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Transitions from Education to Work And Non-Work in Saudi Arabia[1]

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Abstracts

Saudi Arabia rarely features in any field of English language youth studies. This is despite the availability of considerable official data in English language on young people's education, employment, and links between them, routinely analysed by gender, province and nationality. However, this evidence has never been analysed using the 'transition paradigm' that has been developed and is now favoured in Western studies of youth education and employment. This paper reports a small-scale interview study among 23 Saudis all aged 25-35 which was designed to fill gaps and enable typical life stage transitions to be identified. The paper describes and justifies the research methods, sketches the Saudi context, then gives examples of the youth transitions that became normal during the latter decades of the 20th century. We then sketch the changed Saudi Arabia context of the 21st century, and give examples of 'difficult transitions' which, we suggest, will become more common. The paper continues with a discussion of how Saudi youth will respond to their new circumstances, concludes that the 'transition paradigm' can be applied and works well in an Arabic and Islamic context, and makes proposals for further research.

Key Words: Education, Employment, Labour market, Saudi Arabia, Unemployment.

Introduction

Youth life stage transitions beyond education in Saudi Arabia have never been subject to the kind of scholarly analysis that is now widely applied throughout Europe, North America,

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Australasia and Japan. In this respect, what applies in Saudi Arabia also applies in other Arab and Moslem majority countries, and indeed throughout most of the world. However, in the case of Saudi Arabia this is not due to a lack of domestic interest in youth issues or a shortage of data. The Saudi government publishes huge amounts of information on rates of participation in different types of education at different ages, and young people's positions within and outside the workforce (see, for example, Ministry of Education 2015; Ministry of Labour, 2015, Observatory on Higher Education, 2014). We know the current situation and trends over time in the proportions of young people leaving education at different levels, and the labour market positions of young people, routinely divided by gender, educational backgrounds, provinces and nationality (Saudis and others). There have also been numerous academic, smaller scale studies investigating the career expectations and aspirations of secondary school and university students (for example, Almobaireek and Monolova, 2012). Criminology has been a favourite specialism among Saudi youth researchers, which has led to studies of the typical backgrounds(which usually include substantial spells of unemployment) that lead to young males' imprisonment (see, for example, Aklotayan, 2006; Al-Thakafi, 2007). However, all this information has never been analysed using the 'youth transitions paradigm' which has been developed by Western researchers, primarily for use in studies of the school-to-work transition (for example, Andres and Aaadamuti, 2008; Aronson et al, 2015; Lange et al,, 2014; Velden and Wolbers, 2007). The differences are that in the Western 'transition paradigm':

i. Youth biographies begin in families of origin, usually grouped into social classes or socio-economic groups, and these origins are shown to have recurrent influence at all career junctures.
ii. As youth life stage transitions have lengthened, it has become standard practice to identify typical sequences of positions (called routes, pathways or trajectories) leading from different childhood origins to different adult destinations.
iii. Young people are credited with the ability to exercise agency at successive career junctures, and hence researchers' attention to how the options facing different groups during their navigations towards adulthood vary between socio-demographic groups, and the sub-cultures that lead to different groups choosing different pathways from the same range of options.

In this paper we report findings from a small-scale, exploratory interview study which was designed to fill gaps in the existing Saudi evidence by focusing on the routes and processes that lead young people from different childhood family backgrounds to different adult destinations within and outside the active workforce. Specifically, we are interested in:

i. How, the processes, whereby young people from different backgrounds reach different occupational destinations.
ii. The role of families in these processes. None of the official Saudi statistics use families' socio-economic status as a variable.
iii. Whether young people are content with these processes and their eventual positions, the sources of any frustrations and discontents, and whether these are likely to become politicised.

Since ours is a small-scale exploratory study which seeks insights rather than tests pre-formulated propositions, our answers to the above questions should be treated as hypotheses that need to be interrogated in subsequent, quantitative research.

We proceed below by describing our research, then the Saudi context within which the fieldwork was conducted and in which young Saudis build careers through education and beyond. Then, from among our interviewees, we present examples of the transitions that became normal for young Saudis (we did not study non-nationals) during the late 20th century. We then explain why these hitherto normal transitions are currently threatened. As in the West (see Woodman and Wyn, 2015), there are grounds of treating 21st century Saudi youth as a new generation, and we have examples of troublesome youth transition experiences that, we suggest, will become increasingly common. We conclude with proposals for further studies of youth life stage transitions in Saudi Arabia, offer answers to our questions about 'How?', the role of families, and develop tentative conclusions about young Saudis' likely responses to their21stcentury circumstances.

The Research

Our new evidence is from interviews with 23 young adults, all aged between 25 and 35. This age group is not our definition of youth. The 25-35 age group was chosen because in Saudi Arabia, as in much of the present-day world, youth life stage transitions are often incomplete until individuals are in their late-20s or beyond. Adopting and operational sing a transition paradigm may be through a prospective study, following a cohort from childhood until their youth life stage transitions are complete, but this takes over a decade to produce final results. The alternative, that we adopt, is a retrospective study when a cohort's life stage transitions are complete or nearing completion, when individuals are asked to recall their successive steps on their life journeys following childhood. Our interviews were unstructured, Respondents were simply asked to tell their life stories, starting in their childhood families, then their education and their employment (if any). Twenty of the interviewees were married couples. This was because our interests as researchers encompassed family and housing as well as the education-to-work (or non-work) life stage transition on which we focus here. Although beyond the scope of this paper, our evidence enables us to explore interactions between education-to-work and family and housing life stage transitions.

The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. Husbands and wives were always interviewed separately by same-sex interviewers. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed then translated into English. Hence we can allow respondents to narrate episodes from their life stories in their own words. All respondents were interviewed twice, six months apart, in 2015 then again in 2016. The first interviews focused on education-to-work (if any) and family and housing histories. The second interviews clarified issues arising from the first interviews, and also asked about uses of old and new media, and each individual's hopes and expectations for his or her own future and that of their country. Domestic youth research in Saudi Arabia, as cited above, has typically involved interviews with samples of school or college students who have been asked about their ambitions. We asked not 'What do you want to do?' or 'What do you think about…?', but 'What did you do? then 'Why?', thereby exposing the practical everyday reasoning that had governed the agency that respondents were able to exercise.

Our respondents were an opportunity, but also a purposively selected, sample. They were divided in roughly equal numbers between residents in Jeddah and Mecca, both major cities in Saudi Arabia's western province. Jeddah is a Red Sea port and major commercial hub. Mecca is the holiest site in Islam, and tourism (by pilgrims) is the major local industry. These cities were chosen because they could be accessed from home by the fieldworkers, but the fieldwork was confined to cities because this is where around 80 percent of Saudis currently live. Most of the rest live in villages and less than one percent are still desert Bedouins. The respondents were then selected equally from those living in villas and in traditional dwellings. These are official categories in Saudi government housing statistics. Villas are typically modern, detached, spacious dwellings, able to accommodate live-in servants. Some are constructed so that two or more independent households from the same extended family can be accommodated, or a self-contained section may be rented to a tenant. The occupants of villas can be called 'middle class' though none of our respondents used this term. They were most likely to describe themselves and their families as 'modern' or enjoying 'good incomes'. Traditional dwellings are older, typically located in city centre districts. All the couples in traditional houses had lower incomes thanall the couples who occupied villas. As we shall see, they also had different occupations, educational and family backgrounds, but those in traditional houses cannot be described as 'working class' because in Saudi Arabia they are 'above' most of the foreigners who still comprise the majority of the workforce. The traditionally housed respondents were most likely to describe themselves as 'traditional' and 'hard working'. Families in traditional dwellings were usually closer to their village or desert origins than the villa dwellers. The parents of our traditionally housed respondents had often migrated into Jeddah or Mecca from rural settlements. Some respondents had spent their own childhoods in villages. The villa dwellers appeared to be a generation ahead in these respects.

All the couples had married social equals. Among those in traditional houses, this often meant marrying within the family. Several of these couples were cousins. Otherwise it meant marrying within the tribe. Among the villa dwellers it meant marriage to someone from a family of similar status and a person with a similar level of education. These were the modern ways of assessing socio-economic equivalence. Roughly a third of Saudis live in villas and a third occupy traditional dwellings. Most of the remainder live in modern apartments which can be regarded as a mid-status housing category. Some of the couples in traditional houses hoped to move into an apartment. None aspired to make the transition into a villa.

Our initial plan was to interview just 10 couples but then we discovered than none of the wives had ever been employed or even sought employment, We knew from official statistics that there had been a trend towards young Saudi women seeking employment, and also a rise in typical ages of first marriages with more women remaining single into their late-20s or 30s. We suspected that these were the same young women who were entering the labour market. Thus we added three single, employed 25-35 year old females to our sample. Like the couples, they were all from Jeddah or Mecca, but purposively selected so that they had left education at different levels (after lower secondary school at age 16, with a post-secondary vocational diploma, and with a university degree) and had entered different occupations. One was a beautician, another was a nurse and the third was a teacher.

Saudi Arabia

Our respondents' lives will remain incomprehensible without the Saudi context. The present-day Kingdom was created in 1932 by Britain who, along with France, had taken-over the administration of former Ottoman territories in the Middle-East. The Kingdom was created as, and remains, an absolute monarchy (see Lacey, 2010, for more historical background). The al-Sauds had been the main, but always disputed, rulers on the Arabian Peninsula since the 18th century. In 1932 the Kingdom's main asset, over which the region's Moslem tribes (including Persians) had fought for centuries, was guardianship of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, where the Holy Prophet preached. Oil was first discovered the 1938 and the first oil boom began, but it was the second oil boom that followed the formation of OPEC and quadrupling the world price of oil in the early 1970s, which led to the creation of modern Saudi Arabia. Vast wealth was poured into the ruling regime which set about modernizing the country. The population was drawn from villages and the desert into enlarged cities. Dwellings were connected to mains electricity, water and telephone lines. Modern education and health services were developed. A problem was that the resident Saudi population was too small (just four million in 1960) to perform all the work that the country could afford. The solution was to import foreigners and by 1980 around fourth-fifths of the workforce was non-Saudi. Only government administration and school education had to be kept in Saudi hands. Other jobs for Saudi males were created as senior professionals and managers in the private Saudi-owned companies that were established to undertake government contracts and other work that the modern Kingdom required. All Saudi males could thereby be employed on salaries that allowed them to support family households, and by the end of the 20th century Saudi households were able to enjoy the equivalent of Americans' standards of living. Needless to say, there are huge inequalities in both countries.

This modern Saudi Arabia did not require Saudi women to be employed outside their homes. Up to now this has been made possible only 'when necessary'. Interaction with males in workplaces has been permitted only 'when necessary'. These are not age old Saudi or Islamic customs. Women villagers and Bedouins did work, tending and marketing crops and animals, and the sexes were not segregated. However, it was feared (correctly given experience in Western countries) that in urban areas traditional family and community controls would loosen, and all kinds of deviance would become more common. In Saudi Arabia swaths of law relating to sex, dress, public behavior and family matters are ceded to religious courts and police. Any 'fornication' other than between a married woman and her husband is unlawful and the penalties can be draconian. This is the context in which it has been considered desirable for women to marry as soon as possible after puberty (there is no minimum age).

There has been public education in Saudi Arabia throughout the history of the Kingdom, but schooling for girls was actually prohibited until 1960. Since then education has been expanded for both sexes though none has ever been made compulsory. Our interviewees were born in the 1980s by when elementary and lower secondary education (up to age 15/16) had become virtually universal, and a fifth of males and a third of young women were entering universities (Ministry of Labour, 2015). Since then there has been further expansion. By 2014 two-thirds of both sexes were enrolling in higher education (Observatory

on Higher Education, 2014). The country was then spending 10 percent of GDP on education, the highest figure in the world (Arab News, 2013).

Education has been one occupation in which it has been necessary to employ Saudi women. All education, from elementary school to university, is sex segregated. Women are also needed in medical services where female Saudi patients may insist on being treated only by female staff. One of our employed single women was a nurse, another was a teacher, and the third worked in a beauty centre where the staff and clients were all females. Sex segregation of staff in education and beauty centres is possible, but health care is one field where some interaction is deemed 'necessary' because it is unrealistic to try to duplicate all medical specialties or accident and emergency care. Sex segregated offices have been created in some government departments, but most private businesses find it more convenient to employ males only.

We can illustrate from our interviews with villa dwellers and those in traditional housing, the relatively straight-forward life stage transitions that became normal during the latter decades of the 20th century. Our interviewees' lives also illustrate more difficult transitions which, we suggest, will become increasingly common in the 21st century Saudi context. The cases that we present below have been selected from the larger sample of 23 respondents to illustrate hitherto normal and the increasingly common 'difficult' transitions that are now being experienced by middle and lower class Saudis.

Education-to-work transitions have become increasingly difficult because by the end of the 20th century it was already impossible for the Saudi government to sustain its version of a youth guarantee: a decently paid government job for every Saudi male. The underlying problem was steep population growth which is continuing. Saudi women average 2.9 live births. The country's population has grown from four million in 1960 to approximately 30 million today (20 million Saudis and 10 million foreigners). Immigrants from other Moslem countries continue to be attracted by the higher salaries than are available in their home states. By the beginning of the 21st century Saudi Arabia's government offices were over-staffed despite allowing employees to retire in their fifties on generous pensions.

Labour supply has risen further as young women, especially women graduates, have sought employment. Around a third of 25-29 year old women are now economically active and a third of these are unemployed (Ministry of Labour, 2015). Graduate women want jobs because after completing secondary school then university they are reluctant to stay at home waiting for the right man. They know that a wait could last many years. Two-thirds of males now progress through higher education. They must establish themselves in careers, earn enough to support a family household, provide a dwelling and pay the costs of a wedding (dowry, celebrations, and gifts for female in-laws). Graduate women are not competing for men's jobs. Top female graduates from top Saudi universities seek government jobs. Nowadays their male counterparts prefer employment with multi-national corporations where the attractions include the chance to work and live abroad. Women graduates expect to earn only half as much as their male counterparts (Gulf Talent, 2011).

The Saudi government's initial (and continuing) response to the imbalance between a rapidly growing Saudi labour supply and labour demand (which is growing more slowly) has been to try to Saudise the workforce. This policy has enjoyed some, but limited, success (Jadwa Investment, 2016; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010; Ministry of Labour, 2012). The proportion of foreigners in the workforce declined

from around 80 percent in 1980 to 55 percent in 2014 (Ministry of Labour, 2015). Private sector businesses are currently required to have at least 10 percent of Saudis on their payrolls. The government's current target for the country is 75 percent. However, it is difficult to persuade private businesses to hire more Saudis. Foreigners are usually cheaper, work permits are of finite duration, and foreigners usually enter ready educated, trained and with relevant experience. According to the female nurse who we interviewed, even public hospitals prefer foreign nurses. Saudi men are unwilling to accept private sector jobs with inferior terms and conditions to those in government employment (Research and Consulting Institution, 2010).

Hence the recent emphasis in government policy on diversifying the economy and creating more jobs that Saudis will accept. This has become more urgent following the steep decline in global oil and gas prices in 2014 and 2015. Oil and gas formerly accounted for over 90 percent of government revenues. This has now fallen to just over 70 percent (Al-Durkheil, 2013; Elliott, 2015). The gap in state revenues is to be filled by import duties, reduced subsidies for domestic supplies of energy, and a value added tax (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Finance, 2015). These measures will reduce Saudis' standards of living. The government's preferred solution to the country's economic and the workforce's employment problems is to diversify. Initially this was expressed as building an unspecified type of knowledge economy, which became a cornerstone in a strategy for youth (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2011, 2013). Hence the expansion of higher education. Highly educated workers were to attract knowledge jobs. This has not worked. There are current plans to boost inward tourist numbers from 8 million to 30 million (Global Strategy Report: Economy – KSA, 2016). In 2016 the deputy crown prince (who became crown prince in 2017) visited Silicon Valley and tried to persuade high-tech entrepreneurs to base themselves in Saudi Arabia. Also in 2016 an agreement was reached with Six Flags, an American operator of amusement parks, to build facilities in Saudi Arabia. These attractions are supposed to make the Kingdom more attractive as a tourist destination, and divert the crowds from Mecca, as well as offering Saudis 'fun' in addition to television, shopping and occasional family celebrations. However, Saudi Arabia's economic and labour market problems will not be solved if profits from any new enterprises go abroad, and if the workforces are foreign. The most popular television channels in Saudi Arabia are owned by Saudis, but the broadcaster is based in Dubai and the owners live outside the country.

The evidence from our interviews suggests, first, that many young people are now having to accept inferior employment than was available for people with their backgrounds and qualifications in the past, and second, that the costs of the country's changed circumstances are being pushed down the socio-economic hierarchy.

Transitions Following Education: Graduate Husbands' Households

Omar and Nouhra

Omar (age 33 when interviewed) and Nouhra (30) were living in Jeddah in four self-contained rooms in the villa that belonged to Omar's father, a retired professor. Omar had a BA in business studies and an MA in finance from Manchester University (UK). The couple had married five years previously, just before Omar moved to Manchester. At the time of his interview Omar was employed in the stockbroking section of a bank. Nouhra had a BA in biology but had never tried to obtain a job. After graduation she had waited for her father to

Find the right man. At the time of their interviews the couple had two children and Nouhra had a series of complaints about her current life. The couple had only four rooms for themselves and their two children. She had no maid, and no car and driver for her own use. She was desperate for Omar to improve his salary ($3,200 a month) so that they could move into their own large, independent dwelling.

Omar spoke as follows. 'I think I am lucky because my childhood was happy. I lived in a stable family. In school I was not excellent but I was not very bad. Some days I did not go to school. Rather I played football with my friends. My father was a strict man. He always said, "You have to be a doctor like me teaching university students or a doctor in a hospital saving people's lives". That was something like a nightmare for me. I finished high school with a totally acceptable result, but not excellent, so my father was frustrated because I could not enter the medical faculty as he was planning. At that time I did not know what I should do, so I decided to follow my friends. Most were deciding to go to the business or engineering faculty, and some went abroad to the UK or USA to study. My father talked with me about business school and if I had a desire for this subject. He told me that he had found an opportunity for me to register as an undergraduate student in that school. That opportunity came with help from his friend who worked there. I was happy because some of my friends were already there. It was not my preferred area for a career.'

'After four years I graduated from business school with a C grade. This was great for me but for my dad it was different. He expected me to get A+. He wanted me to attend the same school as a postgraduate but I did not want that. I took a three month break from everything and went to the USA to visit my brother who was a student on a King Abdullah scholarship. I liked the lifestyle there so I decided to apply for a scholarship. This would make my dad happy and I would change my environment to the USA where you can have an open mind and an open life as well. My father was happy and he used his relationships in the ministry to speed up my application. Finally I received the answer: "Yes". But it was for a UK university not the USA. A huge number of Saudi students were in America and some had problems with racist groups, so the UK was the alternative choice. For me that was no problem. Anywhere was better than staying in Saudi.' At this point Omar's father decided that the son should marry so that he could be accompanied to Manchester by a wife: a necessary moral safeguard.

Like Omar, Nouhra was from a villa family and there had been a similar family expectation that she would go to university, but in Nouhra's case this was not with a subsequent career in mind. 'I lived in a good family. I saw how my father treated my mum so my dream was to get a husband similar to my father. I was number two among my three sisters. We were all girls so my dad was very affectionate. He had a good business so we had a housemaid and driver. My mum felt scared about us so she usually sent the housemaid with us to any place where we were going with the driver. I did not like studying but I had to get a BA so I tried my best to graduate from the biology faculty and managed a grade C. After that I stayed at home waiting my dream man. That man came quickly.'

Omar explained that, 'After graduation I returned to my country and got a job as a banker. My basic job is to deal with the financial stock market. My salary and financial benefits are good and can be increased, but I must work hard and focus on my career because this is very sensitive. Even though I live in my father's house, still the cost of living is very high - the requirements of the kids and Nouhra, phone bills, the requirements for social events and social participation in Saudi society. It has become a nightmare actually. Also I have got a

Car by monthly instalments. All that with a monthly salary of $3,200. It is very difficult. The price of everything goes up. The most important problems for me now are how to improve my level of income to be able to cover all our modern life requirements. And how can I make my wife understand that there is hard competition in my career. I need to cope with all this.'

All the villa husbands had life stories that resembled Omar's in several respects. Their fathers had held government jobs, sometimes moving into business after retirement. All the villa husbands had received useful career advice, and sometimes additional assistance, from their parents, usually their fathers. They had been advised in which university courses would open acceptable career prospects. After university they had all obtained jobs without encountering serious problems. Omar had the lowest salary ($3,200 a month). Fahad who had become a sales director ina retail chain was the best paid on $8,000 a month. Even Fahad felt that he needed to earn more. The other villa husbands were a medical doctor in a hospital that served the military, an architect who was working on the development of Mecca, and a secondary school-teacher who was already applying for headships. They all wanted to improve their incomes so that they could move into independent villas or larger villas, run two cars, employ servants, and participate socially in a way that matched their ambitions. They all wanted their children to be educated in private schools, and to be able to afford private health care. Public services were considered sub-standard. They were ambitious, but they all felt that they were making satisfactory career progress.

Jaber and Marem

Jaber's life story since finishing university was a stark contrast. He was the sole graduate husband that we interviewed among the couples in traditional houses. His father had been a Bedouin, but Jaber had been keen on languages at school and had graduated in Arabic languages at university in Jeddah. His father had been unable to offer any useful career advice. After graduation Jaber had hoped to become a teacher. It was only after applying that he discovered that he would need to take and pay for a two year post-graduate course in education, after which there would be no guarantee of a job. 'Oh my God. It was a very bad feeling. It took a long time until I applied again for any job suitable for someone with my qualification. I did not find such a job but there were administrative jobs, so I applied and got a job but under my educational level. No problem. I agreed because I wanted a job at that time. I started six years ago in this administrative job in the Ministry of Culture and Information. My starting salary was $1,067 whereas as a graduate I should have earned at least $1,600 and now even after six years I have a basic monthly salary of just $2,133.'

It is inevitable that the number of university graduates encountering Jaber's difficulties will have risen, and will continue to rise. This is because two-thirds of males, most of whom cannot be from villa families, are now becoming university graduates. They cannot all obtain what have hitherto been considered commensurate graduate jobs, salaries and the accompanying middle class lifestyle. Jaber was doing a job and earning a salary that someone from his father's cohort would have expected to be accessible with just secondary school qualifications. That said, at least Jaber had obtained a secure public sector job.

Transitions Following Education: Couples with Non-Graduate Husbands

Saad and Haila

Saad (26) and Haila (25) were both from families that had moved to Jeddah from the same tribal, Bedouin backgrounds. The couple were still childless. On marriage Haila had insisted on a separate (from Saad's family) home, and they were renting a two room traditional house for which they paid $2,700 a year.

Saad had lived in a big family. 'My father was married with two wives and had eight children. My mother was the second wife. She had one daughter and three sons and I was the youngest. I was so close to my mum; my dad was busy at his work. He worked as a soldier in the military and was able to achieve several upgrades before retirement. He divided his time between the two houses but usually we met together, sons and father, at the lunch table every day. The women, the two mums and their daughters, also met together. My father did not care about studying but always said to his sons, "You have to be real men and the military is the men's factory". I was too young to understand but when I grew up I realised what it meant, especially when three of my brothers joined the army. Although my mother was uneducated she was aware of the importance of education. She pushed us to study hard to get at least the secondary certificate.'

Saad had a straightforward transition from school-to-work because he decided to take his father's advice and follow what had become a family tradition of military service. He had remained single until he had established himself in his career and could afford to marry. 'After finishing secondary education I chose to join the military as my brothers did. Obtaining the job was not easy. There was lot of studying, training and practising. I applied, then nine months later I got a job as a policeman in the Department of Public Security in Jeddah City. We deal with anything that could threaten society and public safety. The salary is low ($1,200) but will be increased and I get a safety allowance as well. We have health insurance and we are supposed to get a housing allowance.'

The parents of couples in traditional housing had typically moved to Jeddah or Mecca from villages in the surrounding regions. Some fathers had joined the military, as in Saad's case. Others had begun by starting businesses, initially selling produce from their original home village regions. Those with any schooling had been able to obtain jobs in public administration. One father had become the manager of the main post office in Mecca. A hitherto normal school-to-work transition for sons of these fathers had been into a family business, or a low-level administrative post in the public sector. Mohamed had done both successively. He had left school to assist in the shop and bakery that his father and uncle ran. Then when cousins left school and the business could not support them all, Mohamed had applied successfully for an administrative job in the local prison where he earned $1,100 a month.

Some young wives in traditional houses had been to university: preferable to staying at home to wait for the right man. Both Saad and Mohamed had university educated wives. Eventually this had created a problem. At university the wives had met a wider circle of young women. This had whetted their consumer appetites. They knew other young married women whose husbands took them regularly for meals in restaurants, spent holidays in Dubai, and had better housing. Both Saad and Mohamed had wives who were keen to move into apartments, which meant that somehow their husbands needed to increase their incomes. However, both Saad and Mohamed had secure public sector jobs. Other couples in

traditional housing were in more difficult situations. As university graduates such as Jaber were forced further down into formerly non-graduate public sector jobs, lesser educated males were being forced to do what had hitherto been foreigners' jobs, or to work for foreigners' wages.

Sultan and Sarah

Sultan had been a rebel at school, missing classes and smoking cigarettes, which had led to a rupture in his relationship with his father who owned and ran a car and lorry repair garage. Sultan quit school with just a lower secondary certificate and went to live with an uncle. After several years the uncle negotiated reconciliation between Sultan and his father, and Sultan began to seek a job. 'Fortunately I found one as a security man at a big public hospital. The conditions were that the employee must be Saudi, have a secondary certificate, good health and be aged between 20 and 30. I applied and got the job. The salary was low when I started and is now only $666, with no health insurance. I work 10 hours daily from 8am to 1pm then from 5pm to 9pm with only one day off weekly. It is actually private sector. My youngest brother joined the training programme in the hospital where I am working. After nine months he got a job as laboratory technician with a very good salary, health insurance and annual rises. On the other hand, my work is under the umbrella of a private company which works as an "operating company" within the hospital. It is contracted by the Ministry of Health to undertake hospital cleaning, maintenance and security work. My work with this company is on a contract which can be ended at any time by the company. So the comparison is unfair between the two employment systems.' Sultan was among those who were paying the price of the Saudi government's drive to reduce its own spending on public services.

Khalid (age 34) had left school at age 16 and had begun work using his father's car (since replaced) as a taxi. This had been Khalid's main occupation ever since. He earned around $800 a month but was facing increasingly severe completion from taxi firms that operated new models and employed (cheap) foreign drivers. Khalid felt that the competition was unfair.

Single Employed Females

All the single employed females who we interviewed wanted to marry, and they all knew that their employment, which ideally they hoped to continue, was a handicap. Fatima had eight years' experience as a nurse in a public hospital. She had been promoted to senior nurse and was earning $3,200 a month. She knew that her salary, if she remained employed, would restrict the pool of potential husbands (who would insist on being the main earners), and in any case, her job was considered 'unclean', unsuitable for a respectable Saudi woman.

Eman, age 28, was managing a beauty salon which was co-owned by an aunt and a Lebanese partner. She earned just £1,300 a month. All but one of the other 25 employees in the beauty salon were foreign, and the sole Saudi beautician insisted on her job being officially described as 'administrator'. Hands-on beauty treatment, like nursing, was regarded as morally suspect.

Reem's teaching job was respectable, and her salary was $2,400 a month. She had graduated from university with an A grade in English language. She took, and her family paid for, the two-year post-graduate course to train as a teacher. Then Reem applied for jobs. Her family

lived in Mecca, but the only job that Reem was offered was in Taif, a two hour drive away. When interviewed Reem had spent six years in Taif, living in a rented apartment with two other female teachers who shared Reem's predicament. Throughout the six years Reem had been seeking a transfer to Mecca, and a husband. Her problems are likely to have included her family's lack of wasta. Her father had been a tourist guide. Also, Reem was a Bukhari, the name in Saudi Arabia given to Moslems who migrated from Central Asia following the Bolshevik Revolution. Reem knew from previous failed 'negotiations' on her behalf that her ethnic status was a handicap. When interviewed, Reem's mother had promised to search for a husband within the Bukhari community.

Fatima, Eman and Reem had been relatively fortunate: they had obtained career jobs. Nowadays young Saudi women who seek employment must join long queues for the limited number of jobs that are open to women. They are most likely to quit the queues if, before receiving job offers, the 'right man' comes along.

Faith and Materialism

Most young Saudis are not highly religious though some, three among our 23 interviewees, were religious conservatives, but even they had materialist aspirations. In Saudi Arabia nationality and religion are ascribed statuses. Faith is not a choice or option. Apostasy is a capital offence. So Saudis are faithful, but this does not mean that they feel obliged to pray five times a day (incompatible with a modern job and lifestyle) or to attend a mosque for Friday prayers. It is just that they live in a country where the regulation of much behaviour is in the hands of clerics and their courts, but this does not suppress aneveryday consumerist culture. ShelinaJan mohamed (2016) claims that modern young Moslems see no contradiction between remaining faithful and embracing modernity and its consumerism. Our interviewees offered plentiful evidence of this.They wanted to dress fashionably. They enjoyed music. Young women wanted to purchase beauty products and treatments. All 23 of the young adults who we interviewed had a smartphone, usually a latest model iPhone of Samsung Galaxy.

At the time of our interviews there were no bars, cinemas, theatres or concerts in Saudi Arabia. The first music concerts were held in 2017, and cinemas were scheduled to open in 2018. Since 2017 women have been admitted to sports events that were formerly open only to male spectators (in segregated areas for women and families). Amusement parks have also opened: some days for males only, and other days for women and families. In 2017 it was announced that during 2018 the ban on women driving would be lifted.Since 1990 Saudis have been able to receive satellite television channels. The most popular channels offer entertainment and are funded by advertising. Young Saudis will welcome more fun. Despite the recent liberalisation, the most exciting out-of-home free time activity for women is still shopping in air conditioned malls.The young Saudis who we interviewed loved to spend and they all wanted higher incomes.

Here the country and its rulers confront a serious problem. Fewer of its young people's aspirations are going to be fulfilled. Fun costs money. The life stage transitions that became normal in the late-20th century that led to lifestyles funded by husbands' government jobs or private sector jobs which, like government jobs for graduates, opened the door to a villa with servants lifestyle, were not too good to be true, but are now proving too good to last.Jaber, Sultan, Khalid and their wives were among the young Saudis who had become early victims of the 'new times'.

Conclusions

We can now offer provisional answers (pending larger-scale studies of representative samples) to the questions with which we commenced.How do young Saudis obtain employment? Basically, they apply (always online nowadays for government jobs) for employment for which they are educationally qualified. Then they wait for an answer which can take anything up to a year, or never arrive. If an application fails, the process must be repeated. All but five of our interviewees who had sought, and eventually obtained jobs, had entered government jobs. The exceptions were Omar, the banker, Talal the architect, Fahad,a sales director in a retail chain, Eman who managed an aunt's beauty centre, and Khalid the taxi driver.

Families had always played a crucial role. This began with parents' (usually fathers') educational expectations. Fathers who ran private businesses would sometimes find work for sons while the latter waited for government jobs. Getting ahead in traditional families always meant getting a government job which paid a decent, reliable salary followed by a pension. The value of families' economic and cultural capital varied. Some families could afford private education. The crucial cultural capital was knowledge of the value of education to different levels in different subjects. Some could use wasta to accelerate processes, and to influence the outcomes of applications for courses, scholarships and jobs.

Are young Saudis content with these processes and outcomes? We encountered widespread frustration. This occurred while 'waiting'. Wait hood appears to have become a normal life stage between youth and full adulthood in Saudi Arabia, as has happened throughout North Africa, and post-2008 has become common in Southern Europe (Dillon and Yousef, 2009). All the males who we interviewed, even the highest paid, felt that they needed to earn more. Young Saudi women's employment opportunities are narrow: far too narrow to accommodate the enlarged flows of university graduates. Also, they need permission from their fathers, who are normally their guardians, to apply for any course or job. Those who apply find that suitable government jobs are heavily over-subscribed. They face long waits. Youth unemployment in Saudi Arabia appears accounted for mainly by waiting.

In our view, politicisation of these discontents is unlikely. We found no evidence of this. This is not just because political parties, movements and demonstrations are illegal. Worldwide experience shows that waiting can be normalised, as can inferior terms and conditions of employment to those formerly associated with given levels of education. Problems and searches for solutions can be, and normally are, privatised. Individuals and their families accept responsibility. That said, the government's efforts to Saudise the workforce and diversify the economy indicate sensitivity to young people's and their families' discontents.

One non-provisional conclusion is that using a transitions paradigm adds to knowledge about the youth life stage in Saudi Arabia. This should be sufficient academic justification for further, larger-scale, preferably mixed methods research. Also, longitudinal studies of successive youth cohorts will enable changes over time to be monitored more usefully forSaudi policy-makers than the current batches of official statistics.

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