

**Evaluating the Representations of Identity Options and  
Cultural Elements in English Language Textbooks used in  
Saudi Arabia**

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## **Statement of Candidate**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled ‘Evaluating the Representations of Identity Options and Cultural Elements in English Language Textbooks used in Saudi Arabia’ has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution and all usage of sources has been duly referenced.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SELDP	Saudi English Language Development Project
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

## Abstract

Given the importance of teaching language learners cultural identities and culture along with language to enhance their cultural awareness and communicative competence, this thesis evaluates six textbooks from the *Lift off* series to examine their representations of culture and cultural identities in the imagined communities offered to Saudi learners of English in the intermediate stage (Grades 7-9). Data were collected from pictures, reading passages and dialogues. Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework was used for analyzing the data. The textbooks contain two clearly delineated imagined communities, one of Saudi characters and the other of foreign characters. These were examined for gender, occupational identities, ethnicity, nationality and religious affiliation. In addition, the cultural content ascribed to both the source culture (Saudi culture) and the target culture ('Western' culture) was examined. The findings reveal that the representation of Saudi characters is accurate in terms of identity options but that there is oversimplification, misrepresentation and imbalance in the representations of foreign characters. In addition, the findings show that the content of these textbooks focuses on representations of Saudi and Islamic cultures, i.e. the source culture and religion of Saudi learners. By contrast, the textbooks introduce simplistic representations of Western culture(s). The identity representations and cultural content in the textbooks under examination can thus be described as 'Saudi-centric'. These oversimplifications and misrepresentations of foreign characters and foreign cultures may have a negative impact on learners' motivation and may also lead to weak English competence. Thus, this research has implications for textbook design and suggests that a broader range of identity options of non-Saudi people and cultures should be included in English language teaching materials.



# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1.1 Overview**

This chapter provides an outline of this study of representations of identity and culture in Saudi Arabian English textbooks. It starts by introducing the research problem and discussing why the current research study is needed. It then provides a background to the Saudi context and describes the Saudi system of education in general and English language education in particular. The chapter ends with an explanation of the organization of the subsequent chapters.

## **1.2 Introduction**

Recent studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) confirm the strong relationship between language learning, culture and identity (e.g. Cheng, 2012; Norton, 2000; Aguilar, 2007; Byram, 2012). They argue that a language cannot be learned effectively without learning the culture and cultural identities of its native speakers. Learning language alone, divorced from its culture, denies language learners the opportunity to gain “insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system necessary to build up the cultural competence which is required for appropriate use of language” (Alsamani, 2014, p. 144). In addition, learning a language without learning about the cultural identities of its native speakers – including discourses around facets such as race, ethnicity, religion and gender – limits the access of language learners to interactional opportunities with other users of that language because “target language speakers may simply refuse to interact with L2 users, perceived as incompetent communicators” (Pavlenko, 2000, p. 91). Moreover, a lack of cultural competence and interactional opportunities may lead to feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability that have negative impacts on language learners through reducing their achievement in the target language (Pavlenko, 2000; and Norton Peirce, 1995). Most recent studies, therefore, suggest that more attention should be given to teaching language learners about both the target culture and their

own culture (called the ‘source culture’) by including both in language teaching materials. This would enable language learners to achieve greater communicative competence through understanding the culture of the target language and its speakers while raising their awareness of their own culture and cultural identities (Alsamani, 2014; Cheng, 2013; Shradakova and Pavlenko, 2004; Baker, 2012).

Of all language teaching materials, language textbooks are considered the primary tool for providing knowledge in the classroom (Peled-Elhanan, 2012). They play an important role in leading teachers and learners through a curriculum, informing them of where to start and what will come next. Textbooks teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are not only a source of linguistic knowledge but are also considered the main resource for learning different cultural aspects of English (Bahrami, 2015). Thus, textbooks that give a well-considered representation of the language’s cultural elements will increase in the learners’ cultural awareness and improve their performance in language learning, whereas misrepresentation, oversimplification or bias in representation may affect the learners’ achievements and communicative competence. This is problematic, especially as “[i]n recent years, serious concerns have been expressed by the Saudi Arabian government and educationists about the low level of achievement in English among students in schools and universities” (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015, p. 38) and many Saudi students graduate from secondary schools with weak English competence (Alhawsawi, 2013; Rajab, 2013). Although the Saudi government is doing its best, English language teaching and learning needs more development (Al-Johani, 2009). It is therefore necessary to evaluate English language textbooks for the effectiveness, including the effectiveness of their representations of the target culture.

A number of researchers have attempted to identify the reasons behind the low levels of Saudi learners’ English competence. Some of them attribute it to their language teachers; for example, some language teachers depend on using Arabic to teach English (Alhawsawi, 2013) and some do not actively encourage students to learn English (Al-Johani, 2009). Other researchers believe the reasons relate to the learners themselves. For example, many students rely on memorization, which is considered a poor learning strategy (Almutairi, 2008). Another reason given is that students lack practice in English in social environments outside the classroom because

Arabic is the official language of the region and is the language of communication among all Saudi citizens; even foreigners try to learn Arabic in order to be understood (Alqahtani, 2011). However, among these reasons, there is no reference in the literature to the effect of textbooks and their representations on learners' achievements in English learning, even though these have been found to play a significant role in empowering or disempowering students' language learning in other contexts (Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004).

To the best of my knowledge, very little is known about the representations of cultural identity and culture within the "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) of the English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia, especially within the new textbooks recently adopted by Saudi schools. This study aims to fill that gap by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to evaluate six textbooks from the *Lift off* series used for teaching English to Saudi intermediate level students. This thesis will investigate the textbooks' representations of cultural identity and culture in two imagined communities, the imagined Saudi community, which is positioned as the students' source culture, and the imagined foreign community, as the target culture.

### **1.3 An Outline of the Saudi Context**

Islam, as the official religion of Saudi Arabia, dominates Saudi culture, customs and beliefs and is the core of Saudi education (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015). At all educational stages, from primary schools to universities, the Saudi Ministry of Education draws heavily on Islam and Islamic teachings in its policies and practices. For example, the gender segregation required by Islamic teachings is still practiced for both teachers and learners at all stages of education. However, this segregation does not create differences in the treatment of males and females in Islam or in education. Saudi female education is a major interest of the Saudi government, as can be seen by the number of schools and universities for Saudi female students and by the number of scholarships that have been granted for them to study at universities abroad (Alshammri, 2015).

EFL is taught in many countries, including Saudi Arabia. Crystal (2003) states that “English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language – in over 100 countries ... and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools” (p. 5). Teaching the English language has become compulsory in Saudi education because it is seen as a modern, globalized language with importance in economic and other fields (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). However, compulsory English language education in Saudi Arabia is not uncontroversial (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). In particular, there are concerns that foreign ideologies will enter the country through teaching English (Al-Brashi, 2003, as cited in Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). For instance, a Wahhabi Sheikh has issued a fatwa (a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law) warning Muslims not to learn English or use it in their speech because English is “the language of disbelievers” (Al-Brashi, 2003). Mahboob and Elyas (2014) note that resistance to English teaching in Saudi Arabia “contributes to a shift in the language to suit local beliefs and practices” (p. 128). The government of Saudi Arabia is therefore engaged in a careful balancing act between supporting universal English teaching because of its global economic importance, and national concerns about the negative cultural effects resulting from English language teaching.

Textbooks are the main teaching resource in Saudi EFL classrooms. The selection of English language textbooks is controlled by the Saudi Ministry of Education; teachers and learners have no power to decide which textbooks they will use (Al Jumiah, 2016). Language teachers are limited to conveying what is presented in the textbooks and mediating the learners’ understanding. Thus, examining English language textbooks used in Saudi schools is important to show how the Saudi Ministry of Education strikes a balance between teaching English while upholding the local religion (Islam) and the source culture (Saudi culture).

#### **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two (the literature review) critically reviews the principal theories and studies relevant to the current study. The literature establishes the importance of language textbooks and their evaluation, ideology and

power and their role in language education and in shaping the content of language textbooks, and the representations in language textbooks of imagined communities, identities and culture. Chapter Two will conclude by identifying a gap in the literature, namely the need to examine identity options and the cultural elements of the source and target communities imagined in language textbooks, particularly in contemporary English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Three describes the research methods. It starts by discussing the six textbooks examined in this study, and then provides a detailed description of the material used in these books. Following this, it explains the methodological approach of CDA by focussing on Fairclough's (1995) model as the main theoretical framework used for analyzing the data in this study. The chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of this study.

Chapter Four reports the findings relevant to the first research question regarding the representations of identity options in the textbooks' Saudi and foreign imagined communities. This chapter shows that there is good representation of identity options of Saudi characters, in that they are diverse and well-considered, but that this is offset by oversimplification, misrepresentation and gender imbalance in the representations of foreign characters in the imagined communities in the textbooks.

Chapter Five reports findings and presents a discussion relevant to the second research question concerning the representation of culture in the source and target cultures. This chapter uncovers a focus on the representation of the source culture and local religion in the textbooks while there is misrepresentation and oversimplifications in terms of the target culture.

Finally, the Conclusions in Chapter Six provide a summary of the research findings and critically discuss some implications of these findings. Implications include potential negative effects of the representations described earlier on language learners, in terms of their cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. These implications lead to recommendations directed to the Saudi Ministry of Education, as the authority responsible for the production of the textbooks under examination, to introduce English language textbooks that provide Saudi learners with better representations of identity options and the cultural elements of

both Saudi and foreign imagined communities. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for further research, such as to examine English language textbooks used for other educational stages in Saudi Arabia, to use different methodological approaches, and to investigate the perceptions of the actual users of the language textbooks under study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter will establish the need to extend the existing literature with a study aimed at evaluating the representations of cultural identities and culture within the imagined communities in English language textbooks used in Saudi education to examine critically their effects on cultural awareness and the communicative competence of the learners. The broad research problem is motivated by low levels of English language competence among Saudi learners despite universal English language education in Saudi Arabia, as discussed in Chapter One. To gain an understanding of the state of the art in language textbook evaluation with a focus on identity and culture, this chapter reviews literatures related to the present study in five sections. It begins with a review of the importance of textbooks in the EFL classroom (Section 2.2). This is followed by a review of hegemony and ideology in language textbooks (Section 2.3). Section 2.4 then moves on to review research in language textbooks evaluation. The next two sections review research on representations of learner and speaker identities and cultures in the imagined communities of the source and target cultures in language textbooks (2.5 and 2.6). The chapter closes by specifying the research gap and the research questions emerging from that gap.

### **2.2 The Importance of Textbooks in the EFL Classroom**

Crossley and Murby (1994, p. 100) define textbooks as “a standard work on a particular subject designed for classroom use with appropriate vocabulary, illustrations, student exercises and teacher aids”. Textbooks have paramount importance as part of the system of education and as a teaching material used in the classroom. Regarding the important role of textbooks in the EFL classroom, Mares (2003, p. 130) states that textbooks “give cohesion to the language teaching and learning process by providing direction, support and specific language based activities aimed at offering classroom practice for students”. In addition, Cortazzi and Jin

(1999, as cited in Mohamed, 2014) argue for the importance of textbooks, stating that textbooks can play the role of the teacher in the EFL classroom and can also be trainers, maps, authorities and instruments for ideologies. Moreover, Dendrinos (1992, p. 131) states that

The textbook is considered by both the students and teachers who use it as the authority which determines what is to be learnt and how ... the foreign language textbook especially carries an additional authority: the authority of the writer who is a native or native-like speaker.

Thus, the impact of textbooks is not only on English learners, but also on those English teachers who use them in the classroom, especially teachers who have difficulty critically evaluating the authority of a textbook because they are not very familiar with countries where English is used as a native language or do not know whether that which is represented in a textbook is factual.

### **2.3 Hegemony and Ideology in Language Textbooks**

The two concepts, “hegemony” and “ideology”, are related closely to each other. Mohamed (2014, p. 55) defines hegemony as “power and domination in the domains of economics, politics, cultural life and ideology within a certain society or across societies”. Fairclough (1995, p. 219) states that hegemony refers to “power [which] is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion, through ideology rather than through physical force”. In this regard, hegemony achieves the ambitions of a certain social group and it arises from widely shared ideologies, which are “the ideas, beliefs, principles and values that a person has” (Gee, 1990, p. 3).

The relationship between these two concepts, language and education is strong. This is because “language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology” (Fairclough, 1995, p.73). Regarding education, Tajima (2011) states that there is no neutral schooling where schooling aims to introduce certain ideologies and social powers in favor of a certain group of people who are dominant. Therefore, language textbooks as an educational instrument and means for teaching language are



not free from ideologies that serve the interests of certain groups' domination over others. Apple (1990) states that ideology in language textbooks is promoted through the manipulation of knowledge, for example choices regarding which knowledge is presented or omitted. This manipulation may be employed in different texts (written and spoken) and in images and may have positive or negative impacts, or both (Mohamed, 2014). Therefore, language textbooks are not only an important source for conveying subject knowledge but also an important source for conveying interested beliefs and principles underlying that knowledge. Consequently, it is desirable to evaluate language textbooks not only for their content but also for the impact their underlying beliefs have on their effectiveness in conveying knowledge to language learners.

## **2.4 Evaluating Language Textbooks**

The process of learning and teaching English will be affected negatively if there is a lack of well-designed books that meet the needs of EFL or English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and help promote their ability to acquire a second/foreign language. Nowadays, although large numbers of textbooks are published around the world, as Tomlinson (2008, p. 3) argues, “many ELT materials currently make a significant contribution to the failure of many learners of English as a second, foreign or other language to even acquire basic competence in English”. Dendrinos (1992, p. 35) states that the main reason behind this failure is that “the ultimate objective of [textbook publishers] is commercial success”. Choosing good textbooks that are beneficial for teachers, learners and the educational environment is therefore increasingly difficult, although important.

Evaluating the content of language textbooks to determine their effectiveness for teaching and learning is therefore also important. In the field of applied linguistics, there are a number of definitions of the term “evaluation”. One of these definitions comes from Lynch (1996, p. 2), who defines evaluation as “the systematic attempt to gather information in order to make judgments or decisions”. Focusing specifically on evaluating textbooks, Bin Obaid (2016, p. 235) states that “[t]he evaluation of textbooks seeks to identify any weaknesses and strengths of textbooks and help in the

selection process of a textbook with the scope to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive ones”.

Thus, evaluating the content of textbooks as a source for transferring knowledge and ideologies is needed because it helps in providing information regarding whether or not the course content is effective for learning and teaching processes. Evaluating the imagined communities represented in a textbook, which form part of the content of that textbook, is one important element because well-considered representation of imagined communities in language textbooks affects language learners positively (Cortez, 2008). However, oversimplification or misrepresentation or bias in the representations of these imagined communities may “lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, frustration, offence, and conflict, as well as to resistance from students in cases where their own linguistic and cultural values come into conflict with those imposed on them by the texts” (Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004, p. 28). As this study aims to evaluate the imagined communities in language textbooks in terms of the representations of culture and cultural identities and how the ideologies may affect these representations, the following sections will review existing research specifically about imagined identities and their representations in textbooks, as well as cultural representations.

## **2.5 Imagined Communities and Identities in Language Textbooks**

The concept of “imagined community” was first proposed by Anderson (1983) to explain how nationalism and nation-states are created. Anderson argues that a nation is considered an imagined community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991, p. 5). Accordingly, a nation is an imagined community constructed socially by people who see themselves as part of it.

Appadurai (1996) reports that Anderson’s concept of imagined community has been used in many works, especially in the fields of education and globalization. One of the key works using the term “imagined communities” in education studies is

(Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger state that the process of learning is a social practice. They realize that there are different types of membership and not all members participate in communities in similar ways. Some members try to be central members, while others remain marginal or occasional members. In her later work, Wenger (1998) creates a bridge between imagined communities and communities of practice, proposing that there are three ways of belonging to a community: imagination; engagement; and alignment. Engagement is locally-linked participation with other members, whilst alignment is the way in which we position our different actions with other processes to achieve higher aims. Wenger's use of the term "imagination" is similar to Anderson's use. According to Anderson, imagination is a process of constructing images of people and their communities, and this is related to how people understand their participation in larger social constructs.

In the field of second language learning, Norton (2000) adopts Wenger's theory of imagination in her study on immigrant women in Canada who were language students. She argues that these students' imagined communities did not match the teachers' curriculum, and this resulted in non-participation and failure to learn. She found that the students had different imagined communities that were not accessible to their language teachers. For this reason, Norton refers to the importance of tying the notion of "imagined communities" to identity in the field of second language learning by using the word "investment" instead of "motivation". She states that "a learner's imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context" (Norton, 2001, p. 166).

Norton's deployment of the notion of the imagined community serves to enhance the literature's understanding of the strong connection between second language learning and identity. Pavlenko (2002) states that language plays an important role as a site for constructing identities by and in discourses. Further, Cortez (2008, p. 26) shows that "in poststructuralist thought, identities are seen as constructed by discourses, which in turn provide the means of expression of these particular identities". Therefore, individuals may place themselves or be placed in different subject positions – such as age, social class, gender and so on – according to the performance of the discourses. However, these positions may not be stable

because “individuals may be collaborating in as well as resisting their own positioning and are continuously involved in the processes of producing and positioning selves and others” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 284).

Studies of identity and how it is constructed in language textbooks constitute a relatively new direction in the field of applied linguistics (e.g. Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004; Pavlenko, 2002; Norton, 2000), although the direction was heralded earlier by Porreca (1984). Representation of gender identity in textbooks must be considered the most prominent topic of study in this emerging field. Many studies in the literature conducted on gender identity in different contexts have shown that there is a gender imbalance in language textbooks. One of the earliest such study was conducted by Porreca (1984), who analyzed 15 ESL textbooks that were used in schools in the United States, focusing on gender representations in images, texts, noun frequency, occupations, adjectives and “firstness” (i.e. who comes first in a list). She found that sexism was present in ESL textbooks, stating that “although females comprise slightly over half the population of the United States, they are represented only half as often as males in both text and illustration” (Porreca, 1984, p. 718).

More recently, Shteivi (2003) investigated how gender was represented with regard to traditional male and female roles in 96 textbooks in Jordan. He finds that males dominated public roles and females were only represented in traditional roles such as teaching but not in other professional sectors. Similarly, Ansary and Babaii (2003) investigate gender representation in two EFL textbooks used in Iranian secondary schools and their results show that there was low visibility of women compared with men. In addition, all of the conversational topics were dominated by men. Moreover, men dominated the professional occupations represented in the Iranian textbooks (teachers, engineers, scientists and professors), whereas women were only represented as wives and mothers.

This gendered hierarchy of the identities represented in textbooks is not limited to any particular region of the world; Yang (2004) examines gender representation in three EFL textbooks used in Chinese elementary schools and finds that the representations of males were more positive compared to females. She argues that such stereotypes may affect the learning process negatively. Kobia (2009) investigates EFL textbooks that were used in Kenya. The results again show that characters of

“male gender outnumber the female gender in usage of characters portrayed in illustrations, photographs, names and titles used to refer to the genders” (Kobia, 2009, p.57). In yet another study, Barton and Sakwa (2012) examine EFL textbooks that are used in secondary schools in Uganda. By using both quantitative and qualitative methods, they find that the role of women in these textbooks is understated compared to the role of men.

In sum, studies from a range of international contexts have found significant a gender bias in EFL textbooks, where men are consistently represented either as the default person or even as superior to women.

Studies have also been conducted to examine other aspects of social identity. One example of such a study was conducted by Talburt and Stewart (1999), on African-American students who studied in Spain. One of the participants in the study was critical of her Spanish textbooks because they ignored race, and this omission affected her experiences in Spain.

Introducing a new analytical method for studying the identity options represented in second and foreign language textbooks, Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004) use CDA to study the identity options imagined for EFL learners in two Russian textbooks, including gender, ethnicity, race, class, religious affiliation, sexuality and disability options. Their methodology is based on Fairclough’s (1995) framework, which joins cultural and social structures and the properties of the text. In their study, Shardakova and Pavlenko examine which identities of learners and speakers are depicted in the texts and which ones are missing or remain unimaginable for the students. The findings show that American learners are depicted as white, middle-class, educated and able-bodied men of the international elite, whereas “American women, African-American, Asian, Latino, gay, lesbian, disabled or working class individuals” (Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004, p. 33) are not depicted. In addition, the findings show that Russian speakers are depicted as white, middle-class people speaking standard Russian. However, these identity options do not represent Black Russians, Russian Jews or ethnic minorities who speak Russian. Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004) point out that their study demonstrates that textbooks might include biases, oversimplifications and stereotypes that negatively affect learners.

Thus, the representation of a range of imagined identity options in language textbooks is important. This is because the representation of more than one option for identity within the imagined communities of both language learners and speakers of the target language in a language textbook helps in enhancing the level of cultural communicative competence of language learners. However, there are limited studies that examine these options in the literature, so more attention should be given to examining the representation of these options in language textbooks used in different contexts. As the representations of cultural identities, amongst other identities, in language textbooks are important, and given culture is considered an integral part of the language, the representation of culture also needs to be considered.

## **2.6 Culture and Its Representation in Language Textbooks**

The concept of culture has been explained in numerous ways. Merrill (1969) states that there are more than 160 definitions of the word “culture”. Different definitions of culture arise due to the complexity of the concept. Hall (1997 as cited in Mohamed, 2014, p. 2) points out that “‘culture’ is one of the most difficult concepts in the human and the social sciences”.

Regarding the different definitions of culture, Robinson (1988) defines culture as a group of meanings and systems found in complex systems. Kramsch (1998, p. 10) says that culture is “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings”. Culture is also defined as “a prevalent set of customs, habits and values shared by a particular population”, including “both visible aspects – food, clothing, buildings, etc.; and invisible ones – thoughts, knowledge, attitudes etc.” (Alsamani, 2014, p. 144).

Culture and language are closely related. Byrne (1980) states that language and culture are interwoven and it is difficult for anyone to separate them. Lotman and Uspensky (1978, p. 213) argued that “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language”. In addition, Kramsch (1988, p. 63) says that “one cannot learn to use a language without learning something about the culture of the

people who speak that language”. Thus, language and culture are closely interrelated, and it is difficult to understand one of them without understanding the other.

In recent years, culture has been tied to teaching foreign/second languages in the literature. Mohamed (2014, p. 31), for instance, reports that “culture has been a controversial issue in the teaching of foreign languages and new perspectives have increasingly come to light”. Samovar and Porter (2004, p. 29) tie the definition of culture to education and indicate that they see culture as both “teacher and textbook”. In this regard, in the process of foreign language education, teachers and textbooks have to teach students the culture of the target language as well as the language itself.

Thus, language textbooks play a great role in teaching culture. Byram (1989) states that language textbooks are strong signifiers of culture in the classroom. Culture shows “its presence and consequent reflection from the very title page of the book and remains until the last page” where it “is not only depicted through verbal communication but also finds its shadows in non-verbal communication and graphics” (Mahmood, Asghar and Hussain, 2012, p. 36). The presence of culture in language textbooks can be in explicit and implicit (Risager, 1991). In this regard, language textbooks play a role not only in helping students learn English, but also by introducing them to perceptions of the world of English through images, imagined characters, conversations and texts.

Regarding the representation of different aspects of culture in English language textbooks, Mahmood et al. (2012, p. 36) point out that textbooks vary in their representations of culture, where “[s]ome ESL/EFL textbooks tend to deal with culturally greater issues i.e. religion, morality, history etc.”, while others “tend to deal with minor aspects i.e. sports, geography, eating, habits etc.”.

It has therefore been argued that textbooks for ESL/EFL students should depict “inter-cultural harmony” (Mahmood et al., 2012, p. 35). This means that ESL/EFL textbooks should be designed to contain some elements of the EFL/ESL learners’ source culture along with the target culture. In her study on the relation between the source and the target culture, Kramsch (1993) confirms the need to teach two cultures to learners because communication with native speakers of the target language requires that learners understand their own culture. Teaching language learners the

target culture along with the source culture is important because it promotes intercultural communicative competence (Bahrami, 2015). However, this is not the case in many language textbooks. A number of studies have been conducted on ESL/EFL textbooks to examine their representation of cultural content. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) analyze the content of the English language textbooks previously used in Saudi Arabia in secondary schools and find that only the source culture is represented. The finding is the same in Mahboob's (2009) study of the English language textbooks used in Pakistani schools. Saudi Arabia's current English textbooks have not been studied in this regard.

On the other hand, some studies find that there is more focus on the target culture, such as the studies by Dehbozorgi, Amalsaleh and Kafipour (2014) and Bahrami (2015) on different Iranian English language textbooks, the study of Liu and Laohawiriyanon (2013) on Chinese English language textbooks and the study of Hermawan and Noerkhasanah (2012) on Indonesian English language textbooks used in primary schools.

In sum, while a balance between source and target culture in language learning textbooks is desirable, existing research has found imbalances in favor of one or the other. Failing to include the two cultures in language textbooks or focusing on one culture without the other will negatively impact language learning because such representations of cultural content do not contribute to enhancing cultural awareness of language learners. Thus, good English language textbooks should be designed not only to teach ESL/EFL language and linguistic features, but should also have mixed content that includes both the learners' source culture and the target culture.

## **2.7 Summary and Research Questions**

This chapter reviewed the literature on several topics relevant to the current study, including the importance of textbooks in the EFL classroom, hegemony and ideology in language textbooks' language, textbooks' evaluation, imagined communities and identities in language textbooks and culture and its representations. Studies in the field concur that language textbooks play an important role in providing imaginary



worlds that affect language learning in a major way, especially in terms of allowing learners (and their teachers) to imagine multiple identity options and cultures.

Many studies in different contexts have been conducted to investigate the identity constructions represented in language textbooks; whether the studies were conducted on gender identity on other aspects of social identity or by involving different identity options, such as the study by Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004), significant imbalances have been uncovered in most contexts. Yet, despite a wealth of international research, as described here, EFL textbook research in Saudi Arabia has been limited, and no study has investigated the representations of more than one option of social identities in Saudi language textbooks. In addition, no research has yet been conducted into the cultural representations in the new language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia, such as the *Lift off* series; existing research has predominantly focused on the representation of culture in older language textbooks which are no longer used in Saudi schools. This constitutes a gap in the literature, especially given that English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia are considered the main source for teaching English. This is because English in the Saudi context is considered a foreign language, which means that it is rare for Saudi learners to speak English outside the classroom or to meet people who speak English as their first language. In addition, many Saudi teachers depend on language textbooks as the main guide to teaching English, especially for those teachers who do not have personal knowledge of the cultures and language of the English-speaking world or who are not highly skilled in promoting foreign language acquisition.

Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by evaluating English language textbooks used in Saudi intermediate schools in terms of their representations of a range of identity options including gender, occupation, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation and culture to examine how these representations can affect students' motivation and their engagement with English language learning.

As the literature shows that there is no education that is free from ideologies and textbooks are considered instrumental in conveying these hidden ideologies, the current study also aims to investigate how ideology and hegemony may affect identity and cultural representations in these textbooks. To this end, this study aims to answer the following two research questions:

1. What identity options of both Saudi characters and foreign characters are offered in the imagined communities of the intermediate level *Lift off* textbooks?

2. How is cultural content of both the source and target culture represented in these textbooks' imagined communities?

Conducting the current study is significant for two reasons. The first reason is that this study will add to our knowledge of identity options in English language textbooks. In addition, this study will provide the Saudi Ministry of Education, including its materials development and curriculum designers, with a clear critical analysis of the contents of textbooks in terms of their representations of culture in relation to both Saudi and foreign characters, showing both weaknesses and strengths in order to help provide more appropriate English textbooks that suit the learning environment and help learners acquire English effectively.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Overview

This chapter begins with information about the selection of the materials used in this study, in Section 3.2. Then, Section 3.3 provides a detailed description of these materials. After this, Section 3.4 shows the methods of analysis. Finally, the chapter ends with comments on the limitations of the study, in Section 3.5.

### 3.2 Material Selection

In Saudi Arabia, English language textbooks are designed by local and international experts. Several different series of language textbooks are designed with the assistance of the Macmillan publishing house and the Saudi English Language Development Project (SELDP). These include *Get ready* for the elementary stage, *Lift off* for the intermediate stage and *Flying high* for the secondary stage. These series are specifically designed for public schools in Saudi Arabia. The series that will be examined in this study is called *Lift off*. It consists of six textbooks used for teaching English at the intermediate stage (school grades 7, 8 and 9) and was designed under the supervision of the Saudi Ministry of Education. The author of this series is anonymous.

Examining English textbooks for intermediate schools is suitable for the current study because of the relative depth of English textbooks at that stage compared with those for elementary schools. In Saudi Arabia, teaching English starts in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade of elementary school. However, students in elementary schools only learn basic things such as English letters, numbers and some basic vocabulary, with no deep education in English. This is due to a policy of the Saudi Ministry of Education that aims to focus on teaching elementary students their first language (Arabic) and their own culture (Islamic culture) so that learning English does not affect the initial development of proficiency in the students' first language. Alrashidi

and Phan (2015, p. 37) report that “The government of Saudi Arabia was against teaching English at elementary schools because of the belief that learning English may affect a student’s learning of Arabic”, but because of “the importance of English, the education system evolved in 2010, and English is now taught in lower levels of schooling as well (starting from the 4th grade of elementary school, when students are 10 years old)”. Students in elementary schools are taught two 45-minute English classes a week, whereas students in intermediate and secondary schools are taught four 45-minute English classes a week (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015, p. 37). In the intermediate stage, after students have become proficient in Arabic and know more about their own culture and religion, they are exposed to learning more about English, and their textbooks are, correspondingly, richer in terms of identities, characters, images and cultural content. For this reason, both the textbooks for the intermediate and secondary stages were suitable for this study, but because of the word limit and time constraints, I focus on one of the two stages, examining the intermediate *Lift off* series.

Instead of analyzing just some textbooks from this series, which may not have given me the confidence to generalize my data, I was careful to investigate all the textbooks in the series in order to gather a wide range of data to support my interpretation and arguments regarding the representations of the identity options and the cultural content in two imagined communities (the imagined Saudi community and the imagined foreign community) offered to Saudi learners in these textbooks.

### **3.3 Description of the Material**

The *Lift off* series consists of six textbooks: two textbooks are used for one grade over two separate semesters (i.e. *Lift off* 1 and 2 are taught in grade 7, *Lift off* 3 and 4 in grade 8 and *Lift off* 5 and 6 in grade 9). Each textbook consists of ten units, and each unit contains three different lessons as well as a review of the unit focusing on developing English competencies (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) as well as vocabulary and grammar. These units contain a number of reading passages and images as well as dialogues between recurring characters within a narrative that continues across the series. In addition to written exercises, each textbook has a

separate audio CD of spoken texts which are dialogues between characters used for audio exercises in order to help establish the correct pronunciation and develop students' listening skills.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

CDA, introduced in Chapter Two, is an analytic theory that views language discourses as part of social practice (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and it will be used for analyzing the data of this study. Using CDA will be useful for this study because this method allows a researcher to “study the relations between discourse and social and cultural development in different practices in different social domains” (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 60). In addition, this method gives the researcher the ability to interpret texts in order to expose hidden messages and understand social problems such as inequality (Renkema, 2004).

Fairclough (2003) points out that textual analysis is not objective, but is unavoidably selective, and Putnam (2005) shows that the images and texts chosen for analysis indicate the philosophical position and interests of the researchers, who can determine which things should be excluded or included in their studies. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002, p. 78) state that “the choice of research material depends on several aspects: the research questions, the researcher's knowledge as to the relevant material within the social domain or institution of interest, and whether, and how, one can gain access to it”. Thus, I selected those excerpts and images that addressed my research questions in being representations of identity and culture. Data collection was comprehensive with regard to excerpts and images that constituted representations of identity and culture. This is in line with common practice in the field. CDA researchers – and also proponent of critical image analysis, a subfield deriving from CDA (Giaschi, 2000) – emphasize that data collection cannot be arbitrary, with Taylor (2001) arguing for the importance of selecting both data that support a researcher's arguments and data that challenge these claims and arguments. Thus, I was careful to comprehensively collect and analyze all the data within the six textbooks that related to the research questions.

With CDA as the main analytical framework, it is necessary to describe it in more detail. Fairclough's (1989, 1995) analytic model consists of three dimensions: text analysis; discourse practices analysis; and social and cultural practices analysis. Each of those three dimensions is analyzed in different ways. The analysis of texts, including written or spoken texts or both, is descriptive. The analysis of discourse practices, including the practices that result from the production or consumption of the texts, requires interpretation, whereas the analysis of the social and cultural practices, which are considered the main framework for texts and discourse practices, needs explanation. However, a researcher who wants to use this model has to focus firstly on social issues because, as Fairclough (2001, p. 26) explains, "CDA analyzes texts and interactions, but it does not start from texts and interactions. It starts rather from social issues and problems, problems which face people in their social lives, issues which are taken up within sociology, political science and/or cultural studies". The aim of this model is "to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 132–133).

Although Fairclough (1989) focuses his model on written and spoken texts, he acknowledges the importance of images and their role by stating that photographs and texts work together in a "mutually reinforcing way which makes them very difficult to disentangle" (p. 28). Like texts, the role of images is (in part) to carry cultural meanings (Aiello, 2006). In addition, Hyatt (2005, p. 52) finds that images "play a powerful role in the construction of truth and reality". Therefore, images and texts jointly introduce a certain reality. Paltridge (2006, p. 189) points out that "[m]any readings of texts are constructed not just by the use of words but by a combination of words with other modalities of communication, such as pictures, films, video images and sounds". Regarding the importance of images in textbooks, Norris (2004) asserts that the role of images in carrying informative and communicative meaning is stronger than the role of texts for the same purpose. Therefore, as the English textbooks in this study include both texts and images, it is important to use both semiotic and textual analyses.

Thus, in the current study, a critical semiotic analysis of the images in the

selected English textbooks will be combined with the CDA. Specifically, I will depend on both linguistic and semiotic analyses of the audio dialogues, reading passages and images offered in the *Lift off* series to describe and critique how these multimodal texts depict imagined communities, offer identity options and present cultural content for Saudi learners of English, as well as describing and critiquing that which is left out and remains unimagined.

Multimodal texts were coded to prepare them for analysis; each of the identity categories (or ‘axes’) gender, occupation, ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation was counted through an analysis of the content. An intersectional approach was used (following Piller and Takahashi, 2010) throughout the process of analysis to investigate how each axis of identity intersected. Through this, I examined which group of EFL Saudi students was disempowered or marginalized by the English learning process and which groups of native speakers were not imagined for Saudi learners in the communities imagined within the textbooks, to see whether or not these textbooks offered biased and oversimplified identity options to Saudi learners. In addition to the examination of identity options, I examined the cultural content including the representations of both the source (Saudi) culture and the target (‘Western’) culture in these textbooks. Based on this analysis, I uncovered ideologies hidden within the content of these textbooks.

### **3.5 Limitations of the Study**

This study, as with many studies, is not free from limitations. Although the research methods is to examine all the English textbooks in the series used for teaching English in intermediate schools in order to make credible generalized results, this study is still limited to one educational stage while different educational stages use different textbooks for teaching English to Saudi students. In addition, the textbook analysis in this study is limited to that which is relevant to the research questions, which means that I did not analyze every text and image in these textbooks. Moreover, this study depends only on one research method, CDA, and the associated semiotic analysis of images; I consider this a limitation especially because CDA is criticized for its dependence on each researcher’s interpretations, which may lead to “a biased

interpretation: in the first place it is prejudiced on the basis of some ideological commitment, and then it selects for analysis such texts as will support the preferred interpretation” (Widdowson, 1995, p. 169). Excessive subjectivity of the analysis was guarded against through applying a numerical approach, particularly in the analysis in Chapter Four. Furthermore, the comprehensive analysis of all occurrences of identity and culture representations also ensures a systematic data treatment.

CDA has also been criticized for its “position of knowledge that is somehow able to decide for others what is true” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 88). This limitation is inherent in all purely textual studies that do not consider the ways in which texts are produced and perceived. A more comprehensive ethnographic study was outside the scope of this research project but I will return to this limitation and the implications it has for future research in Chapter Six.

To conclude, this chapter has provided information about the method of selecting the materials used in this study (the *Lift off* English language textbooks used in Saudi intermediate schools). In addition, it provided information about the format of these textbooks and the methods of selecting, coding and analyzing multimodal textual data from the textbooks in line with CDA; the chapter explained Fairclough’s (1995) CDA as the main theoretical framework for data analysis in this study. Finally, the chapter provides a clarification of the limitations of this study and how they have been handled.



## **Chapter Four: Imagined Communities and Identity Options**

### **4.1 Overview**

This chapter reports and discusses the findings in relation to the first research question, “What identity options of both Saudi characters and foreign characters are offered in the imagined communities of the intermediate level *Lift off* textbooks?” To answer this question, the chapter sets out quantitative results of a count of the set of gender, occupation, ethnicity, nationality and religious identity options for Saudi characters and for foreign characters offered in the six textbooks.

These findings regarding identity options are based on an analysis of all the 105 characters that are presented throughout all six textbooks of the *Lift off* series. I focused on the identities of the characters as they appear in images, using written or spoken texts related to these images to obtain additional information about the characters appearing in the images to identify specific identities.

The quantitative findings are presented in Sections 4.2 to 4.6. This descriptive analysis will be followed by a critical discussion in Section 4.7.

### **4.2 Characters from the Source and Target Cultures**

The analysis begins by investigating the basic division between Saudi and foreign characters. As categories, these are the two major imagined communities under study and they coincide with the source and target culture imagined in the textbook. (Nuanced sub-categories of ethnicity and nationality are analyzed further in Section 4.5).

*Table 4-1 Character distribution in the Lift off series*

<i>Types of Characters</i>	Saudi characters	Foreign characters
<i>Number</i>	64	41
<i>Percentage (N=105)</i>	60.94%	39.04%

Table 1 shows that the number of the characters represented in the *Lift off* series is 105, including 64 Saudi characters and 41 non-Saudi characters. By comparing the number of Saudi and foreign characters presented in these six textbooks, it is clear that the representation of Saudi characters in the series (60.94%) is higher than that of the foreign characters (39.04%).

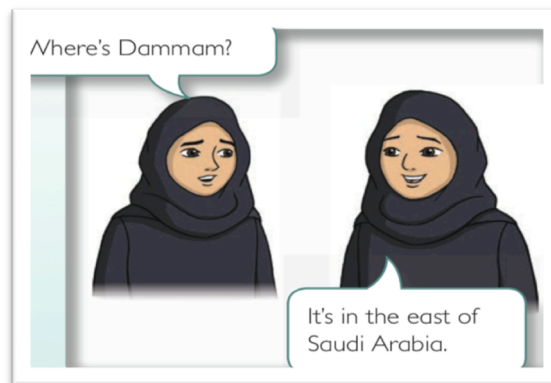
### **4.3 Gender**

*Table 4-2 Gender distribution in the Lift off series*

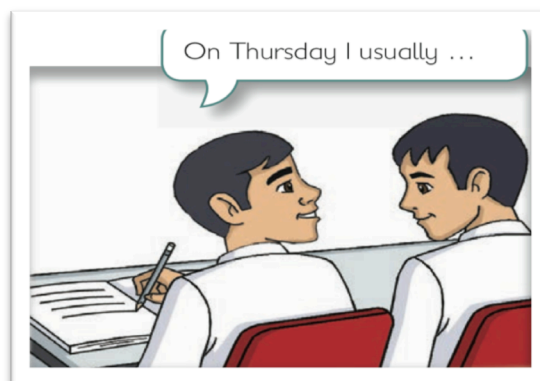
<i>Gender and nationality</i>	Saudi Male	Saudi Female	Foreign Male	Foreign Female
<i>Number</i>	32	32	31	10
<i>Percentage (N=105)</i>	30.47%	30.47%	29.52%	9.52%

In terms of gender distribution, Table 2 shows that Saudi male and female characters are represented in equal numbers (32 male and 32 female). It is difficult to imagine that the precisely equal distribution of male and female Saudi characters in

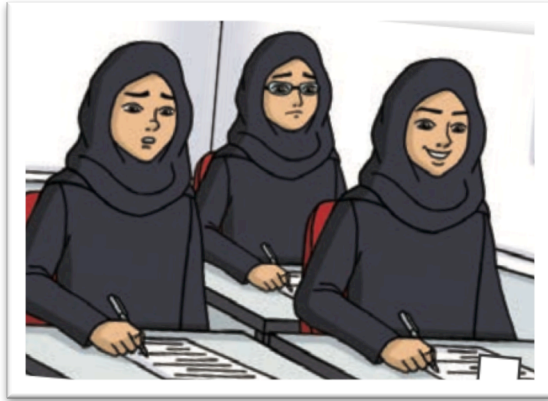
the six textbooks is accidental. (See examples of the equality of representation of Saudi characters in the *Lift off* series in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, below). However, in the case of foreign characters, there is an evident difference between the number of male and female characters (31 male and only 10 female), creating an imbalanced gender distribution and an under-representation of non-Saudi female characters.



*Figure 1 Two Saudi female students talk with each other (Lift off 1, p.52).*



*Figure 2 Two Saudi male students talk with each other in the class (Lift off 1, p.53).*



*Figure 3 Three Saudi female students in the classroom (Lift off 5, p.65).*



*Figure 4 Three Saudi male students in the classroom (Lift off 5, p.65).*

#### 4.4 Occupation

*Table 4-3 Occupational identities of characters in Lift off series*

<i>Saudi Characters</i>			<i>Foreign Characters</i>		
<i>Occupational Identity</i>	<i>Male: 32</i>	<i>Female: 32</i>	<i>Occupational Identity</i>	<i>Male: 31</i>	<i>Female: 10</i>
Teacher	1	4	Teacher	3	2
Student	11	13	Student	8	3
School director	1	-	Homemaker	-	1
Nurse	-	3	Waiter	1	-
Doctor	2	3	Receptionist	1	-
Policeman	1	-	Policeman	2	-
Dentist	1	-	Pilot	1	-
Soldier	1	-	Postman	1	-
Shop assistant	-	1	Farmer	1	-
Presenter	1	-	Doctor	3	-
Homemaker	-	4	Nurse	-	1
Baker	1	-	Director	1	-
Calligrapher	1	-	Hostess	-	1
Carpenter	1	-	Presenter	1	-
Metal worker	1	-	Racing driver	1	-
Tailor	1	-	Boxer	1	-
Ship-builder	1	-	Scout chief	1	-
Athlete	1	-	Diver	1	-
Sports commentator	1	-	Mountain climber	1	-
Diver	1	-	Runner	1	-
Fighter pilot	1	-	Undefined	2	2
Footballer	3	-			
Undefined	-	4			

Table 3 shows the occupations of the Saudi and foreign characters represented in the *Lift off* series. Saudi characters have been assigned 22 occupations, while 20 occupations have been assigned to foreigners. In terms of the occupations represented among Saudi characters, it is clear from the table that Saudi male characters were assigned many more occupations (19) than were female characters (6). This is not a misrepresentation but reflects the nature of Saudi society where women hold a much smaller set of occupations than men, due to certain customs and traditions. According

to the Saudi Arabia Market Information Resource and Directory (2015), Saudi women comprise only 16% of the total workforce in Saudi Arabia. Occupations such as footballer, pilot, diver, sports commentator, athlete, ship-builder, policeman, soldier, carpenter and metalworker are not available to women in Saudi Arabia. For example, while some Saudi women work in the police force they work within female-only detention facilities or work at separate security checkpoints from men at airports; policewomen cannot patrol the streets or drive police cars like the policemen in *Lift off*. Thus, the occupation of policing as represented in the textbooks relates only to Saudi men, not women.

Regarding foreign characters, foreign male characters are likewise assigned a much larger number of occupations (17) than are foreign female characters (5) which means that foreign women are marginalized not only in number (see Section 4.3) but also in the occupations they are represented as having.

The six textbooks here depict a relatively wide occupational range in Saudi Arabia for both men and women, with a gender imbalance but a realistic one, and therefore offer a good representation of the Saudi imagined community. However, these textbooks show a wide range of occupations for foreign men without conveying a comparable representation of occupations for foreign women. This shows that there is an emphasis on representing varied occupations for Saudi characters whereas there is merely a superficial conceptualization of the occupational options for foreign characters, with little attention paid to accurately representation both genders in the imagined target culture workforce.

#### **4.5 Ethnicity and Nationality**

The ethnicity of characters was identified by their appearance in images, along with written and spoken descriptions in texts related to the images. The ethnic identities of the characters represented in the textbooks are identified using physical countenance and skin colour where there is no indication about ethnicity in the written text.

All Saudi male and female characters that appear in the images in the *Lift off* series could be described as “white Arab”, except for one male and one female who

are depicted with darker skin and could be assumed to have African ancestry.

As the majority of Saudi citizens are Arab while a very small percentage is from other origins (Alhawsawi, 2013), this majority representation of Saudi characters seems to be loosely accurate, because it reflects the broad ratio of ethnicities within the Saudi population.

Regarding the foreign characters throughout the six textbooks, most are British, including both the male (22 of 31) and female (7 of 10) characters. Most of these British characters are white; the exceptions are two male characters, one of whom is black, and the other, Asian. A few characters (9 male and 3 female) are from other nations, as indicated in Table 4.

*Table 4-4 Ethnicity, nationality and gender of non-British foreign characters in the Lift off series*

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
White	American	1	-
	Ancient Roman	1	-
	Canadian	1	-
	German	-	1
	Italian	1	1
	Polish	1	-
	Undefined	3	1
Black	American	1	-

Regarding the foreign characters, it is clear that the main focus of *Lift off* is on British people as the imagined speakers of English although a few other national identity options for English speakers are represented. While the six textbooks present characters from different nations (American, Ancient Roman, Canadian, German, Italian and Polish characters), people who speak English as a native language are still misrepresented as being mostly white and British. Although two non-white British men are represented, and English speakers from other nations are also represented

(two American, one black, one white; and one white Canadian), without giving the students information about the diversity of American and Canadian people, and of other nations where English is spoken as a native language, such as Australia and New Zealand, this representation is not enough to overcome the bias constructed towards white British people as the archetypal English speakers. It is clear that the diversity of English speakers has been oversimplified, with the emphasis on British people as if they were the only nationality to speak English as their main or national language.

Regarding foreign female characters, all are white and most are British, with the exception of one Italian and one German. Unlike the male characters, non-white ethnic identities were not represented for women, even among the female British characters. In addition, there is no representation of American, Canadian or Australian women and no female characters, except the white British characters, are represented as speaking English as their native language. It is clear, that besides their marginalization in number and occupations, foreign women are also marginalized in the textbooks' representations of national and ethnic identity options.

#### **4.6 Religion**

All the Saudi male and female characters presented in the imagined community of the six English textbooks are Muslims. For women, Muslim identity is indexed through the *hijab*, shown in the textbooks' images. The Muslim identity of adult male characters is indexed through traditional Saudi clothes, namely a *thobe* (ankle-length shirt with long sleeves), a *ghutra* (a large cotton cloth, usually red or white) and an *igal* (a black cord put on the head over the *ghutra*), while Saudi boy students appeared wearing only a *thobe*. Therefore, wearing Saudi traditional clothes indexes 'Saudianness'. A Muslim identity is implied in a Saudi identity; as Islam is considered the official religion in Saudi Arabia and all the Saudi citizens are Muslims (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015), the religion of all Saudi characters in the six textbooks is Islam.

In terms of the religion of the foreign characters, the textbooks refer to the religion of only two of the male foreign characters, who are Muslims. However, there



is no reference to the religion of the other 29 foreign characters, either implicitly or explicitly, in images or in written or spoken text. Thus, the religion of 29 foreign characters is undefined. Regarding the foreign female characters, in particular, the religion of all female characters (10) is undefined, which means that they are yet again marginalized in terms of their religious affiliation.

#### **4.7 Discussion**

Based on these quantitative results, the study finds that there is clear focus on providing varied representations of cultural and other identities of people within the Saudi imagined community, including both Saudi males and females. Throughout all the six textbooks, there is equal number of both male and female Saudi characters which conveys a gender balance in the distribution. Providing authentic representations that reflect reality in Saudi society through the representations of the identity options including occupation, ethnicity, nationality and religion is also clear.

However, these textbooks do not provide complex representations of the identities for foreign characters compared to the Saudi characters' representations. Oversimplification is very clear, especially in the representations of speakers of the target language. This is clear through the textbooks' depiction of most of imagined foreign characters as white British people compared with the minimal representation of other foreigner characters, especially other native speakers of English such as Americans and Canadians. In addition to oversimplification, a gender imbalance in these representations intersecting with each other axis of identity is also clear, with more options presented for the cultural, ethnic, national, occupational and religious identities of foreign male characters compared with female characters.

This study affirms the findings of the previous research studies such as (Porreca, 1984); (Shteiwi, 2003); (Ansary and Babaii, 2003); (Yang, 2004); (Kobia, 2009); (Barton and Sakwa, 2012); (Talburt and Stewart, 1999) and (Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004) that were conducted on different contexts to examine gender identity or other types of cultural identities in terms of finding a simplified, misrepresentative and male-biased representation of characters in the target culture.

It is clear from the analysis that there is an ideological “Saudi- centrism” in the Saudi Ministry of Education’s determination of the content of these textbooks. The representation is centred on source culture identities of Saudi people (including both male and female) and excludes a wider view of foreign identity options. Moreover, these textbooks convey that men and women in Saudi society are different but equal. In addition to providing positive and equal representations of source culture identities, there is clear focus on Islam as the religion of Saudi characters and of some foreign characters, while there is no reference to other religions at all. This is clearest in the six textbooks’ reference to the religion of only two foreign male characters, who are all represented as Muslim, while effacing any religious identity for the other 29 foreign male characters and all the foreign female characters.

Teaching Saudi learners of English without paying more attention to providing them with examples of varied cultural identities of foreigners (especially native speakers of English) can impact Saudi learners negatively. This is because the restricted teaching of cultural identities does not enhance cultural awareness among those learners, nor does it give them an understanding of meaningful social identities and lifestyles in English-speaking communities; access to such knowledge is needed to communicate effectively with foreign people.

To sum up, this chapter provide findings and discussions regarding the representation of identity options for two groups, Saudi and non-Saudi characters. The analysis has found there is a better representation of Saudi characters than foreign characters in terms of different identity options being offered in the imagined Saudi community while imbalances and misrepresentations pervade the identity options offered in the imagined foreign community.

## **Chapter Five: Imagined Communities and Cultural Representations**

### **5.1 Overview**

This chapter reports and discusses findings related to the second research question, “How is cultural content of both the source and target culture represented in these textbooks’ imagined communities?” To answer this question, two imagined communities (Saudi and foreign) used in the first research question will be also comparatively analyzed in this chapter, based on images, dialogues and reading passages, to examine how Saudi culture as the source culture and ‘Western’ culture as the target culture are represented in the six textbooks. The reason to identify the target culture as ‘Western’ culture in this chapter is that nearly all the foreign culture represented in the six textbooks is associated with of England or other so-called ‘Western’ countries. As the two imagined communities in the textbooks include significant references to different aspects to Islamic culture, this chapter will also investigate the representation of Islamic culture and its relation to Saudi and Western cultures.

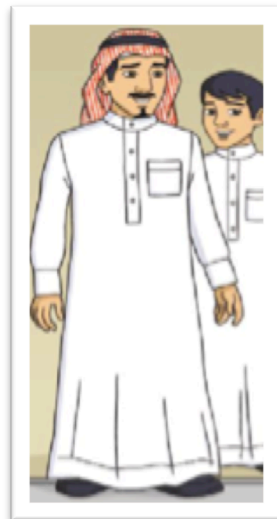
The chapter begins by presenting findings related to the representation of Saudi culture as the source culture, in Section 5.2. This is followed by a description of the representation of Western culture as the target culture (Section 5.3) and a description of Islamic culture as a combination of source and target culture (Section 5.4). These descriptions of the cultures represented in the textbook are followed by a critical discussion in Section 5.5.

## 5.2 Representations of Saudi Culture as the Source Culture

In the six textbooks, there are references to different aspects of Saudi culture. Two different aspects of culture can be identified and these findings are therefore presented in two sub-sections. The first sub-section (5.2.1) describes how gender aspects of Saudi culture are represented whereas the second sub-section (5.2.2) shows how other aspects of Saudi culture such as cuisine, art, traditions, history, celebrities and antiquities are depicted in the textbooks.

### 5.2.1 Gendered Aspects of Culture

Throughout all six textbooks, there is a strong focus on gendered aspects of culture. In Saudi contexts, Saudi males are consistently represented as following Saudi dress codes. Saudi adult and teenage males appear wearing traditional Saudi clothes: the *thobe*, *ghutra* and *igal* in the case of adults and a white *thobe* only in the case of children (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5 Typical Saudi male clothing (Lift off 2, p.19).*

Furthermore, there are frequent references to gender roles in Saudi culture throughout the textbooks. Different gender roles appear in various aspects in the six textbooks. For example, in Unit 1 of *Lift off 1*, a Saudi man (Ibrahim) welcomes a

British family when they arrive in Riyadh, as shown in Figure 6, and the following conversation takes place:



*Figure 6 A Saudi man meets a British family at the airport (Lift off 1, p.8).*

*Dave: Ibrahim, this is my family, and this is my wife, Penny.*

*Penny: Hello, Ibrahim. It's nice to meet you.*

*Ibrahim: Hello, Penny.*

*Dave: And these are my children. This is my son, Fred, and my daughter, Nina. Fred, Nina, this is Mr. Saad.*

*Fred: Hello, Mr. Saad.*

*Nina: It's nice to meet you, Mr. Saad.*

*Ibrahim: Hi, Fred. Hi, Nina. Please, call me Ibrahim. How old are you?*

*Nina: Fred's 13 ... and I'm 13.*

*Ibrahim: Are you twins?*

*Fred: Yes, we are. We're twins. (Lift off 1, p.8)*

While Ibrahim, the male Saudi host, meets the British family at the airport and is introduced to Penny, the British wife, there is no contact between the Saudi wife and the male members of the British family. Rather, the Saudi wife welcomes Penny and Nina. This representation constitutes a reflection of Saudi culture: contact between non-related men and women is prohibited.

Another example of Saudi culture can be found in Unit 5 of the same textbook, where the image depicts the Saudi wife, Rayana, and Penny in the kitchen preparing food together (see Figure 7). Again, this image is an accurate reflection of Saudi culture, where women are expected to prepare food for their families.



*Figure 7 A Saudi woman and a British woman prepare food in the kitchen (Lift off 1, p.40).*

Yet another example of gendered roles and relationships in Saudi culture can be seen in Unit 8 of *Lift off 2*, when Dave, the English father who teaches English at a school in Riyadh, talks with a Saudi family as they prepare to visit Oxford. During their conversation, the Saudi wife does not speak. She appears in the image with her back turned to the Englishman and her face averted, whereas Ibrahim and his children Omar and Reema (who is female but only 12 years old) are looking at Dave. This depiction reflects the Saudi cultural norm that adult women should not talk with men who are not related to them, unless absolutely necessary (see Figure 8).



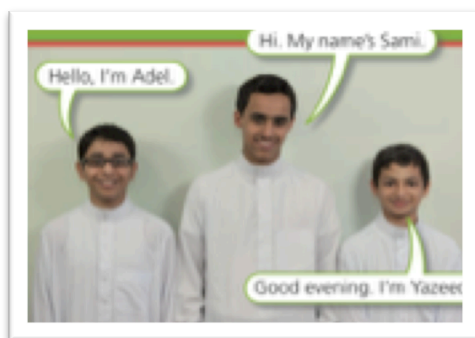
*Figure 8 A British man speaks with a Saudi family before they go to the airport (Lift off 2, p.64)*

These textbook images only show Saudi men and women together when they share a familial relationship, such as between uncle and niece, or brother and sister. One example occurs in the review for Unit 6 of *Lift off 3*, where a Saudi female appears in the image with her family and another man. The artist clarifies this relationship by inserting the greeting, “Hello, Uncle!” (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9 A Saudi family greets a relative at the airport (Lift off 3, p.52).*

Another illustration of gendered norms in Saudi culture relates to the photography of women. In *Lift off 1-4*, drawings are used to illustrate the characters used in the book but from *Lift off 5* onwards there are photographs of real people. In these cases, the photographs of male characters are shown clearly, while those of female characters are blurred or otherwise partially obscured. This reflects Saudi norms that women should not reveal their faces to strangers. To this end, the women pictured in the textbooks do not look at the camera directly. Additionally, their photographs are digitally altered to make them less clear (see Figure 10 and Figure 11).



*Figure 10 Clear photograph of male Saudi students looking directly into the camera  
(Lift off 5, p.6).*



*Figure 11 Blurred photograph of female Saudi students looking away from the  
camera (Lift off 5, p.8).*

Additionally, in a number of images, Saudi men are driving cars. However, no women are shown driving cars. This also reflects an aspect of Saudi culture; women are not permitted to drive cars (see Figure 12).



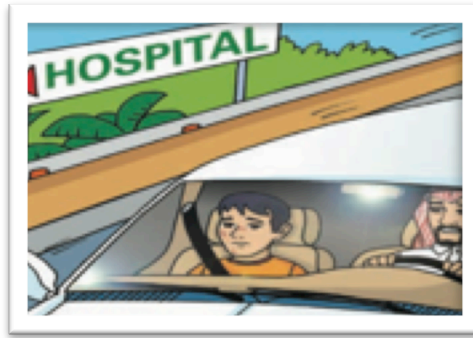


Figure 12 A Saudi man drives a car (*Lift off 3*, p.28).

Noticeably, most of the references to gendered aspects of Saudi culture are represented in an implicit way; it is not spelled out directly that women do the cooking or that women do not reveal their faces. Instead, these norms are presented implicitly so that the readers will recognize them from observation. In addition, the norms of Saudi culture are shown to apply not only to Saudi characters but also to Western characters visiting Saudi Arabia. While this is a true representation – visitors are required to comply with Saudi norms – these norms are unlikely to be as unproblematic to Western visitors, particularly women, as they appear in the textbooks.

### 5.2.2 Other Aspects of Saudi Culture

In contrast to the gendered aspects of culture, which are taught implicitly, there is explicit instruction with regard to other aspects of Saudi culture. Saudi cuisine, Saudi arts, Saudi traditions, Saudi history, Saudi celebrities and Saudi antiquities, in particular, are all introduced directly in the textbooks through providing comparisons with some of these aspects of the target culture (see Section 5.3.2).

Cuisine is represented as one of the central aspects of the source culture through reference to famous Saudi dishes. For example, in *Lift off 1*, there is a mention of what is widely considered the national dish of Saudi Arabia, *kabsa*, a biryani-like dish which consists of meat, fish or chicken along with rice (see Figure 13).



*Figure 13 Kabsa, a famous Saudi dish (Lift off 1, p.45).*

In addition to cuisine, in *Lift off 4*, there are pictures to illustrate the art of Saudi Arabia. These include an image of an ancient Saudi sword, a Hejazi coin and a traditional Saudi silver necklace (see Figure 14).



*Figure 14 Saudi Arabian art (Lift off 4, p.56).*

Other aspects of Saudi culture include representations of Saudi traditions. The first Unit of *Lift off 6* includes several examples of Saudi craftsmen and artisans, such as bakers, calligraphers, carpenters, metalworkers, shipbuilders and tailors. These crafts are considered examples of Saudi traditions and it is explicitly stated that they represent Saudi culture (see Figure 15 to Figure 20).



*Figure 15 Saudi baker (Lift off 6, p.6).*



*Figure 16 Saudi calligrapher (Lift off 6, p.6).*



*Figure 17 Saudi carpenter (Lift off 6, p.6).*



*Figure 18 Saudi metalworker (Lift off 6, p.6).*



*Figure 19 Saudi shipbuilder (Lift off 6, p.6).*



*Figure 20 Saudi tailor (Lift off 6, p.6).*

In addition, *Lift off 6* provides information about and pictures of the Al Janadriyah Festival. This festival is held in Janadriyah, a city near the capital city, Riyadh. During this festival, numerous activities take place, including camel racing and folk dancing, while market stalls showcase traditional crafts such as weaving and leather work, as well as traditional foods (Figure 21).



*Figure 21 Al Janadriyah Festival (Lift off 6, p.8).*

Saudi history is also represented as a part of the source culture in the textbooks. In Unit 2 of *Lift off 5*, for instance, there is a reading passage about the history of Saudi Arabia before and after oil was discovered. Ancient Saudi history constitutes another aspect of Saudi culture that is referenced in the textbooks. For instance, the standing stones of Al-Rajajil are introduced in Unit 6 of *Lift off 3* (see Figure 22). Information about this archeological site is summed in the reading passage below.



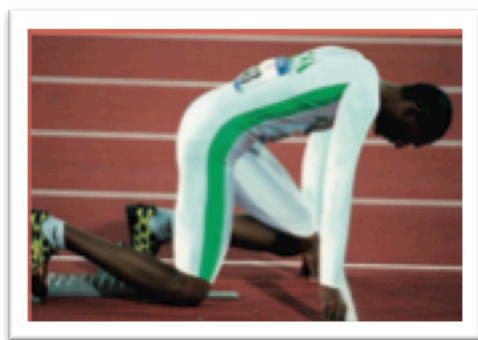
*Figure 22 Al-Rajajil, an archaeological site in Saudi Arabia (Lift off 3, p.47).*

*In Al-Jowf, in the Northern Desert of Saudi Arabia, you can find the standing stones of Al-Rajajil ('The Men'). They are probably over 5,000 years old. There are 54 groups of stones and some of them are three metres high. They go in parallel lines from east to west. (Lift off 3, p.47)*

In addition, some Saudi celebrities are introduced. For example, the fourth unit of *Lift off 5* introduces two prominent Saudi citizens. One of these is Prince Sultan bin

Salman, the second son of current King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz, who worked as a fighter pilot. Prince Sultan is introduced as the first Muslim and the first Arab to go into outer space. Another character introduced in the textbooks as a famous Saudi citizen is footballer Mohamed Al-Deayea, who, according to the accompanying text, started playing football before he was 20 years old and joined the Saudi Arabian national team when he was only 22, winning many championships.

In addition to Prince Sultan bin Salman and Mohamed Al-Deayea, there is a reading passage in Unit 4 of *Lift off 6* about Hadi Soua'an Al-Somaily (Figure 23), a famous Saudi athlete who won gold and silver medals in several world championships. Students learn that his most famous race was at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, where he won a silver medal.



*Figure 23 Hadi Soua'an Al-Somaily (Lift off 6, p.36).*

In sum, many different aspects of Saudi culture are depicted throughout the textbooks, where Saudi culture may be referenced implicitly, as is the case with gendered aspects of culture, or explicitly indicated, as is the case for aspects of Saudi culture including cuisine, art, traditions, history and famous Saudis. The aim of making Saudi learners highly aware of their own culture is clear through the focus on the explicit teaching of various aspects of their source culture, including even relatively trivial aspects such as cuisine. Such source culture teaching is useful because good language textbooks should contain aspects of the learners' own culture as well as representations of other cultures (see Chapter Two) to enhance the learners' awareness of their own culture and develop a communicative competence that will enable them to talk about their culture with others in English. However, what is problematic in the representations of Saudi culture in these textbooks is, particularly,

the application of Saudi gender norms to Western characters. Depicting Western characters as unproblematic participants in Saudi culture leads to a misrepresentation of the target culture because it conveys unreal image about the target cultures to the learners. In the following section, the representation of Western culture as the target culture will be examined in further detail.

### **5.3 Representations of Western Culture**

Regarding Western culture, it must first be observed that the representation of Western culture is much more limited than the representations of the source culture. The relatively small number of representations of Western culture will be discussed following the same structure as the examination of the representation of Saudi culture above: Section (5.3.1) examines gendered aspects of culture whereas Section (5.3.2) examines other aspects of Western culture that are explicitly identified as aspects of culture, including cuisine, calendar, celebrities and antiquities.

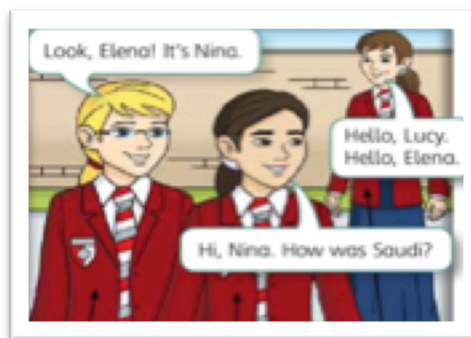
#### **5.3.1 Gendered Aspects of Culture**

Similar to the representation of gendered aspects of Saudi culture, gendered roles and relationships in Western culture are marked through a clearly gendered dress code: throughout the six textbooks, British males appear wearing trousers and shirts, with or without a tie (see Figure 24).



*Figure 24 Typical dress of a British man (Lift off 1, p. 8).*

The dress code of Western teenagers, who mostly appear in their role as school students, is also highly gendered with British girls wearing red blazers and blue skirts, while British boys wear blue blazers and grey trousers (see Figure 25 and Figure 26) (both wear white shirts and colourful ties).



*Figure 25 Dress code of female British students (Lift off 2, p.6).*





*Figure 26 Dress code of male British students (Lift off 2, p.6).*

In addition to the fact that the genders are as clearly distinguished through their dress in representations of Western culture as they are in representations of Saudi culture, Western women also are represented engaging in clearly gendered tasks. For instance, in a number of images, Western female characters appear engaged in household duties, such as cooking and ironing clothes. Western female characters are not presented engaging in any non-household activities and Western men are not represented engaging in household duties. The norms of Saudi culture clearly apply to the Western characters, too, in these representations, although this is somewhat misrepresentative (see e.g. Figure 27 and Figure 28).

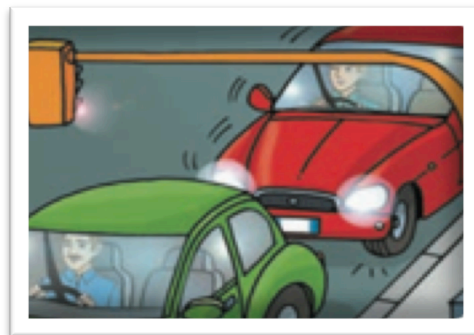


*Figure 27 A Western woman irons clothes (Lift off 3, p.25).*



*Figure 28 A Western woman prepares food in the kitchen (Lift off 3, p.25).*

Another misrepresentation of gendered aspect of Western culture can be observed in the fact that only men are represented as driving cars when the characters are in England. No women are shown driving cars throughout the textbooks. This reflects the norms of Saudi culture, where women are not permitted to drive cars. However, the extension of this cultural norm not only to Saudi characters (examined in Section 5.2.1) but also to non-Saudi characters in England (Figure 29) constitutes a clear misrepresentation.



*Figure 29 Western men drive their cars (Lift off 3, p.26).*

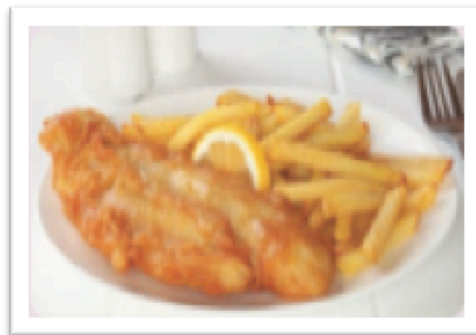
In sum, gendered aspects of Western culture are represented in the six textbooks only to the degree that they conform to Saudi norms. There is no representation of gendered aspects of Western culture that might conflict with Saudi norms such as clearly gendered dress codes, women restricted to household work and women largely barred from public roles. Most of the gendered aspects of Western culture are misrepresented or partially represented to align with the Saudi source culture (see Section 5.2). However, it should also be noted that these representations are

consonant with wider Islamic culture, as will be shown in Section 5.4.

### 5.3.2 Other Aspects of Western Culture

As is the case with representations of the source culture, there are also explicit references to aspects of Western culture, in addition to implied references. However, as stated at the beginning of Section 5.3, these explicit references to the target culture are fewer and more limited compared to those from the source culture. Where they occur, they are usually introduced with the explicit aim of showing differences between the source and target cultures.

One explicitly reference aspect of Western culture is cuisine, similar to the introduction of *kabsa* as a symbol of Saudi culture (see Section 5.2.2). In Unit 5 of *Lift off 1* the famous British dish fish and chips is introduced, as well as roasted chicken (see Figure 30 and Figure 31). These examples serve to show cultural (culinary) differences between Saudi and Western cultures.



*Figure 30 Fish and chips (Lift off 1, p.45).*



*Figure 31 Roasted chicken (Lift off 1, p.41).*

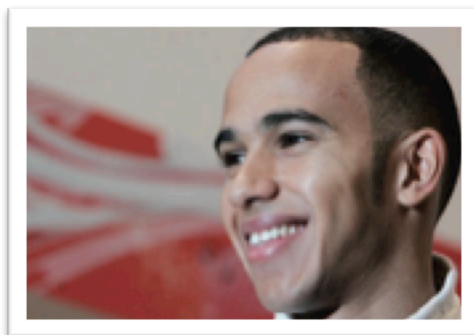
Another aspect of Western culture is introduced in *Lift off 2*, where there is a reference to the differences between the (Gregorian) calendar used in Britain and the Islamic calendar used in Saudi Arabia, concerning the number of days in each month.

Western culture is also introduced through references to famous people from the Western world. For example, in *Lift off 4* there is a text about the ancient Roman writer Gaius Plinius, who is better known as ‘Pliny the Elder’ (see Figure 32). The text explains that he did not like his job as a soldier and that, after the eruption of Vesuvius, he decided to write about Roman life.



*Figure 32 Gaius Plinius (Lift off 4, p.36).*

Another example of a famous representative of Western culture is Lewis Hamilton, a British Formula 1 driver who is introduced as the youngest person in the world to have won a Formula 1 championship (see Figure 33).



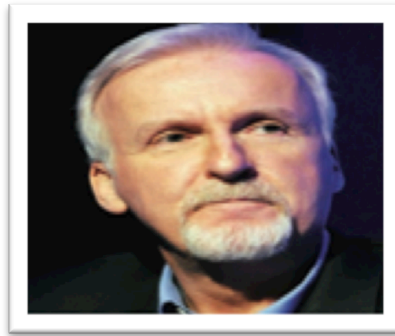
*Figure 33 Lewis Hamilton (Lift off 5, p.61).*

In addition, Unit 4 of *Lift off 5* contains a reading passage and a picture of the late Mohammad Ali, a famous American Muslim boxer, who changed his name after converting to Islam (see Figure 34).



*Figure 34 Mohammad Ali (Lift off 5, p.34).*

Moreover, in *Lift off 6*, there is a reading passage and picture of James Cameron, the famous Canadian who dove to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, in addition to his work as a photographer, author and film director. Also, there is a reference to Juliane Koepcke, a German girl who lived with her parents in South America while they conducted research in biology. She was the only survivor of a terrible accident when lightning hit the plane she and her mother were on, and it broke into pieces as it fell into the rainforest in Peru.



*Figure 35 James Cameron (Lift off 6, p 15)*



*Figure 36 Juliane Koepcke and her mother (Lift off 6, p.18).*

It is noteworthy that of the five famous Westerners introduced four are male. These four are depicted in photographed headshots (or a painting of the face in the case of Pliny the Elder) while the story of the female character is presented in a cartoon despite the fact that photographs of Juliane Koepcke both at the time of the accident and at a later age are publicly available on the internet.

A final aspect of the target culture can be found in an explicit reference is a famous archaeological site in Britain. In *Lift off 3*, Stonehenge is introduced as “a famous circle of stones in England” (p. 64) (see Figure 37). The text points out the similarity between Stonehenge and Al-Rajajil.



*Figure 37 Stonehenge (Lift off 3, p.64).*

In sum, it can be observed that there is significant oversimplification and outright misrepresentation in the representations of Western culture in the textbooks. This is true of both gendered aspects and other aspects of culture. This oversimplification is very obvious and a number of dimensions of oversimplification can be identified: first, the texts present only limited aspects of the target culture; second, most of the examples relate only to British culture while other English-speaking cultures are largely absent, and their depiction is restricted to a few celebrities; finally, most aspects of Western culture are represented through a Saudi lens, either by depicting Saudi gender norms as also prevailing in England or by presenting Western culture as relating in a one-to-one fashion aspects of Saudi culture.

The reason behind this oversimplification is due to the care the textbook developers have taken to only introduce aspects of the target culture that align with the source culture and the cultural practices of Saudi learners. This is particularly noticeable with regard to gender norms where only those aspects of Western culture are introduced that are those thought to not contravene local practices, to the exclusion of any aspects of Western culture that might. The same is true when it comes to the representation of other aspects of Western culture; it is evident that the only cultural aspects mentioned are those that give the Saudi learners knowledge about Western culture through providing comparison to similar aspects in their own culture, such as cuisine, calendars, celebrities or archaeological sites. By contrast, any aspects of Western culture that might be considered controversial in Saudi Arabia, or simply not having a direct parallel in Saudi culture, are studiously avoided so as to

guard against negative impacts on the source culture or practices of Saudi learners.

Another ingenious way to synchronize source and target culture is through a focus on transnational Islamic culture, and the next section turns to the representation of Islamic culture in the textbooks.

#### **5.4 Representations of Islamic Culture as Source, Target and Global Culture**

The six textbooks include many representations of Islam and Islamic culture in different aspects of the imagined communities in the textbook; in fact, representations of Islamic culture predominate throughout. It is, of course, not always easy to distinguish between Saudi and Islamic culture in particular. In the analysis, examples were coded as “Saudi” (and examined in Section 5.2) whenever an example was explicitly identified as “Saudi”. However, in scenes set in the target culture, references to Islam are also frequent; for instance, in Section 5.3.2 we saw that boxing champion Mohammad Ali, an American convert to Islam, was one of five Western celebrities introduced in the textbooks. Throughout the textbooks the focus on Islam and its culture is very clear through depicting it as not only the religion of Saudi Arabia, the source culture, where Islam is the official religion, but also as a religion related to Western and international cultures, as I will demonstrate in the following.

##### **5.4.1 Islamic Culture as the Source Culture**

In the six textbooks there are frequent references to Islam as the religion of Saudi people. For example, the lesson in Unit 7 of *Lift off 4* centers on a Saudi boy advising his British friend, who has to do a school project about Islam. The information provided includes reference to the pillars of Islam (*Arkan Al-Islam*) as shown in the following passage:

*In Islam, there are five pillars (Arkan Al-Islam) of religious faith. For Muslims, the first religious duty is the shahada, the profession of Islamic faith. The second duty of Muslims is salat or in English, prayer. The third duty of Muslims is zakat or giving alms. The fourth duty is sawm or fasting. The final religious*



*duty of Muslims is the Hajj. (Lift off 4, p. 55)*

In addition, the information includes reference to the steps that precede prayer ‘*Salat*’ (see Figure 38). These steps start with hearing the Azan prayer, then performing ablutions (*wudu*) and finally taking off the shoes before performing prayer with Muslim people in the mosque. However, while reading material related to the basics of Islam is quite extensive, there is no reference whatsoever to the religion of the British boy character. This indicates, yet again, that any focus on religion is only on Islam, here as the religion of Saudi people without even a reference to religion in the target culture.



*Figure 38 The steps that precede prayer (Lift off 4, p.54).*

Another aspect of the representation of Islam as the source culture is in an implicit references to Islamic dress codes of Saudi females. I identified the dress codes of Saudi men as part of Saudi culture in Section 5.2.1 because wearing the *thobe*, *ghutra* and *igal* do not constitute a religious requirement. By contrast, wearing the *hijab* constitutes a religious requirement for Muslim women, even if the specific form of the *hijab* differs in different Islamic cultures. Both adult and teenage Saudi females are consistently represented as dressed in long black cloaks (*abaya*), and black scarves (*hijab*) throughout the six textbooks (see Figure 39).



*Figure 39 Typical dress of Saudi Muslim women (Lift off 1, p.27).*

Gender segregation as an aspect of Islamic culture is visible throughout all the six textbooks. There is no contact between males and females at all unless they are relatives (see also Section 5.2.1). An example can be found in the story line of *Lift off 1*, where a British family visits Saudi Arabia. For instance, the Saudi wife and daughter host the British wife and daughter in the absence of husbands and sons. In Unit 5 of *Lift off 1*, the Saudi wife and daughter invite the British wife and her daughter to lunch in the Saudi family home (see Figure 40). In Unit 7, the four women eat out in a restaurant (see Figure 41), and in Unit 10 the two families enjoy a picnic together but the women are again drawn sitting apart from the men (see Figure 42).



*Figure 40 Saudi and British wives and daughters have lunch together (Lift off 1, p.42).*



*Figure 41 Saudi and British wives and daughters in a restaurant (Lift off 1, p.58).*



*Figure 42 Saudi and British wives and daughters have a picnic (Lift off 1, p.81).*

#### 5.4.2 Islamic Culture as the Target Culture

Moreover, Islam is represented not only as the religion of the source culture but also represented as prominent in the target culture. The textbooks have a number of examples that show ways in which Islam is related to British people and their culture. This is especially clear through references to British Muslims' practices. At the same time, no other religious practices are mentioned as existing in Britain or elsewhere. One example is in Unit 10 of *Lift off 2*, where there is a dialogue involving a Saudi man, Fahad, who is an international student in England. Fahad approaches a police officer and asks him to indicate the way to the central mosque on the map. Referring to central Mosque in this example implies that British cities have a number of mosques, but without reference to the religious plurality of British culture, thereby implying even that Britain is an Islamic country or an non-religious community

except for its Muslim citizens. See the following conversation.



*Figure 43 Central Mosque in Britain (Lift off 2, p.78).*

*Fahad: Excuse me, but I think we're lost.*

*Policeman: Where are you going?*

*Fahad: We're trying to find the central Mosque.*

*Policeman: I see. Well, go back down this road. When you get to the [sic] Cowley Road, turn left and keep walking. When you arrive at Manzil Way, turn left. The mosque is on your right.*

*Fahad: Thank you very much. (Lift off 2, p.78)*

Many other examples further suggest the importance of Islam in the target culture while obscuring other religions. Another example of the focus on Islam as an aspect of the target culture can be found in Unit 8 of *Lift off 5*, where there is a reading passage about the 500-year history of Islam in Britain. In addition, there are pictures of a halal butcher and a mosque (see Figure 44 and Figure 45).



*Figure 44 Halal butcher's shop in Britain (Lift off 5, p.67).*



*Figure 45 Mosque in Britain (Lift off 5, p.67).*

Another example comes from Unit 5 of *Lift off 6*, where there is a reference to the holy month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar) and to a British Muslim boy, Hussein, celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic celebration.

Gender segregation as an aspect of an Islamic culture is also represented for British characters in different situations in the six textbooks, as has already been pointed out in Section 5.3.1 above. Another example is the gender segregation with Western characters in schools. This can be seen in Unit 1 of *Lift off 2*, where images show British female students in one image and British male students in a separate image. The images reflect Islamic culture where boys and girls study in separate schools. This pattern can be seen throughout the textbooks: there is no contact between British boys and girls in their schools.

More evidence of gender segregation can be seen in lesson two of the same Unit, where an image shows British female students with a teacher who is also

female, and there are no male students. Another image in the same lesson shows British male students and a teacher who is also male (see Figure 46 and Figure 47). Depicting gender segregation among Western people in different activities including in education in the textbooks indicates misrepresentation of Western culture through conveying an atypical image of their culture and education.



*Figure 46 A female British teacher and female British students in a classroom  
(Lift off 2, p. 8).*



*Figure 47 A male British teacher and male British students in a classroom (Lift off 2,  
p. 9).*

Islam as a religion of Muslims around the world is also referred to in these textbooks, as will be examined in the next section.

#### 5.4.3 Islam as a Global Culture

The emphasis on representing Islam and Islamic culture, over other religions or

cultures, in the six textbooks is also clear through referring to Islam as a global religion related to many Muslim followers in the world.

One aspect of the representation of Islam as a global religion is a reference to two famous Muslim scientists. For example, there is a reading passage in Unit 4 of *Lift off 2* about the famous Muslim scientist and traveler, Ibn Battuta (see Figure 48) and his journeys throughout the Islamic world. In the text about Ibn Battuta, there is a reference to *Makkah* (“Mecca”), considered the holy city for all Muslims in the world, and the *Hajj* pilgrimage, which is regarded as one of the pillars of Islam. In addition, there is a reference to Islamic countries visited by Ibn Battuta, namely Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Afghanistan, in addition to other nations, (parts of which) were Muslim lands at the time such as Spain, India and China.



*Figure 48 Ibn Battuta (Lift off 2, p.35).*

Another famous Muslim Arabic scientist is Ibn al-Haytham who made important contributions in the fields of astronomy, visual perception and optics; there is a reference to him in Unit 9 of *Lift off 3* (see Figure 49).



*Figure 49 Ibn al-Haytham (Lift off 3, p.77).*

In addition to referring to Muslim scientists, Unit 8 of *Lift off 6* provides information about the contributions of Arabs and Muslims to global science, discussing an international cultural and scientific organization called “1001 Inventions”, which aims to raise awareness of these contributions all over the world through holding exhibitions and publishing books.

Moreover, the representation of Islam as an international religion is found in Unit 4 of *Lift off 6*, where there is a reading passage about Islamic Relief Worldwide, an international charity that aims to foster economic self-sufficiency among the poorest people in the world and assist those who have suffered from disasters such as floods and volcanic eruptions.

In sum, the examples in this section show that there is a strong focus on the representation of Islam as the religion of not only Saudi people but also Muslims globally. Yet, these examples reveal a bias in terms of the representation of Islam in the target culture without referring to other religions. This is clear when referring to only Muslim British people and Islamic aspects of British life without referring to other religions in Britain or their associated cultural practices. In addition, the examples show that there is misrepresentation of Western culture when conveying misrepresentative images of Western culture through using Islamic norms such as gender segregation with Western characters in Western countries throughout the situations in the six textbooks.



## 5.5 Discussion

Overall, the finding in relation to the second research question is that there is a more substantial focus on representations of the source culture than on representations of the target culture. Furthermore, Islam – as a vital aspect of the source culture – dominates all the imagined communities of the textbooks, where it is foregrounded as an aspect of both the source and target culture. Islam is presented not only as a religion integral to Saudi culture but also as the primary religion in Western culture and international culture. In addition to the imbalance in religious representations, and related to that imbalance, the domination of Saudi culture over the target culture in these textbooks is clear in the examination in Section 5.2.

On the other hand, Western culture is shown in simplistic representations referring to a more limited range of aspects compared to the range of cultural and religious norms and practices represented from the source culture. All the target cultural symbols and practices mentioned in the six textbooks relate specifically to British culture, except for a handful of famous characters from other Western nations, such as the American boxer Mohammad Ali, the Canadian filmmaker and diver James Cameron, the German plane crash survivor Juliane Koepcke and the Roman writer Gaius Plinius. Referencing only limited aspects of Western culture in these textbooks, and focusing on British culture, is an oversimplification.

These findings stand in contrast to the findings of previous studies, including (Dehbozorgi, Amalsaleh, Kafipour, 2014); (Bahrami, 2015), (Liu and Laohawiryanon, 2013); and (Hermawan and Noerkhasanah, 2012). These studies found that language textbooks from various cultural contexts focused on the target culture more than the source culture. By contrast, the present findings are in line with the findings of Mahboob's (2009) study of English language textbooks used in Pakistan. Mahboob found that Pakistani students' access to semiotic resources and knowledge about the world tends to be limited, discovering that Islam and religious beliefs are a continuing theme throughout Pakistan's English textbooks. Similarly, the findings of this study agree with Mahboob and Elyas' (2014) study of a now-discontinued language textbooks in the series *English for Saudi Arabia* that used to teach English for Saudi Students in the secondary stage. The two researchers found that Saudi English teaching reflects Saudi social beliefs and values as well as the

practices and norms of the source religion and culture, rather than reflecting beliefs, values, practices or norms of Western target cultures. The reason for focusing on representations of the source culture and Islam in foreign language textbooks in some Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, may be due to certain ideologies.

In the case of the representation of the two cultures in the six textbooks under examination in this study, ideological perspective is evident from the way in which the textbooks create a strong connection between learning English, Islam and Saudi cultural practices. Focusing on Islam and Saudi culture is an authorial choice not only evident with the Saudi characters but also with the Western characters. Applying Saudi cultural norms to Western characters can be seen clearly in gendered aspects of the cultural representations, such as Western women engaged solely in household chores such as cooking and ironing or only men driving cars. Regarding Islam, the application of Saudi culture's foregrounding of Islam to Western cultures is clear through reference to British characters who are Muslim, mosques as the only religious buildings in Britain that are shown in the textbooks, the imagery of a halal butcher, and pervasive images of gender segregation among British characters.

This ideological perspective is confirmed through the textbooks only referring to aspects of Western culture acceptable from a pro-Islamic perspective, such as iconic dishes, the calendar, famous people, normative dress codes and the depiction of an archaeological site, as these do not conflict in any way with the teachings of Islam and the norms of Saudi culture. By contrast, there is no reference whatsoever to topics that might be controversial in the source culture but widely practiced in the target culture such as unrelated men and women interacting, co-education, eating pork or drinking alcohol, the latter two of which are forbidden in Islam and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, there is no reference to religions other than Islam that are widespread in the target culture such as Christianity.

The ideological perspective taken in the textbooks under examination might be described as 'Saudi-centrism'. Coined in parallel to the term 'Euro-centrism', this ideological concept serves to reinforce Saudi cultural norms and Islamic religion among students by engaging them predominantly with source religion and cultural issues and norms in the foreign language classroom. This way, the textbooks seek to

manage students' identities and encourage them to learn English without being influenced by Western culture.

The promotion of a Saudi-centric ideology in English language textbooks may be seen as a way to manage tensions related to English language learning, and globalization more broadly, in Saudi Arabia. As explained in Chapter 1, English language teaching in Saudi Arabia is controversial. Fear constrains many Saudi families from teaching Western cultural values (Al-Seghayer, 2015) and many people argue that teaching Western or Anglo-American culture will affect Saudi students negatively by alienating them from their community's values. Because of the feared impact on students' identity, textbooks and classroom activities compensate for these fears through a focus on source culture and religion.

However, the success of the strategy of teaching English from a Saudi-centric perspective is questionable. The textbooks documented in this study are used for teaching students in intermediate school, ranging in age from 13 to 15 years of age. These teenagers may be particularly affected by external ideologies. While it seems that the textbooks were designed to focus on Islam and Saudi cultural practices in order to protect students from any adverse effects of English language learning, the effectiveness of this approach must be doubted because teaching English to Saudi students by emphasizing source cultural practices and Islam, as shown in these textbooks, and undertaking activities in the classroom according to the same approach cannot effectively 'protect' students from being affected by Western values. Students can be exposed to Western values in different ways. Many Saudi students these days use social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Skype and Google, where they can interact with foreigners online, communicate and learn about their cultures. As a result, the misrepresentation and oversimplification students encounter in the representation of foreigners and their cultures in the imagined communities of these textbooks is likely to make students mistrust the information offered in them. This applies in particular when they discover that the source culture implicitly structures the way foreigners are depicted and in doing so misrepresents them, as this study shows. As a result, students' motivation for learning English may well be negatively impacted. Likewise, their engagement with the teacher in the classroom and their English competence and achievement may be affected as a result.

Even if students do not compare the simplified and ‘Saudi-fied’ Western culture in *Lift off* with online cultural representations, the textbooks are still questionable in their effectiveness because they do not render students knowledgeable to talk with foreigners in English about Western culture, having erased many central social norms and practices from the imaged English-speaking communities students encounter.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Overview**

This chapter summarizes the results of the study, discusses implications and provides some recommendations for further research.

### **6.2 Summary**

The aim of this study was to examine the imagined communities represented in English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia, in terms of the identity options for both Saudi and foreign characters made available to students, as well as the representations of both source and target cultures in these textbooks. The examination provides the basis for an evaluation of the effectiveness English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. The study is based on the *Lift off* series of six textbooks used for teaching English to students in the intermediate stage (grades 7, 8 and 9). The data was analyzed using the CDA Framework (Fairclough, 1995) with a particular focus on pictorial representation.

The findings of the study show that there is good representation of Saudi characters in all six textbooks, and there is fair representation of both Saudi males and females in across identity categories including gender, occupation, ethnicity, nationality and religious affiliation. Although the findings showed that the number of occupations assigned to Saudi males is higher than that for females, this representation is reflective of the fact that in Saudi Arabia females cannot hold certain occupations due to Saudi customs and traditions. However, while the representations of Saudi characters must be considered fair and balanced, this is not the case with the representation of foreign characters. With regard to the latter, oversimplification and misrepresentation of speakers of the target language are common. Throughout all six textbooks, the focus is on British people, as if they were the only speakers of English,

and the communication scenarios involve communication between Saudi characters and British people. A small number of characters from other Western nationalities, including some real-life celebrities, are introduced briefly as secondary characters. In addition, the findings showed that there is a gender imbalance in the representation of foreign characters across the different identity categories.

Regarding the representation of culture in these textbooks, it was found that there is a focus on the representation of Saudi and Islamic cultures, i.e. the source culture and religion of Saudi learners, at the expense of representing the target culture. At the same time, there is also oversimplification and misrepresentations of the target Western cultures in all the textbooks used in this study.

The ideology undergirding this representation of two distinct sets of identity options (the Saudi set and the foreign set) and also the representations of the two cultures was described as Saudi-centrism. Saudi learners are given more information about their own cultural identities and their source culture and religion than about those of the target culture(s). Only aspects of other cultures that will not challenge the students' sense of national, religious or cultural identity are mentioned. This indicates that there is an appropriation of language in these textbooks to manage the identities of the students and to build Islamic identities.

The study concludes that representations that focus only on Islamic religion and cultural practices of the source culture without paying attention to credible foreign identity options and target cultures may lead to negative consequences in the processes of English learning. This is because a foreign language cannot be comprehensively and effectively learned without learning about its culture(s) and cultural identities of its speakers. Separating cultural learning from language does not help learners to master the language and also may lead to students mistrusting the authenticity of the communities of English speakers imagined in their textbooks and losing study motivation, or to negative impacts on their intercultural communicative competence.

### 6.3 Implications

The findings of this study have several implications. First, the findings show that there is oversimplification and misrepresentation of foreign characters and foreign culture in these textbooks. This misrepresentation and oversimplification may impact Saudi learners and their English learning negatively by depriving them of learning opportunities about the culture and the communities of target language. Administrators of EFL programs and curricula in Saudi Arabia should therefore pay closer attention to the importance of introducing language textbooks that include rich imagined communities and characters with complex identities from both the source and the target culture in order to support students to understand these imagined communities and attain a high level of linguistic and intercultural competence in English.

Second, the findings show that there is an almost exclusive focus on British culture as the target culture and British people as English speakers, to the detriment of other countries that use English as the primary language. The almost exclusive focus on British culture is misleading and limits the range of possible imagined English-speaking identities for students. Saudi Arabian administrators should include information about different varieties of English by giving information about the people and cultures of other countries where English is spoken. In addition to the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, these should also include postcolonial contexts and contexts where English is used as a lingua franca for international communication. Focusing only on communication between Saudi characters and British characters and culture and oversimplifying the representations of foreign people from other countries where English is the native language without providing information about their cultures, could lead students to think that English relates only to Britain or that British English is more authentic than other global Englishes. It may also make students mistrust what is represented in these textbooks, especially if they have some ideas or knowledge about other countries that use English in a variety of functions and for a variety of purposes.

Third, the findings of this study show that besides the oversimplification and misrepresentation of foreign characters in these textbooks, there is a gender imbalance, where foreign females are marginalized across multiple identity categories

compared with foreign males. This imbalance in representation may convey unrealistic images to Saudi learners about the roles available to foreign women in their societies. Textbook developers should take this into account and be required to accord equal representation and balanced roles to men and women.

Fourth, the findings show that the textbooks are informed by a Saudi-centric ideology in order to manage the identities of Saudi learners and to prevent them from being affected by foreign cultures. Therefore, the Saudi Ministry of Education as hegemonic class that determines the content of the textbooks should pay attention to the negative impacts of the misrepresentation and oversimplification regarding foreign characters and foreign culture on Saudi students and their learning of English. Also, it should modify these textbooks so that they include sufficient information about the target culture and its peoples. Regarding protecting Saudi learners from the negative effects of learning about foreign people and foreign cultures on their identities and culture, the Saudi Ministry of Education should require EFL teachers to teach students cultural features along with linguistic ones providing Saudi learners with information about both the source culture and the target culture, pointing out the differences between them and guiding the students to learn about the target culture in order to acquire the target language without giving up their own cultural values.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations for future research can be identified. First, this study examined only six textbooks representing one series used for teaching English at the intermediate stage. Thus, further research is needed to examine other English language textbooks used for teaching English at different Saudi educational stages. Second, this study examined only the identity options and cultural content offered in imagined communities in the six textbooks due to the constraints of a Masters-level thesis. It would be desirable to extend the present research to also examine the English accents and varieties that are offered in the accompanying audio CDs in order to obtain more accurate results regarding *Lift off's* representations of imagined communities. Third, the researcher depends on her own interpretation of what is represented in the imagined communities in these textbooks



and used only one method for analyzing these data, namely CDA. Further research is needed to examine the attitudes and perceptions of language teachers and learners as the main users of these textbooks. Such research could explore students' and teachers' perceptions of and engagement with the representations examined here through different methods, including questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group interviews, participant observations or institutional ethnography. Fourth, since the findings of this study show that the representations of the foreign characters and target culture are oversimplified and that the focus is on the source culture and Islam in order to manage student identities and prevent them from being affected by foreign culture, further research should examine the ways in which these textbooks are used alongside other media that students and teachers are exposed to and that might represent foreign characters and cultures in quite different ways. Exposure to foreign people and cultures comes from a variety of different sources, such as travel abroad, media, television and from family or friends. Further research should seek to understand the place of textbooks within these sources of cultural and linguistic knowledge and examine the intertextual relationships between them to determine how these relationships, and possibly contradictions, affect students' identities and their attitudes towards their English language learning and also their own culture and religion.

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