

A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power, and Reform in Saudi Arabia

Amelie Le Renard

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The cities of Saudi Arabia are among the most gender segregated in the world. In recent years the Saudi government has felt increasing international pressure to offer greater roles for women in society. Implicit in these calls for reform, however, is an assumption that the only "real" society is male society. Little consideration has been given to the rapidly evolving activities within women's spaces. This book joins young urban women in their daily lives—in the workplace, on the female university campus, at the mall—to show how these women are transforming Saudi cities from within and creating their own urban, professional, consumerist lifestyles.

As young Saudi women are emerging as an increasingly visible social group, they are shaping new social norms. Their shared urban spaces offer women the opportunity to shed certain constraints and imagine themselves in new roles. But to feel included in this peer group, women must adhere to new constraints: to be sophisticated, fashionable, feminine, and modern. The position of "other" women—poor, rural, or non-Saudi women—is increasingly marginalized. While young urban women may embody the image of a "reformed" Saudi nation, the reform project ultimately remains incomplete, drawing new hierarchies and lines of exclusion among women.



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