



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 14

Women, Nation Building and Modernization Projects in the Gulf: Explorations in State Instrumentalization of Women

Workshop Directors:

Abeer AlNajjar (PhD)

Associate Professor of Mass
Communication
American University of Sharjah
United Arab Emirates
Email: aalnajjar@aus.edu

Rima Sabban (PhD)

Associate Professor
Zayed University
United Arab Emirates
Email: Rima.Sabban@zu.ac.ae

Magdalena Karolak (PhD)

Associate Professor
Zayed University
United Arab Emirates
Email: Magdalena.Karolak@zu.ac.ae

Abstract

Women in the Arabian Gulf today, are taking *central stage* in representing and occasionally spearheading the ongoing process of “nation”-state-building, as well as they contribute to the dynamic reorientation of the large-scale state-modernizing projects across the Gulf. While the current advancement of women in the region is transcending beyond the existing political, professional and leadership stage of women empowerment, their symbolic presence is now rapidly moving towards new unprecedented and “unimagined” spaces, specifically for these women as Arab and Muslim from the Gulf. Until very recently, for example, the Gulf states were the bastion of conservatism but now are parting with its traditional reading of gender roles. Conversely, women’s representation in the public across the Gulf—as strategically

framed by the local Gulf officials and media—is also now transforming, formulating women’s embedded positionality and image as part of a broader state agency agenda. More particularly, the state is rapidly yet cautiously advancing women’s multiple roles in all aspects of its diverse tapestry: young leaders, soldiers, educators, sportswomen, fighters, pilots, and “Spartan” mothers (mothers of the young soldiers of the nation). Therefore, women in the Gulf are symbolically emerging as the new ideological “instruments” of the state-led campaign to construct the multilayered vision of the nation-state building agendas and potentially to contribute to this construction and its direction.

The workshop broadly examines the new state-sponsored policies, initiatives, regulations and projects aiming to enhance the public roles, positions, and representations of women in the Gulf in diverse fields, including politics, education, art, economy, army, culture or natural sciences. This workshop additionally aims to explore and synthesize the evolving features, dimensions, and types of female agency by empirically and theoretically looking at grassroots emancipatory activism in the Gulf. By dissecting these processes from a comparative perspective, this workshop intends to uncover complex and multiple interconnectivities and divergences between the two and to explore the implications in the approach towards female empowerment in Gulf states, as well as the dynamic state behaviors in attempting to capitalize on these outcomes.

Description and Rationale

Objectives and Scope

This workshop aims to expand our knowledge on women’s role, position and function in the state-led endeavors towards modernizing the countries and building the nations in the Gulf and advancing the individual nation’s reputation and cultural capital at home and abroad. Observing the shifts in women’s status in state agendas during the past few years, one has to note a departure, in many Gulf countries, from the traditional state positions of conservative empowerment regarding the role, opportunities and spaces available for women in the region, towards the creation of an emerging space of opportunities. The GCC countries, to various degrees, for a long time were globally criticized, commended and positioned based on a mixture of variables, including the status of women in these countries and their female empowerment agendas, projects and policies. Further complicating the investigation of women contribution to nation building in the Gulf is the sensitivity of the status and place of women within Gulf societies as a politically, religiously contested issue about which populist traditional discourse is historically dominant.

The contestation is played out amongst the state, important traditional, political and religious elites within the countries (Featherstone 1990) and the women rights groups and NGOs around the world supported by political elites, the media and occasionally the governments in the United States and Western Europe (Pinto 2012). The ideological and traditional limitations imposed by religious authorities or tribal traditionalists hindered women empowerment and participation on the levels of public discourse and state policy. Since their formation, the states in the Gulf have led women empowerment projects, in which they balanced the countries’ need for women participation, international pressures and demands for more inclusive and gender sensitive policies,

on the one hand, and the national imperative to keep the restraints on women necessary to maintain conservative forces within the society at bay, on the other.

The GCC countries are in continuous pursuit to reproduce their own version of citizen participation and the spaces and restrictions on them, managing a combination of -often contradictory- national, regional and international pressures and demands. The increase in the pace and scope of the region's globalized economies and foreign relations demanded shifting the global perception of the regimes, their modernization efforts, and their citizens. Necessary for these shifts is the change to the position of, opportunities for and conditions of women in these countries, especially with the acceleration of global discourse on gender gaps, gender equality and women empowerment in the past few decades. As of 2017, the World Bank reported that women constitute more than half of the population in the GCC, yet do not exceed 25% of the workforce in these countries (World Bank 2017, September 29)

This workshop will open the investigations of motivations, historical variables and international pressures that have contributed to the emergence of women as a state priority in the nation-building processes in the Gulf. Historical consideration of women role and position within the Gulf countries and the dynamics that have led to current changes are essential to advance our understanding of the national, regional and global imperatives of the changes occurring to women's role and position. Knowledge that is sensitive to regional forces and country specificities and historical moments, locally contextualized and globally informed.

The scope of this workshop also includes the study of effectiveness of these policies in promoting women's resources, economic and symbolic powers as important agent in the process rather than tools that could be replaced or marginalized under new circumstances which are not necessarily compatible with women role.

Contribution to the Gulf Studies

The workshop intends to largely contribute to the growing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary literature on Gulf studies by specifically focusing on the changing, dynamic relationship between women and the state in a context of nation-building processes. While the current literature on women in the Gulf and state has strongly highlighted the limited yet increasingly expanding roles of women in mainstream Gulf societies, the workshop aims to problematize and challenge such embedded assumptions and critically dissect the actively growing status of women in the Gulf across public and private spaces, and how their power, agencies, subjectivities, and positions are currently being subjected, negotiated, and determined by state forces and agendas within the broader context of nation building process in the Gulf region.

The growing high instrumentalization of women's role in public and private spaces has also become the cornerstones for many states' national and regional development initiatives. However, despite the large gains in women's status experienced in the Gulf region, many converging and diverging trends and outcomes relating to the position of women still remain. In fact, the complex relationship between the state and women in the Gulf has also constructed and fashioned to become more dynamic and critically relevant feature in understanding the future economic, social, and political development in the Gulf region. While existing scholarship has extensively explored the multiple social, cultural and economic barriers that have thwarted the integration and utilization

of women's incorporation in economics, politics and culture in the Gulf, further empirical and theoretical analyses are crucial to examine the symbiotic relationships and interaction between the state and women in the Gulf, and how the state constructs, frames, and incorporates gender relations in its nation-building process in a globalized world.

In an economically, politically, militarily and culturally globalized region, the Gulf societies are going through magnificent changes that are worth research and investigation. There is a great body of literature on the Gulf that is particularly focused on the dichotomies of traditionalism and modernism (Kassim & Habib 2011; Eben Saleh 1998) in politics, society, culture and economy. There is a real room for contribution to the public knowledge and conversations on the particularities, potentials and limitations of the societies in the Gulf and especially women beyond the above dichotomies in the context of the current shifts in state efforts to towards nation branding and nation building real or imagined.

Overall, the recent shifts in women reality in the GCC and social perception of their role, intellect and status are worth a close and critical examination that is the focus of this workshop. This is especially vital as the familial, national and global articulations of these shifts, capitalization on them and interpretations of their outcomes are yet to materialize and are largely under-investigated. There are several studies related to the focus of the workshop that can be a source of data to researchers interested in advancing our knowledge on the workshop topics. There is an important data source from the European Parliament on the status of women rights in the GCC. The study includes comparative data sets and country-based data on women economic rights, gender equality rates in education, employment, health and others (Seikaly, Roodsaz, & van Egten 2014).

Nation building in the GCC appeared in the 1950s and 60s in reference to “the process of national integration and consolidation that led up to the establishment of the modern nation-state-as distinct from various forms of traditional states.” Nation building is “an architectural metaphor, that strictly speaking implies, the existence of consciously acting agents- architects, engineers, carpenters and the likes” (Kolsto 2018).

The workshop will seek to advance our understanding and trigger critical analysis in both the motivations of the Gulf states to invest in advancing women role and position in nation building and the gains these regimes and their societies/ countries are enjoying nationally, regionally and globally. Another expected discussion will be focused on these gains of women empowerment and emancipation on the social /public level and the family private level. It is also necessary to examine how do the empowerment reforms tally with emancipatory movements, if any and whether they bring about change in the perception of their role among women themselves and about changes they seek within their immediate environments, for example, family, work, personal aspiration etc.

In their study of the women integration in the post conflict nation building efforts in Afghanistan Benard, Jones, Oliner, Thurston, Stearns & Cordell (2008) recommended a “more engendered approach to nation building”. Although their study focused on Afghanistan in its “post-conflict” era, the second section of their study looks at the effectiveness of women integration into state building efforts and unpacked several

working strategies. One of their most important recommendation is the integration of women in the process of economic construction. In addition to being “goal-oriented” (Bernard et al 2008; 129) in their programs and efforts; they enable the contribution of civil society organizations; integrate data into their programs for women and advance the quality of data collected; “resolve contradictions” between “preexisted and newly created social systems” (135) which can happen even in “developed societies” (136) as a result of the shifts in power distribution amongst actors and the changes in their agencies. This requires according to the authors, diligence and continuous reevaluation of the outcomes.

Nation state theory emerged with the publication of Stein Rokkan’s seminal book in 1964 that is focused on western European democracies. Rokkan’s work was contextual and considerate of historical territorial, political and economic formation of these states and the political role of their citizens. His model was inclusive of “the entire history of state formation, nation-building, and mass politics in Western Europe. It represents an attempt to identify the crucial variables in the long and complex process that led up to the current constellation of territories, economy and political alignment systems.” (Flora, Kuhnle & Urwin Eds. 135) “Despite the limitations on the use of this model beyond the fully western styled democracies of western Europe, yet, many scholars used it to examine nation branding efforts in Russia and post-Soviet collapse nations (Kolsto 2018). John Gultang argues that nation-building “is big and weighs heavily on the shoulders of those who carry the major burden: the peasants, the workers, the women.” (5)

Anticipated Participants

This workshop is soliciting proposals related to Gulf states’ bids to integrate and instrumentalize women in their nation building projects. Empirical research and insightful scholarship are welcome. Participants are encouraged to address any aspect of the main theme of the workshop which focuses on (but not limited to) the below topics:

- GCC-wide studies based or critical comparative historical narratives and case studies.
- Analytical papers of the personal, professional, national or global leverages that lead to women instrumental presence in the national state projects in the Gulf in the past few years; particularly uncovering patterns of inclusion in state projects or exclusion from these projects.
- The role of these initiatives, programs and policies in promoting each Gulf country and its impact on its foreign relations.
- Nation branding, women and Gulf states, women and nation building: how efforts and discourse of nation building is contributing to nation branding? Can national branding campaigns impact or advance the nation building process in the Gulf?
- State initiatives, policies for and discourse on advancing the role of women in education and higher education organizations in light of nation building projects in the Gulf.
- Women mobility and access to the public space in the gulf as part of the state modernization and nation building efforts of the states.

- Observable shifts in women's roles in the family sphere as appears in state discourse on nation building. The case of "spartan women" in the UAE, for instance.
- The great emphasis on the militarization of women in the public sphere, and the high state support of women to join the military rank and files.
- The state promotion of motherhood and the Mother of the Nation role and symbol of women status in the state ideology
- The sharp shift in Gulf states from denying women the right of the public space, and particularly to an almost overnight shift to promoting women in modernized spaces.
- The role of presence and appearance of women as a national symbol, and the very creation of their image as national icons or attractive symbols and imagined national icons
- State initiatives, policies and discourse in promoting women in politics and empowering them to reach political positions and the impact of women in these positions.
- States initiatives, programs and policies in empowering women in cultural projects and heritage related areas.
- State supported projects or initiatives for women in media and marketing communication.
- States efforts in advancing women artists, scientists and medical doctors, and engineers in light of their national projects.
- Shifting state and societal perceptions of gender roles in state building in the Gulf.
- Emerging and traditional grassroots discourses, in the cyberspace, on women's contribution to nation building.
- The role of cyberspace in enabling a state amplification of its discourse on women and nation building to both internal and external publics.
- The use of cyberspace in women emancipation and agency in the context of the nation building.
- Women as an instrument for soft power and cultural capital in the GCC.
- The instrumental use of stories, images and discourse on women by the Gulf States to projects certain image of the country (brand)

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Abeer AlNajjar is an Associate professor of Mass Communications at the American University of Sharjah- United Arab Emirates, Research Fellow at CAMRI The University of Westminster 2018-2019. She earned her PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 2003, was the Dean of Jordan Media Institute 2011-2012 (Amman, Jordan). Abeer served as a member of a UNESCO advisory group of experts (2013/14) for "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development". Dr. AlNajjar's research focuses on political communication, international and transnational news media, media and political conflict, popular culture, gender and political Islam. She published two books and several journal articles and book chapters including "From Women Empowerment to Nation Building: A Case Study from the United Arab Emirates". International Journal of communication (2017).

Dr. Magdalena Karolak (Ph.D. in Linguistics, University of Silesia, Poland) is Associate Professor and Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zayed University, UAE. Her research interests include transformations of societies in the Arabian Gulf and comparative linguistics. Dr. Karolak has published more than 30 journal articles and book chapters on the shifting gender relations, social media, culture and identity and political system transformations in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. She is the author of two scholarly monographs. Contact: Magdalena.Karolak@zu.ac.ae

Dr. Rima Sabban is an Associate Professor of Sociology, currently the Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at Zayed University (UAE). Received her Masters from Georgetown University, and PhD from the American University (Washington D.C.). She has four chapters out of Press (2018): two in *Arab Family Studies*, by Syracuse Press, edited by Suad Joseph. The other two: one out of Brill on UAE Family and Domestic Work, and the later out of MacMillan on Domestic Slavery. Sabban is the author of two books *Maids Crossing* and *Motherhood*, and multiple other book chapters and journal papers on Youth, Globalization, Gulf civil society, Migration, Domestic work, Family, Women and gender, State and Civil society. She received multiple National and International grants awards: LSE-MEC, JSPS, DIFI, SSRC, ECSSR, NRF, RIF and start-up (from ZU). Previously served as Chair of GED at the UD, and was Dean of Student Affairs at the AUS. Active in the UAE community, and quoted in Arabic and English Media. Contact: rima.sabban@zu.ac.ae

Selected Readings

- Allagui, I., & AlNajjar, A. (2018) From Women Empowerment to Nation Branding: A Case Study From the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Communication*. Vol. 12, pp. 68-85.
- Asaju, K., & Adagba, S. (2013). Women participation in national development in Nigeria: The imperative of education. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 3(1), 57-57. doi:10.5296/jpag.v3i1.3214
- Bendix, R. (2017). *Nation-building and citizenship: Studies of our changing social order* (Third ed.) [Third edition.]. London: Taylor and Francis. (2017). Retrieved September 30, 2018, from INSERT-MISSING-DATABASE-NAME.
- Benard, C., Jones, S., Oliker, O., Thurston, C., Stearns, B., & Cordell, K. (2008). *Women and Nation-Building*. Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg579imey-cmepp>
- Eben Saleh, M. A. (1998) The Integration of Tradition and Modernity: A Search for an Urban and Architectural Identity in Arriyad, the Capital of Saudi Arabia. *Habitat International*. Volume 22, Issue 4, December 1998, Pages 571-589
- Featherstone, M. (1990). *Global culture: Nationalism, globalization and modernity*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Gultang, John. *Building on Stein Rokkan*. Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Development – Geneve. <https://www.transcend.org/galtung/papers/Building%20on%20Stein%20Rokkan.pdf>
- HIJAB N., *Women Are Citizens Too. The Laws of the State, the Lives of Women*, New York, Regional Bureau for Arab
- Hatem, M. F. (1998) *Secularist and Islamist discourses on modernity in Egypt and the*

evolution of the post-colonial state. In J. L. Esposito & Y. Y. Haddad (Eds.), *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (pp. 85-99). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hijab, N. (2002). *Women are citizens too: The laws of the state, the lives of women*. New York: Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP

Kabeer, N., "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", *Discussing Women's Empowerment. Theory and Practice Studies* 3, 2002, p. 17 -58.

Pinto, V. C. (2012). *Nation building, state and the gender framing of women's rights in the United Arab Emirates (1971–2009)*. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

Kassim, M, S., & Habib, G, M. (2011) *Strategic Management of Services in the Arab Gulf States: Company and Industry Cases*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Rokkan, S., Flora, P., Kuhnle, S., & Urwin, D. W. (1999). *State formation, nation-building, and mass politics in Europe: The theory of Stein Rokkan: based on his collected works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Seikaly, M., Roodsaz, R., & van Egten, C. (2014) *The Situation of Women in the Gulf States*. European Parliament DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES POLICY DEPARTMENT C: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/509985/IPOL_STU\(2014\)509985_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/509985/IPOL_STU(2014)509985_EN.pdf)

Sutherland, C. (2005). Nation-building through discourse theory. *Nations and Nationalism*, 11(2), 185. doi:10.1111/j.1354-5078.2005.00199.x

World Bank (2017, September 29) *Why Supporting Women Economic Inclusion is Vital for the GCC*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/09/29/why-supporting-womens-economic-inclusion-is-vital-for-the-gcc>

Bibliography

Ahmed, D. A.A. (2010). *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*. Bahrain, Washington, D.C.: Freedom House.

Al-Azri, K. M. (2013). *Social and Gender Inequality in Oman: The Power of Religious and Political Tradition*. New York, USA. Routledge.

Al-Ghanim, K. (2009). Violence Against Women in Qatari Society. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5 (1), 80-93.

Al-Ghanim, K. (2012). The Hierarchy of Authority Based on Kinship, Age, and Gender in the Extended Family in the Arab Gulf States. *International Journal of Jurisprudence of the Family* (3), 329-56.

Al Gharaibeh, F. (2011). Women's Empowerment in Bahrain. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12 (3), 96-113.

Al-Heis, A. (2011, November 27). *Women Participation in Saudi Arabia's Political Arena*. Retrieved from <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2011/11/27/2011127125151908734Women%20Participation%20in%20Saudi%20Arabias%20Political%20Arena.pdf>

Al-Kazi, L.A. (2008). Gulf Societies: Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity. In *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*. Alsharekh, A. and Springborg, R. (Eds) (171-180). London: Saqi in association with London Middle East Institute SOAS.

Al-Muftah , H. A. (2010). How Do Qatari Females Make it to the Top? An Examination of the Organizational Constraints to their Advancement. *Hawwa* 8 (2), 97-119.

Al-Mughni, H. And Tetreault, M.A. (2000). *Citizenship, Gender, and the Politics of*

- Quasi States. In Joseph, S. (Ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* (237-260), New York: Syracuse University Press.
- AlRasheed, M. (2013). *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Salem, A. and Speece, M. (2017). Women in Leadership in Kuwait: A Research Agenda. *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 32 (2), 141-162.
- Al-Zuabi, A. (2016). Sociopolitical Participation of Kuwaiti Women in the Development Process: Current State and Challenges Ahead. *Journal of Social Service Research* 42 (5), 689-702.
- Bristol-Rhys, J. (2007). Weddings, Marriage and Money in the United Arab Emirates. *Anthropology of the Middle East* 2 (1), 20-36.
- Bolin, G., & Stahlberg, P. (2015). Mediating the Nation-State: Agency and the Media in Nation Branding Campaigns. *International Journal of Communication* (9), 3065–3083.
- Clary, C. & Karlin, M. E. (2011). Saudi Arabia's Reform Gamble. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53 (5), 15-20.
- Erogul, M. S., & McCrohan, D. (2008). Preliminary investigation of Emirati women entrepreneurs in the UAE. *African Journal of Business Management*, 2, 177–185.
- Esplen, E. and Brody, A. (2007). Putting gender back in the picture. Rethinking Women's Economic Empowerment. Bridge (Development-Gender) Report 19. Retrieved Institute of Development Studies University of Sussex database.
- Forster, N. (2017). *A Quiet Revolution? The Rise of Women Managers, Business Owners, and Leaders in the Arabian Gulf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Golkowsko, K. (2014). Arab Women in the Gulf and the Narratives of Change: The Case of Qatar. *International Studies, Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 16 (1), 51-64.
- _____. (2017). Qatari Women Navigating Gendered Space. *Social Science* 6(4), 123.
- Hamada, S. (2009, June 5). *New Family Law for Sunni Women in Bahrain Not for Shiites*. Retrieved from <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47106>.
- Hamdan, A. (2005). Women and Education in Saudi Arabia : Challenges and Achievements. *International Education Journal* 6(1), 42-64.
- Herb, M. (1999). *All in the family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democratic Prospects in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*. New York: State University of New York.
- Hijab, N. (2002). *Women Are Citizens Too: The Laws of the State, the Lives of Women*. New York: Regional Bureau for Arab States, United Nations Development Program.
- Hofstede, G. (1998). Masculinity/Femininity as a Dimension of Culture. In G. Hofstede et al. (Eds.), *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures* (3-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jabeen, F. Friesen, H., and Ghoudi, K. (2018). Quality of work life of Emirati women and its influence on job satisfaction and turnover intention: Evidence from the UAE. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 31 (2): 352-370.
- Karolak, M. (2013). Between Women's Empowerment and Emancipation: Societal and Political Determinants of Reforms in the Kingdom of Bahrain. *Chroniques Arabiques*. Retrieved from <https://journals.openedition.org/cy/2108>
- Kéchichian, J. A. (2012). *Legal and Political Reforms in Sa'udi Arabia*. New York: Routledge.

- Krause, W. (2014). Gender and Politics in Kuwait: Women and Political Participation in the Gulf. *Journal of Gender Studies* 23 (4), 457-458.
- Pinto, V.C. (2012). Nation-Building, State and the Genderframing of Women's Rights in the United Arab Emirates (1971–2009). Ithaca, New York: Ithaca Press.
- Maestri, E. and Profanter, A. (2017). *Arab Women and the Media in Changing Landscapes*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Metcalf, B. D. (2006). Exploring Cultural Dimensions of Gender and Management in the Middle East. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 48(1), 93–107.
- Metcalf, B.D., Nabil, S. and Weir, D. (2011). The Role of Women in a Post-Oil Arab Gulf Future. In *The New Post-Oil Arab Gulf: Managing People and Wealth (144-86)*. Sultan, N.A., Weir, D., and Karake-Shalhoub, Z. eds. London: Saqi.
- Pandya, S. (2010). "Women's Shii Maatim in Bahrain", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6(2), 31 -58.
- Pillai, K. R., Prasad, S., and Thomas, J. (2011). Why Do Women Still Experience Downward Gravitation in the Corporate Ladder? A Close Look at Glass Ceiling in Bahrain. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management* 19 (1), 1-10.
- Rizzo, H. (2005). *Islam, Democracy, and the Status of Women: The Case of Kuwait*. New York: Routledge.
- Sabbagh, A. (2007). Overview of Women's Political Representation in the Arab Region: Opportunities and Challenges. In the *Arab Quota Report: Selected Case Studies (7-18)*. Stockholm, Sweden: IDEA - International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Sabban, R. (2017). Arab Family Studies: UAE and Oman (1970-2013). In *Arab Family Studies* (Eds). Suad, Joseph. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- _____. (2017). Arab Family Studies: Qatar and Bahrain (1970-2013). In *Arab Family Studies* (Eds). Suad, Joseph. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Sakr, N. (2008). Women and Media in Saudi Arabia: Rhetoric, Reductionism and Realities. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (3), 385-404.
- Schwarz, R. (2008). The Political Economy of State-Formation in the Arab Middle East. Rentier states, Economic Reform, and Democratization. *Review of International Political Economy* (15), 599-621.
- Seikaly, M. (1998). Woman and Religion in Bahrain: An Emerging Identity. In Esposito, J.L. Haddad, Y.Y. (Eds). *Islam, Gender and Social Change (169-189)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shaya, N. and Abu Khait, R. (2016). Feminizing Leadership in the Middle East: Emirati Women Empowerment and Leadership Style. *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 32 (8): 590-608.
- Tetreault, M.A. and AlMughni, H. (1995). Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 22 (1/2), 64-80.
- Van Geel, A. (2012). Whither the Saudi Woman? Gender Mixing, Empowerment and Modernity. In R. Meijer & P. Aarts (Eds.) *Saudi Arabia Between Conservatism, Accommodation and Reform*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

Williams, A., Wallis, J., and Williams, P. (2013). Emirati Women and Public Sector Employment: The Implicit Patriarchal Bargain. *International Journal of Public Administration* 36 (2): 137-149.



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

2019 Gulf Research Meeting

July 15th-18th, 2019
University of Cambridge

Workshop 14

**Women, Nation Building and
Modernization Projects in the Gulf:
Explorations in State Instrumentalization of Women**

Paper Presenter Abstracts:

**Gender, National Identity and Status of Women in Gulf
Countries**

Zarqa Parvez

Hamad Bin Khalifa University

Qatar

Zarqap3@gmail.com

Abstract:

The Gulf Arab States are engaged in the process of creating a unique national-identity, which will differentiate them from the neighboring states and help them strengthen their image globally. Nationalism and national identity are two still under construction. Recently, Gulf States have accelerated their efforts in promoting a national myth rooted in the selective imagining of the past, the binary of modern nationalism theory. The role of women is central to nation building and national-identity projection; each of the States uses women as a symbol of the nation's values, vision and policies. The paper seeks to answer the following; to what extent and in what ways are national identities and policies in Gulf States gendered? In addition, the paper will explore the status of women in relation to nation-building processes in three main Gulf countries.

Modernization, Nation Branding and Dual Discourse on Women in the Gulf

Abeer AlNajjar

American University of Sharjah

United Arab Emirates

aalnajjar@aus.edu

Sohail Dhadal

American University of Sharjah

United Arab Emirates

sdahdal@aus.edu

Abstract:

Gulf states modernization efforts have been in the making for the past three decades, with variances in pace, focus and appropriation efforts among the different states. Political and social legitimacies in the Gulf are based on a mix of tribalism, religious authority and economic welfare which are highly mediated through mainstream media. Economic and political modernization do not exist without an impact on the society. The inclusion of women within the state's modernizing projects as articulated in their vision documents is an important component of this effort and essential for the integrating the GCC states within the global economy and for creating a national narrative of "traditional modernity", although collective and restrictive. This process inevitably leads to an emerging dual discourse on the nation that is modern and traditional. This paper examines this duality in state discourse as expressed in the state visions, with focus on women inclusion in the future states in the Gulf region. It examines how modernizing efforts are politically framed to require social legitimacy through discourse and what sort of modernity was prescribed as the right one for women in the region. The paper analyzes this effort of the state nation branding as presented in the official state media and vision document and compares it with the citizen narrative in relation to the application of the inclusion of women. The paper concludes that while there is clear effort by the states in including women in this vision there is a disparity between the visions and the situation on the ground, this varies from one state to another and more prominent in larger gulf states.

Women and Emerging National Narratives in the UAE: Duty and Expanding Women's Agency

Sarah Shaer

Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government

United Arab Emirates

Alshaer.sarah@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper examines the nationalist discourse in the UAE between 2011 and 2016 to understand the ways in which gender and women have been utilized in the UAE's national narrative. It employs a discourse analysis method to understand the emergent national narrative and the ways in which women's roles and status came to represent the state's progress, modernization, maturity and openness. Furthermore, following the events of the Arab Spring, and the state's renewed interest in maintaining stability, and its emphasis on moderation, tolerance, and happiness, this paper aims to understand how women were utilized as symbols of the UAE's exceptional status among unstable neighbors and its identity as a tolerant, moderate, generous, and open Muslim country. I argue that UAE women are utilized as symbols of tradition, and cultural continuity, and of the progressive, tolerant, and modern nation. Discourses on national identity are institutionalized through school curricula, and the media, but also through the bureaucracy of government institutions.

In the second half of this paper, I argue that the emphasis on women as monikers of social change and on alignment with global ideals of women's progress (as exemplified through indexes such as the Gender Gap index), provides women with room to act in what would otherwise be considered socially unacceptable ways. State discourse, in defining 'progressive' stances towards women's education, work, and even reproduction, as part of the fiber of national identity, expand the parameters of what is considered acceptable behavior, and thus provide women with increased capacities for action.

Courting Women in the Gulf Monarchies: State Power, Gender and Judging

Rania Maktabi

Østfold University College

Norway

rania.maktabi@hiof.no

Abstract:

Rulers in Gulf monarchies are courting women in the sense that they are opening the doors of courts for female citizens to be appointed as judges and prosecutors. In 2006, King Hamad of Bahrain issued a decree which saw the appointment of Muna Al Kawari as the first woman judge in a GCC state. Roughly a decade later,

female citizens with a law degree have been admitted as prosecutors and judges in court in five of the six Gulf monarchies.

This paper highlights the appointment of women as adjudicators in court. The main question addressed is: What are the driving forces behind the inclusion of women in the judiciary in Gulf monarchies over the past decade? Two circumstances are explored: First, the rise in the number of female lawyers (*muhāmiyāt*) along with the appointment of professional women in law as deputy public prosecutors (*nā'ibat mudda'ī 'ām* or *wakīlat niyāba*) and as judges (*qāḍiyāt*). These processes reflect questions related to how women have obtained positions as prosecutors and judges. Secondly, the paper looks at factors that shed light on the inclusion of women as adjudicators in court. This part addresses questions related to why women have obtained high-ranking positions as prosecutors and judges in courts. Courts are powerful arenas of arbitration and decision-making, and represent core institutions in modern states closely related to the exercise and dispersion of power.

Kuwait provides an in-depth study of how women pressured to be included as prosecutors in court in 2009. Some of the driving forces that explain women's entry as judges include the extension of women's political participation in representative and administrative institutions; legal mobilization by female lawyers, particularly in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; and the urge to engage in human rights discourses as part of branding politics in some monarchies, such as the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar. Two observations can be drawn regarding the inclusion of women as prosecutors and judges. First, authoritarian rule is upgraded under post-2011 rule of law governance strategies. Secondly, female citizenship is expanded in selective ways. Rather than strengthening women's legal capacity and autonomy in patriarchal state laws, Gulf rulers engage in femonationalist policies that empower women as allies in authoritative governance positions. Through such measures women experts in law –as group– consolidate patriarchal interpretations of state law where the legal capacity of female citizens is contingent and dependent on male citizens in arenas such as family law, criminal law and nationality law.

Emirati Women Journalists: Bargaining with Patriarchy in Search of Equality

Noura Al Obeidli

College of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster

United Kingdom

noura-alobeidly@hotmail.com

Abstract:

Unlike women in the Arab East and The Middle East, who in the early twentieth century stirred up the patriarchy system that was holding them back, women in Trucial States, which became known as The United Arab Emirates [UAE] after independence in 1971, lived an unprivileged life engulfed with poverty, illiteracy, scarcity of natural resources, and poor health with most of them dying at

childbirth or from diseases like malaria and smallpox. People of the Trucial States were in absolute confinement and solitude. The political and economic atmosphere in this particular side of the world was in a state of scarcity, permeated with tribal feud and disputes over leadership and land, explored by foreign missionaries who aimed to evangelize the peninsula, and symbolically colonized by the British Empire to control the naval routes of the Persian sea passage to the Strait of Hormuz and the open ocean that led to other British colonies.

The increase of oil wealth, followed by political independence and the formation of The United Arab Emirates [The UAE], as a rentier state that comprises of seven federal emirates in December 1971, marked an evolutionary transition to the Trucial society and women specifically, whose empowerment and emancipation have become an integral part of the state's most silent project to date: nation-building. Moreover, in order to convince the tribal society of the importance of women's emancipation to the development of the nation's economy, the newly born state and its 'neo-traditionalist' leadership have gradually refashioned the traditional and cultural values of the society through establishing various women empowerment campaigns and organizations and have altered the conservative teachings of Islam that the society had persevered for a long time by promoting Islamic feminism with yet a patriarchal vision to control women's participation, creating individuals who are viewed as social negotiators rather than decision makers.

Nevertheless, women's education and employment were restricted because some academic degrees and professions were viewed as off-limits to them, particularly journalism. The role of women in journalism was anonymous. They were rarely seen taking part in this field, compared to their peers in other states in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Kuwait and Bahrain, where women reported on complex political and social issues between the 1960s and 1970s. In light of this, the field of broadcast media and journalism proved to be very challenging for women to enter due to social and cultural constraints set by a patriarchal society that prefers the practice of traditional and fixed gender-defined roles.

The media environment in The Emirates has been viewed as oppressive and unrealistic since that the majority of journalists, men and women, locals and expats, practice self-censorship. After the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to political power in Egypt as an aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2010, Reporters Without Borders reported that a number of journalists were arrested and imprisoned, while others had their passports confiscated and visas terminated by the Emirati authorities. However, the authorities justified the arrests by advancing that the journalists were imprisoned for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which is categorized as a terrorist organization in The Emirates. But to media observers, the Emirati authorities have ostracized journalists whose opinions were not in line with the local political agenda, and therefore, used the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2004 to limit the journalists' freedom of expression. With the absence of investigative journalism, the escalation of censorship, and the increase reference to the red lines by Emirati and expat journalists working in the country, who fear deportation or imprisonment, media observers believe that the country

has created a media system that forms a practice of ‘a priori censorship’ over all types of information.

This research has been formed to present an in-depth study about the media development and the emergence of women’s journalism in The Emirates, and the particular socio-cultural challenges that women journalists face in the Emirati society using participant observation conducted at Dubai News Center and Abu Dhabi News Center, and oral history that was conducted with 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists. Furthermore, this research has been formed to identify the resolutions that can be developed in order to empower Emirati women’s role in media; debating the importance of their engagement, not only to report news to a targeted audience and compete in a male-dominated field, but also to express openly their concerns, desires, and ambitions.

This research study will strongly contribute to the academic and knowledge excellence of The Gulf Research Cambridge, as it is the first to investigate gender dynamics in The Emirates’ newsrooms, with focus on the influence of tribal and patriarchal culture in determining Emirati women’s role as newsmakers. It is also the first to observe and document the newsroom norms and journalism practices in The Emirates, which is delimited by an oppressive 40-year-old media law, political power control, and censorship. Therefore, this research highlights specific themes that are extremely under-examined in The Emirates, including: gender dynamics in the newsroom and self-censorship practice in the newsroom. This research is also the first empirical study to use ethnography to examine these themes.

Staging Motherhood in the (Re)Birthing of the UAE Nation-State

Rima Sabban

Zayed University

United Arab Emirates

Rima.Sabban@zu.ac.ae

Abstract:

As regional geopolitical threats (i.e. Arab Spring, Yemen War, Iran) have intensified in the neighboring Gulf countries, the UAE state has strategically coped by strengthening its domestic military capacity. Through the enforcement of the UAE national service, the UAE state has subtly promoted nationalist rhetoric agendas towards local UAE mothers/women in order to collectively support their children’s military conscription. These nation-building and state branding approaches have become nationalized and institutionalized, acting as a state strategy to uplift their motherhood responsibilities and rebirth and strengthen the UAE nation state’s role as the custodial protector of the nation. Using content analysis of state officials’ interview statements drawn from various local Arabic and English newspapers and other state social media publications (i.e. Twitter), I examine the complex relationships between the state and motherhood in UAE’s contemporary context, and how the UAE state has increasingly (re)branded functions of motherhood in times of unrest. I

specifically argue that the growing maturity of states has increasingly emphasized motherhood as a strategic tool to strengthen and maintain absolute belonging and loyalty to the ruler and ensure regime survival in the long run. The study holds empirical and theoretical relevance because it offers critical insights on the shifting assertive behavior of the UAE state to brand, rebirth, and frame the role of motherhood in nation building, and strengthen its internal and external nationhood and sovereignty in the region

Gender, Arts and Nation-Building: The Case of the United Arab Emirates

Mary Ann Fay

Morgan State University
United States of America
fay_mary_ann2@msn.com

John Willoughby

American University
United States of America
jwillou@american.edu

Abstract:

The authors of this paper have chosen to discuss the role of art in the construction of the United Arab Emirates along with the participation of women who now work widely in the visual and commercial arts. The production and display of art are crucial to the building of a nation because the arts help to create a new nation's cultural symbols and thus its identity. In addition, citizens take pride in the accomplishments of their artists. The establishment of networks of museums and galleries help to brand the nation as a modern, creative society to which potential workers and tourists want to come. The governments of the United Arab Emirates have been particularly interested in promoting traditional and contemporary art and has trained energetic young adults – both male and female – who have become involved in the promotion, production, and curating of artistic endeavor.

These activities have a clear gender dimension. Commentators have noted that many leaders of the Emirati art scene are women. Thus, this paper pays particular attention to the role of higher education in the training and encouragement of national women to enter the fields of the arts. The surge in women's activities has been facilitated by the expansion of women's participation in higher education in general and arts and design programs in particular. This paper highlights women trained in these programs.

The paper focuses on the visual arts such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. We also believe that there is a close connection between these creative expressions and more commercially oriented activities such as clothing, jewelry, and interior design. The paper will examine how university curricula have been developed to encourage Emirati students to enter the world of art.

The federal nature of the United Arab Emirates polity also provides us with an opportunity to examine the gender implications of different models of art promotion. We will contrast Abu Dhabi's efforts to develop world-class centers of artistic display with the more entrepreneurial and decentralized approach of Dubai authorities who have promoted vibrant networks of galleries linked to art studios. In addition, we will examine the government of Sharjah's attempts to develop its own centers of cultural production and display. We will investigate whether different types of art promotion have different gendered consequences.

The paper will be organized in the following manner. In the first part, we will outline the different art promotion pursued by the governments of the United Arab Emirates. The second section will investigate the arts curricula of important public and non-governmental higher educational institutions. It will also examine how these establishments use internship programs to encourage women to enter activities which promote art after they graduate from their universities. The third section will examine how women's activities respond to and shape the trajectory of art production and display in the nation.

The paper concludes with a consideration of the tensions which often emerge when a nation attempts to use art as nation-building and branding activities. Art is often transgressive and experimental, while conceptions of appropriate gender relations are often at the heart of struggles over the essence of the nation. This paper will explore these issues and assess the transformative potential of art promotion and display.

The rise of Bahraini women in politics: an analysis of the phenomenon

Magdalena Karolak

Zayed University

United Arab Emirates

Magdalena.Karolak@zu.ac.ae

Abstract:

This paper aims at analyzing the complex processes that have been shaping an increased involvement of Bahraini women in politics, especially their share in the elected political offices, namely, as parliament members and municipal councilors. Given the highest successes of Bahraini women to date in electoral polls in 2018, this research examines the last two decades of female progress in politics and looks in depth at the factors behind their success. Using the elements of political opportunity structures established through literature review, this research examines their relevance or lack of thereof in the Bahraini political environment. In addition, it looks at additional factors peculiar to the kingdom. The role of Bahraini women has been interwoven with political liberalization reforms in the first decade of the 21st century but their status has been also impacted by the sectarian divisions in the kingdom. In addition, the Arab Spring uprising in Bahrain has also influenced women directly and indirectly. Women participated alongside men in the social movements and were actively involved

in shaping the outcomes of these processes. The Bahraini Arab Spring was ultimately contained, yet, it also created paradoxically unexpected opportunities for women's empowerment. As a result, the case of Bahrain is especially interesting for analysis and sheds light on how sectarianism, reforms and popular uprisings affect women's position in politics in the MENA region.

Reproducing and Reinforcing Shifting State Narrative in Women's Petitions in KSA

Nora Jaber

Dickson Poon School of Law, King's College London

United Kingdom

Nora.jaber@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract:

Saudi Arabia is now undergoing significant political and economic changes which has involved shifting its 'legitimacy narrative' (Al-Rasheed 2013) from being religiously oriented to a more modernising, reformist orientation. In other words the country has moved from fostering a sense of 'religious nationalism' to a form of nationalism that is more localised and secular (Doaiji, 2018). The state is also moving away from seeking pan-Islamic legitimacy to seeking legitimacy from the wider international community within the international legal framework. In doing so, it has continued its tradition of instrumentalizing women to foster a sense of nationalism and garner both domestic and international support for its re-shaped narrative. This has entailed the depiction of the 'Saudi woman' as an urban, working woman (Le Renard, 2014) as opposed to her previous portrayal as a 'godly woman', pious mother and housewife (Al-Rasheed, 2013). As part of this, it has undergone a series of gender reforms, which it has spared little effort to parade internationally. These include the lift of the long-standing female driving ban, and a reduction in the scope of the Wilaya or Male Guardianship System, both of which had been the subject of petitions and campaigns by women's rights activists. Crucially however, the shift in state narrative, and the quest for international legitimacy, despite entailing some progress for women, has been accompanied by an increase in repressive measures against all forms of activism, including women's rights activism.

In light of this, the paper focuses on Saudi Arabia's recent engagement with the international human rights framework both at state level and within the community of women's rights activists. The state's re-shaped legitimacy narrative has pushed it to increase its engagement with international legal mechanisms, and the state has used this space to improve its image within the international community thereby bolstering its international legitimacy. Therefore, the paper highlights and analyses the state's recent increased interaction with UN mechanisms (CEDAW and UPR) and conducts a discourse analysis of petitions and campaign statements by women's rights activists relating to the (former) female driving ban in order to assess the engagement with the international human rights framework on both levels. The paper will then underscore and explain the ensuing tension that has arisen between the state and

the women's rights activist community on the international legal plane. The state's efforts at enhancing its international image may help explain some of the arrests of women's rights activists in 2018, some of whom had used international law and international media as advocacy tools in their campaigns for gender reform. The state has taken measures to eradicate such voices from the international plane so as not to have any competition that could undermine the state's re-shaped legitimacy narrative. It is adamant on presenting these reforms as benevolent or tactical top-down decisions, not influenced by any grassroots movements of civil society activism. Therefore, it is making every effort to eradicate any voices that could distribute credit for these reforms or expose their insufficiency. Finally, throughout the paper it is shown that women in Saudi Arabia are continuously instrumentalized to symbolise and project whatever narrative the state decides to construct, including the current one. It asks whether, considering the motive behind and the cost of recent gender reforms, they can be truly considered progress for women in Saudi Arabia.

Aisha al-Mannai, the Sharia Doyen, and the Making of State Feminism in the State of Qatar

Bader Al-Saif

Kuwait University

Kuwait

ba414@georgetown.edu

Abstract:

The Arabian Peninsula (AP) states have been actively promoting women's rights in recent years. In particular, Qatar's state feminism entails promulgating legal reforms that advance women's rights and positioning its top women performers at the helm of various institutions. In this paper, I examine one such attempt to boldly advance a Qatari woman's career to serve state interests. Aisha al-Mannai rose from obscurity to instant fame after her appointment as the Arab world's first woman rector of a mixed sharia college in November 2003. I argue that the Qatari state stood to benefit more from Mannai's appointment than she benefited women's rights and feminist ideals in Qatar. Even when the state attempts to instrumentalize women to its advantage, it fails to maximize its gains and reach all its objectives when it does not provide sustained support to its selected incumbents. State feminism is neither wholly evil nor wholly benevolent in Qatar. It is a mixed bag that requires handling with care and consciousness to reap the most benefits from it without falling prey to state agendas. I adopt Deniz Kandiyoti's patriarchal bargain model. Kandiyoti demonstrates women's rights as negotiated rights: women make choices and succumb to patriarchy in certain areas to gain traction in others. This bargain can take different forms based on the local context. Women's rights in the AP, including religious rights, are better understood through this paradigm. I tweak this bargaining model to analyze state feminism (arguably still operating under a patriarchal mindset) and its beneficiaries. What bargains could have taken place between the state and Mannai to achieve more lasting results through Mannai's rector appointment?

To support my argument, I evaluate Mannai's nine-year tenure as a rector of the College of Sharia, Qatar University, and track her utilization by the state during and after her tenure. I also profile Mannai's background and analyze some of her key writings and media appearances. Aisha al-Mannai relays the potential and limitations of state feminist incursions in the religious domain. My research is based on multiple site visits to Qatar and a multi-hour interview with Aisha al-Mannai and other Qatari stakeholders. I fill a gap in the literature on both state and Islamic feminisms and their crossover in the AP. Through this case study, the paper sheds light on a phenomenon that affects Qatar, the AP states, and the larger Arab world.

Modernization and Female Labour Force Participation in Oman: GIS Modelling of Local Spatial Variations

Shawky Mansour
Sultan Qaboos University
Oman
shmansour@squ.edu.om

Abstract:

Many theoretical models have been developed to investigate the dramatic rise of women's labor force participation (LFP) over the last century such as household production and work-leisure choice theories. These paradigms tend to explain woman decision to be active or inactive in the labour market considering various certain socioeconomic, cultural and demographic factors. Other theories incorporated the impact of spatial diffusion in explaining female employment. Globally, the number of women laborers is increasing. For example, during one decade (1993-2003), the number of working women increased by 200 million, accounting for 40% of the total workforce in East and South-East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, while still accounting for one-third of the workforce in North Africa and the Middle East, South Asia and Central America.

The economic role of women in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC) in the pre-oil era was limited to traditional family roles while female participation in the labour force was very low. Nonetheless, the economic contributions of women have changed in post-oil periods. Over the last three decades, growth rates in the GCC have seen tangible improvements in living standards. However, and despite the pronounced progress in closing the gender gap in education in the GCC, similar achievement in female employment has not been yet reached. In comparison with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the GCC states, in particular, the rich oil countries (UAE, Qatar, and KSA) are among the lowest rates of female labor force participation in the world. While women's LFP rate tends to increase across the country, there are spatial variations at the subnational level in each country. The rise in oil revenues rates in the GCC states increase the growth of transformational development. Accordingly, this led to a massive flow of low skilled immigrants who work particularly in private sector jobs and infrastructure construction projects. Some governments have developed policies to encourage locals (men and women) to take active parts in

the labour force. Similarly and as a part of the modernization process, the GCC authorities issued laws to shrink the gender gap in the labour force by giving women more benefits to increase women's economic empowerment and participation. Nonetheless, female LFP rate is still low compared to other countries in the Middle East and working in governmental sectors especially for women remains preferred choice.

Several geographical, cultural and social challenges and constraints face increasing female LFP rates in the GCC communities. Likewise, important factors directly influence women's career progression in particular social norms, family ties, geographical mobility, fertility rates, religious beliefs and access to childcare facilities. This study aims to identify factors which influence spatial variations of female labour participation at the local Omani communities. Utilizing Geographic Information Systems capabilities, geographically local modelling process was implemented to investigate causality relationships between female LFP and the major driving forces. In addition, this research seeks to answer different research questions: Where are the places of high rates of female LFP across the Omani subnational administrative zones? What are the major factors that influence low and high rates in Oman? To what extent spatial patterns of high and low female LFP vary spatially across rural and urban communities? One of the main findings of this research is also to capture the spatial effects on female LFP across subnational administrative areas. The spatial diffusions and dependence of female LFP rates over space are analyzed and visualized in thematic maps.