

Evaluation of the master thesis (MT) called „*Saudi Women´s Role in Development of Society*“ written by **Sabra Naji Alshahrani**

It is very difficult to evaluate the MT, because there is no introduction into research goals, more elaborated research questions or hypothesis, as well as into research methodology or into theoretical framework. This is missing, however it must be explicitly stated at the beginning of the text.

The MT is not positioned in any theoretical framework of sociology or historical sociology or any other science. So it is not part of any existing paradigm. For example, the text (page 5) is defining „development“ as „the act to developing or the process of being developed to begin to be seen or become active“. There is no link to any existing literature or author, no citation. No mention that the definition is a kind of logical tautology. The same problem is with a definition of “role” as “the duty or purpose of a person or group in a particular activity or area of life” (see page 5). The problem is that this approach is typical for the whole MT, citations are missing in most of the MT.

I suggest to posit the MT into the context of selected:

- (a) general theories of social change or development (see for example Sztompka: *Sociology of social change*, 1994),
- (b) sociological theories of gender focusing on the role of women in the Middle Eastern societies,
- (c) descriptive papers and studies dealing with the issue of the development of the Middle East – for example, there must be cited several studies of the key series “Arab Development Report” (2002-2007) written by Arab experts, several of them focus exclusively on the role of women in the development which is the topic of the MT
- (d) approaches of contemporary Islamic feminism (see for example Amina Wadud: “*Inside the Gender Jihad*”, 2007)

Very problematic is chapter “The Place of Women in Islam” (pages 12-31). It seems it is based on author´s personal reading of the Koran and the Sunnah. Again, it is not clear, from which point of view is Islam and the role of women interpreted. Is it the Saudi official version of Islam (wahhabi tradition)? Is it the hanbali law school (madhab)? Is it reading of contemporary Islamic feminism, salafism or Al-Azhar? As a result, it is missing a point that Islam has a plurality of interpretations often contradictory interpretations. For example, for the role of women, there is a concept of equality between men and women, but also a completely different concept of complementarity between men and women which is pushed forward for example by Muslim Brotherhood. The plurality of interpretations, however, is not mentioned in the chapter at all. Citations are missing. Also, the author is not a theologian or an Islamic jurist but a sociologist, so it must use sociological imagination and methods. Finally, it is completely missing a critical approach. For example using sentences in a scientific MT like “There is no doubt that...” (page 15) or “This system can seem unfair to people who are not knowledgeable about Islamic law. However, the Almighty said...” or “no one can doubt their importance” (page 31) or “this was proven in the hadeeth” (page 28) is showing no respect for critical approach. The problem is, that in this part of the MT, religion/belief and science are mixed completely and Koran is used as a reliable historical source (in Bibliography it is stated that Koran is a monograph!!!). I suggest to write the

chapter in a more balanced way to show the many interpretations about the role of women in society and the the conflicting relations among the many interpretations.

Very problematic is also a chapter dealing with history of Saudi Arabia (especially pages 33-42). Again, it is missing a critical approach completely. I suggest to use not only official Saudi history books, but also monographs on Saudi Arabia written in the Western universities to reach more balanced view. I also suggest not to focus only on political history (kings and the many battles during the expansion of their power), but also on the social, cultural and economic history of the period, that is more explicitly connected to the topic of MT.

Finally, most of the literature cited and listed in the Bibliography (pages 97-98) is written and published in Saudi Arabia. To produce more balanced analyses, I suggest to read also monographs and papers on the topic written in English by scholars out of Saudi Arabia.

To sum up, the master thesis has got a very important and difficult topic. However, after naming the most important shortages and weaknesses, I **can not recommend** the contemporary version of the master thesis to be discussed and defended in front of the commission. I suggest to do more research and re-write the master thesis in the way I have tried to recommend above, so it could be considered a scientific, rather than an apologetic and ideologically biased work.

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