

Social Change and Women's Work across Three Generations in Abha, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Women's work participation in Saudi society has been characterised as low and limited to a few gender-segregated fields; mainly in education and social services. However, previous social studies provide limited explanations for this, and at the same time little is known about the history of women's work in the pre-oil era. Today younger generations of women are facing high rates of unemployment and underemployment, which requires a deep analysis and understanding. Hence, this study aimed to reveal various aspects of paid and unpaid work across three generations of women in Abha starting from the establishment of the Saudi state in 1932 to the present day.

The study explored the main factors of social change that have constructed women's work, how work experiences have influenced women's lives and identities, and the links between women's work and their empowerment. To achieve this, the research involved a qualitative study based on 77 in-depth interviews with women in Abha, southwest Saudi Arabia. A purposive sample of women was collected from three generations of women, which included a range of socio-economic classes.

Major findings of this study indicate that women's position in the labour market has been influenced by a complex of economic and cultural factors, the core of which have been directed by the Saudi state's political project of being "modern and Islamic". A range of mechanisms have been mobilised, particularly regarding state policies, gender segregation system and education, with profound implications for women's lives. Women have been a marker of the State's political project, and have embodied the paradoxical aspects of this project as modern but Islamic.

Although factors of social change and work experience have had different impacts on women belonging to various generations and socio-economic backgrounds, they have moulded the collective identity for Saudi women in Abha, which has transferred from local to national, and finally to a contested national identity. Across the three generations, women's empowerment has been limited by lack of resources and restricted agency. This makes achieving empowerment through employment by 2015, as required by the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000), a very difficult goal to achieve unless the state launches an urgent reform plan.

Statement of Originality

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Rajaa Taha Alqahatni

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Dedication

To Saudi Women

To My Grandmothers,

Salha Ben Musalat & Abdiyah Ben Aydh, May Allah bless their souls,

and Saudi women of their generation

Hoping this research contributes to documenting a precious part of women's history in
Saudi Arabia.

To My Mother,

Zinab Mimish, and her boom generation

Hoping this research provides a deeper understanding of the changing period of women's
lives in that era.

To My daughter,

Rajwa and her generation

Hoping this study will contribute to constructing a better life for you and all Saudi
people.

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Note on Arabic Translation

Translation of Arabic words follows IJMES translation guide based on modified Encyclopaedia of Islam translation system. Within this guideline definite article al is lowercase except in the beginning of the sentence or a title, yet in this research I would also capitalize surnames, places and organizations. All prefixes are connected with what follows by a hyphen such as Ben-Jrais. Only Arabic words do not appear in Webster Collegiate Dictionary shall be treated as a technical term in diacritical marks and italics, and Names, places and organizations are not italics. The only diacritics used are ' for hamza and ʿ for ayn.

Abbreviations

CDSI	Central Department Of Statistics and Information in KSA
DGE	Department of Girls Education
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council constitutes of
CEDAW,	Convention of Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CPVP	Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (Religious Police) <i>"Hayat Al-Amr Bil-Ma'ruf wal Nahy 'an Al-Munkar"</i>
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HS/TP	High school with Teaching programme " <i>Ma'ahd Al-Mu'alemat Al-Thanawi</i> "
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MABHS	A prayer means "May Allah blesses his/her soul", it usually said after pointing to a dear dead person.
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEP	Ministry of Economy and Planning
MSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NCCC	National Commission to Combat Corruption
OIL	Organization of International Labour
PBUH	Peace Be upon him, a prayer to say following the name of prophet Muhammad.
S/TP	<i>alemat Al- 'ahd Al-Mu</i> Secondary School with Teaching Programme " <i>Ma Mutawisit</i> "
SCRS	The Supreme Council of Religious Scholars in Saudi Arabia
TVTC	Technical and Vocational Training Corporation
UN	United Nation

1. Introduction

Women's economic participation is a major mechanism for empowerment, as the third of eight Millennium Development Goals that all members of the United Nations, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have agreed to achieve by 2015 (UN 2000). It is through paid work that women can achieve economic independence, participate in intra-household decision making, have the ability to leave unhappy marriages and increase the family's income, as discussed in social studies such as Moghadam (2007), Kabeer (2005), Shamsah (2007) and Al-Mosaed (2008). Furthermore, women's full participation in the labour market can enable them to become powerful agents in questioning both the global economic order and patriarchal gender relations (Moghadam 1994). However, women's work in the Saudi labour market is characterized by a low rate of participation, limited fields of work, and a high rate of unemployment (Moghadam 2003; Doumato 1999; Yamani 1996; Al-Qahtani 1995; MEP 1990, 2005). Despite the rapid economic growth and modernization of Saudi society since the 1960s, and the remarkable success of girls' education as a major pathway for women's waged labour, the rate of women's employment in Saudi Arabia is one of the lowest in the world, estimated at 12% of the labour force (MEP 2010:155), representing only 6.6% of Saudi women above the age of 15 (KSA-CDS 2005). This rate is very low not only when compared with women in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) societies which averaged 31%, but also compared with rates of working women in other developing countries of 45-62% (Moghadam 2003:49). The small proportion of women who work in Saudi society have been concentrated in limited fields of work in the public sector, mainly in educational institutions that absorb 80.1%, and 16.9% in the health sector, with the remainder working in a few female sections of state departments (Al-Dakheel 2000). At the same time the private sector is very male dominated; Saudi women represent only 0.8% of the labour force in this field, while the country has a large number of foreign workers constituting 53.1% of the total labour force of 8,020,000 (MEP 2010:158).

Social studies on Saudi women (Al-Mosaed 2008; Doumato 2003, 1999; Al-Dakheel 2000; Al-Munajjed 1997; Bahry 1982; Al-Hussaini 1988; Assad 1983; Al-Baadi 1982; Halawani 1987) have focused primarily on the small proportion of working women as modernized Saudi women who have been financially empowered since the oil boom era in the 1970s, while research data on women not in waged labour, either from younger or older

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generations, is very limited. Oral history points to the distinctive role of women in the period prior to the oil- boom era in the South Western regions, including 'Asir and Al-Baha, but knowledge on women's work experiences in that stage of the history of Saudi society has been hitherto "hidden from historical and social studies"¹. Knowledge of the diverse experiences of Saudi women not only represents a fundamental resource for the social history of women and for gender consciousness, but also contributes to understanding the relationships between women and development, as well as the most influential factors and mechanisms that have formed women's role across different historical stages in Saudi society.

Women's work today, as seen through simple observation, the media and statistics, faces challenging situation. New entrants to the Saudi labour market either have to face a high rate of unemployment - 26.9% in 2008 (MEP 2010:161), or accept poor working conditions in temporary jobs in the public or private sectors. This situation of women's work opposes the major goals of Saudi development plans regarding the labour force, such as calls for new work opportunities for women, and the "Saudization scheme", which aims for the gradual replacement of foreign labour with Saudi citizens, in addition to the flourishing economy in the last few years resulting from the high increase in oil price (MEP, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2010). However, there is a lack of understanding of the reasons behind these work conditions and how women respond to the changing conditions of employment.

Therefore, the overall aim of this study is to provide an analysis of and explanations for women's work in Saudi society within changing circumstances. To achieve this goal, the study will use in-depth interviews to provide a detailed analysis of different forms of women's paid and unpaid work and trace their development across different historical stages. Each form of economic activity is examined in relation to social stratification, based on class and tribe, and gender divisions of labour. A substantive aim of the study is to explore the factors that constructed women's work and shifted it from one condition to another through the contemporary history of Saudi regime. Another aim is to examine the impact of different forms of paid and unpaid work on women's identities and empowerment.

¹ Rowbotham (1973) addresses the phenomenon neglecting women in history as "hidden from history".

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These aims are achieved through the analysis of the work experiences of three generations of women from different socio-economic groups identified according to class, education, occupation. The first generation reveals the history of women's work experiences in the pre-oil boom era (1930s-1950s). The second generation reflects the experiences of the oil boom generation women (1960-1986). This was a transitional period in Saudi history and included the establishment of state-run girls' schools and women's access to employment in the public sector. The third generation focuses on the recent experience of women's work in the post-boom era (1987-2000s).

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken in the city of Abha, the administrative capital of "Asir, in the southwest region of Saudi Arabia. Abha was chosen as the site of the fieldwork for several reasons, first, the lack of social and anthropological studies on small Saudi cities and Abha in particular; the majority of previous studies have taken place in the two biggest cities, which include the three university sociology departments in the country². Understanding the conditions of women's work in small cities that comprise 35.8% of the Saudi population (MEP 2010:196) and where women have less access to employment opportunities, is a major requirement for balanced development. Second, there is a distinctive and rich experience of women's paid and unpaid work within the oral history of the pre-oil boom rural region of "Asir, which has been mentioned by some historians (Hamzah 1951; Philby 1952; Shaker 1981; Rafe'a 1954), but it is completely absent from social studies. Third, there are likely to be similar experiences of second and third generation women in Abha to that of their counterparts in other Saudi cities, especially small cities, who are concentrated in the educational and health sectors as the main fields of women's employment in KSA (Al-Dakheel 2000:176). Fourth, there are difficulties of conducting in-depth interviews and accessing women's lives and homes in Saudi society as a conservative society, as in the rest of the MENA region, which has been discussed by researchers such as Al-Torki and El-Solh (1988) and Abu-Lughd (1988). Thus, conducting field work in my home town of Abha, highlighting my identity as an insider researcher, was a major mechanism to overcome this difficulty. Being an insider researcher provided familiarity with the history and social structure of the city and enabled me to start my field work through my family's social network, snowballing the sample gradually to include

² King Sa'ud University and Imam Muhammad Ben Sa'ud Islamic University in Riyadh and King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah.

other informants from different socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, this strategy provided the study devoted gatekeepers who were also family members and friends.

In recent times, women's role in public life and their rights have been at the centre of internal and external calls for reform that the Saudi state has pledged to achieve, especially after Saudi ratification of the CEDAW convention in 2000 (UN 2007c), the reform strategy of Saudi Arabia after September 11 and the war on terror that accused the Saudi Wahhabi school of generating the ideology behind terrorism, and finally the country's intention to meet requirements for joining the World Trade Organization (Al-Rasheed 2007, 2010; Niblock 2006). At the local level, the Saudi media has recently carried articles and programmes debating the increasing participation of women in public life, their rights and new work opportunities. Therefore, with the state advocating a reform programme, this research seeks to provide some understanding of the changing position of women in the Saudi labour market, the factors that have constructed women's work experiences across different historical time periods, and the impact of work on women's lives. This will contribute to building a body of knowledge on women's work that provides a base for effective planning and reformation for women's position in Saudi society. Such knowledge would increase gender consciousness among women themselves and support women intellectuals and activists' claims for further rights and participation, which have been growing in the last decade in parallel with mass education and mass communication that intellectuals, such as Eickelman (1998), argue is changing today's world.

1.1 Thesis Structure

Chapter two provides an overview of the research setting of the city of Abha and the socio-economic and political changes that the city has experienced. The chapter starts with an outline of the geographical and demographic characteristics, which is followed by an historical presentation of Abha, clarifying the process of state building that the region went through in relation to Saudi Arabian history as a whole. The chapter also reviews the social stratification of the population of Abha based on tribal structure. A discussion is presented regarding major factors changing Saudi society, such as the economy, population structure and labour market, and finally the development of the cultural system with its contested discourses.

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Chapter three provides a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of Saudi women through major concepts of feminist theory and women's movements in the MENA region in particular. The chapter explores the position of women within patriarchal social systems and defines different forms of patriarchy in order to provide an understanding of gender structure and other concepts that build on it, such as gender order and gender regime. Characteristics of women's within patriarchal societies and how they respond to the patriarchal culture either by resistance or bargaining is also discussed. The chapter discusses the relationship between the state and gender and how this relationship is constructed by the 'state project' that varies in the MENA region between modernity projects or authenticity projects based on Islam, and how each project forms women's national identity, citizenship rights and state policies. The chapter explores women's position within the cultural system, which has put women at the centre of debates between liberals and conservatives or modernists and Islamists in Saudi society with regard to women's education, driving and employment. This debate includes female intellectuals and activists who have similar divisions towards women's issues. Then the chapter ends with a discussion on the concept of empowerment as a major goal of women's work.

Chapter four continues exploring women's position in MENA societies with a focus on the economic system. It contextualizes women's work through reviewing literature on different forms of paid and unpaid work in the MENA region, and Saudi society in particular, in three main sections. The first discusses women's unpaid work including household work and agricultural work. The second explores the literature on women's paid work starting with traditional paid work ending with considering the relevance of the characteristics of women's employment in MENA for Saudi working women. The third explores various factors that construct women's work. It uses Hijab's paradigm (1988, 2001) of the conditions for women's work in the MENA region as a framework, which includes firstly economic need, secondly opportunities for women's work that include state policies, class and gender segregation culture, and thirdly, women's ability to work through their educational and training preparation for their economic role.

Chapter five is the methodology chapter and discusses the methodological procedures used, including the research design and sampling, the two pilot studies and the nature of the main fieldwork. A fundamental goal of this chapter is to address the rationale for conducting qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with three generations of women across

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different socio-economic groups. A considerable part of the chapter comprises a discussion of the major strategies employed by the researcher to access women's private arena and gain their acceptance and trust, especially in a conservative patriarchal society where various restrictions on attitudes, actions and movement are applied to both the informants and the researcher. The chapter also discusses some useful strategies that were mobilised to conduct in-depth interviews, as well as reflections on the ethics of this qualitative study.

The thesis comprises five analysis chapters (six to ten) with the first two, chapters six and seven, focusing on the first generation women whose experience reflects the era from the 1930s to the 1950s, chapters eight and nine focus on the second generation who entered the labour market since the 1960s, and chapter ten examines third generation women who entered or were ready to enter the labour market between 1987 and 2006.

Chapter six focuses on the experiences of first generation women with unpaid household and agricultural work, while chapter seven focuses on their experiences with traditional paid work in the city market or in providing services for other women. In both chapters, women's work experiences are discussed in relation to class and the gendered division of labour. Chapter seven ends with a discussion about the impact of different forms of women's work on the collective identity and empowerment of first generation women.

Chapter eight examines the impact of rapid socio-economic changes and modernization on second generation women's paid and unpaid work and how these changes shifted traditional work to new forms. The chapter provides an analysis of the decline of women's work in agricultural and trading sectors, while household work retained its significant role despite the change in its nature and volume. The chapter discusses the role of education in empowering women and involving them in waged labour in the public sector in this era, while uneducated women became excluded from the labour market. Gender segregation became a major strategy for the state in this era to present its view of woman's role as modernised, but within an Islamic framework, presenting a compromise between the economic need for women's work in some sectors, and the requirement of the Islamic image of women within the Wahhabi interpretation. The chapter ends with a discussion on the relationship between work and class among this generation of women.

Chapter nine continues the discussion of the experiences of second generation women and the impact of socio-economic development and modernization enabling women from all

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classes to create a new middle class of professional women and elevate the class of some of their families. This chapter explores how, although empowering women with education and employment, state policies and the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam disempowered women by a package of contradictory and ambiguous rules that restricted women's agency in terms of their decision making, economic independence and mobility, and as a result limited the achievement of empowerment of boom generation women. The chapter also considers the influence of women's work on women's identity, shifting from a local 'Asiri to a national identity. This identity is characterized by contradictory features resulting from the new models of traditional/modern and the model of Islamic/un-Islamic women.

Chapter ten provides an overview of the experiences of third generation women who were ready to enter the labour market since 1987. This chapter explains how agricultural work became social history, and how some women of this generation returned to the traditional housewife role due to their difficulty in obtaining permanent jobs. The chapter discusses the increasing employment of this generation in the health and business sectors and the major current challenges they face of underemployment and unemployment. The chapter also discusses the experience of this generation in relation to class and gender segregation, and ends with a discussion of the impact of the recent deterioration of work conditions on the identity and empowerment of women from the third generation.

Chapter eleven provides a theoretical explanation of the findings in terms of the range of significant factors that constructed women's work across three generations in Abha, which include the economy, culture, religion, social stratification, state policies, gender segregation and education. Yet, the chapter argues that the central factor that directs all these factors has been the state political project, which in Saudi Arabia is based on the project of modernization within an Islamic framework. The chapter traces the development of this project across the three historical stages covered in this study with an explanation of how this project interacted with economic, cultural and social stratification differently in each era. The chapter explains the state mobilization of different mechanisms, including state policies, gender segregation system and education, to fulfil its project on women as symbols of the project of the modern/ Islamic society.

The concluding chapter, Chapter twelve, provides a theoretical discussion of the research in terms of the impact of work on women's identity and empowerment. It discusses how

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women have interacted with different forms of work experience and hence at the personal level there has been diversity among women's experiences with regard to their choices, access and gains from modernization projects including women's employment. However, at the collective level, work experiences have shaped women's identity in each historical era differently in response to the changing characteristics of the state political project. The chapter ends with a discussion of women's empowerment and how resources and agency of empowerment have been restricted across the three generations of women, which are interlinked with the limited achievement of Saudi women in the field of employment. The chapter ends with reflections relating to current reforms and the empowerment of women in the labour market and Saudi society in general.

2. Abha and Social Change

Abha, the administrative capital of the province of 'Asir, the site of the empirical study of this research, has been through several transformations since its integration with the Saudi state in 1338h./1920 (Al-Na'ami 1999:358; Ibn-Alyas cites in Ben-Jrais 2000:25). This transformed the region from a small independent emirate, apart from the time it was under Ottoman rule, to part of a state of 2,149,690 km² (Al-Naddaf 2009:15; UN 2007a) representing 80% of the size of the Arabian Peninsula. It became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in 1932 (Al-Rasheed 2010:1). The state building process took place throughout the following decades, yet the limitation of economic resources in the first half of the twentieth century slowed the modernisation process, but it increased rapidly in the 1960s with the rise of oil prices, which peaked in the period from 1973 to the mid-1980s. During this oil-boom era, the country became involved in world politics and economy, and converted from a traditional society to a country changing rapidly towards modernization and a neo-liberal economy. The state consequently developed its political project in a way that met the new requirements of its political-economic status, and at the same time emphasised its religious status as the birthplace of Islam (Al-Rasheed 2010; Doumato 1992).

In the last two decades, this project of modernization within an Islamic framework has been adversely affected by an unstable economy influenced by the global oil market and political events in the MENA region. Women's position in the Saudi labour market has been reconstructed by all the major transformations and, as contended by Wright Mills (1959), this research starts by exploring the research site, the city of Abha in relation to Saudi society in general, in order to contextualize women's work within major events and circumstances of the society.

2.1 Abha in the Wider Geographical Region

The city of Abha took its name from its location by the valley of Abha, and became the capital of 'Asir in 1828 when Prince 'Ali Ben Mejathel Al-Moghaidi, moved the capital from his village, Amseqa, to Abha (Al-Na'ami 1999:18,20). Originally Abha consisted of two large villages, Manadhir and Al-Qara, and gradually expanded to include a number of surrounding villages (Al-Na'ami 1999; Shaker 1981; Hamzah 1951). This was a major

feature of Arab cities, where borders between the city and the surrounding villages were not clear (Barakat 1993).

The region of 'Asir has an area of 81,000 Km square embracing 4290 villages (Emirate of 'Asir Region 1992) and extends along the western coastal plain called Tihamah to Tathlith by the edge of the eastern desert called Al-Ruba' Al-Khali, and from Belad Khath'am, north to Dahran Al-Janub south (Al-Na'ami 1999: 96). The centre of this region is situated in the highlands of the Al-Sarah Mountain range³ which contains the highest peak in the KSA, rising to 3000 meters in the Al-Suda Mountains, while Abha is situated 2200 meters above sea level (Farsi 2001:215). The city of Abha had an area of 4 Km square up to the 1960s (Al-Na'ami 1999:21), and expanded to become the heart of an urban centre of 50 Km square including the two biggest cities in 'Asir, Abha and Khamis Mushait, and all the villages in between (Al-Faisal 2000:119). The region's population is 1,858,557 representing 7.3% of the total Saudi population, putting the region in sixth place out of the 13 provinces in the country (KSA-CDS 2009:61). 'Asir as a rural area is characterized by relatively a dense population of 16.5 per square kilometre compared with the country's density of 10 per kilometre square in 2000 (United Nations 2008). The distinctive nature and geographical location formed the unique character of Abha. Philby, the British historian, who visited most of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s reported:

"The place had an air about it, a real personality – one might say a definite individuality. I have never seen another place quite like Abha" (Philby, 1952:140).

2.2 The region of 'Asir through different Historical Phases

The region of 'Asir had been part of the Emirate of Makkah since 631 AD, after Al-Serd Ibn Abdul-Allah Al-Azdi and a group of his people visited the Prophet Muhammad (PUH) and converted to Islam and took the responsibility of spreading the new faith in their region (Shaker 1981:114; Ben-Jrais 1994:631). 'Asir maintained its confederacy with the Islamic state of the four caliphates⁴ of Prophet Muhammad, Al-Umayyad State⁵ and 'Abbasid State⁶ (Shaker 1981; Ben-Jrais 1994).

³ Al-Sarah is a ridge of mountains that run parallel to the Red Sea from the north of the Arabian Peninsula to its south end in Yemen.

⁴ From 632- 655 AD

⁵ From 656-786 AD

⁶ From 786 –1172 AD, however 'Asir was not under this State all the time.

Figure 2.1 Map of Saudi Arabia including the region of 'Asir



Source: (The Saudi Network 2010)

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From the tenth century, the central Islamic 'Abbasid state weakened and its authority became limited to cities, while small towns and Arab tribes became partly independent. In 'Asir, local dynasts had developed alliances with the central state that ruled Makkah (Shaker 1981). This situation was explained by Ibn Khaldun (cited in Gellner 2005) who argued that Arab rural tribes strengthened and enjoyed greater independence at times when the central state had weakened and vice versa, as a weak state finds it very difficult to control rural areas where the tribes had their own weapons and were able to gain independence.

The Ottomans (1517-1918) confronted a similar situation in rural and Bedouin areas in the Arab world. In the Arabian Peninsula, Ottomans were mainly interested in Al-Hijaz, which is the province of the two Muslim holy cities, Makkah and Al-Madinah, in order to empower their status as the central Islamic State. Local dynasts of 'Asir consistently resisted Ottoman authority and experienced complete independence from the Ottomans in the 17th and 18th centuries (Shaker 1981). The 'Asir region enjoys some characteristics that have always fortified it against attack from internal and external enemies and supported its autonomy. First is its location in the mountainous region of Al-Sarah, and its rugged mountain routes, which Suleiman Pasha, the Ottoman ruler of 'Asir (1908-1912) explained had represented a major barrier in the Ottoman's struggle with 'Asiri force (Al-Qahtani 1992). In fact, 'Asir takes its name from the Arabic word "difficult", which might not only reflect the mountainous nature, but also the autonomous nature of its inhabitants (Al-Na'ami 1999: 16). This made the region known as "the solid bridge" between the strong states of Al-Hijaz (north) and Yemen (south) preventing them from extending their states towards each other (Shaker 1981: 142). Another characteristic is the fertile land of 'Asir that established its self-sufficient economy and dense population compared with the other vast desert territories of the KSA (Shaker 1981). These features of the land and the people supported 'Asir's resistance to Ottoman campaigns in the 19th century.

The Ottoman governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, in order to enforce his dominance on Al-Hijaz as the holy land for Muslims, struggled to control all the emirates of the Arabian Peninsula, including 'Asir. Historians (Shaker 1981; Al-Qahtani 1992; Al-Hammadi 2009) explain how three Ottoman campaigns (1816-1818) were defeated by Al-Mat'hami, the governor of 'Asir, and only the fourth campaign, in 1818, succeeded in controlling the region. 'Asir had become the only force resisting the Ottomans after the defeat of their

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main ally, the first Saudi state in Najd in the same year. This Ottoman campaign was supported by the alliance of neighbouring emirates, Al-Ashraf in Al-Hijaz, Imam of Yemen and Al-Shareef from Abu-Areesh (Tamizia 1993⁷; Shaker 1981). Nevertheless, the people of 'Asir gained their independence again in 1821 under the leadership of Ibn Musallat, and campaigns continued until the Ottomans finally entered Abha and announced it as their capital of 'Asir in 1875 (Shaker 1981). To prevent 'Asiri resistance, they reached a peace agreement with the local ruler, Al-'Aydh⁸ in 1905, appointing him as the local governor. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, following World War I in 1919, ended Ottoman rule in the Arabian Peninsula and in 'Asir the leadership reverted to Al-'Aydh (Shaker 1981)

Nevertheless, conflict between Arabian emirates over power soon developed, and in 'Asir Al-'Aydh were confronted by Al-Edrisi, the ruler of Jazan in the south west of 'Asir and Al-Sa'ud the ruler of Najd in the central region of the Arabian Peninsula. The people of 'Asir defeated Al-Edrisi, but lost the war against Al-Sa'ud in two campaigns in 1920 and 1921 which led to the integration of 'Asir into the Al-Saud state (Al-Na'ami 1999:358; Ibn-Alyas sites in Ben-Jrais 2000:25; Shaker 1981:265; Hamzah 1951:118⁹). After Abdul 'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud defeated Al-Ashraff in Al-Hijaz in 1925, the new state was given the name of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Al-Rasheed 2010).

The above historical overview illustrates not only the strong sense of autonomy that characterizes the 'Asiri identity, but also the unstable political situation in the region during the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century. International conflict, mainly between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, played a major role in ending the local rule of various emirates and establishing the consolidation of the new Saudi state that was supported by Britain as the main international power in the Arabian Peninsula after World War I (Al-Rasheed 2010; Al-Naqeeb 2008). Unlike other countries in the MENA region, the formation of Saudi Arabia did not go through anti-colonial struggle and inherited nationalist elite. The integration of 'Asir, as with other emirates, Al-Hijaz, Al-Hasa and Hail under the Saudi state in the 1920s, symbolizes the transformation of political authority

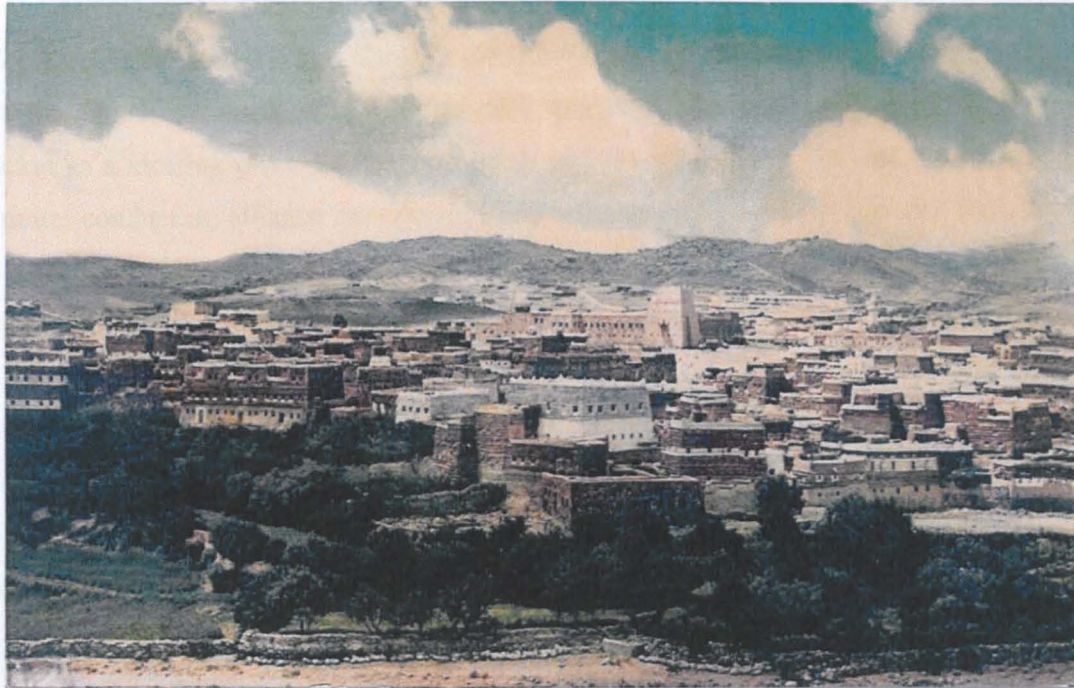
⁷ The original French edition was in 1840, while the 1993 edition is the Arabic translation by Al-Zulfa, M.

⁸ The Al-'Aydh family are descendants of the founder of Al-Umayyad State, Mu'awiyah Ben Abi-Sufyan (Ben-Mesfer 1979: 81-85).

⁹ These references provide detailed descriptions of the two Saudi campaigns on 'Asir, especially Shaker (1981).

in 'Asir from local to state control that later reconstructed social, cultural and economic life in 'Asir.

Figure 2.2 Old Abha in the 1950s¹⁰



2.3 The City of Abha and Social Stratification

The city of Abha emerged as a commercial centre because of its location in the heart of an agricultural region. Cities developed in accordance with their functions before any other factors (Barakat 1993:236). The previous discussion shows that Abha has been a political centre of the region and a defensive area throughout its history, which can still be seen through the wealth of castles and forts in Abha and its outskirts (Hamzah 1951; Ben Jrais 2002; Al-Sa'ud 1989).

Abha has also been a commercial centre serving the rural region with its surplus agricultural produce. The history of Abha points to the significance of the weekly Tuesday

¹⁰ A renowned photo of Abha, yet by an unknown photographer. The vast majority of buildings in this photo were removed in 1976, and the only remaining building has been part of the Shada palace in the middle of the city, which is the city museum today.

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market in establishing the city of Abha and serving the region (Al-Na'ami 1999). This market "Suq Al-Thulath'a", as in other rural societies, not only played a major role in the economic life of the region, it also had political and social roles, explained in other social studies, such as Geertz's study (1979) on Morocco, studies by Al-Ghamdi (1985) and Shokri (1983) on Al-Baha¹¹, north of 'Asir and historical studies in 'Asir, such as Tamizia (1993), Al-Hamed (2005) and Hamzah (1951). Tamizia (1993:154) who visited the region with an Ottoman campaign in 1834 gives examples of the political role of the weekly market as a meeting place for heads of tribes in the region to discuss major issues in the emirate, conducting alliance relationships and solving disagreements between individuals or tribes. Economic activities in 'Asir were coordinated through the Tuesday market in Abha with nineteen weekly markets both within the region and with neighbouring emirates (Al-Qahtani 1996; Al-Hamed 2005). The absence of news media gave the weekly market the responsibility of linking different parts of the region; isolated villages used to send someone called "Al-Habatah" to inform them of the news of the region (Al-Hamed, 2005: 845). Hamzah (1951) points to another social function of Al-Suq as a major site to establish marriage proposals. Young men who were searching for spouses visited the weekly market to choose from the village girls who came from different parts of the region to sell their products. Geertz (1979) argues that the market "Suq" is a key factor to understanding the culture in the MENA region, and that communicating with people of this culture is based on the principles of the market, mainly bargaining and mechanisms of negotiation, to reach the required results.

These various functions of the city provide a range of economic activities and occupations for the population of Abha as farmers, land owners, traders, manufacturers, military personnel, and employees in the public sector. Barakat (1993; 2000) provides an explanation of the stratification of Arab society and rural areas in particular, arguing that it is complicated and based on a number of factors, such as the size of land, income, occupation, tribal lineage and the social relations of power. Barakat's view (2000) of status is in line with Weber's (1979) view which conceptualises status as comprising three factors, property, prestige and power, which intersect together to form social stratification. Gellner (2005) points to another element of Arab society, tribal lineage. He compares

¹¹ Al-Baha region is north of Asir (See 2.1)

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Arabic society with a tree; the tribe "*Qabilah*", is the tree's main branches and the sub-tribe "*Asheera*" is the minor branches. In 'Asir, as a rural tribal society, the population belong to ancient Arab tribes. Suleiman Pasha¹² contends that their Arabic language is the purist and most fluent among all Arabs which might relate to their limited contact with outsiders (Al-Qahtani 1992:58). Those tribes trace their lineages back thousands of years, and each local tribe has its own territory divided between its branches "'Asheera'/'ama'er", which can exceed 100. Each branch settles in a village or a number of villages (Al-Na'ami 1999: 68-104) which shows how tribal origin "prestige" intersects with tribal property to indicate the social status of the tribe (Al-Na'ami 1999; Shaker 1981; Al-Hamed 2005). Those who belong to tribes, base their personal status in relation to the lineage of their tribe "*Asl*", and form strict norms regarding marriage with outsiders who might contaminate their purity of blood (Al-Rasheed 2003), which Ibrahim and Cole (1978) noticed is a more significant criterion than economic status among tribal groups.

In Saudi Arabia, tribes form political organizations that unite them in confederations, known among the static population in villages and cities as emirates, and exist in all regions: Najd, Al-Hasa, Al-Hijaz and 'Asir (Al-Rasheed 2003). The region of 'Asir takes its name from the main tribe 'Asir' which is a large confederation of four tribes: Mughaidh, 'Alkam, Rabi'a and Rufaida, and Bani Malik (Shaker 1981; Al-Na'ami 1999; Hamzah 1951). Furthermore, the region of 'Asir embraces other tribes surrounding the tribe of "'Asir, such as Shahran, Qahtan and Bani Hejer (Al-Na'ami 1999). Each of these major tribes includes two or three sub-tribes which differ in regard to their location and economic activities: Al-Sarah, in the highland of 'Asir where Abha is situated, is the major one, Tihama in the western coastland of the region is the second. These two settled tribes depend on agriculture as their main economic activity. The third group is Badiyah in the eastern part of 'Asir which is a nomadic group (Shaker 1981; Al-Na'ami 1999). This local classification dividing each tribe into three groups agrees with Al-Khiriji's (1983) general classification of the Saudi population based on their lifestyle - urban, rural and nomadic.

In addition to the tribal group, the population of 'Asir includes other social groups with no tribal lineage, which places them in a lower social position, limits the possibility of marriage between the two groups and determines the nature of their work. Shaker (1981)

¹² Ottoman ruler of Asir (1908-1912) (Al-Qahtani 1992: 48).

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and Hamzah (1951) explain how the majority of the tribal population is landowners and farmers working on their own lands, while the non-tribal groups do not own lands, and usually undertake some manufacturing work or provide services. Some were specialized in a specific manual job, for example, *Al-Sona* 'a undertook most manufacturing jobs, such as carpentry, blacksmithing and silver design, *Al-Fiyood* specialized in textiles, *Al-Mahaha* prepared and sold all types of old tinctures, and *Al-Balahtah* was the only group that specialized in playing drums and singing at social events. Other non-tribal groups, such as *Al-Hutum*, *Al-Kahalah*, and finally 'Abeed, from a slavery background, were not specialized and would undertake any work (Shaker 1981; Hamzah 1951). Historical studies do not provide an explanation for the low status of these social groups or if they are native residents or immigrants to the region. The only explanation is provided by Al-Dowsari (1998:63), a controversial study, who argues that some of these groups, *Hutum* and *Fiyood* in particular, lost their tribal status as a result of social punishment for their ancestors who collaborated with enemies¹³ that attacked the region in the old days.

According to Barakat (2000), social stratification occurs throughout the Arab rural society. Combining the strong bond of tribal lineage and the bond with the land resulted in family members working as a unit and social solidarity across the whole rural society. This was confirmed by historians (Al-Na'ami 1999; Ben-Jrais 1994; Shaker 1981, Hamzah 1951) who detected different forms of solidarity, especially at the time of harvest, ensuring the supply of water, building houses and defending their villages or region. The same historians, in addition to Philby (1952) and Al-Dawood (1995), pointed to hospitality as another distinguishing characteristic of the people of 'Asir, which determined family and individual status in the region. These characteristics might contribute to forming historians' impression of the people of the region that:

"They are friendlier and open to mixing with foreigners from people of other surrounding tribes . . . " (Hamzah, 1951:125).

While most history books on 'Asir focus on political history of states, rulers and wars and on discussions about the genealogy of the tribes of the region, reference to the social history of the people of the region, especially women, is hardly found. Rowbotham (1973) calls this phenomenon of neglecting women by historians as "hidden from history". She

¹³ Al-Qaramettah and Al-Raswleen.

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argued that women do not have an acknowledged history because society does not see them as an independent group with particular rights. In fact, the frequent wars and rebellions caused displacement and suffering of the people, exhausted the poor economy and limited development projects (Shaker 1981; Tamizia 1993; Hamzah 1951). Occasional comments on women were included within some foreign historians' descriptions (Shaker 1981; Rafe'a 1954; Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951) relating to the region's dress and marriage customs. They also agree on the distinctive economic role performed by women of 'Asir and their relative freedom compared within other regions, as described by Philby (1951:142, 146):

The women of all but the higher classes go about freely and unveiled in a rather attractive smock with a belt which gives the skirt a kilted effect and shows off the figure to greater advantage than the voluminous, all-embracing mantles of Najd This does not by any means refer only to the older ladies, for in my wandering I had noticed many young women, comely enough and buxom, with well-moulded figures and generally of cheerful, happy demeanour.

Although upper class women were not visible in public places, in their homes they welcomed their male guests and served them as in Philby's story when he visited an upper class family in Abha:

It is the custom to welcome a guest immediately on his arrival by producing a brazier with incense burning on the charcoal to perfume the room It was a woman who deposited the brazier with a word of greeting on her lips, Irhabu – "welcome to you" They are certainly more free and easy than the women of Najd, where such an incident could not possibly have happened. (Philby 1952: 146)

This explanation reflects the specificity of the local culture of 'Asir that was influenced by the rural lifestyle requiring the participation of all family members in work, and a lesser degree of social constraint on women (Barakat, 2000; Shokri 1983). However some historians, such as Hamzah (1951, 131), considered this lifestyle as improper behaviour that required intervention from the state, pointing to the start of the cultural contestation between the local 'Asiri culture and the new Wahhabi discourse, that will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.4 The Economy of 'Asir and Saudi Arabia

When 'Asir became part of the new state of Saudi Arabia in 1932, it supplied the capital (Riyadh) and other cities with crops of wheat, barley, corn, vegetables and fruits (Hamzah

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1951:113). The new state inherited a very unstable political situation and a meagre economy from the Ottomans and previous dynasties. 'Asir and other agricultural oases¹⁴ supplied the country with basic food needs, and the main income was generated through *Zakah*¹⁵ and pilgrims who visited Makkah and Al-Medinah, the two holy cities. In the best of years (1930s-1940s), the pilgrimage taxes never exceeded a maximum of two million dollars (Cheney 1958:34, cited in Al Baadi 1982). Foreign aid (largely British) was the other source of income (Al-Baadi 1982; Kostiner 1992), as the natural resources of the country were very limited. In other parts of the country, nomads lived from grazing cattle, while fishing was the main source of support for people who lived by the coast¹⁶ (Al-Khrijji 1983).

In 1938, oil was discovered in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. However, development was delayed due to the onset of the Second World War (1939-1945) and the monopolisation by the 'Seven Sisters' multinational companies¹⁷ of the oil and its revenue in all the Arabian Gulf countries (Al-Rumaihi 1995b). In 1950, Saudi Arabia reached an agreement with these companies on sharing oil profits equally (Al-Rumaihi 1995; Al-Nageeb 2008). Although this improved the oil revenue, it did not achieve the desired income until 1970, when OPEC¹⁸ began to control the oil price, increasing it to \$6 per barrel in 1973 (Al-Nageeb 2008; Palmowski 2004). Other factors played a part in the huge increase in oil prices in the 1970s, including the massive global demand for oil, the Arab oil boycott of western allies of Israel in the Arab-Israel War in 1973, and the Iranian revolution in 1979 which stopped oil production (Al-Rumaihi 1995). The Saudi economy, as a result of the sharp rise in petroleum revenues in the 1970s, developed into one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The country became one of the main producers of oil and natural gas, embracing more than 20% of the world's petroleum reserves (The World Factbook 2008). It ranks as the largest exporter of oil, and plays a major role in OPEC. The petroleum sector accounts for nearly 75% of Saudi budget revenues, 90% of export

¹⁴ Al Hassa in the eastern region, Al kharj, Hail and Al Qaseem in the central region.

¹⁵ Zakat is the fourth out of five principles of Islam. This pillar refers to giving of a fixed portion of one's wealth to the poor and needy in annual base (Al-Qardawi 2005).

¹⁶ The Saudi coasts line comprise 1800 km in the west and 500 km on the eastern coast

¹⁷ Five companies were American, one was British and the seventh was a British Dutch Company. These companies controlled 80% of the global oil production and 70% of the of the global oil industry (Al-Rumaihi, 1995 b: p.23).

¹⁸ Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was established by five oil-producing and developing countries including Saudi Arabia in 1960.

earnings and 45% of GDP, while about 40% of GDP comes from the private sector (The World Factbook 2008).

This rapid economic growth in the boom era led to the modernization of Saudi society through five-year development plans. The country's first three development plans (MEP, 1970, 1975, 1980) focused on developing infrastructure, transportation, airports, seaports, and educational institutions, and establishing industrial cities, Al-Jubail and Yanbu. Starting from the fourth plan (MEP, 1985), as a result of the slowdown of economic growth, the focus shifted to employment, regional development, economic diversification, non-oil industries, and agriculture. In addition to focusing on earlier issues, the last two development plans (MEP, 2005, 2010) have reflected the growing oil revenue and the state's response to recent social and economic challenges, mainly meeting the requirements of transforming to a liberal economy, privatization, international investment, unemployment, and women's economic participation.

Figure 2.3 Modern Abha¹⁹



Contrasting with Al-Falih's (2000) critique of the limited development of small cities, such as Sekakah in the Northern Province, Abha was fortunate to attract some modernization projects including the development of infrastructure, the civil service and a military base. A

¹⁹ Photo taken by the researcher in 2006.

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large number of schools and colleges, established in the 1970s and early 1980s, were integrated in 2003 under one university, King Khalid University (Al-Faisal 2000; Ben-Jrais 2003; KKU, 2011).

However, this rapid modernization, alike with other oil exporters in the MENA region, is argued to contribute to the macro-transformation from an economy of self-sufficiency to dependency on the revenue that comes from exporting natural resources (Karshenas and Moghadam 2001; Al-Rumaihi 1995b; Sharabi 1988); Al-Naqeeb (2008:122) characterises this type of economy in the Arabian Gulf countries as "Rentier economy"²⁰. The agricultural sector, for instance, has been a major concern of the development plans (MEP, 1975; 2005) and has supported the foundation of large-scale agricultural production units (MEP, 1975), which has enlarged farming land to 26.4% in the Riyadh region and 15% in Al-Qaseem and Al-Juff. Traditional farming in 'Asir has not benefited from this development and farming land has shrunk to only 2% of the total land (MEP 2010:515). The import of equipment, fertilizers, and labourers has made the country more dependent on foreign contributions to produce food (Metz and Chapin, 1992). Al-Sakran (2006) and Al-Faisl (2000) also explain how rural-urban emigration has represented a major challenge for both traditional and private agriculture. From an environmental perspective, Metz and Chapin (1992) argue that the agricultural programme has caused a serious drain on the country's water resources, drawn mainly from non-renewable aquifers, and has required the use of massive amounts of chemical fertilizers to boost yields.

Another impact of modernization on Abha is the struggle with its new identity. According to Al-Faisal²¹ (2000:122-128) the modernization project of Abha, despite its success in linking Abha, Khamis Mushait and the surrounding villages to constitute an urban centre, a major disappointment has been the changing identity of the city by the complete replacement of old buildings and streets with modern ones since 1976, sacrificing the material symbols of the local culture (see Figures 2.2 and 2.4). He attributes the failure to preserve the old city to bureaucracy that restricted establishing the new city on vacant land between Abha and Khamis Mushait. The county's desire to retain some of the declining cultural specificity of Abha, possibly as a later tourist attraction, called for implementing

²⁰ Al-Naqeeb borrowed this concept from Mahdavy's study (1970) on Economic Development in Iran.

²¹ The governor of the Emirate of 'Asir (1971- 2007) (Al-Faisal 2000).

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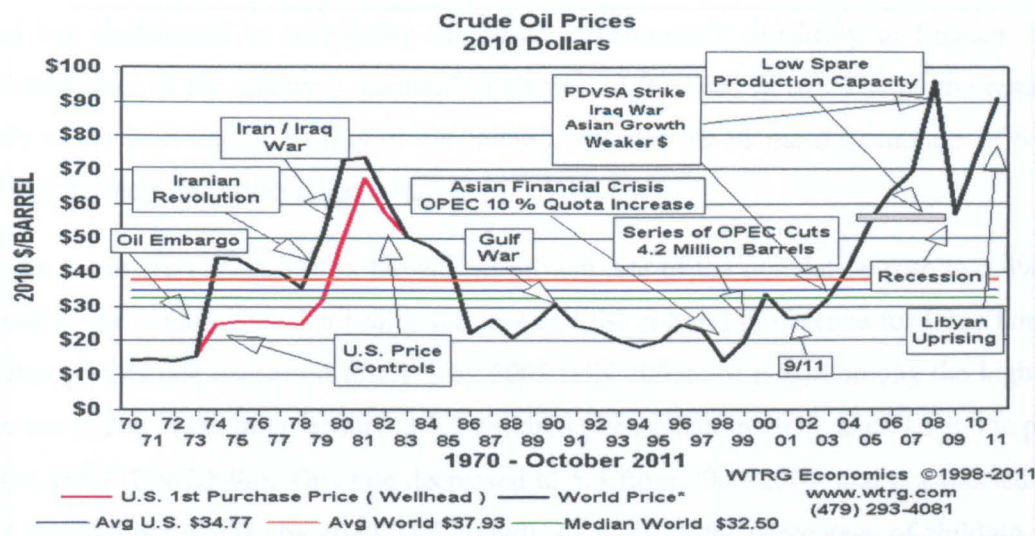
'Asiri architecture on modern buildings in the city, especially buildings of government departments, hospitals and the university (Al-Faisal 2000; Ben-Jrais 2002).

Tourism has been one of the strategies for developing a non-oil dependent economy that has emerged in 'Asir since 1980 (Al-Faisal, 2000). The beautiful nature of the region and its mild climate²² makes it an attraction during the summer, not only for Saudis, but also for people from Arabian Gulf countries (Al-Kahtani, 1997). Although aiming to create new work opportunities in the region and to improve other economic fields such as manufacturing industries (Al-Faisal, 2000; Al-Kahtani 1997), statistics indicate that Saudi males do not exceed 15% of the total employment in the tourism sector and female workers are completely absent (MEP, 2005). However, the future aims of the Supreme Commission for Tourism in the eighth development plan (2005) include increasing the percentage of Saudi workers in tourism, developing traditional industries and crafts, especially home made products, and increasing education and training institutes of tourism (MEP 2005), which might open new work opportunities for women in Asir, although this was not declared in the plan.

Nevertheless as a "Rentier economy" (Al-Naqeeb 2008:105) that depends on the global oil market, the rapid economic growth and development has been reshaped differently. The collapse of oil prices in 1987 ended the oil boom era and, with the high cost of the Gulf War in 1990, the Saudi economy experienced a new era of recession throughout the 1990s (Al-Rasheed 2010; Vassiliev 1998; Metz and Chapin 1992). The estimated \$60 billion that the Gulf War cost the country in 1990 was disastrous for government finances (Niblock 2006:89; Kostiner 1997:11), and the government was forced to borrow on the international market, reduce support for state projects and reduce spending on free public services that Saudis had enjoyed in the boom era (Al-Rasheed 2010; Vassiliev 1998).

²² In Abha, the average temperature in July is 22 Celsius, while it is in the 40s Celsius at the majority of Saudi and Arabian Gulf cities (Moa 2009).

Figure 2.4: Oil Price History



Source: (WTRG Economics 2011)

However, the same oil market has provided the Saudi economy with its highest revenue in the last few years (Inflation Data, 2009). Following the invasion of Iraq, the oil price increased from \$27.7 per barrel in 2003 to \$37.7 in 2004 (Inflation Data, 2009), and reached the highest level ever in 2007 (Al-Rasheed 2010:217). By mid-2008, this assumed second boom in oil prices dropped from above \$145 a barrel in July 2008 to \$46 a barrel in December 2008, with average prices in 2009 and 2010 standing at 56.35\$ and 57\$ respectively, while the events of the Arabian revolutions in 2011, especially in Libya, led to the rise of oil prices again to 85\$ (WTRG Economics 2011). In a global energy market, these growing uncertainties continue to represent a high risk and threat to every aspect of the Saudi economy, as with other MENA societies that transformed to an oil led economy (El-Saadawi 1988; Barakat 1993; Al-Rumaihi 1995; UNDP 2009a; Cordesman 2003). The early years of the 21st century have included the second oil boom era and a developing Saudi economy in a globalized world must confront external pressure to undertake reforms to encourage foreign investment, to enable involvement in the liberal economy and World Trade Organisation, in addition to increasing privatisation (Niblock, 2006). In parallel, internal pressures call for developing the labour force and creating new work opportunities to absorb the increasing number of new entrants to the labour market (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

2.5 The Saudi Population and the Labour Market

The population growth in Saudi Arabia is one of the highest in the world (Winckler, 2008) and has contributed to restraining the Saudi government's capability to finance further enhancement of the country's standard of living (Al-Rasheed 2010). This is the result not only of the high rate of fertility in the country, but also the increasing numbers of foreign labourers and rural-urban migration.

In the boom era (1970s-1986), the annual growth rate of the population rose to 5.4% as a result of the improvement in health services and the cultural preference for large families. Although this rate decreased to 2.1% by 2005 (UN 2007a), it is still among the highest in the world due to the high fertility at 7.2 children per woman in 1955, and 7.3 in the period 1974-1985 (UN 2009a). This rate decreased to 5.5 from 2000-2005, and is expected to be 3.2 children per woman by 2020 (UN 2009d). As a result, the percentage of children under 15 years of age reached its peak in 1980 at 44.3%, decreasing slightly to 39.6% in 2000 and to 37.3% in 2005 (UN 2007b). Development plans have been consistently challenged by this rapid growth in the population, shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The Population Growth in Saudi Arabia

Population (in thousands)	Year
3 121	1950
3 535	1955
4 041	1960
4 787	1965
5 772	1970
7 345	1975
9 801	1980
13 220	1985
16 139	1990
18 492	1995
20 045	2000
24 041	2005
27 448	2010
30 538	2015 (projection)
33 535	2020 (projection)

Source: (UN (ESA) 2012)

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Foreign labour represents another pressure on development; in 2008, the labour force was 8,020,000 including 4,260,000 (53.1%) expatriates, while Saudis constitute 3,760,000 (MEP, 2010: 155). At the same time, Saudi female workers represent only 12% of the total labour force (MEP, 2010: 155). The massive number of foreign labourers were invited to KSA in the 1970s to address the severe shortage of labour in the boom era and, despite calls since the third development plan (MEP 1980) to restrict their size, numbers have grown from 1,328,000 in 1970 (MEP, 1980: 120) to 8,430,000, foreign population including 4,310,000 labour in 2009 (MEPb 2010:1-2).

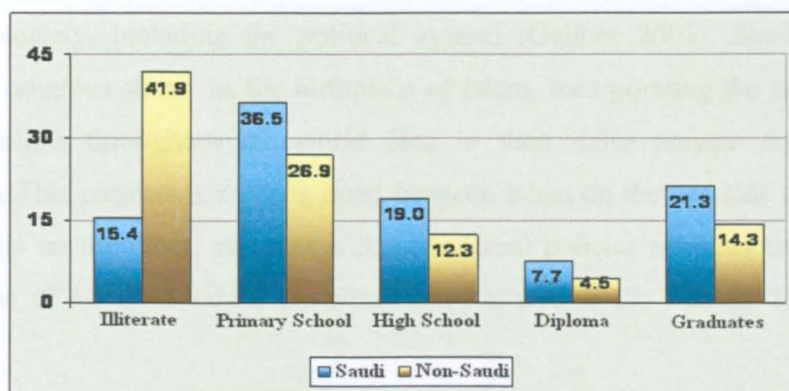
Rural–urban migration is another challenge for socio-economic development. In Asir, migration has been in two directions either within the region, mainly to Abha, or to one of the bigger cities (Al-Amudi 1994; Al-Shahrani 1996; Al-Sakran and Muneer 2006), determined by the concentration of new work opportunities and services (Al-Gotob 1979; Al-Shahrani 1996). In the 1970s, rapid development of the oil industry in the Eastern region attracted 55% of national job seekers, while the rest migrated to Jeddah (21%) and to Riyadh (17%) (MEP 1975: 34-36). By 2010, population density became concentrated in Riyadh and Western and Eastern regions (MEP 2010: 179), while ‘Asir was in fourth place (MEP 2005: 209). The structure of the Saudi population has been influenced by migration, as the number of people living in urban areas grew from 21.3% in 1950 to 58% in 1975 and 81% of the population in 2006, which indicates the urban majority today (UN 2007b).

This rapid population growth has been a challenge to the labour market since the mid-1980s when the large number of children born in the 1970s children became new entrants into the labour market. This led to the emergence of the Saudization scheme that called for restrictions on importing foreign labour and the gradual replacement of these workers with Saudis (MEP 1985:114). However, the increasing rate of unemployment of Saudis shows that this aim has not been achieved (Dourmato 2003; Al-Rasheed 2010; Niblock 2006), as unemployment has become a serious challenge, estimated by official statistics at 9.6% in 2003 reducing to 7.04% in 2004 (MEP 2005:191), rising again to 10% in 2008 (MEP 2010:161). However, non-official sources argue that the actual unemployment rate could be as high as 30% (Raphaelli 2003:23; Hardy 2006), or even 35% (Shah 2006:3). In line with global feminization of unemployment (Moghadam 2003), women's unemployment in KSA increased from 21.7% in 2002 (MEP, 2005:372) to 26.9% in 2008 (MEP 2010:161), while

among men the rate was 7.6% in 2002 (MEP 2005: 372) decreasing to 6.8% in 2008, (MEP 2010:161).

Unemployment reflects the downside of economic globalization (Moghadam 1999), and in the MENA region, the rate in 2005 was 14.4% of the labour force compared with a world rate of 6.3%. The Arab Human Development Report (UN 2009a:10) identified unemployment in Arab countries as one of the main threats to stability in the region. In Saudi society, the situation is more complicated as unemployment does not reflect deficiency in labour demand, but the structure of a labour force that depends on foreign labour (MEP 2003). Despite the Saudization scheme, the number of expatriate workers continues to expand, with an annual growth rate of growth at 2.4% (MEP 2005: 176). During the period 2000-2005, 45.2% of 836,800 new work opportunities went to foreign labour (MEP 2010: 155). While some studies (MEP 2009; Doumato 2003; Al-Rasheed 2010) explain the high rate of unemployment as due to the resistance of the private sector to "Saudization", especially after the reduction of work opportunities in the public sector, private employers argue that Saudi graduates are not sufficiently qualified, have no experience and lack a positive attitude towards work (Barakat 2000; Madhi and Barrientos 2003; Shah 2006; Niblock 2006). However, statistics (MEP 2005) show that the majority of foreign labourers have low qualifications, and Saudis are among the most highly qualified workers in the labour market, as shown in (figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Labour Force, Education and Nationality



Source: (Ministry of Economy and Planning 2005:177)

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Doumato (2003) points to the role of powerful businessmen who have a great deal of influence on economic policies and consider the Saudization scheme against their financial interests. Al-Torki and Bagader (2006) and Ibrahim (1985) attribute this attitude among employers to their immense authority over foreign labour due to the sponsorship scheme "Kafeel", which restricts visa and residency to employers' permission. Furthermore, this scheme has become a source of income for some Saudis who, in return for providing visas, receive a monthly payment from foreign labourers (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006). The power of the private sector in all MENA societies was expected to increase with economic transformation since the 1980s, from state-directed development to a neoliberal strategy (privatization), while the legal status of employees required serious improvements (Moghadam 2003).

In relation to women's unemployment, Boserup and Kanji (2007) argue that rapid changes and development in the Arabian Gulf countries have led to tension between different generations and the sexes, creating pressure groups aiming to preserve or reintroduce the traditional structure and its gender bias through the marginalization of women and dependence on mass foreign manpower. Although Hijab (1988) agrees with this view, she contends that cultural barriers in the MENA societies have been reduced to the minimum whenever women's paid work was needed either by society or their families. As women's work is the core of this study, chapter four will discuss this issue in more detail.

2.6 Contestation within the Cultural System:

In Muslim societies, Islam represents a comprehensive social system that organizes the whole of society, including the political system (Gellner 2005). Saudi Arabia has a distinctive religious status, as the birthplace of Islam, incorporating the two holy cities to which Muslims throughout the world face in their daily prayers and travel to for pilgrimage. This constructs a strong bond between Islam on the one side and political and social orders on the other, and makes Saudi internal policies not only the concern of its citizens, but of Muslims across the world (Al-Rasheed 2010; Yamani 1996; Al-Gudami 2004).

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Hence, comprehending Saudi culture requires knowledge of Islamic principles and history that represent the first phase of Akbar's model²³ (2002) for the development of Muslim society ending with the stage of contemporary Islam as the sixth stage. Islam is a monotheistic religion, which Muslims do not regard as a new religion but as the final word of the monotheism message from God "Allah". This message was preached by a series of prophets (Vaglieri 1963:55) starting with Adam and ending with Muhammad, peace upon them all (The Noble Quran: Surah 8, Ayah 59,65,73,85). Islam means surrender and submission to Allah (Scott and Marshall 2009:374). Thus, Muslims have to prove this submission by actions through four practical principles, praying, fasting, alms tax and pilgrimage, showing that Islam is a religion of both beliefs and actions (Hoffman 1993; Bagader 2004; Gellner 2005). The Qur'an asserts this interpretation on many occasions, one of which is:

"By Al- 'Asr (the time). Verily, man is in loss, Except those who believe and do righteous good deeds...."(The Noble Quran Surah 103)

In line with the above emphasis on both belief and action, Geertz (1993) considers religion as a cultural system with a theoretical side represented by meaning and a practical side represented through rituals, which Geertz (1968; 1995) argues is the dynamic part of the religion influenced by an historical and social context which has resulted in diversity in terms of the way these rituals are practiced in different Muslim societies. For instance, in the Arabian Peninsula, pre-Saudi state, various interpretations of Islam were practiced in different regions. Al-Hijaz, as the land of the two holy cities for all Muslims, embraced the four main Sunni schools²⁴ (Yamani 2006), while the Eastern region has been the homeland of the Shi'i school (Al-Rasheed, 2003). In Najd, Wahhabiya has been the dominant school since the 18th century, whereas in 'Asir, the Shafa'i school was dominant despite the adoption of Al-Mat'hami, rulers of 'Asir in the 18th century, to the Wahhabi school, as an ally to the first Saudi State (Shaker 1981; Hamzah 1951).

Wahhabiya is a Salafi movement that spread to many Muslim societies and is based on the idea of purification of Islam, rejecting what was known as peasant and tribal beliefs and

²³ Akbar's model (2002:30-32) divided Islamic history into six stages: the Ideal stage of the Prophet and his four successors era, Arabian dynasties (Umayyad and Abbasid), Islamic Empires (Moghul, Safawi, Othman), Border Islam (India, Indonesia and former Soviet Islamic states) and Contemporary Islam.

²⁴ The main four Sunni schools are Malki, Shafa'i, Hanafi and Hanbali.

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practices (Gilsenan 1987:151-152). Although Wahhabis²⁵ like to be categorised as Salafi, this study and others (Al-Rasheed 2007; Lacroix 2004) use the name Wahhabiya to distinguish Saudi Salafi from others, yet without the implications of linking Wahhabiya with terrorism as in the western media and some academic publications. Sheikh Abd Al-Wahhab established this movement in Najd in the 18th century and called for a return to pure monotheism not only in beliefs but also in actions (DeLong-Bas 2004). He deplored any form of heterodoxy or religious laxity (Al-Rasheed 2007) that might be contrary to monotheism, even if it was honouring the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Al-Munajjed 1997). Secondly, this movement believed that Islamic law should be re-implemented on the Arabian Peninsula (DeLong-Bas 2004). Finally, Al-Sheikh believed that the two sources of Islam, Al-Qur'an²⁶ and Al-Hadith²⁷, can be followed directly without the interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence schools, causing disagreement with Muslim scholars outside Najd (DeLong-Bas 2004). This revival movement gained power through establishing an alliance with Muhammad Ben Saud, prince of Dr'iya²⁸, which supported the first Saudi state (1744-1818) with a religious legitimacy to extend its control over the middle, eastern and western territories of Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2003, 2007). However this was not accepted by the Ottomans who launched a campaign that ended the first Saudi State and crushed its capital in 1818 (Shaker 1981; Al-Rasheed 2007, 2010).

Wahhabi discourse was reintroduced by the Saudi state in the 20th century (Barakat 2000), as the dominant school of Islamic law, education, and culture (Yamani 2003, 1996). In addition to the old alliance of the Wahhabis with the Saudi rulers, other factors have been emphasised by some studies that will be referred to here briefly as they all contribute to constructing the distinctive status of the Wahhabi school in KSA. First, the need of the new Saudi state to unify its people from various backgrounds under one national identity (Doumato 1999). This started with the dominance of Wahhabi scholars in preaching in the two holy mosques in Makkah and Al-Madinah, and the role of the religious police in enforcing Wahhabiya interpretation in public life (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006). Second, the influence of members of the Muslim Brotherhood fleeing from secular states in Syria and

²⁵ This school is known as Salafi, people of Al-Sunnah and Al-Jamma'ah or Wahhabi.

²⁶ The Qur'an is Islam's holy book.

²⁷ Al-Hadith is the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁸ Dr'iya is a small town in central Najd, which is referred to as the Al-Riyadh region.

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Egypt in constructing state policies and educational curriculum in KSA (Lacroix 2005). Third, the rise of challenging ideologies in the MENA region, such as Arab nationalism in both its versions, Nasserite in Egypt and Ba'ath in Iraq and Syria (Al-Rasheed 2010; Yamani 1996; Niblock 2006), and the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 (Yamani 1996). Fourth, oil wealth enabled the Saudi state to expand Wahhabi discourse through establishing mosques, schools, charity organizations and to support religious groups throughout the Islamic world (Kandiyoti 1991; Al-Rasheed 2007, 2010; Merrissi, 1992). Fifth, the attack on the Grand Mosque in Makkah in 1979 was interpreted as a rebellion against the state and its modernization project (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Yamani 1996). Sixth, the support of the USA and the west for this doctrine as a revival movement employed during the Cold War to resist the expansion of communism and socialism in MENA societies, especially in Afghanistan in the 1980s (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Rasheed 2007). These factors prompted the Saudi state to formulate a political project that stressed an image of Saudi Arabia as the ideal Muslim society, which included King Faisal's adoption to pan-Islamism and his revival of the World Muslim Congress, while the economic status of the country stressed the significance of modernisation (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Rasheed 2010; Doumato 1992). This formed a dual project of modernisation within an Islamic framework (Al-Rasheed 2010: 10).

It is important to note that the dominance of Wahhabi discourse has always been contested by groups, such as other Islamic scholars, liberals and intellectuals, of which Salafi scholars might be the most challenging. Sidani (2005) explains how moderate Salafi scholars, such as Al-Gazali, Al-Qaradawi, Abu-Shaqqa and Al-Turabi, criticize all traditional interpretations of Islam as not representing Islam but traditions, especially regarding women's rights. Inside the country, Islamic scholars in Al-Hijaz retain their independent thoughts; however, their marginal status has not enabled them to debate with Wahhabi scholars (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Yamani 1996, 2006), whereas the Shi'a school in the Eastern Region supported their autonomy (Al-Rasheed 2003). In 'Asir, the dominant school was Shafi'i with simplicity and pure faith described by Suleiman Pasha²⁹ as "*people of Asir are far from any form of heterodoxy, and hold on the pure faith of the early phase of Islam*" (Al-Qahtani 1992:58), while Wahhabi discourse reflects the old culture of tribes of Najd

²⁹ The Ottoman ruler of 'Asir (1908-1912).

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and the toughness of the desert nature (Doumato 2000; Al-Alma'ai 2010; Al-Ghazali 2009). Nevertheless, various mechanisms of the Wahhabi school have gradually spread its thoughts across the region. In a recent novel, Al-Hasher (2009) explains how the educational curriculum and preaching by Wahhabi scholars have shifted 'Asiri culture, including their view of women, focus on women's sexuality as tempting "*Fetnah*", which not only has reconstructed gender relationships between family members and neighbours that was not common in a rural region like 'Asir, but also has legitimized men's oppression over women. Saudi liberals, such as Al-Hamad (1999), contest that Wahhabi discourse has for decades been resisting modernization projects, such as establishing a Radio station, T.V station, girls' schools, mobile telephones, TV satellite dish receivers and the internet. According to Al-Hamad, all these projects were turned down, and mechanisms of prevention and repression were called for, without providing any positive alternatives. The social realm has been the focus of Wahhabiya preaching including on family law, marriage, divorce and the new controversial form of marriage "*Missyar*"³⁰, and supports polygamy which confirms the superior status of men within this discourse (Bashatah 2009), while the political and economic realms are absent from their preaching (Al-Rasheed 2007).

A number of events in the last two decades have established new thoughts and reconstructed cultural and political systems in Saudi society. First, the Gulf War in 1990 and the collaboration of the Saudi state with American and international troops represented a turning point for Wahhabiya, not only influencing the old liaison with the state, but also dividing Wahhabi scholars into two major factions (Barakat 2000; Lacroix 2004; Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2007) - official old Wahhabi supporting the government as the war was seen as an emergency circumstance and without this international help all Gulf countries might have faced a critical situation, and young Wahhabis who were against this collaboration and the invasion of another Muslim country, and considered the international presence on Saudi land as a new form of colonialism (Al-Rasheed 2007; Lacroix 2004). Second, the sharp change in the view of the western media and academics about Wahhabiya, following the events of September 11, from "an authentic revivalist unitarian Muslim tradition", to "the discourse of hatred, intolerance and terrorism", as well as

³⁰ A new form of marriage in which the wife waives her rights of housing, maintenance money "*Nafaqah*" and living together, and usually keeps the announcement of the marriage at a minimum level (Al-Munjed 2011).

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considering Wahhabiyya as responsible for limiting human, women's and minority rights in KSA (Al-Rasheed 2007:7, 9). Although Wahhabiya was a supportive discourse to the western struggle during the Cold War (Al-Rasheed 2007), the west adopted a new strategy of fighting Wahhabiya through the "War on Terror", putting pressure on the Saudi state to reduce the authority of Wahhabis in social, cultural and political areas (Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2010). Third, the Saudi state's application for membership of the World Trade Organisation along with ratification of international conventions, such as the rights of children in 1996 (UN Treaties 2011a) and women's rights in 2000 (UN, Treaties 2011b), which represents another form of international pressure to restructure the socio-economic and political systems.

This new era, that Al-Torki (2000: 225) describes as "the emergence of participatory demands and halting political reforms", has encouraged reformists from Islamic and liberal backgrounds to increase their demands for reform. For example, the head of the Saudi state was petitioned in 1990 by a group of liberals, and two months later another petition was presented by a group of Wahhabis (Al-Torki 2000). These petitions, along with all previous factors of change, encouraged the state to announce the 1992 political reforms establishing the Basic Law of the Government, the Law of the Provinces and the Consultative Council "Majles Al-Shura"³¹ (Al-Torki 2000; Al-Rasheed 2010; Niblock 2006). In 2003, the first National Dialogue Conference in KSA was held, and embraced Islamists and intellectuals from different backgrounds who requested the implementation of the rule of law, equal rights for all people, the emergence of a true civil society, a fair distribution of wealth, serious measures against corruption and waste, the diversification of the country's revenue, improvement of public services, the struggle against unemployment, and giving women their Islamic rights (Lacroix 2004; Al-Rasheed 2010; Niblock 2006). This conference represented a new trend of openness, greater acceptance of all groups and minorities and the end of the Wahhabi monopoly of the cultural domain.

There has been limited emergence of a civil society in Saudi Arabia, the last decade has witnessed the birth of some civil society organizations, such as the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in 2004 and, for the first time Saudi Arabia organized Municipal

³¹ The Consultative Council "Majles Al-Shura" in Saudi Arabia plays a substitute role for parliament, as all members are appointed by the state.

elections in 2005, although without women's participation (Al-Rasheed 2010). The new regime of King Abdul Allah has adopted a comprehensive strategy of reform in the economy, education, infrastructure and employment which has led to further participation from intellectuals in constructing strategies to address demanded reforms. Al-Rasheed (2007) argues that political and religious debate has always existed in the MENA societies. However, the development of communication technologies allows debates in the 21st century to advance more quickly and to include larger numbers of people.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the region of 'Asir and Saudi society in general, and has traced the major historical events, economic activities, socio-economic development, religio-political relationships and change throughout the process of building the Saudi state. The rapid changes in Saudi society since the beginning of the 20th century reflect the transformation, alike with other MENA countries, from an old society to a new state (Geertz 1963). These included changes in social structure and solidarity from tribal and local solidarity to solidarity under the nation state. The function of the city of Abha shifted from a small town serving the surrounding rural region with its weekly market to a modern tourist city. Economic transformations changed the economy from one self-sufficiency to a "Rentier economy" (Al-Naqeeb 2008: 105) depending on oil production and marginalizing traditional economic activities, including agriculture. The state became the major employer for the vast majority of Saudis, while the private sector is monopolized by foreign labour.

Modernization of the city provided a better living standard through infrastructure projects, schools, hospitals and a state-welfare system; yet it has weakened the local identity. The modernization projects not only removed most material symbols of Asiri culture, but shifted the cultural system from a rural culture based on local history and customs of the region and a tolerant interpretation of Islam to a national culture that unified citizens from different regions under one national culture, dominated by the Wahhabi school. Capturing a picture of Saudi society, and the city of Abha in particular as the site of this study, provides a better understanding of the position of Saudi women in the labour market and their work experience inside and outside their households.

3. Understanding and Theorizing the Experience of Saudi Women

Comprehending and theorizing the work experiences of Saudi women requires situating their personal experiences in a theoretical framework that takes account of both women's experiences from their own perspective as women and the wider social, political and economic context of Saudi society itself. Edward Said (1978) argues that the western view of the east is not only applied by western researchers, but also by easterners who study in the west and apply western theories to their own societies. Therefore, the experience of Saudi women in the city of Abha, as part of the MENA region representing the centre of what Caldwell (1982) characterizes as the "patriarchal belt"³², would benefit from Middle Eastern gender studies, or what is also called post-colonial feminism. This school would provide my study on women's work in Abha with theoretical understanding that takes into account the specificity of historical development, political structure, cultural debates, and socio-economic change within this region.

Despite the specificity of each society, people of this region have been united by the three elements of solidarity, race and language, land and religion as explained by Jankowski (1986:193). The majority of people in the MENA region have been united by their common Arab race and Arabic language, and since the 7th century these two elements have been asserted by Islam that integrates Arabs with other races to constitute the Islamic nation³³. The MENA region as a territory has been under the same Islamic ruling states since the 7th century to the end of the First World War³⁴. Most of the countries in this region are new states, apart from Iran and Turkey (Kandiyoti 1991a), that emerged only after their liberation from western colonial or indirect colonial rule, such as in the Arabian Gulf countries. The Saudi state might be one of the oldest independent states in the region, as

³² This concept of "patriarchal belt" refers to the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and East Asia (Caldwell 1982).

³³ It is important to note that in addition to more than 22 Arab countries, the MENA region includes other non-Arab countries, such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in addition to the existence of other racial and religious groups within Arab countries, such as, Berber and Kurds who have their own languages. In addition to other religious groups, such as Christians and Jews.

³⁴ The MENA region has been under Islamic states starting from the state of the four caliphates of Prophet Muhammad, Al-Umayyad State and 'Abbasid State. The weakening of the latest gave a chance for the emergence of a number of states in different parts of the region that was then united again under the Ottoman Empire (1517-1918).

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despite the British control over its coasts; this colonial power was not interested in the Arabian Peninsula because of its poor economic resources in that era, and the special religious status of the two holy cities in the western region for all Muslims (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Rasheed 2010). Hence, Britain encouraged the integration of the vast majority of emirates of the Arabian Peninsula under the rule of Al-Saud to become the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

The position of women within this region has been influenced by all these factors including Islam and its various schools, the patriarchal social context, the structure of these new states and their different political projects, and debates between liberal and conservative powers to reform the political project. Therefore, to contextualize the experiences of women in Abha, this chapter reviews literature that explores women's position at the macro level starting with the patriarchal social order, state, and cultural context, and concluding with a discussion on women's empowerment, as the terminal goal of women's work, which will be the focus of the following chapter.

3.1 Women within the Patriarchal Order

Patriarchy is a fundamental feminist concept that defines a specific kind of gender social-political structure with its own value system, cultural discourse and gender relations based on a distinctive mode of economic organization (Sharabi 1988:15). This structure, although applied to different societies at varying historical stages, has existed in diverse forms in Europe and Asia. In the MENA region, patriarchal structure has a distinctive form that Sharabi (1988:15) named "traditional Arab society" and Kandiyoti (1988: 278) addresses as "classic patriarchy". Hence, although this chapter will explore some common or global characteristics of patriarchy, it will give more attention to the specific features of patriarchy in MENA societies.

Al-Torki (1999: 215) explains that the literal meaning of patriarchy is "the rule by the father". In a patriarchal system, the father is the master of the household, and enjoys great authority over all family members, which might include several generations, while the role of mothers is marginalized in such a system. She (1999:121) argues that patriarchy may relate not only to the household but to the whole social structure of a society. She gives a broader definition of patriarchy in contemporary Arab societies as "the dominance of males

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over females and elders over juniors and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality and idioms to institutionalize and legitimate these forms of power" (Al-Torki 1999:121). This hierarchal structure of patriarchy consequently enforces obedience, limiting any chance of independence or resistance to the greater authority of the male head of the family, the community or the state (Ben-Salamah 2004:114).

Women within strongly patriarchal societies do not hold any form of power or any public position in terms of political, ideological, economic or military power, while men mobilise all means of power (Moghadam 1992). In the MENA region, women have had a high rate of illiteracy, high fertility and maternal mortality, with a low rate of educational attainment and paid work participation. More importantly there is the institutionalization of extreme restrictive codes on women's behaviour within this patriarchal belt region (Moghadam 1992). Here, powerful ideologies associated with specific forms of kinship link family honour "*Ird*" and status to the virtue of its women (Abu-Odeh 1996; Kabeer 1999; Dodd 1973; Al-Mosaed 1993). Within this ideology, it is men's responsibility to safeguard the family's honour through complex forms of social control and protection arrangements over women's behaviour, dressing, veiling and movements (Kabeer 1999; Faqir 2001). This patriarchal control over women is strongly linked with the family's class as upper class families have the ability to exclude their women from public life and implement strict codes of modesty. At the state level this view explains the low rate of economic participation in the Arabian Gulf societies since the oil boom era (Nikki and Beck 1978; Boserup 2007).

Living under the conditions of a patriarchal system leads women to adopt various responses, which Kandiyoti (1988) suggests take two forms. The first is relative autonomy and protest against the patriarchal constraints, as in sub-Saharan societies, evidenced by Kandiyoti (1988: 275-287). The second is a form of accommodation to the patriarchal context, which is the strategy adopted by women in the area which the demographer John Caldwell (1978) called "the Patriarchal belt" and Kandiyoti (1988:278) called "classic patriarchy", which occurs particularly in extended households and within agrarian societies. Women in these societies get married at a very early age and older women in the household enjoy great authority over their daughters-in-law (Kandiyoti 1988), which Hartman (2001) refers to as "Hierarchical patriarchy". Here the hardship women experienced in their youth is superseded by the respect and authority they enjoy when they become the senior women

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in the household (Kandiyoti 1988), which Joseph (2000: 136) argues reaches the level of "iconizing the mother" as the source of all good in the society. Al-Torki's study (1977, 1989) on Saudi families in Jeddah provides a number of examples where older women have the power over marriage decisions of children and grandchildren, and also play the role of intermediary between young household members and the male head of the family to reach the desired decision. This accommodation of women in the patriarchal system turns them into active participants within the system that has oppressed them, providing an example of "female conservatism" (Johnson 1983: 21), since they resist the breakdown of classic patriarchy as it would threaten their old strategies without providing any empowering alternatives (Kandiyoti 1988).

Rapid modernization and urbanization in MENA societies, including Saudi Arabia, as discussed in chapter 2, has not broken patriarchy, but has produced a division between two forms of patriarchy "traditional patriarchy" and "modernized or neo-patriarchy" as argued by Sharabi (1988: 4). The latter applies to contemporary MENA societies and can be characterized as "material modernization, the first (surface) manifestation of social change, only served to remodel and reorganize patriarchal structures and relations and to reinforce them by giving them "modern" forms and appearance" (Sharabi 1988: 4).

In western societies, Walby (1990: 179) argues that women's involvement in public life led to a new form of "public patriarchy" where women were subordinated by the state and in employment, while within the household they were under the oppression of the male head of the family within "private patriarchy", and Yuval-Davis (2008) argues that the boundaries of private patriarchy became structured by public patriarchy represented in the state.

According to Walby (1990), patriarchy in society can be distinguished by six structures: household, employment, state, male violence, and culture including education and religion. In the labour market, women are exploited and subjected to new forms of patriarchy, such as working in low paid, part time jobs and segregated into certain caring professions, in health, social work and education (Walby 1990), which Hartman (1982) argues sustains men's power in the labour market, and provides them with higher wages. Connell (2009: 142-143) argues that such a "patriarchal dividend" makes men defend current gender

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policies, which is sustained through the strategy of solidarity among men, as explained by Hartman (2001: 673).

"Patriarchy is a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enables them in turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labour power".

Taking into account globalisation, Connell developed the concept of the "gender order" (Connell 1987, 2009) to provide a broader analysis of gender on a local and global scale, including international relations between developed and developing countries. This concept refers to the way society is organized around the roles, responsibilities, activities and contributions of women and men (Connell 1987). On a global scale, gendered western transnational corporations, agencies and the media control the international economy, economic relations between women and men, and construct the gender order in both developed and developing societies (2009: 126-127). At the same time, Connell (2009: 73) used the term "gender regime" to describe the gender arrangements in an institution and how any change in gender arrangements usually starts in one sector of society and gradually expands across the whole society.

Within patriarchal societies with a rigid gender order, women's subordination is institutionalized on a society-wide basis, which is supported by the state through its political project, national identity and citizenship rights as discussed in the next section.

3.2 Women and the state

Comprehending women's position in the MENA societies has to take into account the role of the state as the centre of patriarchal society within which women are excluded and power relations reflect the dominance of men not only in political life but also in philosophy and political science (Connell 2002: 104-105). Feminists in general see the state as a patriarchal institution, or what Connell characterizes as a gender regime (Connell 2009: 120). In MENA societies where the gender divide is clear and rigid, power is concentrated in the hands of the state and strategy for change comes "from above" rather than as a response to pressure from below through social and political movements (Charrad 2001: 233). Indeed, Kandiyoti (1991a:1-2) criticised the predominant approaches that had examined women's position in Muslim societies merely through Islamic Ideology or socio-economic transformations, and contended that the role of the state had not been given

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enough attention. Hence, Kandiyoti argues that an adequate analysis of women's position in this region must be grounded in an examination of the political project of the state and the historical transformations it experienced.

The political history of Muslim societies is not homogeneous, and current political regimes differ among these societies. However, Kandiyoti (1991a) argues that they are all in the process of building modern nation states with a new identification of citizenship and national identity, leading them to search for the most appropriate ideologies to support their political and economic goals. Some states have based their political project on modernization, such as Turkey (Kandiyoti 1991b), Tunisia (Charrad 2000) and Iran during the Shah's regime (Najmabadi 1991). Others form their Arab socialism as in Nasserite Egypt (Al-Ali 2000; Badran 1991) or Ba'thist in Iraq and Syria (Joseph 1991). At the other end of the spectrum, some Muslim states build their projects on authentic Islam, such as Iran in the post-Islamic revolution (Najmabadi 1991; Poya 1999), Pakistan (Jalal 1991) and Saudi Arabia (Doumato 1992; Al-Rasheed 2002, 2007).

The political project in Saudi Arabia was constructed by a prolonged alliance between the Saudi state and Wahhabi doctrine since the 18th century, which was revived with the establishment of the third Saudi state at the beginning of the 20th century (Al-Rasheed 2010). This coalition, discussed in chapter 2, contributed to the development of a firm Islamic project for the Saudi state, while the discovery of oil and rapid economic development required modernization and led to the formulation of a political project defined by Al-Rasheed (2002: 10) as "modernization within an Islamic framework".

Therefore, the state represents the central institutionalization of gender power that, in the light of its political project, constitutes gender identities, constructs women's citizenship rights and generates gender policies.

3.2.1 Women, State and National Identity

Within these contested ideologies in the MENA region, women have been a marker of cultural identity and political goals during the process of state building and revolution and when power is contested or reproduced (Kandiyoti 2004, 1991a). Thus, women either are linked to modernization and progress representing an image of modern, educated, professional and unveiled women, or are linked to cultural authenticity and religious

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orthodoxy by representing an image of the ideal Muslim woman with her veil and gender role as a housewife and a mother (Kandiyoti 2004; Moghadam 1994). Islam represents a symbol of authenticity within Muslim culture and an inviolable source of national identity (Kandiyoti 2004, 1991a; Doumato 1992; Mernessi 1987; Ahmed 1992). Within this authentic culture, women provide a vital symbol of the Islamic order represented as "the ideal Muslim woman" not only among Islamist groups, such as in Egypt, Algeria, and Palestine (Doumato 1992; Badran 1991), but more profoundly within states that adopted the Islamic political project such as Saudi Arabia throughout the last 80 years (Bahry 1982:502; Doumato 1992:33;) and in post-Islamic Revolution Iran (Najmabadi 1991; Afshar 1996; Poya 1999).

The Saudi political project has forged an image of the kingdom as the guardian of Islam, and has at the same time emphasized the state's role in modernizing the country (Al-Rasheed 2010). Bahry (1982) discusses the impact of rapid modernization on Saudi women and the remarkable achievements women achieved during 20 years of development in the fields of education and employment. At the same time, he illustrates restrictions on Saudi women, such as rigid gender segregation that has limited their fields of work and exclusion from senior positions dominated by men. However, Bahry's article reflects the optimistic tone of the boom era with high expectations of continuing speed of modernization and further involvement of Saudi women in the labour market. In contrast, Doumato (1992) questions the limitations on women's participation in Saudi society that contradicts the high success of girls' education, leading Doumato to argue that the symbolic image of Saudi women as the "the ideal Muslim women" has played a major role in limiting her employment to only a few fields, which has been an essential strategy for the state to fulfill its political project as "the ideal Muslim society".

The Islamic model links women with the broad Muslim nation despite all racial, linguistic and cultural differences and gives religious identity precedence over the other forms of solidarity, including territorial, language and ethnic solidarities as categorized by Jankowski (1986:193). The Islamic model emphasizes gendered roles, where women are housewives and mothers, and men are the breadwinners, expressed in Saudi state policies on education and employment, as well as in religious rhetoric by Wahhabi scholars (Doumato 1992, 2003; Bahry 1982). Najmabadi (1991:67) explains how the Islamic model is based on two assumptions: the first refers to imperialist domination of Muslim countries

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not to economic or military powers, but to the weakening of religion and moral corruption, and that women as mothers and wives have a heavy responsibility to establish moral health and political stability; the second is the power of women's sexuality which justifies both veiling and gendered segregation.

Women practicing the Islamic model are considered by modernists as traditional. They are usually not educated, are veiled and seen as signifying economic and cultural backwardness (Moghadam 1994: 3), which made secular states in Iran and Turkey, during the building of their modernization projects at the beginning of the 20th century, enforce 'modern' customs on women (Kandiyoti 2004:49). At the same time, Islamists presented the Islamic model in comparison with two other models, western and westernized; the first is linked with imperialist hegemony and moral corruption, and the second is linked with modernized Muslim women considered as imperialist devices for moral corruption and social ills (Kandiyoti 2004; Najmabadi 1991). Al-Bar's study (1992) on women's work in Saudi Arabia reflects the Wahhabi view of the role of Muslim women as housewives and mothers, while considering women's employment primarily as a feature of western women. Al-Bar argues that women's influx into public life has weakened the family structure and caused a number of social ills, such as sexual harassment in the workplace, prostitution, abortion, illegitimate children, infidelity, incest, homosexuality and sexual diseases. This view emphasizes the power of women's sexuality as a major characteristic of women within the Islamic model (Najmabadi 1991), which is also patriarchal and shares the same opposition to women's work as in the Victorian era in the UK as argued by Walby (1990).

It is important to clarify that national identity is not a fixed but a dynamic trait that not only varies from one group to another but also from one historical stage or from one regime to another, such as in Egypt across various regimes with different political projects (Al-Ali 2003) and during the Shah regime and post-Islamic revolution Iran (Najmabadi 1991). In Saudi Arabia, where the country has had the same regime since the beginning of the 20th century, Yamani (2001) argues that the rapid socio-economic changes have constructed different identities. Although Yamani's study focuses on exploring the identity of young Saudis, male and female, she points to the identity of the older generation in the pre-oil era, 1900-1940s, as based on regional identity linked with the local culture and loyalty to their kinship. Local identity reflects the diversity of regional cultures including accents, costumes, traditions and food and, most importantly, the diversity of Islamic schools

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(Yamani 2001: 27-29). Yamani gave examples of some of the mechanisms that united the diverse local identities into one national Saudi identity since the 1960s, such as the educational system, media, employment in the public sector, the dominant Islamic school, Hanbali Wahhabi, and the new national costumes, white *Thoub* for men and black '*Abaia* for women. It is also in this era that national Arab identity was stressed, through Arab newspapers, radio and the increasing number of Arab migrants to the country. This new national identity has been supported by the growing oil revenue and improving living standards that also provided the state with legitimacy and people's loyalty (Yamani 2001: 32-33).

The younger generation in Saudi Arabia, as the focus of Yamani's study, represents different forms of contradictions and struggle; while they were born in the boom era, 1970s-early 1980s with all its economic privileges, they have been confronted with the recession era, since the mid-1980s with its economic shortages, corruption and increasing rate of unemployment (Yamani 2001: 127-159). Their identity reflects the fears and uncertainty of the economic situation in the present and the future. This generation can be distinguished by an internal struggle between tradition and modernity, creating their own identity through a consideration of the two. They struggle between various identities as Saudis, Muslims, and Arabs as part of the globalized world, missing the strong cultural base of their grandfathers and facing the challenge of new technology. Yamani (2000 167) concludes that within all these struggles, Islam has been a dominant characteristic for this generation, and that in their search for some certainty and identity they hold to religion and tradition to help confront the rapid changes that surround them.

The sacrosanct inviolable and symbolic status of women in MENA societies has been explained by a number of factors. First, a strategy to resist the historical western hegemony³⁵, which has meant that calling for women's rights in Muslim countries became linked with imperialism and was seen as collaborating with the west (Kandiyoti 1991a; Ahmed 1992; Helie-Lucas 1994). Second, the need for a populist ideology reducing the boundaries between diverse classes, religions, Islamic schools, and ethnic groups within Muslim societies. Women's discourse as a result became the heart of a "utopian populism"

³⁵ Western hegemony refers to colonial power and Christian missionaries in the colonial era and to imperialism in the post-colonial era that has called for reforms of sexual mores, family tradition and women's position (Kandiyoti 1991a).

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to unify Muslims on the one side and was used as a mechanism of social control on the other (Kandiyoti 1991a). In Saudi Arabia, for instance, Doumato (1992: 44) explains how applying the model of "the ideal Muslim woman", veiled and separated in public places, became a visible sign of the ideology of the ideal Muslim society and made women a symbol of the national identity. Imposing Islamic commitment on men is likely to face rejection from various elements, such as non-Wahhabi scholars, Shi'a and also liberal Saudis. In addition to other Islamic symbols, this policy allowed the state to compromise with the conservative rhetoric for the ideal Muslim society and to initiate negotiation between conservatives and liberals. At the same time, the country persisted with westernizing the economy, education and infrastructure. Thirdly, the symbolism of women in the authentic Muslim culture is differently mobilized. Islamic movements³⁶ use this image to confront the westernized elite (Kandiyoti 1991a), while states mobilize women's image as a mechanism to justify elite actions and divert attention from social inequalities and economic failures (Moghadam 1994), which Al-Rumahi (1983) describes as the only available platform for public debate.

3.2.2 Women, the State and Citizenship

The political project not only influences the construction of national identity, but also determines women's rights as citizens. In the west, women's rights and employment have changed rapidly not only as a result of economic and social transformations, but more significantly because of women gaining the right to vote (Walby 1990). However, in the MENA region, the gendered construction of citizenship is still based on the assumption that women are family members rather than individuals, and their responsibilities and rights are drawn in relation to their kinsmen, who are expected under this system to protect and support women not the state (Joseph 2000; Al-Torki 2000; Al-Mughni 2000). Hence, the state can be seen as having an alliance with the elder male in the family, which has powerful implications for women's role in the public and domestic arenas (Al-Torki 2000; Joseph 2000; Charrad 2001).

³⁶ Post-Tanzimate in Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in addition to the Khomeini regime in Iran (Kandiyoti: 1991a).

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Joseph (2000: 110) examined the civic myth of extended kinship and argued that while western feminists focus on the nuclear family and the conjugal relationship of wife and husband and see it as the greatest barrier to equal citizenship for women (Vogel 1994), Joseph focused on the kin contract rather than "the sexual contract" (Pateman 1988) or the "vulnerability by marriage" (Okin 1979). Yuval-Davis (2008: 78) provides an analysis of women's citizenship and the influence of dichotomies such as private/public, nature/civilized and active/passive citizen. She explains how the public sphere primarily relates to the political sphere, while the private sphere is linked to the family, which is the main site of women.

This paradigm is supported by social studies on women's citizenship in the MENA region, showing the linking of women to the private arena and the family. Al-Mughni (2000: 249) elucidates how the society as a whole has a symbolic meaning as a family in Kuwait, where the constitution states that "National laws should preserve the family structure, strengthen family ties, and protect motherhood and childhood". In Saudi Arabia, Al-Torki (2000) confirms this view by pointing to Article 9 of the Basic Law on the Political System underlining the significance of the family as:

"The family is the core of Saudi society. Its members are raised on the basis of Islamic belief, the requirement of goodwill, obedience to Allah, his prophet, and those in authority, respect for the law and its execution, love of the homeland, and glorying in its majestic history" (Al-Torki 2000: 219-220).

Al-Torki (2000) accounts for people's loyalty in Saudi society to the family, friendship and economic networks, rather than to the state due to the relatively young age of the nation-state idea. Nevertheless, this loyalty to the state has shifted as a result of the extensive socio-economic development in the 1970s and the Gulf War in 1991, which was constructed as reflecting a threat to the community. Thus, with an increasing sense of patriotism came an awareness of the significance of participation in development and reforms with contesting views about the appropriate method of achieving these reforms (Al-Torki 2000).

Nature/civilized, as the second dichotomy discussed by Yuval-Davis (2008: 6), implies that women and men are categorized in contrasting groups whereby women relate to "nature" and are excluded from the "civilized" public sphere of men. This has resulted in identifying

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women with the domestic sphere and child-rearing, putting women in an inferior symbolic position compared with men who are linked with culture (Yuval-Davis 2008: 6).

Active/passive citizenship is Yuval-Davis's third dichotomy (2008: 83), identified by Turner (1990: 209) as "whether the citizen is conceptualized as merely a subject of an absolute authority or as an active political agent". Middle Eastern feminists point to the limited authority of women's organizations in the region on the one side, and on the other, how the state uses these organizations to implement their policies, such as in Iran and Egypt (Badran 1991; Najmabadi 1991). Al-Torki's (2000: 218-219) discussion of citizenship in Saudi Arabia gives an example of active and passive citizenship by pointing to ambivalence about how Saudi people are seen by state officials, either as citizens or as "*Ra'aya*", a person to be protected, and implying the ruler's role as "looking after" his people. Al-Torki (2000) argues that the two views co-exist at the same time.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Torki (2000) argues that this alliance between the state and the family is controlling every aspect of the life of Saudi women. She examined Marshall's modern notion of citizenship (1950: 10-11, cited in Al-Torki 2000: 217), which includes three aspects of individual rights: civil, political and social, in terms of their relevance to Saudi society. Al-Torki (2000: 215) criticizes the individualistic and utilitarian nature of western definitions of citizenship, and offers an alternative analysis of citizenship in the Middle East, arguing that the Saudi state does not have a constitution which includes individual rights, but instead depends on Sharia, Islamic law and Wahhabi Hanbali jurisprudence in particular, which is the most conservative interpretation of all Islamic schools (Al-Torki 2000: 224). Under this interpretation, the law privileges males in all matters including birth, marriage, divorce, and custody. Al-Torki (2000) argues that the only relevant element of Marshall's model is social rights, comprising education and welfare; yet she contends that the irrelevance of the concept of citizenship to the marginal status of Saudi women has resulted from social and cultural constructions rather than Islamic sacred texts, as largely believed in the west. At the same time, Al-Torki's study (2000) recommends establishing a creative adoption of the concept of citizenship within Saudi Arabia in order to make the concept a central part of the political and social structure.

State policies represent the pragmatic reflection of the state political project and its view of the national image of women and their rights as citizens. Through these policies the state

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regulates and shapes gender relations and has the ability to change the gender order through reforms, while also having the ability to retain the existing gender order (Connell 2009). Thus, state policies have been either reformist aiming to achieve gender equality as part of their modernization project, such as in Turkey, Tunisia and Iran in the Shah regime, or have aimed to limit women's participation in the labour market through applying Islamic symbols of women in order to achieve their Islamic project, such as in Saudi Arabia (Doumato 1992; Al-Rasheed 2007) and Islamic Iran (Moghadam 1994; Afshar 1996; Poya 1999). However, neither of these types of state project can claim complete modernity within a patriarchal society or complete Islamic authenticity without any consideration of the economic needs and global circumstances.

In this context, Al-Ali (2003: 229) points to two characteristics of state policies regarding women's rights in the MENA societies that have had a substantial impact on gender politics; one is ambiguity as argues by both Connell (1990:519) and Kandiyoti (1991a: 11, 2004: 56), and the other is contradictions as stressed by Kandiyoti (2004:45,56). An example of ambiguity is the pension system in Saudi Arabia that links a woman's pension rights with her husband's pension rights, while the rights of other female workers, who are single, divorced or widowed remain vague (Al-Sheikh 2011). Contradiction, as the other character of state policies in the Middle East, may result from the contradictions between national identity among different regimes and different groups. Kandiyoti (2004) argues that contradictions exist even within the same regime, such as the contradiction of women's image represented by nationalists that includes women as "victims of social backwardness, and at the same time icons of modernity or privileged bearers of cultural authenticity" (2004:47). Another major contradiction regarding gender policies is the implementation of Islamic law "shari'a" in the area of family law and women's rights within some Muslim countries that have adopted a modernity project, such as in Morocco and Algeria (Charrad 2001) and Iran during the Shah regime (Najmabadi 1991).

In Saudi society, many feminists (Yamani 1996; Al-Torki 2000) contend that Islam has provided women with economic rights since the 7th century enabling women to own or sell property, enter into commercial contracts and to inherit. Fernea (2000) also suggests the influence of Moorish-Islamic law on the contemporary rights of women in America. However, contemporary rules in Saudi Arabia restrict these old Islamic rights (Yamani 1996; Al-Torki 2000). The rule of guardianship "*Mahram*" means that a woman is required

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to be accompanied by, or obtain a written consent from, her male guardian³⁷ to apply for some jobs³⁸ or a scholarship, to obtain a medical operation, raise a case in the court, marry and travel abroad (HRW 2008: 20-31). In the economic context, the need to have a legal proxy "*Wakil*" requires a business women to have a male manager who has to be provided with complete legal delegation to present on her behalf in public organizations and run the enterprise, if not serving merely women, which represents a major barrier for women to develop a private business as argued by Yamani (1996) and Al-Turki and Brazwail (2010). These policies, in addition to the ban on women's access to public organizations and ban on women's driving explains the United Nations ranking for Saudi women as 74th out of 75 countries regarding women's empowerment, measured by women's economic and political participation (Human Rights Watch 2008:17).

3.3 Women, Culture and Religion

Since women represent critically important but differing symbols for liberals, Islamists and the state, this has put women's issues at the centre of cultural debate in MENA societies. In Saudi society, women's issues, as one of the major concerns of the Wahhabi scholars who dominate the social arena (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Al-Rasheed 2007), have faced profound resistance from representatives of Wahhabi discourse towards women's rights of education, driving, gaining independent ID cards and new work opportunities, while liberal intellectuals and writers support these rights. Establishing girls' state run schools represented the first and most prominent debate between the liberals and Wahhabis throughout the 1940s-1950s (Al-Sadhan 2010; Al-Issa 2009). Al-Baadi's study (1982) found that 35% of 84 newspaper articles on women in the 1950s were calling for girls' education, but Wahhabi opposition delayed the establishment of girls' schools until 1960. Debates on women's right to drive reached a peak in 1990 when a group of professional women drove their cars in the streets of Al-Riyadh; however that event not only led to the suspension of those women from their jobs, but more importantly shifted the social ban on women's driving to a clear regulation that prohibited women from driving throughout Saudi Arabia (Doumato 1999; Al-Torki 2000; Al-Rasheed 2010). The most recent debate

³⁷ A male guardian is the male head of the family who is usually the father or the husband, and in some cases it could be the woman's brother, uncle or even her son if he is over 16 years old.

³⁸ Jobs in non-gender segregated fields or outlying areas (Human Rights Watch 2008: 13-19).

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throughout the 2000s has been over the need to integrate women into new fields of work including working in shopping centers, especially in lingerie, female clothes and make up shops (Al-Shahrani 2010; Al-Ashiwan 2010).

Feminists argue that the role of the state is fundamental in order to empower women and gain their rights (Kandiyoti 1991a; Connell 2009; Walby 1990). Indeed, in Saudi Arabia, the intervention of the state has been fundamental in ending debates on women's rights either by compromising between different groups or by supporting one group through state policies. The establishment of girls' schools in 1960 reflected the state's compromising strategy, as the Department of Girls Education became under the supervision of Wahhabi scholars from 1960-2000 which limited their opposition and at the same time responded to the liberal demand for girls' education (Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Rawaf and Simmons 1991; Al-Sadhan 2010). The other strategy of supporting one of the debating groups is exemplified in the state legitimatization of the social ban on driving after the harsh campaign against women's call for the right to drive in 1990 (Al-Torki 2000; Doumato 1999), while liberals were supported by the state over debates regarding women's work in female products shops. In 2004, the state over-turned the ban on employing men and women at the same workplace with Act 120 of women's work under the conditions of Islamic law "Shari'a" by both employers and employees (Ministry of Work 2006; Al-Turki and Braswel 2010). However, Wahhabi scholars (Al-Bader 2011) have strongly opposed this rule, and the *Mufti*³⁹ (cited in Al-Makhlafi and Al-Misineed 2011) has declared his opposition:

"A Muslim woman is not permitted to work in fields that require mixing with men. A Muslim woman has to work only in a field that doesn't make her a subject or object of strife "fitna"."

This Wahhabi opposition has delayed the implementation of Act 120 to 2012 (Al-Watan 2012). The state support represents the main reason behind Wahhabi's power, while the other source of power of Wahhabis is their widespread public appeal and the significant role of gender ideology in opposing political and economic changes (Doumato 1999).

According to Najmabadi (1991: 69), debates on women's issues are based on differing views towards two main principles: women's role in society and the meaning of Muslim

³⁹ Mufti is jurisconsult, highest religious authority (Al-Rasheed 2007:xvi)

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women veiling "Hijab". First, women's public participation is fundamental for moderate Muslims across the Islamic world. Al-Gazali (1990) criticizes the lack of participation of women in Muslim countries and argues that this is a major cause of the "backwardness" of the Muslim world; he even called for the participation of Muslim women in the women's movement within Islamic principles. The socio-religious study of Abu-Shaqqa (1991a) on women's liberation in Islam presented a moderate interpretation of women's role in Muslim societies by giving numerous examples of women's active participation in political, economic and social life during the prophet's days to correct the misunderstanding of women's role in Islam (Fakhro 1996; Sidani 2005). However, Wahhabi scholars argue that a woman's role is in the domestic arena as a wife and mother, and her work should only occur under specific conditions: the family's need for her work income, gaining the permission of her male guardian, and to work only in gender segregated fields with complete hijab (Al-Othaimin, 2004; Al-Fozan 2009). Sheikh Ben-Baz, grand scholar "Mufti" of Saudi Arabia (1975-1999), argued that women's engagement in "males' domains" is against their nature and eventually leads to misery for women and moral decay in society (Ben-Baz 1979 cited in Al-Bar 1992: 223-224). Ben Salamah (2004) and Bashatah (2009) point to a Wahhabi juridical pillar, that is the 'blocking of the means' "Saad Al-Daria'a", which specifies that any action that might lead to sin must be prohibited (Ben-Salamah 2004:16). This pillar is used extensively as a justification for severely restricting women's roles, including in employment.

"Hijab" is the second controversial principle. Views about modesty among most moderate Muslims are that women's veiling should cover most of the body but not their face and hands (Bashatah 2009). Al-Ghazali (1990, 2009) contends that a Muslim woman should present herself and her religion in an elegant and civilized manner, and that wearing the hijab does not prevent Muslim women from participating in public life. On the other side, Wahhabis, similar to Islamists in Iran (Najmabadi 1991: 67), based their view of hijab on woman's sexuality and "*fitna*", and hence the entire body of the woman is considered as intimate "*Awrah*" and should be covered from head to toe (Al-Othaimin 2009; Ibn-Jabreen 1987). In addition, even the woman's voice is seen as tempting and hence should not be heard in public places (Al-Juraisi 1999: 1131-1132). Merrissi (1994) argues that this view of Muslim women represents a basis for the gender division of labour that can 'send them back to the kitchen' in times of economic crisis enabling the state to substantially reduce

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the number of unemployed people to half of the real number. Yamani (1996) elucidates how this view, even in the economic boom in KSA, limited women's work and resulted in strict gender segregation not only in educational institutions and workplaces but also in public places.

Although Saudi Liberals, alike with their counterparts in other MENA societies, have played a major role in supporting women's rights to education, employment and an active role in public life as part of their project of societal modernization since early in the 20th century (Kandiyoti 1991b; Merrissi 1992; Ahmed 1982; Al-Baadi 1982; Al-Sadhan 2010), some feminists (Al-Mughni and Te'treault 2000; Najmabadi 1998) have argued that liberals are still influenced by patriarchal views about gender roles, and hence they link women's rights with the family's needs and interests rather than women's rights as independent citizens. In Saudi Arabia, Lacroix (2005) argues that the title 'liberal' that unified different groups of writers, novelists, academics, Arab nationalists, seculars, and socialists did not exist in Saudi society before the 1990s, and that this group, apart from supporting modernization projects, has no common agenda except challenging Wahhabi discourse. Despite Al-Bedair (2011) subscribing to a liberal discourse, she denounced the lack of unity and courage among Saudi liberals to express their thoughts even when their intellectual participation has been most needed in the current era of revolutions and change in the MENA region.

Nevertheless, Wahhabis are very cautious towards the growing role of liberals and attributes this to the recent decline of Wahabbi's power within the cultural scene as argued by Al-Hirfi (cited in Al-Kanan 2011) and Al-Ghudami (2010). However, Al-Dakheel (cited in Al-Kanan 2011), as a prominent liberal, presents an analysis of the recent role of Wahhabis, arguing that Wahhabis have not been weakened despite their constant resistance to modernization, but in a globalization era they cannot accommodate with the rapid socio-economic and technological transformations. Al-Dakheel continues his argument saying that over recent years, the role of the Saudi state has been expanding within the global order, as an active member in international organizations, such as United Nations, WTO and the 20th group, with a commitment to international conventions and relationships, which has enforced the separation between the state and the traditional Wahhabis in favour of liberals.

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Female intellectuals in the MENA region in general follow the same tradition of distinguishing between modernity and authenticity approaches, represented by three schools, secularist, Islamic and an articulation of these two discourses, forming what Badran (2001) calls 'holistic cultural feminism'. However, these women who are academics, writers, Islamic scholars and what Doumato calls "state feminists"⁴⁰, do not see themselves as feminists, but just as intellectuals or activists. Al-Ali (2000) attributes this phenomenon not only to the negative stereotype of feminists⁴¹ in the MENA societies, but that feminism is also seen as associated with large forms of oppression on people in this part of the world, such as Imperialism and Zionism. The secular feminists base their struggle for women's rights on civil law and international conventions of human rights, while opposing religious authority and the implementation of Islamic law "Shari'a"; these feminists see secularism as "the acceptance of the separation between religion and politics, and it does not necessarily denote anti-religion or anti-Islamic positions" (Al-Ali 2000: 130). Saudi female academics⁴² and writers also base their arguments for women's rights on international conventions of human rights in addition to moderate Islamic interpretations of Islam, yet apart from Wajiha Al-Hwaider (2009; Al-Dakheel 2007) the female activist, secularism has rarely been declared. Within the Wahhabi domination of the cultural scene and their intolerance of different opinions and any form of theological debate (Al-Rasheed 2010:5), it is difficult to conclude whether secularism does not exist or has just not been proclaimed. Hence it would be more appropriate to categorize this group under what Badran (2001:52) calls "holistic cultural feminism" or under "liberal" as the broad title that unites a diversity of intellectuals.

At the same time, Islamic feminism has two types, conservative and radical, with schisms within each group. Kandiyoti (2007) explains that the strong bond between Islam and cultural authenticity has meant that feminism could proceed only through two strategies. The first is conservative, denying the oppressive nature of Islamic practices, while the other

⁴⁰ Doumato (2003:254) identifies state feminists as "elite women with *wastaa* (the power of social network), connections in high political places . . . these women may be ambitious, well educated, competent and rich, but at the same time, being women, they could not do what they do unless in their arsenal was the ability to approach the right men".

⁴¹ Al-Ali (2000:4) explains that feminists, within Egyptian culture, are portrayed as "men-hating, aggressive, possibly lesbian and certainly westernized women".

⁴² The most prominent Saudi female academics defending women's rights are Mai Yamani, Soraya Al-Torki, Nora al-Mosaed, Fawziyah Bashatah and Hatoon Al-Farsi.

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is radical, asserting that Islam is not sexist and that gender discrimination in Muslim societies is social and has no religious or natural base (Kandiyoti 2007:9). The conservative group is also divided into fundamentalists and moderates in Saudi society; Yamani (1996) points to the large proportion of fundamentalist Islamic feminists that appeared since the 1980s, who although educated and most of them working, do not support women's rights to vote, drive or work alongside men, as they consider these practices as non-Islamic. Al-Hasher (2007) gives a number of examples of the dominance of this fundamentalist discourse within girls' educational institutions, while a recent article by Meccawy (2011a) explains some of the methods this group uses to impose their thoughts on young women.

Doumato (2003) discusses the other female Islamist group that adopts a moderate approach who are building up religious awareness and defending women's rights from an Islamic perspective. Fatimah Naseef (1995) represents this small proportion in Saudi society, while this trend has more representatives in other Muslim countries, such as in Egypt⁴³ as argued by Badran (2009:149). It is worth noting that the majority of these two conservative feminist groups are Islamic scholars.

The other Muslim feminists are radicals who challenge the dominant patriarchal interpretation of Islam by presenting radical views of women's rights and status in Islam, for instance the work of Mernissi (1991, 1993, and 1996), Ahmed (1992) and Al-Hibri (1982). This strategy calls for a major reform of Islamic law, *Shari'a*, and the resurrection of an independent religious interpretation "*Ijtihad*" of holy texts in Al-Qu'ran⁴⁴ and Hadith⁴⁵, as the basis for a dynamic Islamic approach (Al-Hibri 1982; Mir-Hosseini 1996; Fakhro 1996). However, absence of theological debate is a major characteristic of the Saudi cultural context which has restricted such discourse. This discourse, in the same way as secularism, is not evident in the Saudi cultural context or at least not declared.

A focus on the cultural and religious context has for a long time been the predominant approach used to analyse the position of women within Muslim societies by orientalist and Muslim feminists (Kandiyoti 1991a). The limited work opportunities and rigid gender

⁴³ Egypt has a number of moderate Islamic representatives, such as Zinab Al-Ghazali, Safinaz Kazim (Badran 2001) and Hebah Ra'uf Ezzat (El-Gawhary 2001).

⁴⁴ The Holy book of Islam.

⁴⁵ Speeches and deeds documented for Prophet Muhammad peace upon him (PUH).

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segregation in Saudi Arabia have been attributed to patriarchal culture and Islam (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004; Bahry 1982) with a focus on Wahhabi doctrine as in Doumato's studies (2000, 2003). However, Kandiyoti (1991a) argues that this approach has neglected the significant role of other features of Muslim society, such as economic, political or kinship systems, and the broad socio-economic transformations. Hijab (1988) also contends that in the Middle East, as elsewhere, despite the influential impact of socio-cultural barriers in forming women's work experience, in times of economic need either for the state or the family, these barriers are reduced or even diminished. In Saudi society, where Wahhabi discourse places firm restrictions on women, Al-Rasheed (2007:11) argues that this school, especially the official Wahhabi, are flexible and have been influenced by historical and social contexts, such that she would not be surprised to hear a Wahhabi scholar supporting women's right to drive in the near future.

3.4 Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment and gender equality is the third out of eight of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (UN, 2010), which Saudi Arabia committed to in 2000, together with other nations, to be fulfilled by 2015. Through this goal the United Nations aims to promote women's position in education, employment and political participation, and as women's work is the focus of this study it is important to explore the concept of empowerment, how it can be measured and the strategies to empower women in the MENA region, while the next chapter will review research literature on women's work.

Kabeer (2005: 13-14) identifies empowerment as the ability to make choices, and explains how people who exercise various choices in their lives might be powerful; however, they are not empowered if they were never disempowered. In other words, disempowerment refers to the denial of choice, while empowerment is the process by which the disempowered acquire "the ability to make choices" while living within the same context that previously denied them this ability of choice. Furthermore, having a real choice requires two conditions, the existence of alternative choices that are both seen and are accessible.

The World Economic Forum (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005) used a number of criteria to measure empowerment and the gender gap in 58 countries, including economic participation, economic opportunities, political empowerment, educational attainment and

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health and well-being. Kabeer (1999) argued that each criterion of empowerment is constituted by three interrelated dimensions through which processes of empowerment can occur: resources, agency, and achievement. Resources is the first dimension that not only includes material resources, but also human and social resources that are acquired through a multiplicity of social relationships conducted within different societal institutions, such as the family, market and community. "Access to resources" as argued by Kabeer (1999: 443) is twofold, namely potential and actualized, as the resources can exist, yet are restricted by norms and rules, such as the social restrictions on women's land inheritance in the Muslim community despite women's right to inheritance.

According to Kabeer (1999: 445), the second aspect of empowerment is agency or the process of making the choice, which has positive and negative connotations. The positive side refers to the power to make choices "power to", while the negative refers to some people's "power over" the agency of others. Agency also encompasses "the sense of agency" or power which relates to the meaning, motivation and purposes that women link with their actions (Kabeer 1999: 438). Similar to Kandiyoti's (1988) view of how some women respond to classic patriarchy through bargain or resistance, Kabeer (1999) also argues that disempowered women, in addition to the two previous strategies, can also practice their agency of decision making through some forms of deception, manipulation and subversion. Social norms can constrain women's agency over making strategic life choices, while as a subordinate group their choice to resist is very limited such that they might accept or collude with (Kabeer 2005:14). Other forms of agency include women's freedom of mobility within the public arena, and their participation in public life (Kabeer 1999).

The third dimension of empowerment is achievement, referring to the extent to which agency and resources are or are not realised. Kabeer (1999) contends that measuring empowerment is not only a matter of choice but depends heavily on the meanings and values that control the three processes of empowerment. For instance, she makes a distinction between status and autonomy, as women usually choose status over autonomy whenever they contradict. Youssef defines women's status in the MENA region as consisting of two elements, respect and rights, stating that:

"Confusion ensues because the two distinct factors are erroneously used interchangeably, when in reality they are often inversely correlated. Thus women

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receive great respect in certain societies that give them few rights, they receive equality rights in societies in which they compete with men but have relatively low respect." (Youssef 1978: 76).

Empowerment involves various strategies and levels; Al-Torki (1986) argues that "strategic capital", or what Kandiyoti (1988) names the "patriarchal bargain", has been effectively used by Saudi women to negotiate with their husbands to extend their rights, including access to education and employment, and hence Kandiyoti (2000) suggested that through their existing resources in the domestic arena, women can expand their access to economic, political and civil resources. In other words, women's empowerment within their families will become part of the national agenda. Doumato (2003) supports this strategy as she believes that women from the elite class through their family connections can approach the right men to implement reforms; a strategy called by Mary Ann Te'treault (2000: 273) "weapons of the weak", similarly Al-Torki (2000) argues that it is a realistic strategy that enables women to take advantage of their moral authority as mothers and nurturers.

Kabeer (1999) argues that the acts of individuals have limited impact and that the woman who acts against the norms may pay a high price for her autonomy and hence the project of empowerment cannot be achieved without both a collective solidarity in the public sphere and individual assertiveness in the private sphere (Kabeer 1999: 457). Some of the common collective strategies for women's empowerment in the Middle East as observed by Moghadam (2003: 279-284) are literary efforts, involvement in women's voluntary organizations and social movements, and international intervention. In Saudi society, literary works calling for women's rights started from the beginning of the 20th century and have grown with the increasing number of educated Saudi women, academics, writers and novelists since the 1970s, as discussed in Section 3.3.

The main women's voluntary organizations have been charity organizations that started with two⁴⁶ in the 1960s and today number over 30, in addition to 25 female sections within men's organizations all under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, which support disadvantaged families and orphans, promote literacy among adult women and provide a variety of training courses in tailoring, computing, hand crafts and languages (Ben-Afif 2008: 147). These organizations provide practical support for women to face the

⁴⁶ Al-Jameyah Al-Khaireeyah in Jeddah and Jameyat Al-Nahdah in Riyadh (Ben-Afif 2008: 147).

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limitations of resources in specific areas, yet they have no direct impact on the formulation of state policies or reforms. In the last few years the country has witnessed the establishment of new forms of women's institutions, such as the Women's Committee of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce⁴⁷ in 2004 as the first women's professional organization (Al-Turki and Braswell 2010), another is the female section of the National Society For Human Rights established in 2004, which includes defending the rights of abused women (National Society For Human Rights 2011) and the Bahethat Research Centre on women's issues in Riyadh which was established in 2006 (Bahethat 2010). This limited role of female organizations in Saudi society has restricted women's ability to put pressure on the state to undertake some reforms and made state development an ultimate pathway for women's empowerment.

International interventions represent the other strategy for women's empowerment, although according to Kandiyoti (1991a) this has been more influential in poor developing countries, whereas in the globalization era the role of international organizations has gained more power over developed *and* developing countries through international conventions. In 2000, Saudi Arabia became a member of the CEDAW convention, yet with a general reservation that the kingdom is not obligated to observe any terms of the convention that contradict Islamic norms, which can include a large number of the articles. Another reservation is directed to two articles, 9/2 regarding women's rights to pass their nationality to their children, and article 29/1 regarding the procedures to take disagreements or the interpretation of any issue to the International Court of Justice (UN 2007c:8). However, Al-Mosaed (2007: 17-18) argues that the state's formal opposition to a number of the CEDAW articles is based on two main factors, Islam and the cultural specificity, while in reality Islam constitutes a number of schools with various interpretations that are not sacred but are a subject of negotiation, and the cultural specificity is just the patriarchal norms that enforce women's subordination. Connors (1996: 364) also argues that although Islam effectively regulates the main matters of personal law, it cannot be argued by Muslim countries that some of the convention's articles on employment, political participation, citizenship rights and education are not compatible with Islam which has no clear

⁴⁷ Al-Saiyidah Khadijah Bent Khuwailid Center

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regulations on these issues and that Muslim societies themselves have different views towards them.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is another international convention that was ratified in 2000, and includes the goal of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment by 2015 (UN 2000). The latest Saudi reports on the MDG (MEP 2011: 52) declared that achieving gender equality is expected by 2015 and shows a significant increase in the female student enrolment rate at all educational stages from 90.5% in 2005 to 96.1% in 2010. However, in the field of employment the rate of women's participation is still as low as 14% with women's greater involvement recommended in the industrial and private sectors in particular, and in some further female sections in the public sector in the near future, while political participation was not discussed (MEP 2011: 50,51,58).

These international conventions reflect the interlinkage between women's movements, international organizations and states in a global era within which women's empowerment is no longer a matter of a single society but is linked with the global order. This started with the UN Decade for Women in the 1970s and grew with the 1994 Cairo Conference and the 1995 Beijing Conference to form an era within which women find themselves at "the nexus of patriarchy and globalization" (Moghadam 2007: 2), which is also an era that has raised contradictory trends which include how the hegemonic discourse of women rights is also dominated by discourses of neoliberalism and fundamentalism. This shows how women's empowerment is determined by both internal and external factors and within which women mobilise a variety of strategies to improve their conditions and gain equal rights.

While this section discussed the various aspects and strategies of empowerment, the next chapter will continue this discussion by focusing on women's work as a major pathway for empowerment and explore literature on different forms of paid and unpaid work.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of theoretical literature on the position of women in the MENA societies and in Saudi Arabia in particular. Women in this region live under one of the most restrictive codes of patriarchy "Classic Patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 1988) which has profoundly influenced women's characteristics and strategies to deal with this social system. Rapid modernization in the region since the 1950s, however, has not diminished

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patriarchy but modernized it to produce what Sharabi (1988) refers to as "Neo-patriarchy". Patriarchal societies are gender orders where roles, responsibilities, norms and policies advantage men over women, and where these orders include gendered institutions, "gender regimes", which include the state, education and employment (Connell 2009). States in the MENA region act as gender regimes despite their various political projects, either modernity or authentic Islamic. They have mobilized women's image as a marker of their projects, while citizenship has been gendered and women are primarily seen as family and kin members, which has also directed the state to enforce gendered policies. The cultural context of each state in the region, including Saudi society, is constituted by various trends, mainly Islamic and liberal, with a schism within each group and women's issues being in the spotlight of debates between these groups. However, the dominance of Wahhabi discourse in Saudi society over the Department of Girls Education from 1960 to 2000, as the main state agency that supervises women's education and employment, has made Wahhabi discourse the most influential over Saudi women's lives. Within the Saudi strict gender order, literature by gender scholars has suggested several strategies to achieve women's empowerment starting with individual efforts within the family, through to collective efforts via literary and voluntary organizations that contribute by putting pressure on the state to reform, and finally the role of international organizations and conventions in empowering women.

Within this context, my thesis explores women's work experience across three generations in Abha in the light of these complex structural and cultural issues, acknowledging these multiple influences on women's work. While some studies focus in their analysis of women's position in Muslim society on the cultural context including Islam, patriarchy and the gender segregation system⁴⁸, other studies give priority to the role of economic factors, such as Hijab (1988, 2005) which is the focus of the next chapter. However, the recent trend among Middle Eastern feminists, since the key study of Kandiyoti (1991a) on women, Islam and the state, has been focused on the role of the state and its political project in constructing women's position in the society. All these various views and theoretical concepts will be examined in relation to the work experiences of women in Abha in order to better understand the structure of women's work in this region and the

⁴⁸ This will be discussed in the following chapter in the section on the opportunities for women's work.

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most influential factors forming their experiences. This theoretical framework will also throw light on the impact of different forms of work on the national identity of women and the degree of empowerment of Saudi women in Asir across three historical stages.

4. Contextualizing Women's Work in Saudi Society

Chapters Two and Three provided a broad overview of social change and transformation in Saudi society, and the position of Middle Eastern and Saudi women within the socio-political structure. Chapter 4 continues building this broad review by focusing on women's work, its various forms and its features and the range of influential factors and concepts that construct the experience of women with work in the MENA region and in Saudi society in particular.

As discussed in the previous chapter women's economic participation and economic opportunities are among the main criteria used by the World Economic Forum to measure women's empowerment (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005). However, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2011) identifies the labour market in the MENA region as being weak and with limited work opportunities for women. It is also characterized by poor working conditions including low wages, limited social protection, a poor investment climate, a tightly controlled private sector and a high rate of unemployment especially among young people and women. The ILO argues that this complex labour situation has played a major role in limiting women's access and participation in the labour market and makes the dependency rate in the MENA region the highest in the world (UNDP 2005). This general view of the labour market in the MENA region leads this chapter to explore the position of women in this labour market not only in paid work but also in unpaid work. This chapter covers three main areas: the first is unpaid work including household work, agricultural work and traditional paid work. The second section discusses women's employment and its features, while the third reviews the main influential factors borrowed from Hijab's paradigm (1988:73) including first economic need for women's work, second is work opportunities referring to the official effort through state policies, gender segregation system, class and cultural context. Third condition identified by Hijab (1988) as the ability to work referring to the state effort in educating and training women in requested skills.

4.1 Women's Unpaid Work

This form of work in households or families' fields is not recognized as work but as a woman's gender role as a family member. According to Morsy (1990) and Hijab (1988, 2001) women's work in the MENA region, as in other developing countries, remains

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hidden until they enter the labour market, which explains the low rate of women's labour participation in the region in national surveys.

4.1.1 Household Work

In patriarchal societies such as MENA societies, it is a common belief that the home is a women's world where they practice their responsibility of biological reproduction and housework, while paid work is the man's world and women in the labour market are just outsiders treated with relative tolerance (Connell, 2009; Pollert 1983). Housework was identified by Oakley (1990) as work undertaken by a woman just like any other kind of work even if it is not paid, and is not just a part of the role of a housewife.

Walby (1990) traces the different views of sociologists and feminists, showing that functionalists see housework as an ideological activity rather than being work itself on the basis of the principle of men and women being different but equal, while radicals and Marxists see housework as a form of women's subordination. However, some liberal feminists suggest that the sexual division of labour within the family is reduced in contemporary western societies as a result of men's increasing role in domestic work, the involvement of women in paid work, and the rise of the nuclear family together with other changes in attitude (Young and Willmott 1975). This view is contested by most gender studies which contend that the gendered nature of housework (Connell 2009; Oakley 1990; Hoteit 2004), means the work itself symbolizes subordination, and can be either resisted or embraced for that reason. Al-Mosaed's study (2008) on working women and power within Saudi families contends that housework remains a fundamental responsibility for women undertaking economic activity outside the household as it is considered as part of their gender role as wives and heavily influences their marriage stability.

Housework has some special characteristics, particularly the length of the work, which Oakley (1990) found averaged 77 hours per week in the UK, even with the privilege of "labour saving machines" such as microwaves and vacuum cleaners (Connell 2009). Other features are the repetitiveness of tasks and the lack of a specific standard to build a measure of psychological satisfaction (Oakley 1990). Some social studies in Western and Middle Eastern societies identify the influence of housework on women, including some positive features, such as the autonomy of being their own boss (Oakley 1990), while negative features are their economic dependence on the male head of the family, isolation and

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loneliness (Attwood and Hatton 1990). Studies document the dissatisfaction of the majority of housewives, for example in England (Oakley 1990), Lebanon (Hoteit 2004), Egypt (Al-Khashab 1983) and France (Deplancq-Nobe'court 2001, cited in Hoteit 2004). While Lebanese housewives interpret this dissatisfaction through a personal explanation, in England and France housewives apply a societal explanation arguing that society does not give housework proper recognition and attributes low status to the role of housewife. Hoteit (2004) explains that becoming a housewife in Lebanon is not a choice, but results from early marriage, the family's class and economic needs⁴⁹, a husband's attitude towards women's work and women's adaption to the convenience and autonomy of this role.

This gender division of work in the household constructs the basis of the gender order in contemporary societies, and the two areas of work, public and private, include different social relations and different cultural meanings (Holter, 2005). Within the broad gender order, Mies (1986) explains how the global economy developed through both colonization and 'housewifization', as in colonized societies under the conditions of the global economy; women were transferred from participants in the local non-capitalist economy to become increasingly dependent on their male breadwinners. In modern economies, large corporations have control over the economy, and as a gender regime guide influence the global market in terms of gendered policies, promotions, wages and marketing that are biased towards men (Connell, 2009).

4.1.2 Agriculture Work

In the Middle East, women's participation in agricultural work is a common phenomenon performed either in their family's fields or in others' fields. In some countries (Jordan, Syria and Tunisia) women represent an average of 21% of the total labour force in agriculture (El-Fattal, 1996), while in Saudi Arabia, Al-Mana (1981) points to the declining number of women in agriculture, in the Eastern region that fell to 1% in 1981. As discussed in the second chapter, the number of Saudis, both women and men, working in agriculture has rapidly declined since the 1960s due to a number of changes that occurred in modernizing the country. Some of these reasons are rural-urban migration of village young men who seek work in the public sector or the oil industry with high wages compared with the high cost of traditional agriculture and its low income (Al-Shahrani, 1996; Al-Sakran and

⁴⁹ The Hoteit study (2004) was on middle class housewives in Lebanon.

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Muneer, 2006), in addition to limited sources of water and dependence on foreign labour (Metz, 1992). However, it is important to note the limitation of growth of the agricultural economy in the MENA countries, especially in oil exporter countries, as a major feature of the Rentier economy that focuses on developing oil and service industries (UNDP, 2009; Al-Naqeeb 2008).

El-Fattal (1996) argues that women's work in agricultural areas has not been well documented, despite their fundamental role within the economy of their families and countries, and they have been less empowered than urban women regarding their lack of control over decision making, family revenue and in particular land property which is completely male dominated in patriarchal societies. This supports Kandiyoti's view (1988) of women's position in the MENA region, especially egalitarian societies, within which women are disempowered and their strategy to deal with what she terms "classic Patriarchy" is accommodation and bargain, while the other strategy is resistance that exists in sub-Saharan societies in Africa. Some black feminists, such as Collins (1990) support this view of African women, in both West Africa in the pre-slavery time and later in the enslaved period in America, who have a high sense of gender equality due to both sexes performing the same cultivation tasks.

Other studies argue that general equality might apply in relation to daily work responsibilities, but would not be applied to major rights, such as land property. Kabeer (1999) elucidates how the high value of land in rural societies in India makes men, both Muslim and Hindu; monopolize the property of land, although in theory Islam gives women the right of inheritance while Hinduism prevents it. Some strategies to exclude women from inheritance include selling their lands to their sons, as in Egyptian villages (Morsy 1990:111), turning the land to Waqaf⁵⁰ which was common in 'Asir (Ben-Jrais 1994:130) and in Al-Baha as well (Al-Ghamdi 1985: 69). Another common strategy in Al-Baha was giving some money to widows who do not have male children, to waive her share

⁵⁰ Waqaf means "restricting the origin and benefiting for the profit", it is a legal Acts that has to be documented before the death of a person to declare that his/her properties cannot be sold after his death, but its income or any kind of benefit of this property can be used by a specific group the person has to specify. The Waqaf can be for the benefit of family members, a specific group or disadvantage people. Although this act is usually used as a charity, yet some people can mobilize it to protect their property from selling or turning to the hands of daughters' children or widows' husbands who might not belong to the same kinship group or the tribe (Saidoni 1989).

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to her husband's family (Al-Ghamdi 1985: 255). Hence, endogamy has been a widespread phenomenon in MENA rural societies as a strategy to preserve the family's property and limit potential conflict (Barakat 2000).

The gender division of labour is a common phenomenon in plough-based agricultural societies, where men are responsible for heavy physical work, while women take responsibility for the rest of daily agricultural activities (Boserup 2007). Anthropological and social studies in Saudi Arabia (Al-Torki 2001) in Onizah⁵¹ (Al-Ghamdi 1985; Shokri 1981) in Al-Baha, in addition to some historical studies (Shaker 1981; Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951) on Asir confirm the role of the extended family as a unit and women's active participation in this work, yet these studies do not provide detailed descriptions of women's agricultural role as it is outside their scope of interest. Al-Torki's study (2001) on Onizah explains how men were responsible for heavy tasks such as fertilization of palm trees and collection, while women were excluded from these activities and participated in the later processes, such as splitting the dates into categories and the preservation process.

Katacora's (1996) study on the villages of Wadi Fatimah⁵² in 1960, pointed to the absence of women's participation in agriculture; they were undertaking the grazing of animals and traditional industries at their homes. Katacora (1996: 77) points to a common proverb in the area saying "men outside and women inside". The conditions of women in other Saudi rural societies reflects the diversity between rural communities even in the same country, and also indicates the Bedouin nature of these villages, settled only since the mid-1950s, resulting in a lifestyle that combined bedouin and rural lifestyles, unlike the original rural areas in the South Western region and oases.

4.2 Women's Paid Work

Anthropological and historical studies on different regions in Saudi Arabia point to different forms of women's paid work. In 'Asir, historians (Shaker, 1981; Philby, 1952; Hamzah, 1951) point to the distinctive economic role of women compared to any other part of the country, as women were participating in agricultural activities and working in the city market. Historians also described the increasing movement on weekly market days, in

⁵¹ Onizah is an oasis city in Najd the central region in Saudi Arabia.

⁵² Wadi Fatimah constitutes a number of villages (around 10) in the Western region (Al-Hijaz). This area is 75 km east of Jeddah and 30 km west of Makkah (Katacora 1996).

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Abha or other cities or towns in the region, when village people, men and women, come to sell their products and get their needs from the city (as discussed in chapter 2). In Al-Thuqbah, a small town in the Eastern region, although Al-Baadi (1982) was studying women's education, he gives example of some forms of paid work within the private arena of women in the recent past, such as tailors, bakers, part-time cooks, part-time domestic workers, and singers, in addition to some door-to-door saleswomen and market saleswomen. Al-Oteiby's study (1982) on women's involvement in employment points to the economic role of bedouin women who, in addition to their grazing and caring for livestock were specialized in handicrafts, such as native embroidery on clothes, carpets and tents "Sadow" (Al-Baadi 1982), while Al-Torki's study (1989) on the city of Onizah also points to women's work in the city market.

Traditional industry was another economic activity that women performed in 'Asir, as discussed by Shaker (1981) who also explained how this work was linked with social groups among the working class and each group specialized in a specific type of industry that was practiced by the whole family as a unit. However, Moghadam (1999) and Smith (2003) explain how traditional industry in the MENA region has been negatively influenced by international trade, capital flows, known now as economic globalization, and the oil led economy of the region, especially in oil exporter countries (UNDP 2009). In Algeria, for instance, Smith (2003) elucidates that during the French colony⁵³, traditional industry, agriculture and even nomadic grazing were weakened and in some parts of the country diminished as a result of the French policy of opening the market to competition from international cheaper products.

Domestic paid work is another form of traditional paid-work that has been undertaken by working class women in different parts of the world including the MENA region. Collins (1990) explains that globally, urbanization for poor women means migration from agricultural work to home-based work or to domestic employment in the cities. The migration of the whole family to the larger cities also shifted the focus of domestic work from 'live-in' servant to day work, as with black women in the USA up to the 1940s. In Britain, the two world wars had a huge impact on women's employment, as a great number

⁵³ The French colony in Algeria as the longest in the MENA region ran from 1830 to 1962 (Smith 2003).

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of work opportunities became more accessible for working class women who had previously worked mainly as domestic servants (Attwood 1983:116).

In Saudi Arabia, rich families in the big cities in particular, royalty, Sheikhs and traders, were dependent on slaves for fulfilling domestic work up until the 1950s, as pointed out by some studies (Philby 1952; Doumato 2000; Katakora 1996). In addition, some local working class women used to provide their services, either as part time or full time work (Al-Baadi 1982). However, freeing slaves in 1962 (Katakora 1996), and the economic growth provided these groups with better jobs, while the need for domestic workers increased with the flourishing economy in the 1970s. In fact, the domestic worker has become more globalized as working class women immigrate from poor developing countries to developed and rich countries to undertake domestic work overseas (Lan 2003). In the Arabian Gulf societies, gradually having a foreign domestic worker became a characteristic of the family in this region, such that the number of domestic workers in Saudi Arabia reached 1,000,000 in 2000 and the average number of domestic labourers within a family in Kuwait and UAE was 2.2 (Bagader 2003). This phenomenon of employing live-in domestic workers from developing countries is the result of a number of reasons including the growing living standard, expansion of the size of houses, women's involvement in education and employment, the high rate of fertility of women in this region and the limited availability of child care and cleaning services (Bagader 2003).

4.2.1 Features and Size of Women's Employment in the Middle East

MENA countries experienced rapid economic and structural changes before and after the oil boom era, especially in the period 1960s-1980s, as the region as a whole achieved one of the highest rates of growth in the world economy (Karshenas and Moghadam 2001). Fargues (2005) contends that oil wealth has influenced the non-oil economies, as well as the oil exporter or mixed economies in the region, through private investment, development assistance and migrant workers to the oil exporter countries. However, MENA feminists (Moghadam 2003; Hijab 2001, 1988) agree that women in the Middle East have not benefitted from this economic growth as their economic activity is among the lowest in the world. Although their work is influenced by the diversity of the economies in the region, they share common characteristics:

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- 1. Low rate of women's economic participation in the labour market** (Moghadam 2003; Hijab 2001), contributing to the low level of women's empowerment (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). The expansion of trade markets starting in the 1970s led to the feminization of employment throughout many developing countries (Moghadam 1999:372), and in the MENA region in the period 1990-2003 the increase of women's employment participation was 19% compared with the world's rate of increase of 3% (UNDP 2005:88). However, women's economic participation in this region remains the lowest in the world, and has not exceeded 33.3% of women above age 15 compared with the world average of 55% (UNDP 2005: 88). In Saudi Arabia, the third Development Plan (1985) represents the earliest data on women's economic participation, estimated at 5% of the total labour force, which remained the same up to the end of 1992 (MEP 2005:361), and increased to 12% of the total labour force in 2010 (MEP 2010:155). However, the proportion reached 33.2% of national labour in the public sector where Saudi workers are concentrated (MEP 2010:155,157).

It is important to point out that a significant reason behind the low rate of women's participation in the MENA region in general is the definition of economic participation in statistics as "labour for wages" (Hijab 1988:72), excluding women's unpaid work in unregistered businesses, self-employment and home-based work (Moghadam 1999).

- 2. Concentration of working women in the public sector** (Moghadam 2003:51). Although the concentration of working women in the public sector is universal and in the Middle East⁵⁴ it has increased since the 1980s when wages eroded in this sector and men moved to private sector employment (Moghadam 1999). However, in Saudi Arabia the public sector is not only the "biggest single employer of women" (Doumato 1999:569), but is for all Saudis, both men and women. This started in the 1960s-1970s when the country had a massive shortage of labour that attracted national labour to work in the public sector, army and oil industry, and some foreign labour to fill the remaining jobs in public sector, while the private sector was completely filled with foreign labour. Today, foreign labour constitutes

⁵⁴ Mainly in Egypt, Iran and Turkey (Moghadam 1999).

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78.4%⁵⁵ of the total number of the labour force of 8,020,000, while the national labour at 21.6% is concentrated in the public sector, within which Saudi men constitute 92% of male labour, and Saudi women constitute 88.4% of the 311,200 female workers in the private sector (MEP 2010: 155-158).

- 3. Concentration of women in professional occupations, especially in social public service (Moghadam 2003:48).** Teaching although historically the occupation that women pursue in the Middle East, in the KSA the limited access of women to other fields of work has increased the proportion of women in this field to 77.5% of working women in the public sector in addition to 2.6% in higher education (Al-Dakheel⁵⁶ 2000:295). Working in the health sector which was previously socially restricted as a non-gender segregated field (Al-Munajjed 1997; Doumato 1999) has expanded and by 2000 became the second sector for women's employment at a rate of 16.9% of the total number of the female labour force (Al-Dakheel 2000:295).

In the MENA region women have a limited presence in administrative and managerial jobs (Moghadam 2003), and in KSA only 3% of the total Saudi female labour force works in different government departments as social workers, administrators and researchers in the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Ministry of Media, and other women's sections in government departments (Al-Dakheel 2000; MEP 2005:295).

- 4. Limitation or absence of women's employment in private sector jobs and particularly in industry sectors (Moghadam 2003).** According to the ninth development plan (MPE 2010: 158), the labour-force in Saudi private sector is 6,220,000 including (5,390,900) foreign workers representing 86.7%, while Saudi labour, male and female, is only 829,100 constituting 13.3% of the total labour force in the private sector. This includes merely 51,500 Saudi women, representing 0.8% of the total labour force and 36% of the female labour force in this sector (MPE 2010: 158). Pace

⁵⁵ All proportions or numbers in bracket are calculated by the researcher based on the available figures.

⁵⁶ The eighth Development Plan (2005:374) points to 83.4% of working women in the public sector being in teaching jobs, while 5.4% in health sector in 2003. However the proportion of working women in the health sector has not kept pace with the expansion of this field in the last two decades and with Al-Dakheel (2000) study that was based on more detailed statistics from the Ministry of Civil Services.

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This marginalization of women in the private sector is a universal phenomenon, which Connell (2009) refers to as the gender regime of transnational corporations dominating economic institutions in the contemporary world, although in Saudi society the rate is remarkably low; that even in the industrial Cities, the rate of women's participation has not exceed 1% in 2011 (Abdul-Aziz and Basmael 2011).

Self-employment and unregistered small enterprises reflect the development of informal economic activity since the 1990s throughout the world, achieving a high rate in Iran, Indonesia and Peru in particular (Moghadam 2000). In Saudi Arabia, the limited work opportunities in both the public and private sectors resulted in an increase in female enterprises as a new field of work, especially given women's large savings in Saudi banks that reached 15 billion S.R without investment (MEP 2005:375). In 2004, the number of private businesses owned by women increased to 22,000, representing 4.7% of the total number of private businesses in the kingdom (MEP 2005:375). Although the percentage of female enterprises is still small, these women have broken the social norms that exclude women from the market (Mujahid 1985; Moghadam 2003), enlarging a new arena for women's economic participation. Aiming at female customers is seen through the concentration of 80% of these companies are in boutiques and accessory shops, wholesale goods and food businesses (MEP 2005:375, Yamani 1996: 277).

4.3 Conditions of Women's Work

Middle Eastern feminists (Moghadam 2003; Hijab 1988, 2001; Doumato 1999:568) contend that understanding the variation in women's work in the region can be understood in terms of the inter-relationship between the socio-cultural factors together with state policies and the level of economic development of the society. Hijab (2001, 1988) presented a paradigm of three conditions that construct women's work in the MENA countries: needs, opportunities and ability. Each condition has to be met at two levels: national and personal levels. Furthermore, the three conditions must be integrated at the same time, and Hijab (1988: 74) argues that not meeting any one would result in the maintenance of the status quo. This section discusses women's work in relation to the first condition, economic needs, and the following two sections address the other two conditions: women's work opportunities and women's education and abilities with regard to participation in paid work:

4.3.1 Economic Needs

The economic needs of the state for manpower and the needs of the woman and her family for her income is the first and main condition, in Hijab's paradigm (2001 1988). Hijab explains how the large shortage of labour was common in the boom era in all MENA countries, yet it was treated differently. In the Arabian Gulf countries, instead of involving more women in the labour market the oil wealth, in addition to social and cultural factors, enabled these societies to open the labour market to massive foreign labour (Kandiyoti 1991a; Hijab 2001; Boserup and Kanji 2007). At the same time, in the labour-exporting countries, like Jordan, men's migration gave women the chance to access employment in large numbers. At the personal level, the inflation in Jordan drove families to encourage their women to work, but in the Arabian Gulf countries the families' economic needs were not so pressing for women to work in that era (Hijab 2001:49).

Marxist feminists support this view linking women's work to the demands of the economy and labour market. Beechey (1987) applied Marxist theory to women's work and found that when a boom economy requires more labour, women enter the labour market, but return to their homes in times of recession. Fergany (1998) confirmed this theory in Egypt where women's employment declined at the beginning of the 1990s as a result of the slow economic growth, while men's employment increased in the same period, especially in the private sector. War time has reflected the transition of states' positions on women's work not only in the USA and Europe during World War II (Barayon 1989, Walby 1990), but also in the MENA region (Mohanty 2003). Najmabadi (1991) explains how in Iran ideology about gender roles was used at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 to marginalise women in the labour market, supported by the patriarchal interpretation of Islam. However soon after the start of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) the state transferred to a supportive attitude, such as establishing nurseries which it had previously accused of being a western strategy.

Gender studies (Walby 1990; Hartman 2001, Witz 2007; Moghadam 2003, 1999; Connell 2009) have stressed the fundamental role of capitalism in constructing the position of women in the labour market by its control over both the labour force and labour market. First is capitalists' monopoly of the means of production enabling them to impose their conditions for the labour market and labour, limiting choice to not working at all or being exploited by these employers (Tong 2009). Second is the capitalists' use of a long-term

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"reserve of labour" as a threat to their workers to discourage them from asking for higher wages or better conditions in times of high demand for labour, which can apply to women (Walby 1990: 35). Third is the capitalist response to a growing globalized economy with cheaper external products, driving local capitalists to transfer some jobs from the formal to the informal sector in order to increase flexibility, lower the cost of production and labour through subcontracting, and feminization of labour as they encourage the involvement of low cost female labour (Moghadam 2005, 1999).

These transformations are growing with the state's change to the new-liberal economy, as discussed in relation to the Saudi economy in Chapter two, including the privatization of some public services where working women are concentrated and the increasing role of gendered transnational corporations and international organizations that dominate the globalized economy today (Connell, 2009; Moghadam 1999, 2005).

As to women and their families' needs for work income, Kabeer (2005) argues that women's paid work can enhance their bargaining power as respected members of their families and communities, yet the influence of paid work as a resource of empowerment varies from one society to another and from one generation to another (Hijab, 1988). Hijab's example of Jordan and the Arabian Gulf countries in the boom era reflects not only the state's needs but also the families' need and how these needs have formed women's employment. Other studies in the boom era in Saudi Arabia, Al-Hussaini (1988) and Al-Nemer (1988), assert that women do not work for money in the first place but for self-realization and fulfillment. Whereas recent studies, Doumato (2003) and Al-Mosaed (2008), explain how the collapse of oil revenue and its impact on the family's income in the post-boom era has reduced men's ability to provide a good living standard to their families and has urged Saudi women into the labour market.

4.3.2 Women's Work and Opportunities

In Hijab's paradigm (1988:74) for the conditions of women's work, opportunities refer to state efforts to establish appropriate settings for women's employment by planning and legislation, and at the personal level to the socio-cultural norms and challenges to women's work. In the MENA region, although socio-cultural factors have been a major reason behind the low rate of women's economic participation, economic needs and state policies have had success in many countries in limiting the role of socio-cultural barriers when

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women's work was needed (Hijab 2001; Moghadam 1999). Some feminists (Hartman 2001; Walby 1990) argue that although economic factors related to "capitalism" and socio-cultural factor related to "patriarchy" are different, they oppress women deeply when they intersect. The following section discusses the influence of the interaction of these two factors on state policies, gender segregation, and class, while the cultural context was discussed in Chapter 3.

4.3.2.1 State Planning and Policies

As discussed in Chapter 3, women's integration into the economy and public life varies from one country to another, as some countries in the MENA region adopt modernization projects including numerous state policies to involve women in public life and the labour market, while other countries represent a patriarchal gender order that marginalizes women's participation in the formal economy and in public life in general, such as the case of Algeria, Jordan and the Arab Gulf countries (Moghadam 2003; Doumato 1999, 2003; Al-Mughni 2001).

Women's work is influenced by regulations in the legal system, welfare system, employment and even transportation policies. Although all Saudi women are influenced by the state policies of guardianship "*Mahram*", legal proxy "*Wakil*", ban on entering public organizations and ban on women's driving, the study of Al-Turki and Brazwail (2010) on business women in Jeddah contends that these policies discourage women from starting their own businesses and result in the closure of many. They explain how the rule of *Mahram* and *Wakil* cause extra spending, a delay in some business commitments and limit the chance of businesswomen attending training programmes abroad, while lack of efficient access to government services adds layers of bureaucracy, as women's sections of government departments have limited power of decision-making (Al-Turki and Brazwail 2010).

In relation to the small number of female workers in the Saudi private sector, although there is little information about their conditions, Al-Torki and Bagader (2006:54) consider this work as 'forced labour' due to the lack of a minimum wage act. In the Arabian Gulf countries, Shah (2006) and Gill (2008) explain how wages in the private sector in general do not have a clear structure that depends on the qualifications and experience of employees, but what the employer thinks fit according to the nature of the work performed

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and the nationality of the worker. For instance, western workers receive the highest wages, Saudi citizens receive less than half of the western wages without the other benefits, and workers from developing countries receive the lowest wages (Gill, 2008). Another significant factor that has limited workers' rights in this sector is the lack labour unions to defend employees' rights, as the Ministry of Work is the only representative of both government and workers' interests regarding private sector (ILO, 2011).

In addition to the poor or unstable income in the private sector, globally the private sector provides less legal rights, while the public sector, which Hijab (2001:50) calls "trouble-free and respected employment", provides higher wages, better benefits and, most of all, greater job security and obligation towards work law (Connell, 2009; Hijab, 1988). For instance, legislation regarding maternity leave, time-off for child care, and provision of child care facilities and prevention of dismissal due to pregnancy are fully implemented in the public than in the private sector (Hijab 2001; Moghadam 1999). Maternity leave in the Saudi private sector is 45 days with 100% of salary if the mother has exceeded three years of work, 50% if the mother has worked from one to three years, and no leave for workers who spend less than one year at work (Ministry of Work 2006: 27). However, in the public sector, according to Act 22, maternity leave is 60 days with 100% of salary, and since 2006 working mothers have the choice of child care leave from three months to a total of three years across all their working years with 25% of their salary (Ministry of Civil Service 2006: 22). However, it is not declared if this regulation applies also to government employees who work under temporary contract, which is the situation of most employees recruited since the early-1990s.

The most recent state policies regarding women's employment is Act 120 in 2004, which called for new work opportunities for women, including selling in cosmetic and lingerie stores, and replacing the ban on employing men and women at the same workplace with Act 4 of stating that women's work has to follow Islamic law "Shari'a" by both employers and employees (Ministry of Work 2006). However, this act is still being contested by private sector employers and conservative Wahhabis, especially because it is not supported by mechanisms for implementations. Such policy reflect the state's interest to reform women's employment conditions, yet it is lack of ability to implement the change (Hijab 1988:83)

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The welfare system in some Arabian Gulf countries, according to Hijab (1988), contributes in driving women away from employment, as divorced and widowed women are eligible for social security, rather than involving them in the labour market. However, it is important to note that the social security payment is only 1000 S.R (\$266.70) a month in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Social Affairs 2010), which hardly meets basic needs and cannot represent a major reason behind the low percentage of Saudi women within the labour force.

In summary, the state's role is fundamental in empowering women. As Walby (1990) argues it is the state's role to facilitate women's employment, and to compromise between capitalist and patriarchal forces to gain more advantage for women.

4. 3.2.2 Gender Division of Labour

The gender division of labour refers to the division of economic activities into men's work and women's work regardless of the presence of the other sex in each field (Connell 2009; Karshenas and Moghadam 2001). However the way the gender division of labour is practiced varies from one society to another and from one stage of time to another (Connell 2009). In the agricultural field, for instance, Boserup (2007: 12-13) observed two forms of gender division of labour in developing countries; agriculture was predominantly practiced by women as in Africa, while the other termed "plough cultivation" was predominantly practiced by male family members and women in many of these societies in Asia were excluded from farming activities.

In urban areas in the MENA region, Karshenas and Moghadam (2001) argue that, although patriarchal families have become nuclearized and ties with kinship have been weakened, the gender division of labour is still predicated upon the traditional gender role of the male-breadwinner and the female-home maker forming one-wage earner families, which is confirmed by Al-Mosaed's (2008) study on Saudi working women.

The gender division of paid work reflects common patriarchal stereotypes of women in society that Anker (2001) divides into three stereotypes of women: positive, negative, and general. The positive stereotypes include characteristics, such as caring nature, skills related to housework, manual dexterity, greater honesty and attractive physical appearance, giving women access to jobs like nurse, teacher, social worker, cashier, salesperson, housekeeper, hairdresser and cook. Negative stereotypes of women indicate their lack of ability to

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supervise others, their lesser physical strength, negative attitudes to travel, less ability in Maths, limiting women's access to male dominated jobs, such as manager, government executive, scientist, architect, or construction worker. The third group includes general patriarchal stereotypes about women, such as readiness to take orders, less complaining about working conditions, more acceptance of repetitive work, acceptance of lower pay and less need for income, and finally, a greater interest in working from home. These stereotypes legitimize inequality in the labour market and result in women having limited work opportunities, low paid jobs, fewer benefits, less training, less promotion, and less authority (Anker 2001). Reskin (1993) explains how employers are influenced by patriarchal stereotypes about women's work believing that family and childbearing responsibilities lead working women to a high rate of absenteeism and turnover. Hence Hartman (1982) argues that these stereotypes limited women's work options to domestic work.

Hakim (2004) has examined how the gender division of labour is associated with two types of gender segregation at work. One is vertical segregation which keeps women in lower paid and lower grade jobs, while men dominate higher level occupations with higher payment which results in a wage gap and authority gap, with women's access to the highest-grade jobs in their profession restricted by invisible barriers, often termed a "glass ceiling" (Hakim 2004:178). Gender segregation is also horizontal, which concentrates women in a few types of work, linked to the patriarchal stereotypes discussed above. These forms of gender segregation are more common in the private than in the public sector and in large rather than in small public institutions (DiPrete and Soule 1988; Baron and Bielby 1984).

Another model of gender segregation in the labour market is associated with dual labour market theory, which divides the labour market into "primary and secondary sectors" (Witz 2007:248). The primary sector includes jobs associated with high income and employee benefits, skilled jobs, with good opportunities for training and education and a higher level of unionisation, while the secondary sector includes jobs associated with low income and benefits, lack of skills, fewer opportunities for education and training and limited unionisation (Witz 2007). According to this model, women's work opportunities are primarily in the secondary sector where workers have five key attributes: dispensable,

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socially different, less interested in high income, less interested in training, and less organized.

Features of women's employment in Saudi Arabia, discussed earlier in this chapter, show that Saudi women are concentrated in the public sector, while their rate of employment in the private sector is very low, only 0.8% of the labour force (MEP 2010:158). In the public sector women cluster in the educational field, 80.1% of working women are in the public sector and 16.9% in the health sector (Ministry of Civil Services 1997). Although gender segregation is common in all Muslim countries, in Saudi Arabia it became complete separation between the sexes, as women mainly work in girls' schools, the female sections in universities or female sections in government departments (Doumato 1999,2003; Al-Munajjed 1997). This horizontal gender segregation also applies in the private sector where women work in girls' private schools, female bank branches or in women's shops with signs "For women only: Men are forbidden to enter" (Yamani 1996:273). Hospitals, both public and private, are the main exception as a result of the difficulty of separating the sexes; hence female workers have to dress to a strict code (Doumato, 2003). Banks started recruiting women in women's branches mainly in the big cities from 1980 in Riyadh, 1982 in Jeddah and then throughout the country (Al-Munajjed 1997: 91). Aramco, the Arab American Oil Company in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, has been recruiting Saudi women since the 1960s with a special permission from King Faisal (Al-Munajjed 1997:92), which confirms the role of the state in forming the policy on women's employment. In the last decade, an increasing number of companies have recruited Saudi women to mixed workplaces. Al-Mamlakh Corporation⁵⁷, is a leader in this trend, which has been followed with great caution by other companies and banks in the big cities (Butters 2009).

Hartmann (1982) contends that horizontal and vertical segregation take place at the same time in a circle in which women are absent from upper level jobs leading to their primary role in domestic work and reducing their access to jobs in the highest positions. Thus men have gained access to better jobs with higher wages. Witz (2007) explains that women find it very difficult to reach supervisory positions in workplaces that include both sexes and that their exclusion from higher positions forces them into marriage and financial dependency on husbands, reflecting a strong relationship between public oppression in the

⁵⁷ Owned by Prince Al-Waleed Ben Talal

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labour market and private oppression in the family (Cockburn 1991). In Saudi Arabia, the strict horizontal segregation of women consequently led to their exclusion from top positions in government departments, universities and banks (Doumato 2003; Al-Munajjed 1997).

In the MENA countries, Hijab (1988) explains how horizontal gender segregation is used as a strategy to protect the honour of women by preventing them from mixing with men. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, for women to work with men at the same workplace is considered un-Islamic by the dominant Wahhabi discourse (Al-Juraisi 1999). Other studies argue that gender segregation is not only patriarchal but is a strategy that has been used by capitalists to reduce the costs of production and control the labour force, preventing their solidarity and resistance to capitalist demands (Walby 1990; Hartman 1982).

Societies develop several mechanisms that bolster gender segregation in the labour market starting with the gendered division of childcare (Riesman 1986, cited in Connell, 2009: 88) and emphasized through gender role socialization (Reskin 1993) and education (Jacob, 2001). In fact, gender segregation in the labour market starts in the household which has been resistant to change, despite married women's advancing participation in the labour market across countries (Breen and Cooke 2005); husbands' contribution to household work and child care is lower than one third of women's contributions (Gershuny 2000; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001). Studies show that the division of household labour has an impact on the stability of marriage, and hence, some breadwinner wives continue doing more domestic work in order to seek balance in their marital relationship and to emphasize their traditional gender identities (Breen and Cooke 2005). It is argued that women's position in the family influences their status in the labour market (Witz 2007), but in addition, Walby (1990) and Hartman (1982) contend that gender segregation in the labour market and public patriarchy determine women's position in their families.

4.3.2.3 Women's Work and Class

Sociologists have different views about women's class. Acker (1996) explains that the mainstream assumption in social science is that the family is the main unit in class stratification, and the status of the family and its members is determined by the male head of the family. For example, a woman is seen as determining her own class position only when she is not attached to a man. However, some feminists (Acker 1996; Delphy 1996;

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Walby 1986) argue that in western societies, a woman's own occupation should be considered when determining her class, regardless of her marital status and that the role of housewife should be considered as an occupation with a place in the occupational scale. Within the MENA region where women's citizenship, identity and status are based on their membership of an extended family (Kandiyoti 1988; Joseph 2000; Al-Torki 2000; Yamani 1996; Al-Mughni and Te'treault 2000; Charrd 2001, Shami 1990), it would not be pragmatically accepted to depend on women's own occupation rather than her family to determine the class of a woman. Furthermore, this criterion is difficult to implement in a region that is characterized by a low rate of women's employment combined with a high rate of women working with their families as a unit either in agricultural or in traditional industries (Hijab 1988, Moghadam 2003).

The ideology of domesticity and woman's gender role as a housewife depending economically on her husband has spread in different societies and historical stages, such as in the industrial revolution in Britain (Witz 2007) and also in developing countries as explained by Boserup (2007). In Europe, this ideology spread first among upper class and middle class women, while the financial needs of the working class limited the influence of this ideology. The development of capitalism interweaving with class and patriarchy gradually restricted women's participation in the labour market. Not involving women in paid work outside the household is a common characteristic among Saudi upper class women, which was emphasized in Al-Torki's study (1989) on merchant families in Jeddah, which showed that none of these women were undertaking any form of paid work. Al-Ba'adi (1982) in his study on the eastern region and mainly in a small town "Al-Thoqabah" also linked traditional forms of paid work, with working class women. Philby (1952:142,146), in his visit to Abha in the 1930s, distinguishes between the visibility of village women and working class women in the fields and in the city market, while meeting an urban upper class woman occurred only when he was invited for dinner in the house of an upper class family.

However modernization has transferred the seclusion of upper class to provide them with what Moghadam (2003:38) addresses as "positive discrimination" or a quota system that benefit upper class women and provide them with a better access to employment, while limiting social mobility for lower class people. Upper middle class women have played a major role in women's activism in industrial societies, it was middle class women who

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began calling for additional employment opportunities and better working conditions for women in the UK (Witz 2007), and in the MENA countries it was middle class women who first entered higher education institutions and the labour market to achieve freedom and higher status in the independence and post-colonial era (Merrimssi 1994). However, their increasing power became a threat to fundamental Islamists, as these women represented a challenge to power and resistance to political and social dominance. In the 1980s, this was the case of women in Pakistan and in Algeria (Merrimssi 1994) and in Iran (Najmabad 1991; Moghadam, 2003), as professional women demonstrated against political oppression and resisted the marginalization of women in public life.

The role of working class women in public life has been limited despite having more anger and more frustration about their socio-economic conditions, yet their struggle with harsh daily life, poor income and long working hours limited their choice to participate in public activities (Merrimssi 1992). In fact, paid work across cultures and regimes has a strong bond with working class women who view paid work not as a choice, but as a matter of survival for themselves and their families. Shami (1990) explains how the need for women's income has been a common feature among both urban and rural poor families in Jordan. Hamman's study (1979) on women working in textile factories in Egypt, also concludes that there is one major reason for seeking paid work, , the economic solvency of the household which cannot be maintained without women's contribution, regardless of their marital status. Nevertheless, despite the significant role of class in understanding women's position in the labour market, it is argued that a profound understanding of women's work is not possible unless it is integrated with other factors, which vary from one approach to another. While some, such as Acker (2000) argue that a successful analysis is based on the integration of class with gender and race others, such as Witz (2007) argue that it is based on macro analysis that includes class, capitalism and patriarchy.

In the occupational class system, education is a major factor that influences women's upward mobility in the workplace (Abbott and Sapsford 1987). Garnsey (1982) indicates that a woman's occupation can have a significant effect on her family's income, especially among the working class.

4.3.3 Education and the Ability for Work

Education represents the third aspect of Hijab's model (1988) for the conditions of women's involvement in the labour market in the MENA region. Education at all levels, but higher education in particular, provides women with options and empowers them to be independent thinkers, active members in society and agents of change (Bacheley 2011). Women's educational attainment is seen as a major criterion to measure their empowerment by the World Economic Forum (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). Mernissi (1994:201) explains how women in the MENA countries in the post-colonial era, considered entry into higher educational institutions as a means of access to the labour market and independence for themselves. Hence in the 1980s, the number of female academics reached an average of 26% in Egypt, Algeria and Pakistan; and the percentage of women in Medical schools was 50% in Tunis, 37% in Syria and 30% in Algeria (Mernissi 1994).

In Saudi Arabia, education has been one of the most successful development projects and women's literacy has been improving from 16.4% in 1970 to 68.2% in 2005 among adults (15 + over), and from 35.4 % in 1970 to 91.0% in 2005 among youth (15-24) (UN, 2010). The proportion of female literacy to male literacy among young people has reached 97:100 (MEP 2005: 360). The annual rate of female student enrolment at all educational levels increased sharply to 8% over the period 1975–2002, compared with about 4.2% for boys (MEP 2005: 359). School students in Saudi Arabia constitute 4.6 million representing 30% of the population; female students constitute 48.6% of those students, and in higher education the proportion of female graduates is 56.5%, exceeding that of male graduates (MEP 2005: 360).

These numbers show the rapid development that girls' education has gone through since 1960 when the state established the first 15 girls' schools throughout the country after prolonged debate between Liberals and Wahhabi scholars (Hamdan 2005; Al-Sadhan 2000; Al-Rawaf and Simmons 1991, Al- Baadi 1982). However, it is important to point to the intellectuals role in establishing a total of 24 elementary private schools in big cities prior to the state schools, which started with "Madrasat Al-Banat Al-Ahliyah" in Makkah in 1942, which also opened the first secondary classes to train for teaching in 1956 (Al-Dakheel 2000: 70-73; Al-Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 288). Whereas most of these schools were concentrated in Al-Hijaz region, in other regions girls' education depended on 64

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"*Kuttab*"⁵⁸ (Al-Dakheel 2000:58-63). The need for higher educational achievement inspired some intellectual families to send their children to other Arab countries, mainly Egypt and Lebanon, and they formed a new educated middle class in the 1970s and contributed in modernizing the country (Al-Torki 1977; Yamani 2001).

There is little available information regarding the development of girls' education in Abha or in 'Asir. However, Al-Dowsari (1998) points to the role of some princesses of Al-Aydh, the previous royalty in 'Asir, in educating women⁵⁹. In addition to the role of the grand mosque in Abha as an educational institution in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a Turkish elementary school for girls was established by the last Ottoman governor, Muhee Aldeen Pasha (1913-1919) (Al-Dowsari 1998; Al-Dawood 1995), and Al-Rasheediyah elementary school for boys (Al-Na'ami, 1999; Ben-Jrais 1995). In 1921, the first Arabic boys' school was established by Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Al-Mutawe'a at Al-Gara mosque with 80 male students; an interview with his son shows that Al- Al-Mutawe'a lessons in the early 1950s at his home included boys and nine girls (Ministry of Education 2002). Al-Qara'awi, who was an active Wahhabi sheikh, started his educational mission in the south western region by establishing a school in Samtah⁶⁰ in 1938 and by 1959 he had 1000 schools in 'Asir, but there is no information regarding girls in these schools (Ben-Jrais 1995:162-168). The main aim of these educational institutions, apart from the secondary class in Makkah to prepare teachers, for girls was not to prepare them for any future profession, but to provide them with religious education as part of their socialization as Muslims and future mothers.

The establishment of girls' schools in 1960 was a turning point in the history of Saudi women's education and the only opposition was represented by a small group of Wahhabis that stoned the first girls' school in Buraydah in Najd (Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Turki 2000). However, after a prolonged debate for two decades, 1940s-1950s, giving Wahhabi scholars

⁵⁸ Kuttab Classes provide basic education, mainly teaching reading the Qur'an, some writing and basic math. Usually it takes place in the mosque or in the teacher's house, with a male or female teacher. This form of education was the major method of girls' education until 1960.

⁵⁹ Al-Dowsari (1998:236-239) points to Princess Fatima Ben-Ayed (1823-1977) as an educated lady who memorized the whole Qur'an and read and wrote in both Arabic and Turkish and educated her niece Fatima Ben Sa'ad Ben Aydh (1854-1919), while they were in exile in Turkey (1872-1878). Later Fatima Ben Sa'ad returned to 'Asir and began educating girls with her cousin 'Etrah Bent Sa'eed (1858-1920s) (AL-Dowsari 1998: 303-307). Al-Dowsari's story about an educated princess was confirmed by a historian of the region who has some of her writing in the Shafe'i Islamic school, but names her as Sarra rather than Fatima (Muhammad Mimish interview, cited in Al-Na'ami 1999)

⁶⁰ Samtah is a village by the Saudi -Yamani borders, and 257 Km from Abha.

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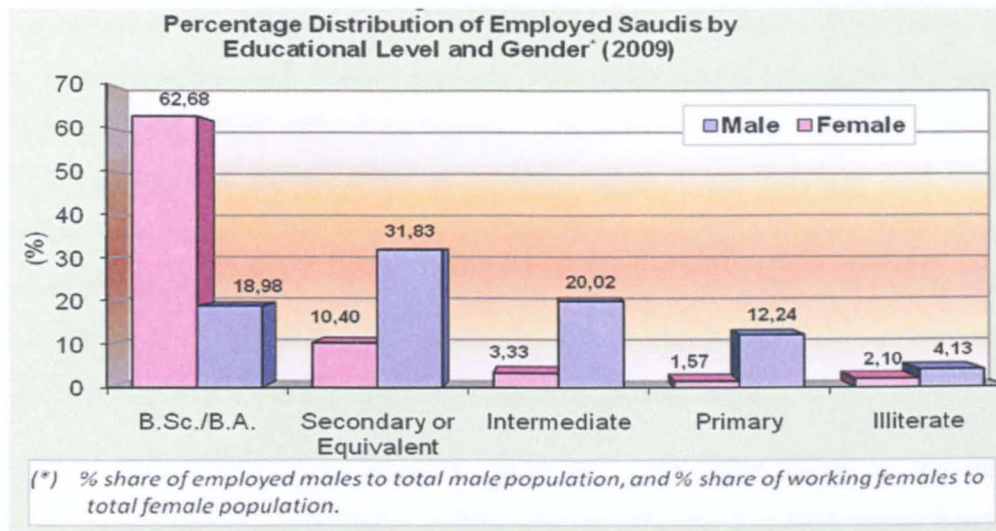
the responsibility of supervising the Department of Girls' Education absorbed their anger and their fears of women's involvement into public life (Al-Baadi 1982; Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Torki 2000). Nussbaum (2003:339-340) explains the reasons behind resistance to women's education as:

"Women's education is revolutionary; it is a key to many other sources of power and opportunity. It is therefore not that surprising that people who resist extending these other sources of power and opportunities to women typically oppose women's education or at least its extension."

Modernization and economic growth were so fast that the budget for girls' education became 50 times greater by the end of the 1960s in order to establish many more schools (Abdul-Wassi'e 1970). Higher education also started accepting women as part timer students in King Saud University in Riyadh in 1961, in Shari'a college in Makkah in 1967 (Al-Dakheel 2000), and in the same year, King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah was the first to accept women as full-time student in a separate section (Al-Munajjed 1997). Graduates of these universities participated in redressing the massive shortage of teachers, while in small cities like Abha some secondary schools included teaching courses "Ma'ahad Al-Mu'alemat" to train teachers for elementary schools until 1976. After this only some high schools gave these courses until 1997 (Al-Dakheel 2000). A Moderate Teachers College was established in 1979, and in 1982 the teacher's college was established (Ben-Jrais 1995:168; Al-Faisal 2000: 444-445). In 2003 this college and the Nursing College were integrated under King Khalid University in Abha (KKU 2011).

Tracing the development of education is essential to this study to provide a broad picture of the options that women in Abha have confronted and how the development of education impacted on the ability of women to access the labour market. As discussed previously teaching has been the main jobs for Saudi women and educational institutions represented the major areas of work for 77.5 % of working women in 2000 (Al-Dakheel 2000:295).

Figure 4.1



Source: (MEP 2011: 54).

Obtaining a higher education has a very important impact on whether Saudi women are in the labour market. Figure 4.1 shows that 62.7% of Saudi women who are working have a degree, compared with only 19% of working Saudi men. Despite this strong relationship between women's education and their employment participation, the formal educational policy (in 1970) had the same view of girls' education as part of their socialization as Muslims and to fulfill their gender role as future mothers and housewives:

"Islamic socialization is main goal for girls' education in order to prepare girls for their future role as wives, mothers and housekeepers and to prepare girls to work in areas that do not contradict with their nature, so girls can work in teaching, nursing or medicine." (Ministry of Education 1970:24).

The dominance of Wahhabi discourse on education has influenced the educational policies and curriculum aiming to form a unified national identity (Yamani 1996; Domato 2003). However, since September 11 this discourse became contested and the school's curriculum has been accused of implementing hatred discourse and terrorism ideology, which has put education in the spot light of debate in the country (Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2010; Doumato 2003). The educational system in Saudi society has other characteristics and challenges that have influenced its ability to meet the requirements of the labour market, among these challenges are: concentration of the female graduates in the subjects of

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education and Humanities (Al-Issa 2009; MEP 2005), the poor quality of teachers due to lack of training, occupational dissatisfaction due to the new forms of temporary contracts with lower benefits, and limited concern with international languages (Al-Issa 2009). Furthermore, the Saudi educational system, similar to other educational systems in the MENA societies, has limited ability to develop technical and industrial skills required by the modern economy as discussed by UNDP (2009) and Hijab (2001). With the growing trend of privatization in the country, the role of private schools and universities has rapidly increased, while the quantity and quality of state-run schools and their facilities are unable to meet the high growth in the number of students (Al-Issa 2009).

All these characteristics have been the focus of a consistent debate in the media and national conferences for the failure of education to produce a skilled labour force and for inspiring radicalism, especially after the increasing international pressure, mainly from the USA after September 11, on the state to implement serious reforms within different areas of society, including education (Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2007, 2010). In the end, although girls' education in Saudi society had a great success regarding raising literacy rates and producing a large number of graduates, the ability of this educational system to produce a qualified labour force to meet the demands of the labour market represents a major challenge for both the educational system and the labour market.

4.4 Conclusion

The review of literature on women's work in this chapter shows that there is not any study on women's household work in Saudi society, while social studies on rural communities, such as the studies of Al-Ghamdi (1985), Shokri (1981) and Katakura (1995) gave little attention to women's role and only view information was included within the description of the agricultural work. Although, Al-Torki's article (2001) on women in Onizah discussed women's lives in the 1920s, it depends on historical data most of which focuses on the 19th century and includes different parts of the Arabian Peninsula, while women's work was not the focus of the study. Hence, it is important for my study to examine the missing elements of social knowledge on women's work in Saudi Arabia, especially in 'Asir where there are no social studies and where we know very little except through historical studies. Documenting the history of women's work hence would not only provide an understanding of the development of women's work as a social phenomenon and explore the influential

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factors that construct women's position in the labour market and Saudi society in general, but will also contribute in constructing the base for theorization of women's issues in Saudi society.

While statistics and some social studies on Saudi society have clarified features of women's employment in the MENA society, this research as a qualitative study intends to provide further understanding of the reasons behind these features by analysing how women's work has been developed through three historical stages that cover the history of the Saudi state since its establishment in 1932 until today. Furthermore, in the light of social studies on different societies, especially in the MENA region, my study will use the concepts provided by these studies as tools to understand women's position in the Saudi labour market, mechanisms that control women's work and how work has influenced the lives of women in Abha.

5. Methodology

This study aims to build a holistic picture of women's experiences with work in Abha supported by a contextual understanding of the development of work throughout the contemporary history of the Saudi regime. In order to gain deep and rich data, qualitative interviewing was chosen as the method of study, and a sample from three different generations and socio-economic groups was selected. The characteristics of the sample and the strategies for choosing it are clarified in this chapter. Two pilot studies were carried out, which improved the fieldwork as a result of changes to the interviewing method and the sampling strategy. This chapter discusses in detail the strategies employed to gain access to the private arena of Saudi women to successfully undertake the fieldwork, while bearing in mind the ethical issues.

5.1 Aims of the Study

My interest as a female researcher in women's work is motivated by sociological inquiry and by recognition that through paid work women can achieve economic independence, gain higher status within the private and public spheres and become active participants in society. Although education has been a successful mechanism of women's empowerment in Saudi society, it has not led to equal success in the field of employment. Women's employment in Saudi society is characterised by a low rate of participation and by limited fields of employment.

The majority of social research studies on women's work in Saudi society (Al-Baadi 1982; Halawani 1987; Al-Husini 1988; Al-Gahtani 1995; Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Dakheel 2000; Vidyasagar and Rea 2004) have focused on the positive side of women's work experience and achievements as markers for the country's modernization. Yet there is a lack of social knowledge on other aspects of women's work. The first of these is the limited understanding of the factors and mechanisms that construct women's position in the labour market as involved, but marginalized. Another deficiency is the limited knowledge of the history of women's work in Saudi society, especially in the region of 'Asir. Revealing and documenting the hidden role of older generation women is one of the major aims of this study to highlight their experience of both paid and unpaid work. A key contemporary issue is the increasing rate of unemployment among younger women, associated with the poor conditions of most available jobs. While this condition is attributed to the recession

economy following the collapse of oil prices in 1987 (MEP 1990, 2000), this justification is contested by the expansion of the rate of foreign labour to 53% of the total labour force in 2010, while women did not exceed 12% (MEP 2010:155,158). In addition, the emergence of a new oil boom economy since 2004 has not ended the poor working conditions of women. This requires deeper understanding of the recent situation of women in the labour market and of the factors underlying it.

As improving women's conditions is one of the major goals of feminist research (Skeggs 2001), this research aims to contribute to building a theoretical understanding of Saudi women's position in the labour market to enable policy makers to formulate an effective plan for reform. This study becomes more relevant in an era of increasing engagement by the state with women's rights and empowerment, which started with the ratification of CEDAW in 2000 (UN 2001) and involvement with the Millennium Development Goals including the goal of empowering women by 2015 (UN 2000a), in addition to King Abdullah's (2005-) adoption of the reform policy with a focus on women's rights (Othman 2005; Al-Mefleh 2009). As argued by Bulmer (1982), social research cannot change policies, but can call for changes by providing descriptive studies and theoretical understandings relevant for policy makers.

In order to fulfil these aims, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of work among women in Abha, and how has it developed across the contemporary history of the Saudi regime?
2. How do different groups of women from different generations, socio-economic groups and educational backgrounds, interact with factors of social change?
3. What are the axes of power that construct women's experience with paid and unpaid work?
4. How does women's work, paid and unpaid, construct women's identity and empowerment?

5.2 Qualitative Research

This study used qualitative methods for many reasons. First, to my knowledge, there have been no social studies about Abha or any other part of 'Asir, and therefore no sociological literature is available. In such cases, qualitative research seems the most appropriate approach to explore substantive areas and to gain novel and deeper understanding of the

social phenomena under investigation (Stern 1980 cited in Strauss and Corbin 1998). Qualitative methods are used when the researcher knows relatively little about the subject under investigation, as is the case for my study (Silverman 2000). Moreover, as the first study about social change and its effect on women's work in Abha, qualitative methods can provide the study with richness, depth, nuance, context, and multi-dimensionality (Mason 2002).

The second reason for using qualitative methods is that this study, as a feminist research study, seeks to examine women's work from the perspective of the participants, the women of Abha, and to build a holistic picture of how multiple axes of power impact on women's experience (Collins 2000; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006). Qualitative methods are flexible and sensitive to the real life context of participants and allow focus on the holistic forms of analysis and explanation rather than just pointing to surface patterns, trends and correlations (Mason 2002). Hammersley (1992) also emphasizes the importance of qualitative studies for documenting the world from the perspective of the participants, which is in line with the feminist call for understanding women within the context of their own culture (Lengermann and Brantley 2003).

Finally, the flexibility of qualitative methods enabled me as a researcher to apply an insider rather than outsider analysis of women's position within Muslim and Saudi culture (Said 1978; Lazreg 1988; Najmabadi 1998; Silverman 2000; Abu-Lughod 2001).

Therefore, applying qualitative methods would help to fulfil the goal of this study to provide a contextual understanding of the work experience of women across three generations, presenting this from the women's perspective and within their historical, ideological and social context.

5.3 In-depth Interviews

"A conversation with a purpose" is how Kahn and Cannell (1957, cited in Marshall and Rossman 2006:101) describe in-depth interviewing. Kvale (1996:5) also describes the interview as a professional conversation, which is based on the conversations of daily life. Kvale defines the interview as "a conversation whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (1996:5-6). The strength of interviews is in obtaining large amounts of data

quickly. This involves observation and personal interaction and allows a better understanding of the meaning that people hold about their everyday activities. The lack of social scientific knowledge on women's work in 'Asir, especially from the first and third generations, and the richness and detailed data the in-depth interview provides, made it the most valuable method of generating data.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Mason (2002) suggest that in-depth interviewing gives interviewees more freedom to express their views and to reflect on their understanding of the phenomenon of interest, not those of the researcher. As a feminist researcher, in-depth interviews enabled me to gain a better understanding of women's experience, including their complexity and diversity and based on their own view of their experience. Interaction between the respondents and myself as the researcher was also a valuable characteristic enabling follow-up questions and supporting and answering the interviewees questions (Mason 2002), rather than controlling the interviewees as objects, which feminists have viewed as a masculine approach (Bryman 2008). In addition, Mason (2002) explains how the in-depth interview provides an understanding of the depth and complexity of people's contextual accounts and experience, which is effective in explaining social change and comparisons across different historical stages.

This flexibility of in-depth interviewing was valuable in approaching the non-homogeneous sample of this study of women from different generations, education levels, and socio-economic groups. The wording of the questions was adapted to the age, experience and educational level of the participant, which proved to be particularly effective with older women with an illiterate background. This study utilized multiple strategies to conduct the in-depth interview effectively with women in Abha to encourage them to produce what Lofland (2006:17) summarized as the objective of in-depth interviewing: "rich and detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis data". Section 5.7 discusses these multiple strategies (The in-depth interview guideline is provided in appendix 2).

5.4 Research Design and Sampling

As feminist research, women are both the subject and the object of this study, with the aim of interpreting their experience from their own viewpoint. Generating knowledge from a woman's standpoint is a major concern of feminism (Abu-Lughod 2001; Skeggs 2001;

Lengermann and Brantley 2003; McCall 2005). Abha, as the research setting has been introduced in chapter 2, and this section discusses the sample's characteristics, size and strategies.

5.4.1 Characteristics of the Sample

The goal of the research dictates the way in which a sample is designed, and while some research aims to obtain a representative sample in order to draw conclusions about an entire society, others are selected to maximize theoretical understanding (Arber 2001). As a qualitative research, the sample is purposive, aiming to build a sample that generates data and ideas to advance the theoretical understanding of women's work in Abha.

The heterogeneity of women in Abha points to the significant role of the intercategorical approach that requires "adopting existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions"(McCall 2005:1773). In this study, the sample was collected from two categories, the first based on age or generation, and second based on socio-economic class.

5.4.1.1. Age (Generations)

In order to trace the development of women's work and the factors that directed change, the sample was chosen from three different generations, one method by which social scientists study social change (Merete 2000). Dividing the sample into different generations is based on studying a social phenomenon after a particular event has occurred and identifying any change that has accrued as a result of that event. In this study, I used two important phenomena that have affected Saudi society and women in particular. First, the establishment of girls' state-run education in 1960 as the beginning of the rapid modernization era, and second, the collapse of the oil price in 1987 marking the start of the recession era. These two phenomena divided the research sample of Saudi women into three generations as follows:

1. Older Generation (Women between 65 and 90 years of age, born before 1941)

The experiences of this generation reflect the history of women's work in Abha in the pre-modernization stage since the establishment of Saudi state in 1932 to the 1950s, and how older women have coped with the rapid changes since the 1960s.

2. Middle Generation (Women between 40–64 years of age, born from 1942 to 1966)

This generation comprises women in their 40s to early 60s. Their childhood and youth was lived in the boom era and they were the first Saudi women to attend state schools and enter the public sector. Their experiences reflect the modernization and rapid changes that took place in the boom era.

3. Young Generation (women in their 20s and 30s, born after 1967)

Women of this generation grow up in the boom era and enjoyed the high living standard in that era (1970s -1980s). However, in adulthood they have encountered recession, unemployment and poor conditions in available jobs. The experience of this generation reflects the recent condition of women's work in Saudi society.

5.4. 1. 2 Socio-Economic Groups

Bill (1972) explains how economic stratification, based on Marx's concept of class, does not reflect the real structure of Arab society, as there is also a division of power among tribes and groups. Charrad (2001) and Gellner (2005) also confirm the significance of tribal status in constructing social stratification in Arab society. In 'Asir, historians (Al-Na'ami 1999; Shaker 1981; Hamzah 1951) emphasized the importance of tribal lineage in specifying the structure of 'Asiri society and the social status of the people. As a tribal and rural society, tribal lineage in 'Asir has been linked to Weberian stratification which focuses on the multi-dimensional aspects of economic, social and political status (Abbott, Wallace and Tyler 2005). The first pilot study showed that social stratification in Abha is divided into two types, the first based on social status and tribal lineage, and the second on economic status and occupation.

1. Social Stratification based on tribal lineage:

- a. Qabili (Tribal): people who originate from well-known tribes in the region ('Asir, Qahtan, Shahrān, Bani-Hejr and their sub tribes).
- b. Non-Qabili (Non-Tribal): people from an unknown lineage, who may have been old immigrants to the region as indicated by local historians.

2. Economic Stratification based on wealth, land and occupation of the male head of the family:

- a. Land owners and merchants
- b. Small Merchants and government employees
- c. Peasants
- d. Low paid jobs “mainly manual”

This study combined these two bases of stratification to build a new socio-economic stratification of the people of Abha, in line with the Weberian stratification that includes social, economic and political status (Abbott, Wallace and Tyler 2005). However, political status was replaced with tribal status to match local stratification which emphasised the significance of lineage (Gellner 2005). Marriage network was also used to distinguish between classes and groups. Tribal families and non-tribal families do not inter-marry,, although marriage might occur between families of the same tribe regardless of their socio-economic class. The class of the family is also determined by the status of the male head of the family as educational and occupational status varies among women of the same family. Other studies (Joseph 2000; al-Turki 2000; al-Mughni 2000; Yamani 1996) contend that women in MENA societies are seen as family members, as is their status, rights and citizenship rights. Being an insider of the society played a major role in developing the following categorization of socio-economic groups with the help of local historians and gatekeepers, confirming Wax’s view (1971) that secondary knowledge and socialization do not provide the researcher with the same authority as that of the insider researcher. Selecting the sample of this study therefore was based on the following categories of socio-economic groups:

3. Socio-Economic Groups

- a. **Upper class**, from the higher social status in the Qabili (tribal) group, and the rich families in Abha. This group includes families from previous local royalty, Ottoman officers and Ashraf⁶¹, and tribal merchants' families.
- b. **Middle Class**, could be *Qabili* (tribal) or non-*Qabili* (non-tribal), and the male head of the family may be either a small merchant or a government employee. However, empirical study shows that this group is composed of tribal family only.

⁶¹ The tribe of Prophet Muhammad peace upon him.

- c. **Working Class**, are Qabili and non-Qabili families, where the male head of the family works in a low paid job.

Today, most peasants have moved from agricultural work, as discussed in Chapter 2, and are in government jobs. Thus, the status of the family is measured by the recent work of the head of the family and classified either as middle or working class.

5.4.2 Sample Size

According to Kvale (1996), the number of interview subjects needed in qualitative research ultimately relates to the research goals. He suggests that researchers should "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know" (1996:101). The aim was to get the best representative data for this study with considerations of time and cost and, crucially, enough respondents from each generation and from the three different socio-economic groups. The field study was planned for a total of 45 participants, 15 from each socio-economic group, divided into five informants from each generation (see table 5.2). The first pilot study was undertaken with 14 informants from the older and younger generations. The second pilot study was undertaken later with 8 informants from the second generation. However, the final sample was extended to comprise 77 female informants for several reasons:

- 1- Snowballing the sample from the pilot studies had limited success for the main fieldwork; some informants did not wish to continue their involvement, which necessitated interviewing new families.
- 2- During the interviews seven women expressed an interest in discussing their work experience. The enthusiasm of this group provided very rich and deep data.
- 3- Interviewing three members from different generations of the same family on the same day was undertaken with only 10 of 21 families. Hence, completing interviews with three members of the same family was not clear until the last period of fieldwork, when the size of the sample had exceeded the plan.

In the end, I followed Kaval's (1996) recommendation to interview as many participants as needed to maximise the understanding of women's experience with different forms of work. Table 5.2 shows the size and classification of the final sample covering the two pilot studies and the main fieldwork. Each informant in Table 5.2 was

given a code that shows her family number, socio-economic class, generation, age and marital status. This informant code is explained in Table 5.1.

A family number has been specified in Table 5.2 when referring to informants, the family number is before the slash with the rest of the code following. For instance, the informant code (F 23/ G2 b 45m) means that the informant is from family number 23 in the sample, middle class G2, middle generation b, age 45 and m reflects her marital status as married.

In addition, five men were interviewed, three historians and two husbands of elderly informants who insisted on participating and providing general information. Each informant was given a pseudonym representing the same characteristics as her original name.

Table 5.1: Explanation of The informant's Code

Meanings	Code
Family Number or Person Number	F number P..... number
Class	G G1: upper class G2 : middle class G3 : working class
Generation	a: Elderly generation b: Second generation bb: Another second generation informant from the same family c: Third generation cc: Another Third generation informant from the same family m: Male informant
Age	Number
Marital Status	m: married s: single d: divorced w: widow m/p: married in polygamy marriage

Table 5.2: Sample Size and Stratification by Generation and Socio-Economic Group⁶²

Total of female informants	Male Informants		Younger Generation 20-39		Middle Generation 40-64		Older Generation 65-90		Family N.	Socio-Economic Group
	Age	M	Age	C	Age	B	Age	A		
3			26	1c	42	1b	81	1a	F 1	G 1 Upper Class
3			27	2c	44	2b	67	2a	F 2	
3			21	3c	42	3b	66	3a	F 3	
3	80	4m	31	4c	55	4b	72	4a	F 4	
4			23	5c	56	5b	80	5a	F 5	
			21	5c c						
3			28	6c	50	6b	72	6a	F 6	
1	75	7m					82	7a	I 7	
1							80	8a	P 8	
1							67	9a	P 9	
1					41	10b			P 10	
23				7		7		9		Total of
3			23	20c	55	20b	77	20a	F 20	G2 Middle Class
3	87	21m	27	21C	45	21b	73	21a	F 21	
3			25	22c	56	22b	80	22a	F 22	
3			21	23c	64	23b	-	-	F 23	
					53	23bb				
4			27	24c	49	24b	83	24a	F 24	
			21	24cc						
4	76	4m	27	4c	40	4b	70	4a	F 25	
			23	4cc						
3					63	B25	87	25a	F 26	
							75	25aa		
1					42	27b			I 27	
1					59	28b			P 28	
1					60	29b			P 29	
1					59	30b			P 30	
1					54	31b			P 31	
1					52	32b			P 32	
-	72	33m							P 33	
29				8		14		7		Total of
3				40c	47	40b	68	40a	F 40	G3 Working Class
3			21	41c	43	41b	67	41a	F 41	
3			25	42c	42	42b	68	42a	F 42	
3			23	43c	47	43b	90	43a	F 43	
3			25	44c	47	44b	70	44a	F 44	
2			22	45c		-	90	45a	F 45	
3			27	46c	46	46b			F 46	
			25	46cc						
2			21	47c	50	47b			F 47	
1							67	11a	P 48	
1							77	12a	P 49	
1			24	49c					I 50	
25		-		10		7		8		Total of
77		5 m		25		28		24		Total of Sample

⁶² The meanings of the colours of the informant's number in Table 5.2 are:

Purple: 3 informants of pre-1st pilot study, Red for informants of the 1st pilot study

Green for informants of the 2nd pilot study, Blue for informants of the main fieldwork 47b

5.4.3 Sampling Strategy

As I am related to two of the well-known families of Abha, I started the pilot study interviews with informants who are in-laws and family friends. These links not only provided acceptance and trust between the interviewer and interviewees, but also offered a rich historical and social background that helped in building the socio-economic stratification and in undertaking the data analysis. However, as I had not lived in Abha, my social network there was limited to a few families, so the role of gatekeepers in collecting a purposive sample was essential.

Snowball sampling was another strategy used to meet informants. According to Arber (2001), snowball sampling can only be used when the target sample members are involved in some kind of network with others who share the characteristic of interest. For example, gatekeepers usually knew one woman from a family. Then the sample snowballed and this informant introduced the researcher to other family members or friends. Snowball sampling was used in the main field study after building relationships with the informants in the two pilot studies. Other informants I met while interviewing some informants, and they declared their willingness to be interviewed to discuss their experiences.

5.5 The Pilot Studies and the Main study

Data for this study were collected in three stages. The first stage was a pilot study of two generations of women, the older and younger generations. A second pilot study was undertaken mainly with the middle generation to represent all generations of women. The main fieldwork took place from May 2006 to September 2006 in Abha.

5.5.1 The First Pilot Study

A few months before the first pilot study, in December 2003, I did two unstructured interviews as a practice for the pilot study. These were with two of my great aunts, over 75 years of age. These two interviews provided me, as a researcher, with a good background about the social history of the city of Abha and its people, and was good practice for developing interviewing strategies. Six months later, in May - June 2004, the first pilot study took place in Abha. At that time the research aimed to study two generations only, the older generation and the younger, grandchild, and generation. This pilot sample was of 12 informants, 9 from the older generation and 3 from the younger

generation. Life history was the chosen method for the pilot study in order to obtain rich, in-depth data.

5.5.2 The Second Pilot Study

One of the advantages of the first pilot study was that it led to a repositioning of the research methodology. After finishing the first pilot study and writing some reports, it was clear that there was a distinct gap between the two generations and their life experiences. As May (2002) points out, searching for unexpected findings is the purpose of pilot studies in order to make adjustments and paradigmatic shifts. It was found that while the older generation reflected the history of Abha before social and economic development, the younger generation interviews pointed up only recent times. Data about the middle generation were missing and needed. Therefore, another pilot study took place in November 2004 with six women from the middle generation and two more interviews with women from the younger generation.

Interviewing women from the middle generation reflects the modernization and transformative stage in Saudi society in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of the women interviewed were the first educated women in their families and the first to be involved in employment. The other change made in the second pilot study was the use of in-depth interviews instead of the life history interview used in the first pilot study. I found that in-depth interviews helped to avoid the irrelevant data that life history interviews had collected, reducing the length of the interview and, more explicitly, focusing on specific themes.

In short, the two pilot studies were useful in testing the method, the sample and the research focus, requiring major shifts in the main fieldwork.

5.5.3 The Main Study

The fieldwork was delayed by the birth of my twins and commenced in April 2006, after three months of maternity leave. The twins were four months old when the fieldwork started and they accompanied me to Abha with my husband and my mother to help as first gatekeeper and to take care of the twins while I prepared for and undertook the interviews. We live in Jeddah, the second biggest city in Saudi Arabia, 649 kilo meters from Abha (MHE 2000:142).

As a Saudi female researcher, I had to overcome some obstacles that face Saudi women in their daily life. The usual strategy that women depend on is the help of their closest male relative. Thus, being accompanied by my husband was essential to search for a house and sign the rental contract, since in Saudi Arabia, this is a man's responsibility (Human Rights Watch 2008). Although taxis are available in the bigger cities, public transport is not available in most Saudi cities, and a critical factor is that women are not permitted to drive (Human Rights Watch 2008). Therefore, I had to hire a private part-time driver with his own car to take me to informants' houses. Having a private driver does not indicate a luxury lifestyle in Saudi society, but is a necessity as it is the main means of transport for women. However, since the driver was part-time, I needed the services of the chauffeur of my second gatekeeper who took me to most interviews. Both drivers were familiar with the city and the addresses of most families, and were very helpful, especially as Saudi cities do not have a consistent numbering system to identify streets and houses. Fatani (2008) explained how people adapt to that situation by using landmarks when providing directions to their homes, but that requires a familiarity with the city landmarks, which I did not have.

The main decisions regarding the fieldwork are discussed in the following section.

5.6 Gaining Access to Women's Arena in the Fieldwork

Gaining access to the women's arena in a conservative society like Saudi Arabia was the main challenge of the study, which extended the study by six months and required using a number of strategies to gain acceptance and trust. I tried to be creative and to take advantage of a variety of possible strategies, discussed below:

5.6.1 Being an Insider and Women's Attitudes towards Participation in Interviews

Women's attitudes towards participation in the interviews were divided into two groups. Both groups were impressed that a researcher was interested in studying them and their experiences. The first group were excited to be part of the study and invited me to visit them soon, while the second group was conservative about sharing their personal lives with someone else. The message I got from the second group was "interesting research but not with me". A few gave a direct rejection, while others kept delaying the interview date using different excuses, such as not answering my follow-up phone calls. Some women seemed worried about the reaction of the male head of their family, especially the younger

generation who are surrounded by more restrictions. In Arab society, a woman's status is symbolic and essential for the social status of the whole family, which explains the over-protective policies in some families towards young women as discussed by Dodd (1977), Abu-Odeh (1996) and Moghadam (1992). Any story about one of the family's daughters can affect the family's status for generations and the chances of their daughters' and sons' marriage prospects. Hence, access to families was achieved through first or second generation, except for one interview with a third generation woman at her workplace.

Some women were suspicious of the motivations for the study. Lewis (1973) explains that there is an increasing fear that the information collected by an outsider researcher, someone not constrained by group values and interests, will expose the group to outside manipulation and control. The insider researcher, on the other hand, is accountable; s/he must remain in the community and take responsibility for her/his actions. Thus, s/he is forced through self-interest to exercise discretion. In this study, the women who agreed to be interviewed supported Lewis's view regarding acceptance and trust towards an insider researcher.

On the other hand, women who declined to be interviewed may have been fearful of the insider researcher popularizing their personal stories to the wider social network. Abu-Lughod (1988:146) in her study in Egypt, explains people's fear of researchers in Third World countries. Outsider researchers are often suspected of being CIA agents, whereas insider researchers are suspected of being government agents. Some of the older women who worked as shopkeepers in the old market refused to be interviewed. They were suspicious about the purpose of the study, especially as they just had a bad experience with a journalist who reported on women working in the old market. They were also worried that I was working for the city municipality and planning to raise the rent of their stores. Nevertheless, after a conversation with one of these women, her acceptance was gained on recognizing the old neighbourhood relationship with the family of my second gatekeeper in addition to remembering my grandmother MABHS⁶³ and her volunteering role as a traditional midwife; she then provided the study with one of the richest interviews. Some young and middle generation women, who did not know me personally, also felt more

⁶³ MABBHS, May Allah bless her soul," *Allah Yrhamha*" abbreviation for common prayer for dear dead people, which will be used a lot in the informants' quotation in the following chapters. listener conclude that that the person referring to is dead and is respected by the speaker.

comfortable after socializing with me, and discovering the kinship relation between some of their old friends or neighbours and myself. Therefore being an insider, originally a member of the community I studied, provided the fieldwork with valuable advantages.

5.6.2 Mastering the Language

As an insider researcher, I was empowered in the field not only by having common knowledge with the informants but also by mastering the language (Wax 1960) which is a fundamental tool in understanding the people under study. It also enabled me to understand the local accent, which is more difficult to comprehend among elderly women. Even though, I speak the same language, local accents and the local proverbs proved problematic. In some interviews, the meaning or the implications of proverbs were not clear, at least at first. In one interview, I did not realize what the informant had implied by one proverb until I listened to the interview during transcription. The timing of the proverb, and its relation to the context of the interview, implied that the researcher is a woman who breaks the social norms by studying abroad, giving less attention to her role as a wife and mother, unlike older generation women. This appeared to be a defensive strategy of that elderly informant to praise the achievements of her generation as good wives and mothers in comparison with younger professional women.

5.6.3 Being a Female

A male researcher would not have access to the women's arena in Saudi Arabia unless the women were close family members. Being a female researcher gave me access not only to the informants' houses, but also to their life histories. For the older informants, the interview allowed them to give some information about their past lives to someone who was interested in their knowledge. The middle generation, especially those in paid work, focused on their achievements, while for young women, the interview was a chance to express their frustration of the poor condition of women's employment. Being a female helped me to understand women in terms of their role in their private world, the domestic arena, which in Arab societies is different from their role in the public arena.

5.6.4 Being Married and Family Support

Another aspect facilitating access was my social status as a married woman. Going into detail with older women about their life histories, in particular discussing issues related to marriage and relations with men, would be considered improper behaviour from a single

woman. However, being married offered me as a researcher more acceptance, freedom and mobility in the city compared with single women. Al-Torki (1986) and Abu-Lughod (1986) confirmed the restricted freedom available to single women in MENA societies,⁶⁴ Saudi Arabia and Egypt where their studies were conducted. Both of them adopted the role of the dutiful daughter, as Abu-Lughod described her relationship with her informants. On the other hand, married Arab women researchers enjoyed more freedom and more acceptance of their mobility in the society. As Morsy (1978:86) states:

"My husband's presence in the Egyptian village on the first day of my residence there proved invaluable in defining certain significant dimensions of my social status to the people of Fatiha".

It was not only my marital status but the support of my family which was important. Thus, the success of the fieldwork in a neo-patriarchal society was conditioned by family support. My mother accompanied me throughout the first pilot study and main fieldwork. As in other MENA societies, as explained by Al-Mughni and Tetreault (2000) a women living on her own is not acceptable socially; breaking such a patriarchal code would affect the family's status and may make her vulnerable. The presence of a male guardian, my father during my first pilot study and my husband during the main fieldwork, was essential for several reasons. Their help was important not only to arrange accommodation and transport, but to show their approval of my research to the community and empower my social status. My fieldwork experience validates the argument of other studies confirming the significant role of family in constructing women's status and achievements in Saudi society (Al-Turki 2000; Yamani 1996) and the MENA region in general (Joseph 2000; Charrad 2000; Al-Mughni and Tetreault 2000; Moghadam 1992).

5.6.5 The Role of Gatekeepers

In Abha, support from family and kin played a major role in conducting the majority of my interviews. My mother acted as first gatekeeper and presented me to a number of informants and joined the first part of ten interviews; during the remaining interviews she took care of my twins. The second gatekeeper was a cousin who was deeply devoted to the field-work. As a headmistress and a member of a charity organization, she had a broad social network across all classes, which enabled her to arrange 31 interviews. The two

⁶⁴ Al-Torki (1986) conducted her study in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, while Abu-Lughod (1986) conducted her study with a Bedouin tribe in the Western Desert in Egypt.

gatekeepers helped in recommending informants, specifying their status according to the socio-economic grouping of the study, arranging interview times and joining the first part of the interviews. Another three gate-keepers arranged 15 interviews.

5.7 Conducting the In-Depth Interview

Undertaking a qualitative interview requires various strategies to gain rich, honest and representative data. Interviewing as a social visit was not only a strategy to gain access and acceptance from the informants, but also to gain trust and conduct the interview as an informal conversation, building up a friendly relationship with the informant that included the shared experience of both parties. Conducting a professional interview required a balance between building a friendly relationship and a professional interview, as directed by the research questions in the interview guidelines. Recording was another helpful strategy to maintain the professionalism of the interview.

5.7.1 The In-Depth Interview as a Social Visit

The fieldwork depended mainly on the strategy of “In-depth Interview as a social visit”. Interviewing people and asking them about their most personal and intimate stories for the advancement of knowledge is the most difficult thing about qualitative research. It requires a strong belief in one’s study, and a certain amount of courage (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). Douglas (1985) gave numerous examples of creative interviews that used different tactics depending on the research and the sample. Douglas explained that creative interviewing involved a package of strategies and techniques to steer beyond the interview questions, and that the interviewer should create an atmosphere that encourages a mutual relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

To adjust my interviews to the society’s traditions and norms the interviews were conducted as social visits. Not living in Abha, my mother and I had the status of guests in a culture that significantly values hospitality, as noted by historians who visited the region (Hamzah 1951; Philby 1952; Shaker 1981). Calling on in-laws, friends or old neighbours was met with great generosity, as were the interviews within our social network. In the interviews arranged by the second gatekeeper, I was welcomed as a relative of their friend.

In Abha, the social status of the family is measured by several criteria, one of which is hospitality. Even the poorest families welcomed me as a guest, serving hot drinks, sweets

or light meals. In ten interviews, informants served dinner and on two of these occasions the interviews had to be rearranged because the informants surprised us with formal dinners attended by other family members and friends.

The research strategy of the social visit requires following its rules, such as socializing with the informants early in the visit, giving presents, especially if the family has recently had a birth, marriage or has moved to a new house. Holding some of the interviews with members of my personal network saved time in building a relationship with the informants, but in another 36 interviews I had to build a friendly relationship, introducing myself not only as a researcher but also in relation to my gatekeepers and some families in the city. I observed that the informants became more open after discovering that I was related to one of their old friends or neighbours, confirming the significance of personal relationships in qualitative research in Saudi society.

Timing was another fundamental rule of interviews. In Abha, the common time for a social visit is either late afternoon, around 4:00 pm or in the evening around 6:30 pm. Only three interviews were undertaken in the morning - I had no transportation in the morning, since the two drivers were busy at work – and one at midday.

The interview time was also determined by other events influencing social life, such as school examinations, summer holidays and Ramadan. During final exams, I undertook only a few interviews with older women; most working women were teachers or had children preparing for exams. Summer was the most productive time, as social visiting is more common then, since 'Asiris living in other regions usually spend the summer with their families.

5.7.2 Building a Friendly Relationship

Douglas (1976) argues that the qualitative researcher should build a friendly relationship with informants in order to be liked and trusted and to encourage them to be open and provide full responses. Kvale (1996) also contends that conducting an interview requires expertise not only on the subject matter, but also on human interaction. In order to build a strong bond with my interviewees, all the strategies of gaining access were used to obtain the acceptance and trust of the informants. In addition, some symbolic actions by the

researcher led to greater acceptance; for instance, wearing ‘Asiri thob’⁶⁵ or some old silver jewellery given to me by my grandmothers launched the conversation with some elderly informants and impressed younger generations. This action emphasized my identity as a member of the community and my respect for the local culture. Another essential point was my liking and enthusiasm for my research, which I believe showed in my body language and exerted an influence on the interviewees. This emphasizes the significance in qualitative research of choosing a topic which the researcher is enthusiastic about, as that will be reflected in the fieldwork in particular.

5.7.3 Sharing Personal Experiences

May (2001) explained how difficult it is for a feminist researcher not to become fully engaged in the interviewing process, or to enter into a dialogue. Hence, I took advantage of this process and used it as a tactic to establish trust and encourage some informants to open up as Douglas (1976) recommended. This tactic was particularly useful with shy young women or when an informant was unhappy about discussing some issues they did not like about their lives. For instance, a number of young unemployed informants tried to hide their frustration at being unemployed, making excuses for their situation. At that point, I talked about my experience of unemployment and how I had to work in temporary jobs while applying many times for the job I wanted until I finally got it. Sharing my personal experience allowed them to overcome their feelings of shyness and disappointment. It also demonstrated that unemployment is a social problem not a personal one, and achieving my goal in the end gave them hope for a better future, changed their mood and made them more open to discussing their experiences. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested, the interviews were more like conversations than a formal event that specified multiple choice answers.

5.7.4 Maintaining a Professional Interview

In all of these strategies to gain the acceptance and trust of the study community, I was aware of the temptation to drive the interview away from its professional direction. Kvale (1996:5) defines the in-depth interview as “a professional conversation, whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the

⁶⁵ A modern version of the traditional Asiri costume

meaning of the described phenomena". In order to practice professionalism, the interview guide (see appendix 2) which reflects both the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study, was a valuable tool that helped to keep the interview focused. This was not always easy with elderly informants in particular, even though they were the most open and honest interviewees, as they kept discussing irrelevant issues which led the interview away from its core topics. It was embarrassing to interrupt, especially when the informant was talking about a dear memory, such as the death of her husband. It was a changing point in the informant's life so she kept referring to it. In cases like this the informant's interest was respected and I gave her time, hoping that she would still be interested in the interview when I asked the main questions. In one interview, I felt I was playing a football match. The interviewee kept talking about irrelevant issues and taking the interview away from its main focus while I tried to change the direction back to the interview goals and to keep the interview under control. This interview 'match' extended the length of the interview from an average of two hours to seven hours, and exhausted both parties within the interview.

5.7.5 Recording the Interview

Recording the interview by MP3 was most important in documenting the interview and enabling me to concentrate on the discussion and its flow rather than on writing. However, in five interviews recording was rejected by the informants. Interestingly, those informants ranged across all three classes and had different educational and occupational backgrounds. The common theme was that they did not know me personally and did not have a strong bond with the gatekeepers. It seems that the stronger the relationship between the informant and the researcher or the gatekeepers, the more the trust and acceptance, confirming again the significance of personal relationships in qualitative research with women in Abha.

I had initially expected to face a major difficulty with recording; however for the majority of the informants, recording was considered as part of the interview. It seemed that recording conveyed to these informants that their interviews were respectable and taken seriously (Fielding and Thomas 2008). In the interviews which depended on writing, I could not write all answers in the informants' words and had to focus on the information itself. Trying to follow up with the informants' speech limited my chance for follow up

questions. Recording would have reduced missing data, interview length and the effort involved in the written interviews.

In short, in the fieldwork, I tried to be as flexible and creative as possible in order to gain access to the women's arena in Abha and to conduct fruitful interviews. As a member of the community of the study, having a social network and devoted gatekeepers were major factors that facilitated access to the women's world. In addition, using a number of strategies not only helped me in gaining access, but also helped in building up acceptance and trust.

5.8 Ethics of the Qualitative Study

In the qualitative in-depth interview, ethical considerations should be taken into account when formulating the interview questions, sequencing the questions in relation to the participants' interests and characteristics based on the informants' age, educational and class background, and the briefing and de-briefing before and after the interview. The researcher should not dominate the interview, but should simply strive to keep the focus on the topics relevant to the research inquiry showing consideration for the rights, needs and values of the interviewee. Many of the ethical guidelines published by professional academic associations emphasize the importance of informed consent, confidentiality and consequences.

In the fieldwork, I did not obtain written consent from the informants, but depended on oral consent. In doing so, I managed to keep the interview running as a social visit and informal conversation, which was a major strategy to gain access. I carried identity evidence which was readily available: University of Surrey ID card, University of King Abdul Aziz ID card and a letter from the University of Surrey. These identities were available, if necessary, to reassure the informant of my validity as a researcher; however it was not asked for in any of the interviews.

In contrast, asking them for a formal written consent would have made the participants more suspicious about the research and the researcher, and may have led them to think of the interview as an investigation rather than a conversation, as explained previously in relation to the fear of research in Third World countries (see section 5.6.1). Conducting

the in-depth interview as a social visit depended on a friendly and non-formal relationship, and using written consent would have contradicted with that strategy.

Confidentiality was given top importance in transcribing the tapes and reporting the findings. Participants' real names were not disclosed in the research analysis, pseudonyms having been used instead. These alternative names however preserve the main characteristics which the original names carry, reflecting the generation, class and cultural aspects of the participants⁶⁶. In qualitative studies the interviewees are cases and the information gathered forms the database from which to generalize. That is, what matters is not their names and personal information, but their experiences. At the beginning of each interview, I ensured that this guiding principle was clear to all the participants.

5.9 Reliability and Validity

As Kirk and Miller (1986) and Silverman (2001) state, reliability and validity are crucial elements in any research study. Indeed, both the objectivity and credibility of the findings depend largely on the reliability and validity of the collected data. Social science should aim to produce a description of the social world that corresponds with the interviewees' world (Perakyla 2004). Given that description is always based on a specific perspective, the analysis should represent the social phenomena rather than reproduce them (Hammersley 1992).

Kirk and Miller (1986:20) define reliability as "the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research". Hammersley (1992:57) interprets validity as "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers".

In qualitative research, a central dimension of reliability and validity involves the correspondence between the social world and people's experience versus the analysis made by the researcher. This is one of the challenges that the qualitative researcher faces

⁶⁶ In Saudi Society, names reflect different cultural influences and periods. For instance, older generation names usually reflect old Islamic names after the daughters, wives and female companions of Prophet Muhammad (peace upon him). Other names reflect the local 'Asiri culture and nature, such as the names of flowers in that region. The names of the middle generation reflect interaction with other cultures and include names from other regions or other Arab countries. The names of the third generation are more creative and unique and people started to pick names from the Arabic dictionary or the Quran. The Islamic names continue being common among the three generations, but with a higher percentage among the older generation.

(Mason 2002). Even though reliability and validity are significant in establishing the credibility of the research findings, reaching perfection in these two areas is impossible. As Silverman (2001) notes, qualitative researchers should not be overly defensive, because even quantitative researchers have no “golden key” to reliability. He warns qualitative researchers against a common challenge with their in-depth access to single cases. Their aim should be to convince themselves and the readers that the study findings are grounded in critical investigation of all the data of the study, rather than on selected cases. This challenge is commonly known as “anecdotalism”.

In order to avoid this problem and to establish both validity and reliability, I followed some supporting strategies:

- Collecting the data from various social, economic, generational, educational and occupational categories of women, resulting in a comprehensive sample of women from different generations and social groups "intercategorical".
- Comparing data gathered at different times, and from the two pilot studies and that of the main fieldwork interviews led to common findings, strengthening the reliability of the data.
- Evaluating data from different angles and with different purposes enabled the researcher to examine reliability and validity. Linking the data of the study to the literature review studies is another way of testing the accuracy of the data by emphasizing the similarities and differences between the two (Schatzman and Strauss 1973).

When a researcher undertakes a study, the major goal is always to understand and make sense of the social reality. This cannot be achieved without the right choice of method and tools which will lead to reliable and valid data. Bryman (2009) believes that these two concepts complement each other, for if the data is not reliable, it cannot be valid.

5.10 Coding and Data Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), data analysis is the process of organizing, structuring, and interpreting the mass of collected data. They argue that it can be a messy, puzzling, time-consuming, inventive and sophisticated process. Searching for general statements about relationships between different categories of data is the aim of qualitative data analysis. Dey (1993:30) argues that data analysis is “*a process of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure*”. Marshall

and Rossman (2006) argue that data collection and analysis should always go together to achieve a coherent interpretation of the data. However, Sarantakos (1998) asserts that during data collection conducting analysis can only generate meaning after several interviews have been transcribed. In this study conducting the data analysis during data collection was not possible. Undertaking fieldwork in Abha, away from my home in Jeddah and my residency in the UK, involved a lengthy search for representative informants and gaining their acceptance to undertake the interview, as well as the financial costs of the fieldwork. Dealing with these difficulties required much time and effort, and hence the transcription and analysis were completed after finishing the fieldwork.

The transcription process was undertaken later during the final six months of my one year child care leave. The average length of the interview was two hours per informant, while some interviews with older informants exceeded four hours, since it was difficult to keep them focused on the interview questions. Transcribing one hour of an interview took an average of four hours, especially when the sound quality was poor. In order to protect the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the informants' identity, I undertook all the transcription myself. However, in the final two months, because of shortage of time, I had to get some help from two cousins and they helped to transcribe 10 long interviews. I ensured that the interviews they transcribed were of people outside their social network, to maintain the privacy of the informants. Checking the first two interviews, showed that one of the transcribes had transformed the interview into formal written Arabic and deleted many sentences because she thought they were not relevant to the subject of the interview. It was clearly explained to them that the informants' words should be written exactly as spoken, with the local accent, which Fielding and Thomas (2008) characterised as "transcribe the lot verbatim". It was also emphasised that everything in the interview had to be typed because it is difficult for the transcribes to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not.

Primary coding for each interview was undertaken in a Word programme during transcribing. Notes were written and a picture of the women's situation was gradually built up. After finding a computer assisted qualitative analysis programme that accepted Arabic "MAX qda", the interviews were imported as rich text. The data analysis was based on thematic analysis, which is recommended when there is a large variety of information (Winter 2008). According to Boyatzis (1998:4) "*Thematic analysis is a*

process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding enquires an explicit 'code'. This may be a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators and qualifications that are causally related, or something in between these two forms". He explains that developing themes and codes is undertaken within three different approaches: theory driven; prior data driven from previous studies, which Boyatzis argues is similar to what Miller and Crabtree (1992) called "editing style of analysis"; and what Strauss and Corbin (1998) called "axial coding"; the third approach is inductive driven from the data.

In this study, I combined two approaches, prior data driven from previous studies and inductive driven from the data. Coding was undertaken in several stages:

1. Organizing the data: As the sample of this study was chosen from an intercategorical background, three different generations and three socio-economic classes, it was important to organise the interview' files in terms of these two dimensions. The major one was class, categorizing the data in a similar way to Table 5.2, where each class was coded in one group. Another categorization organized interviews into generations, older, second and third generation. Max qda was used to organize data in relation to its major attributes, such as marital status, educational level, work situation and field of work. Organizing the interviews into different groups enabled me to search for relationships between these groups and codes later.
2. Developing codes combining the two approaches, as explained by Boyatzis (1998), of prior data driven, from previous studies and inductive driven, from the data. The prior data coding approach was used to determine the major codes. According to Silverman (2000), coding data in qualitative research according to the studies of others can only be the first stage. Hence, major codes included some themes that feminist studies had previously linked to women's work, such as class, gender segregation, and the nature of women's paid and unpaid work. Hence, major codes were paid work, unpaid work, division of work, work and class, and other themes derived from the data, such as work and social status, work and identity, family and work, work and empowerment.
3. This second stage of coding depended on the data driven approach. At this stage all possible answers were included as sub-codes under each major code. For example, the major code of unpaid work included two forms of work, agricultural work and household work.
4. The third stage focused on including inductive codes under each sub-code. For instance, while feminist studies showed the importance of women's unpaid work (major code), data of this study point to the significance of household work as a major form of unpaid work (sub-code). Therefore, in the third level of coding,

household work was divided into three inductive codes - daily work, weekly work, and occasional work.

5. The fourth level of coding focused on relationship codes, which linked the codes to explore the relationships between different concepts, for instance, the nature of work with class, the division of unpaid work with age or gender, and the nature of work and social status.

Aronson (1994) explains the need to formulate the data themes and codes to gain a systematic overview of the data and develop a story line. Marsha and Rossman (2006) also suggest that data analysis is about telling the story and giving meaning and coherence to the data. Thus, in order to tell the story of Saudi women and work, the data analysis chapters followed a storyline across the three generations of women in five chapters. Under each generation a thematic analysis was used together with a feminist theoretical interpretation.

Mason (2002) suggests starting the analysis of data with several interpretative readings, and this was adopted in my analysis. Then the major codes were analysed and linked with other codes to see the whole picture of each generation. Comparison and searching for similarities and differences between groups of informants, generations, classes and fields of work was undertaken to construct a plan for the data analysis chapters. The following five inter-related data analysis chapters analyse the experience of women with paid and unpaid work across three generations of women, covering the history of the Saudi state since its establishment in 1932.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of both the characteristics and procedures that guided the fieldwork. It has introduced the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions, and the rationale for choosing qualitative methods and in-depth interviews and has presented the sampling criteria, the snowball sampling for the study, the research setting and the characteristics of the sample. The details of the two pilot studies were described, with an explanation of the methodological shifts made in the second, which continued for the main fieldwork. Gaining access is one of the important issues in qualitative studies. Studying women in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia required special strategies to access the private arena of Saudi women in a small city like Abha. These strategies were discussed in detail together with methods of managing the in-depth interviews in the Saudi cultural context.

Chapter Five: Methodology

Finally, this chapter discussed ethical issues related to this qualitative study, in particular the justification for depending on oral consent, and the strategies to preserve the confidentiality of the informants' identities. Issues of reliability and validity were also discussed. The chapter concluded by discussing thematic coding and the data analysis procedures.

6. First Generation Women and Unpaid Work

The work experiences of first generation women reflect the pre-boom era, 1930s-1950s. In that era the political situation in Saudi Arabia was just becoming stable, and building a national state with administrative control over various regions was in its first stage. However, this process was going slowly due to the limited economic resources. In 'Asir, the economy was based on subsistence agriculture, some trade and traditional industry. Access to education was very limited, especially for women. The cultural system was based on the Shafi School of interpretation of Islam and the local rural culture of 'Asir (see chapters 2 and 4).

The work experience of most women has two aspects, unpaid and paid work (Swiebel, 1999; Morsy, 1990). This chapter discusses the experiences of first-generation women with unpaid work, while the next will discuss their experience with paid work. Data in this chapter reflect two major forms of unpaid work, household work and agricultural work. Each form includes several types of work practised on a daily, twice-weekly or occasional basis. The chapter examines the relationship of each type with class, and traces the division of unpaid work in the family based on gender and age. Finally, this chapter discusses the impact of unpaid work on the empowerment of first generation women.

In rural societies, such as 'Asir, housework and agricultural work were mixed, and women undertook agricultural work and household in parallel, moving from one to the other. This was the situation for the majority of women living in the outskirts of Abha and the surrounding villages; only women belonging to urban upper class families were engaged simply in household work. Table 6.1 shows the characteristics of first generation women and their work status from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Chapter Six: First Generation Women and Unpaid Work

Table 6.1 First Generation Women and their Eperience of Paid and Unpaid Work

Class	N.	Pseudonym	Age	Marital status	N. Children	Education	Work In the Past	Recent Work
Upper Class G 1	F 1	Fatimah	81	Widow	-	Read & Write	Fulltime Housewife	Fulltime Housewife
	F 2	Mesferrah	67	Widow	6	Read & Write	Agricultural / Household Work Teacher	Fulltime Housewife
	F 3	Felwah	66	Married	6	Elementary	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 4	Salma	72	Married	8	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 5	Mozah	80	Divorced	5	Illiterate	Fulltime Housewife	Fulltime Housewife
	F 6	Mohrah	72	Married	1	Illiterate	Fulltime Housewife Seamstress	Fulltime Housewife
	P 7	Sharifah	82	Married	-	Illiterate	Fulltime Housewife	Fulltime Housewife
	P 8	Sharah	80	Single	-	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	P9	Aishah	67	Widow	8	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
Middle Class G 2	F 20	Salehah	77	Married	7	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 21	Sarrah	73	Widow	4	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 22	Fadiyah		Widow	6	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	F 24	Zinab	83	Widow	7	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
	F 25	Halimah	70	Married	8	Illiterate	Fulltime Housewife	Fulltime Housewife
	F 26	Abdiah	77	Widow	4	Illiterate	Agricultural / Household Work	Fulltime Housewife
Working Class G 3	F 40	Zehbah	68	Divorced	5	Illiterate	Agricultural Work Domestic Worker Peddler	Pedlar
	F41	Nalah	67	Widow	6	Illiterate	Agricultural Work Domestic worker Peddler	Shopkeeper
	F 42	Zelfah	68	Divorced	5	Illiterate	Agricultural Work Domestic worker	School janitor
	F 43	Shahrah	90	Widow	8	Illiterate	Domestic worker Painter Prison guard	Retired prison guard
	F44	Zaharah	75	Widow	6	Illiterate	Agricultural Work School janitor	Retired School janitor
	F 45	Thanowh	90	Widow	6	Illiterate	Agricultural Work Painter	Fulltime Housewife
	F 46	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	F 47	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	P48	Eiddah	67	Widow	5	Illiterate	Agricultural Work Domestic Worker	Singer
	P 49	Hadbah	77	Widow	7	Illiterate	Agricultural Work	Fulltime Housewife
	Total number of informants		23				9 in committed paid work	

6.1. Household Work

There were several types of household work. In addition to daily work to fulfil the family's needs of cooking, baking, house cleaning, laundering and ironing, the second type of household work was weekly work, which required serving visitors coming to the Tuesday market each week. The third type was occasional household work such as house maintenance, painting and preparing for social events.

6.1.1. The Nature of Daily Household Work and Socio-Economic Class

In line with Witz's (2007) argument linking the ideology of domesticity and women's role as housewives with the economic status of the male head of the family in Abha, housework was more linked with upper class and middle class families who lived in households comprising family members of different generations, and who had many visitors. Aishah, the wife of a landlord in Abha, explained women's work among upper class families:

My in-law-family was very big, my mother-in-law, her older son, his three wives and children, my husband and I We started the day praying and soon we fire the wood, baked bread that filled three wood-burning stoves and made tea and coffee. Then, we do the breakfast of 'Arikah⁶⁷ or Mabthoth⁶⁸ in Tuesdays and Fridays Then every woman does her job for that day, but not our mother-in-law. One would milk the cow; another would clean the house, and the one who is responsible for cooking that day would start cooking lunch. Whoever finished her work would go and help in cooking Edams⁶⁹, rice or anything. (Aishah; F9/G1a 67w).

This family represents an image of Al-Torki's definition of patriarchy (1999) that comprises several generations and age groups. It also reflects what Hartman (2001) calls hierarchal patriarchy not only between men and women but also among women themselves as the older women occupy the role of the female head of the family.

Across different historical stages and different societies, a major characteristic of household work is that it is time-consuming (Oakley 1974; Al-Khashab 1983). Among first generation women in Abha this was the first characteristic emphasised, as housework used to require the whole day to complete. The timetable of work was organized by prayer time, as women

⁶⁷ A famous dish made of wheat, ghee and honey. Wheat meals were used only on special occasions and for guests.

⁶⁸ Dish of wheat and liquid yogurt, which is cooked occasionally

⁶⁹ Several dishes of vegetables, meat and sauce

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started working before the dawn prayer and finished their tasks after the night prayer⁷⁰ around 9:00 pm. The division of household work was not only based on gender as it was completely a women's job to serve men, older people and young children, but was also based on age as it was the responsibility of young women to serve the rest of the family, whereas the oldest female in the family usually supervised the work.

A number of factors influenced the length of time spent on domestic work. First, the large size of the extended family promoted by the rural culture. Barakat (2000) explains that a large number of children was considered free labour and their number had a symbolic meaning reflecting the status of the family. Second, was the absence of any supporting services, such as shops, restaurants or bakeries, which Halimah explained:

We were doing everything by ourselves with no help at all. Nothing was available, not even bread for sudden vister. (Halimah; F25 /G2a 70m).

Third, the traditional basic tools required a long process of work unlike the "labour saving machines" in contemporary societies. For instance, all the processes of food production were undertaken at home by women. Technological tools were very basic, such as "Raha" (grindstone) and "Al-Meefa" (wood-burning stove). Fourth was the need for great physical ability. Felwah who belonged to an upper class family explained this through the bread baking process:

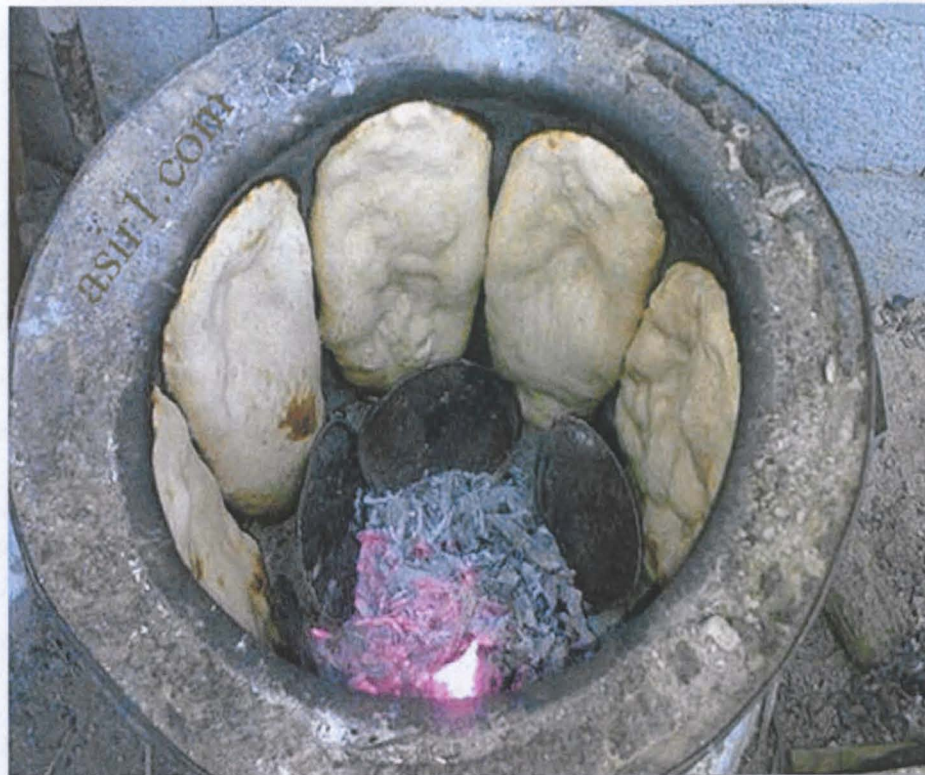
Oh, how "Al-Raha" had harmed our shoulders and hands We used to leaven the dough after 'Esha prayer, and before the dawn prayer, we started firing the wood. Then when the wood is hot enough, we baked the bread. At noon, we bake again for lunch. Allah knows that there were no ovens in those days, but only "Al-Meefa". At night, we would bake again or cook rice; our faces were burned from those Meefa. (Felwah; F3/G1 a 66m).

⁷⁰ Prayer times are determined by the position of the sun in the sky. The Muslim day begins with the dawn prayer, by the occurrence of daylight. The *Duhr* (noon prayer) and the *Asr* (afternoon prayer) are given by shadow-lengths. The *Duhr* is given shortly after the sun has passed its highest point, when shadow-length is at its shortest. The *Asr* is given when this shadow-length has doubled. *Maghrib* prayer is performed at sunset. The last of the prayers to be regulated is *Isha*, which begins at nightfall up to midnight. The prayer times vary depending on both location and the time of year.

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This extract illustrates Blacker's argument (1975 cites in Dixon 1982) that the production of bread is an economic activity that goes through a chain of processes starting with planting and harvesting and ending with pounding the grain and baking it; however the latter is not considered part of the production process because it is mainly conducted by housewives. In addition to involving long hours and the requirement of physical strength, the other characteristic is the repetitiveness of the tasks several times a day. Repetitiveness is not only linked to old forms of housework, but represents a fundamental feature of the kind of work that housewives in both industrial countries (Oakley 1974; Deplancq-Nobe'court, 2001 cites in Heteit 2004) and developing countries such as Egypt (Al-Khashab 1983) and Lebanon (Heteit 2004) also complain about.

Figure 6.1 Al-Meefa (The firewood- burning stove)



Source: (Ali 2009)

Housework is influenced and constructed by certain factors that determine its extent and nature. While urban women of the upper and middle classes were baking and cooking all

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day, working class women gave household work little attention, as their focus was on agricultural or paid work. Salehah who was married to a merchant in Abha compared the household in Abha to work in her village:

Back home at my village, all of us used to work at home. However, houses were not as big as the houses today. It was small houses of four or three rooms. We just slightly cleaned the house with a sweeper, and baked bread. That was it. While in Abha, we didn't stop cleaning and cooking. (Salehah; F20/ G2 a 77 m).

The meagre economic condition of the region as reported by historians who visited the region in the 1930s (Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951) influenced even the amount of housework. Small houses and scarce resources limited domestic work among the majority of village people and working class families where meals were very basic. Upper class families lived in bigger houses with a large number of family members which required more work, and where bread was prepared three times a day associated with other dishes. Occasionally meals with expensive ingredients, such as meat, wheat and ghee, were served among upper class families, which explain the increased amount of work in upper class households.

In addition to the class and economic status of the family, the location of the family's house and fields was another influential variable that determined the lifestyle of the family and the form of work women undertook. Abha, at the centre of a rural region, was a mixture of urban and rural lifestyles. Families living in the heart of Abha experienced a completely urban lifestyle, and women in these families undertook only household work. Mesferrah, a wife of one of the richest merchants in the city, explained her household work:

No, no, we did not work at fields; ours were outside Abha, nor fetch water. We only worked at home. However, "Wallah"⁷¹, it was fatiguing work. We were moving back and forth the whole day. (Mesferrah; F2/ G1a 67w).

At the same time even upper class families living on the outskirts or whose fields intersected with the city, performed both household work and some agricultural work. Asking Felwah if life became better when she married a rich urban man and moved from the village to the city, she said:

⁷¹ W-Allah means I swear by God, "Allah" in Arabic.

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Oh dear, I did not get any convenience at all (hahah). We used to have some fields next to the house in Abha, with plenty of cows. We have to milk them and cut some stover from the family's fields for these cows every day. In the harvest season, of course we have to help as well" Felwah (F3/G1 a 66m).

6.1.2 Tuesday Weekly Market and Women's Weekly Household Work

As discussed in chapter 2, the weekly market in Abha "Suq Al-Thulatha" was the core of economic, political and social life in the region of Asir, and played a major role in the growth of the city (Al-Na'ami 1999). For urban families in Abha, the weekly market emphasised the significance of hospitality for the weekly visitors. Halimah, the wife of a merchant in Abha, explained the impact of weekly market on household work:

Every Monday, we started preparing for guests of the Tuesday market. Relatives and friends came from their villages with their products in the house, and I have to clean again when they leave. They come Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. We get some rest for a few days and then they come again the next week. This was the situation in every house in Abha. There were no hotels or restaurants. You can't even find bread for your guests, if you don't bake it at home. (Halimah; F25/G2a 70m).

Historians (Hamzah 1951; Shaker 1981; Philby 1952) asserted that the high value placed on hospitality reflected the family's socio-economic status. Shaker (1981:69) and Ben-Jrais (1994:94) explained that the provision of hospitality was surrounded by rules supervised by the head of the village or the mayor of the area to guarantee the convenience of the guests and collaboration among people in achieving this mission. Serving guests was women's role, to confirm their families' generosity and high status despite the great pressure this put on women by increasing the time, effort and repetitiveness of housework.

6.1.3 House Maintenance, Social Events and Household Work

The houses of Asir, until the 1950s, were built of stone, mud and the wood of juniper trees (Al-Qahtani 1996; Ben-Jrais 1994) (see Figure 6.2). These houses required frequent maintenance especially after rains and before social events, such as the holy month of Ramadan, Eid Al-Fitr⁷² and Eid Al-Adha⁷³. At these times all relatives, friends and

⁷² The first three days in 10th lunar month of the Islamic calendar. In these days, Muslims celebrate and visit each other, after fasting the month of Ramadan.

⁷³ The second biggest occasion for Muslims. Whereas some Muslims undertake pilgrimage to Makkah in the 12th month in the Islamic lunar calendar, the rest of Muslims not going to pilgrimage would fast the main day

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neighbours visit each other and families organize social gatherings. Maintenance and house decoration were also undertaken before family celebrations, such as wedding parties and "khitan parties" the celebration of boys' circumcision⁷⁴. Sarah explained house maintenance and decoration work in the old days:

Those mud houses required consistent maintenance. We were in the habit of scrubbing and cleaning the walls and whitewash "Sehar" it and "Khudar" make the lower part green with some berseem leaves. Then, we draw some lines and shapes in the middle of the wall. I do not do the painting. We pay a woman who is good at Qatt painting. (Sarah; P8/G1a 80s).

Although house maintenance is usually considered men's work in contemporary societies (Swiebel, 1999), in Abha this kind of work and all tasks related to the house was a woman's job. The old buildings required frequent scrubbing, and natural colours used in decorative painting faded and needed re-painting several times a year. The frequency of undertaking house maintenance and decoration reflected the class of the family and women's proficiency in maintaining the beauty of their houses either themselves or by paying other women for their services. Upper class women had the financial support of their families to pay for domestic workers to assist in this house maintenance, and to pay a professional painter to undertake the final fresco, whereas middle class women usually undertook house maintenance and decoration less frequently and depended on their own talent in decoration. At the same time, working class women assisted upper class women in painting and decorating and were paid for that help. Mohrah explained house maintenance and decoration:

(name) used to paint for us in Sha'aban⁷⁵.....we just prepared the walls for her. We whitewash "Nesher", and paint green colour "Nokhdor" with some leaves. Some women used to help us doing that, but only (name) do the painting and we all help her. Many women⁷⁶ used to gather at our house in Sha'aban, and they helped us in the dusting of furniture and bringing it back clean. Then, we paint Salal⁷⁷ and doors as well. All these things should be done before Ramadan and Eid. (Mohrah; F6/G1 a 72m).

of pilgrimage, the 9th, then celebrating Eid Al-Adha the following three days (the 10th, 11th and 12th days of the month)

⁷⁴ In 'Asir, circumcision used to be undertaken between the age of 12 to 15, and families used to celebrate this occasion as the entrance of their sons to manhood (for more explanation for this old tradition see Hamzah 1951; Al-Saud 1989).

⁷⁵ The 8th month in lunar Muslim Calendar, and it is the time for preparing for Ramadan and the Eid Al-Fitr.

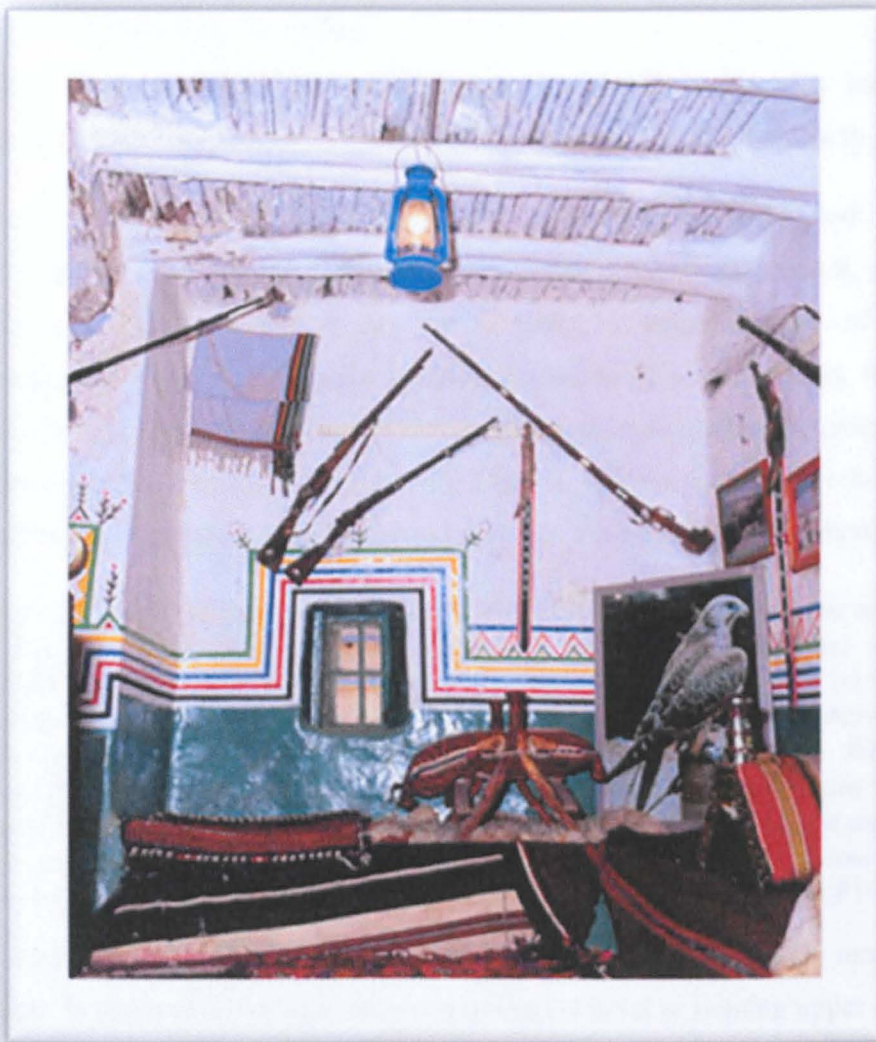
⁷⁶ Poor women come to help at housework in order to get something in return.

⁷⁷ Space heater with coal in living room that also keeps coffee and tea hot(See Figure 6.2)

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At certain times of the year, all forms of household work were undertaken at the same time; house maintenance was linked with special occasions like Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr as the biggest occasions not only in Abha but throughout the Muslim world. Thus, the preceding month *Sha'aban*, was the busiest month regarding household work, when women undertook all forms of household work simultaneously. Fatimah explained:

Figure 6.2 Qatt Painting in the Middle of the Wall



Source: (La'asani 2008)

Ramadan is a dear guest, we prepare for it all the month of Sha'abanWe paint the house. Besides, we clean the whole houseThen , we get busy with storing

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up the vegetables and fish, my father sent from our fields in Abha and from Tihamah, to use later in Ramadan. (Fatimah; F1/G1 a 81w).

While religious and social events specified the timing of house maintenance in Abha, in the outskirts of the city and in the surrounding villages, harvest time controlled this kind of work, as described by Zinab who used to live in a village:

While waiting for the harvest to turn out well, we maintain houses and paint them.....People who always have guests and like their house to be clean and beautiful, would keep cleaning and maintaining it. Some, they would not care so much. (Zinab; F24/ G2 a 83w).

The location and lifestyle of the family, urban or rural, again not only influenced the priorities of women's household work or agricultural work, but also the timing of each.

Preparation for family events represented other occasional household work. Celebrating family events, such as wedding parties or boys' circumcision celebrations, affirmed the socio-economic status of the family. Men spend a large amount of money on accommodation for guests, catering and entertainment to show their status, while women try to show their household skills to empower their status not only in their extended family, but to enhance their reputation in the community. Fatima explained how her family celebrated the circumcision of their sons and the role of women in that celebration:

Circumcision of boys was a very big event, and my grandfather used to be so proud of it. Now, it just takes place in hospitals with no more ceremonies at all. Weeks before the gathering, we women used to prepare the house, grind plenty of wheat, prepare ghee and everything. Guests used to come from everywhere and stayed almost for ten days. The house was like a market full of people. We didn't stop working and serving dishes of wheat and ghee, and tin cans of dates were opened and served with it⁷⁸. At dinner lambs' meat was served. Serving tea and coffee was on going the whole day Yes, we had Jarat (housemaids) and some women used to help us, but none of us stopped working all those days. (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w).

Family events placed huge pressure on women and greatly increased the amount of their housework. The role of working class women was essential in helping upper class women in particular to achieve this hard household work. This indicates that a negative attitude towards domestic work is not recent or exclusive to western women (Grint 2005; Oakley 1974) or contemporary societies, but was common in earlier times, especially that domestic work used to require substantial physical strength. However, the volume of housework

⁷⁸ Referring to generosity in serving large amount of food.

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where there was a large extended family did not leave a place for women to complain of isolation and loneliness, unlike the grievances of many housewives in contemporary societies (Attwood and Hatton, 1990).

6.2 Agricultural Work

In a rural tribal region like 'Asir, the social structure emphasized the importance of both tribal blood and land, as in rural areas throughout the MENA region (Barakat, 2000). In these kinds of communities, every member of an extended family participates in maintaining the family's land and products, as people in such a society see themselves as part of a unit and not as independent individuals (Barakat, 2000). Agricultural work was a collective activity uniting the people of the village against nature, in the same way that tribes united in times of war against outsiders. Agricultural work was associated with household work, and was not exclusive to working in the fields but included selling products in the city market and emergency work after natural disasters.

6.2.1 Agricultural Work and Class

The significance of agriculture as the main economic activity in the region was reflected in the practice of this work by most first generation women from all classes, but to different degrees. Of 23 informants of the older generation, only five did not undertake farming activity (see Table 6.1). The common characteristic of this group was belonging to urban upper class families and living in the heart of Abha, while their families' fields were out of the city and farmed by workers. Fatimah stated, when asked about her experience in agricultural work:

No, why would I work in the fields? We do not work in the fields. My grandfather used to have plenty of workers in our fields in Al-Moftaha⁷⁹. We used to work so hard at home. That was enough, dear. (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w).

Among the middle class women, Halimah was the only one who did not engage in agricultural work:

In my family, we women of Al-(family name) didn't work at the fields at all. Our fields were in Tihamah, out of Abha. My father-in-law was a merchant who had many workers and six slaves as well. (Halimah; F25/G2 a 70m).

⁷⁹ Western outskirts of Abha, it is two kilometres far from the heart of the old city. Nowadays, it is in the town centre of Abha (see figure 6.3).

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Although the location of the family's fields, as much as belonging to an upper or middle class family, influenced women's experience of agricultural work, some of these women undertook farming work occasionally when they visited their fields. Sharah who belonged to an upper class family that had their fields in Abha said:

When we were living next to our fields, I used to cut and collect some stove to feed the sheep and cows. I used to collect bundles of stove and carry it on my back and feed the animals. We also milked cows and shake the milk we were working hard with maids and workers. (Sharah; P 8/G 1a 80s).

In rural societies agricultural activity has a high value and everyone has to participate as needed. Upper class families employed more labourers due to the large size of their fields, and thus family members and labourers worked together in those fields. However, the level of agricultural work undertaken by these upper class women was secondary, as they were helping in animal care, with only occasional participation in land work. Mohrah confirmed the significance of the location of the fields and the occasional work she conducted.

We didn't use to work in the fields, because we were living in Manadhir⁸⁰, but when I spent some times in Al-Miftaha I used to help my cousin's wife and the workers cleaning the sheep cot and bringing water from the wells. (Mohrah; F6/G1 a 72m)

In this rural region, agricultural activities were highly valued, and no one was excluded, regardless of gender or age. Mesferrah explained her family's economic need for agriculture and the nature of the work she undertook:

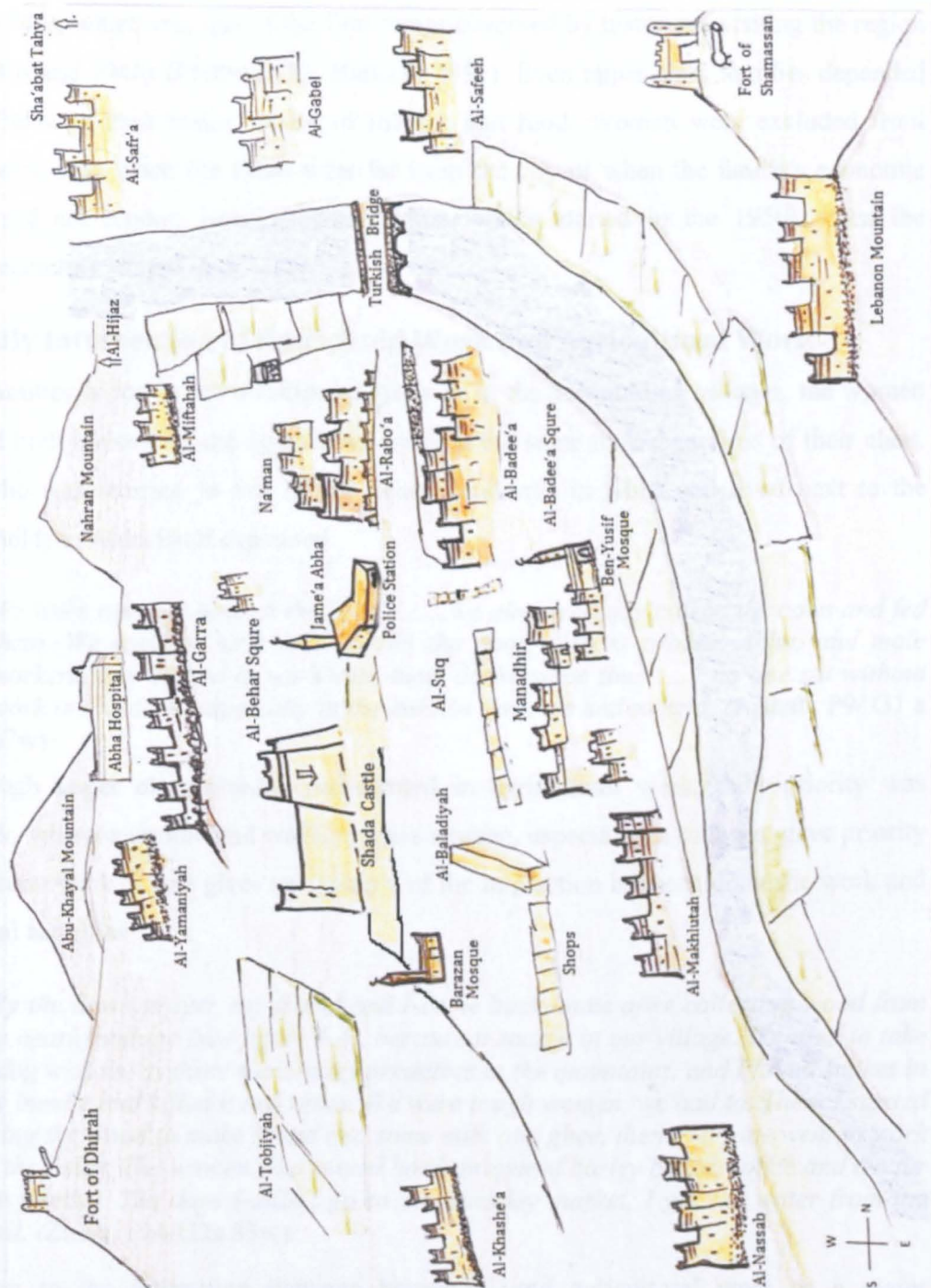
All people were working in the fields, even me. Either my older brother or I went with our grandmother to our fields in Al-Khodilah⁸¹. None of our younger siblings experienced that, as life become better⁸² and my father rented workers to take care of the land. We used to stay in a small room for three months in a very isolated place. We had to take care of the harvest of grain. Sometimes, an enormous number of baboons attacked the field, so my grandmother used to have a shooting iron only with a sound to protect the fields from animals. There was nothing, only poverty. In harvest time, some workers harvest the fields and got something, while we kept the rest for the whole year. There was nothing, we just depended on those fields after Allah. (Mesferrah; F2/G1 a 67w)

⁸⁰ The heart of the old city of Abha (see Figure 6.3).

⁸¹ Fields, 6 kilometres north west of old Abha although it is part of Abha nowadays.

⁸² Linking this with other family events shows that this historical stage was the 1950s.

Figure 6.3 Map of Old Abha ⁸³



⁸³ The map is based on data from informants and most of all on the guidance of Mr.Hussein Mimish, Mr.Taha Al-Qahtani and the help of Engineer Essam Manadhir. An Arabic draft is in the appendix

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Although the previous statements were made by women from the richest families in the region, they show the meagre economic situation of the traditional household economy until the 1940s, which was one of the first things observed by historians visiting the region in the 1930s and 1940s (Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951). Even upper class families depended on their fields as their major source of income and food. Women were excluded from farming work only when the fields were far from the city or when the family's economic situation did not require women's contribution, which started in the 1950s when the country's economy started to develop.

6.2.2 Daily Intersection of Household Work and Agricultural Work

Among families living in the outskirts of Abha or in the surrounding villages, the women conducted both household and agricultural work at the same time regardless of their class. Aishah who was married to one of the richest landlords in Abha and lived next to the family's fields in Abha itself explained:

We were working hard at the house we also everyday milked the cows and fed them. We used to have maids from the poor villages around Abha, and male workers, but we had to work with them at the same time no one sat without work in that time, especially in the harvest time, we had to help. (Aishah; P9/ G1 a 67w)

Even though upper class women participated in agricultural work, their priority was housework, whereas middle and working class women, especially in villages, gave priority to agricultural work. Zinab gives an example of the interaction between domestic work and agricultural activities:

"By the dawn prayer, my friend and I came back home after collecting wood from the nearby village (see figure 6.4), because it scarce in our village. We used to take a dog with us, as there were many predators in the mountains, and I found snakes in my bundle and killed it two times. We were tough women, we had to. Then, I started firing the wood to make bread and some milk and ghee, then everyone went to work in the fields. The women who stayed home prepared barley bread, coffee and tea for the family. The days I didn't go to the Tuesday market, I got the water from the well. (Zinab; F24/G2a 83w)

In addition to the interaction between household and agricultural work as a major characteristic of women's work in rural communities (Dixon 1982; Morsey 1990), this statement reflects other characteristics of women's agricultural work in 'Asir. First, the site of the work is so broad that it includes the household, the family's fields, the surrounding

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areas of the village and the city market. Second, the length of working day, starting before sunrise and ending two to three hours after sunset.

Figure 6.4 Women Carrying Bundles of Fire-wood



Source: (Ahmed 2009)

Third and fourth, agricultural work not only requires physical strength to carry heavy bundles of wood or harvest, but also the ability to confront dangerous animals and serpents in contrast to Anker's negative stereotype (2001) of women as lacking physical strength and the ability to face precarious situations. Fifth, solidarity is an essential characteristic in rural communities, especially with the lack of public services and the need for support during illness and in the harvest season. Different forms of solidarity attracted the attention of visitors to 'Asir (Hamzah 1951; Shaker 1981) and characterized rural communities in the MENA region in general (Barakat 2000; Morsey 1990).

6.2.3 Different forms of Agricultural Work

In addition to practising both household and agricultural work on a daily basis, the agricultural economy included activities such as harvesting and marketing the products, and group work in emergencies.

6.2.3.1 Agricultural work and marketing

The weekly market in Abha, similar to markets in other urban centres in the middle of a rural region, such as Halab (Hourani 1991) and Fes (Geertz 1979), played a major role in the economic life of the region of 'Asir, and had important political and social significance. Families in rural areas send one "Laqi" to sell their products and buy their needs (Al-Hamed 2005). Women and young girls also participated in this mission as Felwah discussed:

I used to go to the Tuesday market with almost twenty girls from our village. Our land was very good. I used to sell Berseem, and fruits. We used to have plenty of fruits such as plums, figs; pomegranate and everything my older sister and my cousin met their husbands in the weekly market. Girls just got married and went for a better life we unmarried girls were distinguished with our yellow scarfs, while married women put a black veil over that scarf. (Felwah; F3/G1a 67m).

This shows the active economic role of young women in marketing agricultural products in 'Asir in contrast with Shami's study (1990) in a Jordanian rural community where marketing was described as a "male task" and women conducted this work only when men were absent. However, it is important to note that first generation women in this study are discussing the situation in the period from the 1930s to mid-1950s, when people in the region were more homogenous in their educational background and the agricultural products sent to market were limited to the amount a donkey could carry.

Felwah's statement also points to another social function of the weekly market as a site of marriage proposals. Hamzah (1951: 132) explains that this was very active during the time of his visit at the end of the 1930s. Social custom supported this tradition, shown in the norm of sending maidens to the city market and distinguishing their costumes from those of married women, another characteristic of the rural culture of 'Asir.

6.2.3.2 The Harvest Work

Harvest time is the busiest time of the year, and the amount of work on the land was controlled by the kind of crop. Most families had winter and summer crops, and so the harvest would take place for at least four months a year. Women's work on the land in harvest time was always combined with household work, fetching water from the wells, collecting wood and serving food to waged labour during this season. Abdiyah gave details about these activities:

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When the harvest was ready we stayed up to one month and a half reaping, bundling and storing it. We also protected the crop from birds. Children help, but they couldn't do it all by themselves. We women also have to take care of men and women who come from other villages to help us. They drove us zonked⁸⁴. We grind and bake bread for them, while they take care of the fields In the winter we reap cornfields, wheat and barley, and lentils in the summer. (Abdiyah; F26/ G2a 77w)

The volume of harvesting work and the short span to fulfil it required the contribution of all family members in addition to the help of other farmers from inside or outside the village. In some villages, farmers would collaborate to harvest all fields together one after another, while sometimes they had help from other villages in return for sharing some of the crops.

6.2.3.3 Emergency Work

The social structure of 'Asir which linked people by tribal lineage as well as the agricultural work that built up a strong bond between people and their lands, united them further during times of personal or natural emergencies. Heavy rains, floods and locust swarms represented the major threats to crops. If any of these threats attacked the village or any part of it, the people of the village, including women, would work together to fight the damage. Zinab explained this:

When heavy rains came, it used to destroy houses and fields as well. Sometimes flood took the whole year's harvest. Floods usually bring stones and sands that only strong men can carry. All men and women of the village collaborated with the one whose fields were destroyed. Thanks Allah, if you know how much we suffered. (Zinab; F24/ G2a 83w)

Women were integral to this kind of work which reflects the strength of the group and significance of solidarity not only against external threats to their security, as described in chapter two, but also against threats from nature to their survival. Within tribal rural communities, women's economic activity was directed to serve both the extended family and the village as a whole in order to confirm their responsibility as a member in the group. This parallels Morsey's observations (1990) in Egyptian villages where women supported each other in times of sickness in return for having the same support when needed, which was also the case in Asir as explained by Zinab:

⁸⁴ Referring to their hard work in serving workers in the fields.

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When a woman was sick, her husband used to announce that in the "Masjed" and other woman would help by fetching water or a bundle of wood. (Zinab; F24/ G2a 83w)

6.3 Division of Unpaid Work

According to Hakim (2004), the gender division of labour is associated with two types of gender segregation at work, vertical and horizontal segregation. Although Hakim's concern was directed to paid work, in this study the division applies also to unpaid work, both household and agricultural, as the following discussion will explain. Gender has played a significant role in constructing these two forms of unpaid work, as women were linked with lower status and less autonomous work. However, the economic need of the family for women's participation has reduced the visibility of this hierarchy in the agricultural field although it is still evident in household work. The interaction between gender and factors, such as class, the family's economic needs, a woman's age and her status within the family, constructs the division of women's unpaid work in 'Asir.

6.3.1 Household Work and Horizontal Division of Labour

Household work has always been gendered and considered as feminine work (Al-Khashab, 1982; Al-Mosaed, 2008; Hoteit, 2004) not only in MENA societies but in industrial societies where men's participation in the household has remained limited (Oakley, 1990). Among first-generation women in Asir, it was found that all activities related to the house were considered women's responsibilities regardless of the physical strength required or the location of the work. For example, carrying a bundle of wood or a goatskin filled with water several times a day is quite heavy work for women, and young girls in particular, but it was not acceptable for men to undertake this kind of work. Zelfah commented:

Men don't get water from wells nor do any domestic work. That is 'ayb (shame) the man would be taunted "Are you a woman?" But they work in the fields. (Zelfah; F42/G3a 66 d).

Ferree (1990) argues that this linkage between household work and femininity by social norms symbolizes women's subordination. The breaking of these norms, either by women or men, would impact on their gender identity and their status in the community. In addition, according to Swiebel (1999), this gendering of household work is a major reason for excluding it from economic activities and linking it to women's gender role as housewives. Fatimah confirmed this gendered division of household work:

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After the sun has set, my family used to let us women go and bring water. One of our brothers walks in front of us No, they didn't carry the water goatskin. We girls do. "Go with girls, take care of them". They were worried that any man would talk to us, but if one of us fell down in the well, it's up to us even if we die. It was so heavy, but we girls were excited just to go out of the house. Later, when life got better, none of my cousins did that work. My grandfather used to pay some women to do it. Then some Yamani men⁸⁵ took responsibility for that work. (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w)

The family's economic situation not only influences women's involvement into paid work as argued by Hijab (1988), but can also apply on the nature of woman's domestic work. As soon as the family's economic situation improved, women would withdraw from any outside activity, as it is believed in patriarchal culture that women's arena is the household (Connell 2009; Pollert 1983). According to Kandiyoti (1988) classic patriarchy in the MENA region includes forms of control and subordination over women, which are represented in Fatimah's example through fetching water at night and in the company of brothers. Her story provides an example of the strict patriarchal codes on women's movement and behaviour as a strategy to protect the family's honour symbolized by its women, which is thoroughly discussed in several social studies (Moghadam 1992; Kabeer 1988, Abu-Odeh 1996; Dodd 1973).

Even after many decades, Fatimah is still angry about that strict control and subordination over her freedom, yet the majority of women were accustomed to this segregation, and were not aware of the pressure of these norms. Sarra is an example:

No, I couldn't join the boys (in the study circle) It was not forbidden, but it was not my business. They have their work and I have my work I start the day collecting wood and carry it on my back. There was no school or anything, only hard tasks and grinding on a stone gristmill. My brothers used to pasture the sheep, while I took care of the housework, cleaning and cooking. (Sarrah; F21/G2a 75 w)

Women's accommodation with such patriarchal norms represents what Kandiyoti (1988) calls the "bargain with patriarchy" - internalization of these norms in order to gain power and security in later life. According to Jacob (2001), socialization and social control are fundamental strategies to maintain the gender division of labour, as socialization teaches

⁸⁵ In the mid-1950s and in the 1960s, the economic situation started to improve and labourers from neighbouring countries started to immigrate to KSA. The society accepted the idea of men undertaking this work because Yamani men were outsiders who do not follow the local norms.

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women the normative nature of gender segregation, while social control keeps the voices of angry women subdued and uncertain, as in the example of Fatimah above.

6.3.2 Agricultural Work and the Horizontal Division of Work

Whereas gender segregation was strictly enforced in the household, in the fields it was less transparent. In line with Boserup's (2007) argument that in a plough-based agricultural society, like MENA societies, the land is the man's responsibility represented by conducting all the heavy physical work, such as ploughing, planting, irrigation, and all relevant decisions. However, the collective nature of cultivation makes this division less rigid as women and all family members participate in all the other daily agricultural activities. Women living next to the family's fields in the outskirts of Abha or in villages faced the difficulty of combining the two forms of work, in the house and in the field, while men merely conducted agricultural work:

Figure 6.5 Mountain Terraces in 'Asir



Source: Abo-Mobarak (2008)

Wallah, women were working more than men. Everyone was working hard. Oh, there was a lot of drudgery. Men also work hard, and were knackered. It was not easy to plough or irrigate those fields in the mountains Our fields are

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*Atharai*⁸⁶, but we have one *Saqawi*⁸⁷ field and it was for the good crops. We women helped them and life goes on. The man, his wife and his children all work. (Abdiyah; F26/G2a 77w)

The gendered division of labour in agricultural work intersects with other factors, such as the type of crops, the irrigation system (Shami 1990; Morsy 1990; Al-Torki 2001) and the size of the family and of their fields. First, women's contribution increased in the cultivation of seeds and vegetables which was the case in 'Asir, similar to Al-Baha north of Asir (Al-Ghamdi 1985; Shokri 1983), Egypt (Morsy 1990) and Jordan (Shami 1990), while the cultivation of date palm trees, the main product in most oases in Saudi Arabia, is male dominated and women's role is limited to storing dates (Al-Torki 2001). Second, dependence on rain as the main source of irrigation "*Athari* cultivation" also decreased the level of gender division of labour in 'Asir, as only a few fields depended on irrigation from wells, "*Saqawi* cultivation". The latter requires hard work to extract water from wells and build canals to the fields, which is restricted to men as it requires heavy digging work, especially with the solid nature of land in 'Asir due to its location on the slopes of Al-Sarrah mountain (see Figure 6.5). Where there is "*Saqawi* cultivation" in other regions contributes to constructing a strict gendered division of labour, such as in Wadi Fatimah in the western region (Katakura 1996) and Onizah (Al-Torki 2001). Third, the size of both the family and the fields also determine the degree of women's participation in agricultural work as Zaharah illustrated:

There was only hard work dear. Our field was big and the land is difficult. My husband and his two brothers worked so hard to prepare it for cultivation, and we women helped them. All what we got was from fields. In harvest season, all the people of the village, men and women, old and young, harvest the fields one after another. (Zaharah; F44/G3a 77w)

Women's participation increased in small families and in bigger fields where the family's economic need for more labour required women's work. This economic need reached its peak in the harvest season when every member of the family and in the village contributed. Family members worked as a unit, and performed most tasks together, showing that a clear division between what men do and women do was ambiguous, as in some cases women would practice men's work and vice versa. This collaboration and intersection between

⁸⁶ Fields that depend only on rain.

⁸⁷ Fields that require irrigation.

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men's and women's work reduced the consciousness of the gender-division of work among rural women. However, it did not reach the level of the sense of equality argued by Collins (1990) among African farmers in both Africa and the USA in slavery time.

The improvement in the income of families, especially those headed by government employees, gradually decreased women's role in agriculture. This was associated with the new Wahhabi discourse in Asir, explained by Zinab:

I used to go to the weekly market while my mother worked at home and my step-father worked in the field, until one day a group of Al-Matawe'ah⁸⁸ captured me with other village girls from the city market. Al-Metawe'a asked me "where is your Mahram?", and I asked him back "What is a Mahram?". He said "your father or husband, where are they?". I said "my father is working in the field, and my husband works in Tabuk in the military, otherwise I would not be here". They preached us about the importance of covering our faces and let us go. Later village women became prohibited from selling in the city market, and fathers would be arrested if they sent their daughters. (Zinab; F24/ G2a 83w).

Women's participation in marketing their families' crops in the city market represents the first confrontation between local culture and the new Wahhabi discourse in the region. Wahhabi scholars associated with the religious police, "Matawe'ah", embodied the first mechanism for implementing Wahhabi doctrine in 'Asir that gradually increased to exclude village women from the city market, and which later expanded to reconstruct all norms about gender relations. State support for the Wahhabi discourse has been fundamental to its expansion in 'Asir, which Doumato (1999) and Al-Rasheed (2007) contend is the major reason behind the significant status and authority of Wahhabiya in KSA.

6.3.3 Hierarchical Division of Household Work

In addition to the gendered nature of household work, it was also determined by class, age and the status of the male head of the family. Household work was primarily the duty of the young women of the family while elderly women and female children had smaller roles. Young women were usually the daughters-in-law of the male head of the family, or

⁸⁸ An unofficial title referring to any religious men, including those in the religious police and the clerics. The plural of this title is Al-Matawe'ah and the singular is Al- Metawe'a. In this quote, the informant was referring to members of the religious Wahhabi police who later became an official government department under the name of Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (CPVP) "Hayat Al-Amr Bil-Ma'ruf wal Nahy 'an Al-Munkar".

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younger wives, if he had more than one wife. Felwah explained the hierarchal division of household work among her extended family-in-law:

Housework was divided between three of us; the young wife of my father-in-law, the wife of my brother-in-law and me. The older wife of my father-in-law did not touch a thing in the house. She was our boss My father-in-law respected her a lot; she was a smart woman and had inherited a lot of real estate from her father, as she was his only daughter. Everyone in the city respected her, and people came to her for advice and support. (Felwah; F3/G1 a 66m)

Families in Abha comprised of several generations headed by a male with authority over all members of the family, which is in line with Al-Torki's definition of patriarchy (1999:215); however these families, unlike Al-Torki's view, did not marginalize mothers. In fact, the above example and throughout this chapter, informants' statements reflect the high status of female heads of extended families; it was younger women who were marginalised. Kandiyoti (1988) explains that within this form of patriarchy which she calls "classic patriarchy", senior women gain high status and authority as a result of their strategy of bargaining with patriarchy through accommodating its norms at a younger age and participating in the system that oppresses them, referred to as "female conservatism" by Johnson (1983:21). Felwah continued explaining the younger women's role:

We wives of sons worked like housemaids. The mother manages the house and tells us what to do. We only say "yes". Every day one was responsible for cooking. If not good my stepmother-in-law would say in front of everyone "this is the cooking of (name), what do these village girls know about cooking???!!" So we all did our best not to be taunted we just worked hard and rarely went out, and arguments never stop between us, which was a heartache. It was my mother-in-law who represented the family in social occasions and ceremonies in the prince's palace. (Felwah; F3/G1a 66m)

Family members not only have to show obedience to the authority of the male head of the family, which Ben-Salamah (2004) emphasises as a major characteristic of this kind of family, but also to the female head of the family, another feature of this type of family. The female head of the family controlled a daily schedule of household work, food supplies and decisions taken with the male head of the family. This high status of the female head of the family was more practiced among upper class families where the domestic participation of the female head of the family decreased with her increasing authority within the extended family. Usually this position was occupied by the mother of the male head of the family;

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otherwise it would be the woman who was oldest and closest to him. Mesferrah's clarifies this point:

My sister-in-law used to work only when my husband invited some guests. She was a very good cook. She did the edam⁸⁹ and cooked thabiha⁹⁰ She was very good. In other times, she would sew clothes for the whole family, while we, the two wives of her brother did the housework. (Mesferrah; F2/G1a 67w).

The authority of the female head of the family varied based on her relationship with the male head of the family. Mothers of the male head of the family usually enjoyed higher status and more influence than older sisters or wives. Joseph (2000:136) explained how senior women in patriarchal societies are rewarded for their acceptance of the patriarchal structure not only by kinship care and respect but also by "iconizing the mother" as the source of all good in society. Therefore, a younger female head of the family had less authority, and would participate in some work. The economic need for the participation of all family members among working class and rural families required the contribution of the female head of the family in both domestic and agricultural work:

My mother-in-law was strong, and used to help us in grinding the corn with the stone-grinder, while one of us the three daughters-in-law fed the bulls She was a tough woman, worked inside the house and with her sons in the fields and controlling the whole family. May Allah forgive her, she was so hard on us, but life was difficult too. (Zaharah; F44/ G3a 70w)

Hence, the authority of the female head of the family was determined by the intersection of class, age and the status of the woman within the family based on her relationship to the male head of the family. This strict hierarchical division of household work between women could cause conflict within extended families, as explained by Mesferrah:

My grandmother was a strong woman and controlled everyone including my mother and the other two wives of my father and we her ten grandchildren, but not the last wife of my father She didn't work, and knew that the man was on her side. The second wife left the house and my mother ordered us, her daughters, not to work as well At the same time, my grandmother got older and weaker than before Yes, there was conflict between women at every house in Abha, but not like our house where problems were every day. (Mesferrah; F2/G1a 67w)

⁸⁹ Different dishes of vegetables with tomato sauce to be eaten with bread.

⁹⁰ A whole lamb is usually cooked for a guest with rice, and it could be two or three lambs depending on the number of guests.

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Although the common response of women to "classic patriarchy" in MENA societies was accommodating with patriarchy and bargaining as argued by Kandiyoti (1988), within their extended families, women in Abha, despite their accommodation with patriarchy, showed some form of resistance, not towards the authority of the male head of the family, but with other young women and, in a few cases, with the female head of the family. The role of the male head of the family was fundamental here to control women's resistance and enforce the authority of the female head of the family. Within most patriarchal families, resisting patriarchal authority might result in excluding the young woman from the house by divorce, unless she had a special status as in the above example.

Female children from all classes were also engaged in household work. As a result of limited educational access at this time, a girl's future role was fundamentally linked with that of a housewife. Hence, mothers, as role models, trained their daughters in order to build the status of both mother and daughter as good housewives. Zannah explained the toughness of that training:

Omi, my mother, MABHS, started training me for baking the bread at a very early age. When I got scared of the fire in "Al-Meefa" (the wood-burning stove (see figure 6.1), she would push my hand to the stove wall to be burnt. Even though, I am her only child. (Zannah:F26/G2a 63m)

Belonging to an upper class family did not exclude girls from domestic work due to its significance for women's status. Among working class families, the participation of girls in household work was essential to fulfil the family's needs, as mothers were engaged in paid work outside the house. Whereas Hijab (1988; 2001) argues that training represents a major condition for women's paid work, these stories show that it is also significant for unpaid work. Shahrah gives examples of her household work in childhood:

My mother used to lock me home from sunrise to sunset when she went to work for people. I swept the room, ground the seeds and cooked our meal. At sunset, she came back and we ate our dinner..... My daughter also took care of her six brothers and cooks our dinner when I was at work. (Shahrah; F43/G3a 90w)

In short, household work was mainly linked with young women in the upper class, while older women conducted less work and enjoyed more authority, and female children of these families were considered as in a training process. At the same time, among the working class, the participation of older women and female children was higher, which emphasises

the importance of class and the family's economic needs for the nature of women's unpaid work.

6.3.4 Hierarchical Division of Agricultural Work

Not only were both women and men working hand in hand in the fields to fulfil the family's economic needs, older women and children also contributed in lighter agricultural jobs; no family member was excluded from cultivation work unless they were completely incapable. A major and important activity of protecting the harvest from birds was mainly the job of children and the elderly, and due to its importance, young men and women used to participate when their support was required, as explained by Fadiyah:

As children we used to protect the harvest from birds, which was our entertainment as well. My grandmother used to help us and shout at us if we did not notice some birds. The harvest was in danger of those birds and most difficult was the attack of locust swarms that can eat the whole harvest, but everyone in the village contributed in collecting them and we eat them after being roasted. (Fadiyah; F22/G2 a 77w)

Training for cultivation activities started with this mission of protecting the harvest by children and older people. The greater the economic need of the family for children's contribution in both household and agricultural work, the more social control was implemented. Children's contribution in these cases cannot be considered as just training but complete economic participation, as illustrated by Salma:

When I was little before taking the sheep for pasture, I fulfill "Al-Zeer" (the pottery vat) with water with my small water goatskin "Al-Gerbah". I also brought firewood, cleaned the sheepcote and took the dung out to be used as manure. Then, I took my young orphan cousin, and guided the sheep to grazing land. At noon, I came back, cleaned the house and helped my mother after she baked bread for us. I prayed the noon prayer and went back for pasturage. I was less than ten years old carrying a bundle of wheat on my back There was no time for playing, only sometimes, we children played in the mountain around our sheep. On my way back, I collected "Rihan and 'Ettrah"⁹¹ for my mother to put in her hair or around her neck. (Salma; F4/G1a 72m)

This shows how early engagement with adult activities reflected the hardship of children's training, especially for girls who combined both agricultural and domestic work. This form of training emphasised gender role and gender segregation of work that was internalized

⁹¹ Ornamental plants (basilicum, aromatic herb) (Al-Qahtani, 2006:300, 312).

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through socialization, as argued by Reskin (1993). Furthermore, this need for children's participation in economic activity reflected the meagre economy of the region in that era.

At the same time, although older women were enjoying kinship care and respect as a common feature of elderly status in MENA societies, as contended by Kandiyoti (1988) and Joseph (2000), the family's need for their contribution included them in field work undertaking light tasks, unless they were incapable of work. Within rural families, older women usually became responsible for housework, child care or herding livestock in order to enable younger women to work in the fields. Zinab clarifies:

In harvest or ploughing time it was difficult to take children to the fields, so I left them with my mother. They either company her, while young infant used to be tied to something so he can move in the room but not to fall from the window or burn himself with the hot coal at "Al-Salal" (see figure 6.2). She kept looking at the baby from time to time as she has to fetch water, water the cows and cook our dinner When she became weak, it was my turn to take care of everything. Later, even my step-father stopped working in the fields and we moved to Taif with my husband, and rented the land to a man in our village. (Zinab; F24/ G2a 83w)

The influence of modernization that attracted people to cities, men to government jobs and children to schools largely contributed to the abandonment of agricultural activities in the region for both sexes and all ages. Agricultural work, as a result, became part of the social history of the region, and lost its economic value. Abdiyah details changes:

No, I do not work in the fields anymore, why would I? I worked hard enough all of my life. Women stopped working as the village is surrounded with roads that bring strangers from everywhere, and people worried about their daughters and wives Today, every house in the village has at least one person working for the government. Thanks Allah, life is good now, and products come from everywhere Most fields in the village is abandoned except a few ones. Rain now gets much less and the land is difficult. My younger son cultivates a small field close to the house with anything we need for the house" Abdiyah (F26/ G2a 77w).

As economic and social development improved the living standards of people in the region, agriculture paid the price. This statement agrees with studies attributing the low production of agriculture in Asir to several factors including lack of water, migration to the cities, the high cost of agriculture and the limited state policies to protect local products (MEP, 1975; Al-Sakran, 2006; Metz and Chapin, 1992). All these factors have contributed, with socio-cultural barriers, in restricting not only women's work in agriculture but also that of men.

6.4 Unpaid Work and Women's Empowerment

Although unpaid work does not enable economic independence, a major resource of women's empowerment, this section will explore if unpaid work fulfils any form of empowerment or gives women the ability to make choices, as Kabeer (2005) and The World Economic Forum (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005) identify empowerment. Limited sources of empowerment for first-generation women emphasised the significance of women's work in households or fields and linked it with their social status. Hence unpaid work as a resource of empowerment was determined by a strict standard with two aspects to measure women's skills; one aspect classifies a woman's skills as excellent "Sagrah", while the other classifies her as ignorant of basic skills "Khummah". Informants explained this standard:

My grandmother chose my mother for my father because she was quite "sagrah" and can take care of the house, while my father was looking for beauty. (Mesferrah; F2/G1a 67w)

I was young and beautiful, but a man needs a "sagrah" woman that takes good care of his home, children, fields and guests. (Abdiyah; F26/ G2a 77w)

My mother started training me for baking the bread at a very early age she wanted me to be "sagrah" and not to be taunted by other women for being "khummah" I heard women praising the loaves of a woman that it looks like swords and I wanted to do the same. (Zanah; F25/ G2a 63m).

This standard of their skills at unpaid work was used as a mechanism of social control over women to drive them to compete with each other to fulfil the family's needs, and to prevent their resistance to the pressure of hard work. Hence this standard constructs a firm gender role that represents the core of girls' socialization and training for their future roles as housewives, as a girl's level of excellence affects her chance of getting a good husband and building status among her marital family in the future. Therefore, excellence in conducting unpaid domestic work was an important resource for women's bargaining with patriarchal power for some rights and autonomy, as Felwah describes:

I was sagrah, and my husband and his family admitted that, but couldn't bear daily arguments with women. Besides, I had three boys and a girl at that time, and my husband income improved. I just went to my brother's house and refused to come back unless in a separate house It was also difficult for my husband to leave his father's house Nobody boss me anymore, and now all my sons live independently, every woman wants to be the queen of her house. (Felwah; F3/G1a 66m)

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In order to bargain for further rights, first-generation women depended on their limited resources, mastering forms of unpaid work in addition to producing children, especially boys, and retaining their husbands' affection. The gradual breakdown of classic patriarchy that started at the end of the pre-boom era with economic transformation and new market forces weakened the extended patriarchal family. In line with Kandiyoti's argument (1988), one of the first consequences of the breakdown of classic patriarchy was young men's separation from their parental household; another was young women escaping the pressure of hierarchical patriarchy. Although Kandiyoti (1988) argues that this generation of women lost their future roles as female head of household, data show that they were prepared to sacrifice this to attain their autonomy, especially as their social status still distinguished them as mothers.

Agency, as the second aspect of empowerment, reflects women's ability to control the resources and choices that can increase her potential to participate in household decision-making, her social status and freedom of movement. Previous discussion shows the high status of senior women who have gained respect and security with their kinship and community through a long process of bargaining with patriarchy during their youth. These women also occupy the role of the female head of the family. Discussion on hierarchical division of work shows that decision-making in the family falls within the man's arena, while the female head of the family plays the role of his right hand and makes decisions related to the house management. At the same time, young women rarely had this agency as they were in the process of gaining resources and building their status.

Women's mobility in the public domain is another aspect of women's agency (Kabeer 1999), which the data show varies depending on the women's location, class and nature of work. Within urban upper and middle class families, only old women enjoyed freedom of mobility; the mobility of young women was restricted, as several statements asserted. However, women living in the outskirts of Abha and in villages enjoyed great mobility due to their duties in fields. Sarrah explained the ambivalence between the mobility of village and urban women:

In my village, we women leave our homes from dawn to sunset to take our cattle to grazing, fetch wood and water. When I got married and lived in Abha, I only could see the sky Only his mother used to visit neighbours and I have to work at home all day When he married another woman, I carry my child and walk to

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*Al-Hijaz*⁹² all night, in mountains that even brave men cannot walk through without a weapon. By dawn I reached my village. (Sarrah; F21/G2a 73w)

Unlike the patriarchal stereotype that sees women as lacking the ability to travel or to face danger (Anker 2011), the majority of first-generation women were brave and had the strength to face danger as part of their daily lives.

Women's achievements, as the third aspect of women's empowerment, aim to gender equality and empowering women with their rights. However, unpaid work provided first generation women only with respect and some participation in household decision-making in later life, while their freedom of movement was determined by the nature of their work, in agricultural activities in particular. However, this status did not increase their access to social and economic rights, especially when it contradicted the interests of the male head of the family, as Fatimah clarified:

Money? No there was no money. We only got Eideyah in Eid Al-Fitr, from my grandfathers In Sha'aban he used to send home some rolls of cloth, and each woman would have cloth for two new dresses for the coming year Thanks Allah, we get something from our inheritance, you know women usually do not get anything. Men do not follow Allah's words, and they do not want their money to go to strangers. (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w)

Within this patriarchal system, in the same way that unpaid work was conducted by the family as a unit, the reward was also given to family members as a unit. Women's payment was not in cash but in the life standard the family provided for its members, including house wares, meals and clothes that seemed like a uniform for all the women in the household. The inheritance rights of women in Abha, as in other MENA societies (Kabeer 1999; Shami 1990; Morsy 1990) although given by Islamic law; in practice women rarely received their share of inheritance, especially land. Women who do receive inheritance either acquire this in part to stop them from claiming this right, or do not have a male relative of first degree who can monopolize the family's inheritance.

The socio-economic status of families in rural societies is based mainly on the size of the family's land that has to remain as an intact unit. Farmers in MENA societies use several

⁹² Al-Hijaz is the name of the mountains region in the west of Abha, and this informants village is 20 kilometres from Abha.

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strategies to prevent the splitting of families' lands, such as monogamy marriage which is highly valued in patriarchal societies (Barakat 2000). Mozah explained these strategies:

My sister and I had no one but Allah, we had our inheritance and house which I live in even after getting married, why would I live in that big house full of people In villages, girls either get forced to marry their cousins or after the death of the father, brother would invite their sisters for dinner "thabiha"⁹³ and ask their sisters to waive their share of the land, and women agree. "no security with a husband", and who wants to enter the court and involve in conflict "Meshara'ah"⁹⁴ with her brothers. They are unjust men "Dalammah" who do not implement Allah rules. (Mozah; F5/G1a 80d)

While Al-Ghamdi's study on Al-Baha (1985) points to the custom of asking a widow with no male children, to waive her share of the land to her husband's family, this study shows that this habit includes all female members of the family. In line with studies in other MENA societies (Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer 1999), the phenomenon of women waiving their economic rights indicates women's subordination and limitation of choices, as their economic rights are restricted by several patriarchal norms. Raising a legal case against a family member is considered as shameful "ayb", and required the support of a male guardian "Mahram" to access the court and progress the case (Yamani 1996; Doumato 2010). As resisting this patriarchal norm carries heavy personal and social costs, the only available choice for women is to waive their economic right to inheritance in order to gain a high social status among their kinship and to maximize their security in case of the breakdown of their marriage.

6.5 Conclusion

Experiences of first-generation women with unpaid work showed that economic needs, social stratification, social norms and training played a prominent role in constructing the nature, division of unpaid work and the extent to which it empowered women in the pre-boom era.

Economic needs at the state and family level in this era stressed the need for women's participation in the major activity of the region, agriculture, and as a result the socio-cultural barriers towards women's work were reduced. The state was in the early stage of building its bureaucratic system and had limited economic resources from traditional

⁹³ See Glossary

⁹⁴ Raising and tracing a legal case in the court.

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agriculture in Asir to supply other regions with agricultural products. The demand for agricultural labour in such a rural society required the participation of all family members including women regardless of class, gender or age.

Economic need also reduced the influence of class on women's work among rural families living in villages or the outskirts of Abha; the majority of women in 'Asir from all classes practised agricultural and household work at the same time. Only urban upper and middle class women in Abha were involved exclusively in household work, while urban working class women provided their services to others, which is the subject of next chapter.

As a region of "plough cultivation" (Boserup 2007: 12), although hard tasks like preparing the land for sowing was a man's job, women assisted men in all activities in contrast with Boserup's (2007) observation that women in some of these communities are excluded from agricultural work. However, household work was completely gendered and men would not contribute to outside activities, such as fetching water and wood. Hierarchal patriarchy not only provides the male head of the family with power and authority over family members, the female head of the family, usually the senior woman in the household, also enjoyed great authority over the rest of the family, including young men and women. This hierarchy was implemented among urban upper and middle class families but was less obvious among rural families where older women also participate in light activities in the fields and were responsible for household work and child care. Young women were the most subservient members within the patriarchal family and had to show respect and obedience to both the male and female head of the extended family. Adopting patriarchal norms and bargaining with patriarchal power were the major strategies to gain some rights and respect in later life. Some young women showed resistance to the authority of the female head of the family and competed with each other to reach that position. However, there was no evidence of resisting the authority of the male head of the family.

Socio-cultural barriers gradually became more visible when the economic need for women's work by the state and the family decreased by the end of pre-boom era in the 1950s. Patriarchal norms of gender segregation were mainly implemented on urban upper and middle class women, while it was reduced to a great extent on rural and working class women. However, with economic improvement of the state and the spread of the Wahhabi discourse the state intervention became more visible through Wahhabi preaching and

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religious policies that opposed women's participation in public life. This exclusion was strongly resisted by women and their families, as women's work was essential for the economic life in the region. Under pressure from religious police, village women withdrew from the city market yet continued their agricultural work in their villages.

Education as a major condition for women's work was very limited to basic education for a few upper class girls in Abha. The meager economy of the state and Wahhabi opposition throughout the 1940s and 1950s limited the opportunities for education for this generation and their chance to be employed later in the public sector. Hence, among this generation, training was significant in providing female children with skills for an assumed future, working either in the household or in the fields.

Ultimately, limited resources in the pre-boom generation led women to utilize their special skills in domestic work as a source of empowerment, in addition to the production of male children. These were the only resources for women to bargain with patriarchal power for some security and to participate in household decision-making in their later life when usually they became the female head of the family. Women of this generation also enjoyed freedom of movement as a necessity for agricultural work, while among urban upper and middle class families only the female head of the family enjoyed this right. Although women in this era enjoyed some forms of agency, their access to socio-economic rights remained limited and controlled by the male head of the family.

7. First Generation Women and Paid Work

This chapter traces the experience of first-generation women, in terms of exploring the different forms of paid work. It examines the relationship between paid work, class and gender segregation (vertical and horizontal). The chapter then moves on to examine the impact of paid work on women's empowerment, and ends by discussing the impact of various forms of paid and unpaid work on the identity of first-generation women in Abha.

7.1 Nature of Paid Work and Class

The previous chapter showed that the role of class was not very influential among first generation women practicing agricultural work, as all members of families living next to their fields were engaged in cultivation activities, yet to various degrees. However, among urban families, the class of the family played a major role in concentrating women's role on domestic work. Data in this chapter suggests that paid work is generally undertaken by working class women. In Abha's outskirts and in villages, they worked for rich farmers, while in Abha they assisted upper class women in their household work. Nalah explained her experience with paid work:

I worked almost in everything. I used to wash carpets, to paint houses from outside and inside with Horrah⁹⁵ and Norah⁹⁶ I used to fetch water from wells for some families of Na'man⁹⁷ up to 20 times a day. Al-Kobariah's⁹⁸ daughters do not carry Al-Gerbah (water goatskin) or go out I also had sold stover in the market place I sold tea and coffee for people in the market place. For seven years, I sold vegetables in the market. Then, I opened this shop 20 years ago for women's traditional clothes, herbs and souvenirs. (Nalah; F41/G3a 67w).

Although the general economic situation in Saudi society was poor between the 1930s and 1950s (see chapter 2), the situation of working class families was even more difficult. Every family member had to work and contribute to the family's income. The stories of this group of women show how the families' economic needs limited social barriers and increased their willingness to have women seek work outside the household. Women of this group were working in the city market, providing their services to upper and middle class

⁹⁵ Special kind of sand used to colour the ground and outside walls of mud and stone houses in the old days in Abha.

⁹⁶ Special kind of natural white colouring that women prepare.

⁹⁷ The northern area of old Abha, see figure 6.3.

⁹⁸ See glossary.

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families in their homes or as peddlers. Table 7.1 shows women's participation in paid work among first-generation women.

Table 7.1 Paid work undertaken by first-generation women

Group	N.	Age	Pseudonym	Marital Status while working	Social group	Paid Work	Marital Status while working	Who Controlled paid work Income	Recent Work
G1	F2	67	Mesferrah	Single	Tribal	Teacher for 3 years	Single	Father	House wife
	F6	72	Mohrah	Single	Tribal	Seamstress for 8 years	Single	Herself	House wife
G3	F40	68	Zehbah	Married, Divorcee	Non-tribal	Part-time domestic worker, Pedlar	Married, Divorcee	Husband + Mother-in-law Herself	Pedlar
	F41	67	Nalah	Married, Widow	Non-tribal	Part-time domestic worker, Pedlar, grocer, shopkeeper	Married, Married Widow	Mother-in-law Herself Herself	Shopkeeper
	F42	68	Zelfah	Divorcee Married Divorcee	Non-tribal	Part-time domestic worker, School janitor School janitor	Divorcee Married Divorcee	Herself Husband Herself	School janitor
	F43	90	Shahrah	Married, Widow	Non-tribal	Part-time domestic worker, painter, jail warder	Married, Widow	Husband Herself	Retired prison warder
	F44	75	Zahrah	Married, Widow	Tribal	School janitor	Married, Widow	Husband Herself	Retired school janitor
	F45	90	Thanowah	Widow	Tribal	Painter	Widow	Herself	No work
	F48	67	Eiddah	Single Married, Widow	Non-tribal	Part-time domestic worker, Singer	Single Married, Widow	Mother Missing Data Herself	Singer
	F49	77	Hadbah	Single	Non-tribal	Agricultural work Part-time domestic work	Single Single	Missing data Missing data	Full-time Housewife

Table 7.1 shows different forms of paid work and includes women from both the upper and working classes. All eight working class women had undertaken paid work, while only two from upper class families had undertaken paid work and this was for a short period before getting married. Furthermore, this table shows that the kind of paid work a woman can undertake is also influenced not only by her class but also her social group, whether tribal

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(“*Qabīlī*”) or non-tribal (“*Non-Qabīlī*”). Shaker (1981) explains how these different social groups specialised in various form of economic activity⁹⁹. Most forms of paid work were hence only available for women of a specific class and social group, and will be discussed in the following sections.

7.1.1 Domestic Worker

According to Bose and Acosta-Blen (1995), a domestic worker is a person who provides in-house services for others. In Abha, the majority of working class women helped upper class and, to a lesser degree, middle class women in fulfilling the hard tasks in their households. Domestic workers were divided into two types, part-time and live-in domestic workers:

7.1.1.1 Part-Time Domestic Worker

Urbanization for working class women meant migration from agricultural work into domestic work for other households. Helping upper class women was the first form of paid work that the majority of working class women undertook, which was also common in other regions, such as the Eastern region (Al-Baadi 1982). Zehbah explained this transformation in her work experience:

In our village, my family did not have land, so my mother and I used to work for others When I got married and moved with my husband's family into Abha, my mother-in-law asked us, her sons' wives, to work. There was nothing. We used to leave our children with her and sometimes take the little ones who still breastfed with us to people's houses. (Zehbah; F40/G3a 68d)

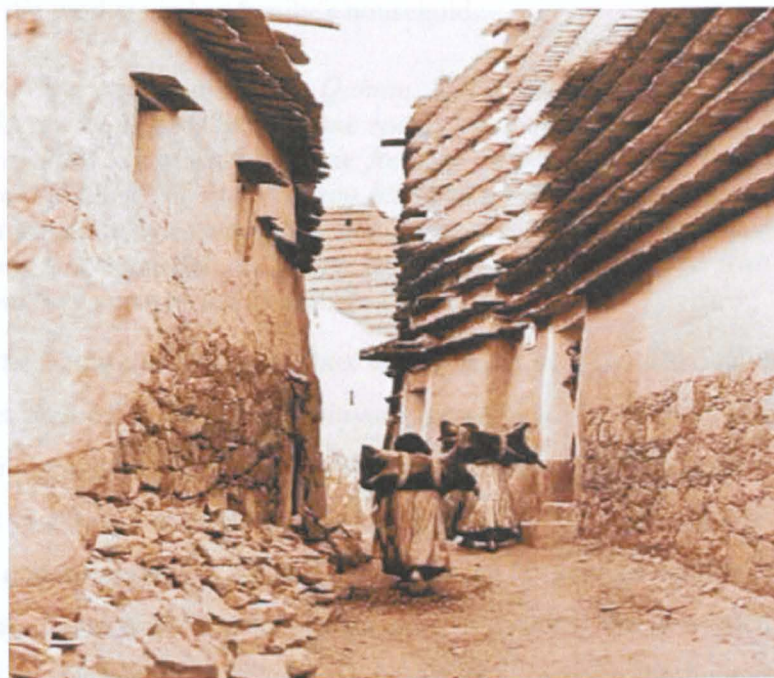
Part-time domestic workers helped upper class women in the tasks that require leaving the house, such as fetching water, or the more strenuous tasks, such as house maintenance. Childcare did not represent a problem for working women due to the supporting role of the extended family and the flexibility of their work, as mothers could take young children with them to work. Some of these part-time domestic workers undertook just one type of activity such as fetching water, while the majority undertook any required work as ‘Eiddah explained:

⁹⁹ See chapter 2.

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"I have been working since I knew myself. I used to bring water from wells for our neighbours in Na'man¹⁰⁰. I also used to help them in whitening and greening the walls and to do anything" ('Eiddah; F48 /G3 a 67w).

Figure 7.1 Women carrying *Gerbah* (water goatskin) on their backs in the streets of Abha



Source: Mojaan forum (2011)

These domestic workers were living with their own families in the city, and most were undertaking paid work for their upper class neighbours who paid them by the job. Class heterogeneity was a common characteristic of Saudi cities, which Bagader (2004) also points to in his study on old Makkah. These part-time domestic workers belonged to both the working class and non-tribal group. These women were excluded from patriarchal codes on the movement of urban women due to the need for their services. Not belonging to a tribe also reduced the pressure of patriarchal codes and links these women with low paid income jobs as asserted also by historians (Shaker 1981; Al-Dowsari 1998).

¹⁰⁰ See Glossary and Figure 6.3.

7.1.1.2 Live-in Domestic Worker "Jarrah"¹⁰¹

Some working class women used to come from villages around Abha and undertake live-in domestic work for upper class families in Abha. Unlike part-time domestic workers, these women were tribal "Qabili" working for some rich families who were known to their own families and were treated as family members. In some cases, the domestic workers were from the same tribe as their employers, or an equal tribe. Fatimah gave examples of the situation of domestic workers in her family's household:

We used to have housemaids from Qahtan, Sha'af¹⁰² and Al-Hijaz.¹⁰³ They used to eat and sleep with us girls in the same room. Some of them were from big families, but life was hard. They used to come for work when it was not harvest time. My grandfather (MABHS¹⁰⁴) used to keep his eyes on those girls. At night he used to check that everyone was in bed the house was full of young men, and the girls were young and beautiful One of the "jarat" fell in love with one of my cousins and they got married. (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w)

This statement reflects the complexity of class stratification in 'Asir. Although there was an economic gap between employee and employer, the equal status of the tribes of the two sides reduced the hierarchical relationship to the extent that people from the two different classes could get married. However, the economic need of the employer's family for the services of these domestic workers inside and outside the house, and their belonging to the rural working class reduced the restrictions on the movement of these women in the city. The male employer assumes the role of their fathers in protecting the honour of women, embodying the honour of their extended families, who are temporarily under his care. This indicates what Hartmann (2001) calls "men's solidarity" as a major mechanism in the application of the patriarchal codes over women's behaviour and appearance in order to protect family honour as discussed by Abu-Odeh (1996), Al-Mosaed (1993), Moghadam (1994) and Dodd 1977.

7.1.2 House Painter "Qattatah"

The region of 'Asir has been distinguished with its unique decorative art "Qatt" that was transmitted from mothers to daughters. In line with Mauger's study (1996), this polychrome

¹⁰¹ The literal meaning is female neighbour, but it was also the title of a housemaid. The plural is Jarat.

¹⁰² The eastern and south eastern areas of 'Asir.

¹⁰³ Al-Hijaz refers to the villages in the western mountains of Abha.

¹⁰⁴ Abbreviation for a very common prayer "May Allah blesses his/her soul", usually said after pointing to a dear dead person.

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fresco was women's responsibility, while building the house was the man's duty. He explains how this fresco was not appreciated as a work of art, but as a symbol of the skills of the wife of the male head of the family, who accepts the honour. However, this applies only to upper and middle class women who compete with other housewives over the beauty of their houses, while working class women use their talent to gain income from house painting for others. Shahrah illustrated her work experience:

I used to work only for people I like [names], I used to bring them water, fire-wood and to help in everything I used to prepare walls by curetting and painting it. Then I ashar [whitened] the upper part of the wall and Akhdor [green coloured] the lower part with some leaves. I then started painting and drawing shapes in the middle with different beautiful colours. (Shahrah; F43/G3a 90 w)

Figure 7.2 Female Qatt Painter practising *Qatt* Frescoes



Source: Mauger (1996: back cover)

Some of the specialised painters used to undertake “*Qatt*” painting as one of the many services they provided as part-time domestic workers, whereas those more skilled worked solely as “*Qatt*” painters. Thanowah, a “*Qatt*” painter, explained her work:

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My “Qatt” painting was very well known. Some of my paintings are still in our house and in the city museum. I used to do the “Qatt” painting only, after the women of the household prepared walls for painting Researchers from everywhere visit me now to study my painting. (Thanowah; F45/ G3a 90w)

Figure 7.3: *Qatt* Frescos in a five star hotel in Abha, designed by the most famous *Qatt* painter in the region, Fatimah Qahass¹⁰⁵



7.2.4 Female Shopkeeper

Data from the study indicates that specialised “*Qatt*” painters belong to the working class and are mainly from the tribal group, whereas painters combining painting with domestic work are mainly from the non-tribal group. “*Qatt*” painting is one of the few options for paid work for poor tribal women, while the options for non-tribal women were more open. In other words, while the tribe and its norms protected the status of a woman and her family, they at the same time restricted her independence in order to maintain the status of the tribe itself.

¹⁰⁵ Photo taken by the researcher.

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7.1.3 Pedlar “Dallalah”

The norm of confining urban upper and middle class women to their houses created some jobs for working class women who enjoyed more freedom of movement, similar to that of rural women in the outskirts of Abha and in the villages. Sharifa, who belonged to a merchant family, explained this taboo:

No, no I never visited the city market in my youth, and I did not even know how it looked. My grandfather didn't allow any of us women to go to the city market, because all our needs were brought home. I visited the market for the first time, when visited Abha later [in the 1970s]. (Sharifah; F7/ G1a 82m)

Hence, some working class women mainly from the non-tribal group used to work as peddlers supplying other urban women with their needs. The peddlers played an intermediary role between the segregated urban women and the city market. Zehbah described her work as a peddler:

I used to sell vegetables in the city market for years. We women just sit outside under a big umbrella. Sometimes I took some of the vegetables to my customers' houses. My neighbours used to ask me to bring them something from the market Women used to give me their silver accessories or even their gold accessories to sell for other women or to a goldsmith. I don't have enough money to rent a shop, so today, I sell some women's clothes and accessories to my old customers all over the city. (Zehbah; F40/G3a 68d)

The work of peddler women included various activities and selling products in order to serve other women. The kind of products peddlers used to sell depended on the needs of their customers. Some peddlers sold vegetables, while others sold women's clothes, silver accessories and cosmetics products, such as Henna and stone kohl.

7.1.4 Female Shopkeeper

The city market in Abha included several shops owned and run by women in the 1930-1950s.¹⁰⁶ Some female shopkeepers were old merchants of the city, while others were pedlars who developed their work in order subsequently to run a shop. Sharifah who belonged to the family of one of the biggest merchants in the city described female shopkeepers in Abha as:

¹⁰⁶ Today, some of the old female shopkeepers still have their shops in the new location of the Tuesday market.

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In Abha, women were always working in the city market and were very well respected. Some of them were selling vegetables, herbs or clothes. “Sha’atolah”, was a very famous merchant in Abha. She was a smart and strong woman, and she used to travel with other male merchants to Sana’a to buy her products. She was just like a man. (Sharifah; F7/ G1a 82m)

Figure 7.4 A female Shopkeeper in Tuesday Market in Abha



(Source: Al-Watan 2011:1)

The city market was the men's arena, although some women were accepted for the necessity of the trade process. Village girls used to sell their products in the city market, and non-tribal working class women, as pedlars, were helping male shopkeepers in selling their goods to women in their houses. Nevertheless, there were some exceptional cases of women from the tribal group working in the city market, like “Sha'atolah”, in the example above. Although the success of these female merchants was respected, it did not change the mainstream negative patriarchal stereotype of women's work based on the belief that women do not undertake work that requires travelling, dealing with maths or supervising

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others (Anker 2001). Instead, these women were considered exceptional cases and praised for being like men.

7.1.5 Singer

The financial needs of working class women inspired them to use any talent or skill they had to increase the family income. Eiddah explained this:

When life got better and people had those water tanks and got these new paintings, then I worked as a singer Now, I'm raising up my orphan¹⁰⁷ children with this work (Eiddah; F48/G3a 67w).

Economic development resulted in the decline of some types of traditional paid work, such as fetching water, selling stover and “*Qatt*” painting. However, the need for some services continued, such as singing and playing on drums at wedding parties, which are gender segregated and can be undertaken only by females. Some domestic workers shifted to working as singers, which provided a good income. However, this job has been concentrated in one non-tribal group called “*Balahtah*”, while it is a social taboo for all other tribal and even non-tribal groups. The history of “*Balahtah*” is not documented, so no one knows the location of their original land.

7.1.6 Female Seamstress

This form of work was undertaken by some upper and middle class women, and was considered one of the skills of a good housewife in serving her family. However, in difficult economic times, women undertook sewing for other people as well as for payment. Fatimah referred to a famous seamstress thus:

“[Name] whom everyone knows and respects, used to help her husband sewing for people. When he died, she continued sewing. Then, she stopped when her son grew up and started to take care of her” (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w).

Sewing was accepted by the norms of the upper and middle classes from the tribal group, since this type of work did not require going out of the house and entering the houses of strangers. Sewing was also not considered a social taboo for the tribal group, unlike other handcraft work that was undertaken only by non-tribal men and women (see chapter 2). Mohrah, who belonged to an upper class family, confirms this:

¹⁰⁷ Any child who has lost one or both parents is termed an orphan.

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My older brother used to sew for men of the family. I learnt from him and sewed clothes for women of my family Nothing was wrong with sewing. I sewed for other women only for a few years after my father passed away then, I got married and sewed only for my daughter Then, my back pain prevented me from using the sewing machine. (Mohrah; F6/G1a 72m).

Since sewing was a skill that was relevant to household work, all women who undertook it were from the middle and upper classes. Among these two classes the strong ideology of domesticity played a major role in excluding women from paid work when they got married and encouraging them to become engaged solely in household work. The husband then became as the main breadwinner, while women participated in family income only when seriously required.

7.1.7 Working in the Public Sector

In the mid of 1950s and in the 1960s, women entered the public sector for the first time. Establishing the first girls' schools created new work opportunities for women. Fatimah Ben Masaud, the first Saudi teacher in 'Asir, discussed her experience as a teacher:

I studied in the Kuttab¹⁰⁸ of Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Metawe'a in his house with other girls and boys for three years until I became good at writing, reading and memorising some chapters of the Qu'ran. Then, I taught girls for three years helping Om Ismail in Al-Qara'awi girls' school My father, MABHS, was so proud of me. He loves education and wanted us to learn. I stopped when I got married as I got busy with children and housework, besides, there was no salary. The salary arrives after four to five months. (Fatimah; F2/G1a 68w)

Although there were many girls studying with Fatimah at the Al-Metawe'a kuttab, she was the only one of her fellow female students to put what she had learnt into practice by teaching other girls. For the first-generation of women, teaching was the first form of work that required a qualification. The social status of this work and the high income it paid at that time made it very attractive for women and their families. Unlike other studies implies the absence of any form of girls' educational activities in 'Asir till the establishment of girls' state-run-schools in 1960 (Al-Dakheel 2000; Ben-Jrais 1995), this study indicates the involvement of girls in the 1950s in Al-Metawe'a Kuttab, as the first educational institution in the

¹⁰⁸ Classes providing basic education for young children at the teacher's house (see chapter 4).

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Saudi regime¹⁰⁹. Al-Qara'awi, the Wahhabi sheikh, who established more than 800 schools in the South Western region (Ben-Jrais 1995:261), had also established one girls' school in Abha around 1956 and stopped in 1959 for lack of financial resources that forced teachers to quite their jobs.

Establishing completely gender segregated girls' state-run schools in 1960 required not only female teachers but also female school janitors, which created new work opportunities for working class women. Zaharah, was one of the first school janitors in Abha said:

We were working in the fields in our village, but the crop was hardly enough, so my husband used to go to work in Makkah in the Hajj season and bring us good things. When girls' schools opened, we moved to Abha and my husband became the gatekeeper, while I became a school janitor in the first girls' school Thanks to Allah, life started to get better. (Zaharah; F44 /G3a 70w)

Working in the public sector required less physical exertion, was well paid and more secure than working in agriculture or for other families. Hence, some working class women, tribal and non-tribal, moved from agricultural work and part-time domestic work to employment in the public sector. Zelfah, who belonged to the non-tribal group, had been working as a school janitor for the last 30 years, and explained why she enrolled in the public sector:

When I got divorced and my husband threw me out with my children, I lived with my children in a room made of tin and worked for other women doing anything for them just to survive. Later, good people told me to apply for a job, and, thanks Allah, I became a school janitor. (Zelfah; F42 / G3 a 68d)

Security was a new feature that public sector work provided for women, unlike any previous work they had experienced. Security was essential to women, especially in the bad economic times and in times of family crises. Shahrah who belonged to a non-tribal group explained how she shifted to work in the public sector:

I worked hard during my life; I worked for people fetching water, grinding seeds, and painting. My husband used to take care only of his other wife,

¹⁰⁹ According to Al-Metawe'a son, his father started teaching in Al-Qara masjid in the early 1930s (Ben-Jrais 1995:247).

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*while I had to give him money and take care of my children and the house
..... Then, I worked as a prison guard in the women's prison for 30 years
..... my work helped me to bring up my children and now I receive a
retirement salary. (Shahrah; F43 /G3a 90w)*

Although the public sector attracted literate women from the upper class into teaching, the majority of women working in the public sector from the first-generation were from the working class and from both the tribal and non-tribal groups. The prestigious status of working in the public sector played a major role in attracting women from the tribal group to this kind of work, while the generous payment attracted all social groups.

7.2 Gender Division of Paid Work

The discussion in the previous section suggests that the work of first-generation women involved both gender segregated and non-gender segregated paid work. Meanwhile, women were concentrated in poor income work. Each form of gender segregation is discussed in the following section.

7.2.1 Horizontal Segregation of Paid Work

Witz (2007) divided paid work into primary and secondary sectors. In Abha, women's access to the primary sector of work, government jobs associated with the highest income and benefits, was very limited and started only in 1960s in girls' schools or the women's prison. First-generation women were primarily concentrated in the secondary sector associated with low income and benefits and in both gender segregated and non-gender segregated workplaces. Gender segregated field includes paid domestic work and "Qatt" painting. In addition, work serving other women, such as serving as a seamstress and singing at women's parties, is also considered to be in the secondary sector, with limited opportunities to accessing high socio-economic status. The only exception was working as a teacher, which was represented by only one person and was unusual for first generation women.

On the other hand, some first-generation women had access to non-gender segregated work in the city market. Even though this was the men's arena, women were accepted in some circumstances, such as being a village woman selling crops that were needed in the market, or being a non-tribal working class woman. The intersection of gender, the poor economic conditions of the market and the socio-economic group of the women enabled them to

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participate in commercial work. Despite the exclusion of village women from the city market with the increasing power of Wahhabi discourse in 'Asir since the 1950s, working class women were not able to withdraw from the market. At the same time, the need of upper class families for the services of working class women became more limited due to the advances in technological household appliances, modern painting, water services being installed across the city and the increasing numbers of foreign labourers replacing domestic workers. The market, hence, remains a major field for this group of women, yet with increasing restrictions as explained by Nalah.

Women used to work in the market with no problems till those matawe 'ah (religious police) came and force us to cover and set only in specific place There is a famous story of a girl from Tihamah who opened the head of one metawe 'a as he hit her with his stick for talking to a man from her village. Women had no fear in that time. Yes, they hit women who do not cover their faces; we were not use to that. Now, as you see we are old women and covering very well, but it seems not enough the other day one young metwe 'a shouted at me and I said "Take it easy my son, I am just like your mother " and he replied " No, you are not, my mother would not work in the streets with men". (Nalah;F 41/ G3a 67w)

The strict gender segregation has been influenced by the Wahhabi view of women's hijab and focus in women's gender role as housewives and mothers, while completely excluded from public life (Bashtrah 2009; Al-Juraisi 1999). This discourse was enforced first on the city market by the power of religious police. Breaking the new patriarchal codes on women's behaviour and appearance, made women vulnerable to different levels of public patriarchal control starting by preaching, verbal assault as in the example above and can reach hitting or imprisoning women or their male guardian. While village women were able to withdraw due to the increasing living standard with the development and modernization, working class women had to adopt to the new circumstance in order to keep their work in the market.

7.2.2 Vertical Segregation of Paid Work

In line with Hartman's argument (1982) that horizontal and vertical segregation take place at the same time, the concentration of working women among the first-generation in the secondary sector limited their access to high status jobs in the public sector, where women were almost completely excluded. In the commercial sector, the majority of the big merchants in the city were men, and only a few female merchants existed as special cases. A male historian discussed the female shopkeepers in Abha in the following terms:

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Women were working in the city market side-by-side with men. They were very well respected. There was the famous female merchant Sha'atolah, She used to travel with the other male merchants, to Aden, and she was a very tough woman. In addition, there were several shopkeepers selling vegetables, clothes and herbs. Women were having no problem in working in the market and dealing with men. (Mahmoud; F33/G2 m 72m)

In line with the historian's observations of the exceptional participation of women of Abha in the city market, discussed in chapter 2, in contrast with women in other regions of the new Saudi state, this statement points to the active role of a female merchant and shopkeeper. However, it is important to note that these women represent a small number, and the market remains a male domain. As said before, challenging the patriarchal stereotype about women (Anker 2001) does not correct this, but rather leads to the woman who break this stereotype being considered an exceptional case.

7.3 Paid Work and Women's Empowerment

Paid work is a major resource of empowerment (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005; Shamshad 2007; Moghadam 2007), however, according to Kabeer (2005), empowerment is also influenced by the nature of the work and women's ability to control their own resources. In the pre-boom era, empowerment of working women was influenced by the meagre nature of paid work and women's limited ability to control their income, as discussed by Shahrah:

People used to pay me with barley, rice, coffee, cardamom or wheat – whatever they have. I also used to take their old clothes, patch them and wear them. Later, I was paid in cash Only working in the government as a prison warden later provided us a good life My husband used to say "give me money", and I did in order not to be divorced and my children taken away from me. He used to love his other wife. She was so beautiful I took control of my money only after his death. (Shahrah; F43/G3a 90w)

The in-kind payment for work reflects the depressed economic situation of the 1930s and early 1940s, and how the economy and living standards of people have improved since then. Working in a government department shifted women's work from working for survival to working to provide a higher living standard for herself and her family.

Women's responses to patriarchal control over their own income led to the examination of their agency in decision-making as the second dimension of empowerment. In line with Kandiyoti's argument (1988), data indicates that women varied in their responses, either accommodating with their situation or resisting it. Within patriarchal culture, women are

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seen only as members of the family, not as independent individuals (Kandiyoti 1988; Joseph 2000), which explains the control by the head of the family of women's income. Women's accommodate with this norm, either to bargain for secure marriage as in the previous example, or simply accept that this norm gives the man financial responsibility. Zahrah, who is a retired school janitor, explained how her income was managed:

My first salary was stolen from me at school. My husband, who was the school door janitor, said "You will not keep the money; I will take it from you next month". We had only one disagreement over money, as I bought golden bangles with my salary, while we were already indebted to the butcher and the grocer. My father got mad of me and said "did you work to say this is my money and this is yours, or to collaborate to raise up your children ", and I never said this is my money again. My husband (MABHS) was a generous man and he spent the money on our children and guests. He built this building of three apartments and I live in one of them. Today, I receive my pension and am not in need of anyone. (Zaharah; F44/G3a 65 w)

Patriarchal stereotype of women as lacking financial skills, as explained by Anker (2001), has enforced men's control over the income of their female members of the family and convinced women to accept this control over their own income. Women's resistance to this norm, as the other response towards this kind of patriarchal control, was declared only in case of extreme misuse of the man for the wife's money as explained by Zehbbah:

We both used to work and save some money in a bag One day, a woman told me that he got married to another woman. I knew it was not a joke when I found our saving bag empty. He paid her dowry and presents from our money I did not mind about what people say, and raised a claim against him in the court and got divorced, but could not retrieve my money as I have no proof. Now, he is trying to kick me and my children out of the house we built together. (Zehbbah; F40/G3a 68d)

Women's limited agency of decision-making not only refers to patriarchal norms, but also to the legal system, as one of the aspects of public patriarchy, asserted by other social studies on women's legal position in MENA societies (Charrad 2001; Fakhro 1996; Mir-Hosseini 1996). Women's legal rights are restricted by a number of patriarchal norms. First, these norms consider women's access to the court as degrading to the woman and her family's social status "ayb", as discussed also in chapter 6; yet belonging to a non-tribal group reduce the pressure of this social norm. Second, patriarchal norms oppose the documentation of financial issues among family members, which weaken women's chances to prove their rights in case of disagreement, such as in Zehbbah case. Third, the patriarchal

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bias to men in divorce and custody cases forces some women to adapt with abusive husbands to protect themselves and their children from worse conditions in case of divorce. Therefore, the study shows that most of the women enjoying complete economic independence are divorcees and widows as explained by Nalah:

I worked to help my poor husband similar to the wives of his brothers, yet all our income was in the hands of our mother-in-law when my husband got married, I could not continue that life any more. I rented a room for my children, my two brothers and me I love work and like to manage my money the way I like. I never asked anyone for any sort of support. My husband used to take care only of his third wife because she was not working, and he does not say anything about my work in the city market as long as I am not asking for anything from him I forgive my husband when he got sick, and now after his death, I am trying to pay his debts. I am also trying to save some money to build a house for my children and me, I do not know how long I can go on working in this shop. I never asked anyone for anything, and may Allah never put me in that position in the future. (Nalah; F 41/ G3 a 67w)

Women's agency to make decisions is conditioned by the approval of the male head of the family, and hence even accessing paid work was restricted by the husband permission. In line with other social studies on empowerment (Kabeer 2005; Shamshad 2007), paid work among first-generation women, although barely able to meet the survival needs of the family, allows some women a self-governing lifestyle, improves women's and their families' living standards and prevents abusive marriages. However, lacking occupational security represents a major threat for most working women classed as self-employed, while the sense of security provided by the pension system is most appreciated by working women in the public sector, as in previous examples.

Similar to village women, working class women in Abha enjoyed distinct freedom of movement compared with women in other regions as also contends by historians visited 'Asir in the 1930s-1940s (Philby1952; Hamzah1951). However, the movement of urban upper class women and young ones, in particular, was strongly restricted by private patriarchal control. The city market "Al-Suq" and all public organizations, such as the court, represent the men's arena and the presence of a woman in such place would degrade the status of her family. Alike with other patriarchal societies, it is merely upper class and some middle class families who can afford excluding their women from public life to emphasise their power and ability to provide their families high living standard.

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Achievements, as the third aspect of women's empowerment (Kabeer 1999), that result from paid work are in contrast to the achievement of the unpaid work of this generation. While a major characteristic of women conducting unpaid work is economic dependence on the male head of the family, working women, despite the poor income of most of their jobs and the restricted agency over their own income, enjoy some economic autonomy or at least a source of empowerment to bargain for further rights. However, the economic rights of both groups of women are restricted by legal systems and social norms that enforce women's subordination to men's control over their resources, choices and rights. Hence it was found that women had control over their work income only when they were divorced or widows, while the income of married women is controlled by their husband, with or without their own approval.

Women's social status is influenced by the patriarchal culture that values the ideology of domesticity and gender roles (Witz 2007). Therefore, working women, who were mainly from the working and non-tribal class, would not enjoy the same social status as housewives. Fatimah, who belonged to an upper class family, explained her view towards working women thus:

(Name) was painting for people in order to raise her orphan children... When her son grew up he supported his mother and sisters and did not let them work for others Allah rewards her for her long sacrifices (Fatimah; F1/G1a 81w).

The patriarchal culture shows respect towards women who accommodate their gender role as wives and mothers and sacrifice for the sake of their family. Individualism and its values, such as professional success, ambition, and self-esteem, were not voiced by these first-generation women. Women's work was always for the sake of their family, but not for the working women themselves. The experience of paid work was described with words and phrases such as "for the children's sake," "family's sake," "sacrifice" and "patience."

In short, although paid work enabled women to have further participation in household decision making, their economic independence was conditioned by their marital status, and only unmarried women were able to control their own income. Legal systems and social norms played a major role in limiting women's economic role in the household and society. As for social status, despite the respect of the society for working women who participated in meeting the survival needs for their families, these women could not enjoy high social status.

7.4 First-generation Women and Identity

The identity of first-generation women was influenced by a number of factors that formed the social structure of “Asir in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s. This era represents the first stage in the process of building the Saudi state with its new relatively stable political situation after decades of wars, a meagre but diverse and self-sufficient economy, and homogeneity of population, culture and religion.

As in Moghadam's description (1992) of women in the patriarchal belt region, first-generation women have a high rate of illiteracy (see Table 6.1), especially with limited educational institutions¹¹⁰. The fertility rate was also high (see Table 6.1), which is in line with the UN (2009) estimates of the number of children per Saudi woman at 7.2 up to 1955, but high child mortality rate at 105 (per 1000 live births) up to 1975, and women's life expectancy estimated at 40.7 in 1955 (UN 2009).

Different forms of paid work influenced first-generation women's perceptions of themselves in various ways. For instance women's sense of gender hierarchy and their gender role as housewives and mothers varied among women who conducted different forms of work. Urban housewives had a high sense of gender hierarchy, especially with the strong ideology of domesticity and their economic dependence on the male heads of their families, while this feeling is much less prominent among women practicing the same economic activities as men in the fields or in the city market. Nevertheless, those women encourage their daughters to become housewives. Nalah, who is a very independent shopkeeper, explains this point:

I have been working hard all of my life, and do not like to need anyone My three daughters are married and their husbands take care of them. Why would they work, if their husband can take care of them? (Nalah; F 41/ G3a 67w).

The contradiction between working women's actions and beliefs indicates the strength of the ideology of domesticity even from women who could not afford to apply to themselves. It also reflects the view of women's work as basically linked with economic need. In addition, this view points to the difficulties surrounding women's paid work, such as limited

¹¹⁰ The only available educational institutions for girls in this era were Al-Metawe'a Kottab and Al-Qara'awi school.

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income, difficulty in controlling their income, lack of pension for self-employed and cultural barriers.

The sense of power and authority over family members that senior women enjoyed was more evident among urban upper and middle class families in which women only practiced household work. In contrast, within rural and working class families senior women could not enjoy the same authority and prestigious status, as every member in the family had to participate in economic activity. However, the social status of senior women, and mothers in particular, was supported by both hierarchal patriarchy, and the Islamic principle that gives mother a distinctive status. A number of holy texts glorify the status of parents, such as "*And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but him and that you be dutiful to your parents*" (Quran, Surah 17: ayah 23), which put duty and kindness towards parents in the position following the main principle of Islam, monotheism. According to the Prophet Muhammad "Your Heaven lies under the feet of your mother". Joseph (2000: 136) describes the mother's status in MENA societies as "iconizing the mother as the true idea of all that is good in society".

In contrast with negative patriarchal stereotypes of women as physically weak, lacking the ability to face physical danger or to travel and also having impaired abilities in maths (Anker 2001), first-generation women provide numerous examples that refute this stereotype of women. This chapter and the previous one include numerous examples of women's performance at tasks that required a special physical strength and distinguished ability to face physical danger as explained by Sarrah:

We were young and healthy; we were as strong as men. We never heard about diabetes or cloistral in those days, only when we get rest. We were working inside and outside the house The mountains were full of wolves, snakes and scorpions, but we knew how to deal with them. (Sarrah; F21/G2a 73w)

Throughout these last two chapters, first-generation women also provided examples of undertaking the hardest travelling trips on foot in the mountain roads for distances of up to 30 kilometres. Most of these trips were for the sake of marketing their families' agricultural crops. All these examples disprove the negative patriarchal stereotype of women and reflect the strong personality and the distinguished abilities of first-generation women.

Religious identity was dominating women's lives, as intersect with daily life. Daily prayers conducted at specified times of the day are used to construct the timetable of women's paid

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and unpaid work. Occasional work such as house maintenance was also linked to religious events, such as Ramadan and the two 'Eids. The strong religious identity can be seen in women's speech, including many prayers and also in their Islamic names. For example, the names of Prophet Muhammad's family members were the most common names, such as Fatimah, Aishah and Halimah, while the other names reflect the territorial identity including names of flowers, plants and places in the region, such as Zahrah, Sharah, Nallah, and Sandalah,.

Territorial identity can be seen through the great impact of the nature of the region and tribal structure and history on the identity of women of this generation. The nature of the land and the kind of crops, irrigation system, and harvest seasons in 'Asir play a major role in constructing economic activities and women's role. Unlike other rural regions that depend on date palm cultivation, which is considered a male job (Al-Torki 2001), the diversity of agricultural products in 'Asir involved women in agricultural activities and reduced the level of gender segregation to a great extent, a point also underlined by historians (Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951; Rafe'a 1954). Tools for painting, cultivation, and cooking were all produced from local materials by people of the region. Even women's cosmetic products depended on local ornamental plants from the banks of valleys or surrounding mountains. The tribal structure of the region represented a major element of territorial identity. Women of this generation always emphasised their identity in relation to 'Asir, and upper class women emphasise their class and defined their social status as "We 'Asiri" or "We Al-(family name)". This shows the role of the extended family in constructing women's class. The territorial identity of this generation, hence, was based on the interaction between land, history and tribe. Threats towards the autonomy and identity of 'Asir at the beginning of the twentieth century constructed a strong sense of territorial identity among first-generation women, which is a common reaction in times of crisis (Abdallah 1994 cites in Al-Ali 2000).

On the other hand, a sense of linguistic and ethnic identity with the Arab nation or with other Saudis was represented in marriages between 'Asiri women and men from outside the region. The majority of those men were government employees who enjoyed higher economic status than mainstream people in the region, which encouraged some women, especially from the working class, to marry an outsider in the hope of a better life.

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In short, although first-generation women faced difficult economic situations, illiteracy and poor health services, the hardships they experienced provided them with physical strength and the ability to face poverty and its consequences, and also empowered them to face physical danger. Women's contribution with men to the family's income and in undertaking almost the same tasks in the fields and in the market reduced their sense of gender role to a large extent; the restricted view of women's gender role applied exclusively to urban upper and middle classes in Abha.

7.5 Conclusion

The data in this chapter indicate that the paid work of first-generation women was influenced by the interrelationship between poor economic conditions, class and tribal stratification, and patriarchal culture, in addition to limited access to education. In line with Hijab's argument (1988, 2001), economic needs played a major role in involving women of this generation in different forms of paid work. This strong economic need on the part of both society and families reduced the level of socio-cultural barriers that can restrict women's work outside the household. At the same time as the state was in the building process, the role of state legislation was very limited, especially in the 1930s and the 1940s. In the 1950s, modernization began, including the establishment of the first girls 'school, Al-Qara'awi School.

Social stratification was the second fundamental condition of women's paid work in Abha in this era. The women's class and tribal status influenced whether women could take up paid work or not and also determined the nature of the work each woman could carry out. The majority of first-generation women carrying out paid work belong to working class and, particularly, non-tribal families. In a rural region such as Asir, economic life was concentrated around agricultural activities; however, working class people's lack of land ownership forced them to practice secondary jobs, such as providing their services to help others in their fields or households. The economic need for women's participation in agricultural work and in the city market reduced the patriarchal codes on women in Asir and strict patriarchal codes were implemented merely on urban upper class women in particular.

Gender segregation of paid work among was explicit, as the majority of the work was directed to serve other women in their household work, tailoring or teaching. In the city

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market, although women were included as peddlers and shopkeepers, vertical gender segregation excluded women from top positions of city merchants, who controlled economic activities in the region. However, in this era the private sector showed more acceptance of women's integration into the labour market than the public sector, which completely excluded women, except for a few jobs in female institutions such as the women's prison or girls' school.

Cultural barriers in this era were extensively controlled by the economic need of the community and families. In addition, the desperate economic need for working class families for the women's work income and the communities' need for their services reduced the implementation of patriarchal norms for working class women. Urban families needed the services of these women in fetching water and wood, helping in household maintenance and decoration and also marketing the merchants' goods to housewives who were forbidden from going to the city market. These economic needs of the community and the lack of infrastructure limited the complete implementation of a Wahhabi view of women's role as being completely excluded from public life. Hence, religious police limited their speeches on women's hijab that included covering the face, which working women started practicing only by the end of this era in the 1950s.

Although Hijab's model (1988) suggests education as a major condition of women's paid work in the MENA societies, the experience of this first-generation shows that the primary ability required for most available work was physical abilities such as fetching water and wood. Other abilities were also required to work in the market, such as numeracy, while working in *Qatt* painting required some artistic skills. Training for the latter jobs used to follow very strict rules and start at an early age, and was usually monitored by mothers or older female members of the family.

In line with Kabeer's argument (2005), women's paid work as a resource of empowerment had enhanced their bargaining power as respected members of their families and communities. Their income gave them further participation in household decision making, freedom of movement and some economic independence. However, the poor income of most jobs in this era in addition to restrictions by patriarchal norms and legal system

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limited women's social and economic rights and their empowerment. Although economic independence and the hardship of work created tough, physically and emotionally strong women, their beliefs about gender roles were as strong as those among housewives.

8. Second Generation and the Structure of Women's Work

The establishment of girls' state-run schools in 1960 was a major modernization project, and represented a turning point in the lives of Saudi women. The period from 1960 to 1986 was a transformative era in which the country changed from a traditional to a modern one. Modernization projects and the building of state bureaucratic institutions rapidly increased in the 1960s, reaching a peak in the 1970s as a result of the massive increase of oil revenue after the establishment of OPEC, increasing global demand for oil and the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 (see chapter 2).

This chapter explores how the demand for labour instigated by this rapidly growing economy and modernization influenced women's experience of paid and unpaid work, and the forms of new economic activity in which the boom generation became involved. The chapter examines how traditional and modern powers interacted and reconstructed women's work in this transitional era and explores the shift in women's economic activities in this era and its relationship with other conditions of women's work, namely education and its ability to prepare women for the labour market, and the socio-cultural environment, including state policies and gender segregation.

8.1 Unpaid Work

Among second-generation women, unpaid work was in decline compared with first-generation women. Socio-economic developments transformed the concentration of women's work from agricultural work to paid work in the public sector. At the same time, the rapid changes in this period greatly reduced the level of household work, and enabled women to more easily combine housework and paid work.

8.1.1 The Decline of Agricultural Work

The majority of second-generation women in this study spent all their lives in the city of Abha, and experienced an urban lifestyle, unlike most of their mothers. Therefore, only five out of 28 second-generation women spent their childhood or part of it in a village and were familiar with agricultural activities. Three out of these five women experienced similar agricultural activities to their mothers and grandmothers. Shamsah, like the majority of village girls, explained her experience with agricultural work:

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I used to work hard in our fields and help my parents, since I'm their oldest child. I used to be my father's right hand. He taught me everything, even how to slaughter sheep and shoot. (Shamsah; F31/G2b 52w).

This traditional lifestyle continued in only a few villages far from Abha. The location of a village was an important factor, since it was observed that the further the village was from Abha, the more slowly it abandoned agricultural activities and changed to an urban lifestyle. The family's financial situation also influenced women's attitudes towards agricultural activities. Rabeah gave an example:

I did not work in fields, because my father rented it to other farmers. They took two thirds of the harvest and we took a third. However, I used to collect wood, bring water from wells, pasture cattle and worked at home. After my father's death, we moved to live with my brother in the city Today, only my older brother and his family still live in our village. The land needs a lot of work, and there isn't enough water. Everyone moved to cities to get good jobs. (Rabeah; F22/G2b 55m)

There was therefore a rapid decline in the work done by second-generation women in the fields. Desertification has been a great challenge in Saudi Arabia, and harvest income is not good enough to cover the high cost of water¹¹¹ and farming; cities provide a better life, with opportunities for education, work, services and entertainments. Furthermore, as a result of the boom era, families' incomes rose, enabling them to hire workers to take care of farming and hard tasks. While men went to nearby cities for jobs (Al-Sakran 2006), boys went to school and women did domestic work at home and undertook light work in their villages. Samrrah, who lived in a village close to Abha, confirmed this abandonment of agricultural activities in her village:

In our village, it was only the houses of my father and my uncles. However, I never experienced any kind of farming activity. Not did my cousins . . . we only worked at home. There were workers on our fields, but we did not depend on those fields as only wheat and some vegetables were cultivated (Samrrah; F21/G 2b 45m).

The location of the family's house and fields directed second-generation women into or out of agricultural work. In Samrrah's case, her village was only ten kilometres from Abha, and today is within Abha's outskirts. Rural families on the outskirts of Abha and the nearby

¹¹¹ In dry seasons, farmers have to buy tankers of water to water their fields.

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villages, and eventually the villages further from the city gradually moved to the urban lifestyle and abandoned agricultural work. Rufaidah, who spent her childhood on a farm in Abha's outskirts in the 1970s and 1980s, agreed with Samrrah about not experiencing any agricultural activities, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, despite living in the same place. She said:

In my childhood, we used to spend the whole day out in the fields playing, but not working My family had workers. (Rufaidah; F3/G1 b 42m).

In line with other studies of Saudi society (Al-Shahrani 1996; Al Sakran and Muneer 2006; Al-Man'a 1981; Shokri 1983; Al Ghamdi 1985), not only women of the boom generation but also their families withdrew from agricultural work for several reasons: the rapid economic transformation, shortage of labour force in the public sector, desertification, rural-urban migration and the establishment of schools. Upper class women were the first to withdraw from working in the fields, and agricultural activities progressively fell into decline.

8.1.2 Household Work

From the 1960s onwards, Saudi society changed from a traditional to a modern society. People moved from their stone and mud dwellings to modern houses that required less maintenance and had electrical appliances. White goods were introduced. As a result, the amount of domestic work decreased, especially with the increasing role of the market that provided cheaper goods, such as food and clothes than domestically produced ones, which Braverman argues release women for paid work (Walby 1990). Naflah explains:

I was in secondary school when my family moved to a new modern house. My father gave each one of his three wives an independent flat with her children with a common area for him and the guests, which made everyone happy. The new house was provided with all new white goods, and I cannot forget how excited we were when seeing T.V for the first time in the 1975¹¹² I think. We could not sleep before it was closed We had electricity even in our old house, but in my uncle's houses in Al-Hijaz they did not have electricity until the 1980s My mother was sagrah and so strict with us; we start working at home the moment we entered the house, and in the school holidays she did not touch anything at home. (Naflah; P10/G1b 41m)

¹¹² In 1965, two television stations were established in Riyadh and Jeddah and broadcasting includes surrounding cities (Ministry of Information 1999).

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Modernization of the region not only reduced the amount of time and effort of domestic work, but also provided a new lifestyle and a new understanding of entertainment. In addition to the economic changes, family structure was transformed from extended to nuclear. While this transformation preserves the status and respect of the male and female heads of the family, it weakens their authority over younger men and women. The economic independence of young men working in the public sector and moving to separate houses has diminished conflict between young women and the intervention of female heads of the family, and provided women with autonomy to conduct their domestic work and to make their decisions. Felwah explains this:

No, I did not attend the kuttab of Abdul Rahman Al-Metawe'a,¹¹³ we were living in Al-Khasha'a¹¹⁴, and were only working. When the women's adult school was opened in Abha in 1971, I was so eager to study and learn to read the Qur'an My husband didn't really mind, since I kept undertaking my duties of taking care of the house and my seven children and I did, especially that I we were not living with my family-in-law anymore. In that time, life became better; we had washing machine and oven. There were no housemaids in that time, but my daughter used to take care of her other siblings when I went to the school in the afternoon In four years I gained my elementary degree and was the first graduate of adult school. I was so happy when I became able to read Al-Qur'an and bills and provide some help for my younger child. (Felwah; F3/G1 a 66m)

Socio-economic development in this era provided the region with infrastructure services that became more active in the 1970s, aiming to reduce the gap between 'Asir and big cities (See chapter 2; Al-Faisal 2000). The expansion of educational institutions in this era included establishing adult schools which reduced the high rate of illiteracy among women. Although this form of school usually stopped at the elementary level, it provided illiterate adults with a sense of power and control over their own individual affairs and furthermore reduced their sense of alienation in a fast changing society. However, with regard to the educated second-generation, who had the chance of obtaining waged labour, they faced the responsibilities of the dual role of being both working women and housewives for the first time, especially in that the ideology of domesticity (Witz 2007) retained its strong influence on women's social status, which is explained by Ra'eya:

¹¹³ The main educational institution for both female and male children teaching up to the early 1950s (see chapter 4 and 6).

¹¹⁴ A village east of Abha and today is part of the city.

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After graduation, I worked for one year. Then I got married and worked for another year. I was living with my husband's family, and used to come from school while my husband's sister and wife of his brother were working and preparing lunch.¹¹⁵ They were my age but had not finished their education. It was so embarrassing for me. Then, I got pregnant and I decided to resign to take care of my child as well. I did not want anyone to talk about me at all. (Ra'eyah; F20/G2b 55m).

In line with Al-Mosaed's study on Saudi working women (2008), new resources for women's empowerment, such as paid work that allows for economic independence, do not necessarily reduce the gendered nature of domestic work. This form of work remains a core part of women's gender role as wives and mothers, influencing their marital happiness and their social status within their family-in-law. Hence, working women continued to give priority to their domestic and found difficulty in maintaining a balance.

8.2 Paid Work

The major shift of the economy in this era primarily depended on the large oil revenue. Whereas this transitional economy weakened traditional economic activities, such as agriculture and traditional industry, it developed the export and import and services sectors (Al-Amudi 1994; Al-Shahrani, 1996; Al-Rumaihi 1995). However, a major difficulty of the socio-economic development in this era was the massive shortage of labour. The public sector and armed forces solved this by providing high wages that attracted men to abandon their old jobs, while the private sector completely depended on foreign workers (Al-Gotob 1979; Al-Nageeb 2008).

This economic need for an increasing labour force (discussed in chapter 2) shows that the first condition of women's integration into employment was fulfilled, while next sections explores how other conditions, such as education and opportunities were met by this generation of women.

8.2.1 Education and the Ability for Paid Work

The establishment of girls' state-run schools in the 1960s represented a revolutionary change in the lives of Saudi women. After prolonged debate between supporters of girls' education and Wahhabi scholars throughout the 1940s-1950s (Al-Baadi 1982), the vast majority of families welcomed the establishment of girls' schools. Only a few young girls in

¹¹⁵ Lunch is the main meal in S.A, and is usually around 3pm.

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this period could not access schools due socio-cultural barriers, their families' economic need for their work in the household or in paid work, or living in distant villages.

The role of the family's attitude towards girls' education is explained by the oldest educated woman among the second-generation with a high school degree and was works as a pre-school teacher:

My father, MABHS, studied in Rejal-Alma'a with sheikh Ben-Yusif. My father was one of the few men in Abha who received newspapers and magazines from Egypt. He was so proud of my older brother, who continued his study in Makkah and Egypt, and became one of the first pilots in KSA. and the first in 'Asir, and my older sister as the first Saudi teacher in 'Asir, who studied in the kuttab of Al-Metawe'a, then taught in Al-Quara'awi school for few years He insisted that I enrol in the first girls' school, while I had already attained kuttab of Al-Metwe'a and refused to re-start with little girls. He solved that matter with the headmistress who put me in third grade My grandmother also said "Go and study, do you want to spent your life working in the house? Go and start a new life". I studied until the sixth grade, and then got married, and continued my study as "Manazel student"¹¹⁶ until I got the high school certificate and studied English language when my husband was doing his Ph.D. in USA. I have worked as a teacher and by the end of this year I am going to retire. (Zainah; F23/G2b 64m)

The development of education in 'Asir was influenced by cultural interaction with other Arab societies that were more progressive and played a major role in forming a supportive attitude towards girls' education. Daughters of intellectuals were hence the first to enrol in the girls' school. In line with other social studies that confirms the role of education as a key instigator for empowerment (Kabeer 2005; Hijab 1988; Nussbaum 2003), this statement show how girls' education provided pioneer women not only with employment but also with a distinguished social status. It also provided women with new choices and the agency to choose between household work and paid work. A male historian of 'Asir explains the enthusiasm and positive attitude among the majority of families towards girls' education, especially after the prolonged debate regarding this matter throughout the 1940s-1950s:

No, no. People in Abha did not show any objection to girls' education. That was only in Buridah and in Najd, but not in 'Asir. Actually, people were looking forward to educating their daughters. People in 'Asir are very open-minded.

¹¹⁶ Manazel student is a system that enables adult students to study by themselves and only attend the final exams at schools.

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Women were always participating in public life, working in the fields and in the city market. (Mahmood; P33 /G2 m72m)

This provides another example of the specificity of the 'Asiri culture, influenced by its rural lifestyle and Shafe'i school that embraces women in most economic activities, which has also emphasised by historians (Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951). However, despite people's enthusiasm about the establishment of girls' state-run schools and the fact that schools were accessible for all classes, the majority of female students of this generation were from urban upper and middle class families whose mothers were marginalised from public life. Only a few working class girls attended schools. Safiyah, who worked as a baker, explains the reasons for not attending school in her childhood:

When I was a child I used to help my mother and carry the water goatskin with her. I also helped her in whitening and greening houses Later, when she became a vegetable seller in the city market, I took care of the house and my younger siblings. No time for school, only hard work. (Safiyah; F/G3)

The family's economic need for the girls' contribution of income or services was not only a fundamental condition for women's employment, as Hijab (1988) argues, but also for attending school. Although socio-cultural opportunities were supported by the general positive attitude of the people of the region (see Tables 8.1 and 8.2), patriarchal norms existed, especially among upper class families. This is indicated by Zanah:

I attended the kuttab of Al-Metawe'as for only three days. Although my father wanted me to study, my older brother used to catch me on my way to the kuttab to beat me. He used to ask my father "Do you like your daughters to study in order to learn how to send letters to men?" Anyhow, may Allah forgive him, he prevented me from studying, but thanks Allah I encouraged my daughters to study and today one is a teacher and the other is a lecturer at a university. (Zanah; F26/G2 b 63m)

Women's education represents a threat to patriarchal codes (Faqir 2001; Abu-Odeh 2006). Doumato (2000: 91) explains how conservative patriarch in the Arabian Gulf countries in the early decades of the 20th century saw women's writing as family disgrace, "Why should she want to write and to whom?". A Kuwaiti man used the same justification of writing letters to men to oppose women's education (Doumato (2000: 91), which spread throughout KSA during the debate on women's right for education in the 1940-1950s. Although women's only choice was to obey, in line with Kabeer's argument (2005), resistance to this oppressive norm occurred across generations, with women providing their daughters the choices they themselves never had, as in the previous example. The other form of response

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to this constraint was accommodating it (Kandiyoti 1988) and, in some cases, adopting it and becoming a proponent of the oppressive system, a phenomenon called "female conservatism" (Johnson 1983: 21). Salmah reflects the latter response to patriarchal constraint:

I studied until the eighth grade. Then my father decided to withdraw us, his daughters and nieces, from school after hearing a story about a girl who went out with a guy from school My principle in life is "Stay in your house."¹¹⁷ When I am home, I pray more and I praise Allah more. The more a woman goes out, the more she will sin. At home, there are plenty of things to do: take care of her children, talking to her daughters and cleaning her house. I do not mean she should stay away from people, as she can visit family and friends. But I do not like too much freedom. The times we live in are so dangerous. (Salmah; F2/G1b 44m)

The patriarchal view of women's role in public life has been transformed from a social norm to a religious rule through the Wahhabi discourse that spread among this generation of women through school curricula, the media and religious speeches. This discourse at one level values and stresses the role of women as wives and mothers in preserving families (see chapter 2 and 3), while at another level perceives any unnecessary or prolonged mobility of women outside their homes as leading to sin or personal harm as stressed by Wahhabi interpretation (Al-Juraisi 1999; Bashatah (2009). The Quran verse, "Stay in your houses" (The Noble Quran Surah 33, Ayah 33) is constantly quoted by the Wahhabi school as a principle in defining women's role, as explained by Bashatah (2009), while moderate Islamic scholars argue that this verse was directed at a specific context in relation to the prophet's wives and not meant to apply to all female Muslims (Abu-Shaqqa 1991b:18). Salmah, in the above example, attributes the practice of Wahhabi view of limitation on women's mobility, to the jurisprudence principle of blocking the means "Saad Al-Daria'a", as a major principle of Wahhabi doctrine as discussed by Lacroix (2004) and Bashatah (2009). Although this perspective on women's role in Wahhabi doctrine resulted in a strict control over women's mobility, a large number of women adopt this view and accommodate it as a religious value for the sake of what Doumato (1999) calls the "ideal image of Muslim woman". This discussion reflects various responses of women and their families to the new choice of education, which varied from enthusiastic involvement of the majority to resistance, either due to patriarchal or class restrictions.

¹¹⁷ Part of a phrase in the Qu'ran.

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Education, not only educated women, it also enabled them to enter the labour market and changed many ideas about women's role in society. Table 8.1 summarises the relationship between education and the form of work women conducted.

Table 8.1: Second-generation Women, Work and Educational Level

N.	Education level	N.	Work
5	Educated (Elementary or Secondary with teacher programme).	11	Full-time Housewives
6	Non-educated (Illiterate or some primary study).		
13	Educated (Secondary with Teaching programme, High school, diploma, graduate, post graduate).	17	Working Women
4	Non-educated (Illiterate or some primary study).		
28		28	Total

New work opportunities in this era required academic preparations; among the study sample 17 out of the 28 middle generation women were working and the majority, 13 of them, were educated (see table 8.1). All interviewees who had a high school certificate (HS/TP) or above were working, which confirms the strong linkage between education and employment among this generation compared to the first-generation, whose work depended on physical ability. At the same time, being a housewife was linked with uneducated women, as none of them exceed secondary school. This agrees with other studies (Kabeer 20005; Hijab 1988; Nussbaum 2003) indicating that education is a key resource for women's employment as the following pathway for women's empowerment. In contrast, the choice of uneducated girls remains limited to early marriage and being a housewife.

8.2.2 Fields of Paid Work

Despite women's involvement in waged labour, their employment remained circumscribed, with women comprising less than 5% of the labour force up until 1990 (MEP 2005: 361). In line with the findings of other social research in the MENA societies (Moghadam 2003; Hijab 1988 2001), the majority of working women were concentrated in the public sector. Data presented in Table 8.2 shows that 13 out of 17 working women work in the public sector and mainly in educational institutions. This agrees with the policy of the Department of Girls Education (DGE), which emphasised preparing girls for their role as mothers and wives and for jobs compatible with society's perception of feminine nature (Ministry of Education 1970).

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Table 8.2 Second Generation Women and Work

Class	N.	Name	Age	Marital Status	N. Children	Education	Graduation Year	Current Work	Field Of work	Monthly Salary
Upper Class G I	F1	Amal	41	M	1	Post Graduate	1986	Assistant of college dean	DGE	13000
	F2	Salmah	44	M	6	8 th Grade		Housewife	-	-
	F3	Rufaidah	42	M	5	Graduate	1986	Headmistress	DGE	15000
	F4	Dabyah	55	M	6	Secondary		Housewife	-	-
	F5	Zakiah	56	M	6	3 rd Grade		Housewife	-	-
	F6	Nawal	50	S	-	Diploma/TP	1982	Arabic Language Supervisor	DGE	15000
	P10	Naflah	41	M	5	Graduate	1989	Headmistress' assistant	DGE	14000
Middle Class G II	F20	Ra'eyah	55	M	6	Secondary/TP	1976	Housewife	-	-
	F21	Samrrah	45	M	6	3 rd grade		Housewife	-	-
	F22	Rabeah	56	M	7	Illiterate		Housewife	-	-
	F23	Zainah	64	M	1	High School	1980	Teacher	DGE	9500
	F23	Hailah	53	M	7	Elementary		Business woman	Self-employed	Not stable
	F24	Razinah	49	M/P	6	High School /TP	1978	Headmistress assistant	DGE	11800
	F25	Mona	40	M	4	Diploma		Provisional teacher	DGE	2000
	F26	Zanah	63	M	4	Elementary		Housewife	-	-
	P27	Wafaa	42	S	-	Graduate	1986	Manager of charity organization	MSA	10000
	P2	Lila	58	M	3	Secondary/TP Graduate	1972 1979	Assistant manager of 'Asir Education Directory	DGE	15000
	P29	Norah	60	M	4	Secondary/TP Graduate	1967 1979	Assistant manager of 'Asir Education Directory	DGE	15000
	P30	Jamilah	59	M		Secondary/TP		Headmistress	DGE	150000
	P31	Shamsah	54	M	8	Illiterate		Business Woman	Self-employed	Not stable
	P32	Huda	52	M	6	High School		Social worker	MSA	8000
Working Class G III	F40	Safiyah	47	M	5	Illiterate	-	Baker	Self-employed	5000
	F41	Asalah	43	M	6	5 th grade	-	Housewife	-	
	F42	Sauda	42	M/P	7	2 nd Grade	-	Singer	Self-employed	5000 per party
	F43	Foddah	47	M	6	Read/Write	-	Housewife	--	
	F44	Dalal	47	M	6	8 th grade		Housewife		
	F46	Rihanah	46	M/P	5	3 rd Grade		Housewife	-	
	F47	Turkeyah	47	M/P	5	Secondary/TP	1972	Retired administrator	DGE	4728
Total		28							17	

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This corresponds to a major patriarchal stereotype of women as having caring natures, which hence directs them to working in teaching and social work in most societies (Anker 2001). At the same time, there was almost no involvement of women in the private sector in the boom era, and women who established their own enterprises or became self-employed involved in this business only in the post-boom era.

8.2.2 The Department of Girls Education

Girls' schools fell under an independent Department of the Ministry of Education and were run by Wahhabi scholars from 1960, being integrated into the Ministry of Education only in 2000 (Hamdan 2005). State-run schools in this era depended on Arab teachers in addition to a few Saudis, the latter accounting for only 14 out of 114 teachers in 1960 (Al-Dakheel 2000: 93). Those Saudi teachers had graduated from the only private secondary school in Makkah or abroad (Al-Dakheel 2000). Razinah explains this:

The majority of our teachers used to be Palestinians,¹¹⁸ only one Syrian and one Egyptian. Anyhow, they were few. Then, the graduates of secondary school started to teach us in the elementary school, and we used to look up to them. (Razinah; F24/G2 b 49m).

Girls' education began much earlier in other Arab neighbouring countries,¹¹⁹ and hence Arab teachers played a major role in the progress of education in Saudi Arabia, filling the massive shortage of teachers in schools. In order to cope with the lack of teachers in the 1960s, a teaching programme was included in the secondary curriculum until 1976 (Department of Girls Education 1986).

Teaching programme was gradually integrated into the high school curriculum in 1968, and today this programme is available only as a diploma or BA at teachers' colleges. This elevation of the teaching programme occurred simultaneously with the increasing number of national female teachers. Norah was a pioneer who enrolled in the first class of graduates from the first secondary school in 1967, graduated from the first high school in 1975, and became a university graduate in 1979. She described her experience thus:

¹¹⁸ After the 1948 war in Palestine, many Palestinian families were forced to leave their country and immigrate to neighbouring Arab countries; Saudi Arabia was one of these.

¹¹⁹ Girls' education started in 1873 in Egypt (Badran 1991: 203), 1928 in Bahrain (Fakhro 2001: 137) and 1937 in Kuwait (Doumato 2000: 89).

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My older sister studied with Al-Metawe'a, and I was among the first students in Al-Qara'awi school with only two teachers; Om Ismail, a Palestinian woman, and Fatimah Ben Mas'aud, the first Saudi Teacher in 'Asir. I studied there for three years In 1960, the school was transferred to a girls' state school. In 1967, all of us four graduates of the first class from secondary school worked as teachers in the elementary school. In 1972, a girls' high school was established, so I quit my job and joined it Then return to my work and got a teaching diploma during work. When Al-Emam University in Abha established a part-time programme for girls, I was among the first female class of graduates in 1979. I was upgraded from second level to fourth level even before I received the formal certificate. Today, I work as the assistant of the manager of the 'Asir Department of Girls' Education, and by the end of this year I am going to retired. (Norah; P29/ G2b 60m)

This shows not only the rapid development of girls education in this era and people's positive attitude towards education, but also the strong relationship between educational achievements and women's employment and promotion at work. Furthermore, the state's need for labour led to the formulation of a flexible bureaucratic system that encouraged employees to acquire further education and provided further privileges for higher qualifications. Turkeyah, who was a graduate of a secondary school, explained the role of flexible bureaucracy in her access to the labour market as a teacher:

When I graduated, I was only 14. The minimum age to be an employee should be 18, so I was not employed I stayed home for one year. Then I asked my auntie, who was the first national headmistress, to let me teach only as a volunteer, and three months later, I became a formal teacher, and the age issue was ignored. (Turkeyah; F47G3b 47m)

Working from an early age gave second-generation women more years in their working life, and consequently time to achieve more progress in their careers. At the present time, these women stand in the highest available positions in their fields as Saudi women. They have reached high positions such as executive director of the teaching department, which is the female section in the Regional Department of Girls' Education in 'Asir. In addition, second-generation women are working as teachers' supervisors, headmistresses, administrators and social workers.

The establishment of Moderate Teachers College in 1979 and Teachers College in 1982 improved the quality of national teachers in the region (Al-Faisal 2000: 444-445; Ben-Jrais 1995:168). Amal, who is an associate professor in the Teachers College, explains her experience thus:

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In 1986, I graduated from Teachers College. Application forms for jobs used to be given in classes in our final semester. All of us were recruited by the end of the summer holiday in the jobs we had chosen. In girls' schools, everyone was recruited to the closest school to her house. The first two classes of graduates received 50,000 riyal or a piece of land during their first year of work, but this reward was stopped from my class. My friend became the dean of the college after gaining her master's degree, as the number of national staff was very small. (Amal; F1/G1b 41m)

The state's need for a national labour force led to flexible and inclusive policies. State policies in this era aimed to reduce all possible socio-cultural barriers through consideration of the close location of workplace, good chances of reaching high positions and even good financial rewards. Education not only provided women of this generation with good jobs, but also opened many opportunities for them to develop themselves and reach high positions.

8.2.2 Other Government Departments

Data presented in Table 8.2 confirms the high concentration of working women in the educational field. The Ministry of Social Affairs was the other public department that included women on its staff, while self-employment was the third field of work among boom generation women.

Although Saudi women in the big cities had been working in the Ministry of Social Affairs since 1962, in Abha only four women joined this Ministry in 1976 (Al-Dakheel 2000). In this study there were two women working in this field; one is the head of a women's charity organisation and the other is in the women's section in the branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Abha. This Ministry provides a few work opportunities in its institutions, such as girls' orphanages, charity organisations or the female section in the Ministry.

Women's work had become available in the Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Media, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Ministry of Defence since the 1960s (Al-Dakheel 2000). Nevertheless, none of the second-generation women in this study worked in these fields, firstly because working in the majority of these ministries was accessible only in the larger Saudi cities, and secondly because only a very small number of second-generation women worked in the Ministry of Health and none were represented in this study. The enforcement of the Wahhabi discourse, including its rigid gender segregation, limited the

number of women working in this field, especially with the availability of gender segregated jobs in educational institutions in the boom era.

8.2.3 Self-Employment

Self-employment maintained its importance as a field of women's work, especially for non-educated women from the second-generation. Three of the self-employed women were illiterate, and one had completed only elementary school. In this era, self-employment became more limited than for first-generation women. Working in services linked with household work, fetching water and wood as a domestic worker or *Qatt* painting ceased due to the establishment of water and electricity services across the country and the use of new painting colours rather than the traditional *Qatt* painting. The old city of Abha and its houses built of stone and mud was removed in 1976, and modern buildings were constructed with electrical and water services. In addition, by the end of the 1970s, domestic workers from developing countries were widely employed in Saudi society (Assad 2007; Bagader 2003). In line with Moghadam (1999) and Smith (2003), the opening of the Saudi Arabian market to the competition of international labour and products limited work opportunities for uneducated women and stifled many traditional economic activities, such as providing services and painting.

Although trading continues, the development of women's activities did not flourish as much as men's enterprise in this boom era. Women's participation remained limited to simple businesses mainly in the traditional city market mainly by the first-generation women, while access to young women was largely restricted. Hence, women's enterprise became serving only women, such as dressmaking boutiques, beauty salons and working as a singer at women's parties, or providing general services that were run by male employees. Shamsah explained her experience with business:

When my husband died ten years ago, I could not run the house of eight children, my mother-in-law and myself with his pension. I am illiterate, but very good in math. I used to help my husband in his accounting work. Hence, I borrowed some money from a friend and established a key shop with only one male foreigner worker. Today I have 11 workers in another two shops, one for shoe maintenance and the other for aluminium windows and a small café Workers in my shop run the shops and have to give me a specific amount of money every month and the rest is for them. (Shamsah; P31/G2 b 52w)

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Although the boom economy involved educated women in the labour market, the choices of uneducated women became very limited. Women's work in private businesses became very uncommon, as this work was based on interactions with male dominated government departments, male workers and other merchants, which challenged the new Wahhabi discourse of gendered segregation. Hence, the number of women conducting such work was very small, while most women's enterprises served only other women. Some uneducated women created new forms of services, such as baking traditional bread and dishes for big parties. Singing and playing drums in women's parties has been one of the few traditional jobs that have survived. Sauda discussed her experience as a singer:

I got married when I was only 13 years old, and was happy to leave the family house due to the physical and emotional abuse by my father and his wife. They even withdrew us from schools to work at home, but not her daughters, who are teachers now After having four children, I worked as a waitress with the charity organisation. My ex-husband's salary was not bad, but he did not spend anything on the house and our six children. Afterwards, he became addicted to drugs. I got divorced, but for years I could not apply for social welfare benefit as my ex-husband refused to document divorce at court. In that time, I was working for some teachers in a school, and I received only 700 SR (187\$) a month that was for the rent, while everything else depended on the support of some kind people. In addition to my six children, I was taking care of my sister's eight children whom she left to get married I joined my cousins' band, and in a few years I got my own band and things worked well I'm planning to quit this work as I know it is haram, but when things get better, inshaa Allah.¹²⁰ (Sa'uda; F42/G3b 42m)

Education as a major condition for women's employment determined women's ability to access the labour market. The case of Sa'uda and her educated half-sisters reflects the gap between the choices of uneducated and educated women. The fact that education and paid work are fundamental resources of women's empowerment drove some families to prevent their daughter from accessing these resources in order to keep them under the family's control. The male guardian's permission is fundamental not only for accessing education and paid work, but even to get social welfare support. Hijab (1988) argues that the social welfare system in Arabian Gulf societies, providing monthly benefit to divorcees, widows and their children, discourages those women from work. However, in reality, this benefit hardly meets basic needs and, due to the limitation of women's legal rights, including the ability to document divorce in the court, some women eligible for this benefit can be

¹²⁰ Inshaa Allah, a prayer meaning "With God's will and support".

excluded. These restricted legal rights have been argued by many feminists in MENA societies as the basis of gender inequality.

8.3 Gendered Segregation in the Boom Era

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the association between the Saudi state and Wahhabi discourse was deepened in the boom era as a result of economic and political reasons, including the need to present Saudi Arabia as the ideal Muslim society and Saudi women as the role model for Muslim women (Doumato 1992, 33). However, women's integration into the labour market represented a major challenge to the development of the image of the ideal Muslim woman, who was meant to be completely excluded from the public sphere, according to Wahhabism. State policies were hence responsible for compromising between the formation of this new model and the economic need for women's economic participation through some patriarchal strategies to include women in the labour force but without losing patriarchal control over them.

8.3.1 Horizontal Gender Segregation of Work

In line with Walby's (1990: 53) contention, patriarchal strategies in employment in Saudi society were implemented through two patriarchal strategies: exclusion and segregation. Exclusion in the Saudi labour market totally prevented women's access to the large majority of state departments and private organisations. Gender segregation concentrated women's employment into two public departments providing services only for women, such as the Department of Girls' Education and The Ministry of Social Affairs, roles which match with the patriarchal stereotype of women's caring nature (Anker 2001). However, the complete separation between male and female workplaces in KSA enabled women to work as teachers and social workers, unlike other societies where gender segregation usually forces women into lower ranking jobs and excludes them from occupations that require higher education (Reskin and Roos 1990).

According to Walby (1990), women's involvement in employment and their entering the public arena raised the need for the formation of new forms of patriarchal control over women. Therefore, the state, as a "gendered regime" (Connell 2009), established new policies that controlled women in the public arena, such as the legislations of *Mahram*

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(guardianship) and *Wakil* (legal proxy)¹²¹. Shamsah, a business woman, explained the impact of these policies on her:

In every state department, I am asked to have a Wakil I have no man to fulfil my work, and why would I pay someone to talk for me? I am 50 years old and still not able to talk for myself. How can I trust a stranger about my money and work? What if he misused my information and the complete delegation I have to do for him at court? In court, the judge asked me "Where is your Mahram?", but my problem was against my Mahram (my two brothers). (Shamsah; P31/G2 b 52w)

Religious justification for such gendered policies increases its legitimacy, and people's adaptation to it makes the gender regime a usual feature of organisational life in Saudi society. Forbidding women's access to government departments, as well as any form of mixing between men and women, represents a practical example of the Wahhabi juridical pillar of "*Saad Al-Daria'a*", the blocking of the means (Lacroix 2004). These policies force women to rely on the support of men, usually a family member, in order to deal with government bureaucratic procedures, while most business women either hire an employee or some specialised agency to validate their documents, after giving that person a complete delegation from the court. This is explained by Hailah:

In order to open my dressmaking shop, I did a delegation for one of my brothers to take care of all needed documents from different government departments my husband was working in another city, and when he moved to Abha, he became my Wakil. May Allah bless them, they always do all they can to fulfil my work I only supervise work at the shop and the income with the help of my daughters. (Hailah; F23/G2b 53m)

Furthermore, these patriarchal policies not only reflect patriarchal control over women by individual men but are also realized impersonally through the state. Bargaining for the sake of a good relationship with a male guardian therefore becomes one of women's main strategies of obtaining support necessary to accomplish their work. Huda explains how the process of bargaining influenced power relations and emotional relations with her husband:

I was forced to tell my husband about an investment I made because the bank insisted on getting a permit from my husband as my first degree Mahram, while I didn't want to tell him about it Then, he depended on me to fulfil the house's need more and did not stop asking for money, what can I do? I don't want to get divorced again and lose my children as happened with my ex-husband. (Huda; P32 /G2b 52m)

¹²¹ For definitions of these policies see chapter 3.

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The control that is given to men by these measures reflects the special alliance between private and public patriarchy to keep women subservient, as confirmed by Walby (1990) and Hartman (2001). Women are effectively rendered unable to conduct business, such as investing in the stock market for example, without their male guardian's awareness and permission. Huda's case shows how women's potential resistance to men's control is restricted by state policies and how they are hence forced to bargain with patriarchal powers, in private and public, to obtain access to any economic rights.

8.3.2 Vertical Segregation

Similar to Hartman's (1982) argument that working women face horizontal segregation that concentrates them into a few specific areas of work, they also face vertical segregation that excludes them from the highest level occupations. Although women are universally underrepresented in managerial positions, a phenomenon known as "the glass ceiling" (Wirth 2004), in KSA this could be called "the concrete ceiling", as state legislature explicitly prevents women from obtaining senior positions. The Department of Girls' Education, for instance, even after its integration with the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Hamdan 2005), represent a strict example of "gender regime" (Connell 2009). Within such regime, all the teaching and administrative jobs in girls' schools, colleges and the Department of Regional Teaching Supervision are held by women, while all the positions in regional and national administration are occupied by men. Men hence exercise control over all forms of administrative and educational policies, curricula, finance and relationships with other state departments.

The same vertical segregation applies in the Ministry of Social Affairs, where the women's department is responsible for direct supervision and contact with female institutions and female receivers of the welfare funds, whereas men control all other departments in the ministry. Amal, who works in a high administrative position in the Teachers' College, commented on the lack of authority that working women had even in the highest positions. She said:

In the college, we female staff cannot take any independent decision. We have to go back to the male department that supervises all colleges in 'Asir in every decision, while we female staff are the ones who are the experts in college matters. At the same time, we have to apply and defend the men's decisions. It is a very complicated situation Yes, of course the qualifications and the salaries of most of us are

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*higher than the qualification of the executive director of the girls' education in the province, but he is the decision maker*¹²². (Amal; F1/G1b 41m).

Although this situation presents an "authority gap" (Wright and Birkelund 1995), working women in the public sector do not face a promotion gap or payment gap. The religious interpretation of gender segregation excludes men totally from all female workplaces and vice versa. As a result, one advantage of this strict gender segregation is that working women do not have to compete with men from lower grade jobs, allowing women to climb to the top of the women's sections. The sample of this study included headmistresses of girls' schools, directors of orphanages, charity organisations and supervisors in these institutions. Furthermore, some of the second-generation interviewees work as assistants to the female Dean of the Teachers' College or as an assistant to the female executive director of the female section in the Ministry of Education in 'Asir. Thus, the complete gender segregation of Saudi society gave working women a better chance to reach higher positions than would be possible if competing with men. Lila confirmed the equality in payment among men and women undertaking the same job:

My job is on the fifth grade level in the teacher's scale, and I receive a salary of 15000 Riyals. Yes, this would be equal to the income of a male teacher in the same grade and experience. Both male and female teachers follow the same scale In the female section in the Department of Girls' Education, we women receive better income because we follow the teachers' scale which provides better salaries rather than the administrative scale, bearing in mind the 30% benefit of teaching. (Lila; P28/G2b 59 m)

Unlike the fact that vertical segregation keeps women in lower grade jobs with less authority and less payment (Hakim 1979, 2004), the complete gender separation in Saudi society during the boom era gave women a better chance of reaching higher level positions. Working women in this era enjoyed equal promotions and payment as men, which is equality that working women have acquired without the need to fight for this right.

¹²² Female staff in the college is under the academic professional ladder, while the administration members are under the administrative ladder with less income and benefit.

8.4 Conclusion

The oil-boom era witnessed revolutionary change in the nature and the structure of women's work. It was completely reconstructed by a number of factors of change including rapid modernization that led to the establishment of girls' education and also demanded for qualified labour force. At the same time, the growing political-economic status emphasised the religious status of Saudi Arabia and its alliance with Wahhabi scholars. Therefore, the role of the state became explicit in this era to compromise between the demands of modernization and demands of Wahhabi scholars to implement their interpretation for women's role.

Women's work in this era thus reflected contradicting situation. From one side, mass education, as a major condition of employment (Hijab 1988), provided boom-generation women from different socio-economic background with the ability to join professional jobs in the public sector. And rapid socio-economic development required a large number of labour force that encouraged the state to integrate women into public sector. However, this rapid modernization has marginalized traditional economic activities in agriculture, services and in the labour market, which limited the economic role of uneducated women. Household work has also been reduced with the improvement of living standard and the transformation of families to the nuclear form.

On the other side, the growing role of Wahhabi scholars in this era has formed a strict gender segregation system that limited women's work opportunities in few fields serving merely women, mainly education and social affair. Within these fields, women were also excluded from senior positions, as the top administrative positions have been run by separate male sections. The state as a gender regime supported this rigid gender segregation system by other patriarchal policies, such as the rules Of "Mahram" and "Wakil" in addition to ban on accessing public organisations and on driving that form as strict patriarchal control over women.

In the end, women's experience of work in the boom era reflects a contradicting situation that although involved women into waged labour, they became restricted with strict rigid gender segregation, state policies legitimised by Islamic interpretation. In the following chapter, the discussion focuses on the impact of this condition on women of the boom generation.

9. Second Generation, Class, Identity and Empowerment

This chapter explores the experience of boom generation women with different forms of work by examining the impact of work conditions on class stratification in the city of Abha. The chapter also examines paid work as a resource of empowerment and the extent to which it enabled women of this generation to gain agency and achieve empowerment. In addition, it examined how new forms of work and rapid changes have reconstructed women's identities in the boom era.

9.1 Class and Women's Work

Free education from elementary to higher education, in addition to several encouraging state policies, attracted boom generation women from different socio-economic backgrounds to become involved in the public sector. Unlike working women from the first-generation who were mainly from working class families, working women of this generation mainly belonged to the upper and middle class (see Table 8.2). As discussed in chapter 8, free education was not enough to involve all young girls in schools in the 1960s, as socio-economic barriers limited educational attainment for some girls. Patriarchal codes and early marriage were the main reasons behind early withdrawal of girls from upper and middle class families, while the responsibility of domestic work and caring for siblings were the main reason among working class girls. Another important reason was living in a village that did not yet have a girls' school. This lack of education, a major condition of employment, limited the chance of uneducated women to access the modernized labour market. New work opportunities in this era were concentrated in the educational field, which provide only the job of school janitor to uneducated women, already occupied by first generation women.

The massive expansion of education in this era produced what Yamani (2001) calls a "new middle class". The educational achievement and high wages of these young professional women consolidate the socio-economic status of their families from the middle and upper class. Class mobility was a common phenomenon in the boom era (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Al-Rumahi 1983) in GCC societies, but it was more often observed among working class families whose professional daughters actively contributed to upgrading their families from working to middle class, especially among families not headed by males. A common example alluded to by several interviewees was discussed by Naflah:

[Name] is a pioneer teacher and headmistress in Abha who has been working since the 1960s. Her mother was working as a Qatt painter, but educated her daughter. The daughter became a very independent woman who has a nice house and is taking care of herself and her mother without the need for a man's support. (Naflah; P10/G1b 41m)

In addition to the class mobility that resulted from the work of the boom generation, this statement points to the transformation of the nature of paid work and the abilities required for each form of work. Education provided the boom generation with training for employment in this era, while physical ability and personal skills were the main demands of work among first-generation women. Further, high wages in the boom era enabled workers to provide a better living standard for their families, unlike first-generation women who worked to survive and fulfil their families' basic needs. This was confirmed by Turkeyah:

When our father died, MABHS, my older sister and I were already teachers. His pension was not enough for a family of six children and my mother, so my older sister and I took care of the financial needs of the family. Later, my two younger sisters graduated and joined us, while my brothers were young and studying In a few years, we bought land with our savings and the compensation for our old house. The Real Estate Development Bank¹²³ lent us an amount of money to build a big building of three flats on our mother's name. (Turkeyah; G3 b50m /F47)

At the state level, elevating the living standard of citizens was a major goal of development (MEP 1975, 1980). To achieve this goal, people were given hefty compensation in return for the removal of their old stone and mud houses in the old city (Al-Faisal 2000), and provided with long-term mortgages with no interest by the Real Estate Development Bank.¹²⁴ These policies, associated with educational achievement and high wages, represented some major reasons behind class mobility in the boom era.

Whereas most working women upgraded their family's class, some upper class women took advantage of their class and their family's social connections to gain more privileges at work. Some women in senior positions pointed to the role of their father's or husband's "borrowed power" (Ermarth 2000: 115) in providing them with access to these positions or other privileges. This is explained through Rufaidah's clarification of her work as a headmistress in a private school:

¹²³ A Governmental Directory lends people a mortgage to build their houses with no benefit.

¹²⁴ This project still exists, but with much less efficiency due to long waiting periods and the small mortgages that have not kept pace with inflation in the prices of building materials.

I was working as a teacher in a high school. Then, I was delegated¹²⁵ as a headmistress at a private school I have been in this school for the last ten years my father is the owner of the school, and insisted on having me as the headmistress rather than anyone else (Rufaidah; F3/G1b 42m).

In line with Acker's contention (1996) that a woman's class is determined by that of the male head of her family, class can here be seen to work as a system that allows upper class women to monopolize high positions and privileges (Moghadam 2003). Rumaihi (1983:70) refers this utilization of the family's class and social network to the value of solidarity among kinship and tribe members and called it "Bedouin Bureaucracy", as it combine between the two different systems. However, it is worth noting that the massive shortage of labour force in this era led to the embracing of employees from different classes and to some extent limited the phenomenon of upper class women monopolizing senior positions.

At the same time, the absence of economic pressure for income from women's work led to a high rate of reassignment among teachers, especially from middle and upper class. According to Department of Girls' Education (1980), teacher reassignment became such a common phenomenon in the early 1980s that it at one point reached a rate of three a day. Zainah talked about her sister's experience:

My sister was among the first class graduates of SS/TP. She taught for two years. Then, she got married and moved to Riyadh. When she got pregnant, she resigned. There were no nurseries or housemaids in that time. Then, she travelled with her husband to the USA to get his postgraduate degrees Her friend Hilimah resigned after getting married as well. (Zainah; F 23/G2b 64m)

Educated women of this generation were not only the first to have the choice of paid or unpaid work, but also the first to face the consequences of the dual burden of employment and domestic work. Large numbers of upper and middle class women thus quit their jobs and returned to their traditionally prescribed gender role. In addition to the burden of dual roles, this phenomenon relates to families' diminished economic need for women to contribute to household income (Al-Husaini 1982; Al-Nemer 1988). Furthermore, working women lacked support for their household responsibilities and child care, as most new couples lived independently of extended families. The combination of these complex factors forced some working women in this era to abandon paid work to return to their traditional gender role.

¹²⁵ Under delegation rule, a government employee can temporarily move to work in another government, private or international institute with reserving his/her job (Ministry of Civil Services 2002).

In contrast with the expansion of choices and work opportunities for educated young women in the boom era, the lack of educational qualifications marginalised uneducated women in the labour market. This is substantiated by Safiyah:

I got married to a poor widow with five children living in a village when we moved to Abha he worked as a janitor and I worked as a waitress in wedding parties for one year. Then, Al-Jam 'ayah¹²⁶ replaced us with Filipina waitresses I could not get a government job as a school janitor, so I worked as a part-time janitor for some teachers. I prepare their meal, coffee and tea When they and the taxi driver moved, I stopped that work Later, I started baking traditional bread and cooking some special dishes for big occasions. I have been doing this work for more than ten years now. Thanks Allah, it is helping us to rise up our children. (Safiyah; F40/ G3b 47m)

While uneducated women faced limited work opportunities in the public sector, the private sector completely excluded them in the boom era. Further, increasing numbers of foreign workers and employers' preference for these workers represented a major challenge for uneducated women. Therefore, families' economic need for women's wages inspired some uneducated women to become self-employed and establish their own private enterprise.

9.2 Paid Work and Women's Empowerment

In the boom era (1960-1986), Saudi women had further choices due to the establishment of girls' education and the new work opportunities in the public sector. However, these new choices have been restricted by both public and private patriarchy, and bargaining with male holders of authority remains the major strategy for women to gain further empowerment.

Exploring the role of paid work for the empowerment of second-generation women entails an examination of paid work as a resource for empowerment, access to this resource, and the influence of state policies on this resource. Further, it explores how paid work influences women's decision-making agency, social status and freedom of mobility. This exploration ends with a discussion of second generation women's empowerment achieved through paid work.

9.2.1 Paid Work as a Resource for Empowerment

As discussed in chapter 8, modernization has seriously diminished women's agricultural work, while household work was reduced to a great extent due to the transition to new

¹²⁶ Al-Jam 'ayah refers to the women's charity organization that established this project to provide work for some women.

modern houses, nuclear families, and the use of white goods. However, it is worth noting that the ideology of domesticity and gender roles retained its power over second-generation women and determined women's status in the society. This is confirmed by the phenomenon of quitting jobs by some married working women in this era (see section on paid work and class).

On the other hand, education as a major resource of empowerment gave this generation the opportunity to choose between unpaid and paid work. However, in line with Hartman's (2001) argument, the rigid gender segregation limited women's employment to a few fields and excluded uneducated women and forced large numbers of women into the role of housewife. Kabeer (2005) explains that choice requires not only the existence of alternatives, but, more importantly, the ability to access choice, which was not available for uneducated women of this generation and was restricted for educated women.

9.2.1.1 State Policies and the Ambivalence of Inclusion and Control

State policies reflect the will of state to shape gender relations either through reforms or the preservation of the existing gender order (Connell 2009). Data of this study show that state policies in the boom era included these two strategies at the same time. The need for female labour led to the formation of several inclusion policies aiming to integrate women into the labour market. On the other side, women's involvement in the labour market represented a threat to traditional powers and led to the formation of new policies to reinforce patriarchal control over women in the public arena. Informants provide some examples for the inclusion policies: :

Yes of course, in the college I used to receive the monthly reward for student (890 SR.). As you know, 50,000¹²⁷ SR. reward also used to be given only to College bachelor graduates I did not receive it though, because I graduated in 1986. I was among the third class of the college. I believe it stopped in 1985 I received a dual salary of 13000 in my first month of work. All my colleagues have worked since graduation till today. I don't know anyone who did not work. (Amal; F1/G1 b 41m)

After graduating from the HS/TP, in one week I got my job in the school I chose where my friends teach in a village one hour from Abha, and received 60% of my salary as outlying benefit. this payment stopped in 1987, even for people who work three or four hours away from Abha. (Razinah; F 24/G2 b 48m)

¹²⁷ One Saudi Riyal is equal to 3.75\$ (xe.com 2011).

Due to the continuing influence of the ideology of domesticity and gender roles, financial rewards succeeded in influencing women's choice of employment. Inclusion policies included a monthly payment, 890 riyals, for higher education students, a graduation reward of 50,000 riyals to graduates, male and female, who are involved in the public sector, a double salary in the first month of work and a benefit of an extra 60% of the basic salary for teachers working in outlying villages. These financial payments played a crucial role in raising the rate of women's work in the public sector to 5% by 1985 (MEP 2005) and fulfilled one of the aims of the development plan: to improve the living standards of citizens to match growing national income (MEP 1970, 1975).

These financial resources provided working women with the sense of independence rather than simply meeting survival needs. However, within a patriarchal context the influx of women into public life has heightened the need for collaboration between private and public patriarchy to reinforce their control over women. The income of the large majority of working women was under the control of the male/female head of the family as the following interviewees clarify:

After graduating from SS/TP in 1967, I worked as a teacher my first salary was 650 Riyals. I used to put it in a drawers, and everyone could take from it. When my father noticed that I did not know the meaning of money, he started buying stocks for me. Then I started saving my money and gave it to my father. After getting married, I became completely responsible for controlling my income. (Norah; P29/ G2b 60m)

Since I became a teacher I used to give my salary to my mother, MABHS. Even before my father passed away, she was the one who ran the house My father's pension was not enough, so my sisters and I were responsible for the house income, and we supported our younger brothers until they finished their higher studies After I got married, I continued giving my salary to my mother, and she used to take some and give me back the rest. (Turkeyah; F47/G3b 47m)

These two interviewees exhibit diverse methods of dealing with the woman's income, correlated with differences in class. While the working class family of Turkeyah used her income to fulfil the basic needs of the family, the middle class family of Norah directed it to investment. Dealing with an independent income was a new experience for women from the second-generation, especially those from the middle and upper classes. The patriarchal ideology continued in terms of considering women's income as family income, and believing that women do not know how to handle financial issues (Anker 2001). Furthermore, the policy of preventing women's access to public organisations, such as government

departments, banks and estate agencies, plays a major role in limiting women's knowledge and ability to access this male dominated sphere.

Discussing financial issues was one of the most embarrassing parts of interviews, and hence interviewees provided further information related to this topic when discussing it as a general rather than a personal matter. Naflah gives a brief description of teachers' struggle with patriarchal control over their income:

Some men put fake obstacles in front of the marriage of their daughters to continue using their income. In some cases, father and husband agree about sharing the teacher's salary and document this in the marriage contract No one ever control my income, as my father passed away and my brothers have their jobs. I saved my income and bought a land We teachers notice how husbands become very nice in the week before receiving salaries. Poor teachers, they just give them money to avoid problems especially that the DGE did not deal with banks, and give salaries in cash. At the same time there were no women's banks in Abha. Hence it was the men's role to deposit the money. After integrating with the Ministry of Education in 2001, our salaries are deposited now in our account, which relatively has decreased the misuse of teachers' income. (Naflah; P10/G1 b 41m)

In line with the findings of other social studies (Kabeer 1999, 2005; Shamshad 2007), paid work alone cannot ensure women's economic empowerment, as women cannot exert complete control over their income as a resource of autonomy. This resource is also influenced by the power of the male guardian, as women have more ability to resist husbands' or brothers' control over their income than fathers' control. At the state level, patriarchal state policies, such as the rules of *Mahram*, lack of personal identity cards and restriction of access to public organisations, give male guardians power over women's income.

9.2.1.1 Ambiguity of Employment Legislation

In line with Connell's (1990) and Kandiyoti's (1991a) findings, ambiguity is a substantial characteristic of state policies that have a great impact on women's empowerment. Working women complained that learning about the bureaucratic rules related to employment and pensions was based only on practical experience through trial and error. Turkeyah explained this situation thus:

I was among the fourth year of graduates of the secondary school in 1972. I worked as a teacher for a few years. Due to a health problem I moved to an administrative job. I did not know that this would reduce my salary. When I retired seven years ago, I was surprised that after 27 years of work there was no retirement reward for

administrators if they retired early. I would have delayed my early retirement a few years more, if I knew the benefit No, nobody explained anything about these rules. These things run in the men's section. (Turkeyah; F47/G3b 47m)

This agrees with Al-Sheikh's discussion (2001) of the pension system as very ambiguous to women who learn about it only by experience. Further, resources of information have not been available, and neither has the ability to question legislation, especially given the fact that the Human Resource Department is under the men's section. Strict gender segregation as a result not only limited women's work opportunities and promotions, but also their legal rights. In line with Kabeer's argument (2005), this limitation of women's access and control of resources weakens their capacity to make strategic life choices.

9.2.2 Paid Work and Agency for Empowerment

Paid work in the boom era provided women with contradicting conditions, as it financially empower their position within their families, yet a number of restrictions have limited their agency:

9.2.2.1 Decision Making

The agency of decision making is a substantial aspect of power (Kabeer 1999), has been based on the level of women's control over their work income, as a major resource of empowerment. Turkeyah gave an example of the negative impact of husbands' "power over" (Kabeer 2005) their wives' income and how women respond to that.

I participated with my husband in building this building. It is two floors to live on one and rent the other, but as soon as we moved, he got another wife and lives with her in the lower floor. I have six girls, and he wants a boy, and he argues that he is worried for the girls and wanted a brother for them I never imagined that he would do this to me, but what can I do, it is his right He divorced her after seven months of marriage, because she did not get pregnant. Anyhow, I could not trust him anymore. He might do it again I asked my brothers and uncles for a meeting with both of us After a great effort from all of us, he agreed to document my share of the building. (Turkeyah; F47/ G3 b 47m)

Paid work alone cannot ensure true economic empowerment. This shows how women's "power to" (Kabeer 2005) have economic independence is very circumscribed by both private and public patriarchy, including patriarchal norms, state policies and Wahhabi interpretation, which empower male heads of the family and legitimize their means to oppress female members of the family. Denial of choices to face economic, social and emotional constraint

force women to adopt bargaining strategies with patriarchal power to gain further rights and prevent worse consequences. Within this patriarchal context, bargaining provides better chances for women to gain their rights rather than the legal system, as discussed in chapter 7.

Bargaining is not only a strategy to solve existing problems, but also to prevent potential risks, especially protecting women's economic independence. Social networks in the workplace provide a new resource of empowerment, which has been also found by other studies (Hammam 1979; Kabeer 2005). Through these networks women increase their awareness of legal and economic rights and the best strategies to protect them, which was explicitly elucidated by Nafiah:

Many teachers have been defrauded by their husbands their stories enlighten the rest of us. I share two properties with my husband. I asked my brother to help us in determining the share of each one and documented everything in court. I know that this might be 'Ayb',¹²⁸ but Allah said it clearly in the Quran. I know my husband is an honest and religious man, and would not misuse my money, but what about life and death? I have only girls, but no boy. Everything should be clear for both of us. (Nafiah; P10/G1 b 41m)

Women's insecurity under patriarchal norms and policies inspired some of them to utilize possible mechanisms in their bargaining, such as family intervention and their knowledge of Islamic rights. Saudi sociologists, Al-Torki and Bagader (2006), explain how educated Saudi women have adopted a new approach of calling for women's rights in the Islamic context, which gives them a better chance of securing agency. These women started a new trend of distinguishing between patriarchal norms and the Islamic view of women's role in the society.

9.2.2.2 Agency and Social Status

Social status is another aspect of women agency that is also divided into two contradicting ways based on the level of compatibility of women's work with patriarchal norms, especially regarding gender segregation. Working in the educational field not only conforms to the patriarchal stereotype of women's caring nature (Anker 2001), but it also meets the strict gender separation emphasised by Wahhabi discourse. In addition, this field provides high wages and benefits, and hence women working in this field enjoy high social status, as the following interviewees clarify:

¹²⁸ See Glossary.

The first class of Saudi teachers' taught me in fifth grade. We students were looking up to them. They were young and looked smart, and they brought their clothes from Riyadh or Jeddah. It was my dream to be like one of them. (Lila; P28 /G2 b 58m)

My father always says "my six daughters [all of whom achieved high positions at the DGE] raises up¹²⁹ my head my husband always says "I am proud of you", and he asks for my opinion regarding everything. He appreciates my achievements I know that he does not belong to the mainstream The status of working women is different even her children, she can control them more. In case of divorce, she can support her children (Amal; F1/G1b 41m).

Second-generation women represent a new model of women as intellectual and financially independent. The nature of teaching is linked with more knowledge and better religious understanding, which played a major role in establishing a high social status for working women in both their parental and marital families. In addition, a woman's success as a member of an extended family empowered the status of their families in the community. In return, family members showed the working woman more respect.

The economic improvement that women's income provides households gives them greater agency to participate in the household decision making, and many of them have the agency to manage their own wages. Professional women have also become more modern in appearance which distinguishes them from the traditional style of the first-generation and from housewives of their own generation. Employment gives women a better chance to escape abusive marriages and support children in the case of divorce. Further, working women became more selective regarding marriage decisions; in contrast with the patriarchal norms of early age marriage, out of 17 second-generation working women, four got married in their mid or late 30s, and another two in their 40s are still single. These women are all graduates, have good working positions and belong to the middle and upper classes. Wafaa, who is a single professional woman, discussed her view of marriage:

A proverb says "A happy singlehood is better than a miserable marriage."¹³⁰ I refused to get married in order not to lose my freedom, to complete my study and succeed in my work. Marriage limited my sisters' freedom. The men who like to marry an educated working woman are few. Men who accept a successful wife are few, even when they are successful themselves. (Wafaa; P27/G2b 42s)

¹²⁹ "Raise up my head": An expression meaning "made me proud."

¹³⁰ See glossary

Working women's views of marriage have changed as a result of seeing themselves as independent and equal partners rather than as dependent wives. While they wanted to build their own families and meet the traditional standard of women's social status as skilled and fertile wives, they also want to meet the new standard of educated and professional women. This generation was the first to face various choices of life, and women varied in ordering their priorities. At the same time, women were also influenced by men's attitudes towards working women, which was explained by Amal:

My husband told me how shocked some of his friends were when told that he got married to a professor assistant. One said 'We have problems in controlling teachers of elementary schools, and how could you control this professor?'. (Amal; F1/G1b 41m).

The increasing power of working women represents a potential threat to the authority of men in the household. Data shows that men vary in their attitude towards marrying working women; some avoided such women to retain their patriarchal power over their wives, while others preferred working women to improve the living standard of the family and only a few intellectual men preferred these women for the sense of partnership.

At the other end of the spectrum, women's work in jobs that contradicted social norms faced serious challenges. Working as a business woman, a singer or a baker indicated some degree of freedom of movement and communication with men in government departments, banks, customers or workers. Despite the high income of self-employed work, breaking the norm of complete gender segregation reduced their social status and put them into a critical situation. Shamsah, who runs small enterprises, explained the socio-cultural barriers she has faced:

I used to work in the fields with my parents and my brothers. My father, MABHS, used to say, "You are my rock, I wish you were a man", which made my brothers jealous When my husband died ten years ago, my brothers wanted me to give away my eight children and my sick mother-in-law to my husband's family and live with them I would not abandon my children to serve my brothers and their wives What is an ideal mother? Is she the one who cooks, and washes only, or the one who takes care of her children and protects their rights A woman, who is not able to protect herself when going to governmental departments, will also not protect herself at home¹³¹ Today I have four different shops, and do not need the help of anyone Lately, my brothers attacked my home and beat me I brought a claim to the police and court, but I suffered a lot through all procedures and got nothing out of it. Everywhere, I was asked to bring my "Mahram", but what if my problem is with my Mahram? I was not even able to discuss my problem because my

¹³¹ Referring to the sexual relationship that might happen when mixing with men outside the house.

voice is "Ora"¹³² as the judge said, and how would I take my rights? (Shamsah; P31/G2 b 52w)

Shamsah's experience with work reflects the changing ideology regarding women's work and social status in the boom era even among rural and working class families, among whom women used to participate in economic activities. The increasing power of Wahhabi ideology including the norm of complete gender separation became widespread and adopted by people in 'Asir and implemented by state rules. Breaking this social norm by entering the men's arena of business and enjoying freedom of movement in government departments represents resistance to both private and public patriarchal control, and is hence strongly rejected by representatives of both arenas, as in Shamsah's case. Wahhabi interpretation of women's veiling as a complete invisibility from men not only excluded them from the public sphere, but also in the private sphere and for necessity, which is explained by Safiyah, a baker and a cook, who works from home:

My son, May Allah enlightens him, is a little bit difficult One time he did not let me talk to a man who came to collect seven big dishes of Tasabee¹³³ for a wedding party, and he gave the man all the dishes. He thought I knew the man's that man never showed up again and I was not paid anything for my work, and even lost seven huge plates. (Safiyah; F40/ G3 b 47m)

It is hence not only male relatives with higher authority like fathers, older brothers or husbands who can implement social control over a woman, but even a son of the woman. This shows the power of these patriarchal norms on both sides. It is only the society and the family's need for these forms of jobs that keeps women in these jobs, yet with low social status. Su'da, who worked as singer, explained this:

When I joined a band to sing at wedding parties, my brother got angry. I am not educated, so what work can I undertake? I told him "I know how to protect myself, and if you can feed all these 14 children"¹³⁴, I will quit now," so he just shut up. I know this work is "haram", but I am planning to stop after building a building to live in part and rent the rest. (Suada; F42/G3b 42m)

Being uneducated limited the work opportunities of this category of women. Although singing is conducted only in women's parties, it contradicts the Wahhabi view of music and singing as a taboo (Ben-Baz cited in Al-Juraisi 1999: 1239). Although this view could not

¹³² According to Wahhabi discourse, women's voice can be tempting and hence should be heard in public places, see chapter 3.

¹³³ A traditional dish cooked on big occasions that require long preparation.

¹³⁴ Her six children and eight children of her widow sister.

diminish people's work in this area, it links it with low social status and has restricted this form of work to the specific social group "Balahtah" who have historically specialised in this work, as indicated by Shaker (1981).

This indicates that women's work is accepted as long as it follows the society's norms, whereas working women would face strict social control by private and public patriarchy if their work fell outside the established norms.

9.2.2.3 Agency of Mobility

Freedom of movement represents one aspect of women's agency (Kabeer 2005), which became very restricted in the boom era. Unlike first-generation women, second-generation women in Abha faced a contradictory situation. They have been admitted to girls' schools in Abha and surrounding villages, while the new image of Saudi woman as what Doumato (1999) called "ideal Muslim woman" restricted their freedom of movement. This model has been represented from a Wahhabi view that idealizes women's complete separation from men, and hence put strict codes on women's mobility, including driving (Bashatah 2009). In a country that does not have public transportation (Za'azo 2004), women's only choice has been to depend on their male relatives or a foreign chauffeur. Amal, who works as a Lecturer at the teacher's college, explains women's struggle with transportation:

My husband used to take me to college and then go to his work Then he has his evening job. Now he can't do it anymore, so I go to work with my family's driver and my single sister goes with my other sister and her driver Sometimes I need to stay longer at the office and I feel guilty for leaving the driver waiting in the cold weather outside, but I have to finish my work. You know we do not have any public transportation in our country, and in Abha it is worse. We don't even have taxis. It is really a dilemma When the driver gets busy for some reason with my family, I become stuck in the college helpless. If my child gets sick suddenly, I cannot even take him to hospital. I'm a working woman who is over 40 and is not able to move or even walk in the street without a man even if he is just a little kid. (Amal; F1/G1 b 41m)

Limiting women's mobility is based on the juridical Wahhabi principle of "Saad Al-Daria'a" the blocking of means that might lead to sin (Bashatah 2009; Lacroix 2004), which became dominant after the women's demonstration in Riyadh in 1990 (Al-Torki 2000; Doumato 1999; Yamani 1996). This event was confronted with a huge Wahhabi opposition that not only turned the social ban to a legal ban, but supported this with religious justification to forbid women's driving (Al-Juraisi 1999). This discourse became the dominant interpretation of Islam in 'Asir, especially with the Wahhabi justification of the 'Asir old lifestyle as

"Ethem" (sin) that reflected their ignorance of Islam, as discussed by Al-Hasher (2009, 2007). Restrictions on women's mobility not only limited their freedom of movement, but also restricted their agency for decision-making and represent a daily challenge for families. Professional women of the boom generation show the most frustration towards the ban on driving, as despite their academic and professional achievements, this restriction limits their autonomy and self-esteem.

9.2.3 Paid Work and Achievements

Women's achievements in the boom era varied according to class, education, work status and family attitudes towards women's rights. From one side, second-generation women from different socio-economic backgrounds entered the labour market, which provided them with economic independence and enabled them to improve their family's social class and status. State policies in this era created a contradicting situation for women. From one side they empowered women through employment while from the other, the state formulated a package of patriarchal rules that limited women's agency over their resources, decision making and mobility.

From the other side, rapid development limited work opportunities for uneducated women with few opportunities to work as self-employed or to adopt the role of housewives. The social status of paid work in this era was based not only on educational qualifications and high income but also on compatibility of the job with the socio-cultural context. The growth of Wahhabi authority in this era reinforced patriarchal norms, especially regarding gender segregation. This new culture gave high social status of women work only within gender segregated workplaces, while working in non-gender segregated work includes low social status. Empowerment of the boom generation shows that it was achieved as a result of individual efforts by women through education and paid work, while the only form of group effort was represented through voluntary work in charity organisations, which Laila clarifies:

Although I was already stressed with my responsibilities at work, home and with my four children, I forced myself to find some time for voluntary work. We have responsibility towards disadvantage people, and when I was invited to join the organisation, I could not say no Among our activities is training women for some work, such as tailoring and free courses for computer, and encouraging some traditional industry. (Laila; P27/G2b 58m)

This voluntary work may reflect the initiative step to established group effort, which would support further empowerment of women. Moghadam (2003) explained how this form of work

represents the first step in the women's movement in the MENA. Women's efforts in a group to achieve empowerment might have a good start among this group of educated women

9.3 Second-generation Women and Identity

The identity of boom generation women was influenced by the rapid changes, including the establishment of girls' schools and women's involvement in public sector employment. These changes, in addition to the influx of technology and means of communications and the economy's integration into the global market, have changed women's view of their role in society. For the first time, women faced various choices of education, household work and employment, which led to the formation of a diversity of identities of women in this transitional time. Analysis of women's identities and their models points to the dichotomies of traditional/modern and the Islamic /un-Islamic models. Naflah represents a comparison between traditional and modern models of women:

Working women are different in everything compared with housewives. I know the importance of time, money and my children's education. I can fulfil my needs I can take actions, and I am not dependent on a man. In fact, I participated with my husband in building our house and in another building Working in school administration taught me how to deal with different personalities, which has helped me to deal with my family-in-law. (Naflah; P10/G1b 41m)

In contrast with the traditional model of women that is linked with illiteracy and the role of a housewife, especially that most of professional women came from urban upper and middle class families and whose mothers were housewives. The modern model of women includes a new attitude of women to themselves, to life around them and their role within family and society. This model implies economic independence, agency of household decision making and personal characteristics gained as a result of their broader social network. Confidence, security and access to information are among the characteristics most emphasised by interviewees. Razinah explains how employment has influenced her life:

Work is beautiful. I gained a lot of privileges from work At work I meet people; I learnt many things from others. Work life takes women away from the old routine of cooking and cleaning Work makes me active and organises my time I get bored sometimes in the weekend. Through work a woman can give, and will not be financially dependent on others. Work is like a weapon that protects the woman; no one knows what might happen in life When I got a job, my mother said, "Now that you have your own income, I can die in peace. Today, you have an income that will support you, if life turns its back to you or if the husband abandoned you. With your own money, you can give charity whenever you want". (Razinah; F24/G2b 49 m)

Employment, despite all the patriarchal control and restrictions, has made previously disempowered women independent and with a great sense of security for their future. Describing paid work and education as a weapon reflects women's sense of disempowerment and their desperate need for employment as a new resources of empowerment. Razinah's statement reflects the deep security gap between working and non-working women. Although patriarchal control restricted women's empowerment, employment provided them with considerable tools in their bargain with patriarchal power. Working women aim to security of pension system in later life rather than the power of senior women over the rest of the family, which turned to a prestigious status due to the transfer to nuclear families This agrees with Mernissi's (1984) argument that women's employment in the MENA region shifted women's dependence from men to the state during their search for security. Nevertheless, domestic work remained the responsibility of the working wife, as has been emphasised by different social studies (Al-Mosaed 2008; Gilbert 2008; Oakley 1974). This generation was hence the first to experience the dual role of being both a mother and a worker, which was explained by Naflah:

Child care is the daily subject for teachers. The majority leave their children with their mothers or mothers-in-law, but not in my case I tried to establish a nursery in my school, and the DGE employed a child minder, but she was not qualified. Later, the room was needed as a classroom. Therefore, housemaids have been my only choice. I used several strategies to supervise them and be sure that they don't harm my children, especially after hearing all those shocking stories of child abuse. Some of them were good and some were bad. I thought about retirement several times, but I love my work. My sick mother-in-law also required special care It is a relief now that my children are all in school. No there were no nurseries in Abha, and the ones opened lately are not good enough. (Naflah; P10/G1 b 41m)

Many boom generation women tried to combine the two models of traditional/modern. Data shows (see Table 8.2) that not only housewives but also working women continued to have a high rate of fertility. Childcare is the major problem facing working mothers, especially since the majority of women had more than four children, which according to Gilbert (2008) classified them within the traditional model, while the average number of children of modern women generally did not exceed two. This has increased the burden of the dual role among this generation, which forced some of them to quit their paid work. The increasing phenomenon of foreign housemaids since the 1970s (Assad 2007) has played a major role in supporting working women to keep the balance between the responsibilities of their dual role, especially with the lack of services of child care or housecleaning.

The other dichotomy of Islamic /un-Islamic models has been emphasised in the boom era with the growing Islamic movements throughout the MENA region (Kandiyoti 1991a; Najmabadi 1991) including Wahhabi school in KSA. What distinguished this school is its historical consolidation with the state (Doumato 1999; Al-Rasheed 2007). This gives Wahhabiya the authority to form the national identity of the country as the ideal Muslim society with a focus on the image of Saudi women as the role model of Muslim women as discussed by Doumato (1992). Statements of second-generation women, especially within the discussion of horizontal and vertical gender segregation, show the process of transformation of gender relations in 'Asir and the norms that determine women's role in public life to the Wahhabi view. Wahhabi discourse empowered patriarchal norms that were previously limited to urban upper class women in Abha, while state policies implemented this new view of veiling from head to toe and complete separation between the two sexes as a major characteristic of Islam. The Islamic model of women became dominant and represents a symbol of the authenticity of Saudi state and society. In line with Kandiyoti's (1991b) argument, national identity is articulated as a form of control over women and limited their resistance; interviewees complaining of some patriarchal policies, for instance, stressed the need for reforms, but in an Islamic way, which was explained by Amal:

Even at women's institutions, such as teachers college, the decision making is in the hands of men. I am not asking to work with men in top positions, no, no, but to have a completely independent institution just like Princess Norah's university in Riyadh¹³⁵ Yes, our mothers used to work with men in the fields, but life was simple and all people knew each other. Life was different from this time. Beside, you know the majority of people were illiterate and their knowledge of religion was so simple in the old days. (Amal; F1/G1b 41m)

This belief of gender segregation as an authentic characteristic of the Islamic way of life reflects the expansion of Wahhabi thoughts in 'Asir and the decline of local rural culture of the region that had included women in all major economic activities. Women in this study referred this shifting attitude towards rigid gender segregation to people's ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam in the old days and social illness of recent days. Al-Hasher (2007) contends that although women of this region were the most active in public life and economic activity compared with women of other Saudi regions in pre-boom era, their resistance to the

¹³⁵ After the integration of the Department of Girls' Education with the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Hamdan 2005) all teachers' colleges integrated with girls' sections in the main universities except one in Riyadh, which became Princess Nora Girls' University in 2008 (PNU 2011). In Abha, the teachers' college integrated with King Khalid University in 2007 (KKU 2009).

new Wahhabi thoughts might be the weakest. She refers this to the limitation of a profound intellectual life in 'Asir, as a rural region with limited cultural contact to outside world, as in the Western region that has a strong bond with all Islamic schools due to its status as a the land of the two holy mosques.

The role of language and ethnicity as another aspect of identity also became clearer in this era, especially the Arabic language as the language of the Qur'an is considered as part of the Islamic identity. The growing cultural interaction with neighbouring Arab countries, mainly through Arab workers in KSA and the media, emphasised the Arab identity. The names of some interviewees of this generation, for instance, reflect cultural opening to other Arab cultures including names, such as Amal, Mona, Lila and Wafaa, which were not common among the first-generation. However, the boundaries of ethnic and language identity stop at the border lines with national identity. Fear of losing their national identity became a common characteristic of second-generation, as was also the case with their counterparts in the Arabian Gulf societies, as discussed by Hijab (1988), which resulted from massive influx of foreign migrants to these societies. Hence, one of the consequences of this fear is the absence of any marriage of second-generation women in this study or their female family members to non-Saudi men, which became supported by state regulations that strongly restrict this form of marriage. This agrees with Anthias and Yaval-Davis's argument (1989) about marriage regulations reproducing the boundaries of the identity of women's group; especially that women are seen as what Kandiyoti (2004:51).describes as the "custodians of cultural particularism".

The boom era as a historical stage of state building and modernization was associated with the development of women's national identity, which has been integrated with religious identity and the reproduction of the image of Saudi women as "the ideal Muslim woman" even though it subordinates local identity.

9.4 Conclusion

The boom era represented a revolutionary stage for Saudi women that involved them in educational institutions and the labour market, and women of upper and middle class in particular experienced waged labour for the first time in Saudi society. However, the impact of women's employment, as Kandiyoti (2004) argues, has been rich in paradoxes and ambiguities.

The massive shortage of labour led to several inclusion policies, including high wages and generous benefits. This integrated a large number of women from all classes into the labour market. Despite the mainstream assumption in social science that the family is the main unit in class determination (Acker 1996), women's employment in public sector during the oil-boom era gave women an increasing role in reinforcing or up-ward the class of their families, especially in non-male headed families. However, it is important to note that this upward movement was restricted to the economic aspect of the family's class. Increasing income of a family can do little with regard to the change of other aspects of class, prestige and power (Weber 1979), especially within a tribal structure that distinguishes people in relation to the lineage of their tribes, as asserted by social and historical studies in KSA (Al-Rasheed 2003; Al-Hamed 2005; Shaker 1981). At the same time, the role of the family was limited to supporting working women whenever resources were limited, which is in line with Moghadam's (2003) argument that class works as a system that works for the benefit of upper class women to monopolize high positions and privileges.

As for empowerment, while the state provided employment as a resource for economic independence, yet it also limited women's control over this resource of empowerment. State policies in this era have reinforced patriarchal control of the male head of the family over women's income through a number of gendered policies. Despite the increasing agency of household decision making and the increasing social status of working women, state policies limited women's access and control over the main choices in their lives. Al-Torki (2000) argues that women's citizenship in KSA is restricted to their social rights; and that women's achievement reflects the level of tolerance of her male guardian rather than her empowerment.

Women's work has also led to contradictory impacts on the identity of women of this generation. Women's identity is divided between traditional housewives and modern educated and professional women. However, a clear cut between the two models was not very clear due to the continuing influence of traditional culture over professional women represented in the high value of gender role and women's fertility. The other dichotomy within women's identity in this era is the Muslim/westernized model of women. The distinguished alliance between Wahhabi discourse and the state integrated national and Islamic identity and formed the image of Saudi women as "the ideal Muslim women", which became the dominate identity of women in Saudi Arabia.

10. Third Generation, Women and Work

The post-boom generation of Saudi women were born and grew up in the boom era of the 1970s and early 1980s, and enjoyed all the financial privileges of that era. Starting from the end of the 1980s, this generation have witnessed and been influenced by the dramatic shifting from "affluence to austerity" (Al-Rasheed 2010). In addition to the high cost of the Gulf War in 1990 and the Iraq War in 2003, the massive decline in oil prices since 1987 and the rapid increase in population weighed heavily on the country's economy (see chapter 2). The cultural scene in this era has been influenced by the schisms within Wahhabiya and its relative decline of authority, which has given alternative doctrines better opportunities to express their views in addition to political reformation in this era (Al-Rasheed 2007; Al-Torki 2000). The rapid development of communication technology has also contributed in reconstructing women's role in the Saudi labour market in this post-boom era.

This chapter examines the impact of these transformations on different forms of women's work in this era. It explores the nature and the fields of new work opportunities and the development of gender segregation in this era, and also examines the impact of the new conditions of employment on women's class, empowerment and identities.

10.1 Unpaid Work

In this era, women's participation in agricultural activities disappeared completely, while the number of women conducting exclusively domestic work increased due to the limitation of paid work.

10.1.1 Agricultural Labour Became History

The decline of dependence on agriculture as the main economic activity in 'Asir started in the 1960s, and accelerated with rural-urban migration, lack of water and the transfer of agriculture from a family-run to a corporation-controlled activity (see chapter 2. Among third generation women, only one interviewee lived in a village, and one other woman spent her childhood in a village. However, urbanization of villages is clearly observed through the urban lifestyle of women today. Riyadh, the only interviewee living in a village, smiled when asked if she has any experience with agricultural work and said:

No women work in the fields these days. I just learnt about my grandmother's agricultural work during her interview today. Nowadays, fields do not provide any income, and water is so little. We live just like any family in Abha, my father works as a headmaster, while my brothers study at schools. In the field next to our house, a worker plants some products just for the household use, and my father works with him sometimes. (Riyadh; F45/ G3c 22m)

Agricultural work became part of the region's history, linked only to the experience of the older generation. Both rural-urban migration and the urbanization of villages have driven people away from agricultural activities. Men joined the public sector to gain a better income and both male and female children attended schools, while the new Wahhabi thoughts limited women's opportunity to work in the fields, since this work required mixing with men.

10.1.2 The Return to the Role of Housewife

Unlike educated second-generation women who had the choice to be full-time housewives or working women, most third generation women do not have these choices. Badriyah, a graduate housewife, explained this:

Since I graduated in 2000, I got only one offer for a job in Tihamah. My family did not agree, of course. The road is so dangerous. I wanted to work, but not by taking a high risk like that. Then I got married and got children. I am planning to establish a private business When my children grow up (Badriyah; F2/G1c 26m).

The other housewife who studied only for two years discussed her situation:

My husband receives only 2000 SR. a month, and I would like to work as a school janitor or anything, but who would hire an illiterate woman, when even college graduates can't find jobs (Khiriyah; F40/ G3c 32m).

In contrast with the second-generation who are role models of educated and professional women, large numbers of the post-boom generation were forced to return to the role of a housewife. Unemployed married women who constitute seven out of the 12 unemployed women (table 10.1) represent the new phenomenon of "educated housewives" as called by Najmabadi (1998). In line with researches in the MENA region (Doumato 2000; Fakhro 2001; Najmabadi 1998), this condition of educated women reflects the gendered educational regime and its policies that are disciplinary rather than emancipatory and which aimed to produce better housewives and mothers. The policy of Girls' Education in KSA explained this as "Preparing girls for their future role as wives, mothers and housekeepers" (Ministry of Education 1970: 24). However, in the boom era, this aim remained in theory,

while in practice the focus was on the other part of the first aim, "preparing girls to work in areas that do not contrast with their nature, such as teaching, nursing and medicine". The work conditions of Saudi women show that women's choices are limited in those two options based on the society's need. The second aim of the educational regime declares, "The state aims to offer all the facilities to include all girls in the age of schooling and to provide them with the chance to study areas that match their feminine nature and meet society's needs" (Ministry of Education 1970: 24).

Women's domestic work in this era was not referred to as an obstacle to involvement in paid work as the amount of housework had decreased to a great extent. This is due to the availability of household labour-saving equipment, a change in family structure to nuclear families living in smaller houses, the growing phenomenon of hiring live-in domestic workers from developing countries and, most of all, the fact that the majority of interviewees were unemployed

10.2 Paid Work

All development plans since the third (MEP 1980) have called for a gradual integration of national graduates into the labour market, creating new work opportunities for women, decreasing dependence on foreign labour and for a comprehensive plan to coordinate between higher education institutes and the public and private sectors. Nevertheless, the percentage of working women in the Saudi labour force remained as low as 5% up to 1992, and reached 12% in 2008, while female graduates constitute 56.5% of the university graduates (MEP 2005). By the end of the 1980s, unemployment had started in big cities (Al-Qahtani 1995; MEP 1995; 2000; 2005), and in a few years became a problem all over the country. This situation has again changed women's work in the different fields of work.

10.2.1 The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education maintains its importance as the major field of work for young women; however, the quality of jobs has dramatically changed. New underemployment jobs were established, which is defined as "employees with high skill levels but low wages, and people working in part-time jobs because full-time jobs are not available"

(International Labour Organisation, 1982: 4). These new work conditions have different titles and characteristics, which are:

Table 10.1: Educational Attainment and Work of Third Generation women

Group	N.	Alias	Age	Marital Status	N. Children	Educational Level	Major	Graduation Year	Current Work	Kind of Job	Work Years	Month Salary	Field
G1 Upper Class	F1	Areej	26	M	1	Graduate	Geography	2001	Unemployed				
	F2	Badriyah	26	M	2	Graduate	History	2000	House wife				
	F3	Nada	21	S	-	Graduate	Biology	2006	Unemployed				
	F4	Reem	30	M	2	Master	English	BA 97 MA2004	Teacher	Formal	9	8000	Ministry of Education
	F5	Bothynah	24	S	-	Graduate	Math	2003	Unemployed	-			
	F5 cc	Iamya	22	S	-	Graduate	Information system	2006	Unemployed	-			
	F6	Hajer	28	M	-	Diploma	Computing		Unemployed	-			
G2 Middle Class	F20	Nosiba	26	M	-	Graduate	Geography	2002	Unemployed	-			
	F21	Shuruq	27	M	-	Graduate	English	2003	Teacher	105 Clause	3	4000	Ministry of Education
	F22	Hanan	25	M	1	Graduate	Math	2001	Teacher	105 Clause	4	4000	Ministry of Education
	F23	Elham	22	M	-	Graduate	Information system	-	PG student	-			
	F24	Najlaa	27	M	-	HSTP Diploma ¹³⁶	- Computing	1998 2000	Teacher	Anti-Illiteracy Clause	6	2000	Ministry of Education
	F24 cc	Lamees	23	S	-	Graduate	Medicine	2006	Oculist	Intern	<1	5000	Ministry of Health Private
	F25	Maha	27	S	-	Graduate	Home Economics	2003	Business Woman	Private	<1	-	
	F25 cc	Ahlam	23	S	-	Graduate	Biology	2006	Unemployed	-			
G3 Working Class	F40	Khiriya	32	M	-	2 nd Grade	-	-	House wife	-			
	F41	Soha	21	S	-	Graduate	History	2006	Unemployed	-			
	F42	Tahani	25	S	-	3 rd Grade	-		Not-Active	-			
	F43	Sahar	26	M	-	High school	-	1999	Unemployed	-			
	F44	Joharah	25	M	-	Diploma	Computing	2001	Unemployed	-			
	F45	Riydah	22	M	--	Graduate	Home Economics	2005	Unemployed	-			
	F46	Abeer	27	S	-	Graduate	Nursing	2001	Nurse	Formal	5	8000	Ministry of Health
	F46 cc	Noff	25	S	-	Graduate	Nursing	2004	Nurse	Formal	2	7200	Ministry of Health
	F47	Ebtehal	21	M	-	Diploma	Computing	2000	Unemployed	-			
	P50	Khulood	24	S	-	Graduate Diploma	Geography Computing	2000 2002	Data Entry	Temporary	4	1200	Private
	25												9 working

10.2.1.1 The Clause of 105

This clause refers to a new form of job started in 1994 in the Department of Girls' Education. After this department was integrated with the Ministry of Education in 2000, the Clause of 105 applied to male teachers as well (Al Nwaiser 2001). According to Al Himidi¹³⁷ (Ministry of Education Forum 2009), more than 84,000 teachers, both male and female, started their career on the Clause of 105, such as Reem, who explains her experience with this clause:

I graduated in 1997, and got the job soon due to high demand for English teachers. I used to receive fixed 4000 SR. In 1422, royal order stopped this clause and all teachers were transferred to teachers scale, but I was given second grade instead of the fifth, which was given a few years later. Although my wage improved, but as years of experience on 105 Clause are not counted my wage is much less what is it supposed to be. We are given our rights in drops and usually men first. In short, my wage and my pension rights is like I was recruited in 2002 not 1997. (Reem; F 4/G1 c 30m)

According to teachers scale, graduates of teachers' college start their career on the fifth grade and with a monthly wage of 6580 SR. However, under the conditions of Clause 105 new teachers from 1994 to 2002 were not on any scale and receive only 60% of the original salary, which is fixed and without any benefits. Further, years of experience are not counted, and even after cancelation of this clause teachers still called for counting those years up to 2010 (Ministry of Education Forum 2009; ksa-teachers 2011).

10.2.1.2 The Clause of Anti-Illiteracy School

A newer title for underemployed jobs that was exclusive for teachers working in Anti-Illiteracy adult school started in early 1970s as optional overtime work in the afternoon (4-6 pm). Later it became an independent full-time job in the 1990s that include 180,000 female teachers (Al-Khodair 2011), as explained by Najlaa:

I always admired my mother's achievements, and wanted to be a teacher in a primary school just like her. Hence, in 1993, I enrolled in the high school/TP in Al-Nomas¹³⁸ as the one in Abha was closed already. For the last six years I have been working under the poor conditions of the Clause of Anti-Illiteracy. This year, 2006, salaries were upgraded to 2000 SR for graduates of HSTP and 2500 SR for college

¹³⁷ An official in the Ministry of Education.

¹³⁸ Al-Nomas is a small city 150 kilometres north of Abha.

graduates, but holidays still not paid. I do not know what is the future of this job, but what else can I do? (Najlaa; F24/G2 c 27m)

Teachers working under the conditions of the Anti-Illiteracy Clause, although they undertake the same tasks as the teachers, are not on teachers scale but on an annual contract. Their monthly wage is fixed and represents only 37.9 % of the original wage in the teachers' scale. Holidays, maternity or sick leave are not paid and no other benefits are included. Although this is supposed to be a temporary situation, regulations about transferring to a stable job are vague.

10.2.1.3 Substitute Teacher during Child Care Leave

Working as a substitute teacher for a teacher on child care leave is another temporary job. Bothynah, the maths graduate who has been unemployed for two years, explained her experience with this job:

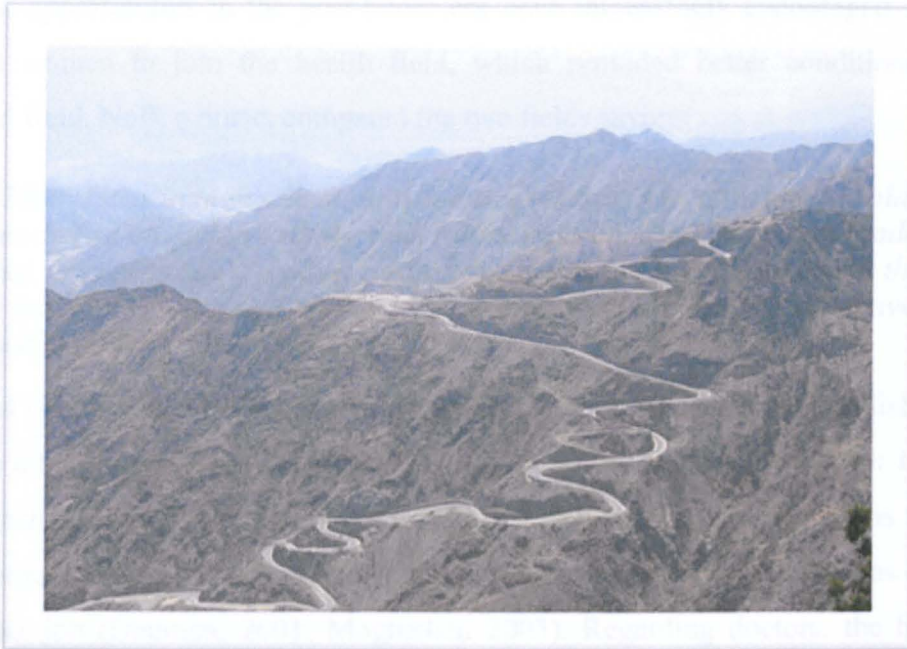
Last semester, I worked as a substitute teacher for another teacher who took child care leave. This leave, established only last year (2005), can be from one semester to three years. I enjoyed working life and received 6000 riyal, and the teacher on the leave received only 25% of her salary No, this year I don't have a chance to get the same job since the job must be given to other unemployed graduates. (Bothynah; F5/ G1c 24s)

This situation reflects the demand in the educational field for more teachers; however, the high supply of college graduates associated with limitation of work opportunities for graduate women enabled employers to reduce the cost of the labour force.

10.2.1.4 Working in Outlying Villages

At the same time as new college graduates were working under the new Clause of 105 or the Clause of Anti-Illiteracy, the majority of new teachers had to start their first teaching years in outlying villages. Two of the four teachers in this study were working in isolated villages at sea level, which included a high-risk daily trip on the mountain road (see Figure 10.1). Safety is a major difficulty facing teachers working in outlying villages every day. According to Al-Arabia News Channel (2005), the average distance between the city and workplace of teachers in outlying villages is 106 km, and 14% of car accidents included cars carrying teachers on their daily work trip. Shuruq, an English teacher in Tihamah (coastal land of 'Asir), explained her experience:

Figure 10.1 Mountain Road (Al-'Aqabbah)
linking highland (Sarah) with sea land (Tihamah) of 'Asir



Source: (Mekshat Forum 2009)

First job was so far away from living areas that after four hours of driving, we decided to reject that job. Due to the lack of English teachers and my father's connections, I got another job in Tihamah. I have to go through Al-'Aqabah road, which is so dangerous, especially when it rains or foggy in the winter I go with a group of eight teachers in a minibus with a retired man and pay him 1800 of my 4000 SR salary as I'm still on the 105 Clause, while teachers of the Anti-Illiteracy Clause pay only 1000. I also receive an extra 7% of my salary as an outlying benefit, which is 280 Riyals a month. Only teachers working in schools 60 km or more from Abha receive this benefit. Yes, the driver received higher monthly income (8700 SR) than us teachers!!! In order to arrive at 7:30 am; I have to leave home at 4 am before the dawn. I do not have the right to ask for moving to Abha until I finish my third year of work there, which is this year. (Shuruq; F21/G2c 27m)

This shows how concentrating women in the educational field enabled the employer in less than three decades to fulfil its basic needs and reduce all privileges and benefits starting with the monthly salary, the occupational scale, and benefits, such as outlying benefit that reduced from 60% to 7% in post-boom era.

10.2.2 Ministry of Health as a New Employment Field

Although women in KSA have had access to work in hospitals since the 1960s, only three Saudi women were working in this field in 1960. The health sector has been dominated by

foreign labour, both male and female (Al-Dakheel 2000: 171). In 2004, the country had 54,000 nursing jobs, but only 1000 were occupied by Saudis (Niblock 2006: 116). The limited job opportunities in the post-boom era have increasingly encouraged some third generation women to join the health field, which provided better conditions than the educational field. Noff, a nurse, compared the two fields saying:

In 2000, I was in high school, and had two models in front of me. My older sister is a teacher in an outland village under the conditions 105 Clause until today, and my other sister who works as a nurse in Abha with a payment that exceeds the salary of the teacher. Of course, I chose to be a nurse. Besides, it is not repetitive work like teaching. (Noff; F46/G3 c 25s)

Shortage of nurses in Saudi Arabia encouraged the Ministry of Health to establish extensive policies to attract women to work in nursing. According to Al-Dakheel (2000: 181), Saudi nurses constituted only 3.25% of nursing staff in 1997, and high payment was thus major policy to attract national women to work in this occupation that previously was considered an improper job (Doumato 2001; Moghadam 2003). Regarding doctors, the high socio-economic status of this job and its link with high academic achievement made it an aim of some ambitious female students. Lamees, the oculist, explained why she chose to work in this field:

Figure 10.2 Saudi Female Doctors



Source: Al-Riyadh Newspaper (2007)

Working as a doctor was my dream, especially after my older sister became the first female surgeon in 'Asir. Academic achievement is very important in my family. This

made my parents send my sister then me to Riyadh for study, in King Khalid University. (Lamees; F24/G2cc 23s)

Lack of access to medical schools in 'Asir has reduced the number of Saudi female doctors in the region. The medical school in Abha was established in 1980 under a branch of King Saud University, yet female students started to enrol in this school only in 2004, after the establishment of King Khalid University in 2003 that integrated the two branches of King Saud University, including the medical school and the Emam University branch, and established a female section¹³⁹ (KKU 2009). In 2007, this new university included a Nursing College, established in 1999 (Al-Fawaz 2007) and a Teachers College as well (KKU 2010). Compared to big Saudi cities, the lack of medical higher education limited the ability of women in 'Asir to get involved in the health field, which had started in Riyadh and Jeddah since 1975 (KSU 2011; KAAU 2011), while the first class of women doctors in Abha is supposed to graduate in 2011.

10.2.3 Paid Work in the Private Sector

As discussed in chapters 2 and 4, the shortage of labour in KSA concentrated the national labour force in the public sector, army and oil industry, while the private sector has been dominated by expatriates. However, in the post-boom era, replacing foreign labour with local became a major goal of the state, which wants the expatriate rate to drop to 51%, at a rate of 5% per year, as a result of Saudization policy (MEP 2005). The limitation of work opportunities in the public sector drove large numbers of women to aim for private institutions:

10.2.3.1. Private Schools

Private girls' schools, as completely female institutions, represent the most attractive private organisations for Saudi female graduates, and were experienced by four interviewees of this generation for a short period of time. Maha discussed her experience in a private school:

¹³⁹ Girls section started with three majors in 2003, Biology, Information Systems and English. In 2004, female students enrolled into the Medical school (KKU 2009).

I worked in a private school for almost one year Imagine, the salary was only 1000 SR., and I had 27 classes a week I convinced myself that this was better than staying at home They don't show any respect for I used to buy the materials from my own money, and they wanted me to give full marks to all students Most of all it was bad treatment from the headmistress who preferred non-Saudi teachers. They are the majority and would do whatever the headmistress wants. (Maha; F25/G2c 27s)

These poor conditions of work made Al-Torki and Bagader (2006) call working in the private sector “forced labour”. Although Saudi development plans and the state call for Saudization, the private sector shows a stronger preference for expatriate workers. Rofiadah, who is a headmistress and owner of a private school, explained this phenomenon:

In our school, 50% of teachers are Saudi, but the expatriates teach the difficult subjects, such as maths, science, Arabic and English. Saudi teachers can leave any time for public sector, so I do not depend on them. All teachers received a salary of 1200 or 1500 Riyals I don't import teachers but hire women who come with their husbands as dependents, because, which save the cost of visa, airline ticket and accommodation. Besides, they would not leave the work like Saudis No one interferes regarding teacher's salaries, we decide. (Rofaidah; F3/G1b 42m)

In contrast with employers' explanation that their preference for foreign workers refers to their high qualifications and positive attitude towards work compared to national workers in Arabian Gulf countries (Gill 2008), data refer this preference to financial benefits employers gain from this type of labour. Female private organisations benefit from illegal workers who enter the country with a dependant visa on their husbands, which make them the cheapest and most loyal employees. In line with Connell (2009) and Hijab's argument (1988) that the private sector has greater ability to escape the political pressure for reforms and equality, the private sector in Saudi society has not be subject to effective state policies to protect national and foreign labour through a minimum wage act, labour organizations to defend employees' rights and mechanisms for implementing the Saudization scheme.

10.2.3.2 Other Private Organisations

Although the private sector as a gender regime is globally practicing gender segregation against women (Connell 2009), Saudi corporations go further and completely excluded women, with the exception of ARAMCO the oil company and a few banks in the big cities, since the mid-1980s (Al-Munajjed 1997). In addition to private schools, third-generation women are increasingly entering new work opportunities in private hospitals and banks, yet

their number is still so small in Abha that it was not represented in this study, which is explained by Rofaidah:

In Abha, there are only two female bank branches. Al-Rajhi and Al-Riyadh, however, they are very small branches, three employees in each one, and services are not good. Hence, I do not deal with these female branches. My account is in another Bank, which does not have a female branch (Rofaidah; F3/G1b 42m).

Nevertheless, the limitation of decision making disempowered both female employees and clients and reduced the qualification of female branches. Al-Turki and Braswell (2010) explains how such a situation represents a major barrier for Saudi business women in particular. Further, this condition stresses the negative stereotype regarding women as lacking the ability to supervise others (Anker 2001), while in reality they lack the power and authority to practice the role of a supervisor. Maha discusses the problems of both employers and the employee in the private sector:

As a Saudi woman I suffered from limited work opportunities and a poor situation in private schools. When I established my own beauty salon, I was planning to hire Saudis. However, I did not find any professionals in these areas, while I have to establish a good reputation and I have financial obligations. I employed only one Saudi as an assistant to help her to learn. (Maha; F25/G2 c 27s)

As one of the first class graduates of home economics established in 1999, she faced the poor conditions of the available jobs, and as a new business woman she faced the lack of specialised national labour. Education as a major condition for women's employment (Hijab 1988) has focused for decades on teaching, while the labour market has different demands. Although beauty salons represent a major field for female enterprise (Yamani 1996; MEP 2005), there is a lack of training for jobs in this field. Later, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation established 14 schools throughout the country in 2007, and in 'Asir one was established in 2009 (TVTC 2011). Tahani points to the significance of this field:

I love drawing and handicraft, but I do not know where or how to improve my skill, and would like to work in any job that require drawing or handcraft skills, but there is no work for people like me. I tried to work in a beauty salon, but they just want those foreign makeup artists. (Tahani; F42/G3 c 25s)

Handicapped and uneducated women are those who have least access to employment, as vocational schools (Calvert and Al-Shetaiwi 2002) and colleges (TVTC 2011) are provided for those with high school level. However, Calvert and Al-Shetaiwi (2002) contend that

even graduates of vocational schools (Tailoring) have limited work opportunities, while foreign male labour makes up 90 to 95% in textile and sewing factories. According to the World Bank (2002), the weak linkage between vocational education and the private sector in MENA societies is a major reason for the limitation of women's work opportunities in this field.

10.2.3.3 Private Business

Despite the fact that private work used to attract uneducated women in the boom era, limited work opportunities for both educated and uneducated women in the post-boom era has encouraged some women to establish a small enterprise. Maha explained her enrolment in private business thus:

I gave up on waiting for a job in the public sector, and decided to establish a beauty centre I was planning to apply to the Borrowing bank.¹⁴⁰ However, my family lent me 120,000 SR the "Mahram" issue consumes a lot of time and effort, since my father lives in another city and I have no brothers. Only in the bank my grandfather came with me. I did everything else by myself, but it was not easy at all Procedures took six months, now the hairdressing has started, while dressmaking still requires more time. (Maha; F25/G2c 27s)

In line with Human Rights Watch (2008) and Al-Turki and Braswell's study (2011) on businesswomen in Jeddah, gender has continued to play a major role in directing women's private businesses in several ways. First, a private business depends on the family's attitude towards women entering the public arena of men. Second, it requires practical help of the male guardian "Mahram" or a male employee to process documents through government departments. Third, women's enterprise should serve other women or require a male manager "Wakil". Not fulfilling these three conditions would challenge the progress of a woman's business, as indicated by the case of Khiryah (F40/G3 c 32m), who could not establish a catering enterprise at home due to the negative attitudes of her husband towards such work. Najlaa (F24/G2 c 27m), who established a small business in her house making teaching materials faced several challenges to expand her work due to lack of supportive a Mahram or a Wakil.

¹⁴⁰ A state department lends people with practical degrees an amount of money (average of 45 000SR) in order to start small businesses.

10.3 Unemployment

Unemployment is "the state in which a person is without work, available to work, and is currently seeking work"(International Labour Organisation 1982: 4). According to this definition and data in Table 10.1, 12 out of the 25 third generation women were unemployed. The latest official figure of unemployment was 10% in 2008 (MEP 2010: 161), while unofficial sources estimate the rate between 20 and 30% (Raphaeli 2003; Hardy 2006). Nosiba, an unemployed graduate of geography, explained the situation of mass unemployment:

I graduated in 2002, and for the last four years, the Ministry of Civil Services¹⁴¹ offered only ten job in my fields, while every year almost 450 girls graduated from my major in the Teachers' college in Abha (Nosiba; F20/G2 c 26m).

A United Nations analysis of youth unemployment in Arab countries (UN 2002), states that it is a result of the inability of the economy to create new job opportunities sufficient to employ the increasing number of potential labour market entrants. The condition of labour in KSA and in the MENA region in general reflects one aspect of the dependent economy, as many social studies argue (Karshenas and Moghadam 2001, Al-Rumahi 1983, Al-Naqeeb 1997). Another factor is the lack of sufficient planning, as Al-Rumahi (1983) and Al-Naqeeb (1997) argue. In fact, all development plans since the third (1980) have called for a comprehensive plan coordinating between the demand for labour market and the quality and quantity of the outcome of educational institutions. However, mass unemployment indicates either insufficiency in planning or what Hijab (1988) called separation between theory and reality in the labour market.

The labour market has been influenced by the mismatch between the outcome of the educational system, and the demands of the labour market for graduates with specific subjects and skills (MEP 1980; 1985; 1990; Al-Qahtani 1995). However, data in Table 10.1 show that unemployed graduate women come from both Human Science and Science majors. First class graduates of Biology, Information Systems and Home Economics are facing very limited work opportunities similar to other majors that were established since

¹⁴¹ The ministry in charge of employment in the public sector.

early the 1980s, such as Arabic Literature, Islamic Studies, History and Geography. Maha explains this situation:

I was among the first graduates from Home Economics in 2003, and out of 200 graduates only seven were recruited. If our majors are not needed in the labour market, why was it opened? I really don't understand. What should we study in order to get good jobs? (Maha; F25/G2 c 27s).

In addition to the previous factors referring this phenomenon to economic, planning and educational factors, other studies argue that in the Gulf countries in general women's low economic participation and unemployment is the result of the country's economic ability to import foreign labour and patriarchal culture's segregation of women in a few areas (Hijab 1988; Kandiyoti 1991a; Boserup 2007).

10.4 Women's Class and Paid Work

Class, as a major factor influencing women's work, has interacted with factors of socio-economic changes in this era to produce a new situation during the last two decades. At first sight, Table (10.2) seems to indicate that women from all classes have been affected by the poor situation in the labour market; however, each class responded in different ways.

Table: 10.2 Classes and Work situation among Third Generation Women

Class	Working women	Unemployed	Housewives	Students	Inactive	Total
Upper Class G I	1	5	1	-	-	7
Middle Class G II	5	2	-	1	-	8
Working Class G III	3	5	1	-	1	10
Total	9	12	2	1	1	25

A positive attitude towards education is a common phenomenon among third-generation women (see Table 10.1); nevertheless, poor work conditions reduced the number of upper and working class women. The absence of a stressing economic need for work made upper class women less willing to accept jobs in the outland or with temporary contracts. While working class women competed with middle class women who had stronger family support to gain better chances.

The only employed woman among the upper class is a teacher with a stable job, representing the ideal job for this class. Three of the unemployed women among the upper

class had experienced work in temporary jobs and left because of the poor working conditions in both the public and private sectors. Badriyah, the only full-time housewife among this group, explained:

Why would I go to Tihama every day, and put my life at risk. Neither my family nor my husband left me in financial need I would not reject a job in Abha, but current jobs do not worth the effort of applying. I am planning to establish my own enterprise when my children grow up. (Badriyah; F2/ G1c 26m).

Poor working conditions would affect the family's standing in the community, and hence this kind of work with low status has reinforced gender roles. According to Marxist feminists, upper class women are first to withdraw from labour market and adopt the role of the housewife to become a "reserve army" in the time of recession (Beechy 1977 cited in Walby 1990). At the same time, middle class and working class women show more flexibility in adapting with temporary jobs and new fields of work, such as in the Ministry of Health, or by establishing small enterprise. Expansion of education and the decline of living standards compared to the boom era have pushed working class women into paid work again unlike their mothers in the boom era.

The role of the family has become more fundamental in supporting women to overcome the increasing barriers in the labour market. Maha the only business woman among this generation explained this point:

Without the support of my family, my work would not have been established. Not only they give me the money to start but they encouraged me to do everything by myself and helped whenever it is needed. (Maha; F25/G2c 27s).

Not only did the family's economic situation help women to establish their enterprise, but also their efforts to reduce the pressure of patriarchal norms and patriarchal state policies that represent major barriers for accessing the business field for women. The limitation of work opportunities increased the importance of family support, especially with the increasing competition to get available jobs. Khulood, a top graduate from a working class family explained this:

I graduated in 2003 from the Teachers College with merit, and applied for a researcher job in the college, but another girl took the job because of "Wastah". She has a relative in a high position, while my father is just a teacher. The computing diploma I took after my BA enabled me to get this part-time job as data entering for teachers, and they pay me 900 to 1200 depending on whether any one is on a maternity leave. (Khulood; P50/G3 c 24s)

Although “Bedouin Bureaucracy” (Al-Rumahi 1977, 1983) has made the value of solidarity between members of the extended family and the tribe part of the occupational culture in MENA region, the limitation of work opportunities in this era has extensively increased this phenomenon. In fact, five interviewees referred to the role of their families’ connections in gaining jobs, while one interviewee pointed to the role of her brother’s connections in moving her from working in an outland village to the city only in a few months. Therefore, this inequality of access to the limited stable jobs became exclusive to women from powerful families, while working class women had little chance to gain these jobs or any other privileges.

10.4.1 Class Mobility

Women's role in the mobility of the class of their families became determined by the nature and the field of their jobs. In the health sector, alike with women in the boom era, paid work retained its influential role in relation to the class of employees' families, especially in the case of doctors from the middle class who started enrolling in this field. Nurses who came mainly from the working class were able to achieve financial upward mobility to the middle class, yet the social barriers around this job limited their social upward mobility. Abeer explains her role in her family thus:

My sister and I receive a good income from our work as nurses. My father is retired and we take an active financial role in the house and also pay the cost of the study of our brother abroad in a medical school (Abeer; F46/G3c 27s).

The higher the income of a job the more women can influence the class of her family, while poor conditions of work emphasised the role of the family in determining the class of the woman. While the health sector represents the first direction of influence, the educational system in the post-boom era represents the second. The poor condition of the new work opportunities in the educational field made working women subject to what Abbott (1987) called potential downward class mobility. Areej, who is from an upper class family and worked in a private school for a few months, gave an example:

Although I used to receive 3,000 SR. which is a good income these days, I couldn't continue in that private school. The headmistress was worried about my family connections in the Ministry of Education, and kept creating problems My husband's income is only 2,000. Fortunately, we live in my father-in-law's building and he helps us occasionally, besides the income I get from my father's inheritance. (Areej; F1/G1c 26m)

The phenomena of unemployment and underemployment in this era resulted in the downward class mobility of some third generation women and their nuclear families. However, their extended families played a major role in maintaining the living standard of their class, which supports the sociological view that the class of a woman is determined by the class of her family (Acker 1996). The poor conditions of employment in this era have restored the strong bond between the class of the women's family and the nature of her work.

10.5 Gender Segregation

Despite the fact the gender segregated work remains the most desirable field for women's work, restrictions on non-gender segregated work became much less during this era. Women in this era worked in both gender segregated and non-gender segregated settings as did first generation women.

10.5.1 Horizontal Segregation

Hartman (1982) argues that the gender division of labour is a major mechanism restricting women's access to the labour market and limiting their options to domestic work. The working conditions of the post-boom era generation show that the high rate of unemployment among this generation is a definite result of centralizing women's employment in the educational field, with only a small number of jobs in other sectors. Consequently, women, in line with Marx's view (cited in Walby (1990) and Tong (2009), accept underemployment as it becomes their only choice other than unemployment. Entering new fields of work that are not gender-segregated, such as health sector or private business, became their third option.

Working in the Health Ministry, hence, became the second major field of work among post-boom generation women. In 2004, Al-Wabel, Head of the Girls' Health College, stated that the college had 237 students in that year, while previously there had been only 30 students in each year since it opened in 1999 (Al-Fawaz 2007). Rihanah, the mother of Abeer, a graduate of the first class from the Nursing College, declared:

In the beginning, I was worried about her, but her father encouraged her since he was working in a hospital. I do not care about what people think because I know my daughter and how I raised her up. Today, my neighbours say "you were smart.

There was a good opportunity and you took advantage of it.” (Rihanah; F46/G3b 46m)

Attitudes towards gender segregation reflect two aspects of the cultural system in ‘Asir; the first is contestation between the local culture and recent changes in the national culture, and the second aspect shows the impact of socio-economic changes on people's attitude across different historical stages even under the same regime. Members of the older generation, who are more influenced by the local rural culture and experienced non-gender segregated work in the pre-boom era, were more open towards their daughters’ work in such jobs, while the younger generation generally opposed this form of work, as they grew up within the Wahhabi doctrine that strongly condemns any form of mixing between the two sexes (see chapter 4). The latter attitude is explained by Nosibah, who was unemployed for four years:

Although my husband works in a hospital as a social worker, he refused the idea of me working at the same hospital. He said “What would my colleagues say if they saw you with me”. (Nosibah; F20/ G2c 26m).

Codes on women's visibility and movement are constructed by both Wahhabi interpretation of women's role in Islam and by patriarchal norms. Wahhabi principles regarding women are based on complete hijab and women's gender role, while public roles should be only in necessity and with consideration of the two previous principles (Al-Othaimin, 2004; Al-Fozan 2009; Ben -Baz 1985, 1988). Patriarchal norms also include strict codes on women's behaviour and movement in order to protect her as a symbol of the family's honour (Moghadam 1992; Kabeer 1999; Abu-Odeh 2006; Al-Mosaed 1993). Gradual integration between these two discourses form a rigid patriarchal control over women, and religious legitimization gives more acceptance even among women themselves. Rufaidah explains how patriarchal codes became symbols of modesty:

My bank account is in a male branch, and whenever I need anything I make a delegation for my son. I really get embarrassed to enter. You know, people in Abha know each other. (Rufaidah; F3/G1b 42m).

Doumato (1999) argues that Wahhabi schools get their power and authority from the support of both the Saudi state and the people, and data of this study show the importance of patriarchal norms in supporting the power of Wahhabiya. Patriarchal norms not only support Wahhabi discourse, but also represent a major source of its thoughts. According to this new discourse, a woman's presence in the public sphere contradicts with modesty and

the status of her family. However this strong integration of Wahhabi ideology with state and patriarchal culture has confronted the pressure of political and economic changes since the Gulf War and the later war on terrorism. The decreasing authority of Wahhabi discourse gave the chance for other schools and doctrines to influence in the cultural scene. The changing attitudes of Abeer's neighbours reflect this shifting from one historical stage to another under the same regime, in addition increasing economic need among Saudi families for income of female members and the poor conditions in the gender-segregated fields has contributed to this shifting attitude.

10.5.2 Vertical Segregation

As with other societies, working in non-gender segregated fields has reduced women's chances of reaching senior positions that are, according to Boserup (2007), universally monopolized by men. This is especially the case in developing countries. Vertical segregation not only limits women's authority but their access to further qualifications and training, which is explained by nurse Abeer:

There are some training courses in Riyadh, but we are not told about them. Administrators decide that Saudi girls cannot travel, while my family would not mind. Those administrators with 9th grade certificates are jealous of us, because of our higher incomes. Unfortunately, they are the decision makers. (Abeer; F46/G3c 27s).

The authority gap (Wright and Birkelund 1995) is one of the forms of vertical segregation that women working in hospitals face. They are excluded from higher administrative positions. Within the Saudi patriarchal society, integrating women into a non-gender segregated system, such as the health sector does not aim to empower women but to benefit women patients who no longer have to communicate with male professional staff as argued by Boserup (2007). Although working women in the health sectors have equal wages and occupational rights with their male counterparts, yet administrative positions are completely dominated by men even those with less qualifications, which Hartman (2001) refers to as solidarity among men that enables them to preserve their control over female labour.

10.6 Third Generation and Empowerment

Despite the rapid development of girls' education and growing proportion of female graduates of higher education, the development of women's work in the post-boom era has

witnessed dramatic transformations. Women of this generation were the first marginalized group from the labour market due to the 1990s' recessions and they have faced a high rate of unemployment and underemployment in both the public and private sector.

In contrast with expectations, mass education for women and the expansion of women's empowerment in the Saudi labour market did not progress in parallel, unlike for women's education in the boom era. In fact, a massive gap occurred between the two areas of education and employment in the post-boom era. Women's empowerment has been influenced by the ambiguity of state projects towards women's economic participation and the paradox of state policies in this era.

10.6.1 Resources of Empowerment

In light of the previous sections, paid work as a resource for empowerment divides the post-boom generation into three categories (see table 10.1). The first is a small group of women who have stable jobs that provide them with economic resources for empowerment, yet, like second-generation women, they are still struggling with private and public patriarchy to exercise control over this resource. The second category is underemployed women in the educational system with contemporary contracts, such as the Clause of 105 and the Clause of Anti Illiteracy, or women working as self-employed whose work became a resource of disempowerment rather than empowerment. The third category represents the financially dependent majority who included unemployed, graduate housewives and post graduate students.

State policies played a major role in limiting women's access to paid work in this era. Concentrating women's work in only a few areas since 1960 led to the recent mass unemployment after those fields became unable to absorb all the new female entrants to the labour market. This situation also gave the employers, mainly in the educational field, the power to form new underemployment jobs and women's choices became limited between accepting these jobs or becoming unemployed.

Women's responses to these new forms of public patriarchal constraint vary between adoption and or resistance. Although it is believed that gender segregation and its limited work opportunities drive women back to their gender role at home, large numbers of this generation have resisted by searching for "alternative resources" of empowerment (Kabeer 2005). Internet forums (Moltaqa Saudi Teachers 2011; Ksa-teachers 2011) represent a new

resource for empowerment, especially with the absence of a civil union with which to raise their claims, which is explained by Najlaa:

I am a member of a forum that discusses the situation of Anti-Illiteracy Clause. Through this forum I knew about new changes or possible reforms. (Najlaa; F24/G2b 27m)

These forums enabled underemployed women to represent their claims as a collective rather than a personal issue and later enabled them to raise a legal case (Moltaqa Al-Saudi Teachers 2011; Ksa-teachers 2011) against the Ministry of Education.

For unemployed women, their search for new resources of empowerment led them to one of five strategies: establishing private business - only available with family's financial and social support; accepting underemployment in private schools, which many have experienced for a short period; adopting the role of educated housewives, especially when having young children. Other unemployed women aim to further education either in a vocational field or postgraduate studies. A computing diploma, for instance, much in demand in the labour market, provides Khulood with self-employment, which her bachelor degree did not, while Elham is doing a master's in the UK; as the wife of a government employee with a scholarship she has the right to a scholarship as well. The establishment of King Abdullah's international scholarship programme in 2006 (Ministry of Education 2011) provided unemployed men and women equally an alternative choice which included up 100,000 students including Lamya and her sister who are hoping that higher qualification will provide them with better chance for employment.

My sister and I graduate this year from the department of Information system, and already apply to scholarships There are no jobs now, but we hope to be employed in the university when getting our Ph.D degrees, especially that there is no single Saudi among the staff, and most of the staff is from Bangladesh. Fortunately, my father just retired and we are the youngest, so my parents will join us. (Lamya; F5/G1c 22s)

In contrast with the exclusion policies that limited women's work opportunities, this scholarship programme provides a fundamental resource of empowerment for the younger generation, equally men and women, in that their number reached 100,000 students in 2011 (Ministry of Education 2011). However, the high rate of unemployment and poor conditions of the available jobs have reduced socio-cultural barriers, which can be seen in families acceptance for their daughters to work in outlying areas and in enrolling in

international scholarship programme that might not have been accepted by large numbers of families in the oil-boom era. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this expansion in international scholarships does not have clear long run aims or associated mechanisms for absorbing young women into the public and private sectors in the near future.

10.6.2 Agency of Empowerment

As with the other two previous generations, agency, the second aspect of women's empowerment according to Kabeer (2005), is examined in three areas:

10.6.2.1 Agency of Decision Making

Women's decision making has remained under patriarchal control. Bargaining with private patriarchy increases the choices of many women in household decision making, but at a public level adapting to the culture has not enhanced women's situation. Reem explained this:

My husband is still doing his Ph.D in the USA, and I came back with my kids for my job, after getting my Master's degree. Unfortunately, nothing changed. I was not even able to rent a flat, so the contract was written under the name of my father-in-law. At the bank, fortunately I have identity card but still not allowed to open a saving account for my kids without their father's permission, while I am the one who deposits the money. As a married woman, I do not have the right to import a housemaid or a chauffeur, only divorcees or widows can. Hence I employed illegal ones with all the risks involved, and asked my mother to move into the same building to look after my kids. (Reem; F4/ G1c 30m)

Higher education, modernization and women's employment have reduced the level of gender hierarchy within young nuclear families, and women had further participation in household decision making. However, state policies have limited women's ability to undertake any independent decision in the public arena regardless of her age, educational qualification or employment status. The rule of the male guardian and linking women's rights to their marital status strongly ensure that women are seen only as family members under patriarchal supervision rather than as independent individuals, a finding arrived at by several studies in the MENA (Joseph 2000; Al-Torki 2000; Al-Mughni 2000). Hence, bargaining remains a major strategy for women who face private and public patriarchal control. While financial resources provide working women with an effective tool for bargaining, underemployed and unemployed women lack this tool.

10.6.2.2 Paid Work and Social Status

The social status of paid work is linked to the level of patriarchal norms of gender segregation, education, and job privileges. Teachers who have the three conditions retain their social status but unlike for second-generation women, their privileges became much less. In the health sector, women's status varies from one job to another. While nursing provides a good income, socially it is still not attractive to many women, which Nofe explains:

People either feel sorry for us or believe that we are bad women. Some old patients ask why my family lets me work in such a job, and why didn't I work as a teacher. Old men usually are gentle Men do not like to marry nurses; some asked me to leave my job to get married Some old nurses from nursing school are not nice with people because they are fed up with the bad treatment of doctors, administrators and patients In our job, there are many examples of physical and verbal abuse I am very strict, and wear very narrow neqab¹⁴², and without any makeup. I would not give any one a chance to treat me badly. The woman's honour is the first to attack in case of any disagreement Yet, this situation is changing. (Nofe; F46/ G3c 27s)

The three conditions of high social status of women's work were broken by women working as nurses during the boom era, which created a low status of this job, especially as it was undertaken only by working class or minority women. However, the shortage of nurses, increasing financial privileges and upgrading educational preparation from secondary and high school to college level is enhancing the social status of nurses today and attracting women from different classes and even from tribal origin. However, this job still breaks patriarchal codes of women's movement, behaviour and interacting with the other sex, as major characteristics of patriarchal society (Moghadam 1992; Kabeer 1999; Abu-Odeh 1996; Al-Mosaed 1993). The Wahhabi view of women's hijab and role in the public arena, discussed in chapter 3, contributes in constructing the low social status of women working in non-gender segregated places. As a result this group of women became vulnerable to different levels of patriarchal control, including stigma, limited marriage opportunities and finally made them exposed to verbal and physical abuse. Nevertheless, in line with Hijab's view (1988, 2001), the economic need of both the state and families for

¹⁴² A piece of cloth to cover the face and show only the eyes. It is a new version of bedouin burq'a that bedouin women used to wear, (see the woman in the right figure 10. 2).

women's work in this sector encouraged some women to ignore socio-cultural barriers and gradually changed it.

Female doctors, although working in a non-gender segregated environment, do not face the same conflict with patriarchal view. Lamees, the oculist, explain:

I had no problem with my family, or from the staff at the hospital. Patients are also fine. I have an agreement with my male colleagues to see the female patients and they see the male patients all female employees wear neqab at hospital there are quite a number of female doctors in 'Asir hospital from tribal and high status families. (Lamees; F24/ G2 c 23s)

In line with the study of Vidyasagar and Rea (2004), Saudi female doctors enjoy an exceptional high social status as practicing what Yamani (1996: 272) called an honourable task, and also had good relationship with male colleagues and patients. This has encouraged upper class and tribal women to enrol in this prestigious job, which provides a good resource of empowerment in the workplace and in the society.

10.6.2.3 Women's Empowerment and Freedom of Movement

As discussed with the second-generation, women's mobility continues to be a major difficulty for Saudi women, especially in the absence of public transportation and the ban on women's driving. Reem discusses her struggle with transportation:

I have the right to buy a car, but not to drive it although I have American licences. I have to give my new car to someone still practicing driving and destroying it, while I am watching and cannot say anything or he would leave and start the headache of searching for a driver again. I pay him 2000 SR in addition to repairing the damages he caused for my new car, which I am still paying its premiums. His salary exceeds my sister's salary, who has a degree in math, but works in a private school for 1500 SR, imagine!!! (Reem; F4/ G1c 30m)

Although debates regarding women's right to drive have been running for decades, people still have different views towards it. Women like Reem who are frustrated about the limitation of their rights are looking forward to the day women gain their licences alike with other rights. On the opposite side, young women who are influenced by the Wahhabi view consider driving as a pathway to moral corruption, which Hanan explains as:

May I die before the day a woman drives. This is the land of Islam, and women's driving brings so many corruptions with it (Hanan; F22/G2c 25m).

A third group do not agree with women driving but express less opposition as their reasons are cultural rather than religious. As Areej says:

I don't agree with women's driving. This is not an easy mission; it needs a man's strength and his fast response. Women are weak and cannot drive in these mountain routes (Areej; F1/G1c 26m).

The assumption that women are weak and unable to face danger are primary negative patriarchal stereotypes of women (Anker 2001) that have been reinforced by socialization, education, the media and religious discourse. Many third generation women are strongly influenced by the patriarchal culture that integrates with Wahhabi thoughts since the boom era, and shows more negative attitudes towards women's issues than first- or second-generation women.

10.6.3 Paid Work and Achievement

Just as resources and agency varies among different women, personal achievements and women's access to their rights vary between women depending on their ability to bargain with private patriarchy and the view of their male guardian towards women's issues. Most young women explained how their male guardians helped them to cope with the difficulty of transportation to their work, especially in outlying areas, to establish small enterprises, to trace their papers in government department and thus effectively fulfil their role as the male guardian. This agrees with Al-Torki's (2000) view that women's empowerment in Saudi society has to go through the equalizing of gender relations within the family before it can spread to other domains.

At the state level, major achievements in the post-boom era have been women's influx into the health sector, private sector and establishing their own business, and the flexibility of this generation to be involved in new areas of work. In addition, this generation has taken advantage of the expansion of higher education and registered for new, non-traditional majors and the international scholarship programme. Nevertheless, employment conditions in this era have changed dramatically since the boom generation. Women's employment has been influenced by the recession of the 1990s and early 2000s that led to a high rate of unemployment and to the marginalization of women's jobs through underemployment. These poor conditions of women's employment have driven large numbers of women to adopt the role of housewife, while others have been searching for alternative resources of empowerment. Therefore, women's achievements in this era are contradictory, as most

young women have high educational qualifications, yet face poor working conditions, such as a college graduate with a distinction working at data entry for only 900 SR (240\$) a month.

10.7 Women's Work and Identity

Previous sections indicate that there has been a transformation of women's identities in the post-boom era, as these women experience what Al-Rasheed early called "affluence and austerity". Their identities include the contradictions of the two eras; as the boom era provided large number of this generation with higher education, the post-boom era astounded the majority with the dramatic change of employment conditions (see Table 10.1). Data is asserted by statistics pointing to the rise in literacy rate among adult female to 68.2% and to 91.0% among young females (UN 2007a). In addition, 56.5% of all graduates are women, while the rate of women's economic participation did not exceed 14% (MEP 2005: 360,361).

This designates some characteristics of women in "neo-patriarchal society" (Sharabi 1988) where women combine traditional and modern characteristics. Women of this generation in KSA are highly educated, yet remain subordinated in employment through gender segregation, underemployment or unemployment. The other example is not being married at an early age, which is a typical feature of women in patriarchal societies (Moghadam 1992), but not working. The fertility rate among this generation decreased dramatically, although this is difficult to judge as these women are still in the reproductive age and statistics point to an average number of 3.17 infants per woman in 2005-2010 (UN 2010). Further, the poor conditions of women's employment has improved young women's attitudes towards marriage, as unlike in the boom era paid work is not guaranteed anymore, which reflects women's view of marriage and paid work as resources of empowerment and security.

Contradiction and frustration is a major characteristic of the identity of this generation. They have paradoxical views towards the ideal model of Muslim women and also towards the western model, and are frustrated about both views. This generation also combines contradictory features of modern and traditional women. Dissatisfaction with working conditions associated with a variety of new resources of information provoked critical

views towards the mainstream model of the "ideal Muslim woman" and also the image of Saudi Arabia as "the ideal Islamic society" (Doumato 1999).

Islam does not prevent women's rights. We are not ignorant to accept whatever Sheikhs say. As a Muslim, I only believe what Allah said "And indeed We have honoured the children of Adam."¹⁴³ Muslim women should enjoy the best rights in the world, this is what happened 14 centuries ago in Makkah, even in my grandmother's time women had more freedom and rights." (Reem; F4/G1c 30m)

In line with Yamani's study on young Saudis (2001), religious identity continues to be dominant among this generation. Building Saudi national identity on a religious base succeeded in unifying people of different regions, and accepting a Wahhabi definition of the "ideal Muslim woman" in the boom era. However, this generation has different interpretations of features of this model that vary from one group to another, similar to their attitude to women's driving. The first is the liberal group, like Reem, who disagrees with recent definitions and argues that the limitation of women's rights and work opportunities are not Islamic and require rapid reforms. Second is the conservative group, like Hanan, who completely agrees with recent interpretation of women's conditions and is suspicious about reforms that she believes result from western intervention to weaken the Islamic model. The third group represents the moderate majority of this generation who, although accepting the dominant Wahhabi view of women's issues, also accept other discourses and hope for change, which indicates a state of uncertainty and contradiction between what they believe and what they need. The young generation, although they vary in defining the ideal model of Muslim women, agree that it is not Islam that subordinates them.

Frustration not only results from diverse views about the ideal model of Muslim women and its contradiction with women's rights in Saudi society, but also from a comparison between the ideal image of Saudi society as the ideal Muslim society and reality. Shuruq explains this contradiction:

I would not get my job in Tihamah without my father's wastah [social connections]. However my wastah is not strong enough to move me to Abha I wish this poor job worth the long daily trip and high cost of transportation, while Abha is full of expatriates who enjoy the good jobs and I have to sing "Raise your head up you are a Saudi."¹⁴⁴ (Shuruq; F21/G2c 27m)

¹⁴³ Qur'an, Surah Al-Isra (17), Ayah (70).

¹⁴⁴ Title of a national song.

This state of frustration is implied through sarcastic jokes of third generation women about their employment conditions and decline in living standards in contrast with the image of their country as an oil rich society. This generation is dissatisfied with the paradox between ideology and reality; their poor work conditions contradict with the increasing wealth of the country and large number of foreign labourers. Inequality of work opportunities and corruption also contradict with the image of their society as the ideal Muslim society. Scholars contend that this attitude among the younger generation represents a great threat to the country's stability if not dealt with successfully through real reforms (Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2010; Yamani 2001).

Among this generation, local identity becomes more integrated with national identity, which might refer to common features of the identities of 'Asir and Najd, representative region of Saudi national identity, as both belong to Sunni school and tribal stratification. However, limitation of work opportunities reinforces the significance of the extended family and tribe as major elements of local identity, and people rely on their personal connections rather than their qualifications, which empower a limited number of women.

This generation is also critical about the western model of women. They adopted global technologies, such as satellite T.V. channels and the internet, which mainly represent the west. These technologies not only have broken down the monopoly of one cultural discourse in KSA, but also provided women with tools for solidarity, such as facilitating the social networking of underemployed and unemployed women. However, their attitude towards the western model of contemporary women is not considered the alternative model but is rejected. This refers to the position of this model as the opposite to Islamic model (Al-Bar 1992). Further it also resulted from the general state of anger and distrust in MENA towards the West due to its invasion of Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Iraq; in addition to the continuous support of the West for the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which reveals the Western double standard regarding democracy, human rights and women's rights.

In the labour market, in line with Connell's argument (2009), the private sector that is more linked with the neo-liberal global economy shows more exclusion to women. Nada gives an example of the state of frustration among this generation:

I do not want to be a teacher. Why do women in this country have to be either housewives or teachers, and not to work at a bank? Their work is based on usury. New work opportunities must be created. We do not want to be like Western women, but just like other Muslim women, like in the Arabian Gulf countries. (Nada; F3/G3c 21s)

A moderate Islamic model is the model that this generation aims for rather than strict Islamic or Western models. In line with Yamani's study (2001), although this generation is suspicious and frustrated about everything and all discourses, their religious identity remain the dominant one. Yamani (2001) explains how in times of rapid changes and challenges, people hold to resources of certainty, which is religion in Saudi society. While economic changes cause a state of dissatisfaction and frustration, it also gives hope for a better future. As Nosiba said:

The country has been into difficult circumstance since the Gulf War and things are not as it was in the boom era. However, oil now reached very high level and the country achieve remarkable revenue, so there must be new work opportunities and development projects. I hope, this is a neo-boom era, and I hope I will get a good job before I give birth to my baby. (Nosiba; F20/ G2c 26m)

Despite all the frustrations, hope has increased since the massive increase of oil revenue since 2004 (see figure 2.5) and King Abdullah's announcement for the reform programme when he came to the throne in 2005, yet so far the speed of the reforms is much slower than people's needs and hope.

10.8 Conclusion

Women's work in the post-boom era has been greatly influenced by economic decline and slow development despite the economic improvement since 2004 due to increasing oil price. Good jobs became very limited, while most women faced massive unemployment or underemployment in both public and private sectors. Saudization achieved reasonable success in the public sector, while private sector reserves its dependence on foreign labour due to further financial benefit from such labour.

Educational institutions continued providing the labour market with increasing numbers of high school and university graduates, and mainly prepared female students for teaching, while the labour market complains of the low quality of education and incompatibility with market demands. However, data shows that both graduates of humanities and science face

very limited work opportunities, and graduates of medical sciences majors have the best chance for work in this era.

Work opportunities have been reconstructed by transformations in state policies and cultural discourse. The state policies include both inclusion and marginalization policies. While some policies encouraged women to involve into health sector, other policies, such as contemporary contracts, marginalized women work in educational sector in particular. Although the cultural discourse became more diverse, women's issues remain controversial among traditional Wahhabi, moderate Islamic scholars and liberals. Wahhabi discourse continues its objection to women's work in non-gender segregated work places in particular. However, in line with Hijab's argument (1988, 2001) the economic need of families for women's work, and the state's role (Connell 2009; Kandiyoti 1991a; Walby 1990) in approving women's access to non-gender segregated fields have reduced the influence of Wahhabi opposition over women's decisions to work in such fields.

Families also provided significant support to their female members to face the increasing challenges in the labour market through financial support to establish their own enterprise and retain the same living standard of their class or to gain some work privileges with the help of their family social network "*wastah*". Although family support is more provided by upper class families, women of this class were the first to withdraw from the labour market due to its poor conditions, while working class women, unlike their mothers, became involved again in paid work.

Women's access to paid work as a major resource of empowerment (Kabeer 2005, 1999) became very limited in this era, which is in contrast with the high level of women's educational achievements among this generation. Few women have stable jobs, yet employed women continue to struggle over control of their work income. The poor employment conditions drove post-boom generation to search for alternative resources, such as solidarity through internet forums to organise their demands for reforms, and higher or vocational education that might provide better access to employment or establishing a small enterprise. While higher education and changing gender relations within the family provided this generation with further empowerment in the private arena, the poor employment conditions limited the empowerment of Saudi women in the public arena.

Finally, women's identity in contemporary Saudi society is affected by poor work opportunities, debates within cultural scene, globalisation and new resources of information, slow reforms and contradictions between traditional and modern role models for Saudi women. This diversity led to different redefinition of the ideal image of Saudi women by different groups of women from liberal, moderate to conservative. In line with Yamani's (2001) claim, young Saudis are characterised by the common state of frustration as a result of the employment conditions and all the contradictions in their neo-patriarchal society. However, it is important to note that this generation also has a great hope for change, which is strongly supported by the state economic enrichment due to the massive increase of oil price since 2004 and the state programme of reforms adopted by King Abdullah.

11. Discussion: The Construction of Women's Work

Women's work is seen as one of the most significant resources of women's empowerment by international organizations (UN 2000) and social studies (Moghadam 2007; Shamshad 2007; Kabeer 1999, 2005). Therefore, the concern of this study has been to examine women's work in a Saudi city with a distinctive history of such work, yet there are parallels with the present conditions of women's work in other Saudi cities. In order to explore women's work from different angles, this study traced the development of the nature and structure of different forms of paid and unpaid work that women have experienced across three historical stages, pre-boom (1932-1959), boom (1960-1986) and post-boom (1987-2000s). This examination also explored the factors that have constructed women's work in each historical stage and how various kinds of work experiences have impacted on women's identity and empowerment. While previous chapters provided an in-depth analysis of these issues within each generation, this chapter provides a theoretical explanation for the common factors that have constructed women's experiences across the three generations.

Examining work experiences of women in Abha has revealed how multiple powers and factors have shaped them. Throughout this study, I have used qualitative interviews to examine different factors raised in the literature on women and social change in the MENA societies (Moghadam 2003, 1998, 1995; Kandiyoti 1988, 1991a; Al-Rumaihi 1995; Al-Naqeeb 2008; Hijab 1988, 2001). These studies pointed to the significant roles of a number of factors, e.g., political economy, the economic need for labour, social stratification, state policies, Islam and patriarchy in forming the position of women in this region. These various aspects were examined throughout this study and were shown to have made a significant contribution in constructing women's work experience in Abha. However, the empirical foundation of this study shows that while the influence of each of these factors is important, they are not equal, and hold different levels of power over women's work.

In line with Kandiyoti's argument (1991a, 2004) that gives the political project the leading role in constructing women's position in MENA societies, this study argues that women's work experience in Abha demonstrates that the state, as the heart of the structure of the society, is the central factor that has constructed the nature of women's work across the three historical stages from the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 to the 2000s. This

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does not undermine the other factors, but stresses that their significance depends on the state's interaction and management of them. Hence, the first part of this chapter will discuss this hierarchy and how the political project intersects with economic and cultural factors to construct women's work across the contemporary history of Abha. The second part of the chapter moves to identify and discuss the key mechanisms utilized by the state in order to regulate women's work in accordance with its political project. These mechanisms, as concluded from my empirical study, are state policies, gender segregation systems, and education.

11.1 The Formation of the Islamic Political Project and Women's Work across the Three Generations

Placing the state at the centre of this discussion on the factors forming women's work in Saudi society is due to a number of reasons. First, in line with Connell (2009), my empirical study indicates that the state, as the core of the structure of power relations, represents a gender regime with a strong gender division of labour in Saudi society where women are excluded from most fields of work and concentrated in a few areas seen as feminine jobs. Secondly, the absence of labour unions and a civil society in general concentrates the authority to generate policies that form the employment conditions to the state. This coincides with Charred's (2001:233) argument that change in the MENA societies "comes from above rather than as a response to the people's demands". Thirdly, empirical study indicates that women's position in the Saudi labour market has been influenced by the political designs of the Saudi state which, according to Kandiyoti's classification (1991a, 2004) of political projects in MENA societies, is seen as a project of cultural authenticity legitimised by Islamic interpretation, similar to post-Islamic revolution Iran as described by other social studies, such as Moghadam (2003), Afshar (1996, 1998) and Najmabadi (1991).

As discussed in chapter 3, the political project of the Saudi state as "modernization within an Islamic framework" (Al-Rasheed 2002:10) has employed a number of visible symbols, including the image of Saudi women as "the ideal Muslim woman" (Doumato 1992:33), to attain the political project of authenticity, a common strategy in the MENA region, as argued by Kandiyoti (1991a, 2004). Although the impact of this ideology on women's work was first suggested by Doumato (1992), this chapter develops this ideal type to provide

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further theoretical understanding of Saudi women and to reveal the current/recent situation in the labour market,.

11.1.1 The Emergence of the Islamic Political Project and Women's Work in the Pre-Boom Era:

In the early stage of state building from the 1930s to 1950s, work experiences of women in 'Asir indicated very limited influence of the state's image of the ideal Muslim woman. At this time, the state was in the process of nation building, establishing its bureaucratic systems and infrastructures from scratch, yet burdened with a meager economy. As such, the agricultural products of 'Asir were vital for the state and were collected through the "*Zakah*"¹⁴⁵ (Ben-Jarais 2004). The limited intervention of the state on women's roles left space for other factors to take influence, such as the economic need for women's work, local Asiri culture and its adherence to the Shafi'i Islamic school of thought, along with tribal and class classifications and norms. As discussed in chapters 6 and 7, traditional agriculture as the main economic activity in 'Asir was practiced by the whole family as a unit, and involved the majority of women from various socio-economic backgrounds in cultivation activities in addition to performing household work. Only urban upper class and some middle class women in the heart of Abha were excluded from agricultural work. A few women of this group performed paid work, such as a seamstress or a *Kuttab*¹⁴⁶ teacher for a short period, while landless working class women worked as farm labourers, domestic workers, peddlers, shopkeepers, qatt painters and singers. The economic need of the state, community and families for women's economic participation, as argued by Hijab (1988, 2001), reduced gender segregation and socio-cultural barriers for women's work and mobility, all of which were recognized as major symbols of the specificity of 'Asiri culture by historians (Hamzah 1951; Philby 1952; Rafe'a 1954) who visited the region in the 1930s and 1940s.

Although Wahhabi doctrine entered the region of 'Asir with its scholars on integration with the Saudi state in 1921 (Shaker 1981; Al-Na'ami 1999; Ben-Jarais 2002), its impact on women's role did not become clear until the mid-1950s when the state became an equal

¹⁴⁵ See glossary

¹⁴⁶ See glossary

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partner with international oil companies, which sharply increased the state revenue (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Rumaihi 1995; Al-Rasheed 2010). Economic improvement not only emphasized the political and economic status of the Saudi state, but also made the implementation of the Islamic project obtainable. The social scene, as discussed in chapters 2 and 4, was open for Wahhabis to implement their thoughts. The state accepted Wahhabi opposition to girls' education throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Al-Baadi 1982; Al-Munajjed 1997; Hamdan 2005; Doumato 2000), encouraged the Wahhabi in their definition of the Islamic model of women that emphasized complete veiling, strict gender roles, exclusion of women from public life and a firm view of gender segregation as discussed in chapter 4 (Al-Jurisi 1999; Ben Baz cited in Al-Bar 1981). This explains the confrontations between women and religious police (CPVP¹⁴⁷) in the city market in Abha, as discussed in chapter 7, when Wahhabis began to enforce their new concepts regarding gender relations. "What is a *Mahram*", a first generation woman replied to the *metawe'a*¹⁴⁸ when he asked why her male guardian (*Mahram*) did not bring the crops to market instead of her. A similar question "what is this new religion" was raised by a character in Al-Hasher's novel (2009:136) which captures the early spread of Wahhabiya thought into 'Asir. However, with time, Wahhabi discourse, through preaching and enforcement by the religious police, gradually convinced women in 'Asir that their old thoughts and lifestyles showed an ignorance of Islamic principles, which has parallels with the Wahhabi view of religious contexts in the Arabian emirates prior to their movement as explained by Al-Rasheed (2007: 22-23).

While this discourse succeeded in excluding women from all newly established state agencies, gradually forcing village women to withdraw from the city market, urban working class women were left to continue their work, although marginalized, with restrictions being placed on new entrants. However, in some distant villages, the spread of the new discourse was not apparent until the late 1970s or early 1980s when 'Asiri young men graduated from the Islamic University in Abha and contributed to enforcing Wahhabi doctrine. This era witnessed the gradual withdrawal of rural women from public life due to

¹⁴⁷ See Abbreviations.

¹⁴⁸ *Mutawe'a* is a member of religious police (see glossary).

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the implementation of the ideal Islamic woman's image, an image adopted by the state and legitimized by the Wahhabi school.

11.1.2 Dominance of the Islamic Project and Women's Work in the Boom Era:

In the boom era, the modern and Islamic political project became more significant for the Saudi state, not only inside the country to unify people of different regions but, as discussed in chapter 2, to stress its religio-political status in confrontation with the expansion of Arab nationalism and socialist ideologies spreading in the MENA region (Al-Rasheed 2010; Al-Naqeeb 2008). The circumstances of the Cold War in this era and the growing relationship between the KSA, the USA and the west emphasized the importance of the Islamic project, as discussed by Al-Naqeeb (2008) and Al-Rasheed (2010), while the rapid economic growth urged modernization. Within this context, the Saudi state developed the political project of modernization within an Islamic framework (Al-Rasheed 2010:10). While modernization and Islamic principles based on Wahhabi's definitions were bound to encounter many blocked roads, both elements were fundamental for the Saudi state to meet its political and economic as well as its ideological needs. This dichotomy has been greatly reflected in Saudi women as the marker of the political project.

This era represents a turning point in the history of Saudi women as girls' education was established and a large number of educated women were integrated into employment in gender-segregated parts of the public sector. Nevertheless, women's education, employment and their social and economic rights became restricted by a number of patriarchal state policies that regulated every aspect of women's lives, such as the guardianship rule "*Mahram*", *Wakil*, ban on an independent identity card for women and the ban on women's driving. The attempts of the state to compromise between modernization and the Wahhabi view of women's role can be summed up as a policy of controlled inclusion or to borrow Sharabi's term (1988:4) "modernized patriarchy" in his discussion of neo-patriarchal societies, within which he argues that the encounters between modernity and patriarchy applies equally not only to macrostructures, but also to microstructures, such as the family and individual, as in the case of Saudi women. These new restrictions came to represent the characteristics of the Muslim woman according to Wahhabi interpretations of Islam. They

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succeeded in turning patriarchal norms that were previously restricted to urban upper class women from a social discourse to a gender regime (Connell 2009); one that excluded women from the majority of private and public organizations, and concentrated them in a few gender segregated fields serving other women, such as in education and social affairs. Even girls' education, although considered a major modernization project, became part of the Wahhabi domain of control which covered socio-cultural matters, as explained by Al-Torki and Bagader (2006) and Al-Rasheed (2007), while remaining detached from the economic and political domains. This dichotomy of the state project reflects what Sharabi (1988:4) calls "Neo-Patriarchy" in which the society is "neither modern nor traditional".

Although the rapidly growing Saudi economy was facing a massive shortage of labour, which as argued by Hijab (1988) is a major condition for women's involvement in employment, the political project in Saudi society placed greater emphasis on forming women's position in the labour market. The experience of boom generation women coincides with Kandiyoti (1991a) and Boserup (2007) who argue that the Islamic project associated with oil wealth enabled the Saudi state to meet its economic needs through foreign labour, while women were segregated into educational and social affairs institutions. In contrast, during that era the same economic need was met differently by other oil exporter countries with modernity projects, such as Iraq, which urged women to be involved in all economic sectors and filled only the remaining jobs with foreign labour (Joseph 1991; Kandiyoti 1991a; Al-Ali 2007).

Another side of Neo-Patriarchy is economic dependency, which in KSA resulted from the economic transformations from self-sufficiency to dependency on exporting natural resources (Karshenas and Moghadam 2001; Al-Rumaihi 1995b; Sharabi 1988). Within this "Rentier economy" Al-Naqeeb (2008:105), traditional economic activities from the pre-boom era, such as agriculture, industry and services, were contracted, forcing women working in these fields to withdraw and adopt the role of housewives. While modernization created limited work opportunities for uneducated women, new work opportunities in the public sector, the oil industry, private sector and the army were exclusively integrating men (Al-Shahrani, 1996; Al-Sakran and Muneer 2006; MEP 1980, 1985). The high wages in this era enabled families to depend on one breadwinner, reinforcing the Wahhabi view of appropriate gender roles.

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This strict view of women's limited role in public life was expected to be relaxed with the increasing numbers of educated women, expansion of the new middle class of liberal professionals, and the rapid modernization process throughout the 1960s and 1970s. However, this was not the case; the Islamic image of Saudi women became even more rigid after the Saudi Islamic political project was strongly contested through the siege of Makkah's mosque in 1979 by radical Wahhabis opposing modernization followed shortly by the Islamic revolution in Iran, which represented Iran as a competing Islamic leader in the region (Al-Rasheed 2010; Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Yamani 2006). As a result, the speed of modernization was reduced, and the Islamic model of woman became more clearly defined.

11.1.3 Contestations of the Modern/Islamic Project and Women's Work in the Post-boom Era:

In the post-boom era, although the state still employs the symbolic image of the modern Muslim woman, this image became characterized as ambiguous (Connell 1990:519) and contradictory (Kandiyoti 2004:56). The state view of women's role became ambiguous, as some policies reflected the state's continuous commitment to the Wahhabi interpretation of the Islamic element, while other policies were based on a growing modernity, and women's employment policies varied between inclusion and marginalization. For example, in the main field of women's work, education, female teachers have been marginalized by the transformation of new teaching jobs to underemployed work. On the other hand, women have been encouraged to enter the health sector - a non-gender segregated field - through the establishment of Nursing and Medical colleges for women, and the offer of good wages and benefits to women entering this sector. This inconsistency is also seen in the Saudization scheme, which was first called for in the third development plan (1980) to counter unemployment and the rising numbers of foreign workers. For although Saudization achieved some success in the educational field, it fell severely short in other government sectors, such as in higher education, health, and private sectors, as numbers of foreign labourers have been increasing with an annual growth rate of 2.4% (MEP 2005: 176). This in particular undermined the developments achieved by expanding higher

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education majors for women in the late 1990s and 2000s. Despite new subjects being added to the curriculum at several women's teachers' colleges and universities, no new work opportunities were created to absorb even the first batch of women graduates of these new majors.

Contradictions also expand from the national to the global level. In 2000, the Saudi state ratified the CEDAW convention (UN 2007c), and while some developments have been achieved, the fundamental patriarchal policies created in the boom era still remain to restrict women's access to education, employment, mobility, and/or the establishment of private enterprises¹⁴⁹.

Three factors might provide an understanding of this ambiguity and contradictions in the state's political project in the post-boom era. The first is the shifting economy from "affluent to austerity" as discussed by Al-Raheed (2010:130). The second is socio-cultural barriers represented in Wahhabi discourse as the official doctrine of the Saudi state, and the third is the contradictory ideologies of different pressure groups that influence the state. These three factors will be briefly outlined.

First, the recession economy associated with the rapid demographic growth, discussed in chapter 2, has led to the reconstruction of women's employment. As Moghadam (2003:67) argues "what the state gives, the state can take away". The state, as an employer, has replaced the high wages and benefits of teaching jobs in the boom era with temporary contracts providing lower wages and benefits and limited rights. With the decline in living standards, women have been forced to accept the underemployment status to escape unemployment. This is in line with Beechy's argument (1977) that women are the first to be excluded in times of recession to become a reserve army and a threat to male and foreign labour. However, the Saudi economy has recovered since 2004 with the dramatic increase in the price of oil reaching its highest point in history, exceeding \$140 per barrel in 2008 (Inflation Data 2009). Although this has enabled the state to repay much of its debt from the 1990s and embark on some extensive development programmes (Niblock 2006; Al-Rasheed 2010), very few reforms have been achieved in terms of employment.

¹⁴⁹ For further details see section 11.2.1

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The second factors women's limited work opportunities by Wahhabi discourse that opposed the expansion of women's employment, as was the case in the boom era. However, it is important to note the declining authority of the Wahhabi school in the post-boom era over its two main resources of power - people and the state, as argued by Doumato (1999). While this discourse is still adopted by a large number of women and their families, an increasing number of women have defied some Wahhabi principles through working in non-gender segregated fields, in outlying areas and joining international scholarship; these women have turned to a moderate interpretation of Islam following other Islamic scholars or new moderate Wahhabis. At the same time, despite the strong relationship between the Saudi state and the Wahhabi school, in the post boom era the authority given to Wahhabis has been reduced since the aftermath of the Gulf War, September 11 and War on Terror. This was first sparked by the state when it ended Wahhabi control over girls' education in 2000 (Hamdan 2005), followed by the expansion of women's employment in the health sector, and then the approval of women work in shopping centers in 2004 (Ministry of Work 2006). Another example is the underemployment condition of teachers, although created by the Wahhabi administration of DGE in the early 1990s; teachers' conditions have not improved since the administration was given to the Ministry of Education in 2000. Hence, it is clear that Wahhabis are not policymakers, but one of the state's effective resources to form and implement the political project.

The third factor explaining the ambiguity and contradictions of the political project in the post-boom era refers to the paradoxical ideologies of external and internal pressure groups. On the local level, calls for reform by Saudi liberal intellectuals and moderate Islamic scholars became difficult to ignore in an era referred to by Al-Torki (2000:225) as "the emergence of participatory demands and halting political reform". On the international level, the influence of the global gender order became more evident. The increasing influence of feminist calls for gender equality on international organizations, such the UN, OIL and WTO and international conventions, such as the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000), CEDAW (UN 1980, 2007c) and Human Rights (UN 2008), impacted significantly on gender policies for all members of these organizations, including Saudi Arabia. Ratifying these conventions consequently required economic reform and increasing the role of women in the labour market. These reform discourses received even more emphasis from the USA and the West as part of the War on Terror, which required tackling

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some aspects of the socio-cultural scene, including education, women's and human rights. However, some of these reforms contradict the political project of the Islamic government, including the symbolic image of "the ideal Muslim woman".

While the state might have withdrawn some of the powers it had yielded to the Wahhabis, seen by some liberals as the birth of a new era of separation between the state and the religious institution (Al-Dakheel 2010), the state still gives the Wahhabis great consideration as their dominance for decades over the cultural scene had a wide support base throughout the kingdom's social fabric, making them a vital element on which national and regime security is grounded. It is the ambivalent influences that all these different power groups hold on the Saudi state which has resulted in the ambiguous image of Saudi women in the post-boom era. Contradictory policies varying from more rights and access into new fields of work to marginalization in other fields all show that women's image and the Islamic project in general are in a transitional stage. Despite this image being tilted toward the liberal camp, it is still within the tight hold of the Wahhabi doctrine, restricted by the interests of powerful capitalists, and let down by a deeply corrupt bureaucracy¹⁵⁰.

11.2 The State's Mechanisms for Implementing the Model of Muslim Women

According to Connell (2009), the state as a gender regime has the power to change and reform; equally it has the power to retain things the way they are. This study indicates the significant role of the state as the core factor in shaping and developing women's work across three generations of women in Abha. In the process of developing the Islamic project of the state in which the image of woman is a key, the state has employed various mechanisms which can be divided into two types: theoretical and executive. Theoretical mechanisms aim to implement Wahhabi interpretation of Islam through extensive preaching of Wahhabi scholars across many communication platforms, such as mosques

¹⁵⁰ While corrupted bureaucracy has always been a grievance in KSA, it was not until recently, after the Jeddah floods that occurred in 2009 and 2010 that the dramatic mismanagement of development projects in the country due to bureaucracy could no longer be denied now. Proof to this problem, and in an effort to absorb people's anger, the state established a government agency for anti-corruption in Feb 2011 (Arabic.CNN 2011).

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and the media, and through formulating educational policy and curriculum. Executive mechanisms aim to enforce the practice of Wahhabi thoughts through religious police (CPVP), justice system, state policies and gender segregation system. These mechanisms have been very effective not only in implementing Wahhabi discourse, but in constructing the image of the Saudi woman as the role model for the Muslim Woman, an icon of the Islamic project of the Saudi state. This section discusses some of these mechanisms that are the most effective on the in the area of women's employment and public role in general:

11.2.1 State Policies

The image of Saudi women has been shaped by a number of gendered and gender-neutral economic policies that have impacted on women's work. By state policies this chapter means either the state's implementation of certain policies, its neglect in the implementation of other vital policies, or leaving the floor to the Wahhabis. Throughout the three historical stages, state policies regarding women's issues have been correlated with economic conditions and Wahhabi discourse, which has varied from one stage to another.

State economic policies although appearing gender-neutral; have always marginalized women's participation in the Saudi labour market. This started with the state transformation from self-sufficiency to an oil-export economy which, as other studies on the MENA region indicate (Al-Naqeeb 2008; Al-Rumaihi 1983; Smith 2003; Karshenas and Moghadam 2001), marginalized traditional economic activities. Consequently, women who had provided services, such as fetching water and firewood, painting houses or selling local produce, found their services or products replaced with better and cheaper ones. They also found themselves competing with cheaper male foreign labour, with no state policies to protect them or their products. In addition, the marginalization of traditional agriculture in favour of large scale agriculture associated with environmental challenges, such as drainage or irrigation projects (Metz and Chapin 1992), has forced rural women to withdraw from the fields and solely occupy the role of housewife.

In the boom era, the state policy of depending on foreign labour supported the patriarchal policies that segregated women into a few employment fields, and contributed to the high rate of unemployment among the post-boom generation. Regardless of the Saudization scheme since the 1980s (MEP 1985), lack of mechanisms for implementing this policy has

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resulted in limited achievement. Furthermore, lack of labour unions or women's movements has contributed to framing the limited work opportunities for women and the poor condition of the available jobs.

Gendered policies have represented a major mechanism for implementing the political projects of modernization and the Islamic state since the beginning of the boom era. These policies reformed "classic patriarchy" to become what has been termed "neo-patriarchy" (Sharabi 1988). As discussed in chapter 9, in order to pursue modernization, the state created a number of inclusionary policies, including high wages and benefits, to attract educated women to employment in the public sector, these were necessary to counter the ideology of domesticity which was common among urban upper and middle class families that most educated women came from.

Nevertheless, policies that apply the Islamic element of the political project in Saudi society have become the core of the gender order. Women's integration into education and employment was associated with patriarchal control policies that substituted patriarchal codes on women's behaviour and movement by family codes within classic patriarchal society as explained by various writers (Abu-Odeh 1996; Al-Mosaed 1993; Moghadam 1992; Dodd 1973¹⁵¹). The Saudi state created a package of patriarchal state policies that circumscribed women's social, economic and movement rights, mainly through the guardianship rule "*Mahram*", legal proxy "*Wakil*", banning women's access to public organizations, ban on women's driving associated with absence of public transportation in small cities in particular, and ban on women's independent identity cards, which ran until 2001. These regulations¹⁵¹ have been represented as Islamic and supported by Wahhabi interpretation (Al-Fozan 2009; Al-Othaimin 2004; Al-Juraisi 1999) arguing that these rules embody the characteristics of ideal Muslim women that practice complete hijab including avoiding the public arena and mixing with men, and gender roles within which women concentrate on their role as mothers and wives.

The relationship between Saudi women and the state is constructed through these patriarchal policies that imply that women are second class citizens, not seen as independent individuals, but as family members, which is the case in most MENA societies

¹⁵¹ Further discussion on state policies is in the following chapter under empowerment section.

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(Joseph 2000; Mughni 2000). Applying Yuval-Davis's analysis (2008:78) of citizenship on patriarchal policies shows that female citizenship in KSA is related to nature and the private sphere, considering women as passive citizens, while men belong to the public and civilized spheres and are active citizens who play the role of the moderator between women and the state. Al-Torki (2000) contends that out of the three aspects of Marshall's definition of citizenship, which includes social, civil and political rights, only the social element applies to Saudi women. However, this study indicates that patriarchal policies even restrict women's access to their social rights of education, employment, marriage and divorce which require the consent of a male guardian. The legal position of women has become contradictory, although in theory it is based on Islamic Shari'a which entitled women to many rights since the 7th century, as also contended by other social studies (Al-Torki 2000; Yamani 1996; Fakhro 1996) and Islamic studies (Abu-Shaqqah 1991a), in reality these rights have become restricted by state policies based on the patriarchal Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

In the post-boom era, state policies reflect the ambiguity of the political project towards women's role. Although "contradictory" has been a major characteristic of gender policies in both the boom and post-boom eras, in the latter both modernity and Islamic elements have been challenged by new policies. Modernity has been restricted by the marginalization of women's work into gender segregated fields and new forms of vulnerable temporary employment, such as the 'Clause 105', the Clause of Anti-illiteracy and substitute teaching. At the same time, the Islamic elements, according to the Wahhabi school, have been challenged by the breakdown of gender segregation, as women increasingly become integrated into non-gender segregated fields, and the 'concrete ceiling' to achieve senior positions has begun to be broken down by appointing a number of women to top administrative jobs, such as Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Education in 2009 (Abdul-Haq 2009). Hence, these contradictory policies have created a state of uncertainty among young women in particular, during this stage of reconstructing the political project, yet they are taking advantage of some of the new choices.

11.2.2 Division of Labour

The gendered division of labour has been employed as a major mechanism for implementing the desired image of the Saudi modern Muslim woman as an integral part of the overall political Islamic project of the Saudi state. Gender segregation was at its strongest in the boom era, when the political project, Wahhabi doctrine, and oil revenues were all at their peak. As a result, women's work in this oil boom era was strictly gender segregated, while in the pre- and post-boom eras, women's work varied between mixed gender and gender segregated fields, though to different degrees.

In the pre-boom era in 'Asir, implementation of the political project of the state was limited to excluding women from the newly established bureaucratic system. 'Asiri women continued to work in agriculture and the town market due to the economic need for their participation. Although farming in 'Asir was considered as "ploughing cultivation" (Boserup 2007:12) in which men were the predominant labour, 'Asir's women performed an active role within the family as a production unit; the segregation of men's work and women's work in the fields was not clear because of the enormous demand for labour. Class and tribal norms played a fundamental role in constructing the nature of women's paid work; the higher the socio-economic status of a woman the more her paid work opportunities were restricted and vice versa.

With the growing role of the political project in the boom era, the division of labour became completely determined by the state and embodied the Wahhabi interpretation of women's work only as a necessity, and only in gender segregated fields to serve other women (Ben-Baz cited in Al-Bar: 223-228). This supports Boserup's argument (2007) that employing a small number of professional women in patriarchal societies does not aim to empower women, but to assert gender segregation in society, as there will be no need for the majority of women to have contact with male professionals. Gender segregation policies have been implemented in a manner that Walby (1990:23) refers to as patriarchal strategies in employment: exclusion and segregation. These policies exclude women from the majority of public and private organizations in Saudi society that are completely dominated by men, while women are segregated into a few caregiving fields, mainly education and social work; reflecting a strict implementation of patriarchal stereotypes of women and their work abilities as explained by Anker (2001).

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In line with Hartman's (1982) and Hakim's (2001, 2004) arguments that horizontal and vertical segregation take place at the same time, within the rigid Saudi horizontal gender-segregation system, Saudi women were completely excluded from the top senior positions, addressed in this study as the 'concrete ceiling' rather than Wirth's (2001) concept of the "glass ceiling" regarding women's exclusion from top managerial jobs as a global phenomenon. However, the complete separation between men and women in Saudi workplaces created a unique gender-segregation system where women had the chance to reach top positions in female sections and were not confined to lower jobs, also found in Al-Husaini's study (1988) of professional women in Jeddah. However, a major complaint of women in administrative positions has been what Wright and Birkelund 1995:410) address as "authority gap", as decision-making is dominated by men's sections and women's responsibility is supervising the implementation of men's decisions.

Rigid gender segregation in the post-boom era hit women hardest as their concentration in the educational field made them the first marginalized group in the economic recession, in line with the feminist notion of "women last in, first out" (Walby 1990). The increasing supply of graduates since the early 1990s enabled employers in both public and private sectors to reduce the cost of labour and create new jobs with underemployment conditions. This dramatic change shifted women's work in the educational field from what dual labour market theory called "a primary sector" that provided high income and benefits in the boom era to "a secondary sector" with temporary contracts, including low wages and limited rights (Witz 2007:248). The other option left for third generation women, other than underemployment, was unemployment, which Marx and many others argue is the reason behind people's acceptance of poor work conditions in the first place (Walby 1990; Tong 2009). These poor conditions of women's employment have been justified by patriarchal views of gender roles that consider paid work as a secondary role in women's lives, and give priority to men's employment. At the same time the shortage of labour in the health sector and the relative decline of Wahhabi authority, have stimulated the state to generate inclusionary policies to involve Saudi women in the health sector, making it the second most popular work field for women in the post-boom era.

These contradictory conditions of women's work in the public sector reflect the ambivalence of the political project and the state policies between inclusion and marginalization. Women work in the private sector demonstrates further paradoxical and

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ambiguous views of the role of Saudi woman. Globally, the private sector represents a firmer gender regime than the public sector (Connell 2009; Diprete and Soul 1988; Baron and Bielby 1984), yet in the Saudi private sector women are not only segregated but almost entirely excluded, apart from a few organizations¹⁵². In Abha, private schools represent the main private institutions recruiting Saudi women. The pressure of high unemployment rates has enforced a hesitant Saudization policy, and segmentation of labour within the private sector became determined by both gender and nationality, based on benefits reaped from each group. Foreign male workers are at the top of this hierarchical segmentation, while Saudi women come at the bottom, behind Saudi male and foreign female workers.

Some studies (Al-Torki and Bagader 2006; Ibrahim 1985) explain employers favouring of foreign labourers in Saudi society by the sponsorship system "*Kafeel*", which gives employers great authority over employees. My study reveals other benefits for employers in female enterprises, such as private schools and beauty salons, who preferred employing illegal female workers entering the country accompanying their husbands as dependents. Not only did they represent cheap labour, they also saved employers additional fees for labour visas and importation, as well as this group's illegal work status limits their work choices, thus giving employers further authority. This provided a pragmatic justification for preferring foreign female workers over Saudi women, rather than lack of skills and positive attitudes towards work, as argued by Madhi and Barrientos (2003) and Shah (2006). Another reason is that the segmentation of labour, as argued by Marx (Beechy 1977; Walby 1990), represents a substantial strategy to control the labour force, gaining higher benefits for capitalists. In the Saudi context this form of segmentation contributes to understanding the inadequate implementation of the Saudization scheme.

11.2.3 Education and Women's Work

Education is a considerable strategy for socialization and producing model citizens. In the Saudi context, this "model citizen", as Doumato (2003) explains, has been through public education directed in a manner that fulfills the state's political agenda - with both its

¹⁵² As discussed in chapter 4, women were working in ARAMCO, the oil company in the Eastern province, since the 1960s, due to a special permit from the state. Some banks established female branches in bigger cities since the mid-1980s (Al-Munajjed 1997). However, as discussed in chapter 10, in Abha only two small branches were established in the early 2000s.

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modern and Islamic elements - by homogenizing religious discourse, culture, and national identity among its heterogeneous citizens. For women in particular, the influence of the educational system reflects the development of the state's political project and its characteristics in each historical stage.

The economic conditions in the pre-boom era limited the role of what little education there was. Al-Mutawe'a Kuttab in Abha could only provide the small number of urban upper class girls with basic religious knowledge, and only one of them became a teacher in the first private school in the city¹⁵³. Hence, within such a classic patriarchal society, mothers were responsible for training and preparing their daughters for future work, paid or unpaid, depending on the economic needs of the community and family. Tribal and class status of the family also were determining factors, as girls from rural and working class families were more engaged with hard tasks that limited their opportunity to enroll into girls' schools in the 1960s.

Women as the "inner sanctum" in MENA culture (Kandiyoti 2004:50) has been in the spotlight of debate between liberals and traditionalists since the 1940s in Saudi society, initiated by the establishment of girls' education throughout the 1940-1950s. The result of this prolonged debate could be seen as a success of modernity groups; nevertheless the new state Department of Girls' Education (DGE) was one of the most rigid gender regimes for forty years (1960-2000). The dominance of Wahhabi scholars over the administration of this department enabled them to implement their patriarchal interpretation of the Islamic model of woman, as discussed in chapter 4, through the school curriculum, policies and gender segregation systems. As their educational policy emphasized women's role as housewives or in caregiving jobs servicing other women, female students were directed to these areas as their only choices. Hence, while every possible effort was made to establish and develop teaching schools and colleges¹⁵⁴ in Abha, other majors did not exist. Even

¹⁵³ Al-Qara'awi girls school ran from 1956-1959 as discussed in chapter 7 and 8.

¹⁵⁴ According to some of the pioneer teachers among the sample of this study, teaching programmes were attached at first to secondary schools " *Ma'ahd Al-Mu'alemat Al-Mutawisit*"(S/TP) graduating its first class in 1967. This kind of schools developed in 1972 to high school level " *Ma'ahd Al-Mu'alemat Al-Thanawi*"(HS/TP) to meet the shortage of teachers in this era. With the increasing number of teachers in 1979, a Teachers college was established in Abha and then developed to a bachelor degree level in 1981. In 1997, the kingdom has 31 teachers college al through the country (Al-Dakheel 2000: 149).

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nursing, which fits the patriarchal traditional stereotype of women's work as care-giving, did not fit the Wahhabi view that opposes non-gender segregated jobs. Hence, nursing was neglected and only one nursing school was established, in 1983, in the whole Asir region. This shows that it is not merely socio-cultural barriers, but also the political project of the state that marginalizes education for the health sector and fills jobs with foreign labour. Indeed, the education sector in the boom era explicitly reflected the contradictions of the political project of modern and Islamic. Although it provided Saudi women with two fundamental resources of empowerment, education and employment, as a gender regime it enforced a strict gender segregation system that integrated women merely into necessary fields. More importantly, this department (DGE) indoctrinated boom and post-boom female generations with a patriarchal interpretation of the Islamic model of woman, creating what Jonson (1983:21) addresses as "female conservatism" unless they were subject to other cultural influences.

In the post-boom era, the ambiguity of the political project has increased the contradiction between the educational system and its production of labour unable to meet the demands of the labour market. Another instance of modernization achievement in this era has been the end of Wahhabi control over girls' education and the integration of girls' schools with the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Hamdan 2000), as well as the integration of teachers' colleges with state universities¹⁵⁵. Higher education in general has expanded in this era, and in 'Asir, a number of teachers' colleges and branches of universities were unified under King Khalid University in 2003 (KKU 2011), in parallel with the expansion of private colleges. Thus, new choices in higher education became available through medical education¹⁵⁶ and new majors¹⁵⁷ in KKU, preparing students to work in the health sector, banks or corporations.

In 2006, King Abdullah's international scholarship programme provided graduate and postgraduate studies for more than 100,000 male and female students at international

¹⁵⁵ In 2007, all Teachers' Colleges in Asir were integrated with the University of King Khalid in Abha in 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Nursing College was established in 1999 (Al-Fawaz 2007) and integrated with KKU in 2007 (KKU 2011), and Medical school in KKU started to accept female students in 2004.

¹⁵⁷ Such as information system and biology and another 11 major established in the last few years (KKU 2011).

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universities (MHE 2011), which some young women from Abha joined hoping to gain better chances for productive jobs. Young women taking advantage of every new opportunity demonstrates that women's concentration in teaching jobs in the boom era was due to the limitation of alternative choices.

However, despite this development in the educational abilities of the post-boom generation, employment in the educational sector was reduced to secondary status in the early 1990s. Even after integration with the Ministry of Education and economic growth since 2004, teachers still face underemployment conditions. Unemployment has been the other option not only for graduates of majors established since the 1980s, but even for graduates with a First Class degree in new majors in Abha, such as Information Systems, Biology and Home Economics. In 2011, the media (Meccawy 2012, 2011a; Bakhit 2011) began to discuss the unemployment also being experienced by postgraduates and graduates of King Abdullah scholarships. This paradox between women's educational abilities and the availability of work opportunities, especially with recent economic growth in the country, is seen by many as incomprehensible, but reflects the ambiguous political project that has no explicit view towards women's role in Saudi society.

11.3 Conclusion

Women's work in Saudi society has been constructed by a complex of factors that varied from one historical stage to another and this chapter has argued that the impact of these factors is not equal. The state, as the core of society in the MENA region, has been the central factor since it has the power to formulate the political project, including the image of woman, which has been mobilized successfully as a marker of the Modern/Islamic project in Saudi Arabia. Despite the significant role of the economic need for labour in shaping women's position in the Saudi labour market, it has been a state decision whether or not to accomplish this need by national women or foreign labour. At the same time cultural factors, including Wahhabi discourse and patriarchal norms, have been the most visible factor. This factor restricted women's work most in the boom era, but had less impact during the meager economy of the pre-boom era and is much contested in the recent post-boom era, when the state reduced its definitive support for this doctrine.

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The Saudi state as a gender regime has formulated and mobilized its policies, gender segregation system and educational order as mechanisms for implementing the political project of modern within an Islamic framework, with an emphasis on constructing an image of Saudi woman that symbolizes this project. Hence, researchers should broaden their analysis when studying Saudi women and not focus merely on economic or socio-cultural factors. Policy makers cannot put all the blame for the low rate of women's participation on socio-cultural barriers, but need to focus primarily on comprehending the political project of the state and its view about women's role in society.

12. Conclusions “The Circumscribed Working Women”

One of the aims of this study has been to explore the impact of various forms of work on women's lives, particularly how work, paid or unpaid, shaped their collective identity and the extent to which work, as a major pathway for empowerment, has supported women's status and their access to new and existing rights. The analysis chapters explored and provided in-depth analysis of women's work, its nature, division and interaction with issues of class, identity and empowerment in each generation separately. Chapter 11 discussed the development of the political project of the Saudi state as a modern and Islamic society and how this project has shaped women's work through various mechanisms.

This chapter will discuss the impact of different forms of work on women across the three generations arguing that this relationship is twofold: firstly, the diversity among women in how they respond to different types of work; and secondly, the common impact of work on all women in Abha in forming their collective identity and influencing their empowerment across the three generations.

This study, if not the first, is one of the pioneer social studies on women in the region of Asir. It aims to provide a preliminary theorization in the light of previous studies of women in the MENA region in the hope that this will contribute to further theoretical understanding of Saudi women's lives and the main mechanisms that construct their experience. At a time when the state is advocating its reforms programme¹⁵⁸, my contribution as a researcher will provide a comprehensive picture of women's work in Abha within the region of Asir which, while it has some specificity due to regional aspects, shares many national aspects, especially among boom and post-boom generations, as will be explained later. A theoretical understanding will provide policy makers with a clearer vision of women's position in the labour market and what is needed to improve their situation and meet the aim of women's empowerment, a major objective of the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000) and of modernizing Saudi society.

¹⁵⁸ Since King Abdullah came to the throne in 2005, the Saudi government has been advocating its reform programme, including women's rights (discussed further in this chapter).

12.1 Diversity among Women and their Work Experiences

Diversity among women has become a fundamental element of contemporary gender studies not only within Western societies (Davis 2008; Zack 2007; Yuval-Davis 2006) but on a global scale between women of the north and those of the south as discussed by Mohanty (1997) and even in the MENA region (Moghadam 2003). My study indicates that women's experiences, even in one country or in one city such as Abha, are not uniform and homogenous but diverse, based on a number of factors of social division such as age, class, tribal origin, education, geographical location, field of work and attitude of male guardian, which construct multiple positioning for Saudi women. The Islamic political project of the state has succeeded in unifying Saudi women from different regions and various socio-economic circumstances under the image of the ideal Muslim woman which, as a result, reduced a certain specificity of women in Asir such as their economic role in the pre-boom era. However, it is vital to note that women's responses and interactions with such merging factors have not been the same. The experience of an elderly, non-tribal, working class, illiterate woman working as a shopkeeper in the city market is dissimilar to that of a boom generation, tribal, upper class, educated woman working as a headmistress of a girls' school. It is this latter image of educated, professional women who belong mainly to upper and middle class families that is the dominant image of Saudi women in social studies (Al-Husaini 1982; Al-Munajjed 1997; Doumato 1999; Hijab 2001). Some of these studies argue that Saudi women have no economic need for employment (Al-Husaini 1982; Al-Nemer 1982; Hijab 2001), and Moghadam (2003:10) draws a luxurious picture of these women chauffeured to their jobs by migrant workers. This image applies merely to professional boom generation women who were encouraged to become involved in the educational sector through various state policies; yet it cannot be applied to uneducated first generation women who worked in poor income jobs, such as school janitors, prison guards or shopkeepers. Further, the image of high socio-economic status of professional women in the boom era does not apply to young women today who work under the conditions of temporary contracts with 40-60% of the original monthly wage of a teacher, a 50% expenditure on transportation if working in outlying villages, and with fewer job benefits and rights.

Social divisions construct women's experience not only among different generations, but also among women from the same generation. Women's work experience has always been

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determined by their social position across all historical stages in 'Asir. This relationship is equally clear in a poor economic situation as in the pre-boom era, as well as in the post-boom era when women have limited choices for employment. As discussed in chapters 6 and 7 women's work in the pre-boom era was determined by their class and tribal origin, as paid work was undertaken primarily by working class women. The nature of the job itself was determined by tribal norms, as most non-agricultural activities, such as manufacturing work and services, had low social status and were undertaken only by landless, non-tribal groups. In the boom era, economic transformation, the establishment of state-run girls' schools and access to employment in the public sector reconstructed the relationship between social stratification and women's paid work. Daughters of urban upper and middle class families, whose mothers performed only household work, represented the majority of students who became the first educated and working women in the public sector, while most of their peasant and working class counterparts lacked access to school or employment, as they were working with their mothers or were in charge of household work and childcare. The declining economic situation and employment conditions in the post-boom era have intensified the role of class again. The limited number of work opportunities has motivated young women to mobilize all available mechanisms, such as their families' social network "*Wastah*" based on class and tribal origin, to gain access to good employment. It is upper class women who are most capable of mobilizing such mechanisms, while working class and some middle class women are limited to underemployment or unemployment. Upper and middle class women also have financial support from their families to establish their own private enterprise, continue their post-graduate studies or just adopt the role of an "educated housewife" (Najmabadi 1998).

Another essential factor in constructing different work experiences among women is the geographical location of a woman's residence - in Abha, an 'Asiri village or in one of the bigger Saudi cities¹⁵⁹. The experience of first generation women in 'Asir, as a rural region, indicated a distinct economic role that involved the majority of this generation in the main economic activities, compared with women living in urban locations, whose experience of work was concentrated in the household, as concluded by other social studies in different

¹⁵⁹ The biggest Saudi cities are Riyadh, Jeddah, Eastern province and Makkah.

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parts of Saudi society¹⁶⁰ (Al-Torki 1986; Al-Baadi 1982), similar to the small number of urban upper class women in Abha. However, this situation reversed among boom and post boom generations. Just as rural women, especially in outlying villages in the boom era, had limited access to education and employment compared with women living in Abha, the latter had limited access to jobs compared with women in the cities. Although women's employment in Abha, as in other regions, was concentrated in the educational field, including 80% of women working in the public sector (Al-Dakheel 2000:295), the level of teachers' qualification in Abha was limited to the level of high school (HS/TP) until the late 1970s, although higher education in the big cities started in the 1960s (Al-Munajjed 1997). The regional gap within socio-economic development is a common phenomenon in the MENA region (Khoury and Moghadam 1995). The small number of women in the health sector can also be attributed to the late establishment of medical education¹⁶¹ in Abha, while this form of education had been established in Riyadh and Jeddah since 1975 (KSU 2011; KAAU 2011). An extremely small proportion of Saudi women work in the private sector, only 0.8% of the total number working in this sector (MPE 2010: 158), and in Abha only occurs in the post-boom generation, mainly in private schools and, more recently, in two small female bank branches, private hospitals and beauty salons.

This study emphasises the diversity among Saudi women, including those of Abha and how, despite being exposed to the same factors of change, women respond differently in each historical phase and in each group. Generalization has been a major problem of gender studies, opposed not only by black feminists (Huggins 1991; Day 1974) but also later by feminists from the South, or what is often called the Third World (Mohanty 1997). In this study I have tried to emphasize the heterogeneity among Saudi working women and to show that the stereotype of affluent women, who work primarily to fulfil their self-actualization, as suggested in some Middle Eastern studies (Moghadam 2003; Hijab 1988) and also in some Saudi studies (Al-Husaini 1982), cannot be applied to all Saudi women.

¹⁶⁰ This is also concluded from the absence of any information on first generation women's paid work in historical or social studies from other regions and even from oral history.

¹⁶¹ As discussed in chapter 10, the Nursing College was established in Abha in 1999 (Al-Fawaz 2007) and the girl's medical school in 2004 (KKU 2011).

12.2 Construction of National Identity of Women in 'Asir

Notwithstanding diversity within the female population in Abha, the political project of the modern Islamic state in Saudi society has enforced a single national identity for women in the state's search for distinct religio-political status in both local and international spheres. Gender studies (Kandiyoti 2004, 1991a; Moghadam 1994) argue that women in the MENA region have been employed as a marker of cultural and political projects that is either modern or authentic based on Islam. In Saudi society, Doumato (1992) refers woman's position to the symbolic image of women as the "Ideal Islamic Woman" supporting the broad project of the modern Islamic state.

Building on this, this section discusses the development of the relationship between women's work and their national identity. The ideal model has not only constructed women's work, as discussed in chapter 11, but has shaped women's national identity, which has not been static but dynamic across the three historical stages. Although the image of the ideal Muslim woman was a dominant element of national identity in the boom era, it was under construction in the pre-boom era, and has become contested in the post-boom era.

12.2.1 Traditional 'Asiri Identity

As an "agrarian classic patriarchal society" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 278), first generation women of Abha are characterized as "traditional women" (Moghadam 1994:3) with a high rate of illiteracy, fertility and economic dependence on men and holding no form of power or any public position. However, although women's traditional economic activities were mainly unpaid or provided subsistence income, their work experiences formed tough and confident women, invalidating some of the negative features of patriarchal stereotypes of women discussed by Anker (2001). As indicated in chapters 6 and 7, the work experience of this generation provided them with physical strength, a distinct braveness in facing dangerous situations, freedom of movement and the ability to travel independently and deal with the market, financial and social requirements. These characteristics of Asiri women reflect the specificity of their rural region, its Shafi'i interpretation of Islam and its authentic culture that was observed by historians (Hamzah 1951; Philby 1952; Shaker 1981) who visited the region in that era.

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The image of the ideal Islamic woman was not completely formed in the pre-boom era, and mechanisms for implementing the state's political project was left to the Wahhabi scholars and the religious police. Women saw themselves through a regional identity, including the three concepts of social solidarity; religion, territory, and ethnicity, as classified by (Jankowski 1986:193). Religion was naturally integrated with the rural 'Asiri culture and women identified themselves as 'Asiri Muslim women rather than ideal Islamic women. Indeed, even Holy Makkah at the time seemed so far away that they used to call it Sham¹⁶². Women's work was interlinked with religion and nature; daily work was based on the timing of the daily prayers and crop requirements, while occasional work was directed by religious events and agricultural seasons. These factors, in addition to the nature of work, shaped every aspect of women's lives, such as their costumes that met both the general Islamic guideline of hijab according to Al-Shafe'i doctrine (Al-Shafe'i 1990:89; Abu-Shaqqah (1991c) and the practicality of agricultural work. Hence, only urban housewives adopted the Ottoman style of hijab that included covering the face, but not within the household or among the social network, as confirmed by Philby (1952) and explained in chapter 2.

Among a homogenous tribal 'Arab population, such as 'Asir, tribal identity substitutes ethnic identity as the third aspect of social solidarity (Jankowski 1986). The tribe provides its members with protection and socio-economic status (Gellner 2005) and women in return enhance the tribe's status not only by preserving the honour¹⁶³ and prestige of the tribe¹⁶⁴, but its land¹⁶⁵ as well through agricultural work. This two-sided relationship built a strong tribal identity among this generation of women.

Women's awareness of gender hierarchy is also influenced by the nature of their work, the level of gender segregation and the economic need for their participation; the firmer the gender segregation, the more women have an awareness of gender hierarchy. This awareness was highest among urban upper class housewives whose domestic work was

¹⁶² Sham refers to the northern Arabic countries, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. This term is still used by first generation 'Asiris to refer to the north, while referring to the south as Yemen.

¹⁶³ Within patriarchal society, family honour is linked with the virtue of its female members (Abu-Odeh 1996; Moghadam 1992; Kabeer 1999).

¹⁶⁴ As women's personal honour symbolizes her family and tribe's honour.

¹⁶⁵ As explained in chapter 2, each tribe in Asir has its own territory divided between its branches "Asheera", which might be in one village or more (Al-Na'ami 1999).

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strictly horizontally and vertically gender segregated and was less observed among working class women. The latter group was treated with tolerance due to the economic need for their services. However, the lowest sense of gender hierarchy was among rural women, as the economic need for traditional agricultural labour reduced the level of gender segregation, although 'Asir was considered as "ploughing cultivation" (Boserup 2007:12), which is usually male dominant. Women performed many of the same activities as men; in fact many pointed to their role as more difficult as they worked both inside and outside the household.

In brief, the identity of first generation women reflects the specificity of the socio-economic structure of 'Asir. Although this generation holds more characteristics of traditional women in a classic patriarchal society, many were tough and confident and most of all enjoyed some rights that became restricted with modernization.

12.2.2 Contradictory National Identity

In the boom era, rapid socio-economic transformation repositioned the society from a "classic patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 1988: 278) to a "neo-patriarchy" (Sharabi 1988), and consequently women's collective identity in 'Asir transferred from a local, traditional model to a national model of the "modern Islamic woman". The latter image has been mobilized as an icon for the political project of the Saudi state, which Al-Rasheed (2007:15) presents as "modernise while remaining faithful to the authentic Islamic tradition".

This contradictory within the state's political project and the ideal model for Saudi women is reflected in the duality of women's identity as modern yet Islamic. Although a large number of women of the boom generation became educated and employed, their Islamic hijab was not relaxed as in other Muslim countries with secularist projects, such as Turkey (Kandiyoti 1991b) and pre-Islamic revolution Iran (Najmabadi 1991). In fact, women's involvement in employment was associated with the growing role of the ideal Islamic model as one of the main concerns of the Wahhabi school and as a symbol of the state's authentic project, as discussed in chapter 11. In this era, this discourse was enabled by the growing status of Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi dominance over the Department of Girls Education (DGE), as the main department in charge of women's education and employment. Within this gender regime, Wahhabi discourse was implemented not only

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through Islamic curricula, but through strict gender segregation and hijab, opposed even by other Islamic scholars, such as Al-Gazali (1990, 2009) and Abu-Shaqqah¹⁶⁶ (1991b).

Despite the influx of young educated women into the public sector, they were largely confined to the educational field, and women's work in the agricultural, industrial and private sectors became marginalized, forcing uneducated women to adopt the role of housewives. In addition, women's involvement in employment, as argued by a number of sociologists (Mernissi 1992; Bagader 2005; Boserup 2007), posed a threat for conservative groups who actively contributed to forming new patriarchal state policies, such as *Mahram*, *Wakil*, the ban on women accessing public organizations and on women's driving, all reflecting a distinctive solidarity between private and public patriarchy to reform the patriarchal structure by giving it a new, modern appearance characterized as "Neo-patriarchy" by Sharabi (1988:4).

Women's attitudes towards issues including employment have been built upon a number of specific models in MENA societies. Kandiyoti (2004) and Najmabadi (1991) classified these models as Islamic, western and westernized, which also apply to women in Abha, but also include a fourth, pre-Wahhabi 'Asiri model. The Islamic model is based on holy texts and the history of Muslim women in the "golden era" of the Prophet Muhammad in Al-Madinah in the 7th century, but is interpreted differently by Islamic schools. In Abha, women follow either Wahhabi or Shafe'i or other moderate schools. As discussed in chapter 4, the Wahhabi interpretation of women's hijab and role in public life is very restrictive. In addition, this discourse has a patriarchal stereotype of women similar to Anker's paradigm (2001). Women adopting Wahhabi thoughts refer to positive and negative features. The positive side focuses on the mother status in Islam, the caregiving nature of women and the image of women as the "jewels", to be hidden and protected, justifying strict gender roles and gender segregation. At the same time, rejection of new work opportunities in non-gender segregated fields or women's driving is justified by the negative stereotype of women as weak, vulnerable, sexually tempting "*Fitnah*" and in need of protection to prevent the spread of social ills in society. While conservative women refer to the Wahhabi interpretation to justify the recent conditions of women, liberal women

¹⁶⁶ Abu-Shaqqah specifies volume 3 of his 6 volumes book, on Women's liberation in the era of the Message of Islam, to discuss fundamentalist interpretations.

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oppose it and believe that Muslim women should play an active role in public life that accommodates a moderate interpretation.

The westernized/moderate model is the most controversial one, as conservative women and Wahhabi scholars address it as secularist or liberal and, although referring it to western influence, the term "westernized" is not common in KSA. At the same time, women with liberal views refer to this model as a moderate understanding of Islam and an acceptance of other cultures provided they do not contradict with main Islamic principles. These women allude to the experience of other Muslim countries in achieving a better compromise between Islam and modernity, especially other Arabian Gulf countries that have a socio-economic structure similar to KSA. However, the majority of women agree that the "western imperialist model" is not their aim, especially with the state of frustration and mistrust of the west resulting from cultural hegemony and continuous western intervention in the MENA region¹⁶⁷. In addition to previous models, women of Abha point to a model of Pre-Wahhabi 'Asiri. This model attributed 'Asiri women's freedom of movement, working within a less gender segregated system and not covering their faces in the pre-boom era, to people being ignorant of the pure Islamic faith. Unlike Al-Hashr's grandmother (2007:170) who strongly declared her rejection of this justification, a number of 'Asiri women from different generations in my study adopted this Wahhabi view reflecting the power of this school among 'Asiri women today.

Advocacy of the Islamic model succeeded in heightening the religious and territorial aspects of national identity and unifying the female population under a broader model that includes Saudi women from different regions. However, in such a neo-patriarchal society, the role of tribe and kinship in forming the national identity became significant in defining women's status, especially as patriarchal state policies located male relatives as moderators between women and the state. Despite women's education and employment, the extended family still remains an essential source for women's security in later life and if there are marriage disputes, yet with less degree than among nonworking women. At work, the role

¹⁶⁷ In addition to the history of colonial influence until the Mid-20th century, the Middle East has witnessed the consequences of western support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine since 1948. In the last two decades, the region has experienced a number of wars, such as the Gulf War in 1991, War in Afghanistan since 2001, and War in Iraq since 2003.

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of kinship and tribe became limited, except in cases of competition for a higher status job, when the kinship's social network might be mobilized.

Ultimately, the national identity emerging in the boom generation is contradictory in the same way as the role model of modern and Islamic woman. However, boom generation women had a sense of pride and responsibility for being the role model for all Muslim women and at the local level had a sense of pride for being the fortunate and pioneering generation in education and privileged employment. In addition, this generation enjoyed a sense of satisfaction due to improving living standards and high wages as a result of the rapid socio-economic development in the boom era. Nevertheless, women's sense of gender hierarchy was not reduced but strongly confirmed through the patriarchal Wahhabi interpretation of the Islamic model of woman, as well as the mechanisms of implementing the state political project, as discussed in chapter 11. Hence, although Saudi women in this era became modernized through education and paid work, the remodeling of patriarchal control made them "more circumscribed than in any other MENA country" (Moghadam 2003: 65).

12.2.3 Contested National Identity

Amongst the post-boom generation, the gap between modernity and patriarchal policies presented as Islamic, has become more entrenched. Modernity, in the era of globalization, has provided young women with better education and communication technology which is reconstructing their awareness of themselves and their society. According to Eickelman (2000: 125) "education, like mass communication, makes people more conscious of their belief and practices and encourages thinking of them as a system allowing for comparison with other ideas". Therefore, this generation, highly educated and with access to the internet and satellite TV channels, no longer accept the single interpretation of the Islamic model. Chapter 10 shows how young women, while emphasizing their religious identity, have also various definitions of what the Islamic model should be, which has become more apparent with shrinking Wahhabi authority and the increasing influence of other Islamic, moderate Wahhabi and liberals on the cultural scene. Cultural diversity, in addition to women's solidarity through internet forums and social networking services, influences young women's renegotiation of their rights and employment.

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The post-boom generation is more critical regarding women's issues, stemming not only from cultural diversity, but from the high rate of unemployment, underemployment, and the limited achievements of the Saudization scheme, contrasting with the increasing wealth of the state since 2004¹⁶⁸. This paradox has led to a state of frustration and the questioning of the political project of the state as a modern Islamic society, and the Wahhabi interpretation of the ideal Islamic woman with their notion of "blocking the means that might lead to sin". While this concept has limited women's work opportunities, it has not been mobilized to oppose women's unfair work situations in outlying villages nor the poor conditions of new jobs in the public and private sectors, characterized as "forced labour" by Al-Torki and Bagader (2006: 54). This contradiction between theory or models and reality, either in the political project or in the ideal type of Saudi woman, represents the grounds for frustration and contestation among the younger generation.

A large number of this generation adapted with the new conditions of underemployment or became "educated housewives", while others are breaking down the patriarchal interpretation of the Islamic model. These women, who do not see themselves as liberal, are involved in non-gender segregated fields of work in hospitals, or in their own enterprises, which presents a challenge to the ban on women's access to public organizations. Despite the challenging circumstances facing this generation, they are supported with education, mass communication and their hope of a second oil-boom.

12.3 Women's Work and Empowerment across Three Generations

This thesis started with a discussion of women's empowerment and how paid work is amongst its major mechanisms (Moghadam 2007; Kabeer 2005; Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005; UN 2000). This section ends the study with a discussion evaluating women's work across the three generations of women and the extent to which work has enabled Saudi women in 'Asir to move towards empowerment as a goal to be achieved by 2015 (UN 2000). This discussion is based on the three dimensions of empowerment suggested by Kabeer (1999, 2005), that is resources, agency and achievement.

¹⁶⁸ See chapter 2.

12. 3.1 Limited Resources

Resources for empowerment have been either limited or restricted for the three generations of women in Abha. Paid work has been influenced by society's economic transformation and the need for labour in each historical phase. In the boom era, the inclusionary policies offered women greater access to employment in the public sector with its high wages and benefits as a new and effective resource of economic independence and security in old age, which distinguished the work experience of this generation.

This contrasts with the poor economy of the pre-boom era that offered only a few self-employed jobs that barely met survival needs. The only fortunate women of the first generation were those involved in the public sector in the 1960s, working as school janitors or female prison guards, which had provided these women with a good pension today. The recession economy, in the aftermath of the oil crisis in 1987, together with the patriarchal interpretation of the Islamic model of women, led to further marginalization of women in the Saudi labour market. Uneducated women withdrew from the labour market in the boom era due to the decline in traditional economic activities as one feature of the "rentier economy" (Al-Naqeeb 2008:122), and in the recession women became the first marginalized group. The Ministry of Education, where working women were concentrated, was the first sector to enforce temporary contracts¹⁶⁹ to meet its need to reduce the cost of labour; hence teaching was transferred from a "primary job" to a "secondary job" (Witz 2007:248). New teaching jobs not only lack occupational security, but offer lower wages and benefits in addition to the high cost of transport to outlying areas where most of these new jobs are situated. Only a small proportion of women working in higher education¹⁷⁰ and the health sector still work in a permanent job on the appropriate occupational scale. This limitation of choice has forced some young women to work in private schools. However, these jobs represent vulnerable employment, providing poor occupational security and fewer rights. Wages vary from one institution to another under the absence of a minimum wage act. Financial resources, as a result, became available for only a small number of women, while underemployed women have a meager income, and the

¹⁶⁹ Temporary contract jobs are not on the occupational scale, and hence provide fewer privileges. Among these jobs are 105 Clause, Anti-illiteracy Clause and the substitute clause.

¹⁷⁰ Women working in Teachers Colleges in different parts of 'Asir or in the Nursing College in Abha, which integrated with King Khalid University in 2003 (KKU 2011).

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unemployed have no income at all¹⁷¹. This has stimulated young women to search for "alternative resources for empowerment" (Kabeer 2005:14). Some found the solution in establishing small enterprises, such as computing services, catering or beauty salons. Others aimed for higher or vocational education that might provide a better chance of employment. Internet technology enabled some underemployed women to find a new form of solidarity through internet forums¹⁷² to support each other and their claims, which may prove to be beneficial especially in the absence of occupational unions. Women's Charity Organizations also established training courses in computing and tailoring, and projects to provide jobs for uneducated women, such as party services projects, organizing bazaars and marketing homemade products. The remaining unemployed women, lacking access to any of these resources, are forced to adopt the role of housewife if married or just wait for a job or a husband if single.

Resources of empowerment among rural women were restricted as land property, similar to income from crops, belongs to the family as a unit. Although women within Islamic law "*Shari'a*" have the right of inheritance, in practice women in 'Asir as in other Muslim societies, explained by Kandiyoti (1988) and Kabeer (1999), are requested to waive their share of land to their brothers, a common practice to preserve the family's property, especially as land is a central element of the family's socio-economic status in rural society. These disempowered women may mobilize this action as a strategy to "bargain" (Kandiyoti 1988) for parental family support in case of marriage breakdown.

Lack of financial independence has caused women to search for "alternative resources" (Kabeer 2005:14), leading to the mobilization of their abilities in labour production and reproduction. While the latter was measured by the number of male children, labour production was measured by a two-fold standard, a positive "*sagrah*" and a negative "*khummah*". This standard largely determines the woman's ability to bargain with patriarchal power (Kandiyoti 1988) for higher status and security in later life. In addition, this standard represented a major mechanism of control over women, to raise the level of

¹⁷¹ Providing unemployed people with a monthly salary of 533\$ was included in King Abdullah's reform plan declared in February 2011) and introduced in January 2012 (Arab News 2011; The Saudi Gazette 2011).

¹⁷² These forums include the forum of teachers of Clause of 105 (Moltaqa Saudi Teacher 2011; Ksa-teachers Forum 2011) and forums of teachers of Anti-illiteracy (ar-ar.facebook 2011; Moltaqa Anti-Illiteracy and substitute Teachers).

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their abilities, as under the limited economic resources in the pre-boom era, not fulfilling any task successfully either in the house or the fields represented a high cost for the whole family. This standard has been relaxed with the modernization and increasing wealth in society. In fact, since the boom era, women have withdrawn from agricultural work with the decline of this activity in 'Asir, and the significance of domestic work has become limited because of the growth of the nuclear family.

12.3.2 Restricted Agency

Having the resources of empowerment, unless associated with the agency to control these resources, cannot lead to women's empowerment (Shamshad 2007). Among the women of Abha, women's agency of empowerment was restricted across the three generations either by private patriarchy as in the pre-boom era, or by the solidarity between private and public patriarchy in the boom and post-boom eras, which will be discussed by considering two of the main elements of agency, decision making and freedom of mobility.

12.3.2.1 Agency of Decision Making

Examining women's empowerment in Abha confirms the argument of some middle Eastern feminists (Joseph 2000; Al-Torki 2000; Al-Mughnia 2000) that women and their rights within this "patriarchal belt" (Caldwell 1982) are seen only as family members and not as independent individuals. Indeed, this is not only at state level as argued by previous feminists, but at the personal level. In the pre-boom era, women's ability to make strategic life choices, such as marriage, divorce and education, were under the supervision of the male head of the family, with the female head of the family perhaps playing the role of his consultant. Young women within extended families in that era were completely disempowered, and their agency was restricted by their limited resources, although through the long process of bargain might provide them with security later.

Women's economic decisions are the most restricted by their male relatives. In the case of inheritance, for instance, while brothers usually put great pressure on a woman to waive her share, women's choice to resist also required the support of her husband and sons. Among working class women, income from work for the majority of women was controlled by the husband, either by the woman's choice or by force. Resistance to this control was accepted only when the husband misused the money for his personal interests, such as marrying

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another woman. However, women's resistance to this misuse rarely led to a positive solution, as documenting financial issues among family members is not accepted by social norms and only the intervention of senior members of the family can solve financial disagreement. However, income from work provided some women with a beneficial resource to bargain either to preserve their marriages, or the ability to leave an unhappy marriage and support their children. Furthermore, working women of this generation had control over their own income when they headed their family as a divorcee or a widow.

In the boom era, employment in the public sector provided women with a good financial resource that enabled some to achieve economic independence, similar to first generation women within a non-male headed family. Some working women upgraded their working class families to middle class, or provided their families with more prestige in the community. However, although modernization, education and employment usually reduced the level of patriarchal control and provided women with more ability to make independent decisions as in other MENA societies (Mernissi 1994; Moghadam 2003), the implementation of the modern Islamic project of the Saudi state led to the formation of a package of patriarchal policies that restricted all women's decisions to the validation of her male guardian. These policies advantaged men with what Connell (2009:141) calls the "patriarchal dividend", as men not only control women's income, which is the case among a large number of working women, but accrue several benefits including authority, services, access to institutional power and control over women's lives. Contrasting with Walby's assumption (1990) that women's involvement in employment shifts patriarchy from the private to public form, in KSA patriarchal policies have established solidarity between the two elements of patriarchy to keep working women under control. The role of the male guardian "*Mahram*" is required not only to access employment, but to trace any document their female relatives may need, even in the department in which she works¹⁷³. Thus, a number of unemployed women could not establish a small enterprise or extend an existing one due to the lack of a male guardian's permission or his ability to be the legal proxy "*Wakil*".

¹⁷³ The implementation of the ban on women accessing state departments is not standardized. While some departments, such as the Ministry of Education, where working women are concentrated, and courts are very strict about it, other departments show some flexibility.

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Within this neo-patriarchal society, women continue to depend on the "bargain strategy" to accommodate with private and public patriarchy. Al-Torki (2000) argues that women's empowerment has to start from within their families, who can support their empowerment in the public sphere. Work income has provided women with an effective resource with which to bargain and has made an impact. Higher wages have provided women with greater prestige in their parental family and more authority in their marital family, within which they may become a partner rather than a dependent, participate in household decision-making and have more control over children. However, women's success in bargaining depends on the effectiveness of their resources of empowerment, based on the size of their income. Another condition is the woman's awareness of all the risks associated with the *Mahram's* control over her life decisions, in addition to her ability in negotiation mechanisms. Geertz (1979) sees this as a major characteristic of people in the MENA region; while Kandiyoti (1988) considers it the central strategy for women in accommodating with patriarchy, and this study suggests that the rigid gender order in Saudi society requires greater bargaining abilities among Saudi women.

The other condition for a successful bargain is the male guardian's attitude towards women's work and rights. In this study, while most working women pointed to the supporting role of their fathers or husbands, a number of unemployed women referred to the situation of their *Mahram's* rejection of the available jobs¹⁷⁴. Some working women pointed to the monopoly or misuse of their income by their *Mahram*, usually declared only in cases of conflict with male guardians, or when referring to friends' experiences, but not their own. As argued by Kabeer (2005:14) such gender hierarchal relations are supported by patriarchal norms, which women as a subordinate group are likely to accommodate, or even justify, especially when resistance is either not an option or will carry a heavy penalty. Al-Huwaider, the Saudi female activist (cited in Neyouf 2004), comments on the unique authority of the male guardian: "*No matter what the Saudi woman achieves, her accomplishments are just a thermostat for how civilized and open-minded her male guardian is*".

¹⁷⁴ Some male guardians refuse to let their daughters or wives work in jobs that do not meet the features of women's work in the boom era with good wages, close location and most of all non-gender segregated. Thus, those *Mahrams* reject jobs in hospitals, or any other non-gender segregated field, working in outlying areas or establishing private business which requires communication with government departments.

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In the post-boom era, women's agency has become more complicated. While empowered with education and technology, the majority of young women lack the power of financial resources due to underemployment and unemployment. Internet forums have united this frustrated group, and constructed the base of the new strategy of resistance. Female teachers of the Anti-Illiteracy Clause were the first to protest in several Saudi cities on April 4, 2011 (Al-Ghamdi 2011; Basmael 2011) including Abha (Al-Hatlaa 2011), after their exclusion from the reforms decree announced by King Abdullah on February 27th 2011 (The Saudi Gazette 2011; Arab News 2011). This action would not have been possible without their new solidarity, in addition to the increased awareness of the role of public opinion in causing change since the start of the Arabian revolutions throughout 2011. Teachers' protests declared their rejection of the gender ideology that justified their marginalization. And while women across the three generations have adopted an accommodation strategy towards patriarchal constraint, which Kandiyoti (1988) argues was the main strategy in the MENA societies, the recent teachers' demonstrations point to the emergence of a new era of resistance.

12.3.2.2 Agency of Mobility

Women's mobility in 'Asir has been a visible sign of the major transformations that women's lives have gone through across the three historical phases. While modernization and education usually provide women with more independence and freedom of mobility, in 'Asir, modernization, education and employment have been associated with restrictions on women's mobility.

The distinct freedom of mobility 'Asiri women enjoyed in the pre-boom era was not only reported by historians (Shaker 1981; Rafei' 1954; Philby 1952; Hamzah 1951), but by the experience of first generation women in this study. Although 'Asir has been a patriarchal society, rural culture and the economic need for women work reduced patriarchal control over their movements. Women moved constantly across their villages, fetching firewood and water or grazing cattle. Walking for distances of up to 25 km to go to weekly markets was also common. In Abha, only urban upper and some middle class women were secluded from the public arena; working class women were moving freely through the city to provide their services to upper class housewives or at the city markets.

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Women's mobility was restricted gradually with the development of the state political project as the "modern Islamic state". Women's exclusion from the public arena, and the ban on women driving represented major material symbols for the Wahhabi interpretation of the Islamic model (Al-Juraisi 1999; Al-Bar 1992; Bashatah 2009). According to Wahhabi doctrine, women's freedom of mobility and participation in public life is linked with moral corruption, and hence women's driving is a sin, "*haram*", as discussed by Sheikh Ben-Baz and Sheikh Ben-Othaimin (Al-Juraisi 1999: 1096-1102). While other Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazali (1990) and Abu-Shaqqah (1991b) argue that this view is generated from traditional social norms rather than Islamic, this interpretation firmly embodies the patriarchal view of woman in MENA societies as a symbol of the family's honour. To protect this honour, a system of patriarchal codes is applied to women's behaviour, veiling and movement (Kabeer 1999; Abu-Odeh 1996; Moghadam 1992; Dodd 1973). Wahhabi discourse (Al-Juraisi 1999) shares the same view of gendered space, which Massey (1994) divides into domestic, feminine places versus public, masculine places which are seen as dangerous and include high risks for women, whose mobility between the two arenas would blur patriarchal boundaries.

This interpretation of space represents the basis for state patriarchal policies, including the ban on access to public organizations and on women driving, officially declared only when a group of women in Riyadh demonstrated against the ban on driving in 1990 (Al-Torki 2000; Doumato 2000). In the post-boom era this became more of an issue with the enlargement of the city of Abha, the increasing population and the lack of public transportation.

While some women depend on their male relatives for transport, others employ foreign chauffeurs. Although this choice implies a luxurious lifestyle to outsiders as discussed by Moghadam (2003) and Abdallah (1993), women complain of the economic and social pressure this choice puts on them, especially with the lack of efficient regulations that organize this relationship. At the same time these arrangements expand the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2009:141) not only to male guardians, but to labour-importing agencies and national drivers who, in addition to Wahhabi scholars, represent the main opponents to women's driving today. The debate over women's driving reflects diversity not only among pressure groups, but also among women. A large number of "female conservatives" (Johnson 1983:21) are indoctrinated with the patriarchal Wahhabi interpretation of Islam

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and believe that women's driving is against Islam and represents a "path to social ills". Others reject this view and believe that driving is a necessity in the contemporary world, as is the case in other Muslim countries, while a third group is ambivalent on the matter. The debate on women's driving has become symbolic in the recent contestation between modernity and authenticity that has come to prominence since the campaign for breaking the ban in June 2011 (Women2Drive 2011).

12.4 Women's Work and Achievement of Empowerment

Women's empowerment has been influenced by the limitation on women's resources and restrictions on agencies of empowerment. According to Kabeer (2005, 1999) the three dimensions of empowerment, resources, agency and achievement, are interlinked and any change in one would influence the other two. The state's political project as modernization within an Islamic framework, has directed all other factors to form a contradictory position for women. While modernity has offered women education and employment as major resources of empowerment, the patriarchal Wahhabi definition of the Islamic model has concentrated women into only a few employment fields, enforcing rigid patriarchal policies that restrict not only women's agency but also their access to social and economic rights.

However, women's accommodation with these patriarchal policies has reduced the level of constraint it enforces on women through two main mechanisms; family support and adopting Wahhabi discourse. While supportive male guardians see patriarchal policies as part of their responsibility towards female members of their family, abusive *Mahram* take advantage of these regulations to control women's life decisions and model them to fit their personal interests. Thus, women who are most frustrated by these policies were those who had experienced some form of conflict with an abusive *Mahram* who had restricted their access to education, paid-work, marriage or custody. Liberal and intellectual women, even if not oppressed by this neo-patriarchal control on a personal level, consider it a violation on the rights and citizenship of all Saudi women.

The other strategy of accommodation was to adopt the Wahhabi interpretation of the ideal Muslim woman, including the complete hijab and strict gender roles, in addition to embracing the Wahhabi patriarchal stereotype of women, as discussed in section 12.2.2. Accommodating with the justification of patriarchal control in private and public arenas builds the respect element of women's social status in the MENA region according to

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Youssef (1978). Therefore, women who agree with this interpretation do not see themselves as oppressed or that the patriarchal policies reflect gender inequality or are unjust. In fact, these women see themselves as representing the ideal image of Muslim women. Despite the limitation and restriction on women's resources and agency of empowerment, this interpretation of the Islamic model is providing women with respect.

Considering the other side of women's social status - rights - women's legal status in KSA has been unified by a package of patriarchal state policies which prompted the Human Watch report (2008) to characterise Saudi women as "Perpetual Minors". As discussed in chapter 11, these policies not only restrict women's ability for decision making and freedom of movement, but also limit access to their social and economic rights in addition to their rights as citizens. However, within each field of work and even among different generations of women in the same field of employment there is diversity of rights. Professional women working in the public sector in the boom era are the most fortunate group. They have benefited from the inclusion policies that provided women with equal wages and benefits with men despite strict gender segregation, the authority gap and the ambiguity of pension rights. The second group is involved in the same educational field but in the post-boom era, when teaching jobs were transformed into secondary jobs under temporary contracts with fewer financial and legal rights. The third group works in the private sector with the worst conditions, less income and rights. This sector has the most rigid gender regime and is less accessible for reform, as argued by Connell (2009). The fourth group is self-employed women, and is the most pressed by patriarchal policies, as their work requires frequent contact with public organizations. In addition, they lack occupational security due to the absence of private pensions.

In recent years, although the state political project remains the same, the practice of this project has reconfirmed two features of gender policies that are ambiguous and contradictory Connell 1990; Kandiyoti 2004), which can be seen through the contradiction between some reforms and the continuous restrictions on women. The ratification by the Saudi state of CEDAW in 2000 (UN 2007c) has been followed by a number of reforms, such as the right to an independent identity card in 2001 (Doumato 2010), including female students in the King Abdullah scholarship programme with international universities (MOHE 2010), breaking down the ceiling of vertical gender segregation when a woman became Deputy Minister of Education in 2009 (Abdul Haq 2009; Aljazeera 2009), and

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appointing a woman as a university chancellor in 2008 (Al-Shebal 2008). Women also became members of some national communities¹⁷⁵ (Al-Turki and Braswell 2010; Al-Mosaed 2007). King Abdullah's historic announcement on September 25th, 2011 (Murphy 2011; Afet and Al-Qahtani 2011) permitted women to become members of the Consultative Council¹⁷⁶, and to nominate themselves as candidates and vote in elections of municipal councils from the next session in 2015.

Nevertheless, these achievements involve only a small number of Saudi women and present a "cosmetic empowerment" (Al-Mosaed 2007: 25) improving the international image of Saudi women, while the majority of women are still marginalized or excluded from the labour market. Today, the hopes of third generation women have increased with the improving economy and the King's reform plan, which declared on February 27th 2011 an end to unemployment through the creation of new work opportunities, and the cancellation of temporary jobs (The Saudi Gazette 2011; Arab News 2011). This would improve the quantity and quality of jobs as a major resource of empowerment. However, a year after the decree, the implementation has been slow or incomplete¹⁷⁷. New work opportunities announced in both the public and private sectors represent new forms of underemployment¹⁷⁸ and the implementation of further patriarchal policies¹⁷⁹. Moreover, the campaign to remove the ban on women's driving since June 17th, 2011 (Watson 2011; BBC 2011a) has not achieved its goal and has been strongly resisted (BBC 2011b; BBC 2011c).

¹⁷⁵ Journalist committee, Board of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and National Human Rights Institution (Al-Turki and Braswell 2010; Al-Mosaed 2007).

¹⁷⁶ The consultative Council "Majlis Al-Shoura" was established in 1993, as a substitute for parliament. Members within this council are appointed by the state for each session of four years. Women have been collaborating as consultants since the early 2000s (Al-Torki 2000).

¹⁷⁷ Teachers employed on the anti-illiteracy clause and substitute teachers clause still face contradicting statements regarding turning them into permanent jobs (Al-Amri 2011; Al-Matter 2012; Basmal 2011b), while teachers of 105 clause, although turned to permanent jobs are not on the level that meets their years of teaching experience. They also complain of gender bias within the process of reform (Al-Sihaimi 2011).

¹⁷⁸ The Ministry of Education declared that each job will be shared by two female teachers and so the wage violates Article 11 of the CEDAW convention that emphasises gender equality in employment (UN 2000). In the private sector, the only new jobs offered are saleswomen in female products shops and cashiers at supermarkets, which have been strongly opposed by conservatives and debated since the announcement of Act 120 in 2004 (Ministry of Work 2006), but implemented in 2011. However, these new employees complain of the absence of regulations to protect their rights against the lack of a minimum wage, long working hours that can exceed 12 hours, transportation difficulties and working two shifts (Al-Hajri 2012).

¹⁷⁹ Among the requirements of the new teaching jobs, mainly in outlying areas, is the Mahram's consent to live in the same residence as the teacher, not only his written permission for the teacher to live there (Al-Bahes 2011).

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Contradictions are exemplified by the situation of women in Saudi society today. These examples of policies simultaneously empowering and disempowering women point to an ambiguous political project that has no clear aims in relation to the role of women. They also illustrate the dispute within the state between the demands of the liberal trend, represented by national intellectuals, and the conservative trend represented by Wahhabi scholars and powerful capitalists, which may provide an explanation for the contradictory actions of the state.

In line with the writings of Middle Eastern feminists (Kandiyoti 1991a, 2004; Najmabadi 1991; Charrad 2001; Badran 1991) my research on women's work across three generations of women in Abha shows that women's position in society, including the labour market, is constructed by the state political project, and hence it is the state, as a gender regime, which has the power to reform or to keep things the ways they are, as argued by Connell (1990). A reform plan to empower Saudi women all through the kingdom, therefore, should start with a number of strategies. Redefining the political project must be the first step; the new definition should consider the diversity in the cultural structure and reject the monopoly of any single discourse, which is more possible with the declining authority of Wahhabiya. Women cannot be just a symbol of this new project, but need to be active participants in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the new project.

Despite the substantial influence of the state political project on women's work, it is also interlinked with the economic and cultural systems and as a result has different characteristics in each historical stage. The influence of economic and cultural systems was clear in the state building stage when the political project was not completely formulated yet. In that era, women's work reflected the specificity of the economic conditions and local cultural in the region, while the role of the political project has become the dominant factor since the boom era. Hence, in the current stage when the Saudi state is empowered by a growing economy and the emergence of diversity within the cultural context, a new view of women's role should be formulated.

The same mechanisms that were mobilised to enforce the image of "modern and Islamic" with the Wahhabi patriarchal interpretation, have to be directed to construct a new image of women as equal citizens. This should start with reform policies including diminishing patriarchal policies that restrict women's agency of decision making, economic

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independence and movement. As to employment, effective empowerment of women requires policies that meet women's demands, such as creating new work opportunities, minimum wage act, and anti-harassment act, which are included with others in the Kings reform plan declared in February 2011 (Arab News 2011; The Saudi Gazette 2011). However, these policies, similar to the Saudization scheme, have to be supported by mechanisms of implementation and evaluation that can be added to the responsibilities of the newly established National Commission to Combat Corruption (The Saudi Gazette 2012). Education as another influential mechanism in forming the position of Saudi women in the labour market, it should not only continue its recent expansion by establishing new majors to prepare female students for various professions, but it has to reshape the image of women and their role in public life in its curriculum. Reconstructing the image of women within the Saudi cultural system, including the educational system and religious preaching that should accept the diversity within Islamic schools in Saudi society, would contribute by reducing the level of gender segregation and enable Saudi women to access new fields and occupy senior positions.

In the end, despite all restrictions and challenges Saudi women in Abha have faced across three historical stages, women's persistence to take advantage of new available choices has been essential to achieve empowerment at the personal level. Yet, the empowerment of all Saudi women requires state intervention to provide women with effective resources of employment and to eliminate barriers to women's agency of empowerment, as all three aspects of empowerment have to be fulfilled.

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Appendix 1 (Glossary)

Arabic term	Arabic Pronunciation	English Meaning
أبها	<i>Abha</i>	The administrative capital of the region of Asir, south west Saudi Arabia.
أبلة	<i>Abla</i>	The title of a female teacher
عيب	<i>'ayb</i>	Sham, a term that refers to any act that brings shame upon one's self or family.
القرى	<i>Al-Gara</i>	The western area of old Abha
القربة	<i>Al-Gerbah</i>	The water goatskin
الهباطة	<i>Al-Habatah</i>	A person sent by the people of his village to weekly markets to collect and inform them of the news.
الحديث	<i>Al-Hadith</i>	words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad
الحجاز	<i>Al-Hijaz</i>	The western region of Saudi Arabia including the two holy cities, Makkah and Al-Madinah. In 'Asir, people also used the word Al-Hijaz to refer to the villages west of Abha in the mountain of Al-Sraah
الخشع	<i>Al-Khasha</i>	An eastern outskirt of old Abha, and part of the city today.
الخديلة	<i>Al-Khodialh</i>	Fields, 6 kilometres from old Abha, and it is part of Abha nowadays
الكبارية	<i>Al-Kobariah</i>	Rich and powerful Families (big families)
الله	<i>Allah</i>	God
الله يرحمها	<i>Allah Yrhamha</i>	A prayer said in favour of a dead person. It means "May God bless her soul"
الله يسامحه	<i>Allah Ysamhuh</i>	A prayer refers to sadness and forgiveness. It means may Allah forgive him
سوق آل مدحان	<i>Al-Madhan Market</i>	The old name of Tuesday market in Abha, renamed after the family that established this market.
المدينة المنورة	<i>Al-Madinah</i>	The second holy Muslim city and sited west of Saudi Arabia, Al-Hejaz region. It is the city where Prophet Muhammad spent his last ten years of life. Al-Madinah was the first capital of Islamic state.
المسجد الحرام	<i>Al-Masjid Al- Haram</i>	The sacred mosque in Makkah. It surrounded Al-Ka'abah which was built by Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail. Muslims all over the world turn towards this mosque during their five daily prayers.
الميفا	<i>Al-Meefa</i>	Wood-burning stove (see Figure 6.1)
المشرق	<i>Al-Meshreq</i>	Eastern villages of Asir

Appendix 1

المُفتَاحَة	<i>Al-Moftaha</i>	The western outskirts of Abha, two kilometres far from the heart of the old city. Nowadays, it is in the town centre of Abha
النُماص	<i>Al-Nomas</i>	A small city 150 kilometres north of Abha.
القَابِل	<i>Al-Qabil</i>	An area of the old city of Abha
القَرَى	<i>Al-Qara</i>	One of the two main areas of the old city of Abha
القرآن	<i>Al-Qur'an</i>	Islam's holy book
مدرسة القرعاري	<i>Al-Qara'awi School</i>	The first private girls school in Abha established by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Qara'awi in 1956 which ran until 1959.
السراة	<i>Al-Sarah</i>	A ridge of mountains running parallel to the Red Sea from the north of the Arabian Peninsula to its south end in Yemen. The region of Asir is situated on a high plateau on Al-Sarah mountains.
الشَعَف	<i>Al-Sha'af</i>	The name of an area south east of Abha.
الوهابية	<i>Al-Wahhabiyah Wahhabism</i>	An Islamic school established by sheikh Muhammad Ben Abdul-Wahhab in the 18 th century. This jurisprudence Islamic school represents the mainstream school in Saudi society.
عمتي	<i>Amati</i>	My mother-in-law
عشيرة	<i>Asheera</i>	Sub-tribe or clan
عسير	<i>'Asir</i>	The South western province of Saudi Arabia, and is the name of the main tribe in this region.
أصل	<i>Asl</i>	Lineage
عثري	<i>'Atharai</i>	.Fields that depends solely on being rain-fed
معركة أحد	<i>Battle of Uhud</i>	A battle in the 7 th century between Muslims in Al-Madinah and the people of Quraish tribe from Makkah.
خليفة	<i>Caliph</i>	The linguistic meaning is the successor, and it is a title that used to refer to the head of a Muslim state or community (<i>Ummah</i>).
بند 105	<i>Clause of 105</i>	The title of an annual contract job in the public sector. This contract is the main form of underemployment in Saudi public sector. Under this contract the employee receives less income without any benefits. The years of work experience are not counted.
بند محو الأمية	<i>Clause of Anti-Illiteracy School</i>	Another temporary job for teachers with an annual contract excluding holidays and with lower payment and no experience counted. This construct represents another form of underemployment of working women in the Ministry of Education.
دلالة	<i>Dallalah</i>	Pedlar
ظلمة	<i>Dallammah</i>	Plural of unjust
إيدام	<i>Edam</i>	Different dishes of vegetables with tomato sauce to be eaten with bread.

Appendix 1

عيد الأضحى	<i>'Eid Al-Adha</i>	The second biggest occasion for Muslims. Whereas some Muslims undertake pilgrimage to Makkah in the 12 th month in the Islamic lunar calendar, other Muslims would fast the main day of pilgrimage, the 9 th , then celebrate Eid Al-Adha the following three days (the 10 th , 11 th and 12 th days of the month)
عيد الفطر	<i>'Eid Al-Fitr</i>	The first three days in 10 th lunar month of the Islamic calendar. In these days, Muslims celebrate and visit each other, after fasting the month of Ramadan.
عينية	<i>'Eideyah</i>	A small amount of money given to children in Eid Al-Fetr.
إثم	<i>Ethem</i>	Sin
فتوى	<i>Fatwa/Efta'a</i>	Legal opinion issued by Islamic scholars
الحديث	<i>Hadith</i>	Narratives of Prophet Muhammad's, speeches and deeds
حره	<i>Horrah</i>	Special kind of sands used to colour the ground and outside walls of mud and stone houses in the old days in Asir.
اجتهاد	<i>Ijtihad</i>	A technical term describing a legal practice in Islamic Law in which scholars make legal decisions by intellectual efforts and independent interpretations of the holy text
إن شاء الله	<i>In-shaa Allah</i>	A prayer that means with Allah's will and support
جارة جارات	<i>Jara Jarat (Plural)</i>	The literal meaning is female neighbour, but it was also the title of a housemaid
كفيل	<i>Kafeel</i>	the rule of "Kafeel" is a the rule that implies the sponsorship of Saudi employer, individuals or companies, to foreign employees as a condition for their residency and work in the country
ختان	<i>Khitan</i>	Circumcision, In Asir, used to be undertaken between the age of 12 to 15, and families used to celebrate this occasion as the entrance of their sons to manhood.
خضار	<i>Khudar</i>	Colouring the lower part of the inner walls of mud house green with some berseem leaves (see Figure 7.1)
حُمة	<i>Khummah</i>	A title of a woman who is not skilled at household work
كتاب	<i>Kuttab</i>	Classes providing basic education at the teacher's house. This form of education was the major method of girls' education until 1960.
لاقي	<i>Laqi</i>	A person sent by the people of his village or his family to weekly markets to sell their products and buy their needs.
محرم	<i>Mahram</i>	Legal terminology; A Mahram is any first degree male relative of a woman (father, brother, husband, son, uncle, nephew, father-in-law). If the Mahram is the male <i>head</i> of the family (usually father or husband) then he is considered to be the woman's legal Guardian "Wali-Al-Amer".

Appendix 1

مكة المكرمة	<i>Makkah</i>	The holly Muslim city sited west of Saudi Arabia, in Al-Hejaz region
مناظر	<i>Manadhir</i>	The heart of the old city of Abha
منازل	<i>Manazel Student</i>	Part time student. It is a system that enables adult students to study by themselves and attend only the final exams at schools.
مجلس الشورى	<i>Majles Al-Shura</i>	The Consultative Council which plays a substitute role for parliament, as all members are appointed by the state.
مسجد	<i>Masjid</i>	Mosque
مشارة	<i>Meshara'ah</i>	Raising and tracing a legal case in the court
مطوع	<i>Metawe'a</i>	An unofficial title referring to any religious men, including clerics and religious police and the. The plural of this title is Matawe'ah
زواج مسيار	<i>Misyar Marriage</i>	A new form of polygamy marriage in Saudi Arabia but without the obligation of equality between the wives, which is a fundamental condition in polygamy marriage. In Misyar marriage, the second wife has to give up her rights in the announcement of the marriage, housing, maintenance money (Nafaqah), and living together.
نعمان	<i>Na'man</i>	The northern area of old Abha
نقاب	<i>Neqab</i>	A piece of cloth covering the face and showing only the eyes. It is a new version of the bedouin burq'a bedouin women used to wear (figure 10.2).
غير قبيلي	<i>Non-Qabili</i>	A person who does not belong to An Arab tribe
نوره	<i>Norah¹⁸⁰</i>	Special kind of white natural colures that women prepare to whitewash the upper part of inner walls of the Asiri mud houses (see Figure 7.1)
امي	<i>Omi</i>	My mother
قبيلة	<i>Qabilah</i>	Tribe
قبيلي	<i>Qabili</i>	A person belong to a An 'Arab tribe
قحطان	<i>Qahtan</i>	The name of one of the main tribes east of 'Asir
قط	<i>Qatt</i>	Asiri home decoration based on drawing lines and shapes in the middle part of the wall, between the white in the upper part and the green in the lower part of the wall in the old mud and stone houses (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2)
قطاطة	<i>Qattatah</i>	Qatt painter

Appendix 1

قريش	<i>Quraish</i>	One of the major Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, which Prophet Muhammad belonged to, and the holy Quran is written in their pure Arabic accent. This tribe is based in Makkah.
رحى	<i>Raha</i>	Grindstone
رمضان	<i>Ramadan</i>	The 9 th month in the lunar Islamic calendar which is a holy month for Muslims in which they fast from all types of foods, drinks, marital intercourse, smoking from sunrise to sunset.
هيئة الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر	Religious Police	Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (CPVP) or (Religious Police), "Hayat Al-Amr Bil-Ma'ruf wal Nahy 'an Al-Munkar" (Al-Rasheed 2007:15). This committee runs by Wahhabi scholars under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, has no authority and specialized only in monitoring religious and moral behaviours. In earlier times, people used to refer to this committee as Al-Matawe'ah (plural) or Metawe'a (singular) and later as Al-Haya'a.
سد الذريعة	<i>Saad Al-Daria'a</i>	A juridical pillar means the blocking of the means, which indicates that any action that might lead to sin must be prohibited
صقرة	<i>Sagrah</i>	A title of a woman who is highly skilled in household work
صلل	<i>Salal</i>	Space heater with coal in the living room, It warms the room and keeps coffee and tea hot. It was a major character of old Asiri house.
سقوي	<i>Saqawi</i>	Fields that requires irrigation
سعودة	<i>Saudiization</i>	This term was first established in the third development plan (1980) referring to a new policy of increasing the proportion of Saudi workers in both the public and private sectors.
صهار	<i>Sehar</i>	Whitewash the inner walls of the Asiri mud house.
شعبان	<i>Sha'aban</i>	The 8 th month in lunar Muslim Calendar, and it is the month before Ramadan.
شريكتي	<i>sharikati</i>	The other wife of the woman's husband. The literal meaning is "my partner" as two women or more share the same husband.
شوال	<i>Shawal</i>	The 10 th month in the lunar Islamic calendar in which the first three days are the holy days of Eid al-Fitr
شيخ	<i>Shiekh</i>	The title of an Islamic scholar or the head of a tribe
ذبيحة	<i>Thabiha</i>	A meal of a whole lamb
تهامة	<i>Tihamah</i>	The coastal land in the west of Asir, this narrow coast land is parallel to the Red Sea to the west and Al-Sarah Mountains to the east.
وكيل	<i>Wakil</i>	A male representative who via a delegation from the court acts as a woman's <i>legal proxy</i> in any government, legal, or business matters. This male Wakil can be a relative or non-relative

ولي أمر	<i>Wali-Al-Amer</i>	A legal term (used in government documents) to refer to the main male guardian of a woman (father, husband or brother)
والله	<i>Wallah</i>	I swear by God "Allah"
واسطة	<i>Wastah</i>	Using personal connections and social network to fulfil some work or obtain some favors and positions.
زكاة	<i>Zakat</i>	Zakat is the fourth of five pillars of Islam. This pillar refers to giving of a fixed portion of one's wealth to the poor and needy on an annual basis (Al-Qardawi 2005).

Appendix 2 (Interview Guideline)

Introduction

I deeply appreciate your participation in this study that aims to explore women's experience of work in Abha across different generations. Please express your own experience with work freely as there is no right or wrong answer. You have the right not to answer any question you don't like. This research aims to social knowledge, so your response will be anonymous and no personal information will be published.

Code of the informant

Date of interview:

Interview Starting time Ending Time:

2nd Interview start at: Ending at:

Generation 1 2 3

Demographic Information

- Age.
- Marital Status
- Work
- Parents' jobs
- Number of children

Education

- What is your educational Level?
- What is your field of study?
- What is your parents' educational level?
- What were your parents' attitudes toward girls' education?
- Where did you study (kuttab, private girls' school, state-run school, adult school, and Secondary school with teacher training programme, high school with teachers' training programme, teachers' training college, university, and post graduate study)?
- What was your educational field in teachers' training college or university

- What year did you graduate?
- In case of illiteracy, why you did not attend school?
- How did education prepare you for work?
- How do you see the future of women's education in S.A?

Unpaid Work

- Did you ever undertake any form of agricultural work? Where? When?
- Was your agricultural work occasional or daily work?
- What did you exactly do in the fields? Please explain
- How was agricultural work divided between family members?
- What kind of income you had from your agricultural work?
- How did this kind of work influence your life as a woman, your status with the family and in the community?

Paid Work

- What is your job? In which field?
- When did you start working?
- How did you apply for work?
- Why did you undertake paid work? What were your motivations?
- What is your rank in work?
- What kind of training did you go through to undertake your current job?
- What is the status of women in your field of work?
- Are you satisfied about your recent work? Why ?
- How much is your work income?
- Who controls your work income?
- Do you contribute to the household expenses? How?
- Did work influence your personality? How?
- Did work influence your social and economic status in the family and in the community? How?

- What is your family's attitude towards your work?
- What are the major difficulties in your work?
- How do you manage with transportation to and from work?
- How do you handle household work and childcare with paid work?
- What are your suggestions for improving the participation of Saudi women in the labour market?

Non-Working Women

- Why not working?
- Do you have any paid work experience ? why did you stop it ?
- If looking for a job, what offers did you get? Why you did not accept?
- Do you have any experience with paid work? Why did you stop your previous work?
- How do you cope with the situation of being unemployed?
- What is your future plan regarding work?

Appendix 3(Arabic Interview Guideline)

دليل المقابلة

المقدمة

عزيزتي المبحوثة أشكرك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة التي تهدف إلى التعرف على التغيير الاجتماعي و مشاركة المرأة في العمل من خلال خبرات ثلاثة أجيال من نساء مدينة أبها. أرجو منك التعبير بحرية عن أفكارك و آرائك فليس هناك إجابات صحيحة أو غير صحيحة, كما أن لك مطلق الحرية في رفض الإجابة على أي سؤال. هذه الدراسة تهدف للمعرفة العلمية لذلك اسمك و بياناتك الشخصية ستحظى بالسرية و غير قابلة للنشر.

بيانات المقابلة

تاريخ المقابلة

بدأت المقابلة الساعة نهاية المقابلة الساعة

بداية المقابلة الثانية نهاية المقابلة الثانية

الجيل 1 2 3

البيانات الشخصية للمبحوثة

- السن
- الحالة الاجتماعية
- العمل, الدخل
- عمل الوالدين
- عدد الأطفال

التعليم

- ما هو مستواك التعليمي؟
- ما هو تخصصك؟
- ما هو المستوى التعليمي للوالدين؟
- ما هو موقف والدك من تعليم الفتيات ؟
- أين تعلمت (كتاب, مدارس حكومية, مدارس خاصة, معهد المعلمات المتوسط, كلية التربية المتوسطة, كلية التربية, جامعة, مدارس محو الأمية)؟
- إذا لم تكوني متعلمة, لماذا لم تلتحقين بالمدرسة ؟ ما هي الأسباب ؟
- كيف أعدك التعليم للعمل ؟
- ما هي مقترحاتك لتطوير تعليم الفتيات في المملكة ؟

Appendix 3

العمل الغير المدفوع :

- هل سبق لك ممارسة العمل الزراعي ؟ أين ؟ و متى ؟
- هل كان عملك الزراعي بشكل يومي أم من حين إلى آخر ؟
- ماذا كانت طبيعة عملك الزراعي ؟ اشرحي لي ؟
- كيف كانت طريقة تقسيم العمل بين أفراد العائلة ؟ و هل كان لك دور في اتخاذ القرارات الأساسية في العمل ؟
- ماذا كان دخلك أو العائد عليك من العمل الزراعي ؟
- كيف أثر عملك الزراعي عليك كأمراة وعلى مكانتك في الأسرة و دورك في المجتمع ؟

العمل المدفوع :

- ما هو عملك ؟ و في أي قطاع ؟
- متى بدأت العمل ؟
- كيف حصلت على هذا العمل ؟
- لماذا قررت دخول مجال العمل المدفوع ؟ ما هي دوافعك للعمل ؟
- ما هي مرتبتك أو مستواك الوظيفي ؟
- ما هو نوع التدريب الذي حصلت عليه للتأهل لعملك الحالي ؟
- ما هي مكانة المرأة في مجال عملك ؟
- هل أنت راضية عن عملك الحالي ؟ لماذا ؟
- ما هو دخلك الشهري من العمل ؟
- و من هو المتحكم في هذا الدخل ؟
- هل تتشاركين في مصروف البيت ؟ و كيف ؟
- هل أثر العمل على شخصيتك ؟ كيف ؟
- هل أثر العمل المدفوع على مكانتك (الاقتصادية و الاجتماعية) في الأسرة و المجتمع ؟ كيف ؟
- ما هو اتجاه أسرتك نحو عملك ؟
- ما هي أبرز صعوبات العمل التي تواجهك ؟
- ما هي طريقة المواصلات المتبعة للذهاب للعمل ؟
- كيف توازنين بين عملك و رعاية الأطفال ؟

الغير عاملات

- لماذا لا تعملين ؟
- هل سبق لك ممارسة أي عمل مدفوع ؟ ولماذا توقفتي عن ذلك العمل ؟
- إذا كنت تبحثين عن عمل , ما هي فرص العمل التي عرضت عليك ؟ لماذا لم تقبلين بها ؟
- كيف تتكيفين مع وضعك الحالي كغير عاملة ؟
- ما هي رؤيتك المستقبلية حول العمل ؟

Appendix 4: Map of Abha with Arabic Names

