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Female Labour Force Participation in Saudi Arabia
Saudi Women and Their Role in the Labour Market
under Vision 2030

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Abstract

Saudi Arabia constitutes an interesting paradox regarding female labour force participation. Despite high living standards and education levels among women, Saudi Arabia has the largest gender employment gap in the world. The Saudi government addresses this issue in the recently launched National Development Plan Vision 2030 which aims to reconstruct the economy in order to decrease the kingdom's oil dependence. This thesis analyses the position the labour market policies under Vision 2030 attribute Saudi women and discuss how this is likely to affect female labour force participation (FLFP) in general and in the private sector in particular. The study is based on the "What's the problem represented to be"-approach developed by Carol Bacchi. It carries out a discourse analysis of the Saudi Labor Market Report 2016, connecting the discussion in academia about reasons for low FLFP in Saudi Arabia to the notion of subjectification effects. The study finds that the depiction of women is inconsistent throughout the policies, portraying Saudi women, on one side, as strong agents and untapped potential and, on the other side, as unproductive, unable citizens. Picking up on previous studies which have pointed towards restrictive cultural norms as one of the major causes of the Saudi gender employment gap, this thesis concludes that the labour market policies exemplify the government's struggle between preserving traditional Islamic values and the desire to modernize the Saudi labour market. While the labour market policies under Vision 2030 represent a positive first step towards a gender-balanced workforce, the inconsistency in the depiction of Saudi women in the labour market and the resistance to overcome restrictive cultural norms are likely to hamper Saudi women's labour force participation in general and in the private sector in particular.

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List of Abbreviations

FLFP	Female Labour Force Participation
GASTAT	General Authority for Statistics
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MLSD	Ministry for Labor and Social Development
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
RQ	Research Question
SAMA	Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency
WEF	World Economic Forum
WPR	“What’s the problem represented to be?”

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with its unique character has attracted many researchers' attention over the years. The young state represents a blend of extreme wealth based on the oil business resulting in high living standards and development rates while being a highly religious and conservative society under an absolutist monarchic ruler. This unique political, economic and social environment frames Saudi women's role in the society and in the labour market.: Saudi Arabia has the largest gender employment gap worldwide (WEF, 2017). Approximately 19 per cent of Saudi women participate in the labour force, meaning they are able and willing to work, compared to 64.6 per cent of men, according to the kingdom's General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT, 2018). Additionally, among Saudi women who are economically active, the unemployment rate is about five times higher than that of men (Koyame-Marsh, 2017).

1.1 Problematization

The extreme imbalance between men and women in the Saudi labour market presented above stands in harsh contrast to the country's high economic and human development levels. On one hand, the Saudi state invests heavily in women's education, leading to the majority of college and university graduates being women. On the other hand, 68 per cent of unemployed Saudi females had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2015 compared to 21 per cent of unemployed males (Koyame-Marsh 2017). Rather than a lack of investment into women's capabilities, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017) points towards social norms as the primary factor determining economic outcomes for women. So far, the Saudi government's efforts to increase female labour force participation (FLFP) have failed to address social structural factors creating barriers to women's employment opportunities in the labour market (e.g. Abeer, 2016).

The recently published National Development Plan Vision 2030 aims to restructure the Saudi economy in order to decrease the kingdom's dependence on the petroleum sector. The Vision puts a large focus on increasing FLFP, re-sparking the debate surrounding the topic in academia and the international media alike. However, while a lot of research has been conducted interrogating the different constraints to FLFP in Saudi Arabia, there is a lack of research regarding how the issue is being addressed under the Vision 2030 due to the novelty of the development agenda.

1.2 Aim of the Study

Following the premise that social structural factors determine Saudi women's access to the labour market, this study aims to discuss the effects of the labour market policies under the Vision 2030 on FLFP in general and in the private sector specifically by investigating how Saudi women and their role in the labour market are depicted in those policies.

In order to reach that aim, I pose the following research questions:

How do the labour market policies under Vision 2030 depict Saudi women and their role in the labour market?

How are these depictions likely to affect Saudi women's labour force participation in general and in the private sector specifically?

The first research question I pose is more descriptive, asking for the depiction of Saudi women and their role in the labour market. By "depiction" I mean several things: On one hand, I interrogate which characteristics Saudi women are attributed and where the government positions them in the society. Regarding their role in the labour market, I analyse not only where Saudi women are placed in the labour market but also what role and responsibility they get assigned in solving the issue of low FLFP. The second research question is more explanatory. In analysing the likely effects of the depiction uncovered in the first question on women's labour force participation, I focus on subjectification effects, which describe the way in which subjects – in this case Saudi women – are constituted in the discourse of the policy (Bacchi, 2009, p.40) and how this affects their self-perception and their "field of actions" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790).

1.3 Scope of the Study and Relevance

The scope of this research is the particular case study of the labour market policies under the Saudi Arabian Vision 2030. Firstly, I have chosen to study this particular case because it is interesting in its own right, presenting an extreme case of gender imbalance in the labour market with Saudi Arabia having the largest gender employment gap worldwide. Analysing an exceptional case like this can provide valuable lessons in how to address low FLFP elsewhere. Furthermore, the recent publishing of the Vision 2030 makes it a case of contemporary relevance for researchers interested in FLFP that has not been sufficiently studied yet, unlike

previous labour market policies under Saudi Development Plans such as the Eighth and Ninth Development Plan or the Nitaqat policy (see e.g. Koyame-Marsh, 2017; Abeer, 2016).

Secondly, Saudi Arabia has a representative character, making it a relevant case to study. The kingdom holds a very special place in the Muslim community and takes great pride in being the birthplace of Islam. As Al-Rasheed (2002, p. 5) points out, “the symbolic significance of Saudi Arabia for Islam and Muslims cannot be overestimated.” Not only is Islam deeply rooted in the state’s self-identity since its formation, but the kingdom is also home to the two holiest places for Muslims: The mosques of Al-Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) and Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (in Medina). The Saudi king also holds the title of the “Custodian of the Two Holy Places”. Saudi politics directly affect the whole Muslim community as the country portrays itself as the custodian of Islamic values (Maisel 2011, p. 117). Saudi Arabia’s constant efforts to immerse the very traditional Wahhabi interpretation of Islam into modernity paves the way for the direction Islam is taking worldwide.

Saudi Arabia does not only have a strong influence on the Muslim community but is also a political and economic powerhouse in the Middle East. The kingdom is often viewed as one of the most politically stable countries, which became especially visible during the Arab Spring when it was one of the few countries that did not experience an outbreak of political revolutions. Saudi Arabia not only holds a role-model position but also has the possibility to actively influence other countries. It can be seen as the power broker and mediator of the region (Maisel 2011, p. 120).

1.4 Delimitation

As most case studies, my research is limited in regard to its external validity. The findings of this study are specific to the case I have chosen. However, as I have pointed out above, the Saudi Arabian case is representative of the Muslim community and the Middle Eastern region. Insights into policy changes there are, therefore, indicative for a wider set of countries. Furthermore, the methodology and the theory framing my research are upholding the internal validity of my study and make it replicable in other contexts. Methodologically, my study lays out an example of how policy agendas in countries that are grounded in or heavily influenced by traditional cultural and religious values can be analysed.

With the Vision 2030 I will analyse an agenda that is only at the beginning of its implementation. Saudi Arabia has shown in the past to set very ambitious goals that it could

not meet in the end (Kinninmont, 2017). What speaks for the implementation of the Vision 2030, however, is the undeniable economic necessity for the country to move away from its pressing oil-dependence (Kinninmont, 2017). Further, the newly appointed crown prince has invested his own political capital into the Vision 2030 and is, therefore, pushing for its rapid implementation. The kingdom has come a long way in a very short time as previously unthinkable reforms like the infamous lifted driving-ban on women demonstrate (Revesz & Stevenson, 2017). However, to actually determine how effective Vision 2030 is in promoting FLFP, an evaluation in a few years' time would be useful.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is outlined as follows: I will begin by providing some background information regarding Saudi Arabia's economy and the Vision 2030 to put the study into context. I will then go on to review the literature on constraints to FLFP in Saudi Arabia, presenting the findings of previous studies that act as a facilitator for my own research. Then I will introduce my theoretical framework, followed by the methodology I employ and the data I analyse. Subsequently, I present the findings of my research and discuss my results, connecting them to findings of previous studies. I close this thesis with some concluding remarks summarizing my findings.

2. Background

Saudi Arabia is one of the most oil-dependent countries worldwide. The reliance on oil has brought the country extreme wealth but, at the same time, it puts the long-term sustainability of the Saudi economy in jeopardy. It is estimated that the kingdom possesses around 22 per cent of the world's petroleum resources making it the largest exporter of petroleum in the world. The oil and gas sector accounts for about 50 per cent of gross domestic product, and about 85 per cent of export earnings (OPEC, 2018). This poses a problem as the future of oil as a commodity in the short and long run is highly uncertain: the collapse of the oil price in 2014 has shown once again the risks and the volatility of the oil market. Due to overproduction, oil prices fell sharply and the member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed to produce less oil in order to clear the global supply glut. This has slowed down economic growth in Saudi Arabia significantly (IMF, 2017a). Apart from the economic instability surrounding the trade with oil, the fact that it is a finite resource forces the

kingdom to diversify its economy and explore alternative, more sustainable business sectors to ensure the economy's wealth in the long run. The IMF (2017b, p. 21) states: "Lower oil prices have made it more urgent for the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] economies to rely less on the public sector as the main driver of growth. Apart from fiscal sustainability concerns, this growth model has not produced the productivity gains—the key long-term driver of living standards—or the private sector jobs for nationals that are needed."

The need to reform has been recognized by the governing elite. The 32-year old Mohammad bin Salman, who was appointed Crown Prince by King Salman in 2017 and also holds the positions of First Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs, and Minister of Defence, is taking matters into his own hands. In 2016, Saudi Arabia published an extensive National Development Plan to secure the country's prosperous future in terms of economic performance, as well as the well-being of the population – the Vision 2030.

The Vision 2030 is an ambitious multidimensional development agenda built upon three pillars: "A vibrant society, A thriving economy, An ambitious nation" (Vision 2030, 2016). Its implementation encompasses all government entities, distributing responsibilities according to their different spheres of action. The Ministry for Labour and Social Development, for instance, holds the main responsibility for implementing the labour market policies under the Vision 2030. The inclusion of Saudi women into the workforce is one of the main features of the extensive Vision 2030. In order to decrease its dependence on the petroleum sector, the Saudi government seeks to diversify the Saudi economy and open up alternative business sectors. Women present a large untapped potential in this regard. Studies suggest that the potential boost of including women equally to men in the workforce could be as high as 47 per cent of the MENA region's GDP (McKinsey, 2015). Therefore, Saudi Arabia clearly has strong economic incentives to include women in the workforce. Previous ambitious policies aiming to do so have, however, not lived up to expectations (Kinninmont, 2017; Abeer, 2016). Examples of such policies include the Saudization and Nitaqat policies put in place to increase the share of Saudi nationals in the private sector which momentarily mainly employ expatriates. Studies suggest that such quota-based policies have had some success but did not achieve a sustainable increase in FLFP because they failed to address social structural factors that create barriers to women's employment opportunities in the labour market (Abeer, 2016).

3. Literature Review

In this section, I will present the previous studies which act as a facilitator for my own study regarding constraints to FLFP in Saudi Arabia. The previous research both provides the background information that sets my own research into an academic context and at the same time justifies the methodology adopted in my research.

3.1 The Main Controversy: The Individual vs. the Society

The discussion about female labour force participation in the world and in particular in Saudi Arabia is mainly concerned with the reasons for the persisting gender gap in employment. In other words, most scholars want to explain what it is that keeps women away from the labour market. While there are many theories and assumptions that fit into the topic, there are two main opposing views in this debate that stick out. In the widest sense, the debate circles around a responsibility issue. While one side sees the individual woman as responsible for entering or not entering the labour market and thus puts a large focus on agency (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014; Jiffry, 2014; Hakim, 1998; AlMunajjed, 2010), the other side views the effects of social norms on women's employment as more determining and emphasizes the social structures in which women live (Koyame-Marsh, 2017; Manea, 2008; AlMunajjed, 2009; AlMunajjed, 2010; Al-bakr et al., 2017; Doumato, 2010). In the following, I will present the arguments of both sides regarding the prerequisites for labour force participation, namely human capital, and the actual process of finding employment. Importantly, the two camps are not strictly divided. While different scholars lean more to the one or the other reasoning, most of them acknowledge the effects of agency or structures respectively on FLFP as well.

3.2 The Prerequisites: Education and Human Capital

Most studies agree that women's education plays a vital role when it comes to FLFP. This assumption is based on the human capital theory. Human capital can be defined as the skillset, knowledge, and experience of an individual with which he or she contributes to economic development (Becker, 1993). The underlying logic is that investments in education and training will increase an individual's productivity and employability as he or she meets the demands of employers (Becker, 1993). Several studies find that FLFP in Saudi Arabia grew with increasing investments in women's education (Koyame-Marsh, 2017; AlMunajjed, 2009; AlMunajjed, 2010). Saudi Arabia puts a large emphasis on female education: 53.6 per cent of Saudi schools are exclusively for women (SAMA, 2015) and increasingly more women enrol and graduate

from university programs according to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) (2013). The positive effects of women’s education on FLFP become apparent when looking at education levels of women in the labour force: The large majority of employed women are highly educated, as Chart 1 (adapted from GASTAT, 2017) shows.

Economic Participation Rate for Saudi Population Aged 15+ by Sex and Education Level

Education level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	15.7	1.0	4.0
Literate	32.0	2.0	9.6
Primary	41.3	3.0	19.7
Intermediate	36.4	2.4	19.2
Secondary	63.6	6.6	39.5
Under-university	86.6	61.6	80.2
Bachelor’s degree	88.2	60.6	74.5
High	86.1	69.6	81.5
PhD degree	84.1	84.7	84.2
Total	62.6	17.8	40.7

Chart 1

Source: GASTAT, Labor Market Q3 2017, p.53, Table 36

The defendants of the agency-theory see their theory confirmed by this data. The rising number of female graduates and women entering the labour market seems to suggest that when women decide to invest into their own education, they get rewarded by getting employed (Becker, 1993). Furthermore, while in the past, most study programs open to women belonged to fields regarded “fitting” for women such as education and caretaking careers, more and more programs have become available to women in recent years. The Saudi MoHE declared to

... give Saudi female students the freedom to choose majors that fit with their individual wishes and tendencies, and to achieve their ambitions to effectively and actively participate in the development of the country. (MoHE, 2013, p. 20)

With this relaxation of rules, new fields, such as retail, marketing, and industry, are opening to women (Yusuf et al., 2015). The fact that women still fall behind men in all work fields except

for educational occupations (Koyame-Marsh, 2017) seems to support those scholars who believe that low FLFP is mainly a product of women's own preferences. Hakim (1998), for instance, claims that women's behaviour in the labour market is determined by their "natural" preferences to choose certain occupations over others.

There are, however, several points calling this theory into question. First of all, Saudi women are limited in their ability to decide for themselves whether and what they want to study due to the persisting system of guardianship (OECD, 2014). The system of guardianship also limits women's autonomy in choosing where to work and whether to accept certain job offers (Manea, 2008). This social hierarchy translates into a practical constraint to Saudi women's agency. Institutional theorists further point to several social structural constraints for women to choose their own educational pursuits. Institutional theorists are concerned with processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour (Scott, 2004).

One manifestation of this is the large dichotomy between Saudi women's educational status and their economic participation, Koyame-Marsh (2017) points towards in her study. Despite the fact that the majority of university graduates are women, they only make up 17 per cent of the labour force. Clearly, having a high educational level does not grant women a job in Saudi Arabia (AlMunajjed, 2010). This is, on one hand, the result of an educational system that does not meet the demands of the labour market (AlMunajjed, 2009, 2010; Al-bakr et al., 2017), and, on the other hand, a segmentation of the workforce. This means that the labour market is not a competitive environment with equal demands and rewards for all participants, but it is segmented into different groups within the labour market. This segmentation is, for instance, manifested in different returns to investment: Employers do not reward investments into education equally for men and women (Leontaridi, 1998). This becomes apparent when looking at educational levels among unemployed Saudis: 84.5 per cent of job seekers in Saudi Arabia are women and 73.4 per cent of unemployed females hold a university degree, while the majority of unemployed males only hold a secondary degree (GASTAT, 2017, pp. 54-61).

3.3 Women's Place in the Labour Market – Who Chooses Whom?

Moving on from prerequisites, namely education, to the actual process of finding employment, the discrepancy in previous studies can be described as circling around the question "Who chooses whom?". The agency-theorists see Saudi women as choosing to enter the labour

market or refraining from it. As mentioned above, some scholars also view the gendered occupational distribution as a reflection of “natural preferences” (Hakim, 1998). AlMunajjed (2010, p. 4), for instance, claims that “Saudi nationals are selective in their choice of jobs, often refusing unskilled, manual, or low-paying work.” One must also consider in this regard, however, that women are to an extent influenced by persisting cultural norms in their choice of career. Several studies show that women prefer to work for the government and in the education sector because of the fully ensured sex segregation at the workplace to comply with Islamic values and cultural norms (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014; Jiffry, 2014). The strong quest to conform with Islamic values becomes apparent when looking at public opinion surveys: In a government survey of women in 2006, results showed that 86 per cent of women believed they should not be employed in environments with mixed genders (Al-bakr et al., 2017). In a survey conducted by Al-bakr and her co-authors (2017) 43 per cent of male respondents stated that allowing women to work undermines Islamic practice.

Scholars concerned with social structural constraints point out that there are simply not enough rewarding employment opportunities available to women: The rise in FLFP during the Ninth Development Plan was accompanied by an unexpected increase in female unemployment to over 30 per cent – five times higher than male unemployment in the kingdom (Koyame-Marsh, 2017, pp. 438-439). Even though women have the opportunity to study a larger variety of programs now, they are still restricted when it comes to actually working in higher positions.

Furthermore, many scholars point to sex segregation at the workplace as a major constraint to FLFP (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Doumato, 2010; Manea, 2008). On one hand, employers have lower incentives to employ women because of the inconvenience of having to segregate their staff, leading to a segmentation of the labour market (Leontaridi, 1998). It also leads to a limitation in what occupations women are allowed to work in. Under the Saudization policy, the government issued a decree allowing women to work in all-female factories and lingerie-stores (Abeer, 2016, p. 35) – both employments that might not be sufficiently rewarding for women with a university degree.

3.4 Study’s Contribution to the Discussion

Previous research suggests that the constraints women face in accessing the public sphere and thus the labour market, namely the guardianship system and the sex segregation are partly

rooted in the legislation of the kingdom but are largely held up by social norms (Al-bakr et al., 2017). This facilitates my own approach to the topic:

The majority of previous studies point out that women in Saudi Arabia continue to face social structural constraints that are rooted deeply in the society. This explains why FLFP remains as low as 19 per cent in Saudi Arabia despite investments in women's education and the implementation of several policies facilitating women's employment. My study contributes to the discussion on constraints to FLFP by connecting it to the notion of subjectification effects explained in the theoretical framework section below. Women in Saudi Arabia are, to a large extent, constrained in their labour force participation by the way in which society views them. The discourse inherent in policies upholds or even reinforces social norms that are hindering FLFP. The depiction of women in political and societal discourse shapes their reality by affecting both their self-perception and their field of actions. This study aims to analyse how women and their role in the labour market are depicted under Vision 2030 and discuss the likely effects of that depiction on FLFP.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this section, I explain the theoretical framework my research is based on. I will begin by explaining the relevant abstract theoretical concepts and subsequently break them down to a more applicable level, putting them into the context of my research. I also provide brief clarifications about the application of the theories to my research in practice. However, I will go into more detail with this in the methodology section following the theoretical framework section.

This research is placed in a post-structuralist, feminist framework. It follows the premise that people's roles in society are a social construct and that all emerging concepts and categories in which people are subjectified have a value and can be contested. This framework is closely linked to the methodology employed, namely Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach to policy analysis. The WPR approach views policies not as responses to emerging social problems, but as creators of those problems: As policy-makers lay out what is to be done about something, they define a certain problem. Policies can, therefore, be seen as problem representations (Bacchi 2009, p. 1). The way in which a problem is represented through a policy assigns the subjects of that policy a certain role which has a direct effect on

those subjects' day-to-day lives. This research focusses on the subjectification effects of the policies regarding female labour force participation spelled out by the Saudi Vision 2030. Bacchi points out that "the political implications that accompany how subjects are constituted within problem representations of policy deserve a great deal of attention." (Bacchi 2009, p. 17). Policies set up social relationships and people's place within them, making certain subject positions available that guide how a person views themselves and others.

4.1 The Foucauldian Notion of Subjectification

Bacchi's approach is, to a large extent, based on a Foucauldian theoretical framework. In adopting this, I put special emphasis on Foucault's notion of subjectification which he describes as a form of power that

applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault 1982, p. 781)

According to Foucault, the power of subjectification lies by the state, in this case the Saudi government. "Government" in its original meaning therefore not only refers to the management of states but rather the conduct of individuals or groups. "To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others." (Foucault 1982, p. 790)

Applying this thought to the context of Saudi Arabia, I will analyse how the Saudi government subjectifies women through the discourse inherent in the labour market policies the Vision 2030 prescribes. This allows me to engage with the problem representation present in those policies and discuss what their likely subjectification effects on Saudi women are.

4.2 Economic Citizenship

In order to make Foucault's rather abstract idea of subjectification more applicable, it has to be placed in a realistic context. Kessler-Harris' notion of economic citizenship provides that context and puts it into a historical perspective. She describes economic citizenship as the "possession and exercise of the privileges and opportunities necessary for men and women to achieve economic autonomy and independence" and should entail

the right to work at the occupation of one's choice (where work includes child-rearing and household maintenance); to earn wages adequate to support of self and family; to a non-discriminatory job market; to the education and training that facilitates access to it; to the social benefits necessary to sustain and support labour force participation; and to the social environment required for effective choice, including adequate housing, safe streets, accessible public transport, and universal health care. (Kessler-Harris 2003, p. 159)

Kessler-Harris picks up on T.H. Marshall's statement that the right to work is the most basic civil right (Marshall 1950 cited in Kessler-Harris, p. 159). However, she points out that this civil right has never been secured as it has not been applied equally to men and women. Women have historically been viewed as housewives rather than breadwinners. Women's access to the labour market – if they want it – has a large impact on their general standing in society. Granting them economic citizenship is essential for gender equality in a society as it is closely linked to women's political and social citizenship. Kessler-Harris quotes political scientist Judith Shklar in this regard: "We are citizens only if we earn" (Shklar 1991 cited in Kessler-Harris 2003, p. 166). Analysing the subjectification of Saudi women regarding their labour force participation in the policies implemented under the Vision 2030 therefore allows me to make a prediction about the degree of economic citizenship they are likely to gain from the reforms. I will return to the notion of economic citizenship in the discussion of my results.

4.3 Social Groupings

As Kessler-Harris points out, women have historically been treated as a different social group than men. Folbre (1994) provides a framework for this that pairs well with the Foucauldian notion of subjectification. She states that individuals are assigned to social groupings within a society that stand in hierarchical relationships to each other. She differentiates between given and chosen social groups: While associations and parties are examples for chosen groups which one can join and abandon voluntarily, given social groups such as (but not limited to) gender cannot simply be abandoned. These groups create "structures of constraint", she says, locating certain boundaries of choice (Folbre, 1994, p. 51). She argues that individual and collective identity are socially constructed (Folbre, 1994, p. 4), therefore fitting in with the constructivist framework for my study. In my research I aim to analyse which social groups Saudi women are assigned in the labour market policies under Vision 2030.

In summary, Folbre's (1994) notion of given social groupings and Kessler-Harris' (2003) notion of economic citizenship put the more abstract Foucauldian theory of subjectification (1982) into the thematic context of my research. Everything is held together and made practically applicable by Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach.

5. Methods and Data

In this section, I explain and justify the methods I employ in my research and the data I use. First, I explain in depth Bacchi's WPR approach that I have already touched upon in the theoretical framework section, explaining which part of that approach I use and why. I also clarify how the discourse analysis fits into the WPR approach. Going into the data section, I present my unit of analysis and justify my choice. Lastly, I point out the limitations to my research regarding the methodology and data.

5.1 Methods

My methodology is guided by Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach to policy analysis. The essence of the WPR approach is that problems are created within policies and do not exist outside them. Policies do not simply address problems, they give shape to them, making them endogenous to the policy-making process. Problem representation inherent in policies directly affect what is being done about that problem and this affects the targets of that specific policy. In my research, I aim to interrogate the likely subjectification effects of the labour market policies under the Saudi Vision 2030. Subjectification effects describe the way in which subjects – in this case Saudi women – are constituted in the discourse of the policy (Bacchi, 2009, p.40) and how this affects their self-perception and their “field of actions” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Subjectification through discourse, thus, affects the reality of people. McHoul and Grace (1993, p.35) clarify “[D]iscourses don't merely represent ‘the real’, ... in fact they are part of its production”. More specifically, this study can be viewed as a study of political discourse, which is

... the question of how the world is presented to the public through particular forms of linguistic representation. For example, how is language used in attributing meaning to individuals and groups with reference to the performance of their social practices? (Wilson, 2015, p.776)

Because of the important influence of discourse in policies on the reality of those targeted by the policy, I have chosen to employ a discourse analysis as my methodology to analyse how Saudi women and their role in the labour market are depicted under Vision 2030 and discuss which effects that depiction is likely to have on their labour force participation in general and in the private sector specifically.

It is important to notice that my research is based on Bacchi's WPR approach but does not follow it exactly since this would exceed the aim and scope of this study. Bacchi (2009, p. 2) suggests asking the following questions when analysing policies:

1. What is the problem represented to be in the specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. How/Where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

I employ Bacchi's questions 1 and 2 as sub-questions to my first, descriptive research question which I address in my analysis, and use questions 4 and 5 as sub-questions to my second research question which I address in the discussion part of my thesis. Even though it would be interesting to answer Bacchi's questions 3 and 6 as well, this would exceed the scope of my study.

Since my aim and my research questions are rather abstract, I use Bacchi's framework to break them down into more manageable sub-questions. Those are again divided into operational questions to guide my analysis. This results in a hierarchical structure of questions illustrated in Graphic 1 below.

Structure of the Questions Posed in the Study

<p>Aim: Analyse how Saudi women and their role in the labour market are depicted under Vision 2030 and discuss which effects these depictions are likely to have on their labour force participation in general and in the private sector specifically.</p>		
Research Questions	Sub-questions (following Bacchi’s WPR approach)	Operational Questions
<p>RQ1: How do the labour market policies under Vision 2030 depict Saudi women and their role in the labour market?</p>	1.1 What is the problem represented to be in the specific policy?	
	1.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?	1.2.1 Which social groupings (Folbre, 1994) are identified in the report and what characteristics are they attributed?
		1.2.2 Which “ dividing practices ” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777) are apparent in the policies?
		1.2.3 Which key-words appear repeatedly in the report and what do they convey?
<p>RQ2: How are these depictions likely to affect Saudi women’s labour force participation in general and in the private sector specifically?</p>	2.1 Where are the silences?	
	2.2 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?	2.2.1 What are the likely effects on Saudi women’s self-perception?
		2.2.2 What is likely to change or remain the same?
		2.2.3 Who is likely to benefit or get harmed?

		2.2.4 How does the attribution of responsibility for the problem affect those targeted?
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Graphic 1

5.1.1 Limitations to the WPR Approach

Applying Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach by conducting a discourse analysis will not yield objective results. It is important to notice that my analysis and the interpretation of my results reflect my own problem representations that are influenced by my environments (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). A WPR approach is normative in its nature and the implied recommendations for policies reflect, to a certain extent, my personal beliefs regarding gender equality. I am aware that the subjective and normative character of the WPR approach limits the confirmability of my study. I have, however, followed the idea of the WPR approach to discuss the policies on the grounds of “minimising the losses and maximising the gains” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 73).

5.2 Data

As my unit of analysis, I have chosen the “Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016”. It presents a detailed account of the policies the Saudi Ministry for Labor and Social Development (MLSD) intends to implement regarding FLFP. After going through the available material, I have decided to analyse this particular document because it provides the most detailed account of labour market policies under the Vision 2030. The Vision 2030 document itself only gives a very broad overview of the intended changes in the economy and is more idealistic than practical in its character. Furthermore, it only mentions female labour market participation briefly and therefore does not provide enough content to apply a discourse analysis to. The Labor Market Report is directly connected to the Vision 2030, as it was published only two months after the Vision 2030 itself was made public. The report outlines “the economic provisions that are most relevant for employment and social development” (MLSD, 2016, p. 26). Therefore, it provides all the necessary material to analyse how Saudi women are depicted in the labour market policies under Vision 2030.

5.2.1 Source Criticism

The Labor Market Report will serve as my unit of analysis because it represents the official agenda of Saudi Arabia. However, I am aware that the agenda outlined in those documents is partly designed to provide the public – in this case the G20 for which the report was written – with a positive picture of Saudi Arabia and therefore underlies the usual bias inherent in all state documents (Bryman, 2008, p. 550). As Bryman points out, though, their official character is precisely what makes state documents interesting in their own right. Therefore, I do not see this bias as a problem, but rather as a necessary prerequisite to my study since my research seeks to analyse the discourse in the report to uncover how the Saudi government subjectifies women in their labour market policies.

Having said that, I acknowledge that I am to an extent limited in my research through the existing language barrier. The original policy documents are written in Arabic, which makes them inaccessible to me since I, unfortunately, do not know Arabic. Furthermore, there might be more contemporary documents than the report I chose that simply have not been translated into English yet. My research is furthermore constrained by the fact that the translated English document I am working with represents the interpretations of the translator and is therefore not voicing the official Saudi Arabian policy agenda exactly. However, I am convinced that the official character of the report that was written for the G20 guarantees that the translation mimics the Arabic expressions of the original as closely as possible.

6. Analysis

In this section, I analyse the “Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016” to answer my first research question:

How do the labour market policies under Vision 2030 depict Saudi women and their role in the labour market?

To answer this overarching question, I will follow Bacchi’s WPR framework and methodology to policy analysis, asking the following sub-questions:

1. What is the problem represented to be in the Saudi labour market policies under the Vision 2030?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

6.1 What is the problem represented to be?

In order to understand how women are constituted in the Saudi labour market policies, it is necessary to identify what the Saudi government perceives to be the problems regarding the Saudi labour market. Therefore, I will first give an overview over the problem representations inherent in the labour market policies as spelled out by the “Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016” following Bacchi’s WPR approach that I have explained in the theoretical framework and methodology sections. As broad as the policies laid out in the report, as diverse are the problem representations inherent in them. In this research, however, I am mainly concerned with those connected to FLFP. First of all, the MLSD interestingly identifies low FLFP as a specific challenge (see Graphic 2), even though the other four identified challenges are all underlying reasons for low FLFP.

Labour Market Challenges as Identified by the MLSD

The newly formed Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MLSD) has prioritized five of the nation’s main challenges:

1. A lack of competitive and fulfilling private sector jobs attractive to Saudi nationals
2. A disproportionate reliance on foreign labor within the private sector
3. Youth unemployment is higher than the Saudi national average for unemployment as a whole
4. Demand for labor is not being efficiently matched with the supply of labor
5. Women’s labor force participation continues to be significantly lower than that of men

Graphic 2

Source: MLSD, Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016, p. 6

While the main problem of relevance to this study is represented to be low FLFP, one needs to know what the problem *behind* low FLFP is represented to be (Bacchi, 2009, p. 21). The policies through which the ministry wants to address the challenges named above uncover further problem representations, meaning the assumed underlying problems leading to low FLFP. The Saudi government sees both social as well as economic problems at the roots of low FLFP. This is represented by the merging of the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Social Affairs into one entity, the “Ministry of Labor and Social Development” (MLSD, 2016, p.33).

The labour market and the Saudi society are seen as affecting each other and are therefore being addressed by the same ministry (MLSD, 2016, p.33). This is also pointed out by the “strategic pillars” the MLSD spells out to address the five challenges above (see Graphic 3). Pillars 5-8 all have social policy dimensions. The social policies have Saudi women as one of their main targets. The MLSD not only sees low FLFP as caused by social and economic factors but also as being important for both the economy and society.

Pillars of the Strategy for Economic and Social Development

MLSD has identified eight strategic pillars that will drive the country’s Labor Market Strategy:

1. Supporting the creation of *sustainable jobs* in the private sector and among non-profit organizations
2. Developing the *skills* of the Saudi workforce
3. Managing the *Saudi-expatriate worker balance*
4. Ensuring a *rapid entrance or return to the labor market* while supporting decent work
5. Providing fundamental mechanisms for an *efficient labor market* as well as *social development*
6. Preventing and *reducing social issues* affecting the most vulnerable groups of people while encouraging *active participation in society*
7. Protecting and supporting citizens through *social welfare*
8. Improving society through *social development*

Graphic 3

Source: MLSD, Labor Market Report 2016, p. 6-7 (Emphasis added)

The policies laid out in the report represent what the Saudi government perceives to be the problems underlying low labour force participation – including *female* labour force participation – particularly in the private sector. Those can be divided into agency-based and structural problems – a differentiation that is prominent in the academic literature as well. I summarize the problem representations in Table 1.

Problem Representations of low FLFP in the Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016

Agency-based problems	Structural problems
Gender-neutral	
Saudis perceive work in the public sector as more prestigious than work in the private sector (p. 13)	Working conditions (e.g. wages and hours) are better in the public than in the private sector making it more attractive to Saudis (p. 13)
Saudis follow family tradition of working in the public sector (p. 14)	No efficient matching of job-seekers and employers, which traditionally relies on personal relations (p. 16)
Saudis have too high expectations when entering the labour market (p. 16)	Expatriates are cheaper to hire than Saudis because they are not protected equally under the labour law (pp. 15)
Saudi students pick majors that do not equip them with the skills that are in high demand by the private sector (p. 16)	Employers prefer expatriates because they bring the skills and experience that Saudis often lack (p. 15)
Women-specific	
Saudi women prefer public sector employment because workplaces are more “women-friendly” (p. 18)	Only jobs with guaranteed sex segregation are available to women (p. 18)
Women feel discouraged to apply to private sector jobs that do not guarantee “women-friendly” workplaces (p. 18)	Private employers prefer hiring men because they are cheaper (no maternity leave, day-care options, workplace segregation) (p. 35)
	Women have to pay for day-care for children (if there are day-care options available) (p. 35)
	Women have to pay for transportation to and from work (if it is available) (p. 18)

	<i>(This problem has already been partly resolved by the government by lifting the driving ban for Saudi women)</i>
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Table 1

What we can learn from these problem representations is that the Saudi government has recognized the low FLFP as a specific problem as well as the many underlying reasons for it – both from the agency- and the structural side. As I mentioned before, the problem representation of FLFP is not as clear-cut economic for women specifically as it is for the ungendered Saudi workforce. Even though the underlying reasons for low labour force participation, especially in the private sector, of working-age Saudis in general include women, when low FLFP is addressed specifically, the policies place a large emphasis on underlying social reasons for it.

6.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

To interrogate the presuppositions and assumptions underlying the problem representation, I conduct a discourse analysis following the operational questions I introduced in the methodology section above:

- Which social groupings (Folbre, 1994) are identified in the report and what characteristics are they attributed?
 - o Social groupings are apparent through the differentiation of people by putting them into different **categories**.
- Which “dividing practices” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777) are apparent in the policies?
 - o In order to analyse how different social groupings are posed against each other, I analyse the prevailing **dichotomies** in the report.
- Which **key-words** appear repeatedly in the report and what do they convey?

6.2.1 Social Groupings (Categories)

As explained in the theoretical framework section above, policies assign people to given social groupings creating collective and individual identities that constrain people in their behaviour (Folbre, 1994; Bacchi, 2009). In order to identify those constructed groupings presented in the

labour market policies under the Vision 2030 I have analysed the people categories named in the “Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report 2016”.

The Saudi government divides its population into different categories regarding their origin. One of the most frequent differentiations in the report is the one between Saudi citizens and expatriates. However, since I am, in this particular research, concerned with Saudi women, I will not pay too much attention to that differentiation. I will briefly touch upon the division between citizens and non-citizens in the dichotomy-section below. The MLSD divides Saudi citizens in reference to four main characteristics: Age, economic contribution, social status, and gender. The following categories emerge throughout the report:

Social Groupings/People Categories Among Saudi Citizens Identified by the MLSD

Characteristic	Social groupings (categories)
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth/young population: Age 15-24 respective 29 (the definitions differ within the report) - Working-age citizens: Age 15 years and above - Elderly people (not specified)
Economic contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers - Job-seekers - Citizens that are dependent on social services - Citizens able to work - Citizens unable to work - Unemployed
Social status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vulnerable groups - Disadvantaged groups
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men - Women

Table 2

The report divides the Saudi citizens quite clearly into those different categories and therefore fails to acknowledge the overlaps and linkages between them. For instance, it defines youth

unemployment and female unemployment as two separate challenges without considering the link between them, namely the unemployment of the female youth. Rather, the MLSD assumes a homogeneity of the different social groupings. Only once does the report point towards gendered differences among young Saudis:

About 29 percent of Saudi youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, and 25 percent of men and 8 percent of women in the same age group are classified as NEET– Not in Education, Employment or Training.

(MLSD, 2016, p.15)

This statistic shows that the situation is, in fact, quite different for female and male youth, with a much smaller proportion of women classified as NEET than men. Therefore, the interventions for youth unemployment should address those groups differently.

This falsely assumed homogeneity applies to other groups, too. When the report talks about “Saudi workers” or “working-age, employable citizens” (MLSD, 2016, p. 23), for example, female workers are naturally part of that group. This is, however, never specified in the report, thereby denying women a place in those interventions targeting the entire population because it is not considered how those might affect women differently from men. I will return to this issue in the discussion on subjectification effects below.

Rather than acknowledging Saudi women as part of the “total working population” (MLSD, 2016, p. 6), female workers are seen as a “specific group” that is only addressed separately. On one hand, depicting women as a specific group shows the government’s awareness that increasing FLFP calls for tailored interventions. On the other hand, however, it denies Saudi women an equal stand to men in the labour market and reinforces the existing segmentation of the labour force. This becomes particularly clear when the report talks about creating special “jobs for women”, for instance through initiatives like “female employment in the retail sector” (MLSD, 2016, p. 35). Furthermore, women are encouraged to work from home through remote telework. The report states that “... the flexibility of telecommuting options strives to generate opportunities for women and the disabled” (MLSD, 2016, p.46). This puts women and disabled people on the same level due to their inability to access the public sphere. Returning to Kessler-Harris’ concept of economic citizenship, which is, among other factors, defined as “the right to work at the occupation of one’s choice ... [and] to a non-discriminatory job-market ...” (Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 159), women are not constituted as economic citizens equal to men

under the labour market policies of Vision 2030. Even though the Saudi government wants women to participate in the labour market, they are still limiting them in their “field of actions” (Foucault, 1982). This is generic for the inconsistency in the kingdom’s labour policies, trying to balance modernization and the preservation of traditional norms.

Women as a gendered category themselves are assigned different attributes throughout the report. The differences in attribution are especially visible between the policies regarding the labour market and the social policies. When women are mentioned in an economic context, they are depicted very positively as “a wealth of untapped potential for the economy” and “highly educated and motivated” (MLSD, 2016, pp. 17, 18). The MLSD projects the strength of women, wanting to “empower women to recognize their potential” (MLSD, 2016, p. 23). On the other side, in the context of social policies, women are depicted much more negatively. In describing its objectives, the MLSD names women alongside those groups who are not contributing to the kingdom’s economy:

The merger has created a new ministry with the priority of providing a smooth beneficiary journey for all people in Saudi Arabia. This includes encouraging working-age citizens currently depending on social security to enter the labor market. We also are committed to creating open pathways for the disabled and the underprivileged to find fulfilling work. And we are dedicated to ensuring that women and youth have the skills and opportunities they need to participate in the Kingdom’s economic expansion. (MLSD, 2016, p. 33)

Furthermore, under Pillar 6 of the Strategy for economic and social development “Promote social harmony and cohesion” (MLSD, 2016, p. 37), the report depicts women as vulnerable members of society. Pillar 7 “Protect and support through social welfare” (MLSD, 2016, p. 38) even places women among the weakest and most disadvantaged members of society:

The social welfare system must be modernized to make it more efficient, empowering and transparent in identifying people with disabilities, orphans, the elderly, women and the poor and matching them with the proper types of care. These disadvantaged people must be provided with benefits tailored to their needs that alleviate their economic circumstances and give them the ability to move from depending on government aid to becoming self-sufficient members of society. (MLSD, 2016, p. 38)

The picture of the vulnerable, disadvantaged woman stands in stark contrast to the praise of women's potential and strength in the economic policy section of the report. This depiction puts the Saudi government into a benevolent light, assigning women the role of policy beneficiaries. The inconsistency in the depiction of Saudi women shows how torn the government is between allowing and actively assigning women an important part in their economy and therefore in Saudi society and upholding the traditional image of the woman as vulnerable and dependent.

6.2.2 Dividing Practices (Dichotomies)

The prevalent dichotomy dominating the labour market policies under the Vision 2030 is the repeated differentiation between working and non-working citizens. This dichotomy is established through the contrasting of welfare-dependent and -independent citizens. Welfare-dependency is negatively connotated for “working-age, employable citizens” (MLSD, 2016, pp. 23, 33). The report repeatedly points towards “citizens currently relying on social security” and “those who are collecting benefits but don't need them” (MLSD, 2016, p. 33) in opposition to “those who are in need of services and support because they are unable to work” (MLSD, 2016, p. 6), which are also referred to as “the most deserving” (MLSD, 2016, p. 33). Through those “dividing practices” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777), the Saudi government seeks to stigmatize those citizens relying on the state and at the same time encourage the desired behaviour of active labour market participation, especially in the private sector among the population. This dichotomy matters in regard to Saudi women's depiction in particular. They are, as I have presented above, seen as part of the group of unproductive citizens because the majority of them does not participate in the labour market. I will return to the definition of female productivity and its effects in the discussion below.

6.2.3 Keywords

The entire labour market policy under the Vision 2030 is directed towards encouraging Saudi citizens – both men and women – to become “productive citizens” (MLSD, 2016, p. 33). The emphasis on productivity, ambition, and competition as desired characteristics becomes especially visible in the three pillars the Vision 2030 is based on: “A vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation” (MLSD, 2016, p. 19). The report appeals to the sense of nationality of Saudis by constantly contrasting the Saudi citizens with expatriates. The report entails very positive and encouraging formulations, replacing private sector jobs with keywords like “rewarding opportunities” (e.g. MLSD, 2016, p. 26) and “fulfilling work” (e.g. MLSD,

2016, p. 33). Such keywords are supposed to elicit Saudis' desire to enter the labour market and the private sector specifically. The keywords that appear in the report underline the dichotomy between productive and unproductive citizens discussed above.

7. Discussion

After answering my first, rather descriptive, research question in the analysis above, I now turn to my second, explanatory, research question in the discussion:

How are the depictions of Saudi women and their role in the labour market likely to affect their labour force participation in general and in the private sector specifically?

I answer this question by digging deeper into the findings of my analysis. My discussion is guided by the following questions suggested by Bacchi (2009, p. 2):

1. Where are the silences? (What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Can the problem be thought about differently?)
2. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

The second question is broken down into four operational questions:

- 2.1 What are the likely effects on Saudi women's self-perception?
- 2.2 What is likely to change or remain the same?
- 2.3 Who is likely to benefit or get harmed?
- 2.4 How does the attribution of responsibility for the problem affect those targeted?

In the discussion, I will further relate my findings to the findings of previous studies and position my study in the literature on the topic of FLFP in Saudi Arabia.

7.1 Where are the silences?

7.1.1 Women's Heterogeneity

In my analysis, I laid out the people categories identified by the Saudi government in the report. I already pointed out the government's failure to see the linkages and overlaps between those social groups. I will return to this point later on. However, not only group linkages play an important role in planning and implementing effective policy interventions, but so does the

differentiation of groups. It is striking how women are depicted as a homogenous group throughout the entire report. By doing so, the MLSA ignores that women's constraints to participating in the labour market may vary greatly depending on, for example, their age, their educational status, whether they live in rural or urban environments, their marital status and whether they have children or not. Only in describing the country's demographics does the report recognize the difference in unemployment rates in different parts of Saudi Arabia (MLSD, 2016, p. 12). The report does not address those differences in the policy prescriptions, though. While recognizing at least regional differences, social differences among women are neglected. The government denies that different women might have different needs regarding labour force participation and that policies to enhance FLFP need to be tailored to a blend of social and demographic factors in order to be effective. Returning to the notion of problem representations (Bacchi, 2009), the Saudi government fails to take into account the heterogeneity of women as a social group in their problem representations of FLFP.

7.1.2 Religious Constraints

As pointed out in my analysis of Sub-question 1 (What is the problem represented to be?), the Saudi government sees both agency-based and structural problems at the base of low FLFP (see Table 1). Nonetheless, the labour market policies under the Vision 2030 do not address "the elephant in the room", namely the structural constraints to FLFP caused by Islamic norms. The system of guardianship that is seen to limit women's self-determination and therefore labour force participation (Manea, 2008; OECD, 2014) is not even mentioned in the report. The practice of sex segregation, which most scholars also see as a major constraint to FLFP (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Doumato, 2010; Manea, 2008) is mentioned several times and recognized as a constraint to FLFP, but not at all challenged or questioned in the report. Rather, it is depicted as a given: "Available jobs are restricted to those in which direct interaction with men is not required. Therefore, companies must invest in separate spaces where women can work ..." (MLSD, 2016, p. 18). Instead of challenging the norm that men and women are not allowed to work in the same room, the report sees private companies' struggle or unwillingness to invest in separate workplaces as the cause of the problem, which can be solved through state subsidies. The fact that the Saudi government consciously does not include religious constraints into their problem representation shows the kingdom's struggle to modernize and liberalize on one hand, while preserving and protecting Islamic values and traditions on the other hand.

7.1.3 Definition of Female Productivity

I already mentioned that there is no differentiation between women regarding, for instance, their marital status or whether they have children or not. Tying into this is that the report does not acknowledge household and caring work as productive work. As pointed out in the analysis, in the dichotomy between productive and unproductive citizens, women are attributed the latter along with the disabled and underprivileged (MLSD, 2016, p. 33). Even though the Saudi government recognizes women's responsibilities as mothers by pointing out that finding day-care for children is a major issue for Saudi women (MLSD, 2016, p. 18), it ignores women's indirect contribution to the Saudi economy through their reproductive work. According to Kessler-Harris, economic citizenship should, however, entail "the right to work at the occupation of one's choice (where work includes child-rearing and household maintenance)" (Kessler-Harris, 2003, p.159). The labour market policies under the Saudi Vision 2030 deny women that right by condemning women who are not in a paid employment in the labour market as unproductive citizens. As Folbre (1994, p. 3) points out, there is "a certain historical reluctance to see women's work in the family as an economic activity, rather than a natural or moral responsibility." This reluctance is still persistent in Saudi Arabia today. By not recognizing family care as work, the Saudi government neglects the double-burden working mothers carry. At the same time, Pillar 8 of the Strategy for economic and social development presented in the report calls for an "increase[d] role and responsibilities for families, from child development to cultural contributions" (MLSD, 2016, p.39). Calling for parents' stronger involvement in their children's upbringing while recruiting both mothers and fathers to participate in the labour market at the same time is paradoxical. I will return to the effects of ignoring the emerging double-burden for women below.

7.2 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

7.2.1 What are the likely effects on Saudi women's self-perception?

Through the labour market policies under Vision 2030, women are being constituted as certain kinds of subjects (Foucault, 1982) or, as Kessler-Harris (2003) puts it, economic citizens. On one hand, this becomes apparent through the social groups they get assigned (Folbre, 1994). On the other hand, it shines through the policy interventions targeting women (Bacchi, 2009). As I already pointed out, in the policies under Vision 2030, women are seen as a different group than men and are not specifically addressed when the report talks about Saudi workers in general, either. Instead, they are depicted as unproductive and underprivileged.

This subjectification of women as unable and different from the rest of the workforce is not only likely to limit women's possibilities in the labour market, but also influences how women view themselves. The discourse inherent in the labour market policies makes certain subject positions available for women to assume, affecting the way they feel about themselves and others (Bacchi, 2009, p. 16). Many women may, for instance, simply accept the restrictions to full economic citizenship due to sex segregation because the government incentivizes them to conform with them (e.g. through teleworking) rather than challenge them. Furthermore, Saudi women are seen and likely see themselves as economically subordinate to Saudi men. The suggested "jobs for women" in the report do not entail any high-ranked or leadership positions in the labour market. Rather, women are being hidden from the public. There is no discussion or suggestions about how to increase women's leadership or entrepreneurial skills in the labour market policies under Vision 2030. Since women are depicted as less able than men in the policies, they are likely to perceive themselves in the same way rather than develop into ambitious participants of the labour market.

7.2.2 What is likely to change or remain the same?

Since the Saudi labour market policies under Vision 2030 do not enable and incentivize women to strive to high-ranked working positions in the private sector, it is likely that a majority of women will continue to prefer working in the public sector. This is supported by the fact that policy interventions aiming at bringing more Saudis into the private sector likely will not have the same effect on women as on men. The reason for that is that even if women receive career-counselling and get access to job-matching platforms, there will always be the final burden of sex segregation at the workplace. Whether they can actually get a job in a company, even if their skills match the needs of the employer, depends entirely on whether the employer is able and willing to provide a "women-friendly" workplace (MLSD, 2016, p. 35). Due to the sex segregation, women also face much larger constraints to reaching managing positions. Therefore, it is likely that the majority of women will continue to work in the public sector. With more men entering the private sector, the public sector might evolve into a kind of women-domain, as well as those sectors where employees can work through telecommunication. Where companies receive subsidies from the state to make their workplace "women-friendly", women will be able to enter the private sector, however, most likely in rather low ranked positions.

7.2.3 Who is likely to benefit or get harmed?

As already mentioned above, women and men are constituted as different kind of subjects, or, as Kessler-Harris (2003) puts it, economic citizens. With this representation of the problem, not all social groups are likely to benefit equally from the policies implemented by the MLSD. I have already pointed out above that men are likely to benefit more from interventions like career-counselling and job-matching than women. But also among women, not everyone is likely to benefit to the same degree from the policies. The Saudi government, for instance, sees women as the main responsible ones for child- and family-care, as becomes clear on several occasions in the report (MLSD, 2016, pp. 18, 46). The report does not indicate any redistribution of responsibility for child-rearing to the father. Even though the report mentions at one point the “equalizing [of] day-care costs across men and women” (MLSD, 2016, p.35), it does not elaborate on this point any further. Mothers will, therefore, likely continue to face the additional constraint of finding an employer that offers day-care or having to make alternative arrangements. The labour market policies do not problematize this sufficiently. Mothers are, thus, also in this regard dependent on the employer’s willingness and ability to cover additional expenses to make the workplace “women-friendly”. Childless women and men are therefore likely to benefit more from interventions like career-counselling and job-matching.

7.2.4 How does the attribution of responsibility for the problem affect those targeted?

The MLSD places responsibility rather equally on the government, the employers and recruiters, and the Saudi population, including unemployed citizens and job-seekers (MLSD, 2016, p.43). Connecting this to the literature on the topic of FLFP, the Saudi government recognizes both agency-based and structural constraints, as is visible in my analysis of the problem representation (see Table 1). Even though the Saudi government points towards women’s preferences to work in the public sector due to more “women-friendly” workplaces, as well as women’s tendency to focus on skills that are not in high demand in the labour market, it states clearly that “it is not the preference of Saudi women driving low female employment. Many women are looking for work and are unable to find it.” (MLSD, 2016, p. 18) The FLFP policies, therefore, do not blame women alone for low FLFP. On the contrary, they put a large share of the responsibility on private companies who are described as having a bias against hiring women. The report repeatedly emphasizes that “policies require commitment from the private sector ... [and the] participation of Saudi citizens” (MLSD, 2016, p. 7). This even

distribution of responsibility among different stakeholder has the positive effect that there is no one alone to “blame” for low FLFP.

8. Conclusion

In my analysis, I have shown that the Saudi government identifies both structural and agency-based problems as underlying the gender imbalance in the Saudi labour market. However, in addressing these problems, the policies do not sufficiently challenge the social structural constraints to FLFP. This study contributes to the discussion regarding FLFP in Saudi Arabia by connecting it to the notion of subjectification effects, pointing towards the likely effects of the depiction of women in the labour market policies under Vision 2030 on FLFP. Saudi women and their role in the labour market are depicted in a number of ways in the labour market policies under the Vision 2030 and those depictions shape the social norms affecting women’s labour force participation in general and in the private sector in particular.

Saudi women are, on one hand, depicted as active agents that can be held responsible for FLFP, for instance when it comes to choosing educational paths that match the demands of the labour market. On the other hand, Saudi women are seen as a homogenous social group that faces specific structural constraints to participate in the labour force. The clear distinction of women from the rest of the workforce allows for women-specific labour market policies. However, assuming that all Saudi women face the same constraints regardless of their social and demographic situation, stands in the way of well-tailored interventions. Furthermore, the separation of Saudi women as a social group from the total workforce denies them a place in those interventions targeting the entire population. Such interventions are likely to have a stronger effect on men than on women, mainly because – despite policies such as career-counselling and job-matching – women are ultimately restricted in their labour force participation by the mandatory sex segregation at the workplace. The government does not challenge this constraint but rather accepts it as a given to work around with initiatives like teleworking.

Women are furthermore not depicted as equal economic citizens to men. “Jobs for women” include mainly low-ranked jobs and the labour market policies do not entail any initiatives to bring women into leadership positions. This does not only restrict women’s possibilities in the labour market, but also affects their self-perception as less able and subordinate to men. It also

takes away the incentives for women to be ambitious labour market participants. This, as well as the persisting sex segregation in workplaces, make it likely that a majority of women will continue to prefer working in the public sector.

The Saudi government draws a dichotomy between productive and unproductive citizens. Women are partly depicted as an untapped potential for the economy and partly as a burden to society. Working-age, employable citizens relying on social welfare are stigmatized through such dividing practices, nudging Saudis to enter the labour market. However, the government views citizens only as productive when they are in paid employment, denying the contribution of women to the economy through reproductive work. The so created double-burden is likely to constrain FLFP, especially for mothers. On a positive note, the Saudi government distributes the responsibility for achieving higher FLFP evenly among the government, the private sector (the employers) and Saudi women. This has the positive effect that they do not blame anyone specifically for the problem of low FLFP.

In conclusion, the labour market policies under the Vision 2030 lay out a number of potentially effective policies to enhance FLFP, but the government is not consistent in its depiction of Saudi women and their role in the labour market. On one hand, it depicts women as untapped potential that needs to be unlocked while promoting the wide-ranging modernization and reform of the Saudi labour market. On the other hand, women are depicted as unproductive, unable and as a burden. Furthermore, the government does not challenge persisting structural constraints to FLFP such as sex segregation. This inconsistency in the depiction of Saudi women in the labour market and the resistance to overcoming restrictive cultural norms are likely to hamper women's labour force participation in general and in the private sector in particular. While the labour market policies under Vision 2030 represent a positive first step towards a gender-balanced labour force, much remains to be done. If FLFP is to increase substantially, the Saudi government needs to stand by their course of modernization and reform and grant women access to the labour market equal to men on all levels. It would be interesting to evaluate the outcomes of the Vision 2030 regarding FLFP when its implementation period comes to an end in future research. The labour market policies under the Vision 2030 exemplify the kingdom's constant struggle to combine reform and traditions, modernization and preservation. The Vision 2030 attempts to stretch the rubber band holding the Saudi society together just far enough to allow some breathing space – especially for the young and the female population – but not so much that the band rips.

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