Zusammenfassung

Bildung, Ehe und Arbeit: das Dilemma moderner katarischer Frauen


Schlüsselwörter
Frauen, Geschlechtsnormen, Ehe, Heirat, Golf von Arabien

Summary

We offer observations about the obstacles to promoting a gender-inclusive labor force based on two sets of data on female Qatari students and professionals. Data set 1 is the result of a project pertaining to the disparity between education and employment among Qatari women. We surveyed 274 young women between the ages of 17 and 25 with the aim of understanding some of the reasons why Qatari women were not entering the workforce. Data set 2 derives from 350 focus groups and interviews with female students to assess the effect their tertiary education had on their marriageability. While education has delayed the age of marriage when this generation of women is compared with that of their mothers and grandmothers, the social expectations of becoming a wife and ensuing motherhood mean that marriage can restrict a woman’s working outside the home.

Keywords
women, gender norms, marriage, Arabian Gulf
1 Education, Marriage, and Work: The Modern Qatari Woman’s Dilemma

The rapid economic development of the rentier states in the Arabian Gulf raises an array of social and cultural questions regarding the relevance of traditional values for contemporary Gulf societies. Oil wealth has afforded unique economic and political stability in the Middle East for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. A high standard of living is accompanied by the conspicuous consumption of Western products. Indoor ski slopes exist in a desert climate where pearl diving was once the main industry and the Indian rupee was the main currency. Prior to the discovery of oil, schooling in GCC countries consisted of boys learning to read and write in Qur’an classes held in mosques. Girls of wealthier families were privately tutored in their homes by Islamic scholars. In Qatar, the first formal boys’ schools opened in 1948, offering a curriculum of Islamic studies, Islamic history, math, geography, English, and Arabic (Al-Kobaisi 1979: 34).

The discovery of oil in the region in the 1970s transformed these national economies on account of their focusing exclusively on the petrochemical industry. Developments in the petroleum sector triggered simultaneous projects offshore and on the fringes of capital cities such as Doha, Qatar. Most GCC rulers created welfare states, offering their citizens free health care, education, water, and electricity, paid for by the exponential budget surpluses from the newfound oil wealth. Mehran Kamrava (2013: 35) explains how these funds were used to “invest substantial sums in human development, most notably tertiary education, health care, and the fostering of knowledge-based economies in preparation for the post-oil period. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this type of investment has been in the establishment of new universities, or the attraction of branch campuses, which resulted in the growth of universities in the GCC from 1 in the 1950s (in Saudi Arabia) to 13 in the 1970s, 29 in the 1980s, 40 in the 1990s, and 117 in the 2000s, an increase of over 290 percent in a decade.”

This early stage of national development focused on infrastructure expansion rather than changes to the social order. Traditional Gulf social conservatism persisted despite meteoric economic growth, which was accompanied by increased interaction with other countries and a variety of contemporary lifestyles. In Qatar: A Modern History, Allen Fromherz (2012) juxtaposes Qatar’s rapid economic development with a lack of social change as unique among nation-building developmental trajectories.

Economic change is often a catalyst for social change, as seen in the way social mobility in Britain was made possible by the Industrial Revolution. Yet, Qatar’s change in economic circumstances did not mirror such social transformation. While Qatar’s economic investment in infrastructure projects has ushered in unprecedented opportunities for its citizens and – through necessity – embedded them in global networks, these projects are intended first and foremost to build and strengthen its domestic situation rather than cultivate a new generation of cosmopolitan actors. In fact, the increased

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1 Study 1 discussed in this article was made possible by a grant from the Undergraduate Research Experience Program as part of the Qatar National Research Forum.
2 Interview protocols cited in this article were approved by the Qatar IRB Board IRB HM20001017.