

# **Employment Transience: An Approach to Examine Gender Equality within Organisations in the Changing Saudi Labour Market**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following great success of the Saudi vision 2030 increasing women numbers in employment, this paper attempts to provide an approach to analyse how gender (in)equality can be analysed within the unprecedentedly changing socio-institutional context of Saudi Arabia. This timely study investigates how new patterns of gendered (in)equalities develop within three major sectors: multinational enterprises, semi-government organisations and state-owned companies. A case study approach was adopted with a unique aspect of the chosen sample being the emphasis on methodological intersectionality that captured the hitherto under-considered dimensions of tribe alongside nationality.

Drawing on from Islamic feminism, the analysis and line with previous literature (Mobaraki and Söderfeldt, 2010; Alhejji et al., 2018; Syed et al., 2018; Tschirhart, 2014; Sian et al., 2020), highlights that societal traditions and misinterpretation of religious texts (in a Muslim majority country) can emerge as barriers for gender equality. However, unintended consequences for equality policies could rather facilitate misinterpretations of how equality should be exercised. Particularly, this study underlines how the sense of employment transience prompts organisational malpractices, triggered by the sense of gendered uncertainty vis-à-vis socio-institutional protection. I define employment transience in this particular context as ‘the situation where gendered employment experience, directly or indirectly, discourages the sense of permanence of employment’. Saudi women, hindered by weak social networks, limited organisational options and the sense of temporary state protection, turn to create/rely on fragile personal networks for organisational protection as an alternative.

‘Employment transience’ challenges prevailing views in literature (AlAhmadi, 2011; Khalaf et al., 2015) by revealing how inequalities shape gendered employment, especially at times of change. It critiques prevailing arguments that the rentier welfare approach provides relatively secure jobs, and that increasing the level of female participation is an efficient tool to tackle gender inequality.

This study comes to fill the gap in organisational equality literature, incorporating gender equality in the Saudi labour market, where the examination of the Saudi context lacks consideration of the unique socio-institutional characteristics (Salem & Yount, 2019; Hanieh, 2011).

**Keywords:** Gender equality, Islamic feminism, Saudi Arabia, gendered employment.