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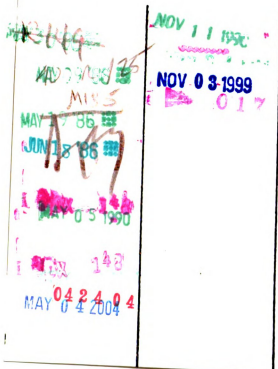


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MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE
IN KUWAIT

by

Fahed Al-Naser

A THESIS

Submitted
in partial fulfillment of
the degree of

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ABSTRACT

MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

IN KUWAIT

by

Fahed Al-Naser

The purpose of this study was to examine and explore how social change is taking place in Kuwait and to show how this change affects marriage norms and values.

Kuwait provides a number of advantages for examining the impact of urbanization and Westernization on social life in general. The country is moving toward urbanization and Westernization at a speed and intensity rarely found in other countries.

The aim of this study was to see whether the marriage system has undergone any corresponding change. It was expected that these changes would be in the form of altering the attitudes of the Kuwait family.

From this study we conclude that the old marriage patterns are giving way to new ones. The change is evident in the declining role of the family as an agent for marriage, an older marriage age, and less polygamy. The

sudden increase in wealth in Kuwait, only indirectly if at all related to Westernization, has meant that bride prices have become extremely high in some segments of society.

DEDICATION

To my

mother,

father,

sisters,

and brothers

this work is dedicated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my major advisor, Professor Thomas Conner, for his patience and encouragement and guidance. I deeply appreciate his assistance on this project, and I greatly value the time we have spent together.

I would also like to express my special thanks to the other committee members, Professors Margaret Bubolz and Chris Vanderpool, for their critical guidance and cooperation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, profound developments have been taking place in the social life and structure of the Third World, and the Arab Muslim World is no exception. This move toward modernization and industrialization, especially in the Arabian Gulf countries, is unusual in that it is happening so rapidly. It is having a radical effect on social life and structure.

In searching for the reasons for the social change occurring in Kuwait and other Arabian Gulf countries, it is difficult to pinpoint only one. Nevertheless, the discovery of oil certainly has been a major factor. The effect of the new wealth it created has been felt throughout Kuwait society. This paper focuses upon the effect of this new wealth upon one important aspect of Kuwaiti social life--its marriage norms. Specifically, we will look at changes in norms concerning:

1. the age of marriage,
2. the dowry,
3. the selection of mates,
4. polygamy,
5. homogamy and heterogamy,

6. engagement and wedding ceremonies, and
7. divorce.

These variables tend to be present to some extent in marriage creations in all cultures and are important factors to be considered in Islamic society.

Review of the Literature

Research on the effect of urbanization and industrialization on family structure and marriage in non-Western societies is sparse, limited in scope, and often contradictory. The literature of the past two decades generally seems to indicate that a society's move toward industrialization, urbanization, and Westernization is accompanied by a noticeable modification in family structure. Talcott Parsons has stated that industrialization and urbanization have several effects on the family: (1) a decrease in size of household, (2) a loss of most family functions to other social institutions, and (3) a breakdown in wider kin ties within the family.¹ The shift is from an extended to a nuclear family.

One very good study on the extended family as an agent in urbanization has been done by William Flanigan, who did his research in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Flanigan's hypothesis is that the extended family is not an

¹Talcott Parsons, "The Kinship System of the Contemporary United States," American Anthropologist, 45 (1948): 22-38.

outmoded unit of social organization in urban/industrial society. His findings "are integrated within a comparative framework which demonstrates that the pattern...documented for Tanzania is neither novel or exotic."¹

The rapid population growth in many African cities has created high levels of unemployment and underemployment, as well as housing shortages. "The extended family network with its dual rural and urban base is instrumental in this transition. Rather than an obstacle, more than a survivor, the extended family is an active agent of urbanization and social change."²

Studies on marriage and the family in Arab countries are few and use little or no substantive data. One exception is a Ph.D. dissertation by Hind Nassif, "Marriage Patterns and Social Change in Rural Tunisia."³ It focuses on a small, rural community in Sahel where up to sixty-five percent of the population resides. In rural Tunisia, religious belief is strong; customs and values relating to social structure, marriage, and the status of women have been slow to change. Nassif's research indicates a slight shift in traditional patterns due to

¹William G. Flanigan, The Extended Family as an Agent in Urbanization (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1977), p. 173.

²Ibid., p. 179.

³Hind Nassif, Marriage Patterns and Social Change in Rural Tunisia (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1978), p. 194.

expanded educational opportunities, increased contact with the city, and government planning for rural development.

There is a great need for systematic, well-designed field studies of Middle Eastern countries, especially those in the Arabian peninsula where rapid changes are taking place.

Shiekh Abrar Husain, in his study "Marriage Customs among Muslims in India," tried to focus on finding out the main factors and problems in the institution of marriage and the effect of social change on its patterns. His findings are that "industrialization, along with the expansion of education, is the outlook of the people and, hence, it is affecting the institution of marriage amongst the Shias. . . . Owing to their position the Shias in the past could afford such prolonged entertainments, but now, under the present economic stress and strain, it is difficult to continue the old practices."¹ Also, he concluded that the age factor, for example, plays a great role in marriages. Marriages are avoided for young adults of school age, which has been extended by the extension of higher education. His conclusions are: "The old order is changing, yielding way to the new. Old traditions, customs and ceremonies are becoming obsolete and changes are taking place with the evolution of a new society in free and industrialized India.

¹Shief Husain, Marriage Customs among Muslims in India (London: Sterline Publishers, Ltd., 1976), p. 197.

Changes are visible in every community and the Shia community is no exception. Increase in knowledge, as a whole, is also responsible for modification and changes in customs, etc. . . ."¹

In Kuwait, although industrialization has not proceeded very far, the processes of urbanization and Westernization have moded with a speed and intensity rarely found elsewhere. The fact of a small and varied population augmented by migration has always forced those in power in Kuwait to be more flexible in decision-making than most traditional leaders in the Middle East. Such need for flexibility, plus the special factors inherent in a trading area which receives varied information about other cultural institutions in the world, has led to a bourgeois-democratic form of government unique in an area peppered by monarchical governments. This government whose design best compliments a capitalist economy and a bourgeois form of culture has given great impulse to social change. As other Middle Eastern countries become further enmeshed in the world economy, they will ultimately find their cultures affected by Western culture and institutions and thus begin to experience changes which are already being experienced in Kuwait.

The results in Kuwait are seen in widespread compulsory education, the establishment of a new Western-type

¹Ibid., p. 198.

bureaucracy, and the expansion of mass communication. The process began two decades ago and is not yet complete. Hence, unlike Western countries, Kuwait offers us an opportunity to study change as it is taking place.

Many theories of social change have been proposed in the last two centuries. These provide inadequate guidance for sociological research, but no modern theory of social change has arisen to replace them. There is no adequate theory of social change just as there is no fully developed general theory of society. Talcott Parsons and Wilbert E. Moore have suggested that a theory of society and a theory of social change are inseparable. Parsons closes his discussion of change in the social system with this statement:

Perhaps, even, it is not too much to hope that this chapter as a whole will convince the reader that there is a certain falsity in the dilemma between "static" and "dynamic" emphases. If theory is good theory, whichever type of problem it tackles most directly, there is no reason whatever to believe that it will not be equally applicable to the problems of change¹ and those of process within a stabilized system.

Social change has been defined by Moore as alteration in human behavior resulting from changes in one or more of man's social institutions. Moore says: "Social change is the significant alternation of the social structure and manifestations of such structure embodied in norms

¹Talcott Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951), p. 535.

(rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols."¹ T. B. Bottomore's definition is similar: "A change in social structure or in particular social institutions or in the particular relationship between institutions."²

Social changes are changes in social behavior brought about by technological innovation, conquest, or governmental reorganization. Karl Marx's theory of social change suggests that the two most important factors are the level of technological development present in a given society and the relations between social classes. This theory is rooted in the idea that the most important aspect of material life is the way that men reproduce their material existence. The mode of production in a given society at any time determines the way men will be socially organized. A major component of Marx's theory is the idea that there is always a struggle, between ideas as well as men, and that this struggle is the motor force of change.

There have been studies about change and modernization in the Middle East. One is by Daniel Lerner who emphasizes the modernization of communication media that contributes to change in the region, rather than searching for

¹Wilbert E. Moore, International Encyclopedia of the Social Science, 14 (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 366.

²T. B. Bottomore, Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 276.

the conditions leading to that change.¹ It is important to analyze the factors contributing to social change, and in Kuwait the discovery of oil was undoubtedly the most important. It is easy to see the effect such a shift in national resources would have on an economy dependent mainly on pearling and trade. As Bottomore has explained, altering the production process in a society will cause concurrent changes in social relations and will, therefore, foster the emergence of new values.

The discovery of oil had a tremendous effect on Kuwait, and not merely on its economy. All aspects of society have been touched, including family structure.

Research Questions

This study will focus on change in Kuwaiti marriage customs. The analysis of the changes occurring will focus on two main questions. The first question concerning change in Eastern marriage customs is whether or not the family has been able to remain the primary agent for marital arrangements. That they traditionally have been so is a cornerstone of Eastern custom. The extent to which this prerogative has been taken away from the center of the family collective gives us some means of quantifying the change that is occurring.

¹Daniel Lerner, The Passing of Traditional Society (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 44.

A second research question of great interest is the extent to which increased personal income, due to the increased wealth in Kuwait nationally, has affected marriage norms and values. It must be noted that these two research questions often tend to interact with each other, and so the analysis of their influence in changing marriage norms cannot be independently analyzed with statistical methods.

Source of Data

This study will rely on Arabic and English sources, which are far from plentiful. The lack of Kuwaiti census data for the pre-oil era is unfortunate. The best data that can be gotten under these circumstances are those which can be given by elders who are able to compare their memories of marriage customs with the changes which have occurred for their children and grandchildren. The study draws heavily on fieldwork studies done by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Planning with 1978's being the target year of concern to this study. Also used are data from the census and the annual abstract published by the Kuwaiti Board of Statistics as well as other published materials and library sources. One problem in using these data is that information on personal income is unavailable in Kuwait. Therefore, gross national product (GNP) figures are used as a supplement for a general investigation of changes in wealth in Kuwait. While GNP is not the best

source in this case, it is the only indicator available at this time.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON KUWAIT

The Economy

In the mind of Westerners, the name of Kuwait is synonymous with oil and, therefore, with some measure of international power. But before the discovery of oil in Kuwait, the pearl industry was the economic factor which had the most impact. The importance of pearling to old Kuwait's socioeconomic life was enormous. Innumerable customs, traditions, and patterns of social organization and civil activities can be traced to the pearling economy. Even music and literature were profoundly affected. Before the discovery of oil, Kuwaiti life revolved around pearling.

The second most important economic activity in old Kuwait was trade based on the pearl industry, for which Kuwait is excellently situated geographically. Trade was of two types, by sea and by camel across the desert; and Kuwaitis have always been proficient at both. Although fishing, hunting, agriculture, and herding involved a substantial portion of the population, the relative economic contribution of these occupations was small, compared to the pearl industry and its resultant trade.

Marriage in the Past

Customs differ from one society to another, and marriage norms and values such as mate selection, bride price, age at marriage, and so forth are no exception. The patriarchal structure in old Kuwait meant that the male elders chose their children's mates. Sons might be consulted, but a daughter's opinion was not sought. It might seem that mate selection is a very personal issue, but the choice is largely dictated by social and cultural norms, as is most other social behavior. Mate selection, for example, is tied to traditions surrounding class and/or religious endogamy or exogamy.

Before the discovery of oil, Kuwaiti society was very traditional and simple. Individual rights were virtually unheard of; group rights and tasks prevailed. In this kind of society, members are obedient to social norms, and no social organism exists outside the family. Marriage is based on affinity relationships and involves a wide net of social relationships and exchanged obligations between families.

In order to understand issues concerning marriage in Kuwait, we must understand Sharia, or Islamic law as established in the Quran. Islam encourages marriage:

And among His signs is this, that he created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find rest (and peace) in them. And he has put

love and mercy between your (hearts);¹ verily in this are signs for those who reflect.

Thus, one purpose of marriage is to enable spouses to find peace, love, and security through their relationship. The second purpose is to respond to the basic biological instinct of procreation. Children are the realization of motherhood and fatherhood.

Many outside Islam misunderstand its concept of polygamy. It is true that Muslims may marry more than one wife, as many as four, but several conditions must be met before a second marriage can be contracted. If the first wife has a permanent disease or cannot give birth, and if she grants permission and is assured that she and all subsequent wives will be treated equally, then the husband may marry another woman.

Marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four. But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one, or (a captive) that your hands possess that will be more suitable, to prevent you from injustice.²

It is important to note that the Quran indicates that it is difficult to treat all wives equally and suggest that it is better to marry only one.

The four conditions mentioned above are difficult and often impossible to achieve. Hence, it could be said that Muslim law does not, in fact, favor polygamy, but, rather, acts to limit and regulate it when it does occur.

¹Holy Qur'an, Chapter 30:21.

²Ibid., Chapter 2:5.

Furthermore, although family relations are governed by the principles of the Sharia in most Muslim countries, customs vary from one country to another. In Tunisia, the code of personal status prohibits polygamy. In Egypt, much has been done along similar lines; for example, the Egyptian National Assembly has adopted strict divorce procedures. In general, especially in the more industrially advanced Arab countries, polygamy is almost nonexistent.

Family Structure

Pre-modern Kuwait was characterized by a post-tribal social structure. The primary unit was the extended family, consisting of the grandparents, their sons, and their sons' families, all living in one large house. This family was a part of the tribal network and also was a manifestation of a broad kinship relation. The family was the base of economic production and social relations. As the primary agent of socialization, it enforced the traditional social restrictions and taboos of the Arabian Gulf societies.

The male head of the family possessed all economic and social power. Among others, he made all decisions concerning marriage. Men had complete authority over women, as the latter did not participate in production. This attitude was rooted in very ancient traditions and is not a product of the Islamic religion. In Islam, the man is not the single most important family member; he is supposed to

care for the family financially, but the other members are supposed to participate in decision making.

In Kuwait, as in other traditional Arab countries, women have had an inferior status in relation to men. Their proper roles were as housewives and mothers, and their proper place was at home. There was complete separation of the sexes. When girls reached the age of ten or twelve years, they were expected to stay home; on the rare occasions when they went out, they were expected to cover their faces. Marriages were arranged by parents, and women were expected to obey their husbands' wishes. These customs are the product of the social structure long established in Kuwait and the Arab peninsula, but not rooted in Islamic religion.

Women were regarded as a potential source of disgrace and were not allowed any freedom, be it the right to choose a husband or express an opinion. The Kuwaiti historian Shiek Uasuf Ben Eissa Al-Genai wrote:

A woman represents no value to men especially the old ones. She is a worldly pleasure that one should avoid. If you mentioned her in your speech, you should say to your listener, "May God grant you honor." A girl was compelled to marry her man, especially if he were her cousin. It does not matter if he were ugly or immoral. A man who is 80 has the right to marry a 20 year old girl. Her sponsor can force her to do this if the bridegroom is rich.¹

¹Y. I. Al-Ganai, History of Kuwait, 4th edition (Kuwait: 1968), p. 78.

Stanley Mallory wrote on this subject at the beginning of this century. "If there were any suspicions about the honor of a girl, the only way to abolish the disgrace that besmeared the name of the family was her death. In some cases the girl is not killed but is punished in other ways."¹

A marriage contract is more an agreement between two families than between husband and wife. The marriage ends if one of the partners dies, but the bond between the families continues forever. Marriage creates a tie between the two families, which produces kinship relationships and affinities extending beyond the married couples.²

Attitude about marriage in Kuwaiti society reflect general social attitudes for example, prejudice is part of the basic social structure; and the primary criterion in marriage decisions is social status, according to ethnic or tribal origins. The individual's personal characteristics and even economic standing are not important in the eyes of traditionalists. The person acquires his status from the family; as an individual person, he has no value, he works for his family, and he marries for his family.

In Kuwait, as in other Muslim societies, sexual virtue is highly regarded. Since it is believed that premarital contact can lead to premarital sex, social

¹Stanley Mallory, Kuwait Before Oil (Kuwait), translated into Arabic by M. Al-Riwashi and Basen Sarah, p. 12.

²Hussain, Ayyah, Research on Divorce in Kuwait (Kuwait: The Ministry of Social Affairs, 1978).

interaction between the sexes has traditionally been restricted. The family was instrumental in this as it was in its interest to restrain behavior which might bring dishonor to the family as a collective entity. The restriction in interaction between the genders gave the young little to say in the process in mate selection; and the difficulty of extended restrictions of cross-sexual contact led the families to arrange marriages at relatively young ages for their children.¹

¹Sabarh, Salah, The Social Customs in Kuwaiti Society, trans. by Fahed Al-Nasar (Kuwait: Al-Sabah Publishing, 1980), p. 77.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL CHANGE IN KUWAIT

The discovery of oil in Kuwait produced rapid and dramatic changes in the economy. The small size of the domestic market, the lack of skilled workers, and the shortage of local capital posed no problems to the oil companies because they were linked to the world economy. Thus, the oil industry grew much faster than other sectors. High wages first attracted labor from farming, fishing, and boatbuilding to the oil industry. A second wave came to the city for jobs in government service, construction, and the expanding service sector in a high-income economy. Traditional, labor-intensive industries could not offer competitive wages and were either reduced to a fraction of their former significance or disappeared entirely. Transformation of the economy was well under way within a decade of the discovery of oil, and after twenty-five years there was little left of the Kuwaiti economy of the late 1940s.

One of the most dramatic and traumatic economic changes was the influx of foreigners. The high wages attracted many workers, primarily from nearby areas. They provided both skills lacking among Kuwaitis and also the labor for work considered too demanding for Kuwaitis.

Economic growth was based largely on imported labor. The work force increased from 80,288 in 1957 to about 304,582 in 1975. Kuwaitis (24,602) accounted for about thirty percent of the work force in 1957 and for about thirty percent (91,244) in 1975. Even in the mid-1970s, most observers thought that importing additional workers was critical to further growth and diversification of the economy.

By the mid-1970s, the oil sector dominated the economy, contributing between seventy and seventy-five percent of the Gross National Product. Official statistics included crude oil production and some minor extractive industries in a broad category of mining and quarrying, which accounted for sixty-four percent of GNP in 1973 (see Table 1). Oil refining was included in the manufacturing sector and was its most important activity. Total employment in the oil sector was about 7,600 (three-quarters of whom were non-Kuwaiti) in 1970 and probably remained unchanged in 1976. The sharp increase in oil revenues in 1974 added to the importance of the oil sector, but data were unavailable in late 1976 to measure the gain.

Government services, the second most important sector of the economy, contributed ten percent of GNP in 1973. Expansion of the services provided by the government caused a steady increase in the number of workers employed by the government, rising from 66,600 in 1965 to 112,000 in 1974. Approximately one-third of the work force was employed in this sector in the mid-1970s, or about one civil servant to

every four citizens. Some observers thought this ratio was kept high in order to distribute oil revenues among the population. Government employment was looked on as a sine-cure by many Kuwaitis, and the result was overstaffing and inefficiency in most government offices. At the same time, observers noted that the few truly competent Kuwaiti administrators were overworked.

All other sectors of the economy contributed less than twenty percent of GNP in 1973. Wholesale and retail trade, always a significant part of the economy, declined appreciably in the 1970s as other sectors developed, even though growing oil revenues brought in more imports for distribution and sale each year. Financial services grew rapidly in the 1970s, surpassing trade in importance in 1972. Manufacturing was another sector that expanded rapidly in the 1970s as a result of the construction of some large plants. By 1975, agriculture and fishing were a minute part of the economy, contributing the small fraction of one percent of GNP.

Because of the dominance of the oil sector, economic growth was largely paced by the growth of oil revenues. Between 1956 and 1970, these rose at an average rate of seven percent per year.

Kuwaiti officials have objected to the standard methods of computing GNP for an economy such as theirs; that is, one excessively dependent on crude oil production. They note that GNP was achieved largely by drawing on

capital in the form of petroleum reserves, for which an allowance should be made.

World Bank economists acknowledged that GNP for Kuwait and some other oil states should be calculated differently than for most economies or perhaps reduced by thirty percent, but by late 1976 no method had been agreed on.

X Despite the problems of measuring Kuwait's economic growth in the 1970s, the very large increases in oil revenues contributed to boom conditions in 1976 that have lasted into the 1980s. The flow of funds stimulated both the public and the private sector, contributing to growing diversification of the economy. Changes were underway in the mid-1980s that probably will make the economy of the 1980s as different from that of the 1940s as the latter were from that of the 1940s.

As industrialization spread in Kuwait, many people moved to the cities in search of economic independence. One consequence was the breakdown in the extended family structure and the shift to the nuclear family (father, mother, and children). The government contributed to this change through its public housing policy; the small units which were built were inadequate for large extended families.

Economic independence also has affected decision making within the family. Sons or daughters' having jobs and, thus, sources of income, are freer to make their own decisions, such as whom to choose as mates. All aspects of

women's personal behavior have been affected by the new values: women are now able to work, use public transportation, drive cars, and go to social clubs.

In the past, the father controlled all family affairs, including the disciplining of children. Within the home, his word was law. Today, the father has lost much of his authority, so there is a generational conflict. Some of this authority has been transferred to the mother, and some to the children. The older generation wants to maintain its social attitudes, whereas the young tend to ignore the traditional ways.

The two most important transformations have been in the separation of economic and educational functions from the family. These are now transferred to the workplace and the schools. In the years between 1958 and 1978, the ranks of public school students swelled by 6,779, with female students' increasing from 36.8% to 46.3% of the school population (see Tables 2A and 2B). Public education is thus gaining acceptance by Kuwaiti families. Ideology and social conditions affect people's thinking about family size. Specifically, education plays an important role in influencing these attitudes. The change to public education from family-controlled private education has taken away from the family its influence in shaping these attitudes.

Today, many women want to work and are able to do so without official opposition. Not long ago, most went into teaching or nursing, but recently women have begun to

work in laboratories or as engineers, in virtually every kind of job. Thousands of Kuwaiti women have taken advantage of the new opportunities in education and employment. In the labor force, the number of women has risen from 8,768 (or 4.8% of all women) in 1965 to 35,206 (7.8% of all women) in 1975. This more than doubled their share of the total labor force participation. This increase has received great impetus from the wide participation of immigrant women in Kuwait (see Table 3). Some of the increase in public labor for women can be surmised to have come from the pressing need for larger numbers of workers in Kuwait, a need which has previously been resolved through the encouragement of immigration to Kuwait, but which can be resolved by increases in female participation in the labor market as education and the disappearance of social barriers encourage more women to participate in the labor sphere.

With the spread of education at various levels, the availability of working opportunities for women and the increasing emphasis on individual rights in Kuwait, women have advanced several steps toward a more egalitarian relationship with men, both in the home and elsewhere in society. In the past, a man looked for a beautiful wife or for a good homemaker to rear the children and take care of the house. A woman sought a man who was a good provider. The attitudes of young men, young women, and their parents have changed markedly in only a short time. In choosing a

mate, the emphasis is now on companionship and the sharing of responsibilities.

Although their position has improved in Kuwait, women are still far from achieving equality. They have not yet secured the basic political right to vote, for example. Women's organizations, supported by the well-educated and wealthy, are holding public debates on the laws, values, and norms that have prevented women from taking an equal position in society. The trend toward changes in traditional patterns is expected to accelerate as the number of educated women increases. Also, as women gain more authority in their households, they provide their daughters with stronger role models of behavior.

CHAPTER IV

CHANGE IN MARRIAGE NORMS

Age at Marriage

Most observers of the Arab world assert that Arabs marry very young. This is said especially of females who, it has been thought, marry as soon as they reach puberty. Kuwaiti law does not specify a minimum age for marriage; this has been left to the elders to decide.

It is very difficult to measure changes in the marriage age because historical information is not available. In the past, marriages were seldom registered; hence, the lack of hard data. But we can learn something about the average marriage age from older people and from stories about social traditions. This evidence indicates that marriage at puberty, or ages thirteen to sixteen, was the norm. This practice lessens the pressure on families who still carry the norm of protecting the virginity of their female members. Table 4 gives the age for husbands and wives who registered for marriage in 1978. In general, Kuwaiti women today tend to marry between ages fourteen and twenty-four; men between twenty-five and twenty-nine. It should be noted that many marriages are unreported, especially among

the nomadic Bedouins, but it is known that the latter prefer to marry at an early age.

Those who are educated apparently feel that individuals should marry after they finish college and establish themselves in the community. This is important since the male is responsible for furnishing the household, for paying a large bride price, and for other marriage expenses. Indications are that the marriage age for males is rising, a trend more apparent among the educated. In 1978, the largest grouping by age of bridegrooms was Kuwaiti males aged twenty to twenty-four years old, representing 43.5% of males registering for marriage. The next largest group was aged twenty-five to twenty-nine years old (25.1% of registered grooms). This suggests that most young males registering for marriage are of an age that would have allowed them to finish high school and some amount of college education (see Table 4). The effects of urbanization and Westernization through education are most evident among the wealthy and among young people. These segments of the population seem to be more interested in pursuing higher education and in establishing themselves before getting married. Consequently, highly educated women expect to marry later in life than do uneducated women.

A very good empirical study of marriage in Kuwait was done by Abdullah Gloom and Izat Ismael in 1974. They found that the average marriage age in Kuwait was between sixteen and twenty-five. This age group accounted for

44.13% of marriages.¹ In a society moving toward urbanization, it should be expected that the average marriage age will rise. The main reason is the feeling that marriage in this new type of society brings many new responsibilities that are best faced when one is economically, psychologically, and educationally prepared.

Dowry

A custom prevalent in many societies is the bride-price, and it provides another example of male dominance.

Anthropologist Marvin Harris says:

Bride-price compensates the bride's family for the loss of her valuable productive and reproductive services. A striking fact is that the logical opposite of the bride-price, groom-price, virtually does not exist. (A single case, recently brought to my attention by Jill Nash, is that of the Naborisi of Bougainville, where economic compensation is given by the bride's sister and mother to the groom's sisters and mother for the loss of his valuable productive and reproductive services.)²

In the same book, Harris also distinguishes between the bride-price and the dowry:

Dowry. . . is still another form of wealth exchange at marriage. Dowry occurs in patrilineal societies and is given by a bride's father and brother to the groom or his father.³

Dowry is not a kind of compensation for the loss of the groom's productive and reproductive activities (in the way

¹A. Gloom and I. Ismael, Marriage in Kuwait (Kuwait: 1974), p. 34.

²Marvin Harris, Cannibals and Kings: The Origin of Cultures (New York: Random House), p. 59.

³Ibid., p. 59.

the bride-price functions as compensation for the loss of the bride). It is a means to help cover the cost of the marriage.

The dowry is an ancient tradition in Islam. The giving is obligatory, and it is offered by the groom.

When a girl or woman is married, it is an essential part of the marriage for the bridegroom to give her a dowry (mehr), which may be of any value agreed upon. This dowry is not like the old European dowry which was given by a father to a daughter on her marriage and thence became the husband's property. Nor is the Muslim dowry like the African "bride-price" which is paid by the bridegroom to the father as a form of payment or compensation. The Muslim dowry is a gift from the bridegroom to the bride and it becomes her exclusive property.¹

In Kuwait, the dowry is usually paid when the marriage contract is concluded. The amount differs from one social class to another, and it can range from \$4,000 to \$10,000. The amount also differs between city people and Bedouins. High dowries lead many Kuwaitis to delay marriage or marry non-Kuwaitis. Many fathers still ask high dowries because they consider it an evaluation of the girl and her family. They also consider it as insurance that the prospective husband can adequately provide for the daughter.

Al-Thakeb has done an empirical study of the family in Kuwait. In his conclusion he states:

It seems that although the majority of respondents prefer the dowry to be a symbolic sum of

¹B. Aishalem and Farima Heeran, Women in Islam (England: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), p. 20.

money, this wish will become a social reality only when men and women select their spouses freely without family interference. Widespread education and large-scale employment of females lead in this direction.¹

One way to obtain sufficient funds for marriage, popular among the Bedouins, is for the family and friends of the groom to donate goods and money for the bride. This is indicative of the complex relationship in the tribal community and creates a communal interest in the success of the marriage. This assistance is expected to be reciprocated when the sons of the donors marry. In this way, tribal bonds are strengthened through ties of obligation. The practice makes clear the value the tribe places on marriage and on thus becoming part of the community.

Mate Selection

Parents traditionally have played a primary role in their children's decision to marry and in the selection of mates. It was once normal for a son's marriage to be controlled by his parents who chose the wife, often when the prospective couple were still children. Marriage was regarded as a union of two families rather than of two individuals. Such an alliance may be sought for political, social, or economic reasons. It creates a bond and an obligation between the families.

¹Fahad Al-Thakib, Kuwaiti Family Today and Yesterday (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 197).

The parental role has changed in recent years, due to education and the economic independence of sons. Today, a son chooses the time of marriage and has the final say in the selection of his spouse. A daughter has less independence, and parents still have a strong influence on the timing of her marriage and on mate selection. The women most at the mercy of the traditional pattern of mate selection are those with the least education. Even so, 64.5% of registered marriages in 1978 in Kuwait were between couples of equal or similar age (within five years of age of spouse). This suggests that offspring may very well be having some say in mate selection, choosing mates of an age near to their own, which we would expect as people tend to be attracted to members of their own peer group or near to their own age. As long as young girls are economically dependent on their parents, the latter will control the decision-making process. Traditionally, when someone asks a girl's father or brother for her hand in marriage, the girl is seldom consulted. Even if her opinion is asked, the final decision is left to the head of her family. In contrast, sons are consulted by their parents or ask their parents for an opinion.¹

¹Shwikar Elwan, The Status of Women in the Arab World (Arab Information Center: The League of Arab States).

Polygamy

Most Kuwaiti law is based on the Islamic Sharia which permits a man to have as many as four wives, provided he treats them equally. But men with more than one wife are rare in the Arab world, and Kuwait is not exception. Economic considerations, plus the difficulties of managing a quarrelsome household, discourage polygamy. According to the 1970 census, the number of polygamists in Kuwait was 4,856. Of these 4,324 had only two wives, and very few had three or four (298 and 234, respectively).¹ By 1978, the situation had changed radically; of the 4,886 marriages on record, 426 were polygamous (8.7% of total). The majority (411) involved only two wives, fourteen took a third wife and only one a fourth wife (in forty-one cases, the data were not clear) (see Table 5).

Since the amount of polygamy occurring in Kuwait, according to the 1970 census, was 0.9% of all marital relationships, it seems unusual to see that nearly nine percent of the marriages registered in 1978 were polygamous. Since we do not know what proportion of all marriages formed each year are registered, it cannot be determined what effect this has on the national percentage of polygamous marriages. But, if registered marriages are representative of the marriages occurring in Kuwait, then it would seem that polygamy

¹Fahad Al-Thakab, The Kuwait: Family Today and Yesterday (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974).

is currently on the rise. This can be explained by the rise in personal income in Kuwait coupled with a tradition that has not yet died out. This does not mean that this trend would tend to continue indefinitely.

Westernization and education have had a profound effect on individual attitudes regarding polygamy. The availability of advanced medical care for women who have difficulty bearing children also has made it unnecessary for some men to marry a second wife. In the past, women lived in one household, but now they often demand separate, well-furnished households.

William Goode writes:

The trend (away from polygamy in the Arab world) over the past generation or more is clear. . . . It seems evident, however, that the change has come about, not because of substantial industrialization, but because of change in publicly supported ideals, largely adopted from the West. In most Arab countries at the present time, some substantial move has been made to abolish or severely limit polygamy, although it cannot be supported that it is a moral problem for most of the population in any of these countries.¹

In his study of the Kuwaiti family, Al-Thakeb writes:

As for the majority who reject polygamy, the indication was that it causes difficulties and problems among wives and among sons. It is also very difficult to raise children in various households. There are others who state Islam has permitted such practice on the condition: that all wives receive equal treatment. This condition, they assert, is difficult to fulfill, especially in an emotional sense. Yet a third group, more influenced by Western ideas, argues that they

¹William Goode, World Revolution and Family Patterns (New York: Free Press, 1963-1970), p. 102.

reject this type of marriage because it is degrading to women and undermines the love aspects of marriage in the nation.¹

In summary, polygamous marriages can be expected to decrease, despite the current economic spur to it, in modern Kuwait. It is expected that a small segment of the population will continue the practice for some years, but it is also expected that legal restrictions and social resistance will be forthcoming. These will take the form of minimum age laws, proof of adequate economic support, and the right of the first wife to acquire a divorce. The emergence of Western-style norms of individual love may prove to be the most effective means in restricting future polygamy.

Homogamy and Heterogamy

As in any capitalist economy, economic differences are very distinct in Kuwait. Social inequality also exists in terms of religion, race, tribal origins, and other sociocultural aspects. These take many forms in Kuwait. There are religious differences between Suni and Shi-ite Muslims; there is racial discrimination between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis; there are tribal differences between urban dwellers and the nomadic Bedouins. Distinctions based on wealth and property as well as family name, all of which determine a person's class, are somewhat less

¹Fahad Al-Thakeb, Kuwaiti Family Today and Yesterday (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974).

dramatic than in the past, but they still exist. Social discrimination in Kuwait is readily apparent, especially among the urban population. There are clearly two segments in society: Nobles (Assel) and non-nobles (Bessary). This distinction is ancient; it is not related to Islam, but stems from tribal history. In the past, tribes are divided into two kinds based on property and wealth; thus, there were the high class or wealthy tribes and the low class or poor tribes. There was absolutely no social interaction between the two.

Modern Kuwait still reflects this discrimination, but there have been changes. Since the discovery of oil, socioeconomic changes have brought wealth redistribution and, therefore, class mobility. Some people not of noble (Assel) origin have gained wealth and property. With their great economic power has come power in political decision making, too. Consequently, many in the nobility are softening their attitudes, at least toward the wealthy in the non-noble class, and some social interaction is beginning to take place. With the changes taking place in Kuwait, social discrimination has lessened, especially among educated people. Nevertheless, it is still considered unacceptable for the ruling family to marry foreigners.

Further, around 1975 the government of Kuwait instituted a premium of \$3,000 (1000 dinars) paid to the male partner in engaged couples under the condition that they both be Kuwaiti nationals and that the marriage be the

first one for the husband. This premium has been recently increased to discourage marriage with non-Kuwaitis and, therefore, prevent the creation of a pool of unmarried Kuwaiti females, as well as trying to maintain a homogenous society.

All of these social differences, of course, affect marriage. In particular, there is little or no social interaction among people of different classes. Dr. Mohammad Al-Rumaihi has written:

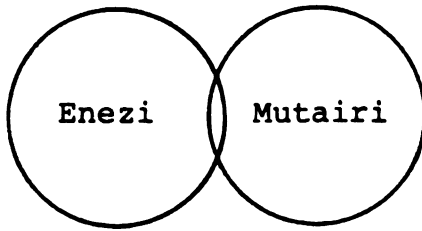
The families classified themselves as of noble origin (Assel) and exotic origin (Bessary). Traditional marriage does not occur between these families. It is even restricted among the upper class families. For there is a kind of social gap in making an affinity with each other.¹

For a better understanding of homogamy and heterogamy in Kuwait, Figures 1 and 2 describe the social interaction in Kuwait.

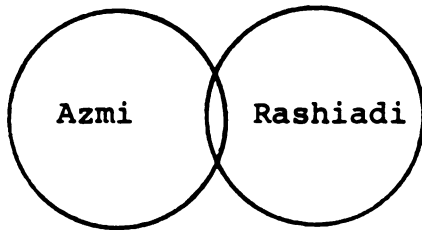
Engagement and Wedding Ceremonies

The traditional pattern, as indicated previously, is for marriage to be arranged. There is no Western-style engagement or courtship. Recently, however, some modifications of the traditional system has taken place, especially among the wealthy and educated segments of the

¹M. Al-Rumaiti, "Mode of Production and Its Relation in the Societies of the Arabian Gulf Before the Discovery of Oil," a paper presented to the First International Conference at the Arabian Gulf Center, Exeter University, England, 9-13 July 1979.



Bedouin tribes like the Enezi and Mutairi are the "noble class" of the Bedouin society. This is purely due to status more than current economic class, but based on previous wealth. All tribes with this level of social status tend to intermarry, but do not intermarry outside their status level.



Tribes like the Enezi and the Mutairi intermarry because they have mutual characteristics of less-than-noble status, and compatible religious convictions.

Fig. 1: Homogamy and Heterogamy in Kuwaiti Society among the Bedouin Tribes.*

*Tribes mentioned here are used purely as examples of a wider social phenomenon.

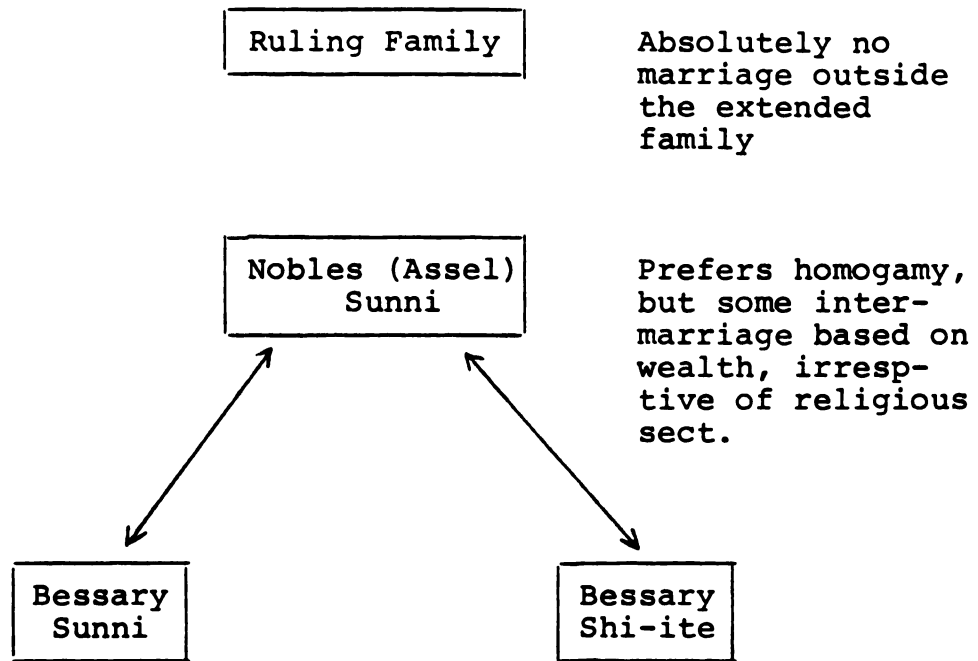


Fig. 2: Homogamy and Heterogamy in Kuwaiti Society.

population. There is more freedom to chose mates, and the family is no longer the primary agent for marriage. With increased social interaction between the sexes, more people are entering marriages of their own choice, based on love.

Al-Thakeb said in his study: "Level of education seems to be related to attitudes about the importance of knowing a person before marriage. As compared to those formally educated, among illiterates and those with no formal education, there is less interest in knowing a person before engagement and marriage."¹

Upon engagement, the marriage contract is signed, but traditionally the couple was not permitted to cohabit or see each other until the wedding day. Engagements were very short and were intended to give the woman time to prepare herself for marriage.

The new engagement custom is halfway between the traditional and the Western patterns. Today the engaged couple is allowed to go out if chaperoned by a relative. Although the time is short in most cases, and the engagement is almost irrevocable, it does not give the couple a chance to know each other. The contract is signed at the time of engagement for religious reasons and because of society's sensitivity about premarital sexual relations.

¹Al-Thakeb Fahed, Kuwaiti Family Today and Yesterday (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974).

Compared to Westerners, most Kuwaitis seem to attach relatively less importance to love and to knowing their future spouses. However, the younger generation has come a long way from the traditional norms, and many of them favor greater freedom in choosing mates.

In summary, the old marriage patterns are giving way to new ones. There is more freedom of choice in selecting a marriage partner. This selection is ideally based on fondness and understanding. More couples are going through a relatively short engagement before marriage. As the authority of the family decreases and as the economic independence of individuals increases, it is likely that these new patterns will become the national norm.

Wedding Ceremony

In the past, the wedding ceremony was very simple. It was held at home, and only neighbors and relatives attended. This was true for the rich as well as the poor.¹ Since the oil boom, marriage ceremonies for the wealthy have become more elaborate and are held at large hotels. Instead of being readied for the ceremony at home, brides and even some grooms are prepared in beauty salons. Wedding invitations have become fashionable, and photographers record the occasion on film. Expensive honeymoons in Europe or the United States often follow.

¹M. Al-Nashmi, Marriage in Old Kuwait (no further data given).

Divorce

Marriage plays a significant role in the kinship system in every society, especially in traditional ones, although the nature of this role depends on the social system. In turn, the kinship systems serves as a major institution of social control, with profound influence on individual behavior.

Divorce disrupts kinship relationships. Furthermore, it affects not only the nuclear family, but also the extended family. Because marriage is chiefly a joining of two families rather than of two individuals, divorce weakens broad social bonds. For this reason, in traditional societies divorce may not occur until the elders or leaders have been consulted. Divorce also may have broad and serious economic consequences for the families involved. As a result, the divorce rate in traditional societies is very low.

As is often true elsewhere, in Kuwait attitudes about divorce are closely tied to religion. Although Islamic law permits a husband to divorce his wife, and vice versa, it also tries to limit divorce. Aside from the Quran's teachings about the relationship that should exist within and between families, the institutions of the dowry and the sum a husband must pay in the event of divorce tend to prevent the easy termination of a marriage. The divorce price (Al-mu'akkhar) usually must be agreed on by both families, and agreement may not be arrived at quickly. Furthermore,

most divorces are handled through a court, and the judge tries to prevent the separation by counseling and by delay. However, if the parties insist, the judge eventually may concur.

It is important to reiterate that divorce is not preferred in Islamic law; it is permitted as a last resort. It is reported that the Prophet said that the worst halal (offense) in the eyes of God is divorce. Since family relations are so important in Kuwait, and since divorce so profoundly affects those relations, social tradition opposing it is almost as influential as religious attitudes against it. Even so, the radical changes taking place in the Arab world are affecting all the traditional values, and the rising divorce rate is evidence of these developments. This does not mean that the society is becoming weaker, but it does reflect the fact that the family system is altering as a result of, and along with, other social phenomena.

An empirical study has been done by the Ministry of Social Affairs about divorce in Kuwait.¹ It reached several conclusions, one being that there is a relationship between urbanization and divorce. Divorce is higher among urban dwellers than among the nomadic Bedouins because kinship as a means of social control is weaker in cities. This is the result of increased social mobility, fostered by

¹Aliyya Hassan, Divorce in Kuwaiti Society (Kuwait Government Press), 1978.

urbanization. The study found that divorce rates are high when there is a large age difference between husband and wife, but highest in cases involving spouses of roughly equal age (see Table 6).

It may be that marriage between spouses of similar age are often "love matches" as well as contracted marriages. Marriages "for love" bring with them different expectation of the purpose and functions of marriage than do contractual marriages. The higher expectations that marriage "for love" creates may yield greater disappointments and less patience when the union experiences discord. It can also be expected that parental influence or interest in maintaining the marital bond may be less in marriages which were arranged by personal choice rather than parental decision.

Furthermore, the longer the marriage lasts, the less the likelihood of divorce, and vice versa; as Table 7 shows, divorce was highest for marriages of one year or less. Another finding was that divorce increases as education decreases. As Table 8 shows, 50.3% of the divorces granted in Kuwait in 1978 involved illiterate wives, 28.4% involved illiterate husbands. In total, divorces involving one or both illiterate spouses were 54.4% of those registered. Further, 42.1% of the divorces registered in Table 8 involved couples of equal educational levels.

CHAPTER V

TABLES AND ANALYSIS

Statistical Tables

The following are statistical tables that the author will use for examining the changing marriage norms, and factors contributing to this change. We can conclude from these tables how the social change is taking place in Kuwait; therefore, the author will begin by showing economic changes which are the major source of social change in Kuwait.

The statistical tables included in this study involve both some general demographic tables and tables related specifically to marriage patterns.

TABLE 1

GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT BY SECTOR, FISCAL YEARS 1969-1973 (in dinars)

Sector	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	Net Change*	Percent of Total Increase**
Agriculture & fishing	5	4	4	4	4	down 20%	--
Mining & quarrying	557	652	902	936	1,447	up 160%	79.3%
Manufacturing	36	38	42	60	75	up 108%	3.5%
Utilities	37	39	47	36	43	up 16%	0.5%
Construction	39	34	40	21	21	down 46%	--
Trade	85	81	90	107	113	up 33%	2.5%
Transport, storage, and communications	35	36	41	59	66	up 89%	2.7%
Government services	177	58	159	216	208	up 18%	2.7%
Financial services	18	19	21	123	134	up 644%	10.3%
Gross National Product	989	961	1,346	1,562	2,111	up 113%	100%

Note: Fiscal year begins April 1. Figures used are from late 1976.
Figures in millions of Kuwaiti dinars.

Source: Based on information from Annual Statistical Abstract, 1975, Kuwait, 1975, p. 151.

*Rounded to nearest percentage

**Rounded to nearest tenth of one percent

TABLE 2A

PUBLIC EDUCATION (1958/59-1978/79)

Years	Teachers			Students			Classrooms	Schools
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total		
1958/59	750	1,092	1,842	12,661	21,764	34,425	1,157	111
1959/60	877	1,134	2,011	15,324	24,978	40,302	1,329	103
1960/61	1,007	1,248	2,255	17,459	27,698	45,157	1,475	134
1961/62	1,180	1,371	2,551	20,230	30,860	51,090	1,633	142
1962/63	1,390	1,551	2,941	23,877	35,674	59,551	1,844	140
1963/64	1,699	1,890	3,589	28,597	41,511	70,108	2,082	157
1964/65	1,974	2,241	4,215	32,509	46,613	79,122	2,510	166
1965/66	2,356	2,680	5,036	38,238	53,550	91,788	2,878	176
1966/67	2,701	2,967	5,668	43,026	58,702	101,728	3,201	178
1967/68	3,053	3,342	6,395	47,655	64,366	112,021	3,504	195
1968/69	3,506	3,811	7,317	51,673	68,877	120,550	3,897	212
1969/70	3,984	4,235	8,219	55,783	73,262	129,045	4,280	224
1970/71	4,446	4,639	9,085	60,384	78,363	138,747	4,644	230
1971/72	5,138	5,275	10,413	66,219	84,460	150,679	5,208	245
1972/73	5,771	5,734	11,505	71,334	88,897	160,231	5,660	273
1973/74	6,408	6,199	12,607	76,046	93,371	169,417	6,012	287
1974/75	7,223	6,990	14,213	82,717	100,061	182,778	6,426	309
1975/76	8,988	7,484	15,472	92,034	109,873	201,907	6,932	326
1976/77	9,359	8,868	18,227	107,823	127,380	235,203	8,117	378
1977/78	10,101	9,673	19,774	116,498	136,714	253,212	8,663	394
1978/79	10,466	10,158	20,624	123,932	143,586	267,518	9,060	437

TABLE 2B
PUBLIC EDUCATION (1958/59-1978/79)*

Years	Total Teachers	Female	Male	Total Students	Female	Male
1958/59	1,842	750	1,092	34,425	12,661	21,764
1978/79	20,624	10,466	10,158	267,518	123,932	143,586
Change	18,782	9,716	9,066	233,093	111,271	121,822
Net Increase	1019.6%	1295.5%	830%	+677%	878.8%	559.7%
Percent of Total Increase		51.7%	48.3%		47.7%	52.3%
1958/59	100%	40.7%	59.3%	100%	36.8%	63.2%
1978/79	100%	51.5%	48.5%	100%	46.3%	53.7%

* Percentages are rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.

TABLE 3
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LABOR FORCE IN YEARS 1965, 1970, 1975*

Years	Number of Working Women	Percentage of Kuwaiti Women	Percentage of Kuwaiti Labor Force	Percentage of Total Labor Force	Percentage of Total Population
1965	1092	1.0%	2.5%	0.6%	0.2%
1970	2055	1.2%	3.1%	0.8%	0.3%
1975	7477	3.2%	8.1%	2.5%	0.8%

Years	Number of Working Women	Percentage of NonKuwaiti Women	Percentage of NonKuwaiti Labor Force	Percentage of Total Labor Force	Percentage of Total Population
1965	7676	10.4%	5.4%	4.2%	1.6%
1970	14542	9.9%	8.2%	6.0%	2.0%
1975	27729	12.9%	13.0%	9.1%	2.8%

Years	Total Num- ber of Working Women	Percentage of Women Working in Kuwait	Percentage of Total Labor Force	Percentage of Total Population
1965	8768	4.8%	4.8%	1.9%
1970	16597	5.2%	6.9%	2.2%
1975	35206	7.8%	11.5%	3.5%

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.

TABLE 4

MARRIAGES REGISTERED BY AGE (1978)

Age of Husband	Age of Wife										Total Marriages	Percent ** of Total
	NS*	50+	45- 49	40- 44	35- 39	30- 34	25- 29	20- 24	15- 19	of less		
20 or less	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	38	125	7	175	4.6%
20-24	1	-	2	-	1	12	89	554	926	56	1,641	43.5%
25-29	1	-	1	2	3	17	122	386	399	17	948	25.1%
30-34	-	-	-	-	6	30	58	108	78	4	284	7.5%
35-39	-	-	-	3	9	22	38	56	52	4	184	4.9%
40-44	-	1	3	6	12	17	20	34	31	5	129	3.4%
45-49	-	1	2	6	4	6	9	15	6	1	50	1.3%
50-54	-	3	2	2	4	3	7	12	9	1	43	1.1%
55+	-	11	4	13	11	8	11	20	6	-	84	2.2%
Not Stated	231	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	233	6.2%
Total	233	16	14	32	50	115	359	1,223	1,634	95	3,771	100.0%
% of Total**	6.2%	0.4%	0.4%	0.8%	1.3%	3.0%	9.5%	32.4%	43.3%	2.5%		100.0%

*NS = Not Stated

**Percentages rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.

TABLE 5

AGE OF HUSBAND BY STATUS OF WIFE IN REGISTERED
MARRIAGES IN KUWAIT, 1978

Age of Husband	Status of the New Wife				NS	Total	% of * Total
	1st Wife	2nd Wife	3rd Wife	4th Wife			
20 or less	230	1	0	0	0	231	4.70
20-24	2166	33	0	0	0	2199	45.00
25-29	1212	80	3	0	0	1295	26.50
30-34	271	90	3	1	0	365	7.47
35-39	101	65	1	0	0	169	3.46
40-44	49	56	1	0	0	104	2.13
45-49	26	35	1	0	0	62	1.27
50-54	24	18	1	0	0	43	0.88
55-59	21	14	1	0	0	36	0.74
60-64	14	10	0	0	0	25	0.51
65-69	5	7	0	0	0	12	0.25
Over 70	19	3	0	0	0	22	0.45
NS	281	1	0	0	41	323	6.61
Total	4419	411	14	1	41	4886	100.0%
% of Total	90.44%	8.41%	0.29%	0.02%	0.84%	100%	

* Percentage rounded to the nearest one-hundreth of one percent.

TABLE 6
DIVORCES REGISTERED BY AGE (1978)

Age of Husband	Age of Wife										Total Marriages	Percent of Total
	NS*	50+	45-49	40-44	35-39	30-34	25-29	20-24	15-19	15 or less		
20 or less	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	5	-	10	0.8%
20-24	-	-	-	-	1	3	25	101	100	5	235	18.7%
25-29	-	1	2	-	3	10	54	117	76	-	263	20.9%
30-34	-	-	-	1	3	19	50	60	33	-	166	13.2%
35-39	-	1	-	6	16	23	35	36	17	1	135	10.7%
40-44	-	4	2	12	20	17	24	22	12	2	115	9.1%
45-49	-	7	3	7	15	15	17	19	8	1	92	7.3%
50-54	-	7	4	10	6	7	10	19	6	-	69	5.5%
55+	-	39	8	8	14	12	15	21	7	-	124	9.8%
* Not stated	-	48	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	50	3.9%
Total	-	107	19	44	78	106	231	400	265	9	1,259	100.0%
Percentage** of Total		8.5%	1.5	3.5	6.2	8.4	18.3	31.8	21.0	0.7		100.0%

*NS = Not Stated

** Percentages are rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.

TABLE 7
DIVORCE RELATED TO THE DURATION OF MARRIAGE IN
KUWAIT IN 1978.

Duration of Marriage (in years)	Divorcees	% of Total	Cumulative %
less than 1 year	224	21.1%	21.1%
1 year	163	15.3%	36.4%
2	93	8.8%	45.2%
3	83	7.8%	53.0%
4	48	4.5%	57.5%
5-9	156	14.7%	72.2%
10-14	77	7.3%	79.5%
15-19	38	3.6%	83.1%
20-25	22	2.1%	85.1%
25+ years	24	2.3%	87.4%
Not stated	134	12.6%	100.0%
Total	1,062	100.0%	

TABLE 8

DIVORCE RELATED TO THE EDUCATION OF SPOUSES IN KUWAIT IN 1978

Education of Husband	Education of Wife						Total	% of * Total
	Illiterate	Read and Write	Ele- mentary	Inter- mediate	Sec- ondary	Uni- versity	Not stated	
Illiterate	283	30	8	5	3	-	1	330 28.4%
Read and Write	130	56	15	18	7	-	2	228 19.6%
Elementary	75	23	32	30	6	-	-	166 14.3%
Intermediate	75	29	39	65	24	1	1	234 20.1%
Secondary	17	17	14	43	47	7	-	145 12.5%
University	-	2	-	10	18	7	-	37 3.2%
Not stated	6	1	-	1	1	-	14	23 2.0%
Total	586	158	108	172	106	15	18	1,163 100.0%
% of total *	50.3%	13.6%	9.3%	14.8%	9.1%	1.3%	1.5%	100%

* Percentages are rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study has been to show the effect of urbanization and/or increased wealth on changing marriage norms and values in Kuwait. In particular, the focus has been on behavioral patterns regarding marriage.

Kuwait, as shown earlier, is moving toward urbanization and/or Westernization at a speed and intensity rarely found in other countries. The aim has been to see whether the marriage system has undergone any corresponding change. It was expected that these changes would be in the form of altering the attitudes of the Kuwaiti family.

In summary, the old marriage patterns are giving way to new ones. There is more freedom of choice in selecting a marriage partner. This selection is ideally based on fondness and understanding. More couples are going through a relatively short engagement process before marriage. As the authority of the family decreases, these new patterns probably will become the national norm (see Figure 3).

The most profound effect on the family system is evident in the institution of marriage. In traditional Arab society, marriage is characterized by pre-arrangements between families, the youth of the couple, a dowry, and

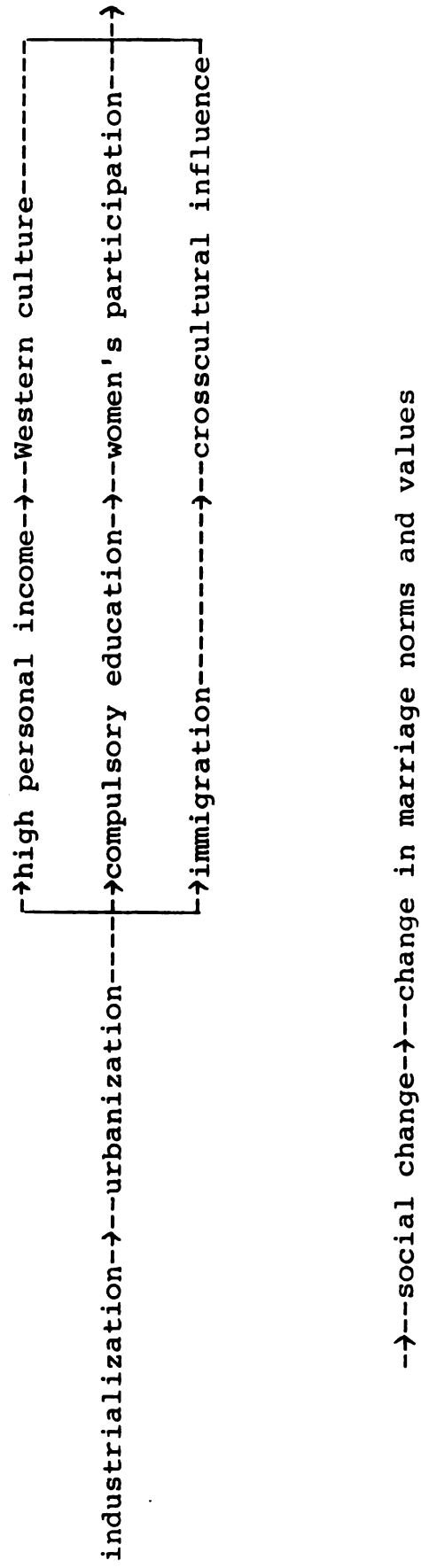


Fig. 3. Industrial Influence: this figure shows how industrialization is leading the change in marriage norms and values.

polygamy. To what extent has Westernization affected such patterns? The change is evident in the declining role of the family as an agent for arranging and maintaining marriage, and in an older marriage age. The sudden increase in wealth in Kuwait, only indirectly if at all related to Westernization, has meant that dowries have become extremely high in some segments of society.

There has been a clear departure from the traditional patterns (see Figure 4). This new trend has the support of the overwhelming majority of the college-educated and the young. One pronounced change has occurred with respect to mate selection. Traditionally, parents select a son-in-law without their daughter's approval. This is less true today. The relative personal freedom of selection typical in Western societies is becoming more common in Kuwait. More emphasis is being put on the personality of the future spouse and less on family status, income, and so forth. Getting to know a prospective spouse, love, and engagement are foreign to the traditional institution of marriage in Kuwait, but with exposure to Western ideas, these attitudes are becoming familiar.

Dowry and polygamy are two notable features of the institution of marriage in traditional Arab society. The groom pays his future bride a sum of money in line with his socioeconomic status. This practice is still the norm in contemporary Kuwait. Westernization and education no doubt have had an effect on people's attitudes toward the dowry

dependent variable	age at marriage	dowry	mate selection	polygamy	homogamy	engagement and wedding ceremony	divorce
industrialization	+++	+	++	--	+-	+	++
modernization	++	0	++	-	-	+	+
communication	+	0	++	+	-	+	+
growth of education	++	0	++	-	-	+	0

Figure 4.

system, and many of the educated reject it. The belief is becoming more widespread that the dowry should become a symbolic or token sum only. It is expected that its elimination will come only when the family is no longer a primary marriage agent and when individuals select their mates freely.

Polygamous marriages constituted less than one percent of the total in the 1965 and 1970 censuses. Those who show the most negative attitudes toward it are found among the educated, the young, females, and the upper class. It can be expected that negative attitudes regarding polygamy will continue to grow in Kuwait as the norm of individual love in marriage becomes more widely accepted and as women receive more power in arranging their marriages. While economic growth makes it more financially possible to have polygamous unions, that same economic growth fosters an ideology of individuality congruent with monogamy as a norm.

When Kuwait was a small community and people belonged almost exclusively to one faith, interfaith and inter-social marriage seldom occurred. Now, over half the population is non-Kuwaiti and belongs to various religions. It is probable that some Kuwaitis have married non-Muslims and non-Kuwaitis. Census data do not provide any information regarding the nationality or religious background of spouses, but it is likely that interfaith marriage is limited to a small segment of those who acquire their education abroad.

In summary, the institution of marriage in contemporary Kuwait is going through a significant transition

period. There is more freedom of choice in mate selection, which is based more and more on the compatibility of the personalities of the two parties. Still, unlike the custom in Western countries, engagement in Kuwait involves signing a marriage contract and imposes some restrictions of social intercourse between the engaged couple. This indicates a melding of tradition with newer norms. It could be said that social norms and ideologies compatible with the new economic structure have not kept pace with the rapid economic change.

Final Comments and Recommendations

This study raises many questions about Third World societies, particularly Arabic ones. More information is needed about family structure, family relationships, and the interrelationship between family patterns and the processes of urbanization and/or Westernization. Social change, due to the economic changes and the increasing reality of a global community, is inevitable in the Middle East. If our societies would want to plan for change, then there must be available accurate information on the ways in which economic change reverberated throughout a social system. It may be possible that, from a cost/benefit analysis point of view, some economic changes might be best foregone in light of some of the expected social disruptions to emanate from that change. Or economic change could be more readily embraced if society were better prepared to readjust its institutions

to mitigate the more disturbing disruptions incurred through economic change. This, and further studies, can help shed light on changes in marriage and family relations that can occur with sudden economic change. If society finds some of these changes disruptive to social equilibrium, then it is possible to consider means of effecting economic change without incurring the disruption of the family.

There is a need for further work in other Arab countries, especially those on the Arabic peninsula, where rapid changes are taking place. The need is for systematic studies that will use all available data and well-designed field research. Census materials and other data are becoming more available in that part of the world, although the lack of census data for the pre-oil era is unfortunate.

Future research should focus on specification and comparability. Such issues as male-female relationships with kin and husband-wife relationship with inlaws are of special interest. Another area that needs further investigation is social class differences in relation to family ties.

The relationship between adults, youths, and their parents is also of special interest. It may be that (unlike Western societies) parents are closer to their sons than to their daughters.

In general, future studies should focus on (1) types of family systems, (2) types of marriage, (3) mate selection, (4) intermarriage, (5) divorce and social change, (6) child

rearing, and (7) family planning. It would add greatly to our knowledge if such studies were to take place in Kuwait or similar Arab countries, where relatively little is known about family patterns.

Future research in social change in Kuwait should be able to take advantage of a somewhat lengthier period of data collection than was the author of this study. Even so, this study seems to have captured a moment in which the changes in marriage customs were just beginning to be manifested. If social change begins to catch up with the material changes in Kuwait, we could expect to see significant changes in age at marriage, divorce rates, homogamy, heterogamy, and compatibility of spouse age and education within the few years of registry that will have occurred.

This study was important in that it raises questions that have not yet been researched fully in the Middle East concerning rapid urbanization and sudden wealth and their effect on social patterns of behavior. If other Islamic Third World countries are interested in planning for future growth, Kuwait should be an enlightening example of the processes of social change that occur during rapid economic growth.

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