Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Salam Kedan

Title: The role of women in the reforms in Saudi Arabia

Programme/year: MAIN/2023

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Anna Kotvalová

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	**10**	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	**30**	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	**40**	16
Total		*80*	48
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	**10**	8
	Style	**5**	3
	Formal requirements	**5**	3
Total		*20*	14
TOTAL		*100*	62

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Evaluation

Major criteria:

The presented thesis deals with the role of women in the process of ongoing changes in socio-political realities in Saudi Arabia. The thesis poses a clear research question which could have been answered through the selected methodology: both in-depth interviews and content analysis. Unfortunately, on some levels the thesis fails to deliver.

The strongest part of the thesis is the theoretical/conceptual chapter. The author uses modernization theory, normative feminism, and gender mainstreaming in order to theoretically frame the topic and explains the theoretical perspectives sufficiently. On the other hand, the thesis fails to frame the topic into the IR theoretical debate since the literature review is only one and half pages long. Additionally, the author poses some hypothesis which is confusing since not only I believe that they are not necessary in this type of (qualitative) research but more importantly, as they are argued/structured they are not hypotheses at all, they are rather theoretical assumptions the thesis deploys.

The biggest problem of this master thesis is the way how it utilizes the methods of choice and the "original" analysis. First of all, the author does not state clearly the used data set. In terms of the interviews, it is not clear at all how many women will be interviewed, for what purposes, what are the ethical aspects of these interviews, and what specifically will the author look for in them. Secondly, it is not clear why and how will the author use content analysis and which data will be analyzed. Moreover, throughout the analyses I was not able to find the content analysis at all. In the chapters which should have contain the original analyses done through the interviews and the content analysis, the reader can only find historical context of Saudi Arabia and different aspects (and maybe affects) of Vision 2030. Part of the text (p. 32-43) does use some of the said interviews and tries to utilize them into some form of analysis but fails to deal with them the way how interviews should be used in a text/analysis. The problem is that the "original analysis" fails to use primary data for the most part, and mostly only uses secondary data.

Also, the conclusion fails to deliver clear conclusions/findings of the thesis since the text deals with the way how the various reforms in SA played role in gender mainstreaming rather than on the different roles women played in the process of implementing these reforms/political actions in the first place. Hence, I believe that for the most part, the thesis failed to fulfill its original goal.

Minor criteria:

Regarding minor criteria, I have also identified several problems. First, the text is sometimes incoherent and chaotic for a reader and does not follow the typical structure of master thesis.

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That would not be problem per se since I am all in favor of disrupting the rigid academic writing, but it must be done so for the benefit of the text. In this case the chapters are not sufficiently visually separated, and their order does not follow a logical flow of the argumentation/research design.

Secondly, there are some grammar/stylistic mistakes in the text (e.g. page 7, 9, ...).

Additionally, the thesis does work with sufficient amount of literature although I do think that the literature review as such is quite short.

Finally, the thesis is quite short: 45 pages of text. I believe such a complex topic could have used a more elaboration.

Assessment of plagiarism:

The degree of similarity is 1% which is negligible.

Overall evaluation:

Presented thesis aspires to investigate the role of women in ongoing reforms in Saudi Arabia. The author employes the modernization theory and normative feminism in order to understand the complex socio-political realities and to explore the role of women in this context. According to my understanding depside the highly relevant and interesting topic of this thesis the text still fails on several to levels to meet the requirements of master thesis.

First of all, although the direction of the thesis is clearly stated the theoretical and methodological argumentation does not follow this direction, the literature review is quite short, although some hypotheses are stated in the thesis, I would rather argue that these are not in fact a hypothesis in line with the research design but rather theoretical/conceptual assumptions for the thesis. Posted like this they do not serve the purpose of being proven/disproven. The theoretical part mainly deals with the modernization theory and normative feminism. Although these theoretical assumptions or positions do align with the topic of choice, I would argue that there are much more relevant/bold theoretical choices which could have been used in order to research this topic such as postcolonial/decolonial theory, postcolonial feminism, intersectionalism (although it is mentioned further in the thesis (p. 22), the text does not work with it from theoretical standpoint) and other critical perspectives.

In current IR debates we can notice that there are a lot of voices arguing that the modernization theory is quite problematic from inclusive/postcolonial IR, and I would argue that to use it on researching the role and positions of women in Saudi Arabia is not very convenient (although this is a personal researcher´s choice and does not reflect the points I gave for the theoretical/conceptual framework).

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The biggest problem I have is the methodological part of this thesis. Although the research question is well stated and is in line with the methods of choice (both in-depth interviews and content analysis) the methodological part fails to deliver the answers and any original analysis to this research question. In the methodological part the author states that she will be doing in-depths interview and content analysis but fails to deliver the analysis in the analytical part. Regarding the interviews, it is not argued clearly how many interviews it is done, which people and why are interviewed for what purposes and what specifically the author is looking for in their answers/interviews. The data set is unclear, and we can only find some deeper information about the interviewed women in the appendix which is not sufficient. Secondly, the author argues that she will also be doing content analysis. But again, not only it is nowhere to be found in the original analysis it is also not clear what kind of data the author is analyzing.

Unfortunately, the part of the text which should have been an original analysis/work with the interviews and content analysis fails to deliver any original analysis. Instead of original analysis we can find historical background of the role of women in SA and a major part of this chapter contains a description of different attributions of Vision 2030 by using mostly secondary sources.

Overall, this thesis had a potential to provide us with better understanding of the role of women in the ongoing changes in socio-political realities in Saudi Arabia and additionally, to provide in-depth interviews with relevant sources but fails in this aspiration. On the other hand, it is clear that the author dedicated a substantial amount of time to write this thesis so both of those aspects are taken into consideration.

Suggested grade: D

Signature:

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