

Representations of Saudi Male's Guardianship System and Women's Freedom to Travel in Western Newspapers: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

There has been a tremendous interest in the Western media concerning the status of women in Saudi Arabia. The recent reform in women's rights and guardianship system has Western media gone into motion frenzy. A few research has been done on the representation of Saudi women in Arabic newspapers, but there is a scarce of research in Western English newspapers to date. This article exercises a critical discourse analysis approach to investigate the language used in three famous Western newspapers to uncover the hidden ideologies behind the representation of Saudi women's guardianship system. To this end, van Dijk's (2004) analytical framework was employed to reveal the underlying ideologies of six reports by *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *Toronto Star*. The findings show that the three newspapers have expressed the notion of "otherness" in their descriptions of Saudi Arabia and Saudi women. Furthermore, the newspapers have shared the employment of consensus and negative other-presentation to portray Saudi women as being oppressed and subordinate.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, guardianship system, otherness, Saudi Arabia, Saudi women, van Dijk

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Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach that aims to study discourse to investigate how text and speech establish, reproduce, and withstand social power abuse, dominance, and inequality within the social and political context (van Dijk, 2005). CDA is an interdisciplinary and issue-oriented research approach that encompasses a set of paths with different epistemological presumptions and theoretical patterns (Wodak, 2001). van Dijk (2005) emphasizes that unlike other approaches in discourse studies, CDA is not an orientation, doctrine or specialty, instead it seeks to provide a different mode or perspective of theorizing, analysis and application. Subjects such as racism, gender disparity, sexism, xenophobia, colonialism, employment, war, nuclear weapons, and power are the focus of the majority of CDA analysts (Fowler 1991 as cited in Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019, p.5). In fact, to express the potential indoctrinating perspectives, accurately and covertly, critical discourse analysts aim to expose how texts are built (Batstone, 1995).

Unlike other discourse approaches, CDA is critical which implies that it locates texts in their broader social, economic, historical, cognitive, and political settings, and critically investigates how texts relate to each other and how the current social practices establish texts and vice-versa, instead of examining the apparent linguistic properties of texts (Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019). "A critical analysis should not remain descriptive and neutral: the interests guiding such an analysis are aimed at uncovering injustice, inequality, taking sides with the powerless and suppressed" (Wodak, 1989, p.14). According to Fairclough (1992), being "critical" signifies that it is a type of study and investigation dedicated to improve individuals' lives and aims to connect semiosis with different types of social practices. Wodak (2002, p. 9) states that "critical could be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social context, taking a political stance explicitly, and having a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research." However, CDA is not exclusively associated with "negative" semiosis critique in social life, instead it "positively" examines and reconnoiters forms of semiosis which are new and resistant (Fairclough, 1992). In some occasions, the analysis may be aimed toward a positive outcome, such as the texts written in the 1960s during the anti-racial discrimination movements in the United States (Bloor & Bloor, 2007).

CDA and Ideology

Crucial to CDA is the term "ideology", which has been defined as socio-cognitively shared belief systems that embrace "axiomatic" representations of a group's social identity (van Dijk, 2006). Fairclough (1995) situates ideology in the structures and conditions that establish past and present events as well as events themselves. For Fairclough, the physical form of ideology is language and that language envelopes ideology. Usually, ideologies are expressed and reproduced in discourse, although, they are not exclusive to discourse since they can also be expressed in other forms and actions (van Dijk, 1995). The principal aim of CDA is to expose the hidden

ideologies of different types in discourse (Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019). Furthermore, Wodak (2002) notes that CDA is concerned with the means whereby language mediates ideology in various social institutions.

Media and Newspapers

The news media has a significant role in people's daily lives all over the world (Rugh, 1979). One of the most widely read and trustworthy sources of news are newspapers (Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019). The primary purpose of newspapers is, of course, to report news. They cater a variety of news on politics, business, sports, and others to make a profit (Tahir, 2013). Rugh (2004) mentions five tasks that media can provide: Reporting generally exciting information and news, providing comments and interpretations on events along with opinions and perspectives, upholding social norms and cultural conscious by delivering societal and cultural information, promoting advertisements by giving specialized information, and entertaining the audience.

Nevertheless, each newspaper conveys a particular influence of a stereotyped image which establishes the image of the sender in the minds of the readers when reading the text (Bednarek, 2006). Reah (2002) argues that the news of newspapers is delivered with an "ideological spin" that affects readers' judgments regarding the events being reported and thus, makes it challenging to the readers to take independent decisions based on their viewpoints. Furthermore, Ghannam (2012, p.3) states that "the language used in newspapers can potentially be used to influence and manipulate readers." Usually, newspapers, as institutions, propagate the policies and opinions of those who own or control them (Tahir, 2013). Ideologies are not embedded only in news stories; rather, headlines can engage readers as well. In fact, readers concern headlines more than news articles themselves (Mahmood et al. 2011).

Unlike the rest of the newspaper, the language of headlines has an abundance of distinctive vocabulary and is usually characterized by short and more dramatic sentences (Taiwo, 2004). According to Reah (2002), headlines have the ability to encapsulate a story and provide the whole picture of current news to the reader. Moreover, Stonecipher et al. (1981) list five purposes that headlines serve: they (a) brighten the look of the page, (b) quickly summarize the news, (c) classify the importance of news by size, (d) attract readers to read the story, and (e) indicate the personality of the newspaper. Therefore, newspapers are a great source of imposing power in society (Mahmood et al. 2011).

Women's Conditions and the Strides Made in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Over the last 50 years, Saudi women's position has developed significantly in various respects (Elyas et al., 2020). They have witnessed tremendous growth of their activities in several domains; for instance, there has been an increase of opportunities for women in terms of education and employment due to social

development (Elyas et al., 2020). Education is the domain in which Saudi women have experienced the most improvement (Almunajjed, 1997). New educational institutions have been established for females and also, fields such as, engineering, media studies, sciences, and several vocational courses have been made available for them (Quamar, 2013). “Currently, women account for 58 percent of all Saudi university students, and this rate is expected to increase with the opening of new colleges and universities across the Kingdom” (Islam, 2014, p.72).

In fact, Saudi women have rights that men do not possess; for example, the first faculty of art and design was exclusively established for women at Princess Noura Bint Abdelrahman University in 2010 (Al-Senan et al., 2018). In terms of employment, according to Princess Dima Bint Turki Bin Abdul Aziz, (2007) cited in Adham, (2012), Saudi women hold jobs as deans of colleges and universities, CEOs of banks, IT specialists as well as medical doctors, artists, photographers, film-makers, journalists, authors, and fashion designers. Furthermore, in the public sector, Saudi women gained access to hold positions in the Ministry of Justice, airports and land-border crossings (Ho, 2019).

Saudi women have also experienced a great improvement in terms of their social rights. In 2011, King Abdullah proclaimed that women would be nominated to Majlis al-Shura “consultative council” and they would be able to vote in the 2015 municipal elections (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Quamar, 2013). Further, in 2018, King Salman had announced a decree that lifts the ban on women driving and permitted females to apply for driving licenses.

Significance of the Study

Language can never be neutral but always carries the speaker’s attitudes and assumptions toward any subject. “The language of the news plays a major part in the construction of what has been referred to as the social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckman, 1976 as cited in Conboy, 2007, p.5). According to Said (1978), orientalism refers to the way that Westerners view eastern societies as primitive and inferior and thus, label them as “others.” Therefore, this study attempts to investigate this biased attitude to shed light on such negative “otherness” indications and find the motivations behind such representation.

Literature Review

Generally, any media system necessarily reacts to and mirrors its environment, especially the current political realities, economic, cultural and other factors (Rugh, 2004). No doubt that newspapers have a powerful influence over their readers. In fact, they choose what attitudes and values that the readers should accept (Nordlund, 2003). After all, the main goal of newspapers is to create readers and not news (Conboy, 2010). Due to the low economic grounds of newspapers, many of them seek financial aid from various governmental and private structures, and admission of the political significance of the press has promoted sponsorship (Rugh, 2004).

Many discourse analysts have turned their focus on newspapers to make people more mindful of how language can be manipulated as well as to reveal biased language usage (Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019).

For instance, Mahfouz (2013) has examined the police news story framing published in two Egyptian newspapers, *Al Gomhuria* and *Al-Dostour* before January 25 Revolution. He exercised a CDA approach to analyze the linguistic features and the possible ideologies behind the news stories. The study revealed that there were political and ideological interests behind each representation. While *Al Gomhuria* justified the abuse of power by the police, *Al-Dostour* condemned such behavior. In other words, each of the newspapers has manipulated the news stories according to the beliefs of its readers. Another study was executed by Mahmood et al. (2011), which investigated the news headlines of the budget of Pakistan 2011–2012 in 37 headlines from local English and Urdu, and international newspapers. The results showed that there were hidden ideologies behind the statements of editors. Each of the three types of newspapers presented the news in accordance with its readers' assumptions.

Tahir (2013) explored the representation of Muslims in an article published in *The Washington Post* regarding the protests against an offensive cartoon about the Prophet of Islam Mohammed (PBUH) in European newspapers. He utilized van Dijk's (2004) framework to analyze the ideologies underlying texts of ingroup and outgroup presentation. The analysis revealed that Muslims had been treated negatively as "others" by a diversity of semantic devices. In contrast, those with opinions similar to the author were presented positively. On a similar vein, Poorebrahim and Zarei (2013) studied the relationship between language and ideology to uncover the ways in which Islam is portrayed in Western newspapers. Data analysis showed that manipulation of headlines and a diversity of linguistic selections were used to frequently stereotype Islam and negatively represent Muslims.

Amer (2017) examined texts in four international newspapers to analyze how social actors are being represented in media coverage of the Gaza war 2008–2009. He claims that the political orientations of the newspapers have affected their news telling of Gaza war in the way that credit was given to Israeli agency in achieving ceasefire rather than to Palestinian agency. Further, Elyas and Al-Zahrani (2019) published a paper that investigates front-page headlines of the Saudi newspaper *Okaz*. They exercised Fairclough's (1992) three-Dimensional Model to examine the textual and discursive features of *Okaz*'s headlines. The findings displayed an intelligent use of language in lexical morphology, syntax, and semantics. Also, the study shows how the discursive features of headlines signify a deep conception of the Saudi society and its culture.

Gökhan (2016) applied critical discourse analysis to analyze the ideologies of newspapers from different cultures. He compared the views of European and Turkish newspapers regarding the Syrian refugees coming to Europe. The study's findings reveal that while the Turkish newspapers described the tragedy of the refugees and what they have been through, European newspapers only considered the risks that the refugees might bring to Europe. Eissa (2015) explored ideological bases of polarized discourse in the reports of two websites, namely, *Egypt Independent* and *Ikhwanweb*. A critical discourse analysis framework was

employed to analyze three interrelated events: the issuing of a constitutional declaration by the Egyptian President, the aftermath clashes outside the presidential palace, and the issue of the Egyptian Draft Constitution. The analysis shows that both of the websites created “we” versus “them” dichotomy and that each website sought to marginalize the other.

Moreover, Ghannam (2012) aimed at analyzing the grammatical features of an event reported in six Lebanese newspapers with different ideologies to find out whether the freedom of speech of the newspapers is affected by the ideology behind the text. She found that language signifies hidden ideologies by reporting and reforming the articles in different ways. Further, Ghannam maintains that language is a tool which can be manipulated on purpose to meet the concealed interpretation of the newspapers. Sivandi and Dowlatabadi (2016) compared the two English newspapers *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* regarding the negotiations of Iran’s nuclear program. Eight reports related to the issue were collected from the newspapers’ websites and analyzed based on the exercised discursive strategies by having recourse to the discursive micro and macro strategies proposed by van Dijk (2000). The results show that each newspaper sought to positively represent its perspective and negatively reflect others’.

Research Design

Reflection and Positionality of the Researchers

This section discusses epistemic reflexivity and explains how the researchers adhered to a rationalist philosophy of knowledge at the outset of the research concerning the current topic. Reflection, in the context of research is a tool for intellectual development, which allows the researcher to exhibit positionality and to increase the level of learning gained from past experience (Moussa-Inaty, 2015). Reflection is seen as a form of individual cognitive thinking with the purpose to generate meanings from an experience and/or accumulative knowledge based on one’s own meanings. The present research adopts Rogers (2001) definition of reflection which combines seven theories on reflection. These include four elements that are useful when reflecting. Rogers (2001, p.41) defines:

Reflection as a cognitive and affective process or activity that (1) requires active engagement on the part of the individual; (2) is triggered by an unusual or perplexing situation or experience; (3) involves examining one’s responses, beliefs, and premises in light of the situation at hand; and (4) results in integration of the new understanding into one’s experience.

Bolton (1970, as cited in Snyder, 2019) developed a model that focuses on description (what), implications (so what), and change (now what) involving three phases: sensing (which refers to the experience), transforming, (which refers to sense and generating meaning from experience), and acting (which refers to applying learning in a new case). Boud et al. (1985) contribute to the reflective

writing literature by explaining how an individual can evaluate their experiences for the purpose of learning for future action. Their contribution led to the DIEP model which focuses on describing experience, interpretation, evaluation and planning (Regmi & Naidoo, 2013). The DIEP model is similar to Gibbs's (1988) reflective cycle framework which focuses on descriptions, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions, and action planning (Toros & Medar, 2015). Johns (2009) introduced a different model named structured reflection. It focuses on the "look in and lookout". The look in describes the writer's thoughts and emotions. The lookout describes the situation surrounding the writer's thoughts and includes aesthetics, personal ethics, empirics, and reflexivity. Reflection in this model refers to connecting past experience with how it can be changed if the experience is repeated.

Understanding the differences between reflection, reflexivity, and positionality is central to the researchers' understanding in this article. Reflexivity is different from reflection as Bolton (2010) argues that reflexivity is an approach to determine the person's own influences such as attitude, beliefs, values, and culture in relation to a context such as research. Learning about these models of reflections and the difference between reflection and reflexivity allows the researchers to determine a reflection model and reflexive approach that is suitable for a specific context. An example of the reflexivity approach is given by Dean (2017) who argues that reflexivity is an approach to understand research influences and positionality from macro and micro reflexivity. Positionality refers to the researchers' identity and role based on a context that shapes the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Macro reflexivity is reflexive and this approach seeks to understand how the adopted research method affects the data and theory adopted for analysis. Micro reflexivity is a unique set of personal beliefs (Dean, 2017). A major benefit of understanding the meaning of reflection and theories of how to be reflective led the researchers to reflect, in this article, on their positionality based on the theories adopted in the present research. This approach, hence, will enable the researchers to exhibit and learn from the personal influences and ethics as Saudi males accustomed by the Saudi/Arabic ideologies governed in day-to-day lives. This positionality and reflective approach seem appropriate when using van Dijk's analytical framework to unpack hidden and perceived attitude and perceptions of otherness.

Data Collection and Sampling

The data of this study were gathered from six reports of three different newspapers' websites. Two reports were collected from *The Washington Post*, a well-known American newspaper with interest in national politics. Another two reports were taken from *The Guardian*, a daily famous British newspaper. The remaining two reports were gathered from *Toronto Star*, a Canadian newspaper which is rated as the highest circulated newspaper in that country. The authors have targeted these newspapers in particular because they are considered as some of the most famous newspapers in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and globally as well. The reports were issued between August 1 2019 and August 4 2019. They were

collected according to the timeframe of the issuing of the decree. These reports were reactions to the release of the royal decree that removes the male guardianship system.

The authors used purposeful sampling in their research. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). The samples for qualitative inquiry are generally assumed to be selected purposefully to yield cases that are “information rich” (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2011). As Patton (2002, p.240) explains, “The purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis. Each of the strata would constitute a fairly homogeneous sample.” Hence, the authors used two distinct sampling by three uniquely different newspapers, which are ideologically infused, to fit the purpose of and the topic being researched.

Data Analysis

van Dijk (2004, p. 734) has established an analytical framework to investigate the tacit ideologies of texts in relation to ingroup and outgroup representation at the level of the meaning. He states, “Ideologies often have a polarized structure, reflecting competing or conflicting group membership and categorization in ingroups and outgroups.” van Dijk’s framework provides general categories of ideological discourse analysis. They are listed ahead along with their brief descriptions which are adopted from van Dijk, 2004 and Tahir, 2013.

- **Actor description:** the way an actor is described relies on our ideologies;
- **Authority:** supporting a claim by quoting authorities’ statements;
- **Burden:** presenting premises that are taken for granted;
- **Categorizations:** assigning people with different groups;
- **Comparison:** comparing ingroups and outgroups either positively or negatively;
- **Consensus:** establishing a general agreement;
- **Counterfactuals:** assuming what would not happen;
- **Disclaimers:** saying something positive then denying;
- **Euphemism:** substituting negative expressions;
- **Evidentiality:** providing proof to support statements;
- **Example/illustration:** using short stories or vignettes as examples;
- **Generalization:** making generalizations to create prejudices;
- **Hyperbole:** is a semantic device for willful exaggeration of meaning;
- **Implication:** implicitly express a meaning;
- **Irony:** saying something to indicate the opposite;
- **Lexicalization:** choosing certain words to negatively indicate the other;
- **Metaphor:** making abstract, complex, unfamiliar, new or emotional meanings more concrete for persuasion;

- **National self-glorification:** praising someone's nation in order to indicate him or her positively;
- **Negative other-presentation:** categorizing people into in-and-outgroups or differentiating between good or bad outgroups;
- **Norm expression:** explicitly expressing norm statements;
- **Number game:** use statistics to make a claim more plausible;
- **Polarization us–them categorization:** assign positive attributes to “us” and negative attributes to “them”;
- **Populism:** to speak in the name of people;
- **Positive self-presentation:** emphasizing the positive attributes of one's group;
- **Presupposition:** to assume the truth of some proposition without being stated;
- **Vagueness:** make meanings ambiguous; and
- **Victimization:** tell negative stories about outgroup members.

Results and Discussion

Before we commence the analysis, it should be noted that van Dijk's 27 categories provided above may not be found in all situations. Therefore, we are going to highlight the ones which exist in or relevant for the selected articles.

The Washington Post

Actor Description

Ideologies affect the way people describe each other. Generally, we represent our group members positively or at least in an unbiased manner, while characterizing those who do not belong to us negatively (van Dijk, 2004). At the same time, we lessen our group's negative descriptions and stress those of others (van Dijk, 2004). The newspaper in question has described Saudi women as being oppressed and subordinate to men, which signifies the notion of “otherness.” “The kingdom's male guardianship system forces women to get permission from men for a wide range of activity, consigning women to second-class status.” (Editorial, 2019).

Authority

Quoting authorities is a famous political strategy for persuading readers and gaining their trust. The cited authorities usually depend on the ideologies of authors (van Dijk, 2004). Authorities can be organizations, experts or moral leaders (van Dijk, 2004). The news article has quoted the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the Saudi embassy to establish credibility. “Saudi Arabia's new ambassador to the United States, as well as Saudi media office, suggested that women would no longer be required a male guardian permission” (Fahim, 2019).

“The new travel regulations, which were approved by King Salman this week, will take effect at the end of August, according to an information sheet released by the Saudi Embassy in Washington” (Fahim, 2019). “The Saudi ambassador to Washington, Princess Reema bint Bandar said on Twitter” (Editorial, 2019).

Consensus

Consensus refers to a mutual agreement upon a subject. *The Washington Post* has exercised this political strategy to describe the reasons behind women empowerment in Saudi Arabia. The newspaper indicates that the lifting of the guardianship system is not for the sake of gender equality but instead as a response to international pressure. “The shift comes as Saudi Arabia faces growing international scrutiny for its human rights record” (Fahim, 2019).

Disclaimers

Disclaimers are combinations of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 2004). First, they express positive attitudes and then they deny them. The newspaper had first presented the positive amendments that Saudi government had taken but then, highlighted what had not been done. “Saudi Arabia loosens its male guardianship system—but not nearly enough” (Editorial, 2019).

The kingdom has published decrees allowing women to apply for passports on an equal basis with men, register the births of their children and gain new protections against employment discrimination. But these steps inevitably also call attention to what is not being done to ease the kingdom’s draconian practices (Editorial, 2019).

“The changes, though, do not allow women to marry or to leave prison without the permission of a male relative” (Fahim, 2019).

Disclaimers

Statements or points are more plausible when they are supported by evidences (van Dijk, 2004). These can be references to authority figures, institutions, witnesses or sources of intelligence (van Dijk, 2004). The news article has focused on Saudi Arabia and its ambassador as evidence for the newspaper’s claims. “Saudi Arabia said Friday that it would allow women to travel without the permission of a male relative, loosening a system that rights advocates say has long relegated Saudi women to second-class citizenship, dependent on male approval for their most important life decisions” (Fahim, 2019). “Saudi Arabia’s new ambassador to the United States, as well as a Saudi media office, suggested that women would no longer be required to obtain a male guardian’s permission to travel” (Fahim, 2019). “(T)he ambassador, Princess Reema bint Bandar, wrote

on Twitter. A Saudi government fact sheet on the changes said they grant freedom of travel to women 21 and older” (Fahim, 2019). ““This is a huge step forward, but much remains for women’s equality”, Sarah Leah Whitson, director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, wrote on Twitter” (Fahim, 2019).

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a form of deliberate extravagance of meaning. Hyperbolic terms are used to describe others’ negative actions or to mitigate our bad actions (van Dijk, 2004). In the examples below, the word “onerous” is an intentional exaggeration of meaning which personifies how oppressive is the guardianship system. Similarly, “draconian” is another instance of hyperbole and negative otherness. “Saudi Arabia’s latest step to ease the onerous male guardianship system” (Editorial, 2019). “But these steps inevitably also call attention to what is not being done to ease the kingdom’s draconian practices” (Editorial, 2019).

Lexicalization

Lexicalization is used to convey underlying ideas and beliefs in particular lexical terms (van Dijk, 2004). Depending on the role, goals, viewpoints or opinions of the sender, similar meanings can be delivered in different words (van Dijk, 2004). The verb “loosens” has been intentionally used to indicate dissatisfaction toward Saudi Arabia’ new amendments and to signify that male guardianship is still in place. “Saudi Arabia loosens its male guardianship system” (Editorial, 2019).

Metaphor

Metaphors are used to convince the audience by personifying abstract, unfamiliar, complex, new or emotional ideas to make them more concrete (van Dijk, 2004). Here, the newspaper used the metaphor “butterfly effect” to indicate how the humble efforts of women’s rights activists have been able to create change. “Butterfly effect produces big changes” (Fahim, 2019).

Negative Other-presentation

The differentiation between ingroups and outgroups or between good or bad outgroups is inspired by ideologically based applications and values (van Dijk, 2004). Saudi Arabia is being represented negatively as abusive and far away from respect for human rights. “The Saudi kingdom is a dictatorship” (Editorial, 2019). “A kingdom that has a long way to go toward respect for human dignity” (Editorial, 2019).

The Guardian

Actor Description

Similarly, to *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* has also described Saudi women as being inferior and shackled by the male guardianship system. “(D)ismantling controls that have made women second-class citizens in their own country” (Graham-Harrison, 2019). “Women, unlike men, still cannot pass on citizenship to their children and cannot provide consent for their children to marry” (Graham-Harrison, 2019).

Comparison

Here, *The Guardian* uses comparison as a strategy to compare outgroups. It shows that the Saudi government has been the only Muslim government that imposed such a strict guardianship system to reflect the concept of “others” and extremism. “Throughout Islamic history, no other government has enforced such a pervasive guardianship system” (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

Consensus

The Guardian also (through the use of consensus) indicates that the dismantling of the guardianship system was in response to international criticism and not as a move toward gender equality. “Friday’s move comes at a time of increased international scrutiny of women’s status in Saudi Arabia” (Graham-Harrison, 2019).

Disclaimers

The removal of Saudi Arabia’s guardianship system was at first positively represented but later on denied through exceptions. “Saudi women can now travel without consent - but this progress is fragile” (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

(A)uthorities have announced that women can be granted passports and travel abroad without the consent of their male guardians. They can also register a birth, marriage or divorce. But they still cannot marry, or leave prison or a domestic violence shelter without the consent of their male guardians (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

Negative Other-presentation

Saudi women were represented as being shackled and forced by the guardianship system. Further, the reputation of Saudi Arabia was described negatively as being in a retrogression manner. “The bizarre guardianship system is pervasive in Saudi Arabia. It stipulates that women are not legal persons, and consequently, they have to be represented by male relatives to work, marry, study, travel, and seek

medical care” (Al-Rasheed, 2019). “Saudi Arabia’s reputation is reaching an unprecedented low ebb” (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

Victimization

According to the article, a number of Saudi women have sacrificed their freedom in the way of freeing women. They are depicted as victims of Saudi Arabia and male guardianship.

Many Saudi women who pushed the agenda to be treated as equal citizens won’t be able to celebrate the recent announcement as many are either in prison – such as Lujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi and Nasima al-Sada – or banned from travel, like Aziza al-Yousef, Hatoon al-Fassi, and Eman al-Nafjan. Others have fled the country and sought asylum in Canada, Australia, the US and Europe, among them Hala al-Dosari, Saffaa Hassanein and Omaira al-Najjar (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

Toronto Star

Authority

Similar to *The Washington Post*, *Toronto Star* seeks credibility by making use of Saudi newspapers’ announcements in particular. In addition, it quotes Amnesty International to create some sort of consensus against the kingdom. “The kingdom’s official gazette tweeted that amendments to travel rules, the labor law and civil status law would be included in its next edition” (Nereim, 2019). “The latest changes remove language that dictates a woman’s place of residence is with her husband and will allow women to report marriages, divorces and births similarly to men, Okaz reported”(Nereim, 2019). “The decrees, issued Wednesday, were made public before dawn Friday in the kingdom’s official weekly Um al-Qura gazette. The government said Friday the new rules would be in effect by the end of August” (Batrawy, 2019). “Amnesty International said Friday a lot remains to be done for women’s rights in Saudi Arabia but that the new laws could ease the guardianship system” (Batrawy, 2019). “Saudi newspaper Arab News noted that in the segment on travel, the new decree were written in gender-neutral language rather than outright stating that women no longer need male consent” (Batrawy, 2019).

Comparison

The newspaper compares Saudi Arabia with other Muslim countries to concentrate on the notion of “otherness” and to show that unlike other Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia is an extremist. “Other Muslim countries, however, don’t have similar restrictions on women’s travel” (Batrawy, 2019).

Consensus

This newspaper also believes that the removal of Saudi women's guardianship system is due to international criticism; "... ending a restriction that came under heavy international criticism" (Nereim, 2019). "The kingdom's legal system has long been criticized because it treated adult women as minors, requiring they have a man's consent to obtain a passport or travel abroad" (Batrawy, 2019).

Evidentiality

Women rights activists are being quoted to support the case against the guardianship system. "A thousand congratulations to our girls, and no tears are shed for those who opposed this in order to protect their interests and authority," Hamsa Sonosi, a Saudi female writer and researcher, wrote on Twitter. "From my heart, I'm rejoicing for the situation of many I know who suffer subjugation because of this issue" (Nereim, 2019).

Lexicalization

The use of the verb "loosen" here is to indicate the limitedness of Saudi authority toward freeing women from the shackles of the guardianship system. "Saudi Arabia on Friday published new laws that loosen restrictions on women" (Batrawy, 2019).

Negative Other-presentation

Again, the newspaper provides insights that represent the notion of "otherness" by presenting a wrong idea on what the Saudi society might be like. "However, a new policy on travel would likely frustrate some conservative Saudis and lead to clashes within families" (Nereim, 2019).

Victimization

The newspaper uses the strategy of victimization to show the western dissatisfaction with the new amendments by reporting victims of the guardianship system. "Many of the women who fought for an end to guardianship are currently banned from travel or are behind bars, including Loujain Al-Hathoul, an activist who turned 30 in jail this week" (Nereim, 2019).

Discussion

This article sought to uncover the hidden ideologies behind the representations of Western newspapers on Saudi male's guardianship system and women's rights.

The three newspapers have utilized similar ideologies through various political and semantic strategies to describe Saudi Arabia, Saudi women, and the male guardianship system. For example, *The Washington Post* has exercised actor description, authority, consensus, disclaimers, evidentiality, hyperbole, lexicalization, metaphor, and negative other-presentation to manipulate its language use to reflect the notion of “othering.” *The Guardian*, on the other hand, has employed fewer strategies, including actor description, comparison, consensus, disclaimers, negative other-presentation, and victimization to describe the position of Saudi women and society. Last but not least, *Toronto Star* has used authority, comparison, consensus, evidentiality, lexicalization, negative other-presentation, and victimization to depict the status of Saudi women. The three newspapers have shared the use of consensus, disclaimers, and negative other-presentation.

The articles seem to be quoting Saudi authorities and newspapers exclusively. While *The Washington Post* has quoted mostly the Saudi US ambassador and the Saudi embassy, *Toronto Star* has focused on the two most famous Saudi newspapers *Okaz* and *Saudi Gazette*. On the other hand, *The Guardian* and *Toronto Star* have denoted Saudi Arabia as an extremist by comparing the Saudi government to other Islamic states throughout history. Furthermore, they have exercised the strategy of victimization by reporting a number of guardianship system’s victims to stimulate the readers’ empathy and to show dissatisfaction toward the system of guardianship. The three newspapers have also concentrated on the use of disclaimers in which they provide positive claims about Saudi women’s rights and then deny them, which is the most valid indicator of the newspapers’ tacit ideologies against Saudi Arabia.

The Washington Post has been the most biased newspaper, while *The Guardian* was the most neutral one when compared to the other two newspapers. The three newspapers believed that Saudi women are being mistreated and oppressed by the guardianship system. Furthermore, the notion of “otherness” was not absent in their descriptions. The three newspapers have been feverishly trying to represent Saudi Arabia as being oppressive and inhuman in its treatment of women and the so-called “loosening” of guardianship system has only been viewed as a response to international demands and not as a step toward gender equality. In fact, the whole Saudi community was viewed negatively as “others” through the use of “negative other-presentation” and “consensus.” The reasons and motivations behind this negative “othering” of Saudi Arabia are still ambiguous. Moreover, some of the headlines have negatively personified the nature of the guardianship system and Saudi Arabia as being drastic.

The findings of this article indicate that both Saudi women and Saudi Arabia were viewed as “others” through the use of various linguistic choices which is in line with what Tahir (2013) has argued. Further, the results also agree with Poorebrahim and Zarei’s (2013) findings in which the manipulation of headlines was intentionally used to stereotype the subjects. Indeed, there was a purposeful language manipulation which goes in line with the hidden interpretations of the news articles as maintained by Ghannam (2012). Moreover, the study’s findings show resemblance to the findings of Amer (2017) in which the newspapers’ news telling was affected by their political orientations.

What is ironic is that the newspapers are criticizing Saudi Arabia for taking positive measures in favor of women, which signifies their negative ideologies against the kingdom. Instead of welcoming and encouraging these new laws, the three newspapers have only considered the empty half of the glass, highlighting what the Saudi authorities did not do and questioning the motivations behind such decrees. It worth mentioning that the tone of mockery can be easily detected in the two reports of *The Washington Post* more than the other two newspapers, which reflects their negative prejudice of Saudi Arabia as being uncivil and savage.

Conclusion

The current paper has adopted a critical discourse analysis approach to explore the language of three Western newspapers based on the 27 criteria suggested by van Dijk's analytical framework. Consequently, two reports were collected from each newspaper to investigate the depiction of Saudi women regarding the lifting of the guardianship system. The study has shown that the three newspapers have manipulated their language use in accordance with their tacit ideologies. To this end, actor description, authority, comparison, consensus, disclaimers, evidentiality, hyperbole, lexicalization metaphor, negative other-presentation, and victimization were utilized to describe Saudi Arabia as being abusive and Saudi women as being subordinate to men. Although the three newspapers varied in the degree of offense, all of them viewed Saudi Arabia and Saudi women as "others."

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