

# Women and Globalization in the GCC

Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change

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## Proceedings Report

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LUND UNIVERSITY  
Center for Middle Eastern Studies



كلية دبي للإدارة الحكومية  
DUBAI SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

*Gender and Public Policy Program*



Gulf Research Center  
Knowledge for All





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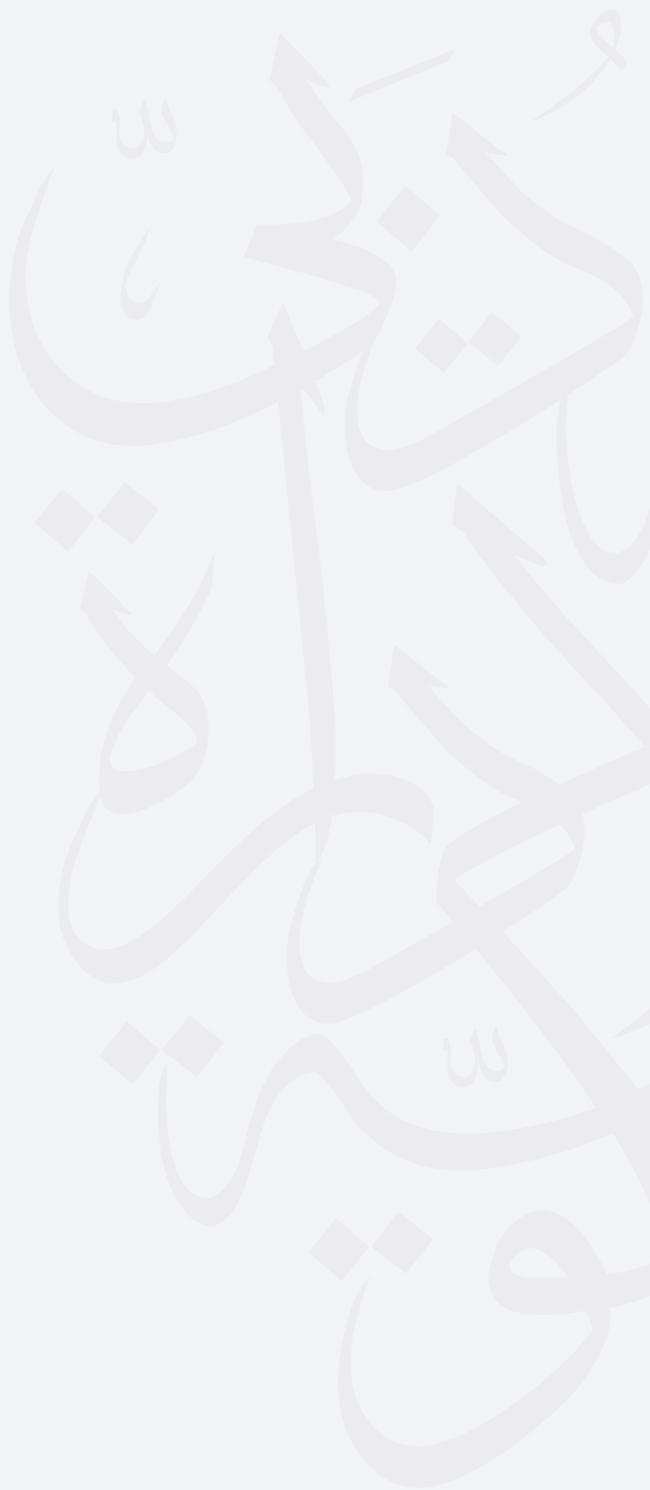
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# CONTENT

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7	Abstract
9	Globalization
10	Globalization in the Gulf
11	Women and Globalization in the Gulf
12	GRM Workshop Summary
18	Summaries of Workshop Papers
18	Marwa Al Obaidli   Women Empowerment through Globalization: A Case Study on Bahrain
19	Fawzia Al Farsi   Empowerment of Women in Oman
20	Salma Alderazi   Globalization: Women in GCC between Modernity and Inherited Traditions
22	Gokuladas Vallikattu Kakoothparambil   Women in Higher Education in the Era of Globalization: A Case from Sultanate of Oman
23	Linzi Kemp   Women in Business Leadership in the United Arab Emirates: Females Shaping their Environment
24	Nada Al-Mutawa   Women and Globalization in the GCC: The Role of Business Networks
25	Rania Maktabi   Family and Female Citizenship in Kuwait and Qatar: A Comparative Perspective in Light of Globalization in MENA
26	Leila DeVriese   Genie Out of the Bottle: Enfranchisement of Gulf Citizenry in the Age of Globalization
28	Nadera Alborno   Globalization and the Employment of Women with Disabilities in the UAE
29	Rima Sabban   UAE Women Moving up as Transnational Domestic Workers are Moving in: the Globalization of Gender and Class in Dubai
30	Shefali Jha   Women and Community: Dilemmas of Expatriate Women in Qatar
32	Staci Strobl   Globalization and the Deployment of GCC Countries' Policewomen
34	Susan Dun   Globalization and Women's Participation in Sport: the Case of Qatar
35	Jillian Schedneck   'We're Normal. We're Just like You': Gendered Practices of Cultural Exchange and Translation in Dubai
37	Basma Al-Mutlaq   The Impact of Globalization on GCC Women: Genres and Themes in Twenty-first Century Saudi Women's Fiction
37	Mariam Rahmani   The Long Black Dress: Abaya, Fashion, and the Female Body in the New GCC
39	Biographies of Workshop Contributors
44	References

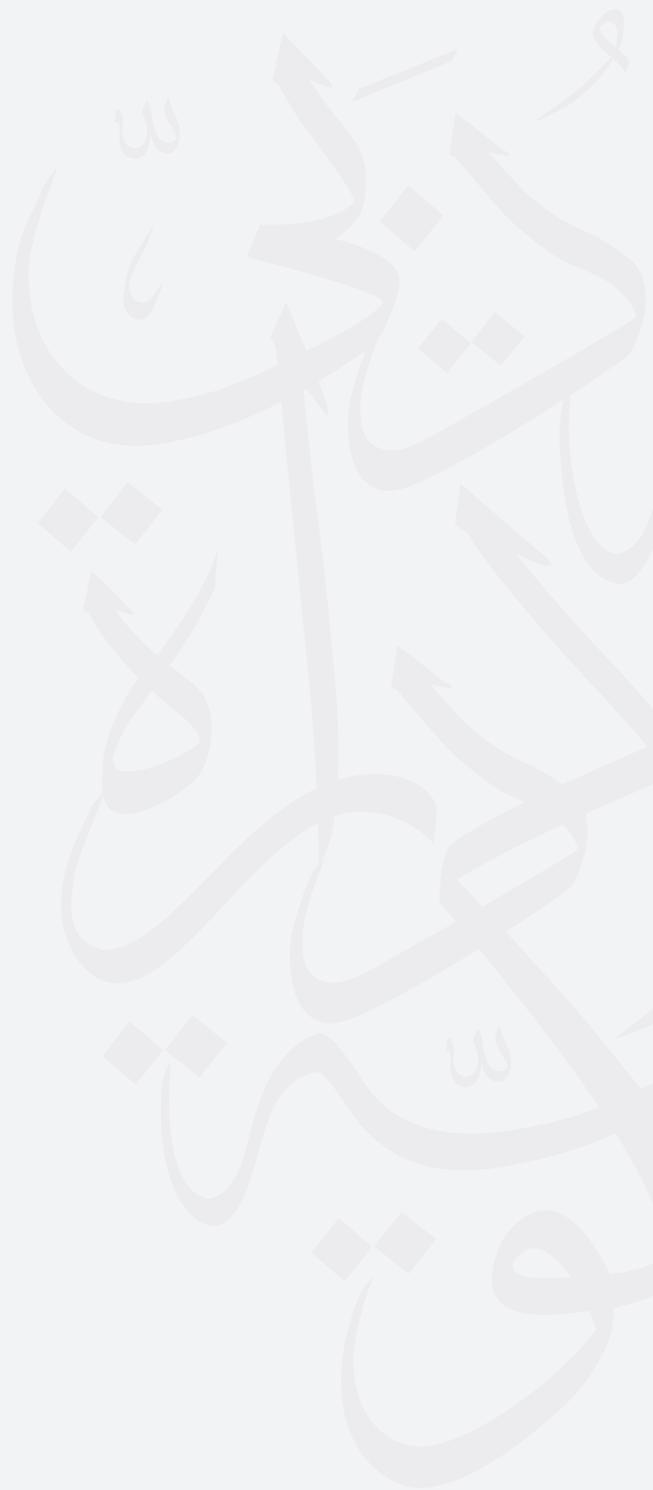


# ABSTRACT

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“Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change”, is a workshop organized by May Aldabbagh from Harvard University and the Gender and Public Policy Program at the Dubai School of Government (DSG) and Dalia Abdelhady from the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Lund at the 2012 Gulf Research Meeting in Cambridge organized by the Gulf Research Center. The overall aim of the workshop was to problematize the “position” of women in the GCC by situating their experience within the framework and rhetoric of globalization in order to arrive at an understanding of the diverse institutional and cultural mechanisms that influence gender dynamics in the region. Specifically, the workshop aimed to explore the variety of ways in which responses to global economic, political, technological, and migratory flows influence the position of women in the GCC and simultaneously how women themselves utilize the institutions and rhetoric of globalization to improve their own position.

A total of fifteen papers were presented showing different ways of understanding, operationalizing, and deconstructing gender dynamics in the region. The authors utilize different methodologies, disciplinary traditions, and analytical perspectives. Yet, they all draw our attention to the complex and contradictory ways in which men and women from or living in the Gulf are selectively incorporated into a world society. The workshop papers were summarized and form the basis of this proceedings document prepared by Ghalia Gargani, Acting Director of DSG’s Gender and Public Policy Program, and the workshop organizers for the benefit of the authors and the larger community of scholars, students, and policy makers interested in women and globalization in the GCC. We hope that this document will be a useful reference for those interested in a more nuanced and complex view of women’s “position” in the Gulf.



# GLOBALIZATION

A concept laden with many meanings, globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness of people, products, information, and processes throughout the world and the consequences that arise from such interconnections. Implications of globalization are vast and have contributed to transforming traditional societies and cultures and shifting local practices and identities across the globe. Globalization may appear to promise plenty for all, but in reality, this is not necessarily the case (Heron, 2008). For some globalization represents exploitation while for others it is about opportunity (Prilleltensky, 2012). Conceptualizing the specific forms and outcomes of globalization, the social processes globalization engenders, and the impact of globalization on individuals and communities is imperative to understanding modern day social issues (Diaz & Zirkel, 2012). Across disciplines, from economics to psychology, studying globalization and its influences from multiple perspectives and different levels of analysis and delving into how it translates in everyday life is of paramount importance.

Much scholarship already exists on globalization, from diverse fields, some taking a broad global outlook and others honing in on its impact in local contexts, such as, for example, the Arab Gulf. George Ritzer, Benjamin Barber, and Francis Fukuyama (see Beck, 2000; Stegar, 2009)—although differing in their opinions on outcome—all agree that globalization is a standardizing and homogenizing process, one that imposes western norms and lifestyles onto more vulnerable societies and contributes to eroding local cultures. On the other hand, in the work of Roland Robertson (1995), Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995), and Arjun Appadurai (1996), the impact of globalization is not seen as erasing local traditions (see also Beck, 2000; Turner & Khondker, 2010; Stegar, 2009). Delineating plurality and reflexivity as hallmarks of the concept of globalization, Turner and Khondker (2010) have accurately argued that globalization points to a complex and non-linear reality. In order to conceptualize globalization in a more meaningful way, binary modes of thinking must be transcended and globalization must be recognized as a multi-dimensional process.

In bringing in a feminist analysis to global processes Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, and Hanson (2002) suggest that it is not enough to merely recognize gender as being important, but that there needs to be a substantial “rethinking of how to conceptualize, study, and act in relation to economic globalization” (p. 257). Their underlying argument suggests that such an analysis brings about a fundamental change to how economic globalization is understood. Gender is also deeply entangled in the intersections of globalization and culture (Aldabbagh & Grey, 2012) and there are often invisible gendered frontiers of globalization on which women are living and working (Tickner, 2004). In societies which are experiencing rapid globalization (such as in the Gulf Cooperation Council), gender can become a battleground in which broader social anxieties become apparent—a process that may often have negative implications on women.

# GLOBALIZATION IN THE GULF

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman—offer a unique space to look at globalization. Certainly, the GCC is not a coherent unit nor does globalization play out identically in all the countries constituting this political construction. However, because of a number of shared economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions, a focus on this particular group of countries has been warranted and in recent years formed the core of an interdisciplinary scholarly area called ‘Gulf Studies’. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the strongest shared denominator between countries constituting the GCC is the avid way in which they have embraced contemporary globalization, thereby forming, a laboratory par excellence useful for assessing and fine tuning globalization theories (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah & Al Mutawa, 2006).

GCC countries are characterized by impressive communication and technological advancements, sophisticated urban and transportation infrastructure, high levels of movement of people and capital, and ultra-modern cityscapes (Aldabbagh & Gargani, 2011). As major hubs for services and hosts of an infrastructural construction boom, GCC countries have become huge importers of labor, inviting large communities of expatriates and workers from the Middle East, Asia, and western countries (Nederveen Pieterse & Khondker, 2010) who make-up over 33% of the population in the GCC and, in most cases, the majority of employees in the private sector (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah & Al Mutawa, 2006). The establishment of branches of foreign universities and higher educational institutes with foreign affiliations is a manifestation of the globalization of higher education and an indication of some of the Gulf countries’ extensive attempts at becoming knowledge-based societies. The investment in large scale cultural projects such as western museums, international sport events, among others, symbolically signal the commitment of the hosting state to being relevant on the global arena. GCC countries have also been signatories to a number of international agreements which signal the state’s interest in being engaged with international conceptions of neoliberal economics, gender equality, and human rights which have implications for people living in and interacting within the GCC.

Understanding globalization in the Gulf needs to go beyond an understanding of material realities to an appreciation of the socially constructed contexts in which economic, political, and cultural globalization is experienced and created. Indeed, globalization scholars have recognized that ‘the global’ is not a ‘thing that is out there’ influencing the ‘local’. The ‘global’ has been recognized as a social construction (Appadurai, 1996) constantly being produced, not “ready-made and primordial” (Davids & Van Driel, 2009) and the ‘local’ itself, is complex, ambiguous, and shifting and the two are mutually constitutive. For example, alongside transformative economic processes in the GCC, ruling monarchies have championed and supported ‘cultural protection’ initiatives and programs aimed at conserving local values perceived as under threat by globalization. The perceived loss of local identity, the Arabic language, heritage, and traditions has resulted in the (re)invention of the local in dress, identity, and gender norms, for example, as argued by Rahmani (2012) and Schedneck (2012) in our proceedings. New discursive contexts are being created in the Gulf with competing notions of citizenship, state, and modernity. This rich context offers a unique opportunity to deconstruct the multi-dimensional and contradictory experiences of globalization in local contexts. In this report, we consider the ways in which the global and the local are constructed and the implication of that for women in the Gulf.

# WOMAN AND GLOBALIZATION IN THE GULF

Viewed as a set of processes concomitant with the economic development of GCC countries, contemporary globalization has had a significant impact on the material realities of women's lives in the Gulf and can be linked to increased opportunities for public participation within the context of the modern state. For example, there have been impressive gains in Gulf women's access to education leading to what has been described as a reverse gender gap in educational attainment in a number of GCC countries (see for example, proceeding papers by Alderazi, 2012; Al Farsi, 2012; Al-Mutawa, 2012; Kakoothparambil, 2012). Women's access to salaried employment opportunities has also increased in recent decades and government statistics show that the majority of working Gulf women are public sector employees, and in some cases, such as the UAE, occupy a significant percentage of senior positions (Al-Abed & Vine, 2010; Parmar, 2011). Despite low levels of private sector employment, GCC women are entering the economy as businesswomen and entrepreneurs in growing numbers (Alderazi, 2012; Al Farsi, 2012; Al-Mutawa, 2012; Al Obaidli, 2012; Kemp, 2012; Sabban, 2012). The changes associated with globalization have also led to increases in women's political participation in formal state organizations (Alderazi, 2012; Al Farsi, 2012; Al Obaidli, 2012; Sabban, 2012). Women took part as voters and candidates in elections in the UAE, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain and have been appointed to senior positions in legislative and executive branches of government in all GCC countries, despite the large degree of variation in type and number of appointments within them. Women are present in traditionally male-dominated institutions such as the military and police (Strobl, 2012), and more recently, in an historic appointment, one woman was appointed to the judiciary.

It would be inaccurate to characterize all state-led development projects for women as simply strengthening women's position in society or expanding the freedom of all women in equal ways. Increasing conservative attitudes, segregation, and constraints on women's decision-making roles have also been documented and demonstrate the contradictory and problematic effects of modernization projects for women in the GCC (e.g., Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Krause, 2009; Sonbol, 2012). Indeed the broad indicators popularly used to describe globalization's positive effect on women, often obscure the different categories of women that exist in the GCC that have differentially benefited due to their sect, tribe, citizenship, disability, or dwelling. As a number of papers in our proceedings show, women in the GCC are still struggling with personal status laws, domestic violence, sexual harassment, political activism, and freedom of expression. How women deal with these issues, how they connect to one another, how they engage with a constructed global audience, how they negotiate their role within state-led narratives of women's empowerment are all examples of processes that are replete with contradictions and with opportunities that are worthy of analysis and research.

Because research on women in the GCC needs to move beyond descriptive analyses of the 'status' of women, we offer this summary document as a way of encouraging a more critical analysis of institutional and cultural mechanisms that complicate our understanding of gender dynamics in the GCC region. The understanding of the contradictory trends shaping the position of women in the GCC cannot be complete without accounting for the impact of global economic, political, and cultural processes and the way they shape the economies and societies of the Gulf region.

# GRM WORKSHOP SUMMARY



“Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change”, a workshop organized in July 2012 by May Aldabbagh, Research Fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard University and Dalia Abdelhady from the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Lund at the Gulf Research Meetings in Cambridge, provided a vibrant forum for a research driven discussion on the relationship between global processes and the position of women in the Gulf region. The overall aim of the workshop was to problematize the “position” of women in the GCC by situating their experience within the framework and rhetoric of globalization in order to arrive at an understanding of the diverse institutional and cultural mechanisms that influence gender dynamics in the region. Specifically, the workshop aimed to explore the variety of ways in which responses to global economic, political, technological, and migratory flows influence the position of women in the GCC and simultaneously how women themselves utilize the institutions and rhetoric of globalization to improve their own position. Collectively, workshop papers explored the complicated and contradictory interactions between women, states, and societies in the Gulf region which shape (and are shaped by) globalization processes. The two day workshop allowed for critical analysis and brought together scholars from different disciplines ranging from literature, anthropology, sociology, and business and covering a wide variety of topics such as social policy, security, business, entrepreneurship, education, law, family, migration, intercultural dialogue, and even sports. Given this broad spectrum of disciplines, approaches and research questions, various ways of conceptualizing globalization were presented, analyzed, and critiqued.

A total of fifteen papers were presented showing different ways of understanding, operationalizing, and deconstructing gender in the region, and the various ways of engaging with this construct in the GCC. Authors themselves were differentially positioned as some were from or based in the GCC while others were not or had a scholarly interest in gender more broadly in the Middle East. The diversity of disciplines, topics, affiliations, and locations

was a key feature of the workshop which enabled the participants to go beyond parochial discussions about women in the GCC, while at the same time, grounding theoretical discussions about gender dynamics in the lived realities of women's experiences. Overall, the papers varied in their methodologies, operationalization of globalization as a construct, and use of gender as a conceptual lens. The papers were originally presented in a slightly different order than they are in this document due to time constraints, presentation time, and author and discussant schedules. Some of the papers viewed globalization as an opportunity for women's empowerment/rights, an extension of modernization/westernization, with the state conceptualized as the primary mechanism by which globalization can further women's empowerment. These papers also focused on the ways in which traditions and traditional roles are simultaneously challenged, reinforced, and invented in the context of globalization in a variety of different domains. A second set of papers shifted the analytic lens to include the experiences of women who are marginalized in official narratives about women's rights in the GCC, such as domestic workers and women with disabilities. These papers also highlighted the ways in which the transnational flow of ideas about gender equality affects both women and states in the changing landscape for women's rights in the GCC. Some of these papers move beyond the material realities of women's lives in the GCC to look at the way they are implicated in discursive contexts of writing, dress, and global modernization projects. The papers presented at the workshop were summarized by their authors and form the basis of this proceedings document prepared by the current Acting Director of DSG's Gender and Public Policy Program, Ghalia Gargani and the workshop organizers for the benefit of the workshop participants and the larger community of scholars, students, and policy makers interested in women and globalization in the GCC.

The advancement in the position of women in the GCC is a fact that imposes itself on most analyses of Gulf societies especially as they are being transformed due to their incorporation into the world economy and their states' modernization efforts. At the same time, much evidence persists that highlight the significant obstacles facing women in Gulf societies—with globalization at times strengthening such obstacles (see for example Ross, 2008). As we mentioned earlier, however, critical analyses of globalization and its impact on women in the GCC need to move beyond whether globalization is good or bad for women, and delve more into scrutinizing the ways it has impacted women's lives and status in society. This workshop represents an important step towards illuminating the analysis of the dynamics of globalization in the GCC especially as it related to women. The two-day workshop looked at ways state institutions are heralding modernizing efforts that target women and the advancement of their position in society, as well as modes in which women interact and define processes of modernization that also re-define their position in society.

All the papers discussed during the first day of the workshop engage with the impact of globalization, highlighting the ways it has motivated state policies, women's own attitudes and actions, and cultural traditions to promote women's public roles and participation in positive ways. At the same time, the authors also stress that challenges continue to be present that demand the attention of policy makers in order to further enhance the incorporation of women in their countries' developmental and nation-building trajectories.

Al Obaidli addresses the commitment of state actors to the enhancement of women's roles in Bahrain in the form of educational advancement, work force integration, and attempts to eliminate some forms of discrimination. While the author argues that the Bahraini national culture plays an important role in the process, Al Obaidli also acknowledges the important role global forces played in providing opportunities for education, access to information, and prospects for transnational networking and organizing among women. Al Farsi also stresses that women's empowerment is at the heart of the state-building project in Oman. Highlighting the strong conviction of policy makers in including women in Oman's development trajectory, the author traces revisions made to legislation relating to social security, social insurance, labor, civil service, pension, and personal status laws. The author also stresses the importance of education as impacting other developmental/modernization goals, an argument made more explicit by Alderazi's paper.

The three authors, Al Obaidli, Al Farsi, and Alderazi build their arguments by analyzing state policies, speeches of leaders, and development plans which all show the commitment on part of policy-makers to the incorporation of women in the formal sectors of their countries' educational, political, and economic institutions. While Al Obaidli and Al Farsi make reference to some institutional and cultural barriers affecting full integration, Alderazi offers the strongest critique by highlighting subjective preferences, cultural obstacles, and economic conditions that impede women's further integration. The author shows that women who have benefitted from higher education, for example, have not all entered the workforce—one reason for the persistence of the gender gap in employment. Additionally, Alderazi also highlights the limited role women who are educated and/or employed play in promoting advocacy for social justice, women's political, legal and civic rights, and cultural change—processes that can further transform their societies into becoming more egalitarian especially with regards to gender.

The analysis of global education and its impact is further taken up by Kakoothparambil in his analysis of Omani women's educational aspirations and career preferences. Focusing on a survey of younger generations who have been impacted the most by Oman's integration into the global economy and state policies to promote the education of women, the author shows that with regards to career preferences, however, female students have different aims when compared to males and prefer sectors which are perceived as more female friendly such as health and natural and physical sciences when compared to (for example) engineering jobs which remain dominated by men for the most part. Both Alderazi and Kakoothparambil offer arguments that problematize descriptive analyses portraying women's educational advancement in the GCC and highlight some of the obstacles that help us understand some of the limitations that women in the region continue to experience especially as they wish to participate in the work force.

Kemp's analysis takes off where Kakoothparambil's left as she looks at the conditions affecting women's employment in the UAE. Agreeing with the previous authors that the GCC is witnessing an increasing acceptance of women's public roles partially due to the regions' integration into a global economy and culture, Kemp highlights institutional obstacles that continue to limit women's employment and proposes strengthening women's networks as a way to more

effectively transform economic institutions and work cultures to become more hospitable towards women. While Kakoothparambil calls on policy makers to consider efforts that support female students in diversifying their academic backgrounds and penetrating the workforce, Kemp believes that women's own efforts are more effective in bringing about the desired changes. Through strengthening women's networks and redirecting their activities towards training in leadership and team building, entrepreneurship assistance and advice, securing internships and work placement, and advocating for legal and political changes, Kemp argues that women can be better positioned to transform their own social environment—a point also advocated by Alderazi. The topic of women's networks is further analyzed by Al-Mutawa. Based on in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in Kuwait who are also active in business networks, Al-Mutawa highlights the reasons women have for joining these networks and also some of the constraints they face in their networking efforts. Similar to Kemp's analysis, Al-Mutawa's investigation offers a way towards enhancing the collective role of women and strengthening their roles in shaping their societies' transformation.

Papers presented on the second day of the workshop delved deeper into the analysis of social and cultural transformations that are sweeping the region as a result of global incorporation. While the first group of papers provided analyses that focused on state policies that promote national women's education and employment and the institutional challenges they face, the second group of papers shifted the focus to how different categories of women in the GCC are engaged with and entangled in globalization processes. The papers also emphasize women's agency in shaping the conditions for their inclusion, activism, and representation in society. This set of papers illustrates the many strides women in the GCC have accomplished and at the same time the inherent contradictions imposed on their roles in society that only reflect the contradictions that are part and parcel of global processes.

Outlining the role of global discourses of human rights and rule of law in motivating the governments of Kuwait and Qatar to address women's civil rights, Maktabi shows the importance of a vocal women's movement and individual women pioneers in utilizing these discourses and creating a legal environment that is more favorable to addressing women's rights. In a similar fashion, DeVriese argues that as Gulf countries attempted to become global commercial centers by investing in education and telecommunications, women in the region have made use of these opportunities to mobilize online and become politically active to affect public discourses on gender-specific issues. Makatabi and DeVriese illustrate different ways women's agency is a factor of both openings presented by globalizing states and individual interest in advocating for social change.

Gulf women's agency cannot, however, be understood as always strategic and effective. While Maktabi and DeVriese illustrate ways in which some pioneer women have benefitted from global opportunities, Alborn, Sabban, and Jha show that "other" women are often left behind. Utilizing life histories of four women with disabilities, Alborn sheds light on the constraints they face in the UAE. At the same time, her analysis shows that globalization may be providing opportunities for social transformation that affect women with disabilities as the women she studies engage with prospects for change. Sabban argues that the empowerment of some

women in the UAE was only possible by the use of cheap female imported labor. Her analysis draws attention to the fact that while women may be making use of the opportunities afforded them through their globalizing modern states, their reliance on “other” women may hinder their collective advocacy for further changes in social and work conditions that would be more favorable for working women. Providing the only analysis in the workshop that looks at the conditions of non-Gulf women, Jha focuses on the conditions of expatriate women from India and the Philippines in Qatar. Experiences of expatriate women in the GCC are an important aspect of globalization that highlights, as Sabban argues, the backbone for the improvements in the social positions of native Gulf women. The narratives Jha provides emphasize the lack of social and institutional support that these women face, and the ways they compensate for such weak support systems.

Analyses of the impact of global dynamics on Gulf societies in general and the position of women in specific call into attention the need to understand not only the ways globalization has influenced different groups of women in different ways, but also the ways different groups of women internalize and influence the form of the globalization of their societies. While much of the literature analyzing institutional advances made by women also emphasize the role of pioneer women (or role models) as icons of modernization efforts and representatives of Gulf women, a group of workshop papers probe the question of the representation of women from different angles. Strobl and Schedneck illustrate the contradictory messages involved in the process of representing women to non-natives where selective narratives are emphasized to portray positive modern images of women. At the same time, omissions take place that eventually lead to contradictory messages. Dun, Al Mutlaq and Rahmani look at how women internalize and react to such forms of representation. The five papers move beyond simplistic representations of Gulf women role models as highly educated, professional, and modern yet embodying essential elements of traditional values of modesty and commitment to cultural preservation, and raise important questions regarding the process of representation itself.

Strobl looks at the ways policewomen are represented in media discourses that are designed to influence global perceptions of Kuwait. Through discourse analysis, Strobl calls our attention to the contradictory portrayals of Kuwaiti policewomen as simultaneously embodying tradition and modernity. Such a contradiction should be seen as an expected outcome of the globalization efforts in a context where local culture is perceived as being under threat. Following a different thread, Dun looks at female athletic role models in Qatar and their potential impact in popularizing women’s participation in sports. Dun shows that Qatari women have been notably present in recent athletic events to counter international pressure that accompanied Qatar’s 2022 World Cup bid. While it was hoped that these role models would play an exemplar role domestically as they do internationally, Dun finds that their influence on women in Qatar to be insignificant and thus draws our attention to the limited role state representations may have in shaping the lives and attitudes of women. The “burden of representation” and the contradictory messages expressed and placed on women is the central argument in Schedneck’s analysis of cultural exchange programs in Dubai. In her analysis, Schedneck argues that women are called on to represent their modernizing society and at the same time embody cultural tradition. She further shows that selective forms of representation are utilized to demonstrate, on the one

hand, women's agency and emancipation and conservatism and traditionalism on the other. Such forms ensure the representation not only of women in the UAE but UAE society itself as modern but not western, illustrating the negotiated mode of incorporation of the UAE into a global society.

While Schedneck looks at the ways women are carefully represented in state-sponsored cultural exchange programs, Al-Mutlaq and Rahmani examine the ways women themselves may participate in processes of representation in ways that also illustrate the interplay between tradition and modernity. Al-Mutlaq looks at a sample of literary works of contemporary Saudi women writers whose experiences are influenced by globalization. These women writers, Al-Mutlaq argues, provide new narrative forms that at times challenge and at others perpetuate stereotypes of women in the region. The contradictory strategies adopted by the women writers further call our attention to the "burden of representation" that Schedneck puts forth in her analysis. The final paper offered by Rahmani looks at dress and illustrates similar interplays between traditional roles women play and new performances of identity and culture that women also put forth within the context of globalizing societies of the region. Rahmani focuses her analysis on women's traditional dress, or abaya, and the recent surge in local designer production, and argues that many of the designers see their work as representative of their culture in an era of globalization. Through modernizing traditional dress, Rahmani shows that female designers are preserving Gulf culture and at the same time modernizing it in ways that reject a western-dominated fashion industry. Taken together, the last set of papers address questions related to representation, translation, and cross-cultural dialogues and illustrate ways in which Gulf culture and identity is shaped within global contexts that at times wishes to be part of global cultural dynamics and at others desires to influence the mode of cultural incorporation itself.

Altogether, the papers discussed at the workshop present insightful investigations of the ways GCC societies and cultures are interacting with global forces of economic incorporation, universal discourses, and cultural dialogue. The authors utilize different methodologies, disciplinary traditions, and analytical perspectives. Yet, they all draw our attention to the complex and contradictory dynamics involved in their societies' incorporation into a world society. More important, they lead us to conclude that globalization cannot be understood without examining processes that take place within local contexts. While most investigations offered during the workshop narrowly defined the "local" as bounded by national borders, it is important to note that the local provides a pivotal platform for evaluating and critically engaging with global processes that are rapidly sweeping the GCC region as well as other parts of the world. Through local understanding of global dynamics, we successfully arrive at critical assessments of social and cultural transformations that move beyond binary conceptualizations of the world such as "traditional vs. modern", "East vs. West", "good vs. bad", "opportunities vs. constraints", or "empowerment vs. disempowerment". These binary frames of reference not only limit our understanding of complex social phenomena, but curb our ability to promote social change as well.



### **Women Empowerment through Globalization: A Case Study on Bahrain**

*Marwa Al Obaidli*

During the past few decades, great strides have been made in enhancing the status of GCC women as a response to the process of globalization. Through an analysis of the Bahraini model, Al Obaidli considers the extent in which globalization has enabled women to succeed politically, economically, and socially in the GCC countries.

The further education of women and their expanding presence in the labor market provide some of the best measures of progress in the region. GCC governments have invested heavily in raising the quality of education of women and in achieving gender equality among school and university students. Governments have also been working towards implementing policies that increase social, economic and political opportunities for women. Women are also

engaging in different social activities that have moved them beyond the traditional confinements of home and family.

Among the GCC countries, Bahrain can be described as an open society that respects women's rights. The public participation of women in Bahrain began as early as 1924 and their inclusion in elections was not only a great leap forward, but also marked a progressive move in the Kingdom's history.

Bahrain was the first Gulf state to establish social organizations for women in 1955. With the early introduction of education into Bahraini women's lives, it is apparent today that they are well represented in all of the major professions, as well as various women's societies and organizations.

Since King Hamad took power in 1999, he has emphasized the idea of empowering women in Bahraini society and allowed them to play a significant role in the state building process. The importance of this cause was highlighted

in 2001 through the establishment of an organization dedicated especially to gender equality and the empowerment of women: the Supreme Council for Women (SCW). Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa chairs the council, making Bahrain the first country in the GCC to have the ruler's wife play the public role of the first lady.

Apart from gaining the right to stand for elections to the lower house of the Bahraini Parliament (Majlis al Nuwab) in 2002, women were appointed in prominent public offices. Women were also appointed to the upper chamber of Parliament, the Shura Council. Moreover, women represented Bahrain on the international scene.

Women in Bahrain have managed to open their own local NGOs and establish women's societies around the Kingdom. These associations vary in focus. A number of leading societies around the Kingdom include: the Bahrain Women's Union, the Bahrain Women Society and the Young Ladies Association.

Globalization has certainly played an important role in empowering women in Bahrain by providing opportunities for Bahraini women to learn abroad, by enabling women to access information, by the introduction of traditional media and the internet, and by allowing Bahraini women to benefit from international NGOs. However the most important factor in explaining Bahraini women's advancement has been a historical culture of openness towards women and the freedom to participate in public life.

## **Empowerment of Women in Oman**

*Fawzia Al Farsi*

Since 1970, Omani leadership began a state modernization project to build a country which secures essential services at the social, economic, and political levels. At the heart of this state building project is the empowerment of women, and their encouragement to participate in all aspects of society.

Priority was given to human resources development, with a special focus on women, recognizing that they are key players in development, in increasing domestic production, and in securing a high standard of living in the country. By tracing the leadership's speeches, messages, and directives as well as the five year interval development plans of the country, Al Farsi outlines the gains women have received in Oman as a result of the nation's phased and constructive modernization program.

Legislation was revised in Oman through royal directives and the State Basic Law to afford women many more rights than they previously had, bringing them to a more equal footing with men. These revisions encompassed social security, social insurance, labor, civil service, pension, and personal status laws, among others. For example, in addition to clearly specifying non-discrimination between men and women in relation to work, the labor law has special provisions specifically for women, such as the entitlement of maternity leave.

Post 1970, the education of women became the backbone of Omani development. In 2006, the ratio of girls going to school surpassed that of boys' at all three levels (primary, secondary and tertiary). Illiteracy rates among women decreased heavily from 53.9% in 1993 to 29.4% in 2003 with a high percentage at 97% enrollment of women in illiteracy classes in 2008. The spread of education nationwide had many positive results for women, such as decreasing the previously high rate of early marriage. Women also became more health conscious, began to space out births between children, became more vocal in expressing their opinions about their rights, and increased their participation in the workforce and social life. Omani women also joined the ranks of leaders in the country as ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors, advisors, members of parliament, and public prosecutors.

Despite these gains, however, the political participation level remains relatively low among Omani women. A survey conducted in 2001 investigated the reasons why women's participation in casting votes and running for Shura Council elections remains low. Results showed that 22% attributed low participation to norms and traditions, 2% feared the tough competition with men, and 19% were worried to lose their jobs after the end of the term. Other reasons mentioned by women included lack of awareness of working in the Shura Council, lack of qualifications and capabilities, family and husband's objections, inability to win trust of voters, and lack of communication skills.

The Omani government has recognized that the economic and social development

and well-being of the country is dependent on the significant participation of women. Despite the efforts that have placed Oman at the forefront of other Arab countries with regards to women's empowerment, much more remains to be done.

### **Globalization: Women in GCC between Modernity and Inherited Traditions**

*Salma Alderazi*

Alderazi analyzes the effects of globalization on women in the GCC and the pressures, obstacles, and ideological collisions they face between modernity and the values inherited within their ethnic groups, national background, and other societal and cultural dynamics. She investigates how GCC women are attempting to take advantage and/or to resist this global phenomenon by looking at different themes, pillars, and perspectives such as education, work, marriage, familial responsibilities, and interaction with expatriate women.

Female education indicators are higher than males in all GCC countries with a percentage of females in university education at 58.7%. Globalization opened doors for women in terms of education and study, but it has created conflicts with customs and social traditions. For example, it is still not well accepted by many GCC families to allow their daughters to pursue education abroad due to fear of western cultural influences. The more GCC women are educated, the more they collide with social and religious norms.



The mixed education in some schools and universities has led to more openness in the day to day relationships among males and females resulting in a healthier understanding between men and women in marriage and marital relationships and to some degree reducing the phenomenon of arranged marriages. On the one hand, GCC women are now more aware of the necessity to review laws and legislations related to marital life and personal status. On the other hand, it has been argued that globalization has caused a rise in spinsterhood and has increased the age of marriage and the rate of divorce. More extreme arguments state that globalization shook the integrity of the Muslim family, marginalized the role of motherhood, and disrupted family relations and cohesion.

Although globalization has increased the number of women in the workforce, a huge gender gap still exists, with the fraction of working women not proportional to the number of graduates from universities. Compounding this gap are cultural

obstacles, limited mobility of women, familial responsibilities, competition from expat women, and the economic recession.

Through media technology, especially social media, GCC women are becoming more empowered and are having a stronger voice publically. Some find that social media is a “gender equalizer”, however; there exists a virtual gender gap compared to men and to the global average which is primarily a result of perceived societal and cultural constraints.

Globalization’s most profound impact is changing gender roles and securing women’s place in the workforce. The empowerment of women in turn changes the gender hierarchies and the traditional division of labor that works against women both in the family and in society at large. Women in the GCC still aspire to achieve more and to demand more support to reach higher levels. Empowered women still don’t have enough significant impact on the more transformational processes such as advocacy for social justice, women’s political,

legal and civic rights, and cultural change. The author provides a set of recommendations to GCC policy makers to maximize the benefits of globalization. Eventually, to overcome any negative impacts of globalization in the GCC, more awareness programs should be conducted to understand the different views from both religious and non-religious groups.

### **Women and Higher Education in the Era of Globalization: A Case from Sultanate of Oman**

*Gokuladas Vallikattu Kakoothparambil*

Gender equality in the field of higher education is considered as an indication of the social growth of any economy. Kakoothparambil takes a closer look at higher education in Oman, where he analyzes gender related performance of students with respect to academic aspirations, age, and career preferences. In so doing, he analyzes three years of secondary data related to Omani students born in the early 1990s, and who have grown up exposed to and directly impacted by globalization. Also, demographic and academic data of students was analyzed to measure the academic performance of undergraduate female students vis-à-vis their male counterparts. The outcomes of this study support policy makers in creating a more conducive learning environment for female students which will foster their participation in nation building more concretely and more effectively.

Traditionally, an Omani woman derived her status from her family and her primary role was to maintain her family as a social institution and economic entity. The cultural and religious environment in Arab countries

dictated disparities between men and women in education, health, employment and income opportunities, and control over assets, personal security, and participation in the political process. More recently, while undergoing drastic changes in developmental strategies, the Omani government recognized the importance of empowering Omani women in order to secure a better future in all spheres of the country—at the crux of this empowerment is education.

The study's findings show that comparatively, the younger generation of females has more inclination towards higher education when compared to older women and to their male counterparts. The number of female students seeking education in the 18-20 age-group has been growing steadily, underlining that the younger generation—the beneficiaries of globalization—are more inclined to pursue a post-secondary degree. The analysis also found that gender was strongly correlated with high performance confirming that female students are performing academically better than their male colleagues.

With regards to career preferences, however, it was found that most of the female students have different career aims when compared to males. Females prefer sectors such as health and natural and physical sciences which are believed to be physically less demanding and more compatible with family related commitments when compared to (for example) engineering jobs which remain dominated by men for the most part.

Overall, the study has proven that globalization has invoked a greater response from female students as far as their

educational aspirations are concerned. It has clearly shown a steady increase in the number of young female students participating in higher education programs in Oman, which is an ardent indication about the future growth of this country. Despite these promising results, there is still a need on the part of the government to further boost the social and economic conditions that could support female students in diversifying their academic backgrounds and penetrating the workforce.

### **Women in Business Leadership in the United Arab Emirates: Females Shaping their Environment**

*Linzi Kemp*

Women's contribution to society in the United Arab Emirates has been extended through higher levels of education, and a cultural acceptance of women outside the home in public employment and entrepreneurship. Females have entered the political arena, and laws have been introduced to protect women's right to work. Through secondary research, Kemp studies the environment surrounding female employment in the UAE, analyzing the status of women in the economy from academic and locally published sources and organizational websites.

A gender analysis of labor force activity finds that women are progressing into work mainly in the government sector. In 2005, 40% of national females worked in government services, and by 2009 this participation rate had increased to 45.8%. This preference for employment in the public sector is due to the security of tenure in government jobs, as well as benefits of shorter working hours, better pay, longer maternity leave, and less

expectation for work than in the private sector. The position of women in the workplace is currently weak in various regards—for example, women suffer gender income disparity, even though the constitution stipulates equal pay for equal work. Furthermore, female entrepreneurship is relatively low in the UAE.

Women, as individuals and in groups, take action to shape the context of the external environments. It is therefore of interest to take into account the work of women's associations, led by national women for the benefit of female citizens, to shape the economic, legal-political, and socio-cultural environments that effect female entry to the workforce, and their rise to leadership positions. Furthermore, the establishment of female only associations enables women the opportunity to network with others to change the context of work.

Based on these findings, Kemp makes some initial observations about females shaping the environment for women, and proposes a model of networking in women's associations to support their advancement in the labor market. Women's associations can continue to encourage females through training in leadership and team building. The associations can offer start up advice and secure finance for entrepreneurs. Unemployed females, who desire to work, need help from associations to gain internships, work experience, and placement. Legal and political advocacy is necessary for family friendly working arrangements, such as for example, part-time work. Further shaping (re-shaping) of the labor environment by UAE women can increase the levels of female entrepreneurship, and address somewhat the gender imbalance in private



business and governmental organizations. Extending contact with males is required for their sponsorship and mentoring of females.

Women are now in situ in the economy to progress to senior organizational positions in the UAE. Further academic study on the networking potential of females in women's associations is required to understand their important contribution to the economy. In addition, research and publication shares the knowledge about women in the UAE as being active in the shaping of the environment towards their own success.

### **Women and Globalization in the GCC: the Role of Business Networks**

*Nada Al-Mutawa*

According to David Held, one of the main features of globalization is the emergence of forms of interconnectedness, these forms include networks, interregional networks of power and trade, and business networks. Networks are important vehicles in the

development of businesses as they provide access to resources, knowledge, and links to other businesses. This research focuses on women entrepreneurs networking within business networks. Al-Mutawa uncovers various characteristics of networks, the reasons behind joining networks, barriers encountered, and benefits gained through qualitative analysis, by interviewing sixteen women entrepreneurs who are members of major networks in Kuwait.

Attention is needed to maximize the utilization of networks. The study investigates the motivation, benefits, and barriers of a sample of members from two business networks- network A, "Proud to be Kuwaiti" (P2BK), is a local business network and network B, "Business and Professional Women" (BPW), is a female only business network which is under the Kuwait Economic Society and relates to international organizations such as the United Nations.

Findings indicate that there are a growing number of networks in the State of Kuwait which women entrepreneurs are utilizing to empower themselves as well as to enhance the effectiveness of their businesses. P2BK and PWB are good examples of such networks. Results provide evidence that among the main reasons which motivated and encouraged women to join business or entrepreneurial networks was the desire to achieve, to develop ideas, and to find business partners.

Findings of the study have shown that the barriers that women entrepreneurs face while networking are time constraints due to family responsibilities and the fear of having to part with their ideas to someone who wrongfully uses them. Benefits gained from joining networks are access to financial resources, spotting opportunities, psychological support, and access to information. The start-up stage has been identified as the business stage in which women entrepreneurs network most frequently and excessively.

Special attention is also given to networking during the expansion phase. Women exhibit a tendency during that stage to exit informal networks and join formal government based networks. The research recommends that women business owners should follow a more pro-active approach within their social networking. It points out that if they join networks and utilize them well they are more likely to experience benefits such as having access to financing, information etc.

## **Family Law and Female Citizenship in Kuwait and Qatar: A Comparative Perspective in Light of Globalization in MENA**

*Rania Maktabi*

Efforts at expanding female citizenship in the domains of family law and citizenship law in Kuwait and Qatar reflect a common trend seen throughout MENA since the mid-1990s. At the domestic level, governments are addressing women's civil rights by pledging adherence to international norms of human rights (e.g. CEDAW). Transnational pressures at enhancing human rights and rule of law standards have impacted differently on Kuwait and Qatar. While family law in Kuwait was codified in 1984, Qatar did not have a codified family law before 2005. The near two-decade 'time gap' provides an opportunity to probe into similarities and differences between the two Gulf states, and to situate them within a wider MENA framework.

Through interviews and conversations with politicians, women leaders, academics, representatives of associations, lawyers, economists, and even taxi drivers and by looking at parliamentary documents, Maktabi addresses important questions. First, she considers the main similarities and differences between Kuwait and Qatar in terms of pressures that influenced reform, as well as counterforces against reform, since 1995. Second, she looks at ways in which the citizen—noncitizen divide in female labor force participation impacts on pressures for potential reform in female citizenship in general and family law in particular. And third, she investigates how pressures for reform

in family law have strengthened female citizenship in Kuwait and Qatar compared with those observed in other MENA states.

Maktabi offers an analytical framework within which she links globalization and rentierism to domestic pressures relating to reform within female citizenship in the Gulf. Rentierism colors, so to speak, the kinds of political issues and the varieties and—most remarkably—the sheer size and quality of demands that are articulated and raised by women’s and human rights’ groups, the political alliance patterns that are formed in order to substantiate demands for reform, as well as the patterns of counter pressures raised within Kuwait and Qatar against some of these demands. She presents some preliminary reflections regarding potential pressures for widened female citizenship in Kuwait and Qatar.

In both Kuwait and Qatar, greater emphasis on female citizenship in general and family law in particular has come by way of decisions and policies initiated mainly, but not primarily, by the government in the name of the state. Five factors shed light on the economic leverage of Kuwaiti women compared to Qatari women with regards to extracting economic rights within family law to their advantage despite the implicit unequal distribution of civil rights within the law among males and females. First is the existence of unitary courts in Kuwait as opposed to dual courts (until 2003) in Qatar. Second, the codification of family law in 1984 at a comparatively early date, laying the basis for qualified judicial practice and the building up of judicial skills in court rulings that have—judged from the tentative review of legal cases presented and reported in the press—safeguarded the economic rights of Kuwaiti

female citizens. Third is the vocal women’s movement which was established in 1963, a year after the formation of the constitution in 1962, and fourth is a free press where societal concerns are addressed and debated without censorship. And finally, fifth, is the insistent voice and legal impetus of Kuwaiti professor in law and practicing lawyer Badriyya al-Awadhi who has focused on and addressed issues pertaining to family law issues and women’s human rights since the mid-1980s, i.e. since the codification of the law.

### **Genie Out of the Bottle: Enfranchisement of Gulf Citizenry in the Age of Globalization**

*Leila DeVriese*

GCC countries have all actively pursued economic policies designed to not only maintain their competitiveness in the global economy, but also become hubs in global financial flows, transportation, and manufacturing. The architects of economic policy in the Gulf states were quick to recognize that the keys to becoming successful and powerful players in the global economy were investment and commitment to first-rate (mostly westernized and English-language based) education, development of sustainable knowledge-based economies, and the mobilization of national labor force.

By investing in skilled human capital and sophisticated telecommunications grids, Gulf countries have opened the path for cyberactivism and other types of online communities, thereby reviving contentious politics and discourses of opposition that chip away at the supremacy of the nation state. While a well-educated elite skilled workforce



in the fields of business and information technology (coupled with high speed Internet connectivity) were seen as winning formulas for attracting foreign businesses, this combination has also had an adverse and unanticipated effect. An increasingly educated and technologically savvy labor force has served as a breeding ground for online interaction, and the availability of high-speed digital media across most parts of the Gulf has expanded access to social networking. This has resulted in the creation of online communities engaged in carving out new public spaces to increase participation in discursive interactions in a remolded public sphere.

Meanwhile the top-down empowerment of women and their integration into the public sphere has inadvertently contributed to their politicization and mobilization. Not only are more women seeking public offices and decision-making roles, but they are making their voices heard using the very building blocks of globalization—ICTs—to affect public discourse on controversial issues.

For example, DeVriese takes a look at blogs, and how they deconstruct the public/private dichotomy and redefine what it means to do politics—so that the personal is very much political—thus expanding the parameters of the public sphere. Blogs can serve as catalysts for previously unlikely political mobilization. DeVriese gives examples of how the growing female blogosphere in the Gulf is tackling personal and often taboo issues such as personal and romantic relationships, social norms, censorship, free-speech, and cyberactivism. In Saudi Arabia, an estimated half of blogs are written by women, and most address issues that directly impact women's lives in the Kingdom. For Saudi women, and much of the Gulf, blogs have become a safe haven, where they can demand social and cultural change and express frustration with the slow pace of reform in their country.

In the absence of an independent and free civil society, the expansion of public space and democratization of the public sphere through ICTs are laying the foundations for an



independent and inclusive polity, an integral element in the realization of democratic aspirations and ideals. The pro-reform movements' use of ICTs is a manifestation of a newly emboldened citizenry's attempt to create, in the long term, a public space that fosters freedom of expression and participation by all segments of society.

## **Globalization and the Employment of Women with Disabilities in the UAE**

*Nadera Alborna*

The increasing level of competition in the UAE job market as a result of globalization has created challenges and barriers for employment for women with disabilities, making them less attractive to employers. Alborna investigates the effect of globalization on the employment opportunities of Emirati women with disabilities from an economic and socio-cultural perspective.

The UAE has been striving to modernize the education, labor, and social welfare sectors

with recent awareness of the rights of the disabled especially following the introduction of the 2006 Federal Law No. 29 on the Rights of People with Special Needs and later the UAE's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. However, the UAE is a society deriving its beliefs from Islamic teachings and the majority of UAE society considers people with disabilities as needy and therefore regards the caring for them as a charitable act. Yet, this understanding is a misconception, as the care for people with disabilities is declared to be a human right in the Quran, where it is defined as duties towards others. This belief is mirrored in the UAE Constitution and Federal Law No 29/2006 which supports the right of people with disabilities to have equal access to education and employment.

Following the narratives of four women with disabilities, Alborna summarizes the barriers to the employment of Emirati women using a globalization lens. She looks at person and service-related barriers from a demand

and supply perspective. The most common person-related barrier is level of education and skills, whereby the majority of disabled students attain a middle school or high school degree and a very low percentage make it through to graduate and postgraduate education stages. Also, lack of self-confidence and self-esteem and fear of failure as a result of years of negative experiences and community stigma has led women to have lower hopes for their career prospects. The lack of personal desire or need to work is also common—although there is a national need and governmental encouragement for women to join the work force to reduce the dependency on expatriate workers, working in the UAE society continues to be less central to women than men. Negative attitude of parents and cultural constraints on women's employment, dearth of role models, and challenges in transportation are also among the barriers women identified.

Service-related barriers included lack of binding policies that forces and supports employers in providing job opportunities for women with disabilities and attitudes of employers, supervisors, and co-workers who usually have low expectations based on misconceptions and prejudices. Absence of disability friendly facilities on the job site is another barrier.

The main barriers to employment fall into three categories: legislation, rehabilitation and training, and awareness. To this end, UAE legislation needs to be revised to become more binding to employers to provide career and development opportunities for women with disabilities. Rehabilitation and training programs need to be further developed to

address the gap between the rehabilitation outcomes and the requirements of the employment market of a rapidly developing economy like the UAE. Intensive awareness campaigns should be established, which involve all community sectors, and starting with schools, where curriculums should address the importance of the employment of women with disabilities in civic studies and their equal rights to participation and contribution in the society. Finally, there should be awareness campaigns dedicated to parents to target all types of discriminatory beliefs and behaviors against women and disabilities.

### **UAE Women Moving up as Transnational Domestic Workers are Moving in: the Globalization of Gender and Class in Dubai**

*Rima Sabban*

Globalization has introduced many processes of change in the Gulf region, among them the shift and rise in the position of women, particularly national women. Women in the UAE are becoming the token of achievement as members of parliament, ministers, judges, ambassadors, businesswomen, and entrepreneurs. Sabban's research looks into the advancement of national women in the UAE, with a focus on Dubai, characterized as the most globalized city in the region today, and addresses the important role of domestic workers in sustaining a system which supports such advancement. She argues that despite the complete dependency on migrant domestic workers, the role they play in the development of national women remains highly unrecognized.

Women's empowerment and leadership have become the cornerstones for national women in Dubai. Globalization necessitated the preparation of national human resources (women included) to take leaps in their development and for their inclusion in the public sphere with global ambitions and aspirations. Through government support and encouragement, women became an icon of globalization, development and modernity and have moved up the ladder to achieve high leadership positions at all levels. The globalization of the economy of Dubai has also increased their access to markets. The global women of the UAE are becoming trend-setters for the rising global generation of other national women in that they: speak excellent English with a native like fluency; are liberal in their outlook, yet preserve the tradition in their dress and public presentation; push for the globalization of the public agenda, with the total respect of patriarchy and loyalty to the ruling family; are famous feminine figures in the UAE, looked up to by the younger generation of women; and are not media shy, as their previous generation of mothers.

Sabban argues that such benefits could not have been possible without the support of other globalized women in the city, namely domestic workers. Introduced at a lower level of globalization and feminization of migration, the other global women and particularly domestic workers are supporting the advancement of women in the city—mostly the upper and middle class. Domestic workers and other low skilled workers constituted 25% of the total female working force in Dubai in 2010. Domestic workers today are providing the life sustainability of the city, in many households, the ratio of

child to nanny is one to one, especially if the mother is working.

Globalization is creating a bonding reality of national women 'globalized-locally' and domestic workers 'globalized across nations or trans-nationally'. Such a bonding reality is unfortunately not seen by local women and even other upper class expatriate women in the city as a boost to their status and a partial reality in their empowerment as women. There is a widespread tendency to consider domestic workers as merely service providers, who do their job and leave. This creates an environment where the importance of domestic workers in supporting the empowerment of women remains highly unrecognized.

Domestics in the city of Dubai are supporting almost all families and households, surpassing the challenges of globalization, and maintaining its benefits. If it were not for global domestic workers, women in the city and mostly the middle, upper middle, and upper classes in Dubai and particularly the nationals, would not have been able to sustain such achievements.

### **Women and Community: Dilemmas of Expatriate Women in Qatar**

*Shefali Jha*

The forces of globalization have both compelled and allowed women to leave their families and political communities to work in other countries. For some countries, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, women have comprised sixty to eighty percent of migrants legally deployed every year in the last thirty years. Jha looks at how these migrant women,



who leave their families and their countries to become wage earners in the Arabian Gulf, are affected. She surveyed a total of fifty migrant workers, half from the Philippines and the other half from India, including office workers, nurses, shop assistants and domestic workers in Doha, Qatar. She investigates the situation of these women, what type of social exclusion they face in the host countries, and how they experience the removal from the communities they leave behind back home. What kind of community do they try to recreate for support in the Gulf? What is it that allows globalization to have a differential impact on different groups of women in the GCC, and does this differential impact need to be addressed?

Jha begins by specifying the women she seeks to study, in a context (the GCC) where the social positioning of women has less to do with their gender identity and more with their belonging to a particular nationality. This raises a query which she attempts to address in her research project: if globalization is the

movement of capital, commodities, ideas, and people across national boundaries, then, in the context of women in the GCC, how does it end up making their nationality a salient category? Looking at certain categories of transnational women workers, Jha tries to find out if these working women find an improvement in their situation, or whether they find themselves caught in another 'set of gender constraints'.

Almost all of the Filipino women surveyed cited higher salaries as the main reason for migrating to Qatar for work. Most of them reported not having the means to bring their families and sending remittances on a monthly basis to their home country. Although they suffered from the absence of immediate family, especially their children, these women said they had to work in Qatar for financial reasons. Some of them were afraid to shorten their stay because that would put grave financial strains on their family. Women who face problems at work reported that they solicit the assistance of OWWA (a government



agency of the Philippines that assists overseas workers), associations which are mandated to assist Filipinos, the church, and friends.

All of the Indian women surveyed are working as housemaids in Qatar for extended periods of time, not able to leave due to their families' financial dependence on their income. Most of these women suffered from quite a lot of family disruption. They reported relying on each other for help and assistance, or on natal family (e.g. brother, sister or nephews) who also live and work in Qatar. Some of them related the possibility of running away to the Indian embassy, if in trouble with the sponsor, for aid in returning back to India.

Expatriate working women in Doha, Qatar, try to recreate support networks in their new country of residence, in order to get assistance with dealing with their sponsors. Sometimes they are able to do so with other family members or with friends who are already working there. Their last resort is usually a welfare organization affiliated with

their embassy or their embassy itself because at that stage it is only through the embassy that they can receive assistance in returning home. These women do earn a higher income in Qatar, but there do not seem to be very many organizations in local civil society to which these women turn to for help. As the sponsorship regulations can only be negotiated with the intervention of a family member or an embassy staffer, these women often have to fall back on their families/states to deal with their sponsors.

### **Globalization and the Deployment of GCC Countries' Policewomen**

*Staci Strobl*

The presence of women in policing in the Gulf represents a modern shift in the exclusively male responsibility for community safety and security in the context of originally kin-based small-scale societies. The advent of women in policing, though a western transplant, appealed to those in the Gulf societies who valued more traditional notions of

women's honor and wanted women victims, witnesses, and offenders managed by other women. Maintaining gender segregation in the criminal justice arenas, transformed from local dispute resolution venues into modern, bureaucratic entities in the 20th century, posed a particular cultural problem for women participants who risked their honor and reputation by interacting with male actors in the public space of the criminal justice system. In this sense, it was precisely because of traditional gender segregation that policewomen were needed to handle cases involving women in a way that would maintain their honor and reputations. Despite this nuanced history, policewomen in the GCC are seen as indicators of political and cultural modernization.

Strobl draws on a multi-dimensional theoretical framework, including globalization, cultural criminological and comparative feminist theories, to unearth the social and political meanings of the introduction of women police in Kuwait in 2009. Like their counterparts in other Gulf countries, their new deployment spawned a media discourse about them as signifiers of political, social, and economic liberalization, modernization, and globalization, designed to influence global perceptions of Kuwait; however, other contested meanings were also palpable.

Stobl presents a discourse analysis of English and Arabic newspaper articles from May 2008 to April 2012 primarily aimed at non-Kuwaiti media consumers. A close reading of these articles uncovers the stated reasons that women should be welcomed into the national police force: as service providers to the nation;

pioneering women in a male-dominated field; defenders of traditional gender segregation; and symbols of modernization and development.

Meanwhile internal ambiguity and contestation about women's roles in positions of authority are also confronted, such as their problematic deployment given more conservative notions of female identity in both the cultural and religious senses. The changing roles of women in society become sites of local contestation and for forms of resistance to global capitalist development and its perceived threat to indigenous cultural identity and autonomy. Globalization has led to an amalgamation of what is 'global' and what is 'local' as neither perception of women wins out completely, necessitating careful analysis of how women's roles are negotiated in specific contexts. The presence of policewomen in the Gulf and how they are reported in mainstream media outlets contain important clues that must be unpacked to discern the deeper cultural and social meanings at play, both in official discourse, and that which may be operating underneath it. This endeavor is particularly important in a global capitalist environment in which cultural meanings are often obscured or ignored. Overall, the research shows that the media coverage about Kuwaiti policewomen puts forth a bipolar frame of the debate about their deployment as being one about tradition versus modernization. This framing obscures the nuance in the debate and obscures the notion that policewomen in Kuwait may actually be symbols of both tradition and modernity simultaneously.

## **Globalization and Women's Participation in Sport: The Case of Qatar**

*Susan Dun*

Globalization has had both positive and negative effects on women in Qatar. On the positive side, Qatar has aspirations on the global elite sporting scene, including its stunning coup to win the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and hosting of a variety of world class sporting events. This world-class level activity has been accompanied by pressure for Qatar to increase participation of women athletes. Qatar responded by dedicating considerable resources to women's sports and Qatari women have been prominently featured in recent athletic events.

At the same time globalization has wreaked havoc on the health of Qataris, including rampant diabetes and obesity rates that are the highest in the region and among the highest in the world. In the Gulf, the leading causes of morbidity and mortality are due to several chronic, noncommunicable diseases that are linked with obesity and diabetes. Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE ranked globally in the top ten countries in prevalence of obesity. This prevalence is connected to several factors directly or indirectly linked to globalization of the local economy, including changed dietary habits, lack of physical activity, and altered cultural lifestyle.

Women face particular constraints on physical activity in the conservative Islamic country that make it potentially more challenging for them to engage in it. Over the past twenty-

five years, a number of studies have focused on the participation of Muslim women in physical activity and sports, partially in response to their lower participation rates in international competitions. The rich insight they provide into the experience of Muslim women and physical activity is helpful in understanding the sorts of issues Muslim women in Qatar may experience. The studies tend to focus on constraints Muslim women may experience, including wearing the hijab and the supposed conservatism of Muslim families vis á vis women and girls.

While it is clear that globalization is having beneficial effects on the participation rates of Qatari women in sports at the elite level and negative effects on the health of Qataris, what is not known is how to increase participation levels of women and girls generally in Qatar. Qatar's global aspirations in the sports world have been accompanied by pressure for the country to increase participation of women on its international sports teams. One strategy Qatari officials have voiced is that the women who competed in the Arab Games and the Olympics are role models who encourage women and girls to engage in regular physical activity.

To ascertain if these new role models are indeed having an effect on female residents of Qatar, Dun undertook survey research to investigate what role, if any, that role models play in the attitudes and physical activity and sports participation levels of women and girls in Qatar. She questions whether the recent increased participation of women in Qatar has had any noticeable trickledown effect on women and girls. She found that while personal role models such as friends



and family play an important role in physical activity, public figure role models, such as those cited by Qatari officials, are far less frequently cited as influences and in fact, not one Arab public figure of any kind—celebrity, athlete, etc. was mentioned as a role model. The conclusion can therefore be made that public figure role models are far less influential, both in number and in method of influence, than are personal role models. At this historic point in the development of elite female athletes in Qatar, the research provides some of the first empirical assessment of the effect role models may be having on women and girls in Qatar.

### **‘We’re Normal. We’re Just like You’: Gendered Practices of Cultural Exchange and Translation in Dubai**

*Jillian Schedneck*

Since the union of the United Arab Emirates, and the beginning of its cities’ development, citizens and rulers have been discussing the possible threats to and loss of cultural identity. There has been a push for Emiratis to

differentiate themselves from foreigners, and to create avenues for cultural understanding, where Emiratis can explain and demonstrate aspects of their culture in a congenial and controlled environment. One example is the Sheikh Mohamed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU) in Dubai.

Young male and female Emirati volunteers at the SMCCU are involved in a complex discursive situation that involves re-inscribing notions of western liberal thought. These volunteers align their responses with this dominant discourse, but also move beyond it, redefine its acceptable boundaries, and uphold significant difference. Using data from the SMCCU’s programs, Schedneck analyses examples of how Emirati women’s choice and agency is portrayed, and asserts that volunteers’ responses are at once attempting to align with and present alternatives to western expectations of women’s freedom and empowerment. While the research emphasizes female volunteers’ responses and the ways women are spoken about, Schedneck points to the broader challenges of answering cultural and religious questions in the complex discursive situation that the SMCCU creates.



It has been argued that women bear the burden of representation for their nations. Women are placed in the precarious position of representing their “modern emancipation” as well as their commitment to following cultural “tradition” in order to define cultural change as well as demonstrate a move toward or away from western modernization. The nation-building efforts of the UAE have indeed featured Emirati women as their most visible public relations tool and mark of development. Emirati women are highlighted for their advanced educational and career opportunities alongside their ability to maintain the Arabian Gulf’s conservative Islamic values.

Presenting this complex, symbolic portrayal of Emirati women as free and empowered as well as traditional and religious—as relatable and similar to western woman as well as significantly different—is the difficult and primary task of the SMCCU. Schedneck describes and highlights the limits involved in the kind of cultural translation employed at SMCCU events, and utilizes the voices of Emirati volunteer participants to construct a sense of the various and complicated considerations

that take place when answering visitor questions at an SMCCU event.

She concludes that within the SMCCU, the representation of women’s agency and freedom is highly selective, reflecting both consideration of liberal thought as well as significant alternatives to western cultural norms as understood by the SMCCU volunteers. However, deeper understandings of how some Muslim women enact piety are certainly not delved into, nor the ways in which choice and agency relates to submission to God and adhering to religious authority in the minds of many Muslim women. Therefore, while some form of positive cultural exchange clearly takes place between western audiences and Emirati volunteers, there are limits. The question remains as to what cultural understanding truly looks like and how it is achieved.

## The Impact of Globalization on GCC Women: Genres and Themes in Twenty-first Century Saudi Women's Fiction

*Basma Al-Mutlaq*

In a recent interview Mohammed al-Abbas, the Saudi literary critic, maintained that although we now have a globalized literature of people who are rebelling against tribal, ethnic, social, or class definitions, this is still less evident in the Arab world. He also claimed that until the present day there are no Saudi women writers who are capable of changing the reader's world: the crux of the problem, he writes, lies not in state bans and censorship, but in self-censorship that is fraught with wariness of the illicit, shameful, and haram, although fiction writing in its simplest form demands gnawing away at feelings of embarrassment and shame. Furthermore, according to Abbas, women writers, bombarded with oppressive laws, do not have the real life experiences that usually provide writers with ideas.

Taking into consideration the concerns raised by critics such as al-Abbas, Al-Mutlaq provides an analysis of the literary works of contemporary Saudi women writers. She situates the experiences of Saudi women, as explored through fiction, within the framework and rhetoric of globalization. The effects of globalization on the identities of women from the region are looked at and problematized through the preoccupations of the, largely, female protagonists. Arab women writers attempt to hold up a mirror to their society, experimenting with new narrative forms and voices, challenging—or arguably in some instances perpetuating—stereotypes of women from the region. What are the images, values, and cultural codes they convey through their work, and what global influences are the most prevalent? Crucially, which identities

are being constructed or deconstructed in a context of rapidly shifting political, socio-cultural, and economic realities?

In the past decade, Saudi Arabian women novelists made their breakthrough on the international literary scene when Raja al-Sanae's debut novel, *Girls of Riyadh*, was translated into English and created a niche in the market. Eager to lift the veil off women's life in the conservative Kingdom, al-Sanae chronicled the lives of four university friends. *Girls of Riyadh* has been the catalyst for a new wave of Saudi mass-market, so-called 'chick-lit' novels with suggestive and enticing titles: from Saba al-Herz's *The Others*, Samar al-Mugrin's *Women of Abomination*, to Athir Abdullah's *I Loved You More Than I Should*, writers have even broached the hitherto taboo subject of lesbianism. This relatively privileged generation is clearly torn between the dominant cultural discourse and religious decrees that invite international ridicule, and a private sphere that is increasingly liberal. Through the licit use of information communication technology, travel, and education, they have been exposed to cosmopolitan mores and have come to expect basic levels of freedom of expression, cultivating new spaces to openly negotiate taboos around sexual relations and romantic love.

## The Long Black Dress: Abaya, Fashion and the Female Body in the New GCC

*Mariam Rahmani*

In recent years, the United Arab Emirates has sought a position as the economic and artistic capital of the Middle East. Dubai's fashion scene has grown in tandem, importing top European and American brands—a process that was expedited with the onset of the global economic crisis, when established markets for luxury goods like the U.S., Europe, and Japan

were left almost desiccated and retailers turned to emerging Middle Eastern and Asian markets. In the UAE, entrepreneurs, many of them young Emirati women who have the required capital, have started successful fashion labels, which are often centered on abaya design. Many of these designers, whether they produce abayas or other 'western-style' clothing, view themselves and their work as cultural bridges in an era of globalization.

Over the course of the past two decades, the traditional abaya, a long, loose, black-sleeved cloak, has been transformed. The fashionable abayas sported by Emirati women usually maintain the generous fit, length and base color of the traditional abaya. The designer abaya industry has burgeoned in major cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well as other cities in the Gulf, with designers showcasing their work in high-end boutiques that sample work from various designers, single-label boutiques dedicated to their own designs, and major department stores. Designer abaya labels show spring/summer and fall/winter collections that are based on a concept, mirroring the organization employed by western fashion runway collections. Sometimes they align with trends in the global fashion scene set by European and American labels. Interactions between the abaya and western fashion industries are not limited to allusions in design. Well-known western labels and designers have also produced abayas. Yet, the majority of high-end abaya labels remain small entrepreneurship started by Gulf nationals. Where dress serves as a way for a society to visually communicate values on a daily basis, the message being sent by the Emirati abaya goes beyond a gesture toward the maintenance of Islamic modesty; instead, it makes a claim for an Emirati cultural identity distinguished from expatriate communities in the UAE in terms of customs and status. As these

women recognize, implicit to globalization is a threat to local customs and culture due to globalization's inherent power imbalance. Rather than allow the economic and cultural capital of the western world dictate their modes of dress, however, these women have responded by both redoing traditional garb (abaya) so as to preserve Gulf culture and aiming to shift the east-west power differential by participating in the industry as producers as well as consumers. The abaya's presence rejects the hegemonic claim that modernization must be equivalent to westernization.

The result of seven months of quantitative and qualitative research, Rahmani focuses on the contemporary Emirati abaya. Using the fact that the popularization of the black abaya in the past several decades correlates with the increased globalization of the UAE, she claims that the black abaya functions as an attempt to consecrate an Emirati identity in contradistinction to foreign, and especially western, norms. Yet, as the newest reincarnation of a traditional garment, the fashionable abaya—which operates in tandem with the larger, western-dominated, fashion industry—posits a globalized Emirati identity. The female body is thus configured as a fraught site unto which tensions and values, not least of all social and sexual expectations, are mapped, as both subject and object. To regard the abaya's essential function as an attempt to preserve Islamic modesty would be an oversimplification. The author demonstrates that in fact the abaya functions as a marker of identity—an identity that is religious, national, and cultural, and all three components cannot be easily disentangled.

# BIOGRAPHIES OF WORKSHOP CONTRIBUTORS

## **Nadera Alborno**

Nadera Alborno holds a Masters in Computer Engineering from Imperial College in the University of London and is a Doctorate of Education candidate at the British University in Dubai. She is currently a lecturer at the School of Arts and Sciences at the American University in Dubai and a researcher in the Faculty of Education at the British University in Dubai. She possesses over 15 years of experience working in university educational settings. Her current research interest is the development of inclusive education in the UAE as well as the empowerment of people with disabilities through education and employment from a human agency perspective.

## **Dalia Abdelhady (Workshop co-chair)**

Dalia Abdelhady is a Senior Researcher at the Center for Middle East Studies at Lund University. She received a PhD in Sociology from the State University of New York. Her work deals with the ways globalization shapes the lives of individuals in various ways. She looks at Arab immigrants and their children in Europe and North America and investigates the complex ways they integrate to their new societies, maintain ties to their homelands and construct global solidarities and cosmopolitan identities. She is the author of *The Lebanese Diaspora: The Arab Immigrant Experience in Montreal, New York and Paris*, NYU Press. A second line of her research investigates the impact of globalization on gender dynamics in the Arab World.

## **May Aldabbagh (Workshop co-chair)**

May Aldabbagh is a Research Fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University. She earned her PhD in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford and her B.A. degree in psychology from Harvard University. Previously, she was the founder and director of the Gender and Public Policy Program at the Dubai School of Government, the first program of its kind in the GCC that conducts theoretically and methodologically rigorous research for informed policy action. She has taught and published on a variety of topics including cross-cultural and social/organizational psychology; the psychology of globalization; and cultural and gender differences in leadership, decision-making, and job-related outcomes.

## **Salma Alderazi**

Salma Alderazi obtained her Doctorate in Business Administration from Liverpool Business School and her MSc. in Electronic Engineering from Cardiff University. She is a Bahraini strategist with both technical and commercial experience in public and semi-private entities both locally and regionally. She currently holds the position of Senior Officer at the Economic Development Board of Bahrain which is headed by the Kingdom's Crown Prince. Her interests are in ICT, women's empowerment and poetry writing. She has published a book entitled *Towards Improved Electronic Strategy* as well as an Arabic poetry book, *Ana Salma Alarabiya (I am Salma the Arab)*.

### **Fawzia Al Farsi**

Fawzia Al Farsi holds a PhD in HR Development from the University of Exeter and is currently a member of the Bureau of the State Council in Oman having won 62 votes out of 82 (the highest of the four members of the Bureau). She is a founding and Board of Trustee member of A'Sharqiya University where she also chairs the Academic Committee. Her previous experience includes Undersecretary of Education and Curricula in Oman's Ministry of Education; Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education; and Director of the Staff Development Department in Sultan Qaboos University. She also held regional and international positions at institutions such as UNESCO and the Arab Education Bureau. She is founder of several charitable organizations in Oman.

### **Nada Al-Mutawa**

Nada Al-Mutawa received her PhD in International Relations from the American University of London and her MBA in Global Strategic Management from Maastricht School of Business. She currently heads the research and studies division at the Center of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at Kuwait University (KU). Her past experience includes Lecturer at the Arab Open University and Teacher Assistant at KU. She is a regional board member in the Young Arab Leaders Entrepreneurship Organization and has received teaching excellence awards from both the Arab Open University and KU. She has presented on scholarly panels in the US, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East and has been published on GCC women and globalization in the Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy.

### **Basma Al-Mutlaq**

Basma Al-Mutlaq has a PhD in comparative and feminist literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, where she developed her interest in gender in Saudi Arabia and Arab women's literature. She was an assistant professor for two years at Prince Muhammad Bin Fahad University in Saudi Arabia. A contributor to various Arab media publications, and to Patriarchy in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (2010) and *Global Viewpoints* (2010) she is also author of the forthcoming *The Discourse of Resistance in Saudi Women's Fiction* (2014). Al-Mutlaq is also the creator of the blog *Saudi Amber*, about and for women in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

### **Marwa Al Obaidli**

Marwa Mohammed Al Obaidli graduated from Bentley University with a BSc degree in Management and Computer Information Systems in 2010 and has recently received a CIMA post-graduate qualification diploma in Business Accounting and Islamic Finance. She currently holds the position of Research Assistant at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies. Prior to this she has held internships and trained at the Department of Political, Strategic and Public Opinion Survey Studies of the Bahrain Center for Studies and Research; the Policies and Business Process Re-Engineering Directorate of Bahrain's e-Government Authority; and at the Eskan Properties Company of Eskan Bank.

### **Leila DeVriese**

Leila DeVriese is a professor in Global Studies and coordinator of Middle East Studies at Hamline University in Saint Paul. Her research explores alternative strategies for mobilization by social movements in the Middle East, focusing most recently on social media and contentious politics leading up to and following the “Arab Spring” protests. Her forthcoming book is titled: *Virtual Democracies: Social Media and Democratization of the Public Sphere* (Ashgate).

### **Susan Dun**

Susan Dun received her PhD in Communication from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana and is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communication at Northwestern University. She taught at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois before moving to Qatar to start up the Northwestern campus in Education City in 2008. Her research focuses on a variety of subjects relating to the Muslim world including digital and media literacy, sports participation among Muslim women, and Internet searching strategies of bilingual Web users.

### **Shefali Jha**

Shefali Jha teaches political science at the Centre for Political Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. Her areas of interest are political theory and political thought, women’s studies, and constitutionalism and democracy.

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Gokuladas Vallikattu Kakoothparambil is a graduate in Economics and Law and post-graduate in Business Administration and Entrepreneurship currently holding a faculty position in Business Studies at Salalah College of Technology in Oman. His PhD thesis revolves around the topic of employability of fresh graduates covering research areas including training and development, higher education, and gender studies. He has over 23 years of professional experience in the field of Industry and Higher Education and has published in various publications in reputed international academic journals. He has also presented papers in various international conferences held in the U.K., U.A.E., Malaysia, and India.

### **Linzi Kemp**

Linzi Kemp is Assistant Professor with the American University of Sharjah, School of Business and Management, teaching Leadership and Organizational Behavior to MBA and undergraduate students. Her research focus is on the study of women in employment and leadership in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, she led the information technology curriculum at an international school. Originally from the UK, she was a manager and lecturer in private and public organizations. She was also an administrator and faculty member with the State University of New York for five years. Other international experience includes Voluntary Services Overseas, where she spent two years teacher training at a college in the People’s Republic of China.

### **Rania Maktabi**

Rania Maktabi is a graduate of political science from the University of Oslo. She earned her PhD in 2012 with a thesis entitled: *The Politicization of the Demos in the Middle East: Citizenship Between Membership and Participation in the State*. Born in Beirut in 1963, she migrated to Norway in 1976 where she currently works as Associate Professor at Ostfold University College. Her works include studies on Kuwait as rentier state, the 1932 census in Lebanon, and family law reform in the MENA region. She is currently associated with the project “Citizenship in the Middle East: Political Transitions and the Arab Uprisings” coordinated by Professor Nils A. Butenschøn at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights.

### **Mariam Rahmani**

Mariam Rahmani holds a Master’s in Islamic Art and Archaeology from the University of Oxford and a Bachelor’s in Comparative Literature with an interdisciplinary focus on Art History from Princeton University. Recently, she spent ten months pursuing independent research on the anthropology of fashion, studying the contemporary abaya in the UAE, with the support of a US Fulbright scholarship. She currently works in the field of contemporary art.

### **Rima Sabban**

Rima Sabban is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Zayed University. Her research interests include gender, youth and family studies, feminization of migration, labor, and the Gulf region. She is currently working on a grant supporting research on the UAE family. Her past positions include Head of the Department of General Education at the University of Dubai and Dean of Student Affairs at the American University of Sharjah. She has taken part in multiple collaborative projects in the MENA region and is active in the UAE community. She is the author of two books: *Maids Crossing*, and *Motherhood* (Arabic) and a number of papers on globalization, Gulf civil society, labor, women, youth, and childhood, among others.

### **Jillian Schedneck**

Jillian Schedneck holds a Bachelor’s degree from Boston College and a Master of Fine Arts from West Virginia University in the US. She is currently a PhD candidate in Gender Studies at the University of Adelaide in Australia. She lived and worked in Abu Dhabi and Dubai as an English lecturer for two years and is the author of the travel memoir *Abu Dhabi Days, Dubai Nights*.

### **Staci Strobl**

Staci Strobl completed her doctorate in Criminal Justice at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center, received her MA in Criminal Justice at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and her BA in Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Law, Police Science and Criminal Justice Administration at John Jay. She is the 2009 winner of the British Journal of Criminology’s Radzinowicz Memorial Prize for her work on the criminalization of domestic workers in Bahrain. Her area of specialization is gender, race, and ethnicity as they relate to policing in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Earlier in her career, she worked as a U.S. Probation Officer and a crime journalist.



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