KUWAITI FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION: AGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT SUSTAINABILITY IN KUWAIT

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED TO THE LAW SCHOOL OF TULANE UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ON THE 24TH DAY OF JUNE 2015

BY

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Abstract

In spite of oil wealth, modernization, and high female educational attainment, the International Labor Organization cites female labor force participation in Kuwait as lower than other high-income countries, world averages, many non-Arab Islamic countries, and some gulf countries such as Qatar and the UAE. These statistics suggest a lack of female participation and agency in development of Kuwaiti society.

As Kuwait and other gulf countries create economic strategies to move from dependency on natural resources to the development of skilled and innovative labor, the gap between high educational attainment and low labor force participation must be explored. With a grounded theory approach, this study uses statistical analysis and other secondary data, along with ethnographic methods of observation and in-depth interview with over 56 participants, to identify the social, economic, and political forces shaping the demand and supply of female labor in Kuwait.

This research argues that increasing a women’s freedom (capability + agency) to participate economically, as well as politically and socially, increases their wellbeing and the sustainable development of their country. Therefore, research also considers Kuwaiti female agency in society for overall participation in sustainable development. To foundationally inform this study, interviews and observations seek a basic understanding of the Kuwaiti woman’s experiences, as well as her definitions and perceptions of freedom.

Interestingly, research finds two administrations in Kuwait record female LFP at least 18% higher than ILO estimates—a discovery backed up by interviews and
observations. These numbers not only include the high number of non-Kuwaiti female workers, but Kuwaiti women working in public, private, and informal markets. In addition, the number of Kuwaiti women entrepreneurs in home-based and other small businesses is increasing and becoming important to the economy, but is largely undocumented—suggesting female LFP in Kuwait may even be higher than administrations report. These findings suggest significantly greater female participation in the labor market than reported by international organizations, contradicting stereotypical views of disempowered Middle Eastern women—a view perhaps too often accepted without question by western research and society. Implications of research show potential for growth in the Kuwaiti female labor market within the private sector.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSB   (Kuwait) Central Statistical Bureau
GDP   Gross Domestic Product
GNI   Gross National Income
HDI   Human Development Index
HDR   Human Development Report
IMF   International Monetary Fund
ILO   International Labor Organization
FLFP  Female Labor Force Participation
KFAS  Kuwait Fund for the Advancement of Science
LFP   Labor Force Participation
MENA  Middle East North Africa
PACI  Public Authority for Civil Information
PPP   Purchasing Power Parity
SAP   Structural Adjustment Program
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
Chapter 1 Introduction: Outline of Research Project and Problems Addressed

The countries of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region are often considered as one unit in economic analysis. However, the MENA region can be widely divergent in terms of what characterizes and drives each economy, especially when considering the labor market. Two main differences in categorizing a MENA country are whether or not it has abundant or scarce resources (such as petroleum, gas, coal), and whether it exports or imports its main labor supply. (Chaaban, 9-11; tables 1-3)

Kuwait, an Arab Islamic society and one of the ten largest exporters of total oil products, is an example of a MENA country abundant in oil resources (owned by the state), with oil and gas accounting for 95% of export revenue and 50% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (2013). (Heritage 2013)

Kuwait has a naturally low labor supply and imports a high percentage of migrant labor. (Chaaban 9-10; Tables 1-3) Today, Kuwaitis make only 31% (2014) of the total population of slightly over 4 million people. (PACI 2014, Table 1, 1) The remaining 69% of the population is foreign-born, originating mainly from South Asia and South East Asia (59% in 2007) from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. (Shah 2010, 43) The largest single expatriate community in Kuwait is Indian, accounting for almost 20% of the foreign population. Egyptians make up the largest foreign Arab population. (IOM) Both of these characteristics—oil abundance and high migrant labor population—have been important in shaping Kuwait’s labor force.

Oil revenues maintain high living standards for Kuwaiti citizens through oil subsidies, guaranteed public sector jobs, and the creation of a large welfare system that
transfers oil revenues into health, education, loan, and housing benefits, and electricity, water, and fuel subsidies. (IMF 2012, 14) Gross National Income per capita (PPP) in Kuwait is $47,750 USD (2012) with an average annual Gross Domestic Product growth rate in the years 2011-12 of 6.2%. (World Bank 2014a, Table 1)

1.1 The State of Kuwait and the Need for Development Reform

In 2013, the state of Kuwait publically emphasized the need for “overall reform” in its economy, stating that the current economic system, based on oil revenue and a large social welfare system, is “unsustainable”. The state’s four-year Development Plan (2013/14-2016/17), sent to Kuwait’s national assembly in October 2013, recognizes that without public spending reform Kuwait will “experience real budget deficit” by 2021, estimated between 51 and 414 billion Kuwaiti dinar (181 billion to 1.5 trillion USD) by the year 2035. (Izzak, 2013a) The development plan includes (1) cutting welfare spending, (2) diversifying the national economy to decrease Kuwait’s reliance on oil revenue, which accounted for 96% of budget revenue in 2012/13, (3) transforming Kuwait into a regional trade hub by 2035 and (4) creating 77,500 jobs for Kuwaitis in the public and private sectors. (Izzak 2013a; KUNA)

Although Kuwait’s economic statistics are currently favorable, Kuwait’s Development Plan was in response to future sustainability problems due to lack of diversification in products and trade, an over extended public sector, and weak private sector investment. (Arnold) In 2012, an International Monetary Fund report warned that increasing government expenditures (8%, 2011) such as rising public sector wages (19%, 2011), increased pension costs and rapid population growth (3.9% during 2008-12) will over-extend oil revenues by 2017. (IMF 2012, 1; WDI online c) At the same time, Gulf
Cooperation Council (GCC)\(^1\) states, all of which are oil-based economies, realize that “oil reserves are finite” and while oil prices and national incomes are currently “at record levels” it is time for countries to “devise and implement successful strategies, while the money is still there”. (Peterson, 2) Although three GCC countries—Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—are still achieving surplus incomes from oil, they have watched Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia face “immediate requirements for replacing oil income” due to smaller, lower quality and finite oil reserves, increasing costs to produce oil, and population growth. (Peterson, 2-4)

In a speech given to the members of parliament on October 29\(^{th}\) 2013, HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said Kuwait is embarking on “a new phase” of economic and societal improvement to address the future, and stressed that Kuwait’s first national objective is a “major qualitative leap” in reform and development, making up for “lost time” and “lost opportunities”. The Amir describes the future development of Kuwait as not being limited to the construction of buildings, roads, or airports, but additionally stresses the importance of human development to national stability. (KUNA)

Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah also warns that Kuwait’s current social spending is “unsustainable” and maintains the state must reform current policies on subsidies and public services. (Izzak 2013a) However, according to the World Economic Outlook 2012 (in reference to oil exporters) entitlement spending is a slow, “hard to reverse” process. To boost progress, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) urges oil-producing countries to focus on “productivity-enhancing spending on

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\(^1\) The Gulf Cooperation Council is an economic and political alliance between six Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Established in 1981, it was formed in order to achieve “coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States” in all fields—economic, financial, trade, communication, education, and culture—in order to create unity between Arab states based on faith in Islam and service to “the sublime objectives of the Arab nation.” (Cooperation Council)
human capital and infrastructure investment” which may also support diversification of the economy. (IMF 2012 c, 84)

1.1.2 Human Capital Development and Problems in the Kuwaiti Labor Market

A necessary part of the development of human capital is to strengthen and train a modern labor force, which in turn supports a progressing and diversifying economy. Today’s modern economy is structured on the core belief that jobs are the “cornerstone of economic and social development” and any modern economy will encourage both men and women to be productive within the labor market. (WDR 2013, 2)

Jobs help create and maintain sustainable economies through earnings and employment opportunities for individuals. These individuals in turn generate “output,” increasing society’s living standards and decreasing an individual’s potential burden on society. (WDR 2013, 15) In addition, jobs build social cohesion, which contributes to a stronger, more unified national identity—a social element which has been historically important to Kuwait’s state and society. Social cohesion occurs during the process of labor as workers build networks and support systems, make collective decisions, learn to interact with people of different genders or ethnicities, and are challenged by new ideas that initiate innovation. Social cohesion helps manage tensions within society; a lack of job opportunities can bring social discord, frustration, even violence. (WDR 2013, 12; Iqbal)

A surface glance at Kuwait’s labor market shows positive statistics. Kuwait’s Labor Force Participation rate is 60%, only slightly below current world averages, and unemployment is estimated at only 2 % (PACI 2014, Tables 1 & 16; WDI Online). However, while high labor demand in the oil production and exportation sectors help
maintain low unemployment rates in Kuwait, so does the Kuwaiti Constitution of 1962, which guarantees every Kuwaiti citizen a job within the public sector.

Seventy-five percent of the local Kuwaiti labor force works in the public sector, a public sector labor surplus, which typically characterizes developing countries. In the past few years, public sector salaries, wages, social security, and other allowances of those working in the public sector accounted for 50% of the state budget, about $70-74 billion. Wage and salary expenditures account for 19% of Kuwait's GDP, about $181 billion, “an amount unmatched by any spending allocations in developed or developing countries outside the Gulf”. (Al Hayat)

Only 22% of the Kuwaiti labor force works in the private sector. (PACI 2014, Table 14) Migrant labor is much cheaper (than Kuwaiti labor) to hire within the private sector, and most Kuwaitis would rather work in the public sector where they can enjoy higher wages. (Tetreault & al-Mughni, 70) Public sector jobs are a channel through which the state distributes oil income to Kuwaitis—the entitlement to pay is foremost, the quality of work is secondary. (Longva, 64-5)

Over time, while Kuwaitis have been concentrated in service positions within the public sector, foreign laborers have continued to do the “bulk of productive work” within the private sector where they make up the majority of the private sector labor force. (Tetreault & al-Mughni, 70; Longva, 59) To the Kuwaiti, “labor” positions are lower status jobs and are for migrant workers. (Longva 59) Migrant laborers are mainly employed in the wholesale/retail trade and hotel/restaurant sector, the construction sector, and the manufacturing sector. (Chaaban, 39)

In addition, the high employment rate in Kuwait seems to reflect the employment
of migrant laborers, not Kuwaitis, underlining Kuwait’s dependence on foreign labor. Of
the currently employed population in Kuwait, only about 17% are Kuwaiti and 83% are
foreign laborers. (PACI 2014, Table 14 & 16) One explanation may be that extensive
welfare programs award needy Kuwaiti families more with welfare benefits than they
could earn through employment, and thereby decrease work incentives. (Longva, 64-5)

Because of the Kuwaiti labor force concentration in the public sector, Kuwait’s
education system continues to focus on educating Kuwaitis for public sector jobs. As a
result, Kuwaitis are not skilled to work in the private sector—a problem which
perpetuates the cycle of an under-developed Kuwaiti labor force and reliance on foreign
workers and shows problems for the future labor creation requirements of a modern job
market. (Tetreault & al-Mughni, 70; Arnold; IMF 2012, 1; 2013, 11)

Between 2012 and 2016, only 17,000 jobs have been forecast to be created in
Kuwait’s private sector, which is dependent mainly on government expenditures for
growth, having relatively low private investment—an average of 16% of GDP in 2005-
2011, and only 8.8% in 2012. (IMF 2012, 6-16; IMF 2014, 31) In addition, most of the
new jobs created in Kuwait require low-level skills. (Tetreault 2001, 210)

1.1.3 Female Labor in Kuwait: the Importance of Understanding LFP

The labor force participation (LFP) rate measures the economically active
proportion or percentage of the population that is of working age (ages 15 and older)—
calculated as the number of people in the labor force divided by the working-age
population 15+. (ILO 2014, 29; World Bank Data) This measurement is important
because it expresses the size of the supply of labor that is available in a country to
produce goods and services, relative to the working-age population. By breaking the LFP
rate down into sex and age groups, a picture of the distribution of those available to work within the country can be determined. Furthermore, if a large percentage of the working-age population is “out of the labor force” (and/or unemployed), it is indicative of significant under use of a country’s potential labor force, and “thus the economic potential of a country”. (ILO 2014, 10)

According to the International Labor Force, women’s total (Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti) participation in the labor force in Kuwait (43.6%; 2013) is twice as high as the average of the MENA region (21.6%; 2013) with a low female unemployment rate of 2.4% (2013), due to better access to education, changes in labor laws, the continual work of women’s rights movements since the 1960s, and the large presence of female migrant workers. Kuwaiti women have also become much better educated in the past 30 years, and have equal access to education and a high literacy rate. Adult female literacy (95% in 2012) is now near the same rate as male literacy (96%). (World Bank WDI Online)

In spite of educational gains, there are problems with the female labor market. Although an average of 55.6% (2005-2012)\(^2\) of women ages 25 and older have at least some secondary education, of these 51.3% (2006) are unemployed, and 13.5% (2006) of women with a tertiary education are unemployed (seeking work but not currently employed). ((HDR 2014, Table 4; World Bank WDI Online) In the case of women with higher education, unemployment is most likely due to underemployment, or the inability to find work suited to the education or skills of the job seeker. (KCBS 2011)

In addition, in Kuwait women only make up 23.8% of the total labor force population (2013) and participate about half as much as men do in the workforce.

\(^2\) Refers to most recent year available between the time period of 2005-2012.
According to the International Labor Organization’s modeled ILO estimate, women’s labor force participation rate is currently 43.6% while men’s is 83.1% (2013).

Female LFP figures in Kuwait are well below global averages—where women make up 40% of the global work force and the global female LFP rate is 51% (2013). Moreover, Kuwaiti female labor force participation is also low when compared with other high-income countries\(^3\), where the LFP rate is 52.3%, and 41.9% of the labor force is female. (2013) Kuwait’s FLFP rate is also lower than the two other wealthiest countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Female LFP rates in Qatar and the UAE are 51% and 47%, respectively. In addition, Kuwait’s female educational attainment rate is below the rates of both of these countries. (See Table 1) (WDI Online)

As compared to many non-Arab Islamic countries, such as Indonesia and Bangladesh, the LFP of Kuwaiti women is still lower, especially considering that Kuwaiti women have higher literacy and educational attainment rates. Bangladesh has a female LFP of 57.4% and 40% of the labor force population is female; in Indonesia, the female LFP rate is 51.4%, and 38% of the labor force is female. (2013) (World Bank WDI Online)

Turkey is a non-Arab Islamic country with a much lower LFP rate (29.4%; 2013) and lower female literacy rate (91.6%; 2013) than Kuwait. In addition, the percentage of Turkey’s female population with at least a secondary education (39%)\(^4\) is half that of


\(^4\) See footnote 2
Kuwait. Interestingly though, the female percentage of Kuwait’s labor force (24%) is slightly below that of Turkey’s (31%). (WDI Online; HDR 2014, Table 4)

Table 1
Comparison of Kuwaiti female LFP and educational attainment with world averages, other high-income countries, GCC states and non-Arab Islamic countries. All statistics from WDI Online and the year 2013, unless otherwise noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Kuwait</th>
<th>World</th>
<th>High-Income Countries 5</th>
<th>Qatar</th>
<th>UAE</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total FLFP</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female % of LF Population</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Literacy Rate</td>
<td>95% (2012)</td>
<td>80.2% (2010)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>95.8% (2012)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>55.1% (2012)</td>
<td>90.1% (2011)</td>
<td>91.6% (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female population w/ at least some 2ndary education, ages 25+</td>
<td>55.6%*</td>
<td>54.2%*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>66.7%*</td>
<td>73.1%*</td>
<td>30.8%*</td>
<td>39.9%*</td>
<td>39%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates the most recent year available between yrs 2005-2012. Reference: Human Development Report 2014, Table 4

Understanding the labor force participation rates of a country is key to studying the forces that shape the supply, demand, and composition of a country’s human resources. Understanding LFP rates are fundamental to projecting future labor composition, in creating employment policies and developing education or training plans, and in projecting future retirement rates and planning for social security systems. Labor Force Participation rates are also used for “understanding the labour market behaviour of

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5 This is the FLFP rate of non-OECD or Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. There are 14 member countries who have ratified the convention of the OECD. Kuwait is a non-OECD High Income country.
different categories of the population”, as will be discussed further in the context of female labor supply and demand in Kuwait. (ILO 2014, 29)

1.1.3.1 Female Migrant Labor and Kuwaiti Female LFP

Because migration is so high in Kuwait, any analysis of Kuwait’s female labor market would be lacking without consideration of female migrant workers and their impact on the development and labor participation of Kuwaiti females. Of Kuwait’s migrant population, 24% are estimated to be women (485,975), making up 71% of the total female labor market in Kuwait. (PACI 2014, Tables 14-16)

The high population of female migrant workers in Kuwait also brings into question whether or not female LFP rates mainly reflect the work of female migrant workers, and not the LFP of Kuwaiti women themselves. In fact, of the 683,081 females currently employed in Kuwait, only 29% (197,106) are Kuwaiti. (PACI 2014, Tables 14-15) This in turn leads to the question of how much Kuwaiti women actually participate in labor market productivity and, in consequence, the development of their own society, a problem in which the “full costs…ultimately harm everyone” and hinder a country’s future and sustainable development. (World Bank 2001, xi)

1.1.4 The Research Objectives, Questions, and Approach

The main objective of this research is to identify what factors create low female labor force participation in the modernized, high-income society of Kuwait, which also boasts high female educational attainment and literacy. The context of this research implies a lack of female agency and development participation in a modernized country.

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6 Labor force participation (LFP) rate includes both citizens and migrant workers: The LFP rate “is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active: all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specified period.” WDI Online Labor Force Participation Rate, Total. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS
To identify the drivers behind labor force participation, this research seeks to identify the main characteristics of the female labor market in the context of the dominant traits of Kuwait—an oil-rich, Islamic society with a high migrant labor population—and considers what social, economic or political forces drive the demand and supply of female labor. Drivers explored include: economic conditions, political or legal forces, cultural norms, migrant labor, family influence, and societal, religious, or familial concepts of women’s roles.

This research argues that, along with an understanding of the drivers behind Kuwaiti female labor force participation, increasing women’s freedom (as defined by capability and agency) to participate in her society economically, politically, and socially increases not only her well being, but also the sustainable development of her country. Therefore, research also considers how female agency in society affects female labor force participation and overall participation in Kuwait’s sustainable development. To foundationally inform this study, interviews and observations seek a basic understanding of the Kuwaiti woman’s experiences of freedom in her society, as well as her definitions, perceptions, and experiences of freedom with capability and agency.

With a grounded theory approach, the ethnographic methods of in-depth interview, observation, and secondary data are used to study Kuwaiti women in Kuwait. Secondary data gives a look at past and present events and institutions in Kuwait and their effect on women’s participation in the labor force. Interviews and observations help identify the drivers of Kuwaiti female labor force participation as well as characteristics of the female labor market. To differentiate between the large population of migrant workers in Kuwait and the differences between citizens and migrants in type of work,
wages, and class status, data collection focused on Kuwaiti females, which also enables exploration of the effects of migrant labor on Kuwaiti females. However, the perspective of female migrant laborers and Kuwaiti males as it pertains to Kuwaiti women’s work has informed data analysis.

1.2 Research Project Contributions to Kuwait and Science

This research project has two main contributions. The first is to improve the sustainable development of Kuwait, and the second is to benefit scientific research.

Contribution 1: Improves the Development Sustainability of Kuwait and the Agency of Kuwaiti Females to Participate

This research contributes to the improvement of the development sustainability of Kuwait, by supplying important labor data for the state’s new Development Plan 2013/14-2016/17, of which the development of human capital and the diversification of the economy are important elements. In the pursuit of economic and social sustainability in Kuwait, the development of Kuwaiti female labor is important to the Kuwaiti Amir’s vision of a “new phase” of development where “old concepts” are exchanged for new and better ideas to encourage “growth and development in all aspects of life”. (Izzak 2013b)

Research findings can supply the state of Kuwait with tools to develop “gender-sensitive” strategies to increase female participation in the labor force and development of society, which leads to a stronger, more efficient modern labor market, increased Kuwaiti-based productivity, and stronger national identity through increased social cohesion of Kuwaiti women in the workforce. To find these tools, research identifies the drivers behind the relatively low labor force participation of Kuwaiti female citizens, who have above average educational attainment and literacy rates and live in a high-income
modernized society, to find out why their labor force participation is low compared to other high-income countries, world averages, and many non-Arab Islamic societies.

Encouraging the participation of women in the Kuwaiti labor force makes sense, since 40% of the population of Kuwait (and therefore 40% of the potential labor force) is female. Extensive development research shows that a country that does not encourage full female participation in society will not reach full economic or social development in the wider society. (World Bank 2001, 2003; UN 2013; UNDP; Sen; Kristof; Nussbaum) However, a country that supports and promotes women’s engagement in society helps “raise economic productivity, …contributes to improved health and nutrition, (and) increases the chances of education (and overall wellbeing) for the next generation”. (Kristof, xx) (Sen, 193-199)

**Contribution 2: Adds to Scientific Research in Multiple Ways**

The second objective of this research is to attempt to fill the wide gap in academic and scientific research and literature concerning the female labor market and female labor force participation in Islamic societies, especially within oil-rich, Islamic societies with high migrant populations. Moreover, this research seeks to add to postdevelopment theory by demonstrating the role of freedom, as defined by capability and agency, in increasing the participation of women in the development of their society.

Regarding the status and rights of women living in Islamic societies, there is a wide gap in research on the female labor market and female labor force participation, especially within oil-rich, Islamic societies with high migrant populations. Although LFP

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7 In most countries roughly \( \frac{1}{4} \) of the population is female. See: [http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS) The reason for the relatively low female population in Kuwait is due to the high number of male migrant workers who live and work in Kuwait, but whose wives and children live in their countries of origin, where the males send remittances.
is considered by development experts to be a very important element of women’s progress and the sustainable development of any country, the literature regarding women in Islamic societies lacks a description of what supports or hinders female labor force participation. Literature regarding the human rights of Muslim women mainly focuses on property, marriage, or political rights, but says little about labor rights or statistics. (See Chapter 3, Background of Research Subject)

This is especially true in Kuwait where current, comprehensive information and research on Kuwait’s labor market and especially on female labor is not readily available. In fact, the last comprehensive study, regarding female job roles in Kuwait and influences on women’s labor force participation, was conducted in 1997 by Swedish anthropologist Anh Nga Longva. (Longva 1997)

In addition, many statistics on female labor in Kuwait (and other female/gender statistics) are not available or up-to-date (see WDI online female statistics). The World Development Report 2013 “Jobs” does not include statistics on the Kuwaiti labor market in its tables of selected indicators. Under the topic headings “Demographic and Economic Indicators Home for Kuwait Women” and “Indicators of Gender Equality,” the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau online reports “No Data Found”. (KCSB online)

Within this lack of research on female labor is another gap. Since oil-rich Islamic societies are generally highly populated by foreign laborers, the element of migrant labor can be a strong influence in shaping the labor market and the labor force participation of women. (Longva) However, there has been relatively little research regarding the impact of female migrant labor on the development of Kuwaiti women or their labor force participation in these societies. This is an important missing element to understanding
Kuwaiti female labor market, since as mentioned previously, almost 71% of the female labor market is foreign-born. (PACI 2014, Table 14-15)

In addition, the proposed research is constructed within the context of defining development and its success with more than the measure of economic growth and its ensuing social development, instead emphasizing that the definition and goals of development should include the freedom, or capability and agency (ability to act on one’s own behalf), of human beings. This is in accordance with goals of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which adheres to a “broader definition of human development” which is “far more than GDP per capita—(which only) tells us remarkably little about the state of a society, (and) particularly where gross inequity prevails”. (Clark 2012) In its most basic terms freedom affects, positively or negatively, the improvement of economic and social development indicators: an individual cannot help raise labor force participation rates if obstacles to enter the labor force are present or s/he does not have the ability to enter.

In this context, this research considers the sustainable development of the high-income country of Kuwait, and the freedom of Kuwaiti women. This research attempts to add to postdevelopment’s “participatory” theories and measures of development by further exploring the role of freedom and by demonstrating the role agency plays in their success. In development research, “the extensive reach of women’s agency is one of the more neglected areas…and (is) most urgently in need of correction”. (Sen 1999, 203)

1.3 Dissertation Chapters Overview

This research, entitled *Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation: Agency and Development Sustainability in Kuwait* is presented in 13 chapters. Chapter 1 has explained the importance of exploring the reasons behind relatively low labor force
participation of women in Kuwait, and how it contributes to the current development sustainability needs of Kuwait and to gaps in scientific research. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical perspective behind this research, which argues that freedom, defined by agency and capability, drives the development of women and overall society. Chapter 2 also discusses labor market theory in the context of Kuwait.

The background on the research subject is presented in Chapter 3 in a literature review entitled “The Main Drivers of the Status, Freedoms, and Rights of Muslim Women Living in Islamic Societies,” which identifies five main drivers found in the literature. Chapter 4, Background on Kuwait, gives a pertinent overview of the history, political economy, and social structures of Kuwait, discussing implications on women and development sustainability. Next, Chapter 5 outlines the details of the ethnographic research methodology of this project, discussing in detail interviews, observations, and the use of secondary data.

Research findings, post-data collection, are presented in Chapters 6 through 13. Interestingly, Chapter 6 offers credible alternatives to the relatively low female labor force participation rates reported by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and World Bank, as cited in Chapter 1, and the statistics on which this research was first proposed. These statistics, which are national estimates and are significantly higher FLFP rates than the ILO modeled estimates, are supported by interviews and observations, which is detailed in Chapters 7 and 8, Support for Female Labor Force Participation in Kuwait, and Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation: Public, Private, and Informal Sectors. The main characteristics of the female labor market are discussed in these chapters, as well.
Chapters 9-11 report the main economic and social obstacles to Kuwaiti female labor force participation. In Chapter 12, the Kuwaiti female’s relationship with Non-Kuwaiti women in the labor market is discussed, along with the implications of this relationship on Kuwaiti female productivity and family. Finally, Chapter 13 summarizes this research’s main conclusions on how Kuwaiti women’s experiences relate to literature review findings, whether Kuwaiti women are fully participating in the workforce and society of Kuwait, and what the future of Kuwaiti female labor force participation and development sustainability will be. Recommendations on how society and state can successfully support future participation are also made.
Chapter 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 From Modernization to Postdevelopment Theories of Development

2.1.1 Development Theory and the History of Modernization

Since the end of World War II, theories and strategies of international development have largely been founded on the belief that industrialization was the cure for “third world” underdevelopment. Developed in the late 1940s, western modernization theory promoted industrialization-led economic growth (using the developed world as its model) as the way to bring societal changes, ranging from “rising educational levels to changing gender roles” to increased democratic behavior. (Rapley, 24) (Inglehart & Baker 2000, 20) In sum, decades of development theory and programming have been involved in a “widely prevalent concentration on the expansion of real income and on economic growth as characteristics of successful development”. (Sen 1990, 41)

Immediately after World War II, state-led modernization and industrialization (reflected in Keynesian theory) was thought necessary to overcome the problems of the Great Depression and post-war politics. This approach was largely successful due to the high global demand for third world raw materials and primary goods, which brought new capital to the governments of underdeveloped countries, and the capability to create infrastructure and industry. (Rapley 15-18, 35-58)

By the 1970s, problems with state-led development emerged. Because state-led industrialization was mainly directed at physical-capital formation, it often neglected other elements of development such as resource-use efficiency, innovation, technological
advancement, and competitiveness. As a result, “neoclassical” ideologists began espousing a lesser state role in industrialization and a freer, less-structured market space in order to nurture these elements in developing societies. (Rapley, 2-3, 47) The writings of neoclassical theorists (also referred to as orthodox liberals) such as Milton Friedman criticized state interference in the market, connecting economic progress, individual freedom, and higher standards of living with the separation of economic and political power. (Friedman, 9; Cohn, 83)

During the 1970s and 80s, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) promoted market deregulation and trade liberalization. Under SAPs, in order to qualify for financial and technical support from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), states were required to adhere to neoclassical structural reform policies, such as fiscal austerity, privatization of state owned enterprises, trade liberalization, and financial and labor market deregulation. (Rapley, 77-79)

Although more advanced developing countries did benefit from modernization and neoclassical theories, by the end of the 20th century, the shortcomings of these strategies were evident. For example, outcomes seemed to favor the higher-income developing countries and to be less effective in poorer countries where quick change was needed. (Rapley, 4) In addition, the much-promoted SAPs had unforeseen negative impacts on human development, including women’s opportunities and gender equality. These development policies, with few exceptions, focused on “rapid” industrialization and on overall and per capita economic growth, which policy makers believed would bring economic and social benefits to the wider society. However, persistent problems of “poverty, discrimination, unemployment, and income distribution were of secondary
importance”. (Todaro & Smith, 15)

2.1.2 Postdevelopment Theory

In view of these shortcomings, in the 1980s post-development theorists emerged, such as Arturo Escobar and James Ferguson, often opposing traditional approaches to development, and questioning its ultimate goal. Whereas for the past forty years, development and progress were automatically assumed to be “beneficial, and humane”, they were now viewed skeptically as “powerful (and) controlling.” These theorists asked “Beneficial for whom?” or “Beneficial according to whose standards?” Postdevelopment theory suggested the goal of traditional development strategy was not to better the lives of people, but to “establish control over citizens’ lives” by rapidly developing economies and strengthening state power, often at the cost of abusing and sacrificing individual freedom. (Peet & Hartwick, 218-9; Rapley, 4-7)

In 1990, Ferguson’s case study of the small African country of Lesotho exposed an “unremitting failure” to achieve the objectives of development programs. Ferguson cited the failure of 200 rural development programs implemented in Lesotho, in spite of the “official development assistance” of international organizations such as the World Bank. Although these interventions failed to be effective, they nonetheless had regular effects of expanding and entrenching bureaucratic state power within the society of Lesotho, and bringing about structural change based on the ideas and values of the western world. (Ferguson, 7-9; xiv)

In the 90s, Escobar promoted his belief that the concept and process of “development” were created and used by the western world to form a system of western hegemonic power throughout the world. Through the use of institutions and “discourses”
of development, the west had invented a globally-accepted concept or “reality” of development, and imposed the identity of “under-developed” on countries throughout the world. (Escobar, 10-15; Peet & Hartwick, 221-223)

Postdevelopment theory supported a “decentralized and participatory approach” to development strategy, to weaken state power over citizens’ lives and to see citizens as the participants, measures, and determinants of development. At the same time, neoclassical theory focused on reducing the power and size of the state, a process which harmonized well with postdevelopment approaches of “decentralization, participation, and emancipation”. (Rapley, 4-7)

Although postdevelopment thought has impacted current development theory, promoting the necessity of a participatory people-based approach to development programming, unfortunately it has been “more heard than implemented”. (Rapley, 5) Similarly, although much thought and detailed planning has been given to the concept of “market design” in development theory and strategy, little attention has been given to the “structures, methods, and objectives of social design”. (Oosterlaken, 91) More must be said on how to increase participation in development, and what the role of freedom or agency within society and state is in doing so. The lack of freedom to participate must be considered as a constraint to the success of development programs, and agency as an important element of the development process. This research study attempts to identify some “building blocks” of social design in development planning, as related to the freedom and agency of women to participate in the development of their own country.

2.1.3 Economic Measures of Development

Historically, the attainment of successful development has been measured by
economic growth. Often economic growth is assessed by the ability of a previously long-term static national economy to begin producing and maintaining an annual increase in Gross National Income (GNI) of 5 to 7% or more; or by GNI per capita, which assesses a country’s ability to increase economic output at a rate faster than population growth rate. (Todaro & Smith, 14).

At the latter part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, development focused on creating economic growth by adhering to the market reforms of Structural Adjustment Programs (World Bank 2001, Forsythe et. al, 2000, Elson 2009), and in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century by efforts in globalization (Neumayer & Soysa, 2010), trade liberalization, integration, competitiveness, export growth, and increasing foreign direct investment as a percentage of GDP. (World Bank 2001, Kim & Trumbore 2010, Neumayer & Soysa, 2010).

In 1998, Schott and Rose’s Trade, Investment, & Integration Readiness (TIIR)\textsuperscript{1} Scale gave a somewhat clearer picture of a country’s economic condition, while exposing potential sustainability problems related to economic, political, and civil freedoms. Using mainly economic indicators such as price and currency stability, budget discipline, and debt and savings along with a “policy sustainability” rating created from the UNDP’s Human Development Indicator (HDI) and political and civil rights scores as established by Freedom House, the TIIR indicators give a “broadbased” picture of economic conditions beyond the country’s current income and indicate the “capacity… to compete in the global marketplace”. (Schott) The purpose of the TIIR is to assess a country’s ability to compete in the global marketplace, and as such indicators are skewed toward economic stability. While seven indicators are economic in nature, only one indicator is

an average of political and civil freedom—and does not include other well-being indicators such as condition of the environment, or gender inequality.

In 1999, Amartya Sen’s book *Development as Freedom* reflected the postdevelopment theory and “concern with individual well-being,” stressing income growth was only *one way* to increase individual freedom, and that sacrificing liberty in order to “raise output” was a cost that ultimately defeated the purposes and goals of development. (Rapley, 7) As a result of postdevelopment discourse, more and more governments and international organizations recognize the need to go beyond the statistics of economic gain in assessing development, adding measures of sustainability and human wellbeing. For example, in 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), created a Human Development Index (HDI) which assesses both social and economic development by measuring longevity (by life expectancy at birth), knowledge (by school enrollment and adult literacy), and standard of living (by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)-adjusted GNI per capita). However, the HDI has some shortcomings—it has a hard time collecting reliable data in many countries, does not fully measure the effects of “rapid socioeconomic and political change”, and “does not measure political aspects of human rights such as free speech and elections.” (Cohn, 31-3)

In 2008, French president Nicolas Sarkozy established the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress to “identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress”. The report, also known as the Stiglitz commission report, found that GDP was inefficient alone to measure economic and social progress, but that measures of sustainability and human
well-being should be included. Economic growth often did not consider damages to society or the environment. (Stiglitz et al, 7) (Jolly) The report emphasized that well-being is important because “there appears to be an increasing gap between the information contained in aggregate GDP data and what counts for common people’s well-being, saying also that well being “should be put in a context of sustainability”. (Stiglitz et al, 12)

In addition, the Stiglitz report offered ways to improve measures of economic performance, by suggesting ways to measure the quality of the output, not just quantity. According to the report, increasing output is more a “matter of an increase in the quality of goods produced and consumed than in the quantity,” and is vital to measuring material wellbeing in numbers of real income and consumption. (Stiglitz et al, 11)

2.2 Freedom as a Measure of Sustainable Human Development

2.2.1 Defining Development—What are the Goals of Development?

In general, modernization and economic development do improve lives by increasing incomes, or increasing opportunities available to earn income, or making vital public services more widely available—such as education, health, and transportation services—all of which are also “avenues for improving the well-being of girls and women and increasing gender equality”. (World Bank 2001, 181) In addition, experience bears out that most “successful” societies have undergone elements of modernization, leading to improved statistics (such as increased longevity) and that in some regards “rising incomes lead to rising contentment”. (Rapley, 192)

Modernization born out in traditional development programming has also, at times, been destructive to individual liberties, traditional societies and natural
environments (Rapley, 187), while showing strong inclination to distribute wealth unequally. (Peet & Hartwick, 2) In addition, modernization’s often singular focus on economic data may not take into consideration individual concern for well-being, such as the productivity factors of unpaid female labor, or decreases in living standards due to longer working hours, environmental destruction, or decreases in personal freedom due to the state’s ability to monitor citizens’ lives through collection of taxes. (Rapley, 188)

Sen highlights the limitations of focusing on economic growth as the main measure of development by pointing out what he sees as the current development problem of a globalized world—an “unprecedented opulence” in wealth and material goods, existing at the same time with “remarkable deprivation” seen by persistent poverty, unmet basic needs, wide-spread hunger, and “violation of elementary political freedoms,…basic liberties, (and) extensive neglect of the interests and agency of women”. (Sen 2000, xi) This is particularly incongruous when one considers countries “with high per capita incomes can have astonishingly low achievements in the quality of life while countries with relatively low per capita incomes can perform well on various wellbeing indicators”. (Prendergast, 39)

As Sen points out, his list of “deprivations” can be seen in both rich and poor countries. (Sen 2000, xi) This seeming “paradox” of rising global wealth coupled with persistence of economic, social, and political “deprivation” brings the question: what are (and should be) the goals of sustainable human development?

In light of the limitations of economic growth, one must consider “development” as being different from “growth,” since a modern concept of development should “(spring) from the most optimistic moment of the modern rational belief” in the pursuit of
an individual’s wellbeing, freedom, and participation, while growth is more “practical, technological” and often unconcerned with distributing the gains of development equally. (Peet & Hartwick, 2-3) Economic growth must then be considered as only an **intermediate** goal of development, whose importance “is contingent on what it contributes to human lives.” (Pendergast, 2004, 39; Sen, 1990, 3, 42) The process of sustainable human development should be considered as the search to “create the conditions for every person on this earth to have a life free of hunger and want, to be able to be educated, have decent shelter and work, access to health services, and the genuine freedom to choose to live lives which they value”. (Clark 2012)

“Development” then, can be defined as a “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy,” whose main goal is freedom—economic freedoms such as to clothe yourself and to satisfy hunger, but also the individual freedom to “participate in the social, political, and economic life of the community.” (Sen 2000, 3-5)

From this point of view, one sees that “…development analysis is relevant even for richer countries”. This is especially true since the development of subgroups within “rich” countries (such as “women” in oil-rich middle eastern societies or “African Americans” in the U.S.) often contrasts with the development of other subgroups (such as “men” or “whites”), and an understanding of how and why these contrasts occur can be an “important aspect of the understanding of development and underdevelopment”. (Sen 2000, 6)

This is a re-thinking of development theory, where one does not “throw the baby out with the bath water” as post-development’s rejection of modernism (and of development itself) has sometimes done. Rather, modernism is maintained, but put in its
proper place of importance, that of being integral to economic and social development, but considered inefficient without the elements of individual freedom and capability, and not the primary goal of sustainable development.

2.2.2 Freedom as a Driver of Development—Capability, Agency and Participation

Interestingly, freedom is not only the main goal of development, but also “an engine for development” which expands the capabilities of people to “lead the kind of lives they value”. (Sen 2000, 18) These “capabilities” are expressed in the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that the recognition of the equal rights of all human beings is the “foundation of freedom” in the world, in which “freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want” are the “highest aspiration(s) of the common people”. (UN 1948, 1)

This research views capability much in the way Martha Nussbaum does, as an “underpinning for an account of basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires”. (Nussbaum, 5) Human capabilities, according to Nussbaum, are “what people are actually able to do and to be—in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being”. She argues that capabilities “should be pursued for each and every person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others”. Throughout history, women have been often treated as the supporters of “the ends of others” and not as autonomous “ends in their own right”. (Nussbaum, 5)

In relation to women, “capability,” or the removal of barriers to individual freedoms, leads to the improvement of economic and social indicators, as women are
allowed the ability to participate in (for example) improving political representation statistics by voting or running for office, improving educational attainment statistics by attending school, or increasing LFP rates by entering the labor force. In addition, political freedom gives women the “liberty to participate in …the making of public decisions that impel the progress of…opportunities.” (Sen 2000, 5) In other words, freedom is both an improvement and a force to drive improvement, in women’s (and society’s) living standards.

In this context, freedom must be considered not only as the capability or the lack of interference in pursuing individual improvement, but also as agency, or an individual’s ability to act and bring about change (according to ones values and goals) “as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions”. (Sen, 2000, 19) A great deal of an individual’s success in attaining improvement in living standards rests on whether or not society allows and supports the exercise of personal rights, such as “the capacity for taking part in creating their own livelihoods, governing their own affairs and participating in self-government”. (Peet & Hartwick 2009, 3)

Traditionally, when development has turned “gender-sensitive”, it has concentrated on the “wellbeing” aspects of development to achieve better and equal treatment for women. However, in focusing on women’s participation in the workforce and society, the term “agency” is considered as a contrast to “well-being,” meaning that women are not only a “passive recipient of welfare-enhancing help” (although also an important part of development) but also an “active agent” of change for herself and her community. (Sen 2000, 189)
However, in view of the above definitions of freedom, this research recognizes that concepts of “freedom” vary across regions, cultures and communities. In addition, the degree of freedom an individual enjoys in a specific realm (for example property rights versus marriage rights) differs according to cultural, political, social, and economic circumstances within the wider society in which the individual lives. In other words, the wider society defines the circumstances that shape the level of freedom an individual enjoys. It is for this reason research will seek a basic understanding of the Kuwaiti woman’s interactions in society and her experiences, definitions, and perceptions of freedom within a cultural context, as a foundation to inform data analysis.

2.2.3 Freedom as an Outcome of Development: Agency Increases Agency

In the same way that improving a woman’s freedom and agency to enter the workforce can improve the health of a country, more women in the workforce can increase agency for women. The act of working in a social location increases a woman’s activity in the social processes and change of a society, making her an actor or agent in improving her own welfare. (Sen 2000, 189) The results can be more economic freedom for women, but also the possibility of increased national and household bargaining power, a voice in community decision-making, political influence and an enhanced social identity, (WDR 2013, 12-15; Ross, 110) and perhaps even change society’s concept of women’s roles and status. This is an example of freedom as both a driver of, and outcome of development.

Low female labor force participation may even be at the root of the persistence of cultural discrimination and patriarchy. According to basic (liberalist) feminist theory, legal and traditional constraints block women's entrance to and success in society,
therefore ensuring their subordination. Because society promotes the belief that women are less intellectually and physically able than men, women are excluded from education, politics, and the market place and as a result, do not reach their “true” potential. Women should be given, liberal feminists argue, the same opportunities and rights of men to succeed. However, radical feminists believe that equal opportunities are not enough, since “the patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition”, and patriarchy's legal, political, and social structures (including family and church) must first be overturned, uprooted, and recreated in order for women to succeed. (Tong, 2)

In this vein of thought, Ross (2008) demonstrates an inverse relationship between labor force participation and the strength of patriarchal structures. His study shows low female LFP reduces female influence in politics and decision-making, and “patriarchal institutions…go unchallenged”. (Ross, 107, 110, 120) On the other hand, women’s formal LFP nurtures women’s participation in society and creates a “new social and political constituency” of empowered women who may question patriarchal political and economic structures and gender relations. (Spierings et al., 505)

### 2.2.4 Why the Freedom of Women is Important to the Sustainable Development of a Country

Protecting and promoting female capability and agency in all aspects of society is vital to the overall economic and social development of the wider society. While gender inequalities and female lack of participation in education, finance, labor or politics directly hurts women and girls, the “full costs…ultimately harm everyone” in the wider society, and hinder a country’s future and sustainable development. (World Bank 2001,
Number 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set forth by the United Nations in 2000 is to “promote gender equality and empower women.” (UN 2013, 18) The World Bank links all the MDG goals (which range from eradication of poverty and hunger to promotion of global partnerships for development) to a strong focus on gender equality, stating that “a gender equality perspective will facilitate attaining the goals—gender equality is important not only as a goal in itself, but also as a path towards achieving the other goals”. (World Bank 2003, 1) In the same way, Sen argues “nothing is as important today in the political economy of development”, as a recognition and promotion of the agency, participation, and leadership of women. (Sen 2000, 203)

Extensive development research shows that a country that does not encourage full female participation in society will not reach full economic or social development in the wider society. (World Bank 2001, 2003; UN 2013; UNDP; Sen; Kristof; Nussbaum, etc.) However, a country that supports and promotes women’s engagement in society helps “raise economic productivity, …contributes to improved health and nutrition, (and) increases the chances of education (and overall wellbeing) for the next generation”. (Kristof, xx) (Sen, 193-199) Research on women’s agency and participation in India suggests that variables that relate to women’s agency, such as literacy, education, and labor force participation, are often more important in “promoting social well-being,” such as child survival and lower fertility rates, than variables “relating to the general level of opulence in the society”. (Sen 1999, 195-198)

In relation to the labor market, jobs are the “cornerstone of economic and social development” and any modernizing economy encourages both men and women to be
productive within the labor market. (WDR 2013, 2) Jobs help create and maintain sustainable economies through earnings and employment opportunities for individuals. These individuals in turn generate “output,” increasing society’s living standards (WDR 2013, 15) and decreasing an individual’s potential burden on society. In addition, a country’s “rejection of the freedom to participate in the labor market is one of the ways of keeping people in bondage and captivity” and “…the freedom to enter markets can itself be a significant contribution to development”. (Sen 2000, 7)

In light of this, in the pursuit of sustainable development, protecting the participation of women in the labor force makes sense, since in most countries roughly one-half of the population (and therefore one-half of the potential labor force) is female.\(^2\) A country that does not use its female population to its full advantage in the labor force will not reap full production or income-earning potential.

The following conceptual model demonstrates freedom (capability and agency) as an engine to drive development in the context of female labor force participation, and freedom as an outcome of the development of both women and society.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Freedom (capability + Agency) is a driver and an outcome of development for both women and society:

2.3 Labor Market Theory—Equilibrium and Segmentation

This research also considers the feasibility of sustainable development in Kuwait within the context of Kuwait’s labor market and a classic labor market model, which assumes a “perfect” labor market driven by the forces of supply and demand. In this consideration, it is assumed that according to basic (positive) economic theory, economic forces are always operative to “coordinate individual actions and allocate scarce resources” and the “invisible hand” drives the market toward equilibrium as dictated by the pressures of supply and demand. (Colander 1998, 12-17)

However, social forces can prevent market forces from operating freely to create competition and equilibrium in the labor market. Political, legal, historical, and social forces often combine to influence economic institutions to operate in ways different than
how economic theory predicts. (Colander 1998, 17) As discussed in Chapter 1, Kuwait is a rent economy, almost fully dependent on oil income (96% of budget revenues) and not on the production of goods and services. A main characteristic of Kuwait’s economy is that oil income is distributed to citizens by the public sector, where the majority of citizens work. Therefore it is assumed that the supply and demand of labor or goods and services in Kuwait do not fully operate according to the classical market model.

Moreover, this research considers that labor markets are imperfect, and “not like ordinary commodity markets and do not equilibrate in a textbook ‘market-clearing’ way…but are a special market form, consisting of complex social relations and institutional arrangements”. (Martin, 461-2) Kuwait’s labor market is considered within the context of its high population of migrant labor. The high concentration of foreign labor in Kuwait’s private sector, in addition to high quantities of citizenship labor in the public sector, implies problems in labor market integration.

Labor market segmentation theory argues a “dual split between primary (or independent) and secondary (or subordinate) segments”, where both exist side-by-side and function relatively independently. (Bauder 2001, 38) Divisions between segments may include differences in types of labor, wages, productivity, stability of earnings, and vulnerability to macroeconomic fluctuations. (Campbell, Box 1, 2) Furthermore, study shows that external characteristics and internal perceptions of cultural differences both relate to labor market segmentation. (Bauder 2001, 41)

In addition, the existence of asymmetric information in the labor market, a “natural consequence” of skilled and non-skilled migrant labor in rich countries, further contributes to market segmentation. (Kar & Saha 2011, 27) Asymmetric information in
this context may be described as an employer’s lack of knowledge of “the productivity levels of potential employees” due to the migrant labor force’s inability to rely on their home countries’ information structures for networking or proof of productivity or skill. In addition, ethnic segmentation within Kuwaiti society inhibits the exchange of labor information. (Kar & Saha 2011, 2) Asymmetric information can also come in the form of gender bias or social concepts of gender roles. The implications of imperfect markets, market segmentation and asymmetric information in Kuwait will be discussed in Chapter 13, Conclusions and Recommendations.
Chapter 3 Background on Research: Literature Review

The following literature review entitled “The Main Drivers of the Status, Freedoms, and Rights of Muslim Women Living in Islamic Societies” was done to discover gaps in scientific research and to avoid duplication of ideas or research already discussed in the literature.

3.1 Literature Review: The Main Drivers of the Status, Freedoms, and Rights of Muslim Women Living in Islamic Societies

Although the state of Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy, proponents of Islam within both religious and political bodies have had great influence over state, family, and society development in Kuwait. In addition, The Kuwaiti constitution declares Islam as the main official religion of Kuwait, which is considered along with Islamic sharia law as the main sources of Kuwait Laws and Legislations. (KGO) Kuwait is a Muslim majority country, in which 74.1% (2010) of the population, including immigrants, is Muslim. (Pew 2012, 47) In order to analyze the status of Kuwaiti women and better understand the freedoms held by them, it is necessary to view their freedoms within the broader context of the freedom of women living in Muslim societies around the world.

In almost all modern Muslim societies, sharia laws prevail. Sharia law is Islamic religious law purportedly based on the Quran, community consensus, and the teachings and practices of the prophet Mohammed. Sharia law influences legal codes in most Muslim countries, and is often used to interpret personal status and criminal law. In
addition, sharia is used to guide family, religion, and all aspects of Muslim life. (Jonhson & Vriens)

Many laws under sharia are considered contradictory to human rights and gender equality as defined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares equality and “freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want” as the “highest aspiration(s) of the common people”. (Othman, 339-4) (UN 1948, 1) In addition, sharia law tends to place “external controls on individuals and socioeconomic structures.” (Shaheed, 1000) In regard to women, sharia law influences society to place restrictions on women’s rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, and freedom of mobility. (Coleman, 52-53) Sharia also places an emphasis on restricting women to private life and barring them from the public spheres of working outside the home or taking part in politics. (Johnson & Vriens)

However, the degree to which sharia is adhered varies from society to society. Restrictions on human rights vary across the Muslim world according to the community (and its religious institutions) interpretation of Islamic texts, and the degree to which it holds to conservative codes of conduct. For example, codified laws in different Muslim societies vary greatly in the interpretation of a woman’s marriage rights (the right to freely decide to marry), her right to initiate divorce, and her obligation to obey her husband. (al-Hibri, 7-13) (See also Section 3ci)

The concept of “freedom” in Muslim societies also varies across regions, cultures and communities. In addition, the degree of freedom an individual enjoys in a specific realm (for example property or marriage rights) differs according to cultural, political, social, and economic circumstances within the wider society in which the individual
lives. In other words, the wider society defines the circumstances that shape the level of freedom an individual enjoys. This chapter presents a summary of the main drivers of the status, freedoms, and rights of Muslim women living in both Muslim majority and minority countries. This literature review will identify the key circumstances within Muslim majority and minority societies that drive women’s status, and briefly consider the major differences between drivers within Muslim majority and minority countries.

### 3.2. Background on Muslim Populations

Muslims represent 23% of the world’s population, or 1.6 billion people. Contrary to popular western belief that most Muslims live in the Middle East, the majority of the world’s Muslim’s (61.7%) actually live in the Asia-Pacific region. (2010) (PEW 2012, 21)

Approximately 1.3 billion people, or eighty percent of the world’s Muslims live in countries where the majority population is Muslim. (PEW 2009, 7) There are forty-nine Muslim majority countries in the world (PEW 2012, 23), many of which are concentrated in the Middle East North African region. In the MENA region, the populations of 17 out of 20 countries are more than 75% Muslim. (PEW 2009, 8) The top eight Muslim majority countries (where Muslims are 87 to 99.9% of the population) are Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco. (2010) (PEW 2012, 21)

In this review, it is important to also consider Muslim women living in Muslim minority countries because of the largeness of their absolute numbers. Twenty percent of Muslims, or 317 million people, live in Muslim minority countries. (PEW 2009, 7) The top five countries with the highest number of Muslim minority populations are India,
Ethiopia, China, Russia, and Tanzania. For example, India has a Muslim population of 14.4%. However, this small percentage accounts for more than 176 million people and the third largest population of Muslims world-wide. (2012) (PEW 2012, 22)

However, in spite of the large number of women living in Muslim minority countries, these women are rarely specifically referred to in literature concerning Muslim women’s rights, which instead focuses on Muslim majority countries (of mainly low to middle income). This lack of attention to the condition of Muslim women in Muslim minority countries makes placing them on a “spectrum” of Muslim women’s freedom a challenge.

3.3 The Spectrum of Muslim Women’s Freedom

In order to understand the differences and levels of freedom within and between societies, one may begin to conceptualize a spectrum of Muslim societies where each country is placed along the spectrum according to the amount of freedom it offers to women. In general, there are wide variations pertaining to women’s freedoms between Islamic societies, most generally based on which Islamic school of jurisprudence it adheres to most strongly (reflected in its interpretation of shari’a law), its culture, history, and economic development, as well as its social, state, and religious institutions.

At the “conservative” end of the spectrum (less freedom), one might place the countries of Saudi Arabia and Iran. In Iran, the Islamic clergy are the ultimate authority (Aslam and Kazi, 12) and laws discriminate against women in public and private life. In Saudi Arabia, the treatment of women has been referred to as “gender apartheid” and the discrimination against women as “pervasive”. (Aslam & Kazmi, 12) (Afary, 111)
For example legal, economic, and social institutions in Saudi Arabia claim that according to sharia law, women’s roles are in the home. Although women in Saudi Arabia make up 70% of university enrollment, they are only 5% of the workforce—the lowest proportion in the world. (Aslam & Kazmi, 12) In addition, women have unequal legal status and are not permitted to drive. There are no women in government, no women’s rights organizations, and no changes in the treatment of women since Saudi Arabia participated in the ratification of the international 2000 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (Afary, 112)

At the other end of the freedom spectrum, Turkey is considered, “…one of the most liberal Muslim nations on women’s rights with Malaysia, Tunisia, and Indonesia not far behind.” Turkey is different from most Islamic majority countries, in that it has a secular constitution, and its laws are not based on the Qur’an. Turkey’s civil code was reformed in 2001 helping to improve women’s education and economic opportunities and declaring women equal in marriage status and rights. In addition, the Reform Law (which was accepted by conservative, nationalist, and religious political groups) provides community property with a 50/50 split for divorce. (Aslam & Kazmi, 11) However, under Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, who was voted in for a third term in 2011, woman’s status in Turkey is in jeopardy. Not only has Erdogan closed his eyes on violence against women and female “honor” killings in Turkey, but he also has been quoted as saying “I don’t believe in equality between men and women” and encouraging women to have “at least three, preferably five, children”. (Steinvorth)

In relation to other Arab women, Kuwaiti women might be placed on the freedom spectrum somewhere in the middle, and perhaps slightly to the right of middle, towards
Saudi Arabia. Although Kuwaiti women are often considered more “empowered” than other Arab women, lacks in Kuwaiti women’s freedom may be masked by high educational attainment, wealth, and by higher levels of freedom in the overall Kuwaiti society, as reported by international organizations. (See Section IV C 3 b: Status and Freedom of Kuwaiti Women: Citizenship and Equality in the State, p. 50) In addition, Kuwaiti women were considered to be achieving greater empowerment during the 1960s, before the Islamist movement influenced Kuwaiti parliament. (See Section IV C 3 c: Trend of Conservative Suppression of Women’s Rights, p. 51)

3.4 Five Main Drivers of the Status, Freedoms, and Rights of Muslim Women Living in Muslim Societies

Five main drivers of Muslim women’s status, freedoms, and rights in Muslim societies are identified in the literature. These are: a history of patriarchal Arab culture and tradition, state Islamization, the rise of Islamist movements, deviations in the interpretation and practice of Islam with respect to women, and the use of women’s rights by the state and political groups to gain power.

3.4.1 Deviations in Interpretation and Practice of Islam with Respect to Women

Although legal, religious, and community institutions in Muslim societies purportedly base patriarchal belief and practice in the fundaments of Islam, many researchers of Muslim women’s rights, and members of “Feminist Islam” groups, believe Islam actually gives equal rights to women. Their view is patriarchal interpretations of Islam are incorrect, and a misrepresentation of Islam. In addition, they believe many Muslims deviate from the practice of the true “ideals of Islam”, and allow their practice
to be influenced by a syncretistic combining of Islam, tradition and culture rather than Islam’s actual writings and intent. (al-Hibri, 1-4, 38-43) (Ahmad, 43, 56, 61)

Those who support a feminist sensitive interpretation of Islam believe Islamic societies’ current teachings are contrary to the Quran, and women in Muslim societies “often face discrimination contrary to the rights Islam guarantees to all women”. (Ahmad, 54) For example, when first established, Islam gave women “certain rights” to (a religious) education, to choose whether to marry, to manage their own property, and to receive their dead husband’s estate. In addition, under Islam’s original teachings and practice, women are “entitled to intellectual, physical and emotional fulfillment, …have the right to participate actively in society,” and are protected by the Quran from being treated as slaves. (Ahmad, 50, 53, 56) Feminist interpretations of Islam also show that Islamic history portrays women as being active within politics and religion, and never as confined to their homes. However, society ignores this history. (Ahmad, 55-6)

This “deviat(ion) from the ideals of Islam in respect to women” (Ahmad, 61) is attributed to patriarchal social norms, which have over time, infiltrated religious bodies and organizations to combine with a lack of education and ignorance, and lower women’s status in contemporary Muslim societies. (Aslam & Kazmi, 10) Ahmad (2012) states that within Muslim societies, “…social attitudes can be so pervasive as to affect even progressive religious writings, leading them to be interpreted in a way that reflects prevailing attitudes”. (42) As a result, women’s rights, as revealed to the prophet Mohammad, were “subverted by patriarchal society” and Muslims are “no longer aware” of the religious component, or of the “true” interpretation of Islam. (Ahmad, 42) (al-Hibri, 5)
Proponents of feminist-sensitive interpretations state that almost all Muslim societies have deviated (in varying degrees) from the true identity given to women in Islam, saying there is a “wide gap between what Muslims are supposed to believe in and what they actually practice.” In fact, social and political influences are often stronger than the importance given to the teachings of the Quran, which is often interpreted to suit socio-political conditions. For example, female infanticide, which is prohibited by Islam, occurs commonly in some Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. Other examples are underage marriage, domestic violence, unprosecuted acid attacks, and honor killings. (Ahmad, 62-3)

The social movement of “Feminist Islam” is promoting the improvement of the economic and social status of women within the Middle East, within a framework of respect and adherence to a gender-equal interpretation of Islam. (Tetreault (2001), 211-212) (Coleman, 33-35) This movement is rising up within many Islamic societies, spreading the idea that Islamic texts promote women, and supporting a gendered re-interpretation of Islam to “re-imagine women’s nature and their social roles to recognize them as autonomous human beings as well as members of society”. (Tetreault 2001, 211-212) (Afrey, 123) (Coleman, 33-35) (Rinaldo, 424) For example, in Kuwait, Islamic feminists are speaking out in public in support of female independence within an Islamic framework, to achieve a “female model of Islamic society”. (Tetreault 2001, 211)

3.4.2 History of Patriarchal Culture and the Continuance of Traditional Norms

Most literature since the early 1990s concerning the rights of Muslim women looks beyond the ubiquitous (deemed western) view that Islam is to blame for women’s
subordination and low status in Muslim societies. One view separates the concepts of “religion” or “Islam” from the strong influence of culture on women’s status.

3.4.2.1 Arab Culture

Although countries of Islamic religious tradition throughout the world are more likely than other countries to oppress the rights of women, quantitative studies suggest the effect is “much stronger and more consistent” for countries of Arab history and culture. (Donno & Russett, 583)

Arab culture was greatly influenced by the Byzantine and Persian empires, both of which developed and existed within the “firm grip of Patriarchy”. (al-Hibri, 5) Social and political society in Arabia, before Islam was spread, was organized by membership in tribes and clans and dominated by patriarchal leaders. Arabian tribal leaders built relationships and alliances with other families by marrying many wives. Women were treated as possessions, enslaved, dominated for sexual pleasure, and even inherited as possessions. (Ahmad, 49-50)

Many believe then, that it was not Islam that reduced the status of women in Muslim societies, but rather strong historical and cultural ties to patriarchy, which continued to strengthen over centuries, leading to persistent discrimination today. According to several researchers, during the lifetime of the Islamic prophet Mohammad, women in Muslim societies were businesswomen, jurists, religious leaders, and warriors. The higher status, better conditions, and greater freedom women enjoyed during this time are thought to contrast greatly with the inequality and lower conditions of women in modern-day Muslim societies. (al-Hibri, 5)
Strong Arab, patriarchal culture led to the establishment of today’s religious and traditional norms that “inform social policy on the status of Muslim women in a conservative way” and support discriminatory policy practices. These discriminatory practices are broadly reflected in the negligent non-enforcement of already existing women’s rights, and the setbacks in progress made in women’s rights, due to the resurgence of Political Islam in the world around the 1970s. (Abusharaf, 715)

3.4.2.2 Non-Arab Islamic Culture

Turkey is an example of a non-Arabic Islamic culture. Although considered a more liberal Muslim country, Turkey ranks second to the bottom for gender equality among the world’s upper-middle income countries. (World Bank 2011) Although Turkey’s female health and education statistics are rapidly improving, social norms supporting traditional household roles for women create “considerable” gender inequality in the categories of women’s economic participation, economic opportunity, and political empowerment. (World Bank 2012a, 4) The persistence of traditional gender roles prevent women from benefiting from legal rights and opportunities that already exist, and supports the persistence of violence against women, honor killings, and forced marriages (14% of marriages are child marriages where one spouse is underage). (World Bank 2012a, 8)

3.4.2.3 Middle Eastern Oil-Economies and Cultural Tradition

Ross (2008) bases a quantitative study on the belief that oil-based economies in the Middle East are at the root of religious, social, and economic patriarchal forces that decrease the status of women in modern middle-eastern countries. However, Ross (2008)
summarizes his findings by stating that the underlying cause is a “cultural tradition of occupational segregation”. (120)

Ross’ explanation is this: in developing countries, women are often excluded from most of construction and formal retail sectors, and are largely employed in trade sectors in low-wage agricultural and factory exporting jobs. (Ross, 110) New oil production and wealth produces an economic condition in these countries called “Dutch Disease,” which moves the economy away from the trade sectors of agriculture and manufacturing to the non-trade sectors of construction and services. Demand for construction and service jobs boosts male labor force participation (LFP) and decreases the demand for female labor, due to the practice of occupational segregation of women from the construction and service sectors. Also, due to higher government transfers and higher wages for men, women have less incentive to work outside the home. Decreased supply of female labor and decreased demand for labor in the trade sectors (where women mainly work) results in overall lower female LFP. (Ross, 110)

3.4.3 State Islamization: Government Religious Institutions and Islamic Legal Framework

Quantitative studies suggest the incorporation of Islam into state processes and policies (called state Islamization) negatively affects gender equality in Muslim economies. (Spierings et al., 507, 503) Although state Islamization reported no negative effect on women’s absolute labor force participation in a modernizing economy, it does

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1 Oil wealth tends to produce an economic condition called “Dutch Disease” and oil production crowds out the production of other traded goods. Dutch disease occurs when new oil wealth increases a country’s real exchange rate, making it cheaper for locals to import tradable goods rather than buy them domestically and increasing the demand domestically for non-tradable goods in construction and retail services. The economy then moves away from the “traded sectors” of agriculture and manufacturing to the non-traded sectors of construction and services. (Ross, 109)
have a negative effect on female labor force participation relative to males, varying according to the degree to which Islam is integrated into the state structure.

In other words, economic development does have a positive effect on women’s labor force participation, but economic growth alone cannot reduce gender equality in states influenced by Islamization. The negative effect on relative female LFP comes indirectly through the level to which state Islamization influences practical democracy or political opportunity structures. (Spierings et al, 504, 517) Practical democracy (which refers to the full and equal participation of people in the practice of democratic processes such as voting or running for office) is central to gender equality in labor force participation, and has a positive effect. Political opportunity structures offer women the ability to be represented in political decision-making, and the opportunity to act as agents to oppose patriarchal systems through participation in elections. (Spierings et al., 503-4, 507, 518)

3.4.3.1 The Influence of Religious Institutions in State and Society

Within Muslim societies, “traditional institutional frameworks” often lead to “contradictory social and policy practices” regarding the roles and rights of Muslim women. Improvements in women’s social development (such as in the areas of education, health, legal rights, employment) in conjunction with the overall economic growth of a country does lead to an increase in the economic participation and condition of women in developing countries. However, if the institutional framework of a country limits women from participating in economic activities through discriminatory practice or law, these improvements are not sufficient in themselves to create sustained progress in women’s rights or development. (Abusharaf, 716-7)
Religious Institutions in many Muslim societies are a powerful part of the traditional institutional framework, and have great influence over both state and society. Government religious institutions, also called Islamic law jurists (called *ulama*, and in most societies considered a higher authority than an *imam*), guide the state on the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, and advise the state on whether social policies and laws comply with Islamic principles. When social policies are formed within the government, the views of religious institutions are favored. In addition, their power and influence extends to the public where they offer personal spiritual guidance, teach society how to understand and interpret Islam, and apply its principles to their lives (Abusharaf, 71-8) An example is the religious police in Saudi Arabia, called the Office for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. This is a government-funded organization that abuses women who do not adhere to traditional dress code or who appear in public with male non-relatives. (Afary, 112)

Because these jurists “infuse politics with religious legitimacy” and their opinions are highly regarded in terms of social order and women’s roles and rights, they strongly influence the development and protection of women. (Abusharaf, 717-8) Unfortunately for the rights and status of women, “patriarchal reasoning and culture has influenced Islamic jurisprudence for centuries”. (al-Hibri, 42-43) The prevailing interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and gender equality is founded on a medieval culture of patriarchy and justified by an interpretation of Islam that regards women as biologically and psychologically limited, as having different roles in society than males, and as (a consequence) subordinate to men. (Barlow & Akbarzadesh, 23)

3.4.3.2 The Presence of Legal Frameworks based on Islam and Patriarchy
Beyond the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence regarding women’s inequality, Muslim women are explicitly discriminated against by the existence of state laws and regulations integral to legal frameworks within many Muslim societies. In Iran, some laws, which are tied to strict religious doctrine, discriminate against women based solely on their gender. For example, the religious tradition “quessas”, entrenched in Iranian law, values a woman’s life at half that of a man’s. Therefore a woman’s life is considered half as valuable as a man’s in murder cases and in court a woman’s legal testimony is valued at half that of a man’s and sometimes considered of no value unless corroborated by a male testimony. (Barlow & Akbarzadesh, 23, 40) In Kuwait, women are not granted the same rights as men in social welfare, inheritance, marriage or divorce. In addition, a Kuwait woman cannot pass her nationality to a foreign-born spouse or to their children. (Afary, 109)

In almost all modern Muslim societies, sharia laws prevail, most of which are contradictory to human rights and gender equality as defined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (Othman, 339-4) (UN 1948, 1) The existence and preeminence of these laws has justified the non-enforcement of already existing gender-equal laws or policies, and legitimizes customary practices of gender discrimination within societies. (Abusharaf, 718)

However, restrictions on human rights vary across the Muslim world according to the community (and its religious institutions) interpretation of Islamic texts, and the degree to which it holds to conservative codes of conduct. For example, codified laws in different Muslim societies vary greatly in the interpretation of a woman’s marriage rights
(the right to freely decide to marry), her right to initiate divorce, and her obligation to obey her husband. (al-Hibri, 7-13)

Varying interpretations of sharia law are based on the views of the four main Islamic jurisprudential schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, and Hanbali. (Abusharaf, 718) These schools influence the level of protection a Muslim community will offer to women’s roles and rights, shaping policies, national law, and society in differing ways.

Syria, Egypt, and Jordan adhere to the Hanafi School of jurisprudence. In Sudan and Algeria, family codes are derived from both Hanafi and Maliki schools. Morocco, Algeria, and Kuwait also adhere to Maliki codes. (al-Habri, 7) As compared to other schools, Maliki school interpretations of codes are moderate. For example under the Maliki code, 18 is the required marrying age for girls and boys but in Tanzania, where most Muslims are of the Shafi school and are considered more conservative, the required marrying age is only 15 years old. (Abusharaf, 717-8)

In many Muslim majority countries, such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Morocco, Turkey, Kuwait and Iran, constitutional law guarantees citizenship equality in theory. In practice, however, equality is often not enforced, either legally or with public resources, and civil codes and courts specifically discriminate against women’s property rights and economic participation.

In Turkey since 2001, new civil codes and other legal reforms have eliminated many discriminatory practices such as discrimination against a woman’s land ownership; however Turkey still lacks the legal (and other societal and state) structures to fully enforce the new laws. Although during the past ten years Turkey has restructured the legal system to “transform discriminatory social traditions and values,” strong traditional
patriarchal practice still influences women’s rights. Although a constitutionally secular country, women’s rights are used as “a political pawn between religious and secular extremism”. (Aslam and Kazmi, 11-13)

3.4.4 The Rise of Political Islamist Movements: Retrogression, Islamization, and Cultural Authenticity

Since 1960s and 70s, the rise of political Islamist movements within Africa, Central Eurasia, South Asia and the Middle East has had a “particularly discriminatory and oppressive impact on women” as they espouse (patriarchal interpretations of) Islam as a political ideology and the source of law and public policy. (Afary 109) (Othman, 339)

Although sharing a common patriarchal concept of gender roles, rights and female sexuality and the belief that “Islam is the solution” to the problems of present-day society, Islamist movements vary according to their missions and extremity in belief and action. (Othman, 339, 341) However the laws, policies, administrative measures, and restrictions set forth by Islamists promote unequal access to legal justice and “militate against women’s autonomy and self-actualization”. In some societies, these laws have been “retrogressive” in comparison to already existing laws, which provided for more female equality. (Shaheed, 999) (Othman, 339-4)

In general, within the movement, both state and non-state actors use Islam to justify women’s oppression and discrimination by referring to Islam’s authenticity, age, and social viability. The result has been increased Islamization in most Muslim societies, and the institutionalization of gender inequality through legislation and the enforcement of Shariah law. (Shaheed, 999)
Political Islam movements have been viewed as a response against western culture, power, and “imperialist intervention in the Muslim world”. (Salime, 200) Islamist movements have often arisen in former colonies of the west (or in societies with colonial relationships with the west), which reject the “western model of modernity”. (Rozario, 368-9)

In order to gain power in these societies, Islamists label liberal and progressive stances on women’s rights as “western,” “immoral,” or dangerous, and not an authentic part of Muslim identity. (Hussain, 325) (Afary, 125) As a result, women’s rights are in the middle of the struggle for political power between traditionalists and moderates and their conflicting views about how to preserve societal identity in the development of modern Muslim countries. To political Islamists, the denial of “Muslim women’s citizenship rights is also perceived as a proximate effect of ‘cultural authenticity,’ and tends “to inform social policy on the status of Muslim women in a conservative way”. (Abusharaf, 715)

Many Islamists commonly seek to control women’s bodies, social roles, movements and sexuality to establish a “pure” Islamic society and state based on “authentic Islamic values”. (Othman, 341) Widespread throughout the Muslim world, Islamist discourse promotes the concept that women are inferior to men, must be cared for by men (including in their morality and chastity), and therefore must be obedient to male authority. These discourses are promoted by public rhetoric, policy formation, media, public education programs, and organized by state and non-state religious authorities. (Othman, 342)

3.4.4.1 Regional Examples
After the rise of political Islam, many governments in Muslim countries, even those secular leaning or less conservative, responded by adopting more “retrogressive” laws that discriminate against women and by implementing sharia’ah law. (Othman, 339-4)

After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Islam became the foremost political ideology of Iran and shari’ah law was implemented as the law of the state. (Kian-Thebaut, 57-8) Following the belief that “the West and its model is evil,” women in the state’s administrative system were dismissed from their positions and encouraged to keep traditional roles of wife and mother within the home. (Kian, 75, 77) A series of retrogressive laws concerning women’s public and private life discriminated against women in marriage, divorce, child custody, mode of dressing, and travel. (Afary, 118)

Islamic movements created an Islamic state in Sudan and formed states based on sharia in Nigeria in the 1990s. Whereas society in Sudan had been more lenient toward the punishment of women in violation of laws regarding marriage or sex, Islamists replaced this with harsh, intolerant interpretations of Malaki Islamic law. (Afary, 110) Likewise, in Pakistan, Islamist movements have led to high rates of violence against women (90% domestic violence rates), and increases in honor killings, despite the leadership roles of women and feminist organizations. (Afary, 111)

Between 1981 and 2003, Malaysia underwent an Islamization agenda implemented with economic development policies. (Othman, 341) As a result of Islamic movements, Malayan cultural identity is gradually being replaced with political versions of “Arabised” culture practice and codes. Whereas it is believed that classical Islamic
jurisprudence allows cultural diversity in interpreting Islamic principles, contemporary
Islamist movements “promote an Arabic version as the preferred or ‘truly Islamic’ rule”.
(Othman, 343)

Today in Kuwait, the most “vociferous” opposition to women’s rights comes from
Islamic groups. Women’s rights, which Islamists still associate with Westernization and
secularization, have become the “battle ground on which Islamists challenge the
legitimacy of the liberal political groups”. (al-Mughni 2001, 178)

Although Kuwaiti women achieved increased levels of education, employment
opportunity and social expansion during the 1960s to 1980s, the Islamist movement,
which began to gain strength in Kuwait in the 1980s, was successful in halting aspects of
progress for women and ultimately the development of the country. (Tetreault 2001, 204,
209) During the revival, Islamists rose up against the Kuwaiti woman’s right to work
outside of the home. The Islamic movement in Kuwait, in fact, was thought to be a
countermove against the social effects of westernization and modernization in the
Kuwaiti society, with the main intention of “restoring order”—by restoring the authority
of males and pressuring women back into the seclusion of domestic life. (al-Mughni
2001, 95, 123-4)

The clash between Islamic movements and modernity has created an identity
crisis in post-colonial Bangladesh. While traditional Bengali religious practice is less
orthodox, Islamic fundamentalists question “the purity of the humanist Bengalis’
religious identity”. Women are caught in the middle—between viewing religion as
oppressive to women and modernization as liberating. (Hussain, 325, 327) Because the
image of the veiled woman in the public sphere is one of the “markers of Muslim
identity”, the influence of Islamists movements in the early 2000s led contemporary Muslim women in Bangladesh to adopt wearing the burqa—something their mothers and grandmothers did not do. However, some see Islamists movements as having a “significant detrimental impact on women’s rights in Bangladesh” as it reinforces women’s stereotypical roles in taking on the burqa. (Rozario, 378) (Hussain, 327)

In Muslim minority countries, such as the Philippines and Singapore, a growing sense of Islamic identity has led to advocating conservative Islamic values in society. (Othman, 343) The adoption of feminism has come to be regarded as “betraying… religious, political and nationalist identities” and the rejection of sharia is considered the rejection of heritage, identity, and religion. (Othman, 339)

3.4.5 Women’s Rights Used by the State and Political Groups to Gain Power

Commonly in many Muslim societies, women’s groups and organizations are “caught up in the middle of political or social forces competing for state power and control”. Many Muslim state governments, in the quest to build a strong centralized government powerful enough to suppress competing social forces, have used women’s issues to gain power. (Abusharaf, 726) In general, this struggle for control is between more secular “modernized” elites and traditional Islamic parties (or movements) both of whom have conflicting views on the status and societal roles of women. (Othman, 340; Abusharaf, 715)

In trying to adapt Muslim society to contemporary society, political groups often will not promote the absolute exclusion of women, but frequently “assign” them certain roles in order to serve specific political interests. For example, women have sometimes been integrated into political structures in order to maintain social order or support from
certain social groups. (Abusharaf, 726) In Kuwait, in the 1980s, women were made part of a state propaganda to build national identity by encouraging them to remain home in order to bear and educate children. (Longva) The concept of the state regarding the status of women “which sometimes treats women as productive agents, or values’ guardians, or the very crux of the invention of a new Islamic citizenship” seemingly contradicts itself because “women under state policies, national laws and the general social order cannot take advantage of full citizenship”. The result has been a slow, complicated and controversial progression in the social status of women. (Abusharaf, 727)

Historically women’s rights have been used as a tool for political power, even during colonialism. Before modernization programs in the Arab world, the low status of Arab women was politicized and used to justify colonial modernization while at the same time British and French colonialists in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon lacked interest in educating women—a contradiction reflected in discriminatory public spending policies. At the same time, nationalists promoted the education of women as their center agenda, creating a battleground based on women’s rights, between political groups struggling for power. (Hatem, 21-2)

Postcolonial Arab States continued to use women’s citizenship rights as tools to gain political power or to serve national interests. As agents of economic development in the 1960s and 70s, Arab states controlled women through the provision of social services like education, health care, and jobs. Without “adequate political representation for women and/or their ability to influence state policies, their ability to maximize the benefits derived” from education, jobs, and health care was limited. (Hatem, 21, 26) For women, many states provided education, employment, and political participation for
women in exchange for reaching the state’s developmental goals of creating teachers, nurses, doctors, clerks, and other workers for a newly modernizing economy. Kuwait is an example of this, as the state promoted the education of women and their placement in “suitable” job positions as part of development programs in the 1960s and 70s. (Longva)

Since the early promotion of modernization within Kuwait until the present day, the Kuwaiti government has been a “state of two minds,” balancing its actions between efforts of modernizing and democratizing its social and political spheres, and the powerful force of Islamic proponents of tradition. Caught between this conflict is the social and political development of Kuwaiti women. (Tetreault 2001) Since the establishment of a constitution and national assembly in 1961, which side the state takes—whether it promotes modernization and women’s political and social advancement, or whether it promotes traditional roles and subordination of women, seems to be depend entirely on its own interests in the struggle for legitimacy and power. In fact, the Kuwaiti Amir uses the struggle between modernity and tradition rooted in Islam as a political strategy. Often its allegiance has been to itself in order to strengthen its own kinship ties, ruling power, and legitimacy. (Tetreault and al-Mughni, 67)

Colonialists in non-Arab Muslim societies used women’s oppression to justify the project of “undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized people,” forcing nationalist movements in colonies to either reform women’s status or to support traditional structures of oppression. An example is in India, where women became the ground for a colonialist vs. nationalist debate where they were viewed as representatives of tradition. The aim of this debate was not women’s welfare or status, and “negligible
action” was “taken in terms of legislative reforms affecting women in personal or family matters”. (Shaheed, 1002)
Chapter 4 Background on Research: Kuwaiti Political, Economic, and Social Structures—Implications on Women and Development

4.1 A Historical Overview—the Maritime Economy, Modernization, and Iraqi Invasion

4.1.1 Maritime Economy

Although it is commonly thought that urban development began in Kuwait after the discovery of oil, history demonstrates “Gulf cities are not solely outcomes or end products of oil”. In Kuwait’s case, before oil was discovered in large, exportable quantities in 1938, the maritime industry had already been a huge factor in shaping the political, economic, and social structures of the town port of Kuwait. It was not until exportation began that these were drastically changed and shaped by oil wealth. (Al-Nakib 2013, 7)

Historians believe that Kuwait was first settled by the Bani Utub tribe from Central Arabia, in the early part of the 18th century. This settlement was perfectly situated on the Arabian Gulf, linking the Mediterranean world with Indian and Arabian trading routes, and contributing to Kuwait’s rise as a major trading center. (Shuhaiber, 96-7; Casey 2007, 24-5)
By the mid 1800s, Kuwait had developed into a maritime economy, supported by pearl diving, fishing, trading, and shipbuilding. The town port of Kuwait was a hub of “urban expansion as the markets, harbors, shipbuilding yards, and residential quarters all emanated from this central point on the shoreline.” (Al-Nakib, 3-6-14; Al-Nakib 2013, 7)

## 4.1.2 Oil Booms and Modernization

Although oil was discovered in Kuwait in 1938, oil production did not start until 1946, at the end of World War II. In the 1950s and 60s, with oil production and revenue “booming”, the state of Kuwait embarked on a full program of social and economic development based on a process of modernization and nation-building. (Longva, 214; Al-Mughni 2001, 32) Kuwaiti men were sent to western universities to be educated as businessmen and professionals, in order to return and help modernize Kuwait. (Williams)

During this time, the Kuwaiti regime under Sheikh Abdullah al-Salim Al Sabah created a welfare state with free education, health services and housing grants, and in
1961-62 set up a constitutional government and elected national assembly. (Al-Mughni
2001, 36)

As is common to most countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait saw an explosion
of migrant labor after the increase in oil production in the 1950s, making Kuwaitis a
minority in their own country. In 1965, Kuwaitis made up only 36.1% of the total
population of Kuwait, falling to 27.7% in 1985. (Longva, 1; Tetreault and al-Mughni, 68)
Kuwaitis as a percentage of the population grew to 37% in 1995 but has steadily declined
since then to 31% in 2007, where it remains today. (Shah 2010, 39) The growth rate of
Non-Kuwaitis doubled between 1995 and 2005, from 3 to 6% per year, growing another
3% between the years of 2005 to 2007. (Shah 2010, 37)

In keeping with the then-current theory of modernization, which focused on capital
formation and a market economy for development, the ruling class of Kuwait promoted a
national program of Nahda (meaning “progress”). (Rapley, 25; Al-Mughni 2001, 53)
Nahda was a form of western modernization, promoted by western-educated Kuwaiti
elites, which concentrated mainly on the education of citizens and the promotion of
Kuwaitis into the labor force. Nahda’s motivating idea of development was to break
away from old cultural traditions and customs build a modern infrastructure, and adopt
westernized concepts of civilization. (Al-Mughni 2001, 53)

Another concept of Nahda was the social expansion and education of women. (Al-
Mughni 2001, 53-4) In the 1960s, Amir Al Sabah sought to give Kuwaiti women more
access to higher education and the freedom to lobby for economic, cultural, and political
rights. The education of women was encouraged, the first girls schools were opened, and
the first generation of women went to universities abroad. (Al-Mughni 2001, 57-59)
Recognizing the importance of women’s participation in the labor force in order to improve the economy, the Amir also allowed women greater access into the labor market. (Al-Mugbni 2010, 223; Olimat 2009, 199, 201) The education and workforce participation of women led naturally to an expansion of women’s social boundaries including more frequent contact with both male and female members of other families. (Tetreault 1993, 280)

In 1967, the Arab-Israeli war led to an Israeli airstrike on Egypt, and Israel swiftly took over the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank. In the 1970s, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as a part of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), boycotted the sale of oil to the United States in response to the US decision to re-supply the Israeli army against Syria and Egypt during the Yom Kipper War of 1973. The decision to use leverage over the sale of oil for political means raised oil prices and stabilized the gulf economy. What became known as the “oil crisis” in other parts of the world was known as the “oil boom” in Kuwait. (Al-Nakib, 4-27-14)

After the 1973 oil boom, demand and supply of foreign domestic workers increased greatly. The increasingly affluent Kuwaitis desired domestics to take over their household menial tasks, and the global economic crisis (due to high oil prices) forced more and more foreigners to migrate to Kuwait and send their salaries back to their native countries. From the mid-1970s to the late 2000s, the migrant domestic worker population in Kuwait increased from 12,000 to 500,000 people. The percentage of Kuwaiti households which hired foreign domestics increased from 13% to 90%. (Ahmad 2010, 27)

4.1.3 The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait
On August 2nd 1990, Iraqi Armed Forces invaded Kuwait “without provocation or warning.” The invasion was seen as Iraq’s attempt to counteract over-production of oil in Kuwait (which lowered oil prices), cancel a debt of 14 billion dollars owed by Iraq to Kuwait, and to gain “rightful” oil, land, and political support. (Bush; Al-Nakib 5-8-2014)

During Iraqi occupation, women in Kuwait began to assume positions crucial to the survival of the country—volunteering in hospitals, smuggling weapons, food, or money across military checkpoints—gaining the attention of the nation. After the invasion, in accordance with public promises made by the Kuwaiti government, women were given leadership positions such as university rector, vice-president of Kuwait Oil Company, and the first female ambassador of the Gulf region. (Al-Mughni 2010, 223-4)

In February 1991, Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation after Operation Desert Storm, a 6-week defensive led by the United States, along with the combined efforts of the Kuwaiti Army. (Al-Nakib 5-8-2014; Tisdall et al.)

4.2 Political Economy and Implications for Development Sustainability

Kuwait’s market and labor sectors are discussed in detail in Chapter 1 and the proceeding chapters. However, as a foundation for understanding Kuwait’s unique political economy, it is important to discuss Kuwait as a rentier state, and the implications of this on Kuwait’s sustainable development. Kuwait is considered an Arab Gulf rentier state, among five others—the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. (Herb, 2)

Rentier state theory (RST) first developed in the 1970s during the oil-boom periods in the Arab Gulf. In its most simplistic terms, a rentier is a nation state, which “generates a large proportion of their income from rents, or externally-derived,
unproductively-earned payments,” generally in the form of payments and royalties for
gas and oil exports. An early proponent of RST, economist and former acting Egyptian
Prime Minister Hazem Beblawi categorized a rentier as someone who “does not
participate actively in the economic production, (but) receives nevertheless a share in the
produce….the distinguishing feature of the rentier thus resides in the lack or absence of a
productive outlook in his behaviour”. (Beblawai 1987, 55; Gray, 1)

Rentier State Theory asserts that as the state distributes oil income to citizens,
and therefore is not reliant on society to generate taxes for its support, the state does not
need to “offer concessions to society” such as democratic structures and processes or
development strategies. In essence, the relationship between state-society is based on
allocation of rent incomes. (Gray, 1-5)

However, political economist Matthew Gray argues that early RST has not
adapted to the political, economic and social changes seen in the Gulf in the past two
decades, and is an “oversimplification” when used to describe the wealthiest of the Gulf
rentier states. Gray says that internal and external influences such as globalization,
population change, international pressures, and stage management issues have caused
these states to move from the classical phase of RST into a “late rentier” model “where
the state is more entrepreneurial, supportive of development and responsive than it was
previously. However, the fundamental characteristics of rentierism remain: in none of
these states has there been a dramatic transition to pluralistic or Western-style
democracy, for example, nor has the allocative nature of the state’s spending shifted
very much…” (Gray, 1-4, 15, 22, 37) In this sense, the term “late rentier” may also be
applied to Kuwait.
Michael Herb classifies Kuwait as an “extreme rentier”, along with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which are the rentiers who “enjoy the highest per capita rent incomes in the world”. Kuwait is known to be more empowered than other Gulf monarchies, as it is the only one which has a strong parliament. Kuwait’s Constitution of 1961 provides for free elections to a National Assembly which “has real power”, and offers “a path forward toward democracy”. In contrast, the constitutions of other Gulf monarchies do not provide for free elections to parliament, and/or “lack a parliament with more than advisory powers”. Therefore, although the other wealthiest of the gulf monarchies (Qatar and the UAE) share similar labor markets with Kuwait, it is only Kuwaitis who can truly “hold their rulers accountable,” giving Kuwaiti citizens a voice in economic policy. (Herb, 2, 45)

However, Kuwait’s practice of democracy and accountability hinders development. Kuwait’s great wealth enables the state to employ 75% of the citizen labor force in the public sector, without collecting taxes from the private sector. (PACI 2014, Table 14, 59) In doing so, the majority of citizens (of the middle class), who rely on oil revenue for their salaries, as well as social subsidies and public services, have little interest in private sector growth, and encourage Kuwait’s parliament to vote for public sector, not private sector development or economic diversification. Therefore “despite the progress of Kuwait toward democracy, Kuwaiti capitalists today invest their money any place but in Kuwait” and Kuwait’s record of attracting foreign direct investment is bleak. Whereas between the years of 2000 to 2012, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE show net positive surplus in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Kuwait shows a negative flow of $50 billion dollars. (Herb, 2-7)
In contrast, the lack of a powerful parliament in the UAE, allows the ruling families, who are the local capitalists, the freedom to pursue their capitalist interests. (Herb, 1-2) This has allowed for diversification beyond an oil economy in the UAE, leading to, for example, the regional trade and business hub and major tourist destination of Dubai. Dubai’s economy accounts for 25% of the output of the UAE. (Dokoupil)

Democracy, as it is generally understood, requires that the leaders of both executive and legislative branches are elected by citizens, in fair and free elections. (Schmitter & Karl, 1991) Although the Kuwaiti National Assembly is elected, the monarchy appoints the main officers of the executive branch. (Herb, 45)

When discussing the “extreme rentiers,” Herb also adds that democratization “is signaled where free and fair elections…are respected by the incumbent authoritarian regime”. (Herb, 45) The Amir of Kuwait has the power to dissolve the parliament at any time and for long lengths of time—even years—and uses dismissal of parliament to ensure his own interests. The Amir has also suspended parts of the Kuwaiti constitution, taking away the “exercise of many civil liberties” during certain periods of time. The first suspension of both parliament and constitutional liberties occurred in 1976 and lasted to 1981, the second from 1986 until 1992, again in 2006, and the most recent in 2012. (Tetreault 1993, 204-5; Izzak 2012)

The report summary of the 2012 IMF Mission to Kuwait sums up Kuwait’s institutional foundational problems for future economic growth and stability if political infighting continues: “A reversion to domestic political gridlock could hamper (the economy)” and that the “overarching issue” which impedes the process of modernization
is “the ability of government and parliament to push an agenda that improves the investment climate and promotes sustainable and inclusive growth”. (IMF 2012, 8)

4.3 Social Structures

4.3.1 Population

Kuwait society has two population “imbalances” which are a result of its large oil-based economy and low local labor supply. First, as was previously discussed, out of a population of 4,039,445 people, Kuwaitis comprise only 1,258,254 or 31% (2014) of the population. (PACI 2014, Table 1, 1)

Second, only 40% (2014) of Kuwait’s population is female, a population imbalance which can be an indication of a less developed country due at least in part to high maternal mortality or a preference for sons over daughters. (PACI 2014; UN 2010, 2-6) However in Kuwait, this is a reflection of the large number of foreign male workers who reside in Kuwait and send money home to their countries of origin where their wives and children live. (UN 2010, 2) According to the Public Authority for Civil Information, Kuwaiti-only female to male ratios are more typical of developed countries—51% female and 49% male (PACI 2014). 2

One of the most significant characteristics of Kuwaiti society is that it is comprised of many national, ethnic and social groups, which although having pronounced cultural and social differences, mainly co-exist peacefully.

4.3.2 Kuwaiti Society

1 With author’s calculations
2 With author’s calculations
Kinship relations form the foundation of Kuwaiti society, as they do in many Arab societies, where the economic and the political systems are maintained and controlled by groups of families led by males. Political decisions are made among men in social gatherings called “diwaniyas”, a custom dating back to the pre-oil era where “male heads of families and other men from a similar social background” regularly meet and form a society to operate for “its own collective benefit.” (Al Mughni 2001, 16)

Kuwait, influenced by Arab and Islamic tradition and belief, is considered a “collectivist society” like many Arab communities, where individuals most often identify as a member of a group (families, tribes) and consider group needs more important than the need of the individual. (Sullivan, 87; KI Interview) Although a wide generalization, anthropologist Geert Hofstede (1994) wrote that industrialization reinforces individualism, so “individualism prevails in developed western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed and Eastern countries.” (Hofstede, Ali et al., 630)

However, Kuwait exhibits characteristics of both collective and individualistic societies. Due to its history as a trading and shipping hub between India, Europe, and Mediterranean countries, even before modernization, Kuwaitis were exposed to individualistic cultural and customs which influenced Kuwaiti society. As a consequence, Kuwaitis have developed “a spirit of competition…and entrepreneurship and at the same time have adhered to the traditional views of authority, recognition, and cohesiveness. Therefore, the Kuwaitis exhibit two
contradictory values: a strong individualism on the one hand and a passionate attachment to primary (tribal, sectarian) groups on the other.” (Ali et al., 630)

4.3.2.1 Citizenship and other Social Divides: Badu and Hadar, Shia and Sunni

Citizenship in Kuwait is closely guarded, as it is “largely defined in terms of access to welfare benefits”, and not necessarily to equal social or political rights. (Longva 2006, 187; Khalaf, 355-7)

Anh Longva describes Kuwait’s process of citizenship as “the politics of exclusion”, in which the “external threat” to welfare benefits and national identity have created a system of “internal identification” that classifies those who possess varying degrees of “Kuwaitiness”. (Longva 1997, 43-5) There are, in fact, nine categories or levels of citizenship in Kuwait, each varying in social privileges and benefits. (Al-Nakib 4-6-2014)

Strong cultural divides also exist among Kuwaiti nationals. As previously described in Chapter 3, Kuwait is a Muslim majority country, in which 74.1% (2010) of the population, including immigrant, is Muslim. (Pew 2012, 47) Kuwait has a 70% Sunni Islam ruling majority, and a 30% Shia minority, creating political and social divisions. (Shah 2010, 54) However, although historically these groups have been in conflict with each other, “major Sunni-Shia conflicts are not anticipated in Kuwait, where the Shi’a population is better integrated.” (Stiftung, 27)

The second divide among Kuwaitis stems from the cultural and historical differences of the “Badu” and Hadar” communities. In simplistic terms, Badu (also called Bedouin) are considered descendants of former desert nomads, and have strong ties to tribal communities. Hadar, or “settled urbanites,” are descended from traders,
sailors, and pearl divers who lived in Kuwait before the oil era. (Al-Nakib 2014, 5; Shah 2010, 55-8)

In general, Badu tend to be significantly more traditional in behavior and dress than Hadar, especially among women. Badu women marry younger, more often marry a relative, bear more children, have less education, and in 1999, worked significantly less often outside of the house. In a survey done in 1999, only 17.8% of Badu women worked outside the home, as compared to 45.5% of Hadar women. (Shah 2010, 57 Table 2.11)

Chapter 10 discusses interview findings on the differences in and similarities between Badu and Hadar women in the workforce, and may suggest that more Badu women work outside the home today than 15 years ago.

4.3.3 Non-Kuwaitis

According to historians, Kuwait was and has always been, a society of migrants. Kuwait’s economy has been dependent on the migration of labor since soon after settlement (by migrating Arab tribes) in 1716. In the 1800s, various ethnic groups from Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Oman migrated to Kuwait to participate in Kuwait’s maritime economy of pearl diving, shipbuilding and trade. In the 1950s and 60s, and again after the oil booms in the 70s and 80s, thousands of migrants came to support Kuwait’s growing oil economy and helped develop the new modernized state of Kuwait. (Al-Nakib 2014, 1)

Today, Non-Kuwaitis compromise 2,781,191 million people, or 69% of the population in Kuwait (PACI 2014 Table 1, 1) and originate mainly from South Asia and South East Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Philippines). The largest single expatriate community in Kuwait is Indian, accounting for almost 20% of the foreign
population. Egyptians make up the largest foreign Arab population. (IOM) Most foreign residents of Kuwait are very limited in the ability to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship through naturalization. Therefore, “the majority of the resident population…plays no meaningful role in the nation-forming process”. (Stiftung 2014, 4)

_Bidoons_ are counted in the population estimates of Non-Kuwaitis. Bidoons make up more than 100,000 local, yet stateless, Arab residents who are not allowed by the Kuwaiti state to obtain citizenship in Kuwait. Many Bidoons descend from families who settled in the Gulf generations ago as merchants or workers, but for different reasons have failed to prove it. (Stiftung 2014, 4)

### 4.4 Freedom in Kuwait

#### 4.4.1 Economic, Civil and Political Freedoms

In contrast to robust economic statistics and the status of high-income country,³ Kuwait’s scores an overall economic freedom rating of 62.5 out of 100 points in the Heritage Foundation’s 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, and a status of only “moderately free”.⁴ This score is based on evaluation of the rule of law, the power of government in taxation and spending, business, labor and monetary freedom, and the openness of the market. Although Kuwait scores slightly higher than the world average (60.4) and regional average (61.6), it is 17.5 points below the average score of the world’s “Free Economies”. Kuwait’s score expresses high fiscal freedom (as Kuwait

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³ The World Bank classifies a High Income country as having a GNI per capita (calculated using the world bank atlas method) of $12,616 or more (2012). See [http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications](http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications)

⁴ The Heritage Foundation’s index is classified like this: 100 - 80 = Free; 79.9 - 70 = Mostly Free; 69.9 - 60 = Moderately Free; 59.9 - 50 = Mostly Unfree; 49.9 - 0 = Repressed. [http://www.heritage.org/index/Ranking.aspx](http://www.heritage.org/index/Ranking.aspx)
does not tax individual income) but overall economic freedom is hindered by institutional weakness reflected by bureaucratic inefficiencies, inflexible labor regulations, and judicial corruption and weakness. (Heritage)

According to Transparency International, perception of public sector corruption in Kuwait is relatively high, and rates Kuwait’s public sector as below average in freedom from corruption. Kuwait gets a Corruption Perception Index score of “44” on a scale of 1 to 100 (100 being a score of “clean”) and ranks 67th out of 175 countries.5 (2014) (Transparency International) In addition, the World Bank’s 2014 Doing Business Report ranked Kuwait as 104th out of 189 economies on the “ease of doing business” and 152nd on the “ease of starting a business. (World Bank 2014)

In addition, Freedom House categorizes Kuwait’s Political and Civil “Freedom Status” as only “Partly Free” from three possible rankings of Not Free, Partly Free, and Free.6 The status of Partly Free reflects a country in which there is “limited respect for political rights and civil liberties”. Characteristics of “partly free” states are institutional corruption, weak judiciary or rule of law, ethnic or religious conflict, and the dominance of a specific political party. (Freedom House 2014)

Specifically, Kuwait’s Freedom Status is based on two scores—political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House determines the political rights score based on an evaluation of “electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of

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5 Transparency International’s CP Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be, on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Data sources for the index are from independent institutions specializing in government and business climate analysis and include assessments, surveys, and ratings. The country’s rank demonstrates its position relative to other countries. 175 countries were ranked in this year. A ranking of 1 indicates the lowest amount of perceived corruption, and 175th the highest amount of perceived corruption. See http://www.transparency.org/country#KWT

6 Scale: A score of 1.0 to 2.5 ranks a country as Free; 3.0 to 5.0 as Partly Free; and 5.5 to 7.0 as Not Free. See Freedom House Freedom In the World 2012 p. 27 for reference.
government” and the civil rights score on “freedom of expression and belief, associational and organization rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights”. (Freedom House 2013, 32) Kuwait has a political rights rating of 5 in 2014 (showing a decline since 2012) and a civil liberties rating of 5, based on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being “Free” and 7 being “Not Free”. Kuwait’s political rights rating decreased due to conflict in the parliament and the attempt of the state to control political opposition by “revising the electoral law,” and is a reflection of “a steady decline in democratic institutions” and an “increase in repressive policies” within the Gulf States region. (Freedom House 2013, 3, 16, 21)

Reporters Without Borders ranks freedom of the press in Kuwait slightly better than middle-ranged, at only 90th out of 180 countries. (2015)

Kuwait’s Human Development Index (HDI) is in the category of “High Human Development” from a UNDP ranking order of “Very High Human Development,” “High Human Development” “Medium Human Development, and “Low Human Development”. Kuwait ranks 46 out of 187 (2013) countries, a measure of longevity, education/literacy, and GNI per capita, and which does not include elements of freedom, rights or participation. (UNDP 2014, Table 1)

4.4.2 Status and Freedom of Kuwaiti Women

4.4.2.1 Citizenship and Equality in the State

In comparison to Arab States as a whole, Kuwaiti women are considered more “empowered” than other Arab women. Kuwait ranks 50th in the United Nation’s Gender Inequality Index as compared to the GCC country of Qatar, for example, which ranks 113th out of 148 countries. Due to a lack of available data, Kuwait’s overall HDI score
has not been adjusted for gender inequality, an adjustment measure which the UNDP’s Human Development Report (HDR) generally uses to access “loss in human development due to inequality”. Although Kuwaiti women score well as compared to men in educational attainment, there is a wide inequality in parliament seats (6.3% female in 2013) and labor force participation rate (44.3% female compared to 82.3% male) (UNDP 2014, Table 4)

According to Freedom House, for women in Kuwait, political and civil freedom scores are lower than these scores for overall society. Based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 the lowest degree of freedom, and 5 the highest), Kuwaiti women score a middle-range 3.1 in economic rights and opportunity, but a 2.2, 2.4, 2.4, and 2.9 in discrimination and access to justice, individual freedom, political and civil rights, and social and cultural rights, respectively. (Freedom House 2010, 223, 578) A rating of “2” reflects a country where women are “mostly restricted” by state or non-state actors in exercising their human rights. A rating of 3 reflects the “sometimes restricted” status of women’s human rights. (Al Mughni 2010, 588)

Although the Kuwaiti constitution of 1962 provides equality to all citizens (al-Mughni 2001, 36), historically Kuwait has not viewed women as full, autonomous, citizens who enjoy the same rights of citizenship as men. It was not even until 2005 that women were granted full political participation rights with the ability to participate in elections or run for office.

A Kuwaiti woman is not considered an autonomous “civil person in her own right,” since she only accesses her rights as a citizen because she was born to a Kuwaiti father or is married to a Kuwaiti man. Married Kuwaiti women are granted housing
privileges and family support allowances through their Kuwaiti husband or participate in these privileges through their Kuwaiti father. A Kuwaiti woman can lose social subsidies and welfare if she marries a foreigner, even if she lives in Kuwait. A Kuwaiti man, who marries a foreigner, does not. Unequal social rights of Kuwaiti women make them economically dependent on men, creating the “necessity for them to acquiesce in male domination”. (Tetreault and al-Mughni, 74-6).

The state’s ambiguous position on women’s status, rights, and role within the economy has created obstacles for women’s advancement in the areas of career and income earning opportunities. For example, on the one hand, since the 1950s the state has promoted the expansion of women in the economic spheres by devoting resources to women’s education and by promoting women in the workforce during the “Kuwaitization” of the Kuwaiti work force in the 1980s (to counteract an unusually large migrant labor population). (Tetreault and Al Mughni, 1995) On the other hand, the Personal Status law of 1987 made it the legal responsibility of men to support their wives and children, encouraging women to be economically dependent, and remain restricted to the roles of motherhood and domesticity.

4.4.2.2 Conservative Suppression of Women’s Rights—the Islamic Movement and Saudi Influence

In spite of economic and social modernization, the Islamic Revival, which gained strength in Kuwait in the 1980s, encouraged ultra-conservative Islamic values and was successful in halting many aspects of progress for women and Kuwait. (Tetreault 2001, 204, 209; Olimat, 2009; Williams)
Within Kuwait, the Islamic movement was thought to be a counter-response to the social effects of modernization and westernization—and especially to Kuwait’s “feminist movement”. At the same time, as western-educated Kuwaitis returned to Kuwait, bringing westernized attitudes and ideas, and demanding more personal and political freedoms, the Amir sought to combat western influence and to ensure his own Sunni-supported position of power by giving 30,000 Saudi Arabians Kuwaiti citizenship. Saudi Arabia was a Sunni tribe-dominated, fundamental Islam country, and the Amir hoped to bring an ultra-conservative Sunni base into Kuwait to oppose westernization and strengthen his own position of power against Kuwait’s Shiite tribe. (Williams)

During the 1990-91 Iraqi invasion, many Kuwaiti citizens fled to Saudi Arabia where they were exposed to Saudi conservative interpretations of Islam. Even the Kuwaiti Amir and government ruled from Saudi Arabia while Saddam Hussain occupied Kuwait, strengthening religious, tribal, political, cultural, and business ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. (Reuters) Today, although it is illegal, an estimated 120,000 Kuwaitis hold dual citizenship with other Gulf Cooperation Council nations, especially Saudi Arabia. Some Kuwaitis, who have dual citizenship with Saudi Arabia, live in Saudi Arabia and vote in Kuwaiti elections, using different names to avoid detection. Some Kuwaitis also suspect some members of the national assembly hold dual citizenship. (Calderwood) The threat of violence from fundamentalists (who set fire to a radio station for airing negative commentary against them) keeps the government from retracting Saudi-Kuwaiti dual citizenship. (Williams)

Although largely undocumented or spoken about, Saudi Arabia’s influence continues to grow within Kuwaiti government and society, channeled through a Salafis
movement in Kuwaiti parliament. Salafis follow a puritanical and fundamental interpretation of Islam, and their movement has had strong ties with Saudi Arabia since the 1990-91 occupation. Currently, there are four Salafis and six Salafi sympathizers who have seats in the 50-member Kuwaiti parliament. (Reuters)

4.4.2.3 Political Conflicts over Women’s Rights

When the Saudi conservative influence began in the 1980s, Kuwaiti political groups became dramatically polarized, creating great conflict between opposing sides—especially in the area of women’s rights. Sunni Kuwaitis who support a “network that follows Saudi Arabian clergy” are fearful of western culture and, viewing women’s rights as a westernized idea, are often opposed to extending women more political rights. (Rizzo, 652)

The Sunni-Muslim Brotherhood movement in Kuwait changed its previous position on women’s suffrage, no longer being supportive of women’s right to vote, while liberals and Shiite Islamists continued to support women’s struggle to participate in politics. In addition, Sunni Islamists supported by Saudi-influenced tribal members of parliament sought to promote gender segregation in Kuwaiti institutions. (Olimat 2009, 201-202)

The conflict between fundamental Islamists of parliament and moderate Islamists (mainly represented by the Amir and his ministers) has continued over the past three decades. Although the Kuwaiti Amir decreed women the right to vote and run for office in parliamentary and municipal elections in May 1999, this decree was immediately overturned by parliament. Again in 2003, another government sponsored-bill that gave
women the right to vote and run in only municipal councils was rejected by parliament. 
(Al-Mugyni, 223-224)

Finally, in May 2005, women were given full political rights, a result of the lobbying efforts of women’s activists, lawyers, and politicians. In 2006 and 2008, Kuwaiti women both voted and ran for office in both municipal and national elections, though no females were elected into office. Finally, in May 2009, four women were elected as the first female members of a fifty-seat parliament, giving women some decision-making power in the National Assembly that potentially could overturn decrees made by the Amir. In addition, three women since 2005 have been given ministerial positions and 2 have been appointed to municipal council, which controls public services administration. (Al-Mugvni, 224)

In February 2012 no women were elected to parliament. Due to the continued conflict between the fundamentalists and moderates, Kuwaiti parliament was dissolved in the summer of 2012, and the Amir called for the reinstatement the 2009 parliament.

As conflict in parliament continues, the forward progress of women’s rights has been dramatically slowed. In addition to political suppression, some liberal commentators express concern that Saudi influence will continue to restrict the personal freedoms of women. Although a socially conservative society, Kuwait does not restrict personal freedoms “to the extent of Saudi Arabia”. Kuwaiti women dress modestly in public, many in western-style clothing, and are not required by law to wear a veil. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, they drive and travel without a male companion, and occupy positions in business. (Reuters)
Liberal Kuwaitis worry that Salafist members of parliament, who use the lobbying of cabinet members, seminars, and even social media to assert their influence, is pushing Kuwaiti government toward a more conservative interpretation of Islam, and more vulnerability to Saudi influence. (Reuters) Salafis have gained power on many issues in Kuwait. In regards to women’s issues, they have succeeded in gender segregation within public universities, and placed restrictions on mixed sports, dancing, and live music. They also have proposed legislation that bans female judges, flirtatious behavior and indecent attire in public, such as swimsuits on beaches. They have also been successful in banning a TV talent show that featured women singing to and dancing with men, and wearing “revealing” clothes. (Reuters)

There has been a noticeable difference in the personal freedoms of Kuwaiti women since 1960s, indicating the growing influence of conservative Islam. According to one Saudi dissident and scholar at the Institute for Gulf Affairs in Washington, he remembers watching television in Kuwait “when (women) performers (wore) mini-skirts on stage”. “This all changed,” he says “because of the Saudi Influence.” (Reuters)

4.4.2.4 Gender-Based Job Restrictions

Kuwaiti women experience gender-based work restrictions governing their working positions, hours and conditions. For example, Kuwaiti women are barred from jobs that are “physically dangerous or taxing” “such as those in manufacturing or construction sectors or the petrochemical fields. (Katz 2010) Women cannot join the army. (Freedom House, 236) In spite of these restrictions, there are no specific labor laws to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace. (Freedom House, 236-7)
Because the Kuwaiti judicial system is based on Islamic sharia law, which explicitly places women under the authority of men, women have been prevented from holding positions of lawyer or judge, although there are Kuwaiti females who have earned law degrees. Until a recent court ruling in 2012, women were even legally barred from serving in entry-level jobs within the Justice Ministry. (HRW 2012) However in a recent decision made by Kuwait’s High Judiciary Council in Fall 2012, the council will soon appoint 5 to 7 women graduates of the colleges of law and sharia to be public prosecutors. Candidates for appointment will undergo a 2-year training and need 5 to 7 years of experience as prosecutors before they are appointed Judges. (Toumi)

Cultural norms and civil law can work together against female labor force participation in Kuwait, since personal status laws give a husband the right to forbid his wife from working outside the home if her work “negatively affects family interests,” an ambiguous phrase that is open to personal interpretation. (Freedom House, 230) In addition, women’s employment is sometimes perceived as a threat to male job opportunities and to the control of parliament conservative groups. (Freedom House, 237) Conservative members of parliament still promote traditional roles for Kuwaiti women, and propose that the state give housewives a monetary allowance in the hopes they will stay home with their children, rather than work outside the home. (Katz, 2010)
Chapter 5 Research Methodology

5.1 Perspective and Approach

This study uses ethnography as the main research method in accordance with the social constructionism view and its theoretical research perspective of interpretivism. Constructionism views knowledge or a person’s “meaning” as being constructed by the human mind through interaction with the world around them—interpretivism stems from this epistemology and seeks to understand people and their meanings within their own historical or cultural contexts. (Crotty, 42-3, 67) It is from this perspective we see the importance of using the methodology of ethnography, or researcher “immersion” in the culture of the people to be studied, in order to explore and gain insight “into people’s values, beliefs, and behaviors”. (Gottlieb, 47-48)

In interpretivist research, the “basic unit” within the society being studied is the individual and her actions, and she is regarded as the “sole carrier of meaningful conduct”. (Crotty, 68) Therefore, the pursuit of “members’ meanings” in this research is the pursuit of how Kuwaiti women experience and understand their world in the context of their interactions in the labor force and within society in Kuwait. (Emerson et al., 129, 167-8) With this understanding, research explores where women work, live, and interact and how the experiences and perspectives of Kuwaiti females are influenced by relationships and interaction with state, religion, civil society, family, traditional roles, and social concepts of women. Research attempts to understand how these interactions shape the female labor market, drive demand and supply of labor, and the contribute to a woman’s capability or agency within society.
Symbolic interactionism is the main strain of interpretivism used for this study, since Kuwaiti women were primarily observed as they interact with the symbolic tools of their culture, such as language. (Swidler) However phenomenology, another strain of interpretivism, informs this research and is important to mention. Phenomenology, a discipline “deeply rooted in the suspicion of culture”, is a study of how “things,” or phenomena, “present themselves immediately to us as conscious human beings” without preconceived notions impressed upon us by culture, or by pre-existing theories that contribute to our structure of meaning. (Crotty, 80, 78)

In the early 1900s, Husserl interpreted phenomenology as being more than just concerned with people’s sensory experience with phenomena, but also with their “perception, imagination, desire, thought, and so on”, believing that the meanings we construct from our experience are central and significant to our experiences. As a result, Husserl developed a research methodology of phenomenology to “bracket” (set aside to the best of our ability) the understandings and habits people already have, and allow the “experience of phenomena speak to us first hand” in order to extract a true, personally-constructed meaning of experience. (Smith, 188-190, 197-198) (Crotty, 79)

The concept and method of phenomenology can also be used by researchers to collect and analyze data “in ways that do not prejudice their subjective character”. The use of this method puts in place “a number of procedures to prevent, or at least minimize, the imposition of the researcher’s presuppositions and constructions on the data”. Researchers can attempt to “bracket” their own knowledge or preconceived theories in order to collect purer, unbiased data. This can be achieved during semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, and by taking care to check answers are genuinely
found in the data and not imposed upon them. (Crotty, 79, 83)

In this context, this researcher has attempted to bracket personal western-influenced definitions of freedom and gender roles, in order to “have a fresh look” at the experiences of Kuwaiti women, and to be careful not to miss critical information which could inform research.

In this pursuit, interview questions are shaped to find the Kuwaiti (and Non-Kuwaiti) woman’s own definition of freedom, as it is women themselves who can best answer what they believe constitutes capability or agency in their lives, and how they view their own agency within their societies, families and communities. Their definitions and perceptions are used to inform data analysis and to consider the factors that shape female labor markets in Islamic societies and perceptions of female freedom and agency from a woman’s cultural and societal context. In this way, this researcher has attempted to “sustain an intuitive grasp of what is there by ‘opening (my) eyes’, ‘keeping them open’, ‘looking and listening’, (and) ‘not getting blinded’” by possible personal preconceptions of how a Kuwaiti (or Non-Kuwaiti) woman interacts with her society. (Heron, 164)

Because “member meaning” is constructed by interaction in the world and is different for every member, pursuit of members’ meanings in this research is based in a contextual and situational study. For example: within the physical context of Kuwait, or the conceptual context of gender-society relations, or the situational context of women’s participation in the workforce. In view of this, interviews, interview summaries, and observational field notes have attempted to represent what Kuwaiti women consider meaningful and important, within their contexts, and to attempt to extract the local and
“internal” meaning of freedom, obstacles to capability, or agency to enter the labor force.
(Emerson et. al, 167-8, 152, 130-131)

5.2 Data Collection

With a grounded theory approach, the ethnographic methods of in-depth interview, observation, and secondary data were used to study women in Kuwait, with focus on Kuwait women’s experiences. Triangulation occurred often during the research process between different sources of data, since converging several sources of data “build(s) a coherent justification for themes”. (Creswell, 191)

Secondary data gives a look at past and present events and institutions in Kuwait and their effect on women’s participation in the labor force. Interviews and informal or “unobtrusive” observations helped identify the drivers of Kuwaiti female labor force participation as well as characteristics of the female labor market.

To differentiate between the large population of migrant workers in Kuwait, and differences between citizen and migrant labor, wages, and class status, research focused mainly on the work of Kuwaiti female citizens, which also enabled exploration of the interaction of Kuwaiti females with Non-Kuwaiti females. However, the perspective of female migrant laborers and Kuwaiti males as it pertains to Kuwaiti women’s work also informs the data analysis.

5.2.1 Theory and Methods

In keeping with a grounded theory approach, the overall nature of both data collection and analysis was exploratory and inductive, in order to watch as “patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come (or emerge) from the data,” instead of imposing pre-supposed analytical themes upon the data, prior to data collection. However, this
exploration was at the same time both iterative and reflexive, using an ongoing process (during all phases of data collection and analysis) of “continuous meaning-making and progressive focusing” of important themes or patterns that emerge from the data. This process of “reflexive iteration” can be described as a “loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material”. (Srivastava & Hopwood, 77) (Emerson et. al, 172-3)

5.2.2 Interviews and Demographics of Participants

This research focuses on the forces behind female labor force participation and the female labor market in Kuwait, particularly desiring to glean findings from the perspective and experiences of Kuwaiti women. Therefore, the majority of chosen interview participants were inclusive to the Kuwaiti citizen population, and of that, most were Kuwaiti females. Twenty-nine of overall interview participants were Kuwait females, and 11 participants were Kuwaiti males.

A smaller number of male Kuwaiti citizens are included since it is assumed men compete with women for jobs in the workforce, and because men are the main decision makers in politics and society. Their views give deeper insight into drivers of female labor force participation. Furthermore, because of the large number of Non-Kuwaiti female workers in Kuwait who daily interact with Kuwaiti women in the workforce, particularly the large number of foreign domestic workers employed within Kuwaiti households, their perceptions of Kuwaiti female work outside and inside the home are also important.
Fifty-six (56) total in-depth interview participants were recruited—21 female Kuwaiti citizens, 15 Key Informants, 10 Kuwaiti male citizens, and 10 Non-Kuwaiti working females. Because this research is a beginning exploration of the drivers of female labor force participation and characteristics of the female labor market in Kuwait, this number was considered a reasonable amount of interview participants to begin to generate theories and ideas regarding drivers of participation of women in the labor market from the perspectives of different members of society—with the majority of the focus on the perspective of Kuwaiti women.

Leads for potential interview participants were generated from a variety of sources and events during a three-month stay in Kuwait in Spring 2014. Major interview sources included colleagues and contacts of the American University of Kuwait (AUK) and Center for Gulf Studies (CGS), where the researcher was a visiting research fellow, and through CGS or university-led events. Other sources came through political events such as the Women’s Research and Studies Center Women in Parliament Conference held at Kuwait University, the launch of a woman’s legal empowerment website sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme and through social events or daily life in Kuwait—dinners, community events, book-signings, church gatherings, exercise classes, and visiting stores, coffee houses, and hair and nail salons in Kuwait City.

Interviews were purposefully selected, and based on selecting participants who could best contribute to understanding the research problem and questions. (Creswell, 178) In addition, chosen interview participants led to other interviews (Snowball or Respondent-Driven Sampling), especially when it was necessary to find interview
participants who were somewhat harder to reach, such as those more conservative in their social perspectives or religious practice. (Bernard, 147) Along with in-depth and open-ended interview questions, each interview participant was given a simple 2-page demographic survey questionnaire, which has been used to help identify overall characteristics of interview participants.

An audio recording device was used for each interview. Although preparations were made for an interpreter to be present to interpret questions and answers during interviews when necessary, English is widely spoken in Kuwait and is used, along with Arabic, as a common language. Since all interview subjects spoke English at an advanced or high-intermediate proficiency, translators and translated consent forms were not required. However, when there was any doubt of a participant’s ability to clearly understand interview questions in English, an outside source was consulted before interviews began. In addition, interview questions were often repeated in several different ways, to ensure the participant’s understanding.

5.2.2.1 Kuwaiti Women Interview Participants

Twenty-one (21) Kuwaiti women, ages 18 and up, were recruited for in-depth interviews, with purposeful selection, each for an approximately 2-hour interview. These interview participants were selected to gain an understanding of female labor and participation in Kuwait from the perspective of the “average” Kuwaiti female citizen.

Participants were chosen on the basis of residing in one of three groups: university students (8 total, ages 18-35 years from 4 different universities), non-working women, (5) and workingwomen (8). Within each of the three groups, an attempt was made to create maximum variation in age, socioeconomic status, background, or length
of time in “position”, whether in a job, at a university, or not working. Creating variation is “useful for documenting uniqueness” of experiences as well as uncovering “shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity”. (Patton, 172) For example, in the group “University Students” a balance was created of freshman, sophomore, juniors, seniors, and even those in graduate school, all of whom were in various majors and universities. In the group “Non-working women,” those that used to work in the formal workforce were also included, and the group “workingwomen” included those in early, mid, and later stages of their careers.

Kuwaiti female participants were wide and varied in terms of age (18 to 80), occupation, (public, private, and informal sectors), and different religious preferences (atheists, practicing Muslims, and non-practicing Muslims).

5.2.2.2 Kuwaiti Men Interview Participants

To add to the perspective of the “average” Kuwaiti female citizen on their work and participation in society, ten in-depth, one-hour interviews were conducted with 10 Kuwaiti men, whose ages ranged between 22 and 72 years of age. Their occupations varied widely in both public and private sectors—from university students (2), to university professors, businessmen in the private sector, medical doctors and an engineer in the public sector, and a male helping to run a family business. Most of the men were simultaneously in two job positions (as I found many Kuwaitis were), usually working in both public and private sectors. Again, religious preference ranged from no religion to Muslim, and include both practicing and non-practicing.

5.2.2.3 Non-Kuwaiti Women Interview Participants
Because of the large number of Non-Kuwaiti female workers in Kuwait who daily interact with Kuwaiti women in the workforce, their perceptions of Kuwaiti female work and their interactions with Kuwaiti women were important. Therefore, ten interviews were conducted with Non-Kuwaiti women working and living in Kuwait. These interview participants came from varied cultures, backgrounds and countries of origin including westerners from Canada, Arabs from Egypt and Lebanon, and Asians and South Asians from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

As will be explained further in the proceeding chapters, often a Non-Kuwaiti’s country of origin influences, or at least relates to, the job position he or she holds in Kuwait. For example, domestics and service workers are often from Asia and South Asia, middle-class service positions are often occupied by Egyptians or Indians, and high-level professionals are often from western society. However, what is unique to this research is that although some from the group of interview participants do fit this stereotype—for example a Canadian teacher and a Filipino domestic worker—it also contradicted it, giving this research a more in-depth perspective to labor in Kuwait. For example, a Pakistani interview participant is a psychologist, an Indian participant is a company manager, and another Indian is a university counselor and professor with a Ph.D.

The time each Non-Kuwaiti worker spent in Kuwait ranged from 18 months to 54 years, and included even those having actually been born in Kuwait. These “Second Generation Non-Kuwaitis” born in Kuwait, were a demographic not considered prior to research, as interviews had only considered “migrant workers” to be Non-Kuwaitis who lived in Kuwait for roughly up to 10 years, then returned to their countries of origin.
However, in the process of interviews, it was quickly realized that Second and Third Generation Non-Kuwaitis were an important consideration to the study of the labor market.

Second Generation non-nationals make up about 18%, almost 500,000, of all Non-Kuwaitis living in Kuwait. (Shah 2014 b, 1) These Non-Kuwaitis have local characteristics and ties, and weak ties to their country of origin. Most Second Generation Non-Kuwaiti interview or observation participants indicated they held citizenship in their parents’ country of origin. Several, who had Kuwaiti mothers but foreign fathers, held the citizenship of their father. However, they are not granted citizenship in Kuwait, and are generally separate from Kuwaitis in living spaces, social events, and languages or language dialect. In addition, they lack the social welfare benefits granted to Kuwaitis citizens, such as subsidies, guaranteed jobs and education. Where they do often interact is in the market place and in international educational institutions.

Four Non-Kuwaiti interview participants were considered Second Non-Kuwait, and had been born in and lived in Kuwait their entire lives, but were not Kuwaiti citizens. One participant was Egyptian, two were Pakistani, and one Lebanese. Three other participants had lived in Kuwait between 30 and 54 years, and had children who had been born and raised in Kuwait, but held the foreign citizenship of their parent.

5.2.2.4 Key Informant Interview Participants

Fifteen interviews were conducted with Key Informants, ranging from several government officials and a former minister, to those with high-level knowledge and expertise in Kuwaiti politics, economics, history, psychology, gender equality, education, feminism and human rights. Key Informants were chosen for their knowledge
of Kuwaiti society and the relation of the above topics to women’s labor, women’s rights, and female participation in society.

KI participants were not limited to women or Kuwaiti citizens. Of the Key Informants, eleven were Kuwaiti, and of those, eight were female. Others were Palestinian, Indian, and Canadian.

5.2.3 Interview Summary Memos and In-Process memos

In order to make the most of time spent in Kuwait during data collection, interview recordings were transcribed after the end of all data collection. However in order to keep the flow of “continuous meaning-making and progressive focusing” of important themes or patterns emerging from the data that could add to ongoing interview questions and observations, 1 to 2-page Interview Summary Memos were written after each interview. (Srivastava & Hopwood, 77) These interview summary memos focused on what was most important to answering the research questions, what information was unique to the interview, what corresponded with other interview answers, or what did not.

In addition, “In-Process Memos” were written while collecting data, generally at the end of each week. In-process memos are an extended “time-out” of fieldwork to get all ideas, insights, and potential theories recorded as text. They can be used to write about the processes of interaction or communication, or to explore patterns noticed in events during fieldwork. (Emerson et al., 123, 171) In the final analysis of the research, after the process of coding interviews, these In-Process Memos confirmed the themes brought out by the codes, and were the basis for the proceeding chapters.
5.2.4 Secondary Data

Secondary data collection began immediately after arrival in Kuwait (and technically had already begun months before through internet use) and continued until data analysis. Primary sources for secondary data have come from media such as newspaper articles, editorials, and television reports. Other secondary data sources were from government documents, such as statistical reports, women’s organizational documents/reports and available academic literature.

5.2.5 Observations: Living and Working in Kuwait

Informal and “unobtrusive” observations were also used to gain a general understanding of the nature of female labor and to identify obstacles and supports to both female labor force participation and female participation in overall society. (Bernard, 325) Observation was useful for triangulation with interviews, since although interviews are beneficial for one-on-one communication where direct answers can be asked, sometimes people do not give fully “truthful” answers, but answer according to what they expect the researcher wants to hear. Therefore, observation can help provide a complementary understanding of people’s meanings, as sometimes actions are more real than words.

Observation was done in two main ways—through public observations during three months living in Kuwait in Spring 2014 and through a seven-month job contract with a business in Kuwait owned by a Kuwaiti female and staffed with Non-Kuwaiti women. During the job contract, the researcher twice returned to Kuwait and actually worked in the role of a Non-Kuwaiti female worker (as a business development consultant) in a female Kuwaiti-owned business. In both cases, observation proved
invaluable in informing this research and helping to describe the nature of female work, the relationships in which females interact in the workforce and in society (including with males or migrant laborers), their physical surroundings, work or daily processes, and attitudes. Observation roles varied in extent from complete participant-researcher roles, where the role of the researcher was unknown, participant-role, where the role of the researcher was known, and observer-researcher, where observations were made without participating. (Creswell, Table 9.2, 179)

At the American University of Kuwait, the researcher first observed Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis, male and female, working together and interacting as professors, administrative staff, and support service workers. Also, the researcher took a twice-weekly Kuwait history class and an Arabic language class, where male and female university students (Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti) interacting with each other and the professor were observed. Attending social and cultural events, taking historical tours, and travelling to many different and widespread regions in and outside Kuwait City, allowed observation of the built environment and desert life and conversations with many types of Non-Kuwaitis and Kuwaitis including Bidoons.

In addition, daily conversations with taxi drivers, restaurant and grocery store workers, and salon managers added perspective to the Non-Kuwaiti worker experience. Living in the section of Kuwait called Salmiya, considered a Non-Kuwaiti “migrant worker” neighborhood, was beneficial in observing the living standards, eating and buying habits, and even the policing of Non-Kuwaiti workers by Kuwaiti police. Many nationalities (mainly Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi) lived and interacted in this same neighborhood, and often, many people shared the same apartment.
Several times a week, “jottings” or “a brief written record of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases” were used to help recall the scene, details and significant events of each day. (Emerson et. al, 29) A small time later, these jottings were used to create more detailed observation field notes. Fieldnotes recorded a “thick description” of words, interactions, situations, and understandings (capturing “member’s meanings”) to be the basis for future interpretation of their meanings in data analysis. (Gertz, 3; Emerson, 129)

5.3 Considerations

5.3.1 Reliability

This research follows the well-established research processes of case study, ethnography, and qualitative coding and analysis for consistency and reliability of research procedures. Protocol and procedures were documented and checked for accuracy and reliability at each step of the research process. (Creswell, 190)

5.3.2 Internal Validity

The researcher, sought to make findings “accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (Creswell, 191), using multiple approaches to assess validity and to convince others of the accuracy. The approaches used in this study include triangulating data sources (converging several sources of data such as observation, interview and secondary data), field notes’ rich description of setting and findings, and the use of “bracketing” to attempt to set aside researcher bias. (Creswell, 191-2; Crotty 79, 82)

5.3.3 External Validity: Transferability
Supposedly one limitation of an interpretive strategy of inquiry, as compared to a positivist strategy, is that while interpretivism may help us understand social reality, it will not seek to find a cause or effect within social events. (Crotty, 67) However, this research agrees with Weber’s perspective that social inquiry can use the study of subjective meaning to arrive (however eventually) at “a causal explanation of its course and effects” and that using interpretivism one can “explain as well as understand”. (Crotty, 69) From the explanations found in a thorough, triangulated, and reliable study we may discover consistencies and regularities, and infer that “…on the basis of past experience it appears probably that it will always occur in the same way”. (Crotty, 69) If perhaps “always” is too strong an assertion, the researcher is at least confident that the methodologies of social inquiry such as ethnography have been developed to such a point as to “establish a science of social fact” that are able to “describe and classify historical and social facts schematically and deduce experimentally the laws-system of society”. (Crotty, 70)

This argument lends credibility to the “transferability” of social inquiry, if not to “generalizability”. The researcher anticipates that findings, which are based on secondary data as well as a Middle Eastern woman’s interactions, experiences and perceptions, and not on the experiences or perceptions of westerners or males, will in general be transferable to other Middle Eastern or Islamic societies, particularly those like Kuwait who are wealth-producing, “modernized” countries with high migrant populations. For broader development theory and strategy, the researcher anticipates findings would add to an understanding of how sustainable development can be achieved.
by enhancing economic growth with the elements of agency, freedom, and the ability to participate in society.

5.3.4 Ethical Concerns

Oral and written consent was obtained from all interview participants. All participants were informed they were under no obligation to participate and could refrain from participation at any point of the research process, or from answering questions they did not wish to answer. Observations were only done in public places, in unobtrusive ways, in the process of normal daily living. All participants are anonymous, including in field notes, memos, or interview summaries and the researcher, only, has password-protected access to names and assigned identification numbers. All Internal Review Board (IRB) procedures and rules were followed to protect participants and to uphold ethical considerations of human subject research. This research also passed the IRB continuing review process in March 2015.

Regarding Non-Kuwaiti females recruited for interviews, many Non-Kuwaiti female workers are considered to be of the lowest status in Kuwaiti society, (particularly domestics) and regularly go unprotected by labor laws that are not upheld in their behalf. Because of their vulnerable status and unprotected positions, the researcher took precautions to ensure they would not feel coerced to participate in research, in particular by their employers, or fear their answers would be shared with anyone, particularly with their employers. Therefore the researcher only recruited female Non-Kuwaitis unlikely to experience undue influence, such as those employed by persons known to the researcher or contacts at AUK, and who are known to be fair, non-coercive employers. In addition, the researcher was especially sensitive to the vulnerability of these (especially
domestic workers) and did not suggest an interview if vulnerability to coercion or undue influence was evident or suspected.

5.3.5 Limitations

Possible limitations of this study are authors’ bias, cultural and language barriers, difficulty in obtaining some data on women within the cultural context of a patriarchal society, likely differences in interpretations of freedom, agency, or capability, and the scope of interview participant characteristics as related to transferability.

The researcher has taken steps to avoid authors’ bias through the method of phenomenology as described in detail above in the Methodology Section A: Perspective and Approach. In addition, triangulation with interviews, observations, and secondary data, was often used to check supposed findings.

Language barriers were also considered as a limitation. However since English, along with Arabic, is used in Kuwait as a common language among many different nationalities, all found interview participants had at least an intermediate-advanced to advanced capability with English. Therefore, although preparations were made for an interpreter to be present to interpret questions and answers during interviews, doing so was not necessary. However, when there was any doubt of a participant’s ability to clearly understand interview questions in English, an outside source was consulted before interviews began. In addition, interview questions were often repeated in several different ways, to ensure the participant’s understanding.

Next, the difficulty in obtaining non-biased data on women and their capabilities and agency within a patriarchal society should be considered. As previously mentioned, current, comprehensive information and research on Kuwait’s labor market and
especially on female labor is not readily available. In addition, it is possible women interview participants in particular may have felt internally intimidated by perceived outside influences during interviews, such as those from society, state, or family, which could contribute to and shape their responses. However, confidentiality was assured to each participant. It is also possible that some male interview participants were not completely receptive or supportive in their answers to research centered around concepts of agency, or women’s issues or freedoms, or to a western female conducting the research.

Next, differing interpretations of the concept of “obstacles”, “freedom”, or “agency” across varying cultures, genders, classes and activities were considered as possible limitations. For example, the ideals of “productivity” or “social cohesion” produced by a western concept of modernization, which promotes full job participation of both genders, may not be as important to Islamic societies as the value of traditional gender roles. There are also different obstacles or supports to freedom according to the various economic and social classes within society such as “elite class” and “middle class”. Also, the particular level of freedom allowed for or attained by women may differ according to the particular activity in which a woman is engaged. For example, a woman’s ability to enter the labor market may be less hindered by society and state than her ability to enter the political realm. However, recognizing the potential of facing differing perspectives of freedom or agency in the labor market and society was the first step in directing this research and drives the reasoning behind the use of ethnographic methods. It is also why research questions seek to find a more comprehensive understanding of a Kuwaiti woman’s concept of her own agency in society, to better
inform an analysis of the role of agency in improving female labor force participation.

It should be mentioned that some general characteristics of interview participants may be considered as limiting to transferability. Due to time and funding constraints, there was some difficulty in fully reaching all socio-economic classes of Kuwait for participants. Although time spent during data collection gave access to a wide-range of Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis, most were concentrated in Kuwait City and developed through university contacts, and thus may be considered more “liberal-minded” towards the status and treatment of women in society. Almost all Kuwaiti interview participants had spent at least some time spent studying at a university—most had a university degree or advanced graduate degree. In addition, most participants were considered part of the Hadar, or “city dwellers” of Kuwait, from both the elite and middle classes of society, and about half had been educated in western institutions. However, it should be noted that 22.2% of all Kuwaiti females over the age of 25 have a university or graduate degree, and that study outside of Kuwait is often necessary due to the educational institution limitations in Kuwait. (PACI 2014, 41-2) Also, precautions were taken to include Bedouin and conservative member’s perspectives (at least seven Kuwaiti participants were either religiously or traditionally conservative), and in the main themes generated, their answers mostly corresponded with other more “liberal-minded” interview participants.

Of the Non-Kuwaitis interviewed, most were considered higher status foreign workers. Though this may be limiting in some contexts, it is considered as an addition to the exploratory nature of this research since it can be considered as new insight into an area of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) populations that are not often studied. Most
research and reports on migrant labor in the GCC countries are about very poor and vulnerable domestic and other service workers. This report also gives the perspective of higher status expat workers—psychologists, teachers, graduate interns, college students, business managers, even a high ranking government worker (an unusual place to find a Non-Kuwaiti), a labor group mainly unconsidered in research on the GCC. These participants came from many and various cultures and backgrounds and, as explained in the interviews sections, many were not from ethnicities typically having a higher labor status in Kuwait. In addition, as previously described, this research gives insight into the perspectives of Second and Third Generation Non-Kuwaitis and their interaction with Kuwaitis in the workforce, another demographic relatively unconsidered in GCC labor market research, with few exceptions.

5.4 Data Analysis

Transcription of interviews began soon after the end of data collection, using the help of hired transcriptionists. Atlas.ti software was used to help sort and code data collected from interview transcriptions, observation field notes, and secondary data.

5.4.1 Theory and Method—coding to find the thematic narrative

Research analysis follows Emerson’s process of analysis and coding, as it is thorough and well-suited to the process of interpreting member’s meanings within a cultural context. Emerson says that as the “main idea grows out of the process” of coding and selecting excerpts, the researcher will have the core of the narrative s/he wants to tell. Emerson suggests writing the “thematic narrative” and waiting until the story is finished to choose a thesis, ensuring the thesis comes from your fieldnotes (and
thus from member’s meanings) and not a preconceived (a priori) theory. (Emerson, 203)

The first step in research analysis was to read interview transcriptions, Interview Summaries, In-Process Memos, and observation fieldnotes as a whole, or a “complete data set”. (Emerson, 173-5) During this reading, open codes were created as they emerged from the data, that were directly related to the research questions. For example, some preliminary codes were “Jobs-type Kuwaiti females do,” “Perception of female job roles,” “Jobs-obstacles to getting a job,” “Job Support-Family,” and “Perceptions of female agency”. Codes that were descriptive of the participants or place or events were also used such as “Kuwait in the 50s” or “Daily Schedule of Kuwaiti Female” or “Educational Institution”. (Creswell, 189)

While coding, code memos were also written (same as in-process memos, but instead done during coding and attached to codes) in order to “develop, preserve, and elaborate” on any ideas or themes emerging from the data. (Emerson, 185) During this process, more focused codes began to emerge, such as “jobs-public sector”, Kuwaitiness,” “Lack of productivity”, “Islam-tradition vs. Society”, and “Perception of Ethnic Job Roles”. (Emerson et al., 191-192) In the end, 294 codes were created, and because of the complexity and layering of data, especially within interviews, often 3 to 4 different codes were attached to the same quotation.

After creating focused codes, integrative memos (that connect the ideas between the codes within them) helped further develop theories and concepts within the interview transcriptions and fieldnotes. (Emerson et al., 195) Next, the reoccurring major themes were selected from within the open codes and developed into a story outline. (Creswell,
189) Themes selected were related to the nature of the labor market, what forces shape it, the role of capability or agency in female labor force participation, and how women in Kuwait perceive and define freedom. (Emerson et al., 188-189)

As Emerson suggested, the main themes did grow out of this process of coding and selecting excerpts, and the “core” of the narrative of research analysis emerged, resulting in the following chapters. As the thematic narrative was written, overtime, the overall thesis came from interviews and fieldnotes (and thus from member’s meanings) and not a preconceived (a priori) theory. (Emerson, 203)
Chapter 6 Post Data Collection Statistical Analysis: Revealing Female Labor Force Participation in Kuwait

6.1 Post Data Collection Labor Force Statistics

This research project, pre-data collection, was proposed based on labor force indicators from the World Bank’s “modeled ILO estimates” (estimates from the International Labor Organization) which show female labor force participation in Kuwait (total Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti women, ages 15+) as low compared to world averages, other high-income countries, and many non-Arab Islamic countries, and some gulf countries such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.¹ (See Table 1) One of the main proposed objectives of research was to identify what factors created low female labor force participation in an oil-rich, high-income society that also boasted high female educational attainment and literacy. The context of this research seemed to imply a lack of female agency and development participation in a modernized country, and perhaps to support the image of the stereotypical middle-eastern woman living within a patriarchal society.

During data collection in Kuwait, the perception of female labor force participation (FLFP) in Kuwait contradicted low participation statistics, indicating most Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti women, under the age of 65, worked either in the public sector, the private sector, or within an informal market of home-based businesses; it was not unusual for Kuwaiti women to have two, or even three jobs, in both paid and volunteer

¹The World Bank online database provides both Kuwait’s Central Statistical Bureau’s national estimate and the International Labor Organization’s modeled estimate for labor force participation in Kuwait.
positions. Most Kuwaitis, men and women, when asked for their perception of Kuwaiti FLFP also thought rates were much higher than accounted for by World Bank and ILO statistics. As one conservative Bedouin man stated when asked about his perception of the number of women in the workforce, “…most of the women now…every woman I know, they have the intention to work…my mother she’s around, mashallah (God has willed it), 70 (years of age). I think this is the only woman around me not working or (who doesn’t) intend to work”. (Interview, 54)

After visiting the Ministry of Planning’s Central Statistical Bureau (KCSB) and the Public Authority for Civil Information in Kuwait, it was evident that national estimates for overall female LFP (Kuwaiti + Non-Kuwaiti) were significantly higher than the modeled ILO estimate. For the year 2011 (the last available year for CSB) the CSB national estimate of female labor force participation was 61.1%, \(^2\) 18% higher than modeled ILO estimates of 43%. (WDI (a) Online) Furthermore, the Public Authority of Civil Information (PACI) estimates female labor force participation as 58.7% in 2011, also a significantly higher number than ILO estimates, and much closer to CSB estimates. See the comparison of statistical resources in Table 2 below—the year 2011 is the last available year for CSB estimates, but the years 2012 and 2013 are offered for comparison.

\[^2\] The Central Statistical Bureau’s Annual Statistical Abstract (2012) does not feature labor force participation rates (CBS ASA 2012, p. 98) However, using the ASA estimate for the female population in the work force, divided by the female population over 15 years, female labor force participation according to CSB census data can be calculated, using the ILO and World Bank’s definition of labor force and labor force participation rates. In addition, the Kuwait Labor Force Survey Method’s (2011) “Definition of employment” states “employment refers to persons aged 15 years and over who worked during the reference period”.

Table 2
Aggregate Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation Rates* 2011-2013
Total Females in Kuwait (Kuwaiti + Non-Kuwaiti, Ages 15+)
Comparison of World Bank, Central Statistical Bureau, International Labor Organization and
Public Authority for Civil Information Statistics, Year 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International or National Statistical Source:</th>
<th>Total Female Labor Force Participation Rate 2011</th>
<th>Total FLFP 2012</th>
<th>Total FLFP 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Bank 3</td>
<td>43.1% (2011) ILO estimate</td>
<td>43.4% (2012) ILO Estimate</td>
<td>43.6% (2013) ILO Estimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.1% (2011) National estimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Labor Organization (ILO) 4</td>
<td>ILO Estimates and Projections (2011-13)</td>
<td>43.1% (2011) ILO Estimate</td>
<td>43.4% (2012) ILO Estimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) 5</td>
<td>Population Census (2011)</td>
<td>61.1% (2011) National Estimate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) 6</td>
<td>58.7% (2011) 1</td>
<td>58.2% (2012) 1</td>
<td>58% (8-2013) 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(LFP=Pop in LF/Pop 15+)*

6.2 Comparing National Estimates: PACI and CSB

There are two main statistical sources for national statistics in Kuwait—the

Central Statistical Bureau under the Ministry of Planning (CSB), and the Public

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3 World Bank. World Development Indicators. (Online) Database. Kuwait. LFP Rate (pop 15+). Web accessed January 15, 2015 at Databank.worldbank.org/dat/views/reports/tableview.aspx# World Bank provides 2013 as the most recent year available for the Modeled ILO estimate. However, the ILO says its estimates are only until the year 2012, and that 2013 is a projection.


Authority for Civil Information (PACI). The Central Statistical Bureau publishes the Annual Statistical Abstract, which offers statistical information based on population census, administrative records, and occasional surveys. (Interview, CSB) Data on population, specifically, are based on Population Census conducted by the Central Statistical Bureau. (ASA 2012, 45) Data on the Labor Force are comprised from CSB Population Censuses, information provided by Public Authority for Civil Information, and by the Civil Service Commission and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and from Labor Force Surveys when available (the last survey was conducted in 2008). Labor Force statistics from 2011 are from population census and PACI. (KCSB 2012, 97) The first population census was conducted in 1957, and was conducted every five years between 1960 and 1985. The last three censuses were taken in 1995, 2005, and 2011. (Shah 2010, pp. 9-10)

The Public Authority for Civil Information is an independent government body, which publishes statistical reports based on a computerized population register. Since 1989 PACI has published population and labor force statistical reports annually, and population characteristics three times per year. Every resident of Kuwait regardless of age or nationality, whether a citizen or temporary resident, must register and be issued a civil identification card or bataqa madania. (Shah 2010, 10-11)

The population statistics of CSB and PACI, which form the basis of labor force statistics, are consistently and significantly different, comparing years 1995, 2005, and 2011. PACI population estimates substantially exceeding those of CSB in both the case of Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis. (Shah 2010, 14; Shah 2014, 5) Although CSB offers a good estimate of population and labor force statistics, PACI is most likely to offer
“relatively more reliable and valid” statistics regarding population and labor force statistics for several reasons: (Interview Shah, Shah 2014, 5; Interview, 48)

- **Population Data Collection Methods**: CSB collects census data by hiring a part time staff to go door to door over the period of a month, manually filling in household information given on each member. If no one is home, the staff is expected to return. Since 2011, residents have the option of filling in the census form online, but whether or not online registration has increased response rate not yet been evaluated (KCSB 2011) There are no legal penalties for residents who evade the census or do not fully cooperate. In contrast, PACI statistical data collection is ongoing and managed by a full-time staff. PACI registration is mandatory for all citizens and temporary residents, whereby each person is given a PACI civil identification card. Registration with PACI for a civil ID card is easy to acquire, and inexpensive. More importantly, it is required in order to prove identity “for most public civil and legal transactions” such as hospital visits, opening bank accounts, and house rental. In addition, death notifications are sent to PACI to update their system. (Shah 2010, 15-16; Shah 2014, 4,6)

- **Labor Force Data Collection Methods**: CSB uses the population census as a sample frame, which has its own limitations, as pointed out above. In addition, the labor force survey has approximately a 15-20% response rate due to the difficulty of collecting household responses especially those in remote areas of Kuwait, such as on the border of Saudi Arabia or Iraq. (Interview, CSB) In contrast, PACI collects labor force data at the same time population data is received.
• **Temporary Residents:** PACI civil identification cards are proof of legal status for the duration of residency in Kuwait. (Shah 2014, 4) Although migration labor is often hard to determine accurately, the department within the Ministry of Interior (MOI), which issues residency permits for Non-Kuwaitis, is linked through a computer system to the PACI department issuing civil ID cards. When a Non-Kuwaiti cancels his or her residency at the MOI, status within the PACI system is also updated, and it is usually in the interest of the Non-Kuwaiti to cancel residency before permanently leaving Kuwait, in order to collect final service benefits. If the person leaves the country without cancelling his residency, it is automatically cancelled in 6 months. However, it should be noted that in the case of automatic cancellation of residency, status in the PACI database is not also automatically updated, which could account for some overestimation in population figures. (Shah 2010, 15-16; Shah 2014, 6)

• **Stateless:** In the case of Bidoons, although they are not issued civil ID cards like other residents, they are assigned a civil ID number, which is accounted for in the PACI computerized statistical database. (Shah 2014, 4)

• **Research:** Gulf scientists conducting research on demographics and population in Kuwait often use PACI statistics (See Shah 2011, 2013, 2014; Hertog 2013; Gulf Labour Markets and Migration at [http://gulfmigration.eu](http://gulfmigration.eu)), and by business publications such as the National Bank of Kuwait’s Economic Brief 10 April 2012.
According to the CSB, the need for updated statistics is recognized, and the CSB is planning to provide labor force statistics from a new labor force survey conducted in 2014. (LMIS; Interview 23)

However, because 2011 is the last year CSB reported population or labor force statistics, the year 2011 will be used for the following comparison between ILO, PACI, and CSB population and labor force estimates.

**6.3 Comparing National Estimates with ILO Modeled Estimates**

When comparing the ILO modeled estimate with national estimates of female labor force participation in Kuwait, a statistical discrepancy of 18% is significant, indicating that according to the ILO, 18% more women in Kuwait are “inactive” in the formal labor market. The “inactivity rate of women, in particular, tells us a lot about the social customs of a country, attitudes towards women in the labour force, and family structures in general”. (ILO 2014, 17)

Therefore in the analysis of Kuwaiti society, its attitudes toward women, and what factors drive female agency and participation in Kuwait, it is important to know which FLFP rate is more likely to be correct, and why.

The ILO modeled estimate of labor force participation uses data selection criteria and methods which “ensure comparability across countries and over time” and “avoid the inconsistencies” resulting from differing data sources and definitions. (World Bank Data a) Non comparability issues considered by the ILO include the type of source, age group coverage, geographic coverage areas, survey reference periods, inclusion or non-inclusion of military conscription, and variations in national definitions of the “economically active population, particularly with regard to the statistical treatment of
contributing family workers” and the “unemployed, not looking for work”. (ILO 2014, 9-10)

The ILO modeled estimate is compiled with, and based mainly on, nationally representative labor force surveys, but other sources are used—such as population censuses, establishment censuses and surveys, and administrative records such as employment exchange registers and unemployment insurance schemes—only when survey data are not available. The ILO maintains that estimates based on national labor survey data should “provide the best current basis available for reasonable international comparisons.” (Lepper 2004)

For some countries, a combination of sources is used to compile the estimate. (WDI Online, footnote tab for “modeled ILO estimate”; World Bank Data a) ILO estimates, as well as future projections of total population and population by sex and age group, are produced by the UN Population Division7. Using UN population estimates, “the role of the ILO is to generate estimates and projections of LFP (rates) that are consistent over time, across countries and across the various subgroups of the population of a given country.” (ILO Methodology 2013, 7)

Since ILO estimates are “based mainly on nationally representative labor force surveys, with other sources (population censuses and nationally reported estimates) used only when no survey data are available”, it is unclear why the ILO modeled estimates of female LFP are 18% lower in the year 2011 than the calculated estimates of the Central

Statistical Bureau, which conducts both the national labor force survey and population census. In addition, according to the ILO, when commenting on nationally derived estimates “The labour force participation rates obtained from population censuses…tend to be lower, as the vastness of the census operation inhibits the recruitment of trained interviews and does not typically allow for detailed probing on the labour market activities of the respondents”. (ILO 2014, 29) And, according to the World Bank, unpaid workers such as those in family businesses, as well as student workers, and those in the armed forces are often overlooked in national estimates. (World Bank Data b)

Although repeated efforts to contact the ILO were made during the process of this research, the ILO was only able to offer general explanations for non-comparability (See ILO 2013a), but not specific explanations for what non-comparability issues determined Kuwait ILO modeled estimates. ILO labor force estimates, along with future projections of labor force participation rates, are published in the ILO Economically Active Population Estimates and Projections Database (EAPEP, Sixth Edition)\(^8\). In addition, CSB and PACI interview sources were also unable to explain the reason for the statistical difference.

6.3.1 Labor Definitions

ILO, CSB, and PACI definitions of what constitutes labor and labor force participation in Kuwait appear to be the same. All estimates on overall female labor force participation in this research, either as specifically reported by the ILO, CSB, or PACI, or as calculated by the author, include both Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti women

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\(^8\) See also Bourmpoula et al. “ILO estimates and projections of the economically active population: 1990-2020” (Sixth edition) for more information on producing “harmonized estimates”.
populations ages 15+ and the most universally-accepted labor force definitions. (Kuwait Labor Force Survey, ILO Methodology 2013, 6, PACI 2012 Table 10, 609)

Simply defined, the labor force of a country is comprised of the “economically active” or the number of people who are employed, plus the number of people who are unemployed, of legal working-age. The working age population is generally defined as those aged 15 or 16 years of age, or older, varying according to the national laws or practices of a country. (Case et al, 436; ILO 2014, 29; WDI Online (b))

The economically active population consists of all people who are available to supply labor for the “production of goods and services” during a specified period, including both employed and unemployed. An employed person is someone who officially 1) works for pay for someone else or in a self-owned business one or more hours/week, 2) works without pay for 15 or more hours/week in a family enterprise, 3) has a job but has been temporarily absent with or without pay for reasons due to sickness, vacation, inclement weather, labor-management disputes, or personal reasons.

Unemployed refers to anyone who is not working, but is available for work and has made “specific efforts to find work during the previous 4 weeks”. If a person is not working but does not want a job, or has given up looking for a job, s/he is considered “not in the labor force” or “inactive” (ILO 2014, 10). Those who are considered “not in the labor force” also include people who are full-time students, retired, institutionalized, and those who stay home to take care of children or elderly parents. (Case et al, 740, 436)

The CSB and PACI similarly categorize those “in the labor force” which include the

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employed and the unemployed but looking for work and those “out of the labor force” such as those Kuwaitis who are wealthy and not interested in working, the elderly who cannot work, the retired, or university students who are not looking for work.

The above definition of “employed” does not include those working in the informal sector or those working as an informal worker in a formal business. (WDI Online (b); ILO 2014, 29) The World Bank considers informal employment as paid “employment …not under the purview of labor regulations” such as “lack of firm registration, lack of social security coverage, or lack of an employment contract” due to “limited scope” of the position or “deliberate avoidance or evasion.” (World Bank 2013) Informal work can occur in an informal or formal business, or even in a household. (ILO 2013b, 1)

The CSB does not include informal work categories in their surveys, and PACI does not include informal work in their analysis. (Kuwait Labor Force Survey Method, Interviews 23, 55) According to several Key Informant interview participants, informal work in Kuwait is defined as work for profit that is not officially licensed by the government. Lack of taxation on Kuwaiti citizens or businesses make it difficult to track informal business. (KI Interview, 42) However, how Kuwait specifically defines “informal work” in comparison to the ILO is still somewhat unclear.

6.3.2 Breaking Down Labor Force Population Statistics

According to the CSB Population Census, 1,800,033 people (Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti ages 15+) were in the labor force in Kuwait in 2011; The ILO estimates population in the labor force as 1,588,100 for the same year, a difference of 212,000 less people than reported nationally. Interestingly, the ILO estimates 229,700 fewer women
in the labor force during 2011 than the CSB, but 17,700 more men. (ILOSTAT a; KCSB 2012, 101-3, 105)

The question is then, what factors contribute to the ILO “missing” 229,700 women that the National Population Census does count, and to the “addition” of 17,700 men that the ILO does not? In addition, the Public Authority for Civil Information estimates there was even a greater number of people in the labor force—a total of 2,190,348. Of these, PACI reports there were 252,353 more women than ILO reported and 349,500 more men. In both instances, the ILO greatly underestimates the number of women in the labor force as compared to either CSB or PACI national estimates. (ILOSTAT a; KCSB 2012, 101-3, 105) See Table 3 below. Again, since the year 2011 is the most recent year available for statistics from the CSB, the year 2011 is used for comparison.
Table 3
Aggregate Labor Force Population Statistics in Kuwait By Gender
Total People in Kuwait (Kuwaiti + Non-Kuwaiti)
Comparison of World Bank, Central Statistical Bureau, International Labor Organization
and the Public Authority for Civil Information Year 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population in the Labor Force</th>
<th>Total Kuwaiti + Non Kuwaiti</th>
<th>Total Females</th>
<th>Total Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Bank(^{10})</td>
<td>1,587,456 (2011)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO Estimate (^{11})</td>
<td>1,588,100 (2011)</td>
<td>376,200 (2011)</td>
<td>1,211,900 (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Census (^{12})</td>
<td>1,800,000 (2011)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRYA*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Force Survey 2008(^{13})</td>
<td>1,300,000 (2008)</td>
<td>605,856 (2011)</td>
<td>1,194,168 (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Census 2011(^{14})</td>
<td>1,800,033 (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Most Recent Year Available, Used for Comparison

A breakdown of labor force population statistics according to nationality and gender may help uncover if certain groups—Kuwait and Non Kuwaiti, female and male—are counted differently when comparing national estimates and the modeled estimates of the ILO. However, although PACI and CSB include a breakdown on labor force participation statistics according to nationality (Kuwait or Non-Kuwaiti), age, and gender, the ILO does not.

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\(^{10}\) World Development Indicators Online Database. Kuwait. Footnote Tab on Labor Force online data for Kuwait: “Source: International Labour Organization, using World Bank population estimates”


\(^{15}\) PACI Table from ASA 2012 p. 103, from 2011; Total Labor Force.
Although the reasons for statistical differences are not clear, the following suggestions are offered for the significant differences in FLFP rates between the national estimates of PACI and CSB and the modeled estimates of the ILO:

- The 229,700 “missing” women from ILO estimates could be domestic workers in Kuwaiti households. The CSB counts domestics, as does PACI. PACI estimates about 320,000 female “personal and protective service workers” in Kuwait in 2011. (PACI 2011) Most likely, the ILO would have limited access to the Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti populations that local agents would more easily have. In addition, locals are likely not to be as truthful with foreign agencies asking questions about their personal lives and whom they employ in their households.

- Although sources from CSB and PACI indicate that informal labor is not counted in national estimates, (as it is not in ILO estimates) it may be possible that “formal” labor is defined more widely in Kuwait, and “informal labor” more narrowly, giving different meanings to the definition of labor force participation, and increasing the number of women in LFP counted by the CSB and PACI. After interviews and text analysis, how Kuwait defines “informal work” in comparison to the ILO is still somewhat unclear. For example, the Kuwait Labor Force Survey Method (2011) shows that volunteers in some regards are counted as “employed”, and the ILO also defines an “employed” person as someone works without pay for 15 or more hours/week in a family enterprise. The ILO states that non-comparability issues arise “particularly with regard to the statistical treatment of contributing family workers” (ILO 2014, 9-10) National labor force population estimates will vary in the inclusion of some subgroups such
as the armed forces (which are generally included) and seasonal or part-time workers, with most estimates excluding “homemakers and other unpaid caregivers” and informal sector workers. (WDI Online b)

- It is not understood whether or not the ILO counts the Bidoon population. CSB and PACI do count this population, but as part of the Non-Kuwaiti population since 1965. However, since the Bidoon population was estimated as only about 103,000 people in 2006, (Shah, 2010, 39-4) and if one assumes about half of these are women, Bidoons would not fully account for the approximately 230,000 women “missing” in FLFP from ILO modeled estimates.

### 6.4 Choosing New Population and Labor Force Statistics and the Story They Tell

This research now considers female labor force participation in Kuwait to be higher than pre-data collection estimates, which were based on ILO modeled estimates, due to the following:

- Interviews and observations indicate high female labor force participation
- Interviews and observations show high state and social support for female labor force participation
- CSB and PACI report population and labor statistics that openly admit that 80 to 81% of their labor force is Non-Kuwaiti and approximately 17-19% of their labor force is Kuwaiti, an indicator which does not put the productivity, national identity, or human resource availability of Kuwaitis in the best light, especially considering the Development Plan of 2013/14-2016/17 which indicates the national intention to develop local labor by creating 77,500 jobs for Kuwaitis in the private sector. (Izzak 2013a; KUNA)
• CSB and PACI estimates for FLFP are both much higher than ILO estimates (200,000-230,000 women), yet much closer to each other in estimates (a difference of about 30,000 women)

• PACI most likely offers accurate estimates, as it is mandatory for nationals and non-nationals to register with PACI, as well as in their self-interest, to prove identity “for most public civil and legal transactions” such as hospital visits, opening bank accounts, and house rental. (Shah 2014, 4,6)

As described previously in this chapter, PACI estimates are considered the most accurate statistics available. Therefore, in the proceeding research analysis, current PACI estimates will be used. Where PACI figures are not available, CSB figures will be used instead. In summary, PACI estimates place female labor force participation (Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti) in 2011 in Kuwait as significantly higher than world averages, other high-income countries, some GCC countries such as Qatar and the UAE, and many non-Arab Islamic countries. In addition, the female percentage of the total labor force population increased almost 6% with PACI figures to 29% (2011). This percentage is still much lower than world averages and other high-income countries, however, this a reflection of the large number of foreign male workers who reside in Kuwait as migrant workers, and send remittances to their countries of origin, where their wives and children still live.

However, understanding overall female LFP as compared to educational attainment sheds light on only a small part of female labor in Kuwait, especially when considering how to increase local resources for labor. According to the ILO, LFP rates are determined for different categories of the population in order to fully understand labor market behavior within a country because the “level and pattern of labour force
participation depends on employment opportunities and the demand for income, which may differ from one category of persons to another.” For women, “studies have shown that the labour force participation rates of women vary systematically, at any given age, with their marital status and level of education. There are also important differences in the participation rates of the urban and rural populations, and among different socio-economic groups.” (ILO 2014, 29)

Although interrelated, the breakdown of Kuwaiti female labor force statistics, found at PACI, tells separate and much more complex stories of female labor force participation in Kuwait according to age, nationality, education and labor sector. The following are just a few of the most salient examples to this research.

6.4.1 Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation Rates, by Age

According to PACI, in 2014 the overall female labor force participation rate in Kuwait (Kuwaiti + Non Kuwaiti) was 57.4%. However, this number drops significantly when considering Kuwaiti women only—Kuwaiti female labor force participation was 47.1% in 2014, for ages 15 and above.

However, considering high secondary attainment for Kuwaiti women, when using the age range from the approximate age of university graduation (age 20) to the usual retirement age (age 64), Kuwaiti female labor force participation increases to an average of 51%. (2014) However, since female retirement age in Kuwait is currently legal at age 47 (with 15 years of service), which will be discussed in chapter 7, it is necessary to consider participation during these years, causing Kuwaiti female labor force participation rates to jump to 76%. (2014) (PACI, Version 2014.12.31) See Table 4 below.
### Table 4
Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation Rates by Extended Age Groups, Year 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Kuwaiti Female LF Participation Rate 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 years of age and above</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 64 years of age</td>
<td>50.7% (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 45 years of age (approximate age of university graduation to approximate current legal retirement age of 47)</td>
<td>76% (average)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Kuwaiti female labor force participation increases even more during the Kuwaiti woman’s younger years immediately following college. Table 5 shows low Kuwaiti female LFP during university years at 27.6%, and very high Kuwaiti FLFP during the years immediately following university graduation, starting at 83% in the late 20s, increasing to 89% in the early 30s, and falling slightly in the late 30s to 86%. (2014) See Table 5 below.
Table 5
Kuwaiti Female Labor force Participation Rate by Narrow Age Group
Year 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Kuwaiti Female LF Participation Year 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years of age</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29 years of age</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34 years of age</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39 years of age</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6.5 Statistical Analysis Conclusion and Implications

This chapter analysis contradicts international statistics of low female LFP, which may imply a lack of female agency, productivity, and development participation in a modernized country, and perhaps to support perceptions of gender inequality and the stereotypical image of a middle-eastern woman living within a patriarchal society. Furthermore, it shows much higher overall LFP rates of women in Kuwait, and especially of Kuwaiti women of working age, giving a different perspective of the participation and agency of modern women. The following chapters support this statistical analysis, using qualitative data to demonstrate there is high support for female labor participation and a local perception of high female participation in the workforce. However, the limits and barriers of both social support and economic structures will also be discussed, as well as their relation with female agency in Kuwait.
Chapter 7 Support for Female Labor Force Participation in Kuwait

Overwhelmingly, there is both high support and a perception of high support for female labor force participation in Kuwait according to interviews and observations. These findings possibly lend further credence to the higher rates of female labor force participation (than those of the ILO) cited by PACI and CSB statistical sources.

Support is driven by both state policy and society’s encouragement of women to work outside the home—with societal support restricted only by the type of job roles viewed as acceptable or suitable for women.

7.1 State Support: Government Jobs and Equal Pay

State policies offer equal employment opportunities for both Kuwaiti women and men with guaranteed public sector jobs and equal salaries. Government scholarships help women and men receive higher education either in Kuwait (when available) or abroad, and public sector salaries increase according to level of education. The government also offers men and women incentives to work in the private sector by supplementing low private sector salaries with subsidies for both employee and employer, and with “Kuwaitization” programs or quotas to hire Kuwaitis in private sector companies.

Gracious maternity-leave policies offer women the freedom to balance work and family life. Women are given at least 70 days of paid maternity leave, and up to 100 days non-paid. (Kuwait Labor Law)
However, the Kuwaiti government has a policy offering voluntary early retirement for women, which some see as discouraging women from participation in the workforce, keeping them “from productive activity when they should be at their most influential…” (Al-Sabah, 231) Others say this policy makes room for the youth population. (Interview, 45) According to this policy, women have been able to retire from the public sector after 15 years on the job, which enables women in their late 30s or early 40s to retire. In 2007 this law was changed to establish an age limit at which one can retire; today the age limit is 47, but by the year 2020, a woman will not be able to retire until age 50. (KI Interview, 42)

7.2 Social Support: Family and Civil Society

Interviews and observations show nearly ubiquitous social support of females in the workforce from both liberal and traditional-minded families, a concept that many believe has changed when compared to twenty to thirty years ago. All interview participants believe it is highly advantageous for the Kuwaiti woman, her family, and society, if she is a member of the workforce. Only a few disadvantages were cited, regarding less time being available for the woman to devote to the family.

In the more traditional-minded families, often Bedouin (also known as Badu), support is only limited by the types of jobs deemed suitable for Kuwaiti women. There are costs to women who deviate from what is perceived as a suitable female job in Kuwaiti society. These costs, and the perception of suitable female jobs in Kuwait, will be discussed in detail in Chapters 10 and 11.

Societal perception of female job roles was mentioned most often by Kuwaiti participants when discussing obstacles to female labor force freedom. In the same way,
the pressure of social approval and the threat of losing one’s reputation, was mentioned most often as an obstacle to Kuwaiti women’s overall freedom within society.

7.2.1 Defining Freedom and Freedom in the Workforce in Kuwait

As discussed in Chapter 2, freedom is “an engine for development” which expands the capabilities (removal of barriers to individual freedoms) of people to “lead the kind of lives they value”. (Sen 2000, 18) However, concepts of and experiences with freedom vary across regions, cultures and communities, and between gender and age groups. Therefore, as a foundation to inform data analysis and better understand freedom and agency in Kuwait, and as an attempt to mitigate researcher bias regarding concepts of freedom, all interview participants were asked to give their personal definition of freedom.

The overall majority of interview participants, male and female, Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwait, define freedom as the ability to make their own choices—how they live, what they think or believe, and where they physically go. However, almost all participants modified this definition with the need for “boundaries,” “limits,” “rules,” or “parameters” to personal freedom, placed in respect to another person’s freedom.

Participants indicate that consideration of how others will be affected is important to making individual choices and “limits are very important for human beings to flourish”.

Several participants mentioned an Arabic saying, loosely translated as “(My) freedom ends where the freedom of others begins.” (Interview 32, 45, 22, 26)

Kuwaiti women, however, further narrow their definition of freedom as the ability to make their own choices without being judged. One young Kuwaiti female says

…People judge you a lot. And that (creates) a lot of obstacles to a lot of women because they don’t…do something just because they don’t want to be judged. They don’t want to be talked about. It’s a big concern to a lot of women. (Interview, 31)
In fact, often Kuwaiti women interview and observation participants, who had made the personal choice to remain “covered” by abaya (full body covering) or hijab (head covering), also indicated that they believed it necessary to respect another woman’s choice to remain “uncovered”.

The majority of Kuwaiti interview participants believe in the presence of “relative freedom” in Kuwait, particularly political and judicial. However, most participants did not believe they were “fully free,” due to the perception of a lack of full social freedom. The main lacks to social freedom cited were the pressure of social disapproval (mainly on women), limitations in freedom of speech (for example, the threat of punishment for criticizing the Amir), and since alcohol is illegal in Kuwait, the inability to “be relaxed…go and have a drink, even in my own (home)”. (Interview, 35)

Although the Non-Kuwaiti view of freedom, in general, also mentioned the ability to make individual choices, they further define it in terms of opportunity and being treated with greater respect. When asked her definition of freedom, a Lebanese woman working in the public sector in Kuwait answers:

...to be treated like Kuwaitis. Which will not happen. This is to me freedom. To be treated like Kuwaitis, and they will not do this. (Interview, 05)

When discussing the labor force, interview participants—female and male, Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti—seem to take for granted that along with social and state support (capability or the removal of barriers to participation), the right or ability to choose to participate in the labor force demonstrates positive individual agency (or the ability to act on their own behalf).
Education is also viewed as a tool of agency by both Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti participants—particularly for women. A Second Generation Non-Kuwaiti female sums up this perception in the following quote:

I am feeling the degree is the best thing they can have. Other things, sooner or later they will get (them). It’s not only very important, it’s a must…because this is our weapon. This is your weapon. If I’m not (working in my job), how could I be living this way?

Although she is a citizen from a relatively poor country, her education has allowed her to secure a job in Kuwait, which enables her to care for her entire family, including her disabled husband, college-age children, and elderly mother.

7.2.2 Economic Independence and Agency

Social support for female workforce participation and higher education is mainly driven by the economic concerns of Kuwait’s modern society, and the need for female economic agency. As a daughter or sister, a woman’s family considers her financial security and independence of utmost importance, especially due to the perception of a high divorce rate in Kuwait. According to Central Statistical Bureau statistics, there were 11,074 Kuwaiti marriages (by husband’s nationality) between 2003-2013 and 5,165 divorces during the same time period, demonstrating a divorce rate of 46.6%. (KCSB 2013, Table 1, pp. 1, 28) A Kuwaiti male in his 60s comments:

You need servants, you need groceries. Every week I pay 50 to 60 KD ($175-$210) for groceries and all these things. At least the wife, (if she works) she will help him. On the other side, you know, she wants to secure herself. If this husband, one day divorces her, (and says) ‘I quit’. What she will do with the kids, you know? They give her 300 KD every month (in government subsidies) and it will not do anything for the rent, for the kids, so if she work, it’s different. (Interview, 36)

An interesting aspect of female financial security, however, is that social norm, Islam, and the Personal Status law of 1987 make it the legal responsibility of men to provide for the family, their wives and children. Legally and culturally, women are not
required to participate in the support of the household. Rather, as one Kuwaiti woman puts it, “her money, even if she works, and anything that she spends on the house, is considered charity from her”. (Interview, 38)

Even so, female “bargaining power” is still important to Kuwaiti women, which “tends to enhance the relative position of women even in the distributions within the household”. As Sen points out, work at home, which does not produce remuneration is often ignored as a an equal contribution, but when the “employed woman earns a wage, her contribution to the family’s prosperity is more visible” and enhances her voice and independence. (Sen 1999, 194)

One young Kuwaiti university woman illustrates this. She practices a conservative form of Islam, dressing in the full body and face coverings of the abaya and niqab. When asked whether or not she will work once she marries, she emphatically says yes, commenting:

I believe that I have to have my own work, to have my own salary. I think it’s better…even Islam says the woman has (to be an) independent economist (of her own money). I prefer, even if (my future husband) is a rich man and working…typically I prefer to have my own salary to plan what I believe in.” (Interview, 44)

Other participants commented that even if the Kuwaiti woman chooses not to spend on the household, she has the financial freedom to buy things for herself or her family, a choice she makes for herself, “without worrying whether or not he’s going to get it for me”. And, in addition to financial freedom and the ability to make her own financial decisions, “she will gain the respect” from men “much more than if (she didn’t earn her own money).” (Interview, 38)

A job and personal income even enhance a woman’s marriageability. Although the perception is that twenty years ago, many Kuwaiti men preferred for his wife to stay
home, today most husbands believe two incomes are needed in a society which is thought
to have high costs of living. High real estate prices, high living standards, and the cost of
the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca, were among those costs most often mentioned.

The Kuwaiti male mind set of the 1960s, which preferred women to stay home
and care for the children, has been changing since the mid 80s when the standard of
living went up (due to the oil booms of the 70s) and more Kuwaitis came back to Kuwait
from studying abroad. When questioned about the concepts of the more traditional-
minded Bedouin husbands today, one participant said “…economic need is driving these
families to push aside all the cultural obstacles and make money.” Another element that
drives men to support women’s work is that they can take loans on their wives
salaries. (Interview, 53; 17)

A female university professor summarizes the social drive for women to
participate in the labor market like this:

Everyone I know, even if they come from a very conservative family are working and it
is because of (financial need) and actually, today…if a boy tells his mom…I do want to
marry if you can find me someone…most of the men now require that the girl has a
university degree and works. And even better if she’s done pilgrimage (to Mecca) so he
doesn’t have to pay for that. I’m telling you. This is our situation, so a lot of the women
we know today, I mean rarely do I know a woman who takes a degree and stays home.
Some of the upper class women…can afford to start their own business from home, and
then there are some families who are extremely religious and do not want the wife to
drive or to work, yes we still have a few of those. But the majority of Kuwaiti women,
even those who come from religious families, work. (Interview, 03)

Financial security was also mentioned often as a benefit for women attending
institutes of higher education, because the scale of pay in government jobs increases
according to level of education. As one Kuwaiti woman says; “You can apply (for a
government job) without the college degree, but you’ll get half the salary. But if you
have a college degree, you can get double to triple (the) salary of non graduates.”

(Interview, 28)

It is not just young Kuwaiti women who want an education and job for financial security. Kuwait women are also attending college at a later stage of life in order to enter the labor market. A Kuwaiti female political scientist comments that there are many students who “part timers” and who are “at a later stage of life,” at the Arab Open University in Kuwait. (Interview, 17)

Some interview participants believe a high value placed on the outward appearance of financial wealth also drives support for female LFP in Kuwait, since the status of a woman is elevated if she has a college degree and a respectable job title. However, some participants mentioned that once a woman has these, her goal then becomes to stay at home to have kids, a social concept of gender roles discussed further in Chapter 10. (Interview 28, 12)

Also, Kuwaiti women (especially those not contributing to household costs) can afford to have designer purses, bags, and take trips overseas, something perceived to be very important to Kuwaiti women and their reputations. According to one professional Kuwait woman in her 40s “We are a people who are used to higher standards of living. Everyone wants to drive a Mercedes and live in a villa and travel every summer and so everyone wants to be upper class and you need a lot of income for that.” (Interview, 03)

7.2.3 Individual Autonomy, Social Identity and Participation

Although high cost of living and female financial security are the main reasons cited for support for female labor force participation, social support does extend past
economic concerns. Most participants also cited intangible, yet important, benefits to Kuwaiti women and society.

Kuwaiti sociologist Haya Al Mughni says that Kuwaiti state policies are built upon the premise that “it is inconceivable that (women) could exist without the protection of men and with an identity of their own. They are defined as family members whose rights and obligations are circumscribed by their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters”. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 4, although considered “equal citizens under the law” Kuwaiti women are even passed social subsidies through their husbands or fathers. In addition, Kuwait adopted Islamic Family Law “as a means of regulating sexuality, marriage, divorce and inheritance” and which “operates in the favor of men” who act as a woman’s guardian. (Al Mughni 2001, 64)

Among the top benefits of female employment mentioned, was the attainment of an autonomous social identity and purpose beyond the scope of being a Kuwaiti mother and wife, to becoming an integral, productive part of society. A Non-Kuwaiti Key informant describes her perception of Kuwaiti women in the workforce: “I see in them that they have a much greater confidence. They have much greater agency. They’ve learned something about…being autonomous and an individual.” (Interview, 12)

Sen describes the process of acquiring identity in the workforce as related to the process of incorporating the “active role of women’s agency” in the development of society. As workforce participants, no longer are women just recipients of welfare to increase their well being and status, but “women are increasingly seen, by men as well as women, as active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that
can alter the lives of both women and men.” (Sen 1999, 189) A Kuwait University professor and successful artist agrees:

I think work is a crucial part to our identity. It’s very important for a woman to work because not only does she need to figure out who she is as a person, but also who she is as a citizen, participating in the build up of the society.” (Interview, 27)

Nussbaum asserts that women historically have been treated as the supporters of “the ends of others” and not as autonomous “ends in their own right”. (Nussbaum, 5)

One Kuwaiti male labeled a Kuwaiti woman’s personal development and social identity in the workforce, a process of “self-actualization”. He, like most other participants, believed that the sole role of mother and wife was very important, but that “not all women want that”, saying that “for a lot of women, I think going out (into the labor force) is really important for their own personal sanity.” (Interview, 35)

Another Kuwait male from the more conservative Bedouin society, comments about his wife, who has five children at home:

My wife is a teacher, and I think I have enough money to give her what she wants, but I think it’s not about money. Money is important, but it’s not about money. The real thing—she want(s) to do something in her life. She want(s) to do something useful. (Interview, 54)

Also discussed was the idea that jobs “expose” women to society and teach them how to interact with different types of people, even encouraging them to step up to leadership roles. One young Kuwaiti business owner describes loving her job because it has expanded her social horizons. Interestingly, this young woman is from what is considered the elite social class of Kuwait, and she talks about enjoying the part of her work that has caused her to move from her own small social circles to an interaction with other Kuwaitis, with whom (by her own admission) she’d never have interacted otherwise. (Interview 31)
7.2.4 Improving Family, the Workplace, and Overall Society

Research on women’s agency and participation in India suggests that variables that relate to women’s agency, such as literacy, education, and labor force participation, are often more important in promoting social well-being factors, such as child survival and lower fertility rates, than variables “relating to the general level of opulence in the society”. (Sen 1999, 195-198) When asked about benefits to the family, besides the financial benefits, several Kuwaiti women mentioned that being a member of the workforce taught a Kuwaiti woman “real world” skills that she could teach her children, in order to make them better members of society. In addition, a working mother was said to be a role model for her children. The World Development Report 2013 states that increased household income “contributed by women often results in improvements in children’s educational attainment and health.” (WDR 2013, 15)

Also discussed was that women make the workforce environment better and “more civilized than when it is all men” in terms of language, discipline, commitment and ethics. One 40-something Kuwaiti professional woman believes women are stronger leaders and less lenient towards unethical favoritism. (Interview, 03) A young Kuwaiti health care professional and small business owner commented it is important to have women in the workforce because they have a different viewpoint than men and make decisions differently, which she believes balances the workplace. (Interview, 33) Another Kuwaiti woman, who has a Ph.D. in Islamic studies and works privately from her own home as a religious advisor, says a woman in the workforce “serves a message that man cannot give.” (Interview, 45)
As stated previously, a country that supports and promotes women’s engagement in society helps “raise economic productivity, …contributes to improved health and nutrition, (and) increases the chances of education (and overall wellbeing) for the next generation”. (Kristof, xx) (Sen 1999, 193-199) Eight Kuwaiti female interview participants stressed the working woman’s contributions to Kuwaiti society, saying that women in the workforce contribute to the social change and development of Kuwait and the progress of women, showing the world that Kuwait is not a “backwards…third world country” (Interviews 04, 13, 41, 15)
Chapter 8 Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation: Public, Private, and Informal

According to interviews, female labor force participation in Kuwait is very high, and higher than the ILO estimate of 43.6% (2013). In fact, 54 out of 56 participants interviewed believe most Kuwaiti women work in some type of paid position, unless she is over the age of 60. Often, Kuwaiti women have two jobs—a side business or volunteer position in addition to a base job (usually public sector). The majority of interview participants cited guaranteed government job placement and the growth of women’s informal businesses as reasons to support the perception of high female labor force participation.

As will be described in this and upcoming chapters, the overall nature of the female labor market in Kuwait is complex and multi-layered. At this moment in time it is caught between divisions of modernization and tradition, liberal-minded and conservative concepts of women, western work ethic and Kuwaiti entitlement. Although most Kuwaiti women still work in the public sector, many are moving from what has been called “non-productive public sector jobs” to the challenging, innovative jobs or careers in the private sector. A surprising finding is that many Kuwaiti women are pushing to own their own businesses, many informally, often in an answer to the obstacles they face in the labor market.

8.1 Kuwaiti Women Largely in the Public sector
Most Kuwaiti women in the labor force (73%) work in public sector jobs. (PACI 2014)\(^1\) The public sector is the sector of choice for most Kuwaiti women because it offers guaranteed jobs to high school graduates, shorter hours, better pay, and a socially accepted “safe environment” in which to work. Public Sector working hours are described as about 6 hours a day, either from 7:30 a.m. to about 1:30 p.m. or from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Salaries in the public sector are much higher than in the private sector and correspond with education level (as well as ethnicity).

According to the Central Statistical Bureau, the top ministries in which Kuwaiti women work are the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. (KCSB 2012, 121) Interview participants agree that the majority of Kuwaiti women in the public sector work as teachers or in administrative or secretarial positions in government health or educational departments. As one participant put it “…woman power is very high, particularly in that middle, you know, bourgeois jobs. (They are) mostly occupied by women”. (Interview, 03) According to the Public Authority for Civil Information, 94,230 Kuwaiti women work as office clerks. (PACI 2014, Table 1, 103)

However, women also hold public sector positions as accountants and engineers. In government legal professions, women were recently allowed to join the police force, and hold the position of lawyer. However, currently there are no female judges in Kuwait. According to participants, the law that was ratified in 2012, allowing women to begin a track toward becoming judges, has proved problematic. Women judges, who would be in legal decision-making positions, are not actually allowed according to Islam. Because the Kuwaiti judicial system is based on Islamic sharia law, which

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\(^1\) PACI 2014: Calculated using 144,129 Kuwaiti females in government sector work and 197,106 Kuwaiti females in labor force (15+). 144,129/197,106.
explicitly places women under the authority of men, women have been prevented from holding the position of judge. Until a recent court ruling in 2012, women were even legally barred from serving in entry-level jobs within the Justice Ministry. (HRW, 2012; Interview, 45)

According to interview participants, there seem to be few women in leadership positions in Kuwait’s public sector, although some noteworthy females leaders were mentioned as being leaders in the public eye. Among them are Rasha Al Roumi, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Airways (a public company). In addition, three women have been given ministerial positions since 2005. One noteworthy example is Dr. Moudi Al Humoud, former Minister of Education and Higher Education, who now serves as the rector of the Arab Open University in Kuwait.

In 2009, not long after the 2005 decree giving women full political rights to vote and run for parliament, four women were elected to parliament. However, in the next election in 2012, women candidates were defeated at the polls. Currently there are no female parliamentarians in Kuwait.

8.2 Kuwaiti Women’s Low Private Sector Participation

Only 24% of the Kuwaiti female labor force works in the private sector. (PACI 2014, Table 14, 59) As will be explained further in Chapter 9, longer working hours, and gender segregation, and low salaries due to inexpensive imported labor keep many Kuwaiti women out of the private sector. In addition, the private sector is considered a much more strict and difficult working environment than the public sector. A Kuwaiti male in his 70s commented that the Kuwaiti female “doesn’t like the private sector”. When asked why, he says if she is married and has a family life, the public sector offers
“more flex, less working hours” saying it is very easy to take off of work and “go out.” In contrast, the private sector has rules and regulations to keep her from leaving work too often. (KI Interview, 11)

Most interview participants said that a large number of Kuwaiti women work in banking and investment within the private sector, often in administrative or secretarial positions. Other Kuwaiti female jobs encountered during interviews and observations are varied and numerous and include a manager for Kuwaitization programming at a well-known and large private company, salon and spa owners, private sector university professors, accountants, artists, book authors, human rights activists, and an owner of a female fitness studio. A number of participants had worked in private sectors overseas in the UK or in America.

Kuwaitis in the private sector are often business owners or in management positions, and hire Non-Kuwaitis to work in labor or service positions within the company. For example, although a Kuwaiti woman will open businesses to sell clothing, or restaurants to sell creative food items, it is the Non-Kuwaiti woman (and sometimes male) who will sew the clothing, cook the food, or wait on customers in a store. The work relationship between Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis and ethnic job roles will be discussed in Chapter 12 Kuwaiti-Non Kuwaiti Relationships in the Female Labor Market: Productivity and Social Implications.

Many participants mentioned working for family businesses, which corresponded with the close family ties in Kuwait. This is portrayed in the example of one Kuwaiti woman in her 60s who recently retired from her husband’s business in order to spend
full-time in volunteer work, and whose son has now taken over his father’s position as head of a large multi-national company.

A top theme discussed in interviews and observed in Kuwait was that many Kuwaitis have second jobs or side businesses (and sometimes volunteer positions) within the private sector. Often, those waiting to be hired in the public sector (which can take a year to a year and a half) will start a private sector business in the meantime. In addition, those who already work in the public sector often have side businesses. The shorter hours in the public sector (work is usually over by 1:30 or 2:00) gives Kuwaitis the time to run private sector businesses in the afternoon. Although it is not legal for a public sector worker to have a private sector business, several participants mentioned that many Kuwaitis get around government restrictions by putting a business license in the name of another family member, such as a mother or sister who does not work for the government.

When asked why so many Kuwaitis have side businesses, the desire to be entrepreneurial, as well as to supplement economic needs are cited. One young medical student says private school tuitions and “astronomical” real estate prices force doctors and medical interns working within the public sector to have private side businesses:

“There’s a project going on (in Kuwait society). I mean I know a lot of medical students who have a lot of side businesses. At a young age they’re enthusiastic about working because now-in recent years a lot of people have been business-oriented…a lot of people are realizing that you do need a side job, or a supportive job to do your original job, because of the economy.” (Interview, 22)

For example, one young Kuwaiti woman works as a clinical nutritionist for the Ministry of Health, but also runs a business she is passionate about. She and her sister sell nutritious snack foods, made from her own developed recipes, at farmer’s markets and through Instagram.
According to interview participants, women in leadership positions in the private sector are few, but there are some noteworthy examples. One is Sara Akbar, co-founder and CEO of Kuwait Energy, who is the only female CEO and board member of an oil and gas company in the Middle East. (Kuwait Energy.co) Dr. Akbar was mentioned often as being a role model for women in leadership, as she is famous for being the only woman to lead one of the teams that put out the oil fires in Kuwait after the Iraqi Invasion in 1990.

8.3 Kuwaiti Female Labor Market On The Precipice of Change—Increased Private Sector Participation and Educational Dominance

According to interviews and observations, the female labor market in Kuwait is on the precipice of a major change, where an increasing number of Kuwaiti women are moving from mainly working in what was described as “non-productive” public sector jobs to private sector participation, seeking out innovative jobs and pushing to own businesses.

PACI statistics on Kuwaitis in the labor force over the past 20 years support interview and observation findings. Kuwaiti female labor is characterized by a marked decrease in public sector participation and an increase in private sector participation. Since 1989, Kuwait female participation in the public sector has steadily declined. Since 1995, Kuwaiti female participation in the public sector has dropped by 22%. See Table 6 below:
Table 6
Kuwaiti Women in Public and Private Sector Participation, by Year and Sector

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Sector</strong></td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Private Sector</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PACI 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 taken from Tables 14; number of Kuwaiti females in sector/number of total Kuwaiti females in the labor force.
**Shah 2010, p. 97 Table 4.13; from previous PACI estimates.

In addition, instead of the former mindset of just “having a job and getting a paycheck” there is a growing interest among college graduates and other young Kuwaiti women to develop careers, and to do so in fields other than administration or teaching jobs. Many young women are opting instead for professional jobs in investment and banking, medicine, architecture, and engineering. One Key Informant says “younger women are starting to get married a little bit later so they are starting to think more about careers rather than about just jobs…not only getting a job right out of college, but actually thinking about developing a career.” (KI Interview 14)

A Non-Kuwaiti female salon manager, whose clientele is 80% Kuwaiti, says plainly that she has observed Kuwaiti women who were bored, lazy and unproductive in government jobs, “go and start their own businesses” and suddenly become “clever” and “ambitious” in successfully running and expanding their business. (Interview, 36)

Women are also doing jobs that are not typically deemed “suitable” jobs for Kuwaiti women. Mariam Al Mutairi is an example mentioned by three interview participants. She is the first certified female crane and forklift operator in Kuwait, working for the Kuwait Ports Authority. (Youtube KTV 1)
This change in attitude is reflected in the increase in female enrollment in universities, and in the types of university degrees Kuwaiti women are getting. A Kuwaiti female Key Informant remarks:

Women are moving to new areas (in education and jobs), and that shows in the Kuwaiti statistics. There are certain professions the Kuwaiti women are (in) more than the men, like for example…medical doctors, (there are) more women than men…(and) economists, health professionals—we are talking about x-rays, labs, etc—and lawyers. So in these 4 professions you have more women than men and that’s a very good indicator (that women are moving to new areas) when you take into consideration that there’s discrimination in entrance to the University, that you know, they require higher education from women than men. (Interview, 42)

Kuwait University (KU), a public university, is the largest university in Kuwait with over 22,000 students. Kuwaitis who meet entrance exam requirements attend Kuwait University for free. Until recently, women applying to Kuwait University were required to exceed the exam scores of male students in order to enroll in some KU colleges, such as the colleges of architecture and medicine. University officials defended this requirement by saying the unusually large ratio of women to men in these programs made it necessary to try to bring in more males. This requirement was abolished in 2012. (Stiftung 2014, 9; WHO 2014, 4)

Statistics from the World Bank indicate that 41% of women in Kuwait are enrolled in higher education, as compared with only 18% of men. (2013) (WDI Online) However, these statistics reflect the overall population in Kuwait—Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti—and the presence of a large male migrant population. Yet, Kuwaiti women far exceed Kuwaiti males in the realm of education. Of Kuwaiti females over the age of ten, 13.8% (66,174) have a university degree as compared to only 8% (36,682) of Kuwaiti males. (PACI 2014, Table 5, 42) Statistics from the State of Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau indicate during the 2012-2013 school year 56,669 Kuwaiti females
were enrolled in Kuwait University as compared to only 24,267 males. Furthermore, 2,921 Kuwaiti females graduated from Kuwait University as compared to only 1,215 males, a number less than half of female graduates. Private universities also reflect higher female enrollment and graduation, as during the school year 2010-2011, 14,543 females were registered as compared to 10,834 registered males, and 831 Kuwaiti females graduated as compared to 727 Kuwaiti males. (KCSB 2012, 342, 346)

However, high female university enrollment in Kuwait might also (in part) be attributed to the fact that it is more socially acceptable for Kuwaiti males to travel freely outside of Kuwait, and as a result, to leave Kuwait and enroll in universities abroad. In contrast, females are often more restricted by society from travelling outside of Kuwait alone, and may be encouraged to attend local universities.

Key Informant and Political Scientist Nada Al Mutawa points out that these young female Kuwaiti in the private sector have been schooled in private schools, not at Kuwait University, where they have learned to do business in a global way, using the English language and business skills in order to get loans from an international bank. And, Al Mutawa says, they prefer working in the private sector. (KI Interview, 17)

8.4 Uncovering Kuwait’s Large Informal Market

Prior to collecting data for this research in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti female informal labor market was not evident, either in academic or media reports. However, the informal labor force plays a large role in female private sector participation. In fact, a spokesperson from the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau comments there are “many, many, many” people in the informal labor force. (Interview, 23) In another interview, a source from the Public Authority for Civil Information estimates that about 10,000
Kuwaiti women work from home without having a proper business license, a number which does not include the women working as support staff for, or in conjunction with, the “business owner”. (Interview, 55) Lubna Al Kazi, director of the Women’s Research and Study Center at Kuwait University and Sahar Shawa, head of Gender and Development at the United Nations Development Program believe the low FLFP statistics cited by the ILO are most likely inaccurate at least in part due to the large number of Kuwaiti women in informal businesses. (Observation, 3-2014; Interview 42)

The reasons cited for the creation of the informal market in Kuwait were: the long waiting period after applying for a public sector job, difficulty getting a job in the public sector that matched the applicant’s skill or desire, and the “cumbersome” process of obtaining a private business license through the government. Also, because Kuwaiti citizens are not taxed, it is easier to go around the necessity of licensing. (Interview, 45)

Although largely undocumented and unregulated, the Kuwaiti female informal market seems highly organized and thriving. These entrepreneurial businesses, often based out of the home, range from selling personally designed cakes, candy, and cupcakes, to gift-wrapping, dress designing and wedding planning. Other businesses mentioned were training workshops for cooks and nurses, or maid service where the Kuwaiti woman temporarily rents out her domestic workers and their services to other households.

Advertisement for these businesses is free and simple—through word of mouth, and mainly through the use of Instagram or Facebook. Customers following a business on Instagram can call in an order and have the order delivered by driver to their home.
Often bigger, more formal businesses will grow out of these informal businesses, eventually being established in a physical location.

One young Kuwaiti university student mentions her cousin’s wife:

She used to work in the Ministry of Healthy, okay? And then she had many problems with her work… She didn’t like the way they dealt with her, so she quit her job. And then she started her own business through Instagram. It was simple… so she used to do small cakes and all this through Instagram. And she took a picture (of her products) and then many (people) would ask her… “will you please make (cakes) for us? And then we will pay you.” And then she started her own business from that and now she is not working, you know, but she is doing her business. She makes money like that.” (Interview, 15)

Currently, the United Nations Development Program in Kuwait is targeting women in the informal work sector with a program to teach young women how to turn their skills for designing or creating products into real businesses. (Observation, 4-2-2014 UNDP Kuwait)

Instagram is used so often for informal businesses, that it may be a way for future research to begin to measure the size of the informal market. (Interview, 45)

Other social media businesses mentioned are selling items over ebay or Amazon. One website is www.Deals.com.kw, a website in Kuwait that offers a daily deal on a featured product and where anyone in Kuwait can register to sell their own products. (Interview, 23)
Chapter 9 Economic and Social Barriers to Female Job Freedom and Participation: The Public and Private Sectors

Although obstacles to female labor force participation can be attributed to many different forces, the main barriers talked about by interview participants are based on structural problems within the Kuwaiti economy and restrictions created by social norms. Economic problems discussed were the oversaturation of Kuwaitis in “non-productive” public sector jobs, the lack of private sector development, and the incompatibility of Kuwaitis in private sector jobs. Social barriers include norms integrated within economic structures, such as a form of nepotism called wassta and an entitlement mentality called “Kuwaitiness”, and norms in social structures, such as concepts of women in suitable job roles and leadership positions, gender roles, and gender segregation.

Interestingly, the main obstacles cited were not those often assumed by outsiders—especially to western thought—of what typifies female participation in a Muslim, middle-eastern country, such as gender inequality, legal barriers or oppression of patriarchal or Islamic institutions. For a fair analysis, however, it could be said that at least part of the social norms mentioned have been influenced by patriarchal traditions.

As stated in the Jobs report of the World Development Report 2013, “…identifying those constraints is not always easy. For instance, a broad set of cultural, social, and economic forces may result in insufficient employment opportunities for women. (WDR 2013, 29)

This chapter, Chapter 9, discusses the economic barriers to full participation in the workforce—oversaturation of the public sector, low job expectations, lack of private sector development, and the incompatibility of Kuwaitis in private sector labor, as well as
two social norms integrated within these economic structures—Kuwaitiness and wasta. Chapters 10 and 11 discuss social barriers extending from concepts of women in suitable job roles and leadership positions, gender roles, and gender segregation.

9.1 The Kuwaiti Labor Force: Public Sector Oversaturation and Private Sector Incompatibility

The low unemployment rate in Kuwait of 1.7% does not adequately portray the condition of the Kuwaiti labor market. A surplus of Kuwaiti labor to the public sector (75%) demonstrates a labor market characteristic typical to many developing countries—where public sector employment outpaces private sector (salaried) employment, and maintains an over-reliance on the government for wages and job management. (Gelb et al.)

Guaranteed hiring through the public sector has given a job to every Kuwaiti wanting one, often “creating” jobs according to the supply of labor, but not according to the market demand for the job. This has led to an oversaturation of jobs in the public sector, and these public sector jobs are supported by oil revenue, not by market demand.

In addition, the private sector is unable to absorb the over-supply of labor in Kuwait for several reasons. First, educated Kuwaitis looking for professional jobs find little in Kuwait’s private sector, due to structural deficiencies of an economy based on oil production and service jobs. Second, there is an incompatibility between Kuwaitis and the private sector. The supply of Kuwaitis in the private sector is low, due to unmatched skills and the fact that the private sector does not offer salaries desirable to Kuwaitis. In addition, the private sector has low demand for Kuwaitis due to their high salary
demands, low productivity and what is perceived to be a high sense of status and class entitlement.

Kuwaiti economist Amer Al Tameemi comments “Obviously, the accumulation of local workers in the government sector and their low contribution to the private sector represent the most important distortions in the Kuwaiti labor market”. Yet the incentives created to move Kuwaitis into the private sector—Kuwaitization and private sector subsidies—are not a long-term sustainable solution to private sector development. (Tameemi, 2013)

In spite of the state policy of guaranteed jobs and attempts at private sector development, most interview participants described a sometimes bleak, often frustrating expectation for employment. All participants said that applicants wait a long time to get a job in the public sector and even then, will most likely have to take a job not matched to their education or interest. Although more Kuwaitis are looking to move into the private sector, business development is hindered by many factors.

9.1.1 Guaranteed Jobs and Job Expectations in the Public Sector

When asked about women’s job expectations or opportunities in relation to men’s, participants often expressed that Kuwait’s problem is not gender competition or a question of whether more women in the workforce will take jobs away from men. Instead, participants expressed the problem of how both men and women can be employed in an economy where there is low job supply, unless “fake” jobs are created in the public sector to distribute oil wealth as salaries, instead of according to a market demand. One Kuwaiti female college senior summed Kuwaiti job expectations up in this way:
Nowadays, it’s very hard to get a job…there are people I know with Bachelor’s and Master’s who, (for) over two years (are waiting) for a job, (and) they still don’t have a job. So they’re sitting at home doing nothing. So it’s harder for a man and a woman to get a job nowadays because there (are) no job opportunities… and sometimes if you apply and the government—let’s say I have a finance degree, they would put me in the medical field as a secretary or something—it has nothing to do with the job, you know what I mean? It’s a job. You have a job. You have money. That’s a problem, I think, that people need to face.” (Interview, 04)

When a Kuwaiti graduates from high school or college, he or she goes directly to the Civil Service Organization (CSO) to be placed in a job within a government ministry. As one Kuwaiti male in the Public Works Ministry commented, “all the graduates (with) different specialties…are streamlined through that organization”. (Interview, 25) Because of the unavailability of jobs and what is often described as bureaucratic incompetency or inefficiency, getting a public sector job often takes a long time. A year to a year and a half is a normal waiting period. Even after the waiting period, the applicant is not guaranteed she or he will be placed in a job that s/he wants or that corresponds with his or her education, skill, or interest.

A Kuwait University department director describes his dealings with the CSO, saying they regularly require him to hire graduates in his department, which is “not an appropriate place” for their skill or education level. He comments that with government job placement “it’s not always guaranteed to work in your field or in your major”. (Interview, 54)

Another Kuwaiti man describes creating jobs in his department under the Ministry of Public Works, in order to meet the government’s requirement to take on recent graduates. When asked what happens if his department does not need those graduates, he replies “You have to hire them. Who else is going to hire them?” When asked what his department does if there is not enough work for them to do, he says “You create. You
know, if you are creative enough, as a senior official in the government or the ministry, then…this is where the challenge comes.” (Interview, 25)

One Non-Kuwaiti teacher, describes her experience with Kuwaitis in the workplace like this:

In our school, the only jobs held by Kuwaitis would be management positions, and there are no clear job descriptions...They have an office and they get paid. There's not so much of a job description or really requirements that they need to fulfill other than being Kuwaiti.” (Interview, 08)

An exception to this that was mentioned several times is that medical students have high job expectations, and are hired as interns immediately after graduation.

9.1.1.1 Guaranteed Jobs and Kuwaiti Productivity in the Workforce

The oversaturation of jobs in the public sector has also led to a huge decrease in the productivity of Kuwaitis. Interview participants described today’s public sector jobs as “non-engaging… passive sort of work”. (Interview, 14) One Kuwaiti woman, a business owner who was educated and formerly worked in the US, describes public sector jobs like this:

I think that women and men should be productive members of society, so if you tell me they have a job in the public sector I’ll say ‘Well that’s not productive’. They’re not adding value. I’ll say you’re just basically cluttering the space and getting a salary. So I don’t see that as very empowering for women. (Interview, 34)

The World Development Report 2013 explains that all jobs are not equal, but that some are better for development sustainability, saying that at the “same level of earnings and benefits, the larger the positive spillovers from a job the more transformational the job can be, and the greater its value to society.” Good jobs provide wellbeing to the individual, and good jobs for development add value to society. “Jobs that empower women” increase living standards, productivity and social cohesion, ultimately leading to better development. (WDR 2013, 15-17) A Kuwaiti businesswoman expresses her
experience in the public sector, saying she was bored “to death” and that she did not go to private school and college to “end up sitting in a chair… to chit chat until it’s 1:30 pm” and time to go home:

So I was talking to my sister…and I said ‘I need to go to the private sector’. *Hallas* (Enough), I can’t keep working in the public sector. *Haram* (It’s sinful), I’m a waste…I felt I was a total waste…I’m a human, I have to be productive. That’s why God created us, not to sit and do nothing. *Haram*. (Interview, 32)

Non-productivity seems to be encouraged in public sector jobs because of their lenient rules and regulations. The World Bank Report of 1979 states that public sector employment, which has become “overmanned at all levels”, leads to a “prevailing environment (which) provides little incentive to workers and managers to improve their performance and thus tends to perpetuate the existing problems.” (World Bank 1979, 64) In Kuwait, state leaders have “worked to protect the deteriorating situation in the government apparatus and provided employees with wages, salaries and benefits without stressing the importance of achievement or improving performance”. (Al Hayat)

Interview participants discussed that it was difficult for a Kuwaiti to get fired. A young Kuwaiti female says “There’s a whole thing where a Kuwaiti can’t be fired unless they’ve had twenty consecutive days of not working—not coming to work with no excuse”. Commenting further, she says “In the Ministries they’re just sitting there. They leave work early; they come to work late. They don’t feel like they have an obligation to do anything.” (Interview, 22) Another young Kuwaiti female who works both in the public sector and the private sector, says of her public sector colleagues “It’s very unlikely for you to get fired. I know some people that come in, they stamp (indicating they have started work), they go home, and they come back at the end of the day and stamp again. No one really sees you come in and out…” (Interview, 33)
When Kuwait first began to export oil, although it had a history of ruling families, there was little state apparatus. In 1964, Fakhri Shehab discussed the early evolution of Kuwait from a maritime community to an oil economy, from what he describes as “poor, obscure and stagnant society” into “one of uncommon complexity and sophistication”. Shehab says: “With abundant financial resources, and in the absence of a strong civil service tradition, there soon evolved an administrative machine which was vast, complicated, cumbersome and not always guided by the highest ethical standards.” (Shehab, 465) These problems persist in Kuwait today.

In addition, most interview participants described an overall lack in the current productivity of Kuwaitis in the development of society. As of 2014, only 17.3% of Kuwait’s overall labor force population of 2,421,885 people is made up of Kuwaiti citizens. (PACI 2014, tables 14, 16 pp. 59, 61) Most participants believe a social attribute of non-productivity stems from the structural changes that took place in Kuwait immediately preceding the gross influx of oil wealth in the 1950s, which increased from $16 million in 1951 to $467 million in 1961, and large increase in migrant populations. (Al-Nakib, 3-27-13) In fact, almost every interview participant, Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti, mentioned the lack of productivity of Kuwaitis in society as a whole.

Many interview participants commented that the decrease in productivity was a significant change since the pre-oil period when Kuwaitis were pearl divers, ship captains, ship builders, and merchants. Whereas before Kuwait had been a merchant economy, relying on ship building, trade, and the sell of pearls, in the 1950s Kuwait became an oil economy, reliant on oil rents from outside sources. As a result, only a small percentage of Kuwait’s population became involved in the production of oil or the
revenues that support the state. Instead, the majority of the Kuwaiti population became “passive” recipients of oil revenue distributed by the state, neither producing these revenues through their own work, nor contributing to the support of the state through taxation. (Al-Nakib, 3-9-2014)

Several participants link the Kuwaiti lack of productivity in the workforce to an overall mentality of boredom, passivity,¹, and a low sense of purpose within both Kuwaiti state and society. Fakhri Shehab, former economic advisor to the Amir of Kuwait, warned of the repercussions of this in 1964. He says that oil wealth brought financial independence to Kuwait which he called “not an unmixed blessing” and that “the ease with which wealth has been acquired has impaired the enterprise of the mercantile class and made them dependent on the state.” He goes on to say, “hardly any worthwhile financial or industrial venture which deviates from the established pattern is ever attempted by Kuwaiti entrepreneurs (of whom there are, in any case, very few) unless it is assured by state financing. (Shehab, 471)

One young Kuwaiti woman says she has seen the boredom and depression of Kuwaitis working in the public sector, and that huge government welfare takes away the need to develop and reach goals:

…the government is pampering society so much they have no goal really…in other countries people have health care, they have education, but they need to work to survive. They need to work to pay for a car, they need to work to pay for their kids. They need to work to have a certain luxury in life. But here, because everything is just handed to you, especially with this new generation…they have no goal. If I am in university I have no goal to work hard because I know eventually when I graduate I’m gonna get a government job because I’m Kuwaiti…when I get married I don’t even have to work to

¹ Definition of passivity: used to describe someone who allows things to happen or who accepts what other people do or decide without trying to change anything (M webster.com).
make enough money to make sure my life’s okay because the government’s gonna give me money…if I have a kid I’m gonna get a certain amount of money every month…(and in) ten years I get a piece of land. It’s like (we) have no goal, no aim.” (Interview, 22)

In addition, about six participants, Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti, believed feelings of passivity and loss of agency in society were encouraged by (certain interpretations of) Islam. A religiously conservative Kuwaiti female says “In Islam there’s some things you don’t ask why. You just follow and there’s no why to it”. (Interview, 45) A Non-Kuwaiti Key Informant who works closely with Kuwaitis says that the wealth of the oil culture, combined with (interpretations of) Islam and cultural tradition, promote the lack of agency in Kuwaiti society:

Those who are fundamental in their practice of Islam refer to themselves as slaves of God…And when they see themselves as slaves to an all-powerful being who can and will do with them as He will...(they see themselves as having a) lack of freedom or agency of choice. The culture here has a very entrenched, external locus of control...Things happen to them...They are very rarely able to understand their own agency and that they have agency. And consequently that trickles down or is evident in a lack of personal responsibility, a lack of motivation, and a lack of the fundamental understanding of cause and effect. (Interview, 12)

9.1.1.2 The Strength of Wasta on Labor Force Participation: Job Expectations and Productivity

The social concept of wasta was also discussed as a hindrance to labor force participation, job expectations, and job productivity. Wasta, (loosely translated as influence due to social and family connections) had not previously been included in interview questionnaires, but was discovered during the interview process in Kuwait. Despite a lack of academic (or other) writing about wasta, it was mentioned—without prompting—in almost half of interviews and often during observations as an influence on job participation, reflecting its great strength and importance in Kuwait. A young Kuwaiti male university student says wasta is just a normal way of doing business in Kuwait:
Wasta is everything. If you want a license, you get it by wasta. If you want a job, you get it by wasta. If you want anything, anything, anything, you get it by wasta. Yeah. That's how Kuwait runs, by wasta...If you know somebody in the oil and petroleum company, you're good (in order to get a job). If you don't know somebody, you'll just get rejected.” (Interview, 51)

As described in interviews and observations, wasta is a form of nepotism² based on tribal family loyalty and the exchange of favors. A Kuwaiti male medical doctor defines wasta, making a distinction between wasta and networking. He says networking is based on knowing somebody good at a job and recommending him to a business owner in need of this person’s expertise, with the goal of helping the person and perhaps bettering the business. Wasta, instead, is the exchange of favors on behalf of tribal loyalty, and not necessarily recommending someone based on merit or for the interest of the business. He says “it’s like I come to you and I tell (you), please give him the job. If you give him a job I will give you a favor in the future. This is wasta.” (Interview, 24)

Traditionally, most Kuwaitis have been identified according to membership in tribal families, which still play important roles in social identity and loyalty, and organization of political, social and economic structures. (Longva, 46-7; Al Mughni, 15) Tribal family ties are very strong:

…They are Kuwaitis. Their sets of values are different and the main value is loyalty to the tribe. The loyalty to the tribe is more important than loyalty to anything else. In fact, actually, if you get two people from the same tribe, and I’m a friend of one of them all my life, and (my friend) never knew this guy from his tribe, if there is any conflict he will take side with the tribe, not (with me), even though I am his best friend. (Interview, 24)

The influence of wasta was mentioned several times as being “stronger than law” in Kuwait. In a public opinion survey taken by the Kuwait Economic Society in 2006 of 1200 Kuwaiti men and women, 51% believed wasta influences the fairness of the

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² Nepotism is “the unfair practice by a powerful person of giving jobs and other favors to relatives” (Merriam-Webster Online)
Judiciary system. As one Kuwaiti female says “The law is not very productive because of relations. That’s the number one paralyzing thing in Kuwait…because relations are stronger than law.” When asked if wasta is legal, she is vague saying “…you have to file a complaint. No one files a complaint. Number 2, it’s done in a very subtle way. And Number 3, everyone practices it, so when you see it practiced against you one day, you know that you are going to use it, so you know…the whole system is built on very shallow grounds.” (Interview, 03)

Many interview participants discussed that the strength of wasta promoted the lack of a merit-based system in Kuwait. A Kuwait University professor remarks:

It’s a horrifying concept. Everything is run (by wasta) in that you know you get scholarships if you know someone. You get jobs if you know someone. Even small, little things. You get a great phone number if you know someone. You know, all our life is run on that system to the degree where it (has become) outspoken…It’s a system within the system. There is no official paper that says “wasta”, but it is stronger than the government. O yeah, oh yeah. They tell you this all the time. ‘(If) you want to register your kid at a school that is full, you have to have wasta’. (Interview, 03)

9.1.1.2.1 Perceptions of Wasta on LFP

Wasta was viewed as both a strong support for, and an obstacle against, getting or advancing in a job, depending on the individual’s level and strength of wasta. One Kuwait female says that very few jobs are available to women just getting out of university and adds “If she doesn’t have the right ‘wasta’ she’s not going to go to any jobs no matter what her qualification is”. (Interview, 16)

About 75% of participants believed wasta was mostly an obstacle to job expectations. A Kuwait University female professor says discrimination in the workplace is an obstacle to both men and women due to wasta:

… if you and me apply for a job and I don’t have someone who knows someone who can (speak to the person hiring), most likely you’ll get it if you have someone who can speak to them. So yeah, most of the jobs, I would say 95% of jobs are given away this
way…not according to eligibility. It’s according to who knows who…a means of getting something you…don’t deserve because of relations. (Interview, 03)

Competition in industry is typically thought to foster creativity and productivity. (Rapley, 49) A study on wasta and development concludes “driving out competence by ignoring merit and performance diminishes the nation’s economic performance. (Sarayrah 1994, 8) Several interview participants mentioned wasta as an obstacle to job productivity, due to its strength and the lack of a merit-based social system.

A Kuwaiti female university student explains wasta-based versus merit-based job qualifications saying “Because I like you so much, I’ll let your daughter work with me, even though the person who applied against her has a better GPA (and) education, but I’ll take her just because she’s your daughter”. (Interview, 04) Another female Kuwaiti student says “I do a better project and because that person knows the professor’s family or because that person is related to the professor he gets an A I get a C…It’s not even subjective.” (Interview, 22)

Wasta discourages Kuwaitis from working hard to achieve the qualifications for a job because their effort is not perceived as powerful a contributor to their success as wasta. As one young Kuwaiti puts it “Why work hard? I’ll get the job anyway,” while another says “Why work hard? Somebody else will get the job anyway.” (Interview, 04, 22) Most participants expressed they are powerless against wasta to change outcomes, a finding which seems to reinforce the passivity and loss of agency participants described prevalent in Kuwaiti society in regard to productivity (see Chapter 9).

Wasta is also used to circumvent the obstacle of low future job expectations in Kuwait due to oversaturation of the public sector of Kuwaiti incompatibility with the private sector. One young Kuwaiti man states that he is fairly confident that because he
has relatives that work at a bank and a petroleum company, he will be able to use his 
wasta to get a job that corresponds with his degree in English. When asked if, after he 
graduates from college with an English degree, he will get a job that he would like to 
have, he simply replies “I have to have a wasta.” (Interview, 51)

Although wasta was presented as an obstacle to labor force participation for both 
men and women, most female research participants viewed wasta as more in favor of 
men, especially in regard to career advancement. As several participants explained, 
wasta helps because men have better ability to network—men have greater access to all 
segments of society and the ability to regularly gather in the community diwaniya.

The diwaniya is where men network and where decisions are made regarding 
community, business and politics. 3 (Interview 02; Al Mughni 2001, 16) A Kuwaiti 
female business owner in her 40s states “the networks are very male. I could never 
penetrate a male network because I am a woman. And a lot of what happens, happens in 
the diwaniya. A lot of the discussions—you don’t have access to them. You’re really 
excluded”. (Interview, 34)

One Kuwaiti female in the elite society of Kuwait says that without wasta or 
“connections” and “people you know in higher positions that will help you,” it is very 
difficult for women in Kuwait to have the opportunity for career advancement or 
leadership positions. (Interview, 43)

9.1.2 Private Sector Development—Planning and Implementation

Currently the state of Kuwait is seeking ways to diversify its economy away from 
reliance on oil and create a stronger, larger private sector. About 80% of participants

3 For more explanation on the diwaniya in Kuwait, see Chapter 4, Background on Kuwait, Social Structure
believe the government has taken some steps to improve the private sector development, but that either these steps were not going in the right direction, were problematic, or that government development planning was not being fully implemented (and probably would not be in the near future).

When asked why Kuwait, a wealthy country, is not implementing plans for business development, over half of respondents cited corruption as being a main reason, saying that money for business development is often spent or stolen by the state or business leaders. The Kuwait Economic Society’s Public Opinion Survey of 2006 reports “An overwhelming majority of Kuwaitis (79%) believe that corruption is widespread in Kuwait. (Kuwait Economic Society) These beliefs may be well founded, as Kuwait (mentioned previously in Chapter 6) scores a 44 out of a possible 100 points (0 being highly corrupt and 100 being very clean) from the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (2014), ranking 67th out of 175 participating countries.  

The complexity, slowness, and disorganization of applying for a business license is also cited as a hindrance to business development, and for discouraging foreign business investment in Kuwait. The World Bank (2014) Doing Business Report ranks Kuwait 152nd out of 189 countries on the “Ease of Starting a Business” and 104th on the “Ease of Doing Business.” (World Bank 2014)

9.1.2.1 Apathy to Development and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait

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4 Transparency International’s CP Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be on a scale from 1 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Data sources for the index are from independent institutions specializing in government and business climate analysis and include assessments, surveys, and ratings. The countries rank demonstrates its position relative to other countries. 175 countries were ranked in this year. A ranking of 1 indicates the lowest amount of perceived corruption and 175 the highest amount. See http://www.transparency.org/country#KWT
Many Kuwaitis interviewed referred to a lack of follow-through, often calling it the “disinterest” or “apathy” of the Kuwaiti government in state development, saying that in terms of carrying out the last phases (for example 2009-2014) of development planning that “nothing got done”. (Interview, 14)

As one Kuwaiti businessman says of the government “there is no planning, no planning…no vision.” When talking about the development plans proposed by the Kuwaiti government, he comments “I must be critical…because they are talking about this for a very, very, long time—that we cannot depend on oil only, that we have to diversify our economy and sources of income. But I don’t see they’re doing much to change the situation.” He further comments on the restrictions the government puts on business development, saying that Kafala (the system that forces all foreign workers to have a local sponsor in Kuwait), and visa and business “complications and restrictions” discourage tourism and foreign businesses from coming to Kuwait. He also cites social prohibitions for the lack of tourism and foreign investment, saying there is “no alcohol, no dancing, no clubs, no bars…things (like you find) in Dubai or Qatar….or Bahrain. So Kuwait cannot compete in that area.” (Interview, 56)

As discussed in Chapter 4, Kuwait’s record of attracting foreign direct investment is bleak. Between the years of 2000 to 2012, whereas Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE show net positive surplus in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Kuwait shows a negative flow of $50 billion dollars. (Herb, 2-7) Interview and observation participants often compare the limitations of Kuwait’s private sector development with the thriving tourism industries in other nearby GCC countries. When questioned about Kuwaiti
women’s job opportunities in Kuwait’s private sector, a Non Kuwaiti Key Informant says:

Kuwait is very limited as far as business is concerned, not like Dubai. The reason is... they aren’t expanding their horizons. There are so many visa problems, so many (business) limitations. I think these young minds will (go to Dubai) because so many markets (in Kuwait) are empty. Hardly you find anyone. The business compared to Dubai, compared to other countries like Hong Kong, is different. Where is Kuwait (in all this)? Kuwait still believes in having their own small country to themselves... there are a lot of visa problems and the standard of living is very high and expensive. They don’t want to pay expats so much. They don’t want to find investors so much. Not like Dubai... so outside investors—where are they?” (Interview, 07)

Commenting on the lack of cultural business development in Kuwait, a Kuwaiti female artist and university professor says Kuwait has stagnated in the realm of art, music, design, and architecture, and that Kuwait should develop a business and art environment that would “draw people from around the world”. She says further “Why would an art collector want to come to Kuwait and collect art here when he can go to Qatar to the museum there, or go to Dubai to the multitude of amazing galleries there?” (Interview, 27) A Kuwaiti female business owner in her 40s says:

It’s impossible for somebody to come in and invest their money in this country when you see that the rich Kuwaitis aren’t investing in this country, the government isn’t investing its money in this country. Look at our hospitals, look at our roads, it’s like there are craters on the highways like we’ve been bombed, again. It’s insane how, in a country that has the financial means to be the best that it can be, that we are below mediocre. It is shameful how poor the roads are, how bad the roads are, how bad the traffic is with no solutions to it. (Interview, 27)

Nabila Al-Anjari, now a Kuwaiti business owner, served as the Assistant Undersecretary for Tourism under the Ministry of Information. She openly recalls being called on by the state of Kuwait to develop a domestic tourism plan for Kuwait. She and her team worked 3 ½ years on the plan with support from the United Nations Development Program and World Tourism Organization, spending 1.5 million KD (Over 5 million dollars) on the development of the plan. Ms. Al-Anjari says the plan was given
to the Kuwaiti government in 2005, with the intention of implementing new goals every 5 years. But she remarks that in the past 10 years “nobody (has) moved one step” toward implementation. She paints a bleak picture about the government’s interest in the development of Kuwait:

The government is not aware (not capable)...(We are) walking without any support, without any thinkers, without anything. We are walking as if we are going to the edge and will be lost and nobody will tell you (where you) are. Now we are facing a very, very, very dark tunnel...Now, we are alive because there is a little oil. We don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Even for the Highness, the Emir. We don’t know what will happen to our system. The royal family are fighting together...they are fighting each other. So how are they going to think about tourism, about economic (problems), about development? (Interview, 30)

Some participants feel the lack of implementation and investment in the future of Kuwait indicates the state’s (and society’s) perception of vulnerability and insecurity about their future existence. A Kuwaiti female says, regarding the overall failure of the government to put money into the development of Kuwait:

I don’t know if I should say this...and this is my personal opinion...but I feel as a regular citizen, the way it makes me feel is that perhaps the government feels that they’re not here to stay. Perhaps they feel that their life is short lived. So why should they invest in the country? (Interview, 27)

About half of interview participants relate the development of feelings of vulnerability in Kuwait to the Iraqi invasion in 1990, saying that the invasion rocked Kuwait’s sense of complacency and security. A Kuwaiti male in his 30s at the time of the invasion says:

…The invasion was an enormous event in the Kuwaiti psyche. It completely changed everything for Kuwaitis, from being a very confident group of people...about where they were living and that things would go on forever, and they suddenly became these insecure, worried, uncertain people...and everybody started thinking about investing outside the country...thinking about what a temporary place Kuwait was, and I’m sure this has been happening from the very top (of leadership), down (to citizens).
One Kuwaiti female remarks that after the invasion, Kuwaitis were forced to ask themselves serious questions, such as “what will happen to us if we don’t have this money, if we don’t have this oil.” (Interview, 28) Participants comment that the overwhelming feelings of future insecurity have contributed to both state and society’s lack in future vision for Kuwait, and to the desire to “live only for the day,” or “stash away as much (money) as you can, and put it (invest it) abroad.” (Interview, 39) One young Kuwaiti male believes:

Our society has been degrading ever since liberation with shopping malls, and more shopping malls. We are becoming more a consumer-based society as opposed to an ambitious society, (like) prior (to the invasion)...I think everyone, instead of thinking for the state (in terms of state well being), is thinking for themselves.” (Interview, 02)

Although Nathaniel Howell, the US ambassador to Kuwait in 1990, is said to have believed the threats of Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait, most Kuwaitis did not. Most Kuwaitis, including the government, thought Hussein was bluffing, and were surprised by the “sharp staccato sounds of gunfire” upon awakening on the morning of Iraq’s invasion August 2, 1990. In fact, since this was holiday time for Kuwaitis, two thirds of Kuwait’s population, including relevant senior officials, was traveling outside of Kuwait during the invasion. (Rajab, 1; Al-Nakib 5-8-2014)

Although Kuwait was liberated in January of 1991, the impact of war had left “the whole country in a total shambles, everything overcast by the heavy black pollution of the massive oil fires” of Kuwaiti oil refineries, set by the retreating Iraqis. (Rajab, 193) In addition, the social effects of the war were many. In a highly migrant society, distrust of foreign populations abounded, certain ethnic populations were deported en masse, and residency laws became stricter. Suspicion of Iraqi-collaboration led to the expulsion of 300,000 Palestinians and tens of thousands of Iraqis previously living in
Kuwait. (Al-Nakib, 5-11-14) Jehan Rajab, an English woman married to a Kuwaiti, who lived in Kuwait at the time of the invasion, says of the lasting effects of the invasion “‘The soul has been wounded.’ The scars from that will always remain.” (Rajab, 197)

9.1.2.2 Low Private Sector Contribution—Kuwaitiness and other Obstacles to Labor Market Reform

Even if the state of Kuwait successfully diversifies the economy away from reliance on oil and begins to create a stronger, larger private sector, the question remains as to whether Kuwait’s human resources will have the training, skills, and compatibility needed to support the private sector. The Kuwaitis’ low contribution to private sector labor “confirms the incompatibility between employment requirements and the Kuwaitis’ professional capabilities, the high cost of employing them, or their reluctance to hold jobs in the private sector.” (Al Tameemi, 2013)

Kuwaitis are not sufficiently educated or trained in the skills the private sector needs. Rather, education has been geared towards filling public sector requirements. There is currently no training for local workers who wish to fill blue-collar positions. Instead, those Kuwaitis without university educations typically go to the police or army and not toward private sector jobs. (KI Interview 11; Al Tameemi 2013)

Dr. Moudi Al Humoud, director of the Arab Open University, states that Kuwait needs a “different quality of composition of labor work,” and that the products of educational institutions in Kuwait do not relate to the future needs of business development. (KI Interview, 48)
Salary disparities, the perception of ethnic job roles, and Kuwaiti entitlement, a concept which is referred to as “Kuwaitiness,” also drive the supply and demand for Kuwaitis in the private sector. Interviews and observation show that, generally speaking, Kuwaitis do not want private sector jobs because of lower salaries and harder work, nor does the private sector want them due to their high salary requirements, a high sense of status and class entitlement, and who are mainly perceived as unskilled “lazy,” “entitled,” “spoiled,” and “unproductive”.

9.1.2.3 Private Sector Supply

The cultural mentality of ethnic job roles, or the desire of the Kuwaiti to take non-labor-intensive highly paid jobs, is a hindrance or obstacle to labor market reform and efforts of private sector development. In 2014, only 22% of the Kuwaiti labor force worked in the private sector. (PACI 2014, Table 14, 59) In addition, the International Monetary Fund states that Kuwait’s Output per Worker and Total Factor Productivity has declined in the past two decades. The IMF explains the decline by saying it stems from “the majority of the labor force (being) in government and low-skilled jobs” (IMF 2013, p.14; Comin, 2006)

The high supply of inexpensive Non-Kuwaiti labor keeps salaries low in the private sector, driving Kuwaitis to public sector jobs. In 2012, about 45% of expat workers were paid a monthly salary ranging between $210-$420, while only 14% received monthly salaries between $420-$630. Kuwaitis, regardless of ability or

5 Entitlement is, in this context, “The belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment” Oxford Dictionaries, US English. 1.2 Web accessed May 4, 2015 at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/entitlement

6 The portion of output not accounted for by inputs used in production, measured by how efficiently and intensely inputs are used.
educational level, receive much higher salaries in the public or private sectors. (Tameemi 2013)

The lack of productivity of many Kuwaitis is reflected in the type of jobs Kuwaitis desire and will do—non-labor intensive jobs for high salaries. For example, Kuwaitis are mostly unwilling to do “lower” jobs such as waitressing or sales positions. However, non-Kuwaitis are willing to do them. Both of these factors contribute to the assignment of ethnic job roles in Kuwaiti society. In interviews, the word “shame” is used several times to describe a Kuwaiti who would stoop to working in a lower class Non-Kuwaiti job. A Non-Kuwaiti Key Informant, who has lived in Kuwait for 30 years, says:

…Work (labor) has come to be defined as foreigner’s work….And so, working at the cash registers in the supermarket is not—Kuwaitis don’t do that. But they may be in supervisory positions on the same floor. Like you see at the Sultan Center…supervisory is okay. Now, women at the immigration (desk at the airport), lots of women are now (there)...but(these jobs are) in a position of authority, so therefore, it’s okay. (Interview, 40)

Key Informant and Kuwaiti economist Al Tameemi says Kuwaiti entitlement and perception of ethnic job roles is a historically cultivated mentality—a result of the huge influx of oil wealth. An article written in Time magazine in 1990 refers to the entitlement mentality of Kuwaitis since the 1950s oil boom, using the term “Kuwaitiness.” The article states "The fantastic wealth made all Kuwaitis keener on emphasizing their Kuwaitiness because being Kuwaiti meant enormous privileges." (Kramer, 1990) As one Kuwaiti female interview participant reiterated when talking about the Kuwaiti view of labor since the 1950s: “The state will take care of me, I don’t have to work hard.” (Interview, 22) Currently only 52.6% of Kuwaitis are present in the labor force. (PACI 2014, Tables 11, 14, pp 54, 59)
A Kuwaiti female, in charge of the Kuwaitization program at a large private sector company describes her experience with Kuwaitiness and with an unqualified Kuwaiti male who was determined to get a management position:

Those who applied (for management positions) came into my office. They forced an interview. I didn’t ask for an interview, they forced an interview. One of them was like, yeah, I need a job. (I said) ‘Yes, enshalla (God willing) we’ll get you a job, but what are your qualifications? Degrees?’ And he said he had not even had high school…he was so confident talking to me, so proud of himself. And I was like, uh, ‘what (kind of job) do you think would be suitable for you?’ (He said) ‘A manager is okay.’ And I was like, ‘a manager in a company?’ ‘Yeah’, he says, ‘I’m clever and I can do’…Huh. He’s so high of himself and that’s the normal thing about most (Kuwaitis).

When asked why some Kuwaitis think they can get a job in management without any qualifications she replies “Because they think very much high of themselves. (They think)—‘I’m a Kuwaiti’”. (Interview, 32)

Living in Kuwait, one often hears Non-Kuwaitis use the phrase “He’s Kuwaiti” to explain a Kuwaiti’s behavior, which means that he feels he is entitled to something or to behave a certain way. One young Kuwaiti male, who always wore western clothes to work, wears the Kuwaiti male traditional dishdasha for a work after hours event. When asked about the change of dress, he replies “So they (the non-Kuwait workers he is supervising) will know I’m Kuwaiti. They will show me respect”. (Observation 3-2014)

A domestic worker from the Philippines gives her perception of Kuwaiti women’s productivity, and a glimpse into the world of the “entitled” Kuwaiti woman. When asked if a Kuwaiti woman would do her job she smiles and says “No. No…they’re lazy…they’re lazy…they want just to sit and go (places) with friends”. (Interview, 18)

However, a Kuwaiti female believes Non-Kuwaitis often talk about how Kuwaitis will not work in jobs with long hours or hard work, in the hope that spreading perceptions of Kuwaiti entitlement will also help build job security for Non-Kuwaitis. (Interview, 30)
9.1.2.4 Private Sector Demand

According to interviews, the Kuwaitis’ bad reputation (even with other Kuwaitis) of entitlement and laziness keeps them from being hired in the private sector. A Kuwaiti male who works with the Ministry of Planning says he believes the private sector demand for Kuwaitis is low because Kuwaitis want to be the “big boss,” and that employers have trouble controlling them. Also, he says, Kuwaitis do not work hard, so private sector employers would rather hire Non-Kuwaitis to work harder for less money. When asked about the privatization of the Kuwaiti economy, a Kuwaiti female in her thirties says “…we are having problems the way I see it…Kuwaitis are a little bit lazy when they are working so the other (Non-Kuwaiti) workforce would really work better than them” (Interview, 28)

As stated in almost all 56 interviews, the overwhelming perception of Kuwaitis as workers, by both Non-Kuwaitis and Kuwaitis themselves, is that the majority of Kuwaitis are extremely non-productive in their jobs. Referring to job positions, Kuwaitis were said to be “lazy” or “spoiled” or “entitled”. Five Kuwaitis interviewed even stated that they and other Kuwaitis, would “never hire a Kuwaiti” to work in their business, citing this perception as one reason “Kuwaitization” had to be implemented.

A Kuwaiti female business owner and entrepreneur in her 40s remarks on her experience hiring two young female Kuwaiti interns on a part time basis to help develop her business. She says that before she hired them, she wrote out their terms of employment, indicating she needed help with administration, filing, and answering emails. She says, though:

Literally they would come in everyday and all they were interested in was the research component—research and writing. And I got to the point where I would get uncomfortable because I would need them too do other things, but…they wouldn’t. They
would only do the stuff that was intellectual. But I got really annoyed. Anyway, (they) lasted three weeks (in the job). (Interview, 34)

When asked his opinion on how to build the private sector, a Kuwaiti male who heads a school in Kuwait, immediately comments:

Well, we wouldn’t (hire) Kuwaitis here, I can tell you that. I mean we have some (Kuwaitis) but usually they have foreign mothers or (a mother) that lived abroad most of her life, because if you get a traditional Kuwaiti here, they’re always taking medical leave, (or) leaving early because of this, going away because of that. (Saying) ‘I need the day off because my brother’s getting married’...It’s just a totally different work ethic. (Interview, 35)

The incentives created to move Kuwaitis into the private sector—Kuwaitization and private sector subsidies—have not significantly increased Kuwaiti participation in the private sector—and are not a long-term sustainable solution to private sector development.

9.1.3 Pushing Kuwaitis to the Private Sector: Kuwaitization and Private Sector Subsidies

Kuwaitization, the nationalization of Kuwait’s labor force, actually began in 1978, with the goal of balancing the national and foreign workforce ratio through educational and skill training programs, and by attempting to change Kuwaiti’s attitudes regarding manual work. In 2008, government policy required private sector businesses to reach quotas on hiring Kuwaitis—60% Kuwaitis in banks, 15% in real estate, and 2% in manufacturing businesses. This policy was immediately followed by another, which subsidizes Kuwaiti salaries in the private sector, in order to make them competitive with those of the public sector. In addition, private sector employers are paid “incentives” to hire Kuwaitis. (Randeree 2012, 18)

According to the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti labor imbalance in public and private sector participation “is being
alleviated, albeit at a slow pace”. (Randeree 2012, 18) Private sector subsidies sometimes reach as much as $3,500 a month per Kuwaiti, and rely on public treasury funds (another drain on the public sector) and a 2.5% tax taken on the net profits of companies on the Kuwait Stock Exchange. (Al Tameemi, 2013)

Less than half of interview participants viewed Kuwaitization as a useful policy for Kuwait. One Key Informant remarks that Kuwaitization helps to “develop the social capital because (Kuwaitis) would not go (into the private sector) if (the government) did not top up their salaries.” She also comments that Kuwaitization encourages young graduates to go into the private sector where they can learn how private companies work. Yet she comments that within private sector hiring, “the element of trust is still for foreigners”. (KI Interview, 17)

A Non-Kuwaiti Key Informant believes Kuwaitization programs are an attempt to “absorb” all the students who are coming back from studying abroad. However, as she points out, Kuwaitization may force-hire Kuwaitis into positions with “fake” pay subsidies from the government, but the structure of Kuwait’s economy will not naturally absorb these jobs. (KI Interview, 07)

Over half of participants believed Kuwaitization and its subsequent salary subsidization not to be a sustainable solution for Kuwait’s private sector development or labor force imbalance. Several participants pointed out that Kuwaitization forces employers to hire Kuwaitis, subsidizing them to do so, yet the Kuwaitis are still not desired by the private sectors because they lack the right skills and level of productivity needed. A Kuwaiti female Key Informant says:

We have a need for highly skilled labor and the products of our universities and our education system are not globally competitive. So, (Kuwaitis) are not attractive to the private sector even with this government nationalization incentive program. That’s an
incentive for nationals, it’s not an incentive for employers because they’re being forced.” (KI Interview, 16)

Several participants believe the money used for subsidies would be better spent on improving Kuwait’s lagging quality in health care and education. In a Gallup World Poll survey on “perceptions of well-being”, 65% of participants said they are satisfied with the quality of education in Kuwait (2012), and 62% are satisfied with the quality of healthcare (2008-12)\(^7\). (UNDP 2014, 220) World Health Organization statistics on health status in Kuwait, such as low maternal mortality of 9.9/1000 live births and infant mortality of 10.7/1000 live births, indicate a high standard of health in Kuwait and adequate health care institutions and workers. The relatively high level of education in Kuwait, with 100% primary and secondary level education for males and females, has contributed to positive health indicators. (WHO, 5)

However, although Kuwaiti citizens are offered free healthcare and education in Kuwait, lack of investment into modern infrastructure for both health and education result in “somewhat deficient” quality of services. In 2011, public expenditure on healthcare accounted for only 2.2% of Kuwait’s Gross Domestic Product (Stiftung 2014, 6, 13) Between 2005-2012, public expenditure on education accounted for only 3.8% of GDP. (UNDP 2014, 193) In 2012, public expenditures for both health and education accounted for about 7% of GDP (IMF, 2014)

Kuwaiti economist Amer Al Tameemi says Kuwaitization and private sector subsidies are “…not the right policy. The right policy is to encourage the private sector to create real jobs”. When asked what policy would create jobs he recommends:

...a full fledged privatization scheme. Because as you know, the government has a dominance in the economy. The government controls the major sectors—the oil sector,

\(^7\) Refers to most recent year available.
utilities, public services, education, medical care services. So how can you encourage the private sector to create jobs without allowing them to play a role in (the) main sectors? This is, I think, the answer for your question. I think in order to encourage the employment of Kuwaitis, you have to encourage the private sector to play a bigger role in the economy. (KI Interview, 11)

The state’s development strategies outlined in the Kuwait Vision 2035 and the Five-Year National Development Plan of 2010 both outline intentions of privatizing Kuwait’s national economy. However, Kuwait has not significantly moved forward on these plans at this time, mostly because of political “stalemates”. (Stiftung, 14)
Chapter 10 Social Barriers to Female Job Freedom and Labor Force Participation: Concepts of Women and their Roles in Society

While almost all interview participants agree that Kuwaiti women were free and encouraged by both state and society to participate in the workforce, participants also agree there are strong social restrictions on what are considered suitable job roles for women, limiting women in the types of jobs they can choose and in advancing to leadership positions. When asked about obstacles to women’s job participation, several Kuwaiti women mentioned that gender inequality is not a factor in the Kuwaiti workforce, but as one Non-Kuwaiti teacher observes “I don’t think there’s any restrictions on Kuwaiti women, or women in general, so to speak” but that instead “…the restriction is on their (type of) job.” (Interview, 08)

The International Labor Organization points out that “cultural factors such as strong family ties or religion have a strong impact on LFP (rates) for some subgroups of the population. For example, in many countries, religious or social norms may discourage women from undertaking economic activities. These structural factors are the main drivers of the long-term patterns in the data.” (ILO Methodology 2013, 7)

10.1 Suitable Jobs Roles-- Badu and Hadar

In spite of Kuwait’s economic and social modernization beginning in the 1950s and 60s, the Islamic Revival, gaining strength in Kuwait in the 1970 and 80s, encouraged ultra-conservative Islamic values and was successful in halting many aspects of progress for women and the country. (Tetreault 2001, 204, 209; Olimat, 2009; Williams) The
concept of “modernization” as related to western civilization came to be synonymous with *kufur* or a selfish individualistic ideology that sought to destroy Kuwait’s community and state. Within Kuwait, the Islamic movement was thought to be a counter-response to the social effects of modernization and westernization—and especially to Kuwait’s “feminist movement”. (Al-Mughni 2001, 123-4)

As a result, the pursuit of modernization in Kuwait came to be based on improving educational attainment for all citizens and by improving the labor force with a male and state-directed placement of Kuwaiti women in “suitable and respectable” jobs. (Longva 188, 200-2) Kuwaiti Sociologist Haya Al Mughni writes that Islamic Revivalists advocated that a woman’s natural role was in the home caring for her family, but that they were “not totally opposed to a woman working outside the home.” However the revivalists believed women should be confined to “traditional jobs in sex-segregated institutions where competition with men is avoided”. (Al Mughni, 2001, 127-8)

In 1986, an Imam (religious leader) wrote about the family system in Kuwait according to Islam saying “…the Muslim woman can pursue her work but without competing, mingling, or being alone in a separate room with men. She can be employed as a teacher, a director, or a secretary in a girls school; or as a doctor, a nurse or a clerk in a women’s hospital, or in other jobs which are most suited to her nature.” (Al Mughni, 2001, 127-8)

According to interview participants, today a suitable job for a Kuwaiti woman is comprised of two main things: first, a “safe” or “controlled” environment—gender segregated, physically undemanding (out of the desert heat, less working hours), and requiring no travel outside of Kuwait. Second, a suitable job befits the status and
entitlement of a Kuwaiti woman, generally meaning some type of management position. It is for these reasons that most Kuwaiti women seek out public sector jobs, since the public sector meets all of the above criteria. The private sector is considered to be a more "open" and unprotected environment, generally less suited for Kuwaiti females.

It is important to note, however, that although job suitability roles is a mainstream concept, actual views regarding suitability vary according to different "mindsets" in society—most often described by Kuwaitis as "liberal" or "conservative-minded" segments of society. It is the more conservative, often Badu (also called Bedouin), segments of society who are strict about gender segregation and do not approve of women travelling outside of Kuwait without a male relative.

A Bedouin woman summarizes the conservative attitude toward Kuwaiti women in the workforce in this way:

A woman should be protected, not jeopardize herself and put herself in situations. You know, this is the main theme. Because if you put yourself in other situations, like lets say, an open job in a bank, you have to go to meetings. You have to go to meetings outside the bank in hotels. You have to travel sometimes. These are the things that most of the conservative people they don’t agree on. (Interview, 28)

Economic gain drives women to the workforce, even in conservative families who believe women should remain in more protective environments, but it is in the public sector where these families will compromise and encourage women to work. As one Kuwaiti male puts it, men from the Bedouin societies “deal with the issue of traditional values or mixing with males, (by pushing) the woman, their daughters, their wife, to study at the college of education to become a teacher, so once she’s a teacher, then he is satisfied that she is kept away from men.” (Interview, 53) Women are also encouraged to go into teaching because teaching jobs “cater to a woman’s qualities” of being a nurturer of children. (Interview, 29)
Interview participants agree that Bedouin women work as teachers or clerks in government ministries because the environment is “protected” and segregated. However, there are even differentiations between which ministries are recognized as suitable for Bedouin women—for example, Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not suitable because it is a more “liberal” environment where women and men intermix and travel outside of Kuwait. (Interview, 54) And although many women work in different levels of positions in the oil sector, it was often mentioned that they do not go into the oil fields. When asked what type of jobs Kuwaiti families thought suitable for Kuwaiti women, a Bedouin college student in her mid 30s comments:

Mostly teachers. Social Services…because coming from a tribal background and an Islamic background, people tend to be more conservative. They don’t want their girls to be open to a lot of society that has men in it in the workforce…and the better paid job is for women to be a teacher. A college teacher is best…so they would only say yes for her to go to college if she was accepted in the educations department. So she wouldn’t have a lot of choices of what to take as an occupation.

However, when probed further about a woman’s part in choosing her own job, she comments:

Most of the girls that I see in the education department are not education material. They were forced to it. They want the money…they don’t have this love inside of them. It’s kind of a pity cause most important for me, the most important thing in the society—it’s teachers. (Interview, 28)

A Kuwaiti male from the elite part of the Hadar or “urban” society agrees, saying “…a lot of (Bedouin women) are teachers. Maybe not very effective ones, but a lot of them are teachers because they want the salaries. Not because they’ve got a career objective, but because they want the salaries.” (Interview, 35)

Hadar, or “urban” women will more often work in the private sector as business owners, or in banking or a “liberal” ministry like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Regarding the private sector, many Kuwaiti women go into banking as accountants and in administrative work. As one Kuwaiti woman says about the banking sector: “It’s because it’s easy. It’s part-time. You get a lot of vacations. You get paid well. It’s kind of a good deal.” (Interview, 13)

However, within both the public and private sectors, the status or assumed “prestige” of the Kuwaiti women’s job and job title is very important. Jobs in management are suitable, service or “labor” jobs are not, which are seen as being beneath Kuwaiti women and suitable only for Non-Kuwaitis.

Anthropologist Anh Longva wrote that in the 1980s, Kuwait instituted a national identity program to counteract the large population of migrants in Kuwait and its perceived threat to nationalism and resources. During this time, Kuwaiti women created a distinction between themselves and migrant women to prove their superior identity and status, especially with regards to social standing and marriageability. Since most migrant laborers worked in low-skill domestic jobs, and Kuwaiti women were extremely affluent, migrant workers came to be viewed as uneducated, ignorant of Islam, menial, and vulnerable to sexual abuse. The image of “female work” came to be associated with an uneducated, lower class quality of life, and further discouraged Kuwaiti women from the workforce. (Longva, 7-8, 202-203)

By the end of the 1980s, ethnic status and distinction became central to defining what was a “proper” or “good” job for a Kuwaiti woman. Kuwaiti women chose work not associated with, or carried out by, expatriate women, and job positions where they would not associate with lower classes. For example, positions such as salesperson, nurse, or airline stewardess were not acceptable because they required servicing
customers from many different classes or ethnicities and were associated with migrant labor. “Proper” work was work done within “protected” environments such as those inside a government agency, a private company or within a school, and among socially “accepted” people (preferably Kuwaitis). (Longva, 202-203)

When asked about today’s perception of Kuwaiti women’s job roles, one Kuwaiti female interview participant in her 20s answers:

...There are no Kuwaiti women (cashiers), or shop merchants (sales people)...cause these jobs are all for expats and Non-Kuwaitis...so it’s not something that’s looked upon as something good. Like a librarian—they’re used to Egyptians as librarians...why (would you be one) as a Kuwaiti?

When asked why Kuwaiti women did not work as cashiers or as shop sales people, which on the surface seem to be “protected” jobs, she answers

Because the status. Her prestige would not allow. Cause...Non-Kuwaitis work at that and so it’s not looked at as something that’s prestigious and high. So, she would rather not work, and stay home, and get the money from the government than work at that job. She never (would) apply for that. (Interview, 46)

10.1.1 Gender Segregation

Although gender segregation in the workplace was cited as one element which characterizes society’s concepts of female job suitability, almost two thirds of participants, Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis, thought absolute gender segregation a hindrance to labor force, as well as social, participation—even citing it as a factor contributing to divorce. The practice of gender segregation in Kuwait is not strictly defined, and is partly dictated by policy such as segregation in public schools (with separate boys and girls classes), and partly by the social norms of some government ministries and private spheres generally depending on the belief of the individual institution, workplace, or family.
Most interview and observation participants, even those from conservative backgrounds, disagreed with gender segregation in schools, and more so in colleges, saying that it limited male and female social interaction skills and future capability in the workforce. A male Kuwaiti university student gives his opinion saying:

If people are here to study and here to learn, it's okay to have mixed classes… Because then we're gonna work in a mixed place. Why should I put this idea, that oh (I can take classes with) only men, and tomorrow I'm gonna work in a place that has women, and I don't know how to act. I don't know how to do anything. (Interview, 51)

A conservative Bedouin female in her 30s says she thinks men and women have a connection problem that affects the workforce, due to the separation of education. She adds:

Okay, I’m not against separation of boys and girls in younger years, but in college, you are preparing them for a life outside as a citizen. So you can’t say ‘I’m a citizen all by myself and I follow …a male community (or a) female community’. This doesn’t work, because you are going to work in the Ministries…and you have to have some kind of interaction. So…I don’t see it as a comprehensive thing to do…because it’s posing problems for understanding (between men and women from the time of their youth). They make an immature community. (Interview, 28)

Another religiously conservative Kuwaiti woman relates a frustrating experience, saying her daughter was denied a job with an all male company in the private sector. She says her daughter applied to be an accountant in this company, and was well liked and highly qualified for the position. She was then hired by the human resources department, but says:

When her papers went to the (Kuwaiti) CEO, he said ‘No. We can’t hire her because the place where she’s working with the room, all of them are Egyptian male and…she can’t work with them’. So, she told them she doesn’t mind because she’s working with Indian males now and she’s the only female. And I told them that I don’t mind at all. (But they) said ‘No, we do mind. She can’t work because they’re all men and she’s the only female' and she told them again, ‘I don’t mind’. So well, (they said) ‘We do mind. It’s not appropriate that you work in this place’. (Interview, 06)
When asked about the origin of gender segregation, most interview and observation participants believe it came from traditional practices, rather than from the following of a pure interpretation of Islam. A follower of the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood, one Kuwaiti female interview participant says segregation is common in many of the ministries but she was surprised when she gave a presentation for the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Studies in Kuwait, saying “I barely saw 3 females among 50 men”. When asked why, she explains:

Because of the tradition there. They don’t want to get mixed because they’re most—they’re quite, ah, maybe extremist. So they don’t want to be mixed with females. They feel it’s haram (sinful), or I don’t know what to be honest. I can’t understand that. I believe, even in Islam it’s wrong to do it in this way (segregation in the workforce) because Islam said you can stay with people but maybe not be alone with a man. This is the restriction (being alone with a man)—not to be working with (male) colleagues. (Interview, 06)

Some interview participants believe gender segregation contributes to the high divorce rate in Kuwait because men and women do not learn healthy interaction in a social setting. One Key Informant, a Kuwaiti male in his 70s, says women do and men do not learn how “to relate”, saying “You have a high rate of divorce because they marry hastily without knowing each other…and they divorce.” (KI Interview, 11) A Kuwaiti female in her 20s believes segregation is a problem “because girls become boy crazy…when you’re segregated and you’re just always around girls, you don’t know what it’s like to have a normal conversation with a guy.” (Interview, 41) Another female medical student agrees, saying integration helps with tolerance between genders:

I’m very against segregation because I feel like it doesn’t help with tolerance. I feel like (you should be) in a mixed society from the start—If you’re segregating in the school but in the real world you’re not segregated, then what’s the point? ...(When you) start working it’s not a shock and you’re more tolerant to social variants”. (Interview, 22)

10.2 Kuwaiti Women and the Glass Ceiling
The term “glass ceiling” was used often to describe another social barrier to women in the workforce. Although most interview participants believe that Kuwaiti women have a certain amount of job freedom, many admit that traditional patriarchal gender roles still persist, especially regarding concepts of women in leadership positions. According to interviews, in spite of Kuwaiti women having more social empowerment than women in other GCC countries, “…it’s very difficult to find women in leadership positions, in the banking sector, in the oil sector, in the government sector, or in industry”. (Interview, 16) A Kuwaiti business woman who has had both government and private sector leadership positions, says “for the woman to advance their career, this is another issue, completely another issue. Sometimes they (are given the) opportunity (starting in the labor force) but…woman would not have the same chance to be promoted and to follow her career”. (Interview, 48)

Social concepts of suitable job roles keep women from advancing into jobs, such as, for example, where women would have to travel or integrate with men. In addition, society still considers women as being less desirable to hire than males due to a perceived instability of females in the job—women are more prone to leave work for various reasons, such as to take a long maternity leave or to care for her family. One young female Kuwaiti university student comments:

I think jobs that are of higher positions are easier (for a guy to get)…there are some qualifications he might not have, but they’d rather take the guy than the girl because they don’t think the girl could handle it…Because the woman’s supposed to be at home, the caregiver, the one that’s soft, can’t control her emotions, that kind of stuff. (Interview, 13)

Al Mughni again discusses this as a result of Islamic revival in the 1980s. She summarizes Islamic writings during that time as promoting the suppression of women
with the goal of reducing “the effect of female competition in the labour force and to ensure that male authority and privilege are maintained. Because they see women as competitors, (they) are trying to draw (women) into…areas where they will serve…in less rewarding and primarily service-type jobs”. One writing she mentions discusses that “a woman is faced with a menstruation cycle which occurs every month and all year round and which weakens her, reduces her ability to make up her mind, to express her opinions and to defend herself. For this reason, the Sharia has…made men the protectors of women.” (Al Mughni 2001, 128) Because the Kuwaiti judicial system is based on Islamic Sharia law, which explicitly places women under the authority of men, women have been prevented from holding the leadership position of judge. Until a recent court ruling in 2012, women were even legally barred from serving in entry-level jobs within the Justice Ministry. (HRW, 2012; Interview, 45)

According to one Kuwaiti female participant, who acts as a religious advisor, the Hadith (sayings of the prophet Mohammed) say that a society would not be prosperous and successful if it were led by, and its decisions made by, a woman. She explains that the reason women cannot be in the position of a court judge is:

… because the judge has to make sound decisions, and (be) unemotional and detached, so if you put a woman (in the position of judge), (her) judgment will be biased and it will be very emotional……to ask a woman to be a judge is something strenuous and big on a woman, and that’s not what’s asked of a woman through society and through Islam, cause for a woman (to have) rights in Islam it’s guaranteed, so we don’t need to fight for that. (Women’s rights are already) there, so this job (of a judge) should be a man’s job.” (Interview, 45)

Former Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr. Moudi Al Humoud points out that the social reluctance to hire women in the private sector in leadership positions is slowly changing, but is still “not up to quantity or quality we want to see”:

Don’t forget that until recently some of our private institutions were (even) against employing the women themselves. You know, some of our big banks they said ‘we
employ only men’. Even if it’s not written policy, but it’s something that they practice. They prefer the male rather than the female. But now I find that much better, they employ certain expertise even if they are female. But it’s still not up to the quality and quantity that we want to see. You know, we want to see equal opportunities for male and female in the private sector. (Interview 48)

In 2011, five women filed separate lawsuits at the Kuwaiti Administrative Court against the Ministry of Justice due to an advertisement posted in local newspapers for entry-level legal researchers. The advertisement specified that the positions were only open to males, and did not offer a reason for this specification. Six female law school graduates applied for the positions but their applications were refused. The court ruled in favor of the five women, ordering the Ministry of Justice to cancel the requirement that the applicants be male, based on the decision that it violated the Kuwaiti constitution and international treaties. (HRW, 2012)

Several female and male interview participants also mention the lack of a merit-based system in the government sector as an obstacle to career advancement. Public sector advancement in Kuwait is based on how many years a person has served, and not on merit, accomplishments, or educational level. One young Kuwaiti woman says she refused to serve under a supervisor in the public sector who had far less qualifications than she did herself. This young Kuwaiti woman had spent many years in the United States and the United Kingdom, earning advanced degrees in her field. In contrast, the supervisor had no experience or education to hold the supervisory position, only having advanced due to the number of years she had worked in the government sector.

Female interview participants discussed that not being recognized for advancement based on their own merit, especially when coupled with another person having more wasṭa (social networking influence discussed in Chapter 9), in addition to negative social concepts of women in leadership positions, often makes career
advancement seem impossible. In addition, at least eight interviews mentioned that women do not currently have the access to networking that men do in order to move into leadership positions. One Kuwaiti female professional in her 30s comments:

And naturally, women don’t have access to the sort of boys’ clubs and the source of networking that would guarantee sort of an easy flow into these leadership positions because they can’t access the holding positions that are gatekeepers to…representation worker’s unions…sports clubs…and co-ops. There are very few (corporate) boards were you’re going to find a woman…I mean, it took a long, long time for the Chamber of Commerce to include a token female. (Interview, 16)

10.3 Gender Roles

Most interview participants agree that female agency in job participation and society is influenced by societal gender roles, explaining that still prevalent in society is the concept that “boys (and girls) need to get married at a certain age” and that a woman’s first duty is to care for a husband and children, a concept which often shapes a woman’s role in the workforce—when she enters the workforce, when she leaves it, what job she takes, and whether or not she advances in it. A Non-Kuwaiti Key Informant says women are not encouraged to have the same attitudes about their careers as men. She describes the attitude toward Kuwaiti women’s careers as:

…A filler on the way to what you should really be doing which is raising a family or…representing a family as a wife and a mother. So women here tend to run into trouble if they choose or want to be a part of a career that is going to require a significant investment of time and energy…we’re back to what the family expects of them. It’s you know, sure you can be a petroleum engineer but you’re only going to do that for a few years until you get married and then we’ll tell everybody that you’re an engineer and we’ll put “Engineer, CM” in front of your name, but you’re actually at home having babies.” (KI Interview, 13)

Several young Kuwaiti university students described having “many” friends who got married in high school and did not finish their education. One describes the thoughts of a lot of Kuwaiti women as:

‘Okay, I have a degree. I just want to get married. I don’t want to work.’ There are still girls who think like that. So I just want to see that mentality change…I just want them to work for
themselves, and then find a husband and then find a family, because that isn’t everything in life. (Interview, 04)

Kuwaiti society’s modern view on gender roles has been shaped by its economic and historical events of the past forty years. As previously mentioned, due to the huge influx of migrant labor in Kuwait after the oil production “boom” in the 1950s, Kuwaitis became a minority within their own country. During this period the state of Kuwait perceived the large migrant population as a threat to their national identity and resources. In response, they promoted policies and ideologies designed to create a “structure of dominance established and maintained by Kuwaitis over non-Kuwaitis.” Objectives were to maintain boundaries between the Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti and to create “distinctiveness” based on citizenship, cultural identity, and economic and legal privilege. (Longva, 7-8)

In the implementation of these objectives, a “discourse of motherhood” was developed, which urged Kuwaiti women to “retake” and reinforce their traditional social roles as mother, wife, and domestic worker. Encouraged by the Islamic movement in Kuwait, the state’s concept of Kuwaiti women, not as autonomous citizens, but as primarily the “vessel for the transmission of nationality between men across generations” gave women the main roles as both bearers of culture and preservers of tradition. The state of Kuwait, Kuwaiti men, and Kuwaiti women regarded this “discourse of motherhood” as being in their own interests--individually and as a society. (Tetreault & al-Mughni, 75; Longva, 214-220)

For Kuwaiti women, the roles of domesticity and motherhood ensured their positions and interests in relation to migrant women. (Longva, 209) Female foreign domestic workers had permeated Kuwaiti women’s homes, raising Kuwaiti children and
teaching them their languages. Kuwaiti men were marrying migrant women, and many Kuwaiti women lived in fear of losing their husbands to divorce (which because of social custom meant they must return to their father’s home) or sharing him through the practice of polygamy. (Longva, 212) Furthermore, Kuwaiti women receive most social welfare benefits through their husbands, and give them up entirely if they marry foreigners. (Freedom House, 22, 242-3)

Islam and state policy dictate that the Kuwaiti male—the father or husband—is in charge of the financial support of the family. And, according to social norms, a Kuwaiti woman “never lives on her own” but rather goes from her father’s house immediately to her husband’s house once she is married. The state also sees the male as the provider of the family, and pays women less in family subsidies. (KI Interview, 16)
Chapter 11 Social Concepts and Implications for Female Agency

11.1 Battling Society’s Disapproval

Kuwaiti women who are generally thought to be more “liberal-minded” and who, according to interview participants, have typically lived or travelled in Europe or the US, will more often work in gender-integrated jobs with long hours, travelling alone as they will, and choosing jobs which may contradict society’s perception of suitable female job roles. However, in doing so, they battle against societal disapproval.

One young Kuwait woman in her 20s describes her experience as an airline stewardess, a service job which is very unusual for a Kuwaiti to have, due to its perceived low status, in addition to being in close contact with men and requiring travel alone. She describes her experience with Kuwaiti men boarding her plane:

…They’ve got their superiority air about them…and I was judged for being a flight attendant by Kuwaitis…it’s ‘oh, you’re like a maid in the air!’…(So I think) why are you condemning other people for their choices?

When she tried to defend her choice of work, she was told by many of her customers, who were mainly male:

‘It’s not a job Kuwaiti girls should be doing’…and I get all sorts of comments (like) ‘How do you expect to get married?’…‘Why are you doing this job? You’re Kuwaiti. You shouldn’t be doing this job.’ So I got to a stage where I was embarrassed to fly—and I quit. I quit the job ” (Interview, 41)

In collectivist societies “people have clearer ideas about what behaviours are appropriate…(and) agree among themselves that sanctions are needed when people do not follow the norms,” a process which contributes to the formation of stigmas. (Papadopoulos et al., 271) In Kuwait’s collectivist society, the issue of job suitability
goes beyond the limitation of a woman’s agency in choosing her own job. Society’s perception of a Kuwaiti woman’s reputation, her family’s reputation, and whether or not she “is a good Muslim woman,” is often formed by the type of job she chooses. 

(Interview, 13) As one Kuwaiti female in her 60s comments, “So our freedom (is still intertwined) with considering society, what society thinks of it…one of my friends she doesn’t care…but nobody will take her seriously.”(Interview, 26)

In going against society’s perceptions, a woman risks losing her own reputation and her family’s standing in society. According to one Non-Kuwaiti professional woman talking about two Kuwaiti women—one who wanted to be a hair dresser, and the other a tattoo artist—“It’s not just the female’s reputation at stake, it’s the father’s or the family’s if these girls do the jobs they want to do.” (Interview, 07)

A Kuwaiti female, in her third-year of medical school describes the stigma of women taking on certain roles as a medical doctor, especially the role of surgeon. She says many of her female colleagues in medical school have already decided they definitely were not going into surgery based on what she calls the “stigma about female surgeons in Kuwait”. She goes on to say:

…Number one, there’s the whole lifestyle…you’re constantly on call…you would be away from your family. You wouldn’t have time for your kids or your husband. And then there’s the thing where you’re amongst a lot of men and it’s kind of a different atmosphere that’s not appropriate, quote—unquote, for women…If I choose to be a surgeon, I have to be in like battle mode and fight off any challenges.

When asked about what she would have to “fight off” she answers:

There’d be society stereotypes. Like even as close as my family, they’d be like ‘Are you sure you want to be a surgeon? And then you also have this pressure where you feel like you have to make a choice—(it’s either my) family or surgery…we don’t have that many female role models in the surgical field…the whole (society) says ‘Surgery is for men’.
Continuing to speak about the stigma of female surgeons, she recalls a conversation with an older Kuwaiti male doctor:

…And he was talking about his daughter…and he said ‘Oh, she wants surgery but we’re trying to get her out of that. And I told him ‘Why? Why would you say that?’ I was totally annoyed. He’s so sexist. And he said ‘No, because she’s a girl and she needs to have a family and stuff’. And I was like ‘But you can still encourage her to have that!’ He’s creating this roadblock (just because she’s a girl)… (Interview, 22)

Even a Kuwaiti woman’s chances for marriage can depend on the type of job she takes. As one University professor says, “Now some women, some women seek a job because it's more attractive to get married.” (Interview, 03) Being in the public eye was often mentioned among interview participants as being something undesirable for Kuwaiti women, both in view of their fathers and mothers, and in view of appearing “marry-able”. Jobs such as a television talk show host, actress, or anything putting a woman’s picture or description on television, Internet, or other social media is not seen as chaste or becoming for a Kuwaiti female.

A young Kuwaiti female talks about a teammate who dropped off the national volleyball team to increase her chances to get married:

…She ways like ‘No, I don’t want to appear on TV, or I don’t want to appear in society as a volleyball player.’…She doesn’t have a fiancé or anything…she’s like ‘because I’m 24, and she feels like that’s old…her chances are going down. She felt like (leaving the team) was the right decision…. people still have the ideology that a girl shouldn’t play sports—that’s for guys…So no one will marry you if you play sports or run around in public (in the public eye)…. (Interview, 22)

The seclusion of women from the public eye to maintain respectability has historical origins in the pre-oil era. Women from wealthy families lived in courtyard dwellings, “secluded from the outside world and confined to a section of the house where there were no windows”, where women’s “voices could not be heard”, something which was considered shameful. However, women who were not able to afford servants
had to venture out of the home to go to market, wash clothes at the beach, get drinking water, or even to earn money. In order to maintain their “seclusion” and respectability outside the home, women would completely cover their bodies with the long black cloth called an abaya, and veil their faces. (Al Mughni 2001, 45-6)

11.2 Social Concepts and Female Agency

As discussed in Chapter 2, in focusing on women’s participation in the workforce and society, the term “agency” is coupled with “capability” as part of a complete definition of freedom to participate, meaning that women are not only “passive recipient(s) of welfare-enhancing help” (although also an important part of development) but “active agents” in her community. (Sen 2000, 189)

The fear of losing reputation due to the disapproval of society was often discussed by interview participants as an obstacle to agency, an obstacle not shared by Kuwaiti males. According to several participants, men do not have responsibility over “what society perceives as their flaws” or “lack of control over their impulses”. However, women do have responsibility for theirs. (Interview, 46) As one Kuwaiti mother of three girls and one boy says, “The man has a right to do anything…any mistakes, ‘he’s a man. He’s okay.’ But the girl, nobody will marry her…if anybody talks about her.” (Interview, 36)

In Kuwait in the 1930s, death threats against women were used as a “powerful mechanism of social control”. Males considered it their right to punish women who “soiled” family honor, and the “slightest rumor that a woman had committed a moral offence could endanger her life, but no legal action would be taken against the man.” (Al Mughni, 46)
A Kuwaiti male at the Kuwait University Faculty of Medicine says he believes today’s society in Kuwait uses approval as a tool to control women:

… It’s about kind of how they’re raised…(they feel) helpless…to get approval. At the end of the day everybody wants approval…especially if they’re a kid for that long. You come loose at 15, you’re not going to care so much about…approval. (But) we don’t cut them (Kuwaiti daughters) loose until they’re well into their 30s and even then we don’t cut them completely loose…I would say (society puts pressure on women) …to get power. There’s limited resources, they want to make sure they get more of the resources, and the more people under their purview, the more resources they have.” (Interview, 37)

In Development as Freedom, Sen writes that as an “active agent of change,” a woman acting in a job outside the home, increases her involvement in the social processes and changes of a society. As a result, the act of working creates female agency in other aspects of society, such as financial freedom and increased political and family decision-making. (Sen 2000, 189) Interview participants described financial freedom, autonomy, ability to improve the family, and self-confidence when speaking about the agency of Kuwaiti women who “have a separate life working outside her home.” A Non Kuwaiti Key Informant and psychologist says:

I see in them that they have a much greater confidence. They have much greater agency. They’ve learned something about…being autonomous and an individual.

When asked what affect social concepts of gender or job suitability have on the agency of Kuwaiti women, she answers:

It’s invalidating, you know, just basically invalidating of their worth or identity as an individual. But it’s more complicated than that because those women who are accepting…unquestioning about the tenets of Islam don’t accept this status quo without recognizing that it may or may not be of Islam, it may or may not be cultural, it may or may not be invalidating of them. So, you’ve also got sort of the women’s attitudes themselves that there is a small and vocal minority that is pushing back and sort of could be classified…as a woman’s movement or a push towards equality. But quite frankly the reality is that they’re in the minority”. 
She then describes the great struggle Kuwaiti women face in going against society’s perceptions of female job roles:

Paradoxically, or maybe as a result of that...they...have a higher level of anxiety (and) tend to have the physical ailments that go along with chronic anxiety. I see them (in therapy) because...what brings them in is panic attacks, panic disorders. Because they really, really (have persisted)—and not just women like Rola Dashti (who are in leadership positions in the public eye) but women who have careers that are sort of countered to (the job suitability and gender roles) we’ve just been talking about. They’ve persisted. They may have families and...they’ve persisted in a career path that has brought them into conflict with the family or the husband, or you know—it’s a struggle all the time. And that chronic, constant struggle produces a chronic toll on their health (Interview, 13)

The struggle between Kuwaiti women and social concepts of women illustrates the theory that women’s formal labor force participation nurtures women’s participation in society and creates a “new social and political constituency” of empowered women who may question patriarchal political and economic structures and gender relations. (Spierings et al., 505) It is through the “questioning” of social structures and relations that conflict arises. In contrast, Ross (2008) demonstrates that low female LFP reduces female influence in politics and decision-making, and “patriarchal institutions...go unchallenged”. (Ross, 107, 110, 120)

11.3 The Society of Contradictions

Interview participants describe this struggle as stemming from Kuwait’s “society of contradictions”. The contradictions, as a Kuwaiti female artist and writer explains, are between “East and West” and the need for Kuwaitis to “join...traditions with...technologies and contemporary life.” Furthermore she says “You grow up with this... the northern and southern hemisphere inside you...not living harmoniously, but constantly... combating each other”. (Interview, 27)
In 1993, Samuel Huntington hypothesized that the world was entering a new era of global politics and conflict—one where not state, nor political ideology, nor the acquisition of territorial or economic power would be the impetus for war and conflict—but a world where the most dominant source of conflict would be cultural, and divided between distinct cultural civilizations. (Huntington 1993, 22-23) Although Huntington is describing a cultural clash between different nations, his theory epitomizes the conflict arising from the “cross-fertilization” of west and east within the state of Kuwait.

Today, the major sources of political and social conflict within Kuwait come from the struggle between the progress and processes of modernization stemming from oil wealth, and Kuwait’s economic, political, and social structures based in the tenets of Arab Islamic tradition. As described often by interviews and observations, these “two hemispheres” have collided in Kuwait due to two major reasons—first, the large number of Kuwaitis who study in Europe and the United States and return to live in Kuwait, and second, globalization mainly in the form of Internet and other social media.

Although Huntington did recognize globalization as a future aspect in global politics, and that “increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness and awareness of differences,” (1993, 25) it was impossible for him to fully appreciate the dramatic increase in global communication due to technology such as cell phones, 24/7 media services and the explosion of social media. Forces of technology make it much harder to separate countries culturally, due to increased communication and migration, both of which intermix cultures and create pluralistic societies. In this context, as culture moves into the protected space of another culture, conflict evolves and develops within a country rather than being a clash between two different states.
According to interview participants, both western education and globalization have fostered liberal-mindedness and individuality in a society of conservatism and conformity, which most interview participants regard as a positive or preferable change to society. A more liberal-minded Kuwaiti female explains:

People are more open-minded. People are bringing ideas from outside the country and so they are like shocking the system little by little. So yeah, it is adapting, but we’re still behind. We are still moving forward in terms of women and how society views them in Kuwait, but it’s still behind. (Interview, 22)

Educational subsidies for Kuwaiti citizens open the door for many to study abroad at western schools with scholarships. In addition, as there are few Master’s Programs in Kuwait, and currently no PhD programs, Kuwaitis wanting a post-graduate degree go abroad to the west. In this way many Kuwaitis when returning to Kuwait, according to a young Kuwaiti male, “broaden their horizons” increase the liberal-mindedness in Kuwaiti society, and bring back western work ethic. (Interview, 02, 08)

Often, extreme conservatism and liberal-mindedness seem to co-exist side by side in Kuwait, reflected most clearly in the various styles of dress among Kuwaiti women. At one international university in Kuwait, a young undergraduate student wears Ronald-McDonald red hair, a tank top, and a tight stretch skirt about 3 inches above her knees, while another young woman walks about campus in the traditional black abaya and niqab, holding a prayer book. Still, the appearance of the covered young woman reflects westernization: she wears false eyelashes, Gucci sunglasses, Yves St. Laurent pumps, and her lips are lined beyond natural boundaries with dark pink lip liner and colored in with bright fuchsia lipstick. (Observation, 4-2014; Interview, 53)

11.4 Is it Islam or Tradition?
When asked what westernization is in conflict with—traditional cultural values or Islam, most interview participants were unsure, citing different reasons. As one Kuwaiti female explains “…the problem is, with Kuwait and the areas of Middle East, culture and religion are so intertwined, so that sometimes you don’t know if it’s culture or religion”. (Interview, 38) However the majority of participants (about 48) thought Islam promoted equality for all individuals, blaming oppression of women in various forms on (in their view) incorrect interpretations of Islam (usually for the goal of personal power or political gain) and on the influence of patriarchal traditional culture.

Slightly less than half of interview participants believe the extremes of conservatism in Kuwait come from neither Islam nor culture, but as a result of the Islamist movement that influenced the entire Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s. According to some historians, Kuwaitis were not very Islamic until then, which in addition to the influence of the Islamic Movement, Kuwaiti society created ties with the ultra conservative Saudi Arabia. (See Chapter 4) Participants cited the 1960s in Kuwait as a time of freedom and advancement for women, saying the Islamic Revival brought retrogression to women’s freedom and agency in Kuwait during the 70s and 80s. As Al Mughni writes “It was women…who were the primary target of the Muslim revivalist movement”. (Al Mughni 2001, 123)

Interestingly, these participants mentioned Kuwaiti women now in their 60s, who were heavily influenced by the Islamic movement in the 1980s, as the main elements of society who promote “intolerance” and strict adherence to gender roles and female job roles. A Kuwait University professor and human rights activist reflects the general consensus of these participants when he says:
…their traditions are ‘bullshitting’…they pretend they are keeping tradition because it makes them more virtuous, like wearing abaya, covering their head, etc. I think the Islamists sold them a bill of goods—a national identity, a religious identity. Which maybe made them feel better after the Invasion caused vulnerability and fear of dying (religion). (Interview, 53)
Chapter 12 Kuwaiti—Non-Kuwaiti Relationship in the Female Labor Market:

Productivity and Social Implications

As discussed previously, 69% of Kuwait’s population is foreign, 92% of which works in Kuwait’s private sector. Non-Kuwaitis working and living in Kuwait comprise almost 83% of Kuwait’s total labor force population of 2,421,885 people. Most of the Non-Kuwaiti population is male (76%), many of whom send money back to their countries of origin in order to support their families. (PACI 2014, Table 15, 60) To better understand the labor force in Kuwait, it is necessary to have an understanding of the relationship between Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis, especially since the majority of their interaction occurs within the context of the labor market.

While comprising only 24.3% of the migrant labor population (485,975 women), Non-Kuwaiti women make up 71% of the female labor force in Kuwait and therefore must be considered when analyzing the female labor market, especially considering their close interaction with Kuwaiti females. (PACI 2014, Tables 14-16) The majority (331,481 or 68%) of female Non-Kuwaitis work as “Personal Services Workers,” which mainly describes the high number of domestic workers in Kuwait who work (and often live) within Kuwaiti households. Domestics have high personal interaction with Kuwaiti families, especially with Kuwaiti wives who are the supervisors of the domestics and who often train their domestics in cooking, cleaning, and other personal services. (PACI 2014, Table 3)
The next largest majority of female workers (28,399 women) are in some type of sales or service positions, which are categorized as either “Sales and Services, Elementary Occupations” or “Models, Salespersons, and Demonstrators”. These Non Kuwaiti females are the ones hired by Kuwaiti business owners to sell products and offer services within businesses in the private sector. (PACI Table 3, pp 111-3) The third largest subsections of Non-Kuwaiti female labor are “Office Clerks” at 21,061 women and “Teaching Professionals at 13,061. The fifth largest subsection of Non-Kuwaiti women (5,292) are categorized as “Corporate Managers.”(PACI Table 3 p. 111-3)

12.1 Basis of Relations: Interdependence, Ethnic Segregation, and Power Positioning

12.1.1 Interdependence

Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis have an interdependent relationship. In the most simplistic terms, the private sector demand for inexpensive skilled and unskilled labor depends on Non-Kuwaitis, and Non-Kuwaitis depend on Kuwaiti wealth for salaries large enough to support their families—salaries that they could not otherwise make in their countries of origin.

Many Non-Kuwaitis work and live in Kuwait to send remittances home to their families. For example, a Pakistani taxi driver who has lived in Kuwait for ten years, has a wife and three daughters (all school age) living in Pakistan. He visits them about once a year for a month. The four Pakistani taxi drivers he lives with in a two-bedroom apartment in Kuwait, all have similar family and work living arrangements. (Observation, 3-2-2014) A domestic worker from the Philippines has worked in Kuwait for about 15 years, supporting her aunt, nieces, and nephews who live in the Philippines.
She currently has three jobs—to clean a community building, a private business, and private household. Each month, she sends $242 dollars home, plus keeps some for her own living expenses. She says working in the Philippines, her family makes only about 250 pesos, or $5.60 a day, which amounts to less than about $140 dollars a month. (Interview, 18)

Many Kuwaitis interviewed agree that the majority of Non Kuwaitis work very hard, face difficult circumstances living without their families and are paid poorly, yet their job in Kuwait is better than what they would have otherwise. A Kuwaiti woman in her mid-30s says “they (the Non Kuwaitis) are needy…so (Kuwaitis are) giving them the chance to work. They are really working very hard and they are earning way less than Kuwaitis. Like half as much…they actually want that job because compared to their own country, it’s better”. (Interview, 28)

When asked about their perceptions of Non-Kuwaitis, most Kuwaitis (and Non-Kuwaitis) indicated that Kuwaitis “look down on other nationalities” and the jobs they do, in spite of admitting that Non-Kuwaitis are necessary to do (inexpensively) the jobs that Kuwaitis would not do. (Interview, 32) When asked how Kuwaitis perceive foreign laborers, a female Kuwaiti Key Informant says:

Sadly, I would say still with a lot of degradation. Not many (Kuwaitis) have great respect for the workforce laborers, particularly domestic workers. A lot of them are suffering… (KI Interview, 03)

12.1.2 Ethnic Segregation and Power Positioning

Although Non-Kuwaitis often integrate in social groups and neighborhoods among themselves, they live quite separately from Kuwaitis, in different neighborhoods, and move in separate social groups. Another distinction is that Kuwaitis live in houses
and Non-Kuwaitis mainly live in apartments. Although mainly segregated in living spaces, social settings, and social status, Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis integrate in the workplace, forming complex labor relationships. (Observations, 2014)

Nationality often dictates an individual’s job position in Kuwait, and job position and nationality dictate the status and power of the individual in the workplace. About 1/3 of interview participants described this relationship as a “negotiation of power positions”, often referring to the Gulf system of Kafala, the system whereby Non Kuwaitis may enter and work in Kuwait. Kafala can be translated “sponsorship” and dictates that foreigners may only enter and reside in Kuwaiti if employed by a Kuwaiti citizen or institution. (Longva, 1997, 77-8)

Under Kafala, workers are tied to their employers for three years and can only leave the employer or Kuwait during this time if they have the employer’s consent (employers generally hold the Non-Kuwaitis passport). If a worker leaves their current sponsor, even when fleeing abuse or non-payment of wages, the employer must report the worker as “absconding” which categorizes their behavior as illegal and can lead to detention and deportation. (HRW 2012)

Kafala gives one Kuwaiti individual or institution control over Non-Kuwaiti workers. A Kuwaiti Key Informant, and a Non-Governmental Organization advocate on behalf of domestics, describes an imbalance in the system of power created by kafala as follows:

One person (has) more power than the other, because you can cancel the residency…there are so many glitches in the laws that makes the sponsor, or Kafil, have a lot of power over this person…When (I was) growing up, (Kuwaitis) used to say “(Arabic)”, which means ‘I will deport you’…growing up kids would say it to anyone that’s not Kuwaiti, whether they’re Palestinians, whether they’re Egyptians, because the government gave them so much control that they started threatening with deportation—because they can.
She describes a recent trip to the police station to file a complaint on behalf of two
domestic workers who were physically abused in service to a Kuwaiti female doctor. She
says that whether or not domestics are treated well:

…Depends on whether the employer is a nice person or not a nice person…that
shouldn’t be the case and if (they aren’t treated well) they have no other option (than to
runaway), no choice, nothing. I was at the police station and I couldn’t even file a
complaint on their behalf, imagine if they went alone what would happen. (Interview, 43)

In *Outside in the Nation Machine: The Case of Kuwait*, Mai Al-Nakib aptly
summarizes the segmentation of power between Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti saying “It
creates a structural opposition…that goes beyond the typical opposition between
nationals and non-nationals of most other countries. By controlling labor movement
within the country, by holding passports, and by threatening, if not actually carrying out,
deportation, the sponsor wields an unusual degree of power over the sponsored…it
segments the population into Kuwaitis, as those who have sponsorship power, and non-
Kuwaitis, as those who don’t.” (Al-Nakib, M. 2000, 204-5)

12.2 From Her Perspective: Female Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti Interaction in the
Labor Market

The large presence of nonnationals in Kuwait, and the dependency of Kuwait’s
economy on their labor, has often been a debated topic in politics and news. The Kuwaiti
government announced intentions in March 2013 to deport expatriate workers by 100,000
every year for the next 10 years until the number of Non-Kuwaitis was comparable to the
number of Kuwaitis, at about 1 million. (HRW 2014)

However, when Kuwaiti interview participants were asked about how they felt
about the large amount of nonnationals working in Kuwait, almost every Kuwaiti
interviewed indicated that they did not feel threatened by their majority presence, but
accepted the necessity of them in Kuwait to do supportive service positions that Kuwaitis needed, and even welcomed them in order to do the jobs that Kuwaitis would not do. When asked what would happen if the majority of the expat labor left Kuwait, most Kuwaiti (and Non-Kuwaiti) participants said that Kuwaitis would not fill their job positions.

Kuwaiti interview participants almost uniformly indicated their reliance and need for Non-Kuwaiti women in the labor market. In the case of the two largest labor subsections of Non-Kuwaiti women, domestics and sales positions, both were said to be very useful to Kuwaiti women and to increase the productivity of Kuwaiti women in the labor market.

12.2.1 Non-Kuwaiti Females in Sales and Service: Increased Participation, Entrepreneurship, and Productivity of Kuwaiti Women in the Labor Market

Non-Kuwaiti women act as private sector laborers hired specifically to do various supporting roles in Kuwaiti female businesses. Key examples are: Sewing the clothes Kuwaiti women design to sell, doing the daily running and maintenance of the shops Kuwaiti women own, and waiting on and offering services to the customers and clients of these businesses. Non-Kuwaiti female labor is in large supply, and is inexpensively purchased to support the success of Kuwaiti women in their businesses.

An Egyptian woman manages a hair and body salon in Kuwait City owned by a Kuwaiti woman. The Egyptian woman hires two helpers (Moroccan and Filipino women) to wash hair, assist in coloring, and do body scrubs. The Egyptian woman waits on customers, cuts and colors hair, and is in charge of all the paperwork needed to keep the business running. Another Egyptian woman runs a nail salon nearby. She hires
and oversees the approximately 18 Filipino females hired to perform services such as pedicures, manicures, and massages. In addition, she books appointments, and takes care of paperwork. Although approximately 80% of their clientele is Kuwaiti, these salons also service other Non-Kuwaiti women, mainly Egyptians and Westerners. (Observation, 4-2014)

A Kuwaiti woman who owns a fitness studio relies on Non-Kuwaiti women to run and grow her business. An American woman acts as a business development consultant, a female from the United Kingdom manages the personal trainers and staff, an Indian woman runs the office, and two women from the Philippines provide personal training and teach exercise classes. (Observation, 2014)

A Kuwaiti woman in her 50s has owned a large hair and nail salon (of about 20 hair stations and 8 nail stations), for 22 years and another Ayurvedic spa for 4 years. She also designed both spaces, which are functional and beautiful. She oversees both businesses herself, but relies on a large staff of roughly thirty south Asian women to cut and color hair, paint nails, and work the front desk in the salon, and a smaller staff of about six to run the spa. In addition, she says she searched India to find an Indian woman, who she calls an Ayurvedic doctor, to oversee the validity of the Ayurvedic treatments. (Observation 4-15-2014)

12.2.2 Reliance on Domestics Workers: Increased Productivity for Kuwaiti Women in the Labor Market

In the MENA, the ability to hire a domestic (household worker) is a symbol of higher social status, and domestics account for 5.6% of total employment. (ILO 2013) The relationship between the domestic worker and the Kuwaiti may be the more intimate
and complicated relationship between Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti labor, as the domestic
works within the home of the Kuwaiti, serves the Kuwaiti family, and is involved in the
Kuwaiti family life. Many domestics even have their own private living quarters in the
Kuwaiti household. Domestic work is considered the lowest status and lowest paying job
in Kuwait, and most keenly reflects the power imbalance of the Kafala system.

Kuwaiti households rely heavily upon domestic workers. In 2014, there were
554,327 “Personal and Protective Services Workers” in Kuwait, of which 60% were
women. (PACI 2014, Table 3 p. 112) Male domestics often work as drivers for the
family. Each household, depending on wealth and size of the family, can have 1, 2, 3,
and sometimes up to 7 domestic workers serving and living within the Kuwaiti
household.

Most interview participants agreed that, although it is “different from household
to household”, in general Kuwaiti women do not do their own housework, saying, “the
mother doesn’t need to do anything. She doesn’t work in her house.” (Interview, 45) One
Kuwaiti female in her 20s says that her husband yelled at her for picking something up
off the floor. He told her: “Why are you picking it up? The maid can do it…” She goes
on to say:

…it was a shock when I went to the States and I lived alone. I think my biggest trouble
was it took me a while to realize that I have to take out the trash. I have to think about
it… because it was never an issue (in Kuwait). I never had to deal with trash before and
it was like, ‘Oh, I have to do this’. (Interview, 31)

The Kuwaiti’s reliance on foreign house-help leads to the conclusion that the
perceived lack of productivity in Kuwaiti society (discussed in Chapter 9) also extends to
the Kuwaiti’s own household. However, interviews and observations made it clear that
although the reliance on domestic workers decreases a Kuwaiti woman’s productivity in
the household, and even in raising her own children, it increases her productivity in the workforce. As interviews suggested, reliance on domestic workers in the household has given many Kuwaiti women the ability to be much more productive in other areas of society—in having a job or a career, in opening a business or starting a home-based business, or in having a side business in addition to a base job.

A Bedouin man in his 30s says that his wife is a teacher and they have five kids. He says that she does not work because they need money, but works “to do something useful with her life”. When asked how she manages to balance work with five children, he explains they have seven domestic workers at home—cooks, nannies, maids, and a driver. (Interview, 54) As one Kuwaiti married woman describes it:

> What’s now common is that there’s no house with just one housemaid, you have to have more than one…They have like two housemaids, a cook and a driver, (a nanny) for the kids and everything, so (the woman can) go and (be) employed outside the house.” (Interview, 45)

Not only do domestics provide house help that frees women to work outside the home, several interview sources described that they (and others they knew) used their domestics to support the day to day running and tasks of their home-based businesses, especially while the business was in an early stage.

For example, one young Kuwaiti woman develops the recipes for food she sells through a home-based side business and has been using her house help to cook the food that is sold. Once the food is cooked and packaged, her family’s personal driver delivers the food to the customer. When asked if she has been doing the cooking, she says. “No, no. I have staff at home that help me…two cooks at home…that I’ve taught them some of my recipes.” However, now that the business is growing, she says “we’ve just hired our first staff member last week”. (Interview, 33)
12.2.3 Reliance on Domestics: Social implications for Kuwaiti Families and Future Generations

As more Kuwaiti women work outside the home or own home-based businesses, a greater number of Kuwaiti families become reliant on domestics. Interview participants and observations revealed what Kuwaitis consider to be a major social problem in Kuwait—that Kuwaiti children are being solely raised by foreign nannies.

One young unmarried Kuwaiti female explains “…as a society we are noticing that a lot of kids are…being raised by their nannies rather than their parents. Their parents are just like acting roles.” (Interview, 22) Another participant says Kuwaiti women “depend solely on (domestics) completely, even with the children. Now, they’re not even raising their kids”. (Interview, 43)

Participants described that in many Kuwaiti households there is one nanny per child, and often two or three nannies per household. A young Kuwaiti female says “…like when you walk around the neighborhood. I’ve never seen a parent walk their child. And it’s really sad because the nannies are walking the children to the grocery store. Or the nannies are taking the child to the bathroom. The nannies are playing in the playground with the child.” (Interview, 22)

One Kuwaiti female in her 30s says that domestics are used even in “driving the…kids around. It’s the driver that does that. He has all the addresses (and) the maid in the car. The driver drives but there has to be a maid in the car.” She then says she does not use a driver, but because of this her friend asked her “What do you do when you (arrive home at night) and your kids are asleep in the car? So I (reply) ‘I teach them to
walk and go inside! What do you do?’ (My friend says) I bring the maid (so she can carry) the baby…’ (Interview, 45)

Also, when Kuwaiti families go out to dine in a restaurant, or walk around to shop in the mall, several maids often go along to care for the children. A Kuwaiti female describes her perception:

The thing is we have extremes. That’s the problem. We have like the extreme of one nanny per child. And the woman literally has—the mother—has no obligation whatsoever because that nanny is doing everything…and you can see this as soon or as early as a child (at a) couple months old or a couple weeks old. And (the maid’s) giving him the bottle and there’s no obligation from the mom whatsoever…and I know at least 20 girls who have gotten married and all of them are open to getting a nanny even before having children. (Interview, 22)

As a result of the over-reliance on domestics as nannies, participants described Kuwaiti children as being brought up in close attachment to the nanny and in detachment from their parents, living in a subculture within their own Kuwaiti household and forming stronger bonds with their nannies than with their parents. Participants described the problem of some Kuwaiti children spending so much time with their nannies that they did not learn to speak Arabic well, but instead speak the English or Arabic dialect of the nanny, as well as the nanny’s native language. A Kuwaiti male medical doctor describes this as a threat to the development of values in the Kuwaiti child:

This is the problem. The women who are working, they will leave and they don’t want to spend more time with the children, so the children will have the values from the nanny who’s actually…just cheap labor. I mean…we’re not talking about nannies or butlers of the wealth…(who) are the cream of the cream—they know how to behave, they know how to transfer knowledge. We don’t have this…we want just cheap labor. I mean, what? Somebody who’s never seen the world or anything, doesn’t have an education, sits with a child 4 years old. So the children, they don’t have any skills whatsoever…we don’t get the best. We just want somebody to sit. (Interview, 24)

Another Kuwaiti male entrepreneur says of this problem:

I think that in the end, you get what you pay for, and I think that part of the problem in Kuwaiti society (is that) kids end up, generations have been raised by people who cared more about their 60 KD or 50 KD a month, and they care more about losing their jobs,
than actually raising the kids…the problem is you have people who are low skilled, they aren’t going to make any money and they really need that much and they’re more worried about losing their jobs than actually doing the right thing. And so you end up with a hostile, spoiled (generation of Kuwaitis). (Interview, 37)

A Non-Kuwaiti woman, who works as counselor with Kuwaiti and Non Kuwaiti children and adults, says there is a lot of conflict in Kuwaiti households when Kuwaiti children learn one set of values and social norms from their nannies, and then clash with their parents, whose views and values they were not taught to respect. In addition, she says that these children often go to international schools in Kuwait where they learn another set of values: “…there are a lot of behavioral problems (with Kuwaiti children). Basically, they’re all from Kuwait, raised by nannies. No manners at all. No manners, at all…Now, the mothers have no role at all in raising the kids.” She goes onto describe the problem she sees:

So, the nannies are replacing the mothers. Everything a mother is supposed to do, starting from taking care of the child, like the very early childhood age—nurturing emotional attachment, or you know, teaching them values, everything, nannies are doing. And what happens if a nanny is being kicked out of the house or she decides to run away or she decides to leave? The child is in trouble because then he looks for the compensations or an alternate. He doesn’t get it, and the mom is not there to provide that…

When asked about her perception of the long-term effects on Kuwaiti society, she answers by describing the breakdown of the Kuwaiti family and the tradition of several generations living together:

…There is a conflict between the parents and the children, that’s what, because when a child is not raised by you, he doesn’t—he or she doesn’t know what is being expected. You don’t teach them your values, your own norms, you know…there is a conflict…the parents expect something else, and they cannot comply. (Interview, 50)
Chapter 13 Conclusions and Recommendations

Using the previously described findings of this research, four conclusions have been made in answer to the wider research objectives. These will be discussed in this chapter in answer to the following questions:

- How do the main drivers of Muslim women’s status, freedom and rights found in the literature relate to the experiences of Kuwaiti women?
- Do Kuwaiti women have full agency to participate in the workforce and development sustainability of Kuwait?
- What is the future of the female labor market in Kuwait?
- What is the future of development sustainability in Kuwait?

In addition, recommendations are made to actors within state and civil society regarding how to support women’s labor force development in relation to the findings on economic and social barriers to participation. Recommendations include leadership support of women in decision-making roles, social media networking, new research investment into the possibilities of the informal market, and the adoption of a “new employment philosophy”.

13.1 Conclusion Question 1: How do the five main drivers of Muslim women’s status, freedom and rights found in the literature relate to the experiences of Kuwaiti women?

In Chapter 3 Background on Research, five main drivers of Muslim women’s status, freedoms, and rights in Muslim societies are identified in the literature review
done prior to data collection. These are: a history of patriarchal Arab culture and
tradition, state Islamization, the rise of Islamist movements, deviations in the
interpretation and practice of Islam with respect to women, and the use of women’s rights
by the state and political groups to gain power. The findings of this in-depth qualitative
study agree with, contradict, and add new drivers to the five previously found in the
literature.

“Deviations in the interpretation and practice of Islam” was often brought up in
interviews as influential over the agency of women. Over half of participants believe
Islam in its truest form in not gender-biased, but that its interpretation is shaped by the
perceptions or background of the individual or community. In addition, “Patriarchal
Culture and…Traditional Norms” were also cited as an influence over female freedom.
But because of Kuwait’s strong cultural ties to Islam, participants were often unable to
differentiate between the influence of Islam or the influence of culture, explaining that
Islam and culture were often “entwined”.

In addition, interviews cited the “Islamic Movement”, which influenced the entire
Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s, as the cause of “retrogression” in Kuwaiti female
status and rights. It was also during the time of the Islamist movement that “Women’s
Rights (were) Used by the State and Political Groups to Gain Power” and women were
made part of a state propaganda to build national identity by encouraging them to remain
home in order to bear and educate children.

However, an interesting finding of this research, perhaps specific to Kuwait, is
that slightly less than half of interview participants mentioned they believe the Islamist
movement was not a “return to Islamic tradition and culture” as propagandized by
Islamic revivalists, a concept which is widely accepted in Kuwait today. Instead, they labeled this ideology as a “myth” or “bill of goods sold” to Kuwaiti people in order for Islamists to assert political control in Kuwait.

According to these participants, conservative Islam or traditions were not a large part of Kuwaiti society prior to the Islamic movement, but Kuwait historically was a much freer society. Participants cited the legal use of alcohol and prostitution in pre-oil society (alcohol was banned in 1960) and two relatively liberal, twentieth century rulers of Kuwait. First mentioned was Salim ibn Mubarak (1917-1921) who, when opposed by conservative elements in society, that he was unwilling to interfere in the personal lives of his people. The second was Abdullah Salim, who leaned toward the expansion of political participation in Kuwait in the 1960s. Other participants (many of whom were old enough to remember) cited the liberal nightlife of the 1960s when Kuwaitis frequented parties and nightclubs, and when women appeared in mini skirts on TV, singing and performing with men. (Interview 53, 24, 14, 35; Al-Nakib, 3-13-2014)

The same concept can be applied to female job agency and participation in society. Discussing pre-oil Kuwaiti society, most participants agree that some women lived privileged lives inside their homes, however this was not the case for the majority of women. (See also Al-Mughni 2001) As many interview participants pointed out, most Kuwaiti women, before oil wealth changed Kuwait, worked for money in service or labor positions. In addition, while the men of the community were gone for months at a time at sea, women became the decision makers and community actors in Kuwait. These historical accounts lead to the conclusion that women as non-productive, “protected”
actors in the community is a new concept to Kuwait and not traditional to Kuwaiti society.

As Longva points out regarding the justification of “suitable” job roles for Kuwaiti women, that “insofar as tradition was involved, we are not witnessing its reproduction but its “reinvention”, that is to say, the reenactment of a behavior and a discourse whose form was the same but whose content had changed considerably and was related to the novel circumstances.” (Longva 1997, 201)

Perhaps the most important findings to add to the literature in regard to drivers of female status and agency in Muslim societies, particularly when discussing collectivist communities and countries of the GCC, is the powerful influence of social norms in driving the economic behavior and participation of women.

As discussed in Chapter 11, the threat of losing social reputation and identity is a powerful driver of female participation in the workforce, especially if a woman deviates from what society determines is a suitable female job role—protected and out of the public eye, gender-segregated, prestigious, not requiring a great amount of physical effort, and in second place to the role of wife and mother. In fact, beyond the question of job participation, when asked what obstacles there were to overall female participation in Kuwaiti society in any sphere, loss of reputation in society was often named (by males and females) as number one.

In addition, the social concept of *wasta* as a barrier to full job freedom or participation, for both men and women, has not been discussed in the literature until now. *Wasta* is a socially developed concept used in the economic sphere as a force to override merit-based achievement to the help or detriment of an individual. Wasta was cited as a
powerful influence in determining job participation, job expectation, lack of productivity in the workforce, career advancement and confidence in personal agency. Although wasta affects both males and females, it is perceived as more of an obstacle to female job participation, since women do not have access to the same influential social networking systems as men, an element which increases individual levels of wasta.

13.2 Conclusion Question 2: Do Kuwaiti Women have Full Agency to Participate in the Workforce and Development Sustainability of Kuwait?

Every Kuwaiti has the right to work and to choose the type of work. Work is the duty of every citizen, necessitated by personal dignity and public good. The state shall endeavour to make it available to all citizens and to make its terms equitable. (Article 41, Constitution of Kuwait)

Contrary to pre-data collection analysis, statistical data from the Public Authority of Civil Information on female labor force participation, interviews, and observations indicate that Kuwaiti women are indeed participating in the workforce in Kuwait, at a rate above world averages, and compatible with other high income and Islamic societies. However, in general Kuwaiti women are practicing a “surface” participation in the workforce, not widely or fully adding female productivity, decision-making or creative processes to Kuwaiti labor.

The majority of the Kuwaiti female labor force is in the public sector, where jobs are guaranteed for women. However, as most of these jobs have been described as “non-engaging… passive sort of work” women are not acting as fully productive participants in the public workforce. Although women are encouraged to get a job to be financially secure, the social concepts of female job suitability, gender roles, wasta, and gender segregation, are restrictions that take away a woman’s agency in participation. Social norms and the economic structure of Kuwait, more than the Kuwaiti woman,
determine what type of job she takes, if it is suitable for her, and whether or not she advances in the workforce. Public sector placement, private sector obstacles, and social ideas of job suitability for women do not take into account the Kuwaiti woman’s needs, skills, creative power, ideas and abilities to develop the economy or society.

In addition, the agency a Kuwaiti woman gains by participating in the workforce is limited in its scope to produce increased agency for women. (See Chapter 2 Conceptual Model) Negative social concepts of women in leadership positions do not advance women in the workforce nor put female decision-making into practice. While women do have increased agency of financial independence, some autonomy and self-confidence, in general, the majority of work Kuwaiti women do in the workforce does not “empower“ them well. As a Kuwaiti female business owner and entrepreneur explained:

So let’s say you do have women in the labor force (and) that increases women’s participation rate. So what? They’re basically processing visas at the airport. It may change the way men perceive women to a certain extent. It may allow the guy next door, who might not have allowed his wife to work, to work, so in that sense it could help shape perceptions more positively towards women’s employment. But it doesn’t change the status of women, overall. (Interview, 34)

In future research on Kuwait, it may be useful to consider the possibility of, and reasons behind, “surface” participation of women in all aspects of society. For example, this concept may also be applied to Kuwaiti women in the current state of political participation. Since 2005, Kuwaiti women have had the right to vote and run for office, but there are currently no women in parliament, few in government leadership positions, and as a result the voice of Kuwaiti women is not fully heard in political decision-making.
Al Mughni calls this an “illusion of liberation” in which patriarchal ideology contradicts modernization elements of development to offer no more “than an illusion of liberation”. (Al Mughni 2001, 54-6) While women are necessary to demonstrate that a country is modernized, and to help solidify national identity, they are still discouraged from “jeopardiz(ing) the asymmetrical gender relations of power.” Another example is that although women are constitutionally equal citizens, they are still not fully treated as autonomous individuals. Kuwaiti women access rights as a citizen through being born to a Kuwaiti father or being married to a Kuwaiti man. Married Kuwaiti women are granted housing privileges and family support allowances through their Kuwaiti husband or participate in these privileges through their Kuwaiti father. A Kuwaiti woman can lose social subsidies and welfare if she marries a foreigner, even if she lives in Kuwait. A Kuwaiti man, who marries a foreigner, does not. (Tetreault and al-Mughni, 74-6).

Interviews and observations demonstrate that Kuwaiti women are participating in the economy, society, and politics of Kuwaiti more and more over time, but that even though practices change, underlying social norms or expectations are not changed overnight. Although participating, Kuwaiti women continue to fight social expectations in order to gain full agency and participation. As two young Kuwaiti females commented “Now you see more women out. More women doing things they want. But at the same time, if (their actions) challenge anything that a man does, that’s not heard of…someone’s going to talk about it…tell you it’s not right.” (Interview, 46, 47)

13.3 Conclusion Question 3: What is the Future of Kuwaiti Female Labor Force Participation?
In spite of, and in answer to, social and economic barriers of female labor force participation, interviews and observations demonstrate that Kuwaiti women are creating their own paths of agency to participation through increased private sector participation and the creation of small businesses. One Kuwaiti female participant calls the move of women to open businesses in the private sector “coping mechanisms” to overcome obstacles to participation in the workforce saying that currently, “There’s a lot of coping mechanisms…that’s why there’s a lot of businesses going up. That’s why all the young university students are opening their own businesses, because they’re thinking of the future.” (Interview, 22)

Another Kuwaiti female describes the increase in business development as a process to overcome economic obstacles whereby, “Everyone is fending for themselves” (Interview, 27) Through creating their own businesses, Kuwaiti women are overcoming economic barriers to agency and participation such as low job expectations, non-productive work in the public sector, and long waiting periods for public sector jobs. In fact, it is during the waiting period for public sector jobs that many Kuwaitis also start informal side businesses. In addition, in these businesses, Kuwaiti women challenge the perception of Kuwaiti laziness and non-productivity by using entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity, and self-motivated productivity to build successful businesses. Furthermore, the support of Non-Kuwaiti female labor increases the agency of Kuwaiti women to be creative and entrepreneurial, and to increase the productivity and effectiveness of their businesses.

As demonstrated by the increase in home-based informal businesses, Kuwaiti women are circumventing the cumbersome licensing processes of doing business in
Kuwait. Also, these home-based businesses are seen as a compromise or “middle place” between social concepts of female job suitability (public sector jobs, in teaching or secretarial positions) and women’s full participation in a satisfying and creative job of their own choosing.

Home-based businesses take Kuwaiti women from the “boring,” non-productive jobs of the public sector and place them in a more “protected” environment than the formal private sector. In this informal environment, gender segregation is not an issue and the Kuwaiti woman determines the duration, difficulty, and value of her work. Additionally, in this environment she is able to be creative and develop a sense of freedom, agency, and independence in her work. (Interview, 29) Owning her own business also puts her in a leadership and decision-making position. As one participant pointed out, the use of Instagram to advertise businesses gives women agency to be entrepreneurial, as they are able to run their businesses from home and still maintain socially preferred female anonymity. (Interview, 13)

Al Kandari and Hasanen (2011) theorize that Internet use increases individualistic behavior among Arab populations, based on its “individualistic orientation” which “encompasses greater personal selectivity and autonomy.” (247) Interestingly, the move of women to entrepreneurialism and personally-owned businesses show an increased sense of individualism, a concept related more often to western society and contrary to collectivist societies. This may demonstrate the belief of interview participants that Kuwait is experiencing a clash between Kuwaitis who have lived abroad and bring back a western work ethic to Kuwaiti society, as well as the assertion that Kuwaitis have both individualistic and collective values. (Ali et al. 1997, 631)
13.4 Recommendations to Kuwaiti State and Society: Overcoming Obstacles to Female Participation

The findings of this research on the Kuwaiti female labor market reveal the potential of the labor force to be creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and productive through their move to private sector labor and the proliferation of self-owned business. It demonstrates that Kuwaiti women are on the path to overcome the “surface” participation of female labor in Kuwait and are ready for more job opportunities. As one Kuwaiti female participant remarked, “…any jobs that actually allow women to work, women are there.” (Interview, 45) However, because of the many obstacles they face, state and societal support is needed to remove economic and social barriers.

13.4.1 Leadership Support—Tools of Empowerment

As several interview participants discussed, if Kuwaiti leaders and decision-makers were willing to help support capable and qualified females in assuming leadership positions, and publically show confidence in them through media and other avenues, this would be a major step in changing social concepts of women in leadership roles. Over time, more women would become integral to society’s decision-making institutions and process. One Kuwaiti female university student explains:

First you will prove women are able to work and (this will) change the picture women are best for (only working in) homes. So you change the picture the world can see about women…Once they see this as…a great change, it will help to make things better. So you are taking small steps, but these small steps can build a bigger step ahead.” (Interview, 15)

An important example would be the state taking the initiative to show the public that women can be trusted in leadership roles and by appointing more women into cabinet positions. In this way, the state places a woman in a job position, not as a title or concession to women’s rights, while men continue to make the decisions, but in order to
“give her all the tools of empowerment” as a decision maker. (KI Interviews 17, 48, Interview, 25)

Another example is the state’s past support of Fay Sultan, the 17-year old Kuwaiti woman who represented Kuwait in the Olympics in London in 2012. Although she was shunned by some for appearing in public in a bathing suit, and opportunities for training in Kuwait were limited, her support by the state of Kuwait and the men’s national swim team, helped “change the perception of women in her country.” She believes such support will encourage and “spur (Kuwaiti) society to provide more opportunities for women to develop in sports and society as a whole”. (McDonald, 2012)

13.4.2 Civil Society and Social Media Networking—the Female Diwaniya

Men in Kuwait benefit economically and socially from two powerful networking systems within Kuwait—wasta (mainly perceived in interviews as a male benefit) and the male-dominated community gathering at the diwaniya. In order to compete with these networking systems and build social support, women must develop their own social networking systems.

We have the graduate association, the different labor organizations, all these should work together to give the woman more equal opportunity, more freedom to choose, more support in their workplace, you know in promoting not only (the employment of) woman, but also for the woman to advance their career… (KI Interview, 48)

Social organizations for women are present in Kuwaiti society, such as the Women’s Cultural and Social Society, but these organizations focus on charity work or social events, and not on job networking or career advancement for women. In addition, these societies often do not include women from outside the elite class.

Political Scientist Nada Al Mutawa shows through her research into entrepreneurial networks in Kuwait, that although business networks are rapidly growing
and have benefited Kuwaiti women in various stages of business development, they are limited in scope. (Al Mutawa 2014) In addition, when asked if there were networking groups for women in Kuwait, no interview participants were aware of any.

Al Mutawa cites Alghalia, a network created in 2010 to help women increase their financial ability. But, Alghalia is for membership by invitation only. She also cites “Proud to be Kuwaiti” which is for both men and women. She says the “scarcity of networks and lack of direct access to resources, information and support are barriers that many businesses encounter, and women entrepreneurs face them more acutely. An important form of interconnectedness lies within the formation of networks of all types, where global, regional and local business networks have become hubs for entrepreneurs, particularly in Kuwait. (Al Mutawa 2014, 3)

Since social media is already widely used by Kuwaiti women and is convenient, portable, and ever-present on their smart phones, job networking exclusively for females could be done easily and effectively through social media. A job networking website, built on the example of LinkedIn professional network, could potentially connect and build professional relationships between women from all classes of society and of all ages. This site could offer women personal “pages” (like LinkedIn) in order to build networking and job opportunities, and feature special promotional pages alternatively showcasing women in leadership positions, female entrepreneurs, or students looking for potential job placement.

Al Mughni says the diwaniya “functions as a male institution in which family decisions are made, business is conducted and political issues are discussed.” (Al Mughni 2001, 16) During interviews, one young Kuwaiti male participant remarked
“Social media is today’s diwaniya”. (Interview, 02) With proper organization and development, social media could be the diwaniya of the Kuwaiti workingwoman.

13.4.3 Improve Job opportunities for women (and men) within the economy:

A variety of economic sources have already made recommendations to the state of Kuwait for private sector and human resource development. These recommendations include:

- Invest in building a modern educational system in order to meet skilled labor needs of Kuwait’s future diversified economy (Al Tameemi 2013, IMF 2012)
- Decrease corruption, simplify business starting and development, consider a cut off date for private sector subsidies. (Transparency International, World Bank 2013, IMF 2012)
- Implement privatization of the many services currently performed by the state (Al Tameemi 2013)

This research adds the following recommendations to improve job expectations and opportunities, and to ensure the support of a modern, diversified private sector.

13.4.3.1 Uncover the informal market: Fund research to categorize and measure the large informal economy and labor market in Kuwait. Uncovering these may give clues as to what type of private sector development is possible, and what type of labor force and products will thrive in Kuwait, in terms of both supply and demand. Because observations and interviews show that informal businesses by and large use Instagram to advertise products and services, observing these businesses through Instagram may be a way to begin to measure the informal market. In addition, steps to un-encumber the processes of licensing and to improve “doing business” in Kuwait will encourage
informal businesses to seek licensing, thus revealing their presence in the labor market and helping determine labor force participation statistics in the future.

13.4.3.2 Promote the adoption of a new “employment philosophy”: Promote the acceptance of labor and service jobs through job placement programs and focused training and education. As previously discussed, Kuwaiti entitlement and perceptions of ethnic job roles encourage Kuwaitis to stay in public sector jobs, reduce productivity, and reduce local labor supply to large segments of the private sector in “labor” or “lower class” positions. This is a huge barrier to job expectation, opportunity, and to private sector development based on local resources. However, younger generations of Kuwaitis, many of whom are influenced by western work ethic, are ready for this change:

…getting jobs is not as easy as before and so…people of my generation are not making as good of money as my parents generation so they are unable to keep support of our children as our parents kept support of us. we lived very fancifully. And so, things are becoming more difficult. Jobs are becoming scarce, education is becoming more expensive, things like that. And so younger people are finding they need to be in labor, in jobs that we wouldn’t do, but their generation is starting to find them acceptable. You are starting to see Kuwaiti men for example, in the gas stations, which is something that we’ve never seen before. Not filling gas, but making payment (as a cashier). So these are areas that we haven’t seen Kuwaiti men and women in before but you know change of financial circumstances change people’s habits. (Interview, 03)

Through the promotion of a new employment philosophy, overtime more and more Kuwaitis may be encouraged to take “lower class” positions as plumbers, electricians, restaurant chefs, hair stylists, and other service-based positions. Removing the “shame” of labor work through state and civil society propaganda and placement programs, in addition to providing educational requirements for service or “blue-collar” positions would encourage Kuwaitis to broaden their perception and acceptance of job roles. (Also see Al Tameemi, 2013)
Several interview and observation participants mentioned Lothan Youth Achievement Center (LoYAC) as a positive example of a community non-profit in Kuwait, which has an intern placement program for Kuwaiti youths. Through this program, Kuwaitis youths were placed in and trained for positions normally considered unusual to Kuwaitis, such as service positions at Starbucks or McDonalds. (Loyac.org)

Another example is the American University of Kuwait, which commemorates International Labor Day with its own Annual Labor Day. On this day once a year, Non-Kuwaiti workers (cafeteria workers, maintenance, housekeeping, etc.) are given a day off and university students perform their jobs. (Observation 5-2014)

13.5 Conclusion Summary: What is the Future of Development Sustainability in Kuwait?

13.5.1 The Artificial Labor Market

The previous chapters give in-depth insight into the economic and social forces driving supply and demand of Kuwaiti women in the labor market and their participation in the development of Kuwait. This research demonstrates that in spite of Kuwait’s economic and social barriers to development, Kuwaiti women are creating their own paths of agency through increased private sector participation and the creation of small businesses. With increased private sector participation, Kuwaiti women are overcoming economic barriers such as low job expectations, non-productive public sector work, and long waiting periods for public sector jobs. In addition, in creating their own businesses, Kuwaiti women challenge social perceptions of female job roles and Kuwaiti entitlement, and show entrepreneurship and creativity in building successful businesses. However, to
understand how this insight contributes to development sustainability, the Kuwaiti labor force must be discussed in context of the overall economy of Kuwait.

Chapters 8 and 9 describe a market economy within Kuwait which is almost entirely dependent on oil income, and not on the production of products or services. The main employer of the Kuwaiti labor force—the public sector—is a tool for rent income distribution. As the social welfare scheme dictates, oil rents are distributed as public sector wages and private sector subsidies to Kuwaiti citizens, largely outside of the market forces of labor supply and demand.

As also discussed in Chapter 2, a market economy “works like an invisible hand” to guide “economic forces to coordinate individual actions and allocate scarce resources.” However, in Kuwait’s public sector, where the quantity of labor supplied is greater than the quantity demanded, salaries set by government policy do not allow wage levels to fall in response to the high supply of labor. This has created an inefficient distribution of labor, income and an extremely “artificial” or “imperfect” labor market in Kuwait’s public sector, which is held in “equilibrium” only by oil revenue. (Martin, 462) In contrast, the “real” labor market of Kuwait is found in the private sector, where wages are largely market-driven by forces of supply and demand. Private sector labor is based mainly on poor migrant laborers from South Asia, who are in large supply and paid very low wages.

**13.5.2 Disguised Unemployment**

Statistics on the employed and unemployed in a country reveal, “to what extent the economy approaches or departs from a full employment condition”. The labor market category of “employed” can be divided between those who are “adequately employed”,

and those “inadequately employed”. The evaluation of the difference in inadequate and adequate employment helps determine the extent of ineffective or unproductive employment in a country. (Ducoff & Hagood 1957, 155-6)

Although unemployment is low in Kuwait, its labor market cannot be said to support the “ideal construct” of full employment or “optimal distribution and utilization of the labor force”. As discussed in Chapter 9, in Kuwait’s public sector, many Kuwaitis suffer from inadequate employment or unproductive participation, as they are employed without a sufficient amount of work to do. (Ducoff & Hagood 1957, 155-6)

Inadequate employment also describes workers employed at substandard wages, a characteristic of the majority of Kuwait’s private sector labor force. Full employment “requires an occupational distribution of the labor force which is optimal from the standpoint of maximizing per capita output.” Therefore, the term “disguised unemployment” can be used to describe both Kuwait’s public and private sector labor force. (Ducoff & Hagood 1957, 156)

13.5.3 Dualism, Fragmentation, and Development Sustainability in the Labor Market

According to classification based on income-dependency, specifically on GNI per capita, Kuwait is classified as a High Income or “developed” country by the World Bank. However as discussed in Chapter 2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework, defining development in income-dependent terms such as GNI per capita or “high-income country” is “relative” and ignores other elements of development. (Campbell & Ahmed, Box 1, p. 3)

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1 Taken from The Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends, United Nations, Dept. of Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Studies No. 17, 1953, pp. 249-250.
Developing countries tend to have two, somewhat unrelated, “dualistic” economies characterized by a lack of market integration, in which exist elements of both traditional and modern economies. (Campbell & Ahmed, 3) These labor markets support and perpetuate practices of “job differentiation and worker discrimination”. (Martin, 462)

Kuwait’s economy demonstrates a highly fragmented or “dual” economy, where the public sector mostly demonstrates attributes of a “modern” economy, and the private sector, attributes of the “traditional” economy. (Campbell & Ahmed, 3, 21) Economic and social elements within Kuwait, such as the public welfare system, strict citizenship policies, Kuwaitiness, and perceptions of ethnic job positions and female job roles work to keep the Kuwaiti (public sector) and Non-Kuwaiti (private sector) labor forces fragmented rather than integrated.

Kuwait’s public sector demonstrates attributes of the “modern” economy, as it is relatively more formal and urban, has a higher capital-to-labor ratio, is deficient in quantity of jobs, offers workers legal protection/regulation, and is stable and predictable in earnings and income. In contrast, Kuwait’s private sector demonstrates the more “traditional” attributes of informal labor—a low capital-to-labor ratio, orientation toward the domestic and local market, deficiency in job quality, less legal protection, and income and wage vulnerability. Also within the private sector is low capital investment and accumulation, which combined with the large supply of migrant labor, leads to “a scarcity of productive employment,” another characteristic typical of a developing, and not developed, country. (Campbell & Ahmed, Table 1, 3)

Dualistic labor markets can be highly segmented and isolated so that “information does not ordinarily flow across them (or does not flow costlessly and freely)” (Katz and
Major divisions identified between labor market sectors in Kuwait include large differences in job types, wages, and earning stability.

The existence of asymmetric information in the labor market is a “natural consequence” of skilled and non-skilled migrant labor in rich countries, and contributes to market segmentation. (Kar & Saha 2011, 27) Asymmetric information in this context may be described as the Kuwaiti employer’s lack of knowledge of “the productivity levels of potential employees” due to the inability of Non-Kuwaiti labor to rely on their home countries’ information structures for job networking or to prove their productivity or skill. In addition, ethnic segmentation within Kuwaiti society inhibits the exchange of labor information. (Kar & Saha 2011, 2)

Information asymmetry reduces competition, and as a result increases “variance in productivity levels” between Kuwait’s private and public sectors. There is decreased productivity in the public sector, and the relative “real” productive work occurs in the private sector. However, “both production units coexist, with the more productive not driving the less productive out of business” since they compete in more segmented, “different product markets.” (Campbell & Ahmed, 13) Lack of mobility between the private sector and public sector decreases the potential of labor market flexibility and integration, and the lack of competition between sectors. (Schob & Wildasin, 23) Difference in productivity between labor sectors is also more often a characteristic of developing countries.

Social concepts in Kuwait contribute to asymmetric information, promote discrimination, and hinder the flow of knowledge between employees and employers in the Kuwaiti labor market. First, Kuwaitiness and perceptions of ethnic job roles relate to
the external and internal perceptions of cultural differentiation, which have been shown to influence labor market segmentation and job differentiation. (Bauder 2001) Second, concepts of gender roles or female job suitability hinder the flow of knowledge regarding the potential productivity and skill level of female employees, or regarding what jobs or job advancement is available to women.

Third, the social force of wasta may be considered as a type of asymmetric information which promotes job discrimination against Kuwaitis and Non Kuwaitis. Wasta does not allow for the hiring of an employee based on his or her merit, productivity, or skill level, but rather on a non-market force of the exchange of favors. Wasta primarily shows discrimination in favor of Kuwaitis over Non-Kuwaitis. Secondarily, when used between Kuwaitis, wasta hires in favor of the Kuwaiti with the highest level of wasta.

Kuwaitis face much less wage or employment discrimination than Non-Kuwaitis due to the guarantee of jobs for Kuwaitis and the “inability” to get fired in the public sector, and Kuwaitization and subsidies in the private sector. But although Kafala increases Kuwaiti control and power positioning over migrant workers, it does offer labor contracts to most migrant workers. Worker screening processes and labor contracts can “overcome informational asymmetry with particular reference to immigrants” and provide some job stability and protection against wage risk. (Kar & Saha 2011 2, 4; Schob & Wildasin 2003, 9)

13.5.3 Conclusion: The Voice of Change

The labor market policies and practices in Kuwait contradict sound economic rationale, and do not lend themselves to long-term development sustainability. The
employment of most Kuwaiti women, although participating in the labor market, can be characterized as “disguised employment” within an artificial labor market propped up by oil revenue. Increased private sector participation of Kuwaiti women in formal and informal markets does show the desire and the potential of the Kuwaiti labor force to help build the private sector. However, without major economic policy change, and large structural changes to Kuwait’s economy, this potential may be beside the point.

As previously described in Chapter 1, as oil begins to run dry or decline in quality as it has in Bahrain, or population growth outpaces employment opportunity and per capita income, as it has in Saudi Arabia, oil income will no longer offer wages to “prop up” the public sector and maintain high living standards for the average Kuwaiti. Without money for private sector salaries, migrant laborers will return to their countries of origin, and the “real” economy in Kuwait will collapse. This potentially future situation would reflect the actual productivity of labor in Kuwait.

Kuwait has found it difficult to “reform its economy without a strong state led by a government that can make and implement decisions.” (Herb 2014, 210) And, although there is currently a surplus of oil revenue, Kuwaitis are dependent on government spending which “is increasing all the time and …members of parliament are spending, spending, spending, without any return…(not) thinking about alternatives or what the future will bring.” (KI Interview, 56) In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, the majority of Kuwaiti citizens work for the public sector and therefore influence parliament in favor of public sector development, and away from private sector development and sustainability.
As described in Chapter 9, interview participants are distressed over the lack of leadership in development plan implementation, and demonstrate deep concern regarding the weaknesses of Kuwait’s economic structure and future sustainability. Interview participants often expressed personal desire to create real change in Kuwait, giving their own ideas for development, ranging from privatization of public sector companies, to changing attitudes toward “labor” positions, to policy changes that increase tourism. Yet, when asked if they believed major economic change would occur in Kuwait, most participants answered “no”, saying without an actual economic collapse in Kuwait, society would not be motivated to push development implementation.

However if interview and observation participants and Kuwaiti news editorials are indicative, a voice of change toward private sector development and increased entrepreneurship is rising up in civil society. In order to gain support and build momentum to increase this voice, concerned citizens must band together through public forums to talk about future development problems and how to move the government, and reluctant or uninformed Kuwaiti citizens, toward implementation.

Factors to support development sustainability in Kuwait are present—current oil wealth, growing private sector participation and entrepreneurship, and civil society political influence in state decision-making. A future collapse of the Kuwaiti economy is not inevitable. Now is the time to implement successful development strategies.
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Youtube. KTV 1. Mariam Al Mutairi.
Appendix 1: Demographic Survey Questionnaire for All Interview Participants

1) How old are you? (Age in years) ______

2) What is your Gender?  Female  Male

3) What is your nationality? ______

4) Are you a Kuwaiti citizen?  Yes  No

5) What is your level of educational attainment?
   - None
   - Some Primary
   - Primary
   - Some University
   - University Completion
   - Some Graduate School
   - Graduate Degree

6) What is your marital status?  Married  Single  Widowed  Divorced

7) Do you have children?  Yes  No
   - If yes, how many? ______

8) Besides your spouse or children, how many family members live at home with you?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who are they?</th>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Cousins</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9) Do you work outside the home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If yes, how often?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What kind of work do you do? ______________

How much do you earn per year? ______________

10) Have you had any previous jobs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If yes, How many? ________

11) What religion do you practice?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

12) Do you employ a migrant worker in your home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If yes, what gender?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If yes, what does this worker do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Chores</th>
<th>Child Care</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other_____
Appendix 2

Key Informant Interview Questionnaire:

Nature

- How would you describe the female labor market in Kuwait?
- Where do Kuwaiti women mainly work?
- What types of jobs do Kuwaiti women have?
- How do most people in society perceive (or think about) the working Kuwaiti female?
  - How has this changed overtime?
  - What led to these changes?
- What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home? (Economically, Socially, Politically, Psychologically)
  - What are the disadvantages?
- What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who does not work outside the home?
  - What are the disadvantages?

Intersection of Female Migrants

- How do most Kuwaitis perceive (or think about) the large amount of foreign female workers in Kuwait?
- What do you think has been the impact of female migrant labor on Kuwaiti women in general?
  - On Kuwaiti women’s productivity in the workforce?
  - On Kuwaiti women’s productivity in their households?
- How have female migrant workers impacted Kuwaiti families?
- What has been the impact of the large amount of foreign domestic workers in Kuwaiti households?
  - Do they benefit Kuwaiti women or hurt them in some ways?

Capability

- What are the main obstacles a Kuwaiti woman faces in entering the labor force?
  - How do Kuwaiti women typically respond to these obstacles?
  - How should they?
- What are the main obstacles a Kuwaiti woman faces as a participant in the labor force ongoing?
  - How do Kuwaiti women typically respond to these obstacles? How should they?
- What can a Kuwaiti woman do to overcome them?
- Where can she go for help?

Agency

- Does the government help Kuwaiti women enter the workforce? If so, how? If not, how?
• Does government help Kuwaiti women to remain in the workforce? If so, how? If not, how?
• Does society help or encourage Kuwaiti women to enter the workforce? If so, how?
• Does Society help or encourage them to remain in the labor force? If so, how?
• What legislation, policies and programs has the government put into place to improve women’s work opportunities?
• Are there private programs available to help women increase opportunities to work?
• What would you suggest that the government or Kuwaiti society do to encourage women to enter the workforce? To increase her success in the workforce?
• What can increase the Kuwaiti female’s ability to enter the workforce?
• What can increase her ability to succeed at a job or career?
• What can a Kuwaiti female do to increase her own ability to enter the workforce and success at a job or career?
• If female labor force participation increased in Kuwait, what do you think the main outcomes would be for society?

Personal:

• What jobs have you had?
• What prepared you to enter the workforce? (Education, life experiences, etc?)
• Did you experience obstacles to entering the workforce that you had to overcome?
  - If so, how did you overcome them?
• Who or what helped support you? (State, family, individuals?)
• Are there obstacles to being successful in your career that you are facing now?
• What are they?

Perceptions of Overall Freedom:

• As you see it, what do most Kuwaiti women mainly want to achieve in life?
• What other things are important to them?
• Are obstacles present in Kuwaiti society, family, or the workplace that prevent women from achieving what they want in life?
  - If so, what are they?
  - If possible: What obstacles have you faced in achieving what you want in life?
    - How can a Kuwaiti woman overcome these obstacles?
• Should women be involved in the community?
  - If so, why? How?
• What are the correct roles for women in the family?
• What are the correct roles for men in family and society?
• How would most Kuwaitis define freedom?
  - How would you define freedom?
• Do you think most Kuwaitis equate participation in the labor force with freedom?
  - Do you?
• How does a Kuwaiti woman define “freedom”?
• What freedoms does a Kuwaiti woman have?
• How does this compare to the freedoms of a Kuwaiti man?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in her community?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in political/state decision making?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to practice her religion?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to have a job if she wants to?
Appendix 3

In-Depth Interview for Kuwaiti Females: Questionnaire 1

Warm-up:

I’d like to start our conversation by getting to know you better and by understanding what life is like in Kuwait, especially for Women.

- Can you describe your typical day for me? What do you do from the time you get up until you go to bed at night?
- Is the day you described typical of most Kuwaiti women? Why or why not?
- What is most important to you in your life right now?
- How does your answer compare to what most women in Kuwait would say?

Nature and Drivers of Participation:

- How do most Kuwaiti women get the money they need to live?
- Can a Kuwaiti woman earn enough income to support herself?
- What types of jobs do you think are suitable for Kuwaiti women? How does your answer compare to what most people in Kuwait would say?
- What types of jobs are available to Kuwaiti women?
- What do most people in Kuwait think about a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home?
  - On this question and the next three below, probe on characteristics of people they note as seeing things from different perspectives. For example, the participant might say that most people think a Kuwaiti woman should be a mom, but some think women can be teachers, etc. In this case, ask “tell me about the people who think they can be teachers”
- How would most Kuwaiti husbands feel about their wives working outside the home?
- Would most mothers want their daughters to work outside the home? Why or why not?
- If yes, in what types of jobs should they work? Why?
- Would most fathers want their daughters to work outside the home? Why or why not?
- If yes, in what types of jobs should they work? Why?
- In relation to these beliefs about women working outside the home and the type of jobs suitable for women, where do you think these beliefs/ideas come from? (Tailor to participants previous responses)
- What does Islam (and religious institutions) teach about women working outside the home?
- Does the government want women to work outside the home?
- If Kuwaiti women work outside the home, does it benefit her family, her community, or the government? How?
• What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home? For example socially, financially, psychologically, for the family, etc.
  o What are the disadvantages?
• What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who does not work outside the home?
  o What are the disadvantages?

• What do Kuwaitis think about foreign female workers in Kuwait?
• Does the large amount of foreign female workers in Kuwait help Kuwaiti women or hurt them?
  o Why?
• What about female domestic workers? Are they a help to Kuwaiti women or in some ways a hindrance? How?

**Capability:**

• What are the main obstacles a Kuwaiti woman faces in order to enter the workforce? (BE ready to probe—is it people, credentials, stereotypes, etc.?)
  o How does she respond? How should she?
• What are the main obstacles a Kuwaiti woman faces if she has a job and works outside the home?
• Is it more difficult for a woman to work outside the home than a man? Why or why not?
  o What are examples of this?
• If a woman wants to work outside the home and faces these obstacles, where can she go for help?

**Agency:** (For some of these questions, tailor to whether the woman is in university, at home, or works)

• How is the decision made whether a woman works outside the home or not?
  o Probe: who takes part in that decision; when?
• If you decided to work outside the home, how confident are you in your ability to do that? How do you think most women would respond to that question?
• What would increase a woman’s confidence in her ability to work outside the home?
• Does the government help women who want to work outside the home? If so, how?
  o With public programs?
• Are there women’s organizations that help women who want to work outside the home? What are they?
• If a Kuwaiti woman wants to work outside the home, how can she prepare herself? (Education, build support, training, etc.?)
Research:

- This is my first time to do research in Kuwait. Do you have any suggestions on how I could make my interviews better, or how I could improve my research in general?
Appendix 4

In-Depth Interview 2 for Kuwaiti Females: Questionnaire 2

Education/Job Status:

Section A

- “Uncorking question”: Is it beneficial for a Kuwait woman to go to college? Why or why not?

For University Students:

- What are you studying?
- What are your goals/plans when you graduate?
- Why did you decide to go to college?
- What will a university degree prepare you for?
- Do you work outside the home?/Intend to work outside the home? If no, skip to Section B
  o If Yes, what type of work do/will you do?
  o Who supports or will support your choice to work?
  o What kind of obstacles do you/might you face in working outside the home?
    - How will you respond (what actions will you take)?
    - Now skip to Section C

For Non-University Students:

- Did you go to college?
  o If yes, why did you go to university?
  o What did you study?
  o How did you decide to study that?
  o Did you graduate?
    - What were your goals/plans when you graduated?
  o What does a university degree prepare a woman to do?
  o When you were studying at the university, did you intend to work outside the home?
- Do you work outside the home? If no, skip to Section B
- If Yes:
  o Why do you work outside your home?
  o What kind of work do you do?
  o Where do you work?
  o What prepared you to do this work? (experience, training, education)
  o Do you enjoy this work?
  o How many hours a day do you work?
  o What are your duties?
  o How does your job/career benefit you?
Did you face obstacles when you first tried to enter the workforce?
  - If so, how did you respond to these obstacles?
Do you face obstacles in your job now?
Who supported or currently supports your effort/choice in doing this work?
Who does not support your effort/choice?
Does your family benefit from you having a job/career? How?
How do you benefit from having a job/career?
How do you balance time between work and family?
Who cares for your children while you are at work (or for elderly parents if applicable)

**Skip to Section C**

Section B.

- If No:
  o Why do you/will you choose NOT to work outside your home?
  o What do you/will you do instead?
  o Why is this important to you?
  o Do you ever intend to work outside the home? Why or Why not?
  o Who does/will support your choice to not work outside the home?

Section C

- What does your extended family think about women working outside the home?
- What does your husband think about women working outside the home?
- What are your views of women working outside the home?
- Do you hire a domestic worker in your house?
  o What does he/she do for you?
  o Why is this important?
  o Do you have problems with this worker? What are they?

**Perceptions of Overall Freedom:** These questions are formed in a general form to feel safer, less threatening than a direct question would be, but will be used to probe the personal view of the participant, if possible. If the participant seems willing, the questions will be phrased using “you” instead of “a Kuwaiti woman”.

- As you see it, what does a Kuwaiti woman mainly want to achieve in her life?
  o What other things are important to her?
- Are obstacles present in Kuwaiti society, family, or the workplace that prevent women from achieving what they want in life?
  o If so, what are they?
  o If possible: What obstacles have you faced in achieving what you want in life?
  o How can a Kuwaiti woman overcome these obstacles?
- Should a woman be involved in her community?
  o If so, how?
- What are the correct roles for women in the family?
• What are the correct roles for men in family and society?
• Do you think most Kuwaitis equate participation in the workforce with freedom?
• How would most Kuwaitis define freedom?
• How does a Kuwaiti woman define “freedom”?
• What freedoms does a Kuwaiti woman have?
• How does this compare to the freedoms of a Kuwaiti man?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in her community?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in political/state decision making?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to practice her religion?
• Is a Kuwaiti woman free to have a job if she wants to?

Research:

• This is my first time to do research in Kuwait. Do you have any suggestions on how I could make my interviews better, or how I could improve my research in general?
Appendix 5

In-Depth Interview Questionnaire for Female Migrant Workers

Warm-up:

I’d like to start our conversation by getting to know you better and by understanding what life is like in Kuwait, especially for women.

- How long have you lived in Kuwait?
- What country are you from?
- Why did you decide to move to Kuwait?
- For how long do you expect to remain in Kuwait?
- Is your family with you? If not, where are they?
- Can you describe your typical day for me? What do you do from the time you get up until you go to bed at night?
- Is the day you described typical of most migrant women? Why or why not?
- What is most important to you in your life right now?

Female Migrant Labor:

- What kind of work do you do?
  - Where do you work?
  - How long have you worked there?
  - How many hours a day do you work? How many hours a week?
- Who is your employer?
- What do you do for your employer?
  - Why is this important?
- Will you describe your tasks?
- Who do you see or speak to while you are working?
  - (Probe this—other migrant workers, Kuwaitis, customers, employer, fellow workers, etc)
  - How often do you see these people?
  - Why do you see them? (wait on them, care for them, supervise them, etc)

Capability/Agency

- Why do you work outside your home?
- What prepared you to do this type of work? (Education, training, self-taught, family-taught, life experience)
- Did you go to school?
- How did you get this job? Who helped you?
- Was it difficult or easy to get this job?
- How does your job/career benefit you?
- Does your family benefit from you having a job/career? How?
- How do you balance time between work and family?
• Who supports your choice to work outside the home? Your husband? Your family?
• Who does not support your effort/choice?
• Did you face obstacles when you first tried to enter the workforce?
  ▪ If so, how did you respond to these obstacles?
• Who cares for your children while you are at work (or for elderly parents if applicable)
• What kind of obstacles do you face in your job?
  ▪ How do you respond to these obstacles?
  ▪ If the obstacles you face are beyond your ability to overcome, where can you go for help?
• Do you enjoy your work or not?
  o What do you enjoy about your work?
  o What do you dislike about your work?
• Is there a different type of job you would like to do?
  o If yes, what job?
  o How would you prepare for this job?
• Questions on how a larger Kuwaiti female workforce would affect them: more/fewer opportunities? (more need vs. competition). This of course would also depend on whether the Kuwaiti government would allow migrants to work in any position. Is that the case?

Intersection:

• What do Kuwaitis think about foreign female workers in Kuwait?
• Do they think foreign female workers help Kuwaiti society or hurt it?
  o Why?
  o Do you think this assessment is true? Why or why not?
• Do Kuwaitis think foreign female workers help Kuwaiti women or hurt them?
  o Why?
  o Do you think this assessment is true? Why or why not?
• What about domestic workers in general? Do Kuwaitis think domestic workers help Kuwaiti women or in some ways hinder them? How?
• (If participant is not a domestic worker) Do you know a domestic worker who works in a Kuwaiti household?
  o What does he/she do for his/her employer?
  o Why is this important?
  o Does this worker face problems with his/her employers? What are they?
  o What can he/she do about these problems?
  o Who can he/she go to for help?

I’d like to talk to you about women in their societies…

General Perspectives on women in the workforce and society:

• Is it beneficial for a woman to get an education? Why or why not? If yes, how much education? (Primary, Secondary, College)
• Should women work outside the home, or is it better for them to stay home and care for their family?
• What does your husband think about women working outside the home?
• What does your extended family think about women working outside the home?
• From your perspective, what types of jobs are suitable for women?
  o For women from your country?
  o For Kuwaiti women?
• What are the correct roles/tasks for women in the family?
• What are the correct roles/tasks for men in the family?
• Should women be involved in their communities? In what ways?
• Should women participate in political/state decision-making? How?
• Should women be free to practice the religion of her choice?
• Should women be free to have a job outside the home if she wants to?

Perceptions of Kuwaiti women and their work:

I want to ask you now about Kuwaiti women…

• Can you describe the typical day of a Kuwaiti woman? What does she do from the time she gets up until she goes to bed at night?
• Is the day you described typical of most Kuwaiti women? Why or why not?
• What daily or weekly household work or tasks does a Kuwaiti woman do?
• How does a Kuwaiti woman care for her family? What does she do?
• What is most important to a Kuwaiti woman in her life?
• How do most Kuwaiti women get the money they need to live?
• If a Kuwaiti woman works outside the home, can she earn enough income to support herself?
• Do many Kuwaiti women work outside their homes?
• What kinds of jobs do Kuwaiti women mainly do?
• What types of jobs are available for them to do?
• What do Kuwaitis think about a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home?
  o What kinds of jobs do most Kuwaitis think are suitable for Kuwaiti women?
• How would most Kuwaiti husbands feel about their wives working outside the home?
  o If favorably, in what type of job?
• Would most Kuwaiti mothers and fathers want their daughters to work outside the home? Why or why not? If yes, in what types of jobs? Why?
• Where do you think these beliefs/ideas/feelings about women working outside the home, and suitable jobs for women come from?
• Does the government want Kuwaiti women to work outside the home?
• What does Islam teach about women working outside the home?

Capability/Agency:
• If a Kuwaiti woman wants to enter the workforce, is it easy or difficult for her to do so? Why? What makes it easy or hard for her? (Is it people, opportunities, etc?)
  o How does she respond? How should she?
• If a Kuwaiti woman has a job and works outside the home, what are the main difficulties she will face?
• Is it more difficult for a Kuwaiti woman to work outside the home than a man? Why or why not?
  o What are examples of this?
• If a woman wants to work outside the home and faces obstacles, where can she go for help?
• If a Kuwaiti woman wants to work outside the home, how can she prepare herself? (Education, build support, training, etc.)

Perceptions of Overall Freedom:
• As you see it, what does a Kuwaiti woman mainly want to achieve in her life?
  o What other things are important to her?
• Are obstacles present in Kuwaiti society, family, or the workplace that prevent Kuwaiti women from achieving what they want in life?
  o If so, what are they?
  o How can a Kuwaiti woman overcome these obstacles?
• What freedoms does a Kuwaiti woman have?
• How does this compare to the freedoms of a Kuwaiti man?
Appendix 6
In-Depth Interview Questionnaire for Kuwaiti Males

Warm-up:
I’d like to start our conversation by understanding what life is like in Kuwait, for men and women.

- Can you describe your typical day for me? What do you do from the time you get up until you go to bed at night?
- Is the day you described typical of most Kuwaiti men? Why or why not?
- Can you describe a typical day for a Kuwaiti woman? What does she do from the time she gets up until she goes to bed at night?
- Is the day you described typical of most Kuwaiti women? Why or why not?
- What is most important to you in your life right now?
- What would most Kuwaiti men say is important to them?
- What is most important to a Kuwaiti woman’s life?
- What would most Kuwaiti women say is important to them?
- What level of education have you attained? (University, primary, etc?)
- Were you educated in Kuwait, in another country, or in both?
  - If another country, which country?
  - What did you study?
- What sort of job do you do? Where?
- What prepared you to do this job? School? Training? Family?

Nature:
- How do most Kuwaiti women get the money they need to live?
- Can a Kuwaiti woman earn enough income to support herself?
- What types of jobs do you think are suitable for Kuwaiti women? How does your answer compare to what most people in Kuwait would say?
- What types of jobs are available to Kuwaiti women?
- What do most people in Kuwait think about a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home?
- What kinds of jobs do most people in Kuwait think that a Kuwaiti woman should have?
  - On this question and next three below, probe on characteristics of people they note as having different perspectives. For example, the participant might say that most people think a Kuwaiti woman should be a mom, but others a teacher etc. In this case, ask “tell me about the people who think they can be teachers”
- How would most Kuwaiti husbands feel about their wives working outside the home?
- Would most mothers want their daughters to work outside the home? Why or why not?
• If yes, in what types of jobs? Why?
• Would most fathers want their daughters to work outside the home? Why or why not?
• If yes, in what types of jobs? Why?
• In relation to these beliefs about women working outside the home and the type of jobs suitable for women, where do you think these beliefs come from? (Tailor to previous responses)
• What does Islam (and religious institutions) teach about women working outside the home?
• Does the government want women to work outside the home?
• If Kuwaiti women work outside the home, does it benefit her family, her community, or the government? How?

• What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who works outside the home? For example socially, financially, psychologically, for the family, etc.
  o What are the disadvantages?
• What are the advantages to a Kuwaiti woman who does not work outside the home?
  o What are the disadvantages?

• What do Kuwaitis think about foreign female workers in Kuwait?
• Does the large amount of foreign female workers help or hurt Kuwaiti society?
  o In what ways?
• Does the large amount of foreign female workers in Kuwait help Kuwaiti women or hurt them?
  o Why? In what ways?
• What about foreign female domestic workers? Are they help to Kuwaiti women or in some ways a hindrance? How?
• Do you employ foreign domestic workers in your home?
  o If so, what do these workers do for you and your family?
  o Are these workers of help to you and your family or in some ways a hindrance?

**Capability:**

• What are the main obstacles a Kuwait woman faces in order to enter the workforce? (Be ready to probe—is it people, credentials, stereotypes, etc.?)
  o How does she respond? How should she?
• What are the main obstacles a Kuwaiti woman faces if she has a job and works outside the home?
• Is it more difficult for a woman to work outside the home than a man? Why or why not?
  o What are examples of this?
If a woman wants to work outside the home and faces these obstacles, where can she go for help?

Agency:

- How is the decision made whether a woman works outside the home or not?
  - Probe: who takes part in that decision; when?
- If a Kuwaiti woman decides to work outside the home, how easy will it be for her to do so?
  - How do you think most women would respond to that question?
- What would increase a woman’s confidence in her ability to work outside the home?
- Does the government help women who want to work outside the home? If so, how?
  - With public programs?
- Are there women’s organizations that help women who want to work outside the home? What are they?
- If a Kuwaiti woman wants to work outside the home, how can she prepare herself? (Education, build support, training, etc.?)
- Is it beneficial for a Kuwait woman to go to college? Why or why not?

Perceptions of Overall Freedom:

- As you see it, what does a Kuwaiti woman mainly want to achieve in her life?
  - What other things are important to her?
- Are obstacles present in Kuwaiti society, family, or the workplace that prevent women from achieving what they want in life?
  - If so, what are they?
  - Is this different for men? How so?
  - How can a Kuwaiti woman overcome these obstacles?
- Should a woman be involved in her community?
  - If so, how?
- What are the correct roles for women in the family?
- What are the correct roles for men in family and society?
- Do you think most Kuwaitis equate participation in the workforce with freedom?
- How would most Kuwaitis define freedom?
- How does a Kuwaiti woman define “freedom”?
- What freedoms does a Kuwaiti woman have?
- How does this compare to the freedoms of a Kuwaiti man?
- Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in her community?
- Is a Kuwaiti woman free to participate in political/state decision making?
- Is a Kuwaiti woman free to practice her religion?
- Is a Kuwaiti woman free to have a job if she wants to?
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