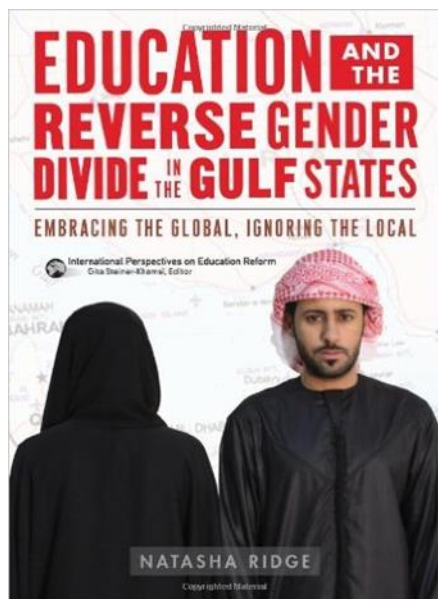


## Book Review

### **Embracing the Global, Ignoring the Local in the Persian Gulf**

## “Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States” by Natasha Ridge

By Olga De Jesus



In this groundbreaking work, *Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States*, Natasha Ridge provides a close examination of the relationship between gender and education in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and reveals that women’s participation and achievement in education is rapidly outpacing that of men’s. Ridge, referring to this situation as a “reverse gender divide,” examines the roots and causes of this imbalance, as well as its implications for the future. The author further describes how GCC countries, in their desire to be perceived as modern nation-states, have enacted and embraced educational policies that leave no space for local policymakers to

acknowledge young male students’ deficits and challenges. In addition to the important implications for educational policy and practice, the author also explores wider social and political issues, such as the impact on the local workforce and the region’s future sustainable development.

The 168-page book consists of seven chapters. In chapter 1, Ridge provides an overview of the development of mass education in each Gulf state. This provides the historical, cultural, and political background necessary to make sense of the present educational situation and gender dynamics. In chapter 2, Ridge presents the rise of young females in the region as the result of a widespread and rapid expansion of educational opportunities. Chapter 3 focusses on the region’s pursuit of modernity and how it plays a role in enabling the current gender divide. Chapter 4 focusses on young males and their educational path since the discovery of oil in the region. The oil issue significantly complicates both the modernization and gender agendas. However, according to Ridge, the nationalization agenda has come into greater focus in the last 10 years. Chapter 5 examines how efforts made in these countries to create jobs for their nationals and expand their workforce have created a lack of encouragement for males in education. Chapter 6 divulges and questions the purpose of education in a society where the demand for work takes away from the

value of education for most males. Ridge concludes her book in chapter 7 with a discussion about the continuing relevance of gender in the region, particularly for education and labor markets. Ridge states that “by taking an inclusive yet critical look at gender; it is possible to reimagine the Gulf as a place where both men and women can enjoy unique comparative advantages” (p. 8).

Overall, the book’s data and research leads to the obvious conclusion that the gender pendulum debate is very much up for renewal. Throughout the book, Ridge stresses the importance of seeing gender in a more serious way, as there are distractions that can derail observers from the fact that one half of the society is facing challenges with educational success and longevity. The book’s implications have the very real byproduct of retaining males in the education system that will lead to reducing their temptation to disconnect from their communities and be led into radical religious wars, drugs, and other rebellious acts.

**“Education and the Reverse Gender Divide in the Gulf States: Embracing the Global, Ignoring the Local.”** By Natasha Ridge. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8077-5561-7

#### **About the Author**

**Natasha Ridge** is the Executive Director of the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research. She holds a Doctorate of Education with a specialization in International Education Policy from Columbia University, New York. Her research focuses on secondary education in the GCC and examines topics such as boys' education, teacher quality, and the privatization of education.

#### **About the Reviewer**

**Olga De Jesus**, Ed.D., is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Mercy College. She has been an educator for 20 years with expertise in bilingual and special education. She is an active member of the New York State Association of Bilingual Educators (NYSABE) and is on the NYSED committee designated to establish the standards for the New York State Seal of Bi-Literacy Initiative. Her most recent publication, *English Language Learners: International Undergraduate English Language Learners' Perception of Distance Learning*, has gained international interest. She has also presented in Austria and has currently been invited to be a member of the Oxford Round Table Conference at Oxford University in England.