

Pushing Boundaries: Exit and Voice in Saudi

Mothers' School Choice

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences and perceptions of Saudi mothers when they choose a school for their children in a time of changing political, cultural, and socio-economic developments in Saudi Arabia. The data was gathered from 15 Saudi mothers from upper middle and the affluent class of the Saudi society. Researching Saudi mothers' lived experiences within the context of Western literature on school choice, the study uses feminist standpoint theory to develop an intersectional analysis of how social class and gender operate in a restricted religious context for women. Personal narrative and auto-ethnography was also used to incorporate the author's story as it intersects with the wider issues of negotiating gendered restrictions in a patriarchal authoritarian State.

The study investigates the significance of Saudi mothers' involvement as they engage on behalf of their families in their children's education and assess their educational choice with exit and voice as decision alternatives. The findings show that while religiously conservative trends remain strong within Saudi society, mothers can play key roles in their children's schooling. The educational care work they carry out for their children is shaped by emotional labour. Saudi mothers use their maternal identity as a site of struggle to alter their circumstances and make use of their power and resources to push their own social boundaries. To avoid restrictions on their own social and personal life style, some mothers exercised school choice by exiting schools in Saudi Arabia and making a daily

journey to Bahrain to place their children in schools there. Mothers' responses to gendered restrictions imposed on them revealed some of the complexities of negotiating mothering identity when positioned between traditional culture, stringent religious values and patriarchal authority. The results of the study demonstrate that through school choice Saudi mothers were looking for prospects for change and emancipation. Through mothers' experiences of school choice, this study identifies how religious, social and cultural forces maintain a political system of gender inequality. The thesis concludes that a movement toward gender equality for mothers is only possible if wider religious and patriarchal forces are changed.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

In this statement I reflect on my journey as a doctoral student and evaluate my experience to show how I progressed throughout the different stages of my learning experience. I identify my learning style and the standard I tried to maintain through all phases of my work. I reveal as well how my personal and emotional relationships have impacted on my studies and how positioning myself frames my sense of self to show how I evolved through this journey.

Background

The timing, location and method of my doctoral studies have been influenced by my role as a mother. As I organised my life in order to care for my family, I was only able to start my doctoral studies at a mature stage of my life when I joined the international EdD programme as a part-time student. With a degree in education and a master in special education I worked with the regular classroom teachers and with parents of children with special needs. The programme offered me considerable insight and understanding of different topics and showed me connections among them. I was able to do things better as I understood many topics and concepts related to my own professional practice. Class discussions related to issues on the key role of education in transforming culture and society, and theoretical and conceptual issues on research methodology expanded my knowledge. Yet it is not an account of what I have learned that contributed to my

academic thinking as much as the indication of how I perceive the paradigm shift in it and realize the transformatory potential in my academic thinking.

The Emotional Journey

When I embarked on my studies I intended to explain the social world through my intellect, however when I included my personal experience I realised that I can know through my emotions and not simply through my cognition. It is through an emotional encounter that I explain the social world and tell the personal and gendered story behind the research. My emotions are the medium through which the inchoate knowledge for my thesis study developed. My research practice on the thesis was a demanding task in an emotional and personal journey. When I started working on it my life was thrown into turmoil with the tragic loss of my husband. I had to traverse the passage to widowhood which was too emotionally tumultuous to withstand the rigor of the thesis. I did not imagine that I would be able to arrive at this final stage. Yet, despite all inward feelings of despair and incompetence that had negative effects for my functioning and well being, here I am reflecting on the work I completed.

My new unwelcome status rendered the last stage of my EdD studies long, difficult and daunting. I was midway through my interviews when I began to see some lines of my research. But as Stenhouse (1980) remarked : “progress in human affairs is not like progress in physical sciences: as we begin to see the lines on which to design a strategy for solving the puzzle, the puzzle itself is

changed”(p. 244). When I proposed my research topic, I already had some strong feelings researching gender issues in Saudi. However, when my situation changed, it was not possible for me to avoid a relevant aspect of my personal experience within my research. Thus I exposed my feelings, beliefs and attitudes to present my perceived reality. I wanted my story to convey the message and provide the meaning that will guide my reader in the construction of the reality.

It was extremely arduous to resume working on my research while trying to cope with my loss, my grief and the ever-growing realisation of its magnitude. Dealing with my situation required coping mechanisms to dispel feelings of melancholy, desolation, depression and profound sadness while withstanding the rigor of my doctoral study. Social isolation was among the emotional issues that I had to contend with at the time and it was not an easy task. At times I questioned my decision to pursue my degree and had doubts that lingered about my performance. I gathered my data in two batches as I did two rounds of interviews due to my personal circumstances. It was rather an intense way to delve into my emotions and as such I acknowledge and take into consideration the interplay of my personal experience and my research. My identity and experience shape the ideas with which I embarked onto this research. It is my experience that alerted me to the meanings and behaviours of other mothers I studied. It had an important interpretive function and was a medium through which I had a perceptive insight

into the new knowledge being produced by my personal account as well as other mothers' narratives.

Even though working on my thesis was emotionally demanding for me, it transformed me from a part-time EdD student in the international programme into a full-time learner. It taught me how to keep sight of the future when the present was consuming all my time and energy. It allowed me to benefit from the clarity of my thoughts rather than the opacity of my emotions. It further enriched me with great sense of achievement and courage to struggle as a woman living in a patriarchal society. The research itself focused on mothers' experiences of choosing a school in a limited context. It looked at Saudi mothers' interaction with schools in a restricted environment; with the aim of choosing a school for their children. It was framed within the literature of school choice and school involvement. The analysis showed the implication of gender on family school choice debate. The production of knowledge was being shaped by my own personal place within the cultural context I was researching. I used feminist standpoint theory to research and understand mothers' lived experiences with school choice.

The Academic Stages

The academic stages prior to working on my thesis provided the foundation for my research and writing skills. Reflecting on the quality of my work based on the feedback I received I recognized that both academic thinking and academic

English represented certain challenges for my work at the graduate level. In this regard Sally Findlow (2006) looks into the prevalence of English as the academic language in higher education in the Arab Gulf and its impact on cultural transformation and identity construction. She sees linguistic and cultural dualism resulting from globalisation and post colonialism as an enabling tool for cultural and social change. In my case, despite my linguistic ability to study in English, I felt vulnerable presenting my work in a language other than my native one, especially with the required critical thinking aspect of it. Realizing that critical thinking is not a defining concept of my culture, the lack of critical thinking was an obvious weakness in the essays that I wrote. I found it difficult to apply critical thinking when I lacked the skills or susceptibility for it, yet this is one of the main skills that I developed through my graduate years of study. Moreover, my ability to engage in academic argument did improve dramatically as I learned better what is indicative of academic argument, and tried to actively participate in the pursuit of intellectual insight and knowledge.

Writing at the doctoral level was demanding indeed. Throughout all the writing assignments required in the EdD program I was guided to articulate my thoughts and my arguments in ways that would be clear to my reader. Writing my thesis familiarized me with the academic expectations of the sort of text I was likely to produce. Producing standpoint theory arguments combined with auto-ethnography I appropriated subjective expressions of the reality where I had to expose my

feelings, beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, I feel that by writing my thesis I was being transformed spiritually, academically and intellectually.

The Learning Experience on the EdD

To summarise my written work submitted prior to the thesis, I provide a brief overview of my written assignments for the taught courses. In the first module “Foundations of Professionalism in Education” I researched the professionalism of the special educator in relation to gifted and talented students in public schools in Bahrain. I sought to implement some of the information I received in the research week about research studies and practical knowledge of research techniques and methods. I discussed certain shortcomings within the education system and how the professional development of the special educator of the gifted and talented students might contribute to the general education system and to professionalism of the regular classroom teacher. I engaged actively in my own learning by realising and executing my own professional research. Engaging with research literature I sought to generate knowledge and find solutions to problems in my professional context. Doing research in my professional setting helped me identify further areas to research.

To follow on with further personal practice of doing research, in the second assignment for the module “Methods of Enquiry 1” I proposed a research study to identify gifted and talented students in regular classrooms in Bahrain public schools. My research questions concerned the identification of gifted and talented

students in regular classrooms and the effectiveness of such identification system. As I was excited to make the connections between what I learned at the university about research and my professional work, my rationale of the study was that identifying gifted and talented students in regular classrooms and meeting their needs by offering them appropriate educational services would improve educational standards for both special and general education.

Further as I was developing competence in research studies and methods, for the third module “Methods of Enquiry 2” I studied the relation between effective study habits and high academic achievement. To understand elements of students’ ability to manage learning and educational tasks, 263 students from secondary school level completed a survey to measure their study habits. I conducted statistical tests, and results showed significant differences as well as significant correlation between effective study habits and school achievement. Based on the implication of the research findings, I recommended planning, developing and implementing special programs that could improve high school students’ study skills and study habits.

My assignment for the fourth module “Specialist Course in International Education” related to the political and social changes in Bahrain in the context of globalization and national needs. I studied Bahrain’s internal problems of the political and social unrest of the 90s that led to political and social changes in the country. Moreover, I discussed the role played by external geopolitical powers,

and illustrated the main features of the political and social reform project. Throughout the essay I argued that although changes were made on the basis of national demands to enhance the prosperity and social justice for the citizens of Bahrain, external pressure added to the complexity and expansion of such changes and reforms. In particular, empowerment of Bahraini women and reinforcement of their critical participation in society is regarded as one of the principal advancements in Bahrain's reforms.

The IFS Putting Research into Practice

The courses on methods of enquiry one and two provided me with comprehensive introduction to the research methods and the necessary preparation in core skills and key elements of the process of research which enabled me to carry on with my IFS research. I grew to be more confident as I embarked on my first field study. I researched teachers' attitudes and practices regarding the integration of students with special educational needs in ordinary schools. The aim of the study was to examine attitudes of regular and special teachers towards integration of children with educational needs in regular Saudi schools. Results suggested that although both regular teachers and special teachers held similar attitudes in many instances, there were a few significant differences between the two groups. Further interpretation of data analysis revealed some significant variables relevant to the formation of teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion. Finally, I stressed the importance of adequate teacher training to improve practices and attitudes towards

inclusive education, and highlighted the importance of appropriate legislation. To conclude, I offered recommendations for further researching the subject as well as implications of the research.

Reflections on my Development

Having completed the doctoral program, there are certain elements of change that I was able to make. I was able to make changes on the personal level as well as being able to make changes in my work due to the doctoral level abilities I have gained. As this doctorate has prepared me to work independently, and be more self-critical, I have become more self-assured in my abilities to work at a high level and am more in control of working processes within a demanding environment. Gaining self-knowledge as well as the ability to work in an intricate and dynamic environment is an initial impact that the doctorate has had upon me. Thus, as I approach the end of my studies, I envisage myself with a new identity and increased confidence in my decisions, actions and self. I truly hope that developing my critical thinking and my research expertise will bring about change and make positive impact on my own community. To me this is the important part of my doctoral outcome along with the elements that augment my ability to be a lifelong learner.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Introduction

In this study Saudi mothers' interaction with school is the context through which I explore the effects of cultural, social and religious restrictions on school choice and women's lives. With the aim of understanding the work Saudi mothers do for schooling I look at the gendered nature of this work. I draw on Saudi mothers' involvement in their children's education to examine their experience of living in the larger Saudi society with its landscape of strict religious and social practices. I reflect on the intersection of gender, class and religious issues surrounding Saudi mothers' experiences to illuminate their identities and their roles within their family lives.

Saudi society holds to the view that women are subordinate to men. Many forms of gender inequality that exist are supported by religious dogma and cultural norms, political and social regulation and institutionalised law (Mtango, 2004). Gender inequalities due to specific realities about traditional, cultural, social and religious practices are endured by mothers in this study who discuss their perceptions of discriminatory cultural norms that are deeply entrenched, institutionalised and legitimised by different social and political forces. In such a context, where male domination is the norm and patriarchal authority has power over many aspects of women's lives, I interviewed 15 mothers from the affluent

and upper middle classes in Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. My focus was their mothering and how they made the decision to choose a school for their child. This research is situated at the intersection of the concepts of school choice, social class and gender. Furthermore, this study looks at adjustments and modifications put forth by mothers - as key educational decision makers within Saudi families – who, given their circumstances, had to make use of their power and resources. It also seeks to examine whether the conclusions from the international literature on parental school choice hold true in the case of Saudi mothers.

In this respect, Hamadeh (1996) remarks on the paucity of research written about mothers and motherhood within the Islamic family, despite the recognition and acknowledgement they attain in Islam. According to her, overlooking the predominant mothers' role when researching women's rights in Islam, justified male dominance and women's subjugation. By looking into aspects of women and family life other than motherhood the relatively important role of women within the family was overlooked. Thus, by exploring cultural and political factors interacting with each other within Saudi society, my aim is to shed light on a neglected yet essential part of women's lives.

The data has not only offered a wealth of information about the distinctiveness of mothers' experiences, but it has also revealed a rich blend of socially constructed themes that enhance and extend understandings about Saudi women and Saudi education. In recent years these two sectors of Saudi society have been subject to

enormous discussions and debates both locally and internationally through media and symposiums. Through this study I intend to go further than depicting the scene of school choice; rather I will elucidate in-depth the gender-specific and context-specific ways that Saudi mothers relate to the home - school relationship. Moreover, I draw on theories of structure and agency as I seek to inform and bring about change in relation to issues of equity and social justice.

Personal and Professional Context

Behind this study lie various personal and professional interests. I became interested in issues related to school choice both as an educator and as a mother. In my professional experience in the field of special education as a qualified teacher and teacher trainer, I worked with parents of children with special educational needs to help them integrate their children into suitable programmes. This was not a simple task in the Saudi education system. Being a traditional one, the Saudi education system conforms to (Sliwka & Istance, 2006a) the description of traditional systems that require parents to send their children to a school within the locality of their residence and within the vicinity of the family home. In addition, the Saudi government maintains control of every aspect of education and schooling both public and private. According to Rugh (2002, p. 40) "Government control, one major feature of Saudi education, started early and has continued to this day." Furthermore, local schools lack special provisions for children with special needs. Following a standard government program local schools, private or

public were unable to offer children with special needs the educational facilities, resources or the demands that they required from schooling (AlFadhel, 2006).

Based on my previous research, my qualification in teaching and in special educational needs, and personal experience working with teachers and parents both in regular and special education, it was difficult to find special educational programmes for those students who did not fit within the general education system. It was evident that parental school choice was restricted because of stringent government control over education including private schools which parents are paying for. Affluent and upper middle class Saudi parents were not happy with tight government control over education, or the centrality of its Islamic character. They regularly voiced their anguish at their inability to have private schools that follow other curricula or pursue any program that differs from the government program. Thus, it was popular for those parents to send their children to study abroad either to other Arab countries such as Egypt and Lebanon, or to Europe and the United States.

For residents of the main cities in the Eastern Province the choice of schools outside the country was made possible with the opening of a bridge connecting the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia with Bahrain in the late 80s. When Saudi parents realised that private schools in Bahrain had a wider margin of independence from state education, they chose to exit a restricted education system to another one that might meet their demands of schooling. This action by Saudi parents is congruent

with the claim by Meuret and Duru-Bellat (2003) that “users may have influence on schools either through ‘voice’ (participation in school life and on school boards) or through ‘exit’ (choice of another school)”.

David (2003) illustrated how feminist studies and ethnographic perspectives founded on personal accounts, narrative voices and stories are used to account for social and policy change. She noted many studies in which mothers as feminist researchers were able to reveal the gendered nature of the relationship between mothers and education. She noted as well that “many feminist researchers internationally had become interested in researching the lives of young women growing up within the changed times and social and economic transformations.” (David, 2003, p. 148)

I myself became practically well informed about the Saudi schooling system and gradually more interested in observing and understanding its fundamental principles as a young mother. As a Bahraini married to a Saudi and living in the Eastern Province, my children attended a local private school in Dhahran, one of the three main cities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Through my children I had my initial connection with the Saudi school education system whereas I had attended school in Bahrain. At first I did some volunteer work in my children’s school. After I received my Masters degree in special education, I started working as a teacher trainer in the field of special education. There I encountered

difficulties with the regular school program as it was not flexible enough to accommodate students with different levels of abilities (AlFadhel, 2006).

On the social level, conversations about children's schooling were at the forefront of topics discussed by young mothers. Wherever mothers gathered – morning coffee, dinner parties, play grounds, or school meetings- they would be talking about school and the Saudi school system. I observed as well that widespread complaint and criticism of, and discontent with, the Saudi education system dominating these conversations. As a mother and a professional I became aware that some issues of schooling in Saudi Arabia are problematic. Furthermore, being attentive to parents' discussions I was involved in exploring solutions within the local community. That is how I became interested in examining mothers' interaction with schools in a restricted context and why I aimed at exploring their experiences, hearing their voice, and seeing if it led to any action at a time of social and political change.

As a student researcher, I embarked on this study with the aim of contributing to and informing the international research and studies of mothers in different cultures. Exploring the influence of socio-cultural forces on women's ability to participate in public agency, and investigating the complexities in delivering and improving education for females in Saudi Arabia, will further understanding of women's education and elucidate various aspects of the relationships between mothers and education. My research examines the educational policies, programs,

and practices that offer and/or deny women the opportunity for change and advancement in Saudi Arabia. With a focus on the dynamic interaction between agency and structure my aim is to bring to light all the complexities and nuances of Saudi mothers' gendered relations with schools in a restrictive context.

Social and Cultural Context

People live in diverse socio-cultural settings that vary in their shared values, customs, social practices, institutional constraints and for opportunity structures. To understand, in depth, the culture of the community in my study and gain insights into the perceptions of its members I need to elucidate various aspects of the social and cultural life of the Saudi family and Saudi women. Thus, the study of the social and cultural context is essential in laying the foundation for this research.

Although Saudi society has always been known as being restrictive regarding women, the years of the 60s and 70s were an era of openness and lenience that lasted for a couple of decades before society reverted to enforce its own version of a strict interpretation of Islamic law. This regress into stringent conventional practices within Saudi society came as a reaction to the two historical events in the region which took place in 1979. Both the Iranian revolution and the attempt by Islamists to take over the Grand Mosque in Makkah were regarded as the reasons that caused the slip back into a conservative religious mood that pervaded all aspects of Saudi society (Keddie, 2007; Sakr, 2008; Yamani, 2000). From

education to all practices in civil and family life, society was affected by growing Islamism led by traditionalists who were socially highly conservative, and whose aim was to protect society from 'westernisation'. As a result, they assumed the right of legal and moral surveillance among the whole society and consequently it is clear that women's rights suffered the hardest relapse. As the Saudi adaptation of Islam was already restrictive regarding women, with the fundamentalist movement becoming more powerful, it is women who suffered most as they were pushed out of the public eye and subjected to more restraints.

According to Federal Research Division (2004, p. 99) depiction, Saudi society is characterised by a high degree of cultural homogeneity. However, Yamani (2000) perceives Saudi Arabia as a heterogeneous country. Despite the fact that the two delineations give the impression of being contradictory or at odds with each other, one can explain this incongruous interpretation of the same society when looking at its constituents. Homogeneity in Saudi society is revealed in a common Arabic language and devotion to Islam as the only religion in a country with widespread value of conservatism and modesty. In spite of this homogeneity, Yamani (1996b) refers to regional distinctiveness within the kingdom which entails some differences in the social and the cultural character of the people of each region as well as social differences that can be attributed to class and cultural capital.

Contextualising the Study

Context shapes people's lives and actions and it is essential to understand the nature of any social research. Thus, the first step in my study of Saudi mothers' school choice was to investigate the context within which factors that exert a major influence on the mother-school relation operate. In this research, I explore how the context for Saudi women's school choice decides the ways in which they have structured their relationship with education. As context is specified according to time and place, I look at the historical period of the opening of the causeway connecting the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia with neighbouring Bahrain. The emergence of this local phenomenon affected Saudi mothers' interaction with school choice, where it made available to them a different school system to opt for. Moreover, I aim to map, describe and explain the mechanisms by which religious, political and social institutions within Saudi society define and shape Saudi mother's school choice. Thus, I focus on these religious, political and social contexts as a perspective for studying Saudi mothers' school decision-making.

Geographical Context and Demographics

This research explores a local manifestation of a phenomenon that is occurring in Dammam, Al-Khobar and Dhahran metropolis in the oil-producing Eastern Province along the Gulf. Of the three neighbouring cities, the city of Dhahran represents a major administrative centre for the Saudi Oil industry. It is the headquarters of the Arabian American Oil Company, fully owned by the Saudi

Government and known as Saudi (Aramco). Aramco is the main oil company operating in the country with the largest oil reserves in the world. Dhahran was founded in 1938, after oil was discovered in the vicinity in the early 1930s. Seven decades on, Dhahran is still Saudi Aramco's worldwide headquarters and the centre of the company's finance, exploration, engineering, drilling services, medical services, materials supply and other corporate organisations. Within the Aramco compound no restrictions are imposed on women's mobility including Saudi women; they can drive and work alongside men.

The population of Dhahran is mainly Saudi, and Saudi Aramco gives home loans to Saudi employees to build their own homes, and supports the community by building schools for the locals. The city population also includes many expatriates from Asian countries as well as Westerners and many non-Saudi Arab nationals. It was the discovery of oil that brought a large number of foreign workers into the conservative country and inconceivable wealth into a traditional society in a tremendously short period of time. In the mid 1970s foreign workers accounted for 34% of total workforce. However, due to the policy of 'indigenisation' of the workforce known as 'Saudization policy', Saudi Aramco at present comprises 85% Saudi employees, with only 15% expatriates. Nonetheless, many companies in the region employ relatively large number of expatriates and they have built fenced-in compounds where only expatriates live. Those skilled foreign workers

were a necessity to meet the fast development in the Saudi economy emanating from oil production.

A Causeway, 15 miles (24 km) long, links the Eastern Province, the largest province in Saudi Arabia, to Bahrain. Opened in 1986 the causeway has helped residents of the Eastern Province enjoy a much less restricted social life by making the island nation of Bahrain within easy driving distance about (32 km). Due to restrictions on social life and women's mobility in Saudi Arabia, some households of expatriates and middle class liberal Saudi citizens prefer to have their homes in Bahrain - where it is more convenient to settle women and children - while the men commute every day to their work in Saudi Arabia. Other households choose only to send their children to study in schools in Bahrain.

This new geographical link produced a phenomenon of school children crossing the borders with their passports to be stamped by immigration and customs officers twice daily. Such a relatively new trend has political and academic elements to it. Consequently, it instigated debate over the stringent restrictions governing Saudi private education and brought up issues of school choice and parental school involvement to the forefront of public social and cultural concerns.

The Family

The family represents commitment for Saudis; it is the primary basis of identity and status for the individual, as well as being the immediate focus of individual allegiance. Sharing common interests and lifestyles, Saudis tend to socialise within

the circle of the family, extended family and family alliances with other compatible families. Thus, placing the family as the central social institution in Saudi society maintains assurance of family values, traditions and attitudes. Values and attitudes regarding relations within the family, and relations of the family with the rest of society, are propagated through adherence to family lineage. This explains the spread of interfamily marriages where individuals tend to marry within the extended family from the same tribe they belong to. This is a traditional practice promoted by most Saudi tribes that measures their respect and high regard by the individual's capability to live up to socially prearranged ideals of honour (AlKhateeb, 1998; Long, 2003).

Tribal affiliation constitutes a major status category for Saudis. Based on bloodline, the claim to tribal status is maintained by patrilineal descent. Thus, intra-tribal or intra-family marriages are considered as means to preserve purity of descent for Saudi tribes. Families in Saudi Arabia are patriarchal where the father is the authoritarian power figure at the top of a hierarchy based on gender and age. Cultural and religious values promote institutionalised male dominance which underpin the entire Saudi society (Federal Research Division, 2004; Viviano, 2003).

Whereas traditionally the family represents the social core of Saudi society, there are variations in many aspects within this core. Some Saudi families assume more liberal standards than others in defining the degree of conservatism and veiling or

segregation between the sexes. Variations can be attributed to regional as well as other social aspects. In this regard Yamani (1996b) talks about regional distinctiveness and differentiated cultural values amongst Saudi society. She attributes most heterogeneous qualities within the society to various major regions that constitute the country. In addition, women from the upper strata of society are more open to Western elements as they are used to travelling as many wealthy families used to educate their boys and girls in foreign schools abroad or in other Arab countries, Europe or the United States during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Rassool (1999) also observed some willingness amongst immigrant Muslim families to modify their traditional views and adapt to the norms of Western society as a result of exposure to the West.

Furthermore, Alkhateeb (1998) observed changes that have taken place in the Saudi family following the discovery of oil. She noted that despite the rapid pace of modernisation and change in the acquisition of material possessions such as the housing, furniture, clothes, food, and domestic equipment, cultural aspects remain remarkably resilient to modernisation and change. The characteristics of family dynamics related to gender roles, the role of the elderly and decision making process within the family have stayed more or less the same. However, she maintains that a comfortable way of life that is driven by oil wealth and the government's commitment to women's education has allowed Saudi women to

acquire more power in the domestic domain where they have more control over the children and the household.

Women's Status

To understand the legal and social status of Saudi women one has to delve into a complex environment where religious law and traditional customs mesh to produce a picture that appears paradoxical. Saudi women in general are buffered against life's realities; they lack basic human rights and freedoms as the legal and moral aspects of their public as well as private life is tightly observed and supervised by different bodies representing different authorities such as the State, traditions, religious authorities and the patriarchal family. Shielded from public life responsibilities, Saudi women are turned into perpetual minors constantly under men's guardianship (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

In Saudi Arabia women retain their maiden name throughout their lives. Officially they belong to the family of their birth and never take their husband's name. Furthermore, many Saudi women personally hold substantial wealth because their share of inheritance is guaranteed under Islamic inheritance laws. As a result of her inheritance share being half of that of a man, legally a Saudi woman should keep it to herself. The husband has no right over his wife's possessions neither can he lay claim to it. Even if the woman is wealthy in her own right, she is not expected to support the household. The closest male relative - whether it is the father, brother or husband - is obligated to support women of the family.

Therefore, under Islamic law any woman is guaranteed her financial independence from male control (Federal Research Division, 2004; Long, 2003; Yamani, 1996b).

The retention of a woman's maiden name, as well as her control over her personal wealth, which is guaranteed by religious laws are considered as indication of women's autonomy. Nonetheless, Saudi women are unable to act without male representation. Yamani (1996b) explains that since women are denied access to judicial or other official public services they are compelled to assign a male representative with power of attorney to handle any official work on their behalf. Forced to be represented by a male of their choice, many women make their husbands, sons, or brothers their proxies. Saudi women hardly ever appear in court, deal with lawyers, manage their own businesses or handle their own financial issues (AlKhateeb, 1998; Keddie, 2007; Yamani, 1996b). For this reason, women are kept away from controlling issues of importance to them. As most of their affairs are being handled by one of their male relatives, many Saudi women are either unaware of their rights or choose not to solicit for their rights for fear of ruining their family's reputation.

Constraints on women's visibility and mobility in Saudi Arabia are apparent. The fact that women are not allowed to drive perpetuates their dependence on men. This rule, coupled with the absence of reliable public transport in the country, makes the use of private drivers and chauffeurs to Saudi families of middle and

upper class a necessity that facilitates women's mobility and allows them to fulfil their role and meet their family needs. Examining the social changes in the Saudi family in general and women's lives in particular, AlKhateeb (1998) asserts that in response to the influx of wealth in the country almost half of middle and upper class Saudi families have private drivers available to them while the other half depend on male members of the family such as father, son, or brother. Hence, in this way, many mothers find in their young boys an egress to restrictions on their mobility. It is not unusual to see young boys between the age of 12 and 15 years old trying to reach for the steering wheel and actually driving under the supervision of an older female member of the family, usually the mother, who finds this as the only solution to her immobility. In a newspaper article (AlFawaz, 2010) Saudi mothers attest that they find themselves pushed into dragging their young boys into driving to help them in moving and fulfilling their family needs. Unfortunately, the same article states that the highest death toll of drivers is between the ages of 15 and 25, while the death toll of accidents involving child driving represent over 20%. At present, various global and local factors, including the popular use of social media through the internet, has instigated a process in which women are renegotiating their personal and political status in the country, perhaps the most important being the issue of their mobility.

Segregation, Segregation, Segregation

Saudi Arabia embodies the most traditional interpretation of Islam in the world for the reason that several social customs were imposed as though they were inviolable religious injunctions. Many practices are not necessarily compatible with the doctrine of Islam. Rather, it is influenced by the patriarchal tradition that existed long before the advent of Islam (Hamadeh, 1996). The most salient of these practices is the extreme segregation between the two sexes; a practice that inflicts severe restrictions on women. In public, men's activities are completely segregated from women's ones. The two sexes do almost nothing together in any public sphere. Public events like football matches, music concerts or festivals are strictly for men. Women are denied access to most official public government services such as ministries or directorates due to the fact that most offices in both public and private sectors are staffed by men. All public encounters or interactions with men are restricted (AlKhateeb, 1998; Federal Research Division, 2004).

It is not only in public places where Saudi women have separate sections where they eat, work or pray, but also in most Saudi households some degree of segregation is observed. In general, Saudi houses have a separate entrance and living room for men which is also used for male gatherings, such as meals with guests or business meetings. These sections in the house are separated by a closed door from the rest of the house or built as a completely separate unit.

Segregation is also imposed over a women's body in Saudi Arabia as women normally adhere to a strict dress code in public. The black cloak called an "abaya" and a head scarf with a veil is obligatory (Yamani, 1996b). The garments that cover women from head to toe must be worn outdoors the moment they leave their homes. Veiling and separation of women are measures designed to ensure chastity and sexual modesty; very highly valued morals that are applied first and foremost to women. Held to be a religious obligation and attached to their family honour, male family members are expected to insist on women's observance and conformity with social restrictions. Women are regarded as being responsible for sexual temptation (fitna); when women are not veiled in public the authorities contact their male guardian whose reputation is believed to be at risk.

Male Guardianship

Amongst other strictures comprising the backdrop of Saudi culture and society, male guardianship over adult women and children remains the most deep-rooted and most difficult to alter or modify. Political and social restrictions on women keep them under permanent male supervision within a system of guardianship that is not possible to eliminate (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Viviano, 2003). In her writings, Mernissi (1991) discusses Islamic societies and women's liberation in Muslim countries, and the role of the state in developing or impeding equality for women. She argues that in some Muslim societies the frame of mind of those with vested interests denies women their human rights and focuses on women's

weakness and the need for male authority and supervision over women in the name of protection of honour. According to her, pertaining to women's rights, the practice of Islam in some Arab and Muslim countries is not essentially well-matched with the principles of Islam as a religion. Rather, it is prejudiced by the interests of the male elite in a patriarchal society. Human Rights Watch report (2008) reveals how restrictive the system of male guardianship in Saudi Arabia is to women's normal lives and that this explains the difficulty Saudi women face in performing simple or basic life functions related to their education, health care, job opportunities, travel and identity forms.

Saudi state laws stipulate male guardianship over women, and social norms amplify this necessity. In the local newspaper *Alwatan* (AlHarbi & ALFawaz, 2009) prominent highly educated Saudi women participated in a debate over the issue of male guardianship. They argued that the rationale behind the establishment of male guardianship in the early days of Islam is not relevant in today's modern life. They disputed the claim that Saudi women today need male protection. They affirmed that Saudi women would be able to support themselves if they were given the chance to do so and were not discriminated against by the official system. They stressed as well that the institutionalised male guardianship is not only outdated, but it is the main hindrance that prevents women from moving forward in any field. They caution against voices that call for limiting or regulating its use, and request its complete elimination.

The Rise of Saudi Business Women: Nascent Women's Movement

Currently, in this strict, religious and traditional society one can find some variety of expression of identifiable women's movements. The business sector is regarded as one main gateway through which Saudi women are accessing the public sphere.

Despite all limitations forced on them, the number of Saudi women entering the business sector is growing (Butters, 2009). Through inheritance they are becoming major shareholders in family businesses and big companies. In addition, many women venture with their own projects that are mainly directed at women or community needs. Many Saudi women have obtained much economic wealth, however, they have not acquired the power entailed with this and are unable to utilise the circumstances to their benefit due to the many restrictions imposed on their agency.

Nevertheless, women's achievements in business have given them public confidence. Well educated and well connected Saudi businesswomen represent a promising women's movement as observed lately by Al-Dabbagh (2009). She argues that, organised as a group, they are laying the groundwork for women's empowerment in economic, social and political domains. Since during the Jeddah Economic Forum held January 17-19, 2004, when they were allowed to participate openly in the same room with men and not via closed-circuit as before - Saudi businesswomen are becoming visible and making their voice heard.

Participating in national and international conferences and symposiums, businesswomen's activities are praised and admired by local and international media. Economic reports estimate the volume of women's capital in Saudi local banks to be around SR 60 billion (\$16 billion) while they own SR 120 billion (\$ 32 billion) in real estate investments and 20% of the country's commercial registries (Nassar, 2011). Moreover, having access to public managerial positions -as in 2004 when two women were elected to the board of directors in Jeddah's chamber of commerce - Saudi businesswomen are using their voice to engage in candid discussions and to challenge social and cultural restrictions imposed on them (AlDabbagh, 2009). They speak up and demand that the rules that govern business transactions be the same for both men and women. The boldness of their speech indicates their determination. They are not dispirited by the disturbing reality that they find themselves in. Through businesswomen centres they motivate local women and empower them through training, campaigning and forums. With the aim of changing old regulations and procedures that stand in the way of women's employment and limit their business opportunities, they persevere with their ambitions.

In another field, Sakr (2008) examines Saudi women's social and political status through their representation in the media. She argues that the increase in their hiring for media jobs is a sign of some change in public outlook towards their gender role. According to her, and in comparison to a previous ban on publishing

women's photos in local media, there has been remarkable visibility of women's faces in the public media since 2004. Albeit a reticent progress, it is widely observed that Saudi female columnists' faces could, at present, be published uncovered in local media. However, she regrets that this did not indicate positional advancement for female media professionals, nor did it alleviate Saudi women's lack of visibility in general. Objections to photographs of Saudi women faces are always being raised by conservatives while her identity remains a contentious issue whether she is identified in person or in image.

The examples stated by Sakr (2008) about various media platforms through which Saudi women were able to address their issues covered a period of 3 years beginning with the election of two women journalists in 2004 to the Saudi Journalists Association. She noted as well the initial formal opening of a university course in Mass Communication for girls in 2005 as an attempt to expand women's education outside the conventional fields of humanities, education and health care. Furthermore, her documentation of the rise of women's visibility as presenters of TV talk shows and as newspaper editors demonstrated how women became both producers and subjects of the media. While she observed a striking rise in novels published by younger Saudi women novelists, Arebi (1994) also explored earlier how contemporary Saudi women writers reshaped the space through which they manifested their concern with their own issues. Yet, both mentioned pioneer women writers who led the way and instigated

debates on how women themselves read their culture through their own experiences.

Women's Education

In no part of Saudi society does the paradox of tradition and modernity manifest itself more clearly as in that of women's education. The field of girls' education has been a true battle of power between traditionalists and reformists since it was initiated by the state, and the divergence continues at the present time.

In a detailed research Alwashmi (2009) investigates religious, political and social motives underlying the conflict between different sectors of decision makers in relation to girls' education. He recognises the deviation between conservatives and modernists and avows that the schism has always been very deep. He observes the fierce objections by conservative elements that accompanied women's education at its inception. This rejection caused stringent restrictions that are still now imposed on women's education and can be distinguished as the main feature of girls' educational system.

Formal schooling for girls in Saudi Arabia did not start until the 1960s when it was established by the state (Alwashmi, 2009; El-Sanabary, 1994; Rugh, 2002). Up to that time, informal religious schooling took place for girls just as it used to for boys prior to the start of formal schooling. However, even if it was only memorisation rather than reading of the Quran, any form of girls' education or tutoring had to end at puberty as girls' veiling and home seclusion began as they

approached their teenage years. Thus even when they were granted some sort of traditional religious education, girls were not allowed to pursue any form of education on a scale similar to that of boys. (Hamdan, 2005; Rugh, 2002; Yamani, 1996b).

To be able to persuade conservatives to accept girls' formal education, the goal of their education had to be ideologically tied to religion. It is stated in official policy that the purpose of educating girls is to bring them up in the appropriate Islamic way to enable them to perform their duties in life, to be perfect wives and excellent devoted mothers. In addition they would be able to contribute to their society when prepared to perform certain careers that are suitable with their 'nature', mainly in the areas of education and health such as teaching and medical care. Furthermore, until recently, girls' official education has always been headed by a male religious figure. From pre-school until high-school, girls' education came under what was known as the General Presidency of Girls' Education; a directorate controlled and staffed by clergymen (AlHariri, 1987; Federal Research Division, 2004).

The decision to reallocate the administration of girls' education to the Ministry of Education came as a response to a fire incident in March 2002 in an elementary girls' school which resulted in the death of 15 young girls (Hamdan, 2005; Prokop, 2003). It was reported by the media that during the incident the religious police authority deliberately obstructed the rescue efforts preventing firemen and

fathers from the premises and blocking exits to the blazing school, as they claimed that it would have been sinful to approach the unveiled girls and their female teachers. Furthermore, education authorities were accused of neglecting safety measures in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Prokop, 2002).

Evidence suggests that reforming girls' education is hardly ever smooth or easy for various reasons. Even though the running of girls' education had been transferred to the Ministry of Education, conservative religious male scholars remained heading the directorate of girls' education with no change implemented for its improvement. The curriculum in general is heavily focused on religious studies, with class periods dedicated to teaching language and liberal arts mostly devoted to teaching religious subjects. At present physical education is not allowed in girls schools while fitness facilities are not available for women in general. High fenced girls' schools are often fitted with only one gate to exit the building - which is kept padlocked during the school day - and guarded by a conservative old gateman (Alisa, 2009; Alwashmi, 2009; El-Sanabary, 1994).

Although the appointment of Nourah Al-Fayez as the first female Deputy Minister for women's education in February 2009 was hailed as a big step for women's participation in decision making, in a conservative country, this might not change the patriarchal nature of Saudi society where women are subordinate in every field (Agence France Presse, 2009). Acting within the existing social realities rather than acting to change them, the appointed female deputy minister worried

advocates of women's equality when she dismissed calls for girls to be allowed to have physical education or do sports at school saying that there are other priorities than physical education for girls. Hence, by emphasizing the premises of the dominant discourse and declaring alliance with it, women in prominent positions might hardly be able to set their priorities independently and appear to be participating in decision making.

While the Saudi Ministry of Education's report (2004) contends that the budget for girls' education is greater than that for boys, Hamdan (2005) states that the dedicated budget for girls' education is just 18% of that for boys' education. In addition, according to the Federal Research Division (2004) fewer resources are allocated to women's higher education than to men's; emphasising that girls' choices in higher education are limited to humanities and medicine. They are not allowed to study engineering, law, pharmacy, geology, petroleum or political sciences. Furthermore, due to gender segregation, girls in higher education do not have full access to university facilities such as libraries or recreation centres. Saudi women in general can access public libraries or libraries associated with educational institutions or universities only through a male relative or during limited visiting hours (El-Sanabary, 1994; Hamdan, 2005; Rugh, 2002).

Despite her argument about gender inequality faced by Saudi women being institutionalised and rooted in the traditional culture they live in, Hamdan (2005) distances herself from any feminist talk about sexism faced by women. Rather she

concerns herself with “explaining the consequences of excluding women from public life and constraining their educational choices” (p. 45). Furthermore, she stresses that she considers women’s issues from a standpoint that focuses on their achievement in higher education and concludes that “Saudi women devise their own strategies to challenge gender inequality and achieve social justice not only in education but in all life matters” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 45). Although it did not clearly discuss feminist theories, the paper exposes gender inequalities in the context of education in Saudi Arabia. Discussing social and political changes that had some impact on women’s advancement in education as well as in other fields within Saudi society, Hamdan concludes that girls’ education has developed since its initial opening when it was met with strong opposition simply because non-religious education was viewed as futile if not in fact perilous.

The fundamental change in public perception of the value of education prompted a rise in girls’ school enrolment from only 2% of the student body to almost 50% (Rugh, 2002). As a matter of fact, girls as a group have done extremely well academically and their achievements surpass those of boys in secondary education. The number of girls graduating from school goes beyond the number of boys even with their lower number entering school compared to that of boys. At the university level the number of female graduates is almost comparable to the number of boys (Federal Research Division, 2004; Hamdan, 2005).

Conclusion

This chapter provided the context of the study by depicting Saudi society in order to familiarise the reader with the background of the study. To understand the operation of the dynamics of social formation in this specific location, I reviewed specific realities within the powerful social and political institutions within Saudi society. Structures of domination within a traditional, patriarchal and religious system spanned the entire social formation of the private and the public life of Saudi women. This explained the subordinate position of Saudi women in the socio-cultural world and raised issues of discriminatory cultural norms that are deeply embedded, institutionalised and legitimised by different social forces.

CHAPTER 2: MOTHERING, CHOICE AND RESTRICTIONS: DEVELOPING A FEMINIST STANDPOINT

In this chapter I utilise my personal experience and situate myself in the research to incorporate my story within the broader social context that I am researching. I focus on how I find myself embedded in a study of mothers' school choice. The detailed narrative tells how I perceived restrictions on my school choice and on my life in general, reflected on my school involvement as a parent and my identity as a mother. Moreover it reveals how gender constituted my experience as a Saudi mother while projecting the historical conditions under which I renegotiated my role. To develop my theoretical position and look at the mothering context in Saudi from my perspective I use feminist standpoint to frame my ideas and mark out a logical space for the social position I occupy as a mother.

I present my narrative as a starting point for inquiry into questions about Saudi mothers' involvement with school choice. By doing so, I demonstrate how my social location has framed my understanding of the world of Saudi mothers and thus shape the way I produce and present knowledge about this world . I draw on Elliot (1994) analysis of feminist perspectives. According to her, experiences of marginalised persons privilege their production of knowledge. In this regard I find that my gender and class allow me to present my experience within aspects of the social order that are conspicuous and that contribute to the emergence of my standpoint.

Harding (2004, p. 7) argues that “Standpoint theories map how social and political disadvantages can be turned into an epistemological, scientific and political advantage”. While feminist standpoint theories structure and shape knowledge from an individual’s social location, they recognise as well experiences of others who occupy the same standpoint as oneself. Standpoint theorists emphasise women’s place as a starting point for enquiry that reveals how the social order is constructed and maintained (Jaggar, 2004; Smith, 2004). It is within this discourse that I present my personal experience in this chapter.

Feminism and Personal Experience

When I embarked on this research to study a social context that I was familiar with as a mother of a Saudi family with school children, I emphasised accounts coming from other mothers. Yet, assuming connection to their experiences, I had as well to reflect on my own experience to maintain the integrity of my research project. Reflexivity entails attentiveness to the power I might hold in relation to the participants in the research project. As a researcher I had to mitigate any hierarchical relations with other mothers and be conscious of the limits, intricacy and distinction between objectivity and subjectivity to assure responsibility and honesty about my role and perspectives.

Feminist researchers extensively acknowledge the use of reflexivity to confront the challenges of studying life contexts at both the individual and political level. Researching one’s own group entails reflexivity as a social phenomenon that

involves reflecting back on self, processes and accounts as well. David (2003, p. 92) affirms that

In searching and studying family life, we are in effect studying the context we live within, that constitutes us as we constitute it...A theoretical notion used for the extent to which we need to be constantly vigilant to this conundrum is the notion of reflexivity – reflecting upon our research and practices, our positioning and our personal perspectives as we study and research them.

Furthermore, feminist researchers stress the importance of engagement in reflection about what they do and insist on the importance of reflexivity. I recognise that the researcher's identity and experiences shape the ideas with which they approach the research process. I take this interaction of individual and research into consideration through a process of reflexivity that requires recognition on my part as researcher of my personal involvement in the research process. This is not to spot areas of potential bias as Robson (2002) maintains, but rather to understand my subjectivity and authority through reflexivity and to position myself as a knower and teller.

Stanley and Wise (1993, pp. 59-60) state that in feminist research "the researcher's self (including her values, likes and dislikes) is inevitably involved in the research process". They argue as well that "the researcher should be the central focus of the research" and advocate that "the researcher's own experiences are an integral part of the research and should therefore be described as such". Thus, as a researcher I describe in this chapter my own experience as one of a group of mothers who have to deal with restrictions and boundaries and try to push them in order to face the

core of dependency that was bred into them to be able to become more assertive, and freer in their movement.

Reflexivity can be employed throughout the research process which particularly permits the researcher to check and examine the power dynamics present when generating the data through the use of interviews. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 118) state that reflexivity generally means attempting to make explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process. It covers various attempts to unpack what knowledge is contingent upon the researcher's social situation, and how the research agenda/process has been constituted.

Griffiths (1995) identifies the importance of self and subjectivity in feminist research. She rejects the objective views as views from nowhere and stresses that in the collective venture of constructing a feminist perspective one assumes the self or subjectivity as a starting point. I tackle my individual subjectivity emanating from the way I experienced restrictions and limitations imposed on me in Saudi. Simultaneously, studying other women's experiences, I observe that despite commonalities among us women of the same society, distinctiveness of our experiences varies on the basis of key aspects of social identity. We diverge in the way we handle our boundaries engaging in different actions in relation to those boundaries. In this research I present my personal experience and my personal observations of the context in which I am living, with an awareness of the shifting subjectivity that governs my method of exploration and my way of understanding.

Auto-Ethnography as Narrative

The closeness between my personal life and my research warranted the subjective expression of my reality to convey my understanding of the cultural phenomenon I was living and researching. Adopting a narrative approach I placed myself within the social context to present my lived experience in an attentive manner. Auto-ethnography has been defined as a “qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon” (Wall, 2006, p. 146). Thus it “offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding” (Wall, 2008, p. 38).

While Anderson (2006) differentiates between analytic auto-ethnography and evocative auto-ethnography he presents five main elements for this distinction that renders the former into a more traditional scientific approach. The five elements are: “(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (p. 378).

On the other hand, responding to this analytic and evocative dichotomy Ellis and Bochner (2006) dispute the disparities Anderson claims on most of the aforementioned points and contend that the only point of disagreement could be Anderson’s commitment to developing theoretical analysis. They emphasise “the elements of a good story” and that “stories always have been used as a model of

explanation and inquiry in sociology” (p. 438). Thus they endorse an evocative approach to auto-ethnography and focus on its link to the aesthetics, art and humanities while criticising the traditionalist’s resistance to change. Likewise, Denzin (2006) approves of the subjective approach to auto-ethnography. Yet, Atkinson (2006) aligns himself with Anderson and justifies his account for analytical auto-ethnography by stating that:

“The Problem seems to be two fold. First there is the elevation of the autobiographical to such a degree that the ethnographer becomes more memorable than the ethnography, the self more absorbing than the other social actors. To that extent therefore Anderson is quite right to insist on the analytic aspect of auto-ethnography.... the problem stems from a tendency to promote ethnographic research on writing on the basis of its experiential value, its evocative qualities, and its personal commitments rather than its scholarly purpose, its theoretical basis, and its disciplinary contributions. This in turn reflects a wider problem in that the methodological has been onto the plane of personal experience, while the value of the sociological or anthropological fieldwork has been translated into a quest for personal fulfilment on the part of the researcher” (p. 403).

Engaging in the debate of analytic and provocative autoethnography, Chang (2008) in her book *Autoethnography as Method*, discussed some autoethnographic approaches focusing on the concept of self and its relationship to culture. She argues that auto-ethnography must always be brought back to the context of a wider cultural interpretation, and the strength of her point of view perhaps places her slightly different to Anderson’s analytic auto-ethnography even though some auto-ethnographic writings that she includes in her book align with the positioning of Ellis and Bochner of provocative accounts.

Thus, my methodology reflects my embedment in the study as I use a reflexive narrative to develop an auto-ethnographic methodology alongside other mothers' stories. I concur with Richardson's (2000) when he argues about disclosing one's personal experience by stating that:

“Casting social science into evocative forms reveals the rhetoric and the underlying labour of the production as well as the social science's potential as a human endeavour because evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies. Through it we can experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation. Trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves, our doubts, and our uncertainties.”(p. 11)

Finally, in this research I resort to personal narratives as one approach to auto-ethnography in accordance with Ellis et als (2011, p. 7) illustration that “personal narratives are stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on academic, research and personal lives... personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context” they stress as well the therapeutic function of writing personal stories which helps “purge our burdens..., encourage personal responsibility and agency..., raise consciousness and promote cultural change..., and give people voice that before writing they may not have felt they had.” They affirm as well that personal writing “allows a researcher, and author, to identify other problems that are cloaked in secrecy-e.g., government conspiracy...and harmful gender norms”

The Personal Becomes Political: My Storyline

In this chapter I situate my experience of being an alert mother with schooling taking central place in my life. I knew how to muster up my resources to complement school's educational work and was immensely aware of the standards my children ought to be realising in school. Nonetheless I experienced conditions and constraints on my school choice and my school involvement as a mother. Thus my experience of playing an active part in my children's schooling took a good deal of work and emotional labour. My research begins at this personal level, with me being active and where my activity frame and organise my experience with school choice. Though my study begins with my personal actualities as they are experienced, its aim is to make a way into the social relations that systematise the wider social level. From my personal standpoint and from the standpoint of other mothers in the study, my research intends to locate the social relations beyond our experiences and as they enter into and organise our lives within the society we are living in.

My narrative exposes my interpretation of certain hurtful gender norms that characterise Saudi culture. Richardson (1998, p. 349) observes that "what something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them...experience is open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests rather than objective truth". She gives the example of "battered wives" and how this issue is experienced in a different way if it is viewed as a normal family matter or as an issue of domestic violence and abuse.

Reflecting on my personal experience while writing this research made me aware of how one's subjectivity is changing, not constant, permanent or rigid. Through my personal and professional life, I observed instances when restrictions imposed on women were normalised. Some women can be influenced by a common discourse that sends an explicit message to shape them in an image drawn on essentialist constructions of mothers' role and place within domesticity. Certain aspects of women's role that could be confusing and troubling for some might be judged as appropriate behaviour by others. Women face extended constraints while living in Saudi Arabia, what these constraints mean to different constituencies vary depending on the discourse available to them and on the social standard they conform to. Some women, whose families hold an important position in society or belong to the prominent business milieu, might be able to find the means of crossing some of their boundaries. Yet, no woman living in Saudi can escape State imposed restrictions even when codes and actual practices of daily life in some households are more relaxed and less restricting.

The affinity I share with women of the community is not created by gender alone; rather we share other social dimensions such as race and social class. Being part of a Saudi family myself, I have a comparable mother's school involvement experience as other mothers I studied. However it is not only this affinity that justified the nagging need for telling my story, rather it is the unexpected and dramatic change in my circumstances that made me introduce myself as a subject

and take into account my story along with my feelings and my interpretations. Widowhood situated me differently within my research and within the Saudi system as well. For the first time in my life I came into direct contact with the Saudi official system that I have previously placed myself outside of. As widow in a Saudi family, I was not anymore protected from the many official discriminations and restrictions on women. Rather I became exposed to limitations and boundaries that previously did not exist in my personal life. As I realised that my situation was changing, new consciousness was forming on my part.

While the roles of women in other Gulf countries bordering Saudi Arabia have witnessed major strides towards more participation, Saudi women constantly endure prevailing cultural norms that restrict their personal, social and political life. Despite geographical proximity, growing up in Bahrain, (the closest bordering country to Saudi Arabia,) where I had my basic education contributed little to adjustment to Saudi lifestyle both on the social and personal level. Due to the self-sufficient and independent life style that I led at a young age during my college years in Beirut, and having a western education at the American University, nurtured in me the notion of liberal thought and the value of freedom. Shifting between the openness and easiness of civil life in one country and the restrictions in another was rather difficult. After living with the notion of women's burgeoning strength and mobility, to relinquish that notion and the freedom it

entails and move to live in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia was a hard step to take. Adjustment both on the personal and the social level was difficult.

Prior to moving to Saudi, I did not anticipate the level of restrictions on women's mobility, neither did I comprehend the hurtful gender rules or regulations that are enforced by the Saudi legal framework that insists on the omniscience and empowerment of men while at the same time curtails women's basic rights. I needed a paradigm shift to become accustomed to, and be fully reliant on, my husband's provisions in all aspects of my life to be able to settle in my new surroundings. My role in the family was typical of a woman's place in an affluent and upper-middle class family. In general I was left with the responsibility of the household and children. Everything related to domestic needs from buying house equipment to doing groceries and shopping for clothes, toys and school requirements for the children was handed over to me. Furthermore, I was also responsible for my children's schooling together with coaching and any out of school sport and social activity within the community or outside. The reality was that my sense of identity came from how well I ran and supported my home and how well my children did and performed in school.

I devoted myself full-time to raising the family and being a full-time home maker. Even though it was not easy to strike the balance between living in a liberal private sphere, and at the same time a restricted conservative public one, being busy bringing up a family and integrating into motherhood, housewife role and

school community life redirected my full potential into the private rather than the public sphere. Nonetheless, it was obvious to me that women in Saudi Arabia have to endure firm segregation and restrictions which compel them to live within boundaries that were not easy to comprehend even for someone coming from a similar traditional background and the same traditions or religious conviction.

As in most upper class and affluent households, my husband was the breadwinner and provider for all family needs while I undertook the carer role. Thus, with time, the overwhelming and multifaceted restrictions turned me from someone who was quite able to take care of herself into someone who was forced to be dependent and encouraged to lean on the superior strength of the male partner. I had to adjust to the emotional conflict of being taken care of and the price of being excessively secure and dependent. As I became a wife and a mother I had to change, redefine myself and reshape my role to conform to the needs of my new family. I was acquiring new skills to run my household while I made use of my professional skills to support my family. I used my bachelor degree in education and my teaching diploma to be a professional mother. However, I had at the same time relinquished other skills. In hindsight I realised that I was no longer professionally or financially independent. Even though it was not a cognisant acquiescence on my part, it was the routine of my married life that reshaped my conformity to the needs of my family.

Having said that, I should stress as well, that being the only female in my family while raising a family of boys only, and not being Saudi myself, made the impact of restrictions easier on my household. My sons experienced less restrictions when they were growing up compared to girls. They were able to drive while families with girls would need to hire more than one driver to be able to arrange for trouble-free female mobility. There were fewer restrictions on their mobility, appearance or dress code compared to girls. In addition, boy's sports activities were available and accessible in the community compared to a non-existence of any sports activity or clubs for girls. On the other hand, boys were prohibited from entering shopping malls or family parks as these areas were classified as female and family areas only.

Because of the potential restrictions on my mobility I never wanted to acquire Saudi nationality through marriage, thus I never had any restrictions on my travel. Saudi women are prohibited from travelling without the written permission of their male guardian. In addition, it has always been possible for me to be accompanied by my husband or one of the boys on occasions that require a close male relative to be present. However, the overarching set of restrictions fetter most features of women's lives in Saudi Arabia depending on their life situations; women can find themselves under varying types or degrees of restrictions just as I suddenly found that my whole life got cut off when I lost my husband. As a widow in Saudi society, it became really complicated for me to navigate all the

formal and legal avenues without my husband who was keen and able to take the helm and direct my life on my behalf.

The tragedy of losing my husband and the bereavement that followed his death left me with the most profound emotional experience of aching separation. My marriage had been my basic reference point of identity for over thirty years. When I moved to Saudi Arabia I gained status through my husband. A highly educated man, we met during college years. He was proud of my accomplishments and supportive of my perseverance with my education until I completed my master's degree and continued my academic journey to embark on my doctorate. His death came two years after our two eldest sons got married and left home. I had to wrench myself out from my pain to be able to support myself with my two other sons; one in college and the youngest in middle school.

I was never prepared to navigate this acute state of conflict I found myself in. I had to reconcile myself to confront an outside world of formal papers and legal forms through the proxy of my sons who themselves were still suffering the shock of losing their father. Sensing the confusion and the incompetence I found myself in within the strictly segregated Saudi system, I had to be stoic and self controlled in redefining the roles and responsibilities for my sons. It is only through them that I could exist in the Saudi judicial system. Being a woman I had to be identified by a male relative; that is through my sons and not by my identification papers.

After years of sharing decisions with a partner, I became in charge of my own life and have to get used to being restricted in the public space through my sons' proxy. The arena of my responsibilities became much bigger and wider, and I resorted to old skills that were lying dormant, and had long since atrophied being unused. Facing external challenges that came with my new situation, I had to rise to the challenge that came from within; the need to move ahead and become more self-reliant. My self-confidence grew with every unilateral decision I took. I embarked on handling financial matters first with the assistance of my two eldest sons, then tenuously arrived at asking questions and consulting with the experts during meetings I had in Bahrain. I also made use of female only financial and banking facilities in Saudi Arabia which are run very efficiently by qualified Saudi women. I even became keen on attending annual conferences on financial management in Bahrain.

Facing up to the truth of my circumstances, I took the plunge at a time when I genuinely needed to be protected and taken care of. Thus I believe I was able to generate new strength along with a realistic sense of identity and advancement in what I was truly capable of achieving.

Mothering and School Involvement under Sex Segregation Rules

Research in the West shows that very demanding and challenging daily school work support is being done by mothers in most households. In general it is the mothers' duty to be in charge of children's education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004;

Standing, 1999; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998, p. 461). Just like mothers elsewhere, Saudi mothers assume full responsibility for their children's education. For mothers in most Saudi households, homework constitutes an important part of their everyday life. The general frame of mind that is held by both school and home is that it is the family's responsibility to follow up on school assignments, see that homework is done and that children perform well in school. The vast majority of Saudi households hire private tutors to help their children with school work. Yet, on the whole, a lot of tension is created in Saudi homes around the time of school exams when most parents clampdown on all social activities during exam weeks.

Due to sex segregation policy, school activities such as parents' open evenings, formal or informal meetings, school trips, sports or any other activities that are held in single sex schools might only be attended by the parent of the same sex. Accordingly, mothers can only attend their daughters' activities in the girls' schools, and fathers are only allowed to go to the boys' schools for open evenings and other activities. Only in some private schools that have special facilities, and only on certain occasions, such as the boys' graduations, can mothers watch their sons' graduation ceremony on big screens in a separate hall or attend general meetings and lectures conducted in boys' school via closed-circuit TV. However, fathers are not allowed to see any of their daughters' activities or graduation ceremonies.

The reality that only fathers are allowed to attend meetings and school evenings in boys' school to discuss their sons' work, did not make their involvement greater than that of mothers. Mothers are the ones most involved in schooling despite the fact that they were physically kept away from boys' schools. From a gender perspective, fathers taking part in their children's schooling is considered as one of their responsibilities as men; such as driving or any other activity that only men are allowed to perform in Saudi. They perceived themselves as legal proxies for mothers.

With the availability of time, material resources and a college degree in education, I provided a positive learning environment for my sons who attended a private school in Dhahran. My household daily routine was structured around the school schedule. I read to my children and supervised their homework using workbooks to help them with various school subjects. Furthermore, I was a supportive and active volunteer mother in the school and took part in school activities. Well-informed of education systems, I had the competence to aim for increasing my sons' achievement within the educational system. I had high expectations for my children and set high standards for their schooling. As a highly educated mother, my actions were typical of West et al.'s (1998) findings which affirmed that highly qualified mothers are more involved in their children's schools and tried to ensure that their children's chances of success in the educational system are increased.

As a result of strict segregation between the sexes in schools, attending school meetings or school events for my sons beyond second grade was not possible. Some private schools were granted a special permit by education authorities that allowed them to employ female teachers to teach boys of six and seven years of age during their first couple of years of elementary schooling in single sex schools staffed only by female teachers and administrators. Beyond second grade boys are shifted to boys' schools with male teachers and administrators. Hence, mothers were kept away from school activities or open evenings to discuss their sons' work once they are in boys' schools and are taught by male teachers. Personally, I always felt that I was denied my natural right to live many moments when my children were growing up to experience and share with them the joy or frustration while learning through moments of winning or losing a game, competing with others, or even seeing them perform on a school stage. The only chance I ever had to cheer on the boys in a sporting event is when they travelled abroad to play a school game in a neighbouring country. In this sense, I feel that isolation between the sexes is being carried from the public sphere into family life and homes, once the strictly enforced sex segregation policy is applied so deeply into schools. Not only does this inflict restrictions on parents' interaction with their children's schooling, but it also creates new conventions and a new typology of parental involvement with schools that can be annoying at the best of times and deeply frustrating at the worst.

Even though a father's involvement in boys' school activities is quite positive for their relationship with their sons (Biller & L., 1997; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004), my husband always felt that he was attending fathers' evenings and having informal discussions with the boys' teachers on my behalf. Being the parent in charge of the children's daily school work, I used to brief him, as all mothers do, before school meetings and bring to his attention all the questions I would ask or any issues I would like to discuss if I were going to be there. Since I assumed full responsibility for my boys' education, my husband would divulge all the information he noted down for me the moment he was back from any school meeting. Most fathers just act like the go-between, sometimes they communicate with mothers using their mobile phones to see if mothers wanted to discuss any specific concerns with teachers. While this setting is sustained in two parent families, school is less accessible for single mothers and their families. With my youngest son still in school, and given that single mothers are not allowed into the premises of boys' schools, I have had to rely on other means of communication such as speaking with teachers and counsellors over the phone or via emails with the school.

Negotiating Gendered Space: Narratives of Protection and Independence

With regards to sexual space boundaries and segregation, Mernissi (1987) discussed the private and the public sphere. She contended that in the male mind "space" is divided into an economic productive arena which is public and male,

and a domestic sphere which is private and female, and these two areas should be segregated. She criticised as well the patriarchal mentality that feels dishonoured if a female member of the family works outside the home.

Nowhere else are women so restricted as in Saudi which forces them to regress and totally depend on a male relative to manage their affairs in public with guardianship rights or proxy method. Since they don't go out and do things for themselves, women remain forever incapable and unable to live fully and perform to the limits of their capabilities. Saudi women are not allowed to be responsible for their own lives even though they are competent enough, mainly because they are denied the experience and opportunity to do so. A sheer frustration of not being able to achieve autonomy led me to figure out how to function in such a situation. It is true that at the beginning I had an inner sense of accomplishment as wife and mother, yet it was not easy to integrate my two worlds of private and public with restrictions hampering many aspects of it. With the children growing up I felt I was stagnating within my environs and that being a good mother was not enough to keep me from feeling inadequate and strangely upset. Inwardly confused and anxious, I realised that true identity comes from doing what is right for oneself rather than what is right for someone else, and that I could never achieve identity or security by being reliant on my role as wife and mother for support and protection. I tried to open new doors and establish more control over my life by choosing and deciding which door to enter.

To endure limitations and come to terms with the dissonance of living with stricture and yet strive for independence, I had to go through a long and meaningful process of identifying means of self fulfilment and discovering the things that were important for me to attain. I was sure that a forward leap of my inner self would come as a result of such a process. The underlying dependency was not just a need to be taken care of; rather it was a system of regress imposed by the political and social system. Thus, unable to beat the system, I had to create my own arrangements and system that suited my world. As it is more convenient for me to take actions on my own behalf outside the borders of Saudi Arabia, I considered going back to university to pursue my higher study, first in Bahrain and then in England. Once I plugged into academic life outside Saudi, I was creating my own life and taking on the responsibility to accomplish and distinguish myself through personal achievement. Studying has always been an essential part of my life. It developed my strength and sharpened my skills. I needed to surmount any passivity that accompanied the underlying dependency which had led me to overlook my need for self development and self fulfilment.

Pursuing my higher study abroad helped me break barriers and build opportunities for myself. Through my personal world I had to break down and analyse and at the same time build up and synthesise and be connected with a world outside my previous limits and boundaries. The moment I leave Saudi borders restrictions are left behind, remaining at the border until I return. Once I am outside the

geographical borders of the country, I am freed from the universal restrictions I live under when inside.

Conclusion

Addressing the development of my standpoint in this chapter provided good starting point for my research. My lived experience offered me good key insights and questions that would have been invisible otherwise. I reflected on my personal experience using auto-ethnography narrative to connect the personal to the social context and combine the roles of both researcher and subject. I explored gender issues in specific situations to communicate the realistic everyday life affairs that were lived in real time and space. The challenge of dealing with severe sex segregation, and handling restrictions on mobility offered a tool of presenting claim to agency within restrictive cultural and political powers.

The literature in the next chapter will show how different social categories such as gender, social class and religion intersect and impact Saudi mothers' school choice and other aspects of their lives.

CHAPTER 3: INTERSECTIONALITY OF SCHOOL CHOICE, SOCIAL CLASS, RELIGION AND GENDER

The first chapter of this thesis situated Saudi mothers' interaction with school in a restricted context depicting related aspects of their life. In order to contextualise the study it also introduced the main overarching issues that form Saudi culture – both in terms of education and gender.

The second chapter provided detailed narratives of my personal context. I aimed at setting the stage for my feminist standpoint by incorporating my personal story. It detailed my school involvement experience and my perception of Saudi gender issues.

Through a review of the literature, this third chapter takes up the intersection between the different issues in order to contextualise and theorise the study. As this research focuses on mothers' experiences with school choice within cultural and social restrictions, this chapter constructs a disciplined focus that contributes to a wider understanding of the various aspects of these experiences. Hence it locates mothers' experiences within the substantial and global concepts that can give justice to its complexity. Reviewing the relevant Western literature on family-school relationship, social class and gender will enable an enhanced understanding of my research on Saudi mothers within a broader regional and international prism.

School Choice: A Middle Class Privilege?

Education reform policies in late 1980s in Western countries gave parents the right to express preference for schools of their choice. Denessen et als (2005, p. 347) note that such policies were based on “neoliberal market-oriented views of education provisions” and “the desire on the part of a growing number of parents to make their own decisions with regard to school choice”. The impact of such policies instigated wide debate and attracted academic research on the issue of school choice. The market metaphor reasoning for school choice advocates improvement both in schools’ educational outcomes, and in parental school involvement. The literature on school choice explores the socio-economic stratification of schools and the decision-making context of parents who exercise their right of school choice (Denessen, et al., 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 1999).

Since much of the literature addressing school choice focuses on social class and racial issues to explain the politics of school choice, I find it relative to my research on middle class Saudi mothers and school choice. Social class occupies a central position in educational research, nonetheless the research on school choice has multifaceted and unclear findings in relation to policy and social class (Morgan & Blackmore, 2007). In their conference paper, Morgan and Blackmore (2007) observe the complexity and the ambiguity within school choice research. They argue that despite the fact that school choice policies were presented to promote equity and freedom of choice for all parents to choose a school for their children, yet school choice is “being taken up unevenly across class groups”. In

this matter much research highlights how middle class parents manipulate the education system. Ball (2003) is critical of how middle class parents are skilful at using their resources to benefit their children's school choice. He argues that school choice policies favour middle class families who have the social, cultural and financial resources that enable them to give their children an advantage within the education system of choice. Furthermore, Reay and Ball (1997) argue that while middle class parents mobilise their resources to ensure their children's educational success, through better use of school choice policy, many working class parents are ambivalent about their ability to make good use of the same policy. This inability of working class is attributed to psycho-sociological aspects associated with school choice policy (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996).

The failure of education policy to eliminate inequality and its bondage to social class advantages and disadvantages is also reiterated by Harris and Ranson (2005). They affirm that educational achievement is highly correlated with social class despite all intervention policies that have been implemented to engender a more even-handed education system. They agree with Ball (2003) that school choice policies will keep on reproducing the same inequalities rather than overcome them, and suggest localised and community-based solutions stemming from the voices of the disadvantaged to meet their needs.

Thus, the oscillation in education research between criticisms of maintaining middle class positional advantage within the education market on one hand, and

the denial of any intentions of self-interest and ethically flawed middle class choice decisions on the other, can be observed as a focal point in much of school choice research. In their research to explore a structure for an ethics of choice in education, Oria et al (2007) blame the incentives and subjectivity of education policy of school choice which creates the grounds for ethical struggle. They observed that the group of middle class parents they studied experienced ethical conflicts as they had to deal with the process of school choice. The parents' values and conduct were stressed as they tried "to balance a personal standpoint, the interests of their family, with their commitment to aspects of the impersonal standpoint, an abstraction from self-interest and an awareness of others"(p. 102).

Obviously, parental relationships with educational institutions were transformed by the shift in educational policies from traditional models that emphasised the state control of education to the exposure to free market forces. This move allowed greater expression of parental choice (Whitty & Power, 2000). Brown (1990) identified a 'third wave' in education that stressed the role of parents in their children's education which he called an 'ideology of parentocracy'. Parentocracy emphasises the role of parental involvement with school and stresses their input that is highly related to their social class.

Reay (1998b, 1999) stresses the centrality of women and the role they play in social reproduction through their school involvement. She argues that middle class mothers use their power and resources and effectively support their children in the

education market. This interference engenders social and cultural reproduction. Reay (2005) places middle-class mothers at the forefront of social and cultural reproduction due to their deep investment of time as well as mental and emotional efforts when it comes to their children's schooling. This makes mothers' role in engendering cultural capital for their children different from that of fathers. Thus according to her, mothers represent the main authority in developing cultural and social capital for their children.

From the abovementioned research, it seems that the abundant array of policy-related research is critical of middle class parents and particularly middle-class mothers for securing positional advantages for their children by using the new school choice policies and educational market available to them. On the other hand, other researchers contest this criticism of class reproduction. For instance, Power (2006) disputes what she calls "misogynistic tendencies" in educational market research. According to her, such research has shifted criticism from the public domain of educational institutions to the private domain where decisions are being taken at home. This social criticism is indicated as well through disturbing accounts in the media. Middle-class mothers are blamed for gaining advantage for their children in the process of school choice and hence instigating social and educational inequalities. She concludes that such a tendency is limiting to sociological understanding and research into more complex accounts of contemporary social changes and related policies of marketisation of education .

Furthermore, Beck (2007) contests Ball's criticism of middle class parents' negotiation with school choice policy. He refutes the reductionism of middle class parents' involvement with educational choice to a mere struggle for positional advantage. He does not find it justifiable to stigmatise middle class parents because of their involvement with school choice policy. Emphasising the complexity of the context in which middle class takes school decisions, he does not find such action as a manifestation of class struggle. Moreover, he argues against stressing intra-class differences when researching the middle class noting the distinction between upper-middle class parents who are used to sending their children to prestigious schools, and ordinary middle class parents who just make their choice within neighbourhood schools. As I will discuss next, Beck remarks on Bourdieu's direct influence on educational theory and research in general through his concepts of 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field'. However, he questions the relevance of his 'cultural arbitrary' theory – which shaped Ball's theorisation of class and culture - in the analysis of class reproduction in modern capitalist societies (Beck, 2007).

Parental Involvement: Capital, Habitus and Field

The work of Bourdieu, particularly the interdependent notion of 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field', which focused mainly on class differences in home-school relations, will provide the conceptual approach that will help in understanding the structure

and the diversity of parental involvement in schooling. However, according to Maeve O'Brien (2005), after primarily focusing on class differences in parental school support, feminist sociology of education turned to attend to the issue of mothers' care work in the educational field. She stresses that "the literature on caring suggests that it is mothers and not fathers who traditionally do day-to-day, caring including educational support work" (O'Brien, 2005, p. 224). In the field of education, Reay (2005) examines mothers' use of emotions as a form of capital to transmit economic, social and cultural capital to their children in the educational field. She stresses that unlike other capitals the emotional capital is gendered and is not tied to social class in the same manner that other capitals are.

Both social class and gender are categories located in my research on Saudi mothers' school choice. Thus I identify the literature on parental involvement, but particularly mothers, as significant to my study.

Bourdieu's conceptual theory presents a way of thinking about the dynamics of how parents in a social class use their resources, whenever available, to transmit to their children the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the education system. According to Lareau (1987) children's educational experiences are influenced significantly by the social and cultural resources available in the home. The availability of effective learning experiences is shaped by the attitudes and aspirations of the home. She argues that cultural factors associated with the parents' social class shape their school involvement which goes with the school's

expectation of them. Therefore she recognises the suitability of Bourdieu's cultural capital as an appropriate theoretical concept that seeks to explain the family-school relationship and reveals its value in studying the social class differences.

Bourdieu (1986) defines 'capital' as an expanded category with resources including, but not limited to, economic capital. Those resources that construct the general theory of the forms of capital are valuable in a specified social milieu. It allows individuals to appropriate precise benefits. Capital comes in a variety of forms that includes but is not limited to economic (material and financial assets), cultural (symbolic knowledge, skills and titles) and social capital which is socially constructed knowledge, identities and resources accruing to individuals by virtue of membership in a group. Social networks and connections represent a mechanism through which a social group reproduces and mobilises its resources. According to Bourdieu capital resources are mobilised by some actors at the expense of others, and this underpins and reproduces social inequality. Not only is capital distributed unequally and differently between and within class grouping, but it is also used differently. For Bourdieu "the kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 230). Because of capital's capacity to bring further rewards to the user, social groups when competing for social standing try to display the appropriate capital in social and economic transactions. Ball (2003) observes that

in educational decision making, a strong financial position allows economic considerations to become less vital and rather insignificant to decision making. Affluent parents' school choice is accessible via the market through the selection of any school or school activity to complement their children's education. Vast extracurricular activities, sporting, cultural or leisure activities can be maintained through educational holiday programs and tutoring. Thus Bourdieu's concepts propose ways to explain the choices that are made favouring one school choice over another via the playing out of various capitals in a socially stratified or 'classed' system.

The many different types of symbolic knowledge and possessions that constitute cultural capital are internalised by individuals to make up what Bourdieu calls 'habitus'. For Bourdieu (1990) habitus designates the scheme of basic mind and body dispositions derived and embodied from familial experiences and through which an individual perceives, judges and acts. These schemata which are sent unconsciously and internalised through and with family socialisation processes are shared by individuals who have comparable experiences.

Based on Bourdieu's various writings on 'habitus', Reay (2004b) observes that habitus is probably Bourdieu's most contested concept. In her analysis of the concept she looks into four related aspects of habitus. Discussing the first aspect of embodiment she explains that it is one of the vital characteristics of habitus as it is the behaviours and activities rather than just merely the mental attitudes and

perceptions that define habitus. Furthermore, she stresses the indeterminate nature of habitus as there is no taken for granted practices that are predicted by habitus, rather there is a broad range of possibilities that allows for individual agency to act. Thus even though habitus offers a model for action that reveals a common pattern of behaviour, it neither predicts individual actions nor does it exclude individual agency. This renders habitus vital to Bourdieu's theory of practice as he avows that the individual habitus is both structured and structuring and is placed in the intersection between the social structure and independent action of individual agency.

Although Bourdieu's work on capital, habitus and field was not attentive to gender as a category of analysis, his research into the Kabyle society of North Africa in his book "Masculine Domination" (Bourdieu, 2001) unequivocally looks into the gendered nature of symbolic violence. Bourdieu from a western point of view notes that in this culturally different society masculine domination is legitimised and naturalised. While he argues that social reproduction of gender order is being done through state institutions (mainly the family as the core institution), the education system, religious institutions and the state legislative system all play a part. He states that through symbolic violence dominated women tend to accept their inferior position as embedded in their biological nature (Bourdieu, 2001).

I argue that the maintenance of gender hierarchies within Saudi society bears some resemblance to Kabyle society. This renders Bourdieu's theories relevant to

my area of research on Saudi mothers' agency within a restricted setting. However while I draw on Bourdieu's theory about the role of society institutions - such as the family, the religious establishment and state legislations - to understand gender order reproduction in Saudi society, I will explore, in a later section Muslim women's agency, power and choice in an effort to understand Saudi mothers' emancipatory use of school choice. First I turn to an examination of parental demands for school choice.

Parental Voice: The Demand for School Choice

The role of parents as participants in educational decision-making has been emphasised equally in policy and in studies in many western countries (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004; Vincent, 1997, 2001; Vincent & Martin, 2002). The rapid expansion in implementation of school choice policies has received increasing attention from researchers both in Europe and North America in the last two decades. Studies were undertaken as a response to the introduction of school choice and parental agency in public policy. in an effort to address the issue of parental voice in public policy and their voting power, research explored not just the psychological and educational need of parents' involvement, but also the political and social need of it (Butler, Hamnett, Ramsden, & Webber, 2007; Butler & Van Zanten, 2007; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Lubienski, 2006; Noreisch, 2007; Raveaud & Van Zanten, 2007; West, Ingram, & Hind, 2006). Studies of school choice and parental voice carried out in the West were instigated by public policy that was keen to introduce 'democratic'

schooling. This policy of school choice in many countries promoted the role of parents as consumers and brought about market rules in public services which resulted in a shift in policy landscape, ensuing privatisation of public services and a change in the social composition of schools and their class nature (Bagley, 2006; David, 1997; Harris & Ranson, 2005; Lubienski, 2006; Ranson, 1993).

The logical corollary of a change in education policy that allows a greater expression of parental choice is the need for schools to respond to the demands of parents. Sliwka and Istance (2006a) state the importance of parental demand in education policy both at the macro level of political demand from significant stakeholder groups that consist of educated parents, and at the micro level where parents can manipulate school provisions. Furthermore, Plank (2006, p. 22) while acknowledging the overt attention to parental demands of education by policy makers, distinguishes between parental demands that are “homogeneous and ... congruent” with what the educational system provides and the rather heterogeneous demands which confront what is offered by the system and represent a challenge to it. Thus parental school demand remains a controversial issue that instigates debate. Parents, as consumers, believe that they have a clear vision of what they need for their children’s schools to provide and at the same time want to play key role in realising their demands and seeing an education system which is responsive to their expectations.

In the special issue editorial of *European Journal of Education*, Istance and Sliwka discussed the reasons behind the study launched by the *Centre of Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)* to research evidence related to the demand for schooling in various countries in Western and Eastern Europe and Japan. They stated that “education must be more responsive to the expectations [the demands] of society and individual ones” (Istance & Sliwka, 2006, p. 7). Results from various countries that participated in the research indicated that changes in policies were made during the 80s and reinforced in the 90s to provide for various forms of formal parental participation in school governance which allowed for extension of parental power. However, they indicated as well that this participation responsibility was taken only by few representative parents and left the wider parental body with a significantly stressed relationship with the school (Sliwka & Istance, 2006b). In this matter I will argue that while these reports were efficient in documenting parental school demands in various countries, it stressed important variables such as social class which could shed a light on, and give more information about parents who did or did not involve themselves with the school.

Furthermore, results also showed that even though more autonomy was allocated to the schools themselves, parental involvement remained a difficult issue. Parents expressed widespread disquiet about their involvement claiming that they were marginalised; merely involved with simple matters with no real role related to decision-making and primary issues in relation to curriculum and the content of

teaching. While CERI reports coming from different countries demonstrated some disparity between what schools were willing to offer and what parents were demanding, Sliwka and Istance did acknowledge the difficulty in providing demand-sensitive arrangements in the context of current social diversity and rapid change. Furthermore, they stressed that “in some systems in particular there are particular problems of engaging parents” (2006b, p. 35).

Exit Behaviour: Alternatives to School Choice

Even though the Saudi culture I draw on to research my enquiry is rather a traditional one with restrictive state practices as I explained in my introductory chapter, existing empirical evidence from different countries and different education systems is crucial to explain the realm of potential school choice available for my sample. Sliwka and Istance (2006a, p. 45) argue - as they study school choice both in public and private schools - that “for choice to be exercised there must be alternatives to choose from”. They see as well that “the exercise of choice among similarly-organised schools or among different types of schools altogether is an example of ‘exit’ behaviour”. According to them parental demands play a significant role in school choice and in transforming education into a ‘good’ that parents are able to buy once school systems present them with a choice between public and private. Thus they interpret parental option for private rather than public education as an indicator of their dissatisfaction with the abandoned school. This finding has resonance with the Saudi experience I am researching.

Many parents state their discontent with the state school system and opt for private schooling for their children.

On the other hand, Goldring and Phillips (2008) contend that parents exiting public schools and choosing a private school is not an interpreter of their dissatisfaction with the public school they exit. Rather they argue that parents are attracted to private schooling because they can be more involved in their children's education, and their communication with the school is much more valued and made easier in the private sector. Hence it is the attraction of the private sector rather than the discontent with public schooling that determines parents' choice of one over the other. Moreover, Aurini and Davies (2005) present the homeschooling as another alternative to private education which they associate with intensive mothering and describe as "the most expressive form of private education" which meets particular needs for the parents such as teaching children with special needs (Aurini & Davies, 2005, p. 461).

Notwithstanding the different views vis-à-vis motives behind school choice whether private, public or homeschooling, most researchers (Butler, et al., 2007; Denessen, et al., 2005; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Reay & Ball, 1998; Sliwka & Istance, 2006a) concur on the variables affecting parent school choice and agree on the characteristics of parents who consider the choice of schooling. Parents' level of education, family income and social status, race and gender are significant variables in determining school choice. Goldring

and Phillips (2008) observe that the higher the parents' education level, the more value they place on educational achievement and the more they are inclined to be selective with their school choice because they are more knowledgeable and informed in the matter. They correctly assert as well that the family's economic status is another variable that is positively related to school choice, mainly private school choice, as significant economic resources are needed to fund private school attendance. This leads to the widely held notion that the middle class manages the education market for the benefits of its children.

The aim of this study is to examine how highly educated affluent Saudi mothers exercise choice in a restricted social, religious and cultural context. Questions of choice – that is private schooling or exiting the Saudi system are ultimately determined by the women's agency and ability to exercise her limited power. There is not a great deal written on Saudi women agency and choice as it is such a closed society, thus now I turn to the examination of the wider literature on Muslim women, agency and Islamic feminism as a corollary to the Western literature on school choice.

Saudi Mothers: Muslim Women's Agency in a Restricted Culture

Concern with agency in a study of Saudi mothers' school choice is primarily concerned with agency in the face of constraining structures of power within Saudi society. In a context in which Saudi women lack cultural and political power my

objective in this research revolves around finding out the means that Saudi mothers employ to refashion and activate their agentic capacity.

Agency is central to related concepts of power, choice and autonomy which inform the analysis of this research. Kabeer (1999) sees agency as a dimension of the power of choice and delineates it by saying that it is “the ability to define ones goals and act upon them.” However she does not limit these actions merely to tangible deeds rather she sees agency in “more than observable action [as] it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the power within”. According to her, agency is not only bound to decision making as mostly presented in the social science literature, rather it can be manifested in various other forms: “it can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis.” Furthermore she adds that agency could be exercised by women individually as well as collectively. (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438)

Women’s agency - just like agency in general - is formulated within a cultural context that has an impact on it and at the same time specifies the form in which it can be manifested. Gerami and Lehnerer (2001) showed how different forms of women’s agency in the fundamental restrictive religious culture in Iran is manifested. They examined four strategies used by Iranian women to bargain with the authority of the patriarchal Islamic establishment in response to the demands

of their families. Whether it was economic hardship or gender oppression enforced on them, women in this study demonstrated four different strategies: collaboration, acquiescence, co-optation and subversion. Social class, education and religious orientation were decisive factors in women's choice of strategy. While working class women who had ties with the religious authority were willing to collaborate, middle class women who were educated used other strategies to subvert the system and challenge the state's control. In conclusion they argue that even when patriarchal representations of gender impact on women's lives, women were able to employ their own strategies in order to achieve their aims.

The same view expressed above - that women are not divested of agency even within a restrictive patriarchal culture - has been echoed by Myers (2002). In her book she argues that patriarchal culture with its oppressive gender schemas leads women to internalise cultural oppression making it essential for feminists to undo this internalisation by providing women with skills to enhance their agency and develop their autonomy. She encourages women to engage in a process of constructing their own account of self determination that is connected to their own voices and their life stories. This, she argues, will enable individual women to create their own self image and narratives in order to assume responsibility for their lives and increase their agency even within an intimidating environment.

Furthermore a resonance of the same idea that calls for training women to empower them with agentic skills is also found in the project "Arab Women Speak

Out: Profile of Self Empowerment” with its focus on increasing local women’s efficacy and active participation in decision making related to their lives and the lives of their families. In this project women were taught to question gender constructs in their own lives, explore implications of such constructs for themselves and find out new opportunities for themselves. As a result of making their voices heard and having access to appropriate resources, women were guided to enhance their lives and participate more fully in the development of their societies (Underwood & Jabre, 2003).

From a theoretical perspective, exercising agency is not seen independently from the social context as indicated by Bevir (1999) as he looks into “agency”, “autonomy” and social construction in Foucault’s work. The two related concepts are placed in opposition while interrogating whether the social construct and being an autonomous agent are equally exclusive or not. However, we find that the issue of agency within cultural and social contexts and the aforementioned opposition between ‘agency’ and ‘autonomy’ is present when Korteweg (2008) discusses Muslim women’s agency. She differentiates between “two understandings of agency: as a reaction against forces of domination, or as embedded in particular historic, cultural, social, and economic contexts” (Korteweg, 2008, p. 437). Moreover, she argues that even though the former type of agency reveals actions that overtly challenge oppression, the latter type allows for better understanding of the manner in which practices of subordination and domination form the

subjectivity underlying the ability for any action. Thus, when studying restrictions on women associated with social forces in religious and traditional cultures, the tacit forms of agency women perform can reflect their active engagement in shaping their lives.

Results from research on Muslim women's agency concur with this argument and show that within Islamic and traditional culture Muslim women's agency is not an agency exclusively informed by resistance, rather in many cases it is shaped by local, social, cultural, and political conceptualisation albeit within a religious framework (Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001; Kikoski, 2000; Povey, 2001; Wassef, 2001). In addition, Treacher and Shukrallah (2001) reveal that women's activism in the Arab world, which started historically as political resistance against western occupation, was welcomed and mobilised for national reasons by different political groups. However, these same political groups would back off from women's demands for gender equality. Thus women are "applauded when they fight the imperialist and colonial power, but are dismissed when they struggle for their own demands"(Treacher & Shukrallah, 2001, p. 11).

In this regard Sayed et al (Sayed, Ozbilgin, Torunoglu, & Ali, 2009) affirm that leading ideologies related to gender issues do not bring about gender equality for women. Studying macro-national perspectives of gender equality in two Muslim countries (Turkey and Pakistan) they debunk ideology claims within feminist discourse by stating that "secularism and shariah as dominant ideologies present

poor agendas for gender equality. Indeed, secularism and shariah hijack gender equality discourse paying only lip service to genuine demands for equality” (Sayed, et al., 2009, p. 67). Thus they demand that gender equality be saved from the grasp of ideology in order to endorse and advance real progression of equal opportunities and social justice.

Whether it is an ideology or observed permanence of gender structure, I discuss next postcolonial perceptions of Muslim women’s agency and its representation through Islamic dress mainly the veil. I argue that this perception concurs with Bourdieu’s observation of Kabyle society during French colonialism in the early 1960s, which finds women in subordinate and disadvantaged positions even though it comes five decades later.

Reading Saudi Women’s Agency through the Head Scarf

As the first chapter depicting Saudi women’s context has shown, the dress code for Saudi women is imposed by the state in terms consistent with the orthodox Islamic position of the country. The constraints imposed on the female’s body and its visibility are influenced by patriarchal traditions which make gender very relevant to the practice of veiling. Furthermore, the debate on the wearing of the veil, whether by Saudi women or Muslim women in general, revolves around women’s agency and the nature of their choice. As this study is about Saudi mothers who are compelled to wear the veil in public, I explore the signification and prevalence of the veil in Western discourse. To look at the symbolism of the

veil in Western discourse as opposed to it being a cultural tool in Saudi context, I need to go beyond themes from the pro-veiling or the anti-veiling discourse that justifies women's decision on the veil.

The Islamic headscarf appears to be a contested signifier in contemporary social and political world. It prompted regulation by most European Western countries that were keen on the enforcement of secular laws and conventions against the veil albeit with different approaches. This increased interest in Muslim women and Islam instigated a need to study Muslims and Islam in the West as well as in Muslim countries. Reviewing the abundant literature in this regard I came across a wide range of views that reflected the complexity of the issue and the contention it involved.

Sauer (2009) indicates how the headscarf issue transformed into an intense debate over the politics of integration of Muslims in the West. Her research focuses on the discrepancy in headscarf policies between three European countries (Austria, Germany and the Netherlands). Explaining various regulations in these countries she probed as well the gendered account of these policies and in what way the Islamic headscarf issue is reflected in them. The resulting analysis elucidated that there is an absence of a stable pattern in institutional settings that regulate the prohibition or accommodation of the headscarf in some European countries. Such instability creates differences in headscarf regulations in Europe. She argued that intricacy of institutional settings reproduced policies of either accommodation or

prohibition of the headscarf that do not necessarily correspond to the related political system and the way it deals with liberalism, democracy or secularism. She stressed that it is rather important to take gender, equality and antidiscrimination policies along with women's movements into consideration when looking into such policies.

Some researchers criticise western liberal democracies' approach to the headscarf debate and blatantly accuse the West of prejudice against Muslim minorities. Discussing this issue, Sonya Fernandez (2009) notes that there are many contradictions within liberal universal values embraced by the West vis-à-vis Muslim women. She disputes the concern for the well being of Muslim women embraced by the West and argues that identifying the veil as a sign of gender inequality masks a concealed prejudice towards women of other cultures while imposing Western values on them. She disapproves of attention being directed towards Muslim patriarchy while condoning non-Muslim patriarchy. According to her Muslim women should not be denied agency in the issue of the veil and what it represents to them.

Furthermore, Wassef (2001) criticises the West's rigidity in response to the issue of the veil. As she explores the veil representation, she contends that Muslim women's option to veil or not to veil is not a sole reflection of their adherence to tradition or religious doctrine. Muslim women consider strategic tactics when negotiating with patriarchy. Thus she argues that the dichotomised view of the veil

fails to reflect profound realities of Muslim women's options. Treacher (2003) explores as well Western misapprehension of Islamic Otherness focusing on construction of Islamic gender experience. She argues that it is imperative for the West to recognise the complexity of the veil representation of Muslim women to be able to understand Muslim women's subjectivity. As she disapproves of the superiority with which the West views Muslim societies and contends that this perception does not lead to better understanding of the Other, she recognises the challenges of exploring gender experiences in Muslim/Arab societies. Similarly Abu-Lughod (2002) doubts the kind of solicitude that the West is showing for Muslim women. She argues that this type of concern and attentiveness which keeps the issue of liberating "women of cover" at the centre of attention does not concern itself with the compound situation and the complexity of issues related to their basic culture and social communities.

To further understand the contemporary headscarf issue and what it represents for Muslim women and what it signifies in Western perception one should go back to look into the historical relationship of the West with "women of cover" during the Western political domination over the Muslim world and trace the history of the veil through colonial and post-colonial history. El Guindi (1999) sees the Islamic dress and veiling among Muslim women as a sign of resistance to the West. She recognises that by opting for the veil, Muslim women strengthen their relationship with their own culture and faith as a form of self expression and empowerment.

It is worth noting that in the background of this form of resistance was the imposed identity and Western dominance that enforced de-veiling during the colonial era in the early twentieth century with the inception of modernisation of elite Muslim women in the shadow of the economic and political interest of the West. During that period modernisation meant ‘westernisation’ just as Atakav (2007, p. 15) describes the emerging new Turkey following the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I by indicating that “it was replaced by a self-consciously modern and westernised Turkish Republic in 1923”. Bahramitashi (2005) revealed how during that time Orientalism prevailed among the educated elites of the Middle East with its binary notion of the civilised West and the Primitive East. Following this notion the kemalist movement in Turkey and the Shah in Iran enforced de-veiling on women in both Turkey and Iran as a way of modernisation. Both countries believed that changing women’s role was the medium to attain civilised identity based on the Western model. Hirschmann criticised the use of force to either veil or unveil Muslim women and explained that “though women under the Shah were not beaten up as they currently may be by ‘cultural police’, they were nevertheless chased by state police for wearing veils in public, their veils were torn off them, and they were harassed” (Hirschmann, 1998, p. 353). Western clothing was imposed on women then as a means of spreading Western culture and its values which would presumably liberate women from the ‘backwardness’ of their traditions (Bahramitashi, 2003, 2005; Hoodfar, 1999; King, 2009).

The presumption here is that throughout modern history, the discursive dispute over veiling or unveiling of Muslim women did not take agency on board. Muslim women were always coerced to either veil or unveil and the manner in which they have endured political, social and socioeconomic changes over the past decades has been strongly related to this issue. Hence, the complexity of the option to veil or not to veil, if such an option does exist, makes it difficult to understand why at the present time, and more than eighty-five years after Attaturk prohibited the veil, the headscarf is worn by the wife of the president of Turkey as well as over 60% of Muslim women (King, 2009). Pertaining to the significance and the controversy of the veil, Ashfar (1998) reviewed historically the different approaches taken either for or against the veil by different intellectual Muslim women. She noted that while Muslim modernists view the veil as imposed on Muslim women by men who are in charge of Muslim institutions rather than by tenets of Islam, fundamentally Islamist women see it as a means to facilitate their social activity, protecting them from being commoditised as sex objects which facilitates their free and independent movement in the public sphere. A similar argument was observed by Wassef (2001) of Egyptian women who in exchange for their independent and unencumbered movement in the public sphere chose to undergo female circumcision even when they could have chosen otherwise.

I argue that the absence of freedom of choice is a core issue in the headscarf debate despite the progressively more pervasive way of veiling among Muslim

women. Muslim women's choices are made against two contextual backdrops. On one side, it is the liberal West, that fears religious revivalism and the political Islam, while on the other, it is the Middle Eastern practices of men within religious authorities who mistrust and fear female sexuality and are willing to silence and mask women's identity by enforcing the veil and restricting them physically and spatially even by persecuting, jailing and whipping them for their non-compliance with the enforced Islamic code of dress (Hirschmann, 1998). Bhattacharjya (2010) contends that interpreting the veil is a complicated issue. She argues that while getting rid of it was considered liberating for Muslim women, its resurgence could indicate a choice of religious or ethnic identity, piety or simply a way in which the body lends itself to expression of agency.

Conceptualising Islamic Feminism: A standpoint for Emancipation

I find the conceptual terrain in which knowledge about 'Islamic feminism' is formed and produced is relative to my research about Saudi mothers' experiences with school choice in a particular local settings that restrict that choice. The relationship between powerful social institutions, women's agency and social change is a theme that runs through this study. As I orient towards the texts mediating the Islamic feminist discourse, my aim is to present Saudi mothers' work in relationship to their children's schooling as part of this discursive process. I observe that their experiences are located within the same common world of social and religious institutions that contribute to the production of the Islamic

feminist discourse. Thus I intend to interpret and measure their local practices within the standpoint of a trans-locally organised discourse of 'Islamic feminism'.

In my attempt to define "Islamic feminism" I find myself challenged by the apparent contradiction of the two terms that constitute it. Trying to locate the concept with its political and social connotations within feminism in general, I noticed that both Muslim and Western scholars when blending the two terms look for an authentication that endorses it and validates its legitimate usage. This could be attributed to feminism being associated with women's emancipation while Islam as all other religions has always been associated with women's oppression (Lenard, 2010). Nonetheless, we need to bear in mind as Badran stressed, "that the terms religious and secular are not hermetically sealed terms; there are, and always have been, imbrications between the two" (Badran, 2002, p. 2); this allows for a merger of religious and secular language when studying Islamic feminism.

The Saudi scholar Yamani in the introduction to her edited book "Feminism and Islam" (Yamani, 1996a) sees the term as one type of feminism amongst a broad array of theories and expressions such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism or post-modern feminism. Using these terms, feminists differ in their interpretations of various meanings related to feminism or what it entails. Chapters in her edited book "Feminism and Islam" focus on subjects related to the structure of gender in Arab societies under Islamic 'Shari'a' law. Political strategies of feminists in some parts of the Islamic world are concerned with issues of social control and

family legislation. Topics in this book illustrate how women in some Islamic societies attempt to be more actively involved not only in learning their rights under this 'Shari'a' (Islamic law), but in rereading this law to improve their status and gain increased equality and freedom (Yamani, 1996b).

Badran (2002) traces the history of the term 'Feminism' as it was invented in France in the 1880s and then emerged in Britain and the United States in the 1910s and in Egypt in the 1920s where it was promulgated in two languages French and Arabic. Furthermore, she argues that even though the term originated in the West, 'Feminism' itself is not Western. Rather she stressed that 'Feminism' is expressed in the locality and particularity of the places it is shaped in, which justifies the numerous types of feminism in different parts of the world. Therein she added that in the 1990s she encountered the term 'Islamic Feminism' through Muslim writers in different parts of the world; Mojab (2001) concurs that the concept 'Islamic Feminism' is relatively new, however she notes that its use in the 1990s was first in Western literature related to 'women and Islam'.

Reviewing the work of six feminist scholars McDonald (2008) notes the dichotomy and conflict in defining Islamic feminism. She declares that there is no agreement on a single definition of Islamic feminism, and that different scholars might only discuss their own understandings of it. However, Badran (2002) attributes such conflict to different uses of the term Islamic feminism by different users. She states that Muslim activists use Muslim feminism to acknowledge their

agenda of endorsing gender equality as an Islamic precept articulated in the Quran. Furthermore, she argues that Islamic feminism is sometimes used as an analytical term by those who study it or as a term of identity by Islamic feminists. Therefore she stresses the need to contextualise the term when using it. Islamic feminist discourse, she argues, embraces those who recognise it as their identity as well as those who see otherwise. Thus according to her, the term is being used by both religious and secular Muslims as well as by non-Muslims (Badran, 2002). For Moghessi (1999) the distinction between Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism, as well as the relationship between feminism and Islam, is a pivotal question. She contends that Islamic feminism is a tool by which Islamic fundamentalists merely present themselves as indigenous feminists. She claims that the rapprochement between fundamentalism and feminism is worrisome as it will only result in serving the fundamentalist agenda in legalising women's oppression in Islamic societies. Furthermore, she contests Western postmodern analysis of Islamic feminism, disputing their rationalisation of cultural differences to justify what she considers as Islamic state repression towards women and maintenance of patriarchal order (Moghissi, 1999).

Afshar (1998) looked into Iranian women Islamists' efforts to reconstruct and implement their interpretation of Islamic doctrines based on early Islamic history and position as regards to women's active role in the early days of Islam. As she introduced the intellectual debate within Islam and among Muslim Scholars on

Islam's position on women's issues she presented an array of opinions of Islamic scholars which negates the idea of one position. According to her such diversity enabled Iranian women who had to contextualise their struggle within Islamic Iranian society to emulate women from the early Islamic state and to base their quest for emancipation on the dynamic role those early Muslim women played in the public sphere. Her research documents and articulates how Iranian women redress injustices against them in a variety of contexts and create a better and more just world for themselves based on the rudiments of the same creed the Islamic authority promulgates.

After all, I would argue that the apparent difficulty in analysing the discourse of Islamic feminism should not hinder the main aim of ameliorating women's conditions in Muslim societies. Thus whether we view Islamic feminism as a standpoint from which Muslim women fight with the aim of achieving gender equality, or just a reading into Western feminist thinking and understanding of other women in the Muslim world, the versatile significance of the discourse for different constituencies both inside and outside of the Islamic world should not obscure tangible measures that validate steps to be taken towards promoting women's rights. I believe that once the hardship of women's everyday lives in culturally different societies is placed on a universal scale of measurement, women driving their own cars on an urban highway in Saudi Arabia will not end up in

prison due to cultural restrictions on their mobility (Middle East Policy Council, 2011).

Intersectionality: A Framework for Analysis

Shedding some light on the concept of intersectionality in this chapter is central in order to grasp the relationship between different socio-cultural categorical concepts and identities of Saudi mothers. This will help in understanding the construction of Saudi women and the emergence of their identity. Whether to assume a shared identity and claim a collective agency or to locate mothers' quest for agency within the individual mothers and their remaking of their identity and their selves, understanding the intersectionality of race, class gender and religion is essential to elucidate the diverse positions of Saudi women's experiences and the complexities of their identities. This research intends to locate Saudi mothers within the school choice process. Thus gender differences experienced by mothers will be striated by divisions of social class along with cultural and religious factors that contribute to the formation of restrictions that feature Saudi women's lives.

The concept of intersectionality has developed in the last 20 years since it was first coined by Crenshaw (1989). In its inception in the American context, Crenshaw criticised the absence of diversity in gender analysis which failed to include women of colour within feminist studies. The theory focused on race, gender and class while adapting the metaphor of roads crossing each other at intersections. The metaphor of intersecting roads illustrated how social and cultural categories

intertwine and diverse axes of inequalities and oppression, such as gender, race and class cut across and mutually influence each other (Crenshaw, 1989). While in the intersection metaphor categories of oppression were thought about independently, another multiplicative approach was adopted to produce dynamic interactive effects within as well as between categories. Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) criticised the limitation of the additive approach for analysis as it might not reflect the diversity within each of the analysed categories. Such fragmentation, she argued, can lead to the marginalisation of certain members of the same social group. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that the intersectionality debate is about “conflation or separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 195).

Myra Marx Ferree (2009) conceptualises intersectionality in a dynamic and institutional multi-level approach in which she addresses the construction of inequalities and the possible changes this brings to all levels of society. Focusing on agency she stresses the multi level process of structuring an interactive dimension of intersectionality (Ferree, 2009). Assembling separated categories of race class and gender in an interactive approach means that the categories intertwine, permeate and transform each other in an interdependency that can be depicted as mutual construction of categories. McCall (2005) defines intersectionality as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities

of social relations and subject formation” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Raising the question about the way intersectionality is studied, she classifies different methodological approaches to intersectionality within different disciplines. This complexity in intersectionality research is due to the subject of analysis that takes in multiple dimensions of social life and various categories of analysis. On a continuum she organises intersectionality into three approaches. At one end the anti-categorical approach rejects and deconstructs analytical categories. In contrast the inter-categorical approach uses them strategically to note relationships of inequality among social groups. In between is the intra-categorical approach which studies particular social groups within defined boundaries. The multiple approaches to study intersectionality represent the methodological complexities that arise in intersectionality research (McCall, 2005).

Other researchers have also applied intersectionality as a theoretical and a methodological approach to study inequalities. Choo and Ferree (2010) noted three styles of work amongst researchers who use an intersectional analysis. The first is the group-centred approach. In this approach marginalised groups are located at the centre of the research. Focusing on including their experiences and perspectives, this method gives voice to the oppressed. The second style they studied was the process-centred approach which - as in a social constructionist approach to intersectionality - underlines power relations and focuses on dynamic processes rather than the addition of categories. The third methodological

approach sees inequalities as spanning and transforming structures and activities in every institutional context. It is a complex intersectional form of systemic inequalities within societal institutions (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

In theorising intersectionality, The black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains – using a Foucauldian framework - how power is organised through different systems within society. According to her, intersecting systems of oppression are organised through four interconnected domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal. These domains set the organisation of power within matrices of domination and consequently control social change.

The structural domain is made up of social structures such as religion, polity, law and economy. This domain is responsible for setting the parameters that manage power relations, thus setting the overall organisation of power. This domain is difficult to change as it would require a large scale social movement in order to achieve any social change. In a further domain, the disciplinary domain, oppression is managed through bureaucratic organizations that control human behaviour. Organisational protocols are used to conceal the effects of discrimination and oppression through normalisation, rationalisation and surveillance. To achieve slow and incremental social change, resistance to bureaucratic rationalisation is not an easy manoeuvre, yet it has to come from within the organisation.

An additional domain that Collins gathers as legitimising oppression is the hegemonic domain. In this domain, authority functions through the general culture's value system and through people's beliefs. The language used, the values held and the ideas entertained by the people all make up this domain. It is reinforced through the education system, religious teachings and community psyche. Individual agency is vital in order to deconstruct the hegemonic domain and bring about change. As Collins states; "racist and sexist ideologies, if they are disbelieved, lose their impact" (Collins, 2000, p. 284).

Finally, Collins elucidates the contradictions of oppression when she explains how the oppressed could turn into the oppressor if they identify with the oppression they experience. Personal relations and everyday interactions make up the interpersonal domain. This fourth domain is open to individual agency and change through intrapersonal understanding and reflections of one's own experience. However, Collins cautions that individuals might not be supportive of other's subordination if they consider it as not being as important as their own. Understanding the complexity and dynamic nature of intersectionality and the different levels of the matrix of domination, Collins argues, highlights the connections and interdependencies between mutually constituted social categories that produce complex structures of inequality rather than single ones. As such this could empower social justice causes.

Drawing on the theoretical reflection summarised above, it could be deduced that intersectionality is a key concept in feminist discourse. Thus I employ it in my research as an analytical tool to explore the positioning of gender and other social categories, such as social class and religion, in shaping the experiences of Saudi women.

Conclusion

I reviewed in this chapter the main concepts and theories underpinning my research. I identified the appropriate topics of issues as I studied concepts of school choice, social class, religion, and gender. Further I looked into Islamic feminism and discussed Saudi women's dress code and the symbolism of the veil in Western discourse to contextualise and theorise the issue of Saudi women's agency. I explored and synthesised Bourdieu's theory on capital, habitus and field to support and justify my data analysis in the final chapter.

With the corresponding growth and development in the knowledge base of many topics, I checked out the key relationships through which the concepts and the application of the topics interact. This allowed me to reconstruct conceptually theories from the West to build on and gave me clearer understanding and ability to assess how well my topic is represented in the literature.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological framing of the research project. It presents an overview of the theoretical perspectives that outline the design and implementation of my research approach. I reveal the general characteristics and the specific strategies behind it; and how these strategies originate in disciplines and flow throughout the process of the research. These strategies focus on data collection and participants' recruitment, research setting and approach to data analysis, as well as types of problems and ethical issues of importance.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The aim of this study is to understand the experiences and perceptions of Saudi mothers when they choose a school for their children in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Positioning women within their individual families, identities, geographies, and cultural situations, I use a feminist perspective where the study discusses the interaction between mothers and school in a time of changing political, cultural, and socio-economic developments. In doing so, it shows that, in a religiously conservative and restrictive traditional patriarchal society, Saudi culture incorporates ideas and practices of male dominance, but at the same time it also provokes challenges to women who have to navigate their lives within the same ideas and practices. While acknowledging that conservative trends are strong, it notes the significance of Saudi mothers' involvement as they engage on

behalf of their families in their children's education and assess their educational choice.

The Research Problem and the Research Questions

Social and political restrictions are a salient feature of Saudi society. Among many constraints in social life is an education system that is managed by and run under strict state control. This research is focused on mothers' experiences in choosing a school under a plethora of limitations. It explores how they might be driven to look for other options and eventually take their children out of the country to escape restrictions on exercising their educational choice. As this study is concerned with mothers' involvement with schools in a restricted social, cultural and religious context, the issue of gender will dominate as women's experiences and their engagement with school are documented.

Thus, the main questions asked by this study are:

1. In the context of social, cultural and religious restrictions, how are Saudi mothers situated in the school choice process?
2. In a restrictive setting, how does gender influence Saudi mothers' school choice experiences?
3. In a male-dominated society with practices of gender inequality, how do Saudi women empower themselves in their tightly restricted lives?

Feminist Standpoint: A Research Approach

My objective in this research is to look into convictions, perspectives and experiences of Saudi mothers who are restricted by strict educational policy in regard of school choice. Based on the theoretical literature on school choice that I reviewed in chapter 3, I take Saudi women's experience as a standpoint construct to study Saudi society through educational choice. Since “personal beliefs and experiences are used as a basis for constructing feminist theory” (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 53), I use feminist standpoint theory to understand those mothers by moving into their field of perception with the aim of seeing their experience as they see it.

Feminist standpoint theorist Harding (1991) argues that in patriarchal culture women live in a predominantly inferior position which is structured by power relation and is qualitatively different from men's position. Hence she suggests that self-reflexivity and stand point theory can help women see more clearly their own paradigms as they are conscious of the power relations that maintain their social place. Feminist standpoint theory suggests that oppressed women, have the ability to frame their own experiences; “the problem to be explored and the evidence that is relevant can be seen best from the standpoint of women”. Thus, standpoint theory is “providing knowledge for women, by women and from the standpoint of women” (Crasnow, 2008, p. 1092). This concept of knowledge and women's

awareness of their social situation with respect to the socio-political power is used as the initial point for my research enquiry.

Given that women in Saudi Arabia continue to face restrictions and struggle with barriers and obstacles in various aspects of their lives, unlike their male counterparts, Saudi women are in a subordinate position and one that is qualitatively different from that of men. To understand the rationalisation behind women's position and understand why the position of women is qualitatively different to that of men, I looked into standpoint literature which despite its multiplicity and the availability of various standpoint theories "all are grounded in one central and founding idea: knowledge is socially located and arises in social positions that are structured by power relations". Hallstein (1999, p. 35).

As I became interested in researching mothers' experiences I was drawn to qualitative, interpretive research. My methodology progressed and developed concurrently with theorising about the research problem. In the practice of researching mothers' lived experiences with school choice, which is the central issue of my research, I draw on phenomenological literature to develop my feminist position and portray the meaning of these experiences. According to Creswell (2003, p. 15) "Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method." Furthermore Robson (2002, p. 195) stresses that "phenomenological research focuses on the subjective experience of the individual studied. What is their experience like? How can one

understand and describe what happens to them from their own point of view? As the term suggests, at its heart is the attempt to understand a particular phenomenon.”

The focus on common experiences echoed my interest to study mothers' involvement with school choice and to establish an interpretive structure of what is studied. Holstein and Gubrium (1998, p. 138) discuss phenomenological principles as an approach to the study of interpretive practice and its subjectivist suppositions about the nature of lived experiences and social order. This is drawn from Alfred Schutz's efforts to develop Husserl's foundations for qualitative study of "reality-constituting practice" recognizing "the ways in which ordinary members of society constitute and reconstitute the world of everyday life". This way mothers' experiences will manifest structures of oppression within Saudi society.

Further, and to fully understand how Saudi women construct their experiences, I refer to feminist standpoint theorists' outlook that "do not view individual consciousness as wholly constructed and determined by the conditions that structure women's lives" rather, "individuals interpret their own experiences and imbue them with meaning" and "view women as active agents who make sense of their own lives within particular social and historical contexts that constrain, but do not wholly determine consciousness" (Hallstein, 1999, p. 37) . Hence Hallstein (1999) identifies socially constructed variations in women's standpoints, and

according to her ‘agency’ that comes out from standpoint theory is a “constrained agency” that even when women are bestowed with it, it takes place within constraints. Therefore it is a discourse that combines both subordination and self-determination and renders women neither fully free nor victims of oppression.

Thus, the nature of my research required the use of standpoint theory to explore mothers’ school choice with the type of data that entails the use of feminist theory to contribute and enrich the understanding of mothers’ experiences. Morse (1998, p. 62) explains how research strategies as tools are decided by the nature of the research problem and that “each qualitative strategy offers a particular and unique perspective that illuminates certain aspects of reality more easily than others and produces a type of results more suited for some applications than others.”

Interaction of diverse aspects in my research such as gender, social class, subjectivities, experiences and social power relations made me consider a feminist perspective to address and problematise my research questions on mothers and school choice. Stambach and David (2005, p. 1650) noted that maternal involvement had always permeated school choice. They emphasised as well the contribution of feminist theory to understand gender as a reality in debates and research on choice in education, and contended that school choice is “gendered in significant ways that go beyond what researchers and policy analysts have recognised and respected”.

Accordingly, Reinharz (1992) affirms, that by giving a voice to mothers in a context that usually masks it, a feminist approach would bring marginalised mothers to the centre and draw attention to them as competent actors, and understand them as subjects in their own right; my aim is to demonstrate that a feminist standpoint approach would provide tools for analysing the role of external structures and forces interacting with mothers' descriptions and accounts of their experiences which would bring them to the focus of enquiry.

Whether it is one feminist method or multiple feminist methodologies, the literature which explores feminist orientation and feminist methodologies characteristically has women and gender as the focus. It employs methods that are responsive to power relations between the researcher and the researched (David, 2003; De Vault, 1996; Stambach & David, 2005). De Vault states that feminist methodologists are unified "through various efforts to include women's lives and concerns in accounts of society, to minimize the harms of research, and to support changes that will improve women's status"(1996, p. 29).

Studies investigating family school choice, whether conducted by feminist or other researchers, demonstrate that, regardless of social class, it is mothers who are involved with the school choice even though the expression "parents" is used as a gender neutral term. As gender itself is not widely researched in school involvement and school choice, it remains at the margins of research enquiries in these fields (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; Stambach &

David, 2005; Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004). In her book “Personal and Political: Feminism, Sociology and Family Lives” David (2003) discussed that feminist researchers drew on standpoint theory to research mothers in relation to education. She acknowledged that some of their main inputs have been about how to understand and interpret women’s perspectives. Furthermore she indicated that researchers’ substantive apprehension about women and their family lives intertwined with their methodological interests.

In this study I want to investigate experiences of mothers in relation to their children’s education with a clear focus on their position in school choice, and to make visible their role in various aspects of formal and informal education of their children. I argue that gender shapes Saudi women’s lives through a traditional culture that is patriarchal, with oppressive social restrictions, guardianship and segregation that mutes women’s voices and places them into positions submissive to men. Gender has a set of linked dimensions; it is a location of structural disadvantages, of repressive practices; it is a standpoint, a place from which Saudi women look at themselves, others and society. It is through mothers’ standpoint that this study will look at cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. However these normative cultural practices are visible more clearly to those they definitively exclude and discriminate against.

Saudi Mothers: The Sample

My sample consisted of 15 Saudi mothers. This was an homogeneous group which represents the upper middle and affluent class of Saudi society in general; however some families were more traditional than others. While most mothers were highly educated, which indicates the importance of girls' education in Saudi society that I discussed in the previous chapter, about half of the mothers in the group did not work at all and attended only to their domestic and social duties. For those who worked, the range of occupations within the group shows that they can only work in teaching or health sector as these are the only two sectors where Saudi women are allowed to work - the only exception to this restriction being in Saudi Oil Company Aramco that can employ women alongside men.

The main method I used for recruiting participants was by word of mouth. Being an insider I spread among my friends and mothers of local schools on different occasions the word about my research project. I asked the first three mothers I interviewed to name or mention other people with whom they had some type of relationship; according to inclusion criteria I defined for the purposes of putting me as researcher in touch with others. They gave me names of mothers they thought might be interested. I also asked the director of the school where my children studied to put me in contact with mothers of children who would be interested in my research including those who pulled their children out of the school to send them to Bahrain.

Snowball sampling is based on social network logic whereby people are linked by a set of social relationships and contacts. Snowballing, or chain-referral sampling, entails the nomination of other potentially suitable people through research participants and has been known to work well with hard-to-reach populations. Snowball methods take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide the researcher with an-ever expanding set of would-be participants, permitting a chain of referrals to be made within a circle of social contact (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003).

In all, ten of the fifteen participants were included in my research through this snowballing technique after I specified the purpose of the research to allow myself direction and control in locating participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest to my research. My aim was that this purposive sample could contribute meaningfully to the study as the determinants I identified in the selection were critical to the phenomenon I am studying.

I asked the participants to give their demographical features not only to get precise description of the sample, but also to be able to interpret their individual stories. Furthermore, demographical characteristics are fundamental so that the reader would understand my interpretations in the final analysis. Table (1) summarizes these features; namely ages, educational qualifications, work, number and gender of children and the familial status of the mother. I used pseudonyms for all participants to conceal their identity.

All but two of the mothers in the group are married as it is usually the man who supports the family financially in a patriarchal society and in this group he is the one contributing financially to the children's education. The widowed mother is supported by the inheritance left by the late husband where she personally took charge of his personal business. Although the divorced mother is mainly supported by her own father, her earnings make an important contribution to support and maintain a higher standard for her own family as well.

Notwithstanding my reluctance to make assertions occurring from the demographic features of the participants, it would be accurate to claim that in general familial relationships within the group seem relatively stable. Furthermore the age of the mothers in the group points towards a significant experience of school involvement. In a lot of aspects they represent the upper middle class of highly educated employees of the oil company Aramco. With sound financial capability my sample represents families who are looking for a prosperous future for their children through high educational standards.

Table 1: Sample Demographical Characteristics

Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Work Exp.	Number/Gen der of Children	Family Status	School Choice
Haya	40-49	PhD	University Teacher	2 Boys	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Amna	50-59	Masters	Used to teach, now studying Counseling	3 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to US & Bahrain
Saba	40-49	Degree	Aramco Employee	2 Boys	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Naima	30-40	Degree	Housewife	3 Both Sexes	Married	Saudi Private School
Najla	30-40	Masters	Hospital Employee	2 Girls	Divorced	Saudi Private School
Maha	50-59	Degree	Housewife	4 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Ruba	30-40	Diploma	Used to work as Dental Technician	2 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Fay	30-40	High School	Housewife with	4 Both Sexes	Married	Saudi Private School
Dana	30-40	Degree	Housewife	4 Both Sexes	Married	Saudi Private School
Rand	40-50	Diploma	Entrepreneur	3 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Samar	40-50	Degree	Secretary in Girls College	4 Both Sexes	Married	Saudi Private School
Tara	50-59	Degree	House wife	4 Both Sexes	Married	Saudi Private School
Basma	50-59	Diploma	Self employed Designer/ Artist	5 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to Bahrain
Hala	50-59	Degree	Housewife	3 Girls	Widow	Saudi Private School
Aseel	50-59	Degree	Pursuing Higher Studies	4 Both Sexes	Married	Exiting to Bahrain

Interviews for Data Generation

Since my intent was to research mothers' experiences I used qualitative interviews to generate my research data which was discursively constructed by participants themselves as they talked about their experiences of school choice. In congruence with the literature, interviews seem to be the most sensible approach for answering my research questions. Kvale (1996, p. 1) defines qualitative research interview as an effort to realize the world from the respondent position and unfurl the gist of his or her experiences in order to explain it scientifically. Moreover, according to Cohen, Manion et al (2000, p. 267) collecting data in an interview through direct verbal interaction between individuals on a topic of mutual interest, accentuates the social positioning of research data. Wengraf (2002, p. 3) argued as well that qualitative research interviewing is intended to develop knowledge. As a researcher I needed to understand special features of this knowledge and study it as it goes into topics in depth. Robson (2002, p. 493) observed that any form of data collection would certainly influence what is being seen in the qualitative data analysis.

After I consulted the literature (Foddy, 1993; Keats, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003; Wengraf, 2002), I formatted individual in-depth interviews that allowed me to delve deeply into social and personal matters related to different aspects of the research issue. According to many qualitative researchers an interview schedule format is determined based on its degree of

structure which ranges from the totally structured to the totally unstructured (Cohen, et al., 2000; Kvale, 1996; Robson, 2002; Wengraf, 2002). A significant account of information may be obtained from unstructured interviews; however it might not necessarily be related to the research topic.

In order for my interviews to yield substantive information about my research questions, the type of the interviews in my study was semi-structured with predetermined open-ended questions. Nevertheless I was prepared to depart from the planned itinerary during the interview, and in certain cases, I followed other questions emerging from the dialogue to pursue the interviewee's interest and knowledge. I sought to be at liberty to respond to unforeseen concerns or matters, to be able to probe while managing any digression. Nonetheless, I maintained the focus on the main set of fixed questions for each interview. Rather than group interviews, individual interviews offered me the possibility to set up a relationship based on understanding and rapport to gather rich personal information and subjective perspectives from individual experiences of the participants.

As a first step in collecting qualitative data I operationalised the research questions and formulated an interview schedule. I altered some questions in the interview schedule as I learnt more about the subject. Questions that were not effective at eliciting the necessary information were dropped and new ones added. To avoid pitfalls, and test whether my accounts for the interview were understood by the participants, I felt that piloting the interview was essential despite Richards (2005,

p. 78) advice that “qualitative projects quite normally have no pilot stage in which the research tools (questionnaires, tests, etc.) are tested”. Being a novice qualitative researcher, as a pilot I did interview two parents before I finalised my interview schedule. I asked them to recount their own understanding and explanations of the interview. Their queries and comprehension helped me clarify some ambiguous wording and eliminate parts that could be irrelevant or confusing to the interviewees.

My data was generated in two batches as I did two rounds of interviews due to my personal circumstances. I interviewed seven mothers between November 2007 and January 2008 before I had to interrupt my work when my late husband became ill and had to undergo critical heart surgery. Sadly he passed away in March 2008. Due to this sad turn of events I interrupted my studies for the rest of 2008. I started a subsequent round of interviews in November 2009. By the time I conducted the second round of interviews I had already transcribed the first lot of interviews.

I conducted my interviews in Arabic. To mark the social experience and construct the identity of participant mothers, I transcribed the interviews first in Arabic then translated them to English for analysis purposes.

Most interviews were held in the homes of the interviewees, I gave all interviewees the liberty to choose the interview location and all invited me to their homes except for one interviewee who preferred to visit me after work. It was the only interview held in my home. Each interview lasted for about one hour.

Following a social practice on social visits, I presented each host with some chocolate when I held the interview session. I was served tea either before or after the interview and we talked freely in a relaxed and intimate manner. To give all interviewees a general idea about my research, at the beginning I made known my research to them and gave a brief introduction to the objectives and research questions. I explained as well the Code of Ethics I have to follow and asked participants for demographic information.

Almost all interviewees expressed interest in the research as most of them sought to make their voices heard and were eager to talk about their experiences. Interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of interviewees; nevertheless I took notes during each interview which was helpful in annotating the transcriptions of the tapes to convey important details during the register of the conversation.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with formal requirement of the Institute of Education, University of London, I had to obtain ethics approval for my research project before it began. I had to consider the main ethical issues which may arise in the course of my research and how they would be addressed. Thus ethical considerations featured highly in my research as I had a chance to reflect on them way before the start of the project. Ethical approval was based on the outline I submitted in which I explained the nature of the research and the measures I would take to insure that I

would observe the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

From the outset of the research I operated within an ethic of respect to my participants. They all agreed to participate without any duress. I explained to them the nature and purpose of my research and informed them about the objectives of the investigation and made full disclosure to make sure that they understood the process in which they were to be engaged. I explained to them how their participation would be used and how and to whom it would be reported prior to obtaining their voluntary informed consent in writing. I informed all participants of their right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time; I explained to them that I would accept their decision if they wished to do so.

Furthermore, for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality I clarified to them as well that any private data identifying them would not be reported and that I would change their names and any identifying features. During my research I took care not to divulge any information about the participants in the community or elsewhere and I kept all personal data related to this research securely.

Acknowledging power dynamics between the interview pair I avoided hierarchical interview practices and sought transparency and rapport throughout my interview sessions. As a mother I was in a relatively equal status with my interviewees, who were all mothers and considered me as an insider and one of them. Ann Oakley (1981, p. 41) argues that “the goal of finding out about people through

interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship”.

Moreover, Janet Finch attributes women’s enthusiasm about talking to other women researchers to their sharing a subordinate structural position in the society (Finch, 1984). However, I had more in common with the mothers I interviewed other than gender which contributed to the non-hierarchical aspect of the interview in which I assumed equal position. Features such as social class, mothering and family, economic standard, school experience and membership of the same local community contributed to the dynamic nature of power in research interviews (Bhopal, 2001; Del Busso, 2007; Holland, 2007; Tang, 2002).

I also wanted to assure all study participants about data that I collected from them. Therefore I offered them the option to review my transcription of the taped interviews so that if they were not happy with something they had said they could ask me to amend it before I used it as data. I e-mailed the transcribed interviews back to the participants for review. One mother indicated to me her desire to withdraw some previously mentioned information from the interview transcription, thus I excluded from my final copy the point she referred to. Due to the bilingual nature of interviews and to presenting final transcripts in English, mothers’ approval of the final copy of transcript was essential.

Data Analysis

Analysis and interpretation of the gathered data began with the process of transcribing interviews with the aim of working up from the data itself. Everything I learnt from the data was being fed back to the research design with the purpose of providing an overall understanding of what was being studied. I found that the process of transcription time consuming, as it initiated the first step in the analysis rather than preceding it. The fact that I had to handle the task myself and type up the interviews for analysis made the data more vivid and familiar. I had to be systematic and consistent with data preparation to be able to manage fine details of the data when revisiting and rereading it for interpretation.

The literature describes qualitative data analysis as a process of data reduction. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) “define analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification”. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 29) describe data analysis as “the art of interpretation” that is constructed creatively from the initial documents or “field text” into a “research text” that consists of “notes and interpretations” that the researcher can work with in an effort to make sense of the data and ultimately produce the final report.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended starting early with analysis and entwine it with data collection. The process of analysis and interpretation was interwoven, embedded and ongoing as I used computer-assisted qualitative data

analysis software to manage and organise textual data. I anticipated saving time and resources with appropriate use of the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo. Advocates of its use argue that the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo enhances the quality of qualitative research. Various tasks are set to enable researchers to organise data using the software. With the use of its tools, it is easy to name categories directly from a participant's own words, add details, memos to documents or coding, run complex searches of the text and codes and create links between data, which all are tasks to simplify the management of data itself and thereby aid analysis and interpretation (Bazeley, 2007; Fielding & Lee, 1998; L. Richards, 2005).

As a first step into analysis I transcribed the first round of interviews in Word document. Concerned by the volume of transcription and the amount of coding and memo writing required, I was attracted by the idea that computer software might simplify the management of the research data. Thus I began training to acquire the skills in the use of the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo. As I became familiar with the software I imported all the transcripts and the demographic data into NVivo. However, for the second round of interviews, I managed to transcribe it directly into NVivo. Typing directly into NVivo, I was able to code as I type and link to the data any log trail document it described.

Ideas were generating as coding progressed, hence it was essential to carry out a much deeper analysis. Richards (2005, p. 68) argues that it is misleading to think

that themes or theories emerge spontaneously from the data. Expressing the need for the researcher to “goad data into speaking” she states that:

The researcher discovers themes, or threads in the data, by good exploration, good enquiry. By handling the data records sensitively, managing them carefully and exploring them skilfully, the researcher ‘emerges’ ideas, categories, concepts, themes, hunches and ways of relating them. Out of such process come bigger ideas, and by hard work, from these loose threads can be woven something more like a fabric, of good explanations and predictions.

So out of the many hours spent entering data and coding it in NVivo, analysis was not only keeping notes on themes, ideas and patterns that were emerging from it, but also finding out how to unlock very valuable information from numerous interviews. Thus, after labelling themes and naming categories I had to look at them as more than just a way of organising the areas discussed by the mothers. I had to examine them comparatively in relation to the context for the study and the demographic features of the participants. Such explanation gave characteristics and boundaries to the themes which enabled me to manipulate the data by comparing and relating different elements and looking for valid evidence.

Although NVivo was very functional in structuring my research project, I had to see relationships, discover themes and patterns and ask queries to justify my claims. Richards and Richards (1998) note that computers are excellent when working with structure rather than content which is delineated and conveyed by the researcher. They explain how computers support theory construction and emphasise the role and skills of the researcher in moving from the textual-level

operations of coding and retrieving, to more abstract theoretical-level operations that find relationships and meanings to create connections between components.

In searching for these connections between components and thereby pattern building for further analysis, negative or divergent views were not disregarded. I assumed that they would offer a rich source for understanding mothers' experiences. That is why I included various tales and quotes of divergent cases to illustrate representation of voices and concerns of all mothers even though some would belong to a particular or unique perspective.

Working with the software, I found that NVivo offered many advantages to qualitative research. Looking into the efficacy of the software in handling the amount of material generated by the literature review, there are sets of tools to support literature analysis and argument building (Bazeley, 2007; di Gregorio, 2000; L. Richards, 2005). I used the literature to contextualise and theorise the issues raised by my research questions. Although the amount of time needed to read, conceptualise and analyse the literature and incorporate it with my actual data would not decrease with the use of the software, NVivo was useful in managing the literature as a source of explanation, exploration and testing. Tools within NVivo made it possible for me to handle ideas efficiently and incorporate the literature rather than force it into the study (Wolcott, 2001). Using NVivo tools I was able to establish relationships between the literature and my research data as

relevant literature was accessible for browsing and searching which enriched queries and analysis.

Conclusion

In this study I adopted an interpretive style that endorsed a positioned, gendered and reflexive representation of the data. Thus by documenting theoretical and methodological influences that have shaped the design, presentation and implementation of this research, I was able to explore, interpret and analyse mothers' experiences with theoretical information on school choice and gender issues to be able to reflect on how these experiences came to be. Olesen (1998) indicates that simply taking experience into account is not enough to reflect on the reasons behind the experience. Thus, interpretation of influences that frame Saudi women's experiences; and analysis of conditions that produced it deemed necessary. Adopting a standpoint theory that took women's experiences as a main concern, I account both for reporting the experiences and interpreting the influences that frame them.

CHAPTER 5: A MOTHER'S CHOICE: FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The telling of stories reflected mothers' perspectives and beliefs about their roles in their children's education. To present the abundance and richness of information shared I return to the original questions that had shaped my conceptualization of the study, as the information shared by mothers mostly fell under these questions. My inquiry focused on how Saudi mothers' experiences in relation to their children's schooling were featured within its social, cultural and religious location. Given the male-dominated feature of Saudi society I look into gender inequality concerns to detect the potentiality of agency in the experiences of those mothers.

The information gathered in interviews revealed the experiential standpoint and views of Saudi mothers and how are they situated in the school choice process along with their perspective of restriction and limitation imposed on them. What the mothers were saying unravelled issues involved in conceptualising the interrelationship of various influences that shaped their lives. Saudi women's personal accounts and testimonies offered an insight and built up a picture of how their self-empowerment resonates in the tightly restricted lives they are living within a male-dominated society. I attempt to use the interrelatedness of varying situations, beliefs, events and actions that shape this world to disaggregate and unravel the complexity of experiences lived by Saudi mothers. Thus I use

intersectionality of gender, religion, social class, patriarchy and other social determinants to understand how their world is put together and shaped by various powers and forces.

Intersectionality, an Analytical Tool

Building the picture from information gathered through asking questions about how Saudi women are situated within school choice entails explaining the various influences that shape their choice. Personal accounts and testimonies combined with data disaggregated according to social class, age, cultural capital, education status and other influences such as religion and patriarchy will reveal through analysis how women's lives are shaped and impacted by all of these influences.

To achieve appropriate and adequate understanding of the unique and particular experiences of Saudi women, I developed my analysis from the perspective of intersectionality and focused my attention on the specific context and the distinct experiences of those women. Intersectionality was evident in the structural and dynamic dimensions of the interplay of different policies and institutions that shape Saudi women's lives. Instead of focusing only on gender relations, discussing intersectionality explicitly through the analysis lay bare the full complexity and specificity through which Saudi women interact with the various dimensions and revealed the way the issues of discrimination featured in their lives and underpinned their yearning for equality.

I draw on intersectionality as an “analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (Symington, 2004, p. 1). In this way intersectionality is functional in understanding the norms and the systems within which mothers’ experiences are located.

To discuss intersectionality as an analytical tool it is necessary to recognise that as the term was used more widely, there was more debate and opinion about “what is being claimed when one names intersectionality as theory or methodology (Lewis, 2009, p. 207). In this regard, Prins (2006) notes the “differences in how intersectionality is treated on either side of the Atlantic” and elucidates that “the US approach foregrounds the impact of system or structure upon the formation of identities, whereas British scholars focus on the dynamic and relational aspects of social identity” (Prins, 2006, p. 279). Thus while one concept of intersectionality focuses on the individual level highlighting identity categories, another analyses intersecting inequalities on a structural level and stresses social structures.

With a multilevel dynamic conceptualisation of intersectionality, in this analysis, I now turn to look at certain explicit norms which govern Saudi society such as hegemonic masculinity within patriarchy, and focus on an intersectional analysis of inequalities in Saudi women’s lives. Furthermore, I investigate how institutional

policies within political and legal institutions, traditions, culture and religion operate as various grounds of discrimination against women.

Mothers as School Decision Makers

Managing data analysis of the study I return to the first question in my research to find out how Saudi mothers perceived their role on the school choice process. I noticed mothers' agreement on the importance of their role not only in the process of school choice but also in the school involvement in general.

Being a significant aspect of public rhetoric as well as the focus of much domestic concern, school choice is particularly subject to gender factors as the role of the mother is principal to all educational actions and ambitions of the family. The literature on school choice suggests that it is mothers and not fathers who have the key involvement and responsibility for day-to-day educational support of their children as well as main decision making when it comes to school choice (David, 1997). Thus the use of the word 'parents' when referring to the home-school relationship, signifies a gender biased language that trims down the mother's role in this relation and masks its centrality. Arguments about the appropriateness of the use of "parents" as an "un-gendered" term postulate that gender inequality is reproduced as mothers perform the main support work for their children's schooling (David, 1997; Dudley-Maling, 2001; Reay & Ball, 1998; Standing, 1999; West, et al., 1998). Furthermore, Cole (2007, p. 165) maintains that "the term 'parent' masks the different gender experiences, knowledge and roles of

mothers and fathers” and that “retaining the neutrality of the term ‘parents’ makes it easier for professionals to not seek or listen to the individual, personal voices and experiences of mothers.”

However, in examining the data on mothers as decision makers we will find that their life stories will reveal the different voices related to their positions in various social contexts as well as diverse identity roles. This revelation illustrates the various voices within the self and allows the construction of particular identifications with various markers of identity; pointing to the way in which different markers of identity intersect.

Haya commented about her role in school choice by saying:

“Definitely, in my household all the schooling decisions are basically mine. I’m the one who decides if the school is not good. If I’m not happy with it, I’m the one who tries to find alternative solutions...I’m the one who goes looks for schools and gets the kids admission. So this is a hundred percent my choice.”

A similar view was also articulated by Amna when she strongly expressed her centrality in the process of school choice by saying:

“I am very central. I am the one. When it comes to choices of school, in my family, yes I am the one. My husband is involved, but ok, I make the decision and then we discuss it. But it is my decision in most of the time. From choosing the school to general involvement in the school, day to day involvement, it is all me. Definitely, it is me.”

Without exception, whether they chose the Saudi school system or sought to exit it, all mothers in this study saw the role they played in their children’s schooling as central. Another mother, Samar saw that the key role mothers play in their

children's education is the norm in society as a whole. She explicitly articulated this by saying:

"In our society it's always the mother's role to look after the kids and prepare them for different aspects of life and I do believe it's a mother's central role to choose her kids school because no one cares about the kids welfare as much as the mother. Plus, no one care as much as a mother if her kids are being well educated and well treated."

Here, Samar directly acknowledged that in Saudi society mothers have the key roles of bringing up children and taking charge of their schooling. It is clear that she has an understanding of gendered ideology of mothering as she rationalised her position by stressing that "no one cares"; this articulation renders the structural role of the mother as the only one liable for children's schooling. Caring as an emotional responsibility that Saudi mothers take towards their children's education resonates with what Reay (2004a) developed in her theoretical understanding of emotional capital. She extended Bourdieu's concept of capital to include emotional capital when she referred explicitly to mothers' devotion to their children's education. Data from case studies showed that most mothers had deep emotional involvement with their children's education (Reay, 2004a) which was similarly reflected in comments made by mothers above.

Saudi Mothers' Perception of Restrictions: Choice, Power and Identity Work

While middle class affluent Saudi mothers in general play the main role in charge of children's schooling, and all that is related to home-school relations (Dudley-

Maling, 2001; O'Brien, 2007; West, et al., 1998), Saudi mothers yearn for such responsibility that gives them power, authority and control in an important aspect of their family life. Saudi mothers' role as key educational decision makers did not only bear resemblance to the position of mothers elsewhere who took the onus and the responsibility of child care and educational work, but they also used their maternal identity as a site of power to alter their circumstances, making use of their power and resources to push their own social boundaries. The following narrations reveal how Saudi mothers perceive political and social restrictions within their everyday interactions.

Najla a divorced mother of two girls expressed her relief that she is the sole person responsible for her children's education by saying:

"I am glad that it is only me that has to decide about their schooling. Their father is not interfering because he is not around. I am a lone mother and if he was around he would only complicate things for me. It is better this way. I have the support of my own father."

Her perception can be situated within the Saudi context and in her situation as a divorced woman in Saudi Arabia, and by the very nature of the case she had to move back to her own family. Najla cannot live as a single mother alone. Her case is representative of what is already noted in my introduction of how Saudi women are buffered against life's realities and how this impacts on their identity and status. After her divorce she had to move back to her own family despite the fact that she gained a master's degree and has a good job in a local public hospital. Strong cultural and familial pressure of women to remain close to their families

makes it inappropriate for her to live alone as divorced woman. Abiding by traditional Saudi standards, her guardianship is shifted back to her father once she is divorced. In an indication of not just her approval to this shift, but rather a relief that she is under the protection of her own family, Najla relished the sense of security her father provides. Living her expectational identity, she does what is expected of her as a divorced mother in a traditional society in which women's family relationships are governed by both gender and generational obligations.

Whether it is acquiescence, resignation, submissiveness or just acting passively within the social realities rather than actively trying to change these realities, a potential question to be raised when analysing Saudi woman's identity -in such a situation- is whether she does or does not come across the issue of autonomous identity? Does she ever encounter the basic questions of independent identity if she is kept permanently belonging to man? In such situations where cultural and social norms lay down the system where a Saudi woman never really confronts questions of her own self-determining identity, belonging to a man and staying under his guardianship is her basic reference point in her definition of self. Early in her life, she is born into role identity of daughter, then when she marries to that of wife, while if she divorces she has to go back to role identity of daughter again. That is why despite being a working mother, this did not liberate Najla, nor made her self sufficient, nor able to head a family of her own.

While mothers with sons can shift their guardianship to their male offspring in a case of divorce or widowhood for their identity, Najla acknowledges that in her case, as a mother of two daughters she will always depend on her father (or maybe a brother) to support her and her two daughters. This identity work is evident in Najla's dialogue, especially when she is confronted with divorce and was solely in charge of her daughters' schooling, yet at the same time she had her own father taking full responsibility for her. Without a role related to a man it is not common for a Saudi woman to confront issues of aloneness, look at her values, needs and goals through an identity stemming from within in her relationship with the world outside.

Negotiating Choice: Fathers, Family and Bureaucracy

Saba, a working mother of two boys, stressed the centrality of her role in the school choice while at the same time she made clear that overseeing the whole process of school choice is contingent on her husband's actions. She justified her choice by saying:

"yes I have a central role in my children's schooling. At the beginning, my children used to study in Saudi schools but I didn't like the education system I was not happy with it, I didn't feel they were getting anything in Saudi schools. I was paying a lot to private schooling here in Saudi. I feel that it is a waste of money and a waste of time. My children didn't get the education I really wanted them to get. I was looking for good education. I wanted them to be fluent in English, strong in Arabic, both languages. Arabic is very important it is their mother tongue, mother language. English also is important"

She emphasised her role by adding:

"I had the biggest role in deciding that my children go to Bahrain for schooling. It was me who suggested the school to my husband. I told him that it was a good school. I suggested going and seeing that school, seeing the teachers, taking a tour in the school."

However, she declared that despite her influence in making the choice, she would not be able to implement her choice without her husband and the part he plays as the man in the family. She affirms:

"all the official documents and travel papers, he has to do it because as a woman I cannot do it. My husband is the one in charge of all the official documents because he is the man, in Saudi only men can do official paper-work. That is how he is involved in the school choice process, if he agrees with my choice and support it, which is the case in our family, he has to do all the official paper-work and documentation. I would not be able to materialize my choice of school to go to Bahrain without his support. I will always require his involvement."

Furthermore she expressed her disapproval of official bureaucratic restrictions on women's official role and visibility in official public departments by avowing that:

"It always is a man's job to do formal paper work in Saudi. Women cannot do formal issues even if they wanted to. They don't go to official government places. They are not allowed to do so. If I could I would like to go and obtain this document so that my children are exempted from half the causeway toll fees because they are students. It saves us almost half the daily travel expenses. I don't mind wearing my Abaya (black cloak worn by ladies over their clothes whenever they leave their homes) and head scarf (Vail) and go to wherever they are issuing this document, but I can't do that. I have no access to official places because I am a woman. I'm paying the driver (100 Sr.) every day for transportation expenses. I want to save on that, but when my husband doesn't have the time to do it I can't do it either because I am a female. I get his support only when he is willing to give it and have the time to do so. I cannot decide and go ahead with my decisions without the support of my husband. On certain issues if he is too busy to do it for me then I can't do it."

Obviously, all policies preventing women from accessing government agencies or obtaining official public services maintain male control over women. Consequently, this renders women powerless and not capable of pursuing their own decisions or conducting their own affairs. Dependency is perpetuated while

issues of self sufficiency, learning how to be independent and searching for own identity are personal challenges that are fraught with hardship. Saudi women either succumb realising that even though they would like things to change it is not possible for them to change things, thus acceptance is really the norm. Others might find it difficult if not impossible to tolerate the level or degree of dependency within the country and opt to depart from it, choosing to escape into freedom outside their boundaries. Ultimately, the position those women expressed in their stories reflected the reality they live either inside or outside as we will continue to observe.

School Choice as Emancipation

While the choice of exiting Saudi schools was taken by some mothers based on restrictions within the education system, for others it was based rather on evading restrictions on their social and personal life style. They did not acquiesce, nor passively become resigned to their social realities; rather, they actively changed these realities using school choice. They felt that restrictions at home limited their possibilities, prospects, and was a simple waste of their talent and potential. The school choice for their children gave them the opportunity to liberate themselves from these restrictions.

The stories of Ruba, Rand and Basma illustrate how some mothers rather than accepting their situation with a kind of passivity, were able to actively emancipate themselves through school choice. Unable to accept a sedentary life at home, they

all have a clear vision of themselves outside their boundaries. They are frustrated at social restrictions on their mobility outside the home. They see that they are marginalised, fettered and deprived from their own self actualisation. Basma explained to me how she as an artist could not take it anymore and had to use her children's schooling as a pretext to move to Bahrain.

"I am an artist, a designer I wanted to work in my field. I did not want to be just an art teacher in a school. That was the only job opportunity opened for me here if I wanted to work so I did not work I stayed at home to raise my family, but then I wanted to have that warm feeling you create on the job, or at any place in mind where you feel you belong. Here we have limitations on our geographic place. We cannot drive. Others determine my style of life by limiting places where I am allowed to go, deciding for me who I am allowed to see or be with. I want to live my own life not a life prescribed for me by others who are hindering me from leading the autonomous life I seek to have. Here in Saudi ordinary people think that they have power over you just because they are conservative and traditional and they feel that they fit the system better than you so if they see you in public places, they tell you to cover your face, cover your head. They have no authority over you but they claim the authority of a traditional system to marginalise anyone who does not fit their traditional standards. They want everybody to conform. I convinced my husband to send our children to school in Bahrain not only for the reason of better schooling but I wanted a better life for myself as well. We rented an apartment. He commutes to work in Saudi and I stay in Bahrain with the children and come here only for the weekend if I need to. In Bahrain my lifestyle is different. I joined an art space, a gallery that promotes creativity and art value, providing the artists and the public with a platform to exchange ideas, provoke intellectual debate, promote, inspire and develop creative thinking and nurture cultural production. This is very nurturing for me as I feel the strong relationship between art and society. I attend and participate in local and international group exhibitions, workshops, talks and debates, film screenings and meetings for the art communities and patrons. My life has transformed I feel that I am living in tune with the world around me not as I used to be in Saudi where I had existed always somewhat to the right of my own image of myself and it was lonely, self-alienated way to live".

One can correctly observe that frustration is increasing and growing deeper among some Saudi women with social limitations on their mobility. They are required to wear the veil and are not allowed to drive or even be driven by any male other

than the guardian such as husband, father, son or brother, or the family driver who is an expatriate worker. Their morality is questioned if they are driven by a male friend, colleague, an in-law or a cousin as they would be illegally alone in a private place – in this case, the car. A rising number of women see that these practices are humiliating and perpetuate the lower status of women within Saudi society. They argue that no cultural or social context should be used as an excuse to validate such practices. Thus despite the prevalent tradition of living in the warm environment of their extended family, it is common to see that some Saudi women seek to liberate themselves from this traditional norm in their quest for their own self-identity and self-fulfilment.

Ruba who renounces the many obstacles that do exist for Saudi working women, believes that Saudi women should have the opportunity to choose any field in which they feel they can contribute the most and excel. She contends that there are lingering misperceptions about the abilities and dedication of women, especially if they are married or mothers. They are expected to stay at home. She said:

“Saudi women get to higher education with the anticipation that new career paths would be open to them, but all they get is frustrations with tight rules and regulations that keeps them within the limited choices of either teaching or medical career. Under the official pretence that women can only work in areas befitting their nature, anticipation for the working environment to become less gender-aware is getting us nowhere and we will always hope for a day to come when the best person for any field is there regardless of gender but the reality is different.”

Ruba left her job, moved her children to school in Bahrain and started her own business there. In Bahrain *“The workplace has evolved well for me”* she said.

Rand believes that barriers to women's career aspirations should dissolve, mainly through education, however there are still many steps that ought to be taken officially to further enhance women's employment opportunities. She contends that the main hindrance for female entrepreneurs in Saudi remains that of male guardianship:

"We must hire a male manager to conduct all the issues related with various government directorates and administer our business. This rule is stipulated by ministerial decree stating that if the business is open for the public that means aiming at both men and women a woman can own the business but not manage it. But in practice even if your business is targeting women only, you are asked to hire a male manager to follow up with all official issues for you because you as a woman cannot show up in official places. That is why you hit the wall if you want to start your own private business. The state asks you to give full authority to someone just because he is a man and you are a woman. Many men managers take advantage of this sponsorship system and women suffer the consequences."

When Rand faced all these constraints as she planned to start her own small business, she was able to convince her husband to move the children to Bahrain for schooling and initiate her own business there.

Even though Saudi women are encouraged to stay at home by traditional religious authorities who have extensive influence in society, they keep pushing their boundaries. The abovementioned vignettes elucidate how they develop their own sort of feminism as they struggle for emancipation and equality on many levels despite traditional conservatism and patriarchy. The possibility of starting their life outside their boundaries upended these women's vision of what constitutes 'fine living', and in so doing they were able to realise their goals and dreams in their

own ways while they experienced shifts in their self–identity which they found in work that utilised their full capabilities.

These local narratives indicate that the three women did not want to relinquish some essential part of themselves and depend solely on their role identity as wives and mothers. This theme coincides with the meta-narratives of the second wave of feminism in the west between the late 1960s and the 1990s. The discontent western women felt with their lives in their identity roles as wives and mothers elicited the second wave of feminism. Diana Leonard and Christine Delphy (1992) in their analysis of the family life in contemporary western societies, noted the significance of Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* on the second wave feminism in the second half of the twentieth century. It depicted the state of affairs that was taken for granted by women at that time which was the reason behind their resentment and anger of their own situation. Women at that time had been pushed to confine themselves to the narrow roles of housewifery and motherhood, giving up education and career ambition in the process. Friedan (2001) brought to the forefront stories of housewives’ discontent with the limited role they had in their lives that left them with feelings of emptiness and depression.

Going back to the same theme of women’s role and the identity of wives and mothers in both groups of women, it should be noticed that when Friedan in her research blamed the American culture of the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s for the discontent of the American women with their role identity, there were no laws and

regulations formally passed by the system to enforce such a way of life on them. However, Saudi women were restricted by the authorities with official decrees enforcing an existing traditional culture and dictating many aspects of their lives that reflect mainly on their identity. Furthermore, Saudi women are aware of various restrictions in their lives and by using the school choice of exit they are interacting with their circumstances to unfetter themselves from such restrictions. It is not a tacit issue such as Friedan defined as “the problem with no name”, referring to the unawareness of the women she studied of what exactly was the cause of their discontent. Rather than being permanently locked into rigid boundaries Saudi mothers developed their own strategies and tactics to circumvent patriarchal restrictions towards which they did not have positive attitudes. It could be seen as their own fusion of feminism with elements of acquired power conveyed to them through the window of their children’s school choice.

Professionalism and Intensive Mothering: Dealing with Special Educational Needs

Amna’s story illustrates the compromises made by a middle class working mother to meet the need of her children. She saw her children as her primary responsibility and exercised that responsibility overruling her professional work. Unable to find a school for her special needs’ children in Saudi, she gave up her job and moved her family out of the country to Bahrain and the United States. She explained:

“We had to get out if we wanted to find proper schooling for our children... I was a math teacher... that was a big move changing career. I had to leave my job. I left my work; it took a lot of planning...”

In Amna’s case although the school choice was based on the suitability for her children’s special needs, it was still a difficult choice to make. It had an effect on all aspects of her family life when the family had to move into the location of the new school and settle their life around that school choice as she indicated above. Her action is typical of what many professional middle class mothers experience in the way they act in response to their role as mothers where they assume the responsibility for their children’s care and see it as a very personal matter. Taking up the issue of professional mothers, mothering and paid work, in western societies, Vincent, Ball and Pietikainen (2004) concluded that as childcare is the woman’s responsibility, it is the women who usually forgo their career in favour of mothering even in societies where what was termed the ‘new man’ was emerging. They asserted that “in two career families, the pace of one partner had to slow somewhat to encompass caring responsibilities. It was the women who moved to part time or give up work” (p. 581)

Furthermore, Amna’s story explores the issue of intensive mothering in the Saudi context. Her experience of Saudi schooling in relation to special education was negative. She found out that students with special educational needs face many barriers to their inclusion in regular schools in Saudi and that their inclusion is solely about placing them in a regular classroom with no special provisions.

required facilities or trained teachers in the field of special education. Researching the topic on inclusion of children with special needs in ordinary schools in Saudi Arabia, I concluded that inclusion is not possible within Saudi schools as there are challenges that face inclusive education in Saudi Arabia. Even though educational policies in the country identify inclusion as an advantageous form of education for individuals with special needs, many factors hinder the application of these policies (AlFadhel, 2006). Due to insufficient facilities, unavailability of specialised personnel or training programmes, scarcity of funding structure and lack of enabling legislation, the situation remains that inclusion is not being effectively implemented in Saudi schools

Thus, in this regard, Amna assumed the role of the professional and prepared herself to take full responsibility for her children's education as she explained:

"I went into higher education and got my master degree in special education to be able to educate my children, know their rights and be their advocate I used the academy where I knew the right connections and made use of it to better serve my children, I had to be aware of their rights, and get all the support I needed from my professors. If I didn't go to the university to specialise in special educational needs it wouldn't have been possible to get them their rights. I had to know exactly what they were entitled to by the system and get it. I was their advocate there.

Amna extended her intensive mothering to the educational institution where she had to work with her children in school and out of school; she went back to study for a degree in special education to be able to oversee her children's education through and make the school choice attainable for them. She was moving her family between the United States, Bahrain and Saudi just to fit her children in

appropriate schools. In her story I find resonance with the description Aurini and Davies (2005, p. 470) offer of intensive parenting and actions of parents who “left secure, well-paying jobs and risked their financial status to enter a highly uncertain venture” of homeschooling. Amna elucidates:

“In Bahrain I had to be the specialist teacher, the educator for my children, I was training regular teachers how to teach special needs children. I was there daily, every day, day and night, some teachers thought that I was an employee there... I worked with the school because I found out that they had absolutely no knowledge of whatever I wanted and what my children needed as special education. So I decided that I will train the teachers. I practically lived in Bahrain. For the first six months I was living in Bahrain... I was in the school daily. I worked with the teachers and decided that that was the situation I was in thus let me make the most out of it. My main concern was for my daughter to get her high school degree. When she got her high school degree I decided that was it. I am out of that system. I could not take it anymore. My son was still in eleventh grade, so I made the choice of home schooling. It was an online program. And he did a year of home schooling”.

The Choice of homeschooling was Amna’s last option when she could not find a suitable school for her son. Such measure befits what Collom (2005) found when he explored the motives of parents who chose homeschooling for their children. He noted that parental disquiet about academic and pedagogical matters were the most important reasons for them to choose homeschooling. In addition he also indicated that pedagogues were the ones who chose homeschooling. Just as indicated by Farenga (1998) the use of technology and the availability of the Internet also influenced Amna’s choice of homeschooling. In her case Amna did not chart her son’s own courses or shape his own curriculum; rather she used her skills as an educator alongside the availability of technology and enrolled her son

in a long-distance homeschooling program that offered him the appropriate curriculum and guidance that was not available for him in local schools.

Furthermore, Barbra Cole (2007) states that for mothers of children with special needs, schooling and home relationships is more difficult than that for mothers of ordinary children. She stresses that “the emotional labour and unpaid care and experience of mothers remain undervalued and underestimated by many professionals” (p. 171). She advocates more rapprochements between professionals and mothers in which professionals relinquish their power, space and status, and share with mothers their knowledge and experience. What seems as out of the ordinary intensive mothering in Amna’s story resembles stories of both mothers and teachers of children with special educational needs in Cole’s (2004) book “Mother-Teachers Insights into Inclusion”. Just like them she changed her professional practice as a result of having children with special educational needs. She played multiple roles at the same time; that of the mother and the professional and greatly invested her time and energy to compensate for the educational service not available for her children otherwise. She came to the same conclusion as Cole (2004); that many teachers of children with special educational needs had no specialist training in special educational needs, or their training was insufficient to meet the needs of these children when they are included in the mainstream setting.

Other mothers also invested a lot of their time and effort to manage after-school activities for their children. Saba demonstrated her intensive mothering by saying:

When they come back home you have to put a lot of effort on your child teaching him a lot of things yourself as if you are sending him to government school or even less, it has to be your own effort. I was following with them every single subject teaching them personally myself and following on them so they can be able to do their homework. Maybe I was very picky myself I don't know but I was really involved with their daily work.

Even though Saba did help her children with their homework, she did not leave her job like Amna to be a professional teacher for her children.

Mothers' Emotional Labour

As mothers were talking about their reasons for exiting the Saudi school system they were also articulating the emotional labour of their engagement with the system. It has been indicated earlier that religious traditionalism characterises Saudi society and as such it defines and informs the rules of engagement between different constituencies within society and its various establishments. Thus, some of the concerns that some mothers had when interacting with schools reflect the intersection between religion as a marker of social identity, and other markers of mothers' identity such as gender. The effects of religious traditional beliefs on socialising, and the mechanism by which some mothers acted in response to the authority it exerts in various aspects of their daily life, is reflected in the emotional exposure in their narratives.

The intensity of mothers' emotional involvement in their children's education is a feature of their emotional labour at different times and to different degrees. In

Haya's experience we find some representations of the emotional labour as related to her children's schooling, to the policy of strict segregation that governs her interaction with the school, and to religious traditionalism that governs society as a whole. She puts across her fretting over her inability to access her boys' school in Saudi as a main reason for her decision to pull them out of that school system:

"...basically let me tell you how I feel about segregation. I feel my right has been taken away from me. There is nothing in religion that tells me I cannot see, I'm forbidden to see my kids for 8 hours. If they can show it to me fine. But they are bringing something that I feel completely wrong that I cannot go to school, I cannot see what is going on inside the school. I cannot sit with their teacher. You know sometimes mothers when they sit with the teacher through the eyes they can feel how this teacher is. You know that by putting this wall between me and them (the teachers and my children at school) I am missing a lot...very much kept away. I feel it is my right to see to see them. It is like they are in prison and I have no access to them. I cannot see them."

Haya's propositional attitude to the issue of segregation between the sexes is declared with intense emotions. She stresses her fear, anger and frustration because as a mother she is not allowed into her sons' school. She reiterates her right to be physically present in the boys' school and have direct contact with their teachers. She contends as well that mothers are deprived of this right because of religious reasons as according to her this rule has no religious base. This shows that even though gender issues are defined, informed and regulated by religion, adherence to extreme religious traditionalism is rejected by some mothers as a base for segregation between the sexes in Saudi society.

Drawing from the work of Diane Reay (2000) as she extends Bourdieu's concepts of capital to include 'emotional capital' as a conceptual tool for understanding the emotional labour and its role in mothers' involvement in their children's

schooling, I find that emotions not only pervade mothers' experiences of school involvement, but also justify some actions mothers take in that regard. Therefore "emotional involvement" is relevant as it refers to emotions mothers bring to their interaction with schooling. Furthermore, Reay (2004a) argues that emotional capital is particularly gendered capital with mothers mainly dedicating their time and ability to the advancement of their children's education. She notes as well that while both positive and negative emotions infuse a mother's approach to her children's schooling it is rather the intensity of the emotions that determines her actions (Reay, 2004a).

Haya is seen here poignantly displaying her negative emotions of intense concern combined with limited power which compel her to opt for exiting the school.

Restrictions led to intensification of mothers' emotional involvement resulting in a high level of anxiety. Thorough analysis of Haya's emotional investments discloses the intricate context in which she processes and comprehends the schooling experience. She fears that traditional values present at the school will be imposed on her children through their peers. She expresses her worry:

'some of the values... some of what other kids bring from their homes and try to tell your kids, my kids come back and say "harram" (taboo, religiously forbidden) to do this because my friend said this. These kids bring something that contradicts with my beliefs and ideologies. It is really one of the most complicated places you'll meet is the Saudi schools. Because so many things there you talk about religion, you talk about social life, you talk about values, you talk about teachers, so many conflicts within that environment that I don't think is very healthy for my child to be there'

Using Haya's emotions as data gave an insight into how she handled her concerns as a mother trying to protect her young boys from conflicting values in an intensely vulnerable and sensitive time of restricted traditional society in transition. Even though some liberal families want their children to respect traditional values, they are wary of the influence the religious elites have over the school establishment and the methods they use to secure blind obedience to their strict prescriptions. Haya wants to protect and guard her children from such radical thinking while they are in the process of their identity construction. She would like to have her children grow up as moderates and wishes for them to understand that religion can provide a proper set of rules that should not be confusing in the world they are living.

Saba also talked about the difficulty she faces bringing up her children as a liberal mother who has to challenge the authority of the religious elites and break social taboos in her private life. She explained:

The Saudi society is much closed and segregation between the sexes is very deep; this is a man, this is a woman, this is ayeb (social taboo), this is haram (religiously prohibited), a lot of taboos. We live in a very judgmental society, ok I want them to know what is right to do and what is not right to do, but these absolute judgements that are imposed on every aspect can lead to extremity. You know I want my children to grow with liberal broad-minded, open-minded thinking. I want them to be moderate, and I think that it is hard when everything is very strict. I want my children to live in an open society and I want them to be open-minded and tolerant not prejudiced against women. You know my mother is Jordanian and she smokes. When my son started being aware of the social restrictions on Saudi females, he was alarmed seeing her smoking, which is not acceptable for a Saudi woman in Saudi society, my son was really not at ease with that, he was anxious because according to him, it was Wow, his grandmother is committing an unthinkable taboo. I had to explain to him that in a different society it is ok for women to smoke. I feel that if they go to school in a different society they become more tolerant.

Saba's account of this problem is further testimony of the dilemma open-minded families meet in Saudi Arabia. They are well aware of the contradiction between home and community's ideology, values and beliefs. Because they want home to reaffirm a basic sense of trust in their children, mothers struggle to protect their children from the ensuing confusion of such contradiction between the private and the public life. The literature suggests the children of immigrant Muslim families in western communities are caught between two cultures and face problematic identity issues in the context of belonging to a minority group (Gies, 2006; Haw, 1998; Ward, 2006). However, mothers in my study worry about their children developing self identity and collective identity under strict sets of rules imposed by religious elites in homogeneous society consisting of mono-ethnicity and following one religion. This could be a cause of confusion for children coming from open minded homes who want to develop their own identity and explore different alternatives in a more relaxed environment. Saba avows that this was a main concern behind her decision to exit Saudi schools:

Definitely I feel the contradiction between my values and Saudi schools or society values. Sometimes we have to live in a community of double standards. I don't like that. I want my children to grow up according to my values and not pushed to the extreme by too much taboos and stringency that forces them to be socially rigid or harsh. I want them to be flexible. I want them when we travel to see other people, understand and appreciate other cultures. I don't want them to be radicals or fanatics. This is a main reason why I exited my children from Saudi schools.

Gendered Nature of Space: Segregation and Choice

Some of the mothers' narratives are an example of the working of the politics of 'space'. The theme of the gendered nature of space was evident in mothers' experiences and had an impact on the choices they made. Segregation between the sexes is a main fibre that constitutes the makeup of Saudi society. Most public spaces whether institutionalised or otherwise are governed by single sex exclusivity.

Najla complained about the strict partition between the sexes in Saudi schools where her father –who is her guardian and in charge of her family- is not allowed into her daughters' school to see their school work. She wished he could play a role in her daughters schooling and be able to see their school performance and meet their teachers. She commented:

“if segregation was not observed in Saudi schools, my father would have been able to attend school meeting for my girls and see their school work and their classrooms”

The gendered nature of space is a theme that reflects the strictness in observing sex segregation rules in most public and some private spaces in Saudi society. Here Najla criticises this policy for depriving her father from accessing her daughters' school, and views it as an obstacle to be dealt with even though it is accepted as a normative idiosyncrasy just like many other norms to which people conform.

Segregation between the sexes is a practice so visceral in Saudi society that men are banned from getting into any physical space allocated for women even in cases of emergency. Naima, a mother with two daughters and a son all studying in Saudi, gave her reasons for choosing private rather than public schooling. She talked about the constant fear she has related to gendered space by saying:

Do you know what it means to be in government girls' school? You are literally locked-in inside the school buildings. You know in government schools the gates are locked from outside and the gateman can disappear sometimes and nobody questions him. I will never send my daughters to government schools. You must have heard about the tragedy of letting 15 girls burn alive in the famous school that burnt in 2002. Firemen were kept away by the religious police because the girls were not covered. The gateman refused to open the school gate for fathers who pleaded to save their daughters. You know paramedics are not allowed into girls schools because they are men. I can never forget this story or another one I witnessed during my college years. There was this girl who was leaning on the handrail and fell one story down. She was left laying on the floor for over two hours until the director get the permission from the men's directorate and clear the area so that no uncovered girls will be seen by strange men who were coming with the ambulance to carry her to hospital. Official permission for paramedics has to come from the men who are in charge of girls' education. The poor girl was left in pain. We went into class had one lecture and came out and she was still laying there. I can't forget this. I worry about my daughters in girls schools. At least in the private school where they go the gates are always open never locked from the outside or the inside, and safety standards are set by ARAMCO and well observed by the school.

The story of Naima above explains the theme of gendered space. It shows that the observance of sex-segregation rule is so deeply entrenched within Saudi society that these rules are not transgressed even to save lives. Her accounts demonstrate the intersectionality of emotions, choice, gender, religion and patriarchy. She expressed her fears and the distressing incidents in which girls were victims of gendered inequality and enforced rules. Her school choice was embedded in emotional involvement and strictness of gendered space.

Through her narration the severity of gendered space became explicit. There is an ongoing debate over this issue in the local community. Incensed locals urge that this severity be eased. Distressing increase in accidents involving female casualties in girls' schools obliged the civil defence authority to blame religious and educational authorities for observing segregation rules at the expense of safety and security measures (AlManjoomi, 2010; Mahfooth, 2010). Accusing school authorities of negligence and disregard of appropriate safety measures in girls' schools, a civil defence official depicted girls' schools as 'cages' admitting the differentiation in emergency measures due to restricted accessibility to school buildings (Alshuhri, 2011).

Curriculum and Choice: Physical Education Banned in Girls' Schools

Naima's experience reveals as well the way in which gender is constituted in school's curriculum in a manner that reinforces existing social norms. Complaining that her two daughters do not participate in sport because of the ban on physical education in girls' schools, she demonstrates another aspect of female repression:

"You know physical education is not allowed in girls' schools and when some private schools give physical education they do it covertly in fear that they might risk official denunciation from the Ministry of Education. My daughters love to do sport, they like to compete and be part of team sporting activities but the school is not giving them the opportunity. The physical education they do in their private school is minimal. When I talk to the school they say that they are not at liberty to offer anything more and they are constantly watching not to attract any attention in this matter. Even though it is a private school but they have to abide by strict rules and regulation set b the Ministry."

Naima focuses on how her daughters are unable to participate in sports because girls are officially prohibited from having any classes of physical activity as part of their education.

Another mother, Hala, a widow with three daughters remembers how her daughters at a younger age were very active physically, but were unable to pursue their passion for sport as they grew up through their teen years.

“When my daughters were young they loved horses and they joined ARAMCO equitation club for horseback riding. Their father used to encourage them up to certain age. One of them was also in ARAMCO swimming team. Now that they are teenagers, and their father has passed away, we moved out of ARAMCO camp they cannot pursue these sports anymore. First of all there is no place for them to practice the sport. Second they cannot appear in public dressed up for the sport, in a swimsuit or the like, it is unthinkable.”

The issue of femininity and sport is an all-pervading topic of public debate in Saudi Arabia both as a national issue, and in terms of international repercussions. For different reasons, whether due to its relation to health issues or merely as women’s right to have access to participate and compete in sport nationally and internationally, Saudi women and sport is a contested matter at the forefront of political and social debate (Mahfoodh & AlKuthairy, 2010; Sultan, 2010). As both mothers describe their daughters’ interest in sport, they are unhappy and disappointed that the educational system and the social environment do not permit them to pursue their passion for sport.

Research elsewhere on Muslim girls and their participation in sport examines similar social and cultural barriers. Studying views of Egyptian women and their

participation in physical activities and sport from an Islamic perspective, Walseth and Fasting (2003) revealed that despite their declaration that Islam promotes women's participation and even encourages them to compete in sport activities, Egyptian women encounter various obstacles which limits their sporting activities. Obstacles faced by women in the study were either related to conservative interpretation of Islam or to the prevalent social code. Similar to what Hala revealed, Egyptian women also avowed that the dress code in sport, and its contradiction with Islam's view of women's bodies and their sexuality, is a main hurdle for Muslim women's participation in physical activities. Moreover, gender segregation with availability or unavailability of sport facilities for women only was a main concern for Egyptian women practising physical activities. As the process of decision making regarding Egyptian women's participation in sport is carried out by men, patriarchy and power relation are also regarded as hampering her involvement (Walseth & Fasting, 2003).

Studies on Muslim girls' participation in sport outside the Muslim world demonstrate as well some similarity regarding religious and social restrictions. Researching immigrant young Muslim women in Europe affirms their limited access to sports due to imposed limitations. When moving to a different culture Muslim girls face an identity crisis due to their physical activities. Parents, family members, as well as ethnicity and religion, curb Muslim girls' participation in sport. While some girls are willing to challenge the boundaries of these

restrictions and consequently face negative and disapproving attitudes, others drop their interest in sport to identify with their own ethnicity and religion. Nonetheless, it is always indicated within this research that Islam promotes physical activities for women and stresses its beneficial health effects (Kay, 2006; Strandbu, 2005; Walseth, 2006).

On the public health level, reviewing gender inequality and its relation to female health, Mubarak and Söderfeldt (2010) concluded that interdiction of physical education instruction in girls schools combined with prohibition of women's gyms or any sport activity in Saudi society had resulted in a prevalence of obesity. Likewise, in their study Al-Othaimen et al (2007) declared that more women than men were obese due to a sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise. Furthermore, a wide variety of diseases associated with obesity such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol and infertility were observed amongst women in Saudi society. As a result health officials are warning of enormous public health problems that place Saudi women at an alarming risk. They attribute the high prevalence of obesity among Saudi women to limited access to physical activity and suggest that the promotion of physical activities for women is extremely necessary to tackle this major problem (Alsaif et al., 2002).

Conclusion

Mothers' responses and the way they perceived restrictions imposed on them revealed some of the complexities of negotiating identity when positioned between

traditional culture, stringent religious values and patriarchal authority. For the most part, those women voiced their disapproval of limitations imposed on them that were restrictive to their roles, despite the fact that they belong to the same culture and religious convictions. It was evident that some mothers questioned the level of restrictions imposed on them along with conventional expectations of them. Rather than being conformists, expressions of individualism emerged, indicating their determination to stride out towards emancipation. Nonetheless, there was also evidence of many hurdles on the road to liberation, be they official, social, cultural or religious.

As religious, social or cultural limits are translated into official restrictions and bans on many activities for women, mothers continually made reference to executive authorities for means of easing imposed restrictions over them. Discussions of what was permissible under official Saudi law showed that rather than officially sanctioning and encouraging women empowerment, official channels confirm restrictions on women. Thus, Saudi mothers navigate not just what they desire to be, but rather what they are able to achieve, given all the restrictive settings in which they find themselves.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: SCHOOL CHOICE AND MOTHERS' AGENCY

This research aimed to explore experiences of Saudi mothers' interaction with school and the way they use school choice to gain control over certain restrictive gender practices in their society. I contextualised mother's experiences within the personal, familial, social, cultural and political influences that shape them. In this final chapter I recap on the some important aspects of previous chapters before moving on to discuss the development of the theoretical debate in response to my research questions.

The first chapter situated the study within the geographical and cultural background of Saudi Arabia. My aim was to contextualise the study and depict Saudi society in order to familiarise the reader with the environment of the study. To facilitate an understanding of how dynamics and relationships operate within the specific location I studied, this first chapter points out specific realities about traditions, culture, family and religion in Saudi society. Living in a traditional patriarchal society, mothers in this study have raised issues of discriminatory cultural norms that are deeply embedded, institutionalised and legitimised by different social forces. Saudi women live under multiple patriarchies based on distribution of power within the family, use of religion tenets to oppress women, and state reinforced patriarchy through its various institutions.

In the second chapter I reflected on my personal experience using auto-ethnography as a methodology. Living in the same social and cultural milieu, I illustrated through the process of reflective writing how this milieu impacted on my own notions of gender. By researching the community I am in, I wanted to connect part of my personal story with my study. Thus I allocated one chapter to reflect on my own encounter with gender restriction and to present my position as a woman in a gendered context with an array of my social roles; first as a wife, then as a mother, and a widow. This connection of the personal to the social context placed me in the intertwined and complex roles of both researcher and subject. Reflecting on my personal experience and the gender norms attached to my various social positions in the early stages of constructing this research enabled me to avoid a pure scholastic stance I would have assumed had I not experienced the same strained gender norms as other women in my study. Examining my life history while also exploring the realities of gender relations in other life stories, I was not only able to transcend the boundaries of the personal into a broader political context, but I was also able to better understand the fuzziness of the social world of the research. Being part of the researched world myself I was able to communicate the realistic everyday situations that were lived in real time and space. I came across processes and strategies adapted by women and used as an approach to combat restrictions and loosen gender's grip on their everyday life. Dealing personally with austere sex segregation, and handling restrictions on mobility as well as access to public offices, enabled me to reflect on

the dynamics that women have assume to create a kind of gender flexibility to enable them to carry on. Both my personal identity as a woman, and coming from the same class, along with my location within the same culture, permitted me to empathise with the experiences of the women I studied as it is for them rather than merely assuming the role of the researcher who would only look for an interpretation of the social world. Wacquant (2008) noted that Bourdieu cautions against such 'scholastic fallacy' that keeps the researcher standing above the researched world rather than being engaged with its reality.

In the third chapter I approached the literature review with the purpose of generating relevant frameworks and perspectives by exploring the concepts and theories underpinning my project. I engaged with appropriate literature pertaining to school choice, social class, religion, and gender issues. As I had to cover a wide range of concepts in this chapter, my main concern was to integrate these concepts and build theoretical grounds for my research. Thus, as this research looks at mothers' school choice I reviewed literature related to home-school relationships and school choice. Further, I examined literature on parental social class and school choice and looked into Islamic feminism while discussing Muslim women's headscarf as an area that is examining women's agency. In addition, I used Bourdieu's theory on capital, habitus and field which supported me in finding new ways of looking at my data and exploring new ideas for analysis. Such a

process impacted on the way I came to understand many aspects of my data and to the way I subsequently approached the analysis.

Recognising the context of knowledge that my research draws on, I explained and justified in the methodology chapter the effectiveness of the feminist standpoint theory to study those mothers' lived experiences. The standpoint of the relatively powerless mothers in a patriarchal system provided a good starting point for my research. They had the ability not only to frame their lives and their experiences of oppression but to see their oppressing world more clearly. Their standpoints provided a valid basis for knowledge, key insights and questions into the way they were excluded from the perspective of power by a powerful patriarchal system.

In the fifth chapter I discussed major findings of the study. From the interviews I had with the mothers they had a unifying standpoint on the importance of their role in school choice and school involvement in general. I find that this constitutes an extension of their role as family caretakers. While they stress the importance of their role, mothers acknowledge as well that fathers hold the key power and major decision making in the household. However, some mothers did use school choice as a means for their own emancipation. Further, the segregated gendered nature of space within schools in particular - and Saudi society in general - factors into mothers' decisions to exit Saudi schools.

Finally to address the objectives of the study, I now turn to discuss and analyse the research findings in response to my research questions that address the issue of

Saudi mothers' school choice. Based on an account of the historical trajectory of the social, cultural and religious restrictions that characterise the Saudi society, I put forward my argument of gender inequality. Furthermore, I examine how practices of gender inequality influence Saudi mothers' experiences through schooling stressing the part that individual women's agency played in constructing their experiences.

Saudi Women's Agency: Dichotomy of Exit and Voice

Returning to the research objectives that are concerned with Saudi women's agency and self empowerment, I note that for mothers in this study being involved in school choice was a way of empowerment; the sort of empowerment that allowed them to avoid what they perceived as restrictive practices in relation to their children's education. This activated agency emerged as a fundamental theme in this research. By expressing choice in their children's schooling Saudi women achieve a modicum of social change which shows the interconnectedness of the social systems of agency and structure. Further the omnipresence of gender in most aspects of Saudi life makes it an elemental theme that constructs the social world. My research demonstrates that Saudi women's lives are constructed under conditions of inequality. Thus I rely on the assumption that when the mothers I studied make choices, any gains they make are built on unequal foundations.

Drawing upon the sociological theory of exit and voice, explored in chapter 3, I find the position of Saudi women in this research is analogous to that described by

Hirschman (1970). Hirschman created a framework of exit and voice as means of signalling consumer's discontent in the economic world. In his original account he argued that exit and voice, the two consumer's reactions to the dissatisfaction with product quality, interact with a third factor, loyalty. The concept behind this framework has been extended in different political and social fields. Its formulation has been revitalised and reconstructed by sociologists, political scientists, economists and management researchers (Dowding, John, Mergoupis, & Van Vugt, 2000). In a comprehensive review of the progression of the concept of exit, voice and loyalty, Dowding et al. (2000) presented a critical examination of Hirschman's theory and reviewed its current use both conceptually and empirically in various fields. Examining Saudi mothers' experiences with school choice I use the exit, voice and loyalty analogy to evaluate mothers' responses to social and cultural restrictions on their choice.

As with exit in this research, I noted that despite the structural barriers that make exit difficult for some mothers, it is a beneficial social mechanism that brings about some change for mothers who can afford this choice. Thus looking at the choice of exit, I find that certain factors are important when managing the cost of exit. Factors such as class, economic and cultural capitals are key factors in facilitating this choice. Mothers who exited were upper class professional mothers who used exit to guarantee the educational advancement of their own children and at the same time secure their own emancipation. However, exit is not the norm for

many mothers who come across challenging choices about their children's schooling. Hence, as an individual response, exit does not bring about change to the entire social group of Saudi women. It is relevant only to those who can afford it.

Applying the theory of exit, voice and loyalty to this analysis, I argue that mothers who do not choose to exit have to tolerate the restrictions as they seek to negotiate and voice their concerns. Mothers in this research voiced their disquiet about the level of segregation in schools. They also expressed their desire to be part of their sons' school activities and also for fathers to have access to their daughters' schools. Mothers want their daughters to have physical education as part of the curriculum and are eager to participate in sports, drama and theatre. Anxiety related to emergency measures in girls' schools is mounting as accidents due to segregation measures are reported. They are dissatisfied with the limitations placed on girls' education.

Nonetheless, those mothers who resorted to voice had less assured results. Expressing their discontent with schools by speaking their mind to me as an interviewer and a listener, is considered 'horizontal voice' like talking to one's friends. According to Hirschman's theory a distinction is made between 'vertical voice' and 'horizontal voice'. One aspect of the application of exit, voice framework is communicating political demands. In this aspect, change is achieved through collective 'vertical voice' that is directed to superiors or authority figures.

Thus mothers voicing their concerns about their children's schooling in this research were not taking part in a collective action and are unlikely to gain any beneficial results.

Another relevant analysis of the motives for exit and voice that Hirschman (1970) stressed is the costs and benefits across contexts. Both exit and voice are costly in certain circumstances. However, exit tends to weaken the proper development of voice if it becomes less costly of an option. Alert citizens instead of learning how to effectively use voice might choose the easier and less costly exit option. This can atrophy voice. In my study affluent professional mothers who might have voiced their discontent with schooling chose to exit because it was an easier and less costly option.

Based on mothers' experiences and through theoretical grounds, knowledge was produced about active principles of Saudi society. Stressing the significance of personal experience methodology in feminist studies, Cole (2009) argues for the importance of narrative to combat the culture of silence and elucidate concealed complexities without simplistic generalisations. I was particularly concerned with agency and its location. While I found that agency is located within the social structures, I concluded as well that individual women - who reflected on their personal experiences - demonstrated decision-making agency despite the fact that they were denied control of certain aspects and had to rely on their husbands. Hence, I can also argue that whereas this form of agency does not conform to

Western feminists' concept of agency, these women have the ability to define their goals even when they are weighing up the restrictions attached.

In writing this research I engaged with various sociological concepts to establish my propositions. The concept of patriarchy explained the subordinate position of Saudi women in their socio-cultural world. It was an overarching system traversing all social formation. Finding its roots in religion and traditional Arabic culture, within Saudi society it pervades all social, political and legal institutions at different levels. On a practical level or an ideological level, Saudi women's lives are restricted by patriarchy.

Nonetheless, women's narratives pointed to tendencies to defy the rigidity of patriarchy. It also showed that Saudi women were seeking social change to liberate themselves. As they realised the power they had and learned to use it, their agency was displayed through their resistance to gender norms and structures of domination. Living in a conflation of religious institutions, cultural identity, politics and traditions that maintain the patriarchal order which circumscribe their lives in Saudi society, Saudi women's accounts reiterate the challenge they face to gain control over such constraints. The social determinations and the dynamics of social formation were present to the consciousness of these mothers. However they were able to negotiate a sense of self and develop a fledging presence of agency as an active principle of their personal and familial lives.

Gender Division and Symbolic Violence

To address the research objective on Saudi women's empowerment that rejects the institutionalised inequalities and demands a dynamic and implemented conscious change through women's involvement in political and public social life, I discuss gender as the major category underpinning this research. Gender is the main constituent of social division in Saudi society. Via their experiences and in their way of thinking and being, Saudi women live out their social realities and embody complex social positioning. As the data indicated, the ways and processes whereby social rules and constraints are produced in Saudi society place women in an inferior position and render them the dominated class in society. There is no doubt that the constraints on Saudi women exist on various levels both directly and indirectly. For example cultural pressure indirectly forced Najla to go back to live with her family after divorce to abide by Saudi traditions. More directly, restrictions on Saudi women's mobility and other aspects of everyday living are also produced by open coercive social and political state control. Information from mothers in the study indicates that the provenance of most restrictions – albeit in its origin in religious or traditional practices - is reinforced through official channels. Whether Saba's inability to access official government buildings, or limitations on Ruba and Rand's mobility and career opportunities, or the fettering requirement of a male guardian, all are among officially stipulated restrictions on women.

In this discussion I draw on Bourdieu's symbolic violence and engage with his theory of power in the social context and his way of seeing social systems as symbolic systems. According to Bourdieu power is the instrument "to imply a certain claim to symbolic authority as the socially recognised power to impose a certain vision of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 106). Thus constructing social reality through symbolic power these 'symbolic systems' serve a political purpose that "help to ensure that one class dominates another (symbolic violence) by bringing their own distinctive power to bear on the relations of power which underlie them" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 167). Furthermore, Bourdieu takes up in his theory of 'symbolic power' the outlook of resistance and conflicts between the different classes and class fractions in what is defined as 'symbolic struggle' represented in the symbolic conflict of everyday life to "impose the definition of the social world that is best suited to their interests" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 167). In addition, in Bourdieu's analysis of 'symbolic power' and 'symbolic violence' he finds an apparent acquiescence on the part of women to be dominated by men, even though this compliance is acquired through practice and not as a matter of conscious learning.

The data shows that patriarchal authority is the symbolic power that pervades all aspects of the Saudi social world in a binary framework of masculine domination and female subordination. This structure that has been maintained in contemporary Saudi social life creates the circumstance for various forms of discrimination

against women. However, despite their subjugation, it was evident in mothers' narratives that Saudi women have been and still are pushing their boundaries in what the Time magazine's cover referred to as "Saudi Women's Quiet Revolution" (Butters, 2009). This signifies that Saudi women do not entirely believe in the legitimacy of men's dominance. In keeping with Islamic feminist views, they challenge the clearly legitimised gender inequality of Saudi society. I see them in this research raising questions of the legitimacy of the absolute authority prescribed to men, and engaging themselves in 'symbolic struggle' for change.

Gender and Capital: An Aspect for Change

Negotiating with patriarchy in their society, Saudi women develop their self-protecting tactics and live with what works for them. In constructing their social identity much is imposed upon them through traditional culture, nonetheless, narratives of Saudi mothers pointed to the different means through which they were able to attain some change. Against difficult obstacles, they have access to power by accumulating various forms of capital. Despite stating that women are not normally known to accumulate various forms of capital and are rather seen as "capital bearing objects" for the benefit of the males of their families and the group they belong to (Lovell, 2000; Skeggs, 2004), women can also succeed in accruing various capital for themselves (Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998a). Mothers in this research came from the upper class of professionals with high education. In this account I argue that their level of education contributed to their cultural

capital. In this regard I refer to Naz Rasool's (2007) research on 'Global Issues in Language, Education and Development'. Although her work assesses linguistic hegemony in postcolonial context, she advocates the establishment of a multilingual approach. I find her work relevant to this research in that it discusses the role of English as the language of power and thus it contributes to the reproduction of a hierarchical social order. All mothers in this study are bilingual who use English fluently as it is designated as the language of higher education, trade and commerce and other professions such as medicine. Rasool (2007) underscores the contribution of this designation to the power of the elite.

In this regard, and stressing the importance of education in enhancing women's power and access to capital, Bourdieu (2001) avers that, "of all the factors of change, the most important are those that are linked to the decisive transformation of the function of the educational system in reproducing the differences between the genders, such as women's increased access to education and, consequently, to economic independence, and the transformation of family structures" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 89). The prime significance of education in facilitating Saudi women's access to power has been obvious throughout my research. Through the high educational qualifications of the sample, and as the literature reflected, Saudi women's education has far-reaching implications for their empowerment. Excelling academically over their male partners in the Saudi education system, Saudi women's massive engagement with education has opened up new

opportunities for them to enter the paid labour market. Despite the gender-specific policies that limit their access to certain educational positions, Saudi women have benefited from government investment in women's education, and expanded their prospects to accumulate various forms of capital. Development in female education has led ultimately to women's employment and wider access to the work-force. Albeit in limited traditional fields, such employment entails a shift in Saudi women's symbolic struggle. Mothers in this research benefited from a more privileged position due to their social class. In this account I address the intersectionality of the sample's social class with gender. I argue that policies that impact on one aspect of women's lives are inextricably linked to other aspects. I note here the intersection of the educational policy, which allowed Saudi women to enjoy some rights to education, with their access to employment and some power.

While the Saudi state has allowed women to enable themselves through education and gain some status, there has always been tension between the state and religious institutions regarding educational policy implementation (Alwashmi, 2009). However, due to such tension, progress in improving women's status has been slow. In this regard, many proposed laws that are announced by the government are put on hold and may never be implemented because of the conservative religious institution. Thus, Saudi women generate power from their maternal identity. Their role as mothers and their caretaking potential is the

impetus behind any effective decision making power they gain. Mothers in the study extended their caretaking role to school where they assumed full responsibility for school involvement and school decisions even though they acknowledge that official and final decision making remains with the father. This was indicated in their answers to my first question, most mothers in the study were confident of their negotiating power within the family and were sure of the decision-making role they had. However this remains a strategic use of power within the family. Not willing to buckle under the restrictions of the system until the forces that maintain such system are addressed and changed, Saudi mothers generated power through education work as part of their family care work. They used this gendered strategic power as a potential source or a capacity to bring about change to their lives. Thus instead of just assuming the role of traditional mothering, that is supposed to restrict their mobility and burdens them with the responsibility for child rearing, they pushed for greater mobility and got beyond the boundaries of their homes or their community by exiting local school and moving across geographical boundaries.

Gender and Field/Border Crossing: Sites of Power

Almost all mothers in this study felt that they have actual influence in school choice. Whether this relative power is significant in its capacity to bring about change is an important issue for this analysis. To tackle this issue I consider what actions mothers actually did to bring about change into their lives. Further, I look as well into conditions that made their accomplishment possible. Adapting the

Bourdieuian concept of field I deduce that some mothers use spatial location as the means of transferring their potential power into an actual means of emancipation. Upon entering a different field, represented here in a different geographical location, some mothers distanced themselves from the traditional restrictive structure they live in back at home. For example, Ruba and Rand were able to liberate themselves from physical, social and economic constraints by moving to Bahrain. Under the alleged reason of school choice they are able to free themselves from a baggage of restrictions. They are able to go out in public dressed normally without covering up in a black cloak. They can drive their own cars and go to public places unaccompanied by a male guardian. With no restrictions imposed on their personal choice, they also chose to move their businesses to Bahrain.

Grenfell and James (2004, p. 509) state that Bourdieu defines field as a “configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions”. Further McNay (1999, p. 113) finds that “as a relational concept the field yields an understanding of society as a differentiated and open structure and provides a framework in which to conceptualize the uneven and non-systematic way in which subordination and autonomy are realized in women’s lives”. Movement across the fields of working and socialising, and moving to a different country encouraged Saudi women to reflect upon differing gendered norms in

these different fields and question their potential capacity to change gender relations in their own lives. Freedom of movement, access to public places, managing their own affairs and being liberated from an imposed dress-code are all aspects Saudi mothers reflected upon when crossing fields between a dominant context and a relaxed one.

Satisfied with their influence in the family, mothers in this study acknowledge the variation in the character of gender relations between their private and the public field in general, as well as between different public fields. Within different households different gender rules apply. Saba stated that she only had one entrance to her house as an indication that she does not maintain sex segregation in her household. Possible movement across and within fields raises “questions as to the naturalness of established gender practices”(Krais, 2006, p. 131). Chambers (2005) argues that gender norms are not identical across all fields or even between different groups within the same field. Curious about gendered habitus, she concludes that, “the gendered habitus develops not in response to any one specific field, but rather in response to the gender norms, the symbolic violence, occurring throughout society”(Chambers, 2005, p. 332).

Reflecting on the working field for instance, gender norms variation is observed between private and governmental sectors. The reasons behind such variation can be attributed to the effect of the exposure of private businesses to multinational firms. For example women working in the banking sector or with the oil company

Aramco are not subjected to the same gender restrictions as they would be if they were working in the government sector. Furthermore, the evolving role of women in business and the increase in business registration by women who want to manage their own wealth, attract international banking and multinational firms to the new and emerging economic power of Saudi women.

Mothers who had the ability to analyse the gendered norms in their culture, questioned gender inequalities within it, and through their position in their habitus and the opportunities available for them were able to move across social fields. It appears that those who attempted to cross fields were mothers who showed resistance, who accrued some capital - whether cultural through their education, or economic through work, or social through networking - and were able to invest that capital in themselves at the same time that they invested it in their children.

Given the dramatically changing geopolitical and economic conditions, I conclude that some mothers act on their tangible resources such as money, education and career to strengthen their capacity to handle their life issues and forge new forms of gender relations in their lives. Mothers who exited the Saudi school system had a disposition to resist social restrictions in their gendered habitus and exploit windows of opportunity for personal and social transformation. They effectively used school choice to trigger these dispositions, made use of windows of opportunity and rendered it politically efficient as a means of emancipation. As mothers they were not only bearers of capital for their family and children, but

also used capital accumulating strategies that benefited them. This demonstrates how the existence of women as repositories of capital for their families may be enabling and empowering to themselves as well. The findings suggest that the domestic domain was not an arena in which mothers were only traditionally functioning as carers, but also a realm through which they gained some freedom and power not available elsewhere in society. While it is true that when unable to subvert the dominant structure, crossing fields remains a functional tool available for Saudi women throughout their symbolic struggle, social class remains an important element in achieving such social transformation. As Lovell (2000) argues, “not all women in all historical and cultural circumstances have equal opportunities to make such boundary crossing, but that certain class cultures facilitate the crossing of gender positioning provided that these take place along the lines of class” (Lovell, 2000, p. 18).

Gender, Habitus and Field: Continuity and Change

The power and determination of the mothers I researched reflects a conscious decision on their part to endorse a process of change. In this process they enact certain strategic life choices that are important to the quality of their lives and which define their individual family parameters, even though they are not explicitly challenging the prevailing gender division in the whole society. Mothers were attempting to realise some oasis of change and achieve some valued ways of functioning within their own families. However the general social field remains

beyond their attempts at change even though it could be subject to incremental change over time.

The two opposing and yet parallel elements that are operating here are the inclination to maintain stability and continuity while resistance and change is working as a dynamic social process to contest restrictions in the social world. In discussing my findings in this regard I look at the affinities with Chafetz's (1990) theory of stability and change in gender equity. She explains that in a system of gender inequality, stability and change are interrelated. By identifying and targeting the variables that maintain and reproduce a system of gender inequality, change can be achieved. Thus it is logical to conclude that, only by changing the bases of gender inequality within the cultural, religious and traditional forces that sustain the status quo for Saudi women can change in gender relations be achieved.

Nevertheless, McLeod (2005) suggests that change and continuity in gender relations are, "complex processes that happen simultaneously in both ambivalent and uneven ways, ... in ways that reiterate traditional gendered relations of power and new yet familiar figurations of gender"(McLeod, 2005, p. 24). The mothers' narratives in this research represent a form of co-existence of change and continuity in gender relations. Thus it could be assumed as well that gender relations are not governed by absolute rules, rather it is a continuous battle between continuity and change in the social world. From this perspective, even

though mothers in this study comment on themselves from the perspective of their traditional culture and its representation of women, they have harnessed economic, political and social changes to alter their status at home and abroad. Within a classic tension of continuity and change Saudi mothers are well positioned to take advantage of the family being the site that transmits cultural, economic and symbolic capitals and thus use their family as a field in which change is achieved.

Saudi Women's Prospects for Change

Mothers' narratives prove that by pushing their boundaries they challenge some powerful ideological forces in their society. However, when considering issues of potential impact on prospects for change for Saudi women, I discern external and internal forces that prompt change. Externally, due to recent geopolitical transformations in the area, international media and various international organizations' attention is directed to Saudi women's status. Consequently, Saudi women have found themselves within a changing cultural landscape in recent years. This requires their involvement and interaction as agents of change. Change that is probed in this study and which is observed within individual families is attributed to mothers' will to change. Even though mothers had the will to change, they still have to operate within the family framework. They situate themselves clearly within their family identity which is the primordial identity for Saudi woman. Hence, whether the family could be the nucleus that could instigate change within the society at large remains to be probed in further research.

Despite the fact that mothers in this research derived some prerogatives and negotiative power from their family care responsibilities and duties, they still are not able to forge the required structural power to be fully fledged in their public participation. The social and political system of domination intensifies their dependency and deprives them of many of the advantages they stand to gain from their negotiation. When it comes to challenging civic institutions Saudi women face a complex structure of boundaries with many limitations on their behaviour. The physical boundary of sex segregation, the ideological boundary of religious orthodoxy, the social boundary of traditions and the psychological boundary which generates a sense of submissiveness in women all operate by a gender system that signals the exclusion of women from active participation in the public and political life. These boundaries operate within a social order that holds back the pace of change. Saudi women require collective agency to cross all the boundaries. However some only left and chose to exit the school system rather than confront the restrictions. Actions taken lately by women who attempted to challenge the law that bans driving their own cars by women were severely reprimanded. Such harsh punishment within a conservative culture that resists change makes it extremely difficult to challenge the boundaries collectively. Saudi women in this research do not seem to challenge certain social and political boundaries even though they challenge the perspectives related to these boundaries. For example they do not accept that girls should be banned from physical education or any type of sports in schools, yet they seem unable to

change this law. Although in the interviews they expressed their disenchantment with the many restrictions on their movement, collective action is not considered as an option by them. There is a prevailing notion of helplessness in relation to all political and social laws that enforces restrictions on women. Acceptance of one's life under restrictions goes together with aversion to its restrictive laws and customs.

Saudi women seem convinced that such laws are entrenched in traditional and religious customs that play a pivotal role in halting the pace of change and slowing any progress in many fields. Within Saudi society traditions often supersede religious tenets and laws which are themselves rigorously followed in all aspects of Saudi life. Accordingly, Saudi women find that many restrictive practices imposed on them have no support in Islam and even sometimes contradict its tenets. Therefore, women who want to manage their own businesses and head their own enterprises find refuge in Islamic Feminism and discover that their religious identity gives them some kind of power to challenge many of the rules forced on them. However, on a practical level, despite all women's arguments corroborated by religious testimonies, conservatives still thwart many officially proposed laws to ease restrictions on women and put these laws on hold. Physical education in girls schools as well as male emergency workers not being able to access girls' schools in a crisis are some examples of opacity that characterises official actions to alleviate strict rules on women. This in turn creates inconsistent enforcement of

many of the restrictions imposed on women which in turn lays many roadblocks that hamper incremental steps towards easing restrictions on women.

Within the Saudi social system Saudi women are moulded to fit certain contours of religious and traditional culture. However, as individual social actors they do not always glide smoothly into positions marked out for them. It is true that as social actors Saudi women's actions and interactions are maintained by social systems and structures, but this does not necessarily indicate that their social identity is entirely not of their own making. Saudi women have growing potential to influence change in their society. Whether mothers' efforts to turn around certain restrictions and achieve change within their individual families can lead to societal change remains to be seen. It is collective rather than individual action that is the prerequisite for any political change. However, one important message these women convey is that the personal is political and the choices they make in their everyday lives do matter. Mothers in this research are seeking social reforms by exercising their choices. As a result they have achieved some desired changes for themselves and their families. Notwithstanding that they did not participate in any form of conventional political activities neither did they seek to confront or participate in coercive tactics outside the boundary of their own families, women in this research had a strong sense of personal efficacy to manage their life circumstances. They had a hand in effecting small but important changes in their lives; their choice of exiting could indicate a rather politically apathetic notion

towards societal change. Nonetheless, it could be argued that while political change is not here yet, some of its elements are in place. While the consequences of exit were obvious for the mothers involved, unlike exit voice is not a dichotomous variable, and this research did not assess the varying levels of voice of mothers involved. Thus further research is needed to measure other key aspects of voice and the relationship between exit and voice as decision alternatives with the possibilities that each choice can impact on the other.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research delves into the world of Saudi women that still tends to be off limits to most feminist researchers interested in women studies. My research into this hidden world offers scholarly and legitimate knowledge in a number of fields and raises issues that have been identified by the women I studied. I can argue that my identity as a mother of a Saudi family did not only enable me to gain access into the community I was studying, but also the congruity in class, gender, and personal experience allowed me to possess the power to know and the authority to produce the knowledge I gained through this research. Thus I discuss in this section the manner in which this knowledge adds to the different fields.

Gender is a universal concept even though it is probed in this study within a culturally specific context. Besides, gender based inequalities exist in the majority of the worlds' cultures. However, while women in most of these cultures might still have to deal with invisible lines of inequality, Saudi women remain unable to

cross clear and flagrant lines of inequality. For such reason, gender and women studies conducted on Saudi women develop and construct additional theoretical ideas to the field. Within an intersectional approach I argue that gender shapes Saudi women's lives through oppressive restrictions. Male guardianship, segregation between the sexes, limitation on women's mobility, all are sets of normative cultural practices, visible clearly to Saudi women who are definitively the target of such practices. Any claims Saudi women make for their equal rights as a self-interested group promoting its own interest is marked and named by such restrictive cultural practices. Their agency is shaped by the social, cultural and political struggles that intersect with religion and patriarchy. Even though when this agency is not informed by resistance, it is directly shaped by these intersecting forces of restriction.

Since the issue of gender and matters that concern women cannot be studied in their own context without being related to an international agenda, throughout the study I drew on international literature to bolster a better understanding of gender issues discussed in this study. Hence I reviewed literature on feminism from various outlooks. I concluded that norms and beliefs on gender issues were looked at differently in different contexts and that these contexts contribute differently to the magnitude and scope of women's subordination and to gender inequality. Intersectionality, therefore, is a useful analysis framework when used as a tool for adapting the global culture of human rights. Studying Saudi mothers as potential

agents for change in a social order that is based on traditional customs and religious culture contributes an important element of knowledge production from the grassroots. Saudi women's narratives illuminated and explored experiences of oppression and marginalisation. This was central to the theme of structure and agency that runs through the study. When used by development actors from the wider world longing to understand Saudi women's social and political status, intersectionality can lay bare the full complexity and specificity of the structural and dynamic dimensions of the interplay of gender, religion and patriarchy in Saudi women's lives.

On the issue of school choice there is a traditional gendering of the relationship between home and school. While findings from this research concur with studies carried out in the West on the gendering of this relationship, they add to the wide literature on school choice. Saudi mothers' experiences are not easily conveyed by conventional Western concepts or abstract knowledge. I put across knowledge from the outcomes of mothers' experiences that provide a window into their world as well as their emotions. When middle-class Saudi mothers choose a school it is not like a practice of choosing among a pool of schools, rather their primary role is to avoid what they perceive as restrictive practices in relation to their children's education. There are obviously emotional and practical burdens on Saudi mothers to do school care work. In a society that allocates power of action, mobility and accessibility to men rather than women, mothers experience emotional and

consuming considerations in the absence of practical and strategic support from the system or men in the family.

Implication for Practice

The learning process in this study touches upon several aspects of my life as I anticipate the impact of it on more than one level. First, on a personal level I avow that a great deal of personal change has been brought about by this research that is specialised in one particular subject that is central to me. By doing this research my world changed. It was personally rewarding to purge my personal grief that demanded expression. I became more practised in recognising and interpreting my emotions through an engaging and therapeutic research. I acknowledge the power and the long term effect of my personal experience in relation to my understanding of myself and my personal identity and my capacity to cope in a manner that I would myself consider professional.

Second, this research impacted on my professional identity. Knowledge and skills developed my research work-base abilities. It also promoted my professional credibility on the subject as well as advancing my capability for continuing development. This research has been built around life experiences including my own. Informed by these experiences, my study is also built on concrete and instrumental concepts, and on literature of gender and school choice. I deem this knowledge as important and transferable to my professional working perspective. In addition it will enhance my ability to identify and research further areas of

interest. Establishing for myself a new professional identity I could imagine that I would be able to address different matters on my research agenda.

On a political level, I believe this research offered me the capacity to gather knowledge and propose solutions to social and political problems within the community. I feel more confident to take the initiative and encourage Saudi women to embark on mindful and focused examination of their gender development. Empowering Saudi women to enhance their lives would be an effective implementation of this research. However, I remain cautious that empowering Saudi women to initiate a process of social change would definitely be challenged by the deeply entrenched structures of rules of inequality. It is without doubt not easy to engage the necessary political will and commitment for public activism amongst Saudi women. Due to social and political restrictions, participation in women activism in Saudi Arabia could be perceived as threatening. Nonetheless, reluctance for participation in any public agency or group does not exclude possibilities for using consciousness-raising as a tool and process to heighten awareness amongst Saudi women.

Even in societies where women are advanced socially, economically and politically, consciousness-raising plays a role in combating gender inequities. Comerford and Fambrough (2002) stress the significance of women's stories in consciousness-raising. They argue that "despite political, social and economic advances made by women, inequities persist, and collective action has been

inhibited by women's lack of understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of their experiences and contexts" (Comerford & Fambrough, 2002, p. 411). They advocate the use of autobiography to sustain solidarity among women. Furthermore, Sowards and Renegar (Sowards & Renegar, 2004) emphasise sharing women's experiences as a tool for feminist activism. Insisting on diversity of women's contexts they focus on personal stories and internal dialogue as a means for contemporary consciousness-raising.

Another implication of this study is that it may be relevant to literature of international bodies on devising indexes that measure gender practices in individual countries. While international interpretation of social justice would denote the Saudi social order as detrimental to women, internally the State considers required action for the endorsement of social change as an internal societal matter and addresses issues of gender inequality in a way that adheres to traditional religious values and its socially ruled beliefs.

Whilst the image of a veiled, powerless and victimised Saudi woman is internationally denounced, the political and social mechanisms that restrict her, mute her voice, and limit her participation remain internally inescapable. Addressing women's status in Saudi Arabia needs to be an integral part of the State reform strategies. This needs to be reflected in institutional policies, goals and practices. In order to realise Saudi women's transition towards gender equity,

change needs to be implemented at the grassroots rather than performing cosmetic changes to enhance the image of the State within the international community.

Thus a wider implication of this study is capturing Saudi women's experiences of gender based constraints as an indicator of their opinions, attitudes and feelings to inform international bodies. This study represents relevant data to make visible certain particularities of the Saudi gender context. Accordingly, it reveals the seriousness of gender issues in the social and political domains of Saudi society. Further it exposes the barriers in achieving gender equality for Saudi women in social and political institutions. Since gaining access to Saudi women might not be an easy task for international bodies, research done by independent insiders renders the issue of accessibility and locality of this research very significant indeed. This makes the promulgation of the research in international venues a key objective

Finally, some limitations of this study are related to the nature of the sample. The group of mothers I explored came from upper and middle classes. Not including women from the lower social class to tell their personal stories in depth renders this research short of reflecting the complete picture of Saudi women's social positioning in restricted settings. Consequently, due to the small-scale nature of this research no attempt is made to generalise from it.

Concluding Remarks

In this research I expand feminist research to the critical topic of Saudi women's lives as they live in a paradox of tradition and modernity in many aspects of their society. My research reflects a social reality and produces meaning to a reality that is historically and locally specific. Sharing the social reality renders my query referential both to me as a researcher and to all women participants who contributed their experience of the social reality in the process of critically deconstructing and reinterpreting those personal experiences. My life situation directed me to produce reflections on my personal experience and to use it as a sounding board in this process of collective narrative inquiry intended for tracing Saudi women's social identity and gender development and weave the theory that informed this research. I addressed the capacity of Saudi women for any social action that allows them to engage with their surroundings.

This study uncovers a social world as inhabited and consumed by women's experiences and critical observations of what it is like to live in a society strictly regulated by patriarchal order and structured around hierarchical divisions based on gender. Mothers in this research perceived themselves as becoming more empowered by the school choice that they had. However, their ability to choose implied a possibility of alternatives outside their restrictive context. This uncovers some issues of concern for women's empowerment and the prospects of change.

To conclude this discussion, one would question if Saudi women's empowerment would bring about a process of change. Furthermore, if it does; does this change entail the capacity to redress the various forms of discrimination against Saudi women in the locality of their context? No doubt the women in their narratives acted in acknowledgement of their social status. It is evident that the intersectionality of gender with their social class and their economic capital gave them alternatives to choose from. Opting for solutions when dealing with problems of gender discriminations and inequality based on exiting the local context leaves deficiencies of society intact. This leads us to a second dialectic concerning Saudi women's passivity versus their advocacy in pursuing change.

Compared to the embedded nature of the social class, the nature of women's advocacy versus passivity entails some choice and agency. This is an important premise in this research. Interrogating assumptions and behaviours of mothers it could be deduced that they acted passively when they perceived that the social and political dynamics were not supportive of their choices. Such strategy assumes apprehension of social and political power.

Thus to bring about change, Saudi women's empowerment would require the right social and political underpinning to support its advocacy and effectiveness in addressing issues of gender inequality. Without the strong political and social foundation change will be limited to certain social categories such as upper middle class and affluent women from strong business families. Slowness and reluctance

will always characterise any attempt for change. In addition, only limited circles of the affluent, the upper-middle class and the business sector could afford some liberty beyond borders while the system of patriarchy within traditional social and powers will falter any impetus for change.

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APPENDIX 1

Dear,

As part of my postgraduate studies, I am conducting a research on educational choice amongst parents in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. I would be very grateful if you would volunteer to participate in this study. In this letter I would like to explain and introduce the research study. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyse the perspectives of mothers of Saudi children, regarding their choice of school, their involvement in their children's education and their engagement with the education establishment.

In order to understand how do mothers of Saudi children exercise their choice within the Saudi education system, This study will be conducted in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia where its proximity to neighbouring Bahrain created in the last two decades an opportunity for new school choice for Saudi parents to exit Saudi schools and send their children every day beyond the borders to another country for education. Furthermore, views of parents who choose to keep their children within the Saudi education system will also be presented in this study.

I am interested in finding out your views and thoughts about this subject. I would like you to share with me your feelings, oppositions or agreements, experiences and your perspectives on the particular issue. I have to reassure you that the information you will provide will be handled with strict confidentiality. To guarantee anonymity and

confidentiality I will not provide any sort of identification of participants in this study.

Pseudonyms will be used throughout the report to protect the privacy of all participants.

Thank you again for participating in this study.

Yours truly,

Noor