

Day 2: November 20, 2023

Session 1: Youth and Families



Mark C. Thompson

Title: The Family Role of Young Saudi Men in Transforming Kingdom: Case Studies from the Regions

Abstract:

Women's empowerment, widespread entertainment, and a breakdown of gender segregation: in much of international reporting and academic literature, these exemplify the 'new Saudi Arabia' freed from the more restrictive practices of the past. However, away from the 'hoopla' surrounding these high-profile issues, how are recent social changes reflected in Saudi family life outside of the main urban centres' of Riyadh, Jeddah, and the Dammam-Khobar-Dhahran conurbation? To what extent have social norms and accepted practices related to family life in the 'old' Saudi Arabia remained? Furthermore, does a homogeneous 'new' Saudi Arabia exist, i.e., are recent societal transformations reflected in family life regardless of geographic or socioeconomic background? Finally, how do young Saudi men in provincial towns comprehend social change as related to their own families? This paper argues that a great deal of the academic literature and reporting on social change in Saudi Arabia falls into the trap of using generalizations to describe what are in fact, highly complex social issues, and/or focuses on the views of urban elites. Yet, to what extent do family priorities manifest themselves differently depending on geographic location and socioeconomic background. To discuss young Saudi male perceptions of these questions (and others), this paper includes three case studies: the views of young men living in Wadi Ad Dawasir, southern Riyadh Province, Al-Mithnab in Qassim Province, and Abu Arish in Jazan Province. Thus, the aim of this paper is to allow the voices of young men from outside the cities, and away from the urban elites, to be heard on this critically important topic.

Bio:

Dr. Mark C. Thompson's principal research areas are Saudi socioeconomic development and societal transformation. His books include "Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society" (IB Tauris, 2014) and "Being Young Male and Saudi: Identity and Politics in a Globalized Kingdom" (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Mark is also the co-editor (with Dr. Neil Quilliam) of "Policy-Making in the GCC: State, Citizens and Institutions" (Bloomsbury IB Tauris 2017), "Governance and Domestic Policy Making in



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Saudi Arabia: Transforming Society, Economics, Politics, and Culture” (Bloomsbury IB Tauris 2022), and the forthcoming “Saudi Youth Policy Relevance: Dilemmas, Challenges and Opportunities” (Springer). Mark is currently writing his second Cambridge University Press book “Youth Issues and Everyday Life in Saudi Arabia”.
