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The Impact of Societal Values on Kuwaiti Women and the Role of Education

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Zaha F. M. M. Alsuwailan entitled "The Impact of Societal Values on Kuwaiti Women and the Role of Education." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Barbara Thayer-Bacon, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Rosiland Gwynne, Diana Moyer, Joe DeSensi

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Major Professor

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and recommend its acceptance:

Rosalind Gwynne

Diana Moyer

Joy DeSensi

Accepted for the council

Anne Mayhew

Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Impact of Societal Values on Kuwaiti Women and the Role of Education

A Dissertation

Presented For the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Zaha F.M.M Alsuwailan

August 2006

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband

Bader Alkandari

who encouraged me, supported me, and believed in my ability to attain this degree, and to my special and beloved children Naser, Yousef, Ahmad and Mariam. Also, to my parents Sheikha Alodailah and Fahad Alsuwailan, my sisters Latifa, Wafa, and Sara, and my brothers Ahmad, Homoud, and Abdullah for their spiritual support and love, and my brothers-in-law Bader AlSahreeda and Jamal al-Sayeed, and to my extended family.

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Abstract

Schools, as vital transmitters of societal values, help to shape students' values and personalities. In Kuwait, female students are subjected to a continuous stream of messages from teachers and textbooks regarding the social roles they are expected to occupy. The school system, however, is a reflection of a larger Kuwaiti society that emphasizes the value of appropriate gender roles. This societal norm has its roots in Kuwait's history and past traditions. In order to understand the effects of this value on Kuwaiti women, I have probed the past of Kuwait while tracing the ways in which the roles of Kuwaiti women have changed over time. In the era preceding the discovery of oil, women's tasks were limited to and defined by the domestic sphere; after the discovery of oil, they were able to leave that isolated private world and emerge into the public sphere. However, they are still confined to restricted public positions and occupations and so they have formed organizations to help them assert their social and political rights. Their claims for expanded public participation have a polarized reaction from conservative and liberal positions: the former wishes to return women to their natural position in the household, whereas the latter supports their involvement in public occupations and responsibilities. Today, Kuwaiti women are voting and running for office, which is a new and unfamiliar expression of Kuwaiti social values. I believe I am uniquely positioned as a cultural studies student to address critical issues in Kuwaiti society at a time when women are becoming visible in its public and political life. Also, in emphasizing education as the channel in which to address them, I have undertaken this dissertation in the hope that it may help Kuwaiti women to review their status and to see the crucial role they can play in the future of their country.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview

This study is a historical study investigating past conditions in Kuwait as a means of examining contemporary problems. The intention is to document the history of Kuwaiti women's educational and political development within its broader cultural, economic, and political context in order to assess its impact on women's social status. The goals of the study are to investigate the gender values of Kuwaiti society, explore how those goals have obstructed women's education and political participation, and examine the factors that led to a transformation of those belief systems. A further aim of the study is to understand current attitudes and the changes that produced them in contemporary Kuwaiti society. This will help us envisage the future of Kuwaiti society and determine whether or not it is able or willing to accept further transformations of societal values.

My interest in this project is driven by two important considerations. First, the impact of Kuwaiti social conventions has been largely overlooked in previous historical studies. Thus, it is important to provide a study that closely examines the principles and practices of Kuwaiti society concerning women and the factors that led to changes in these traditions, such as new ideas in education and the economic effect of the discovery of oil. This transformation of social values is clearly revealed in the history writings of Kuwait in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the work of Zahra Freeth, the daughter of a British diplomat who lived in Kuwait before and after the discovery of oil. Second, Kuwaiti women are regarded as less socially and politically important than men, and as a result their history is seen as playing a marginal role in the history of men. Therefore, this

study brings women's history to light, reveals crucial facts long obscured or suppressed, and raises awareness among women as they reexamine their current values. This study provides a close look at the values of society and the factors that led to the changes in these values. This could help reveal the nature of values currently affecting Kuwait society. According to Stephens (1974), "[historians] are not interested in everything that has happened in the past. Primarily, though certainly not exclusively, [historians] are interested in those aspects of the past that have significance for present society, or at least those which have some value" (p. 5).

Therefore, the study is guided by a desire to clarify the significance and influence of the past on existing Kuwaiti societal values. In this pursuit, I turn to history to provide a meaning of the past that has implications for the present and the future. As Jorn Rusen (2005) asserts, "History is a meaningful nexus between past, present and future—not merely a perspective on what has been. It is a translation of past into present, an interpretation of past actuality via a conception of temporal change which encompasses past, present, and the expectation of future events" (p. 25).

Similarly, through the lens of cultural studies, the purpose of history is to identify the impact of the past on the present and future of our societies. Cultural studies is not as concerned with analyzing history to inspect the errors of the past as with relating what we have investigated in history to the present and future. As Cary Nelson (1997) pointed out, "In its projects of historical and contemporary analysis, cultural studies is often concerned as well with intervening in the present and with encouraging certain possible futures rather than others" (p. 68). Therefore, investigating history will provide an

explanation of the roots of contemporary values in Kuwait and help to clarify the effects of those values on the present position of Kuwaiti women.

There have been several studies of the movement that is seeking to obtain education and political participation for Kuwaiti women, but none have extensively examined the source and effect of values on those movements. I believe that the study of values is important since values are an integral part of any society and substantially affect the way people perceive and interact with the world around them.

In Kuwaiti society, societal values have had an immense effect on the status of Kuwaiti women. One of the societal values that impacted their role in society is the construction of gender. Kuwaiti society placed specific restrictions on women consistent with its traditional social conventions. In the past, Kuwaiti men controlled the economic, political, and educational institutions of their society; these public tasks were reserved for them. As the decision makers in Kuwaiti society, from the time they were young, they were encouraged to lead the open life that allowed them to go to school and work, and to participate in politics. Women, on the other hand, were taught at a very young age to perform domestic tasks and accept a role confined to the private world. As a result, men occupied a patriarchal position in society, and women were confined to the domestic sphere with its restricted values.

A drastic change occurred after 1938 with the discovery of oil. Women began reflecting on their own situation after being introduced to a new culture by foreign laborers in Kuwait and through studying abroad in westernized countries. Since that time, Kuwaiti women have attempted to correct their position in society by challenging societal attitudes that regarded them as “cultural gatekeepers.” They have attempted to introduce

new concepts of women's social activity, such as working in public places, claiming their political rights, and insisting that Kuwaiti society accept modernity. However, Kuwaiti society views modernization from two different perspectives. According to Riffat Hassan (2002), in general the Muslim point of view tends to regard "modernity" in two ways: One is as a process of modernization, which is related to scientific, technological, and material progress; the other is as Westernization, which is associated with promiscuity and other harmful social problems. The dilemma is that Westernization is seen as undesirable, whereas modernization is desirable. The concepts of Westernization were the subject of public debate in Kuwait between the liberal faction (Muslims who value much of Western culture and seek to adapt them to Kuwaiti society), and the tribal/Islamist faction (Muslims who attempt to resist the threat to Muslim culture and thus refute values alien to Kuwaiti society).

I began to understand the importance of the study of societal values while listening to old Kuwaiti women tell stories about their lives, how they were not allowed to go to school or participate in public life because male dominated society consigned them to a secluded and restricted place. They lived in isolation, which limited them to a private world with traditions and norms far removed from the public world of men. This has led me to investigate the factors shaping the different roles allotted to females and males. Therefore, gender value is a crucial part in my study as it provides understanding of how societal values characterize the rights and responsibilities of men and women in Kuwaiti society. According to Moyer (2004), there is a need in the history of education to explore "the process of gender construction in relation to changing historical, social, and political context" (p. 41). Gender, however, in this study means the differentiation

between female and male according to sex, which led to social conceptions about the behavior and characteristics expected for each sex. Peter McLaren (1995) noted that “difference is always a product of history, culture, power and ideology” (p. 43). Thus, gender differences were produced by the values of Kuwaiti society that granted superiority to men over women.

As a Kuwaiti woman, I have seen that marginality plays a role in the lives of Kuwaiti women. According to Sandra Harding (1993), it is marginalized people themselves who present the best perspective about their situation. Marginalized groups are the ones who experience oppression in society and, in Freire’s (2002) assessment, oppressed individuals better comprehend oppressive society: “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of the oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?” (45). Freire encouraged the oppressed to be engaged in reflection in order to perform an action that constitutes true praxis. Freire’s view is clearly illustrated in women’s educational and political development in Kuwait. Women began examining their own situation and the society in which they lived before claiming their political rights through action against the patriarchal society.

I have found myself not only in an outside position, but also in an inside position since I have grown up in a culture that instilled in me certain views about the world. As such, I agree with Thayer-Bacon’s (2003) declaration, “I do not think any of us, as knowers, can escape our own social embeddedness completely” (p. 32). As a Kuwaiti, I have grown up in a culture that places certain restrictions on women and, in experiencing this culture from the inside, I never questioned its values or its traditions when I was

young; I accepted them as common sense. It was only when I grew older that I came to realize the impact of values on women's education; I experienced the impact of values when I attempted to make myself visible in a society that believes in the limited abilities of women. After I graduated from high school, my father forbade me to continue my studies abroad because it was not an acceptable practice for a single woman. However, after my marriage, my husband encouraged me to pursue my studies in the United States, thereby challenging the Kuwaiti social code that considers studying abroad alone appropriate for a man but not a woman. I now believe that I have broken with some of the traditional values that underestimate the abilities of women. Experiencing the impact of the social values that prevented me from studying abroad allows me to understand the importance of studying those values in order to investigate their effect on women. I believe, for example, that illiteracy among many old women in Kuwait is the result of embedded cultural values that favored the education of men while excluding women.

According to Thayer-Bacon (2003), "we are greatly determined by our social settings, as social beings, but we are also able to become aware of our embeddedness, because we are social beings. Others shape our views, but others also help us become aware of how views differ" (32). I became able to view my world through a different lens when I was introduced to a new culture as a student in the United States. I started to examine the status of Kuwaiti women from an outside perspective. Thus, my position as an insider/outsider gives me the opportunity to observe Kuwaiti societal values closely from an inside angle, and also to present a critical view from an outside angle as in the approach referred to by Patricia Hill Collins (1999):

At its best, outsider within status seems to offer its occupants a powerful balance between the strengths of their sociological training and the offerings of their personal and cultural experiences. Neither is subordinated to the other. Rather, experienced reality is used as a valid source of knowledge for critiquing sociological facts and theories, while sociological thought offers new ways of seeing that experienced reality. (p.173)

In this study I seek to recount what happened in the past for women in Kuwait—the conditions of patriarchy and women’s invisibility that actually existed in the past and were the reasons for women’s marginalization. As I have explained above, I am discussing women’s history from a marginalized position, but I am not attempting to force my view onto history; on the contrary, I believe that my position will allow me to see more clearly things that others may have overlooked. For instance, the inspiration to discuss societal values through understanding their impact on women’s status came from my own position as a woman. It provided me with the idea of studying the values of the past and their relationship to women’s education and political movements. My marginalized position has led me to choose the topic that I believe is of great importance to Kuwaiti society, and I think of my work as something useful and not a rigid critique prompted by my position as a woman. I view my work through another lens: “A better approach may be to view each of us for the unique people we are, and the valuable contributions we can make to the conversation, no matter what sex we are” (Thayer-Bacon, 1995, p. 143).

Gaining analytical knowledge as a cultural studies student provides me with opportunities to critically investigate my position and that of other Kuwaiti women. From

a cultural studies perspective, an examination of women's position demands not only a record of the facts, but also a critical perspective with which to inspect the issues of hegemony and women's social inferiority. Henry Giroux (1996) argued, "History is not merely about looking at facts, dates, and events. It is also about critically examining one's own historical location amid relations of power, privilege, or subordination" (p. 52). Therefore, it is important for this study to address the issue of power and women's subordination while revealing the historical facts in order to comprehend women's position in society and how their inferiority was constructed by patriarchal society and its hegemonic values.

Since my work is informed by cultural studies, I believe it is important to reveal how cultural studies influences my work. Nelson (1997) identifies cultural studies as the place where we can investigate our race and gender in relation to society: "Cultural studies is properly an enterprise in which people can explore their race, ethnicity, or gender and articulate its relation with larger culture" (p. 67). Handel Wright (2001), on the other hand, viewed cultural studies as "a new academic field that was not merely interdisciplinary but also anti-disciplinary, one that examined how power operated in culture and represented and championed the oppressed and marginalized of society" (p. 11).

Power is a significant issue in cultural studies. The questions, "Who has power in the society, how it is created, negotiated, maintained? And how we can bring about positive change in this situation" (Wright, p. 3), are the main concern of cultural studies scholars. In order to comprehend the issue of power as it impacts women's position in

society, it is important to understand Gramsci's concept of hegemony in order to explain how power was exercised in Kuwaiti society.

Gramsci uses hegemony to explain, according to Hall (1982), that "the dominance of certain formations was secured, not by ideological compulsion, but by cultural leadership" (p. 85). Hegemony, when used to refer to social relations, tends to refer to a society wherein the dominant group exercises control over the economic and the political institutions in the society (Sage, 1998). The subordinated group, however, may accept this domination as valid and appropriate.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony can be clearly seen in Kuwaiti society. In the past, educating women was a low priority because their main responsibilities were domestic. Therefore, mothers prepared their daughters to be good wives and mothers by encouraging them to perform household tasks. When the first female school was established, many mothers, as well as fathers, refused to send their daughters to school since it encouraged an alien value that was restricted to males. Boys needed education to find a job, whereas it was not important for girls since their main work did not require education. Kuwaiti women accepted as common sense the role that was assigned to them by their culture. Eventually, some women came to resist the societal values that obstructed their educational and political freedom. Thus, it becomes clear that the insights into the historical structure of Kuwaiti society provided by cultural studies are essential in understanding how power affected Kuwaiti women while either enabling them to accept their inferior position, or enabling them to resist their position of inferiority.

Research Framework

This study examines the issue of value by examining history in order to track the source and changes in values in the Kuwaiti society and, since its main goal is to track gender value in Kuwaiti society, it will emphasize the comparison of pre- and post-oil discovery periods regarding the lives, social roles, and expectations of Kuwaiti women.

In this section I will present the purpose of the study and a literature review in order to expose the gaps in history that need to be filled. Furthermore, I will explain my methodology in dealing with the problem of bias and presentism in the study.

Purpose of the Study

The study is designed to explain Islamic and cultural values in order to identify the central role played by values in Kuwaiti society. Furthermore, it seeks to review the history of Kuwaiti society in order to clarify the impact of political and economic institutions on the education of women. In addition, the study examines the effects of the establishment of the first girl's school and the obstacles it faced, and briefly reviews the women's political movement as it was affected by prevailing social ideology.

Study of Related Literature

A literature review not only raises significant questions that may guide the researcher toward her or his research topic, it also assists the researcher to locate the gaps in existing information. It provides an understanding of preceding work that has been done. It also forms the base on which the future work should be constructed (Borg, 1963). In most research, it presents a rationale for the research problem and assists in attaining significant goals. According to Borg and Gall (1979), "The general purpose of the review is to help the research worker develop a thorough understanding and insight into previous

work and the trends that have emerged, the review can also help in reaching a number of important specific goals” (p. 98). It is by making an extensive review of the work previously done on the history of Kuwaiti women that I have found significant gaps that need to be filled. The following discussion presents a representative sample of the studies that I have found so far as they provide examples of the existing gaps in the historiography.

Although there are several studies of the movement to obtain education and political participation for Kuwaiti women, none of them has extensively examined the source and effect of values on those movements. Mariam Abdul-malek al-Saleh (1999), the first Kuwaiti woman teacher, wrote an autobiography in which she described her past and her father’s role in her education. She also explained the system of informal education of Kuwaiti girls by al-mutawa, a female teacher who teaches young girls the *Holy Qur’an*, and furnished an account of the first formal girls’ school, founded in 1937, where girls began to learn the principles of reading and writing. Al-Saleh, however, did not discuss in depth the facts concerning women’s education; she did not describe how she came to work as a teacher in a society that prohibited women from working, or why families at that time allowed their daughters to attend the formal school. Al-Saleh, who witnessed the changes in female education in the past, did not explore the impact of societal values on the development of women’s education in the country.

Abdul-malek al-Saleh (2002) wrote *Pages on the Historical Development of Women’s Education*, which is about the curriculum in girls’ schools. In it she discussed the kind of education available to girls in 1937 and provided a general description of the teachers, subjects, uniforms, and activities that existed in girls’ education. However, she

also did not explain how girls were able to attend school in a traditional society that viewed household tasks as women's' only concerns and education and work meant only for men. She focused more on the organization and programs in girls' schools than on revealing how girls were able to break out of their isolation in order to take advantage of these privileges.

Al-Mughni (2001), on the other hand, has presented a profound study in her work, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*. She discussed the first women's movements in Kuwait and the opposition they encountered from Islamists and tribal forces of Kuwait. She also highlighted the issue of gender inequality and how it became the focal concern of the women's political movement. However, some questions remain for which there are no satisfactory answers in her study these include: How were women able to establish organizations in a society that restricted women to the private sphere of the family and home? How did those women who led the early political movements contend with societal values forbidding women to enter the public realm? How did their families allow them to leave their secluded lives? Although those questions were not the author's main concern, they are crucial to understanding the struggle of Kuwaiti women's political movements. Furthermore, the construction of gender inequality was not explained in Al-Mughni's study. Explaining the construction of gender through an analysis of its historical and social context is necessary in any investigation of the history of Kuwaiti women.

In addressing this same issue, Mary Anne Tetreault (1994) wrote an article about the women's political movement in Kuwait. In it she discussed the political subordination of Kuwaiti women and the patriarchal position asserted by men. Furthermore, she briefly

explained the values of that society. However, Tetreault did not present a deep study of values and their effects on women since her main goal is to present the political participation of Kuwaiti women before and after the invasion. In my research, I will more extensively pursue the issue of Kuwaiti family values introduced in her work. While her study is directed more toward the changes in women's political status, I intend to focus extensively on the source and the effects of values on the position of women in both education and politics.

Jacqueline Ismael (1982), in her book, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective*, has focused on the history of Kuwait in general. She explained how Kuwait was established and what changes occurred in its society due to the British colonial presence in Kuwait and the discovery of oil. Thus, she concentrated on the economic changes that led to changes in the structure of Kuwaiti society and not on the status of women in that society. As important as Ismael's study is in understanding the structure of Kuwaiti society, women play only a minor role in what is essentially a man's history; I believe that there is a need to understand how women responded to those changes in their society.

An anthropological study conducted by Zahra Freeth (1956), *Kuwait Was My Home*, offers observations of the general atmosphere of Kuwaiti society in the past. In one of her chapters, she presented a portrait of women's lives in Kuwait and the status of women by describing the wedding customs and stories narrated by women of that time. However, Freeth rendered this description without explaining how Kuwaiti women came to accept their role. Since it is an anthropological study, it seems that the author's main

purpose was to present a general, objective picture of Kuwaiti society without explaining the nuances behind the traditions and the customs at that time.

Similarly, John Daniels (1971) conducted another anthropological study entitled *Kuwait Journey*. In it he portrayed the atmosphere of Kuwaiti society after the discovery of oil. He explained the effects of the economic growth that occurred as a result. In one passage, he presented a description of a Kuwaiti wedding, which, I believe, reflects the fundamental social values of that period. Daniels' purpose in the study was to reveal the changes that occurred in Kuwaiti society due to the discovery of oil, and he also sought to report on the aspects of life in Kuwait (customs, roads, transportation, etc.) that existed in the past. Thus, he focused more on his journey to Kuwait than on analyzing the impact of societal values as he observed them.

Dalal al-Zaben (1989) conducted a qualitative research into Kuwaiti attitudes towards women's work. She presented the work of women in Kuwaiti society pre-oil discovery and the changes after the discovery of oil. In her study, al-Zaben concentrated on the type of work Kuwaiti women performed in the past. Her main purpose was to present the significance of women's work to society. However, she did not examine the obstacles that Kuwaiti women encountered during their early efforts to work outside the confines of the home. Nevertheless, I find her study to be valuable in that it described the type of work that Kuwaiti women were allowed to do and sheds light on societal views regarding women's work.

Altaf al Sabah (2001), in *Kuwait Tradition: Creative Expressions of a Culture*, has presented a general view of Kuwaiti culture and traditions of the past. She briefly described the roles allotted to both women and men in the past; she also outlines the

structural changes that occurred in Kuwait. Once again, Al Sabah did not give an in-depth description of the status of women in society, how it changed, or the factors that led to that change. She also did not focus on the significance of value on women's lives, yet her study contributes to our comprehension of the meaning of the family as the basic social organization at that time in the society and its role as a defining factor in women's lives.

In her book, *The Historical Development of Kuwaiti Women's Political Rights in 1971-1982*, al-Sadani (1983) discussed Kuwait women's suffrage. She explained Kuwaiti women's resistance to the tribal and Islamist opposition to women's political participation. She also presented the National Assembly debates on the petition for women's political rights and the differing views of parliament members on granting women the vote and other political privileges. Although she did not raise the issue of value and its effect on women in her book, her study is useful because it reflects the reactions of Kuwaiti society to women's assertion of their political rights.

Jill Crystal (1992) offered an important history of Kuwaiti society in her book, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State*, an account of the history of Kuwait before and after the discovery of oil. In one small section, she discussed the gender division in Kuwaiti society today wherein women occupy a position of inferiority. She also explained the control men exercised over the education and work of women, drawing attention to the traditional concept that women's natures suit them for specific, domestic work. However, the role of women is only part of her general description of the history of Kuwait and she did not discuss the role of values in Kuwaiti society as the source for such views in the society, or how women responded to them. On the other hand, she did

present a detailed description of the society in the past that could help establish a general background about life in Kuwait and how it shapes societal values.

In *Kuwaiti Women's Education and Its Role in the Development Process*, Amal al- Sabah (1989) discussed the educational development of women in Kuwait and presented an analytical study concerning women's participation in the work force. She discovered that there are many obstacles to women's participation, such as society's view of women's work and the gender distinction in work that views women as less qualified. She also provided statistics regarding illiteracy rates among women in Kuwait. Although al-Sabah contributed a useful study regarding women's work and its impact on the development process in society, she did not devote a great deal of attention to the role of societal values as a cause of women's illiteracy.

In this brief review, I have attempted to present the studies of Kuwaiti women's position in society that investigated how women's education and political involvement were described in relation to societal norms. I found that these studies focused more on changes that occurred in the Kuwaiti society and not on how those changes affected the position of women in that society. Therefore, I intend to investigate the roots of gender value in Kuwaiti society and the institutions that underpin them. Furthermore, I intend to trace the causes leading to the transformation of gender values that led women to leave their private and limited world.

The previous studies discuss social values in general terms, such as the customs and norms that govern individual behavior and the conduct of daily life in cuisine, dress, and so on. What I will attempt to discuss is social values in specific terms of gender roles, which is to say, the social role each gender is expected to fulfill. However, the previous

studies inform my work in that they help me understand the prevailing institutions in general in pre- and post-oil discovery eras, including education, work, and politics. Once those changes have been outlined, I will then examine those institutions in terms of gender by investigating the roles played by men and women in these institutions.

The Objectivity Question

As a Kuwaiti woman conducting a study that concentrates on the position of women in Kuwaiti society, I am subject to the problem of objectivity. The dilemma is to present a solid and valid work while discussing the status of Kuwaiti women as a scholar belonging to that gender and culture.

In order to deal with the objectivity problem, it is useful to highlight how some historians respond to this problem. Lester Stephens (1974) noted, “Bias is ever- present, even in the best of historical works” (p. 48). Stephens (1974) also acknowledged that objectivity is hard to obtain under any circumstance because historians are humans conducting human studies: “once one enters the domain of human activities—and that is the only domain of the historian—objectivity and impartiality are harder to attain, precisely because he is a human being looking at human events”¹ (p. 51).

Stephens taught me that bias may not necessary devalue historical work. It does exist in many historical works and it is difficult to escape since each historian carries with him or her certain values regarding his or her work. I learned that the existence of bias might not impair my work because it is natural and exists even in the best historical work. Thus, I must not be afraid of my own bias, but instead I must be aware of it and attempt to control it as much as possible.

¹ I use male pronouns in quotations where they exist in that form throughout this dissertation.

Edward Carr (1961) presented a way of looking at objectivity. He explained that objectivity depends on historians' awareness of their subjectivity and their ability to distance themselves from their work, which does not come readily:

When we call a historian objective, we mean, I think, two things. First of all, we mean that he has a capacity to rise above the limited vision of his own situation in society and in history—a capacity which, as I suggested in earlier lectures, is partly dependent on his capacity to recognize the extent of his involvement in that situation, to recognize, that is to say, the impossibility of total objectivity... (p. 163).

On the other hand, James Banks (1998) believed that “researchers should strive for objectivity even though it is an unattainable, idealized goal” (p. 6). He also noted that researchers must strive for objectivity but also be aware that subjective and objective components of knowledge are interrelated and interactive. He strongly maintained that objectivity should be researchers' noble goal.

I agree with Banks that researchers should make their best effort to attain objectivity in their research even though it might be impossible. However, I believe that although researchers may not be able to achieve total objectivity, they can be reliable and honest in their work and, by identifying their subjectivity, produce useful and truthful results. In this vein, William Stubbs (1967) stated, “For my own part, I do not see why an honest partisan should not write an honest book if he can persuade himself to look honestly at his subject, and make allowance for his own prejudices” (p. 109).

Derrick Alridge (2003) offered a practical way of thinking of objectivity in historical research when he explained the objectivity dilemma in his studies. He pointed out the following themes:

(a) Although objectivity is a desired goal in academic research, scholars do not have to detach themselves from their research or research subjects to do good research; (b) researchers should recognize the implicit and explicit meanings of objectivity, critique their own valuations, and strive for “strong objectivity”; scholars should avoid making generalization between the past, present, and future without regard to historical context, but at the same time realize that the time in which they live inherently influences their research. (p. 31)

Alridge has provided me with an approach to deal with the objectivity problem. He helps me understand that I can still perform valid work even if I am close to my study, and that I do not have to detach myself to prove that I have done reliable research. Thus, I see that there are other ways in dealing with the objectivity problem than the rigid approach of traditional historical works that mandated complete objectivity. These ways can be exemplified in the feminist analysis dealing with objectivity. I will first discuss the feminist perspective, then describe the approach I find most useful in seeking to incorporate the academic principles of objectivity.

From a feminist standpoint, Donna Haraway (1988) believed “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (p. 583). In Haraway’s view, we need to be more concerned with how to identify social reality rather than with the degree of objectivity in our research.

In essence, Sandra Harding (1993) presented the concept of “strong objectivity”:
“strong objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge” (p. 69). Harding’s strong objectivity method allows the researcher to be involved in her or his research in order to convey a critical view about her or his subject. Her strong objectivity method indicated that marginalized people are best suited to present a critical study of scientists and their communities:

All of the kinds of objectivity-maximizing procedures focus on the nature and/or social relations that are the direct object of observation and reflection must also be focused on the observers and reflectors-scientists and the larger society whose assumptions they share. But a maximally critical study of scientists and their communities can be done only from the perspective of those whose lives have been marginalized by such communities. (p. 69)

Harding (1987) stressed the importance of knowledge that is based on experience. She indicated that “women’s experiences, informed by feminist theory, provide a potential grounding for more complete and less distorted knowledge claims than do men’s” (p. 184). Harding (1991) also states that in order to make sense of the reality of woman’s life or gender relations in any culture, analyses should start from real and historic lives of women.

Harding’s concept of objectivity, however, has been criticized by Kristin Shrader-Frechetter (1988), who argued that Harding was not using common sense in her characterization of objectivity:

Harding is not employing the term ‘objectivity’ in its ordinary sense ...her use is question-begging both because she has not defended it, and because this sense of

the term is highly stipulative...[in that] she does not explain how scientific work becomes more objective by being directed by moral and political interests...how work expressing moral and political values lays claim to objectivity (p .444).

The observations of both Harding and Haraway, though, have helped me address the question of objectivity. I can see the significance of my position as a woman and the critical knowledge that I can offer from my marginalized position. Although the feminist perspectives of the objectivity issue are contentious, I believe they have offered me insight for dealing with the question of objectivity in my study through valuing my inside position for the experience that it can provide. The value of the inside position can clearly be seen in Haya al-Mughni's (2001) study, *Women in Kuwait: Politics of Gender*. The researcher dealt with her study by benefiting from her inside position as a woman: "[M]y experiences made me [realize] that the endless blame the societies' leaders place on Kuwaiti women for their lack of interest in women's organization is only a cover-up for their exclusionary tactics" (al-Mughni, 2001, p.19).

In general, the scholars mentioned above have provided me with a useful evaluation of objectivity as I began this study. Based on their perspectives, I have concluded that objectivity may be, to some extent, a phantom that researchers attempt to achieve; everyone has her or his own beliefs and values that may be difficult to detach from the work. Achieving objectivity does not necessarily mean detaching ourselves from our research, but it does require the researcher to carefully question her or his values and beliefs before conducting a historical work in order to be accountable.

Presentism

In the study of history, using the past to illuminate the present day problems could lead to the trap of “presentism,” which means, according to Borg and Gall (1989), explaining “past events using concepts and perspectives of the present that originated in more recent times” (p. 825). In this study, I do not intend to view the past through the lens of the present. Instead I am investigating the past hoping that it will provide a meaning for present practices. That is, in this study I am starting from the past in order to see the present generally and not to answer certain questions in the present. I am looking at the past from its larger perspective and raising questions about the history of women’s status in Kuwait in order to investigate past societal values.

Borg and Gall (1989) believe that the study of the past provides a moral framework for understanding the present. It reminds us of other traditions—traditions that involved a defined moral order and connected the individual to a community. In this study, I hope to discover the present and future of women in Kuwaiti society by scrutinizing their historical roles. Although they have gained significant educational and political rights, they are still trapped by the chains of traditional values that perceive them to be less qualified than men for many positions. There is a constant discourse between present and past wherein the past can explain many practices we see in our society: “[History] is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past” (Carr, 1961, p. 35). On the other hand, in the history of education, the past is a place where educators can find answers for many contemporary problems. According to Hay (2005), “Contemporary problems often

have deep historical roots, and understanding historical context is vital for developing realistic solutions” (p. 255).

Historical research needs thorough work from the researcher in collecting, examining, evaluating, and synthesizing data into an accurate account of the topic investigated. The researcher should not treat history in isolation from the present since the present, I believe, is a product of the past. However, we must not look at the past from the perspective of the present because this may trap our attention in certain aspects in history and lead us to neglect important aspects of the past. Clearly, dealing with history demands a consideration of the past as an intersecting element rather than as a separate one.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter One, which highlights the research framework, I provide an introduction to the topic and discuss the purpose and significance of the study. In Chapter Two, I explain the meaning of values from philosophical, anthropological, religious and sociological perspectives in order to work out a meaning of value that can best define values in the study. Moreover, I analyze the roots of Islamic values as a foundation of societal values in Kuwait. Chapter Three consists of general background about Kuwaiti society before the discovery of oil in order to demonstrate how values regarding social roles of gender shaped the roles allotted to men and women in that society during that period. I then describe the changes in these conditions after the discovery of oil in 1938 and attempt to explain the factors that led to a transformation of some of those societal values. In Chapter Four, I reveal the impact of societal values on the women of Kuwait by showing how society’s response toward the

women's political movement contains and reflects those values. In Chapter Five, I conclude with observations about the educational implications of the study of values.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the main purpose of the study as an endeavor to document women's educational and political history, tracing the effect of societal values regarding gender social roles. Furthermore, since there are many studies regarding women's education and political movement, I found it significant to provide the related studies in order to show how this study is different and what gaps it attempts to fill. Thus, through examining the related studies, several questions arose:

1. What are the factors behind transforming values in Kuwaiti society regarding women?
2. What is the role of Kuwaiti women in changing the values of society?
3. What are society's views regarding the changing role of Kuwaiti women?

I will attempt to answer these questions in the next chapters, but first I will clarify what "value" means in this study since the word "value" has different meanings in different disciplines. Moreover, since Kuwaiti values are based on Islamic values, it is important to clarify Islamic values and how they are integrated into the cultural values of Kuwaiti society.

II. THE MEANING OF VALUE

Introduction

Societal values played a significant role in Kuwaiti women's lives and continue to do so. They placed constraints on women, which were the result of their inferior position in Kuwaiti society. These traditional values were also the main obstruction that hindered women's education and their political movement for many years. Many Kuwaiti women were illiterate because of their society viewed women's education as resisting tradition. Therefore, women activists in Kuwait attempted to correct that view of women and to claim their political rights, but they were confronted by the values that viewed politics as the work of men in which women should not interfere. As a result, women struggled for many years to gain their civil liberties and it is only recently that they were granted these rights. However, many Kuwaitis still believe that women do not have the ability to do the work of men.

Therefore, in order to understand a society's values, it is important to examine the bases of its social concepts. Furthermore, since value can mean many different things, it is necessary to clarify how value is defined in different fields in order to establish a comprehensible definition of the concept of value in my research.

There is an endless variety of values and everyone has her or his own opinion about what they are, which raises considerable difficulty in deciding on a fixed meaning of value. As DeSensi and Rosenberg (1996) pointed out, "one serious difficulty that arises when discussing values is determining which values to adopt and express" (p. 18). Therefore, I will attempt to define value as it is understood in different fields in order to find the meaning most appropriate for this study.

In various fields such as philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, value has been defined differently. Even within each of those fields, value has been defined according to the point of view of the philosopher, sociologist, and anthropologist. To present comprehensive explanations of these different concepts of value would be a difficult task since each has a complex view of what value means. However, I will attempt to demonstrate how value is viewed in different fields in order to construct a general understanding of the meaning of value. Thus, I will present the meaning of value from the diverse perspectives of prominent philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists.

Before plunging into the world of value in different fields, I found it useful to first understand what value means in etymology. In ordinary language, there are two meanings of value, which are the character or property of value, or the things that are said to possess this character or property. The former means 'worth' in a wider sense, whereas the latter means a thing regarded as worth having. In Latin, value (*valeo*) signifies strength, and, with strength, health (Laird, 1929).

According to Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1964), founder of the Sokagakkai religious organization, value can be classified as the following:

1. Economic value. It deals mainly with the value of gain. The relationship between an evaluating subject and the object which can be measured with the balance provided by the two concepts of gain and loss (p. 99).
2. Moral value. Terms of evaluation, such as good and evil, are used exclusively by society. They are used only in a case where the community praises or reproves the individual who is himself a component or a part of that society (p. 103).

3. Aesthetic value. The name of beauty is given to those sensed objects which inspire a light wonder in our hearts, changing us to a slight extent. But we do not notice those objects which fail to arouse any feeling of wonder, regarding them as common and unworthy of attention or interest (p. 112).

4. Religious value. It is considered the value of holiness, which is distinguished from truth, good, and beauty (p. 122).

Johnson (1978), on the other hand, pointed out that value is characteristic of what he refers to as “various entities”: (1) intrinsic such as morally good, beautiful, true, pleasure; (2) valuable when they are functioning as means to end; for instance, a pen has its value when it is functioning as an instrument to write a note; (3) valuable in characteristics, for example, a pen is valuable because it is characterized by beautiful and beautiful is characterized by value; (4) external consequences, for instance, the beneficial consequences from serving particular food makes the value accrue to the food; (5) possible such as the possibility of using pen to write a note makes it valuable under certain conditions; (6) potential, for instance, a child, of a good heredity, being raised in a good environment, is valuable because of her or his potentialities which makes her or him capable of growing into a mature person which is valuable kind of adult. (pp. 4-5)

Because philosophy, sociology and anthropology often study an individual’s relationship with society, they have offered significant contributions to our understanding of value. Therefore those disciplines are examined here in order to present their various views on the meaning of value.

Values in Philosophy

In philosophy, according to Honderich (2005), ascertaining the meaning of value has emphasized three related issues: “First, on what sort of property of something its ‘having value’ or ‘being of value’ is; Second, on whether having value is subjective or objective matter, on whether value is a matter of how we feel towards the object or lies on the object itself ; third, on attempting to describe the things that have value as valuable” (p. 941). I will attempt to show how these issues have been presented in various philosophers’ concept of value.

I will start with Socrates’ concept of value in order to determine how value was first viewed in ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle (1952), in *Eudemian Ethics* (1246a), described Socrates’ ethical theory: Socrates believed that all virtues are forms of knowledge, that is, one would be just when s/he knew the meaning of justice. Socrates, thus, believed in moral virtue; he concluded that it could only be achieved by comprehending the moral truth of the universe and that is accomplished through an intellectual insight into the nature of right and wrong. He thought that knowledge of moral facts involves morally right behavior and action and, conversely, ignorance causes wrong action of the same moral facts (Gould, 1955).

Socrates also thought of the soul as a pure being. He inquired about this in *The Republic* (IX): “In general, those kinds of things which are in the service of the body have less of truth and essence than those which are in the service of the soul?...And has not the body itself less of truth and essence than the soul?” (Plato, p. 351). He stated that the soul exists as a thing separate from the body and that nurturing it should be man’s

duty. He considers the revelation of its existence and traits one of the earliest duties of human reason (Dawson, 1974).

In Plato's theory of value, the concept of good is absolute value and reality. It carries the ideal of perfection of every aspect in the world of facts and experience. In *The Republic* (VI), Plato declared, "for you have often been told that the idea of good is the highest knowledge, and that all other things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this" (p. 243).

Among all the virtues, the virtue of wisdom, from Plato's perspective, has a spiritual and divine power that can be turned toward either good or evil: "The virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, hurtful and useless" (Plato, VII, p. 259). Thus, Plato believed in divine value; his work argued that all values originate with the immortals but, in part, as they help men to comprehend the qualities of eternal life, e.g.: holiness, justice, and wisdom (Lodge, 1950).

Correspondingly, Aristotle believed that real value exists in the soul, which carries the good nature of human beings. He declared that "it is clear that the virtue we must examine is human virtue, since we are also seeking the human good and human happiness. And by human virtue we mean virtue of the soul, not the body" (Aristotle, 1102a, 1985, p.30). Furthermore, Aristotle (1985), in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1102b), praised the part of the soul that has reason:

For in the continent and the incontinent person we praise their reason, i.e. the [part] of the soul that has reason, because it exhorts them correctly and towards

what is best; but they evidently also have in them some other [part] that is by nature something besides reason, conflicting and struggling with reason . (p. 31).

Aristotle here indicated that there is a conflict in the soul between reason and desire, with each pulling in the opposite direction. Reason wins in the individual who exercises control, whereas desire wins in the individual who lacks control. The part that has desire can oppose reason, but can also comply with it, and in the virtuous person it can exist in harmony (Bostock, 2000).

The rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza, on the other hand, claims that the act of virtue is formed in the body and mind. Spinoza (1989) explained in *Ethics* that “virtue is nothing else than to act according to the laws of one’s own nature” (p. 155). He follows up saying that “to act absolutely according to virtue is nothing else in us than to act under the guidance of reason” (p. 158). Moreover, Spinoza (1989) declared nothing is good or bad but that our desires make it so: “we endeavour, will, seek, or desire nothing because we deem it good; but on the contrary, we deem a thing good because we endeavour, will, seek, or desire it” (p. 92). Thus, Spinoza believed that one acts virtuously solely according to the law of her or his nature. It follows that if one acts from virtue, ideas are caused from within the mind and movement from within the body (Bennett, 1984).

Kant’s theorized that value stems from the essence of good will, and will essentially creates a connection between virtue and happiness. In other words, the highest good that is practical for us is determined by pure practical reason. Thus, the greatest good is expected to derive from the law of reason (Kant, 2002). In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant (2002), [34], stated:

The law to further the happiness of others arises not from the presupposition that this is an object for everyone's power of choice, but merely from [the fact] that the form of universality, which reason requires as condition for giving to a maxim of self-love the objective validity of a law, becomes the determining basis of the will. (p. 50)

In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant (2000) asserted that good can be determined by reason: "For the good is the object of will (i.e. of a faculty of desire determined by Reason" (p. 53). However, Kant (2005)[401] also pointed out that a person can act according to the law of reason, if he considers it a duty that he has to perform, and hence his actions will have a good will: "The pre-eminent good which we call moral can therefore consist in nothing else than *the representation of the law in itself...*" (p. 62).

Similarly, Hegel (1956) thought that reason is the sole reality of the world: "this 'Idea' or 'Reason' is the *True*, the *Eternal* and the absolutely *powerful* essence; that it reveals itself in the world, and in that world nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory" (p. 9-10). Hegel believed that self-realization of reason can be only through the self-determination of the finite spirits. Chakravarti (1966) noted that Hegel's concept of value has a metaphysical significance and not only an empirical one. The whole can be seen only in relation to moments of realization, and understanding the absolute can be through the evolution of self-consciousness of finite selves. The essence of the universe manifests itself only through the constant attempt of finite being to attain the ideal. Indeed, there is nothing to be achieved in the self-realized Spirit. Thus, there is no value to be realized, but there is a unique value in every individual life as it brings out the meaning the whole seeks to realize in it.

Jean Jacques Rousseau introduced naturalism into the question of value. Rousseau (1979) claimed that “taste is formed by means of industriousness and talents. By means of taste the mind is imperceptibly opened to ideas of the beautiful of every sort and, finally, to the moral notions related to them” (p. 375). According to Bernstein (1980), Rousseau was more “concerned in aesthetic matters with the distinction between the appearance [beauty] and the reality, and approved the former only on condition that the reality behind it has been faithfully expressed, and is itself healthy and praiseworthy” (pp. 90- 91). Rousseau insisted that there is a gap between appearance and reality, but he did not deny the significance of beauty in the “social graces.” In his discussion of the manners of Emile, he portrayed the relationship between beauty and goodness (Bernstein, 1980).

The concept of value is also addressed in the analytical philosophy of Bertrand Russell who believed that questions of value—what is good and bad on its own account, away from its effect—“lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge” (Russell, 1935, p. 230). Thus, the statement that something has value means that we are “giving expression to our own emotions” rather than to a fact that would remain true if our personal feelings were dissimilar (p. 230).

In his work, Russell (1935) analyzed the idea of good in order to prove his assumption of value. He asserted that the idea of good and bad is connected to desire. He thought that “anything that we all desire is good” and “anything that we all dread is bad” (p. 231). However, it is impossible for us to agree on all desires, thus, there is inconsistency in our desires. One does not recognize the relationship between good and desire because he does not grasp the meaning of words involved. Hence, when an

individual says “this is good in itself,” he or she thinks this is making the same statement as “this is square” or “this is sweet” (p. 235). Russell concluded that the objective property of something is stated in the latter assertions, whereas only desire is expressed in the former. Consequently, Russell defined his theory as “a form of the doctrine which is called subjectivity of values” (p. 237). Russell indicated that if two persons have opposing opinions about values, they are disagreeing about taste and not about truth of anything.

John Dewey (1939), on the other hand, after having concerned himself with axiological questions, claimed that “the theory of valuation is itself an intellectual or methodological means and as such can be developed and perfected only in and by use” (p. 54). In other words, the nature of value is actual behavior. He maintained that “the field in which value-facts are located is behavioral in a way that renders the facts open to observation and test in the usual sense of those words” (Dewey, 1949, p. 65). In *Ethics*, Dewey and Tufts (1938) differentiated between three levels of behavior and conduct:

(1) behavior which is motivated by various biological, economic, or other non-moral impulses or needs (e.g., family, life, work), and which yet has important results for morals; (2) behavior or conduct in which the individual accepts with relatively little critical reflection the standards and ways of his group as these are embodied in customs and mores; (3) conduct in which the individual thinks and judges for himself, considers whether a purpose is good or right, decides and chooses, and does not accept the standards of his group without reflection. (p. 7)

Thus, Dewey viewed value as a matter of practical application, that is, we cannot guarantee any evaluative judgment if we do not go outside the “value field” into matters

physical, physiological, anthropological, historical, and so on. It is only when we take facts ascertained in these fields into consideration that we can determine the conditions and consequences of giving value, and “without such determination judgments occurs only as pure myth” (Dewey, 1949, p. 77).

As we have seen, values have been defined differently throughout the history of philosophy, beginning with Plato’s idealistic view and moving to Dewey’s pragmatic one. Each philosopher delineates the concept of value based on his own premises.

Values in Sociology

During the past half century, the study of value became the main concern of social scientists. They examined the role of values, ideologies, and ethical and philosophical beliefs in social actions, and mainly in social determination. Unlike philosophers, sociologists avoid making personal value judgments about social phenomena, particularly as they are not in a position to propose courses of action by recommending that their proposals are essential and unavoidable presumptions based on objective facts.

Nevertheless, given that sociology is concerned with the interpretive understanding of social action, Max Weber (1975) proposed that the orientation of action in terms of absolute value is formulated by self-consciousness of the definitive values leading the action; the orientation of the detailed course of action is planned in keeping with these values. The meaning of action does not exist in the attainment of a result, whether good or bad, but in performing a certain type of action for its own sake.

Weber (1964) thought that the concept that values underlie human action was difficult to entirely comprehend, so it is recommended that, if individuals cannot understand them intellectually, they be received as facts: “Many ultimate ends or values

toward which experience shows that human action may be oriented, often cannot be understood completely, though sometimes we are able to grasp them intellectually” (p .91). He continued, “Depending on the circumstances of the particular case we must be content either with purely intellectual understanding of such values or when even that fails, sometimes we must simply accept them as given data” (p. 91).

In a sociological scientific sense, according to Mukerjee (1965), “values are mechanisms of man’s social orientation and guidance; they are tools of adjustment of human groups and individuals to the physical and social milieu, and are sifted and tested out in actual social experience by the three-fold [criterion]” (p. 8). That three-fold criterion is as follows:

1. to what degrees do the dominant values that one holds lead to the full poise and integration of personality, achieving freedom and control of the environment;
2. how far the present system of values that aids one in creating and maintaining groups, institutions, laws and rights-and-duties successfully guides society in intra-group struggle and survival;
3. to what degree does the present system of values promote the creation and maintenance of intimate, enduring and ideal social bonds and relations and the ideal solidarity of humanity. (p. 8)

Sociologists are more interested in the analysis of values functioning in social life and in discovering the norms inherent in social groups that form the framework of all value meaning and realization. From their perspective, human beings are value-seeking because of their social nature. Their desires, behavior, and interests are changed in social living. Society, personality, and values or morals are seen as integrated elements

(Mukerjee, 1965). According to Mukerjee (1965), “[Society, personality, and values cannot] be understood except in the terms of the others in the on-going processes of man’s social living and dialectic of communion” (p. 3).

Mering (1961), on the other hand, in *Grammar of Human Values* argued that value is meaningful in its significance to culture and the individual. The value that the individual seeks is the one that is indispensable for her or his existence:

[Value] is not restricted to the ethical or normative realm alone. The possible values an individual may hold and share with his culture tend to embrace what is existential and essential for human survival, both in the cultural and individual sense; what is normative or morally and legally prescriptive, directive and regulative; and what is idiosyncratic or represents personal, projective judgments and pronouncements. (p. 70)

Sociology is more concerned with cultural or social value than with individual value as above. According to Allan Johnson (2000), cultural value is a shared idea concerning how something is positioned according to its social desirability pertinence, worth, or goodness. As Johnson explained, “Values can be used to rank virtually anything, including abstraction (logic above intuition), objects (gold above lead), experience (loving and losing above never loving at all), behavior (truth telling above lying), personal characteristics (tall above short), and states of being (healthy above ill)” (p. 339). Thus, value is made by ranking things in relation to one another rather than by comparing them as merely similar or different. They are vital elements in any culture because they influence individual choices and the development and transformation of the social systems (Johnson, 2000).

An analysis of social and cultural systems suggests that most societies make judgments about values concerning a restricted range of objects. Means (1969) suggested that the sufficiency of any list of values depends on the logical connection of any specific action such as optimism, belief in hard work, or pragmatism within this range of objects. The real process of relating the object with the action creates value. He proposed the following list of objects with which to analyze social and cultural systems:

1. The Self
2. Nature
3. Other Minds
4. Time
5. Society (p. 47)

According to Means (1969), a person ought to make assumptions regarding the characteristics and existence of all the previous objects in order to function within the social world. Moreover, he believed that value objects are stable, despite the interpretation of meaning placed on them. The human mind reacts to the value object through cognitive knowledge and emotion. Values, thus, “are not just abstractions in the sense of ideas without any corresponding relationship to external reality. They are found in social reality” (p. 51).

Sociologists have differentiated between value and ethics; they believe the two concepts are related but not the same. Ethics constitutes the “normative standard” of behavior derived from the philosophical and religious traditions of society. Thus, a judgment of other people’s actions is implied by a normative standard. All societies develop a “normative tradition” concerning the criteria of right action and desirable

goals. Nevertheless, the concept of “ethical tradition” is closely connected to any discussion of the nature of value (Means, 1969).

Gail Inlow (1972) defined value as “the determiners in man that influence his choices in life and that thus decide his behavior. It follows then that the person who chooses beef over lamb ... [is responding] to a given set of inner determiners called values” (p. 2). Individuals, on the other hand, are the prime movers of the progress of the culture values. They may counter the existing beliefs and practices of a culture and thus reshape them (Inlow, 1972).

From a sociological perspective, when values emerge in a setting of social interaction they evolve into more enduring systems conducting behavior. Individuals may function as selectors, controlling, or blocking certain values and releasing others, but they do not determine the exact content of system of valuation (Mering, 1961).

The sociological consensus views values as the bond that links individuals together. Stewart and Glynn (1979) pointed out that “societies are held together by the fact that most of their citizens hold many opinions and values in common- in other words, they reach a consensus or agreement. They respect their society enough so that complaints are only minor compared to patriotic sentiments” (p. 21).

Emile Durkheim (1933) argued that morality cannot exist in isolation from society, and it cannot vary apart from social code. He also described morality as an essential quality in each individual to which she or he supposes to conform as much as possible in her or his relations with herself or himself, as well as in her or his relations with others through having a sense of respect for human dignity. Therefore:

Society is not, then, as has often been thought, a stranger to the moral world, or something which has only secondary repercussions upon it. It is, on the contrary, the necessary condition of its existence. It is not the simple juxtaposition of individuals who bring intrinsic morality with them, but rather man is a moral being only because he lives in society... (Durkheim, 1933, p. 399)

Furthermore, Durkheim (1958) concluded that it is the individual's duty to act according to moral rule. Each individual has a duty toward her or his family and her or his State. Those who belong to a family perform their duty according to their positions, whether they are fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, uncles, and so on. Those various duties need to be performed successfully by each one and not necessarily in the same time. Correspondingly, each one has a duty toward her or his state (duties of loyalty, service). Thus, each one has a moral code that determines her or his duties to the society in which she or he lives:

The function of the rules of the individual moral code is in fact to fix in the Individual consciousness the seat of all morals- their foundations, in the widest sense: it is on these foundations that all else rests. On the other hand, the rules which determine the duties that men owe to their fellows, solely as other men, form the highest point in ethics. (p. 3)

Durkheim (1953) considered society to be a moral power that transcends the individual materially: "society is something more than a material power; it is a moral power. It surpasses us physically, materially, and morally" (p. 54). He also asserted that collective power is an indispensable value that makes rules for the individual in society: "Now there is only one moral power- moral, and hence common to all- which stands

above the individual and which legitimately make laws for him, and that is collective power” (Durkheim, 1958, p. 7). Furthermore, regarding the question of the origin of value in society, Durkheim’s (1982) concluded that it is acquired through learning because “it is patently obvious that all education consists of a continual effort to impose upon the child ways of seeing, thinking and acting which he himself would not have arrived at spontaneously” (p. 53).

Herbert Spencer (1897) reasoned that values and ethics are attached through an extensive process of evolution: “Ethical ideas and sentiments have to be considered as parts of the phenomena of life at large. We have to deal with Man as a product of evolution, with Society as a product of evolution, and with Moral Phenomena as products of evolution” (p. 478). That is, society is an aggregate of individuals, and the development of society can be changed only if each individual in that society has developed herself or himself. Freedom can be achieved through the evolutionary process and is the primary aspect of individual happiness. In this respect, Spencer (1998) pointed out that “free-will, did it exist, would be entirely at variance with that beneficent necessity displayed in the progressive evolution of the correspondence between organism and its environment” (p. 620).

In general, the meaning of value in the sociological sense underlines the relationship between the individual and her or his society. Society is the determiner of individual behavior. It consists of a set of rules whereby individuals are expected to behave according to its code.

Values in Anthropology

Any analysis of “values” or “system of values” is generally limited to philosophy and sociology. The meaning of value in anthropology has not been defined as broadly as in those fields. According to Mering (1961), for decades anthropologists have occupied themselves with the question of the role of values: “It is only since the advent of culture and personality research in 1930’s, however, that this problem has assumed its full meaning for them. Even then they remained reluctant to use the term value, preferring concepts of descriptive nature” (p. 7).

Thus, anthropologists have not played a large role in defining value. The first attempt to define value was made by Clyde Kluckhohn in redefining anthropology itself as a comparative study of value. He proposed that value is a “conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action” (Kluckhohn et al., 1962, p. 395). He believed that values are primarily cultural products.

C. Kluckhohn (1956) indicated that there is certain orderliness in nature where value and language occupy an integral part of the same general category of nature, which is culture. He considered values to be unavoidable aspects of culture: “with values, such facts as dependence upon the external environment, birth and death, and social relatedness make value ‘choices’ in these areas inescapable” (p. 119). Furthermore, he thought that there is a basic question of value in human nature and the human condition in which all cultures are obliged to take a position, whether explicit or implicit.

The concept of value-orientation was formulated by C. Kluckhohn (1962); it means “a generalized and organized conception, influencing behavior, of nature, of man’s

place in it, of man's relation to man, and of the desirable and nondesirable as they may relate to man-environment and interhuman relations" (Kluckhohn et al., 1962, p. 411). He proposed that value-orientations could be constructed by individuals or by groups and such as values they differ on the "continuum from the explicit to the implicit" (Kluckhohn et al., 1962, p. 411).

The concept of value orientation has also been discussed by Florence Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). They acknowledged that value-orientations are complicated, but ranked them in order according to three analytically discernible elements, which are the cognitive, the affective, and the directive:

Value orientations are complex but definitely patterned (rank-ordered) principles, resulting from the transactional interplay of three analytically distinguishable elements of the evaluated process- the cognitive, the affective, and the directive elements- which give order and direction to the ever- flowing stream of human acts and thoughts... (p. 4)

F. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) believed that within each individual there is a rank order of value orientations that often becomes visible by a variable portion of time and interest in the activities of the multiple behavior spheres and by variable behavior in different spheres. For a society to function successfully there must be individuals, or a group of individuals, who will devote themselves to the multiple activities of the several behavior spheres.

On the other hand, those cultures have value norms—cognitive, appreciative, and moral (C. Kluckhohn, 1962). The individuals living in these cultures tend to acquire these norms, that is, an individual tends to distinguish between the true and false, the beautiful

and ugly, the good and the bad as prescribed by the culture. Thus, the individual adopts his or her norms from the culture (Kluckhohn et al., 1962).

This raises the question of how individuals view their own desires; C. Kluckhohn (1962) thought that values are ideas about what people desire and believe they must desire. They are the norms by which people judge which desires they regard as legitimate and valuable and which they do not. Values, thus, are ideas formulating action commitment. These ideas are the motivators of individual behavior. He pointed out, “value implies a code or a standard which has some persistence through time, or, more broadly put, which organizes a system of action” (p. 395). Furthermore, anthropology can generalize about human beings in that “no society is healthy or creative or strong unless that society has a set of common values that give meaning and purpose to group life, that can be symbolically expressed, that fit with the situation of the time as well as being linked to the historic past...” (C. Kluckhohn, 1962, pp. 297-298).

Nancy Munn (1986) viewed value as a type of acts and practices: “an act’s various culturally defined capacities are those aspects of its meaning that specify what an actor can expect from performing it” (p. 8). She presented an example in her study of the Gawan people by explaining that if one receives a shell by giving another person food, the value resides in the act of giving food and not the food itself that is returned in the form of the shell—the food is simply the medium. Value, thus, is the potential function of an act.

In general, anthropological theories are more concerned with the notion that cultural and social integration are based on shared fundamental value orientations. From a functionalist and structural functionalist perspective, group unity or “equilibrium” is the

ultimate collective value expressed through culture (Seymour-Smith, 1986). Furthermore, the major aspect of functional theory is that institutions have effects, or functions, that are generally useful to the members of society. The functionalists' concept of ethical relativism, however, is that the idea of social function has a norm that can be used as general or cross-cultural standard for evaluating institutions; the religious practices of a foreign society can be judged by their beneficial effects (Hatch, 1983).

Anthropological theories, according to C. Kluckhohn (1962), tend to agree on the following assumptions:

1. Human behavior is functional.
2. Behavior always involves conflict or ambivalence.
3. Behavior can be understood only in relation to the field or context in which it occurs.
4. Behavior tends toward a state of maximal integration or internal consistency (p. 260).

Anthropological theories based on these premises have increased the ability to comprehend human behavior in a culture and can even serve as guides in a limited capacity and in envisaging certain areas (Kluckhohn, 1962).

Mering (1961) discussed values as part of one's individual life situation because they are essential for his or her emotional commitment. Mering explained, "[values] have an emotional significance to the individual in the anticipation of conduct and the result of it. This is especially true, because others in his life space may or may not accept and honor the value or values he projects into the situation in order to define it both for himself and for them" (p. 67).

Mering (1961) indicated that anthropologists in general are more interested in the problem of situating values in human life. They inquire about the way values arise out of 'real action,' and what makes some values rather than others become fixed or institutionalized. He concluded that "all values, whether widely recognized as such or not, arise by asserting some claim to be socially memorable and honorable. Gradually some, though not all, come to establish themselves in culture by repeatedly providing their claim" (p. 67).

As we have discovered, values mean different things in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. While Euro-western philosophy in general is more concerned with the nature of values, sociology tends to investigate the role of values in social action, and anthropology is concerned with the notion that cultural and social integration are based on shared fundamental value orientations. Each of these fields has attempted to define "value" in a way that answers inquiries about its meaning in relationship to their field of study. I have attempted to provide a glimpse into the concepts of value in each of the fields in order to demonstrate how value can mean different things. It is not my purpose to investigate closely how value has been applied in each field; instead this background will serve to introduce a general view of how value is identified in selected fields in order to establish a definition that is most relevant to this study.

This study draws most heavily on the sociological meaning of value for three reasons. First, my principal concern is to look at the values of society that influence an individual and, in a sociological sense, according to Durkheim (1982), society shapes an individual's act and forces her or him to respect customs and conventions. In Kuwaiti society, women were expected to perform certain actions according to societal values;

those values are the determiners that shape their choices. For them, it became common sense that home was their proper place. Second, according to Durkheim (1982), it is essential to understand how values are acquired in a society. Thus, it is important to comprehend how Kuwaiti women acquired the idea that their position belonged to the private sphere. In this we can find in Durkheim's social theory that discussed that values in society are acquired through learning where children learn from their surroundings the accepted behavior. Given that Kuwaiti women are raised in very restricted and traditional families, it is important to highlight the role of family in order to understand how women learn certain characteristics of conduct. Finally, the concept that a collective power is a central value that makes rules for the individual in the society is a major theme in my study of Kuwaiti societal values, since society consists of groups of people, and those groups establish specific norms and rules for individuals in that society. The women in Kuwait were expected not to deviate from the specific rules that were established for them. They were expected to act according to existing societal rules and values.

The definition of value that I have constructed from my review of values theory is: *values are determiners which shape individuals' action in regard to the societal criteria and principles.* Based on this definition, I intend to investigate how gender values have influenced the social role of Kuwaiti women in their society.

Although philosophical and anthropological definitions of value are somewhat related to human action, I believe that they focus on human behavior independent of social influences. Philosophy highlights values of the individual rather than of the individuals in relation to others. In other words, it concentrates on the individual action and whether it is good or bad and the consequences of that action, first on the individual

and then on society; the individual, thus, is responsible for her or his own action.

Anthropology investigates individual behavior within culture by examining how one behaves within a culture. Anthropologists begin with the individual and then look at her or his broader culture, whereas sociologists, for the most part, begin with society and then evaluate its effect on individuals.

The Meaning and Basis of Islamic Value

In order to understand a society's values and how they impact women's lives, it is important to examine the bases of their social concepts. As Chakravarti (1966) stated, value has an important role in our lives: "the concept of value has deep significance for human life...The nature of the object we value determines the way of our life, including our reaction to Nature" (p. i).

In Kuwait, societal values are a combination of Islamic (religious) and cultural (secular) values. Islamic values are based on the *Holy Qur'an* and *Hadith*, the tradition, the saying of the prophet (PBU). The major characteristics are summed up as follows:

1. They come from the main sources of Islam (the *Qur'an* and *Sunna, the saying and deeds of the prophet* (PBU)).
2. They instruct individuals to perform good deeds—those that are generous and benevolent—and renounce bad ones as greedy and mean.
3. They are based on completeness and comprehensiveness.
4. They are concerned with human beings and the society in which they live.
5. They direct human action and behavior in secular and divine life.
6. They are everlasting for all people in every time and place.

7. They are stable and flexible; stable in that there are divine values that cannot be changed and flexible in that there are relative values that can be changed according to the needs of an individual's life (Abu-alaineen, 1988).

Cultural values, on the other hand, are those tribal values based on customs and traditions. The tribes in Kuwaiti society, both Bedouin and non-Bedouin, are the preservers of the tribal values that they have inherited from their ancestors. Furthermore, they constitute one of the main forces shaping Kuwaiti societal values since they have great influence on the politics of the State. This political aspect is crucial because "although the tribe as a form of kinship organization has important social and economic functions, its primary significance in the history of the Middle East has been in the political arena" (Bates & Rassam, 1983, p. 258).

In Islam, as in other religions, moral value is regarded as the essence of human action. It represents the entire range of actions that are driven by the soul, whether commendable or reprehensible. An understanding of these actions leads: (a) to an understanding of the virtues, and how to acquire them in order to uplift the soul; and (b) to an understanding of the vices in order to avoid them (Fekih, 1998, p. 79).

Morality, in society's perspective, embodies the set of laws and rules that govern the behavior of humans and tends to protect and develop the integrity of society, and reform humankind. Therefore, it is considered one of the basic forms of social consciousness and that led many Islamic thinkers and philosophers to concern themselves with it (Fekih, 1998). The philosopher Al-Farabi (1962), for instance, discussed moral virtue as something pertaining to human being and his soul. He believed that virtue that bestows knowledge does not exist in the soul, but instead it is acquired from outside the

soul: “the natural intelligibles, which exist outside the soul, exist from nature only, and it is by nature that they are accompanied with their accidents” (p. 26). He asserted that a good character and a sound ability to discriminate between right and wrong are crucial prerequisites for attaining happiness (Fakhry, 2002).

Ikhwan al-Safa (1957), on the other hand, are concerned with the question of morality. They find that virtues are driven by the soul that can be cultivated by right belief and good customs. Thus, the basis of right actions and the value of human beings are the virtues that can be acquired by diligence and deliberation. Conversely, transgressions that lead to the corruption of the society are learned from bad customs that were instilled during childhood (p. 366).

Al-Ghazali (1991), however, thought that happiness can be attained by good deeds and discarding sins, which can be achieved through compliance and love of God as “our future happiness will be in strict proportion to the degree in which we have loved God here” (p. 88). Al-Ghazali also asserted that the moral construction and upbringing of individuals in society will ultimately result in compliance with the desired moral order, under which optimal human prosperity and happiness can occur. That moral order is protected in the revealed law (*Shari’a*, the law of God), which only becomes apparent and known through the positive law. Despite the fact that the law is grounded in a discursive tradition, it is a means to achieve higher spiritual knowledge and cognitive intuition (Moosa, 2005). Therefore, Muslim philosophers, according to Fekih (1998), do not ignore the teaching of religious morals despite their belief in reason, and they work to reconcile philosophy with this teaching.

Islamic values, however, which are derived from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, are the norms from which gender role expectations for Muslim women are derived. Hussain (1984) pointed out that these roles within Muslim families are taken from the model prescribed by Islam. However, she stipulated an important fact about the status of Islamic values in Muslim society: they must have an eternal validity in any context and at any time period, but Muslim civilization has been distorted through time and history, and the present position of women in Islamic society has been the product of this distortion. Thus, she concluded:

The ideal is structured by the Islamic role norms from which are derived the Islamic role expectations for female role performance in Muslim society. On the other hand, contextual realities relate to the role performance of females as determined by the culture and structure of various Muslim societies. History and tradition in particular, have influenced the role assigned to women (p. 3).

Islam, thus, has set norms for human actions and attempts to transform the old traditions and customs that were harmful to society; as Gwynne (2004) noted, “Islam placed on human beings new responsibility for their own actions, but it also freed them from bad old *sunan* and revalidated acceptable ones—including the institution of *sunna* itself—by substituting divine and prophetic *sunna* for human *sunna*, the law of God for the law of man” (p. 57). In contemporary Muslim societies, however, many actions are not related to the “law of God” but to the “law of man,” which was taken from *al-jahilyia*, ignorance, before the advent of Islam, including traditions such as the inferior position of women. Before the advent of Islam in Arabia, women had been primarily treated as merchandise to be bought, sold, and inherited (Mehran, 1998).

Islam has granted women certain rights and duties. According to Islamic law, women are entitled to own and inherit property and enter trade and business. Furthermore, Islam does not prevent women from becoming socially and politically active. It does not challenge women's freedom of movement, their ability to participate in the market, their right to control what they earn, or their ability to freely express what they want (Deegan, 1996). The rules of Islam regarding women's rights and responsibilities are clear and may be found in the verses of the *Qur'an*. The thing that complicated the issue is the diversity of interpretation of the same verses. A close look at Islamic law, which is derived from the *Qur'an*, precisely explained the legal position of Muslim women (Mehran, 1998).

Therefore, the role of women in Islamic societies is not restricted to Islamic values, but incorporates traditional values with roots in pre-Islamic societies. Islam was subsequently used to legitimize these female role expectations. According to Hussain (1984), "Religious functionaries stunted the growth and development of Muslim societies by using pseudo-Islamic norms to resolve problems relating to women and other issues. They failed to transcend time and history by trying to make early interpretations of Islamic laws applicable to later context and times" (p. 4).

Lois Beck (1980) also discussed the views of scholars who claim that sexual inequality in Muslim society is due to Islam and those who think that it is due to non-Islamic social and cultural forces, but found a third approach that looks at the integration of both to be the most informative (p. 33). Beck concluded that many scholars addressing the question of the source of gender inequality in Muslim society refer either to Islam as the cause of such an act, or to society's customs and traditions. Beck, however, believed

that it is best to think of the issue as a combination of both Islamic and cultural values rather than to approach it as separate phenomena. She explain that although Islamic laws have granted women the right to work and own property, the social realities for many Muslim women feature sexual segregation, emphasis on their primary duties as wives and mothers, and a lack of formal education or job training, which are all customs that emerged from the socio-cultural system (Beck, 1980).

Woodsmall (1975), however, said that the “Islamic world with its integrated system of religion and society, has preserved with little if any variation, the social customs of the seventh century” (p. 39). In the same vein, Minces (1982) indicated that the values that deny women’s rights in Islamic society are related to pre-Islamic customs: “The *Koran* contains many other equally important reforms. But as it spread, Islam became impregnated with local pre-Islamic traditions, many of which have survived to this day...” (p. 16).

From this discussion it can be seen that the values of Muslim society are a combination of Islamic and traditional values, whereby traditional values overcome Islamic values in many questions concerning the role of women in society. This can be seen in Kuwaiti society in the past when women were deprived of certain rights because of societal attitudes that were more traditional than Islamic. Thus, in order to understand how those values have impacted women’s roles in society, Chapter 3 examines women’s social position before and after the discovery of oil to reveal the impact of social expectations and codes and how they have changed over time.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, I have attempted to present a short review of the concept of value in terms of its philosophical, sociological, and anthropological applications in order to explore a meaning for the term “value” and to differentiate the concept of value used in this study from other forms of values used in other fields. Although it is not easy to define value in different fields, I chose the fields that I believe will direct me toward a comprehensive definition of value. Moreover, I chose to discuss value from the perspective of some philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists to demonstrate that the concept of values take various forms even in each field. On the other hand, I discuss Islamic values in order to clarify the roots and the basis of societal values in Kuwait. In the next chapter, I will discuss the values of Kuwaiti society as they affect the social role of gender by examining the historical impact of values on women’s educational and social position.

III. KUWAITI CULTURE AND THE SOCIAL ROLE OF GENDER

Introduction

Chapter 2 explored the various interpretations of “value,” but fundamentally defined societal values as those determiners that shape individuals’ actions and compel them to act according to specific social norms. In regard to issues of gender, those norms are acquired from the various institutions in society that influence female and male social roles and thus construct the stratification of gender. Kuumba (2001) observed that “the distinction between female and male spheres operates in the family, the economy, religion, political systems, educational institutions, and culture” (p. 9). In every society, certain basic requirements of sexual reproduction merge with a system of social values, rules, and customs regarding what females and males are supposed to be and do. In this environment, children learn to recognize the characteristics and behaviors typical of, or considered appropriate for, each sex, and they learn to act upon what is regarded as appropriate and avoid what is deemed inappropriate (Fagot & Leinbach, 1994).

Kuwaiti society in the past has restricted values regarding gender social roles. Kuwaiti culture was a gendered culture, meaning it contributed to the constitution of gender and gender relations (Billington, Strawbridge, Lenore, & Fitzsimons, 1991), which in Kuwait meant that women occupied a secondary status. Crystal (1992) viewed gender in Kuwait as an important social division. He explained that gender division does not mean women are oppressed by Islam, but that they are placed in an inferior position according to Kuwaiti social values and customs.

Kuwaiti society, thus, emphasized certain roles for both sexes. Those roles have assigned women and men to two different realms. Marida Hollos (1994), in description of

gender role, defined the concept of gender as the expected behavior and values of female and male:

A gender-role structure is a symbolic or meaning system that places people in one or the other of two mutually exclusive categories, male and female. The construction of these categories is the cultural interpretation of sex differences. The criterion of assignment is based on physiological or sexual differences at birth, the absoluteness of which is taken for granted. The resulting categories in every culture are defined by behaviors, values, symbols, and expectations deemed appropriate for each. (p. 65)

It is worth noting how the different institutions of Kuwaiti society emphasized gender role value, how this has transformed over time, and the causes behind such transformation. However, it is important to first present a general background of Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era in order to illustrate the way of life that led to distinctions in the social role of gender.

The Structure of Kuwaiti Society

Kuwait is a small sheikhdom on the western shore of the Arabian Gulf. In the pre-oil era, Kuwait was formed by two central themes of its environment—the desert and the sea. This created three distinctive modes of life: nomadic, maritime, and agricultural. The agricultural influence in Kuwait was minimal. The desert and the sea, on the other hand, jointly formed early Kuwaiti society (Ismael, 1982).

Members of the Bani Khalid tribe established the region in the early eighteenth century. The founders of the political city–state, however, were the Bani Utub, who arrived in Kuwait during this period. As soon as the Bani Utub arrived, they worked in

pearl diving, boat building, and trade. In spite of the Bani Utub's loyalty to the Bani Khaled, they were independent. The Bani Utub built a new identity for themselves by adding new political institutions to support and regulate the life of the community. By the mid-eighteenth century, the al-Sabah became the leading political family (Crystal, 1992).

At this time, Kuwait was threatened by a group of religious and political reformers known as the Wahhabis—followers of the eighteenth-century religious leader Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab—who joined forces with the central Arabian house of Saud to create the alliance that would establish the modern state of Saudi Arabia. As protection against this incursion, Kuwait established a relationship with Britain; the first formal contact with Britain was made in 1775 (Crystal, 1992).

Sheikh Mubarak the Great (1896-1915), the governor of Kuwait, had thus instituted some degree of international protection by the early-twentieth century, and he began developing new state institutions and economic and political policies. The economy of Kuwait flourished throughout the nineteenth century due to its position as an important sea-trading network. During Mubarak's rule, according to Crystal (1992), occurred "the shift in economic orientation from a regional economy to a British-dominated world economy" (p. 14). As a result, from 1899 to 1961 Kuwaiti foreign policy was shaped by Britain. In the 1950s Kuwait embarked on a gradual course toward independence. The British colony could no longer sustain a policy of colonization, especially after the loss of India and its failure to maintain administrative control over Kuwait (Crystal, 1992).

In 1915, Jabir succeeded his father, Mubarak, and ruled for a short period of time. Jabir was succeeded by his brother, Salim, who in 1920 built a great wall around Kuwait

to protect Kuwait against the Saudi Ikhwan forces (Crystal, 1992). This wall ensured that Kuwait was isolated from the outside world; as a result Kuwaiti society became a closed culture with its own norms and traditions.

The socioeconomic hierarchy of Kuwait was composed of sheikhs, members of the ruling family, and relatively rich merchants at the top; Bedouins, fishermen, and pearl divers in the middle; and slaves at the bottom. In the towns located inside the walls of Kuwait, the extended family members of the ruling families, merchants, fishermen, and pearl divers lived in houses around a common courtyard (Nath, 1978). Two courtyards were organized so that one yard and the rooms surrounding it formed the women's quarter of the house (*harem*), and the other was the men's section (*diwaneya*) (Freeth, 1956). The *diwaneya* is still found in Kuwaiti society. It is a place where male relatives and friends discuss business and politics, organize introductions, and grant nepotism through the growth and preservation of connections (*wastah*). As a social institution, it maintains and unites the identities of the extended family. It has an important function in establishing a connection between the individual and the state. The state has great respect for the *diwaneya* and regards it as a listening post (Crystal, 1992).

Kuwaiti houses were built out of mud and mostly consisted of one story. Winstone and Freeth (1972) vividly captured the appearance and atmosphere of the typical Kuwaiti neighborhood:

Few streets ran straight for any distance, houses were not aligned, and the sandy roadways had mostly come into existence where convenient access paths were needed for the donkeys, horses or camels which passed constantly to and fro carrying goatskins of fresh water, dried palm fronds for firewood, charcoal, or

other merchandise...Since the common building material was mud, used either as sun-baked bricks or applied wet to build up a wall course by course without pre-shaping, the general colour of the town was the same tawny ochre as the ground from which it rose (p. 91).

The Bedouin, on the other hand, lived in the desert beyond the walls of Kuwait. They also lived in an extended family with a leader who was responsible for the affairs of his community. Anderson (2000) explained how the Bedouin select the oldest member of the group to be the leader, or *Sheikh al-Qabila*, who becomes the decision-maker and that “this type of social organization, termed patriarchal, places the life of a community under the control of a chosen man” (p. 151). Although the Bedouin tribes in Kuwait no longer live in the desert, they still maintain their traditional social structure; the leader, who is no longer necessarily the oldest member of the tribe, still plays a central role in tribe and family affairs. He is regarded as an important link between the family and the state.

The Bedouin lived in tents called *beit sha'ir*, which means “house of hair.” It was divided in two sections. One section was the domain of women, where they prepared food, took care of the children, and did the daily household work. Only male guardians were allowed to enter the women’s section. The other section was the men’s domain where men met their guests and other men in the tribe (Chatty, 1978).

The division of houses in both the desert and the town reveals the stratification of gender roles. The structure of the house separated men and women into two different realms and categories of tasks. Women were in the private section, isolated from the outside world and performing their daily chores, whereas men were in the public section, meeting other community members and discussing public and private affairs.

Kuwait is a small country with a small population, most of whom are of Kuwaiti origin. According to al-Sabah (1980), before the discovery of oil, information about the population of Kuwait was sparse, and the statistics that are available are taken from the personal estimates of European travelers or from the documents of the British Political Agency in Kuwait. In 1831, the population of Kuwait was estimated to be 4,000; in 1905, the population increased to 35,000; in 1919 it increased to 85,000 (al-Sabah, 1980). In 1957, the first official set of statistics to record the population according to sex registered a total population of about 113, 622, of which the number of males was 59,154, and the number of females was 54,468 (El Mallakh & Atta, 1981, p. 88).

Kuwait's small size, with its correspondingly small population, results in a society in which the people are uniquely interconnected. Many Kuwaitis are in fact related to one another by ties of kinship, or know one another on a personal level to some degree. As a result, their commonly shared values and customs are social bonds of such unusual strength and daily significance that each individual feels responsible for their preservation; this system fosters a widespread sense of commitment to one another as a matter of mutual respect for their homeland as well as their homes. Al-Sabah (2001) described the Kuwaiti community of the past in her book, *Kuwait Traditions*:

Social solidarity and cohesion in the past were attained through cooperation, religious feeling and mutual respect, the traditional foundations of most simple societies. These cultural values manifested themselves in cooperative action and were maintained through kinship ties and alliances. The family, bayt, and the neighborhood, freij, possessed the qualities of brotherhood and affection that bound their members or inhabitant together. (p. 31)

The Division of Gender Roles in the Family

The family is the principle unit for the observation of rituals and an influential site for the transmission of traditions, education, and religion from one generation to another. It is a place for developing concepts of authority, responsibility, and trust (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). Furthermore, it is one of the main institutions for preserving and maintaining the societal values that assign specific roles to women and men; it is also the source of those expectations that compel individuals to behave according to its code. Karmi (1993) defined the Arab family as “a society in miniature, [which] has the functions of providing social and economic support, as well as education and the inculcation of moral standards” (p. 150).

Karmi (1993) also explained the structure of the Arab family: in the patriarchal structure of the Arab family the relationships are vertical, with the father at the top since he has the focal position with regard to power and authority. Walther (1981) pointed out that the father was the undisputed patriarch, and as such the whole family submitted to his will. Al-Heedri (2003) explained the impact of a father’s domination over his family, and especially over his wife and daughters; this domination may cause trouble not only in the family level, but also in the larger society since the father is the one who can either forbid or permit the women in the family to learn or work. In addition, in the patriarchal family the father’s absolute authority passes to his oldest son. Thus, wealth, power, property, and title follow only the male line; the only important ancestor is the father and the mother is valued only for her domestic role (Duberman, 1975).

The inferiority of women in the traditional Arab family, according to Karmi (1993), is the result of customs and values that still impact the majority in spite of

reforms and social transformation. Karmi (1993) further observed that “although an increasing number of women receive education and work outside the home, the majority are still secluded and segregated...women’s role in public life is limited, and women are [marginalized] in all social, economic and political organizations” (p. 151).

Within the Kuwaiti family, women, whether from the Bedouin camps or the town, were expected to behave according to the social values that situated them in the private sphere. They were instructed by their families to be submissive and modest. Minces (1982) has described how Arab families were careful to teach their daughters the proper characteristics of womanhood. Young girls were taught by their mothers to be docile, submissive, discreet, industrious, modest, soft-spoken, and without curiosity about the outside world. Those are the traits that made the Kuwaiti woman acquiescent to male authority. Her father, her elder brother, her uncle or other male guardians, even her male cousins, had absolute power over her.

Consequently, many Kuwaiti women were forbidden to go outside or attend school because their fathers or male guardians believed that a woman’s principal occupation was to learn how to run the household, take care of children, and fulfill her husband’s needs. This placed women and men in different positions where men exercised hierarchal supremacy. Hare-Mustin and Marecek (2001) made it clear that gender construction derives from difference, thus “emphasizing how women differ from men. These differences have furnished support for the norm of male superiority” (p. 78).

The distinction in gender roles was a result of the particular environment that played a vital function in shaping differences. Kuwaiti children, for instance, were assigned gender specific tasks in the family. The mothers would send their male children

to perform tasks outside the house when they were six years old. Boys, thus, led a more open life; they were free to leave and play outside. As for girls, they were compelled to remain in the house and help their mothers with household duties and were expected to be obedient, hard working, and submissive (al-Sabah, 2001). Y.N., an anonymous contributor to *al-Ba'tha Magazine*, wrote in 1954 about the conditions of a woman's life in Kuwait:

You may feel piety and sympathy when you hear that someone is in the prison.

The prison is not only the jail that is built by the government, but it is everything that chained one's freedom either in the prison or in the house. From my point of view, Kuwaiti women are condemned to a life sentence in a house watched over by a male guardian and lived behind the bars of tradition and values. (p. 167)

Furthermore, girls were raised to serve and protect their mothers and families against the harmful effects of a bad reputation. According to Minces (1982), the norm of female behavior is considered an essential part of men's honor: "[P]re-marital chastity of sisters and daughters, marital fidelity on the part of the wife...are the principles on which the reputation and status of family depend" (p. 17). For this reason, girls were veiled at an early age, covering their heads and faces, and they were forced to lead secluded lives inside the *harem* in order to learn the accomplishments customary to their environment (al-Sabah, 2001). Freeth (1956) described the system of *purdah*, or veiling, as protection for a woman's reputation:

Nothing is considered more unseemly than for a woman's actions or behaviour to be the subject of town gossip, even in a comparatively innocent way, and the veil has allowed women to preserve their anonymity when they leave their houses. If

rumour or gossip should seriously cast reflections upon the virtue of a woman of good family, the woman is ruined. (p. 84)

In addition to the secluded life that Kuwaiti women led, and since their male guardians were their decision makers, they grew to be submissive. When a girl turned fourteen or fifteen years old, her parents arranged her marriage; they might even have chosen for her a husband whom she had never seen. In fact, most girls were not allowed to see their future husbands. The parents, after reaching an agreement with their prospective son-in-law, had fulfilled the civil marriage ceremony beforehand, an occasion that the bride was not expected to attend; the bride was then informed what offer had been made, and accepted, for her (Freeth, 1956). It was also not possible for a man to see his future bride or to know her unless he was going to marry his cousin, which is common in Muslim societies (Walther, 1981).

Although Islamic tradition stipulates that a woman has the right to see her future husband and to accept or refuse him, this was unacceptable in Kuwaiti society in the past. Abdul-Rauf (1977), in *The Islamic View of Women and the Family*, commented that under Islamic law women and men both have the right to choose their spouses and being forced to marry against one's will is forbidden:

Thus, in olden days, the marriageable boy or girl, by virtue of tradition, did not have much to say in picking his or her mate. That was the privilege of the parents, whether they made the choice directly or through a 'go-between', or through a 'marriage broker.'... [however] under no circumstances should a guardian compel a girl to marry someone against her choice. (pp. 51-52)

Thus, marriage customs are not related to the Islamic religion, but are essentially a product of pre-Islamic social values.

Marriage in the past was habitually instigated by negotiations between families. An important part of the negotiations was the fee, called *mahr*, paid by the prospective husband to his future wife. Non-Arabs use this Arabic term as well, usually referred to as dowry and wealth. The *mahr* is required by Islamic law in order to legalize the marriage contract (Bates & Rassam, 1983). Pre-marriage negotiations still exist in Kuwaiti society; even when the choice of spouse is the result of a couple's own decision, a formal meeting and agreement between the two families is vital for *mahr* negotiations and wedding arrangements. After they reach an agreement, a *mahr* is given to the bride for her wedding expenses; the groom also presents gifts in the form of gold jewelry and clothes (Shah, 2004). The *mahr* is primarily for the bride and her father or other male guardians are not allowed to take anything from it. However, some fathers do take over the *mahr* and give their daughters just a small portion of it.

Mahr, however, could be a hindrance to marriage in the past. Many Kuwaiti parents, especially fathers, raised the amount of *mahr* they demanded from those who proposed to their daughters. This created a problem for those prospective bridegrooms with limited income. In *Kuwait Magazine*, one of the oldest magazines in Kuwait, a young man states that the amount of *mahr* was raised according to the status and origin of the bride's family. A woman from a rich and noble family was expected to obtain a high *mahr* (Mushkelat al-Zawaj, 1929). Furthermore, some fathers confiscated their daughters' *mahr*, according to al-Dawalibi (1998): "to this day, unfortunately, some backward practices still persist, particularly the way some fathers treat their daughters by

appropriating their dowries when they marry. This sort of exploitation is still common in some Muslim circles” (p. 194).

In the pre-oil era, female relatives prepared a young woman on her wedding day. They washed and dressed her, her hands and feet were patterned with black dye, called henna, and her eyes were ringed with eyeliner. The bridegroom walked with his male relatives to the wedding in the evening (Freeth, 1956). That night, the young bride waited for her bridegroom in fear, knowing nothing about him. Freeth (1956), who attended an old Kuwaiti wedding, described one such bride: “My mother and I went across to the room on the far side of the yard where the bride was waiting. We found her dressed in all her finery, but sitting miserably in one corner; when we approached she hid her face from us in embarrassment, and would not speak” (p. 87).

After marriage, the bride was allowed to visit her parent’s house only once a week, even though they lived in the same neighborhood. At dawn, she left her husband’s house, heading to her parent’s house and accompanied either by her female servant or her husband (al-Zaben, 1989). A married woman must not leave her house without her husband’s permission. This is also the case with the unmarried woman who was under her father’s authority. Until recently it was rare to see women wandering in the neighborhood and the streets in the past: “traditionally, only necessity could justify a woman’s presence outside the home, and no respect was ever attached to poverty and necessity. Respectable women were not seen on the street” (Mernissi, 1987, p. 143).

Furthermore, if a Kuwaiti wife was dissatisfied with her husband, there were few options available to her. If she returned to her parents for any reason, she was for the most part unwelcome, because by leaving her husband she proved that she had failed as a

good wife. The daughters who returned to their parents were persuaded to go back to their husbands, not only because of the harmful reputation may divorce bring them and their families, but also to retain the bonds and good relations among members of the family. Thus, the wife's primary duty was to keep a consistent marriage (Daniels, 1971). In order to achieve this, the wife must exhibit certain characteristics. Abdul-Rauf (1977) articulated the characteristics that he believed epitomized the good wife: "...to promote an atmosphere of gentleness, grace, warmth, peace, acceptance and obedience, and to undertake of the domestic responsibilities..." (p. 67).

Bedouin families followed most of the same marriage customs, but they preferred marriage between first cousins. The eldest girl of the family was destined as a matter of course for the eldest son of her father's brother; if she refused, as sometimes happened, she could not marry another man without the permission of her cousin (Freeth, 1956). This social practice still exists to some extent in many Bedouin families as a remnant of the old societal values. Al-Sabah (2001) explained, "To a degree, Bedouin traditions are still apparent in marriage customs, social manners, dress code (particularly for women), and a strong allegiance to the tribe" (p. 25). Al-Thakeb (1985) conducted a study of marriage customs involving 526 heads of households in Kuwaiti. He found that 48% of respondents were married to relatives, of whom 79% were first cousins.

This practice in the Bedouin community contributes to an innate tribalism that plays a principal role in its social and political life. Marriage is seen as a means to strengthen the family and tribe relationships, and thus it is "a family affair rather than a personal one. Marriage patterns are critical, because they determine the future of the family group" (Riphenburg, 1998, p. 153). Moreover, the customs of Bedouin tribes

constituted a societal code that set the standards for the rights and duties of individuals and was characterized by force (Sabeeh, 1980). The Bedouin woman should obey her male guardian and respect her tribal customs in order to preserve family ties.

In a Bedouin wedding, the bride stayed in the women's quarters with other women celebrating the occasion. The men erected two black tents for the male guests (Dickson, 1970). The Bedouin bride was composed, unlike the bride from the town. The reason could be that the Bedouin lived in an open space where they could easily see their future spouses, and also because they were married mostly to their cousins with whom they might already be familiar. Dickson (1970), who attended a Bedouin wedding, described the experience:

The floor was covered in thick hand-woven rugs in bright colours, and, at one end of the room, under a white muslin canopy, made like a mosquito-net and suspended from the ceiling, the bride was reclining on a new mattress and cushion. Unless one lifted up the curtain, the bride was invisible. She was a pretty girl and appeared to be composed. (pp. 212-213)

After marriage, it was important for a Bedouin woman to immediately begin having many children, especially sons since they were regarded as the backbone of the family. Bedouin parents rely on their sons, as well as the females in the family, to take care of them when they get older. Held (1997) discussed the social criteria that results in mutual responsibilities between the parents and children: "society may impose certain reciprocal obligations: on parents to care for children when the children are young, and on children to care for parents when the parents are old" (p. 265). Thus, a fecund woman is respected in the Bedouin family and, according to Walther (1981), "It was a matter of

great importance for a young wife to produce children of her own as rapidly as possible—especially sons so that she could assume the respected position of a mother” (p. 46). Daniels (1971) described how this feature derived from the old values endures and can be still be observed in the Bedouin families, as well as among the sophisticated townsmen of today:

Bedouin women took their confinements as a matter of course, in the old days, and were frequently up and about their chores a few hours after childbirth.

Though now many Bedouin have given up their nomadic way of life and have obtained Kuwaiti citizenship, they still, along with the more sophisticated townsmen, regard children [especially sons] as of great importance. A large family has both prestige and utilitarian value, and widens a man’s sphere of influence. (p. 151)

In a traditional or arranged marriage, the husband respects his wife more after marriage, because he is the only man in her life. She is dependent only upon him, and through her kindness to and love for her husband she can build a healthy and admirable family and strengthen the bond between herself and her husband (Daniels, 1971).

Fifty years ago in *al-Ba’ath Magazine*, a divorced Kuwaiti man discussed his experience of arranged marriage. He said that he divorced his wife because social customs and values forced him to marry a woman whom he had never seen. He said that the women in Kuwait did not have the right to accept or refuse—it was the decision of their father or male guardian to accept or refuse the man who made an offer of marriage (Abdulkareem, 1954). Al-Baqori (1954) explained that divorce is not a crime, but a tragedy, and the main reasons for it are often the societal values and customs that

Kuwaitis have accepted for themselves, and not allowing men and women to see each other before marriage. In this regard, Daniels (1971) provides additional details:

It was sad, however, to see young people being forced reluctantly into marriage by their parents. Some of these 'arranged' marriage turned out for the best, but some of them left much to be desired. The regrettable twist to this old-fashioned marriage system was that the Kuwaiti mother continued to perpetuate it, even though her own marriage may have been far from happy one. Naturally some of these marriages came to an end, and divorce being an easy matter, the woman was sometimes placed in an unenviable position. (p.146)

One of the results of reluctant marriage is a divorce, which is considered a serious social problem. A marriage is dissolved when a husband says to his wife, "I divorce you." A wife only has the right to seek divorce in specific conditions such as when she suffers violent abuse at the hands of her husband. Although it is allowed in Islam, divorce is discouraged and the couple is pressured to solve the conflict themselves with the assistance of arbiters representing each side (Abdul-Rauf, 1977): "If ye fear a breach between them twain, Appoint [two] arbiters, one from his family, And the other from hers, If they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation" (*Qur'an* IV, 35).

Divorce carries with it a severe social stigma and divorced women are considered ill-fated. According to *Shari'a* law, when there is a divorce where children are involved, the custody of children is first granted to mothers. When boys reach the age of puberty and girls become marriageable, the father then gains custody (Moghadam, 2004). In the past, even when a Kuwaiti woman was compelled to marry against her will, she did everything in her power to avoid divorce.

All of these constraints imposed on marriage helped to create a woman who could not make a decision regarding her own life outside the supervision of her family.

Halvorson (2005) explained that “the attitudes toward girls affect their ability to control their lives and, since their status is typically designated as lower than that of boys; they have little influence over decisions about their own education or marriage” (p. 28).

The men of the family, on the other hand, were given absolute authority. They were instructed to guard and protect the female members of their families, because of the crucial role of women in terms of the honor and reputation of the whole family. In this way, male control of women helped to maintain the survival of the family. The women, occupied in fulfilling their roles as daughters, wives, or mothers, were denied the kind of knowledge and associations crucial to playing active, non-domestic roles in society (Beck, 1980).

The lives of Kuwaiti women were the result of their upbringing. Most children would learn appropriate gender behavior as they grew up; they would eventually exhibit the appropriate gender behavior automatically, and perceived themselves to be the kind of individuals their families and society expected them to be. They would develop the essential characteristics society demanded of women and men and thus “internalize” the social norms (Connell, 2002). In this sense, gender is seen as “a situated accomplishment of societal members, the local management of conduct in relation to the normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories” (West & Franstermaker, 2002, p. 65).

Kuwaiti women accepted their roles as correct and consistent with Kuwaiti social order because they were taught from a very young age to follow the instructions they

received. This is not an uncommon process across all cultures because “we are taught at an early age how to follow rules and what rules to follow” (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 1996, p. 34). However, as al-Sabah (2001) pointed out in her description of the Kuwaiti family, in Kuwait the role of gender in the raising of children is crucial: “the child was trained from an early age to obey and accept the authoritative role of the parent, especially the father. As a result, the fundamental educational relationship was that of the authority of parent over child and of senior over junior” (p. 30). Consequently, the women of Kuwait followed familial rules without questioning their roles or reflecting upon their situation. They inherited their mothers’ and grandmothers’ traits and perceived them to be the appropriate ones. As a result, they remained in seclusion, voiceless behind the wall, and left the outside world to men.

Public and Private Spheres

Family was not the only factor fostering the sharp division of gender roles; economic circumstance also placed men in patriarchal positions. Connell (2002) asserted that according to anthropological and economic studies, the sexual division of labor remains the main determiner of gender. In Kuwaiti society, there were certain tasks performed by men, and others performed by women: men performed outside tasks, and women carried out domestic tasks.

During the pre-oil era, Kuwait lacked economic opportunities and depended on the sea for its subsistence. Kuwaitis, as mentioned above, were attracted to the marine industries, especially pearling, fishing, boat building, and sea-borne trade. This had given the Kuwaiti people a unique character as the seaward orientation gradually transformed the tribal tradition of the desert into an urban community, bringing with it the strong

communal bonds among the people (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1965).

At this time some men worked in the fishing industry, which was one of the most important jobs for the lower classes of Kuwait. They sold fish locally and exported some to nearby countries; salaries and wages were low. Other men worked as pearl-divers; it was a seasonal occupation, starting in mid-May and continuing until mid-September. These divers worked in teams consisting of a captain and crew. The *naukhada*, or captains, were responsible for employing the crews and disbursing the money advances given to the crews by the order of the merchants who were the owners of the boats. The advances were determined by the merchants and approved by the government. These advances, given to the crew members so that they could provide for their families, were barely sufficient to meet subsistence level. As a result, wives went into domestic service to increase the family income (al-Sabah, 1980).

The pearl-diving industry provided an income to the merchants and the government; the government imposed a tax on the boats; the merchants, by selling the pearls at good prices, were able to buy more boats and employ more divers. Furthermore, they acquired the houses of those crew members who were unable to pay off their loans (al-Sabah 1980). The merchants also made a huge profit on the marketing of the pearls. They would estimate the price of the pearl in the local market at four to six times less than the price they were able to obtain in Bahrain and India (Ismael, 1982).

Men also worked in boat building. Kuwait was the center of the boat-building industry in the Gulf. Different sizes and kinds of boats were exported to the rest of the Gulf. Wood was brought from East Africa and South East Asia, and the boats were

designed and built by carpenters (al-Sabah 1980). Others were blacksmiths who made nails and anchors and supplied them to the boat-builder. Moreover, there were the cloak makers, goldsmiths, and silversmiths. Each trade worked in a different section in the town (al-Hijji, 2004). All of these were either directly tied to, or flourished because of, the thriving pearl trade. When the Kuwaiti economy was in decline in 1936-1937 because of the cultured pearls created in Japan and the changes in technology and trade patterns, these traditional occupations were threatened. The number of pearling boats decreased from 700 in 1929 to 320 in 1933 (Held, 2006).

The occupations of Bedouin men reflected their desert life. They were poor and their income depended heavily on the uncertainties of nature that might result in total loss during the course of a drought. Their way of life was hard, with the constant threat of sickness and starvation (Freeth, 1972). Their main source of survival came from herding sheep and goats and clipping the wool. Thus the Bedouin tribes' nomadic life was determined by the amount of rainfall and the need for pasture. Today, the Bedouin are no longer wandering with their herds; they have settled in the cities where there are new employment opportunities (al-Sabah, 2001).

As a result of these conditions, there were few work opportunities in Kuwait and those remaining tended to require the physical strength of men. In the essentialist view, the distinctive spheres allotted to women and men are inevitable and natural; in other words, the division of labor in Kuwait according to gender was a result of biological fate. This is taken from the idea that females and males are biologically determined "natural opposites." Femininity and masculinity are represented as "dichotomized, mutually exclusive sets of behavioral or personality traits" (Kuumba, 2001, p. 10). Thus, gender

was presumed to be directly reflected in a whole set of other differences: bodily strength and speed (men are stronger and faster), physical skills (men have mechanical skills, women are good at trifling tasks) (Connell, 2002, p. 31).

In the resulting division of activity, women performed the domestic tasks that demanded less physical strength. The women members of poor pearl-diving, artisan, fishing, and Bedouin families had to work to help contribute to the family income. Some of the town women worked as dressmakers for women in their community. Others were involved in petty trading as peddlers or market traders. The female traders gathered in a market just for women called *Suq al-Hareem*, or women's market, where they could sell their goods (al-Zaben, 1989). They used to sell vegetables, eggs, clothes, or trinkets (Nath, 1978). Moreover, there were women who sold buttermilk and fresh bread to their neighbors. In *Childhood in the Sand*, Dehrab (2002) described his mother's work:

My mother, after praying, would milk the cows and goats we kept in our home. She made butter, yogurt, and also buttermilk that we sold to our neighbors. Also, she baked fresh bread every day. She sold that bread, along with whatever eggs were available, to a few lazy women in the neighborhood. The cash went to my father....My father was a sailor for many years; he would travel to India, Iraq, Iran, and Africa for several months at a time, only to come home with limited earnings. (p. 180)

Bedouin women worked in tanning, pasturing, weaving. They wove carpets, pillows, and *abbaya* (the traditional long black cloaks worn by women), saddles, and *beit sha'ir* (hair tents). They also cared for sick animals, milked the camels, sheep, and goats daily, and made butter out of the milk to sell in the town (Chatty, 1978).

The poor women in both the Bedouin and the town families were obliged to work to supplement the income of their families. They led less secluded lives compared to those of the merchant women since they had to leave their houses to sell their goods. The societal value of such an act was acceptable and respectable since their husbands might be away for months at a time, and the Kuwaiti people understood that hard conditions forced them to work outside the home. As for women of merchant families, work was something they did to occupy themselves in their *harem*. They sold cloth, perfume, and mascara brought by their men from India and other countries to their neighbors and relatives, as well as making the dresses and skull caps worn by men (Nath, 1978). They seldom left their houses because they had servants to perform the domestic tasks and the daily shopping. In a description of their particular condition, al-Mughni (2001), wrote:

The strict seclusion was a way of controlling women. The trading voyages took men away for long periods of time, leaving women and children behind. Hence it was important for the merchant families that their women be safely protected, hidden and unheard of during the men's prolonged absence. Thus the houses were built to give women maximum protection, to conceal their existence and give them enough room to move around. (p. 45)

A Kuwaiti woman could not leave her house for any reason without wearing an *abbaya* and a veil covering her head and face, and she was expected to avoid all contact with men. The veil was a source of protection that men considered to be the central feature of a woman's honor. A woman of a respectable family must cover her face while in the presence of men who were not relatives. If she unveiled herself, she could face distressing chastisement (al-Mughni, 2001).

Kuwaiti men and women thus performed two different kinds of tasks in the past based on the roles that were established for them by societal values. According to Eagly (1987), both sexes were situated in separate social roles, which indirectly sustained differences, and in turn, this distribution was considered a major source of people's perceptions about the characteristics of females and males. As a result, the obligatory behavior of men and women led to the division of labor between them. In the same manner, women and men were expected to act and behave in certain ways according to the roles that the society implicitly prompted them to play.

Generally, Kuwaiti women were economically dependent first on their fathers and, after marriage, on their husbands (Kassamali, 1998). This led to the distinction in roles between men and women—men as breadwinners and women as housewives—that became a powerful element in strengthening the patriarchal social system. In his definition of patriarchy, Sage (1998) pointed out that it is “a social and economic arrangement whose material basis is men's control over the major social institutions and over women's labor power..... As such, it has been the ideological nucleus of women's oppression” (p. 59). Therefore, the division of labor in Kuwait that assigned certain tasks to men and certain tasks to women was a result of men's domination over the core economic institutions in pre-oil Kuwait.

Inequality of Female and Male Education

Education was one of the prominent aspects highlighting the distinction between the roles of men and women in Kuwaiti society. In the pre-oil era, the informal education of males began in 1887 in *kuttab* (al-Sabah, 1989). There they studied the *Holy Qur'an* in addition to learning basic reading, writing, and math skills. A boy who memorized the

whole Book walked around the houses in the town with other boys reciting a poem that praised the prophet Muhammad (PBU) as a way of honoring their education and collecting money to pay to the teacher. A teacher in a *kuttab* was called *mutawa'*, *Shiekh*, or *mullah*, and he had absolute authority over his students. The students who did not memorize the *Qur'an* or who fled from the lessons were physically punished.

The Mullah also had the right to assign his students certain tasks. He might send a group of them to a house in the neighborhood to recite some of the *Qur'an* for a sick person (Hussein, 1994). Dehrab (2002) described the type of work he and other boys used to do for the mullah: "The boys, when they finished their lessons, always had work to do at the mullah's house, which was separated from the school by a low mud wall. During the shrimp season, the boys had to boil, dry, and peel the shrimp for storage" (p. 181).

Most of the Kuwaiti families were eager to send their boys to a *kuttab* and, as a result, there were many *kuttabs* so that the *mutawas* competed with one another to acquire the greatest number of students. The main kind of competition was in teaching the best handwriting; the judges were merchants who cared a great deal about education in Kuwait (Hussein, 1994).

More *kuttabs* were established based on the merchants' need for workers who knew mathematics and could check accounts. Therefore, some merchants established *kuttabs* at their own expense to teach their sons and the sons of poorer people in Kuwait the basics of math as well as the *Qur'an*. In the period of economic prosperity, some private schools were established for those who had finished studying at the *kuttab* to teach them bookkeeping and English. Those schools were expensive and usually had one teacher responsible for teaching all the subjects (Hussein, 1994).

The *diwaneya* was also an important educational institution for men as a source for acquiring more knowledge and education. Some *diwaneyas'* proprietors had a wide knowledge of religion and literature. They had libraries containing books about religion, language, and literature. The men would gather there to read books and attend lessons given by the *diwaneya* proprietor or the scientists who visited him (Hussein, 1994).

As time passed, Kuwaiti men realized that they needed more progressive schools that could offer modern subjects. The Kuwait Research Center (2002) conducted a study that resulted in a report, *The History of Kuwaiti Education*, outlining the reasons for the growing awareness of the importance of formal schools:

1. The rise of educated and religious men who studied in countries such as Najd, al-Hasa, Iraq, India, and so on. They were impressed by the high level of education in those countries, and inspired them to establish similar formal schools in Kuwait.
2. The emphasis on the importance of education in developing the countries by many scientists and religious men who taught in mosques and *kuttabs*. They compared Kuwait to developed countries and encouraged their students to gain more education.
3. Kuwait was a place where scientists and religious men from neighboring countries used to gather and discuss the importance of education; this convinced the Kuwaiti people to establish schools based on modern curricula.
4. The *kuttab* in Kuwait pursued its traditional role in teaching reading, writing and simple math and did not have the facilities to build new curricula, introduce modern books, or assign new teachers with experience in different subjects.

5. The trading practices of the merchants and pearl divers put them in contact with other developed countries, making them realize the necessity of having a more developed educational system to help them deal with such countries.
 6. The trading and pearling occupations required educated men with high skills in reading, writing, math, and English.
 7. The *kuttabs* and other programs lacked lesson planning for accomplishing certain educational goals since teaching was based on one teacher's individual effort.
- (Kuwait Research Center, 2002, pp. 99-100)

In the reign of Sheikh Mubarak, men were so eager to eradicate illiteracy among themselves and raise their level of education that they collected contributions from members of Kuwaiti society in order to build a school. In fact, the government at that time was not interested in education as Yousef al-Ganaee, one of the founders of boys' school, explained: "Sheikh Mubarak al-sabah saw that it was better that the people remained illiterate for his own benefit" (Abdul-Jadeer, n.d.). In fact, that did not prevent men from establishing the first formal boys' school in 1911. It was called al-Mubarikiya, after the governor of Kuwait at that time. The Kuwaiti families welcomed the idea and rushed to register their sons. More than 254 students registered in the beginning of the school year. The merchants formed the school council and shouldered the responsibility for school expenses.

The school, however, had a different curriculum than that of the *kuttab*. Its students were to learn the following:

1. To write, read, and learn the Arabic grammar.
2. To memorize the *Holy Qur'an* and learn about the Islamic religion teachings.

3. To focus on the prophet and the orthodox caliphs' biography. (Kuwait Research Center, 2002, pp.105-106)

The main subjects were Islamic studies, Arabic, Islamic history, and the basics of math and geography. Those subjects were chosen as conforming to the needs of a conservative society. However, al-Mubarikiya lacked progressive sciences at the beginning; it also followed almost the same teaching method of the *kuttab* in that it had one teacher responsible for choosing the materials for his class, even though the subjects were more advanced (Kuwait Research Center, 2002).

Shortly, al-Mubarikiya faced decline because of the shortage in money and the departure of its more prominent teachers such as Abdu-Alaziz al-Rushaid and Hafez Wahba. It became almost like the old *kuttab*. In order to solve the problem, contributions to improve the academic standing of the school were gathered once again. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who succeeded Sheikh Mubarak, supported the development of the school and encouraged the building of another school. As a result, al-Ahmadia school was built in 1920. The new school had a more progressive curriculum than al-Mubarikiya, and it was administrated by Abdu-almalek Al-Saleh, who was a prominent teacher in the field of education (Hussein, 1994).

As more men sought more education for their sons, the first informal boys' scholarship was established in 1925. Seven boys headed to Baghdad to study at the greatest college, al-Kuliya al-athamiya, under the supervision of ShiekhYousef al-Qinaee (al-Jassim, 1989). Later, in 1938, the first formal scholarship student was sent to Iraq to study at the training college there (al-abdu Al-Ghafor, 1978). Afterward, more scholarship students were sent to Egypt. Hussein (1950) described his scholarship to

Egypt as a dream that came true since it was the first time he left Kuwait to experience a culture totally different from the world in which he lived. He found that the scholarship was an important step in the transformation of Kuwaiti society.

After the decline of its economy in 1936-1937, Kuwait revived and broadened its trading sphere to include India and other countries. Kuwaiti merchants recognized the demand for more modern education and called upon the government to provide it. The government responded by allowing them to establish the first education council in 1936 (Hussein, 1994). As part of this measure, education came under the supervision of the government.

In the beginning, the education council did not have a fixed curriculum. At first Kuwait acquired Iraqi curricula either because of the similarity and proximity of the two countries, or because a school principal had graduated from the elementary education center in Iraq (Hussein, 1994). Kuwait acquired Palestine's curricula in 1937 when the teachers from Palestine came to Kuwait, and it acquired Egyptian curricula in 1943 when the first group of teachers began teaching in Kuwaiti schools (al-Jassim, 1989). The curricula remained that way until Dr. Ismael Qabani and Matta Aqrawi extensively studied Kuwaiti schools and provided a report that was the basis for finally organizing the education process in Kuwait (Hussein, 1994).

However, at the time when men were trying to acquire higher levels of education, women were still in their isolated domestic world. According to al-Tameme (2004), in the Arabian Gulf before the discovery of oil and during the early years after the discovery of oil, women were isolated from the male world and suffered ignorance and illiteracy as a result of inherited customs and traditions.

In Kuwait, the only form of informal education for women in the pre-oil era was *almutawa'a*, where a female teacher taught the *Holy Qur'an*. In 1916 some girls began to attend *almutawa'a* to memorize the *Qur'an* in order to help them perform their religious duties appropriately. The first *mutawa'a*, or female teacher, Amina al-Omar, had begun teaching to earn money; she taught the *Qur'an* as she had learned it from her father. Subsequently, many women, especially those from modest families, followed her lead and worked as *mutawa'a*s and used their homes to teach young girls. The *mutawa'a* received a fee of 2 to 5 rupees per student based on family income (al-Mughni, 2001). A young girl who memorized the *Qur'an* just as a boy did in a *kuttab*, walked around the neighboring houses for three days to collect money for her teacher, for the boy who read the *altahmeeda* (which gives thanks to God), and for her *Qur'an* completion ceremony (Abdu-almalek al-Saleh, 2002). In *almutawa'a*, however, the young girls did not learn reading and writing because those skills would not help them in their domestic obligations. According to Hussein (1994), the early female *mutawa'a* taught only the *Qur'an* because there was no need for a girl to learn reading and writing.

In the view of Kuwaiti society, men had the right to educate themselves since they occupied the public realm of society, whereas women did not need education in order to fulfill their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. Fatima Yousef (1986), in the newspaper, *Alrai al'aam*, said that after she finished her studies at *almutawa'a*, her father continued teaching her at home. He bought a blackboard and taught her how to write and read. Her grandmother, however, used to criticize him, asking him why he bothered to educate her—she was not a boy looking for a job.

Only in 1926, when the first female *kuttab* where study was not restricted to the memorization of the *Qur'an* was established, did Kuwaiti women have the opportunity to formally study reading and writing. Some young girls attended the *kuttab* to learn how to read and write, aside from memorizing the *Qur'an*, but there were a few girls who learned reading and writing from their brothers or fathers before that (al-Sabah, 1989). The *mutawa'a* and *kuttab* pursued their tasks almost until 1950 even after the existence of female formal schools (Abdu-almalek al-Saleh, 2002). The reason could be that some Kuwaiti families refused sending their young girls to formal schools so that they continued sending them to *almatawa'a* or *kuttab*.

The education council proposed building girls' schools but encountered strong resistance from Kuwaiti society, which considered such a move contrary to traditional values. According to Abdu-almalek al-Saleh (2002), Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era was a closed society with little communication with the outside world; it had values that differentiated between the roles of men and women, where a woman's place should not extend beyond the house. It was to be expected that many Kuwaitis refused to accept the girls' school scheme proposed by the education council.

The education council did not give up and succeeded in building the first school for girls in 1937. They brought two female teachers from Palestine since it was difficult to find a well-educated Kuwaiti woman at that time. Shahab (1984) described the education council's decision as a daring and brave step in a society controlled by traditions and customs so that a woman's movements were watched carefully, especially when she reached the age of thirteen. He was surprised that girls could go to school.

The two Palestinian teachers remained for seven months without teaching because Kuwaiti families refused to send their daughters to the school. When the school finally opened, only ten girls attended before their number gradually began to increase (al-Mahmeed, 2003). Many young girls were eventually able to venture outside their sheltered lives for the first time, but they also felt uncertain about leaving the familiar traditional existence. Zakiya Heejazi (1950), an Egyptian female teacher in Kuwait, vividly expressed this dilemma experienced by Kuwaiti women:

The Kuwaiti women are between past and present and knowledge and ignorance!!! They are happy in school because it makes them finally leave their secluded life and enter a new life. They are always in anger and rebel at the belittling that they face at homeThe Kuwaiti girl is moving rapidly forward but she has a strong feeling of deficiency because her family will oblige her to stay at home before she finishes her study (p. 20).

Girls' schools in the pre-oil era paid a great deal of attention to religious and domestic education in order to prepare young girls to be true women capable of carrying out the responsibilities of their household. Mohammad Rasheed (1929) pointed out in *Kuwait Magazine* that Islamic studies should be the central focus of female education since it is a requirement for every Muslim, female and male. Furthermore, young girls studied needlework, nursing, and first aid in addition to math, geography, history, science, and art (al-abdu al-Ghafor, 1978). The study of home economics, however, was undertaken at the expense of other subjects. In this respect, Abdu Al-malek Al-Saleh (2002) observed that there were distinctions between boys' and girls' curriculum

according to the differences in their roles. English language was restricted to the boys' schools, and girls learned sewing, cooking, and childcare.

After girls completed the elementary level of education, they were granted a female studies certificate. There was an emphasis on preparing them to be true women who knew how to take care of their husbands and children. Al-Mazidi (1947) claimed that Kuwaiti women were in need of educational institutions in order to learn the domestic tasks that were the basis for the success of the family.

The female school was an attempt to transform the traditional values that had obstructed women's education. Some families responded to that reform and sent their daughters, while others maintained the traditional values and refused to allow their daughters to be educated. Al-Mahmeed (2003) described the men's position regarding the new values that allowed women to depart from their secluded lives to attend school: The men were in conflict; some completely refused to accept the new values and forbade their daughters and sisters to go to school and even placed more restrictions on them. They went so far as to forbid their sons to marry teachers. Other men admired the new values, but were cautious in expressing this. They allowed their daughters to attend school, but only up to a certain grade. This fact was revealed in a report about female education that appeared in *Al-Ba'tha Magazine*; the reporter praised the schools as a step forward in making Kuwait a modern country (Jawla mosawara, 1950). On the other hand, he regretted that there were still many families in Kuwait that forbade their daughters to go to school (Hussain, 1950). There were also men who wholly embraced the new values, and all Western values, and agreed that education was important for women.

Conservatives viewed female education as an alien value that could affect girls' chances for marriage. A girl who was taught from an early age not to step outside her secluded world in order to protect her family honor and be eligible for marriage, now had to leave her world and risk lessening her chances to marry since traditional Kuwait men looked only for those women who do not leave their father's house except to marry. Moreover, educated women were considered to be forward, which was not a desirable quality in a wife. In this respect, Abdul-Rauf (1977) pointed out:

[A girl's] education did not seem to enhance her marriage chances. In fact, educated women were somewhat feared and even mistrusted...Educated women were thought to be obtrusive and too assertive, and they did not appeal to men who expected them to serve them and obey them blindly. [Therefore] parents, or rather the fathers, refused to allow their daughters to go to school. (p.135).

Kuwaiti patriarchal society, therefore, shaped the destiny of women's education in the pre-oil era. Some girls had the opportunity to go to school through the encouragement of their families; merchants' families were pioneers in encouraging the female educational movement in Kuwait through their contact through business with modernized countries. Others Kuwaitis forbade their daughters and sisters' education and as a result there are a number of illiterate women in Kuwaiti society today.

Illiteracy was wide-spread in Kuwaiti society, but illiterate females far exceeded the number of illiterate males (see Table 1). In order to fight illiteracy, the Kuwaiti government instituted an educational plan to decrease this phenomenon in Kuwait. In 1958 two centers for combating illiteracy amongst the male population were opened, but

Table 1

Illiteracy in the Kuwaiti Population According to Gender, 1965-1985

Year	Kuwaiti Males Over 10 years of age	Kuwaiti Females over 10 years of age	Total
1965	29,387	48,374	77,761
1970	36,703	69,091	105,794
1975	44,880	88,734	133,614
1980	40,655	92,148	132,803
1985	33,466	82,407	115,873

Ministry of Planning, Statistics Department

it was not until 1963 that similar centers for women were established (al-Sabah, 1989).

This gap is another reason for the increased illiteracy among old and middle-aged women (Al-Sabah, 1989).

The gap between men's and women's education demonstrates the gender stratification of Kuwaiti society in the past. As previously noted, boys' schools had found acceptance, but girls' schools faced strong resistance. Sheikh Abullah al-jaber said that the government ought to care for the girls' education as well, but social values of that time were an obstruction (Kuwait Research Center, 2004). Moreover, boys and girls studied quite different subjects: girls were supposed to study only at the elementary level since the main purpose of their education was to make them literate and help them

perform their domestic duties properly (Kuwait Research Center, 2002), whereas boys were given the opportunity to pursue their studies abroad after the completion of their elementary and secondary level education. Furthermore, the number of males in schools exceeded number of females as indicated in Table 2.

Report on education in Kuwait presented by Ismael Al-Qabani and Matta Aqrawi. Some Kuwaiti women were able to break away from their secluded lives and work as teachers in girls' schools. The first woman to do so was Mariam Abdu-almalek al-Saleh who started teaching in 1937 as soon as the first female school was established. By looking back at her history, one could understand how she was able to break with societal values and intervene in the public world. Abdul-Malek al-Saleh (1999), in her autobiography, discussed her first steps in gaining an education. As mentioned before,

Table 2

The Number of Students and Schools in Census, 1939-1955

School Year	Males		Females		Total	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
1939-1940	9	1500	1	330	10	1830
1944-1945	12	2420	3	670	15	3090
1949-1950	18	3906	5	1334	23	5340
1954-1955	30	10100	21	5200	51	15300

Abdu-almalek Al-Saleh, Mariam's father, was the administrator of al-Ahmadia school. Thus, he was an educated man who believed in the importance of education and acted upon this belief by spreading education among his family members. He started with his illiterate wife and taught her to read and write, as well as other subjects. Mariam al-Saleh (1999) described how she was a smart child who was eager to learn. At four years of age she memorized the *Qur'an* in one year. She also attracted her father's attention when she began to spell the letters in his books. The next day, her father brought home chalk and a board and taught her reading and writing. He also took her to *mutawa'a* to learn writing, reading, math principles, and sewing. Moreover, during the afternoons and the holidays her father taught her geography, history, and Islamic studies. After a few years, and when the first female formal school was established, she was chosen to teach there, even though she was only ten years old.

Al-Zaben (1989) also conducted an interview with Latifa Muhammad al-Barak, another of the women pioneers who broke away from seclusion and worked in teaching. She memorized the *Qur'an* at the age of eight and studied as far as the elementary level in the first female school. Her mother was responsible for her and her sister and brother because her father was arrested in India as a result of his participation in a protest against the British occupation during World War II. Her mother worked as a tailor to cover their living expenses. Al-Barak was asked to work as a teacher, but at the beginning she faced the resistance of her mother who kept telling her that a woman should not go outside the house. Finally, her mother was convinced by her grandmother and other relatives to permit her to work as a teacher.

Thus, both the family and the environment were factors that gave rise to women working outside the house. As we can see clearly, Mariam Abdu-almalek al-Saleh was able to break away from the old values and respond to the changes in the society as a result of her upbringing. She was raised in a family that believed in an equal education for men and women. This made her take the daring first step in a conservative society and become a teacher in a time when one would rarely meet women who were even literate. Latifa al-Barak was different in that she was only able to leave her house because her father's absence resulting necessitated that she work for a living.

Factors Transforming Kuwaiti Societal Values

Kuwaiti women, as described above, broke from their sheltered lives and attended the schools that were pathways to a new and promising life. Although the schools for the most part reflected the Kuwaiti patriarchal values that emphasized the role of women as confined to the home and family, they also raised awareness among Kuwaiti women about the importance of education as a bridge from their limited domestic sphere to the wider public one. However, other key factors that helped Kuwaiti women dare to take the first steps outside their secluded lives were the economic, political, and social changes triggered by the discovery of oil. In the following discussion I will explain how the discovery of oil introduced those changes in Kuwaiti society, and how those changes led to a shift in women's access to education and the public sector.

The Discovery of Oil

In 1913 Sheikh Mubarak allowed British companies to search for oil in Kuwait. The first oilfield was discovered in 1938, in Burgan (al-Yahya, 1993). Beginning in 1950, during the reign of Sheikh Abdallah al-Salim (1950-1965), Kuwait witnessed a rapid

transformation from its status as a poor and dependent British protectorate, to that of a wealthy independent state. Sheikh Abdullah was a shrewd and intuitive governor who gained great respect from both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. During his rule Kuwait became an independent and modern state (Daniels, 1971). Nath (1978) described this era as follows:

From 1950 to 1965, Kuwait was transformed from a small, traditional Arab sheikhdom of carrier-traders, fishermen, pearl divers, and Bedouins to a modern city-state with large commercial and financial institutions. The Kuwaitis modernized their life-styles with astonishing speed and vigor. They filled the new schools and offices opened by the government in the thousands, and crammed their new modern houses with consumer goods of every description. (p.174)

During his travels to other countries, including Saudi Arabia, India, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Egypt, Sheikh Abdullah acquired insight into how to build a modern country. According to Daniels (1971), who witnessed Sheikh Abdullah's reign, Sheikh Abdullah modernized the government. He instituted a democratic constitution and established diplomatic relations with Western and Arab states. Moreover, Kuwait became a member of the United Nations and other international institutions. Kuwait made amazing economic and social progress during this time.

The introduction of this new source of income stimulated a new form of community. The government began by launching public projects such as hospitals, the Public Security Building, and some schools and streets. As oil profits increased, its efforts to included street reconstruction, water supply, electricity, medical services, education, roads, and housing. The city plan prepared by foreign consultants expanded

Kuwait City from a walled town into a large metropolis (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1965).

Shafeeq Ghabra (2002), in *My Childhood: Innocence, Politics, and Rebellion*, described the immense changes he observed upon returning with his family to Kuwait from England where his father had been granted a scholarship by the Kuwaiti government. He remarked, “Once back in Kuwait, I was astonished to find how much it had changed during the few years we were away. New areas had been built; much of the open desert close to our house had disappeared” (p. 260).

One consequence of the oil boom was the problem of finding enough skilled laborers in Kuwait to keep up with the demand; one solution was to turn to foreign labor. In 1949, Kuwait’s population was estimated to be about 100,000, with immigrants constituting the largest component of that increase (Ismael, 1982). Between 1957 and 1975, Kuwait’s population increased 557%, with immigrant workers making up the greatest part of that growth (Crystal, 1992). This led to a drastic change in the composition of Kuwaiti society. That trend has continued, in varying degrees, up to the present time (see Table 3).

The influx of foreigner laborers at the beginning of the 1950s was a result of the expanding consumer market, and was largely uncontrolled and unrestricted until 1954 (Ismael, 1982). The main reason, however, behind the heavy reliance upon foreign worker in skilled professions was the consequence of pre-oil era neglect of vocational education; as a result, few Kuwaitis could take advantage of opportunities in the oil industry. Al-Sabah (1980) explained that the oil companies in Kuwait did not give skilled work to Kuwaiti laborers, employing them instead as clerks, guards, and drivers.

Table 3

Population in Census Years by Nationality & Sex, 1965-1995

Census Year	Nationality	Population		
		Male	Female	Total
1965	Kuwaiti	85,856	82,937	168,793
	Non-Kuwaiti	200,456	98,090	298,546
1975	Kuwaiti	153,010	154,745	307,755
	Non-Kuwaiti	390,758	296,324	687,082
1985	Kuwaiti	238,181	232,292	470,473
	Non-Kuwaiti	727,116	499,712	1,226,828
1995	Kuwaiti	326,301	327,315	653,616
	Non-Kuwaiti	587,101	334,853	921,954

Ministry of Planning, Statistics Department

It was in this way that Kuwait opened up to other cultures. Foreign immigrants brought with them values and traditions alien to Kuwaiti society; Kuwaiti women became aware of the outside world through their contact with the foreigners. Furthermore, they learned new values and customs from their non-Kuwaiti teachers. Zahra Freeth (1956) explained the changes:

With the beginning of education for girls within the last ten years, there has grown up a generation of young women who have a new *savoir faire*, and wider interests than their predecessors who lacked formal education and had no access to new ideas from books or periodicals. The young Arab [Kuwaiti] wives in the town today are dressing in European fashion, a change that reflects the influence of the Syrian and Palestinian school-teachers who have taught them to make and

wear clothes of western style, and they are eager to gain information on modern dress and similar topics from women's magazines published in Egypt and other more westernized Arab countries. (p. 83)

Thus, the new modern life that the government provided was accompanied by a crucial change in the status of Kuwaiti women. In the years following the discovery of oil, there was a call for reform that has gradually changed the lives of many Kuwaiti women. Many of them claimed their social and political rights. Some women, especially those from wealthy families, protested against wearing the veil. In one instance in 1956 where this protest was unsuccessful, four young women took off their veils, burnt them in their schoolyard, and returned home unveiled. Their parents and men in the area were infuriated. The girls were threatened with expulsion from school if they did not wear the veil. The young girls submitted to these demands and returned to school the next day wearing their veils. Other women, however, met with more success. The first Kuwaiti women to pursue higher education abroad and learn new values were determined to drop the veil. They did not wear the veil during their years of education abroad, and even their families became accustomed to seeing them unveiled. On their return in 1960, they refused to wear the veil even when it prevented them from gaining employment opportunities (al-Mughni, 2001).

The Kuwaiti women who abandoned their veils wore fashionable modern clothes in an attempt to break with the old values that confined them to the *abbaya*. Nath (1978) pointed out that "by early 1970's, the veil had disappeared among the younger women. A number of the older women also had discarded the veil or had dispensed with the face covering, the *boshia*" (p. 175). During the oil era, Kuwaiti women became more

confident and sought to modernize themselves and establish their presence in the world of men. According to Daniels (1971), Kuwaiti women of the 1960s were confident and enjoyed a noticeable participation in the public sphere, unlike Kuwaiti women in the past who were veiled and rarely ventured from their houses except in certain occasions such as *Eid al Fitr*, the Moslem celebration held after Ramadan fasting. However, conservative families did not drift with the flow of modernization and steadfastly maintained their old values. As Freeth (1956) noted, this can be particularly apparent among the Bedouin tribes:

The tribal man, who builds himself a house or settles in the town, remains a badawin in outlook, and in his attitude to the common townsfolk. He retains also his badawin dress, which for both men and women is distinct in certain peculiarities from that of the townsman... The desert woman [today] may be distinguished from her sister of the town by the fact she wears a *burga*, the black mask with two eyeholes. (p.72)

As life changed in Kuwait, marriage customs also changed somewhat. These changes, according to Daniels (1971), were a result of contact with the outside world. Arranged marriage has become less common in Kuwaiti society and a woman can refuse or accept a marriage. However, arranged marriage remains the preferred type of marriage today. Although marriage customs have changed, and women can see their future husbands, arranged marriage remains the most respectable kind of marriage. In a study conducted by Sabeeh (1980), women and men were asked whether or not they should meet their spouses before marriage. The researcher found that females and males differed in their response: 92% of the men and 82% of the women would prefer to meet their

future spouse. The different percentages of males and females may reflect how Kuwaiti women have internalized those traditional values that emphasize the importance a woman's modesty.

A Kuwaiti woman still cannot marry without the permission of her father.

According to the Kuwaiti Personal Status Law:

It is conditional for the validity of marriage that the woman's opinion should be in accord with that of her male guardian. The divorced woman or the woman who reaches twenty-five years of age has her own opinion, but she cannot undertake the procedures of the marriage contract by herself. She should have a male guardian conduct these on her behalf. In cases where the father refuses his daughter's marriage without legitimate reasons, meaning if he is unjust and tyrannical, the woman has the right to take it to the Personal Status Court to gain an order from the judge to be her male guardian and allowed her to get married. (al-Awadi, 1994)

This law reflects the traditional and conservative elements of Kuwaiti society. The marriage rules are based on Islamic law that emphasizes that consent for a woman's marriage should be consistent with the approval of the family. Thus, unlike in the past where women had no voice in the decision and there was no law that could grant them that right, in the present it is the consent of the individual woman that is the basis for the validity of the marriage contract.

Early marriage customs have also witnessed a transformation although they still can be seen in the conservative sectors in the society. Generally, unlike the past, it is not common for girls to marry at a very young age. They also have more chance to meet their

prospective husbands, especially their cousins, after they have discarded the veil. Cousins can meet each other and the male cousin can see the female cousin without veil. On the other hand, even now their families do not allow Kuwaiti women to marry foreigners, whether non-Kuwaiti Arabs or non Arabs. To do so, women must undertake a long struggle. Nowadays, there are only a few Kuwaiti women who are married to foreigners; Kuwaiti men, however, do not face as much opposition as women (Nath, 1978). Nath (1978) reported, "Attitudes allowing educated young Kuwaiti men to marry non-Kuwaiti women, but forbidding young Kuwaiti women to marry non-Kuwaiti men, have created a social problem, in that a number of educated Kuwaiti women have remained unmarried up to their thirties" (p.185).

Unmarried women are regarded a social problem in Kuwaiti culture. A woman is expected to combine the traditional role of wife and mother with any outside pursuits, for example, if she works: her education or career does not alter her wife-mother role. Moreover, it is unacceptable in Kuwaiti society for unmarried women to live alone. This social attitude has led many Kuwaiti women who do not have the chance to marry a Kuwaiti man to seek marriage to a non-Kuwaiti. In al-Thakeb's (1985) study, the age of Kuwaiti women who married non-Kuwaitis ranged between 30-50 years. Kuwaiti families try to prevent their daughters from marrying non-Kuwaiti because, in their view, non-Kuwaitis have different customs. Also non-Kuwaiti husbands may take Kuwaiti women far from home to another country. Magnifying this problem are the Kuwaiti men who prefer to marry a non-Kuwaiti, which increases the difficulty for Kuwaiti women who are constrained by tradition to find a Kuwaiti husband. To help alleviate the situation, the government encourages marriage between Kuwaiti nationals by providing

an allowance of KD 4000 (\$13,000); half of this allowance is a gift and the rest must be paid in small monthly installments (Shah, 2004). However, this has not solved the problem, and there are still Kuwaiti women who marry non-Kuwaiti men, even over the objections of their families.

Women's lives, thus, have been drastically affected by the economic, social, and political changes that occurred after oil discovery. In addition to the effects described above, increasing wealth has affected the economy by raising incomes, giving many Kuwaiti households the economic ability to employ nannies and servants to carry out many of the tasks that were traditionally performed by Kuwaiti women (Crystal, 1992). Having servants to help with the domestic responsibilities enables Kuwaiti women to go outside to work. Also, as Crystal (1992) pointed out, "Oil wealth and the concomitant social changes it has introduced, such as increasing women's educational levels, have also introduced some demographic changes, inducing women to marry somewhat later and bear somewhat fewer children" (p. 80).

However, the traditional values of the past still exist in many families. As I have mentioned earlier, many Bedouins still practice first-cousin marriage. Thus, the legal rights that the government granted to Kuwaiti women are undermined by social and familial practice as "social restrictions and family pressure effectively restrict the legal right of divorce for men, and a women's power in a marriage will vary radically depending on family origin, social class, and the peculiarities of her circumstances" (Crystal, 1992, p. 78).

Furthermore, although not widely practiced, early marriage occurs in Kuwaiti society despite being a violation of international codes of human rights. Some parents

promote the marriage of their daughters while they are under 18 years old, hoping that marriage will benefit them socially and financially (UNICEF, 2005). The statistics collected by the ministry of planning in Kuwait in 2002 indicated that 24 Kuwaiti females under the age of 15 were married to Kuwaiti males between 20-24 years of age (Ministry of Planning, 2002).

Education

As has been demonstrated, in the post-oil era, the Kuwaiti government became more concerned with the developments of social services and education. It embarked on a large-scale education project involving school construction, hiring new teachers, and encouraging higher education (Crystal, 1992). As a result, the education process was developed and changed in a very short time. Daniels (1971) described the rapid transformation of the educational sector, saying, "Since the first export of oil the State educational program had advanced in typical tempo, which is quick, quick, *quicker!*" (p.40).

In 1949, the council of education decided to make girls' and boys' elementary schools equal in curriculum due to the changing social infrastructure and the need to prepare female students for their new responsibilities in the labor force. Gradually, the number of female students increased, and even exceeded, that of male students. Nagat El-Sanabary (1998) noted an increase in female enrollment rate in Kuwait at the secondary level from 1% in 1950 to 80% in 1987. Recently, the number of Kuwaiti female students in the 2003/2004 statistics, in all levels of education, reached 150,649, while the number of males students was 142,694.

Furthermore, Kuwaiti women were given access to higher education. In 1954, Najeeba Jumaa was granted the first scholarship to Cairo to pursue her high school education in order to specialize in science, which was not a part of the school curricula in Kuwait at that time (Abdu-almalek al-Saleh, 2002). In 1960, the government granted scholarships to Cairo University to the first group of Kuwaiti women. The decision about scholarships faced strong opposition from the conservative members of society. Abdullah Ahmad Hussein (1948) wrote in *Alba'tha magazine* in response to the decision of the council:

I believe that the Kuwaiti woman is a traditionalist, which makes it hard for her to adopt a new environment. Thus, sending women with scholarships to a foreign country will cause them culture shock. Moreover, taking the Kuwaiti woman, who is veiled and only knows her house and her school, to a different world where men walk beside women is an unacceptable custom, [thus] a deep consideration is needed before taking such a perilous step.

When the University of Kuwait opened in 1966, women soon came to constitute the majority of the student population (Crystal, 1992). They specialized mostly in the arts: “Between 1969 and 1978, the female graduates from the University of Kuwait made up to 72% of the total in the school of arts [and out of these the education, sociology and psychology majors]” (Azzam & Moujabber, 1985, p. 69). Today, the number of Kuwaiti females in Kuwait University exceeds the number of males. However, most of the women specialize in majors deemed appropriate to their traditional domestic interests as a result of the societal values that constructs in them preference for education, art, and administrative science (see Table 4).

Table 4

Areas of Study in the First Semester at Kuwait University According to Sex, 2003-2004

Sex	College							
	Social Science	Commerce	Sharia'a	Education	English	Science	Arts	ADM Science
Males	56	1	29	30	68	22	41	61
Females	112	-	24	200	66	86	106	116
Total	168	1	53	230	134	108	147	177

Ministry of Planning, Statistics Department.

On the other hand, the government realized the importance of establishing a training center to prepare the skilled laborers needed for the oil industry. Thus, the Ministry of Education responded to the demands of the State and established a number of training centers to meet with oil industry requirements. The first department for technical and vocational education was established in 1972. Since then, a number of students have enrolled in vocational education courses. However, the female enrollment in vocational courses was limited to certain specializations such as telecommunication and courses for special purposes. Today a number of Kuwait female students in vocational education are enrolled in specific majors such as nursing, secretarial and office work, and telecommunications. Consequently, the roles allotted to women in Kuwaiti society limit their access to vocational education in certain fields. Furthermore, fewer Kuwaiti women enroll in vocational school since it possesses a lower status compared to the university. According to El-Sanabary (1998):

Sex-role stereotypes limit the supply of vocational education for girls, and the low status of vocational education depresses the demand for existing programs. The attitude that woman's place is in the home prevails, obviating the need for job-related vocational and technical education....These attitudes are strongest in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Female access to vocational education in both these countries is negligible. (p. 145)

Work

As a result of the immense influx of foreign labor, the government recognized the need for Kuwaiti women in the labor force and instituted new policies regarding their employment in the public sector. The government set a five-year plan of 1995/96 – 1999/2000 to assure women's entry in the government sector, the details of which were presented at the International Conference on Population and Development concerning the State of Kuwait:

Realizing the fact that development is unsustainable without women's participation on equal basis with men, the government has been keen to adapt, with its development plans, all the appropriate conditions to encourage women to work and responsibility sharing the different activities and fields that may not contradict with their principle role as mothers bearing the responsibility of up bringing the coming generation. (al-Dakhil, 1994)

In the government's five-year plan to increase women's participation in the country's workforce, the state nonetheless intended to limit them to certain occupations and thereby make use of the skills that were seen as best suited to their gender roles. Thus, the government played a large part in changing the position of women by

encouraging their entrance into workforce. However, by placing boundaries on women's work, these policies essentially maintained gender division, even if inadvertently. In 1961 Kuwaiti women protested against the education council's decision to limit women's jobs to the ministries of education, health, and social affairs. They reported their opposition to the newspapers, and the council of education soon abandoned that restriction. Crystal (1992) noted that the first women in government employment in 1961 were initially barred from their jobs because they refused to veil themselves. Constant opposition to the veil and the call for modernization finally forced the government to allow women to work unveiled. The foreign minister, Sheikh Sabah, allowed unveiled women to work in his ministry, and other ministries followed this lead. By 1962, two women worked at the broadcasting station and some worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (al-Mughni, 2001).

Kuwaiti women, however, must still consult their male guardians in regard to work, including the type of work for which they intend to apply. Men—husbands and fathers—still have the authority to prevent women from working (Crystal, 1992). According to Azzam and Moujabber (1985), “the effect of local traditions regarding sex segregation is still considerable, and no woman would embark on a career without first consulting her family, particularly the male head” (p. 71). Many male guardians guide their sisters or daughters to occupations of limited contact between sexes, considering those to be the most appropriate and acceptable kinds of work for women.

As a result, many Kuwaiti women work in occupations that adhere to societal norms and values, such as teaching or other jobs where women have little or no contact with men. The only place where men do not oppose women employees is in the Ministry

of Education because men and women work in separate locations (Nath, 1978). This is clearly shown in statistics gathered in 2002 by the Ministry of Planning: The number of Kuwaiti women employed in the Ministry of education was 32,258, whereas male employees in the same sector numbered 7658. Nath (1978) conducted a study regarding Kuwaiti women's employment and education:

Most graduates wanted women to become teachers, social workers, and doctors. Few desired for women such jobs as personal secretary, bank clerk, and television artist. Some were currently working as librarians and administrators but only a few mentioned these as job preference. The only legal barriers against work by women related to their joining the armed forces...(p.182)

Nath (1978) also observed that biases against certain occupations, such as that of secretary, saleswoman, telephone operator, or television artist, arose mainly from social inhibitions; in these occupations women had to deal closely with men and appear before the general public. Older Kuwaitis, both men and women, opposed women working in the television industry. A Kuwaiti female teacher who is one of the pioneers in teaching said that she would not permit her daughter to work as a television performer, even if she were offered KD 1,000 (\$ 3.472) ((Nath, 1978). Crystal (1992) maintained, "One of the most important norms governing appropriate work for women is the value placed on limiting contact between the sexes. Sometimes women internalize these norms" (p. 80).

There are some occupations, like journalism and law, that Kuwaiti women rarely seek to enter and, if they do, they may face strong opposition from their families. Azzam and Moujabber (1985) pointed out that "even those women who have the necessary educational qualifications find it difficult to secure a job in these fields [law, politics,

engineering and journalism] because many parents are opposed to their daughters entering predominantly male-controlled occupations” (p. 64).

Al-Sabah (1989) discussed the reasons for women’s sparse participation in different fields. She said that women’s work is questionable in the view of society. She also pointed out that the rules that are granted to Kuwaiti women that give them the right to take a leave of absence for childbirth, child care, or accompanying their husbands when they travel abroad have made them less productive than working men. The only leave that men have is in case of sickness.

In all this, it can be observed that the traditional values of the past that caused role division between men and women still exist in Kuwaiti society. The position of women has changed a great deal, but reactionary values persist among some Kuwaitis. Those who oppose women’s right to work emphasize the time-honored norms of female modesty. From their perspective, a woman is a child bearer and there is no need for her work. On this subject, al-Mahameed (2003) noted that “women do not need to prove themselves in men’s fields, they need to live their natural role self-confidently, and there is no need for women to work in Kuwaiti society since the male guardians, father or a husband, are in charge legally of all the household expenses” (p. 61).

Al-Zaben (1989) conducted qualitative research to investigate the concept of work regarding Kuwaiti women. She interviewed a ninety–one year old businessman, asking for his opinion about women’s work. The interviewee said that if a woman pursued an education, it would take her away from her domestic duties and may lessen her opportunity for bearing and raising children. He believed that a woman is created to help men and to raise children and work may take her away from her main task. He also

pointed out that Islam does not prevent women from working, but keeping them sheltered is a way to protect them from the harmful reputation that would cause them to be denounced and cast out by their society.

Traditional values have thus impacted female participation in the labor force. As Azzam and Moujabber (1985) noted, “female employment in the Gulf has been basically moulded by social factors since they dictate what type of economic activity is deemed appropriate” (p. 61). In this regard, al-Sabah (1980) indicated that there is a dualism of men and women in the labor force. She claimed that the number of males exceeds the number of females in almost all economic activities. The percentage of inactive females in 1975 in relation to total Kuwaiti females is about 87% (p. 93). This can explain men’s domination of the labor force. More over, the percentage of males in leading positions in the government sector (managers, ministers or prime-ministers) far exceeds the percentage of females in similar positions (see Table 5).

In comparing the condition of female education and work in the pre-oil era with that of the post-oil era, one can clearly see the impact of societal values on women as a set of limitations on education and certain types of occupations. It should be noted that while in the past most women were forbidden to go to school, today women are still careful to choose careers that reflect the prevailing social values of Kuwait.

The State and Its Impact on Gender Relations

The state has a noticeable impact on gender relations. According to Connell (2002), the state possesses the power to ‘do’ gender: “the state generates policies concerned with gender issues. As these policies are put into effect, the state regulates

Table 5

Leading Positions in the Government Sector According to Sex, 1996-2001

Years	Kuwaiti Males	Kuwaiti Females	G.E.I
1996	291	8	0.03
1997	295	10	0.03
1998	316	15	0.05
1999	326	15	0.05
2000	317	22	0.07
2001	325	21	0.06

Ministry of Planning, Statistics Department

gender relations in the wider society...It involves many policy areas from housing through education” (p. 103).

Stimulated by its new economic wealth, the Kuwaiti government embarked on a housing program for Kuwaiti citizens, granting a Kuwaiti man who marries a Kuwaiti or non-Kuwaiti woman a government house; on the other hand, a Kuwaiti woman who marries a non-Kuwaiti man does not qualify for a government house. The policy was formulated to benefit men rather than women so that state houses are owed to men as heads of households. When a divorced man remarries, the divorced wife either shares the same house with the second wife, or returns to her family (al-Mughni, 2001). According to al-Mughni (2001), “the entire policy of the state has been designed to perpetuate patriarchal relationships and to maintain the traditional role of women” (p. 65). In a press conference held in the home of Aisha al-Rushaid, a woman who intends to run in the

2007 election for the National Assembly, Amal al-Menawer, who works in the housing sector, has stated that Kuwaiti women suffer from the government housing rules since those rules do not apply to all women. They applied only to married women (Oteifa, 2006).

The naturalization law is another form of differentiation between female and male social roles. The naturalization law in Article 8 states, “Kuwaiti nationality may be granted by Degree [level of nationality based on origins] upon the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior to a foreign woman who marries a Kuwaiti national...” However, in Article 5, the law states:

Any person who was born to a Kuwaiti mother and who has maintained his residence [in Kuwait] until reaching the age of majority and whose foreign father has irrevocably divorced his mother or has died. The Minister of the Interior may afford to such children, being minors, the same treatment as that afforded to Kuwaiti nationals in all respect until they reach the age of majority.

Article 8 and Article 5 clearly emphasize the distinction between Kuwaiti men and women. Where the foreign wife to a Kuwaiti man can be granted Kuwaiti nationality, the children of a Kuwaiti mother do not have the right to obtain Kuwaiti nationality or to be treated as Kuwaitis after the age of majority.

Thus, gender distinctions extend to the laws of the country. On this subject, Dashti observed that there are laws that distinguish between men and women, for instance, “the naturalization law which differentiates between citizens where it gave the man the right and not the woman [and] the housing law which secured a house for the man and not the woman” (“Kuwaiti Women Prove,” 2006). In this way the state plays a

significant role in emphasizing a distinction in gender roles through the laws that grant males superiority over females.

Conclusion

As has been described, in the past women were viewed as cultural gatekeepers. They lived in seclusion to maintain their tribal and familial privileges. Their knowledge about the world did not extend beyond the walls of the house, and certain roles were forced on them in order to maintain the accepted social values. Minces (1980) pointed out how “the tribal or familial structural basis of [Muslim] societies imposes upon women a role and a position such that any modification of their status threatens to bring down the patriarchal, familial or tribal pillars on which those societies rest (p. 23).

The roles practiced by both females and males in the past have had an impact on the present social practice as it delineates the different spheres of women and men. As Sage (1990) stated, “[gender division] is historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined social relations and social contexts that promote, reinforce, and reproduce gender oppression and injustice” (p. 58). Although Kuwaiti women have witnessed a drastic change in their society, there are still notable distinctions in the rights and status of women and men in Kuwait; these distinctions are attributable to traditional values. Education and labor laws guarantee formal gender equality, but social practices still discriminate against women: Some families limit the education of their daughters, and some jobs are considered inappropriate for women. Social pressure also discourages men who attempt to challenge existing social practices; for instance, social conservatives may view those who allow their daughters or sisters to study abroad alone to be opposing tradition and therefore less likely to gain the respect of their peers. For women,

oppression is deeply rooted in social practice rather than in formal law (Tetreault, 1994).

In this respect, Nath (1978) remarked:

While the speed of change in Kuwait makes one wonder about the strength of the traditional patterns, it is clear also that many inhibitions and previous practices are still in existence. The coexistence of the traditional and modern in some aspects of living patterns and attitudes is a hindrance to the complete social and political emancipation of women as well as their wider participation in the whole range of economic activities. (p.186)

Therefore, the gender role values of the past still exist in the present, creating a conflict in Kuwaiti society between maintaining the old values and adapting to the new values. In this vein, al- Zaben (1989) concluded that there is a conflict between past and present due to the existence of old values and new values where the old values impact the social life of Kuwaiti society. As a result of this conflict, two poles have emerged in Kuwaiti society. On one hand, the Islamists and tribalists call for a return to the old values; on the other, the liberals and reformists call for adapting to modernity. According to Golnar Mehran (1998):

...the engines of modernization—mass education and employment—began to affect the social and cultural institutions of traditional societies. Muslim societies became divided into the modern and the traditional sectors, each with its own customs and life styles, resulting in a cultural dichotomy within the population. Debates raged regarding the “appropriate” place of women in the home, or in the modern factories, schools, and hospitals that desperately needed their labor. (p.118)

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the societal values that were imposed by different institutions in Kuwaiti society in the pre-oil era had reinforced the division of gender through allotting different roles to both females and males. I also explained how these values changed after the discovery of oil, giving opportunity for women to participate in the public sphere, but how at the same time they remained limited in social practice. This has created a conflict between old values and new values that has resulted in a polarized society. In Chapter 4, I will explain in detail how those opposite poles have reacted to the new values of modernization that allowed women to venture out from their secluded lives.

IV. MODERNIZATION AND CONTROVERSARY REGARDING THE ROLE OF KUWAITI WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I traced Kuwaiti societal values and their impact on the position of women in Kuwait. I also demonstrated the relationship between economic development, modernization, Kuwaiti women's departure from seclusion and their growing participation in the public sphere. However, Kuwaiti women were still denied any right to political participation, which remained a male privilege. Thus, Kuwaiti women sought access to their political rights for many years; it is only recently that they have made progress in this area.

The new role of women in Kuwait, beginning with their departure from their homebound lives and moving to their demand for political enfranchisement, was an issue of debate between conservative and liberal factions in Kuwaiti society. Conservatives believed that modernization was behind women's incorporation into the public sphere and, in their view, this contradicted both religion and tradition, whereas liberals promoted social change and embraced modernization as a way of improving women's position in society. In this chapter, I will discuss how Kuwaiti women have responded to the changes in their society in its attempts to assimilate various modern social concepts. Their efforts in this regard have ignited a contentious national debate on the influence of modernization on traditional values.

Modernization and the Status of Kuwaiti Women

As outlined in Chapter 3, after the discovery of oil, Kuwaiti society experienced a shift toward modernism in everyday life. Local newspapers were established in the

1960s, the structure of houses became more Western in style, streets were constructed and filled with cars, and many Kuwaiti women adopted Western clothing and discarded their veils. Kuwaitis understood this new way of to be the result of modernization.

Kuwaiti women became educated and able to read the magazines and newspapers that were brought from Westernized countries, which led them to change their lifestyle and adopt new values. Consequently, modernization was seen as connected with “ideals of progress and rationality, which sweep away traditional beliefs, ways of life and patterns of authority” (Billington et al., p. 187).

Before the reign of Abdullah al-Salim, the Kuwait government, according to Salih (1991) “was regarded as being patriarchal in character; it never displayed any signs of autocratic despotism. The power of the sheikhs was usually limited by customs...” (p. 52). As a result of modernization, in 1961 the Kuwaiti government established a more democratic form of government based on a Kuwaiti constitution. In the past, the Amir of Kuwait possessed sole power in directing the affairs of the country. Today, the country is governed by three branches: the Amir, who retains a position of primary power; the National Assembly, which has the executive and legislative power; and a judiciary. The executive power consists of governmental institutions supervised by the National Assembly; each of the institutions is presided over by a minister.

The National Assembly was formed by Sheihk Abdullah al-Salim in 1962 as an attempt to build a modern and a democratic society consisting of two governing bodies— executive and legislative. The power of the first branch was confined to the Amir, the Council of Ministers, and the prime minister. The second branch was made up of the

Amir and the National Assembly, whose members are elected every four years (al-Mughni, 2001).

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti government has consistently embraced modernization in its economic growth and social mobilization. It adapted a legal system that incorporates religious (*Shari'a*) law with secular law, stating in Article 2 in the Kuwaiti Constitution, "Islam is the religion of the state and *Shari'a* is the main source of legislations." *Shari'a* is the uncontested guide for personal conduct and family law, whereas secular law governs political and legal affairs:

...although in theory all parts of the divine law rest equally on revelation, in practice a certain distinction can in fact be made. It is the personal and family law that, together with rules and ritual and religious observance, has always been regarded as the very heart of *Shari'a*. The public law, on the other hand, although in theory equally based on divine authority [*Shari'a*], has been much less meticulously observed down through the centuries. (Anderson, 1959, p. 15)

In addition to this impact on Kuwaiti daily lifestyles, technology, and politics, modernization penetrated Kuwaiti society in other ways introduced by the Westernized standards of behavior and social practices of foreign laborers. Contact with Egyptian, Lebanese, and Palestinian women who worked outside home had a profound effect on the Kuwaiti perceptions of gender roles. Moghadam (1993) asserted that social change in gender relations has been influenced by foreign labor: "One of the ways societies influence each other economically, politically, and culturally is through international labor migration, which also has distinct gender-specific effect"(p.19).

The effects of modernization had a great impact on Kuwaiti women's status, leading them to less secluded lives. According to Sonbol (1996), "There is no question that modernization has changed the situation of Muslim women dramatically and that the status of women has become one of greater openness and less seclusion" (p. 7). The role of Kuwaiti women broadened as their education and employment opportunities altered their traditional roles, which were previously limited to the domestic sphere. This has noticeably affected the Kuwaiti economy as women's participation in the labor force reduced dependence on foreign labor. However, as Ghabra (1997) pointed out, even as the new role of Kuwaiti women has significantly influenced the infrastructure of the economy, nevertheless, the old societal values remain social barriers:

Women moving out of their traditional role in the home and into the workforce have brought about significant economic and socio-psychological changes on more than one level...many of the older traditions, however, continue to be obstacles to the advancement of women in Kuwait. The progress of women has not changed the views of large segments of society about women's independence and their evolving roles. (p. 369)

The emergence of Kuwaiti women into the public sphere became a focal point of Kuwait's own emergence into a more global and less isolated economy and culture. As noted by Kandiyoti (1991), "The 'woman question' emerged as a hotly contested ideological terrain where women were used to symbolize the progressive aspirations of a secularist elite or a hankering for cultural authenticity expressed in Islamic terms" (p. 3). The debate highlighted the impact of economic change and how it was related to the transformation of existing values: "Economic development is associated with major

changes in prevailing values and beliefs” (Inglehart & Wayne, 2001, p. 21).

Kuwait’s rapid economic development and the intrusion of Western values created two opposing responses in Kuwaiti society: Kandiyoti (1991) noted that the reformists sought to transform their society by following the West, while the conservatives perceived such reformism as an extensive assault on the integrity of the Islamic regime and a submission to Western cultural imperialism. Haddad (1998) further explained that the debate also revolved around the transforming role of women and family due to modernization:

Over the last two centuries, the role of women and the family in Islamic society has been a central component of the debates over modernization and progress. While the socioeconomic and political changes that have taken place as a consequence of modernization and programs for development, along with the legislation introduced by the Arab governments have left their mark on the society. (p. 3)

Modernization was seen as a stimulant for Westernization in Kuwaiti society. Rejwan (2003), points out that Westernization, often used as another term for modernity, is a construct that has certain characteristics associated with Western cultural values not necessarily related to modernization. He believes that modernity refers to a set of related attributes that are a consequence of the industrial revolution and its social and economic effect on society.

Modernization affected greatly Kuwaiti women in urging them to revise their status in society. As a result, many Kuwaiti women attempted to improve their social and political status. The more active women took advantage of the social shift and used it to

develop their position in Kuwaiti society. At the beginning, they adapted modernization for both its innovation and Westernization aspects. They developed their educational status by attending universities and studying abroad, and at the same time they adapted Western cultural influences, which were most visible in their discarding of the veil and their imitation of Western dress. After that, they looked to other societies, especially Westernized Arab societies such as Egypt and Lebanon, and inspected women's emancipation movements there and began to question their position in their own country. As a result, Kuwaiti women called for their social and political rights, establishing women's associations to improve Kuwaiti women's position. Moghadam (1993) observed that they were thus active agents of social change: "Much of feminist scholarship over the past fifteen years has sought to show that women are not simply passive recipients of the effects of social change. They are agents, too" (p. 26). Tetreault (2001) also commented:

Women's rising rates of participation in public life- as workers, members of the many voluntary organizations that form the bedrock of Kuwaiti civil society, and even as public figures whose opinions and activities are reported in the press- normalize the idea that women are autonomous agents and legitimate occupants of the public sphere. (pp.210-211)

Kuwaiti Women's Movements: Between Equality and Tradition

The re-examination of Kuwaiti women's status by educated women prompted them to built women's organizations in order to alert those Kuwaiti women still practicing their old roles as homebound wives and mothers that they had another important role in their society. Thus, educated women were the ones to first question their

social status. Mernissi (1987) mentioned that “access to education seems to have an immediate, tremendous impact on women’s perception of themselves, their reproductive and and sexual roles, and their social mobility expectations” (p. xxv).

The first two women’s organizations were established in Kuwaiti in 1963: the Women’s Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), and the Arab Women’s Development Society (AWDS). These organizations were a response to the eagerness of Kuwaiti men to modernize themselves while neglecting the progress of women (al-Mughni, 2001). The AWDS was established by Nouria al-Sadani, a middle-class woman who hoped to create a society for women. She convinced six middle-class women to join her. They possessed secondary diploma and were employees of the Ministry of Social Affairs (al-Mughni, 2001). When the AWD was first established, its main goals were to:

1. Fill their spare time by doing something useful;
2. Help Kuwait women by raising educational awareness and by calling for their social rights;
3. Cure the social problems and especially the family problems;
4. Bring up women’s activities in different fields;
5. Support and share the Arabic female emancipation movements;
6. Raise awareness of the importance of the family in the society through Celebrating Mother’s Day and Child’s Day. (al-Hajji, 1991)

In 1980, the AWDS was dissolved by the order of the Minister of Social Affairs due to the decreased number of members when less than ten women remained. However, Al-Mughni (2001) believed that the actual reason for the dissolution of the AWDS was the furious reaction of men to the call of the AWDS for equal opportunities and rights.

The WCSS, on the other hand, was formed by those merchant class women who were the first Kuwaiti women to study abroad. Soon after they came back to Kuwait, they began to establish an association dedicated to improving women's position in society. They gathered at the home of Lulua al-Qatami and set the main objectives of this new women's association. They then presented a request to the under secretary of Ministry of Social Affairs, who is responsible for registering the organization, asking his approval to open a Kuwaiti Women's Club. The undersecretary was amazed by their request and refused it, stating that a club for women was alien to the values of Kuwaiti society; in Kuwait, a club was a place for sport activities, restricted to men in the 1960s. Later on, their request was approved after they changed the word "club" to "organization" (al-Hajji, 1991). The main goals of the WCSS were to:

1. To defend women's suffrage and raise women's awareness of their legal rights;
2. To call for their political rights;
3. To correct the laws and societal traditions that impact women's rights;
4. To incorporate women into public activities in order to prove their active role in the society;
5. To review educational goals in light of a new philosophy of education that discussed women's non-traditional role;
6. To establish training programs for educating women in different social and cultural aspects;
7. To evaluate women's social and educational position in society;
8. To develop charitable programs for improving women's and children's position;

9. To participate in local and international women's conferences to learn about the roles that women play in developed countries and how Kuwaiti women can apply this to their country in a way that fit its traditions and religion (al-Hajji, 1991).

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, each organization pursued its activities based on its own view of the expanding role of women in Kuwait. The WCSS considered women's suffrage and equity in employment to be the major issues for Kuwaiti women. The WCSS is still active today, and it has broadened its activities, which can be divided into official duties, social welfare, and educational and social programs (al-Mughni, 2001). The AWDS, on the other hand, sought to educate women based on its belief that women's liberation begins in raising the educational standards of women.

The Girls' Club was another prominent organization that was born in 1975. Its main purpose was to bring together women for sporting activities, as well as advancing their social position. The main goals of the Girls' Club were to:

1. To practice social, cultural and sports activities;
2. To create a spirit of cooperation among the club members;
3. To create a suitable means for benefiting from the members' hobbies;
4. To participate in national occasions through organizing different activities (al-Hajji, 1991).

During a short period from 1974 to 1977, AWDS and WCSS unified under the presidency of Nouria al-Sadani. This coalition became the Kuwaiti Women's Union and as such intensified the demand for women's rights. Later on, the Girl's Club joined the Union. The Union, however, was fragile and it was closed by the government in 1977 (Badran, 1998). Badran (1998) maintained that the reasons for the closing were the

“persistent rivalries among members created enemies within the ranks; in addition, the government was troubled by president al-Sadani’s association with the Free Democrats, a male Arab nationalist political group, and the society’s staunch adherence to women’s rights” (p. 192). In other words, the government was against al-Sadani not only because of her connection to other Arab political groups but also because of her claim to equalize women and men, especially in politics.

In the 1970s, the women’s organizations shifted their concern from issues related to improving their social status to issues related to gender equality (al-Mughni, 2001). In 1971, one hundred Kuwaiti women gathered in AWDS headquarter (al-Sadani, 1983). They prepared a petition addressed to the Kuwait National Assembly with the following demands:

1. The unconditional right to contest election;
2. Equality in all fields of employment and greater opportunities for women to reach the highest administrative posts;
3. Equality in employment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the enrollment of women in the diplomatic corps;
4. The provision of all allowances for women working in the government sector, including child allowances, which were granted to married men working in private sectors;
5. The appointment of women as special attorneys to draft the family law;
6. The restriction of polygamy by stipulating that the second marriage contract must be signed in court,

7. Barring a husband from receiving any child allowance, granting each father KD 50 (\$173.828) to each child, for his second marriage if his first wife had a child (al-Mughni, 2001, p. 82).

The Girls' Club also gave much consideration to the question of women's political rights. On February 8, 1982 the club held an open discussion with some of the National Assembly members about women's political rights. They also held a meeting on February 10, 1982 to form a national committee devoted to the issue. Al- Sadani (1983), who attended the meeting and was interested in forming such a committee, noted that the committee never materialized; it was nipped in the bud because the Girl's Club did not pursue the initiative.

Kuwaiti women, however, justified their demand for political participation by emphasizing the concepts of patriotic duty, in which both females and males are responsible for defending their country, and the rights of citizenship presented in the framework of the Kuwait Constitution that emphasize equality among its citizens. Moreover, they argued that Kuwait consists of such a small population that it is important to use every human resource to build a nation; women constitute half of that population, and they cannot be excluded from the process of national development. Furthermore, they argued that the Constitution granted equality and justice to all citizens, male and female alike (al-Mughni, 2001). Furthermore, Article 29 in the Kuwaiti Constitution states that "all people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and there is no distinction to race, origin, language, or religion and that personal freedom guaranteed" (al-Sadani, 1983, p. 52).

Al-Sadani (1983) explained that the Constitution's Article 82 does not stipulate the elector to be male. It only requires that a member of the National Assembly be:

1. Kuwaiti by origin;
2. Qualified as an elector in accordance to electoral law;
3. Not less than thirty years of age;
4. Able to read and write Arabic well. (p. 53)

However, it was the electoral laws specifying the conditions for voting and running for office that deprived women of their right to vote and made a distinction in gender; Article (1) of Election law clearly restricts voting rights to male citizens over twenty of years of age (p.52).

By 1982, the various women's organizations faced failure in serving their main objectives. According to al-Sadani (1983), the main reasons for the weakness in the organizations could be attributed to several factors: the lack of cooperation among the women's organizations because, although they fought for almost the same rights, each of them was biased toward its own association; the absence of AWDS, which was a strong advocate of women's right and as such set the foundations for women's political rights; the lack of good planning caused by the lack of experts to guide the steps that the organizations needed to follow; the lack of serious commitment, which became obvious when members increasingly failed to attend the National Assembly sessions and did not work hard to present a strong case; the rise of religious groups that called for women's return to household concerns; and the rise of anti-feminist movements constituted of women against the alien societal values that allowed women in the work of men. Those women presented to the National Assembly a petition with the signatures of one thousand

women refusing their own political rights. As a result, the women's organizations found themselves unable to press their cause.

It is worth comparing the one thousand women who utterly refused their political rights to the one hundred women who fought for their political participation. This shows how Kuwaiti society was sharply divided into those women with a modern perspective who hoped to correct and change societal values, and those who defended a traditional perception and attempted to preserve societal values. At this point in Kuwaiti history the latter group was unquestionably in the majority.

A small group of Islamist women in the mid-1970s, according to al-Mughni (2000), challenged the objectives and alien values of feminist groups and formed a campaign against the transformation and changes in conventional gender roles. Soon, conservative women's movements became more organized in forming an influential social force that generated a major cultural transformation in what in the sixties and seventies had been a liberal modern society:

The early appeal of the Islamist movement to Kuwaiti women was partly a result of the way the women's rights movement presented itself. In condemning polygamy and calling for gender equality and women's autonomy, women's rights activists positioned themselves and were perceived as anti-men, radical, opposed to tradition—even as Westerners. Many Kuwaiti women for whom partnership with men and complementarity of gender roles represented the essence of their Arabic Islamic culture felt alienated. (p. 178)

It was for these reasons that the 1980s witnessed the birth of two Islamic women's organizations: Bayader al-Salam and the Islamic Care Society. Bayader al-Salam was

established in 1981 based on re-establishing women's position according to the principles of Islam and emphasizing the importance of women's role in the household. The organization provided cultural lectures, seminars, and courses for teaching women home economics. Bayader al-Salam aimed at achieving social, educational, cultural, and religious objectives; specifically it sought to:

1. Raise awareness among women about their important social roles through discussions and colloquiums which may help raise their educational level;
2. Build model nurseries to teach Islamic principles;
3. Establish educational courses to teach the participants typing, sewing and house management;
4. Improve the social services in cooperation with different social and educational associations such as aid for the handicapped, orphanages, and infirmaries;
5. Solve social problems through using modern methods in education;
6. Build private Islamic schools from elementary to secondary level.

(al-Hajji, 1991).

Furthermore, Bayader al-Salam encouraged women to participate in different programs and projects in Kuwaiti society and to be active citizens who make important contributions in developing their country. It also helped working mothers by providing nurseries. In 1987 Bayader al-Salam also established the Zakat Committee, a charitable committee, to help needy families (al-Hajji, 1991).

The Islamic Care Society was established in 1982, though its roots began in 1976 after building Fatima's Mosque in the Abdullah al-Salim neighborhood. Sheikah Latifa

al-Sabah proposed presenting religious lessons in the mosque. Many women welcomed the idea, and day by day the number of the participants increased, which led al-Sabah to open a center for teaching Islamic principles and giving religious lessons. The main goals of the Islamic Care society, according to al-Mughni (2001), were “to purify Islam from distorted interpretations, to propagate the true Islam and to build a Muslim life” (p. 105).

Furthermore, it seeks to achieve other objectives, including:

1. Preaching the principle of Islam and giving consideration to the teaching of Qur’an and Hadith;
2. Persuading people to build an Islamic society;
3. Building charitable institutions such as schools, dispensaries, and hospitals;
4. Propagating modern cultural behavior within an Islamic framework;.
5. Providing a help for individuals and families in the Islamic world;
6. Establishing cooperation with Islamic associations worldwide;
7. Propagating Islamic teaching and values through various media such as seminars, conferences, lectures, books, and magazines. (al-Mughni, 2001, p.105-106)

Islamist activists, thus, placed much emphasis on tradition and women’s household duties. They devoted themselves to maintaining the traditions of Kuwaiti society and Islamic values. They perceived their main duty to be the strengthening of family ties, bringing up children, and protecting Kuwaiti tradition. Al-Mughni (2000) remarked that Islamist activists portrayed the ideal woman as “selfless, a caring mother, and a virtuous civil servant who subordinates her gender interests for the sake of

preserving social order” (p.179). Islamist activists later became engaged in the pursuit of women’s political rights, not as a path to gender equality like the liberal activists, but for the purpose of building an Islamic society:

Kuwait’s Islamist and liberal women’s groups have divergent expectations.

Islamist women’s rights activists see the vote as a means to empower themselves to create a moral and orderly society in which women and men have different, but not equal, responsibilities. They share with their male counterparts the goal of achieving an Islamic society ruled by religious idioms and norms, in which women, veiled and modest, worship God and fulfill their familial and social duties. In contrast, liberal women see the vote as a tool for achieving “gender equality.” (al-Mughni, 2004, p. 11)

Clearly, women’s organizations in Kuwait differ politically and ideologically according to their perception of women’s role in society. Some called for full political participation and gender equality; others called for maintaining the traditional household and the importance of women’s domestic functions. Moghadam (1993) observed this dichotomy:

Women are likewise divided ideologically and politically. Some women activists align themselves with liberal, social democratic, or communist organizations; others support Islamist/fundamentalist groups. Some women reject religion as patriarchal; others wish to reclaim religion for themselves or to identify feminine aspects of it. Some women reject traditions and time honored customs; others find identity, solace, and strength in them. (p. 10)

The Amir Jabir al-Sabah, who recently passed away, supported women's political enfranchisement despite the provisions of the Constitution that limit their social participation. In 1999, al-Sabah issued a degree granting Kuwaiti women political rights, but it was rejected by the National Assembly. However, his continual attempts eventually produced results by convincing the National Assembly to grant women their political rights in 2005. Thus, Kuwaiti women's social role and position have been greatly affected by the political ideology of the Amir of Kuwait, as well as by modern economic changes. The position of Muslim women is largely determined by both the doctrines of heads of state and the economic realities of their society; when these two social forces coincide, the resulting gender construction is deeply entrenched in policy and practice (Mehran, 1998).

Today, due to economic growth and government policies regarding women, there are now fifty women's organizations in Kuwait, each with its own goals and objectives. There are employment, cultural, social, and religious organizations. The major goals for those organizations can be summed up as follows:

1. To spread cultural and social awareness among the citizens;
2. To participate in cultural and economical development;
3. To provide social services to those who are in need;
4. To conduct studies about social problems;
5. To care for the children and mothers and support the family in its responsibilities for bringing up the children;
6. To provide social care for the handicapped;
7. To provide financial support for needy families;

8. To raise religious awareness and to teach the principle of Islam;
9. To gather charity for building projects such as mosques inside and outside Kuwait (al-Hajjee, 1991, pp.777-778)

Kuwaiti women, through these organizations, express their significant role in society although they have different priorities. Some attempt to prove their essential role in the development process by challenging the societal norms and values that viewed their abilities as less significant than those of men. Others emphasize the importance of women in the domestic sphere. Some attempt to overcome the societal values that underpin the distinctions in gender roles, others emphasize those values. However, Kuwaiti women's attempts to cross gender boundaries by leaving their home and competing with men in their authoritative position was a surprise to Kuwaiti society and produced different reactions.

Reactions to Kuwaiti Women's Demands for Equality

Al- Sadani (1994) pointed out that the women's emancipation movements shocked both male and female segments of Kuwaiti society. In 1970 AWDS conducted a quantitative study to examine the responses of Kuwaiti women over 18 years of age toward women's work in politics and elections. The study showed that 47% agreed and 53% disagreed that women should work in politics. In regard to women voting, 49% agreed women should have the right to vote, and 51% disagreed. Also, 42% agreed that women could run for office themselves, while 58% disagreed (al-Sadani, 1983).

The reaction of Kuwaiti men was dramatic, described "as being one of astonishment and dismay, like a baffled person who is unable to move" (al-Mughni). Al-Mughni (2000) witnessed the dramatic event: "In 1973, when the Parliament discussed

women's demands for equal rights, deputies exchanged the most hurtful charges ever heard in the parliament and fought each other in the lounge during the recess" (p.174). Al-Sadani (1983) observed the response of the National Assembly members towards the petition Kuwaiti women offered in 1971. She argued that their response can be divided into four trends: The Islamist trend against women's political rights, the neutral trend with a neutral position, the confounded trend without a fixed opinion, and the liberal trend in favor of women's political participation. The debate about women's rights was not limited to the question of political participation, but raised the issue of women's social roles as well. The two opposing trends, Islamist and liberal, are discussed below as the most influential trends in Kuwaiti society today. I believe the Islamists are hindering the progress of women in Kuwait, and the liberals are giving them more access to the public sphere.

The Islamist/Tribalist Response

The two current Islamist movements in Kuwait are the Ikhwan and the Salaf. The Ikhwan, or Social Reform Society, was established by Abdul Aziz al-Mutawa', a wealthy merchant who built a strong bond with the Ikhwan, the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt. In 1956, many members of the Ikhwan Organization in Egypt fled to Kuwait because they were under British attack. They settled temporarily in Kuwait and made the Islamic Guidance Society their headquarters (al-Mughni, 2001). Their objective was Islam and Arab nationalism; Arab unity under this concept is considered the key to Islamic unity. At present, the Reform Association, Jam'iat al-Islah, represents the Ikhwan movement. The leaders of this association are the Imams, mosque preachers, who have power and influence within the community. Another Islamic movement, known as the

Salafiya, was founded in 1981. The Salaf group formed the Islamic Heritage Society, Jam'iat al-Turath al-Islamiya. The Salafiya movement is parallel to the Wahhabi movement in Egypt of the late-nineteenth century. Its guiding principle is the return to the roots of Islam as revealed in *Hadith* and the *Qur'an*. The Salaf is more conservative and traditional than the Ikhwan, the latter presenting a more politicized aspect of Islam that aims to bring about changes at both the social and political levels (al-Mughni, 2001).

Tetreault (1994) asserted that the Islamic characteristic of Kuwaiti society is not monolithic since, as in other Middle East countries that have two monotheistic religions, the *Qu'ran* transmits multiple messages whose interpretation are flexible. In Kuwait there are two different versions of Islam, which differ by sect and by the relative fundamentalism of subgroups within each. The two Sunni Islamist political groups, Ikhwan and Salaf, are more dogmatic than the Shi'a political group. The civil characteristic of Kuwaiti society, as in most modern Arab states, promotes an alliance between the religious leaders, the preachers in the mosque, and the Sunni who are considered the leaders of state.

Although these Islamic movements have different political inclinations, they both believe that women should be restricted to the private domestic sphere and should be excluded from politics. They believe that the practice public power is restricted to men. Their arguments are grounded in a literal interpretation of the *Qu'ran*: "Husbands are the protectors and maintainers of their wives because Allah has given the one more strength than the other" (*Qu'ran* IV, 34). They also think that women's decisions are based on emotion rather than on logic.

The Islamist revival movement rejects Westernized ways for women and calls for a return to traditional family values. It contends that modernization has deprived women of the relative security provided by the traditional family. In this view, society has been shaken to the core by Western infiltration and the structure of the extended family broken by Western-type urbanization (Minces, 1980).

The tribalist faction has the same perspective of women's position in society as the Islamists; its main objective is to return women to their proper place because they are emotional and weak and cannot perform men's work. The Islamist /tribalist members of society rely on religion to justify their argument. They attack modernization and the emancipation of women in Kuwait for introducing Western concepts that could corrupt society. According to John Esposito (1998), religious leaders and the more Islamically oriented Muslims view secular modernists as Westernizers whose concepts of reform threaten religion, culture, family, and society. The alleged Western values of freedom, equality, and self-determination in the modern paradigm seem to be a denunciation of Islam that threatens to undermine the Muslim community and the Muslim family. It has affected every form of life, from dress, education, and employment, to personal status in family law (marriage, divorce, and inheritance). Women have taken off the veil and replaced it with Western dress, and becoming more visible in public life. The tribalist faction has the same perspective of women's position in society as the Islamists; its main objective is to return women to their proper place because they are emotional and weak and cannot perform men's work. The Islamist /tribalist members of society rely on religion to justify their argument. They attack modernization and the emancipation of women in Kuwait for introducing Western concepts that could corrupt society. According

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Watt (1988) also asserted that the Islamist revival's "objection to Western forms of female dress and the opposition to the free mixing of men and women in the workplace and elsewhere are perhaps not surprising when one considers the great upheavals in Islamic society brought about by the impact of the West" (p. 114). In order to exclude the harmful impact of the West, Islamists urge a return to Islamic law: "...Westernization has deculturated Muslims and ... the return to Islam—to the *Shari'a*, to Muslim family law, to the *hijab* [the veil]—will defeat the crisis and strengthen cultural identity and integrity" (Moghadam, 1993, p.141).

The tribal/Islamist faction has thus angrily responded to the rapid changes that affect Kuwaiti women and take them away from their traditional place in the home. This faction believes that the Western concepts introduced by liberal men and educated women distort the traditional and religious values of conservative Kuwaiti society. As Akram (2004) observes, "the type of social change that is sought in the Muslim world by the pro-globalization governmental and non-governmental agencies frequently tend to be in conflict with the norms and ethics of Islam" (p. 261).

One of the most troubling aspects of social change, according to traditionalists, is the issue of women's proper work: the Islamists/tribalist faction believes that women's role in the household is worth more than her role as a paid worker. Al-Nafissi (1990), a former professor at Kuwait University and an active supporter of Jam'iat al-Islah (the Muslim Brotherhood Organization), posed the question: Which is more important, women's work at home or in public? He then answered:

A working woman is the one who leaves her house in the morning and returns in the afternoon and even sometimes she may leave without preparing breakfast for her husband and children. She returns in the afternoon tired and unable to perform her duty as a mother and wife. It is important to correct our false conception about the meaning of a working woman. A working woman is assumed to be the one who only works in the public sphere, and here lies the problem in my point of view, which leads to a destruction in our society because the working woman outside her house is more affected than a women who works in her household. The earlier is included in the statistics as a working woman, whereas, the latter is not included in the statistics as a working woman despite the great role that she performs (p.145).

From the perspective of the Islamist/tribalist faction, the opportunities for women to work outside the home, and the expansion of women's education, have shaken the traditional balance of Kuwaiti society. Women seek to fulfill themselves and build their identity when they pursue a career. Their absence from home has an impact on their husbands and children and this has a negative effect on domestic stability (Abdul-Rauf, 1977).

Al-Mughni (2001) maintained that the Islamists think that the reason for the corruption of society is the departure of women from their natural duties. They blame this for the rising rates of divorce, child delinquency, and drug addiction. They reason that if a woman stays at home and takes care of her children, these things would not occur. Moreover, a working woman is exposed to alien values. She may bring to her house values that do not reinforce society's traditions and norms. According to M'Baye (1998), "Muslim women going out to work gives rise to many problems: it means that they have to consort and associate with foreign women, and in their family setting come under the influence of alien values that may be inconsistent with their own" (p. 126).

Woman's role in the house does not only help maintain moral order, but also lessens the risk of creating *fitna*, a term that means social disorder (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). Furthermore, in order to avoid *fitna*, women and men should be seen to occupy separate places. Yousef Hashim al-Rafae, a member of the National Assembly, emphasized that a woman should not be present in men's places and should not be corrupted by Western civilization (Alseyassa *News paper*, 1972). Hassan (2002) declared that the presence of women in men's places is considered to be extremely dangerous and an "onslaught of Westernization under the guise of modernization" (p. 190). Therefore, it is necessary to put women back in their space in order to preserve the integrity of the Islamic way of life. This, from the Islamist perspective, may liberate society from the invasion of Western influences that have changed the norms and customs of society.

Consequently, the Islamist revival activists were against co-education in the universities; their debate has focused on the segregation of the sexes. Some Kuwaiti campuses have been gender integrated since the 1970s. In the 1980s, the Islamist revival

activists successfully segregated university dining facilities. In 1984 the Saudi religious authority urged the Islamist Students Society in Kuwait to stand against co-education on the grounds that it was anti-Islamic and corrupted woman. Some Kuwaitis reacted angrily, criticizing the students for approaching the Saudi, rather than Kuwaiti, religious authorities (Crystal, 1994). In 1996 the Islamist-dominated Parliament succeeded in passing a bill ensuring the segregation of universities. The government gave the University of Kuwait five years to remodel the existing buildings in order to make sure that women and men are segregated (Castillo, 2003).

Furthermore, the Islamists/tribalist faction strongly opposed the implementation of physical education classes in female primary schools. According to Abdul-Malek al-Saleh (2002), society does not accept formal education and believes that the education of girls is contrary to religion and tradition, especially physical education for which girls wear short skirts to play sports.

The question of women's sport is still controversial in Kuwaiti society. The Islamist/tribalist members of Parliament have recently introduced in the National Assembly a law that limits women's sports in accordance with their biological nature. Alkandari states that the female sports clubs should offer sports that suit the feminine nature of women, participation should be restricted to women's Olympics, and the judges must be women. He adamantly refused to condone unrestricted female sports and pointed out that female sports should be according to Kuwaiti social traditions, norms, and religious practices (Al-Eslamiyon, 2006).

The president of the United Club is also against Kuwaiti women playing soccer. He claimed that "women are not allowed to play football because of their biological

nature and because of the open stadiums that allow men to see them which is against our values and tradition” (Al-Eslamiyon, 2006). He continues, “I would like to tell those who want to participate in football sport that they better stay at home because this sport needs strength and masculinity” (Al-Eslamiyon, 2006).

The women activists refused to submit to Islamist/tribal interference in their affairs. The current president of WCSS, Sheikah al-Nasaf, argued that the Islamist/tribalist faction seeks to restrict women’s freedom in order to maintain its authoritative position. However, there is no need for the National Assembly to place laws in order to restrict girl’s sport since a girl cannot participate in any kind of sport without the permission of her male guardian. Moreover, she points out that the girls are the ones who know best what suits their own natures and interests (Al-Eslamiyon, 2006).

Many Islamist/tribalist advocates responded to women’s rights movements as something at odds with religion and tradition. Dr. Naser Sarkho, a member of the Kuwaiti Parliament, argued that the demand for equality between men and women is something imported from Western societies and therefore is not related to Islamic values since Islam has granted women their rights under its own principles. Women and men, he continues, are equal but not similar: the biological and psychological differences between men and women results in the differentiation in gender roles. Women by nature lean more to the domestic life; however, as a response to the needs of society, women may work in certain occupations, but only those that suit their nature (al-Sadani, 1983).

Sarkho’s view resembles the Islamist perspective in Middle East that argues that the basis of equality of rights in Western societies actually means the similarity of rights, and that women’s demand for such similarity of rights is both immoral and unjust since

women and men are created differently and are allotted different roles in their private and social lives. Given such differences, the demand for equality between females and males becomes an injustice (al-Sadani, 1983). In the same vein, Ibraheem al-kheraibet, a member of the National Assembly, said that a woman is a sister and a daughter and as such she must be a model of modesty and religion and should not be influenced by Western culture (Majles aloma, 1973). The Islamists/tribalist faction grounded its argument by quoting the saying of the prophet: "A nation will not prosper if it hands its affairs to a woman" (Al-awadi, 2000, p.117). Moreover, they believe that women's political participation is a Westernized concept and women's natural place is in the home.

The Islamist/tribalist faction did not accept the petition that the Kuwaiti women activists proposed in 1971 and responded angrily, especially on the issue of polygamy. Those opposing the petition argued that any restriction of the practice of polygamy is contrary to the structures of the *Shari'a*, the main source of legislation in Kuwait, and they opposed any kind of change that contradicts this principles of Islam.

On the other hand, they believe that Islam has granted women their appropriate rights and those rights do not mean wearing mini skirts, driving cars, working in public places, or in any other way blindly absorbing Western values. The Islamist position has set the principles of women's liberation firmly within a context of traditional codes of respect and dignity (al-Mughni, 2001). Noria al-Sadani, the leader of the women's liberation movement in Kuwait, responded to the angry Islamist/tribalist opposition regarding women's equality and polygamy issues:

When we ask for equality of the sexes, we do so for the benefit of the whole society, in which we function under the Constitution. The Kuwait Constitution

does not discriminate between man and woman. It pained me to hear some deputies say that our campaign against polygamy is anti-Islamic. This is simply untrue; we are all Moslems and believe in Allah and the Holy book. We are only asking for equal rights, which we believe are just and beneficial for the whole Kuwaiti society. (1973)

Therefore, the Islamist/tribalist faction works to maintain the traditional social values that view women and men as occupying two different worlds, performing two different jobs, in order to help preserve the customary order that places men in a place of power and women in a place of domesticity. Given that this segment of society has an influential and powerful position, Kuwaiti women are deprived of their independent civil status and are often faced with obstacles in their steps toward social and political enfranchisement. Ghabra (1997) mentions that what slows the progress of Kuwaiti women and makes it difficult are the Islamic fundamentalist movements that criticize women's appearance in public, and women's efforts to take part in co-education, sports, performing arts, and travel. The main purpose of these groups is to weaken the liberal forces of society.

The opposition to Kuwaiti women's public role, however, is not limited to traditional and religious factors, but includes men's fears their power may be threatened if the social and political structures change. Tetreault and al-Mughni (1995) pointed out "the conceptualization of women as 'the intimate enemy' makes their control by men a primary focus of concern, especially for men whose status and power are threatened by modernization" (p. 415). They pursued this argument by saying, "gender is also a strategic card in power plays where men's interest conflict" (p. 415).

One example of the threat to men's power is the granting women's right to vote in Kuwaiti society. This has changed the structure of voting where previously a man who ran for office only needed to convince other men to vote for him now has to convince women; this can present difficulties since the access for women is not easy as for men. As a result, this may negatively impact their election status.

The Liberal Reaction

The liberal perspective first came from newly educated Kuwaiti men who had pursued their undergraduate studies in Westernized Arab countries. They were influenced by the work of Qasim Amin, George Hanna, Taha Hussein, and the many other intellectuals who called for reform. The goal of these men was to lift their society from backwardness and adopt modernization (al-Mughni, 2001).

Dawood Musaad (1950), discussed in *al-Ba'tha Magazine* the history of women's emancipation in the Middle East in order to raise Kuwaiti women's awareness about their own rights. He hoped that one day Kuwaiti women will take the stepstoward change and demand their rights as their counterparts in other countries of the Middle East have done. He concluded, "By reviewing women's emancipation in the Middle East, I knock on the door hoping that the one who opens it will be a Kuwaiti woman calling for her rights. The future of Kuwait is in the hands of Kuwaiti woman" (p. 97).

Some educated women who pursued their university degrees studies abroad have attempted to encourage other women in Kuwait to act against the values that viewed their role in society as less important than that of men. Those women started using newspapers and magazines as a way to enlighten the Kuwaiti women who were still constrained by traditions. For example, Badria al-Ghaneem (1954) wrote:

We should not let our fears of our male guardians hinder our objectives. It is ignorance that handcuffed us under the social values and norms and customs that we thought were from our religion. This is wrong. Our religion calls for good manners and granting a woman her rights. (p. 481)

The reform movement seeks to move forward by breaking away from the old traditions and values and building a modern society; the emancipation of women is central position in the demand for change. The emancipation debate resembles that surrounding the women's movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the west, which focused on sameness vs. difference. The former refers to the contention that men and women are almost the same, with women possessing the same abilities and intellectual capacity as men (al-Mughni, 2001). The latter refers to women's biological difference from men and their caring nature: They bear and take care of children; they are the mothers, housewives, sisters, and partners upon whom men depend (p.55).

The supporters of women's rights have responded to the Islamists/tribalist position by using the same warrant, which is *Shari'a*. Khadijah al-Mahmeed (1996), a Muslim *Daea* or preacher, in the state of Kuwait, defended women's public position by using verses from the *Qur'an* in her research paper, "The Mission of the Muslim Woman." She referred to Sur'a al Tawba/71, a verse in the *Qur'an*:

The believers, men
And women, are protectors,
One of another; they enjoin
What is just, and forbid
What is evil.

She explained that the *Qur'an* does not differentiate between the religious duties of men and women, which are derived from the same principle:

Allah Almighty has pronounced man responsible towards his community in the duty of enjoining good deeds and preventing evil. The same is true of woman. She is responsible of welfare and well-being of the community. Thus, the current estrangement of women from their Islamic role in the society does not reflect true commitment to the teaching and enjoins of Islam. As a matter of fact, the whole Islamic nation is estranged from its active role, and therefore is suffering humiliation and backwardness. (p. 59)

Kouthar Aljoan (2000), a lawyer, also maintained that Kuwait needs women's force and participation in order to go forward and cope with modern life: "The country cannot be developed without women's participation" (p. 232). According to these arguments, the advocates of women's public role propose to correct the false assumptions of the Islamists by presenting concrete evidence from the *Qu'ran* that Islamic principles endorse the participation of women in the public sphere.

Jassim al-Saqer, a member of Kuwaiti parliament, reasoned that Kuwaiti women constitute half of the society and *shari'a* is not against granting women their political rights. Furthermore, Kuwaiti women are now well educated, and they are able to make their own decisions (al-Sadani, 1983). Khalid al-Wasmi also commented that the Kuwaiti Constitution does not differentiate between men and women. Moreover, even in the 20th century we still have ambiguous concepts about the role of women. In the past, women who went to school were seen to be resisting tradition; today educated women are more valued in the family and in the society. We also have seen how Arab women can

undertake prominent public responsibilities, thus providing proof that women are capable of becoming leaders (al-Sadani, 1983).

Regarding the polygamy issue, liberals argue that while it is sanctioned in the *Qu'ran*, it is conditional on men's ability to be just in their treatment of their wives: "But if you should fear that you will not do justice, then confine yourself to one wife" (*Qu'ran* IV,3). Furthermore, the *Qu'ran*, according to Abdul-Rauf (1977) "guards against the abuse of this liberalism" (119): 'And indeed you cannot do justice between women, even when you are eager to be [completely just]' (*Qu'ran* IV,129). Some have also argued that polygamy may cause instability in the family, with wives competing with each other to gain the attention of the man (Haddad, 1998).

Modernization, as viewed by the liberals, is rooted in promoting modernity and progress in a society that is governed by old societal values. The participation of women in politics could lead to a more democratic election system and exchange the existing tribalism, personal interests, and kinship that govern the election process for values and norms that serve the public interest (al-Sabah, 2000). The liberals also believe that women's participation in politics is crucial since there are many social problems related to those women who are divorced, widowed, unmarried, or married to non-Kuwaiti men, which must be considered. The best representatives of these groups are women themselves since they can better understand the suffering of these marginalized individuals. Although there are members of Parliament who represent women, they have not solved these problems and are occupied with other social problems as well.

Although the opponents and advocates of women's political participation have presented different claims, both have based their arguments on religious and secular

practices. Both have used religion to support their point through referring to the *Qu'ran* and *Hadith*. Furthermore, both have explained the impact of modernization in Kuwaiti society—opponents from a negative point of view, advocates from a more positive perspective. Accordint to Hijab (1998):

For more than a hundred years, Arab women have been engaged in the public debate on their role in a rapidly changing society. Both women and men have conducted the debate within an Islamic framework; they have turned to the Qur'an, the sharia (Islamic law), the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, and the lives of his companions to define women's rights in the modern age. While modernists have argued for the most liberal interpretation of Islam possible, the conservatives have used the same sources to argue for restrictions on women's roles (p.45).

Culture, Gender, and the Social and Political Identity of Kuwaiti Women

In reviewing the status of Kuwaiti women in Chapters 3 and 4, we have seen that Kuwaiti women face barriers in their society that impact their progress in improving their status and making a contribution to the public domain. The cultural barrier is one such obstacle that impacts women's political participation. The ideology of womanhood that envisions women's proper place as in the home has a crucial influence in shaping their political participation. In Kuwait, most women perceive their external worldview through their male guardians, while men were encouraged from childhood to spend their time outside the home and were expected to be engaged in associations or organizations, whereas women were required to spend their time at home. This social isolation affects

women negatively in their attempt to make themselves visible or to have independent political views that differ from those of men.

Furthermore, women in Kuwait constantly confront the effects of tribal autonomy (Charrad, 2001). The tribes, as noted earlier, have the power to control and form the policies of the state and this profoundly impacts the position of women in Kuwaiti society. Each tribe in Kuwait has its own *diwanyia* wherein it can discuss political issues. Although some Kuwaiti women have recently formed their own *diwanyias*, this institution is still an integral part of male political culture and it is dominated by rigid patterns of gender segregation under which women's access to a men's *diwanyia* is unacceptable to social values and cultural norms (al-Mughni, 2000).

Another factor is gender relationships within the family structure. As I have explained, the family places women in a subordinate position by giving power over women to men as fathers, husbands, brothers, or other male kin (Charrad, 2001). In Kuwait, most women are under men's domination. They must do as their fathers, brothers, and husbands command; consequently, their vote in favor of a candidate or their decision to run for office themselves is subject to male judgment. According to Tetreault (1993):

A growing underlying perception that granting [Kuwaiti] women the right to vote will not necessarily lead to a change in social relations is also a primary reason for this change in attitude: like the right to go to school or the right to work outside the home, voting rights for women can be constrained by customary social practices and informal regulations of female behavior. This perception explains

the recent reversal in the type of man who says that women's votes would be manipulated by their husbands. (p. 283)

Al-Sowaileh, who recently won a municipal election, stated in *al-Watan* newspaper that he appreciates a woman's participation in the election as both an elector and voter; however, he will not allow his wife or sister to run for office themselves, believing that women still have inadequate experience of the election process (Al-Hajri & Abdual-dayem, 2006). When asked about her intention to enter politics herself, his wife also responded that she will never be a candidate since election is a difficult process, especially for a married woman who has children and responsibilities to her family ("Haram Yousef", 2006).

Thus, Kuwaiti women seem to reflect to some extent what their male guardians instill in them. Nassbaum and Glover (1995) stated that as a result of cultural practices and norms "women have become so deeply internalized that they seem to record what is 'right' and 'natural,' and women themselves frequently come to endorse their own second-class status" (p. i).

Conclusion

I have attempted to present the societal values of Kuwaiti society that were the source of women's inferior social and political position. Most women were deprived of their educational opportunities in the past and were isolated in a private, domestic world. After the discovery of oil, the state adopted a course modernization in order to cope with the demands of the industrial era. The response to modernity has fallen into two different trends: the Islamist/tribal element of Kuwaiti society viewed modernity—or the Westernization associated with it—as a dangerous concept that corrupted women's status

in Kuwait and steers them away from their proper place. The advocates of modernity, on the other hand, see modernization as is not harmful, and believe in women working beside men to accomplish its goals. In other words, while the Islamists view modernization as contrary to Islamic values in all aspects, more liberal Kuwaitis think that it is a necessity for a developing country.

Kuwaiti women themselves have mixed responses to the call for modernization. For the most part they have entered the educational institutions and labor force and attempted to build a social and political identity; however, their advancement is still as premature as a developed embryo that needs to go through systematic changes in order to break away from the shell. As we have seen, societal values shape Kuwaiti women's identity whether in their choice of academic major, type of work, or as participants in politics. Kuwaiti women's organizations that attempted to shape the identity of contemporary Kuwaiti women have pulled them into two opposite directions as in a tug-of-war. The feminist organizations pull the Kuwaiti women toward equality, while the Islamist organizations pull them toward their traditional role. As a result of modernization and women's organizations, Kuwaiti women have come into conflict over whether to maintain their traditional identity or assume a new position in the developing Kuwaiti society: "It is clear that modernization in the Arab world has served to sharpen the conflict between traditional expectations of women and their role and the real demands of daily life in a developing society" (Haddad, 1998, p. 8).

Today, Kuwaiti women play a new role in politics, which contributes a new value to Kuwaiti society. Although they have gained their full political rights, the domination of old societal value of the public and private sphere may still impact their decisions:

“While such rights for Muslim women have been affirmed, however, social customs continue to dominate, still making them unavailable” (Haddad, 1998, p. 7). In order to avoid such confusion and divisiveness, building an independent identity must not be in the hands of organizations since each organization has its own belief and trends that may shape women’s identity according to their particular agendas. Furthermore, despite the noble work of some organizations, it does not reach all sorts of people. Thus, I believe that school is the place where we need to begin to help both female and male Kuwaitis re-examine their relations in order to understand the importance of women’s participation in public life.

Kuwaiti women need to be active participants and overcome the domination of traditional values. As Alshayeji (2005) has emphasized, “for Kuwaiti women now, the immediate challenge is how to mobilize themselves and translate their newfound rights into effective political participation” (p. 7). Unless we provide them with the right tools to help them make independent decisions, they will be passive participants in the election process. What the Kuwaiti school curriculum should consider is how to build an active woman in relation to her changing society. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti school system must cope with the changes that occur in society and not isolate itself. Therefore, in Chapter 5 I will attempt to discuss the role of education in redefining women’s position in relation to society in general.

V. EXAMINING KUWAITI SOCIETAL VALUES IN THE LIGHT OF KUWAITI EDUCATION

“Education cannot avoid dealing with values, either in terms of evaluations of the world
or in the case of standards....”

Robin M. Williams

History, as Jorn Rusen (2005) points out, interprets the problems of the present, and I believe that by reviewing the history of Kuwaiti women, we can explain why many social practices place constraints on women. In the previous chapters I have attempted to show the impact of societal values on Kuwaiti women and considered whether those deep-rooted values still limit the public education and activity of women. In the course of this study, I explored how while the secluded lives to which women were once subjected have changed dramatically, traditional concepts determining the appropriate roles of men and women still persist in Kuwaiti society today. The public role of women is still a matter of widespread debate. In this chapter, I will first discuss the “woman question” in cultural studies to provide some context for my own view of this issue in regard to the current position of Kuwaiti women. Second, I will share the observations I formed during my review of Kuwaiti history. Third, I will explain how Kuwaiti society can address these concerns through education. Finally, I will address how studying societal values can help us identify and understand the future values of Kuwaiti society.

The “Woman Question” in Cultural Studies

In Chapter 4, I have explained how the woman question is contested terrain in Kuwaiti society where women are caught between the public and the private sphere. In order to examine this issue thoroughly, I look to cultural studies as the place where I can

discuss the presentation of women in this culture. This issue has extensively occupied cultural studies scholars and, more particularly, feminist scholars who are concerned with raising consciousness among women. As Thornham (2000) pointed out, “Cultural studies offered an academic and institutional context where feminist research could explore all the complexities of women positioning in culture” (p. 8).

In the context of cultural studies, women can express themselves, navigate their own world, re-question their status and break their silence. Agger (1992) observes that “the standard cultural-feminist answer is that the feminist critical project is important because one of critical tools of male domination is of the silencing women’s voices” (p. 114). Thus, cultural studies offers a space to negotiate women’s “ways of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986)

In feminist cultural studies, according to Agger (1998), the main concern is in studying phenomena related to gender. It focuses on three main premises: “making the invisible visible” through drawing critical and theoretical attention to cultural work by or about women; “unmasking and opposing the sexist objectification of women in culture,” notably, but not exclusively, through the critique of pornography and feminist film theory; and “raising the question of engendering cultural works and interpretation by addressing issues of how masculinity is constructed through culture” (135).

In this study, I have attempted to address two of these premises: women’s invisibility in society and the engendering culture that gives priority to men over women. Through their social and political movements, some Kuwaiti women attempted to make themselves visible after examining their own status in relation to men’s power and

privileges. Michel Foucault (1999) addresses how liberation movements are acts of liberation:

I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is practice. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically.... [Furthermore, the] liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them ... (p. 135).

The construction of gender in Kuwaiti society is a result of an environment that subjects both genders to specific and distinct social roles. In the environment created by family, work, and school, women are constantly inculcated with messages about their appropriate role in the private sphere. Their efforts to expand their roles face constant suffocation by the conservatives who wish to preserve the gendered division of private/public life. As a Kuwaiti woman, I have experienced the constraints placed on me by the prevailing image of my position in the private world. While attempting to pursue my studies abroad, I was seen as a woman belonging to one world and not the other. My high grades in both my undergraduate and master's studies were not sufficient to grant me a scholarship at the beginning—my gender was a more important criterion. If a man and woman, especially a married woman, compete for a scholarship, grades are rarely the deciding factor: The man will always be granted preference because it is an extension of his world, whereas a woman is seen to be attempting to enter into a world that is not her natural place.

The division of Kuwaiti society into public and private spheres is, as we have seen in Chapter 4, an issue debated by conservatives and liberals as well as in the feminist movement itself. That debate encompasses the argument that there exists an equivalence between women and men, while the anti-feminist women's movement underscores the differences between men and women. The feminist movement in Kuwait resembles liberal feminist theories in cultural studies. Liberals view the dichotomy between the private and the public realms as central, arguing against the differences and inequalities between men and women and working for a just society based on equal distribution (Mitchell, 1987). Furthermore, liberal feminists assert that women can improve their place in the family and society through personal achievements—advanced education, rational exchanges of ideas with men, especially husbands, who can be persuaded to adjust their perceptions of gender—and through laws protecting women against discrimination (Agger, 1998).

More radical feminists and socialist critics reject the liberal concept of private and public constructs and view the social order of liberalism as a political problem, rather than a rationale for claiming political rights (Pateman, 1987). Anne Phillips (1987) criticized this liberal concept and noted how “liberalism pretends we can be equal in the public sphere when our differences are overwhelmingly in the private...[it] creates a fictional world of autonomous atoms, each propelled by his own interests and desires, each potentially threatened by others” (p. 15).

bell hooks (1987) observed that for the most part liberal feminism focuses on capitalist and materialist values and does not actually free women economically. On the other hand, socialist feminists emphasize the economic oppression of women and argue

that women cannot achieve social justice without eliminating capitalism and patriarchy. Agger (1989) asserts that “the public/private split is deeper than the domination of capital or gender per se...[it] changes the sexual division of labor central to public/private split” (p. 232). Radical feminism, however, argues that patriarchy is the source of women’s oppression, which functions both in the family and in culture because cultural representations of women oppress and isolate them (Agger, 1998).

Cultural studies feminism rejects the separate-spheres concept of feminism; it views gender as a collection of experiences, discourses, and behaviors constructed in all sites in which women guide their own lives. Moreover, it proposes that feminism not only empowers women to produce culture and gain equal wages, but also eliminates the polarity of gender that segregates individuals into separate and unequal positions (Agger, 1998).

Evans (1997) claimed that the concept of women as victims, a prominent feature of feminist literature from the 1970s to the 1990s, scarcely exists today because the current practice is on distribution and discourses of power (p. 35). Similarly, Althusser (1972), who expanded on Marxist concepts of power, concluded “private institutions can perfectly well ‘function’ as Ideological State Apparatuses” (p. 144). In this sense, power is distributed throughout society and not restricted to the State. Althusser contributed to the discussion the feminist view of the politics of power as omnipresent.

Connecting the private and the public, as well as viewing power as a practice not restricted to one group allows me to develop my own philosophy of the dichotomy between the public and private in Kuwait. Instead of valuing one sphere over the other, it is better to view the public and the private as a connected sphere in which men and

women can be seen in both. Furthermore, it is important to see that a mother in Kuwaiti society who is restricted to her domestic role cannot necessarily raise her children better than a mother who works outside her home. A woman who remains in the private sphere may not necessarily be better than those who attempt to improve themselves, their homes, and their society. Thus, the image of a divided society that all Kuwaitis have grown up with must be revised to value both worlds equally. Furthermore, the issue of power that is limited to certain institutions needs to be reconsidered.

The concepts of cultural studies regarding the issue of the public/private social division are clearly relevant to the condition of women in Kuwait. The impact of this split on the status of Kuwaiti women today must be also be considered by examining the impact of the past on the present status of Kuwaiti women.

The Current Status of Kuwaiti Women

Kuwaiti women are facing barriers in their society that impede their progress in building a society that will consider their social contributions outside the home to be as important as their role inside the home. Furthermore, they face a view that confines them to a limited range of occupations, restricts their access to administrative positions and creates a passive identity that makes them unable to make decisions regarding their own education, future careers, or choice of a political candidate.

Societal Values and the Limited Public Role of Women

By reviewing the history of Kuwait, we have seen how the role that Kuwaiti women play in society is controlled by the values of society. This impacts women's participation in the labor force at present in spite of the advancement Kuwaiti women have achieved in different fields. Al-Mutawa' (2000) asserted that "despite the progress

those Kuwaiti women achieved in the labor force during the last forty years, their participation is still not visible in Kuwaiti society” (p. 217). This has forced some occupations in need of labor, such as the Ministries of Health, and Electricity and Water, to turn to foreign workers rather than Kuwaiti women in order to fill the gap. Women tend to avoid such occupations, considering them less prestigious and, perhaps more importantly, they may involve contact with men. Dr. Mohammad al-Otaibi, the chairman of the Kuwaiti Nursing Society, reports that there is a shortage of nurses in Kuwait and the Society is going to give incentives to Kuwaiti female and male students to encourage them to come into nursing (*Kuwaiti nurses*, 2006). The reason for the reluctance of many women to enter certain fields may be that the type of work or education available to women is closely observed by society, which makes women cautious about the choices they make. Nursing is one of the occupations that Kuwaiti women avoid since there is contact with men.

Teaching, which is considered the most appropriate work for women, is the most respectable profession from the perspective of Kuwaiti men. When a man looks for a spouse, a woman who is a teacher is his first preference because she works in a segregated profession. Although there are many women in teaching who would rather pursue other careers, they cannot leave the confines of teaching because of the societal values that consider other professions as less respectable. In one instance, a woman who was a journalist was asked by her husband to leave her job to become a teacher since teaching is the perfect job for a wife and a mother. She left work that she loved in order to respect her husband’s wish. In the end, because she was not interested in teaching, and because there were few other jobs considered to be similarly respectable, she chose to

pursue her graduate degree. She viewed this as a wise compromise compared to those who choose to stay at home rather than teach.

Kuwaiti women, thus, fall between what they want and what their society wants from them. This puts many Kuwaiti women in such a difficult position that most of them finally tilt the scale toward what the society wants from them at the expense of their own interests and inclinations. Consequently, many Kuwaiti women's decisions about their major area of study or their work, must be consistent with the wishes of their male guardians, or they may be condemned to stay at home. As El-Sanabary (1998) commented, "Students and their parents make decisions on the basis of prevailing perceptions of women's roles and a limited knowledge of educational and career options. The result may be a loss of human talent and resources" (p. 167). One predictable result is that those who are not satisfied with their subject or work may well end up performing poorly both in school and at work.

Societal Values Regarding the Abilities of Women

An examination of the history of Kuwait makes it clear that the social progress of Kuwaiti women is impeded by their supposed inability to perform certain jobs. The controversial question is whether Kuwaiti women have the knowledge and ability to be government ministers, members of the national assembly, or other vital public officials. Some Kuwaiti women attempt to prove themselves and challenge the perceptions of social traditionalists regarding their capacity to hold positions, such as ambassadorships, previously reserved for men. On the other hand, other women endorse the traditional concept of themselves and become less productive in the larger public sphere. I know of some Kuwaiti women who, once they married, found themselves having to choose

between changing to an easier subject or quitting university altogether. In addition, as Carol Gilligan (1982) pointed out, the lack of a viable option can impact a woman's sense of participation in her own life: "To the extent that women perceive themselves as having no choice, they correspondingly excuse themselves from the responsibility that decision entails" (p. 67).

In my assessment, the underestimation of women's abilities derives from the societal values that instill in them a belief in their own limited aptitude. Kuwaiti women who do not believe in their skills have never examined them thoroughly. My own experience as a mother of three children led me to believe at first that I could never study abroad with three children by myself since I am a woman whose abilities are naturally limited. A man can study abroad alone, but it is hard for a woman to do so. That is what my own experiences led me to believe, and that is what many women have told me they were taught. When I began my graduate studies, I found myself determined to finish and so I stayed in the United States with my three children, fulfilling my obligations as a mother and a student at the same time. I teach my children during the day, prepare their meals, clean the apartment, and study at night. Even becoming pregnant and giving birth to my fourth child during this time did not stop me in my path toward my goal. In fact, after my daughter was born, I pursued my studies with even more determination.

In sharing my experience I hope to point out the need to raise awareness among women in general, and Kuwaiti women in particular, of their potential abilities. If I have pursued my studies far from home, alone with my three children, it is not because I am a superwoman, but because I have examined my own capabilities and used them to work for what I believe will best serve the interests of myself, my family, and my society. As I

see it, the problem facing many Kuwaiti women is that they do not know what they can do unless they try. They have never learned how to test their own skills and talents, and thus they may endure the seclusion of previous times. For the Kuwaiti woman of today, seclusion may not necessarily come in the form of the closed home with bars, but in limited opportunities, such as those forcing women to quit school to raise their children because they have been led to believe they cannot raise children and study or work at the same time.

The idea that women have fewer abilities does not only have a serious impact on a society that is in need of a female labor force, but also it has negative effects on women themselves. It is important not to see the Kuwaiti society in its past image—“men work, women stay”—because there are many divorced women and women who do not have male guardians in our society. Those women provide for themselves and their children; they have to work in order to provide a better way of life for their families. If we condemn them to their past roles, it is as though we are burying them.

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti woman has to face the social concept that views her as a representative of her whole gender. According to al-Mubarak (2000), “The Kuwaiti woman, through her efficient work, represents both herself and womankind, whereas when a Kuwaiti man succeeds or fails, he only represents himself and not all mankind” (p. 203). Therefore, if a Kuwaiti woman proves her proficiency to society it would mean other women can succeed, whereas, if she fails, she is reflecting the frailty of all women. This is the challenge presented to modern Kuwaiti women, and to Kuwaiti society itself.

Societal Values and Women's Identity

Women's perception of themselves in their society is another aspect that worth pointing to. History reveals that Kuwaiti women's identity is seen in relation to societal norms and values. Thayer-Bacon (1998) has commented:

People are social beings. As social beings, people grow and develop, learn a language and culture, and form a sense of self, all through their relationships with others. Who we are as individuals and how we think depend greatly on the social relationships we have with others, as well as the time, place, and culture into which we are born. (p.38)

Here Thayer-Bacon addressed a significant issue, which is how the formation of our identity is greatly impacted by others surrounding us. As for the position of Kuwaiti women, we have seen that their society transmits certain norms and values to them through the authority of its multiple institutions. The women internalize these values until those images and attitudes become part of their identity. As a result, they see appropriate and inappropriate gender roles through the perceptions that society has instilled in them.

Thayer-Bacon (2003) noted that we are "socially determined" by our community, but we also have an influence on our environment. Kuwaiti women perceive themselves as attempting to affect society as society affects them, such as in women's social and political movements; others see themselves affected by society more than they affect society. Their identity is formed by society and they are only passive recipients of that image. The problem may arise if they perceive a false sense of values as a commonsense reality, such the belief that women cannot be members of the National Assembly.

Thus, the formation of Kuwaiti women's identity and role needs more attention both in the family and in the school since those are the primary transmitters of societal values that affect women's perception of themselves and the world around them. As a teacher, I intend to focus on education and reveal how it is one of the primary institutions for preserving existing values. Furthermore, I will emphasize the importance of Kuwaiti schools in forming a girl's identity.

Education and Societal Values

The purpose of education may fluctuate from one historical period to another within the same society (Williams, 1961). This can be seen in Kuwaiti society: In the past Kuwaiti female schools concentrated on home economic studies, reflecting the value of a society that identified the role of women as exclusively domestic. Today, Kuwaiti schools teach almost the same subjects to both girls and boys, responding to the transformation in society that promoted the role of women as someone who might work outside the home, even though that work may still conform to a fairly narrow criterion of propriety. Despite changes in education, schools remain one of the primary guardians of established societal values. According to Brim (1958), "The educational system of a society is the means whereby traditional culture is preserved, and that any new values it transmits within one generation are fractional compared to the massive tradition it imparts" (p.16-17). School is considered to be one of the major institutions impacting students' values and personality. The power of education in forming identity cannot be underestimated, and therefore its influence on society at large is at the core of any cultural development. Gramsci (1977) defines culture thus:

It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations. (11)

Kuwaiti schools fit precisely into Gramsci's description of culture since school is a culture by itself. It disciplines a student's personality, teaches the student about her rights and obligations toward society, and raises awareness toward her prospective function in the community and country. Therefore, I will next focus on the Kuwaiti system of education so as to explain how it reinforces societal values.

The Kuwaiti Education System

Government schools in Kuwait, from the elementary to the secondary levels, are segregated by gender both in the student population and in the staff and faculty. In this way, the girls' schools are entirely run by female administrators, teachers, staff members, and maintenance workers. The educational systems in females' and males' schools, however, are equal in term of curricular offerings, as well as in the administrative and occupational roles. As al-Musallam (1984) commented, "Having an elaborate sex-segregated educational system no doubt enhances the notion of two spheres of social life by gender" (p. 120). Thus, the Kuwaiti school system is a reflection of the prevailing social concepts regarding gender division whereby boys and girls, men and women, are located in different spheres.

According to al-Mussalam (1984), under the segregated system the girls learn that they have their separate world and their own domain. From elementary through secondary school, female students are frequently socialized by women as teachers and

principals so that they learn that women have their own culture apart from and different than that of men. Even administrative positions, where women may perceive themselves to occupy a place of power, remain inside the women's realm. Al-Mussalam (1984) concluded, "One can say that the women's sphere is extending to include more of the areas not traditionally perceived to be for women. Nevertheless, such extension in women's role is still within well-defined, sex-segregated social institutions" (p. 123).

I will examine girls' schools in order to see how this segregated system emphasizes societal values, how it creates students' identity, how it forms their perceptions of the world around them, and whether or not it produces a passive student as a result. Before discussing the curricula of girls' schools, I will present a short review of the Kuwaiti school system from kindergarten to secondary levels. The Kuwait educational system consists of three pre-university stages. It is a 5-4-3 system, that is, six years of elementary education and three years each for intermediate and secondary school. Prior to that, children attend two years of kindergarten. Kuwait provides free education at all levels, from kindergarten through university. School attendance through the intermediate level is compulsory. Kindergarten and elementary school students are taught only by female teachers.

The Kindergarten Stage (Ages 4-6)

Kindergarten begins at the age of four to six years old. Its primary aim is to help children become acquainted with school and their peers, as well as with adults outside their family. The children are introduced to each other through activities such as saluting the flag, singing, dancing, and playing games (Nasmah, 1978). Kindergarten focuses on cognitive and language development and sensory-motor development, as well as on more

traditional subjects such as Arabic and Islamic values, religion, and customs (Sabie, 1988). At this level, the relationship between the school and parents is very strong since parents participate in school activities and decisions. Furthermore, the school administration encourages frequent meetings with parents so that the kindergarten has a social environment where teachers and administrators can work together with parents in projects such as planning for national ceremonies (Nasmah, 1978).

Although kindergarten is not sex-segregated, a gender specific aspect can be found in some activities in which girls and boys are assigned different roles by their female teacher, for instance, when a boy is a doctor and a girl is a nurse. Girls also learn simple home economics and boys learn carpentry by using carpentry toys. With these simple assignments, both girls and boys can learn their expected roles in the larger Kuwaiti society. Therefore, the societal values regulating the appropriate roles of females and males start at home and are reinforced in the early stages of schooling.

The Elementary Stage (Ages 6-11)

Elementary education is the foundation of the next stages of education. It emphasizes the development of competitive, achievement-oriented attitudes pertaining to individual career alternatives. In this level, students learn to read and write Arabic and English, and learn basic math skills, Islamic studies, and at the advanced level students learn social studies and science. Student evaluations are based on continuing assessments and written examinations (Sabie, 1988). The school/parent relationship is not as strong as during the kindergarten years. The only expectation is that parents help their children with their homework. The parents do not participate in school activities, rules, or objectives. The higher the grade the student is in, the less important the teacher/parent

relationship becomes. This may cause some contradiction in students' perceptions of values since there is no cooperation between teacher and parent. For example, a girl may be taught in her family that dancing is inappropriate and in school she may learn to dance in a school celebration.

The Intermediate Stage (Ages 11-15)

The students in this level study Arabic, English, Islamic studies, science, mathematics, social studies, physical education, music, art, computer science, applied studies, open activities, and the girls also study home economics. There are 30 lessons for boys and 32 lessons for girls five days a week. The students' assessments on this level depend on monthly exams, midterms, and finals. Students' class work evaluation forms 50% of the grade of every subject. The other 50% comes from the final term tests administered individually by each school. The minimum passing grade is 50% in each individual subject and in the total (Safwat, 1993).

At this stage, a female student is introduced to her role as a mother and a wife through home economics, of which there are two series of classes each week. This subject teaches both theory and practice. The girls learn methods of child rearing, cooking, and sewing through books, and then in the second period they practice what they have learned.

The Secondary Stage (Ages 15-18)

The two-term system is split into two areas of study: science and non-science. The first year the students study the same subjects: Islamic studies, English, Arabic, science, social studies, computer science, and home economics for girls. The students' assessment in this stage is like that of intermediate level: monthly tests, midterms, and finals. In the

next level each student chooses whether she or he wishes to specialize in science or non-science (art). In the science major, the students learn subjects such as chemistry, physics, biology, and math, in addition to the main subjects of Arabic, English, and Islamic studies. The non-science students learn French, philosophy, history, geography, sociology and psychology, as well as the same main subjects (Safwat, 1993).

The unit system is similar to that implemented in the United States. The total credit for graduation is 40. A unit is equal to five lessons per week (55 minutes per lesson) for a period of a semester. The systems offer eight different options (areas) of studies. The grading system is the 4-point scale where A=4 is the highest grade, and D=1 is the lowest grade for passing (Safwat, 1993).

Many Kuwaiti female students choose to specialize in science since it is more prestigious than art in secondary school. However, when the science area students pursue their university degrees, they specialize in majors not related to their science background such as business administration, social studies, English and so on. Some students whom I taught in science have specialized in what I might refer to as “feminine” majors. This reflects the impact of societal values that have guided women’s education toward certain subjects.

Kuwaiti Girls’ Schools

Inside the walls of Kuwaiti schools for girls, as I have pointed out, the students begin to establish their own views of themselves and the society in which they live. They also start to build ideas about their own future pursuits. For this reason I would like to probe the factors that are a hindrance for women in building an active identity.

Teacher/ student Relationships

The teaching in Kuwaiti schools from primary to secondary school is teacher-centered. The teacher explains the lesson and lectures, and students are expected to pay attention and take notes. The teacher also asks questions and chooses who answers. She mostly targets those whom she thinks did not prepare the lesson. She corrects the students' mistakes and requires them to come to class well prepared. The students, in turn, are expected to participate in the class. When they contribute to class discussion, they must raise their hands and stand up before they speak. The students should not interrupt the teacher while she is speaking, and they must demonstrate respect for her when she enters the room by standing up to greet her.

This military-like discipline may create compliant students who are only recipients of what a teacher may bestow on them. The students, thus, may become vulnerable to the values that the teacher may transmit. Since a teacher is a woman who may have already absorbed societal values regarding her own gender, she could convey those values to her students without necessarily being aware that she is doing so. She may even indirectly influence her students to pursue majors that suit their natures. El-Sanabary (1998) explained that "teachers often perpetuate sex-role stereotypes directly and indirectly through what they teach and through their behavior... female teachers may inspire girls to high achievement and accomplishment or direct them toward conformity with prevailing domestic ideals" (p.165). She also noted, "Where schools are segregated by gender, the availability and quality of female teachers crucially affect female enrollment, achievement, and attainment" (p. 162).

Students and School Curriculum

One of the main issues discussed in a forum conducted by WCSS regarding women's position in Kuwaiti society is the images of women in textbooks: "Although Kuwaiti women have made noticeable progress in higher education sector and have substantial participation in the labor force, this image is not reflected in school textbooks and Kuwaiti women are still presented in a picture that does not accord with their new role in society" ("Al- Mara'a wa son", 1996, p.7). A significant study conducted in this field by Abu Naser, Julinda, and others (1983) about the gender-role stereotype in Arab countries, including Kuwait, highlights the image of women and girls in textbooks. Working women, for instance, are typically portrayed as teachers, nurses, pediatricians, dressmakers, girls' and female school supervisors, in other words, in traditional 'feminine' occupations.

In Arabic textbooks, women are seen in their traditional roles as mothers and wives, restricted to the private domestic sphere. Furthermore, the textbooks emphasize the characteristics of womanhood as weakness, sensitivity, submission, dependency, and self-sacrifice, with no identity of their own as persons (Abu Naser, Julinda and others, 1983). Although modern Kuwaiti women can have important functions outside the household, their new role is not depicted in the textbooks:

Women in the majority of Arab countries today are doing more than housekeeping and cooking. They are seeking higher education, entering the labour market as administrators, artists, professionals, writers and journalists...They play an important role in decision making in the home and outside it concerning their

property. In the texts reviewed, there is hardly any reference to any of these functions. (Abu Naser, Julinda and others, 1983, p. 12)

Teacher/Parent Relationships

As mentioned above, the teacher/parent relationship is not emphasized in Kuwaiti schools. The parents do not participate in decision-making regarding school rules or curriculum. Their role is limited to helping their children with their homework. The only interactions between parents and teachers are the school meetings that could be described as an encounter between a detective and a suspect wherein mostly the former, the teacher, poses questions and the latter, the parent, answers them. Most teachers only show the parents their children's grades and only answer parents' inquiries regarding their children's achievements; the exchange should not exceed five minutes.

Instead of the importance of establishing a healthy connection between home and school as a means of establishing positive values, this aspect is ignored and students may sense a disconnection between the most important institutions responsible for nurturing their own values. This may result in some separation between themselves and society since the students may see home and school as separate places, with one more valued than the other, as is the case for those female students who believe that staying home is more important than pursuing their education.

In this respect, I would like to contrast environment to the teacher/parent relationship in the United States. My 2nd and 3rd grade boys are now studying in the United States and I am impressed by the method that their school follows regarding the participation of parents in school decisions. All parents are invited to evaluate the school, participate in school trips, competitions, and contribute to planning the school year. This

creates in my children a model of cooperation and responsibility, as well as giving them a sense of connection between society and school.

Kuwaiti schools need a careful re-examination of their methods regarding female students and how to raise awareness among the girls that they are able to make their own decisions regarding education and work. I will present some recommendations that I hope could help improve female students' image of themselves. In order to present these recommendations, I must first discuss the importance of relationships in Kuwaiti schools since they are a significant element in constructing identity.

Constructing Students' Identity within Relational Epistemology

In order to develop in our schools a proactive student who is able to question her own position and play an active role in our society, we must look to ourselves as teachers to see if we provide the right tools to help our students develop a sense of self. Thayer-Bacon (1998) offered a useful perspective on how a sense of self can grow through interaction with others: "...we develop a sense of 'self' through our relationships with others, and we need a sense of self to become potential knowers" (p. 56). Moreover, she explained how developing a sense of self is improved if experiences a caring relationship based on respect, trust and dignity (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Thayer-Bacon (1998) also highlighted the impact of other's views on us. As social beings, we live in a society that has distinctive social practices. These practices may drive us to accept as true certain beliefs and not others. We may learn from these practices to discard our dreams and to count them as unimportant experiences. Knowledge can be constructed through our relationships with each other. It is essential to know that we have the capacity to learn how to think, speak, read, and write, and even how to establish relationships with one

another. It is not something that we are born with; it is something that we build through our relationships with others (Thayer-Bacon, 1998).

A “healthy self” is one that has a voice with which it can express its own feelings, thoughts, and intuitions. Caring relationships are considered to be healthy –“nurturing and responsive” (Thayer-Bacon, 1998). Nel Noddings (1992) observed that it is difficult to disentangle individual selves from the relations by which they are shaped: “We cannot care for ourselves in any meaningful way in isolation from others” (p. 90). Gilligan (1993) also asserted the importance of relationships even though they might also be a problem and stressed that girls should not distance themselves from relationships:

If girls know what they know and bring themselves into relationships, they will be in conflict with prevailing authorities. If girls do not know what they know and take themselves out of relationship, they will be in trouble with themselves. The ability of girls to tell it from both sides and to see it both ways is not an illustration of relativism...a provisional solution to a difficult problem of relationship [is]: how to stay connected with themselves and with others, how to keep in touch with themselves and with the world” (p. 164).

Thus, establishing a relationship can help us understand ourselves and the societies in which we live. For this reason, our schools must pay attention to the significance of relationships in constructing a student’s identity. There are various forms of relationships that we need to consider in our schools, including teacher/student, student/student, and student/school environment. These relationships, as Thayer-Bacon and Noddings both claimed, need to be based on concern for the well-being of the student in order to be healthy and successful.

In schools, caring relationships may contribute to students' self-confidence. In this regard, Thayer-Bacon (2003) addressed the importance of relationships in school as a means to helping students develop their own skills through interacting with others. Students learn to create a voice "and learn how to express it, for they can feel confident that others will listen to what they have to say generously" (p. 249). The teacher should provide a "democratic classroom" for her students wherein they can express themselves freely. In order to achieve this, a teacher must recognize and respect the needs of his or her students, as Thayer-Bacon (2003) observed:

Teachers must focus their efforts on valuing and appreciating the students' needs and learning what their interests and desires are. Teachers should suspend their own views and listen attentively and generously to their students... This effort of attending to the needs of others helps assure us that the teaching-studenting relationship will be a caring one. (p. 247)

El-Sanabary (1998) has maintained that if female teachers are trained well, they will be able to recognize those girls who are at risk of dropping out from school and provide them with care and encouragement to guide them toward what is best for them and help them value education as a way of providing it.

In Kuwaiti schools, as explained above, for the most part the relationship between teachers and students lacks the element of care. Many teachers instead care only about how to finish their lessons on time, ignoring their students' need for a secure atmosphere in which they can interact with their teacher to gain more knowledge. As the body needs food to grow, our students' minds need a proper education to grow. Education need not only be based on reading and memorizing the books, but on teaching the students to read

the world around them because “reading and writing words encompasses the reading of the world” (Freire, 1987, p. 212). In this way, female students can question their own society and those societal values that still impact their lives.

Furthermore, in Kuwaiti schools it is the book that is the mediator in the teacher/student relationship. The student who memorizes the book well is the one who gains the teacher’s respect, and the one who does not memorize the book may even not gain the teacher’s attention. The teacher in Kuwait follows what Freire (2002) called the “banking system” where most teachers only use the students’ minds to store information needed for tests. I have been teaching for five and a half years, beginning in an intermediate school for a semester. After that, I taught in the two-terms high school system and then in a credit school. In my department, I have worked with many teachers from different nationalities, only a few of whom had a relationship with their students that was not based on a book as mediator.

Students in Kuwaiti schools come from different backgrounds; each will carry the values that she learns from her family. Some carry the belief that the education of girls is necessary, others accept the attitude that views girls’ education as only important to a certain point since someday she has to get married and be the responsibility of a man. In El-Sanabary’s (1998) observation, “A mother’s education has a strong influence on her daughters’ education. Educated mothers can help their children with their school work...they also provide positive reinforcement of their children’s educational and occupational achievement” (p. 156).

Thus, the family has a great influence on daughters’ education and work expectations. Some girls are determined to pursue their education as a result of

encouragement from their parents; others care less about their education since they believe that they will get married one day. As one student told me, someday she will marry and education will be useless to her because her husband will take care of her expenses. In her study of women's education in Kuwait, by al-Mussallam (1984), the scholar concluded that "the contrast between [female students'] private lives and work gradually showed them that their private lives could complicate both their public and private lives, they seemed to value marriage above work" (p. 254).

Kuwaiti teachers generally do not attempt to help those students from different backgrounds explore their own identities and rethink their own futures. They do not help them to raise questions concerning their own values and the different values around them regarding their own education. In this vein, Thayer-Bacon (2003) urged teachers to help their students assess critically different views: "...we must help our students learn how to critique various perspectives, once they have attempted to generously understand them" (p. 255).

It is also so important that students take part in caring relationships with one another. Addressing this topic, Thayer-Bacon (1998) proposed that "teachers have a tremendous possibility of helping students develop their abilities to communicate and relate to each other (thus further developing their constructive thinking skills) by allowing students time to relate to each other by talking with each other in class" (p.161).

In the classroom, students who have the benefit of a mutual support system are able to examine their own values. Students who come from backgrounds that devalue women's public role may re-question their own position through their contact with students from an environment where the participation of women in public affairs is

respected. Thus, in order to help students learn from each other, the teachers should encourage their pupils to communicate with one another by arranging them in groups. In Kuwaiti schools, many teachers form groups without paying attention to the students' background; this may not increase the diversity of learning experience that we expect since students may be surrounded only by those who possess the same views and values. Teachers, then, need to ensure that each group contains students from different backgrounds as a way of exposing them to a variety of perspectives.

Students also need activities that help them become active citizens in their society. Gilligan (1993) argued that "if we want to educate girls who as women will participate fully as citizens in a democratic state, then it would seem beneficial to name girls' activities which are sustaining the school's public governance as political questions and to deal publicly with their differences and disagreement" (p.161). Gilligan further emphasized the need to prepare the female students to confront the attitudes of their community and prove themselves to be equal and legitimate citizens. In order to accomplish this we must begin with children in school by making them aware of the activities of women that can serve as a bridge to the broader society.

Students in Kuwaiti schools are for the most part detached from their school environment. They do not participate in decision-making regarding the activities that may guide them in becoming active participants and contributors to their society. School activities are usually chosen by teachers and not by students; most often it is the teachers who decide what type of activity they should give to their students instead of asking the students what interests them. The activities should be planned by the students rather than dictated by the teachers. This may create a sense of responsibility among female students

as they learn to share in the decision-making process, as well as being a means to help them explore their own interests and talents.

At the same time, the teachers have a responsibility to present a variety of school activities that make it clear to the female students that their existence is valued and that they have a significant role to play in their community and country. One of the more important activities that schools should incorporate into their routine is the school parliament where students can be elected by their classmates in order to voice their concerns to the school administration. Another useful endeavor is a school newspaper in which students can recommend new activities, suggest alternatives to the curriculum, and critique the practices of the school.

The textbook situation is another aspect to consider in creating a relationship between students and the outside world. Thayer-Bacon (2000), in her description of her own classroom, revealed that she has only one textbook assigned to each grade and encourages her students to use the library that she has organized. This method, I believe, broadens students' thinking and even encourages reading, something Kuwait society lacks. The problem that we face with female students is that they only read school textbooks, which are irrelevant to the problems and events of contemporary Kuwaiti society. Most Kuwaiti teachers do not encourage their students to widen their knowledge by further reading. As a result, students grow up understanding what is in the books but not about the everyday concerns of their society. This will not produce a student who engages in "critical thinking" regarding his or her gendered world. It is essential for any society to generate the kind of critical thinking that enables students to "critique

arguments, offer justifications, and make judgments about what are good reasons, or the right answers (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, p. 128).

On the whole, by understanding the importance of relationships in school we can help create a student who can plan her own future and is able to view herself as a significant member in her society. Based on the demonstrable value of school relationships and my concerns, I can offer further recommendations for teachers, hoping to help them guide their female students on a path that will ultimately contribute to Kuwaiti society and benefit themselves.

Female teachers must first examine their own biases in societal values. They need to ask themselves how they view their female students in relation to existing Kuwaiti values and what role they expect their students to perform in the society. Gilligan (1993) raised two vital questions for women to consider regarding their position as teachers: “Two questions about relationship clarified a woman’s position: Where am I in relation to the tradition that I am practicing in teaching? and, where am I in relation to girls, the next generation of women? Are women vessels through which the culture passes?” (p. 161). Addressing these questions will help teachers to be more aware of what they transfer to their students. In addition, they need to help students freely develop their gender identity, construct positive attitudes about all types of occupations, and guide them in reviewing gendered labor concepts. Educators must also be aware of the power of society to shape an individual’s perceptions and help their students understand these pressures and their effects.

Teachers are examples to their students, so their attitudes and behavior may exert great influence on the children and young people in their care. I know many students who

have chosen to pursue their field of study because it was that of their teachers. Thus, teachers may be role models in attaching importance to different occupations and influence their students to enter those occupations that are most needed in Kuwait.

Kuwaiti teachers have to learn to bridge the customary gap between themselves and their students, descending from their ivory towers in order to establish a caring bond with their students. They need to overcome the master/slave relationship in order to break their students' silence and help them express their own interests and views about their expected roles. In the end, the men and women who begin in that environment may be better able to build confidence and form their own ideas.

As part of this nurturing process, teachers will have to establish a close relationship with the parents of their students. To do this they will first need to present lectures in schools for parents, stressing the importance of their role in the school and enlightening them about the important part their daughters will be called upon to play in their society. As for the supervisors and administrators, they must meet with the parents so they can report to the teachers about pupils' backgrounds and needs.

Furthermore, teachers need to connect their students to society by introducing discussion of current problems to help their students absorb a sense of responsibility for their community and country. According to Henry Giroux (1992), "The struggle over public schools cannot be separated from the social problems currently facing the society. These problems are not only political in nature but are pedagogical as well" (p. 199).

In this way the teacher can see teaching as a "performative act," as bell hooks (1994) refers to the undertaking that "offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out of the unique elements in each class" (p.

11). Kuwaiti teachers must consider teaching as an engagement between the teacher and the student, rather than as a teacher-centered hierarchical construct, in order to help the students become “active participants” (p.11).

These recommendations are not only based on my theoretical background, but also on a practical one since I was a teacher and a mother of children who have studied in both Kuwaiti and American schools. My studies and my personal observations have convinced me that there is a better vision for Kuwaiti children.

Viewing Societal Values in the Present and Future of Kuwaiti Society

Kuwaiti women of the past, through their contact with the foreign laborers and through their education abroad, gained new insights regarding the roles that were available to them in their society. In today’s climate of globalization, Kuwaiti women are expected to develop an understanding about their roles and cross the domestic threshold into public sectors and non-traditional occupations. Kuwaiti women are the pioneers of the Gulf region in challenging traditional values and in working hard to change the attitudes toward women. They have improved their educational position and it is expected that they will continue to improve their working situation in struggling for an equal social position.

In the past, Kuwaiti society viewed female education as something outside of custom and only a few girls attended schools when they first opened. Today, the number of female students is increasing and even exceeding the number of boys. Perhaps this change will someday be mirrored in the political arena. Although at present only a few women, less than 30, run for elected office compared to nearly 300 men, it is only recently that women gained their political rights, and many Kuwaitis still regard it as

contrary to traditional values. In the near future, Kuwaiti women are expected to develop more awareness of the significance of women's role in politics, just as they have done in education.

The current climate of change in which women participate in politics, and even run for political office, will ensure that some of the social problems most affecting women will begin to be addressed seriously. For example, the position of divorced women and women who marry non-Kuwaitis will be better in regard to housing, and the issue of nationality for the children of Kuwaiti women who marry non-Kuwaiti men will be given some attention. Furthermore, the attitudes toward Kuwaiti women who marry non-Kuwaitis will change; that is already evident in the number of Kuwaiti families whose daughters are marrying non-Kuwaitis, even if Kuwaiti women still prefer to marry Kuwaiti men.

We live in an increasingly small world, and women around the world have a progressively more common concept about improving their status in their own societies. Kuwaiti women are also taking steps for improving their existence in their society. The ideal image of Kuwaiti society in which all its citizens—female and male—work hand in hand to develop the country seems to be a daydream. At the present moment one of those hands is still not working to its full potential. This situation is expected to change, and the hands will come together to make a better future for Kuwait.

Conclusion

As an educator, in this dissertation I looked to history for answers to contemporary problems in my society. I have inquired about Kuwaiti society's view toward women's role in the past and how much the conception of the past still persists

today. I have also offered a critique of Kuwaiti schools and provided some recommendations for a new path for our schools.

Chapter 1 presents the main purpose in my investigation of Kuwaiti societal values and their impact on Kuwaiti women. I also discussed the importance of my study from a historical perspective as a way to understand the current situation of Kuwaiti women. Furthermore, as an insider and as an educator who uses history to explain contemporary problems, I have addressed my methods in dealing with the challenges of objectivity and presentism. I also reviewed previous studies of this issue to see how societal values were addressed. Chapter 1 concludes with questions that I sought to answer in my study.

Because my study investigates the values of Kuwaiti society, in Chapter 2 I explained the multiple meaning of values from the standpoints of philosophy, anthropology, and sociology in order to adopt meanings that best suit my work. Furthermore, I attempted to explain the origin of Kuwaiti social values as a combination of religion and tradition, where the issues regarding women's inferiority are related more to the practices of tradition. In general, Chapter 2 serves to present an understanding of the overall concept of societal values in respect to this study.

Chapter 3 examines Kuwaiti history in the pre-oil era to reveal how societal values hindered the education of Kuwaiti women and constructed a division in family, education, and work. Moreover, in this chapter I explained how it is only the external aspects of Kuwaiti values that changed after the transformations caused by the discovery of oil; the core attitudes still exist as can be seen in current social practices. Overall,

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of Kuwaiti resistance to the goals of the women's political movement described in the next chapter.

The history, goals, and difficulties of the Kuwaiti women's organizations are covered in Chapter 4. There it can be seen that the demand of Kuwaiti women for their political rights was, and remains, a subject of great controversy between conservative and the liberal segments of society. The debate has centered on women's position regarding the public/private division and the effects of modernization on Kuwaiti women seen in relation to Westernization that puts pressure on the public/private dichotomies. In this regard I have concluded that it is societal values that shape women's identities and perceptions of themselves

Finally, in Chapter 5 I first discuss the "woman question" from the perspective of cultural studies. I address how this is relevant to how societal values affect Kuwaiti women in the present. Furthermore, as an educator, I attempt to analyze Kuwaiti schools, particularly in the education of girls, as one of primary transmitters of societal concepts. I show that there is a relationship between societal values and a relational epistemology in that women construct their own gender identity in relation to the world in which they live. I argue that the teacher can perform an important role in building active students who are capable of making their own decisions.

Writing about Kuwaiti women's history allows me to see clearly what is happening in our society today. Kuwaiti women who faced barriers in the past when attempting to attend public schools are facing the same barrier today in running for office. This time I believe we need to rethink our position and not repeat history, but instead undertake new roles knowing that history has proven that Kuwaiti women have

important contributions in the workplace and thus been a key factor in the flourishing Kuwaiti economy. This helps us recognize the significant role that the Kuwaiti woman can play in developing her country.

Throughout this study, in discussing the impact of societal values on Kuwaiti women, I was also to consider women in general at an international level since they share the same problems around the world. We are not seen for what we do or what we can do, but for what is determined by our gender. We become cautious in our actions and in our writings since we do not want to break with the norms. It is interesting how we always watch ourselves while writing, afraid of what others might think of us when we defend our own gender. In my study, I have attempted to reveal how societal values control the type of education and work we do, and how it even controls our decisions in favor of one political candidate over another. I am only drawing attention to false conceptions of women: many of these perceptions are not related to religious beliefs, but to traditions that have been used by some to maintain the division of the two worlds. I am hoping that my study is not read as a polemic against any one group or institution, but as a way of raising awareness of the importance of ourselves as women. In Kuwaiti society in particular, I look for more opportunities for women where they can prove that they have only one purpose—helping to build a new Kuwait.

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