the fear of criticism, she reported the incident to her manager and family. Consequently, the perpetrator was discipline, which is opposite to what would have happened in the past, where the victim would have been disciplined instead and reprimanded.

Similarly, Layla spoke about a friend who was a victim of domestic violence in her marriage for many years. However, the new laws and legislations empowered her to take the step to divorce her husband and the court granted her application. In the past, divorce, especially due to domestic violence was uncommon. Firstly, women were unwilling to come forward due to prevalent Saudi culture of patience and tolerance, and secondly, they would face difficulty in courts due to the requirement of a male chaperone, support from her family and a sympathetic judge. With the new protocols in place, women are more confident about taking necessary steps for a better life rather than suffering in silence.

Stories such as these, while not necessarily universal, are indicative of how the material processes as initiated by the state, have allowed Saudi women to buttress their trust and bolstered their confidence to counter difficulties without fear.

Unsupported to Supported

The increasing independence and fearlessness amongst Saudi women can be attributed the support system that women are now able to provide one another, especially to their daughters. For example,Nojood, a participant,encouraged her daughter to pursue the career she wanted, even though it meant she would interacting with men. In the past, if a daughter wanted to pursue a career that involved her dealing with men on a daily basis, it would be actively discouraged and opposed as families used to prefer their daughters working in a segregated environment. This was due to a culture of distrust where women were not considered capable enough to make rational decisions and there was also significant concern regarding the family's reputation in society as women mixing with men in any capacity was considered inappropriate. However, since the government has shown trust in women, many families are following suit, as exemplified by Nojood.

The aforementioned stories, though providing examples of the invisible change in Saudi society, is not reflective of the entire country. Nojoodpointed out that —Saudi society still prioritises men in social encounters. For instance, in any social event when my husband and I are together, other men, even shopkeepers, will speak directly to my husband as if I am not even there‖. However,Daliahas a different take on the matter, citing herself as an example, thatt —in city of Jeddah, I interact with men and vice versa, and I am not ignored in favour of my husband who is also present‖ but when she in smaller cities, like Yanbu, it is likely she'd be ignored for her husband. Similarly, Awatfnoted that —I feel like a second-class citizenwhen I travel back home to KhameesMusheet [small remote area in Saudi Arabia located 700 km south of Riadh Capital]; but, I have high esteem and respect amongst both genders at my work at Jeddah city [second biggest city in Saudi Arabia after Capital Riyadh]‖.

This invisibleline of demarcation between urban and rural areas is due to the difference in communication culture (Tolman, Davis and Bowman, 2016). In smaller towns there is limited to no communication culture, which prevents the adoption of new ideas. The growth of communication culture is helpful in developing a wider set of norms that enable both men and women to communicate with each other while treating both genders equally in social activities (Thompson, 2015). This requires expanding qualities and activities that would be able to improve the overall culture and the communication carried out within. This means working on changing gender structure through changing people's understanding of masculinity and femininity through various styles of communication by ensuring that they are able to communicate freely (Busch, Mattheiss, Reisinger, Orji, Fröhlich and Tscheligi, 2016).

Evidently, the invisible change has not quite worked its way through the entire kingdom and is currently contained to the larger cities. According to Al-Ahmadi (2011), the cultural shift occurs rapidly in urban locations and then spreads to remote rural areas over time. This is attributed to the fact that smaller cities and towns are still parochial and hence, these less open to the idea of female empowerment as it contradicts everything they have known (Little, 2017).

3. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore impact of Vision 2030 on Saudi society, specifically women, and while there was an underlying expectation that there would be superficial changes, such as the visibility of women, what was unexpected were the invisible changes that are taking place. All of this is tantamount to a seismic culture shift in Saudi Arabia, though contained for now to specific regionsthat is becoming increasinglyevident for all to see. In the Saudi context, the visible change begets invisible change, which is becoming a symbiotic cycle. What began with the representation of Saudi women in parliament (with the appointment of the women to the ShouraCouncil) led to the rapid changes that are happening today, including reducing the prevalence of male guardianship to empowering women through education and mobility.

Nevertheless, the participants did posit interesting points which even if not wholly true are still indicative of the cultural impact that Vision 2030 has had. Had this research been conducted prior to the initiative, it is unlikely that anyone would have spoken so frankly and openly about topics that are considered taboo, such as divorce and domestic violence.

This research also offers theoretical and practical benefits to various stakeholders. For instance, decision makers can utilise the findings to developinitiatives that will help disseminate cultural change in smaller towns and rural areas faster. There also needs to be a focus on cultural drift within Saudi society, to prevent the current changes from being superficial and fading with trends and influences.Saudi women also can benefit from this research as it highlights the ways in which gender structure is created and reproduced in society and thus equip them to address the issues that result from traditional gender structures.

This research also lends itself to future studies. Researchers should consider expanding on this research by applying mixed methodology with a larger sample size that could be used to reflect the whole population's opinion. Such research would benefit from adopting quantitative methods such as field survey questionnaire or online survey questionnaire; the researcher would thereforenot be limited by the Hawthorne Effect as (Oswald,

Sherratt and Smith, 2014). In addition, there can also be research on the stark and rapid changes that are taking place in Saudi society, especially amongst women, could pose new challenges that may have long-term repercussions for society in general and it would be useful to be forewarned so as to be forearmed.

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