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Abstract

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Keywords

Globalism, Education, Gulf States, Gender, Oil Industry

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This book offers an in-depth study to readers interested in researching the effects of globalization within the Arabian Gulf States and the way this cultural revolution has created emerging roles for women. It encompasses a thorough treatment of a single theme relevant to gender dynamics within the educational system of the Gulf States, segmented into topics associated with nationalization of education in the Arabian Gulf region. Natasha Ridge proposes that globalization has caused reverse gender disparities in educational achievement in respect to occupational prospects and social returns. She emphasizes the paradox that, although women are advancing in education, they lack in socio-economic and political returns. She also stresses that gender stereotypes broaden the economic and social gap within the Arabian Gulf States. Additionally, within the framework of modernity and international rhetoric, she examines the negative impact that these discourses have on both males and females.

In chapter one, “Oil and the Expansion of Education in the Gulf”, Ridge explores the Arabian Gulf States within a historical framework of the 20th and 21st centuries during the expansion of the oil industries. This chapter provides a detailed account of the changes in curriculum in education within Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar. The chapter begins with Kuwait as an influential power in the expansion of the oil industry and the transformation of schooling in the Arabian Gulf States. However, with the onset of Iraqi war in the 1990s, many challenges have impacted the education system in the country such as shortages of local teachers, loss of international accreditation, and inability to meet the needs of the labor markets. This part of the chapter shows how industries and politics changed the philosophies of traditional or religious schooling toward curricula that supports nationalism and economy.

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Ridge also discusses Egyptian education as an influential factor in curricula within the Arabian Gulf States as well as the correlation between the profits earned by the oil industry and the fluctuating investments in teachers. She illustrates this link between industries and education in a diagram, which clearly shows the economic trends attributable to the investments of teachers from 1950 to 2002. In order to resolve the various challenges between educational curricula and the fluctuation of the markets, Ridge points out the positive impact that humanitarian organizations such as UNESCO have had on educational systems in countries such as Bahrain and Qatar. She states, “UNESCO’s 2005-2010 report shows that Bahrain and Qatar were the only countries in the region to attain 100% youth literacy rate” (p. 26). This was a result of inclusive curriculum that supports special education as well as education for girls.

Moreover, in the section about Saudi Arabia’s challenges in education, their literacy rate is slightly behind neighboring countries, at a 96% adult literacy rate (UNESCO, 2010). However, Ridge indicates the country is making efforts to increase government revenue in education, which supports teacher training programs, new school construction, and curriculum improvements. On the other hand, Oman’s challenges lie in the rapid growth of the economy, poorly constructed facilities, and lack of quality teachers. Concerns related to the inadequate learning environment raise prominence for future improvements. However, this development in the construction of school facilities has significantly impacted the education of girls in Oman. Ridge illustrates a 33% to 48% growth rate in the enrollment of girls from 1980 to 2003. She emphasizes that the impact of girls’ enrollment in schools was due to nationalistic trends in rhetoric, which influenced the support for equality in education. Yet, issues related to the quality of teachers and curricula in both boys’ and girls’ schools are left questionable. Ridge concludes this chapter with a sense of bureaucratic dominance within the Arabian Gulf States as the region’s strategic plans for the future are enveloped in the rapid growth of globalization, providing curricula that will improve math and science and the outcomes of women in education.

In chapters two and three, “The Rise of Women in the Gulf” and “The Quest for Modernity”, Ridge establishes political agendas during the post-colonial period that promoted the advancement of women in education. She refers to Western stereotypes of Arabic women as submissive and powerless; however, she stresses that prior to the arrival of the European industries, Islamic women were active in business and politics. Additionally, she recognizes that Islam is a dominant ideology in the world and that it supports academic curricula based on the development of globalization and the empowerment of women in education. For instance, in 1956, public education in Saudi Arabia was introduced. “Although it created many controversies related to gender equality; the public insisted that since the Islamic religion stresses for equity in education, the demand for girls’ schools increased” (Metz in Ridge, 2014, p. 29).

Moreover, Ridge emphasizes some unpredictable challenges that are present in Arabian women’s lives. She states that the correlation between women’s education and the labor market do not match. In other words, the returns of education for females show low economic outcomes. In the chapter, “The Rise of Women in the Gulf”, she demonstrates inconsistencies between educational attainment and economic success in a variety of studies based on women in the labor force, women in science and engineering, PISA scores, and school enrollment by gender.

Accordingly, in chapters four and five, “Leaving Boys Behind” and “Placating the Populace”, Ridge examines modernized rhetoric of national educational growth reports, which support her debate on reverse gender inequalities. Her use of studies from a multitude of sources including UNESCO, Ministries of Education within the Gulf States, UNICEF, PIRLS, and PISA presents a diverse perspective of education in the Gulf. She also scrutinizes the political debates

within these reports as she affirms the overemphasis on women's academic achievements; yet, the reports conceal the realities that men are falling further behind in education. Interestingly, in the chapter, "Leaving Boys Behind", she draws comparisons between gender divides in the Arabian Gulf States to African Americans. Ridge states, "African American males are less likely to complete high school than their female counterparts and are far more likely to be incarcerated than any other race" (Levin et al. in Ridge, 2014, p. 80). Likewise, in the Arabian Gulf States with the progress of females becoming better educated, males within neighboring countries around the globe are suffering from lower academic achievement and negative occupation returns.

Another significant aspect in the chapter "Placating the Populace", is Ridge's examination of international standardized test issues, citing the aforementioned sources on academic rankings of nations. She debates the establishment of national mandates in education and the way they prohibit local school boards from having the power to make critical decisions. Ridge alludes to how nationalized curricula steer the criteria toward creating bureaucratized mindsets rather than allowing a free flow of expression required for innovative education. For instance, in the chapter, she discusses how the nationalization of the labor pool has given males an advantage in the workforce over their female counterparts. However, Ridge suggests that "this signals to young men that by virtue of their nationality alone they are entitled to a job" regardless of their educational qualifications (p. 126).

Additionally, she points out that the majority of teachers and students within the Arabian Gulf States do not share the same nationalities as their students. For instance, in Qatar, Ridge expresses that "studies indicate that students achieve at higher levels with teachers of similar ethnic and geographic areas" (p. 111). Furthermore, she argues that male teachers are scarce in the Arabian Gulf States, and that the philosophy of education as "nurturing" exacerbates the stereotype that women are better teachers than men. Indeed, Ridge makes a clear correlation between the paradigm of reverse gender disparities, and the negative ramifications are the backlash of society's trend toward democracy and globalization. Interestingly, she alludes to the debate related to international test reports as purposeful in closing achievement gaps between marginalized groups rather than as a scapegoat for countries to justify pseudo equal rights and democracies. Indeed, Ridge makes a clear correlation between disparities of marginalized groups and national expansions toward democracy and globalization. However, she posits that the ramifications of nationalized mandates on education have excluded local school boards from making critical decisions in curricula, which have broadened the gap between social classes. Consequently, nationalized sanctions within the school systems have increased women's opportunities in education as well as in the workforce. Interestingly, the globalization effect and the nationalized education reform have created reverse gender disparities within the Gulf States, which have impacted the socio-political landscape.

In chapter six, "The Value of Education beyond Work: Development in the Gulf", Ridge explores some of the socio-political ramifications of the expansion of globalism and increased unemployment among populations in the Gulf regions. Ridge explores the economic, social, and health returns of education in the Arabian Gulf States in comparison to other neighboring countries. She examines a comparative study focused on Iran, Egypt, and Turkey from 1980-2006. The study showed that the increase in returns were positive in all three countries. Ridge affirms that the reason for higher returns in developing countries is due to the competitive labor markets and new job opportunities. In this chapter she also explores the links between education, health and crime. The findings within prominent studies (World Health Organization and Centers

for Disease Control, 2011) indicate that obesity is increasingly prevalent among adolescents within the Arabian Gulf states. The negative returns in health also show a lack of physical education within the schools.

Additionally, the lack of education for males has resulted in an increase in crimes within the Arabian Gulf States. For example, studies indicated, “United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have significantly more prisoners per 100,000 of the population than the world average” (pp. 146-148). In the chapter, “The Future of Gender, Education, and Development in the Gulf”, Ridge challenges the continuing stereotypes of women in the Middle East as oppressed and subservient to men. She states, “The notion of the oppressed woman cannot exist, though, without an oppressor, and it is in that role that men of the region have been cast” (p. 166). She concludes that vilifying men as the oppressor has created inequalities in the region, lowering the educational support for boys and men, further exasperating their potential to gain in monetary and social returns. She suggests that the resolution is not one-sided, and gendered stereotypes impair the development of education in the Gulf regions. Her overall perspective aims at improving the quality of teaching at boys’ schools, expanding the curriculum for at risk populations, establishing career programs, and holding schools accountable for at-risk students.

This book is thought-provoking, and it encourages inquiries into the pressing challenges of globalism within the Arabian Gulf States. Ridge establishes viewpoints and stereotypes influenced by Western depictions of Middle Eastern women as dehumanized and uneducated and men vilified as the oppressors. She attempts to balance these stereotypes with resources that survey the monetary and social outcomes for both genders in the region. Interestingly, her debates between the ideology and realities of the politics of globalism and gender stereotypes act similarly to a pendulum, swaying from one social challenge to another, revealing the influence of globalism as an oppressive contest. She stresses that although the implications within the ideologies of democracy and globalism emphasize optimistic outcomes for society, the ramifications could be harsh if society does not balance the power between social needs and political gains. Crucial solutions to narrowing gender disparities without beleaguering cultural and human needs must be studied and protected. With the on-going conflicts between the West and the Arab nations, this book explores the stereotypes that might be ingrained within Western cultural perceptions of the roles of men and women in the Arabian Gulf States.

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About the Author

Theresa C. Bodon is a doctoral student of Literacy at Sam Houston State University, Texas. Currently, Theresa is a Graduate Research Assistant for the Center for International Education within the College of Education at Sam Houston State University. Her interests include the study of literacy as a solution to pressing global challenges, focusing on topics related to nomadic education in Iran and Egypt. Presently, she is conducting research with Dr. Hannah Gerber related to “Mobile Gaming, Girls’ Empowerment and Developing Nations: A Civic Engagement Project During Egypt’s Transitional Democracy.” Dr. Gerber and Theresa have presented this study at UNESCO’s Mobile Learning Week in Paris, 2015. Theresa has also written WWII documentaries honored by the Library of Congress, The Lincoln Center, and the Cinémathèque Française.