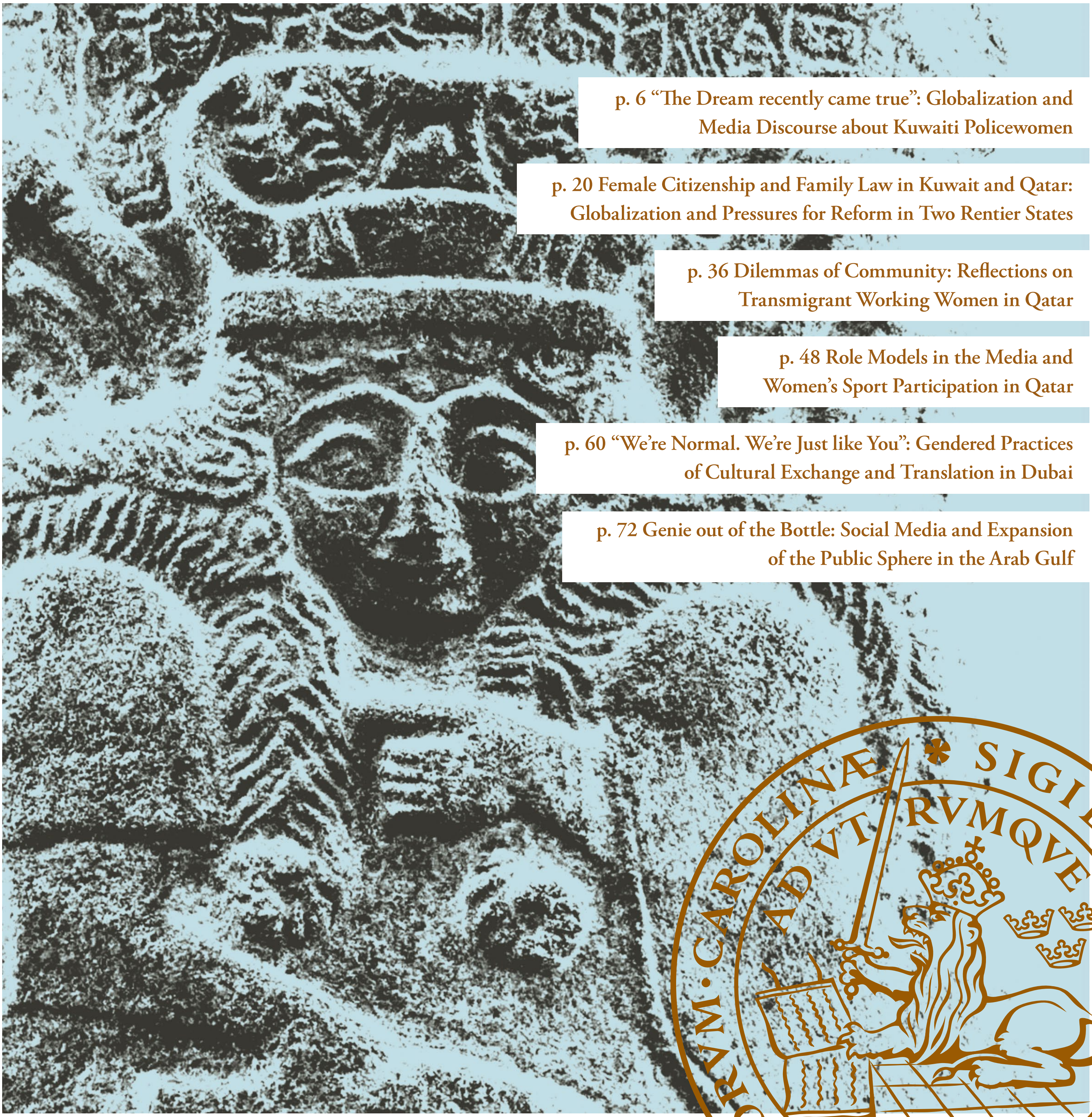
NR 1 | 2016

NIDABA

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL | CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY



p. 6 "The Dream recently came true": Globalization and Media Discourse about Kuwaiti Policewomen

p. 20 Female Citizenship and Family Law in Kuwait and Qatar: Globalization and Pressures for Reform in Two Rentier States

p. 36 Dilemmas of Community: Reflections on Transmigrant Working Women in Qatar

p. 48 Role Models in the Media and Women's Sport Participation in Qatar

p. 60 "We're Normal. We're Just like You": Gendered Practices of Cultural Exchange and Translation in Dubai

p. 72 Genie out of the Bottle: Social Media and Expansion of the Public Sphere in the Arab Gulf

Introduction by the Director of CMES 3
Introduction by the Editor 4

ARTICLES

Staci Strobl
"The Dream Recently Came True":
Globalization and Media Discourse about Kuwaiti Policewomen 6

Rania Maktabi
Female Citizenship and Family Law in Kuwait and Qatar:
Globalization and Pressures for Reform in Two Rentier States 20

Shefali Jha
Dilemmas of Community:
Reflections on Transmigrant Working Women in Qatar 36

Susan Dun
Role Models in the Media and Women's Sport Participation in Qatar 48

Jillian Schedneck
"We're Normal. We're Just Like You":
Gendered Practices of Cultural Exchange and Translation in Dubai 60

Leila DeVriese
Genie out of the Bottle: Social Media and the Expansion of the Public Sphere in the Arab Gulf 72

REVIEW SECTION

Mustang (2015) 84
Do Muslim Women Need Saving? 85
Nation-Building, State and the Gender-Framing
of Women's Rights in the United Arab Emirates (1971-2009) 86
An Islam of Her Own 87

THE MIDDLE EAST THAT NO ONE KNOWS

In the Shadow of Imam Hussein:
The Karbala Film Festival 2016 88

PUBLISHED BY

CMES | Lund University
Box 201
SE-221 00 Lund

BOARD

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Dalia Abdelhady
COPY EDITORS Danielle Soskin, Lukas J. Herbers
LAYOUT & TYPESET Lukas J. Herbers

COPYRIGHT

Unless noted otherwise licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Cover: "VAM Nisaba Lagasch" by Wolfgang Sauber, CC BY-SA 3.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VAM_Nisaba_Lagasch.jpg
Edited by Bergströms, CC BY-SA 4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

Photograph of Mary Ann Tétreault by Trinity University

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) is a lively research and teaching environment at Lund University, Sweden. CMES is one of the more recent institutions at Lund University – inaugurated in 2007 – but rests on a long research tradition dating back to the early days of the university that recognizes the region as an important area of study.

Located in a beautiful villa in the heart of Lund, CMES has expanded rapidly during the nine years of its life. The expansion includes receiving a large grant for the study of “The Middle East in the Contemporary World” in 2009 and the establishment of an international Master of Arts program in Middle Eastern Studies in 2010. These developments have served as a backbone for the CMES’s general development.

Today the CMES engages around 25 scholars and staff and it has established itself as a leading center for the study of the Middle East. In 2015, CMES was evaluated by an international committee of scholars who pointed out the level of excellence in research, education and outreach carried out over the years. The diversity and quality of visiting scholars, research projects, international agreements concerning scholarly and educational exchanges, publications, and the extensive outreach program are important aspects to reaching that level of excellence. Recently, CMES’ staff developed four new research themes that guide our research, which are: (A) Democratization and Social Development, (B) Migration, Multicultural Societies and Minorities, (C) Environment and Sustainable Development and (D) Religion, Processes of Interpretation and Identity Formation. The themes overlap and encourage trans- or inter-disciplinary research. Following these themes, CMES pursues an understanding of the Middle East that is not confined to a geographical area, but is more abstract, fluid and transnational allowing for the study of, for example, cultural expressions of the Middle East in Europe.

Establishing *Nidaba* is an important step for CMES’ efforts to generate both scholarly publications and channels for the dissemination of academic work. As an electronic double-blind peer-reviewed journal our ambition is to create a qualitatively strong platform that is theoretically and methodologically innovative and reflects the interdisciplinary environment at the CMES. I cordially welcome you to the inaugural issue of Nidaba and sincerely hope that you enjoy this new and unique journal.

Leif Stenberg

Director of Lund University’s
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

Being a newly established journal, *Nidaba* aims to provide a platform for new approaches to the Middle East to be shared with scholars, policy makers, and the public.

Introduction

by Dalia Abdelhady | Editor-in-chief

For many observers of the Middle East, the region has historically been fraught with divisions and conflicts. The current influx of Syrian refugees to Europe and North America (despite the fact that neighboring countries continue to carry the mass of the burden) has extended the geographical reach of these conflicts, increasing the sense of emergency, crisis and fear of the Other. At the same time, academics researching the Middle East find their work often scrutinized, criticized and undervalued. Despite these challenges, the region offers a diversity of societies and cultures, political systems, and historical developments that leaves us with much to learn and investigate. Like other parts of the world, the intersection of cultures, histories, and social forces that are observed in the Middle East attests to the interconnectedness of our world. It is the aim of *Nidaba* to highlight such interconnectedness, reveal the diversity in the Middle East, and reflect the multiple ways it can be studied.

Being a newly established journal, *Nidaba* aims to provide a platform for new approaches to the Middle East to be shared with scholars, policy makers, and the public. As such, *Nidaba* encourages submissions from scholars who are at the early stages of their careers or are interested in exploring non-traditional approaches to the study of the region. *Nidaba* also aspires to reflect the interdisciplinary structure of CMES. Ranging from historians, sociologists and anthropologists, to political scientists and economists, and including engineers and natural geographers, CMES embodies inter-disciplinarity in its research projects and outlook to the region. In its attempt to push disciplinary boundaries that reflects the research environment at CMES, *Nidaba* also strives to offer a re-thinking of the physical boundaries of the region across and within the articles it publishes. As an open access journal, *Nidaba* also wishes to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and debates beyond academic institutions.

This inaugural issue includes a collection of articles that are somewhat unique. Earlier drafts of these articles were presented at the Gulf Research Meeting (GRM) in Cambridge in July 2012. Under the title "Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change," May Aldabbagh (New York University, Abu Dhabi) and I organized a two-day workshop where fifteen papers were presented. The papers presented at the workshop demonstrated the diverse institutional and cultural mechanisms that influence gender dynamics in the GCC. Collectively, workshop papers explored the

In dedication to professor emeritus Mary Ann Tétreault

complicated and contradictory interactions between women, states, and societies in the Gulf region which shape (and are shaped by) globalization processes (Abdelhady, Aldabbagh and Gargani 2013). Bringing together scholars from literature, anthropology, sociology, and business, the workshop was a fruitful exchange of ideas, approaches and critiques. The six articles included here were selected for publication from among the fifteen workshop papers by the two workshop organizers and then blindly peer-reviewed prior to their publication.

Given the thematic focus of the articles presented here, it seems befitting that the inaugural issue of *Nidaba* is dedicated to the late Mary Ann Tétreault, the Una Chapman Cox Distinguished Professor of International Affairs Emerita at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. The late professor dedicated much of her academic career to the study of gender in the Middle East in general and the GCC in specific. In spite of the fact that Mary Ann did not participate in the GRM workshop where the articles here were first presented, her influence is reflected in almost all of them. Beyond her academic legacy, Mary Ann was known to others in the field as a supportive colleague, generous mentor and inspirational intellectual. Her departure in November 2015 constitutes a major loss to many who are interested in the study of gender, the Middle East, and international political economy.

Nidaba is the Sumerian goddess of harvest, learning, and writing, who was the patron of scribes, and she is considered to be the provider of the reed stylus. By choosing to name our new journal after Nidaba, we truly hope to offer a new and novel platform for learning and writing about the Middle East that can reflect and contribute to the interconnectedness and diversity in the region, our fields of study and indeed the world we live in.

REFERENCES

Abdelhady, Dalia, May Aldabbagh and Ghalia Gargani. 2013. *Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change*. Proceedings Report. Dubai School of Government.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

“The Dream Recently Came True”: Globalization and Media Discourse about Kuwaiti Policewomen

Staci Strobl
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PLATTEVILLE
STROBLST@UWPLATT.EDU

The existence of policewomen in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is often painted as evidence of the political and cultural liberalization of the Gulf. It is also seen as representing gender equality, and respect for human rights in the region – important for enticing global economic trade and investment in these countries, as well as maintaining positive relationships with strategic, Western allies. This article draws on a multi-dimensional theoretical framework including globalization, cultural criminological and comparative feminist theories, to unearth the social and political meanings of the introduction of women police in Kuwait in 2009. Like their counterparts in other Gulf countries, their new deployment spawned a media discourse about them as signifiers of political, social, and economic liberalization, modernization, and globalization, designed to influence global perceptions of Kuwait; however, other contested meanings were also palpable. The present research is a discourse analysis of English and Arabic newspaper articles from May 2008 to April 2012 primarily aimed at non-Kuwaiti media consumers. A close reading of these articles uncovers the stated reasons that women should be welcomed into the national police force: as service providers to the nation; pioneering women in a male-dominated field; defenders of traditional gender segregation; and symbols of modernization and development. Meanwhile internal ambiguity and contestation about women’s roles in positions of authority are also confronted, such as their problematic deployment given more conservative notions of female identity in both the cultural and religious senses. Overall, the research shows that the media coverage about Kuwaiti policewomen puts forth a bipolar frame of the debate about their deployment as being one about tradition versus modernization. This framing obscures the nuance in the debate and the notion that policewomen in Kuwait may actually be symbols of both tradition and modernity simultaneously.

---->

Keywords:
media; discourse analysis; police; globalization; tradition; Kuwait

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Kuwait graduated its first batch of policewomen from its national police academy, leaving Saudi Arabia as the only Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) without women police. The earliest indigenous female police units in the Arab Gulf region operated in Bahrain and Oman in the early 1970s. In GCC nations' police forces, policewomen primarily find themselves in segregated units, working on cases involving women and juveniles as victims, witnesses and offenders. They also work as security screeners in airports and provide support services to women and children victims and witnesses. Women make up roughly five percent of police forces in Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Strobl 2007) and more than ten percent of the force in Bahrain (Strobl 2008).

The presence of women in policing in the Gulf represents a modern shift in the exclusively male responsibility for community safety and security in the context of originally kin-based small-scale societies (Strobl 2010a; 2010b). Policewomen can be traced to European colonial agents and advisors in the early and mid-20th century who sought to install local women in policing as markers of their modernizing endeavors. Previous analysis of policewomen in Bahrain suggests that the inclusion of policewomen in that GCC country was a result of British efforts to instill a legacy of gaining greater public status for women, seizing on the approval of then-Emir Sheikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifah to do so. As such, it is hard to separate women in policing in the region from the colonial experience of external subjugation (Strobl 2008).

The advent of women in policing, though a Western transplant, appealed to those in Gulf societies who valued more traditional notions of women's honor and wanted women victims, witnesses, and offenders managed by other women. Maintaining gender segregation in criminal justice arenas, transformed from local dispute resolution venues into modern, bureaucratic entities in the 20th century, posed a particular cultural problem for women participants who risked their honor and reputation by interacting with male actors in the public space of the criminal justice system. In this sense, it was precisely because of traditional gender segregation that policewomen were needed to handle cases involving women in a way that would maintain their honor and reputations (Strobl 2010b).

Despite a nuanced history, policewomen in the GCC are most often painted as markers of the political and cultural liberalization of Gulf states. They are cited in mainstream media both within and outside the region as evidence of gender equality and a respect for human rights. This is important for enticing global economic trade and investment in these countries, recruiting skilled expatriate labor, as well as maintaining positive relationships with strategic, Western allies. This article draws on a multi-dimensional theoretical framework, including globalization, cultural criminological and comparative feminist theories, to unearth the social and political meanings of the introduction of women police in Kuwait. Like their counterparts in other Gulf countries, their new deployment spawned a media discourse about them as signifiers of political, social, and economic liberalization, modernization, and globalization, designed to influence global perceptions of Kuwait as a liberalizing country; however, other contested meanings were also palpable. The present discourse analysis of English and Arabic newspaper articles from May 2008 through April 2012 explores the stated reasons for allowing women to join the national police force, and confronts internal ambiguity and contestation about women's roles in positions of authority.

GLOBALIZATION AND POLICEWOMEN AS MARKERS OF LIBERALIZATION

Because of the economic dominance of the West, globalization has enabled the spread of Western, liberal political ideas, as global capital gravitates to countries the West perceives as having developing civil and democratic institutions (Doumato and Posusney 2003). Even though the GCC countries are not full-fledged democracies, and may not be moving toward developing democracy in the Western sense, the presence of some democratic institutions and mechanisms such as parliaments and elections serve as markers of liberalization. Among Arab countries the Gulf societies "...are most responsive to globalization and open to its culture and tools..." because of the high level of infrastructural development, consumerism, and political connection with the West as a result of the exploitation of oil (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research 2009, 12).

The need to sell the country to global capitalists via democratization or liberalization becomes even more apparent when considering such watchdog mechanisms as the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual Executive Option Survey, reported in *The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012* (World Economic Forum 2012). The Kuwait National Bank, for example, takes WEF reports so seriously that they boast about good ratings on their website and provide web-links to the full reports. The Executive Opinion Survey asks more than 4,000 business executives and analysts about the countries in which they operate, providing a ranking of each country's level of friendliness to business. Among the questions in the section on "Government and public institutions" are measures of perceived police effectives, such as whether private businesses can rely on the police for protection (Sung 2006). Kuwait in particular tends to score lower than Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In *The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012* Kuwait ranked as 37 among countries in which global executives operate. Only Bahrain among GCC countries ranked lower. In particular, the report on Kuwait's data indicated that inefficient government bureaucracy was the top problem in the country for business (while "crime and theft" ranked quite low among problems).

With continued British and American protection post-independence, against incursions by Iraq and other regional powers, Kuwait engages in continued alignment with the West. In particular, Kuwait signed a security agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in December of 2006 (Centre for Research on Globalization 2006). Appearing to liberalize and democratize the police can act as positive publicity for the Kuwaiti police in the eyes of Western powers, from which the Kuwaiti nation needs support for its security and continued economic development. The Committee of Women in NATO Forces (CWINF) has articulated the NATO commitment to building and developing the full human potential of member countries by promoting the inclusion of women in all sectors of national security, citing them as particularly necessary in building sustainable solutions to conflict (Committee on Women in NATO Forces 2009). At the same time, Western powers are predisposed to value Kuwait for their own strategic purposes - such as countering the Iranian threat in the Gulf.

Police forces are among the institutions that serve as markers of a country's place along a "continuum of democracy," the level at which accountability, transparency, and compliance with human rights is found in the context of the rule of law (Haberfeld and Gideon 2008, 4-5). At the same time, police organizations are anomalies in developing democracies as their authority to legitimately use coercive and lethal force, often put them in direct odds with other principles of democracy such as individual freedoms and civil and human rights (Goldstein 1977). Regardless, policewomen in particular are representative of democratic forces; they are part of a larger incursion of women in public life in Kuwait.

Some globalization theorists emphasize that opportunities for increasing women's roles in the workplace and public life increases as countries work to attract Western investment through trade liberalization and competition (Moghadem 2003). This was empirically demonstrated in a recent cross-national study which reported a positive correlation between the level of liberal policies, such as gender equality, and the levels of attracted foreign direct investment (Martibez and Allard 2008-2009). Indeed, overall in the GCC we see that women's penetration into the workplace has been increasing during the age of globalization (Doumato and Posusney 2003). At the same time, the changing roles of women in society has become a site of local contestation, encouraging forms of resistance to global capitalist development and its perceived threat to indigenous cultural identity and autonomy.

BLAZING A TRAIL

Because the global perception game focuses on marketing the penetrations of women into the workplace and public life, Kuwait is often touted as politically liberal in the press. Official and semi-official newspapers often feature what women are accomplishing outside the home. For example, Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, visited Kuwait in 2007 and was reported as stating that the country is "blazing a trail in this region… while of course women gaining political rights is just the beginning" (Arab Times 2007a).

When women can be shown to be involved in traditionally male occupations – occupations that even in the West are male-dominated – a country can potentially achieve even greater impact in the global perception game. For example, in Bahrain, Bahraini policewomen are often deliberately posted at the airport, visible to passengers arriving from Western destinations. One police informant indicated that the deployment was a means by which the government attempts to show off women in a male-dominated profession and signal liberalization of the country. Further, a high ranking member of Bahrain's police explained that the introduction of policewomen to the General Directorate of Trafficking in 1991 did not emerge from a local mandate. Rather, he said, it was implemented "from the top" because the Al-Khalifah royal family became committed to modernizing the police through more liberal gender policies aimed to win over foreign critics (Strobl 2007). As one Bahraini policewoman said:

> Today everyone wants policewomen in their units and stations because it reflects positively on the developments and changes in the country (Strobl 2007, 243).

Likewise, in 'Ajman, United Arab Emirates, mixed gender traffic patrols, initiated in 2003, were not the result of policewomen or the public requesting such assignments. Instead, it occurred as part of an overall Emirati strategy to bring women more into the forefront of public life to show the liberalizing trends in the country. The headline for the article on mixed patrols in the *Gulf News*, a publication aimed at expatriates in the region, says it all: "Improving image, crushing crime" (Al-Jandaly 2003). As such, policewomen are often deployed for reasons of "state feminism" in a globalized context (Stetson and Mazur 1995) – to institute policies that increase participation of women in public life in order to raise a country's public image.

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS MESSAGE AND CONTESTATION

Anthropologists such as Michael Herzfeld (1997) concern themselves with the *disemia*, or tension, between official and vernacular attitudes. From this perspective "[t]he culture as lived is never quite the same as the culture as represented" (Katz and Csordas 2003, 285). The culture represented is partially shaped by officially promoted messages that find their way into mainstream media outlets, such as newspapers. Manipulating symbols for public consumption is the realm of public relations work and, like other cultural production, both reflects and creates social meaning. Cultural criminological theory posits that crime control is always subject to a process of meaning construction, particularly in today's media saturated times (Ferrell et. al. 2008). As Lila Abu-Lughod (2009) states, the political and social context of the production of knowledge and cultural artifacts should not be ignored in the Post-Saidian era in which the deconstruction of cultural concepts becomes crucial to legitimate scholarship. The presence of policewomen in the Gulf and how they are reported in mainstream media outlets contain important clues that must be unpacked to discern the deeper cultural and social meanings at play, both in official discourse, and that which may be operating underneath it.

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

Though the message to the western or foreign press is one of liberalizing female pioneers, the deployment of female officers has divergent internal meanings: they are not always viewed as symbols of positive development within Kuwait. In a study of Bahraini policewomen, the government and media celebrated their accomplishments while some local people were irked by them. Critics most often cited such reasons as the threat to honor (*sharaf*) of the women and her family in women embodying such a public role and the frailty of women in the presence of dangerous situations encountered in policing.[1]

KUWAIT AND ITS NEW POLICEWOMEN

Kuwait is a constitutional emirate with a population of 2.6 million people. The country is currently ruled by Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah, and has a significant *Shi'a* minority (approximately 25 percent of the total population). Oil and petroleum production contribute half of its gross domestic product (GDP), 95 percent of export revenues, and 95 percent of government income. However, like many of its regional counterparts, Kuwait has attempted to diversify its industries by developing its financial services market as well as high-tech industries in recent years (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research 2009). Policing in the country is spread over its six governates: Al Ahmadi, Al 'Asimah, Al Farwaniyah, Al Jahra', Hawalli, and Mubarak al Kabir. The legal system is a hybrid form of British common law, civil code, and *shari'a*-inspired law (Central Intelligence Agency 2012).

A ROYAL PROMISE

Originally, a royal promise to allow women to join the police was revealed in 1994. Interior Minister Spokesperson Colonel Adel Al-Ibrahim explained at that time that the development and modernization of the country depended on it, as well as other measures, to ensure women's roles in security services (The Associated Press 1994). This promise was two years on the heels of the invitation for women to join the military, a by-product of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Women contributed to the national resistance to the Iraqi occupation, and their desire to continue serving the defense of the country in an official way was much harder to ignore once the country was liberated, particularly since the Americans who aided liberation supported increasing women's roles in Kuwaiti public life. An official royal approval to create a women police unit in Kuwait, however, did not occur until 2001. Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah explained to the royal cabinet that inaugurating policewomen was "a serious step" toward the augmentation of women's roles in public life "for the sake of noble national aims" (Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) 2001). The intention was then referred to the Emir's office for review and research; for unknown reasons, however, implementation was delayed eight more years (Asharq Al-Awsat 2008). As such, the promise to implement women in policing took 14 years to fulfill.

In 2009, Kuwait graduated its first 27 policewomen from its training academy: 16 lieutenants, eight deputy police officers and three sergeants (Al-Watan 2009). The new policewomen work as airport screeners, in the women's prison, and as trainers in the academy. A recruitment newspaper article indicated that the women were also intended to be deployed in passport issuing departments and special security details (Asharq Al-Awsat 2008). In 2010, an additional 48 policewomen were in training. Assuming all were sworn in, this brings the total policewomen in Kuwait to 75. To be eligible, recruits must be Kuwaiti citizens, be free of any criminal record, between 19 and 30 years in age, unmarried, and in good physical and mental health. They must be either graduates of secondary school, to start at a lower rank, or have a university degree, to be considered for officer-level ranks. The police academy educates them for six months on police and legal studies before field training begins in their sector assignments (Toumi 2010).

---

[1] An oft-heard Muslim critique involved the notion of gender equity, as opposed to equality celebrated in the West. This critique focused on the notion that women have different, but just as important and deserving of respect, roles as wives and mothers (Strobl 2008). Gender equity, rather than strict equality, is at the center of the Islamic feminism movement, an alternative to liberal feminism. Muslim scholar Jamal Badawi (1995) explains that gender role definition in the spirit of cooperation and "complimentarity" remains the preferred approach allowing for overall equity and justice, based on Quranic sources.

METHODOLOGY

The present research is a critical discourse analysis, and confronts mainstream media articles about the deployment of policewomen in Kuwait. Although there is no single reading of a text, discourse analysis centers on the most likely interpretations given the social and political context in which the text can be said to operate as a discursive strategy (Barthes 1972/1957), and evaluates what Fürsich (2009, 249) has called its "ideological potential."

This research analyzes 18 newspaper and news website articles which were found based on a Lexis-Nexis search of articles generated from keyword searches on "Kuwait" and "policewomen," and "Kuwait," "police," and "women," within the May 2008 to April 2012 time period, as well as a similar search on Google (in both English and Arabic). The time period was selected because recruitment calls for policewomen began in Kuwait in the latter half of 2008 and articles on Kuwaiti policewomen can be followed for four years after that point. It should be noted that many articles published in the print media in Kuwait itself are not online or otherwise easily available. As such, several articles that did appear in print in Kuwait on the topic of policewomen could not be accessed. Therefore, a sample skewed toward articles available online and in world, regional or Arab diaspora publications, is appropriate in the context of this research. This is because the sample represents the discourse that is more easily accessible and enduring in the four years after the implementation of the female police. Articles which were extracted based on Lexis-Nexis and Google searches but did not speak directly to Kuwaiti policewomen's deployment were taken out of the sample. Newspapers such as *Kuwait Times*, *Gulf News*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, and *Arab Times* are represented in the sample, as well as others. Articles from online sources such as *Al-Arabiya*, *Al-Shorfa*, *Waahg*, *Al-Islam Al-Yom* and *Jouniha News Portal* were also included. Because the focus of this article is on the discourse which would most likely reach people outside of Kuwait, there are more sources in English than Arabic. Appendix A details each of the articles analyzed. One weakness of the present analysis is that the sample is taken as a whole and does not differentiate between content generated by Kuwaitis and that which is not, nor does it compare discursive strategies based on the national identity

Table One: Emergent themes in the textual analysis

Theme	Description
Gender segregation	Policewomen are needed to ensure traditional gender segregation or to make women feel more comfortable, including female victims, offenders, and witnesses
Unsuitable for women	Policing is not a suitable career for women because of alleged innate gender differences or that policing is an unsuitable environment for women
Islamic tradition	Policewomen are un-Islamic and violate tradition, including Muslim notions of modesty in dress
Cultural tradition	Policewomen violate traditions of a cultural, tribal, Kuwaiti, or Arab nature
Ethical crimes	Policewomen should or should not be used to police ethical or moral crimes (dress, gender harassment)
National participation	Policewomen are good because they allow women to participate in service to the nation
Pioneers/equality	Policewomen are courageous and/or they contribute to increasing gender equality in society
Women challenged	Policewomen are good because they allow women an avenue for personal and professional challenge; women have the requisite talents and abilities
Weapons/ physical combat	Policewomen should or should not train in weapons handling or physical combat
Western	Policewomen are a western transplant and therefore unsuitable for Kuwait
Development/ modernization	Policewomen represent the development or modernization of Kuwait
Change is tough	Policewomen are criticized, but this is to be expected because social changes are always contested

of the owner of the publication or political ideology of the owner/newspaper.

The articles in the sample were examined for emergent themes which developed during the open-coding process. The 12 identified themes are displayed in Table One below.

Many of these themes overlapped in the articles and so they should not be taken as discrete categories. For example, in one article, an argument against women being trained in weapons handling was corollary to a larger discussion about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of policewomen given cultural and religious values within Kuwaiti society. Because of the fuzzy boundaries of the themes, it is not appropriate to attempt to count or quantify precise categories. Rather, this analysis is intended to sort through the meanings behind the deployment of policewomen in a more interpretive way. I did, however, lightly rank the themes into those that occurred more or less often, in order to attempt to sort through some meanings, or themes, appearing to receive more media coverage than others.[2]

WHY ARE KUWAITI POLICEWOMEN WELCOME?

Reporting on the deployment of Kuwaiti policewomen reflected a media bias which seemed to favor them as a positive development. Among the top reasons that Kuwaiti policewomen are considered to be a positive development was that they demonstrate the growing opportunities for women to participate in service to the nation.

NOBLE NATIONAL AIMS

As *Al-Watan* reported in March of 2010, many praised the new policewomen for taking on the laudable task of serving their country. One respondent in *Al-Watan*'s person-on-the-street interviews about policewomen welcomed them because they represented a chance for women to "favor genuine action over shopping trips." This comment apparently references a stereotype that many Kuwaiti women enjoy lives of leisure as consumers; being brought into police service represents a departure from the typical female pursuits in favor of something allegedly more useful to Kuwaiti society. The *Arab Times* reported in February 2012 that the government has been encouraging increased participation of women in all areas of society as a means of national participation and the Kuwaiti policewomen are prime examples. *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* indicated the year before, that the new policewomen reflect an opening up for women to participate in the protection of national security. Indeed, the original decision to deploy policewomen in the country was described by Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah in the official news Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) as "…a serious step towards the practice of woman of [sic] her role for the sake of noble national aims" (Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), 2001).

WOMEN LIKE TO DEAL WITH OTHER WOMEN

Many of the articles reported that Kuwaiti policewomen are necessary in order to preserve traditional gender segregation in public spaces in Kuwait. A newly installed lieutenant in the force told Middle East Online:

Sometimes there are problems in female-only areas and the men can't enter; in our society women like to deal with other women.

Similarly, *Al-Shorfa* reported, having women in police stations "…spare the embarrassment of women and families wary of filing reports to male security officers." Kuwaiti policewomen interviewed for an *Arab Times* story cited the difficult situation policemen are put into when handling female misconduct. In subduing and arresting them, their physical contact with females could be called into question under traditional notions of the inappropriateness of touching a female not related to the man.

Further, women are also considered ideal police officers for issues around gender-related harassment and illegal displays of homosexuality, and as cited in some articles as perfect for enforcing Kuwaiti society's ethical codes. A July 2, 2010, *Gulf News* article revealed that the policewomen would be dispatched to malls and other places where the public gathers in order to fight "gender-queers, transsexuals and transvestites."[3] It also explained that these patrolling policewomen will help to control gender-related harassment of men against women and vice versa.

PLEASED TO BE PIONEERS

Most of the articles implied, if not stated explicitly, that Kuwaiti policewomen were challenging gender norms in their society and as such can be considered heroic trailblazers. A *Middle East Online* article even editorialized that the policewomen were "pleased to be pioneers" as they took up their posts as ethical watchdogs in Kuwait's malls. According to

---

[2] For inter-rater reliability purposes, a research assistant read 8 of the 18 articles in order to provide a check on the analysis and agreed with the researcher about the themes present in all but one of the articles. In the article in which the researcher and research assistant differed, the disparity was resolved to mutual satisfaction.

[3] An article in *The Guardian* fleshed out the Kuwait phenomenon of *boyat*, the Arabization of the English word boy. This trend of young women dressing and behaving like men in public spaces, as well as vice versa, has caused alarm in Kuwait. Cross-dressing (transgendered expressions) and transsexuality are a criminal offense in the country (Moumneh 2011).

Al-Arabiya, "liberals" in Kuwaiti society welcomed the deployment of policewomen as a means of increasing the number of women in diverse sectors of society. *Al-Watan* reported that policewomen were taken by Kuwaiti bloggers as symbols of courage for breaking new ground for female participation in civil service. A Bahraini policewoman trainer of the Kuwaiti female force told the *Arab Times* that at the first call for female recruits, there was an incredibly enthusiastic response and that there were plenty of applicants. One of her Kuwaiti trainees added, "If you look at [Kuwaiti] society as a whole you will find a woman in almost every field and one of the leaders in that field as well."

POLICEWOMEN PROVED THEIR SUCCESS AND THEIR METTLE

A common theme across many of the articles analyzed was the notion that women have the requisite talents and abilities to succeed in policing. Nawara Fattahova, reporter for the *Kuwait Times*, editorialized in 2010 that policewomen on patrol "sounded like a dream" a few years earlier, but "the dream recently came true." In the lead paragraph of her article, she highlights that the "masculine" job of policing was not as hard for women to do as many had originally thought. Similarly, Kuwaiti policewoman Lieutenant Loulwa Al-Salem told *Jouniha News Portal* that being "...trained on the same weapons the male police officers use" was a major accomplishment and source of pride. She said, "...we (females) were able to pull through the military training. It was a huge shift in my life." In an official Kuwaiti press release, Major General Yousef Al-Mudahakha, director of the Kuwaiti police academy, stated, "Policewomen proved their success and their mettle..." in completing their training program as the second batch of female officials. As a result, many security officials had requested even more female recruits. *El-Bayasher*, an Egyptian news website, reported that Kuwaiti security officials felt "appreciation and admiration" (*taqdeer wa a'ajab*) for the abilities of the new policewomen.

NEW HISTORICAL STAGE FOR KUWAITI SOCIETY

In discussing the first group of Kuwaiti policewomen graduates from the police academy, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* characterized the event as representing a "... new historical stage for Kuwaiti society," in light of comments by the Interior Minister. During his graduation speech, the minister focused on the development of the country and its modernizing aims as one of the reasons to applaud the new policewomen. The idea that policewomen signify modernization or the country's progressive development sometimes was collapsed into the larger and more popular national service discourse cited as one of the top occurring rationales identifiable in the sample. However, the two rationales were separable in the discourse as the nationalist one was often merely a matter of national identity, pride and/or national security while the other was sometimes present, on its own or along with the nationalist discourse, as specifically about modernization and development.

A corollary to the notion of policewomen as symbols of modern development was discourse in the media about the difficulty of social change (See "Change is tough" in Table One). Many Kuwaitis interviewed for articles about the new policewomen explained that because it was a new development, and people were not used to it as a social norm, it would naturally face opposition. Some believed this had nothing to do with gender, but a more general human resistance to change. As Kuwaiti policewomen Lieutenant Dalal Mohammed Mosa said:

> When there was opposition in the beginning, it was only for the reason that this new development is new to Kuwait, not because it dealt with women. They were only pessimistic and thought the experiment would fail. However, when they saw the reality of the situation, the accepted and encouraged it (Appendix A, Article 17).

POLICEWOMEN GO HOME

Some of the news article reported reasons why Kuwaiti policewomen should not be deployed in the country. There was particular anxiety over their deployment as patrol officers under the auspices of the Committee of Ethical Control in the summer of 2010. At that time, the policewomen were tasked with controlling everything from cross-dressing to gender-related harassment to inappropriate encounters between unrelated males and females. Overall, the criticism for deploying policewomen in Kuwait portrayed them as breaking up with traditional culture and an aspect of westernization.

A BREACH OF... TRADITION

A primary critique of policewomen expressed in the media involved the inappropriateness of women working in quasi-military organizations like the police. It was presented as a breach of tradition, whether religious or cultural, or as an unnatural occupation for females based on qualities believed to be innate to them.

According to the press, conservative politicians in Kuwait took the opportunity to use an incident of harassment in a local mall as an example of why policewomen should not be deployed in the country. The issue surfaced after some Kuwaiti policewomen themselves were verbally harassed by teenage youths while patrolling in a mall for ethical violations (such as cross-dressing). According to some media reports, the policewomen responded by apprehending the youths and shaving their heads as punishment for their behavior. Because teenage boys reportedly take great pride in their gel-styled hair, this was framed as a humiliating punishment. However, other reports emphasized that the policewomen had to call on policemen for help in the situation, needing to be rescued from their teenage harassers. Conservative politicians attributed the harassment to the policewomen's immodest dress, citing uniforms of tight pants and tucked-in shirts. They further suggested that the policewomen are ironic upholders of public virtue as their own uniforms are not modest enough; they cited both traditional and Islamic standards in making this critique.

Conservative Member of Parliament Muhammed Hayef was reported in *Al-Islam Al-Yom* as directing a number of public criticisms toward the policewomen in Kuwait. Including the above worry about inappropriate uniforms, Hayef railed against the inappropriateness of having women police officers in general given Islamic values. He stated that the government is asking women to behave like men in having them perform the same tasks when, in fact, women's role in society is different from men. He stated to *Al-Arabiya* that women cannot defend themselves if put into danger and so will have to call policemen to rescue them, as he alleged occurred in the harassment incident described above. By allowing the deployment of policewomen despite tradition, Hayef believes the overall Islamic identity of the state of Kuwait will erode. As a result, the very community to be policed will be alienated. He also pointed out that the country's development plan states that any new laws and programs are not to violate Islamic law. Likewise, a Saudi news website, *Waahg*, devoted a whole article to the notion that Kuwaiti policewomen require male police protection in doing their jobs and are useful only as female decoys in male police officers' operations to fight harassment against women.

Kuwaiti religious cleric Ojaili Al-Nashimi also entered the media fray in defense of tradition. According to *Jouniha News Portal*, he cited tribal tradition in penning a *fatwa* against the deployment of policewomen. He told *Jouniha*, "A man's salute to a military woman is a breach of tribal and urban tradition." This comment referred to an April 2009 report in *Gulf News*[4] in which a female officer filed an official complaint with the Kuwait national police when a policeman refused to salute her. The policemen allegedly claimed that to do so was below his "dignity" because she was a woman. Reportedly, other policewomen who came to the female officer's defense pointed out that saluting signals respect for rank in organizations and should be separated from gender identity. Although Al-Nashimi's *fatwa* is not legally binding in Kuwait, there is considerable informal social and political pressure for Kuwaitis to adhere to such religious decrees.

Three other events were also seized upon by opponents of policewomen in Kuwait, according to an article in 2010 in the *Kuwait Times*. Earlier that year a policewoman was witnessed vacationing in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, with a male colleague to which she was not married. Another policewoman was allegedly caught drunk driving. And, an unmarried policewoman and a policeman were spotted in a shameful embrace while parked at the seafront. Hayef used these incidents to argue that policewomen were not adequately being kept in female-only zones within police stations and headquarters and as such, were being tasked in ways not commensurate with a Muslim country. A series of citizen interviews by the *Kuwait Times* journalist elicited an array of responses from disdain for the policewomen to "amusement." Some respondents considered the scandals to be isolated incidents while others condemned policewomen as an institution. One Kuwaiti man explained that enlisting policewomen was a terrible idea due to cultural traditions around gender segregation: "[They] will only lead to problems" when deployed alongside men. Worse, he explained, "the shameful actions of policewomen have affected Kuwait's reputation."

Another discourse about policewomen being in breach of tradition revolved around the quasi-military environment. Masculine pursuits such as firearms training and physical combat are taken to be inappropriate for women. Conservative politician Waleed al-Tatabae stated that "the military environment is just not suitable for women," using the example of their training in the use of firearms. Although women are not deployed with firearms, they train in the proper use of them as police professionals do around the world. More importantly, this is common practice across the Gulf countries. However, conservatives, as reported in *Al-Islam Al-Yom*, believe this practice to be in violation of Islamic traditions which envision women as having the domestic responsibilities as mothers and wives, and not to be involved in military or quasi-military activities. A March 26, 2010, *Gulf News* headline read, "Kuwait Interior Minister under fire for allowing policewomen to use guns and join combat force," responding to pictures the day before in the paper showing black-clad policewomen carrying guns and practicing combat operations.

A BLIND IMITATION OF... WESTERNIZED COUNTRIES

Conservative Member of Parliament Muhammed Hayef was quoted in the *Kuwait Times* and in *Middle East Online* as proclaiming that having policewomen in Kuwait is a "...a blind imitation of... Westernized countries..." In a counter-framing to the argument that suggest their presence represents the progress in the development or modernization of Kuwait, this theme is a critique of policewomen as a mere Western transplant. Another article from a Syrian-based news website opined that policewomen in Kuwait "... [are] the latest step that the U.S. ally has taken toward greater participation of women in society..." linking Western influence to the phenomenon.

---

[4] A similar article appears in print in *Al Dar*, but could not be accessed electronically to be included in this research.

POLICEWOMEN AND THE "IMPOSSIBLE DREAM"

Political scientist Mary Ann Tétreault (2001) highlights the perhaps "impossible dream" that Kuwait can be both "developed" and "traditional" at the same time. From this perspective, the society is operating with a potential contradiction which complicates gender roles and relations, and remains to be sorted out. However, the media landscape may obscure more hidden and informal discourses. According to Haya Al-Mughni (2001), Kuwaitis often practice a double-speak on gender issues. Politicians and governmental elites seem to pay lip service to the imported notion of gender equality while subverting it in intimate contexts. Al-Mughni point out that political and social issues of the day are decided in men's gatherings (*diwaniya*)[5] among the families who control the country (*ashira*). This reflects entrenched modes of interacting between the elites and the people (Ehteshami 2003). Loyalty to the *hamula*, a patrilineal descent group of families with a common ancestor, remains the primary factor in decision-making. Women are then considered the carriers of honor (*sharaf*) and morality (*iraid*) and maintain these values through their roles as wives and mothers (Al-Thakeb 1985). Although other social units, such as the "extended nuclear family," brought to Kuwait through the colonial experience of Westernization and modernization, forms a palpable unit of social organization as well - families maintained strong ties with kinship networks.

In this context, the bipolarity may indeed seem like an "impossible dream" and part of the global contemporary political struggle linking gender inequality to ethnic and religious tradition - the domain of the *diwaniya*. Certainly, conscious of the power of this bipolar discourse, official and semi-official media outlets exploit the apparent show-down in order to communicate that Kuwait is achieving progress in liberalizing the country – despite the critique from conservative quarters. Further, conservative critiques can be caged and de-fanged for a global audience by framing it as an entertaining and a backwards-looking dissent from conservatives and clerics whose full, nuanced arguments will have to be left for more off-the-beaten-path news websites.

For example, arguments focusing on the nationalistic aims and modern development symbolized by Kuwaiti police officers appear more often in publications which inhabitants of Kuwait, whether citizens or expatriates, might read. Meanwhile, the related policewomen-as-pioneers theme resonates well with foreign, western and neo-liberal audiences because it references freedom of choice in employment, a dominant value in western-based, liberal feminist discourse. American blogger Desert Girl (2008) posted an enthusiastic comment about the implementation of Kuwaiti policewomen, on March 3, 2008:

> ...to see WOMEN in HEJAB [*sic*] in a K-9 unit is a major accomplishment. I truly [*sic*] applaud you, ladies. To boldly go where many of your brothers refuse. My compliments!

Another American expatriate blogging from Qatar about the women police in Kuwait proclaimed on her blog:

> Wooo HOOO [*sic*] on you, Kuwaiti policewomen! It is always hard to be in the vanguard, you take the criticisms, you take the disbelieving stares, and you handle questions, even from your own families. It's always tough to be out front – to be a leader (Intlxpat 2009).

The pioneering discourse, involving the corollaries of gender equality and freedom of choice, has internal buy-in, but probably less so than reported. In the sample of articles analyzed, the theme was more often identifiable as editorializing by the journalist, rather than apparent from direct comments from Kuwaitis interviewed on the subject.

Therefore, a middle way seems to be operating, in which the seeming contradictions of tradition versus modernization are holding together in one society. The media discourse assumes bipolarity. Yet, the discussion on the respect for tradition both proponents and detractors exhibit is the glue that holds the phenomenon of policewomen together. Kuwait lagged behind other Gulf States, except Saudi Arabia, in bringing women into policing. It is forty years behind Bahrain and Oman in this regard. There was a 14-year delay between the royal promise to bring women in and their actual arrival. Although there is radio silence about the exact reasons for the delay, one policewoman in a March 2012 *Arab Times* article speculated that internal dissent and concerns about the threat to Kuwait gender-related traditions stalled early efforts. Kuwait's concern with tradition, and the hold that aspects of the conservative critique have on the country, are real. This does not mean that policewomen should necessarily be limited by the demands of *salafi* politicians, but rather that the proponents and detractors of policewomen are closer cousins than the bipolar media framing conveys to the casual newspaper reader.

---

[5] Some *diwaniyat* (pl.) in Kuwait are open to women's participation.

Rather than completely breaking the mold as pioneers for full gender equality, policewomen are actually best described as neo-traditional – a new manifestation of how to keep traditional gender segregation, expectations, and roles in check in a rapidly changing, globalized environment. As a recent Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA) report (Al-Dafaa and Karasik 2011) surmised, women were brought into the Kuwaiti national police "…to handle situations that cannot be handled by men," such as screening women in airports and providing services for women while on patrol in the nation's malls (8). As one Kuwaiti policewomen told *Middle East Online*, "…in our society women like to deal with other women." Perhaps it is also true that many people like it when women like to deal with other women; there is a cultural comfort in structures which are set up so that women can deal with other women when interacting in public settings. The irony remains that this will give opportunity for some women to take on new roles, even as the overall gender roles are maintained, albeit in a new way. If those new ways are offensive to some, this is not a showdown between traditional and modernization, but rather one between a status quo tradition and neo-tradition.[6] It represents a space where an Islamic feminist notion of women's roles can emerge, where tradition and policing by women can coexist.

Moreover, it is important to note that none of the people quoted in the media discourse on any side of the issue showed any indication of intending to have policewomen give up adherence to their cultural, religious, or gender identities, but that what those identities could accommodate in the present age had altered or expanded. Thus one can consider that the neo-traditional approach paints policewomen as a "thin blue line"[7] between the total erosion of tradition in a modern environment and the preservation of it. The neo-traditional can arguably embrace modernization and development, nationalism and opportunity for women's careers, while also staying rooted in a culturally preservationist agenda and being true to other important identities for Kuwaiti women, such as tribal or Muslim ones. It means the "impossible dream" is possible and in fact occurring; unfortunately, it is not being adequately captured in the media discourse.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of economic globalization, simple narratives work best to sell countries to investors and military and political elites as proper places to set up shop and build alliances. For a country like Kuwait that aims to project a friendly atmosphere to global capital and geopolitical elites, the strategy appears to be to put forth rough dichotomies. Perhaps it would be an uphill battle to educate a particular global public on the intricacies of Kuwaiti political and cultural contestations, such as what it means to be Kuwaiti in a traditional sense, and how the new women police fit into that meaning. Even western expatriates who spend significant time in Gulf countries sometimes fail to get beyond the typical modernization-versus-tradition bipolar frame. One educated British expatriate living in Qatar blogged that Kuwait is "…split in two with traditionalists versus modernizers" and pointed to the debate about policewomen as evidence of the schizophrenic state of affairs (Gulf Blog 2010).

The discourse on Kuwaiti policewomen, then, fits into larger patterns of dichotomous framing of gender and society in the Middle East as a result of some political regimes performance of state feminism. For example, Al-Ali (2000) argues that the feminist movement in Egypt has often suffered from being judged based on the extent to which it is either authentic (traditional) or Western. Because of the perceived secularization Middle Eastern states vis-à-vis their more conservative constituents, efforts at state feminism in the region have often been resisted and have given rise to Islamist social movements. These patterns continue to reinforce a binary of tradition versus modernization. As Kandiyoti (1996) explains, the "reactive local discourse" fuels the flames of this type of issue framing across the social and political landscape of the region.

As adjuncts to state feminism, official and semi-official Kuwaiti and Arab media outlets reify the simplified dichotomy and promote policewomen as important symbolic actors in state feminism. They do so by placing them in the frame of modernizing pioneers under the banner of gender equality in order to promote the country's seeming liberalization abroad. Kuwait can successfully deploy that simplistic and misleading media projection while leaving the nuances for the *diwaniya*, where the most sincere and culturally-contextualized conversations about policewomen are likely happening, among Kuwaitis themselves.

---

[6] Walter Miller (1973) coined the phrase "reverse projection" to explain this type of political phenomena. He defined the term as occurring when political actors with set positions on an issue define every other opinion on the same issue as opposite to their own, even when they are not exact opposite opinions, but rather nuances along a continuum.

[7] This is a play on the adage that the police in western societies are the "thin blue line" between law and order and total anarchy.

APPENDIX A

Articles analyzed

	Date	Article title	Publication	Language: English, Arabic, or both	Ownership of publication
1	July 24, 2008	*Al-Kuwait tifta bab al-tisjeel lil-shirta al-nisa'iya fi september*[1]	*Asharq Al-Awsat*	Arabic	Independent Saudi owner, based in London
2	March 29, 2009	*Al-Kuwait: takharaj aul dufa' lil-shirta al-nisa'iya*[2]	*Asharq Al-Awsat*	Arabic	Independent Saudi owner, based in London
3	April 21, 2009	Kuwait: Police open to women, but Islamists oppose	Dalje.com	English	Croatian news website
4	April 22, 2009	Can't salute a woman policeman tells female officer in Kuwait	Gulf News	Both	Semi-official Emirati newspaper
5	July 2009	*Mustasharban tiskheer imkanat al-wazarat lil-shirta nisa'iya Hayef: al-khalid lesa yuaidan 'ala al-istajoab*[3]	*Al-Islam Al-Yom*	Arabic	Independent Saudi owner, based in Riyadh
6	November 6, 2009	*Ashirta nisa'iya fi kul al-qita'at al-amaniya Kuwaitiya*[4]	*El-Bashayer*	Arabic	Independent Egyptian news website
7	November 5, 2009	Policewomen introduction proved a success-- official	Kuwait News Agency (KUNA)	Both	Official Kuwaiti press releases
8	March 26, 2010	Kuwait interior minister under fire for allowing policewomen to use guns and join combat forces	Gulf News	Both	Semi-official Emirati newspaper
9	May 5, 2010	Lawmakers propose all-female police stations in Kuwait	Q8NRI.com	English	Independently owned news website by non-resident Indians in Kuwait
10	July 2, 2010	Kuwait launches all-woman moral police to fight "negative phenomena"	Gulf News	English	Semi-official Emirati newspaper
11	July 11, 2010	*As-shirta nisa'iya fi kuwait titalab t li-dakhil hamayatihun*[5]	*Waahg*	Arabic	Saudi news website
12	July 14, 2010	Kuwait female cops irk officials	*Al-Arabiya*	Both	Independently owned Emirati news channel and website

---

[1] Kuwait opens the door to registration of policewomen in September [researcher's translation].

[2] Kuwait: First batch of policewomen graduate [researcher's translation].

[3] [Proponents] were thankful for the possibilities [offered by] the Directorate of Women Police, Hayef is not celebrating their response [researcher's translation]

[4] Policewomen in all sectors of Kuwaiti security [researcher's translation]

[5] The policewomen of Kuwait ask for intervention for their protection [researcher's translation]

	Date	Article title	Publication	Language: English, Arabic, or both	Ownership of publication
13	July 15, 2010	Kuwait launches female police to monitor behavior in public places	*Al-Shorfa*	Both	United States Central Command
14	July 17, 2010	Kuwaiti female police ask for their counterparts' help	Jouhina Portal News	English	Independently owned Syrian news website
15	September 17, 2010	You're under arrest!	Kuwait Times	English	Semi-official Kuwaiti newspaper
16	September 9, 2010	Kuwait's new policewomen are force to be reckoned with	Middle East Online	Both	London-based website
17	February 24, 2012	Kuwaiti women make it in police force	Arab Times	English	Semi-official Kuwaiti newspaper
18	April 22, 2012	Police to monitor women at cafés	Kuwait Times	English	Semi-official Kuwaiti newspaper

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Leila. 2009. "Overview: Engaging the Arab Human Development Report 2005 on Women." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41: 59-60.

Al-Ali, Nadje. 2000. *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Dafaa, Naimah, and Theodore Karasik. 2011. *Women in Gulf Security Forces*. Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis.

Al-Jandaly, Bassma. 2003. "Improving image, Crushing Crime." *Gulf News*. Accessed from http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/general/improving-image-crushing-crime-1.362084.

Al-Mughni, Haya. 2001. *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*. London: Saqi Books.

Al-Thakeb, Fahed T. 1985. "The Arab Family and Modernity: Evidence from Kuwait." *Current Anthropology* 26: 575-580.

Al-Watan. 2009. "First Group of Policewomen Graduate." *Here, There and Everywhere*. March 26. Accessed from http://intlxpatr.wordpress.com/2009/03/26/first-kuwaiti-policewomen-graduate.

Arab Times. 2007a. "Kuwait Blazing 'Trail' in Region: Cherie Blair: Political Leaders Earn Praise." *Arab Times*, April 27. Accessed from http://www.arabtimesonline.com.

Arab Times. 2007b. "Women Only Police Force Ruled Out in Saudi Arabia." *Arab Times*, March 7, Accessed from http://www.arabtimes.com.

Asharq Al-Awsat. 2008. "Al-Kuwait tiqtah bab al-tishjeel lil-shirta nisa'iya fi September." *Asharq Al-Awsat*, April 18. Accessed from http://www.awsat.com.

Badawi, Jamal. 1995. *Gender Equity in Islam*. Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications.

Barthes, Ronald. 1972/1957. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). 2012. "The World Factbook: Kuwait." Last Modified March 29, 2012. Accessed from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html.

Centre for Research on Globalization. 2006. "Kuwait Signs Security Agreement with NATO." December 13. Accessed from: http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=4138.

Committee on Women in NATO Forces. 2009. Meeting Records 2009. Accessed from http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/meeting-records/2009/meeting-records-2009.html.

Desert Girl. 2008. "Desert Girl on Kuwait." Accessed from http://desertgirlkuwait.blogspot.com/2008/03/you-go-k-9-kuwaiti-police-girlfriend.html.

Doumato, Elanor Abdella, and Marsha Pripsten Posusney. 2003. *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy and Society*. Boulder, CA: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. 2003. "Reform from Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies." *International Affairs* 79: 53-75.

Ferrell, Jeff. and Clinton R. Saunders. 1995. *Cultural Criminology*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

———. and Keith Hayward and John Young. 2008. *Cultural Criminology*. London: Sage Publications.

Fürsich, Elfriede. 2009. "In Defense of Textual Analysis: Restoring a Challenged Method for Journalism and Media Studies." *Journalism Studies* 10(2): 238-252.

Goldstein, Herman. 1977. *Policing a Free Society*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Gulf Blog. 2010. "Kuwait Introduces Female Police." Accessed from http://thegulfblog.com/tag/kuwaiti-women.

Haberfeld, Maria and Lior Gideon. 2008. "Introduction." In *Comparative Policing: The Struggle for Democracy*, edited by M. Haberfeld, and I. Cerrah, 1-12. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. London: Routledge.

Intlxpatr. 2009. "First Kuwaiti Policewomen Graduate." Accessed from *Here There and Everywhere*: http://intlxpatr.wordpress.com/2009/03/26/first-kuwaiti-policewomen-graduate.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1996. "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies." In *Gender the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, edited by D. Kandiyoti, 1-28. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

———. 1998. "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey." In *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, edited by Leila Abu-Lughod, 270-287. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Katz, Jack. and Thomas J. Csordas. 2003. "Phenomenological Ethnography in Sociology and Anthropology." *Ethnography* 4(3): 275-288.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). 2001. "Kuwaiti Government Approves Creations of Policewomen." May 6.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). 2007. "Kuwait's Female Inspectors Work Hand-in-Hand with Colleagues." September 23.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). 2012. "Sheikha Suad Pleased at Current Women Status in Gulf but Calls for Greater." April 18.

Kuwait Times. 2007. "Sound off: Here are the Views of Some Students on 'Women Police.'" *Kuwait Times* May 2.

Martibez, Candace and Gayle Allard. 2008-2009. "Foreign Direct Investment and Social Policy: The Links in Developing Countries." *The Journal of Business in Developing Nations* 11: 77-112.

Miller, Walter. 1973. "Ideology and Criminal Justice Policy: Some Current Issues." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 64(2): 141-154.

Moghadem, Valentine. 2003. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East (2nd ed.)*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Books.

Moumneh, Rasha. 2011. "The Gulf's Gender Anxiety." *The Guardian*. July 6. Accessed from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jul/06/gulf-gender-anxiety-transgender.

Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage Books.

Stetson, Dorothy M., and Amy G. Mazur. 1995. *Comparative State Feminism*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Strobl, Staci. 2007. "Women and Policing in Bahrain." Unpublished dissertation, City University of New York, Graduate Center.

———. 2008. "The Women's Police Directorate in Bahrain: An Ethnographic Observation of a Gender Segregated Unit and the Likelihood of Integration." *International Criminal Justice Review* 18: 39-58.

———. 2010a. "Post-Colonial Policing and the "Woman" Question: A History of the Women's Police Directorate in Bahrain." In *Policing and Prisons in the Middle East: Formations of Coercion*, edited by L. Khalili, and J. Schwedler, 119-135. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 2010b. "Progressive or Neo-Traditional? Policewomen in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries." *Feminist Formation* 22(3): 51-74.

Sung, Hung-En. 2006. "Structural determinants of police effectiveness in market economies." *Police Quarterly* 9(1): 3-19.

Tétreault, Mary Ann. 2001. "A State of Two Minds: State Culture, Women and Politics in Kuwait." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33: 203-220.

———. 2003. "Kuwait: Sex, Violence, and the Politics of Economic Restructuring." In *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy and Society*, edited by E. A. Doumato, and M. P. Posusney, 215-238. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

The Associated Press. 1994. "Kuwait to Let Women Join Police Force." July 13.

The Baluchistan Times. 2011. "Government Committed to Empower Women, Prime Minister." *The Baluchistan Times*. November 25.

The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research. 2009. "Introduction." In *The Arabian Gulf: Between Conservatism and Change*, edited by T. E. Research, 3-14. Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

Toumi, Habib. 2010. "Kuwaiti Women Make it in Police Force." *Arab Times*, March 26. www.arabtimesonline.com.

United Nations. 2005. *Arab Human Rights Development Report*. New York: United Nations.

World Economic Forum. 2012. *The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012*. Accessed from World Economic Forum: http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-competitiveness.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

Female Citizenship and Family Law in Kuwait and Qatar: Globalization and Pressures for Reform in Two Rentier States

Rania Maktabi
UNIVERSITY OF OSLO, RANIA.MAKTABI@IKOS.UIO.NO
ØSTFOLD UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, RANIA.MAKTABI@HIOF.NO

In Kuwait and Qatar, we find tensions between a focus on female education that encourages women to participate in the labor market, alongside policies that support women's role as primary caretakers and homemakers. Lavish, non-taxed rentierist welfare has given rise to a globally unparalleled reliance on domestic workers and the development of a two-tier employment structure where most female citizens work in the public sector, while an overwhelmingly large segment of the noncitizen female labor force is employed as domestic workers. While the two states share cultural and socio-economic characteristics, Kuwait and Qatar differ with regards to how women's issues are organized and addressed politically. The historical experiences of political pluralism shed light on variances in social pressures for expanded female citizenship. In Kuwait, there exist autonomous – though variably weak – pressures that have strengthened female citizenship by buttressing civil and economic rights where women have seen their autonomy expanded. In Qatar, female citizens are part of wider state-building strategies primarily initiated and defined by the ruling al-Thani dynasty. While women's legal autonomy in both states is mediated through the principle of male guardianship, orthodox interpretation of *shari'a* permeate family law and thereby restrain female citizenship to a greater extent in Qatar than Kuwait, where the adjudication of family law tenets is more lenient towards women.

--->

Keywords:
citizenship; rentier state; family law; political actors; political pluralism

INTRODUCTION[1]

Changes at the turn of the millennium confirm an observable trend throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): women's civil rights within the state's family law, nationality law and criminal law were addressed in new ways following the impact of internal and external pressures for reforms to strengthen female citizenship.[2] For example, economic globalization and international norms of human rights, as embedded in CEDAW,[3] influenced, renewed and strengthened demands for reform[4] in Morocco and Egypt. In the Gulf, Qatar, UAE and Bahrain codified their family laws in 2005, 2006 and 2009 respectively (Welchman 2012). This article seeks to highlight how global economic processes, such as migratory labor force and rentierist politics, impact female citizenship in two Gulf states: Kuwait and Qatar.[5]

Rentierism[6] affects the constitution of the female citizen and noncitizen workforce in both states: Around 90 percent of the female citizen workforce is employed in the public sector, and roughly 60 to 70 percent of female noncitizens are domestic workers.[7] The abundance of low waged domestic workforce provides, in principle, opportunities for female citizens to engage in educational and professional careers. However, ideals of domesticated womanhood[8] and a gravely unregulated labor market for domestic workers counterbalance official objectives that encourage female education and the naturalization of the citizen workforce, i.e. the replacement of the noncitizen workforce by citizens.

I compare Kuwait and Qatar because similar conditions, such as socio-economic dependence on rentierist welfare, and fairly conservative interpretations of family law sustain male centered kinship relations that solidify the confines of female citizenship in both states. Family law refers to rules that regulate marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody and maintenance. In states where Islam dominates, such as the case in the Gulf countries, family law is based on Islamic *shari'a* jurisprudence which defines males as the guardians of females. The principle of male guardianship entails that a female adult citizen is not regarded as an autonomous legal subject and, therefore, have unequal rights with male citizens within the state's jurisdiction (Awadi 2006; Breslin 2010).

Historical and political particularities reflect variances that affect the position of women in both states. First, the degree of political pluralism, as reflected in autonomous civil society groups, such as women's groups, has a history that dates back to the 1960s in Kuwait. In Qatar, by contrast, women are engaged in institutions established in the 1990s which, to a large extent, constitute the state's extended social services apparatus. Second, the role of rentierism and its effect on the citizen-noncitizen divide, particularly with regards to female labor participation, differs slightly in the two states. Although female citizens in both states are predominantly employed in the public sector, women have a different legal position as a result of distinct social, historical and political dynamics. The Kuwaiti family law enacted in 1984, family law decisions in court the past fifteen years, and political pressures in parliament between 2009 – 2011 indicate that a Kuwaiti woman is accorded minimal economic rights on an independent basis in matters related to divorce and custody over children. A Qatari female citizen enjoys similar welfare schemes to Kuwaiti women, such as education, health and financial support for housing. However, her civil and economic rights are, to a larger extent, regulated and implemented by state agencies that define and perceive a Qatari woman's legal status and social position as part of the extended family.

---

[1] An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the *Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency and Social Change* at the 2012 Gulf Research Meeting, Gulf Research Centre, Cambridge, 11 – 14 July 2012. Internet citations were last accessed on 15 March 2016. I thank Dalia Abdelhady and the anonymous referee for excellent comments. The article is edited in loving memory of a great scholar, professor Mary Ann Tétreault, who passed away in November 2015, and in loving memory of my father, Reza Maktabi, who passed away in April 2016. Baba convinced me that "travelling is always good," paid for the flight expenses to Kuwait in May 1992, and sent me off to my first fieldwork in the Gulf.

[2] 'Female citizenship' is here defined as the set of civil, economic and political rights as defined in the Constitution, the state's family law, nationality law, criminal law, social security and labor laws, and which regulate the legal capacity and autonomy of a female citizen in the polity.

[3] The United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was enacted in 1979. Kuwait signed CEDAW in September 1994 and Qatar in April 2009. Both states made reservations pertaining to gender equality in nationality laws (article 9), and regulation of marriage and divorce (article 16). Kuwait made reservations concerning arbitration between states in the event of dispute (article 29), while Qatar made reservations to freedom of movement, and of residence and domicile (article 15), and to article 2, which compels states to abolish laws and practices that discriminate against women.

[4] 'Reform' is a relative term and implies here changes in state laws that reduce inequality in the distribution of civil, political and economic rights between male and female citizens.

[5] The findings of this paper are based on a fieldwork in Kuwait and Qatar (11 April – 2 May 2012) where I interviewed academics, representatives of associations, lawyers, and economists. Empirical data on Kuwait is more comprehensive than data gathered on Qatar, a bias I have tried to compensate by retrieving documents for Qatar on the Internet after my fieldwork. Thanks to Mr. Saad Al-Shammari and Mr. Ahmad al-Saffar at the Kuwaiti National Assembly's Documentation Unit who instructed me on how to use official documents on the website during my fieldwork in Kuwait. At the Kuwaiti daily *al-Qabas* (est. 1972), I read the 346 articles which were digitally available under the entry words 'family law' and 'Kuwait' from 1997 until April 2012. I thank Mr. Hamza Olayan for generous access to the archives.

[6] 'Rentierism' denotes the state's structural dependence on a commodity which generates excessive amounts of capital in domestic economies (Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Ross 2012). Henry and Springborg (2010, 212-261) characterize the Gulf states as 'globalizing monarchies.'

[7] See Table Two below for details.

[8] 'Domesticated womanhood' reflects the idealization of women as wives and mothers (Doumato and Posusney 2003, 8-9).

In this article, I point out characteristics of globalization and rentierism and indicate their impact on the female labor force structure in Kuwait and Qatar. I then look into differences between the two states with regards to the degree of political pluralism, women's organizations, and governance strategies by rulers. Following the comparative discussion, I conclude that societal pressures for reform from below in Kuwait are exerted by autonomous women's associations and through parliament that provide avenues for articulating women's interests. By contrast, pressures for reforms that affect female citizens in Qatar come predominantly from the ruling al-Thani family and a political will to invest in education. While women's legal autonomy in both states is mediated through the principle of male guardianship, orthodox interpretation of *shari'a* permeate family law and thereby restrain female citizenship to a greater extent in Qatar than Kuwait, where the adjudication of family law tenets is more lenient towards women.

GLOBALIZATION IN THE GULF

The internationalization of the energy sector is the main driver of globalization in the Gulf region. Since the 1940s rentierism has permeated the economic, social and political fabrics of Kuwait and Qatar. Among the most significant consequences of globalization in the Gulf is the influx of large numbers of migrant workers, which leads to a globally unparalleled demographic situation of noncitizen majorities: In Kuwait, citizens comprise around 39 percent of the total population (State of Kuwait 2010), while Qataris comprise around 10 percent of the total population (Qatar Statistics Authority 2010).

LABOR FORCE STRUCTURE IN KUWAIT AND QATAR

The citizen–noncitizen divide in Kuwait and Qatar is particularly pronounced in the labor force structure. The demographic disparity between citizens and noncitizens has, since the late 1970s, formed the basis for two professed policies at the state level: strict regulation of the majority migrant workforce, and the naturalization of the labor force. These pressures provide a backdrop to state policies which aim at supporting female education, as well as encouraging female labor participation, as a means to enlarge the proportion of citizens in the labor force (Shah 2008). Policies aimed at naturalizing the workforce have not yielded the desired effects since the number of noncitizens has risen steadily over the past three decades. However, citizens dominate as workers in the public sector: A majority of 90 – 95 percent of the female citizen labor force have professional, technical and clerical occupations. Noncitizens are primarily employed in the private sector. In Kuwait, for instance, only 1.3 percent of the male citizen workforce and 0.9 percent of the female citizen workforce is employed in the private sector (Shah 2008).

Table One: Labor force by citizenship and gender in Kuwait and Qatar: Total figures in approximate millions

	Population			Labor force[1]			Female labor force			Male labor force		
	Total	% citizen	% non citizen	Total	% citizen	% non citizen	Total	% citizen	% non citizen	Total	% citizen	% non citizen
Kuwait[2]	2.2	39	61	1.1	19	81	0.3	26	74	0.9	17	83
Qatar[3]	1.5	10	90	1.3	5.6	94.3	0.13	21	79	1.1	4	96

[1] For Kuwait: The figure for total labor force at 1,1 million excludes "out of labor force" which comprises approximately 288,500 citizens. This figure shows that the number of Kuwaiti citizens who are part of the manpower but who are out of the labor force exceeds those that are actually part of the labor force. The latter number approximately 217,000 citizens. For Qatar: Labor Force figures "Economically active population 15+ by nationality and sex" for the year 2009 (Qatar Statistics Authority 2009). For the breakdown on female and male labor, I use figures for the year 2006 (Qatar Statistics Authority 2006).

[2] Figures for the year 2005, see State of Kuwait 2010, 97.

[3] Census figures, Qatar Statistics Authority, April 2010. Total inhabitant population in Qatar (15+) by age, sex and marital status numbers 1,466,851 (table 4.2). Qatari citizens total 146,262 (table 4.2 Q). Noncitizens total 1,320,589 (table 4.2. NQ).

Seen from a woman-centered perspective, table 1 reveals an interesting gendered discrepancy in the citizen workforce: in both states, a larger proportion of female citizens – 26 percent Kuwaiti women and 21 percent for Qatari women – are engaged in the total female labor force workforce compared to the proportion of employed male citizens. In Kuwait, male citizens comprise 17 percent of the total labor force, while male citizens in Qatar comprise of four percent of the total labor force.

Table Two: Female employment among the citizen and noncitizen population according to occupation (in percentage, number of persons are rendered in brackets)

	Kuwait[1]		Qatar[2]	
	Citizens	Noncitizens	Citizens	Noncitizens
Public administration & social security sector	47% (33,971)	1.6% (3,464)	29% (5,584)	1.4% (818)
Education	35% (25,273)	5.8% (12,281)	48% (9,387)	11% (6,176)
Health and social work	7% (5,191)	5% (10,623)	13% (2,525)	11% (6,109)
Domestic services	0.13% (92)	71% (151,017)	0.06% (12)	57% (32,762)

1 State of Kuwait 2010, 108. Figures are from 2005.

2 Census figures rendered in 2009 based on data from 2006, see table 22 in Qatar Statistics Authority (2009). The total number of employed Qatari women was 19,510 persons.

The gendered citizen disparity in labor force participation among the citizen population is, to a large degree, related to the small demographic size of the citizen population compared to the noncitizen population. Also, crude numbers become disproportionately inflated when presented in percentage. For instance, there are four males for each female inhabitant in Qatar.[9] However, the gendered dimension is clear: In both states, female citizens constitute a proportionately larger part of the labor force than employed male citizens. Shah (2010) calls this observation as “the femaleness of the labor force,” and points out with respect to Kuwait that “the government’s investment in educating Kuwaiti women has truly paid off in terms of enhancing participation of the nationals in the workforce, and reducing the reliance on foreign workers to some degree.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FEMALE CITIZEN AND NONCITIZEN LABOR FORCE

Shifting attitudes towards nuclear families, together with lavish welfare services that include publicly financed and free of charge higher education, have affected the form of female labor force participation in Kuwait and Qatar.

In both states, female citizens are employed primarily in three main sectors: public administration, education and health, while female noncitizens are employed primarily as domestic workers.

Almost 90 percent of all households in Kuwait employ one or several domestic workers regardless of the work status of women in the household (Shah 2008). In Qatar, estimates for the year 2007 show that each family has an average of 2.3 domestic workers (Shami 2010). Domestic workers prepare food, take care of children, clean and attend to the physical and emotional needs of all members of the household. Domestic workers are also increasingly attending to the physical needs of the elderly at home.

Most international attention has, understandably, been directed towards the gravely unregulated working conditions that surround low-paid migrant domestic work.[10] Labor Law no. 14 of 2004 in Qatar and Law no. 6 of 2010 in Kuwait regulate labor conditions in the private sector, but the laws do not apply to domestic workers whose residency and work contracts are regulated by sponsorship provisions – the *kafala* – discussed below.[11] The unregulated working conditions of domestic workers is, to a large extent, an effect of rentierist politics, which impacts the consolidation and perpetuation of a gendered division of labor at the household level.

RENTIERISM: A WOMAN CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

The political impact of rent on economy and society in Kuwait and Qatar is both structural and procedural. At the macroeconomic level, rent is structural because it is the primary financial generator in the public and private sectors and constitutes more than 90 percent of budgets.[12] At the micro- and meso- economic levels – i.e. individual and group levels – rent operates in a procedural manner, generating two forms of politicized dependencies. One form of dependency is between rulers and citizens based on a clientelistic contract, where political allegiance is exchanged for nontax-based economic and social welfare.[13] The other is between citizens and noncitizens where the *kafala*[14] system has emerged as a financially rewarding institution for Kuwaiti citizens who extract rent from noncitizen labor on the basis of owning a citizenship certificate. Thus, citizenship documents (*jinisiyya*) generate rent at the individual level in similar ways as oil rent generates wealth at the macro national level.

---

[9] There were approximately 301,000 women and 1,2 million men in Qatar according to figures rendered in 2009, see population (15+) by age, sex and marital status, Census April 2010, table 4.2. (Qatar Statistics Authority 2010).

[10] An alarmingly high number of migrant women who work in the domestic sector are exposed to exploitation and abuse which follow from unregulated working relations coupled with abundant supply of cheap labor (see Human Rights Watch 2010).

[11] In 2015, both states introduced new labor laws, but *kafala* regulations remain. In Kuwait, an important first-time law that regulates work and rest hours for domestic workers passed in parliament in June (Human Rights Watch 2015). Qatar announced labor law changes for 2017 in October (International Trade Union Confederation 2015).

[12] Personal communication with Al Shall’s director,

The femaleness of the citizen labor participation in the public sector, and the noncitizen labor participation in domestic services impacts female citizenship in Kuwait and Qatar in contradictory ways: Female citizens in both states are among those who have attained highest literacy rates in the Arab world (Human Development Report 2015, 219). Also, an affordable armada of domestic workers enables female citizens to participate in the labor market. However, these factors have not provided significant leverage to pressure societies in the Gulf to expand female citizenship, particularly concerning state laws – which remain gendered.[15] In other MENA states, such as Morocco and Egypt, women have higher illiteracy rates and have far lower material opportunities in terms of socio-economic indicators. Yet, their civil rights have been considerably strengthened in the past decade (Maktabi 2013). The absence of large numbers of foreign domestic workers in these two settings, and corresponding reliance on low-paid female citizens who are domestic workers, could be a contributing factor, but further research is needed to draw such a conclusion.[16]

Phillipe Fargues presents one perspective that sheds light on restricted female citizenship in the Gulf. Two decades ago, he argued that wealth in Gulf States represented an 'oil-revenue-inhibited' fertility transition. High levels of education among women in the Gulf, compared to other states in MENA, did not yield lower fertility rates – usually seen as a significant indicator for improved opportunities for women – as observed in other regions in the world.[17] He argued that the patriarchal order – i.e. social relations between the sexes and age groups where male and elder rights are privileged – is strong in the rich Gulf states due to pro-natal policies that support households in raising many children and maintain women inside the home (Fargues 1995). Fargues' observation regarding the social impact of oil revenues on Gulf societies holds true today, but only to a certain extent because the impact of education on fertility rates is clear: Fertility rates in Kuwait and Qatar have dropped from approximately 5.5 in the mid-1990s to 2.3 and 2.2 respectively (World Development Indicators 2012). Fargues' observations prompt us to conclude that rentirerism leads to low levels of female labor force participation and pro-natal state policies that limit female citizenship. The significant impact of rentierism withstanding, there are other factors that shape female citizenship in the region, as I illustrate by my comparison of two rentierist states that have granted their female citizens considerably different access to rights. Other factors that shed light on gendered citizenship and, more importantly, the variances between Kuwait and Qatar in conditions that contain female citizenship, include degree of political pluralism, the institutionalization of women's organizations, Islamist political leverage and governing strategies among the rulers, as I point out in the following sections.

POLITICAL PLURALISM IN KUWAIT AND QATAR

State formation reflects a process whereby political power is centralized within a particular territorial entity (Tilly, Ardant and Rokkan 1975). Kuwait and Qatar differ when it comes to the governing strategies

---

economist Jasim al-Saadoun, 19 April 2012. On the impact of rentierism on Kuwait's five-year plan, see Al Shall Annual Report 2010, 56 - 58.

[13] Political clientelism refers to the reciprocal relationship characterized by inequality and power differences between rulers and ruled in rentier states based on the exchange of different types of resources. Rulers supply extensive non-taxed welfare policies, such as public education, employment opportunities in the public sector, housing and health services, in exchange for the acquiescence of the citizenry towards hereditary rule (Maktabi 1992).

[14] The *kafala* is an elaborate sponsorship system that regulates the entry and presence of the noncitizen workforce in all Gulf States. Initially an administrative regulatory system whereby citizens guaranteed the presence of migrants and ensured that private companies had 51 percent Kuwaiti ownership, it has become the centerpiece of a multi-billion visa-trading business (Shah 2008). The *kafala* regulates entry and residence of noncitizens on the basis of citizenship documents which citizens own.

[15] Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait figure as the three top range Arab states in the Gender Inequality Index (Human Development Report 2015, 156).

[16] One significant study on the correlation between low-income countries and women-friendly legal reforms in 100 states between 1960 and 2010 indicates that, whereas income was not associated with legal reform between 1960 and 1990, only low-income countries show positive correlation with legal reform that expand female legal autonomy within state laws after 1990 (Hallward-Driemeier, Hasan and Rusu 2013, 3).

[17] Low fertility corresponds to 3 – 4 children per woman while high fertility corresponds to 6.5 or more children per woman.

adopted by their ruling authorities. Rule in Kuwait developed through bargaining processes between numerous merchants, and the ruling al-Sabbah family through which demands for political representation and participation resulted in the establishment of a parliament. By contrast, merchants in Qatar were few, and Qatari rulers were traders themselves. This resulted in the development of an autocratic political order in Qatar where competition has been internal within the al-Thani family, and successive rulers have sought to maintain control over the state apparatus (Crystal 1995).

Historical trajectories shed light on contemporary differences in the relationship between rulers and ruled in the two states. Other differences include variances in the degree of political pluralism at the societal and political levels as reflected in autonomous social organizations that are relatively independent of the authorities.

KUWAIT

Among the Gulf states, Kuwait has an unparalleled historical record of political participation, and a rich heritage of autonomous and semi-autonomous organizations. The constitution, which was formed in 1962, a year after independence, delineated the powers of the ruling Emir and main merchant families. Elections followed a year later to the 50-seat National Assembly, and have been carried out with interruptions in 1976 and 1986 when the Emir dissolved the parliament. Parliamentary life resumed in 1992, following the Iraqi invasion to Kuwaiti in 1990. The electorate was limited to around ten percent of the population, before female citizens received the suffrage in 2005. Female candidates failed to obtain sufficient votes to secure parliamentary seats in the first two elections after they got the vote, but in 2009 four female candidates were elected. All four first-time female Kuwaiti MPs – Ma'souma al-Moubarak, Aseel al-Awadhi, Rola Dashti and Salwa al-Jassar – hold PhDs in the fields of education, political science and economics.[18]

The upsurge of political Islam after 1980 bolstered the influence of Islamist groups such as Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, tribalist (*qaba'ili*) groups, and puritanical Salafis. The Islamization of the public sphere has been observed since the turn of the millennium (Tétreault 2003). Since 2006, these conglomerate groups of conservatives have supported the idea of domesticated womanhood. In general, they tend to suggest and vote for policies in parliament that underpin and endorse ideological visions in which Kuwaiti women are seen primarily as homemakers, as will be pointed out below. At the same time, some Islamists – particularly nationalists with tribalist background who share kinship relations with the noncitizen Bidūn[19] population – have raised proposals for strengthening female legal capacity as means to support the legally insecure and socially volatile situation of Bidūn families, particularly male Bidūn married to Kuwaiti women. In short, Islamist groups are not themselves unified in their lack of support for women's citizenship rights (Maktabi 2015).

Kuwait has a history of an organized women's movement with different ideological outlooks, reflecting the country's political pluralism (al-Mughni 1993). Although the 1962 Law of Association requires organizations to register at the Ministry of Social Affairs, many social organizations are active without formal credentials. The *Women's Cultural and Social Society* (WCSS, established 1963) represents a liberal oriented women's group that has pressured for widened female citizenship by demanding equal civil and political rights since the 1970s.

The codification of Kuwaiti family law in 1984 came, partly, as a response to demands presented by the WCSS and a ruler eager to show a commitment towards addressing female issues. Nearly three decades of an institutionalized judicial framework in the form of civil lawyers, courts and judges where family law cases are adjudicated has bolstered the state's legal capacity in regulating the personal affairs of its citizens. Equally important is that these regulations have increased the professional ability of Kuwaitis to address and solve legal matters that, to a large extent, structure their material and immaterial living conditions and life opportunities.

Since 2008 the WCSS has strengthened its focus on family law and collaborated with United Nations organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UN Women, in launching legal awareness programs. For instance, the "*Wracati* [my paper] project" aims at raising women's knowledge about their legal rights in marriage, divorce, work conditions, and nationality issues.[20]

While Qatar lacks autonomous civil organizations, Kuwaitis have a long experience in forming broad-based associations pertaining to interests or professions since the 1960s (al-Hajji 2000). For instance, the Teachers' and Nurses' associations, and the Kuwaiti Lawyers' Bar Association, have seen a noticeable increase in the membership of Kuwaiti women after the Gulf war (1990-1991) saw the exodus of Palestinians from Kuwait (*al-Mu'allim*, 22 February 2014). In addition to professional association, conservative and Islamist organizations such as *Bayader al-Salam* and the *Islamic Care Society* emerged after 1980, gathering Kuwaiti women for preaching missions (*da'wa*), and doing charity work. Whereas these associations mostly espouse ideals of women as homemakers (al-Mughni 1996), the importance of organization and association should not be underestimated because women's interests become articulated in new ways, even within and among groupings that maintain conservative agendas.[21] The rise of Islamic feminism since the middle of the 1990s has, for instance, emboldened Islamic women activists: female members of Islamic organizations have occasionally criticized male dominance within Islamic groups (al-Mughni 2010). For instance, women leaders within the Muslim Brotherhood's Kuwaiti branch (Hadas), such as Su'ad al-Jarallah and Khawla al-'Atiqi, participated both at the 1995 Beijing UN Women's conference. They point out that they benefitted from the experience. For instance, they started thinking in strategic terms to push for women's interests as working mothers within the Teachers' association and within the women's branch of the Islah association (*jam'iyyat al-islah al-ijtima'i*). Also, both women supported the enfranchisement of Kuwaiti women in 2005, running thus against the official standpoint of Hadas male leaders and MPs who voted against female political rights in parliament in May 2005 (Personal communication, 16 March and 25 March 2015. See also *al-Mujtama'* 2014, 8-13).

---

[18] Elections carried out after the dissolving of parliament in November 2011 saw the loss of seats of the four female MPs. Economist Safa al-Hashem was elected in 2012. She resigned in May 2014. Other women MPs include Rola Dashti and Hind al-Subeih who were appointed as ministers.

[19] Bidūn is Arabic shorthand for *bidūn jinsiyya*, meaning 'without citizenship.' Human Rights Watch (2014) operates with the figure of 105,702 Kuwaiti Bidūn, though the number is probably higher due to the politicization of census figures.

[20] Personal communication with lawyer and contributor to the Wracati project, Athra' al-Rifa'i, 18 April 2012.

The collective of women's organizations has been supported by the insisting voice of Kuwaiti professor in law and practicing lawyer Badria al-Awadhi who has taught generations of law students in Kuwait and has addressed family law issues and women's rights since the 1980s. A prolific participant in seminars and conferences on women's rights, she points out that, although the religious tide has grown stronger in Kuwait in recent years, Kuwaitis do not support fundamental religious leanings, but tend to prefer middle solutions [*wasatiyya*]. With regards to female civil rights, she adds:

> Kuwaiti men, in general and particularly those who belong to tribal communities [*qabaliyyin*] do not accept the principle of equality [*mabda' al-musawat*]. But, Kuwaiti women have become more educated. They are able to demand their rights. The Kuwaiti family law is not perfect. But judges and the courts attend to women's problems seriously (Personal communication, 22 April 2012).

Al-Awadhi's observation is substantiated by Adel al-Failakawi, judicial advisor at the Court of Cassation, who suggests the establishment of family courts in Kuwait because cases regarding the husband's financial obligations (*nafaqa*) towards ex-wives and children following divorce account for 70 percent of personal status cases (Toumi 2010).

QATAR

Qatar gained independence from British protectorate rule in 1971, and has been undergoing a state-building process with staggering architectural vigor since the late 1990s, paired with the rapid expansion and institutionalization of state bureaucracies. Qatar is a far less politicized society than Kuwait. Political participation exists only at the municipality level, formed in 1998, where female and male citizens compete to the 29-seat Municipal Council (*majlis al-baladi al-markazi*). There are no non-governmental associations whatsoever. Opposition, particularly religiously-based opposition, is harnessed and coopted.[22] The media is regulated: all Qatari Arabic and English newspapers, including the network station al-Jazeera, are owned by the state.

By and large, Qatar is a closed and self-protecting society. The population structure is unique and globally unparalleled. More than any other state in the world, it is skewed in favor of noncitizens. This radically unequal situation adds a fundamental security weight to being a member of the state which bolsters further the political clientelistic contract between citizens and rulers.[23] In general, whatever political opinion that might exist is suppressed amidst an unarticulated understanding among citizens that the skewed demographic relationship between a noncitizen majority and a citizen minority requires unity among citizens. Autocratic rule can thus be seen as a guarantor of stability, and insurance for sustaining citizen rule over a noncitizen majority in the polity. As such, Qatar resembles Kuwait and other small states with large noncitizen populations where the clientelistic contract between rulers and ruled underpins the politicization of the demographic constituency of the polity and bolsters autocratic rule. (Maktabi 1992; Maktabi 2012, 30-61).

---

[21] For an excellent theoretical discussion on the issue of 'women's interests' and collective political activism, see Vickers 2006.

[22] Yousef al-Qaradawi, spiritual leader of the global Muslim Brotherhood, resides in Qatar where he exerts influence over the conservative religious clergy in the polity with the acquiescence of the Emir.

[23] The constitution of the citizenry in Gulf States is particularly skewed with reference to citizens, migrant workers and stateless long-term Bidūn inhabitants who do not belong to any state. Similar citizenry constellations that rest on political and patriarchal clientelistic contracts between rulers and ruled are also found in Jordan and Lebanon. This argument is part of larger theoretical discussion on who and how the citizenry of the state – its *demos* – is constituted in the Middle East (Maktabi 2012).

Institutions that attend to the concerns of women, children and the noncitizen workforce are relief and charity oriented state organizations that implement governmental policies. These associations complement to a large extent the work carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs (al-Hajji 2000).

The Qatari family law, which regulates female civil rights, was codified in 2006. Codification of the family law evolved mainly as a top down process initiated by the ruler. Discussions regarding the codification of family law had been taking place for years before a drafting committee was constituted of only male judges. Criticism against the male dominated committee was raised following the circulation of the draft law. This eventually saw the re-constitution of the committee to include women and the active involvement of members in the governmental Woman's Committee who commented on the draft and suggested changes.[24] The Qatari family law contains fairly conservative interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence compared to other family laws in the Gulf region with regards to maintaining male prerogatives within marriage, divorce, financial custody over children, polygyny, and women's employment (Welchman 2007; 2010). Also, unlike Kuwait where customary law (*'urf*) is confined to uncodified rulings that regulate the family law of the *Shi'a* community (around a third of the Kuwaiti citizenry), the Qatari family law has customary law as a major source of jurisprudence in articles 8, 43, 45 and 47 that regulate marital engagement (*khutba*) and conflict pertaining to gifts and dowry (*mahr*) (Qitan 2012).

A particular trait of the Qatari legal system is its court system. Until their merger in 2003, Qatar had a dual court system: religious (*shari'a*) courts that handled family law and some criminal law matters on the one hand, and civil (*'adli*) courts that adjudicated in civil law on the other (Hamzeh 1994). The merging of the court system can be seen as an attempt by the ruling regime to strengthen and centralize the hold of the state over judicial review. However, the prerogatives of religious clerics in defining and interpreting religious law have been maintained. The Dean of the College of Law at Qatar University, Dr. Hassan Okour, expresses some concern as to difficulties that arise in that judges who rule in family law in Qatari courts can be either religious scholars or civil judges:

> Now our law program covers both *shar'ia* law and civil law which are taught in two separate colleges: One College of Law (*kulliyat al-huquq*) and one College of *Shari'a* (*kulliyat ash-shari'a*). However, there is only one law in Qatar, and that is the Islamic *shari'a* law. Family law (*qanun al-usra*) is placed under the College of *Shari'a* at Qatar University where it is studied from a jurisprudential perspective (*dimn fikr fiqhi*) (Personal communication, 1 May 2012).

In other words, orthodox jurisprudential interpretations of family law have been retained in Qatar, despite the merging of the two court systems because religious clerics, rather than lawyers mainly trained in civil law, have maintained prerogatives in regulating the implementation of the Qatari family law.

Among the largest and most active organizations that monitor human rights issues in Qatar is The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), established in 2002. The informative yearly reports reflect the wide range of issues the organization addresses: the rights of workers, women, children, and the disabled. Symptomatically, it is not the Women's Convention CEDAW enacted in 1979 which is profiled, but the less comprehensive Convention on the political rights of women enacted in 1952. A closer scrutiny of some of the daily work which the legal advisors at the NHRC deal with indicates that their work relates primarily to cases of migrant workers. Qatari citizens constitute, however, a majority of those who present complaints (*shakawa*): 47 percent of all complaints handled by the NHRC in 2010 were presented by Qatari citizens.[25] One reading of the role which the NHCR plays is that it is a *de facto* governmental office that regulates and safeguards labor policies in the absence of labor unions.

To sum up, the degree of political pluralism is considerably higher in Kuwait compared to Qatar. A fairly rich and autonomous pool of civil society organizations, along with an unrestrained press and outspoken intellectuals, strengthen arenas as well as demands regarding the strengthening of women's civil rights. Qatar lacks autonomous social and political institutions that operate without state intrusion. Islamic jurisprudence permeates the tenets of family law in both states and conditions, to a large extent, the civil rights of women. However, the clerical hold on the regulation of family law in Qatar is stronger than in Kuwait, and codified orthodox texts are more prevalent there, partly because religious scholars maintain prerogatives in interpreting family law.

---

[24] The Woman's Committee succeeded in amending an article in the original draft of the Qatari family law which would otherwise not refer to financial circumstances on the part of a wife in the case her husband initiates polygyny (Welchman 2007).

[25] Qataris were behind 379 of the total number of 791 complaints. Transfer of *kafala*-documents and renewal of residency permits constituted near 28 percent, application for a job 16 percent, and requests for housing benefits constituted near 11 percent of complaints. (NHRC 2010, 23 – 24).

POLITICAL PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN FEMALE CITIZENSHIP

In this section, I overview political pressures to enhance rights for women in the two Gulf states. With a codified family law in place already in 1984, Kuwaiti women's groups and female MPs have been able to extract widened and unparalleled civil and individually-based economic rights compared to other Gulf States. These rights should, nevertheless, be seen as part and parcel of a larger accommodating framework made possible by the heavy economic weight of rentierism on Kuwaiti economy. In Qatar, the political leadership maintains strictly conservative interpretations of religious law and addresses women's rights mainly through 'familiarizing' the woman's role as part of the larger extended family. There is a marked inexistence of a consorted effort at the institutional level in perceiving an adult female citizen as having an independent legal entity which separates her legal capacity from that of the family she belongs to. In the following, I point out pressures for enhancing female citizenship in the Kuwaiti parliament, and the evolvement of what I term as 'state familiarism' in Qatar.

KUWAIT: DEBATING FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN PARLIAMENT

The Kuwaiti Emir has been an explicit supporter of female suffrage since 1999. The Sabbah regime clearly views mobilized female citizens and liberal human rights groups as ideological allies that counterbalance the potency of Islamist groups. The enfranchisement initiative came through pressures from above, first in 1999 by the Emir whose decree was deemed unconstitutional, and once again in 2005 through a new initiative by the Prime Minister (Tétreault 2011, 77-79). The parliamentary session in which women received the vote made two amendments to Article 1 of the Election Law 35 from 1962: the word "male" was deleted,[26] and a sentence added that states a woman is obliged to adapt to rules and norms based on the *Shariʿa*, in order to placate conservative MPs.[27] In total 59 votes were cast: 35 were for (21 votes by elected MPs and 14 votes by appointed ministers), and 23 against (all votes by elected MPs). One MP abstained while five MPs were not present.[28] If we include the abstention and those not present, elected MPs who opposed women's enfranchisement numbered 29.[29] The six pro-women votes that secured the franchise reflect thus a fairly conservative societal atmosphere that is, by and large, not attuned to granting Kuwaiti women political rights. Nevertheless, the regime had important allies in the small but historically significant women's movement that had been pressuring for political rights since 1963 (al Mughni 2001; Tétreault 2004). In parliament, the schism between liberals and Islamists who represent opposing poles was present before the entry of the four female MPs, but it gained a significant edge with the presence of four women MPs – Aseel al-Awadhi, Rola Dashti, Salwa al-Jassar and Maʾsouma al-Moubarak – after they were elected to parliament between 2009 – 2011.

Among the first steps the four female MPs took when they entered parliament was to establish a 'Family and Woman Committee' (*lajnat al-usra wal-marʾa*). A review of cases discussed in that committee, and suggestions presented by MP Maʾsouma al-Moubarak between 17 June 2009 and 24 May 2011, indicate a more explicit focus on female issues compared to earlier parliamentary sessions. [30]

---

[26] Law 17 of June 4, 2005 reads "every Kuwaiti […] has the right to vote" (*likull kuwaiti* […] *haqq al-intikhab*); previously the Election law had stated that "every Kuwaiti male […] has the right to vote" (*likull kuwaiti minal-thukur* […] *haqq al-intikhab*), *Official Gazette*, June 5, 2005 (http://www.kna.kw).

[27] The amendment reads "*yashtarit lil-marʾa fil-tarshih wa-l-intikhab al-iltizam bi-l-qawaʾid wa-l-ahkam al-muʿtamida fi-l-shariʿa al-islamiyya,*" *Official Gazette*, June, 5 2005 (http://www.kna.kw).

[28] In Kuwait, ministers also vote in parliament, which explains why 59 votes were cast, and not just those of the 50 elected MPs. All the information on the political affiliation and voting patterns of Kuwaiti MPs, as well as the voting results used here, are drawn from Michael Herb's superb Kuwait Politics Database found at http://www.kuwaitpolitics.org/

[29] The single abstention was by President of the National Assembly and former Finance Minister Jasem al-Khorafi (3rd circle). The five absent MPs included the Salafi leader Ahmad Baqer (5th circle), Basil al-Rashed (10th circle), Abdullah al-Rumi (4th circle), Ali Khaled al-Saʿid (11th circle), and Walid al-Osaimi (14th circle). They are here counted as against granting women political rights because their opposition was articulated in public prior to the voting session. Before the 2008 elections, there existed 25 electoral circles, with 1st – 5th circles lying closest to Kuwait City's center.

[30] I have analyzed the 32 suggestions (*wathaʾiq*) presented by MP al-Moubarak who is currently professor of political science at Kuwait University. Al-Moubarak served as the first ever female minister in 2005 when the Emir appointed her Minister of Planning. She has also been Minister of State for Administrative Development

Until 2005, at which point women got the vote, discussions mainly circled around female suffrage (al-Kandary 2008). Types of female related issues raised by Islamist MPs and MP al-Moubarak in alliance with women MPs:

> 1) A social insurance law (*qanun ta'minat*) suggested in case the male head of household dies, and the eldest son was unable to take care of the mother or daughter who thereby might be able to receive the dead man's salary (parliament voted against);
>
> 2) Article 15 of the Kuwaiti passport law was changed after a suggestion raised in July 2009 enabling adult Kuwaiti women to issue their own passports and freedom to travel independently of male guardians, thereby securing freedom of travel for all Kuwaiti women;
>
> 3) A law of housing security (*qanun al-ri'aya al-sakaniyya*) was suggested in April 2010 and agreed upon later in parliament granting divorced Kuwaiti mothers (but not single Kuwaiti female citizens) once again the right to housing;[31]
>
> 4) A suggestion raised on 15 April 2009, later agreed upon in parliament, gave children of Kuwaiti female citizens married to a noncitizen the right to public education and health services; [32]
>
> 5) A suggestion presented by the four female MPs to establish public nurseries for children aged 1 – 5 in public institutions where more than 25 females were employed was turned down; and
>
> 6) A suggestion put forth by conservatives and Islamists to establish a monthly direct financial transfer to Kuwaiti women who are not employed.[33]

The last two suggestions illustrate differences in policies that; on the one hand target Kuwaiti women as individual citizens and, on the other hand perceive women primarily as mothers and thereby part of a family. The proposition regarding nurseries, for instance, represents a policy orientation which supports the financial position of working Kuwaiti mothers as autonomous subjects. This suggestion was supported by liberal male MPs and included three of four female MPs who sought to endorse widened opportunities for working mothers. By contrast, the proposition suggested by conservative candidates such as Islamists, Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis regarding direct financial transfers to women in the household reflects a policy that supports domesticated womanhood. Islamist politicians are eager to present populist proposition of direct cash handouts which appeals to non-working mothers. The two propositions clearly reflect alternative ideological visions pertaining to the economic citizenship of Kuwaiti women.[34] Importantly, the total of 15 parliamentary proposals that were raised between 2006 and 2011 regarding direct cash transfers to non-working mothers were eventually settled through a decision issued by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs that gave women over 55 years a 550 KD (about 1800 USD) monthly grant. The policy regarding monthly grants for unemployed women was strongly opposed by MPs with liberal views, including the female MPs, who saw it as a 'pull-factor' that did not encourage female citizens to seek work outside the home.[35] The Ministerial decision conditioning that women be 55 years can be read as a way of placating cases related to poverty alleviation among older women, including those

---

and Minister of Health before being elected as MP in 2009.

[31] Kuwaiti women had the right to housing benefits on an independent basis until 1979 when it was pulled back.

[32] The decision was made by the Ministry of Education in order to alleviate the societal position of noncitizen children of Kuwaiti female citizens. According to former MP Dr. Ma'souma al-Moubarak, the decision did not become a law, and did not involve the Ministry of Justice, weakening thereby the decision's long-term power because it remains subject to withdrawal (Personal communication, 21 April 2012).

[33] Examples of law proposals that targeted women mentioned by al-Moubarak, personal communication, 21 April 2012.

[34] The political divide and tension between the state's financial support of working mothers or non-working mothers is not unique to Kuwait or other states in MENA. It is a major political cleavage found within social policies in welfare regimes in Western liberal democracies. There, conservative Christian democratic groups are usually in favor of 'familial policies', i.e. welfare policies which view women as primarily mothers who partake in the reproduction of care as unpaid labor at the domestic level. Familial policies tend to foster and bolster the position of women as homemakers. Familial policies support interdependent relations within the family where the male head of household remains the primary financial guardian. At the other end of the political spectrum, we find support for 'individualistic welfare model' by center and left-wing social democratic or socialist parties who perceive women as autonomous economic individuals. The latter type of policy bolsters the position of a woman as potential participant in the labor market, and ensures wider avenues for financial autonomy (Korpi 2000).

[35] Although this policy can be seen as 'Islamist', similar policies that aim at safeguarding a financial basis for homeworkers are well-established tax-based 'familial policies' in Western welfare states. Conservative Christian democrats in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium for instance, tend to support policies that safeguard the interests of women as homemakers and that husbands are primal financial guardians of the family's financial welfare through employment in the labor market (Korpi 2000; Revillard 2007).

who are forced to retire at the age of 45, avoiding thus the more politicized side-effects of a grant that supports non-working younger women (Maktabi 2016).

QATAR: THE RISE OF 'STATE FAMILIARISM'[36]

The non-existence of political adversaries and lack of avenues for political representation in Qatar is, to a large extent, constrained due to centralized political power at the hands of the Emir who exercises power with few formal and informal restraints. There is, for instance, no constitutional review in the state, and judges who issue unpopular rulings have at times not been able to renew their visas or work contracts (Crystal 2004). Nevertheless, Crystal (2011, 119) points out that "Qatar has never been a repressive state" because rulers have not imposed their will beyond the palace.

With the ascendance of Emir Hamad al-Thani in 1995, his charismatic consort, Sheikha Moza, established and headed the *Supreme Council for Family Affairs* (SCFA, popularly called *majlis al-usra*) in 1998. The 'Woman's Committee' (*lajnat al-mar'a*), which was central in proposing amendments to the draft family law, was at the time of the SCFA's inception a vibrant unit that addressed women's issues (Welchman 2012). However, after 2005, the Woman's Committee was no longer a vehicle in advocating for women's rights in Qatar. Dr. Kaltham al-Ghanem, professor in sociology at Qatar University, pointed out that the Woman's Committee was not dissolved, but it lost its importance as an executive body – a *lajna* – where views and strategies on how to strengthen the civil rights of Qatari women as individuals were discussed. After 2005 it has become a bureaucratic body – an *idara* – which addresses day-to-day administrative matters (Personal communication, 25 April 2012). For instance, discussions and negotiations pertaining to the future position of women *qua* women in Qatari society, and not necessarily as members of extended families, became to a lesser degree articulated after 2005.

One way of understanding the changed nature of the Woman's Committee is to see its eclipse in light of the establishment of The Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (DIIFSD) in 2004, which later on changed its name to Doha International Family Institute (DIFI). The Institute was formed to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family in December 2004.[37] A profiled Qatari on women's rights issues, Noor al-Malki, who worked at the SCFA since its establishment, is now executive director of the DIFI. In April – May 2013, DIFI organized a conference co-sponsored by the Marriage and Family Law Research Project and the International Academy for the Study of Jurisprudence in the Family at Brigham Young University Law School, a well-reputed Mormon affiliated university in the US.[38] DIFI's research profile overlaps with these American well-renowned pro-family oriented research and higher education institutions.

My political reading of the eclipse of the SCFA's Woman's Committee and the establishment of DIFI is that this organizational change reflects a redirection of focus at the state level. Institutional reorganization indicates a shift of official policy from a more pronounced focus on women's issues before 2004 towards an emphasis on family issues after the establishment of the DIFI. Since 2005, Qatar addresses women's rights through a "familiarization policy" which does not approach women as individuals. Political and institutional focus is clearly on family-oriented policies where women are seen as part of the family and not as independent legal subjects. For instance, research on women is undertaken through the prism of "Putting the family first,"[39] and a conference marking the 1995 Beijing UN women's conference in March 2015 is entitled "The family as the agent of gender equality and human rights;" the focus is primarily on women's role in the family.[40] The alliance at the institutional level between DIFI and ideologically conservative research institutions such as Brigham Young University, alongside emphasis on jurisprudence of the family, fits to a large extent with the profile of strict readings in Islamic jurisprudence embedded in the Qatari family law.

---

[36] Building on Korpi (2000) who differentiates between social welfare policies that target a household unit according to whether they support one or two-breadwinners, 'state familiarism' refers to welfare policies that target households where males are perceived and administratively defined through state measures as head of households. Women are thereby defined primarily as caretakers and homemakers.

[37] The preamble of The Doha Declaration, which supports the marking of the UN International Year of the Family, is to reaffirm art. 16 (3) of the UN Declaration of Human Rights which states that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to the widest possible protection and assistance by society and the State". http://www.difi.org.qa/about-difi/doha-declaration.

[38] "The Jurisprudence of Extended Families and Intergenerational Solidarity", [*fiqh al-usra: al-usra al-mumtadda wal-tadamun baynal-ajyal*], Doha, 30 April – 1 May 2012. For a glance at presenters and abstracts, see http://www.law2.byu.edu/page/categories/marriage_family/past_conferences/apr2012/ABC-Doha%20120229.pdf. I attended the conference, conversed with several of the presenters and interviewed some of them later.

[39] As of December 2013, Professor of social anthropology Suad Joseph at the University of California Davis heads a research program which will "offer reviews of key topics such as marriage and family structure; women's issues; demography and fertility; child and family safety; parenting; transnational families; family and work; family and state; family law; war, violence and families" (Osra 2013).

[40] DFI co-sponsored and participated in a side-event or-

Qatar gives substantial support to the field of education and encourages women to work. There is an impression in the media that a Qatari woman has the opportunity to achieve whatever educational or professional targets she may set. However, despite official calls for the strengthening the position of women, social structures, such as gender segregation in public universities and the codification of orthodox interpretations of *shari'a* jurisprudence in the state's family law where normative ideals of women as primarily mothers are embedded, exert an adverse impact on female citizenship.

One way of understanding the inherent dilemmas pertaining to women in Qatar is that the opportunities offered with regards to education and work target mainly young age cohorts, i.e. women in their twenties. It is, however, married women, mothers and divorcees who, to a larger extent than younger women, experience material or legal obstacles in safeguarding their civil rights – particularly within family law. Given that around 80 percent of female citizens are outside the waged labor force, the majority of Qatari women, particularly those over the age of 30, cope in practice with constrained civil rights embedded in fairly conservative interpretations of family law that support and sustain male dominance within the family.

A phenomenon that provides a potential driving force for a change in the position of female citizenship is the "astonishing rate" at which female students have entered the field of law in Qatar in the past five years, according to Dean of College of Law Dr. Hassan Okour; in 2012 there were 575 students enrolled as law students of which 75 percent were female students.[41] Okour explains:

> In Qatar males have a lot of opportunities. They can travel outside and get an education. Most female students, perhaps 95 percent, are not allowed to travel and live outside their homes. They find studying at the College of Law an attractive opportunity. Admission to the College of Law is difficult and very competitive. Many male students do not meet our standards, but they are able to travel to Jordan and Egypt to pursue undergraduate studies. Because they are able to travel, male Qataris go abroad instead of trying to qualify for the entry exams at Qatar University. Female students have no other options than trying to get admitted at Qatar University if they want to study law. We have students who have tried to enroll three and four times. Each time they fail, they learn more of what is required here. When they finally get in, they are very motivated to study. Female students are more motivated because they have fewer opportunities than male students (Personal communication, 1 May 2012).

Seen from the perspective of pressures to strengthen female civil rights in Qatar, the rise of Qatari females in the field of law is potentially promising with regards to addressing more women-friendly interpretations of state laws.

THE POLITICS OF FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN KUWAIT AND QATAR

Kuwait and Qatar support the education of women, and encourage their participation in the labor force. However, these policies are incomplete as long as they are not supported by other kinds of state policies that ensure that women have access to paid leave policies, flexible working hours and day cares. Gender-conservative welfare models found in Germany and the Netherlands implicitly build on the idea of one breadwinner – most often a male (Korpi 2000). Not unlike such welfare models, Kuwait and Qatar's welfare regimes are conservative in the sense that they equip women with certain resources and advantages – access to education and the labor market – but leave it up to the individual woman to cope with traditional views on the women's position within the family and within society at large. Notwithstanding the point that Gulf states are more conservative than Western European states in terms of sexual norms and liberal ideals, the ideological underpinnings of familial policies in both settings are fairly similar: women – implicitly induced or explicitly stated – are primal caretakers within the household.

Mary Ann Tétreault pointed out a decade ago that working women in Kuwait feel the power of parliamentary Islamists through subtle proposals such as modified gender-segregation at public universities and social pressures on women to leave the workforce after 15 years (Tétrault 2003). Parliamentary propositions put forward by female MPs in Kuwait between 2009 and 2011 point to tensions between suggestions that seek to strengthen female

---

ganized by the Family Watch International, http://www.difi.org.qa/media-room/news/the_family_as_the_agent_of_gender_equality_and_human_rights?backArt=724.

[41] In Kuwait, the same phenomenon is observed. For instance, there were 120 female and 60 male students registered at the Faculty of Law at Kuwait University, according to lawyer Sheikha al-Julaibi, personal communication, 15 April 2012. Data for the academic year 2011/2012 indicates that 60 percent of registered law students at Kuwait University are women: out of 2,520 students, 1,520 were female and 990 were male (State of Kuwait 2012).

civil rights within existing laws, and suggestions proposed by Islamists that seek to maintain the position of women as mainly homemakers. The resulting confrontations between the female MPs and Islamists became more overt and complex, particularly during the two-year period while women were present in parliament. Whereas numerous proposals raised by Islamist MPs supported a monthly wage for non-working mothers, these were accompanied by proposals for strengthening female legal capacity, albeit as medium for ensuring residence and welfare rights for the families of Kuwaiti women married to noncitizens, including Bidūn males.

Qatar has succeeded remarkably in supporting female education to the point that young Qatari women constitute a majority of students at Qatar University, and outnumber male Qataris in some disciplines. However, the state has incorporated fairly orthodox interpretations of family law provisions which emphasize males as guardians of females. The eclipse of a focus on women as individuals after 2005 with the establishment of the Doha International Family Institute contributes to state familiarism, buttressing the role of women primarily as mothers and caretakers. Moreover, religious clerics maintain prerogatives in adjudicating family law cases, a step that sustains religious orthodoxy and supports familial policies.

CONCLUSION

Rentierism and clientelism are cornerstones in contemporary Kuwaiti and Qatari political and economic orders. Citizens legitimize the supremacy of hereditary autocratic rule in exchange for welfare benefits, while noncitizens accept different degrees of acquiescence and servitude for residence and work opportunities. Moreover, rentierism and clientelism have a clear gendered dimension: Almost all female citizens in both states work in the public sector, and between sixty to seventy percent of female noncitizens are employed as domestic workers.

The rise of a two-tiered structure for female employment – one for citizens and the other for noncitizens – is part of the rentierist framework in both states. Noncitizen female domestic workers do not significantly impact female citizens' participation in the labor market, however. Rather, the presence of the sizeable domestic workforce strengthens to a certain degree cultural norms that see female citizens' primary responsibilities in the family. It also weakens the potential for pressure on governments to support working mothers and women in general.

The large female domestic workforce in both Kuwait and Qatar can be seen as an outcome of rentierist political economic settings at the individual level. Reliance on domestic workers has come by way of excessive surplus of capital and reflects low labor law standards that pressurize wages to a minimum, rather than as a result of an interest in or a need to support female citizens' participation in the labor market.

The historical trajectory of each state, particularly with reference to political pluralism, sheds light on some main differences with reference to pressures for strengthened female citizenship. In Kuwait, political claims and deliberations are made within a framework where a multifaceted women's movement, an elected parliament, and an assertive Islamic opposition of various ideological shades make their mark on the type of claims concerning the equalization of rights between male and female citizens. The election of four female MPs in Kuwait in 2009 impacted the profiling of issues that target primarily women's economy. Economic rights, such as a Kuwaiti woman's capacity to obtain housing in cases of divorce, and strengthened female civil rights, such as the ability to obtain a passport for a Kuwaiti woman independently of a male guardian, were adopted by parliament following suggestions presented by the female MPs. In Qatar, the eclipse of the Woman's Committee which addressed women's issues since 1998 occurred after the codification of family law in 2006. Efforts at profiling women's issues in the late 1990s have given way to policies that put stronger emphasis on the role of women within the family as reflected in the establishment of the Doha International Family Institute.

Reform in female citizenship and strengthened civil rights within family law in the past decade have not been primarily based in feminist interpretations of religious text. In Kuwait and Qatar emphasis on female citizenship in general, and family law in particular, has come by way of decisions and policies initiated mainly, but not primarily, by the government in the name of the state. Further research on the potential impact of the rise of females in the field of law may reveal interesting outcomes given that women in the Gulf may become enabled to pressurize for more women-friendly interpretations in state laws.

REFERENCES

al-Hajji, Sa'd Ahmad. 2000. *al-jam'iyyat an-nisa'iyya al-ijtima'iyya biduwal majlis al-ta'awun lidawal al-khalij al-'arabi [Women's Associations in the States of the Gulf Co-Operation Council]*. Kuwait.

al-Kandary, Mariam Hasan. 2008. "huquq al-mar'a as-siyasiyya fi majlis al-umma al-kuwaiti: dirasat fi tahlil madmun madabit majlis al-umma min 1971 - 2005 [Women's Political Rights in the Kuwaiti Parliament: Content Analysis of Parliamentary Formal Documents from 1971 - 2005]". *majallat al-'ulum al-ijtima'iyya [Journal of the Social Sciences]* 36 (3): 13 - 48.

al-Mughni, Haya. 1993. *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*. London: Saqi.

———. 1996. Women's organizations in Kuwait. *Middle East Report* 32-35.

———. 2010. "The Rise of Islamic Feminism in Kuwait." *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 128: 167-182.

Awadi, Badria. 2006. *al-huquq al-siyasiyya wal-qanuniyya wal-insaniyya lil-mar'a al-kuwaitiyya [Political, Legal and Human Rights for the Kuwaiti Woman]*. Kuwait.

Beblawi, Hazem, and Giacomo Luciani, eds. 1987. *The Rentier State*. London: Croom Helm.

Breslin, Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin. 2010. *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress amid Resistance*. Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Crystal, Jill. 1995. *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2004. "Qatar." In *Countries at the Crossroads*. New York Freedom House.

———. 2011. "Political Reform in Qatar." In *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States*, edited by Mary Ann Tétreault, Gwenn. Okruhlik, and Andrzej. Kapiszewski. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner.

Doumato, Eleanor Abdella, and Marsha Pripstein Posusney. 2003. "Introduction: The Mixed Blessings of Globalization." In *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society*, edited by Elanor Doumato and Marsha P. Posusney. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner.

Fargues, Philippe. 1995. "Changing Hierarchies of Gender and Generation in the Arab World." In *Family, Gender, and Population in the Middle East: Policies in Context*, edited by Carla M. Obermeyer. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

Hallward-Driemeier, Mary, Tazeen Hasan, and Anca Bogdana Rusu. 2013. "Women's Legal Rights over 50 years: What is the Impact of Reform?." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 6617.

Hamzeh, Nizar. 1994. Qatar: The Duality of the Legal System. *Middle Eastern Studies* 30 (1): 79-90.

Henry, Clement M. and Robert Springborg. 2010. *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Human Development Report. 2015. Work for Human Development. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf.

Human Rights Watch. 2014. World Report, Kuwait. Retrieved from http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/kuwait.

Human Rights Watch. 2015. "Kuwait: New Law a Breakthrough Domestic Workers." *Human Rights Watch*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/30/kuwait-new-law-breakthrough-domestic-workers.

Human Rights Watch. 2010. "Walls at Every Turn: Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers through Kuwait's Sponsorship System." *Human Rights Watch*. October.

International Trade Union Confederation. 2015. "Qatar's Labour Law 'Reforms' a Sham", 28 October, http://www.ituc-csi.org/qatar-s-labour-law-reforms-a-sham?lang=en.

Korpi, Walter. 2000. *Class and Patterns of Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States*. Vol. no. 224, *Working Paper Series*. Walferdange: LIS.

Maktabi, Rania. 1992. "The Gulf Crisis (1990-1991) and the Kuwaiti Regime: Legitimacy and Stability in a Rentier State," Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, M.Phil. thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Oslo.

———. 2012. "The Politicization of the Demos in the Middle East: Citizenship between Membership and Participation in the State," Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, PhD diss., University of Oslo, Oslo.

———. 2013. "Female Citizenship in the Middle East: Comparing Family Law Reform in Morocco, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon." *Middle East Law and Governance* 5 (3): 280-307.

———. 2015. "Reluctant Feminists: Islamist MPs in Kuwaiti Parliamentary Documents after 2005." In *Annual Conference for the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)*. London.

———. 2016. "Female Citizenship and the Franchise in Kuwait after 2005." In *The Crisis of Citizenship in the Arab world: Citizen Rights, Religion, Clientelism and Authoritarianism*, edited by Roel Meijer and Nils. A. Butenschøn: E. J. Brill.

al-Mu'allim [The Teacher]. 2014. *fi thikra al-istiqlal wal-tahrir: kayfa nu'azziz qiyamuni al-wataniyya? [In Commemoration of Independence and Freedom: How Strengthen Our National Values?]*, no. 1694, 22 February.

al-Mujtama' [Society]. 2014. Monthly Magazine Issued by Jam'iyyat al-Islah al-Ijtima'i. March. www. magmj.com.

National Human Rights Committee. 2010. NHRC's Annual Report: Human Rights Status in Qatar. Doha.

Osra, 2013. The Quarterly Newsletter of the Doha International Family Institute, issue 01, November. http://newsletter.difi.org.qa

Qatar Statistics Authority. 2006. Sample Labor Force Survey. http://www.qix.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/QIXPOC/Documents/QIX%20Knowledge%20Base/Publication/Labor%20Force%20Researches/labor%20force%20sample%20survey/Source_QSA/Labour_Force_QSA_Bu_AE_2006.pdf.

Qatar Statistics Authority. 2009. Labor Force Statistics Bulletin. http://www.qix.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/QIXPOC/Documents/QIX%20Knowledge%20Base/Publication/Labor%20Force%20Researches/labor%20force%20sample%20survey/Source_QSA/Labour_Force_Statistics_QSA_Bu_AE_2009.pdf.

Qatar Statistics Authority. General Statistics. 2010 http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/GeneralStatistics.htm.

Qitan, Imad. 2012. "nathra 'amma fi qanun al-usra al-qatari [General Overview of the Qatari Family Law]". Paper presented at the conference In the Jurisprudence of Extended Families and Intergenerational Solidarity [fiqh al-usra: al-usra al-mumtadda wal-tadamun baynal-ajyal]. Doha, Qatar, April 30-May 1.

Revillard, Anne. 2007. "Work/Family Policy: From State Familialism to State Feminism?" In *Gender Mainstreaming and Family Policy in Europe: Perspectives, Researches and Debates*, edited by Isabella Crespi. Macerata: Eduzioni Universita Macerata.

Ross, Michael L. 2012. T*he Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*. Princeton University Press.

Shah, Nasra. 2008. "Recent Labour Immigration Policies in the Oil-rich Gulf: How Effective are they Likely to Be?" In *ILO Asia Regional Programme on Governance of Labour Migration*, Working paper no. 3. Bangkok: International Labour Organization and European Union. January.

———. 2010. *Population of Kuwait: Structure and Dynamics*. University of Kuwait: Academic Publication Council.

Shami, Anwar El. 2010. "Qataris Urged to Cut Reliance on Maids." *Gulf Times*. http://www.gulftimes.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=336649&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16.

State of Kuwait. 2010. *Annual Statistical Abstract* (ASA). Central Statistical Bureau (CSB). Kuwait.

———. 2012. *Annual Statistical Abstract* (ASA). Central Statistical Bureau (CSB). Kuwait. http://www.csb.gov.kw/Socan_Statistic_EN.aspx?ID=18.

Tétreault, Mary Ann. 2004. "Kuwait's Parliament Considers Women's Political Rights, Again." *Middle East Report Online* 2.

———. 2003. "Kuwait: Sex, Violence, and the Politics of Economic Restructuring." In *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society*, edited by Eleanor A. Doumato and Marsha P. Posusney. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

———. 2011. "Bottom-up Democratization in Kuwait." In *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 73-98.

Toumi, Habib. 2010. "Plea for Family Court in Kuwait." *Gulf News*, August 18.

Tilly, Charles, Gabriel Ardant, and Stein Rokkan. 1975. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Vickers, Jill. 2006."The Problem with Interests: Making Political Claims for 'Women'." In *The Politics of Women's Interests: New Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Louise Chappell and Lisa Hill. London: Routledge.

Welchman, Lynn. 2007. *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States: A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

———. 2010. "Bahrain, Qatar, UAE: First Time Family Law Codification in Three Gulf States." In *International Survey of Family Law 2010*.

———.2010. "Gulf Women and the Codification of Muslim Family Law." In *Gulf Women*, edited by Amira Sonbol. Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing.

World Development Indicators, Fertility Rate, Total (Births per Women). 2012.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION:

Athra' al-Rifa'i, Kuwaiti Lawyer and Consultant to the United Nations Development Program and the Women's Cultural and Social Society, 18 April 2012.

Badria al-Awadhi, Practicing Lawyer and Professor in Law at Kuwait International Law School (KILAW), 22 April 2012.

Hassan Okour, Dean of the College of Law at Qatar University, 1 May 2012.

Imad Qitan, Professor of Law, Teaches Family Law at Qatar University, 30 April 2012, Participator at the Conference "The Jurisprudence of Extended Families and Intergenerational Solidarity" [*fiqh al-usra: al-usra al-mumtadda wal-tadamun baynal-ajyal*], Doha, 30 April – 1 May 2012.

Jasim al-Saadoun, Economist, Leader of the Al-Shall Consultancy Company in Kuwait, 19 April 2012.

Kaltham al-Ghanim, Professor of Sociology at Qatar University, 25 April 2012.

Ma'souma al-Moubarak, Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, First-time Appointed Female Minister of Planning (2005), and One of the Four First-time Elected Women to the Kuwaiti Parliament (2009-2011), 21 April 2012.

Shaikha al-Julaibi, Kuwaiti Lawyer and Consultant to the United Nations Development Program and the Women's Cultural and Social Society, 15 April 2012.

Su'ad al-Jarallah, Leader of the Woman's Association at the Jam'iyyat al-Islah al-Ijtima'i in Kuwait (*lajnat al-mar'a fi jam'iyyat al-islah*), 16 March 2015.

Khawla al-'Atiqi, Member of the Executive Committee of Hadas, the Kuwaiti Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, 25 March 2015.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

Dilemmas of Community: Reflections on Transmigrant Working Women in Qatar

Shefali Jha
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
SHEFALI@MAIL.JNU.AC.IN

The six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have, since the 1980s, attracted a large number of workers from South and Southeast Asian nations. In more recent years, increasingly more women from these countries have found paid employment in the Gulf. Whereas expatriate male workers largely join the construction industry in the Gulf countries, expatriate women work in domestic labor, the hospitality industry, beauty parlors and hospitals, and as teachers, office secretaries and accountants. Even though their residence permits have to be renewed every year, many of them spend as many as ten to twenty years working in the Gulf. These expatriate working women thus, both occupy, and construct transnational social fields. How do these expatriate women, workers from outside, set up new networks of their own to survive their location in transnational spaces? This article undertakes a comparative analysis of the experience of Filipina and Indian working women in the Arabian Gulf country of Qatar in terms of their integration in the Qatari economy and their survival strategies. Employment in most of the GCC countries, including Qatar, is governed by the kafala or the sponsorship system, the provisions of which are often used by the local employers to take advantage of the transmigrant workers. Caught between the practices of the states that they come from and the states that they work in, the transmigrant working women depend on local networks that they set up among their co-nationals in order to be able to negotiate the kafala system and to benefit from their experience of transmigration.

--->

Keywords:
transnationalism; kafala; gender; networks; state policies

EXPATRIATES IN THE GCC

One of the many ways in which globalization has impacted societies of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) is the influx of large numbers of transmigrant women workers. The incorporation of Gulf societies into the world economy increased drastically following the discovery of oil. Since the 1970s, much of the revenues generated by the sale of oil and natural gas of the Arab Gulf countries in the world market have been used to employ expatriate workers, both low skilled as well as highly skilled, to facilitate the development of infrastructure and services. In particular, the number of expatriate women has been steadily increasing in recent years.

The constant increase in the import of foreign labor has created a situation of skewed demographics in the smaller GCC countries (Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait) where the number of foreigners exceeds the number of nationals.[1] For instance, in Qatar in 2010, foreigners were 87 percent of the population while the nationals were a mere 13 percent (Fargues 2011). Further, the percentage of foreigners has increased substantially in each of the six Gulf states from the 1970s to the 2000s; in Oman, for example, from nine percent in 1977 to 31 percent in 2008, and in the UAE from 64 percent in 1975 to 82 percent in 2009 (Ibid.). If we look specifically at labor force figures, the proportion of expatriates to nationals is even higher. According to 2010 figures, the share of nationals in total employment in Qatar was only 5.6 percent, having decreased from 14 percent in 2001 (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning 2011). While the majority of foreign workers in the GCC originated in neighboring Arab countries in the 1970s, many countries from south Asia and southeast Asia now provide the bulk of the migrant workers in the Arab Gulf states (Kapiszewski 2006).

The demographic peculiarity of the GCC region is foregrounded when we consider that historically the region had been one of out-migration. The harsh climate did not successfully support the local population. For much of the region's history, people migrated in search of a livelihood elsewhere. For example, in Qatar, the collapse of the pearling economy led to what is described as the 'years of hunger' (1925-1949), and an "emptying of the Qatari population" (Fromherz 2012). Around the 1920s, the population of Qatar was estimated at approximately 27,000; by 1940, it had fallen to a mere 16,000 (Zahlan 1979; Fromherz 2012). The discovery of oil and natural gas, however, has changed the demographic and economic structures and the region now sustains large numbers of expatriate populations.

The labor market in the GCC countries is dominated by expatriate men in comparison to nationals. This domination is to such an extent that there is a disproportion between the number of nationals and foreigners which has led to a similar disproportion between the number of men and women. In all of these countries the number of men is much higher than that of women because of the presence of single expatriate male workers. This has led many experts, such as Foley (2010), to suggest that national women can play an important role in decreasing their countries' dependence on foreign workers and changing the gender imbalance in the labor force. Despite the steady increase in the educational and employment levels of nationals and especially women, the number of expatriate workers is not falling, and increasingly many of these expatriate workers are women. In the case of Qatar, for example, in 2012, there were 27,072 Qatari women employed in the country (growing from 25,463 in 2009) as compared to 140,648 expatriate women (growing from 98,420 in 2009) (Qatar Statistics Authority). Of these employed non-Qatari females, in 2012, 90,361 were employed in the domestic sector. The corresponding figure for 2009 is 48,147, so the domestic sector employment for non-Qatari women has almost doubled in the span of three years.

This study investigates the transnational experiences of expatriate women in Qatar by highlighting their experiences of migration to seek employment, while drawing upon community networks that connect them to their homelands. As an important aspect of international migration, the migration of women has been growing rapidly in recent years.[2] Women are now migrating to other countries not only for reasons of family unification, but for purposes of employment. In Qatar, my analysis shows that expatriate women's experiences are ones that are centered on their national background as opposed to their gender. As a result, I argue that while globalization entails the movement of capital, commodities, ideas and people across national borders, global inequality strengthens, rather than weakens, the importance of national identities in shaping migratory experiences. Investigating the transnational social fields that these women occupy allows us to understand the effect of globalization on migrant women's experiences and evaluate the impact of global forces on their status.

TRANSMIGRANTS IN TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS

In recent years, the transnational aspects of migrant communities have become important features for understanding migratory experiences in general

---

[1] Nationals constitute a narrow majority in the other GCC states of Oman and Saudi Arabia.

[2] In 1960, women already constituted 46.6 percent of total migration flows, and this number grew to 48.8 percent by 2000. In West Asia, by 2000, the 7.6 million female migrants were estimated to constitute 48 percent of all migrants in that region (see Zlotnik 2003).

(Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994). I am using the term 'transmigrant workers' to refer to the expatriate workers in the GCC countries for the following reasons. Since they rarely have the option of becoming permanent residents of the countries in which they work, they maintain links in the countries of which they are citizens, and to which they will or might eventually return. They also sometimes maintain links with co-ethnic diasporas in other countries to which they may try to migrate later (Gardner 2008). On the other hand, although they usually come on short term contracts, and have to get their residence permits renewed every year, many expatriate workers spend up to twenty years or more in the GCC country in which they work. In that sense their lives are 'embedded in transnational social fields' (Ali 2011). They remain citizens of a particular state, but their way of being is that of a transnational or a transmigrant because they live a large part of their lives in another state. As a result, the boundaries of their social lives become reconfigured because of their experiences with crossing national borders, social worlds and cognitive maps on a regular basis. As they move between states to work and live, these transmigrants "come into contact with the regulatory powers and the hegemonic culture of more than one state" since they are "living simultaneously within and beyond the boundaries of a nation state" (Levitt and Schiller 2004,15).

Although officials in the GCC prefer to refer to these workers as contract workers, many scholars (Fargues 2011; Russell 1990; Sabagh 1990) argue that they need to be seen as transmigrants instead. Their official status may be that of 'migrants with temporary residency,' but many groups among these expatriate workers are actually long time residents of the GCC countries. A large section of these expatriate workers working in the Gulf countries without their families spend decades working there, renewing their contracts with their sponsors periodically. Other expatriates, whose salaries reach the threshold that grants them family visas, have children who are born, educated and eventually find jobs in the GCC. There is also evidence of non-national pensioners in these countries. Such evidence leads us to note that in the Gulf countries, "migration that was initially planned as temporary has often turned into permanent settlement" (Fargues 2011, 6) in the sense that expatriate workers have become a permanent feature of these populations.

The transnational aspects of contemporary migration to the Gulf shape the experiences of migrants. At the same time, such transnationalism has come to shape the GCC societies themselves. Although Gulf societies practice a kind of spatial and social exclusion against their expatriate populations (Gardner 2011), the predominance of the expatriates in managing the different institutions of these societies means that the expatriates become in a way part of the social field of these countries. For instance, their role in running educational institutions, medical facilities, and media services integrates them into the societies of the Gulf states (Russell 1990). Still, their integration and experiences in GCC societies are marked by their connections and interests at home. As such, my research looks at ways migrant women in Qatar are integrated simultaneously into both Qatari society, and the places where they come from, and the ways their transnational position may be limiting or empowering.

THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND TRANSMIGRATION

Transnational economic and cultural practices may be accepted by contemporary nation states, but the idea of the nation state continues to hold a powerful legitimacy. In a nation state, the state belongs equally to all its nationals or citizens; as Canovan (1996) has claimed, many theories of redistributive justice take as given the bounded nature of the state within which it is responsible for redistributing resources. To distinguish between those who belong and those who are outsiders on the basis of membership to the nation continues to be legitimate the world over. In a state where the insiders are swamped by foreigners, it is important that the state find ways to signal that it belongs only to its nationals. On the other hand, some of the labor exporting states – to which these foreigners belong – project the idea of de-territorialized nation states. Caught between the two jurisdictions of the 'receiving' and the 'sending' nation states, how do transmigrants manage and further their interests? This study focuses specifically on women who migrate to Qatar for work. Given that many of these women are considered second-class citizens in the countries they come from, it is important to investigate the ways migration and earning income in an oil-rich country may change their position, both at home and in the new setting. My analysis looks into the ways their position may be constrained or improved with their migration and their increased ability to earn income. My inquiry looks at the changes in the position of migrant working women vis-à-vis their families, their communities and their sending and receiving states as important sites for understanding women's status in society and the possibilities for change following migration.

This article attempts to study the intersection of gender and transmigration in the context of Qatar, which like other countries of the Arab Gulf, has become a magnet for expatriate workers, including large numbers of expatriate working women. Increasingly many of these workers are from Asian countries: two large populations of expatriate workers in Qatar are from India and the Philippines. Indians are the largest group of expatriates at 24 percent and Filipinos are the third largest at nine percent, after the Nepalese (Snoj 2013) but many more Filipino women enter Qatar to work than Nepali women. This article includes the findings of a survey of 25 Filipina and 25 Indian women, including some office workers, nurses, shop assistants and domestic workers, working in Doha, Qatar. The analysis highlights their experiences of change in their position vis-à-vis their families and sending and receiving states. I argue that their experiences show that while globalization has led to the creation of new spaces for women, at the same time, it has also resulted in the 'othering' of certain women. Specifically, I highlight that their class and gender position in their home countries contribute to their 'othering' both by their home states and host societies. At the same time, the experience of migration makes available certain resources that at times entail an improvement in their status. After addressing general issues raised in the literature with regards to transmigrant women, I will highlight the key findings from my case study of expatriate working women in Qatar.

THE PROCESS AND EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Much of the literature on women and transnationalism celebrates this process as benefitting all the actors involved. Reports of the United Nations Population Fund and of the United Nations Population Agency (Eisenstein 2009) assert that not only is it the case that the remittances sent back by the female migrants alleviate poverty in their home countries, but it is also true that migration has impacted millions of women and their families positively. Through transmigration, women can become familiar with 'social norms' linked to the idea of rights; this may push gender norms in a progressive direction in their home countries. In the words of another researcher on female migrants:

> Overall, when the balance sheet is drawn, the consensus among women migrants is that all things considered, their sacrifice has been worth it both in terms of what their family has gained out of their labor abroad (including houses built, children or siblings who have completed an education, savings, and capital for small businesses), and for themselves, a wealth of experience gained in overcoming many obstacles and realizing their self-worth (Asis 2005, 44).

On the other hand, there are many critics who see these migrant working women as continuing to be trapped between hierarchical structures; all that they are able to do is to replace one kind of inequality that they are caught in, with another kind of structure in which they still occupy a sharply unequal position. As one scholar puts it, describing the position of migrant women from the Philippines, "[m]igrant Filipina domestic workers experience migration as a process of relocating from one set of gender constraints to another. As such, they are not likely to prefer one location over another but instead maintain a more complex relationship to the spaces they occupy in migration" (Parrenas 2008, 171).

These contradictory positions in the literature are substantiated with arguments, as we just saw, on the changing position of these women vis-à-vis their families and communities. At other times, attention is focused more on state policies – policies both of the state they come from and the state they go to work in – about migrant women (Rodriguez 2010; Ong 2009). Locating transnational working women in a framework that includes the sending and receiving states, family and community, proves useful in understanding the position of these women.

TRANSMIGRANT WORKING WOMEN AND THE SENDING STATE

The state certainly plays an important role in the transnational position of these women. Sending states have begun to play a crucial part in shaping the migratory process. While initially women tended to seek migration as a means for improving the welfare of their families, they are now being actively assisted in their endeavor by their states. Whether single or married, the decision for these women to migrate for work abroad is taken collectively – as a strategy to improve the position of their natal or marital family. Family members help in providing the funds needed to find a job abroad, and family members pitch in by caring for the children left behind. More recently, and in many cases now, along with the support of their families, the migration of women is also being promoted by their states, since several states have now made the export of the labor of their citizens part of their development strategy.

For example, the Filipino migrant working women are the 'new heroes' (*Bagong Bayani* in Tagalog). In 1974, the Philippine government introduced an overseas employment policy as part of its strategy of economic development, and in 1982, it established the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) which helps the citizens of Philippines find jobs abroad. The POEA provides training as well as orientation programs for Filipinos who have found work in other countries. "Thus, the state is a key player in the unprecedented increase of Filipino migrant workers, totaling approximately 8.7 million (as of 2007) with a daily deployment of close to 3,000. An official document indicates that the POEA had set an annual target deployment of 1 million beginning in 2006" (Lindio-McGovern 2012, 25). Compared to when the movement of Filipinos to work outside the country began in the 1970s, the end of the 20th century saw Filipino women beginning to dominate outmigration. In 2002, 85 percent of all professional and technical workers, 63 percent of clerical workers, 48 percent of sales workers, and 90 percent of service workers, from the Philippines finding jobs abroad were women (Asis 2005). In total, in 1992, 50 percent of migrants from the Philippines were women; this number had risen to 69 percent by 2002. Women constitute the majority of migrants in nine out of the ten major destinations of Filipino workers, namely Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Japan, UAE, Taiwan, Singapore, Kuwait, Italy and the UK (Asis 2005). In general, Filipino women work outside their country not only as 'domestic helpers' but also as nurses, secretaries, and office and retail staff.

Indian women, especially from the southern Indian states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, migrate to the Gulf states as well, to work as nurses or as domestic servants. According to one study, in the 1990s, there were 113,000 domestic workers of Indian origin working in Kuwait, 49,000 of which were housemaids. The Indian Emigration Act of 1983 governs the movement of unskilled labor outside India by requiring an emigration clearance for certain categories of workers. When this Emigration Act was enacted in 1983, its purpose was to allow more categories of workers to leave without needing any emigration clearance – the clearance is not required if the Indian is a graduate or if his or her destination is a particular group of countries. Thus the Indian state has also begun to encourage outmigration in order to ease the pressure of unemployment in India and to take advantage of foreign remittances (Raghuram 2005).[3]

What bears studying is how this active support by the state for women's migration impacts the relationship between these women and their state. Women have often been considered to be second class citizens. Historically, few of them worked for a wage and the state not only undervalued the work they did at home, but also did not take sufficient steps to prevent the systemic inequalities that women often faced in their societies. Now that they are paid workers, contributing to the foreign exchange reserves of their state, their new role may provide some leeway in their access to the state. Whether the women also experience such changes in position remains unknown and is worthy of study.

The modern contract between the citizen and the state is supposed to be based on employment by the citizens, with its attendant taxation, in return for treatment as citizens and not as subjects by the state (Pateman 1988; Levi 1988). Women were not seen as party to this contract because they did not have access to employment in the public sphere till after the World War years. As a result, it is important to investigate whether the change in women's position and, specifically, their perception as 'new heroes' who regularly send remittances home, results in valuing them as productive citizens of their nation. Furthermore, since the state still casts itself as the protector of its women citizens, and any dishonor of its women is considered to reflect on the state, how does this play out with respect to the relationship between the state and these migrant women? These migrant women are certainly helping the state – their jobs abroad not only ease the pressure on their state to provide for employment, but the foreign remittances they send also assist the state with its balance of payments. It remains to be seen whether, in return, the state fulfills any of their longstanding demands for equal rights.

THE TRANSMIGRANT WOMAN AND THE FAMILY

A second set of issues revolves around the relationship between the transmigrant woman and her family. Not only is the family an important factor in the initial step in the decision and ability to migrate, but also often the success of the move depends on what happens with the family the migrant leaves behind. The strategy to send a female member of the family to work abroad is only successful with the cooperation of the rest of the family members. The remittances have to be managed well and not wasted. Younger members of the family need to be looked after, and the family should be prevented from breaking up. Since this is a collective effort, the bonds of the family are strengthened, rather than loosened, in spite of the distance. Much of the literature on the subject, for instance Agrawal (2006) and Asis (2005), shows that some of these women feel empowered since they use migration to remove themselves from the subordinate position that they occupy in their own families and communities. They often earn ten times more than they did in their home countries and they see themselves providing financially for their families back home. Their self- confidence increases as they learn to cope with the conditions they face in a new country alone, and increasingly see themselves as breadwinners. They also provide long distance 'care' as well by keeping in constant touch with their families.

In spite of the attempt to be 'present' for their families, part of which is accomplished by the frequent remitting of monies, the fact remains that these migrant working women are abroad. Their absence sometimes leads to the creation in gaps in their social status upon their return if their savings are insufficient for them, which means that their place in the family may become even more precarious than before.

---

[3] Indonesia and Sri Lanka are two other countries which have been following a similar strategy of sending their female citizens to work in other countries, so that remittances can be sent home. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the policies of Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES AND TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

When women migrate to other countries to work, they might leave their 'place' in an established social structure behind, and with that, they abandon any support networks they have. This support could be provided by some family members, perhaps natal family members, or by friends. Transmigrant women try to replace such support networks either by getting some family members over, by setting up 'fictive kinship networks' (Mahdavi 2011), or by becoming members of new groups they find or organize in the countries in which they work. In Qatar, for instance, there are reported to be about 120 Filipino organizations that cater to the Filipino migrant community. Some of these groups arrange fund-raising activities to help Filipino workers in financial trouble. Organizations in the Philippines which cater to the needs and interests of migrant workers, have branches in some of the countries to which Filipinos migrate. The existence of such transnational communities is helpful for migrants. The quality of migrant women workers' experience will depend on the kinds of support networks that are possible for them in their country of work. The large number of foreigners in the Arab Gulf countries provides a strong foundation for the formation of support networks among the different national and ethnic groups.

THE TRANSMIGRANT AND THE RECEIVING STATE

The last set of issues concerns the legal context in which migrants find work in their destination countries. In each of these countries, different kinds of immigration rules govern entry for work and for other purposes. In the countries of the Arabian Gulf, a sponsorship system, or *kafala*, governs the employment of foreigners. (Longva 1993; Vora 2013). A foreign national can only work in these countries if they have a local sponsor who is a citizen and legally responsible for the foreigner's conduct. The migrant worker cannot change jobs without permission from their sponsor and, when sponsorship is withdrawn, the migrant worker must leave the country. Unless the sponsor grants the employee who is leaving a 'No Objection Certificate,' the employee cannot return to Qatar for work before two years. While illegal, the sponsor often keeps the passports of his or her employees and is able to exercise various forms of mental and physical control over them. This puts the migrant workers in the Gulf in a difficult position. In the case of women migrant workers, the condition which makes it possible for them to get jobs with higher salaries also places them in a subordinate position with respect to the sponsor or *kafil*. These women workers often have no recourse but to take the help of family members or their embassy when navigating the sponsorship system. Any attempts to reform the system face opposition not only from groups in the receiving countries, but also from groups which benefit from the movement of labor in the sending countries: "Other men in other places, friends, placement agents and immigration officers 'help' migrant domestic workers to move but this places them in an even more vulnerable position" (Raghuram 2005,167).

Another factor affecting the position of migrant working women in the Gulf states is the kind of jobs that most of them find. Although they are present in many occupations – as nurses, teachers, cashiers, saleswomen, restaurant workers, shop workers, managers, accountants, and office workers – some of them undergo a process of 'deskilling' and 'downgrading' as the jobs they get do not match their educational degrees. This particularly applies to migrant women from Asia, who often only get lower status jobs in these countries. Some Filipino women, for instance, who might have been primary school teachers in the Philippines, find work as beauty salon workers after migrating. The perception of Asian women as maids contributes to the process of deskilling. Since many of these women, especially from south Asia, have not worked outside their homes before, they find work in Gulf countries as maids. According to Raghuram (2005), the majority of expatriate women in the GCC are Asian domestic workers. Many Indian women from Kerala, for example, predominantly work as housemaids in the Middle East. These women have become part of 'global chains of care' (Weir 2005), where they are unable to physically take care of their own families because the only jobs they get involve leaving their families to care for others abroad. The contradictory positions many women domestics find themselves in, where they are unable to care for their own families yet experience an improvement in their status due to their care for other families in the Gulf, is an important aspect of their experiences worthy of deeper investigation.

BACKGROUND TO THE QATARI CASE

Despite the woeful economic climate in the world today, Qatar continues to attract a large number of expatriate workers. According to a 2009 report of the United Nations Population Division, the proportion of international migrants in Qatar's population was 87 percent. The proportion of foreigners is even higher at 94.3 percent if we look at the labor force figures for Qatar (Thimothy and Sasikumar 2012, 10) These foreigners in Qatar (businessmen, employees, workers) come from many different countries, with large contingents from India, the Philippines, and Nepal, from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam, from many countries of North Africa and the Levant, from South Africa as well as from several countries of Europe and North America.

Of these migrants, a large number are women. Several studies, including that of Thimothy and

Sasikumar (2012, 21) have pointed out that between 1990 and 2010, "the stock of international female migrants has been registering a consistent increase, in comparison to the sluggishness noted in the stock of total migrants and male migrants." This study also points out that of the nine million migrant workers from south Asia in the Gulf countries, women made up half of this number at 49.6 percent. It is in this context that we note that Qatar is a destination for purposes of work, for a large number of women from south and southeast Asia.

There are many occupational areas in Qatar where expatriate women work – many are secretaries and office workers, cashiers in hypermarkets, workers in the restaurant or retail business, teachers in expatriate schools and nurses and doctors in local hospitals. However, domestic work remains the largest category of expatriate women workers: in 2012, there were 90,361 foreign female domestic workers in Qatar, this number going up from 46,202 in 2008 (Qatar Statistics Authority). Since domestic work does not fall in the purview of Qatar's labor laws, abuse of domestic workers is repeatedly reported leading many countries, like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India, to place various restrictions on the export of domestic workers. These restrictions are, however, circumvented through visitor visas that can later turn into work visas. After domestic services, the other categories of economic activity in which large numbers of expatriate women in Qatar participate are health, social work and education.

Like other countries in the Arabian Gulf, Qatar also follows policies for the nationalization of the workforce, and encourages Qatari women to participate in the labor force as an integral part of such policies. Qatari women are more highly educated than Qatari men, but they look for jobs primarily in the public sector. Better paying and more secure government jobs are only available for national women, whereas expatriate women are more commonly found in the service sector working as cashiers, waitresses, nurses and maids. Housemaids can only be 'other' women – from India or Indonesia, who do not enjoy the protection of Qatari labor laws; Qatari women have a different position in their state than these transmigrant working women. This is a situation in which different groups are encouraged to think of themselves as separate and different from each other. The result is that when expatriate working women in Qatar fall amiss of Qatari society and Qatari officials, they are forced to fall back on their national community networks.

FINDINGS

Details about the kind of employment found, the difficulties faced, and their other experiences, were illuminated in the findings of my survey of expatriate working women in Qatar. Since, as I have already pointed out, Indians and Filipinos constitute two of the largest groups of expatriates in Qatar, I surveyed women from both these groups. The majority of the Filipina respondents were secretaries, office workers or shop supervisors and assistants; some were also primary school teachers and nurses and there were two drivers and one beauty salon worker in my sample. The majority of the Indian women respondents were domestic workers. Within their borders, India and the Philippines have different employment opportunities for their female workers. For instance, the Philippines lies within the category of countries with a high percentage of women CEOs, whereas India is a country with very few women in high managerial positions. In India, domestic work is the single largest sector employing women in urban areas (Times of India 2013, 6).

Almost all of the Filipina women I surveyed cited higher salaries as the main reason for migrating to Qatar for work. Except in two cases, all of these women had prior work experience in the Philippines, in comparable jobs or in jobs with more responsibility; however, they earned much less and needed more money to be able to meet the financial needs of their families. Some of the respondents cited the absence of taxes along with the higher salaries as a reason for choosing to work in Qatar. With their higher pay they could send more money home, and could also take more gifts for their family members on their visits home. Some of the respondents scoffed at the rhetoric of the successive governments of the Philippines referring to Filipino transmigrant workers as heroines and heroes and said that they often faced harassment at the airport at Manila in trying to take things home. These respondents also mentioned that the Filipino state organized periodic job fairs at which information with respect to jobs available in other countries was made available; this, the respondents felt, was the least that the state agencies could do, considering that there was a dearth of reasonably paid employment in the Philippines. Beyond this, those surveyed did not feel that their sending state helped them in any significant way in their stay abroad. Their sending state certainly benefitted from their expatriate labor – their remittances, as pointed out earlier, eased the balance of payments situation in their home country – but did not do much for them in return.

Most of the respondents were in their thirties, with the average age being about thirty-five years. Fifteen of the respondents in the sample of Filipina working women were married, although for ten women in this group their husbands and children had stayed behind in the Philippines. Most of the women said that they could not afford to bring their families over, although one respondent also said that she preferred that her family stay in the Philippines. Only five of the respondents were 'single' parents with children, which meant that for the majority of my sample their migration was not a result of the breakdown of a marital relationship. In so far as the majority of the married women respondents were concerned, one aspect of their decision to migrate for work was an acceptance of new ways in which responsibilities for taking care of the family are assigned to husbands and wives.

Most of the women reported regularly sending remittances, usually on a monthly basis, back to their home country. Three of them said that they were able to send as much as QR 24,000 per year (USD 6,600) as remittances to their families at home. Others were able to send about QR 10,000 (USD 2,700) or less in a year. They were usually able to visit their families and friends at home once every year, although a few of them could only visit the Philippines once every two years. They also kept in touch with their family on a daily basis through the telephone and the Internet. Although they suffered from the absence of their immediate family, especially their children, these women said that they had to work in Qatar for financial reasons. Some of them were afraid to shorten their stay in Qatar because that would put their family in financial straits. Their objective was to be able to work in Qatar long enough to improve the material condition of the family left behind, and they were prepared to stay away and make do with short periodical visits home.

Most of the Filipina respondents had been working in Qatar for three to six years. Four had been in the country for eight years so far. I wanted to know where they went for help if, during their stay in Qatar, they faced any problems. Three of the Filipina women in my sample said that they went to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) for help in case of trouble.[4] One named the Dugong Pinoy United Filipino Volunteers as a source of assistance. Some said that they took the help of their Christian friends and of the Church in case of difficulty. In 2008, a Catholic Church, Our Lady of the Rosary, was built in Qatar, on land set aside by the Emir from his personal holdings (Foley 2010). According to the media, there are about 120 Filipino organizations in Qatar catering to the large Filipino population. Since Qatar follows extremely strict policies for the acquisition of citizenship by long term migrants, migrant workers know that their stay in Qatar is temporary. However, most of the women in this group already had family members residing in Qatar such as cousins, sisters or uncles. In that sense they were still near their family and often turned to these family members for help during their stay in Qatar.

The transnational social fields that these respondents find themselves embedded in are, to some extent, created by them, as well as being a part of their situation. As they begin their employment in Qatar, these expatriate working women try to find jobs for other family members – an aunt, a husband, or a brother – who can come over from the Philippines. This is an attempt to create a support network for themselves in Qatar that will then make it possible for them to work for longer in the country. The support network of some family and friends helps them not only when they face problems with their sponsor, but also to bear the absence of other family members, such as their children.

Most of the Indian maids I surveyed in Qatar had been in the Gulf state for six to eight years and were earning more there (about five times more) than they would make as maids in India. The Indian respondents had no prior work experience; they had been housewives in India and had no other skills. Most of them said that, initially, the family members who had sent them had claimed they would only be required to work for two years, but that they had continued to work for much longer, and did not see any possibility of leaving their job. They were in Qatar without their families, and usually lived in quarters in their sponsors' houses where they worked as housemaids looking after older parents or young children. They were able to go home only once in three to five years and, when they did that, they usually took with them many 'gifts' or 'hand me downs' from their sponsors as well as electronic items/clothes bought from the market.

Most of the Indian maids I surveyed were in their thirties or early forties. They were all married women but most of them suffered from considerable family disruption. They had found jobs in Qatar because their husbands did not earn enough, if at all, back home in India. The money they sent home was often misused, and they worried constantly about their children going astray. They repeatedly expressed a desire to go back to India and not return to Qatar, but they accepted that they would probably continue to work for several more years.

One of the Indian maids from Andhra Pradesh spoke about working for a high income Indian family in Doha for about five years. After that her employer had lost his job and had to return to India. Even though she complained of missing her family back in India and of constant worry about her children, she did not see this as an opportunity to return to them. She had asked her former employer to help her find another job as a maid with another Indian family and she had even managed a raise of 200 riyals (about USD 50). She told me that although she was apprehensive about how she would find her new place of work, she was not too worried. If it were not to her liking she would leave and return to India, and then try for a job in Kuwait where she had heard that salaries for domestic work were even better. She had extended family in Kuwait, and expected that they would help her find work. So she looked forward to working in a Gulf country for many more years, as long as she could periodically visit her family in India. Her story reflected the experience of many of the women interviewed. Namely, they tried to extend their stay in Qatar as much as possible, and as they familiarized themselves with the visa regulations, they would attempt to find jobs for other family members. Some of them managed to stay for more than a decade in Qatar.

---

[4] The OWWA provides insurance in case of injury or death on the job. In case of the tragic fire at Villagio Mall, for example, there were press reports that if the three Filipina teachers who died in that fire had been registered with the OWWA, their families would have received some insurance as compensation.

In Qatar, these expatriate maids relied on each other for help and assistance. They would visit each other about once a fortnight and they would generally gather at the quarters of a maid whose sponsor was wealthy and, thus, tolerated the maid helping her friends with 'gifts' or with taking time off to visit the doctor. During festivals like Eid, after Ramadan, a well-off sponsor would present his maid as well as her visiting friends, new clothes and boxes of eatables. Sometimes the maids would be given clothes for children that they could take back home. Apart from each other, some of them had natal family, like a brother or sister and nephews living and working in Qatar. In cases of trouble with their sponsors, some of the maids related the possibility of fleeing to the Indian embassy, to wait for the embassy to arrange for the passage for the maid back home to India. With the help of the Embassy, an organization called the Indian Community Benevolent Forum, organizes return tickets and other such assistance for low-income Indian workers.

Expatriate working women in Doha, Qatar, try to recreate support networks in their new country of residence, to assist them when dealing with their sponsors. They especially need help having their exit permits signed by their sponsor when they want to visit their families back home. Sometimes they are able to do so with other family members brought over for work, or with friends who are already working there. Their last resort is usually a welfare organization attached to their embassy or their embassy itself because at that stage the embassy can only help them to return home. These women do earn a higher income in Qatar, but there do not seem to be any organizations in local civil society to which these women turn to for help. As the sponsorship regulations can only be negotiated with the intervention of a family member or an embassy staff, these women often have to fall back on their families/states to deal with their sponsor.

CONCLUSION

When one thinks of women and migration, one can focus on different aspects. Some scholars talk of 'marriage migration,' given that in patrilocal societies women who marry, have for years been leaving their natal homes and migrating to their husbands' houses in new locations. More recently, apart from 'marriage migration,' scholars have begun to study the movement of women within their countries in search of employment. In countries like India, for instance, women participate in internal migration in large numbers. This article, however, looks at the experience of women who migrate to other countries in search of work. The GCC countries are an important destination for this kind of migration – women from south and southeast Asia are increasingly finding employment there not only as nurses, teachers, accountants, cashiers, beauty salon workers, and secretaries but also as domestic maids.

My research shows that expatriate working women both occupy and construct transnational social fields. They are subject to the jurisdictions of different countries at the same time, and they also maintain their connections across countries, with their families and their communities. Some scholars who have examined these women's lives in these transnational social fields paint a dismal picture of their position. It is as if these women are puppets moved around by the forces of neoliberal capitalism: their relatively higher paying jobs are available only under conditions of leaving behind families and other networks. As Fraser (2009, 110) writes, "the dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation." Other commentators, however, have claimed that women do get empowered by this movement for work – by earning a higher salary and thus becoming a 'breadwinner,' and by learning to cope on their own.

In my case study of women domestic workers, accountants, office workers, nurses, beauty salon workers and teachers, both from India and the Philippines, working in Doha, Qatar, I found that these women were interested in prolonging their stay because of the comparatively high salaries that they were able to obtain. Their experience of migrating to another country for work was mediated by the community networks available to them. The improvement in their economic standing, when buttressed by support from networks formed with members of their own community, made them judge their experience of transmigration as worthwhile. Once they were able to establish or become part of new networks of working women, mostly from the same region, they could activate these networks when in trouble. This enabled them to continue working as expatriate women for longer, as well as made their stay more comfortable.

In the GCC countries like Qatar where they worked (except for Bahrain and Oman which have made changes) the legal framework regulating their working conditions remains intertwined with the *kafala* system, and its attendant abuses. The struggle against the sponsorship system is carried out at another level, as the literature shows (Hanieh 2015). The involvement of international human rights organizations and that of migrant workers NGOs, like the Migrant International of the Philippines pressure sending countries to take steps to improve the position of their transmigrant workers in the countries in which they work. For the transmigrant working women, their negotiation with the *kafala* is at another level, taking the help of the friends they have made amongst other workers from their countries, or their 'cousins' or 'brothers' that are working there or their genuine family members who have been brought over to provide assistance. The attempt to establish these new networks is factored in in the literature on transmigrant workers, and it is these familial and community networks of their co-nationals that merit more attention in understanding the transmigrant experience of these working women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the workshop participants, and especially the directors of the workshop, May Al Dabbagh and Dalia Abdelhady, for their valuable comments on this article.

REFERENCES

Agrawal, Anuja. 2006. *Migrant Women and Work*. New Delhi: Sage.

Ali, Syed. 2011. "Going and Coming and Going Again: Second-Generation Migrants in Dubai." *Mobilities* 6 (4): 553-568.

Asis, Maruja M.B. 2005. "Caring for the World: Filipino Domestic Workers Gone Global." In *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Worker*, edited by S. Huang, B.S.A. Yeoh and N.A. Rahman. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International.

Basch, Linda., Nina G. Schiller, and Christina S. Blanc. 1994. *Nations unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-states*. London: Routledge.

Canovan, Margaret. 1996. *Nationhood and Political Theory*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Eisenstein, Hester. 2009. *Feminism Seduced – How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Fargues, Phillipe. 2011. "Immigration without Inclusion: Non-Nationals in Nation-Building in the Gulf States." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 20(3-4): 273-292.

Foley, Sean. 2010. *The Arab Gulf States – Beyond Oil and Islam*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Fraser, Nancy. 2009. "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History." *New Left Review* 56: 97-117.

Fromherz, Allen J. 2012. *Qatar – A Modern History*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Gardner, Andrew. 2008. "Strategic Transnationalism: The Indian Diasporic Elite in Contemporary Bahrain." *City and Society* 20(1): 54-78.

Gardner, Andrew M. 2011. "Gulf migration and the family." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1(1): 3-25.

Hanieh, Adam. 2015. "Migrant Rights in the Gulf: Charting the Way Forward." In *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, edited by A Khalaf. London: Pluto Press.

Kapiszewski, Andrzej. 2006."*Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries.*" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. May 22. Accessed from http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM_Ittmig_ArabP02_Kapiszewski.pdf.

Levi, Margaret. 1988. *Of Rule and Revenue*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Levitt, Peggy, and Nina G. Schiller. 2004. "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Field Perspective on Society." *International Migration Review* 38(145): 595-692. Accessed from http://policydialogue.org/files/events/Levitt_Glick_Schiller_Conceptualizing_Simultaneity.pdf.

Lindio-McGovern, Ligaya. 2012. *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance*. London: Routledge.

Longva, Anh N. 1993. *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*. Longva Boulder, Coloroda: Westview Press.

Mahdavi, Pardis. 2011. *Gridlock: Labor, Migration and Human Trafficking in Dubai*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ong, Aihwa. 2009. "A Bio-Cartography: Maids, Neoslavery, and NGOs." In *Migrations and Mobilities – Citizenship, Borders and Gender*, edited by S. Benhabib and J. Resnik, New York: New York University Press.

Parrenas, Rhacel S. 2008. *The Force of Domesticity – Filipina Migrants and Globalization*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Pateman, Carole. 1998. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning. 2011. *Qatar national development strategy 2011-2016*. Doha: Gulf Publishing and Printing Company.

Qatar Statistics Authority. *Labor Force Tables*. Accessed from www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/index.htm.

Raghuram, Parvati. 2005. "Indian Domestic Workers in the Global Market." In *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, edited by S. Huang, B.S.A. Yeoh, and N.A. Rahman. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International.

Rodriguez, Robyn M. 2010. *Migrants for Export: How the Philippines State Brokers Labor to the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Russell, Sharon S. 1990. "Migration and Political Integration in the Arab world." In *The Arab State*, edited by G. Luciani. 373-393. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Sabagh, Georges. 1990. "Immigrants in the Arab Gulf Countries: 'Sojourners' or 'Settlers'." In *The Arab State*, edited by G. Luciani. 349-372. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Snoj, Jure. “Population of Qatar by Nationality.” *BQ-Magazine.com*. December 18, 2013. Accessed from www.bqdoha.com/2013/12/population-qatar.

Thimothy, Rakkee. and S.K. Sasikumar. 2012. “*Migration of Women Workers from South Asia to the Gulf*.” Noida: V.V. Giri National Labor Institute and New Delhi: U.N. Women South Asia Sub Regional Office.

Times of India. 2013. “Women in Senior Management Around the World.” New Delhi, March 16.

Vora, Neha. 2013. *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Weir, Allison. 2005. “The Global Universal Caregiver: Imagining Women's Liberation in the Third Millenium.” *Constellations* 12: 308-330.

Zahlan, Rosemarie S. 1979. *The Creation of Qatar*. London: Croom Helm.

Zlotnik, Hania. 2003.“The Global Dimensions of Female Migration.” *Online Journal of Migration Policy Institute*. March. Accessed from www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=109.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

Role Models in the Media and Women's Sport Participation in Qatar

Susan Dun
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY IN QATAR
S-DUN@NORTHWESTERN.EDU

Globalization has had both positive and negative effects on women in Qatar. On the positive side, Qatar has joined the global elite sporting scene, most notably through winning the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. This world-class level activity has been accompanied by pressure for Qatar to increase participation of women athletes. Qatar has responded by dedicating considerable resources to women's sports and Qatari women have been prominently featured in recent athletic events. At the same time globalization has wreaked havoc on the health of Qataris, including rampant diabetes and obesity rates that are the highest in the region and among the highest in the world. One strategy to increase women's activity levels Qatari officials have voiced is that the women competing in the Arab Games and the Olympics are serving as role models. These female athletes have been prominently featured in the local media, to encourage women and girls to engage in regular physical activity. To ascertain if these new role models are indeed having an effect on female residents of Qatar, this article utilizes survey methods to investigate what role, if any, that role models play in the attitudes and physical activity/sports participation levels of women and girls in Qatar. The survey findings indicate that while personal role models such as friends and family play an important role in physical activity, public figure role models, such as those cited by Qatari officials, are far less frequently cited as influences and in fact, only one Arab public figure of any kind was mentioned as a role model inspiring physical activity or sport participation. After the analysis of the findings, the article discusses their implications for public policy in Qatar. At this historic point in the development of elite female athletes in Qatar, the research provides some of the first empirical assessment of the effect role models may be having on women and girls in Qatar.

--->

Keywords:
women's sports; women's physical activity; role models; media effects; globalization, Qatar; Arab; media portrays; Olympics; mega-events

THE MENA REGION – GLOBALIZATION, SEDENTERIZATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

A half-century ago, many Arab populations of the MENA region were mostly impoverished, living on agriculture, fishing, and small-scale trade. The discovery and exploitation of vast reserves of oil and gas changed almost every aspect of traditional life, thrusting these societies into the center of the global economy, creating enormous wealth almost overnight, and allowing for the almost complete urbanization of the population in a single generation. The changes were perhaps even starker for the small Bedouin populations of the Gulf, who had lived a fairly insulated lifestyle, making a hardscrabble living from the unforgiving desert and pearl diving. Water and food were never plentiful, and malnutrition was always just over the horizon (Fromherz 2012; Walker and Butler 2010). While the gleaming modern cities that can be found throughout much of the MENA region can be seen as a positive sign in comparison to the widespread poverty of the past, incorporation into the global economy (in the form it has taken) has had clear negative effects in the area of health. While globalization may not be the only cause of the health issues in the region, it certainly is a strong contributor. Specifically, the MENA region has been highly affected by diabetes in recent years. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) has stated that ten percent of the adult population has diabetes, meaning that about 37 million people in the MENA region are living with this chronic disease, and the IDF predicts that this number will jump to 68 million people by the year 2030 (International Diabetes Association 2015).

The leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are several chronic, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that are linked with obesity and diabetes (Bener 2006). For example, in 2009, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE ranked globally in the top ten countries with a prevalence of obesity (Mabry 2010). In 2004, 56.4 percent of Bahraini men and 79 percent of Bahraini women were overweight or obese, while 64 percent of the men and 70 percent of the women were overweight or obese in Saudi Arabia (Khatib 2004). Qatar has become the country in the GCC region most affected by obesity and diabetes. In fact, Qatar has the fourth highest rate of diabetes in the world, and ranks sixth globally for obesity rates (International Association for the Study of Obesity 2012). According to the Qatar National Health Strategy, 71 percent of residents in Qatar are overweight. Among the Qatari population, 75 percent are overweight. Thirty-two percent of Qatar's residents are obese or morbidly obese, as is 40 percent of the native Qatari population. Even obesity rates in children are high, with 28 percent of Qatari children classified as overweight. Obesity and diabetes lead to several chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases and blindness (Qatar Diabetes Association 2012). These chronic diseases accounted for 47 percent of the deaths in Qatar in 2008.

The prevalence of obesity in the GCC countries is connected to several factors directly or indirectly linked to the globalization of the local economy including: changed dietary habits, lack of physical activity, and altered cultural lifestyle (Henry, Lightowler and Al-Hourani 2004). The high consumption of food rich in fats and calories is a major factor in the prevalence of obesity (Musaiger 2004). The consumption of large amounts of food is tied to the cultural lifestyle changes and socioeconomic growth in Qatar. The recent economic growth has brought the Westernization of traditional foods, as well as the introduction of readily available fast foods known to be high in fat, cholesterol, and sodium (Ibid.). The serving of large quantities of unhealthy foods at frequent gatherings with family members and friends has become a cultural tradition (Serour, Alqhenaie, Al-Saqabi, Mustafa and Ben-Nakhi 2007), and contributes to the alarming rates of NCDs in Qatar.

It is well known that physical activity is crucial to fighting obesity and diabetes (Hu 2011). Maintaining regular physical activity has several health benefits. Short-term benefits include: a healthier heart, more energy, better ability to deal with stress, and improved sleeping patterns (Pace 2000). The long-term benefits include a reduced risk of early death, heart disease, developing diabetes and/or high blood pressure, and becoming obese (Pace 2000). However, many of the same factors that have contributed to rising rates of diabetes and obesity have contributed to relatively low rates of participation in physical activity on the part of the Qatari population, with over 50 percent of the native population not engaging in any regular physical activity (Henry, Lightowler and Al-Hourani 2004; Musaiger 2007). Clearly, the amount of physical activity required for survival and daily life has decreased radically in the last 50-100 years in Qatar. A number of factors have contributed to this change. The migration to the capital city, Doha, of virtually all of the nomadic, Bedouin, desert dwellers cannot be overlooked as the beginning of the change. City life, with motorized transport, electrical appliances, television, video games, professional office jobs - with their known sedentary style, and the easy availability of housemaids have all resulted in a much less active lifestyle (Musaiger 2007). There are also a number of other factors that contribute to low physical activity levels in Qatar including the hot summer weather, which makes outdoor physical activity problematic for a good portion of the year, time constraints, and having musculoskeletal diseases and/or asthma that limit people's ability to be physically active (Serour, Alqhenaie, Al-Saqabi, Mustafa and Ben-Nakhi 2007).

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS

Along with the significant negative effects of globalization in Qatar have come positive effects. Of relevance here are the perhaps unintended consequences of Qatar's global aspirations in sports. After successfully hosting the Asian Games in 2006, the tiny nation burst onto the international sports scene. The emirate further cemented its position in the world of international sport with its competitive if ultimately unsuccessful bid for the 2016 Olympics (reaching the final five) and then with its successful bid to win the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. At the same time, Qatar's global aspirations in the world of sports have been accompanied by pressure for the country to increase participation of women on its international sports teams.

Qatar responded by investing heavily in the development of elite female Qatari athletes and appears to be making some significant headway. At a recent Arab Games hosted by Qatar, of the 785 female athletes competing 13 percent were Qatari women (both are record numbers) (Walden 2012). Even with this and similar investments, it did not escape notice that until the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, Qatar was one of only three countries in the world that had never sent a female athlete to the Olympics. The International Olympic Committee strongly encouraged the inclusion of women on Qatar's 2012 team (Times of India 2011). In response, Qatar sent four female athletes to the 2012 Olympics in London; all four went on "wild card" bids supplied by the International Olympics Committee, as they did not qualify for their events. For people living outside of Qatar the participation of 100 women in a sporting event or sending female athletes to the Olympics might seem trivial but, in the context of the fairly conservative society of Qatar, it leads to a whole series of questions about what women can and should be able/allowed to do in society.

One strategy employed by Qatari officials to increase women's activity levels is describing those women competing in the Arab Games and the Olympics as role models and prominently featuring them in the local media, to encourage women and girls to engage in regular physical activity. One particularly prominent example occurred during the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, where Qatar's flag bearer was a female athlete, Bahiya al-Hamad (ESPN Sports 2012). To ascertain if these new role models are indeed having an effect on female residents of Qatar, survey methods were used to investigate what role, if any, role models play in the attitudes, physical activity and sports participation levels of women and girls in Qatar. Before discussing the findings from the survey and their implications for understanding the potential of role models to encourage female athletic activity in Qatar, an understanding of some of the major concerns associated with Muslim women and participation in sports will be helpful to contextualize the respondents' remarks.

MUSLIM WOMEN, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT PARTICIPATION

Muslim women in Qatar are not unique in their low participation rates in physical activity and sport. Over the past 25 years, a number of studies have focused on the participation of Muslim women in physical activity and sports, partially in response to the lower participation rate of Muslim females in international competitions (Sfeir 1985) and in sports in general (Sports Scotland 2008). Almost all of these studies use qualitative methods, typically involving interviewing a small number of Muslim women about their experiences (see for examples AbdulRazak, Omar-Fauzee and Abd-Latif 2010; Dagkas and Benn 2006), which makes it difficult to use them to draw general conclusions. However, the rich insight these studies provide into the experience of Muslim women with physical activity is helpful in understanding the sorts of issues Muslim women may experience, and has strongly informed the development of the survey items, explained in the method section below. These studies tend to focus on constraints Muslim women may experience, including wearing the hijab and the supposed conservatism of Muslim families' vis-á-vis women and girls (see Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan and Geurin 2003).

There is a strong agreement among Muslim women from a variety of backgrounds that Islam encourages women to be physically active (Jiwani and Rail 2010; Walseth 2006; Walthseth and Fasting 2003). For example, Walseth and Fasting (2003) found that a relatively diverse sample of Egyptian women agreed that Islam promotes physical activity for women. An oft-cited example is that the Prophet Mohammed ran races with his wife, both losing to her and beating her. Young Shia Muslim Canadian women in Jiwani and Rail (2010) indicated that in their view physical activity was a means to becoming a better Muslim. In the studies reviewed here, no Muslim women were reported to indicate that their religion restricted physical activity for women per se but rather believed that Islam requires Muslims to take care of themselves in a variety of ways, including keeping one's body healthy via physical activity.

There are, however, other aspects of Islam as it is currently practiced in many parts of the world, which may constrain the ways in which women can be physically active. These include: wearing the hijab, the requirement for modest dress, and the need to avoid being the recipient of a male gaze, all of which can result in a need for sex-segregated exercise spaces if physical activity is to be engaged in. In Muslim communities there is also sometimes a fear of de-feminization, that is, a concern that sporting females will become too strong and lose their femininity (AbdulRazak, Omar-Fauzee and Abd-latif 2010). As is true of most religions, however, there is considerable diversity in interpretations and the practice of Islam, resulting in a variety of experiences for Muslim women with regard to sport and physical activity. Additionally, Muslim women live contextualized lives, in which their families can play a major role. Thus the families' views of the proper roles and behaviors for girls and women must also be taken into account.

Perhaps because it is the most visible aspect of being a Muslim female, as well as a factor that can obviously affect the experience of physical activity, the wearing of the hijab in relation to physical activity is a main focal point in many studies. It is typically at least mentioned, even in papers not specifically focused on it. In one study of young Muslim women living in diaspora in Canada, they indicated that wearing the hijab was a personal choice, one that is between a woman and God and can be a "crucial part of their identity" (Jiwani and Rail 2010, 262). However, there is no unanimity in the respondents' experiences of and feelings about the hijab in relation to physical activity. To begin with, not all Muslim women wear the hijab. Additionally, some of the respondents indicated that the hijab enabled them to be physically active because of the protection it affords. Many indicated that the hijab and physical activity are quite compatible. Others indicated that it can be physically uncomfortable because they get hot or the hijab can hinder their movement. Finally, some indicated that they felt conspicuous wearing the hijab around non-Muslims. To be sure, despite the variation in beliefs and practices regarding the hijab, it is a critical aspect of many Muslim women's identities and, thus, relevant to the experience of physical activity. The need to dress modestly and/or not exercise when in places where males can view them is commonly mentioned by Muslim females as a barrier to sports participation (Koca, Henderson, Asci and Bulgu 2009). How much of the body should be covered and in what manner (e.g. loose clothing) is not uniformly agreed upon.

The need to exercise where males cannot view them is often managed by the provision of sex-segregated exercise facilities. Many Muslim females (and males too) believe that they must not act in a way that could lead males to gaze at them with any sort of sexual thoughts (Jiwani and Rail 2010). The men in their lives may also share such beliefs. For example, Turkish women reported that jealous husbands worried about males watching them exercise (Koca, Henderson, Asci and Bulgu 2009). If women behave in a way that elicits such a gaze, they, rather than the male, are culpable. Thus, Muslim women who understand their faith in this way are understandably quite uncomfortable exercising where males (typically males not from their family) can see them. In many Islamic countries it is the norm that sex-segregated facilities are provided - not only for exercise but also waiting areas for doctors, governmental offices, hair or beauty salons, immigration lines at airports, and so forth. In the absence of such facilities, and similar to the situation with modest clothing, Muslim women living in Diaspora may paradoxically experience less freedom than they do in their home countries (Nakamura 2002).[1]

As is the case in many cultures, the family often plays an important role in the lives of Muslim girls and women (AbdulRazak, Omar-Fauzee and Abd-latif 2010). Some Muslim females report that their families' desires supersede their own, e.g. if they wish to be physically active but their families believe it is not appropriate, then the family may disallow their participation (Kay 2006). Muslim families are not without variation, however. Some Muslim women and girls report that their families strongly encourage their participation in physical activity and sports (Kay 2006).

The picture that emerges from the literature on Muslim women and physical activity is that while physical activity is encouraged and perhaps even required by Islam, many aspects of Muslim women's lives may constrain the ways in which they can be active including: the need for modest dress, avoiding the male gaze, and the absence of sex-segregated facilities in some places. I now turn to the question of women in Qatar who are situated in a rapidly developing country caught in both positive and negative aspects of globalization.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR WOMEN IN QATAR

Qatar was, until very recently, a primarily Bedouin country. Physical activity for the sake of exercise did not exist when the nomadic Qataris worked hard to scratch out a living from the harsh, inhospitable desert. The modernization that Qatar has recently and rapidly experienced has brought with it the dietary and disease problems referenced above and increasing contact with the global community and its values – of particular relevance here are values regarding women. Women in traditional Qatari society are above all to be protected. In this sense, protected means to protect their virtue from men, who can taint a woman simply by their gaze. As one example, it is quite a recent development for Qatari women's faces to be displayed publically in the media of any kind, from paid advertisements to wedding announcements. In this area the path breaker was Sheikha Mozah, wife of the former Emir of Qatar, who has been a very visible advocate for many changes in Qatari society. She became the first Qatari woman whose face was depicted in the media when she, along with her husband, was interviewed on the American news show 60 Minutes in 2003. Now it has become commonplace to see Qatari women's faces in the press and on TV but there are still families who will not allow this, and will even go so far as to require the removal of their daughters' photos that may have been published in brochures.

---

[1] Many Muslim girls in Diaspora experience considerable conflict between their desire to wear modest clothing and the clothing requirements of physical education classes and sports teams. In some cases, physical education teachers and coaches were willing to ignore the rules to enable the girls to participate. In other cases, they were not, resulting in significant conflict for the girls. Some resolved this conflict by not participating in sports, others ignored the teachers and rules and some conformed or adopted a variety of strategies such as pulling on clothing to attempt to cover themselves. Nakamura notes the paradoxical situation: Westerners may feel that Muslim girls and women living in Diaspora are freer than they would be in their "oppressive" home countries, however, inflexibility regarding clothing rules and a lack of acceptance of the requirements of the girls' practice of Islam may result in them actually experiencing less freedom.

Unlike women in Saudi Arabia, women in Qatar are not required to wear robes or cover their hair with a hijab, are allowed to drive, and gained suffrage the same time as Qatari men. They participate in sports in schools and elsewhere, a right their Saudi counterparts still lack (Saudi Women Push 2012). At the same time, Muslim women dress modestly and most non-Muslim Qatari female residents do so as well. The majority of publically available services from government offices to banks have separate waiting areas for men and women. Esthetic services such as hair salons, massage companies, nail salons and the like are exclusively sex segregated, almost always in separate buildings. Gymnasiums are similarly almost completely segregated. The main public university in the country, Qatar University, has separate men's and women's sides to the campus. The government supported Qatar K-12 schools are similarly completely segregated. Girls do participate in physical education classes in these schools, but away from the male gaze. Women are kept separate from the potential attention of men in many circumstances, whether at the gymnasium or the doctor's office.

As Qatar has rapidly modernized, an enormous influx of foreign nationals has been required to serve in a variety of jobs from construction to the highest professional levels, although not typically in government jobs. Most of these foreign nationals are men; as a result, only 25 percent of the population in Qatar is female (Qatar Statistics Authority 2012).[2] The idea of a woman exercising or participating in sport in a public space, where men can see her, is still anathema to many segments of the Qatari population despite the recent changes in the country. Women do participate in sports in Qatar, and they do exercise outside, but typically they are foreign women; if they are Qatari, they tend to wear the abaya, a long black robe, when exercising. Typically for such women this would involve walking along the Corniche or at a park, usually in the company of a male. Muslim women from other countries often also wear the abaya when exercising outside.

While it is clear that globalization is having beneficial effects on the participation rates of Qatari women in sports at the elite level, and a negative effect on the health of Qataris, what is not known is how to increase participation levels of women and girls generally in Qatar. To this point, the Qatari government has taken a two-pronged approach to the problem. On the one hand, they have taken an approach analogous to the one used at the elite level, what can be called a "build it and they will come" strategy. As a case in point, Qatar recently installed exercise equipment next to the walking/running path located along the Corniche, one of the most used outdoors exercise areas in the country. It is not at all clear, however, that merely providing opportunities is sufficient in a culture where women have historically and still do not enjoy the same freedoms of movement that men have. Commenting on the public location, one woman noted "I do feel that most of the women, find it difficult to work out on these equipment (sic) for socio-cultural reasons. Many feel the lack of privacy - doing a bench squat is not like brisk walking in the public" (Huda 2011).

Simultaneously, and perhaps in order to overcome such prejudices, Qatari sports officials have attempted to overtly link elite participation and more general sports activity for women. Thus, the Head of the Arab Games and secretary general of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Sheikh Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, was recently quoted as saying: "It is my hope that the Arab Games will provide inspiration to the next generation of Qatari athletes to embark on a journey to one day become Olympic champions in front of their home fans in the years ahead. (…) Furthermore, a higher involvement of women in sport means more female role models whom our children can look up to. This can only be good for the future of Qatar" (Walden 2012). This and similar quotes from high level Qatari sports officials were commonplace in the local and international media during the time of the Arab Games in December of 2011 and, also, during the more recent announcement in the spring of 2012: that Qatar would be fielding female athletes for the first time in the London 2012 Summer Olympics. Noor Al-Mannai, CEO of the Qatar Olympic Bid Committee was quoted as saying: "We are happy to have two wildcards and we are looking for more.[3] They will be role models for other girls, here in Qatar and across the region. We genuinely want to build a movement here. It's time" (Doherty 2012). Thus it would appear that at the elite level of women's sport participation, the forces of globalization are having noticeable and positive effects in Qatar.

---

[2] Informal conversations with Qatari informants have revealed the significant cultural conflict experienced when the virtue of Qatari women is perceived to be under threat from the burgeoning population of foreign men whose presence is required for Qatar to develop in accordance with its national goals.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The question then is whether the recent increased participation of women in Qatar at the elite level has had any noticeable trickle-down effect on women and girls in Qatar? Media coverage of the Qatari female athletes in the Arab Games in December of 2011 was unprecedented in Qatar. Daily reports of their successes were featured in most newspapers in the country during the games. Similarly, media reports of the Qatari female Olympic athletes have been widespread. In and of itself, the participation of these women in sporting events is unparalleled in Qatar. To determine whether a trickle-down effect has indeed started, I used survey research methods to ascertain the role, if any, role models play in the attitudes and physical activity and sports participation levels of women and girls in Qatar. The survey examined their participation rates in physical activity; what, if any, sports role models they have; whether or not they believe role models serve an important purpose in their own and other's participation in sports; and their evaluation of the depiction of sporting females in the Arab media. At this historic point in the development of elite female athletes in Qatar, this research provides one of the first empirical assessments of the effect role models may be having on women and girls in Qatar.

METHOD

The data reported here are part of a larger project investigating the experiences and attitudes of female residents of Qatar in regards to sports and physical activity utilizing survey methods. The survey was developed based on the findings from the literature on Muslim women's experience of sport and physical activity as well as the physical activity literature with particular attention paid to barriers to regular physical activity participation women face.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

The survey was self-administered and online. The online nature of the survey may have resulted in a bias toward more Internet savvy women being in the sample. The Survey Monkey link was distributed via email distribution in Education City, Qatar and Doha, Qatar, and via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Because of the distribution method, it is impossible to calculate a response rate. Of the 561 people who clicked on the link, 233 finished the survey for a 41 percent completion rate.

SAMPLE

Although convenience sampling is not the preferred sampling method for a variety of well-known methodological reasons including a lack of representativeness, in this case it has resulted in a quite diverse sample on a number of standard demographic measurements. The mean age of the respondents is 28 (SD = 8.9) with a range of 17-60. They are highly educated, with 91 percent having attending at least some university, 38 percent were current undergraduates, 30 percent held Bachelor's degrees, and 20 percent had at least some post graduate education, although 3.4 percent had not yet completed their studies. The sample is extremely diverse in terms of nationality, with passport holders from 46 countries. Only eight countries had more than five members of the sample; they are the United States, n=37, Qatar, n=34, Pakistan, n=19, India, n=15, Canada, n=10, Egypt, n=10, Jordan, n = 9, and the United Kingdom, n = 6. Although nationality is highly diverse, in terms of ethnic identity there is more homogeneity as 47 percent identified themselves as from the MENA region, 25 percent as European/American, 20 percent as South Asian, and eight percent as East Asian. Most of women in the sample, 64 percent, were not married, while 33.4 percent were married and 2.6 percent were divorced. The most common religion is Islam; 59 percent of the sample identified themselves as Muslim, 28 percent identified themselves as Christian, 3.4 percent as Hindu and 9.4 percent as "other.[4]"

---

[3] After this statement Qatar was granted two more wildcards and sent four female athletes to the Games.

[4] The relatively low number of Qatari respondents could be taken as problematic for a study of the effect of Qatari female athletes in Qatar. However, the present research is concerned with the effects of these potential role models on female residents of Qatar, regardless of nationality. The health issues facing the people of Qatar are not exclusively in the Qatari domain but rather are experienced by non-Qatari residents of Qatar as well. Also, Qatari sports officials have indicated that they hope the Qatari female Olympians will be role models for both Qatari and non-Qatari girls. These statements can be better understood when one realizes that Qatar has a long-standing practice of naturalizing athletes for its national teams, as the native population of 250,000 is quite small and native athletic talent has been slow to develop. For example, the female Qatari Olympic swimmer, Nada Arkaji,'s dad is such a naturalized athlete who plays for the national football team, which leant Nada nationality as well. Finally, the number of Qatari women in the sample is proportional to the number of Qataris to non-Qataris in Qatar, making this a typical sample.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present research is centrally concerned with women's and girls' sports role models at this historic point in the development of elite women's sports in Qatar. The survey investigated what role models women have, what influence they have had and what the women think about the portrayal of sporting women in the Arab media. The findings indicate that sports and physical activity role models are important influences on many of the women in the sample, but role models tend to be people who are personal acquaintances, rather than public figures or professional athletes. When asked if there were people in their lives who had influenced them to be active or play sports and asked to check all that apply, the women indicated a wide variety of people had been influential, including, in order of most often selected: friends, male family members, female family members, coaches and public figures, and others as seen in Table One. Roughly three quarters of the role models selected were personal acquaintances while about 25 percent were some sort of public figure, including professional athletes, celebrities and fictional characters; that is, personal acquaintances were 3 times more likely to be a role model than were public figures. Only 31 women, 12.8 percent of the sample, indicated they had no sports or physical activity role models.

Further evidence for the prominence of personal rather than public role models comes from two open ended questions that asked the respondents to specify in turn: who are their most influential personal acquaintance, and then their most influential public figure role models and how those persons had influenced them. Of the 233 respondents, 166 chose to answer the first of these optional open-ended questions, concerning personal role models. Of the 166, 14 indicated they had no role models and eight indicated a public figure rather than a personal one, although only four specific celebrities were named. The personal role models included spouses, parents, friends, other family members such as siblings and cousins, coaches, and teachers. For the corollary question regarding public figure role models, significantly fewer respondents answered (n = 92), and of those, a large majority (n = 72), indicated they did not have a public figure as a role model and three indicated a personal role model. Sixteen respondents indicated in the open-ended items that they had some sort of celebrity role model; of these five did not mention a specific role model but rather mentioned celebrities generally. Thus, only eleven respondents indicated a specific public figure as a role model, even though this question was preceded by a yes/no question asking if the respondents had a public figure who was a role model and 48 answered in the affirmative. The public figure role models included Michael Jordan, a contestant from the Biggest Loser, and famous male and female tennis players. Notably, only one Arab athlete was mentioned, though not named: the female Qatari runner who won a race wearing a cover-up, which is an athletic version of the hijab and body covering. Given that these data were collected immediately after the Arab Games, during which news stories of Qatari female athletes were prominently displayed in the local media and during the announcements of the first ever Qatari female Olympic athletes, the fact that only one of them was mentioned is sobering. The almost complete lack of any Arab role models for physical activity is striking as well.

These findings also raise the question of the role of global media. Although it is beyond the main focus of the paper, it is nonetheless intriguing to speculate on the role of global media, in this case apparently Western media, in the region. The media landscape in Qatar is quite diverse, with 40 print publications

Table One: Sports and Physical Activity Role Models by Category

Role Model	Response Percent	Response Count
Friend	51.0%	124
Male family member (father, uncle, brother, etc.)	38.0%	92
Female family member (mother, aunt, sister etc.)	37.0%	90
Coach	26.8%	65
Public figure or celebrity (political leader, TV/music/movie star, etc.)	24.9%	58
School figure (teacher, professor, school counselor etc.)	16.9%	41
Female professional athlete	12.8%	31
None	12.8%	31
Fictional character (from a TV show, movie, video game, book, etc.)	5.5%	23
Male professional athlete	7.4%	18
Virtual friend (someone you mostly have contact with online)	7.4%	18
Other (please specify)	5.8%	14
Religious or civic leader	3.7%	9
Mentor (professional or other)	2.9%	7

Table Two: Mean Ratings for Availability and Value of Female Sports Role Models

Items	Mean	SD
There should be more coverage of female sports events in the Arab media	3.81	0.90
If there were more coverage of female sports in the Arab media, more women would participate in sports	3.78	0.92
There is a shortage of good female role models who encourage females to be physically active	3.71	0.88
To be physically active, girls and women need good female role models	3.59	1.03
Physically active females are portrayed positively in the Arab media	3.02	0.99
In the Arab media, physical activity for women is encouraged	2.65	1.42

including: 11 newspapers in English, Arabic and Malyalam, 12 TV channels (nine of which are in Arabic), six radio stations and multiple online news sources (Dun and Al Islam 2011). A wide variety of content is available across these platforms, including local, regional and international and in a variety of languages. Perhaps the preponderance of Western role models cited by the women in the study is indicative of the strong penetration and/or effects of Western media in the region. This is an interesting question that future research could pursue.

It is particularly noteworthy that such a high percentage of respondents (72 out of 92) felt compelled to indicate they did not have a public figure as a role model in the open-ended question, whereas only a very small number (n = 14) chose to indicate a corresponding lack with regard to personal role models. While it is always difficult to speculate about a negative result, an initial guess is that, by emphasizing the lack of public models, respondents wanted to call our attention to a fact about the reality of life in Qatar that they felt to be of particular concern. Supporting this interpretation are the answers to items regarding the availability and value of role models for physical activity in the Arab world. The pattern of answers to these items indicate that the respondents believe that there are not enough female sports role models in the Arab media and more of such role models would be positive influences on women's physical activity levels.

Table Two presents the mean values for responses regarding the availability and value of role models. The mean values for these items are in Table Two. The highest mean values were for two items regarding the amount of coverage of female sports in the Arab media. The respondents agreed that "if there were more coverage of female sports in the Arab media, more women would participate in sports" and that "there should be more coverage of female sports events in the Arab media." They also agreed that "there is a shortage of good female role models who encourage females to be physically active" and that "to be physically active, girls and women need good female role models." There was less agreement, with means close to the neutral point, on two items about how active women are portrayed in the Arab media: "physically active females are portrayed positively in the Arab media" and "in the Arab media, physical activity for women is encouraged." Taken together these data indicate that the respondents not only have few public figures as role models but also believe more should be done in the Arab media to promote women's sporting events and women's sports role models to encourage women to be more physically active.

While the respondents do not have many public figures as role models, they have been inspired in a variety of ways by their personal role models, including both active and passive modeling. One type of active role modeling occurred when the role model specifically verbally encouraged the respondent to be active. As one respondent noted, "He [a coach] always had the most positive words and was very encouraging of living an active lifestyle, even though I really stunk at the sport!" Another type of active role modeling occurred when the role model engaged in behavior that stimulated the respondent to engage in physical activity, typically this involved co-attendance at some sort of exercise activity. Examples included a husband who accompanies his wife to sporting events; the example she cited was a diving course about which she said "I would never have done that on my own;" and friends who accompanied the respondents to the gymnasium or other exercise activities. Active strategies also included the ways respondents' parent(s) had brought them up. For example, one respondent cited both her mother and father as her physical activity role models and indicated they influenced her "by raising me to always be physically active from a young age and to see it as a way to have fun, not another chore." Sometimes active modeling was simply described as support, without the respondent indicating the means by which support was experienced.

On the other hand, passive modeling typically occurred when the respondent was inspired by the example set by the role model. Often this was an example set by friends or family members who lead active lives; as one respondent noted "several of my friends are committed to wellness-they have set a fine example for me," and another noted "they lead by example, by living healthy, being active, and staying happy." Sometimes the role model was inspirational by successfully managing some sort of constraint, especially noted was managing hectic schedules and children while staying active. Mothers were often cited as this type of role model: "my mother by her persistent desire to stay fit despite the lack of time." Passive role models often were inspirational via the motivating type of activity they engaged in. Examples here included marathon runners, an Olympic swimmer, and other successful competitive athletes, such as the captain of a basketball team. Finally, the physical abilities and/or appearance of passive role models was sometimes inspirational: such as a friend who lost a large amount of weight or a role model who is in particularly good physical shape or "looks amazing" or "had the body that [I] wanted to have."

Although personal role models were influential in a variety of ways, as noted already, few public figure role models were specifically mentioned in the open-ended questions. Of the 16 responses to this question, the most commonly mentioned type of role modeling noted by seven of the respondents is passive and concerns the appearance and fitness of the role model as inspirational. The other way the public figure role models were inspirational was also via passive modeling, by their character or success, as one respondent noted "Maria Sharapova, she's confident and successful." Six of the respondents simply listed their role model without explaining how they had been influenced. These data lead to the inescapable conclusion that for the respondents, public figure role models are far less influential, both in number and in method of influence, than are personal role models.

CONCLUSION

Qatari sports officials have confidently proclaimed that the current Qatari elite female athletes are role models and will inspire women and girls in Qatar. If the findings here are generalizable, then the elite level progress being made in Qatar has not yet trickled down to the everyday female resident of Qatar, despite considerable media coverage. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. It may be still too early for a role model effect to have occurred as it can take time for role models' reputations to be built. While this may be true, it is nonetheless surprising that only one respondent mentioned anything about these groundbreaking Qatari female athletes, and that no other Arab athletes were mentioned. Given that the survey was live during the critical period of media coverage, it was reasonable to anticipate that more than one respondent would mention them. Perhaps the problem is one of marketing. For public figure role models to be effective, people must know about them.

It may be that there was a failure of effective media campaigns about the Qatari female athletes to enhance their abilities as role models. During the period of the Arab games there were multiple stories in the local press about their successes, including the winning of more gold medals than the Qatari men and the groundbreaking aspect of their participation. The stories were not difficult to find and figured prominently in paper versions of the newspapers. Nonetheless, it is possible that significantly more coverage over a longer period of time is necessary for elite Qatari athletes to function as role models. It may also be that aspects of mediated communication limit the public figure role models' mechanisms of influence. The respondents would not typically be in personal communication with the elite female athletes, which could limit active role modeling. The survey purposely did not mention any specific names of role models or nationalities, nor ask about types of influence. Instead, the respondents were asked about public figures with examples and about male and female professional athletes. It may simply require a lot more coverage before specific names of new entries to the sports world are remembered, internalized, and start to function as role models.

Finally, it is also possible that in the world of sport, personal role models are far more important than public figures, at least for these respondents. Engaging in physical activity and sport on a regular basis requires a certain level of commitment which, as is well known from rising obesity levels among other NCDs, is not easy for many people. Having a personal role model who consistently and actively encourages physical activity may be far more important than the passive modeling of public figure role models. The data certainly support this explanation as, overwhelmingly, personal role models figured more prominently than public figure role models in the physical activity of the respondents. At the same time, there is some indication that the respondents emphasized the lack of public figure role models for themselves and also thought the Arab media could do a better job of promoting Arab female athletes and sports. Of course this is not an either/or proposition; it may be that having both personal and public figure role models is most effective for encouraging physical activity.

Future research could continue to investigate the development of women's sporting opportunities in Qatar, measuring the effect of media campaigns designed to increase physical activity participation. Qatar provides an unusual test bed because of its recent and rapid development. Few public health campaigns have been attempted compared to more developed nations and native role models are just starting to emerge, enabling the study of media campaign effects in a relatively uncluttered market with a short history, which allows for fewer competing explanations for potential effects.

This study may be limited due to the relatively small sample size and convenience sampling method.

Accessing a national, random sample in Qatar is difficult at this stage of development. Nonetheless, future research could use probability sampling methods to increase the generalizability of the findings.

Globalization in Qatar has been a double-edged sword for women. While it has undeniably brought significant health problems it has also brought unprecedented opportunities for elite female athletes. The next challenge for Qatar is to address the issue of the everyday female resident and her physical activity levels. Perhaps leveraging of the first-ever elite female athletes via effective media campaigns could be effective. However, paying closer attention to the critical role of personal role models – coaches, friends, and family – likely would have a faster and more comprehensive effect on the physical activity levels of female residents of Qatar. Public health and public policy officials should consider developing personal role models to help women in Qatar increase their physical activity levels to combat the epidemic rates of NCDs.

REFERENCES

AbdulRazak, Maesam, Mohd S. Omar-Fauzee and Rozita. Abd-latif. 2010. "The Perspective of Arabic Muslim Women toward Sport Participation." *Journal of Asian Pacific Studies* 1(2): 364-377.

Bener, Abdulbari. 2006. "Prevalence of Obesity, Overweight, and Underweight in Qatari Adolescents." *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 27(1): 39-45.

Dagkas, Symeon and Tansin Benn. 2006. "Young Muslim Women's Experiences of Islam and Physical Education in Greece and Britain: A Comparative Study." *Sport, Education and Society* 11(1): 21-38.

Doherty, Regan. 2012. "INTERVIEW-Olympics-Qatar Bid to Encourage Female Arab Athletes." *Reuters*. March 15. Accessed from http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/15/olympics-qatar-idUSL5E8EF4KE20120315.

Dun, Susan and M. R. Al Islam. 2011. "Paper or Virtual? Media Market Analysis and Survey Research in Qatar." Presented at the *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Emerging Research Paradigms in the Businesses and Social Sciences*, Middlesex University, Dubai, UAE.

ESPN. 2012. "Bahiha al-Hamad to hold Qatar flag." *ESPN* Accessed from http://espn.go.com/olympics/summer/2012/shooting/story/_/id/8158790/2012-olympic-games-one-qatar-first-female-athletes-hold-flag-opening-ceremonies.

Fromherz, Allen J. 2012. *Qatar: A Modern History*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Guerin, Pauline B., Roda Omar Diiriye, Callie Corrigan, and Bernard Geurin. 2003. "Physical Activity Programs for Refugee Somali Women: Working Out in a New Country." *Women and Health* 38(1): 83-99.

Henry, Jeya, Helen J. Lightowler, and Huda M. Al-Hourani. 2004. "Physical Activity and Levels of Inactivity in Adolescent Females Ages 11-16 Years in the United Arab Emirates." *American Journal of Human Biology* 16: 346-353.

Hu, Frank B. "Globalization of Diabetes: The Role of Diet, Lifestyle and Genes." *Diabetes Care* 34(6): 1249 - 57. Accessed from http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/34/6/1249.long.

Huda, N.V. 2011. "Skip The Gym, Head to Corniche." *The Peninsula September* 25. Accessed from http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/166604-skip-the-gym-head-to-corniche.html.

International Association for the Study of Obesity. 2012. "International Association for the Study of Obesity Report." Accessed from http://www.iaso.org/site_media/uploads/Global_prevalence_of_adult_obesity_Ranking_by_country_2012.pdf.

International Diabetes Association. 2015. *Diabetes Atlas 7th ed.* Accessed from http://www.diabetesatlas.org.

Jiwani, Nisara. and Genevieve Rail. 2010. "Islam, Hijab and Young Shia Muslim Canadian Women's Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 27: 251-267.

Kay, Tess. 2006. "Daughters of Islam Family: Influences on Muslim Young Women's Participation in Sport." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41(3-4): 357-373.

Khatib, O. "Noncommunicable Diseases: Risk Factors and Regional Strategies for Prevention and Care." *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 10(6) (2004): 778-88.

Koca, Canan, Karla. A. Henderson, F. Hulya Asci, and Nefise Bulgu. 2009. "Constraints to Leisure-Time Physical Activity and Negotiation Strategies in Turkish Women." *Journal of Leisure Research* 41(2): 225-251.

Mabry, Ruth, Marina M. Reeves, Elizabeth G. Eakin, and Neville Owen. 2010. "Evidence of Physical Activity Participation among Men and Women in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Review." *Obesity Reviews* 11(6): 457-64.

Musaiger, Abulrahman O. 2004. "Overweight and Obesity in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Can We Control it?" *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 10(6): 789-93.

Nakamura, Yuka. 2002. "Beyond the Hijab: Female Muslims and Physical Activity." *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 22(2): 234-255.

Pace, Brian. 2000. "The Benefits of Regular Physical Activity." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 283: 3030.

Qatar Diabetes Association. 2012. "*Long-Term Complications*." Retrieved from http://www.qda.org.qa/about-diabetes/avoid-long-complications.

Qatar Statistics Authority. 2012. Retrieved from http://www.qsa.gov.qa/QatarCensus/Population/PDF/1_1.pdf.

"Saudi Women Push for Right to Play Sports." 2012. *Arabian Business*, March 1. Accessed from http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-women-push-for-right-play-sports-447831.html.

Serour, Maleka, Hanadi Alqhenaie, Sawsan Al-Saqabi, Abdel-Rahman Mustafa and Abdulla Ben-Nakhi. 2007. “Cultural Factors and Patients’ Adherence to Lifestyle Measures.” *The British Journal of General Practice* 57(537): 291-295.

Sfeir, Leila. 1985. “The Status of Muslim Women in Sport: Conflict between Cultural Tradition and Modernization.” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 20(4): 283-306.

Sports Scotland. 2008. *Muslim Women in Sport – A Minority Within a Minority*. London: Women’s Sports and Fitness Foundation. Accessed from http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/0B1E3B86-C824-4B27-8698-D48062C928A1/0/10Muslim-womeninsportaminoritywithinaminority.pdf.

Times of India. 2011. “Qatar Women Hope to Make History at 2012 Olympics,” *Times of India*. December 23. Accessed from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/tournaments/london-olympics/Qatar-women-hope-to-make-history-at-2012-Olympics/articleshow/11213673.cms.

Walden, Laura. 2012. “Qatari women athletes shine at Doha 2011 Arab Games.” *SportsFeatures.com* January 3. Retrieved from http://www.sportsfeatures.com/olympicsnews/story/49253/qatari-women-athletes-shine-at-doha-2011-arab-games.

Walker, Jenny, and Stuart Butler. 2010. “Oman, UAE and Arabian Peninsula.” Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Walseth, Kristen. 2006. “Young Muslim Women and Sport: The Impact of Identity Work.” *Leisure Studies* 25(1): 75-94.

Walseth, Kristen, and Kari Fasting. 2003. “Islam’s View on Physical Activity and Sport: Egyptian Women Interpreting Islam.” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38(1): 45-60.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

"We're Normal. We're Just Like You": Gendered Practices of Cultural Exchange and Translation in Dubai

Jillian Schedneck
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE
JILLIAN.SCHEDNECK@ADELAIDE.EDU.AU

Set in the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU) in downtown Dubai, United Arab Emirates, this article explores SMCCU Emirati volunteers' assumptions about how their mainly Western visitors judge Emirati culture, as well as the ways those volunteers attempt to meet and challenge visitors' expectations. Because of volunteers' assumptions about their Western visitors, they present a liberal model of agency, and use the language of second-wave feminism, such as "choice," "equality" and "empowerment," to convince visitors that Emirati women are not oppressed within the UAE, but are instead thriving, with free and equal treatment to men. Volunteers typically provide presentations that include declarations of Emirati women's modern, liberal agency, as well as demonstrations of distinctive Emirati cultural tradition. At times, volunteers move beyond the expected language of feminism within their cultural presentations to reveal a less one-dimensional representation of Emirati culture. Participant observation within this center and interviews with volunteers provides evidence for the ways in which the discourse of liberal agency shapes volunteers' responses to guests who expect such answers. Using Saba Mahmood's (2005) critique of the dominance of liberal discourse, this research shows volunteers' awareness of this powerful discourse when discussing women's choice and empowerment to Western audiences. Mainly, volunteers go along with the expected "script" of the Center, rather than attempting to convey different aspects of the lived experience of Emirati culture. However, at times volunteers do deviate from and go beyond that "script" to exhibit Emirati culture as wholly different and even superior to Western culture.

--->

Keywords:
cultural exchange; agency; traditions; identity; liberalism

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have looked at re-inscriptions of Muslim women's agency and autonomy (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2011; Fernando 2010; Jouili 2011; Jouili and Amir-Mozami 2006; Scott 2007) within European contexts using critiques of liberal notions of personal choice and freedom. These works have shed light on the ways Muslim women are compelled to speak back to non-Muslims concerning debates over women's religious practices, particularly female Muslim dress. While this work has been useful in a European context, there is a gap in understanding how Arabian Gulf women – specifically Emirati women, who are an elite minority within their own country – present, justify and defend aspects of their culture and religion to non Muslim audiences. Using interviews and participant observation collected from the programs at the Sheikh Mohamed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU) in Dubai, this paper analyses how Emirati volunteers portray Muslim women's choice and agency to their non-Muslim visitors at the Center. While the SMCCU's purpose is more broadly to explain aspects of Emirati culture and Islam, gender issues have become the most important aspect of cultural exchange, arguably because of Western preoccupation with gender difference in other cultures, and because women's roles are seen as the markers of modernity or "backward" tradition. This paper argues that SMCCU volunteers are involved in a complex discursive situation that involves re-inscribing notions of Western liberal thought, particularly around gender. Volunteers align their responses with this dominant discourse, but also at times move beyond it, occasionally redefining its acceptable boundaries, and upholding significant difference. This paper demonstrates the useful application and limitations of recent re-conceptualizations of agency and autonomy in relation to cultural exchanges taking place between Emirati religious and cultural identities and non-Muslim audiences within the global, modern city of Dubai.

While this paper emphasizes female volunteers' responses and the ways women are spoken about, I will also point to the broader challenges of answering cultural and religious questions in the intricate discursive setting that the SMCCU creates. Volunteers feel immense pressure to provide the "correct" answers about their culture and religion. My participants feel they are representing their whole country, and even the entire Middle Eastern region, to their visitors. Therefore, they expressed that their participation in the SMCCU is an incredible opportunity to share their culture with the world and bridge gaps in cultural understanding.

CONTEXT OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Since the discovery of oil in the late 1960s and the unification of the separate sheikhdoms into one united country in 1971, the UAE has been developing into the government's vision for a modern country. Dubai has emerged as a global city in recent decades, and globalization has become a buzzword when speaking about the emirate. Globalisation, which is associated with the open flow of commodities, people and knowledge, is also typically connected to domination and inequality, a threat to local culture, and a loss of identity, tradition and sense of place (Davids and Driel 2005; Elsheshtawy 2004). As Elsheshtawy (2004) points out, current discourses of globalization help maintain this narrative of loss, while also portraying Middle Eastern cities as disconnected from the rest of the world and unable to achieve the developments of the West. The SMCCU considers this line of thinking within their various programs, and utilizes strategies to counter these ideas. Another key aspect of the city's global status has been achieved due to the overwhelming migration of foreign workers to the emirate, constituting a majority population (AFP 2011). The UAE's subsequent development and the overwhelming presence of foreigners has had a downside, and indeed reinforces a narrative of loss as Elsheshtawy (2004) asserts. Citizens and rulers have been discussing the possible threats to, and loss of, cultural identity since the emirates united and the cities' development began (Casey 2010; Fattah 2006a; Fattah 2006b; Gergawi 2011; Heard-Bey 2005; Khalaf 2005; Sawy 2008; Schedneck 2009).

Emiratis are an elite and privileged minority within a foreign population of 88 percent (AFP 2011). They are often viewed by expatriate residents as rare and powerful, an unapproachable novelty. Several recent occurrences of public misunderstandings between Emiratis and Western expatriates has caused some animosity between these two groups. For example, there was an incident involving a British woman who stripped down to her bikini in Dubai Mall when approached by an Emirati woman for wearing an inappropriate top and violating the country's modest dress code (Casey 2010). However, these flare ups are irregular, but speak to a greater anxiety about multiculturalism and how much liberal behavior will be allowed and tolerated within Dubai. Even long-term expatriates have admitted to me that they have never even spoken to an Emirati. Actually knowing or befriending an Emirati is very unusual, especially for Western expatriates. As one of my SMCCU volunteer respondents stated, "there's not enough of us to go around." And, as several respondents explained to me, many Emiratis also do not wish to interact with non-locals who will only live in Dubai for a short time. The SMCCU is one of the few spaces where Emiratis and non-Emiratis do interact.

Therefore, the SMCCU[1] is a key site to observe processes of cultural exchange taking place. However, this form of exchange is not open to everyone. The cost of an SMCCU Ramadan iftar meal or cultural lunch at other times of the year has risen from free in 2007 to 135 dirhams (36.75 USD) for the iftar dinner and 90 dirhams (24.50 USD) for the cultural lunch in 2016. The expense of the SMCCU cultural meal events means that not everyone in Dubai can afford to be part of this program. The cost also demonstrates that these events are oriented toward wealthier Western tourists and expatriates, even though the population of Dubai is overwhelmingly a South Asian majority - most of whom are male laborers. The programs are aimed at non-Muslims audiences unfamiliar with Arab culture or Islam, and therefore attract mainly Western expatriates and tourists interested in a new cultural experience. Importantly, this suggests the West is considered as the most valuable outsider gaze, rather than South Asia.

At SMCCU events, such as cultural meals located at the center, volunteers begin by offering guests dates and hot beverages. Then guests are either led into one of the side rooms for small group discussions with one of the volunteers or remain in a larger group eating and listening to the SMCCU manager, Yusef, speak and answer questions, with input from the younger volunteers. At the Jumeriah Mosque tour, another SMCCU event, a female British Muslim convert explains the five pillars of Islam and how Muslims behave in a mosque to the typically seventy tourists and expatriates who take part in this tour, offered several times a week. In all SMCCU events, the majority of time is left for visitor questions, where they are encouraged to ask anything at all about Emirati culture or Islam. Volunteers have specific aims in answering these questions, which I will describe and analyze in later sections.

Between August and December 2011, I interviewed ten Emirati cultural exchange volunteers or presenters. I attended several cultural exchange events at the SMCCU, including iftar meals, cultural lunches, and tours of Jumeirah Mosque. The private interviews with volunteers are thus offset by their public interactions at the SMCCU.

As a researcher, I was perceived as Westerner, as I am a white American woman. However, since I informed respondents that my research was about cultural exchange, and my questions asked them to reflect upon how they answer visitors' questions, they did provide answers that expanded past the typical responses conveyed during a cultural meal. As volunteers learned I had attended several SMCCU events, they knew to go beyond the usual rhetoric. Yet, I was still seen as an "outsider" who did not know much about Islam or Emirati culture, and certain ideas and answers were certainly "translated" for me. I believe that volunteer participants assumed that the audience for my research was Western readers because of my own background, although none asked, and therefore many of their interview responses stayed within the realm of "translation." However, since I asked questions about these acts of exchange and translation, the insights I received were greater than that of an SMCCU visitor. In short, my positionality did shape their answers, but the nature of my questions allowed them to provide more reflective answers about their cultural translation processes.

All of the volunteers I spoke to stated that the most popular misconception about Emirati culture and Islam was the perceived oppression of Muslim women, and this was the most important belief they wanted to dispel. Indeed, cultural discord between Emiratis and Western expatriates are mainly focused on gender relations in the Arab world; specifically, Muslim women's perceived lack of autonomy within their societies. This focus on gender prompts a majority of SMCCU visitors to ask if women have equal rights in the UAE, and for volunteers to respond in tactical ways. In the next section I will argue that while studies of European Muslim women's responses to debates over women's roles within Islam reflect similarities to the complex discursive situation that the SMCCU volunteers experience, there are also significant differences. SMCCU volunteers present various strategies in gaining acceptance, respect and even admiration from visitors, whereas the recent studies on European Muslim women's defense and justification of their religion most often only re-inscribed liberal notions of agency.

CHOICE, AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT IN DISCOURSES ABOUT MUSLIM WOMEN

Scholarship has demonstrated a common belief within liberal secular culture that religious women, or those living within religious societies, lack or have limited agency (Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen and Maleiha 2011; Braidotti 2008; Mack 2003; Mahmood 2005; Mahmood 2001). Indeed, Mahmood (2005) describes normative liberal assumptions as "the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them" (5). Similarly, Braidotti (2011) sees the dominant discourse shaping

---

[1] The SMCCU functions as a non-governmental entity. However, the UAE government did donate the SMCCU headquarters to the Center. They are funded by income from the cultural meal attendance fees, as well as other events such as private corporate training in Emirati culture. Their official aim and policy is "Open Doors, Open Minds," and their logo is two halves of a cracked circle being held together by a black cord. The SMCCU aims to be that black cord holding the two sides, East and West, together.

Western thought as one where Western, Christian women who are "white or 'whitened' and raised in the tradition of secular Enlightement," have been emancipated and are not in need of any liberating policies. However, "'their women' (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white and not whitened, as well as alien to the Enlightenment tradition)" remain backward and "need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions, or even more belligerent forms of enforced 'liberation'" (Braidotti 2011, 6). These are the assumptions some Muslim women are choosing to debate, and also the assumptions volunteers at the SMCCU are considering and speaking back to.

Little work has been done on such cultural negotiations within the context of a Muslim country where locals are outnumbered by a majority multicultural expatriate population. Therefore, an understanding of how other Muslim women in similar situations have used liberal notions of agency and empowerment to explain and defend their religious and cultural practices to Western audiences is relevant to my study. Research focused on Muslim women in the European countries of France, Germany and the Netherlands provides an important complement and counterpart to my own study (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2011; Fernando 2010; Jouili 2011; Scott 2007). However, the conceptual framework of these studies derives from Mahmood (2005) and Taylor (2007), who have noted that modern liberal Western thought upholds religious ideals that conform to individual sovereignty; a person must have the ability to freely choose their own religious beliefs and practices. Thus, the Muslim women living in European countries in the studies cited above feel compelled to describe their religious experiences on these choice-based and personalized terms. Yet, as Mahmood (2005) points out, this is not typically the way Muslim women feel about wearing the headscarf or veil. The veil, which is often thought of as an expression of religious affiliation that is first felt inside the self and then symbolized outwardly, is rather constitutive of piety.

Through her research among Muslim women of the piety movement in Cairo, Mahmood (2005) contends that piety is formed externally and is then cultivated as an internal experience, rather than first understood internally and then expressed externally. Thus, the practice of veiling is not a mere representation of tradition and religious belief felt inside oneself, but an entirely different way to conceive of how a person becomes pious and expresses religiosity. This idea of cultivating piety externally through wearing the veil is unfamiliar to Western society. Thus, several studies have examined the ways in which Muslim women living in Europe defend their religious practices with talk of agency and individualized inner experiences, even if cultivating Islamic virtues through external signs is a more accurate explanation (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2011; Fernando 2010; Jouili 2011; Scott 2007). As well, obligation and submission to God might be equally compelling aspects of their religious subject formation that do not carry much weight within Western society.

Mahmood (2005, 8) defines the liberal concept of agency as "the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)." In this predominating view of agency, women must act according to their own will, rather than custom or tradition, which is only viewed as holding women back from self-fulfillment of personal desires. This prevailing notion also holds that only when women are free from tradition and religion can they be considered autonomous and truly empowered. Indeed, agency has come to be understood solely as resistance against an oppressive power, yet this binary of subordination and subversion are not the only ways to conceptualize the term. Mahmood critiques these hegemonic assumptions. In particular, she challenges the belief that people living in modern societies will resist and eschew customs and tradition, and that these features inhibit one from achieving or even realizing their own desires and attaining them.

Using Mahmood's (2005) critique of liberal notions of agency, research on Muslim women's responses to European debates over banning Islamic female dress highlights their responses in important ways. Muslim women interviewed within France, Germany and the Netherlands employed strategies to counter hegemonic ideologies about their perceived lack of freedom and autonomy, and their submission to patriarchal authority. Yet these Muslim women are still speaking from within and to the dominant discourse on female empowerment, which views them as "backward." For example, asserting that Muslim women have always been empowered, and that women's liberation was already achieved through the revelation of the Quran 1400 years ago also displays attention to liberal discourse, and speaks back to that ideology (Jouili 2011). By stating that in Islam women have always been liberated and given equal rights, Muslim women are paying attention to certain Western ideas of gender norms. Thus, the female participants in these studies cannot easily break away from the rhetoric of women's empowerment and freedom as understood in Western liberal thought, even if that is their intention. Within the Netherlands, Bracke (2011) has found that Muslim women respond to the public debates over their emancipation in several ways, which attempt to disrupt and also cannot help but acknowledge the dominant narrative of Muslim women who need to be saved from their culture. Bracke (2011) shows that "talking back" to these debates is a very complicated matter, since any subject that responds to the debate has been influenced by its ideology. Thus, any response must refer to, rely on and to some extent accept the legitimacy of its discourse (Bracke 2011).

While I argue that Muslim women do have access to alternative discourses, I acknowledge their difficulty in being understood if they speak to them.

The attempt to respond to European debates concerning the banning of headscarves, and international debates regarding women's religious freedom, can become mired within the dominant script of autonomy versus tradition. This ignores a more complex and accurate representation of Muslim women's subject formation that accounts for choice, adherence to religious duty and submission to God. Stating, or being allowed to state, that some Muslim women hold a different idea of agency – one that involves adhering to religious obligation and submission to God – was not admissible within the European debates (Fernando 2010).

The discursive situation of the SMCCU volunteers is similar to the Muslim women within France, Germany and the Netherlands discussed in the works of Bracke (2011), Fadil (2011), Fernando (2010) and Jouili (2011), as both groups of Muslim women are attempting to justify and redefine their own positions to secular, liberal minded audiences. While the context and purposes differ, the participants in my research are also positioned within and outside of liberal and feminist discourses through living in the multi-cultural city of Dubai. Both groups imagine their wider audience on similar terms: as a dominant group who misunderstands Islam and women's roles within it, and who engages in neoliberal thinking on choice and agency, and must be responded to on those terms.

Yet the Emirati volunteers' explanations of their culture and religion ultimately differ from that of Muslim women living in Western European countries. Emiratis are an elite minority within their home country. With this power comes instilled responsibility to convince visitors that Emirati culture is aligned with Western values as well as admirably different. In addition, volunteers are not speaking back to a particular debate or policy, but to a more implicit sense of how multi-cultural Dubai views Emiratis, as well as broader stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims that Emirati volunteers have absorbed. The studies on Muslim women living in Europe show that they are responding to specific criticisms against their religion and choices to cover, and are much more implicated in the liberal discourse of choice and agency because of this (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2011; Fernando 2010; Jouili 2011). They must respond along these lines if willing to engage at all, as these are the terms employed in the headscarf debate in Europe. The SMCCU willingly takes on a liberal discourse, and at times wishes to show their difference from and movement beyond it. Yet, while the SMCCU has the freedom to engage more deeply in articulating and expressing cultural differences, they most often choose not to.

Consequently, the differences between research revealing the positionality of Muslim women living in Europe and my findings at the SMCCU show that Emirati volunteers have a greater opportunity to speak directly to a mostly willing audience. They can more easily speak to issues of cultural exchange in a direct and staged way than the often more disconnected Muslim women living in Europe who are less immediately involved in the debates taking place. However, this opportunity is not taken up as strongly as is potentially possible within the SMCCU.[2]

As seen in the case of the headscarf debates and bans in Europe, women and gendered practices are a contested site of cultural change and exchange. It has been well documented that women play key roles in nation building and global performances of modernity (Abu-Lughod 2001; Ahmed 1992; Baron 2005; Blom 2000; Gocek 2002; Kaler 2006; Kandiyoti 1991; McClintock 1993; Timmerman 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997); roles that are often manipulated and contradictory. The need arises for developing nations to portray the "modernness" and preservation of "traditions," and these concepts have often been embodied within the roles and practices of women (Kandiyoti 1991). Therefore, any formal or informal cultural exchange is likely to have a component of, if not focus on, gendered practices such as dress.

MUSLIM WOMEN REPRESENTING THE NATION

Debates over Muslim women's dress and the ways in which their perceived roles and treatment represent their nation have a long history (Abu-Lughod 2001; Ahmed 1992; Ahmed 2011; Lewis 1995; Lowe 1991; Melman 1992; Timmerman 2000). Ahmed (1992, 2011) has explained the West's Orientalist perception of Muslim women's dress, as well as the reaction of Muslim men and women to this perception. It becomes clear, as Yuval-Davis (1997, 45) has argued, that women bear the "burden of representation" for their nation. Women are placed in the precarious position of representing their "modern emancipation," as well as their commitment to following cultural "tradition," in order to define cultural change while demonstrating a move toward or away from Western modernisation (Chatterjee 1990; Esposito 1998; Joseph 2000; Majaj 2002).

The nation-building efforts of the UAE have indeed featured Emirati women as their most visible public relations tool and mark of development. Emirati women are highlighted for their advanced educational and career opportunities alongside their ability to maintain the Arabian Gulf's conservative Islamic values. The UAE leaders are lauded within the media and the SMCCU for their role in "empowering" Emirati women, by ensuring their equal rights within the law, and promoting national women's ability to preserve "traditional" values while interacting with new public spaces of work and commerce.[3] The difficulty and primary task of the SMCCU is presenting this complex, symbolic portrayal of Emiratis women as both free and empowered, as well as traditional and religious: as relatable and similar to Western women as they are different.

---

[2] As an alternative, for example, SMCCU volunteers could question the very idea of giving reasons for cultural mores and practices, and present alternatives to such calculated reasoning and rational thinking. I do not wish to promote certain tactics for cultural exchange above others, but only provide alternative ideas on what could be done but is excluded.

Gender features so heavily in cultural exchange projects and dialogues because women's rights are part of the nation building exercise (Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997), and because the questioning of Muslim women's rights is a natural extension of any Muslim dialogue with the "West." A key Western preoccupation with Muslim women has to do with their presumed lack of choice, agency, mobility and bodily freedom, which the West believes signals the "backwardness" of the nation. Because of this, women's perceived oppression outside Western countries will continue to be a crucial site of debate within practices of cultural exchange. The primary intention of the SMCCU is to convince Western visitors that their misconceptions about the Middle East – that women are oppressed – is not true. To convey this argument as conclusive, several tactics are employed, particularly what I call "cultural translation."

CULTURAL TRANSLATION

One of the main strategies the SMCCU employs to discuss the role and appearance of Emirati women within the UAE is to employ cultural translation or to explain aspects and practices related to Islam and Arab culture in a way that Westerners with liberal worldviews and beliefs can understand. This implies that the basic belief underlying cultural translation is that the two cultures involved in cultural exchange are isolated entities, closed off from one another, and translation bridges these gaps (Mandal 2009). Cultural translation projects typically depend upon such binaries: "my" culture and an "other's" culture. This binary of cultural exchange is an easy and simple framework to situate oneself within – one that Emiratis and tourists are familiar with from media and tourism throughout the Gulf.

Much literary fiction and visual art addresses the notion of cultural translation, and attempts to show that histories and cultures are intertwined and always mixing, rather than homogeneous or distinct (Desai 2006; Jarrar 2008; Kureishi 1990; Kureishi 2008). Indeed, in an interview, visual art professor Sarat Maharaj calls for the "self" and "other" to "equally plunge into free fall, breakdown and mutual re-making," and imagines, "the dislocutive scene of cultural translation [opening] up as an unfinishable existential, ethical encounter" (Fletcher 2000, 33). Thus Maharaj encourages a "shifting, collision, coalescing of cultural continents – a mucking up of classificatory order" (Fletcher 2000, 33). Emirati citizens and Emirati culture have indeed blended with other cultures throughout their history, and the views of artists who highlight cultural blending and hybridity are certainly relevant to the circumstances of the UAE. However, the implied assumption of unconnected and discreet cultures is still assumed at the SMCCU, and this is a large part of respondents' thought process when answering questions.

This act of translation can explain why some of my respondents expressed contradictions in articulating their positions. Participants often felt defensive and dissatisfied with the need to explain their culture to visitors. Yet these same respondents also stated that cultural exchange is their passion and they enjoy answering all questions. Volunteers expressed the view that visitors should have learned more about the UAE before arriving, but also that there was no way for tourists and expatriates to know the "truth" about Emirati culture besides visiting the SMCCU. And, finally, they spoke about repressing the urge to become aggressive in their defense of cultural practices, and also stated that it was simply nice of the visitors to come to the SMCCU with open minds and ask questions, rather than hold onto false assumptions.

These contradictions point to the difficulties involved in this selective practice of cultural translation. Hence, within the SMCCU, culture is made of artifacts, behaviors and actions that can be described, visualized and demonstrated. In one sense, the employment of this kind of cultural translation could be viewed as patronizing to guests, since volunteers are often closed off from the possibility of presenting a more accurate representation of Emirati culture and its interaction with the range of Western and non-Western cultures in Dubai. Yet, in another sense, the SMCCU's approach could also be seen as one inspired by respect for guests and a general sense of hospitality and welcoming. Translating certain cultural and religious behaviors into terms foreigners can understand could be perceived as respectful, effective and logical by appealing to modern rational thought processes. As one female SMCCU volunteer, Maha, stated to me:

> I understand [visitors] wonder why do people start first eating a date [at the iftar meal] because I understand that seems weird. …I talk to other Arabs and they say that it's because it's Sunnah. And Sunnah means that the Prophet did it. And I'm like, but they don't believe in your religion. So when you talk to someone who doesn't believe in

---

[3] See the UAE National Media Council's *United Arab Emirates Yearbook 2010* and *Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress* 2008.

> your religion you can't talk to them on the same line … you have to … talk scientific and go to common ground they understand and believe in. I can't say, 'oh, it's in the Quran.' But you don't believe in the Quran, so leave my Quran alone, that's my belief. And let's go up to logic. So it's proven that dates do settle your stomach down and break up the acid from long hours of fasting, so it makes sense to you. But if I tell you it's Sunnah it's not going to make you understand anything.

Maha feels that logic is the common denominator that will achieve acceptance, and she does not mind altering her answer, even if religious and cultural meaning is compromised.

However, there is another way that this consideration for guests can be perceived. Hiba, a female volunteer, spoke to me in these terms regarding Emirati hospitality, stating:

> …usually we don't talk to Europeans or foreigners as if they don't belong here or [say]… 'why are you here?' Or 'what are you doing'? But when we travel outside, okay, they give us very dirty looks, you know? So it's kind of part of our tradition and even religion to be nice to people and welcome them.

While the tradition of hospitality is acknowledged in Hiba's response, a more important aspect of her statement is the way in which she promotes her culture and religion as more welcoming and open than Western countries. Despite feeling as though Europeans and foreigners are denigrating her culture, she is saying that Emiratis will continue to be welcoming and not question others' right to visit or live in Dubai. Thus, the SMCCU operates on a fine line. On the one hand, they are sincerely welcoming visitors and wishing to explain cultural and religious practices in a way Westerners would understand, appealing to liberal secular norms. On the other hand, there exists a distrust of guests' real beliefs about Emirati culture and religion, and moments of cultural superiority and alterity arise from such encounters and translations.

"CORRECT" ANSWERS

As part of an elite minority culture that is not lived daily by expatriates within Dubai, SMCCU volunteers are acutely aware of their roles as ambassadors of their culture, religion and country. This pride in representing their country is often felt to the point where some volunteers are nervous about giving an answer to a visitor's question for fear of getting it "wrong." As Sabeen, a female volunteer, said to me:

One bad thing happens and they will judge [the] whole country so we have to be careful. … We have the chance to show the world who we are. Big responsibility we have.

This awareness of choosing specific ways to answer questions is instilled through the SMCCU training. New volunteers are given a list of one hundred and fifteen frequently asked questions, as well as the model answers to those questions. During the Ramadan I spent in Dubai in 2011, the new volunteers were given the most popular fifteen questions to focus on. Although I was not permitted access to the full list of these questions, I did learn that the most common questions are about women's rights, women's dress, Emirati food, Islam as a violent religion, multiple wives, and the UAE political system. Volunteers are told to use these model answers as a base, and then put their own unique spin on the response.

In a direct sense, then, the SMCCU as an institution defines what is "right." More broadly, correct answers are collectively imagined by volunteers as a response to expatriate attitudes towards Emiratis and Islam, within Dubai and abroad. Through experiences interacting with visitors and Westerners through work and other travels, volunteers have internalized a sense of Western liberal values, and thus respond to this. The SMCCU FAQs reinforce this thinking and make it more explicit in terms of answer models to follow. The volunteers and the institution have aligned ideas of misconceptions they wish to dispel. Yet most volunteers had never thought about the meaning of their cultural practices, and are now being asked to articulate their self-awareness and present reasons for cultural practices they have witnessed and taken part in all their lives. Therefore, volunteers remain anxious over how to convey cultural information to guests. Another respondent, Rawdha, said to me:

> Even amongst the volunteers ourselves we're like, 'you answer the question,' 'no, you do it,' because we are always afraid that we're not going to answer it good enough…We always want people's minds to leave opened with a whole new perspective of how Emiratis are …so we're always looking for the best answer.

This kind of pressure is likewise felt within the Muslim diaspora. As Jouili and Amir-Moazami (2006) note, Muslim women in France and Germany are compelled in similar ways. Their studies show that Muslim women in these countries do not wish to convert others to Islam, but to change negative opinions about their religion, especially with respect to assumptions that Islam creates gender inequality. Similarly, Zine (2006) has found that Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school felt they needed to be careful with everything they said and did, as their behaviour would be seen as representative of Islam. It is the widespread negative opinion of Islam and the treatment of women that concerns the SMCCU and many other Muslim women around the world. This reality makes the work of the SMCCU a serious and vital endeavor to volunteers who feel they are not only representing themselves, but also the Islamic religion and the Middle Eastern region.

For volunteers, the implications for getting answers "wrong" are that visitors will not leave feeling as though they have learned anything new about Islam or Emirati culture, or that visitors' misconceptions will be reinforced. There are also limitations in getting it "right," in that visitors will not know the deeper religious and culturally embodied feelings embedded within gendered, cultural and religious practices. Visitors will leave knowing that rational reasons for gendered practices have been addressed and explained, but perhaps "reasons" is not the right framework for such practices to be explained within. Indeed, volunteers told me that they did not think about any reasons for their cultural practices before their SMCCU involvement. Therefore, a deeper sense of cultural embeddedness would be a more accurate aim, but admittedly much harder to articulate to audiences, if possible at all.

REPRESENTING EMIRATI WOMEN AT THE SMCCU

The most important and striking point made about women's roles throughout the programs of the SMCCU is the focus on Emirati women's traditional dress. This is not surprising, considering that Muslim women's various modes of covering have entered the Western popular imagination as the marker of religious extremism (Kahf 1990; Zine 2006). Muslim female dress is also viewed as synonymous with cultural difference and loyalty to patriarchy, which in turn supports the notion that Muslim women lack autonomy (Zine 2006). Covering has also marked Muslim women from colonial times as erotic and inaccessible (Kahf 1999). Thus, the ways SMCCU female volunteers portray themselves are negotiated within these constructs.

"I bet you're wondering about these funny costumes." Latifa, the British Muslim guide said during the Jumeirah Mosque tour in August 2011, pointing to her abaya and adjusting her sheyla. 'Why do we women wear black cloaks in this heat?' She tells the crowd that women would not want to wear anything else, stating that the abaya's material is thin and loose, and that it creates a breeze while walking. Latifa noted its convenience; a woman can wear anything she wants underneath, and just 'chuck' it on without worrying about finding an appropriate and modest outfit in one's closet. Finally, she mentioned that it was appropriate in all social situations and that black was a slimming colour.

Latifa also spoke about the many reasons a woman would choose to wear a veil over her face. Her main point is that covering, and styles of cover, are each woman's choice, and each woman will probably have a different reason for what they choose to wear. The primacy of choice was echoed throughout my visits to the SMCCU, where female volunteers repeated that it was their choice to wear the abaya and sheyla – their long black cloaks and headscarves – and focused on its modern practicality. This justification is convenient for Western audiences and is presented in this way to encourage Westerns to see the volunteers' choice to wear this dress as valid.

Practicality was not the only reason espoused by volunteers. Alongside mentioning the abaya's beauty and variety of fashionable styles; volunteers expressed a wish to display national pride (which was framed as a universal desire) and demonstrating a woman's personal and private relationship with God, which allows her to choose how and when to cover. All these reasons were also framed as choices: choosing a unique and beautiful abaya style, choosing to display one's national pride, and choosing to demonstrate the degree of one's piety. However, practicality is seen among volunteers as the best way to connect to visitors. Volunteers do not address the self in the ways theorized by Mahmood (2005) by explaining that the veil is the way they enact and constitute their religiosity, that piety is attained externally. Nor do they provide any of the complicated responses as explained to me by respondents outside the SMCCU. Rather, they adhere to concepts they believe are familiar to Western audiences. When I spoke to young Emirati women and men uninvolved with the SMCCU, no one mentioned the practical strengths and modern convenience of wearing the traditional dress. Instead, these other respondents spoke about their pride in displaying their national identity, as well as being modest and adhering to their belief in Islam, among other reasons. The variety of responses I received shows that Emirati female dress is bound up within cultural nuances, negotiations and contestations, rather than practicality.

In her study of Muslim women in Niger, Masquelier (2009) argues that the veil has become part of her participants' social selves, facilitating their relationship with the wider world, and shaping the ways in which they interact within the social world. The veil protects the body, and in that way, Masqulier (2009) argues, it "plays an essential role in the constitution of agency, autonomy and subjectivity" (2009, 212). When Masquelier (2009) surveyed Muslim women in Niger on why they wore head covering, they usually responded: "We veil to cover our bodies." Without much interaction with Western people, or feeling pressured to explain their culture to outsiders, their responses simply stated the fact of their covering as corporeal, rather than something that needs to be articulated as a means of personal choice. Masquelier (2009, 240), writes:

> Because the meaning of veils, for some women, encompasses an entire mode of being in the

> world that is acquired mimetically, the modesty expressed and cultivated through veiling obeys a logic that seems vested more in embodied experience than in conceptual categories. … One could say, paraphrasing Bourdieu, 'It goes without saying because it comes without saying.'

However, even if these embodied ideas of veiling were undeniably shared by the female volunteers at the SMCCU, those ideas are not, and most likely cannot be expressed within the SMCCU. Or, if we take Masquelier's (2009) findings literally, those ideas cannot be expressed anywhere. While Emirati women appreciate the practical aspects of their national dress, it is also clear that this is not typically the first reason that comes to their minds when unprompted by the discursive situation within the SMCCU. Thus, within the SMCCU, these volunteers are giving the "correct" answer to their visitors; the correct answer being the one that guests will most easily relate to. Their responses connect to liberal thinking of personal choice and Enlightenment rationality.

My respondents also frame their ideas on choice in relation to Western attitudes about freedom and tradition in a different way. A female volunteer participant named Hiba said to me:

> …the first opinion [Western people] have of us is that we are oppressed and not …as free or open-minded as outsiders. And I really think that's wrong because we are free and open-minded but in our own way, you know? Under our own culture and our own traditions and our own religion, and we are comfortable with that …Really I don't like it when they call us oppressed.

Several respondents strongly wish to be viewed as "free," but within their own framework and choices, with limits and restrictions that they choose to abide by. Hiba went on to say:

> Americans and Europeans … think being free is, you know, not covering her hair or wearing pants or not wearing the abaya. And … in our religion we're not supposed to drink and … we can't eat pork meat and it's all under …good reason and we know those reasons and we accept them and we think it's for the best. That's why we do them, okay? To us, we want to do them; we want not to do them, ok? But maybe from their point of view they think, 'oh, why can't they do this?' We don't feel like we want to. We feel like we don't want to.

Echoing Rose (1999), Hiba feels that choice and agency is thought about in the West as freedom to choose without external pressure, and freedom from constraint. Here Hiba is declaring her choice to be constrained and limit her options. She also points out the limitations of Western definitions of freedom, which she presumes prohibits Western women from wearing an abaya or headscarf. References to restriction came up often among respondents, as female volunteers wished to assure me and other foreign visitors that the abaya does not prevent them from doing things they wish to do. Volunteers realise the importance of stating that they are free to act without constraint, and if they are limited, that too is their choice. Rose (1996, 17) writes that people in modern society are not only free to choose, but "obliged to be free." Thus, life is understood as the result of choices made from a variety of possibilities, and we must justify our choices through articulating and demonstrating our motives and ultimate aspirations (Rose 1996).

Indeed, Mahmood (2005) states that in liberal thinking, an individual is only considered free when her actions are the result of her own will rather than of custom, tradition or societal compulsion. Therefore, the kind of rhetoric used at the SMCCU works to demonstrate and convince Western visitors of Emirati women's agency within a variety of life choices. However, within cultural exchange, difference must be upheld as well. Emiratis within the SMCCU also differentiate themselves from Western attitudes and attempt to provide alternatives to liberal secular thought.

DEMONSTRATING DIFFERENCE

Rose (1996) argues that the process of Othering includes contrasting oneself with other people, and understanding where you belong through comparing your home with other places. Emirati volunteers at the SMCCU perpetuate this process for themselves and visitors in several ways. Visibly, cultural difference is displayed through the traditional dress worn during the cultural exchange events, marking the Emirati volunteers as culturally very dissimilar to the Western women and men. Even as they attempt to convince guests that any Western woman would want to wear an abaya for its practicality, beauty and variety of styles, the differences between the expensive abayas and kandouras (the long white cloak Emirati men typically wear) - displaying wealth, taste and pride - and Westerners' outfits, is striking. While the traditional dress is presented as practical, it is also often shown as a superior, elegant option that the female volunteers wear with distinction. Thus, they are countering the idea that the unveiled body is "natural" and "free" and a veiled body is a violation of one's "corporeal autonomy or bodily integrity" (Fadil 2011, 97). As Treacher (2003) has noted, Western women are positioned by Westerners as those who are the truly feminine, and Muslim women's veiling breaches the notion of women's "natural" state and subjectivity. Therefore, Western women are viewed as more "real," and Muslim women who cover are viewed as lesser, "not quite the right thing" (Ibid, 70). Yet at the SMCCU, one could argue that veiling is shown as the "natural" and "free" state through volunteers' comportment and ease of movement, as well as their deftness in explaining the various styles and choices involved in wearing the national dress. During demonstrations at cultural meals, volunteers often dress a Western woman in the abaya and sheyla, and then show how a woman wears the face veil and niqab. As much as these demonstrations are educational and hospitable, the discomfort of the Western women modeling Emirati dress compared to the ease of Emirati women appeared to be an intentional signal.

Beyond differences derived from Emirati female dress, there are also strong challenges to the meaning or illusion of gender equality. Yusef described to me how he would answer a visitor question about gender equality in this way:

> Let's say if a tourist asked me, 'why are not women treated equally or the same as men?' I'll say, well, first, 21st century in Europe after fighting for so long to becoming equal with men, are we really equal? There's no such thing as equal. Even men with each other aren't equal, so let's take the word equal out. Then, are you equal to a man's pay in Europe? Do you get paid the same degree as a male with the same degree, the same position? And she will say 'no.' Ok, …let's talk about women positions in Arabia …At one time women in Arabia were very elite and sophisticated and very superior in all over where in Europe they used to buy them and sell them, right? Gift them. And that's the truth. … so for a feminist I will answer in a way her mentality is. …women are not second class [here] but at the same time don't think that you are already first class and they are second, yeah.

Here Yusef is challenging the terms of the questioner: what is gender equality? Has any society achieved it? He is thus pushing the boundaries of liberal thought by questioning the terms of the debate, and European beliefs about their own society's gender parity. He thus blocks contemporary notions of what gender equality looks like and believes that a historical perspective on women's treatment should be included in the debate. However, this sort of boundary pushing is often not taken further than this. When I heard Yusef respond similarly to a group at a cultural lunch, visitors nodded in agreement, but the guests did not take up these ideas to further question why Europeans often presume superiority over Muslim societies. In addition, Hiba's previous quote about Muslim women's freedom to prohibit themselves serves as a similar moment where the boundaries of liberal thinking are pushed. She pointed to Western women's limitations, in that many feel they cannot cover, which astutely counters the notion that Western women have complete freedom and Muslim women are limited. These moments highlight the movement beyond the dominant discourse of liberal thought.

As Aitchison (2000, 144) points out, "the subaltern can speak (to the tourist) but upon stages where audiences and actors are differently engaged and differently empowered in (re)enacting and/or resisting hegemonic colonial and gender relations." Indeed, SMCCU volunteers are certainly speaking, but upon prescribed stages with differing levels of empowerment and disempowerment, co-opting and challenging hegemonic discourses on Muslim gender relations. Aitchison (2000, 145) also believes that these practices can "shape and reshape the social – cultural nexus of gender-power relations in tourism…" This reshaping is taking place at the SMCCU through the strategies of aligning with Western cultural norms and liberal thought as well as pushing these boundaries as well. One respondent, Maha, told me that she hoped visitors understand, "It's ok. We're normal. We're just like you." As shown, there is a strong wish for universalism, to be seen "normal." As well, there is a strong pull for distinction and a wish that expatriates and tourists would understand, accept and respect those differences and the pride Emiratis feel for their cultural history and modern development.

CONCLUSION

Within the SMCCU, the representation of women's agency and freedom is highly selective, reflecting both consideration of liberal thought as well as significant alternatives to Western cultural norms as understood by the SMCCU volunteers and those working with the Center to put together the list of FAQs and their ideal responses. Deeper understandings of how some Muslim women enact piety are certainly not delved into, nor the ways in which choice and agency relates to submission to God and adhering to religious authority in the minds of many Muslim women. The intentional nature of the SMCCU volunteers' cultural translation strategies highlights their difference from studies of European Muslim women, which reveal that these Emirati women also wish to engage in debates and explain the reasoning behind their cultural and religious practices. SMCCU volunteers employ a variety of strategies in order to be understood and seen as "normal, just like you," even if that understanding is ultimately inaccurate. While this pull is strong, the pull for demonstration of difference also arises. Volunteers feel compelled to convince visitors of their shared liberal thinking, framed as shared humanity, as well as demonstrate Emiratis' admirable cultural distinctions, and at times boundary-pushing disparities with liberal thoughts on the meaning of equality and freedom.

My paper has demonstrated the usefulness of Mahmood's (2005) critique of liberal notions of agency, and the ways in which its re-inscription by European Muslim women also connects to the context of the SMCCU. I have also explained the general difficulty of describing the significance of Muslim women's covering outside of liberal norms to Western audiences. My research has also filled a gap in understanding how Mahmood's (2005) critique of liberal norms applies to Emirati female volunteers within the SMCCU. Emirati volunteers at times uphold redefinitions of liberal boundaries and significant differences, and this is also a key strategy of cultural exchange that must be taken into account in further studies in the area of cultural exchange. Recent re-conceptualizations of agency and autonomy can indeed be used to explain some of the cultural exchange strategies of the SMCCU volunteers, but frameworks that allow for intentional demonstrations of differences and redefinition must also be employed.

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2001. "Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies." *Feminist Studies* 27(1): 101-113.

AFP. 2011. "UAE Population Surges to 8.26 million on Influx of Foreign Workers." *The National*. April 3. Accessed from http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-population-surges-to-8-26-million-on-influx-of-foreign-workers.

Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

——— . 2011. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Aitchison, Cara. 2000. "Theorizing Other Discourses of Tourism, Gender and Culture: Can the Subaltern Speak (in Tourism)?" *Tourist Studies* 1(2): 133-147.

Amir-Moazami, Schirin and Christine M. Jacobsen, and Maleiha Malik. 2011. "Islam and Gender in Europe: Subjectivities, Politics and Piety." *Feminist Review* 98: 1-8.

Baron, Beth. 2005. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blom, Ida and Karen Hagemann and Catherine. Hall. *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Berg. 2000.

Bracke, Sarah. 2011. "Subjects of Debate: Secular and Sexual Exceptionalism, and Muslim Women in the Netherlands." *Feminist Review* 98: 28-46.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2008. "In Spite of the Times: the Post-secular Turn in Feminism." *Theory, Culture and Society* 25(1): 1-24.

Casey, Michael. 2010. "Bikini-Clad Brit Arrested at Dubai Shopping Mall." *Huffington Post*. August 5. Accessed from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/05/bikini-clad-brit-arrested_n_671929.html.

Chatterjee, Partha. 1990. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum. Sangari and Sudesh. Vaid. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Davids, Tine and Francien T. M. Van Driel. 2005. *The Gender Question in Globalization: Changing Perspectives and Practices*. Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Desai, Kiran. 2006. *The Inheritance of Loss (1st ed.)*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Elsheshtawy, Vasser. 2004. *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*. London; New York: Routledge.

Esposito, John and Yvonne Y. Haddad.1998. *Islam, Gender and Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fadil, Nadia. 2011. "Non - / Unveiling as an Ethical Practice." *Feminist Review* 98: 83-109.

Fattah, Hassan. 2006a. "Beyond Skimpy Skirts, a Rare Debate on Identity, Memo from Dubai." *New York Times*. October 19. Accessed from http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/10/19/world/middleeast/19dubai.html?pagewanted=all.

———. 2006b. "In UAE, National Identity is a Wedding Guest." *New York Times*. May 25. Accessed from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/25/world/africa/25iht-journal.html.

Fernando, Mayanthi. 2010. "Reconfiguring Freedom: Muslim Piety and the Limits of Secular Law and Public Discourse in France." *American Ethnologist* 37(1): 19-35.

Fletcher, Annie. 2000. "Interview with Sarat Maharaj." *CIRCA* 91: 31-33.

Gergawi, Mishaal. 2011. "A Forty-Year Old Minority in the UAE." *Gulf News*. December 2. Accessed from http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/a-forty-year-old-minority-in-the-uae-1.939898.

Gocek, Fatima M. 2002. "Introduction: Narrative, Gender and Cultural Representation in the Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East" In *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East*, edited by F. M. Gocek. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Heard-Bey, Frauke. 2005. "The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-building in a Traditional society." *The Middle East Journal* 59(3): 357-375.

Jarrar, Randa. 2008. *A Map of Home: A Novel*. New York: Other Press.

Joseph, Suad and Susan. Slyomovics. 2000. *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jouili, Jeanette. 2011. "Beyond Emancipation: Subjectivities and Ethics among Women in Europe's Islamic Revival Communities. *Feminist Review* 98: 47-64.

Jouili, Jeanette and Schirin Amir-Moazmi. 2006. "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority Among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany." *The Muslim World* 96(4): 617-642.

Kahf, Mohja. 1999. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Kaler, Helena.2006. "Inscribing Gender in the Imperial Context: The "Woman Question" in Nineteenth Century Egypt." *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 4(2-3): 328-354.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1991. "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation." *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 20(3): 429-443.

Khalaf, Sulayman. 2005. "National Dress and the Construction of Emirati Cultural Identity." *Journal of Human Sciences* Winter 11: 229-267.

Kureishi, Hanif. 1990. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. London; Boston: Faber and Faber.

———. 2008. *Something to Tell You: A Novel (1st Scribner hbk. ed.)*. New York: Scribner.

Lewis, Reina. 1995. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation*. New York: Routledge.

Lowe, Lisa. 1991. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Mack, Phyllis. 2003. "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth Century Quakerism." *Signs* 29(1): 149-177.

Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2): 202-235.

———. 2005. *Pious Formations: The Islamic Revival and the Subject of Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Majaj, Lisa, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba, T. 2002. *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels (1st ed.)*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Mandal, Somdatta. 2009. "Spotlight: Cultural translation. Review of 'Something to Tell You' by Hanif Kureishi," *8th Day: The Sunday Statesman Magazine*. January 18.

Masquelier, Adeline. 2009. *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

McClintock, Anne. 1993. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family.'" *Feminist Review* 44: 61-80.

Melman, Billie. 1992. *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work*. London: Macmillan.

Rose, Nikolas. 1996. I*nventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*. Cambridge, England ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Sawy, Nada. 2008. "Foreign Influences: Expats Force Locals to Ask Who They Are" *The Financial Times*. Accessed from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e9f2b246-2161-11dd-a0e6-000077b07658.html#axzz2MXjPF3Eq .

Schedneck, Jillian. 2009. "Complicated Identities: Multiculturalism and Dubai Youth." In *Practical Matters: a Transdiciplinary Multimedia Journal of Religious Practices and Practical Theology*. October 1st. Accessed from http://www.practicalmattersjournal.org/issue/2/teaching-matters/complicated-identities.

Scott, Joan W. 2007. T*he Politics of the Veil*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Timmerman, Christine. 2000. "Muslim Women and Nationalism: the Power of the Image." *Current Sociology* 48(15): 15-26.

Treacher, Amal. 2003. "Reading the Other: Women, Feminism and Islam." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4(1): 59-71.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications.

Zine, Jasmin. 2006. "Unveiled Sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and Experiences of Veiling Among Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 39(3): 239-252.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

Genie out of the Bottle: Social Media and the Expansion of the Public Sphere in the Arab Gulf

Leila DeVriese
LDEVRIESE01@HAMLINE.EDU
HAMLINE UNIVERSITY

The economic liberalization launched by Gulf governments in order to integrate their markets into the global economy, has created a paradox for their monarchies. Investment in sophisticated telecommunications grids and expansion of the national labor force through intensive education and training programs for women – as a matter of economic survival – has let the proverbial genie out of the bottle. The top-down integration of women into the public sphere has inadvertently contributed to their politicization. This paper focuses on women's appropriation of the building blocks of globalization – Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media – to not only make their voices heard, but also contribute to an active critique of the socio-political realities of their societies. Subsequently, they now play a role in reshaping public discourse on controversial issues. Engaging new voices which previously had no outlet, most notably women, has expanded the sphere of public discourse in the Gulf. ICTs in general, and social media in particular (in the form of blogs, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and Facebook), facilitate the creation of online communities engaged in carving out new public spaces to increase participation in discursive interactions in an expanded public sphere.

--->

Keywords:
contentious politics; social media; public sphere; social movements; Arab Uprisings; globalization; Arab Gulf

INTRODUCTION

Since the discovery of oil, the social contract – and by extension citizenship – in the historically rentier states of the Arabian Gulf has been characterized by political passivity in exchange for a share of the distributed rent. Recently, however, the economic liberalization and decentralization programs launched by the Gulf aimed at diversifying their economies, integrating their markets into the global economy and maintaining their positions as financial centers, has created a paradox for their monarchies. By investing in skilled human capital and sophisticated telecommunications grids, the Gulf countries have inadvertently opened the path for cyberactivism and other types of online communities, thereby reviving contentious politics and discourses of opposition that chip away at the supremacy of the nation state. Contentious politics comprises the widely varying forms of contention used by non-state actors to bring about social change. They range from social movements, civil wars to more modern repertoires such as cyberactivism (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). While a well-educated, elite, skilled workforce in the fields of business and information technology (coupled with high speed Internet connectivity) were seen as winning formulas for attracting foreign businesses, this combination has also had an adverse and unanticipated effect. An increasingly educated and technologically savvy labor force has served as a breeding ground for online interaction, and the availability of high-speed digital media across most parts of the Gulf has expanded access to social networking. As governments cease to be the largest employers, and jobs are drying up due to the global economic recession and real estate collapse in the region, frustration is mounting among the newly educated and increasingly unemployed or underutilized youth. The compounded effect? The creation of online communities engaged in carving out new public spaces to increase participation in discursive interactions in a remolded public sphere.

In unison, the two above-mentioned phenomena have let the proverbial genie out of the bottle based on decisions made for the purposes of economic survival. Inadvertently, this top-down empowerment of women through state-instituted initiatives and policies, and their integration into the public sphere, has contributed to their politicization and mobilization. Not only are more women seeking public offices and decision-making roles, but they are making their voices heard using the building blocks of globalization – Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) – to affect public discourse on controversial issues. As such, this article seeks to examine the ways in which the forces, flows and institutions driving globalization helped politicize women in the Gulf. I intend to explore the various institutions of globalization that have been used by women in the Gulf to foster empowerment and greater engagement and visibility in the public sphere. My main aim is to map women's appropriation and manipulation of some of the infrastructures of globalization to their own advantage, using these tools to advance their own agendas, build cross-cutting alliances, creating a sense of agency for women and redefining community for previously insulated groups. Ironically this modern technology has succeeded in reviving and expanding the practice of discursive dialogue that had once characterized traditional tribal politics in the Arabian Peninsula.

Premised on triangulation methodology, this study is based on a cartographic exercise by mapping the network of discourses, which are shaping and are shaped by the politics and practices of cyber activists. This approach consists of content analysis, archival research and exploration of existing secondary material, including print and online media, and primary material from websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and blogs. Online content by organizations and activists mirror the conceptualization of issues and organizational philosophy: they give information about the groups' history, values and objectives, and strategies for mobilization. Discourse analysis of trending tweets, popular blogs and Facebook pages sheds lights on the significance of social media activists in mobilizing and reshaping discourses on controversial topics, and the extent to which social media has facilitated expansion of the public sphere. In addition to mapping the network of discourses in Gulf cyberspace, I also draw from a series of semi-structured interviews with activists, journalists, and academics using the grounded theory method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

GLOBALIZING ECONOMIES AND SOCIETIES IN TRANSITION

The political fervor rocking the Arab world today carries the imprint of the digital age and cyber-mobilization. Set against the backdrop of globalization, this novel phenomenon offers many opportunities and raises just as many questions. There are numerous definitions of globalization. Overall, globalization is characterized by (1) rapid integration of the world economy, (2) innovations and growth in international electronic communications and (3) increasing political and cultural awareness of the global interdependency of humanity (Appadurai 1996; Falk 1992; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 1999; Sassen 1996). Globalization brings new opportunities, the most important of which is the possibility of a non-authoritarian universalism premised on global concepts as human rights, democracy and participation (Boli and Thomas 1997). The following section provides a brief background on the role of globalization in shifting the political and economic dynamics of the societies of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Since the discovery of oil, and the economic boom experienced by the six Gulf countries in the 1970s and 1980s, 'rentierism' has been the term most closely associated with the political systems of the GCC. Rentier states derive a substantial share (often 40 percent or more) of net income from external sources, such as export products like oil, as well as tourism and foreign aid. The rentier state, as the name suggests, relies mostly on rent from external sources of income rather than building local economies. Oil producing countries of the Gulf are often associated with this type of system since oil profits from the global market comprise their major source of revenue (Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Tétrault, Okruhlik and Kapiszewski 2011)

Rentier states recycle wealth by receiving economic rent, such as oil revenue, and distributing it through public spending programs, which have become a lynchpin of political legitimacy. In the ideal-type rentier system, the state enjoys substantial autonomy from society by virtue of external revenue: it delivers 'goods' to the population, in exchange for acquiescence. In the 1970s and 1980s, with relatively small populations, and skyrocketing GDPs, Gulf states were able to institute social welfare programs at little to no charge, earning them the description "allocation states."[1] With falling oil prices, shrinking oil reserves, and a series of global economic recessions, public spending and job creation has been shrinking from one generation to another (Kinninmont 2015). However, as state resources declined relative to demands, the presumed 'no taxation, no representation' implication of the rentier dynamic was beginning to falter.

By the 1990s, the Gulf states began to see globalization as an important mechanism for diversification and development of their economies through the investment of oil revenues. Therefore, the GCC countries have all actively pursued economic policies designed to not only maintain their competitiveness in the global economy, but also become key hubs in global financial flows, transportation and manufacturing. The architects of economic policy in the Gulf states were quick to recognize that the keys to becoming successful and powerful players in the global economy was investment and commitment to first-rate (mostly Westernized and English-language based) education, development of sustainable knowledge-based economies, and mobilization of national manpower (Kinninmont 2015).

It is noteworthy that despite the rapid pace of economic and social development, political reform has been insulated from real change until recently. As Gulf states open their societies to processes of economic and political globalization, there has been an incursion on the traditional political system. Traditional political systems are still very much hierarchical, patriarchal and tribal in nature, with power firmly consolidated and centralized within the extensive tribal networks of each country. Mounting pressures brought on by the liberalizing forces of globalization are challenging the time-honored social contract characterized by an exchange of wealth for power while grassroots demands for political reform have gained momentum in the wake of the Arab Uprisings (Kinninmont 2015). Even in Gulf societies, where popular consensus has privileged a gradual and tempered approach to social and political reform, we are now seeing an involuntary acceleration in the pace of change in response to growing public demands. One example of these piecemeal changes includes reforms to election laws such as those recently instituted by Saudi Arabia, granting women the right to vote and run for municipal elections.

Historically, the centralization of power by the ruling families of the Gulf states constituted 'dynastic rule' in which key positions in the state apparatus are held by members of the extended tribe, which remains, for the most part, a cohesive ruling group through the sharing of benefits among the members. Thus, traditionally, political power and decision-making become a monopoly of the ruling elite, in most cases the ruling tribe or clan. And while citizens could express their grievances at a sheikh's *majlis* or *diwwaniya*, decision-making remained the prerogative of the ruler (Tétrault, 2000). Some scholars of Third Wave democratization such as Andrew Przeworski (1991) and Dvid Pool (1993) argue that economic liberalization leads to a growing middle class, and it is this newly emerging bourgeoisie that ultimately serves as pressure group for political liberalization. Hinnebusch (2003, 2006), on the other hand, cautions against this optimistic assumption, arguing that in many cases in the Arab world the bourgeoisie was both created by, and in alliance with, the state. Thus the middle class were only interested in political liberalization which consolidated their own economic advantages and position in this highly hierarchical system. If anything, democratization which opened up political participation to the masses would pose a threat to the economic monopoly held by both the state and bourgeoisie. Distribution of oil wealth associated with rentierism and economic liberalization has contributed to the emergence of a middle class, which, until recently, was content with its growing prosperity and rise in living standards despite its political disenfranchisement. While historically this has been the case in the Gulf, the recent seismic shocks to the global economy and subsequent shrinking of state resources has damaged the ability of the Gulf States to shield their bourgeoisie from economic crises – unhinging the alliance between the two. The effects of the global financial crisis on the Gulf in 2008 and 2009, characterized by a simultaneous 60 percent drop in oil prices and real estate market crash, impacted, not only the Gulf States, but also this middle class composed of civil servants, small business owners and skilled workers.

As the Gulf region becomes more deeply entrenched in the global economic system, forces of modernization and globalization are placing increasing pressures on these states to evolve politically and socially in response. In the past, the rentier wealth shared by a newly modernizing and prosperous citizenry had trumped any potential for political reform. However, the new generations born into growing wealth and increasingly modern infrastructure are no longer content with the old social contract. In an attempt to meet the domestic needs and international standards of increasingly globalized economies, most Gulf states have heavily invested in improving their educational systems and creating a more open media environment. This has contributed to the expansion of political consciousness and, consequently, heightened demands for greater participation in the political process and general enfranchisement. With the improvement in standards of education, exposure to global flows of information through ICTs and an increasingly independent media, we are seeing a younger generation that is more politically conscious, and interested in playing a more active role in the polity (See Figure One).

---

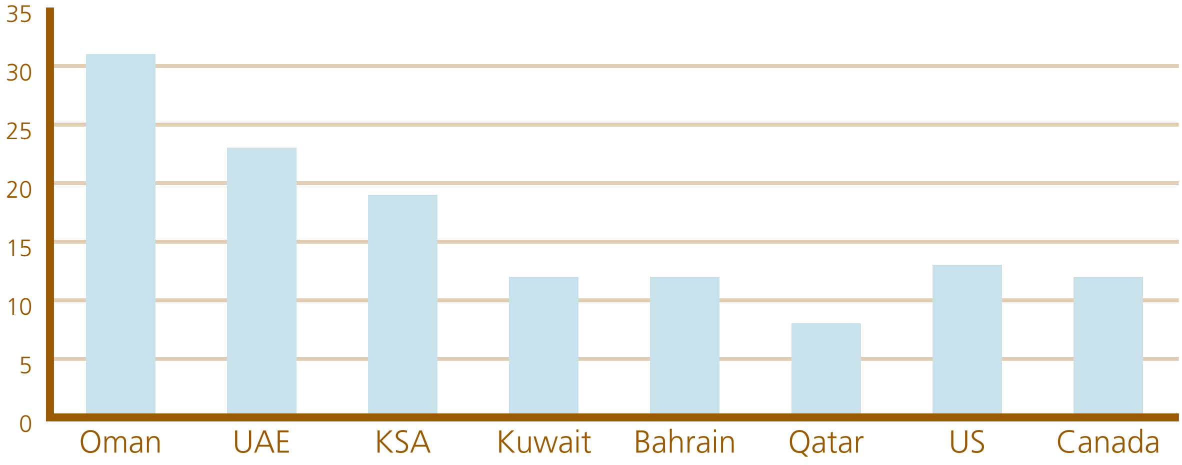
[1] "Allocation states" rely mostly on spending policy, as opposed to "production states," which manufacture finished goods.

At the same time, as Gulf countries used their new oil wealth to finance rapid industrialization and catapault their societies into the global economy, they were faced with the dilemma of producing a skilled work force capable of sustaining and keeping up with this new pace of development. Given the acute imbalance in the ratio of national to expatriate populations in the Gulf, the various states quickly realized the importance of supporting women's education and their entry into the workforce for the purpose of economic survival (Kinninmont 2015). Therefore, it is no surprise that government expenditure on women's education in the Gulf is higher than the rest of the Middle East. Meanwhile, the low rate of employment among nationals (between 10–15 percent of the labor force in the UAE, for example) (Central Intelligence Agency 2011) is a long-standing social problem that has prompted the governments of the Gulf to enforce a quota system in both public and private employment sectors to "nationalize" the labor force. When the policies of Saudization, Qatarization and Emiratization were first introduced, the expectation was that a rigid quota system enforcing periodic replacement of foreign labor by newly minted university graduates from the national population would eventually resolve the huge imbalance in the labor force. Since its implementation in the UAE almost 15 years ago, Emiritization has not succeeded in depressing growth of foreign labor. This has spurred states to create more training programs to help women transition successfully into the labor force and public life. The logic is that excluding women from public participation reduces by 50 percent the already small numbers of nationals running the country (Kinninmont 2015).

Even though economic empowerment of women and their participation in the economy is part and parcel of the social resource mobilization required for sustainable economic development, and despite the fact that women outnumber men in higher education enrollment (by as much as three to one in certain Gulf countries such as the UAE), their high level of training has not translated into widespread participation in the national workforce. According to UNDP statistics (2005), national women continue to make up the largest percentage of unemployed citizens, reaching as high as 70 percent in some cases (see also UNDP 2010). Despite the slow pace of integration into the workforce, the percentage of women working in the private sector has multiplied by as much as threefold since the previous generation (UNDP 2010).

At the same time, access to Westernized higher education systems and advanced information technology has played a significant role in the political socialization of the region's youth, and generated new expectations in terms of citizenship and political participation for both genders. Satellite TV channels, such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiyya, offering programming formatted around audience participation have heightened not only interest in current events, but also participation in discursive practices (Murphy 2009).

Figure One: Public expenditure on education as percentage of total government expenditures. (2008 World Bank Figures)



The recent Arab uprisings have further energized this new generation of highly literate, and wired youth, and we are now seeing a new generation of politicized women (and men) seeking to make their mark of the futures of their respective countries, a subject which is beyond the scope of this article however.

As the region reels from the economic shocks of the global recession, Gulf societies are increasingly questioning the viability of a development strategy premised solely on economic growth. The central debate that is emerging in different contexts across the region stems from a reevaluation of the relationship between the citizens and the state and the need for a new social contract that is not founded on legitimization bought through government handouts. Consensus is building around the need for a system that allows citizens to actively participate in transparent and fair decision-making processes and shape the future trajectory of their societies (DeVriese 2013).

PILLARS OF GLOBALIZATION: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Since 2005, Arab governments have been investing (to varying degrees) in telecommunications infrastructure for greater Internet connectivity through broadband, mobile Internet, and fiber optic cables for increased speeds and capacities to meet the needs of increasingly digital economies and youthful populations (Murphy 2009). In the Middle East, according to Internet World Stats, in 2011, there are an estimated 72,497,466 Internet users, amounting to 33.5 percent penetration. The six Gulf countries enjoy the highest rates of Internet penetration in the Arab World, with the UAE leading at 69 percent (Facebook 53.8 percent), followed by Qatar at 66.5 percent (Facebook 38.1 percent), Bahrain 53.5 percent (Facebook 26 percent), Kuwait 42.4 percent (Facebook 33.9 percent), Saudi Arabia 43.6 percent (Facebook 17.4 percent), and Oman 48.4 percent (Facebook 12 percent). Despite these high penetration rates, it is important to recognize that a digital divide still persists between the wealthy and poor of these societies.

Rapidly liberalizing markets for mobile telephone services and the ever-increasing number of local and regional service providers make GSM (Global System for Mobile) technology the ICT success-story of the Arab world. Between 1999 and 2006 the number of mobile operators based in the Arab countries had tripled (Middle East Economic Digest 2006, 29). By 2006, the eight largest regional telecom companies accounted for 18 percent of the total capitalization of the top 100 Arab companies, expanding from around 73 billion USD to approximately 174 billion USD (ZAYWA 2008a, b). Among the top 100 Arab companies were regional giants like Saudi Telecom, Kuwait's Mobile Telecommunications Company (MTC, which owns Zain), the Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco) and the Dubai-based Etisalat (Murphy, 2009).

Mobile usage penetration rates are particularly high in the Gulf with percentages of GSM subscribers highest at 102.99 percent in Bahrain, 100.86 percent in the UAE and 92.15 percent in Qatar. (ZAYWA 2008a, b). Growing demand in the Arab mobile telephone market has led to the development of regional telecommunication companies like Etisalat, Batelco, and Zain, which are not only extending their service provision into other Arab countries, but also reaching into Africa and South Asia.

New satellite TV programming, GSM technologies and digital and web-based social media have all contributed to a cultural revolution premised on new participatory behavior and discursive practices. According to Murphy (2009, 1149),

> Everything from calling in to Arab talk shows; blogging to protest a common Arab subordination to censorial regimes; using mobile telephones to meet and form relationships with the opposite sex; meeting in Internet cafe´s to formulate strategies to beat the latest regime efforts to block sites of interest; voting in television talent shows; and even making controversial news or interviews a subject for debate: these are all newly available activities which generate cultural transformations which challenge the subordinating impacts of informational capitalism as much as they entail engaging with them.

Critics of social media often cite low Internet penetration rates and the digital divide as a barrier to harnessing the true potential of social media for social activism. Over the past decade cyber cafes have indeed become increasingly prevalent, and affordable in the Arab World; however, it is the availability of smart phones across many parts of the Arab world that has made all the difference. Smart phones with Internet connections mean that one is able to download and upload social media any time anywhere.

Furthermore, the demographic shifts that have taken place across the Arab World over the past few decades have created a ticking time bomb, in part due to the inevitable population explosion – no pun intended – that accompanies post-independence development. The majority of Arab populations are under 30 and educated yet face: double digit unemployment, rising national debt and food costs, and political marginalization. It is no surprise that many are angry. Many of this tech-savvy demographic are also avid users of social networking, often using their smart phones or internet connected mobiles.

Facebook users in the region doubled from 11.9 million to 21.3 million in 2010, according to the Dubai School of Government Arab Social Media Report (2011). Growing Internet penetration, and accessibility to social media via smart phones has lowered the barriers to participation in discursive arenas expanding the interpreters and carriers of information in the Arab world. One of the key developments coming out of the Arab uprisings is an Arab public engaging in critical dialogue with the state (Herrera 2014; Herrera and Sakr 2014).

DEMOCRATIZATION OF PUBLIC SPHERE?

The premise for this analysis draws heavily on Jurgen Habermas's theory of Public Sphere (1989), which highlights the instrumentality of the public sphere as an effective channel for the expression of civil society's needs and/or grievances, and ultimately instigating social change. In order to understand the transformative potential of social media, it is important to first understand its influence on shifting dynamics of public sphere and, inversely, exploring the significance of the public sphere as a foundation of deliberative democracy. The concept of the public sphere has become the most widely cited paradigm for understanding the role of social media in redefining civic engagement and reshaping political spaces.

According to Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the modern bourgeois public sphere emerged when private members of society converged to exercise their reason in a public forum (1989, 1996). In Habermas's model, the medium of talk and the emergent public sphere where citizens debate and air their grievances become an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction, and, thus, a main locus for political participation. As a result, in Habermas's model of civil society, the discourse that takes place within the public sphere is seen as influencing 'democratic opinion' and 'will formation' by generating the issues that ascend to the public agenda and subsequently enter parliamentary debates – ultimately transforming and legitimating legislative reform. An expansion of the public sphere offers new opportunities for liberal political engagement by including a range of members of society from across the board, which is ultimately the key to enhance democratic and emancipatory potential (Calhoun 1992, 2).

In *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), Habermas introduces the idea of an informal public sphere, as opposed to the 18th century formal bourgeoisie public sphere. An informal public sphere is one that "has the advantage of a medium of unrestricted communication" and is therefore effective in widening public discourse, and allowing the articulation of collective identities and need interpretations (Habermas 1996, 308). The Internet is the prime medium to facilitate this process for new online communities and cyberactivists in particular.

Many theorists have criticized Habermas' focus on a singular formal public sphere. The counterargument presented by Craig Calhoun emphasizes the plurality of the public sphere, composed of multiple different "overlapping publics" (1994, 162). It is within these alternative publics that marginalized groups – in this instance the subaltern masses of Arab countries – formulate what Calhoun describes as "oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." Meanwhile, Fraser (1992) proposed the existence of 'subaltern counterpublics,' which she describes as spheres in which the subaltern can formulate counterdiscourses; opening the space for oppositional frames and interpretations of the [Gramscian] multitudes' interests, needs, and identities. These counterpublics serve as an alternative to dominant publics, providing the subaltern with a space to engage and interact with and yet remain separate from the hegemonic or formal public sphere. [2]For the multitudes which are disenfranchised and locked out of the formal or mainstream publics, this then becomes the space where they voice their grievances, develop counter-discourses, and challenge meta narratives.[3] The participation of increasing numbers of women and subaltern groups in this space also serves to challenge the 'public' or 'private' dichotomy. Historically this dichotomy has relegated what are deemed as 'private' issues to the private sphere of the home and family, and therefore kept them out of the public agenda that ultimately shapes policy and governance.

Although Fraser's contribution to the notion of counterpublics is invaluable, I would argue that due to the fluidity, interaction and overlap between virtual and real formal publics, counterpublics are no longer separate. Namely, they exist on a horizontal plane with multiple other publics, none more privileged than the other. The Internet and social media have not only undermined the previous hierarchy of publics, but they have deterritorialized them by connecting audiences across borders. By extension, social media allows citizens to politically participate out of the formal public sphere, as members of an expanded polity.

One of the features of this democratized public sphere is the changing nature of discourse and communication reflected by the inclusion of ordinary citizens using vernacular and slang, and multiple mediums (poetry, rap, YouTube videos) as vehicles for their messages. In Anderson's (2000, 39) view both the public and the discourse, or content, are democratized. Gradually, as they hone their civic engagement and discursive skills, citizens are able to expand their political participation beyond the national public and connect with others across boundaries. This allows them to participate in transnational dialogues on issues of local relevance, such as human rights. As they gain knowledge of different narratives, discursive paradigms and platforms, citizens become better equipped to articulate their grievances, interests and demands, often by tapping into global rhetoric of human rights and democratization. The next logical step from there would be mobilization and action beyond the ether or cyberspace, taking their demands on to the street (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 1997; McCombs 1982; Rogers, Hart and Dearing 1997).[4]

---

[2] Gaytari Spivak's (1988) seminal work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* uses the term the 'subaltern' to refer to the most marginalized and disenfranchised members of society.

[3] This newly emerging alternative to the official public sphere that is restricted and manipulated by the state is what Nancy Fraser (1992) calls *subaltern counter publics* where subordinated social groups that have been historically denied entry into the formal public are now able to carve a space to express their own views and interests.

WOMEN IN CYBER-SPACE

One of the recurring criticisms of Habermas' public sphere is its reinforcement of the public/private dichotomy. Social media deconstructs this binary as it blurs the boundaries of public/private with respect to both participation and content. In the Gulf in particular, where gender segregation is upheld in many areas of life, the new virtual publics have become a necessary tool for youth to create "new forms of communication across gender lines, interrupting traditional social rituals, and giving young people new autonomy in how they run their lives" (Wheeler 2003, 57).

Since the inception of modern notions of citizenship during the French and American revolutions of the 18th century, the political construction of an ontologically masculine citizenship has been closely associated with the public-private divide/dichotomy (Lister 1997). All matters considered the domain of a male (namely rational, logical, independent) were of public interest belonging in the public sphere, while those matters considered female (emotional, corporal, dependent, concerned with familial affairs) were relegated to the private. The public/private has contributed to the exclusion of women and other marginalized groups from full membership and participation in the public space. Women in particular are affected by the exclusionary nature of citizenship, which Lister argues creates non or partial citizens unable to reap the full benefits of membership in a polity or citizenry. The emergence of new publics in the Gulf challenges this exclusivity by deconstructing the public/private dichotomy and redefining what it means to do politics. Now, the personal has become political in Gulf societies – thus expanding the parameters of the public sphere.

Blogs can serve as catalysts for previously unlikely mobilization facilitated by political opportunities – often in the form of elections, national scandals, or controversial legislation. But can they provide the basis for a new public sphere in the Arab Gulf? Two recent examples of how the growing female blogosphere in the Gulf is tackling personal and often taboo issues through the use of personal blogging are "Glitter" from Kuwait, and "Silly Bahraini Girl" from Bahrain. Glitter (GG) is a blog posted by a Kuwaiti woman who focuses on personal and romantic relationships, and social norms in Kuwaiti society. Silly Bahraini Girl (SBG) is a blog posted by a Bahraini woman addressing a wide range of social issues such as censorship, free-speech and cyberactivism.[5] In Saudi Arabia, a country where women are barred from driving, and need permission from a male guardian to travel abroad, many women are embracing the freedom of anonymity on the Internet. Saudi Eve, in her late 20s and single when she first came onto the blogging scene in 2005, gained notoriety as one of the first female bloggers to regularly write about her love life, religion and daily issues shaping the lives of young women in Saudi Arabia.[6] Although her last blog entry is in April 2009, her blog is somewhat representative of the type of blogs written by young women in the Gulf. According to a 2011 Khaleej Times editorial, an estimated half of Saudi blogs are written by women, and most address issues that directly impact women's lives in the Kingdom (Janardhan 2011). Saudi women bloggers range in age from 18-30 years, are university-educated, and use pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. They write in both Arabic and English, mixing journal–type entries, social commentaries, short stories, essays and poetry, and some even host digital photo and art collections. Thus they distinguish themselves from both professional journalists and columnists blogging for established media sites, as well as Internet bulletin boards that often have a militant Islamic angle. "Our society is very critical and I don't feel I can say what I want to say without censoring my words if I use my real name," said Saudi blogger Uber Girl in 2007 (http://ubergirl87.blogspot.com).

---

[4] To gauge the influence of social media on democratization of the public sphere and reshaping of public agendas, I use the theory of agenda-setting, whereby issues move up and down the ladder of the public agenda as various stakeholders and constituencies mobilize and lobby to push their issues forward. Usually, research in this area focuses on platforms and agendas of formal organizations and their translation into policy. I will, however, focus on the use of cross-cutting strategies (social media, networking and protests) by non-ideological grassroots popular movements to generate public discourse on social justice (specifically political and economic rights enshrined in the language of human rights) and the push to move these issues to the forefront of public consciousness. The agenda-setting process is a competitive process by which issue advocates use various mechanisms and channels, including the media and varying public forums, to gain the attention of policy elites. Agenda-setting is often depicted as a zero-sum game due to the scarcity of space in the public agenda, meaning that in order for an issue to ascend to the higher rungs of the public agenda, it must first push other issues down. For the purposes of this article, the agenda-setting theory is most useful in understanding the political processes by which public discourse is able to elevate social problems to the public agenda and consequently capable of generating public policy reform.

[5] The blog is written by journalist Amira Al Hosseini, who goes by @Just Amira on Twitter.

[6] http://eveksa.blogspot.com.

For Saudi women, and much of the Gulf, blogs have become a safe haven, where they can demand social and cultural change and express frustration with the slow pace of reform in their country. While the majority of Saudi female bloggers prefer to post journal-type entries, there are also some writers who have a more activist agenda. In 2006, Saudi-yat.blogspot – a blog run by two female bloggers, Khoulah and Farah – was seen as groundbreaking in its agenda. Khoulah and Farah (who previously produced individual blogs) believed they could bring about change by educating Saudi women and the wider public about their Islamic rights. Their blog, which also sought to celebrate and encourage successful Saudi women, has served as a precedent for other activist-oriented blogs by women. During the early stages of the Saudi Blogosphere, another popular blog (Masoolah) was trying to form a support group for Saudi female bloggers, called the Saudi Female Blog Group. While many of these blogs are now discontinued, others have sprouted in their place. Some of the more issue focused ones are "Saudiwoman" which addresses "women's rights to dignity," and "saudiwomendriving"; both these blogs focus mainly on the ban on driving.[7] Others like Samarworld provide more general social commentary, criticizing everything from tribalism to racism in the kingdom.[8]

In 2006, a number of Kuwaiti blogs launched a virtual campaign for election reform and used their online networks to rally support for street demonstrations in a Ukraine-type "orange" revolution. The campaign was organized by three university student bloggers who seized upon a call by pro-reform MPs to cut the country's electoral districts from 25 to five as a method to fight corruption. They turned this demand into a catchy "5 for Kuwait" orange logo. The blogging community mobilized hundreds of young people to take to the streets waving the "5 for Kuwait" orange banners in a series of protests. Emboldened by popular support, the parliament engaged in a standoff with the government, ultimately forcing the country's Emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed Al Sabah, to dissolve parliament, and hold new elections a month later. At the center of the telecommunication boom in the Gulf is the region's expanding youth population. In gender segregated societies where mingling between the sexes is severely restricted, text messaging offers opportunities for flirtation, organizing social events and even dating. Text messaging, therefore, becomes a pressure valve for maintaining social decorum. For example, during their 2005 campaign for voting rights, Kuwaiti women attributed their mobilization success to text messaging, which had allowed them to call younger protesters out of schools and into the streets.

In the 1990s messages of dissent and Islamist activism were spread through facsimile machines. In the new millennium, independent satellite television channels were set to transform Arab populations' exposure and understanding of the world around them. With the revolutionary advances in ICTs, the Internet has become a dominant channel for messaging, mobilizing and cyberactivism. Each new technology has been met with a parallel response from the region's authoritarian governments to control the flow of information, from restricting licenses for facsmile machines to blocking dissident Websites. (Herrera 2014; Herrera and Sakr 2014). The Gulf states have yet to figure out how to control text messaging channels without negatively impacting the profit-margins of regional telecom giants, whose stock prices have soared as mobile messaging has exploded.

CYBER ACTIVISM, WOMEN, AND THE ARAB UPRISINGS, OH MY!

In Bahrain, two vocal activists on the Twitter stage are the Khawaja sisters, Maryam and Zaynab, daughters of detained human rights activist, Abdulhadi Al Khawaja. Maryam Al Khawaja is a self-professed Twitter activist who also serves as the head of the foreign relations office at the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), and has been actively using social media, specifically tweeting blow-by-blow documentation of protests and human rights abuses since 2011. Zaynab, an active member of the Bahraini pro-democracy youth movement, has been an outspoken voice on human rights abuses and government crackdowns during the recent protests in Bahrain. Zaynab, who in 2011 had 31, 000 followers on Twitter, has had her tweets retweeted worldwide -- thus transmitting her message to global audiences.

In personal communication with Maryam Al Khawaja in February 2012 she described cyberactivism, particularly on Twitter, as essential because the unrest in Bahrain "has been ignored by mainstream media." She went on to say that social media has been instrumental in disseminating information through 3-D and video images of what the government is doing" as well as "mobilizing, and advocating for the return to Pearl Square by announcing strategies and plans for the next protest on Twitter first." Al Khawaja added that blogs, personal and private Facebook pages such as BCHR or Nabeel Rajab's personal fFacebook page, and Twitter posts have created an effective "platform for discussion, where people voice their grievances" (Al Khawaja 2012).

Quoting her colleague and fellow human rights activist Nabeel Rajab, Maryam Al Khawaja said that the current situation “has created a population that is half citizen journalists and half human rights activists.” She believes the first group has been empowered by social media and the latter has been influenced by high levels of engagement by human rights activists, and the subsequent diffusion of human rights frames into daily rhetoric.

---

[7] See http://saudiwoman.me/ and http://www.saudiwomendriving.blogspot.com/.

[8] http://samarworld.wordpress.com/.

Frustrated with what many call a media blackout on the protests and uprising in Bahrain, activists within the movement have been very adept at getting their message out to the rest of the world. For example, when Zaynab Al Khawaja was arrested in December, videos of the protest that took place last winter at the Centre City shopping mall, one of the country’s main retail outlets, went viral through an aggressive social media campaign whereby posts were channeled through multiple platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, SMS, and other messaging applications. In some cases, activists have resorted to the speak2tweet application, which allows users to tweet messages by calling an international number, and is but one example of the platforms used by activists to circumvent Internet blackouts.

As post-Arab uprisings parliamentary elections in Tunisia and Egypt ushered in Islamist parties through landslide victories for the Tunisian Ennahda in Tunisia and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Al Nour Party, the question that emerges is what will happen to women’s rights in these countries? Will the rise of conservative Islamist parties signal a reversal or rescission of women’s hard won rights driving them out of the public arena and back into the home? At time of writing, the answer is still not evident; it is a chapter of history that is still being written for both countries, and beyond the scope of this article. However, what is well within the scope of this study is the current state of public sphere discourse on women’s rights and women’s role in Bahraini society, specifically in the wake of the protests that swept through the small island nation.

During The Frontline Club’s program on *Women of the Revolution* hosted by BBC Arabic, Maryam Al Khawaja described the significance of women’s participation in the protests in Bahrain as “setting a very important step. With this revolution, women have found a new voice for themselves.” The debate, which took place in London, brought together three female panelists; from Bahrain, Libya, and Iran, respectively, to describe their experiences with uprisings. In discussing her projections for women in the aftermath of the Arab protests, Al Khawaja said:

> Pearl Square is the Tahrir Square of Bahrain. There, women read poetry, gave political speeches, and set up their own tents to talk about women rights and movements. One of the important things about the revolution in Bahrain was breaking the stereotype that exists in the western world.

Among the first wave of protesters to descend on Pearl square were women – children in tow –demanding reform and enfranchisement of citizenry in general, not only women. “Women have played a hugely influential role this time and put themselves in danger,” said Nabeel Rajab, President of the BCHR; “they treated the injured in the streets and nursed them in their homes when they were too afraid to go to hospital” (Rice et al. 2011).

Not only have women – especially medical staffers – been detained or disappeared, but many have become politicized and have taken to the streets to protest the disappearance and abuse of their male kin. This phenomenon is very common, and has similarities to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a loose association of Argentine mothers whose children disappeared during the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. Initially demonstrating for the release of their family members, the women became politicized through this process, and the group later morphed into a vocal advocacy organization for human rights.

The Arab uprisings, that brought both men and women activists to the street, signaled a convergence and merging of the virtual public sphere and physical public space. Whether it was Tahrir or Pearl Roundabout, women were bravely shifting their activism and platforms beyond the virtual public sphere.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Stories of Democracy, is an in-depth study of civil society and politics in Kuwait, where that late political scientist Mary Ann Tétreault (2000) demonstrates that a monarchial system richer in resources, and well integrated into the international political economy through its oil exports, can also hold a significant space for civil society to develop. Tétreault (Ibid, 7) stresses the importance of ‘agency’: ‘the capacity of human beings to act, speak, convince and mobilize one another to do something together,’ as contributing to the evolution of ‘political space.’[9] In her discussion of the significance of protected spaces in facilitating democratic politics, Tetreault highlights the roles played by using the home, mosque and diwaniyya in mobilizing political resources.[10] In the wake of the Arab Uprisings and global Occupy movements, virtual publics, and by extention counterpublics, can provide just the type of ‘political space’ Tetreault described.

---

[9] In describing political space, Tetreault references Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘space of appearance’: ‘geographic and metaphoric locations within which it is possible for people to invent new identities, relationships and institutions.’

[10] The peculiarly Kuwaiti institution of the *diwaniyya* refers to a regular gathering of men at the homes of prominent individuals to meet socially and discuss public issues, and became a locus of activity in the democracy movement in 1989 and 1990.

The development of civil society within the Gulf has lagged far behind most sectors. Individual bids to establish voluntary organizations are constrained through arbitrary and opaque decision-making processes governed by institutions, such as the ministry of social affairs and/or interior. The potential for a legitimate civil society capable of acting as a force for social mobilization is further constrained through legislation barring the establishment of political parties and strong regulation of civil society organizations which strips them of any independent functionality. With heavy restrictions placed on freedom of association, expression and protest, avenues for participation in the public sphere and political life of the nation become severely limited.

In the absence of an independent and free civil society, the expansion of public space and democratization of the public sphere through ICTs is laying the foundations for an independent and inclusive polity. The creation of a open and pluralistic public space that encourages an independent-minded and active civil society fully engaged in the political process is conducive to elements of democratization: those that guarantee the free expression of ideas, engaged communities, structured political dialogue and professional and responsible media. The pro-reform movements' use of ICTs is a manifestation of a newly emboldened citizenry's attempt to create, in the long term, a public space that fosters freedom of expression and participation by varying segments of society.

REFERENCES

Al Khawaja, Maryam. 2012. Personal Communication. February 9.

Anderson, Jon. 2000. "New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere." *ISIM Newsletter* 5: 39.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

BBC Arabia. 2011. The Frontline Club's Program on *Women of the Revolution*. December 7.

Beblawi, Hazem and Giacomo Luciani. 1987. *The Rentier State*. London: Routledge.

Boli, John and George Thomas. 1997. "World Culture in the World Polity." *American Sociological Review* 62(2): 171-90.

Calhoun, Craig. 1992. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.

Central Intelligence Agency. 2011. *World Factbook*. Washington DC: CIA.

DeVriese, Leila. 2013. "Paradox of Globalization: New Arab Publics? New Social Contract?" *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 12: 114-134.

Dubai School of Government. 2011. *Arab Social Media Report 2011*. Retrieved from http://www.dsg.ae/en/ASMR1/ASMRHome1.aspx.

Fraser, Nancy. 1992, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 109-142. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.

Glaser, Barney and Anslem L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

———. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Malden, MA: MIT.

Held, David, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton. 1999. *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Herrera, Linda. 2014. *Revolution in the Age of Social Media: The Egyptian Popular Insurrection and the Internet*. New York: Verso.

Herrera, Linda and Rehab Sakr. 2014. *Wired Citizenship: Youth Learning and Activism in The Middle East*. New York: Rutledge.

Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2003. *The International Politics of the Middle East*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

———. 2006. "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique." *Democratization* 13(3): 373-395.

Internet World Stats 2011. http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.

Janardhan, N. 2011. "Social Networking Sparks Dramatic Changes." *Khaleej Time*. March 15.

Kinninmont, Jane. 2015. *Future Trends in the Gulf.* London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Lister, Ruth. 1997. *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.

Lynch, Marc. 2007. "Blogging the New Arab Public." *Arab Media and Society* 1. Cairo: AUC Press.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2): 176-187.

McCombs, Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw. 1993. "The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas." *Journal of Communication* 43 (2): 58-67.

Middle East Economic Digest (2006) Special Report Telecoms. 50 (August) London and Dubai: Middle East Economic Digest.

Murphy, Emma C. 2009. "Theorizing ICTs in the Arab World: Informational Capitalism and the Public Sphere." *International Studies Quarterly* 53: 1131–1153.

Pool, David. 1993. "The Links between Economic and Political Liberalization," in *Economic and Political Liberalization in the Middle East*, edited by Tim Niblock and Emma Murphy. 40– 54. London: British Academic Press.

Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rice, Xan, Katherine Marsh, Tom Finn, Harriet Sherwood, Angelique Chrisafis, and Robert Booth. 2011. "Women have Emerged as Key Players in the Arab Spring." *The Guardian*, April 22. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/22/women-arab-spring.

Rogers, Everett M., William B. Hart, and James W. Dearing. 1997. "A Paradigmatic History of Agenda-Setting Research." *Do the Media Govern?* 225-236.

Sassen, Saskia. 1996. *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Saudi-yat.blogspot. 2006. (Blog). Retrieved from http://saudi-yat.blogspot.se.

Silly Bahraini Girl. 2009. (Blog). Retrieved from http://sillybahrainigirl.blogspot.se.

Spivak, Gayatri. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. London: Macmillan.

Tétreault, Mary Ann. 2000. *Stories of Democracy*. NY: Columbia University Press.

Tétreault, Mary Ann, Gwenn Okruhlik, and Andrzej Kapiszewski. 2011. *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition*. New York: Lynne Rienner.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1992. "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller, 174–202. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Uber Girl. 2007. (Blog). Retrieved from http://ubergirl87.blogspot.com.

United Nations Development Program. 2005. *The Arab Human Development Report: Empowerment of Arab Women*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Development Program. 2010. *Arab Human Development Report: Population Levels, Trends and Policies in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities*. New York: UNDP.

Wheeler, Deborah. 2003. "Blessings and Curses: Women and the Internet Revolution in the Arab World." In *Women and Media in the Middle East*, edited by Naomi Sakr, 56-79. New York: I.B. Tauris.

ZAYWA. 2008a. Top Companies in the Arab World for 2004. Retrieved from http://www.zaywa.com/stopry.cfm/sidZA-WYA20041121075325.

ZAYWA. 2008b. Top Arab Companies. Retrieved from http://www.zaywa.com/story.cfm/sidZAYWA20051213122619.

Mustang (2015)

Director: Deniz Gamze Ergüven
Writers: Deniz Gamze Ergüven, Alice Winocour
Stars: Günes Sensoy, Doga Zeynep Doguslu, Tugba Sunguroglu

Mustang (2015) is a Turkish-French-German co-produced drama film, directed by Turkish-French film Director Deniz Gamze Ergüven. Ergüven, who was born in Turkey but raised in France, was invited to Cannes Film Festival Atelier. There she met fellow director of Mustang, Alice Winocour, who suggested that Ergüven explores her art by focusing on more intimate scenarios. It was after this conversation that Ergüven produced Mustang. The protagonists of the movie are five sisters who share a strong bond. Through their experiences, Ergüven tells the story of the way in which society deals with burgeoning female sexuality. Specifically, Ergüven explores how the girls discover, live and express their sexuality and empowerment by finding escapes from the structures that demonize their womanhood. The movie has been nominated for "Best Foreign Language Film" at the Academy Awards and won "Best Film" at the Lumiéeres Awards.

The movie is set in a conservative sea side town, where five orphaned sisters live with their grandmother and their uncle. The movie begins with the sisters celebrating the last day of school by swimming in the sea, clothed, with their male classmates. They play games - including one where the girls sit on boy's shoulders and wrestle each other. When they return home, cheerful and happy, their grandmother is waiting for them in rage, having heard the girls had been playing with boys. The most striking sentence the grandmother says is "you were satisfying yourselves on boy's shoulders," having heard from a neighbour how they were playing in the sea. This is the first time the audience encounters the perspective of the older, traditional women and the way in which they demonise and malign female sexuality. After this event, the sisters are locked up and subjected to virginity tests. They experience a series of events where they are oppressed, locked in their rooms - caged into the big house they all live in - sexually and verbally abused by their uncle and are finally married off one by one to men they have no special interest in.

The movie explores women's issues by focusing on social and private life, rather than structural and legal problems, and through this delineates the way these oppressive structures are recreated within the family and society. What we see in the movie is a patriarchal family. Interestingly, the nature of this patriarchy does not truly come from an oppressive male who is the head of the family. Rather, the grandmother is the embodiment of almost all the structures that oppress the protagonists. For example, after the girls were locked in the house, the first thing the grandmother started to do is give them cooking lessons in order to make them eligible for marriage. She is also aware of her son secretly going into the girls' room every night to abuse them but maintains her silence on the matter.

The events happening are overwhelming and the movie becomes very hard to contextualize without taking into account its symbolic significance. Mustang is a movie that can be thought of as a microcosm of women's issues in Turkey in general. What comes to mind at first is that it is a good attempt to represent the general gender inequalities and oppressions women face in Turkey through a relatively small, specific case. Some of the remarks from movie viewers claim the movie "exaggerated" real life experiences in Turkey. Indeed, it was exaggerated in a sense that Ergüven tried to encompass more than can be realistically conveyed through one family's story. Though, she has stated that the movie was not intended to represent the reality of everyday Turkish life but, like a fairy tale, was a representation of the things Ergüven experienced as a young woman (Weston 2015). However, when the situation of women in Turkey and the movie are compared, one can find a number of similarities. While gender equality remains structurally embedded, social problems such as rape, honor killings and childhood marriages remain a huge issue in Turkish society. There are scarce attempts to solve these problems at either a structural or societal level. Feminists in Turkey have long been fighting to secure a safer and more equal society for Turkish women. However, exclusion of women's organizations and disregarding the feminist perspective is one of the long running strategies of the 13 year ruling conservative JDP (Justice and Democracy Party) (Afanaseiza and Hogg 2015). Despite the JDP implementation of legal reforms regarding women's rights, thus positioning themselves as the guarantor of gender equality, there has been little change in their actual discourse that limits women's roles to motherhood (see for example Agence France Presse 2016). In this sense, Ergüven's provocative, feminist and critical approach in conveying the struggles of women in Turkey is a noble attempt to challenge and protest the oppressive structures Turkish women have to deal with in every level of their social and private lives.

BY ADILE SEDEF DÖNMEZ

REFERENCES

Weston, H. 2015. "Kitchen Conversations: Deniz Gamze Ergüven." *Criterion*, 30 December. https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/3852-kitchen-conversations-deniz-gamze-erguven

Afanaseiza, D. and Hogg, J. 2015."The fight is still on for women's rights in Turkey." *Reuters*. January 20. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/20/turkey-womens-rights_n_7099184.html

Turkish Constitution, Part 1, Article 10.

Agence France-Presse. 2016. "Recep Tayyip Erdogan: 'A woman is above all else a mother.'" *The Guardian*. March 8. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/08/recep-tayyip-erdogan-a-woman-is-above-all-else-a-mother-turkish-president

Do Muslim Women Need Saving?

By Lila Abu-Lughod.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Only a few days after finishing Do Muslim Women Need Saving? by anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, an event took place which aptly demonstrated the importance of this book. The French minister in charge of women's rights, Laurence Rossignol, made a statement condemning international clothing brands such as Marks & Spencer, Dolce & Gabbana and H&M for catering to the needs of Muslim women. These brands, which see a lucrative market in the production of "modest fashion," take part in "the enslavement of women," Rossignol claimed. To make matters worse, she compared women who wear the burqa to "negroes who supported slavery." The minister's words sparked a social media outcry. Muslim women from across the world voiced their frustration at the condescending and patronizing statement from a so called defender of women's rights. Reading about the affair, I imagined Abu-Lughod rolling her eyes in exasperation and bewilderment over yet another Western politician feeling the need to express their misinformed and simplistic opinions about the plight of "the Muslim woman." I imagined Abu-Lughod asking questions to the French minister, and those men and women applauding the minister's courageous stand for putting "freedom" before the financial gain of the capitalist fashion market. What do you really know about the lives of veiled women and their reasons to cover their hair and (sometimes) face, she might ask them. How can you reduce the different ways and reasons for covering that women from various social, economic and cultural backgrounds employ to one simplistic explanation? Is restricting access to modest clothing a step towards living in freedom? How can you reduce the complicated dynamics that produce women's suffering to a piece of cloth they wear on their heads?

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is a book that scrutinizes "the emerging Western common sense about the plight of Muslim women" (8). Since 2001, when women's rights were accepted as a plausible reason to support military intervention in Afghanistan, "the call for women's rights has gone mainstream," Abu-Lughod argues (54). Scrutinizing the "pulp nonfiction" books that narrate the tragic stories of women out there in undefined lands, and the policies of politicians like Rossignol, Abu-Lughod shows how, each in their own way, they contribute to an understanding of "the Muslim woman" as a victim of a patriarchal, oppressive and misogynistic culture: as a being without rights. Building on more than forty years of experience as an anthropologist working with Muslim women in Muslim communities, Abu-Lughod fights this understanding. Through intimate stories of real women in real places, she repeatedly undermines the notion that women's suffering is cultural or religious. She firmly grounds women's suffering in the contemporary world, a world implicated by global inequality and oppressive military and state regimes. Women's suffering is not the consequence of archaic rooted cultures "somewhere out there." It is the consequence of the very real regimes of power that govern today's world.

Abu-Lughod treads a slippery slope in Do Muslim Women Need Saving? No one can be indifferent to the problems she discusses, such as forced marriages, domestic abuse and sexual violence. It is not surprising then that throughout the book she continuously feels the need to emphasize that she does not condone oppression of, or violence against, women. The book is not a call for cultural relativism or disengagement, nor a criticism of those women working to improve women's lives on the ground (among whom are Islamic feminists held in high esteem by Abu-Lughod). What it is, however, is a biting critique of the tendency of the human rights discourse to "focus the gaze elsewhere": to sensationalize the suffering of people far away and not to be critical of what happens in our own societies or what role we play ourselves in creating suffering elsewhere (221). Abu-Lughod argues that speaking about "rights" obscures how we all, in our shared humanity, are tied in complex ways to the people around us. This means that matters of choice and consent, which are held in such high esteem by the human rights discourse, are never simple or straightforward. It is this that I find the most significant theoretical argument put forward in the book. The obsession of the human rights discourse with choice and consent obscures the ways in which people are implicated in their social environment. Only a human perspective, which would be achieved by looking and listening carefully to each other, can help us to begin to understand "loaded values like choice and freedom and how they actually work in the context of human lives" (224).

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is a complex read in which Abu-Lughod discusses in six chapters a range of very different topics. She moves from speaking of low quality books on the tragic fate of Muslim women, to how the concept of "women's rights" is used in the NGO world in Palestine, to the activities of Islamic feminists in Malaysia and the U.S.A. Yet, she manages to draw the chapters together into with overarching message and statement. The book is also in part a journey through Abu-Lughod's ethnographic career. She draws examples and stories from Veiled Sentiments (1986) her first book on the Bedouin of northern Egypt, her extensive work on rural Egypt, and her work in and on Palestine. She also draws from her own life and family history, which also indicates how personal the matter is to her. To conclude, Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is an important book that not only criticizes but also offers alternative perspectives. Instead of calling for moral crusades to "save Muslim women" out of a sense of misguided superiority, Abu-Lughod urges us to carefully analyze, always remain critical of ourselves and to recognize our common humanity.

By Esther Schoorel

Nation-Building, State and the Gender-Framing of Women's Rights in the United Arab Emirates (1971-2009)

By Vânia Carvalho Pinto.
Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2012.

The theoretical entry point employed by Pinto in *Nation-Building, State and the Gender-framing of Women's Rights in the United Arab Emirates (1971-2009)* is the "gender-framing" perspective. "Framing," as defined by Snow and Benford, refers to the process by which leaders attempt to gain support for ideas by presenting the value of said idea in terms and concepts that relate to a target audience. As a theoretical concept framing accounts for a shifting value base and the need for leaders to consistently frame and reframe concepts in order to continue to garner support from their target audience. Thus, it is a strong explanatory tool for the UAE due to the country's rapid expansion and growth, following its consolidation in 1971. In her book, Pinto analyzes the shifting Emirati social values as they relate to the education, employment and political rights of women. Pinto's specific analytical tool is "gender-framing:" the process by which the state's justification for the changing nature of women's rights constantly shifts to account for the changing values of the target audience.

This adaptive quality of the Emirati state is apparent throughout the book. Pinto carefully takes the reader through the changing social, political and economic landscape of the United Arab Emirates from the 1970s through to the late 2000s. After laying out the theoretical framework in Chapter One, Pinto explores what she sees as the primary motivation behind the Emirati ruler's policy on women – the construction of a nation and a national identity – in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explores the "promotion of the gender-frame" until the 1980's. Chapter Four describes the push for a return to traditional and cultural norms of the past. This exploration of the cultural anxiety of the UAE will be of particular interest to those unfamiliar with the unique demographic situation of the Emirates. Specifically, Pinto highlights how cultural anxiety stemmed from increasing mixed marriages between Emiratis and expatriates, decreasing visibility of Emirati's in the private sector, and fear for the younger generation caught between Emirati tradition and the increasingly globalized world. Chapter Five explores contemporary concerns from 1990-2009 by evaluating the new powers of political participation granted to women. While an interesting development, one indicative of the changes to women's position in Emirati society since the 1970s, the almost total lack of political power held by the elected Federal National Council makes this analysis appear slightly hollow. While female suffrage is important, the extent of male suffrage in the UAE remains equally unimpressive. Thus, Pinto's final section looking at future concerns as they pertain to the millennial generation of Emiratis, touching on the problems of gender-mixing and the increasing difficulty of balancing tradition and globalization, provides a more satisfying end to the exploration of the role of gender in the UAE.

I particularly enjoyed the analysis of the shifting balance of power between the state and society, strongly evident in both Chapters Three and Four. Pinto demonstrates how the state's manipulation of symbols is a means by which it both reflects cultural norms – but also has the power to shape them. This theme can be illustrated by the policies surrounding female education, discussed in Chapter Three. Despite the clear governmental goals requiring the education of women, following consolidation of the UAE in the 1970s, rural families maintained their cultural traditions and failed to see the benefit in educating their daughters. Thus, the state was forced to incentivize them by providing free, segregated education. Interestingly, in this example, and Pinto's wider exploration of government policy, the policies implemented by the state appear to provide the result desired by the rulers - but at a diminishing return. Namely, after a point, societal norms relating to marriage, honor and family become the main driving forces again. This is evident by the subsequent increase in the numbers of females attending school, following the implementation of free education (1970s), until the women reached a marrying age - at which point families continued to remove them from school. Here Pinto touches on the complexity of nation-building under such rapid time constraints: that there is only so much manufacturing of culture that can occur. However, due to the increased education of both genders – Pinto describes how Emirati men began to desire marrying more educated and globalized women to match their own educational background. Education, therefore, became a "necessity of life" (43) for women because it had become fused with the concept of marriage. Thus, while cultural norms relating to marriage continued to play a central role, the content of those norms are shown to have been shaped by the state's rhetoric.

Overall, while an informative read, Pinto sacrifices in depth analysis for a more comprehensive explanation of the thirty-eight years of nation-building. Pinto deftly consolidates the complex landscape of state policies and changing cultural and societal norms and presents them in an accessible format. However, her use of primary evidence in the text is focused heavily on the rhetoric of members of the Emirates royal families. Quotations from women directly quoted in the text remain scarce. Thus, as the reader, I could not come to my own conclusion about the veracity of Pinto's claims about cultural and societal reactions to state policies; instead, her claims about societal response had to be taken on face value. Ultimately, I would recommend this book to those unfamiliar with the UAE who are looking to have a descriptive understanding of the history of state feminism and the position of women in the Gulf country.

By Danielle Soskin

An Islam of Her Own

By Sherine Hafez.
New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Sherine Hafez's "An Islam Of Her Own" is an outstanding account of the subjectivities of Muslim activist women in Egypt. Picking up where Sabah Mahmoud's "Politics of Piety" left off, Hafez chooses to focus on the inconsistencies, disruptions and multiplicities in the subject position of Muslim activist women. Hafez's conclusions are based on an extended ethnographic study of women activists in the Cairo-based Islamic voluntary organization Al-Hilal. The first three chapters of the book outline Hafez's theoretical position and historical contextualization of the growth of Islamic movements in Egypt. The following few chapters of the book contain the insightful ethnographic account of the subjectivities of the activist women of al-Hilal. The ethnographic account also contains field work in the village of Mehmiet close to Cairo, where al-Hilal is active in charity work.

Hafez suggests that examining religious subjectivities requires a historical and contextual analysis. According to Hafez religion cannot be seen as a category that is distinct from history, or separate from other aspects of social life. Both cultural and historical forces produce and shape desire and subjectivities. Like Mahmood, Hafez challenges the binary representations of subjectivities between piety and secularism, otherwise common in the scholarly work on modern Muslim subjectivity; but Hafez claims to go further than Mahmood by questioning the consistency in Mahmood's non-liberal agency. Hafez suggests that subjecthood and desire are varied, heterogeneous and unstable and are often shaped by contradictory constructions. Hafez's exploration of inconsistencies within subjectivities is, however, not entirely new. Mahmood's ethnographic study of activists in a women's mosque did indeed already mention the ambiguities that lie within the subjectivity formation of Islamic activist women (Mahmood 2005, 158). However, the strength of Hafez's book lies in the dedicated focus on these ambiguities.

Hafez's analysis is based on several ethnographic accounts. Through these she depicts how the women of al-Hilal present their own subjectivities as a consistent and homogenous whole, but that these are in fact not as consistent as claimed. One of Hafez's key arguments is that the woman of al-Hilal claim that Islam is a way of life that permeates all aspects of their lives, while asserting that they separate their activities from their and political objectives. Hafez wonders how the women of al-Hilal can assume that Islam permeates all aspects of their lives, while at the same time obeying a secular Egyptian legal system. Hafez explains this dilemma by suggesting that the activist women of al-Hilal are choosing this position because their desires and subjectivities are partially influenced by the secular notion of the separation of the public and private sphere. The way Hafez solves this dilemma is, however, somehow problematic as Hafez fails to explain why the influence of secular ideas has caused the women to separate their activist work from their political aspirations.

While the central contribution of Hafez's "An Islam Of Her Own" is nuancing the subjectivity of the Muslim activist women by explaining how the subjectivity of these women are shaped by different interiorities as well as exteriorities, Hafez overlooks a key structural factor that could potentially explain why the women of al-Hilal view Islam as part of every aspect of their lives except the political one: the impact of authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is an important factor to take into consideration as it could possibly explain both why the women of al-Hilal are avoiding official participation in politics and why they are instead engaging in activist voluntary work. Taking into account the high corruptions rates within the Egyptian state, the Muslim activist women could be choosing to take matters into their own hands and offer welfare services to less privileged citizens instead of 'waiting around' for the state to perform the same duties. Islamic activism could therefore be viewed as a way of escaping the tough realities resulting from decades of authoritarian structures and acting independently while at the same time avoiding confrontation with the state.

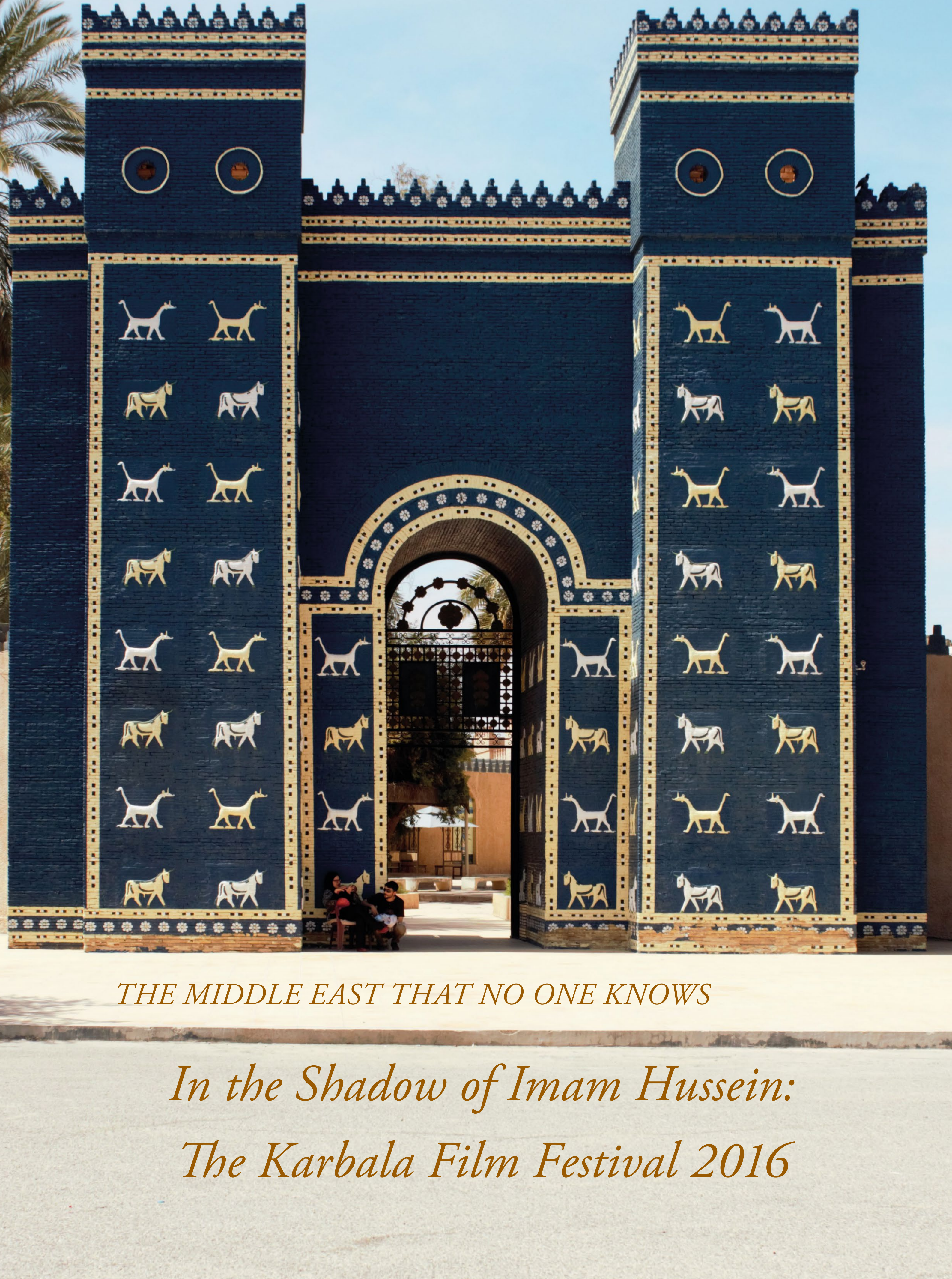
Hafez's "An Islam Of Her Own" is, without a doubt, a significant contribution to the scholarly work on Muslim subjectivities and Islamic activism. Its sole focus on unravelling the different aspects that shape the desire and subjectivities of Muslim activist women is important. Hafez, however, misses an excellent opportunity to broaden her approach to studying subjectivity by including important social structural factors, for instance, the aforementioned authoritarian structures. An inclusion of such factors could possibly contribute to a more convincing argument on how the subjectivities of the Muslim activist women are shaped.

BY ASMAE BADR IBRAHIM

REFERENCES:

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

NIDABA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY



THE MIDDLE EAST THAT NO ONE KNOWS

In the Shadow of Imam Hussein: The Karbala Film Festival 2016

The film festival in Karbala was held for the second year by Karbala Channel and the Imam Hussein Mosque in Karbala. With one hundred invited guests, forty-two different films were shown from a range of countries including: Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Zambia and Sweden. The intention was to show that a country as war ridden as Iraq can use culture as a weapon against ISIS. Through the ubiquitous image of Imam Hussein, his fight and martyrdom at Karbala was stressed. The notion of Hussein as a champion of human rights, during the Karbala battle, was similarly transplanted to contemporary events through the use of these images. There was also a strong nationalistic spirit at the festival. Iraq was presented as a proud nation that will soon be rid of its enemies; as a result, there were many films showing young men fighting and dying for their country.

"We are growing slowly and we want it that way" says Hassanein Hasan, speaking about the choice of location for the festival. As visitors, filmmakers and the press, we attended film screenings at a special camp built for visitors to Imam Hussein's shrine. We were all lodged in a collection of small suites with the feel of an all-inclusive hotel: gardens, spring water and new two-story houses with plenty of staff to support us. There is a small mosque and a pressroom with Wi-Fi. Travel from the accommodation is equally well organized. When we wanted to get into Karbala there was a car and driver at our disposal who helped us navigate through all the checkpoints. However, our temporary home was gated and heavily guarded. Our enclosed area was a strong contrast to the dangerous images depicted in the films or the violent reality of the car bombs that exploded in Basra and Nasriyya during our stay.

The films shown at Karbala Film Festival varied in quality. The submissions were selected by the religiously conservative Karbala Channel. Thus, religion as a vital tool in the war against ISIS, as well as the bravery of the Hashd Al Shabi - the Shiia militia, were dominant themes in a majority of the films. The opening film celebrated the Shia militia as they cared for the abandoned women and children of ISIS militants. Shortly thereafter, another film depicted a martyr's family grieving his death. As the film progressed, I slowly came to realize that the weeping man beside me was the martyr's father who was invited center-stage to comment on the film. In most of the screenings, religion and the nation so closely connected - almost inseparable.

The diversity in the screenings should be not overlooked, however. Yavuz Pullukcu, a young Turkish producer depicted the life of the water Bedouins in the south of Iraq and the impact a dam built in Turkey had on them. Another film by the Zambian director Rongano Neony, "Listen," is about a women sitting in a police station in Denmark seeking refugee from her violent husband. She finds herself in a situation where the interpreter, misinterprets the conservation and wrongly tells the victim that the police urges her to go back to her husband. In reality, the policeman was trying to aid the victim and get a statement against her husband. The film "Warm Nights," by Ayman Al-Shatry, tells the story of a family on a 'normal night' as bombs rain over Baghdad on the eve of the American invasion. The son in the family studies for a history exam – rattling off facts on the Mongolian invasion of Baghdad: history repeats itself. The father drinks his tea and mutters about how his wife is unable to come home from her visit due to the heavy fighting in the street. The house trembles from the attacks but family life continues. One of the most emphatic remarks from that special night was that the weather was extremely warm for the season. The last film I want to highlight was "The Key" by Ameen Ihsaan, a 23-year-old producer from Baghdad. It is a high speed, black and white story about an artist that returns to Baghdad after 10 years in exile to find out that only a wall remains in place of his house. "Iraq is full of walls, mental and real walls, and it will take generations to tear them down," explained Ihsan.

The Karbala Film Festival is not solely about films. International guests were guided on several trips to the shrines of Imam Hussein and Abbas in Karbala. Mosques that were spacious and glittering from the gold, mosaic and crystal crowns were crowded with people. We also visited the Imam Ali shrine in Nadjaf which was equally extravagant - a deep contrast to the poor surroundings. The mosques seemed tremendously rich while the surrounding people seemed tremendously poor. The mosque in Karbala was building its facilities to an extent worthy of a palace in "A Thousand and One Arabian Nights." Meanwhile the people in the surrounding area seemed to struggle with manpowered concrete machines, building their houses from rough stones while their youngest sons are sent off to fight ISIS in the north of Iraq - many of them returning in coffins that are later laid in the mosques.

The reality of war became poignant when I met a group of young Hashd Al- Shabi and their General Rezan who were visiting the festival before heading to Tikrit to join the fighting. The new recruits seemed were very young. I spoke with a 21-year-old man, married with a one-year old child. "I do this for the country," he said. His wife was terrified but supported him. "We are also fighting for your safety in the West" General Rezan told me in response to the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels. I could not help but think about the bizarre situation between the privileged West and the wounded Middle East. Young men being forced to walk into battle, while the West closes its borders to people fleeing from this Hell.

Text and photos by Marie Hallberg

Nidaba

The interdisciplinary Journal of Middle East Studies is an open-access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University. The journal is published bi-annually, and features original multi-disciplinary articles related to the study of the Middle East (broadly defined). Reflecting the general mission of CMES, the journal aims to publish articles that are theoretically informed, methodologically sound and analytically innovative. *Nidaba*'s goal is to contribute to informed public debates and policy formulations related to the Middle East. The journal welcomes submissions with a broad perspective. Interdisciplinary submissions are strongly encouraged.

Lund University

http://journals.lub.lu.se/index.php/nidaba

CMES
LUND UNIVERSITY

Box 201
221 00 Lund
Tel +46 (0) 46-222 00 00
www.cmes.lu.se