

## Abstract

This thesis is a study of the effects of socio-economic change on a category of middle-aged women in Kuwait. These women are from Kuwait's middle class and were young when Kuwait's economy was subject to massive change due to the discovery of oil.

The study was based on the results of field work carried out in Kuwait. The central argument states that due to their strict upbringing and socialization, these women were unable to adjust to modern Kuwait and subsequently feel alienated and suffer from a loss of identity.

Among the few outlets available to these women is zār which gives them a temporary release and alleviation from these feelings. However, the alleviation through zār is only a temporary measure and in fact can lead to increased feelings of alienation. The argument states that in order to prevent further alienation, special attention must be paid to these women.

Special importance has been given to the effect of Islamic concepts underlying the position of women and the way these concepts are manifested in female "religious" practices. These practices are discussed in order to draw a comparison between them and zār which is also considered a type of popular religious practice. Also to compare zār as a predominantly sunni practice with some shi'i practices.

This thesis also examines the case of two categories of the same age group, a certain importance has been given to each category's reaction to change.

The first category is that of middle-aged Failakan [from Kuwaiti Failaka island] women. This category had a different life in the past which was more active than that of Kuwaiti middle-aged. At present, this category suffers from alienation, this is particularly the case with those Failakan women who moved to Kuwait after the discovery of oil. It is argued that this category's feeling of alienation is deeper than that felt by our Kuwaiti middle-aged women.

The second category is that of middle-aged aristocratic women who, due to the particularities of their life before the discovery of oil, have favoured socio-economic change and do not share the feelings of alienation with their middle-aged middle class counterparts.

This thesis also examines the case of another "parallel" group. This is a group of young women (many of whom are the daughters of the above categories) who, although having different backgrounds, share the loss of identity felt by the middle-aged women. These women are searching for identity in a Moslem world through Islamic fundamentalism.

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"Throughout the time spent working on this thesis I was privileged to have the support and encouragement of my friend and brother, Adel Ashkanani. Unfortunately, before completing this work, my brother passed away. It is to his memory that this work is dedicated."



MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN IN KUWAIT:

"VICTIMS OF CHANGE"

by

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the requirements for the degree of  
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### A Note on Transliteration

In this thesis the system of transliteration from Arabic to English used, is that of the Library of Congress.

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The various changes brought about after discovery of oil in Kuwait, have affected almost every aspect of life in the country. The small harbour, once dependant on fishing, pearl diving, other manual crafts and a small scale commerce, has become one of the richest countries of the world. The ways in which oil revenues were invested created a society characterized by wealth and prosperity. The Government has provided free modern schools, university, technical colleges, free health services, modern houses and streets, sophisticated social services and much more.

It was unavoidable that this socio-economic change brought about profound changes on the social and moral levels. Yet as is almost always the case, social values changed at a slower pace than the material world.

The category of middle aged middle class women with whom we are dealing in this thesis, were brought up in very traditional and highly religious families. They were married very young. Their scope of life did not reach beyond their family of origin, and the extended family of their husbands, and few aspects of the community life, all these three which would consist for them the whole "society" were strictly sex segregated. Unlike themselves, their husbands were familiar with public life, the centre of which was the sug (Market). Many men were accustomed to travel abroad, but very few of them would take their wives and daughters with



them. Such was the case only among a few aristocratic families.

Many middle aged women of the aristocratic class do not suffer the impact of present change due to their familiarity with the modern countries, and the lack of the vast gap, which exists in other cases, between them and their husbands. Another point which made them favour change is that women of this class were among the first women to be educated.

Since the early 1950's almost every aspect of life has changed. Our category of middle class women who were then young, found it difficult to respond to this change, although their economic life ameliorated in a way beyond their imagination.

This thesis discusses mainly the dilemma of this category of women, i.e. their feelings of loss of identity, alienation in an ultra modern society where everything is made for educated people, their children are educated and their husbands are more familiar with new techniques and modern methods of a modern life, their extended family and the once close community life no longer exist. For many of them the only resort they find is the zār cult. Although the ostensible aim of zār is to be a curative cult\*, it in fact provides them with other satisfactions.

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\* The expresion "curative" is used here and elsewhere in this thesis, from the patient's perspective and not the author's.

In chapter 2 of this thesis we deal with the problems this category of women encountered in their attempt to adjust to change. The particularities of this category, the way they were socialized in the past, a comparison between their life in the past and that of the present is also discussed.

It is impossible to study any issue concerning Moslem women without mentioning the effect of Islam on women's position. It has two major, enduring qualities. One is the insistence of people (women themselves included) on justifying their oppression by using Islamic concepts. The second major factor is the enormous usage of Islam (sometimes popular, rather than orthodox Islam) in the process of socialization. A third factor, in my view partly a result of the two previous factors is the so called Islamic - "resurgence". In this thesis, it is argued that the recent return to Islam is in the case of Kuwait, a reaction of another category of women "young women", to society and cultural unplanned change.

To elucidate the effect of Islam some Islamic concepts concerning jinn, women and knowledge are discussed in this thesis. The way these concepts are reflected in the image woman has in Moslem society is also shown.

It will be argued that attempts to seek refuge in zār results from maladjustment to change. zār itself is a method of resolving these women's problems in a way familiar and acceptable to the majority of the patients. During the zār ceremony the woman is treated in a way which

takes her back to her socially defined and accepted role as a female. Yet because the reasons and the roots of the illness or feeling of uneasiness and discomfort is inherent in the society itself, the patient is more likely to come back and probably suffer from a recurrence of the same symptoms.

Many rituals and beliefs surround zār ceremonies. These rituals and practices are discussed fully in chapter 4, along with a historical background on zār in Kuwait. The mistress of zār i.e. "the female leader of each zār cult group" is called the mama.

Many myths and beliefs are told about this role. Her main status as was studied in this thesis, is that of substitute mother: the majority of the middle aged patients were given to marriage very young and had to cope with life in a strange household run by a domineering personality, their mother in law.

As a kind of respect for the jinn and the dar i.e. the house in which zar ceremonies are held, and to give more chance for the patients to dance and satisfy their jinn, an annual ceremony is held in the house of some mamas. This ceremony is called IL mama. Chapter 5 deals with the subject of the mama and il mama.

Although in this thesis emphasis is on the category of middle aged Sunni women, to give an overall image of the society in which this category of women live and to trace the life of other women mainly from the same age

group, we have included a chapter on other forms of Islam. The Shi'i practice of Islam conducted by Shi'i women is discussed. This is the main subject of chapter 6.

In chapter 7 we have discussed different types of reaction to change. Because we have considered middle aged women who are zār patients as a category of women who have not been able to adjust to socio-economic change, it was thought important to include other categories of women and to study their method of coping with change. Three categories were chosen. Firstly, Failakan women, i.e. women from the Kuwaiti island Failaka, a category who feels alienated after the process of change. Secondly a category of aristocratic and educated women, who do not feel alienated and have found contemporary life more beneficial and more supportive of women than traditional life.

The third category is that of the young religious generation, who consider socio-economic change to be a means by which people have been stripped of their original and true norms and values and who contend that the only way to regain this originality is through Islam.

The conclusion presents an overall analysis of the whole thesis.

My formal field-work started in 1983. Both during and before I started this thesis I had made some "informal" interviews with the patients and some mistresses of zār (mamas). The subject was of interest for me long before that.

I have interviewed 10 mamas, in different depth. In the case of one mama the interview lasted for 30-35 minutes, but in case of three mamas (in whose houses I attended zār ceremonies) I used to visit them almost every day over a period of two months. As a child I attended two to three zar parties, but the word attended is scarcely appropriate here, as a child would never be allowed to attend a zār. It would be more accurate to say I had some vague memories of a few zār ceremonies, of which I caught some glimpses. During my field work I have attended two tambūra zār ceremonies, two seven day zār ceremonies, and three two day zār Ceremonies. I also attended five dihan (massage done to female patients whose case does not require a ceremony). I interviewed over thirty five patients. Along with this I was very interested in investigating people's attitudes towards jinn and zar.

Unfortunately, I could not get any statistical data concerning the number of patients attending zār ceremonies, due to the fact that these patients are very secretive regarding their illness, and also because the mamas, whom in this case one would expect to be the best informants, either do not remember their patients' names and their exact number, or they do not want to reveal them.

Before going any further I would like to give a brief account of myself as this will clarify my relationship to the topic of investigation. I could understand the way middle aged women expressed their alienation from the modern life as I myself lived during my early childhood up to the age of seven, in a district of old Kuwait, while change was just starting,

during the late fifties. Although this period of time is now a somehow vague childhood reminiscence I can find no concordance whatsoever between the old and the modern Kuwait. Yet I was from the generation for which change had brought about many advantages (literally no disadvantage), and I do not share the feeling of alienation, nor do I lament the past as do the category of middle aged women who are the main subject of this thesis. Nevertheless, I can understand the reason behind this feeling, and tried my best throughout this thesis to take myself back to the past and compare it with the actual life in Kuwait today. Hence, I think that I had an advantage - due to my age, and being a local myself - to understand both the middle aged who are older than myself and the young generation who are about my age and have been subject to the same forces of change that I myself experienced.

After discussing briefly the subjects dealt with in this thesis, I would like to review contemporary literature on women in the Middle East, on the light of the findings in this thesis.

To obtain a rather clearer image of the bulk of literature written on Arab Women, and to put this issue in its historical context, one cannot avoid the works of two pioneers in this field Imam Mohammad 'Abdu (1849 - 1905), and Qasim Amin (1863 - 1908).

In spite of the difference in their social background, these two men shared many views, especially those concerning women's position and social and political equality.

Amin, a son of a Turkish aristocrat, had very close links with the Turkish government which was ruling Egypt at that time. He also had an Egyptian mother, born in a rich family with many privileges and facilities beyond the reach of the poor majority. He was educated in expensive and prestigious schools.

Shaykh Mohammad 'Abdu, born in a village, belonged to a rural family known for its struggle against social injustice. He pursued his Quranic education, and later he continued his education in "Al Azhar", still known as the most famous religious institution in the modern world. (1)

Despite their differing backgrounds, both have occupied important positions in the Juridical field in Egypt. It was mostly in this field that they encountered many cases of social and economic injustice practiced against women, and decided that some changes should be made to women's position.

They are both known for their struggle against colonialism, and were political activists. Finally they were both influenced by Western culture, and tried to persuade people to adopt positive aspects of the culture.

The outcome of the friendship that linked these two men was a strong and continuous effort to free Egypt from underdevelopment and colonialism. This was a concomitant of their fight for a decent position for women.

Imam Mohammad 'Abdu has elicited from Islam, positive ideas which



were to liberate women. His "humane" attitude towards women was one of which caused him many problems and opposition from both the conservative clergy and conservative classes.

Three issues concerning women's cause have been given most of Imam's attention: 1. Women's education, 2. Imposing restrictions on the husband's ability to divorce her, 3. The problem of polygamy, in which he went beyond the limits considered not only by orthodox moslems, but also by the most progressive theorists.

There is no excuse for a man to get another wife, except in the case of absolute necessity as when his first wife gets ill. I say that and I do not like to see a man getting married for the second time for the reason that a wife is not guilty for being ill. And the sense of honour requires that the man tolerate whatever misfortune that might befall her, the same thing applies to the wife in the case that her husband encounters any misfortune." (2)

Amin has discussed various problems, concerning women's position, in a blunt and frank way, unheard of in the early twentieth century Arab society. He has discussed women's position from "within" and exposed many fallacies that have been taken for granted.

In his introduction to the 1970 edition of Amin's famous book "tahrir al-Mar'ah", A. Baha' Addin writes as follow:

"The greatest value of this book lies in its courageous analysis and sharp view, in the depth of women's position, the relations between man and woman, and the

meaning of marriage, maternity and paternity.

"These relations, that have been stabilized for hundreds of years and assumed a certain shape, are not discussed by Qasim Amin from the "outside", and he has not asked only that a woman to learn how to read and write, and to expose her face and palms. He sank deep into her depths, and shook many intact and undisputed ideas in men's and women's mind, concerning very sensitive issues. "He writes things which "hurt" the feelings of man and woman" (3).

Amin regarded long enduring traditions and concepts as the roots of women's backwardness. In his view the way to combat these traditions is not to neglect them as a whole, but to select the right ones and refuse the wrong. This could be obtained by education and healthy upbringing of both sexes. And the notion that woman should be veiled to protect society from her Fitna i.e. seduction, is a fallacy. He also points out that it is important to differentiate between Islam and tradition, as Islam as a religion is flexible and humane, yet it has been used as a tool by which old traditions and customs were justified.

"We do not find any obstacle as difficult in our way to happiness, as our adherence to past traditions without distinguishing between the good and the bad. Yet it is not right to dispense with all our past, we should examine it carefully in order to know its useful and useless aspects." (4)

By taking Abdu and Amin as exemplary pioneers who have taken up the cause of women, it is important to indicate that the demand of women's

liberation started as a male initiative. This issue was strongly linked with the demand for democracy, social justice and most important, the freedom from colonialism.

In spite of the fact that Arab Women are, or should be able to stand for their own rights, the situation is not yet available to fight for their rights as a separate issue. At present, there is no possibility for any radical women's liberation movement that can bring to light women's cause without addressing the general issues prevalent in most, if not all Arab Countries such as socio-economic injustice, and political dictatorship, the burden of which is felt by both male and female members of society. In spite of the time in which Abdu and Amin lived, and the different historical processes and development Egypt and some other Arab countries have undergone, the fact is that women's position in every society is only a facet of the general situation of that society.

One final point should be mentioned here concerning Abdu and Amin, and other early writers who have adopted women's cause, like the Egyptian writer Salama Moussa, and that is the relevance of their ideas to women's case in Kuwait and other Gulf countries. In fact at the time Abdu and Amin called into question women's situation and aimed at a better life for her, the majority of women in the Gulf were living a traditional life in the harim, illiterate and probably never having heard of women's liberation, while in some other Arab countries like Egypt and Syria, some women especially the urban aristocracy had access to education and were to some extent influenced by western life. In spite of the fact that it would be

unfair to imagine that Abdu and Amin were mainly talking and fighting for this educated category, it is inevitable that those women who were influenced by their writings and who fought for their ideas were mainly among this category.

In the Gulf the issue of women's liberation came into existence as a result of the process of female education following the discovery and marketing of oil.

The influence of writers like Abdu and Amin could have reached these countries during the late fifties and early sixties with the emergence of the first generations of educated women, for whom women's liberation in its liberal sense could have had a sound effect.

Nevertheless it should be stressed that the writings of Abdu and Amin have and will still be a source of inspiration for any advocate of women's liberation in the Arab world for many years to come.

I will now consider the work of two famous Arab women writers, who have greatly influenced the feminist movement in Arab Countries :  
Al-Sadawi and Mernissi.

Al-Sadawi (5) discussed the problems which emerge as a result of the process of socialization. These are later reinforced by society in the desired personality of both sexes. Most of these problems are psychological or sexual. In fact, the most important aspect of Sadawi's writing is

the free and open discussion of sexual matters exposing the myths, fallacies and contradictions accompanying sexual beliefs and social behaviour.

The effect of her work as a gynaecologist is clearly seen in her writings. As a gynaecologist she was confronted with some of the most barbarous effects of the appropriation of women's bodies and their damaging effects on women. She was concerned with exposing cultural practice and ignorance, hence her demand for social reform to make women less vulnerable.

In spite of the fact that Egypt has distinct problems compared with Kuwait, Sadawi's work reflects - in different degrees women's position in almost every part of the Arab-Moslem world, including Kuwait. Yet her economist's approach to many aspects of women's life, considering economic factors as a major determinant in changing women's position is rather over emphasised. In this thesis it will be shown that economic change, when unaccompanied by a similar degree of cultural and mental change, cannot change women's positions.

Although Sadawi has discussed some Islamic concepts concerning women, yet the one who has given Islam and its view of women greater attention is Mernissi.(6) Mernissi discussed Islamic concepts which have been effective in the formation of the position of women, past and present. The most important issue she had raised is the implicit understanding in Islam of the active sexuality of women. It is this which is held to necessitate the

many restrictions on women's behaviour, which are still in force today. Mernissi points out the fallacy of women's supposed superiority under Islam, when compared with her position before Islam. Mernissi also discusses sex segregation and change in contemporary Morocco.

In fact both Mernissi and Sadawi are aware of the particularities of Eastern societies, and both are against blindly adopting Western modes of behaviour. Whereas Sadawi discusses many issues in a general way Mernissi seems to be more precise, particularly in her view of change, taking into consideration the particularities of Arab Moslem World. Mernissi has a more comprehensive view of women's situation.

In her writing about women, she makes it clear that women's actual situation is a result of many intricate factors, most important of which are: the political situation, the main feature of which is oppression, the unequal economic situation prevalent in most Arab countries and religion in general which perpetuates concepts associated with the ideal images both men and women are supposed to reflect in society.

Two other works concerning Moslem Arab women, written by male writers, are thought important to be mentioned in this review. A study by (7) Khalil of women's position in pre-Islamic, Islamic and contemporary orthodox contexts, shows that in all three phases devaluation seems to be the everlasting destiny of Moslem-Arab women. As far as the position of Women in Islam is concerned, he states that under Islam the position of

women became legalized according to the doctrines of Islam, and although some women could achieve some success and break the traditional barriers, the majority have suffered from Islamic concepts which are expressed in many matters such as divorce, wearing the veil, polygamy and subordination to man.

Women's status was however subject to change throughout the Moslem world ranging from strict and reactionary to disfavour of women's progress, according to the nature of each Islamic State. The image Khalil portrays of Moslem women in orthodox Islam is negative and reflects the contradictory elements in women's status.

Another writer, whose work deals mainly with the image of women in Islam, and Arabic language and Arab thought is Mana<sup>c</sup> (8). Adopting a dialectical method, he discusses the factors that laid the ground for the introduction of Islam. In his view the past and present situation of women is a result of an unjust division of resources and relations of production which are based on persecution and abuse.

Both Mana<sup>c</sup> and Khalil conclude that the emancipation of women could only be obtained under a socialist system. While Mernissi and Sadawi analyse women's position in the light of case histories and real life situations, Khalil and Mana's studies are more theoretical.

After discussing the work of two female writers and two male writers, both Eastern, I would like to discuss the work of two Western writers:

Mince and Maher.

Mince (9) studied the Arab point of view on many aspects of womens' lives. Most aspects are oppressive for example, divorce, the inheritance laws and polygamy, which remain applicable to women in spite of many recent socio-economic changes.

Mince's work covers a wide area of women's life as it studies the position of women in Arabia in the light of economic, social and religious inheritance, as illustrated by the existing family and kinship structure. Because her work covers such a wide area, the study is a general one. More fruitful results could have been obtained if every aspect was studied more fully and in more detail. Of specific value for our study is her discussion of tradition showing its force in Arab Moslem life. This also applies to the case of middle aged women, studied in this work. In many cases these women might have benefited from socio-economic changes in many ways. Yet they remained disadvantaged, to a great degree, because of the force of tradition.

Maher (10) is another writer whose work will be discussed briefly here. In her work on a Berber village she examines the role of women in a community where economic resources are inequitably distributed.

The solidarity of women is particularly obvious in this society, where women have a surprising degree of control over the economics of their own lives. Under an economic system favouring a few and neglecting the



majority, and imposing various restrictions on women, two features are particularly important. The first is the significance of kinship relationship in sustaining both the social and the economic structures. The second is the relationship of women with each other, their degree of solidarity, creating a strong bond securing their lives and rendering them less susceptible to male authority.

The role of women in general as providing a cohesive factor in their rural society, contrasts with the use of sex in urban society as a differentiating factor, discussed in a later work by the same author (1978).

Maher (11) states that the cause of this lies in differences in the two economic systems. In small villages, commerce is domestically centred, simple and personal, and depends to a large extent on direct "kinship" relationship. City business is indirect, impersonal and competitive.

Of relevance to our study is the division of women in Morocco to eight categories, each differing from the other in terms of advantages and disadvantages occurring from their economic standing, their place of origin and their share of education. This fact supports our finding that in Kuwait there are different categories of women, who live in different situations and have different socio-economic position. A sharp contrast could be drawn between middle aged and young women.

I would like here to point out two studies carried out on Kuwaiti women. I would also like to state that studies on Kuwaiti women are to the best of my knowledge, very scarce apart from the collection of papers which were submitted to two conferences on women and development in the eighties,(12) which discuss many issues concerning women in Kuwait and other parts of the Moslem World.

The papers are mostly very general and the themes are repetitive.

The two studies that will be discussed here are those of Nath's and Al-Marzoog (13).

Nath (1978), in her study based on a survey conducted on 246 Kuwaiti university graduates who have been themselves leaders and pace-setters of change among women in Kuwait, emphasises the rapid change which took place in Kuwait. One result, of this was the great change in the position of women, which is reflected in many aspects of life: the old extended families are now very few, people prefer independence and nuclear families. Arranged marriage, which used to take place without consultation with the girls, no longer exists.\*

In her study Nath used Western criteria for her analysis, based mainly on superficial appearance. She failed to anticipate the anti-progressive backlash taking place in contemporary Kuwait, a backlash par-

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\* This last point made by Nath seems to be very generalised and based mainly on her observation of some so-called westernised Kuwaiti families. Arranged marriage is still practiced on not a very narrow level.

ticularly over issues concerning women. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the changes that have occurred in family structure, and in old customs.

Al Marzoog tries to relate the attitudes of Kuwaitis towards women's education and employment to the class to which the person belongs. It was shown in her study, based on a questionnaire, that education played a principle role in creating a gap between the old and young generation. While the younger generation is enthusiastic for the change, the old one is still attached to traditional norms and values. This point is of great interest as it was confirmed by our study. Further her method in studying Kuwaiti society's attitudes towards education and other changes, according to the socio-economic standing of class, is useful, as in this study it was found that the middle aged women's response to change was to some extent determined by their socio-economic background.

Both Nath and Marzoog's studies are highly specialized, looking at the effect of education on women's position, especially from the point of view of educated people. The present study deals with a somewhat disadvantaged category, whose members are in general not educated.

In this review of literature on women an obvious difference can be detected between the method Western writers used and that used by Eastern ones. Whereas Western female writers depend in their study on Islamic rules and laws and economic system (Mince, Maher); Eastern women writers

focus on the underlying Islamic concepts and social understanding and practices which arise from such concepts, and the misfortunes of womens' daily life.

From this review one can conclude that there is an overall similarity in women's position in Arab world, yet they have different situations according to their position in society. In fact, it is not enough in any study to simplify the reality of women's life by stating that all women are exploited and have an inferior position, although that might be the overall situation.

As in one society some women of certain descent and background could be ahead of other women citizens although they might have lived in an earlier time. (14)

In this thesis it was found that different women of different age groups and different classes have different situations and respond to changes brought about by the socio-economic boom in different ways. Change in socio-economic life was not accompanied by a similarly drastic change in cultural and social values. Hence for many middle aged and middle class Kuwaiti women materialistic advantages were not accompanied by content.

These women who were socialised in the past, in a traditional way, and were subject to a different present which among other things was forcing them to accept different values, found it difficult to cope with their new life, and they are left with a great nostalgia for a past which

had none of materialistic and technological advantages of contemporary Kuwait.

The sense of alienation from society, the loss arising from what they considered unacceptable change in every aspect of life, made zār one of few outlets still available from what was for everybody else an almost forgotten past. Whereas everything in society is modern and sophisticated, in zār ceremonies many past relations and the solidarity of community life are renewed.

NOTES

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- 1) For more details on the effect of the social background and the family life of Imam Mohammad Abdu and Qasim Amin on their works, see M. Amarah 1972, 1978, 1980.
- 2) A. Amarah 1972. The second part P.87.
- 3) Qasim Amin 1970. P.19. The introduction by Ahmad Baha'Addin.
- 4) Amin op. at P.182.
- 5) al-Sa'dawi 1980A, 1980B, 1982A, 1982B.
- 6) Mernissi 1975.
- 7) Khalil 1982.
- 8) Mana<sup>c</sup> 1980.
- 9) Mince 1980.
- 10) Maher 1974. 1978.
- 11) Haddad.Y. 1982.
- 12) Nath 1978.
- 13) al Marzooq 1975.
- 14) Compare the personality of an early twentieth century revolutionary gentlewoman in Cairo (al-Marsot, 1987) with the personality of a contemporary traditional urban women in (al-Messri 1987)

## Chapter Two

### KUWAITI MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN: VICTIMS OF A CHANGED WORLD

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#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Kuwait has undergone a profound transformation almost unparalleled in the contemporary world, as a result of the discovery and development of what subsequently proved to be one of the richest oil reserves in the world. The spectacular wealth flowing from oil has brought about staggering changes in this once relatively unimportant desert bound, tribally based community at the head of the Arabian Gulf. This once small urban society, had a commercial economy based primarily on pearl fishing, boat building and trading, with virtually no agriculture, established in the 17th Century A.D. by tribesmen ousted by intertribal conflict in the Najd region of Arabia. Gradually, it grew into one of the major trading centres of the Gulf region.<sup>1</sup>

However, it was the discovery of oil in 1938, with its exploitation begun after the second world war, in 1946, which brought about the total transformation of Kuwait into the super affluent Sheikhdom of today. The rapidity of the development of oil production in Kuwait, during the early 1950s was directly due to the Iranian oil crisis of 1951-53, when the British were ousted from Iran, and the nationalisation of Iran's oil was established. Kuwait's oil production was increased by British Petroleum to



offset the dramatic drop in production from Iran.<sup>2</sup> Oil production leaped from 17.3 million tons in 1950 to 54.9 million in 1955 and 81.7 million metric tons by 1960<sup>3</sup>.

Between 1953 and 1961 oil revenues earned by Kuwait amounted to approximately 3 billion dollars (KD 897.8 million)<sup>4</sup>. By 1972 Kuwait's oil production of 148 million tons was third only to that of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait possessed 10% of all known world reserves<sup>5</sup>.

In 1973 oil production dropped, in part as a result of the embargo against the U.S.A. and Holland following the October 1973 war between Egypt and Israel, and in part as a result of an increasing awareness of the need to preserve long term oil reserves. However, during this period oil revenues rose because of the rise in the price of oil since 1973. In 1978 Kuwait earned 9.7 billion dollars on exports of crude oil and refined petroleum products, compared to only 2.4 billion dollars in 1972<sup>6</sup>. Thus in the space of 35 years, since the early 1950s, Kuwait, with a then still largely illiterate and technologically unskilled population, with a traditional commercial and trading economy, was transformed into one of the richest nations on Earth, financed by these vast and growing oil revenues. From the early 1950s Kuwait became a capital surplus society.

Unsurprisingly, the literature concerned with contemporary Kuwait concentrates primarily on the results of this rapid development, on oil, international business and finance, and in part on the political ramifications involved in the exploitation and control of the vast oil resources of the Gulf States<sup>7</sup>. Modernisation and westernisation, so particularly pro-

found in Kuwait, has produced radical tensions throughout the Middle East, caused by complex and interrelated economic, political, cultural and social as well as demographic factors.

The particular form of oil generated, capital surplus development of Kuwait since the 1950s has produced a dramatic transformation in the demography of Kuwait.

In 1949, the population of Kuwait was estimated at approximately 100,000. Between 1957 and 1975 the population increased 557%, an annual average increase of 24% over this period. The bulk of this increase was made up by foreign immigration, such that by 1965 Kuwaiti nationals constituted a minority in the nation, comprising 47.1% of the population. By 1980, the Kuwait census reveals, that Kuwaitis comprised only 41.7%, and non-Kuwaitis 58.3% of the total population <sup>8</sup>.

As J. Ismael writes:

"What is significant about the demographic transformation of Kuwait ... is the fact that the distinction between Kuwaiti nationals and non-Kuwaiti nationals is the fundamental classification of the population in every category of each of the censuses" <sup>9</sup>.

Moreover,

"Non-Kuwaiti is a status distinction that permeates the entire social structure of Kuwait society and places manifold disabilities upon the population so classified. Non-Kuwaitis have no legal rights in Kuwait. A non-Kuwaiti cannot secure a working permit or residency without the guarantee of a Kuwaiti

national who is responsible for the non-Kuwaiti in all legal and financial dealings (called the System of Guarantees). A non-Kuwaiti must leave the country once unemployed. Furthermore, non-Kuwaitis do not have free access to the welfare system that Kuwaitis have" 10.

Kuwaiti nationals are given preferential treatment in employment, have greater job security, and preferential promotion. The rapid rise of immigrant labour reflected the imperatives of the booming modern economy, where semi skilled, skilled, professional and managerial skills had to be imported. Up until 1954, immigration was not restricted, when as a result of labour troubles, a survey was carried out, revealing that only 13% of the labour force was made up of Kuwaiti nationals, and controls over immigration were established.

However, Kuwait remains dependent on foreign nationals for a host of professional and technical skilled labour as well as unskilled, and the 1980 census show that 78% of the total labour force remains non-Kuwaiti 11.

While this thesis focuses exclusively on the Kuwaiti national population, and specifically on full national Kuwaiti women, it is necessary to sketch out the critical dichotomy of the population, where Kuwaiti nationals benefit, not only in terms of discriminations briefly mentioned above, but are the prime beneficiaries of the welfare system established, primarily on behalf of their own nationals by the Kuwaiti Government.

Again quoting from Ismael's excellent study:

"What this paternalistic welfare system has done is to transform the indigenous population into a leisure class with a capacity for consumption of luxury foreign goods... Although economic and social stratification have increased substantially as a result of the distribution of oil wealth, Kuwaiti nationals are a privileged ethnic minority - the largest ethnic minority within Kuwait. The humblest Kuwaiti has more rights, greater economic and social security and better opportunities for social mobility than a highly skilled non-Kuwaiti." <sup>12</sup>

The way in which Kuwaitis benefit from this welfare system is discussed more fully below, and the necessity of establishing a modern education system to improve the level of Kuwaiti skills is dealt with in detail below. The non-Kuwaiti population is not the subject of this thesis, and the potential political problems involved are likewise not discussed.

One of the radical tensions which has emerged in Muslim nation States as a result of the processes of modernisation and westerisation has focussed on the issue of women in the contemporary world.

Rarely has a topic been the subject of such stereotyping and misperception as that of Muslim women <sup>13</sup>. However, as discussed in the introduction virtually no literature has been produced concerning women in Kuwait, which contrasts with the recent flood of studies and data about women in other Middle Eastern countries. In the face of the affluence which has come to Kuwait, research into its impact on the lives of women has scarcely been started. Ismael's study of social change in Kuwait, which is otherwise extremely informative, does not deal with women at all, with the exception of a few comments about women in relation to education, and the

fact that women in Kuwait form a tiny minority of the labour force, at least, the women we are concerned with in this thesis - Kuwaiti women. The emergence of women in the labour force, their appearance in education, medicine and other public domains, traditionally reserved exclusively for males, in Middle Eastern society, has produced a backlash in a number of Muslim States, most noticeably of course in Iran since the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime and the inauguration of the Iranian Islamic Republic. In Iran women are now systematically being removed from positions previously held by them in public affairs. In Kuwait, the 'problem' of women in work is treated less rigorously,

"Cultural constraints have been major barriers to female participation and the state's comprehensive welfare system has obviated economic factors as a cause of female participation"<sup>14</sup>.

Thus the tensions felt in many Middle East societies have been ameliorated by the particular form in which modernisation and development took place in Kuwait. However, the perception of women as primarily producers of children, and more appropriately separated from men does find expression in Kuwait, as in all Muslim States.

"Nevertheless, the heavy dependence upon immigrant labour has led to government efforts to overcome cultural barriers that keep half the population inactive."

and Kuwait establish a policy related to its developing needs,by

"Encouraging the participation of Kuwaiti females in occupations which are better suited to the nature of women, by offering them priority in employment" (emphasis added) <sup>16</sup>.

Female participation in the labour force increased from 2.5% to 8.1% between 1965 and 1975, with the increase primarily in the social services, which took up 80.8% of female employment in 1975.

"In fact the increase in female employment within the Kuwaiti population reflects the labour market demands emerging from sexually segregated social service structures. Hence female professionals and service workers - teachers, social workers, etc. are needed to service the female population in a segregated welfare system. Outside these structures, there has been virtually no growth of Kuwaiti female participation" <sup>17</sup>.

In this thesis I shall be concerned with showing that the transformation of Kuwait, with its influx of vast wealth, and the establishment of "leisured" class of Kuwaitis, has in fact had a differential impact on Kuwaiti women. In particular I suggest that a particular category of Kuwaiti women appear to have been 'victimized' by the forces of change.

This category of 'victims' were women born roughly between 1935-45, who were young, typically newly married and non-educated just at the time when the transformation of Kuwait society took off so spectacularly in the early 1950s. By 1982, when field research was carried out in Kuwait among these women, they were 'middle aged', again roughly, since ages are not always known by Kuwaitis of this generation, approximately between 38 and 55 years old.

These 'middle aged' women appear to have been the victims of processes which left them, although affluent, increasingly isolated, physically and socially, morally and intellectually, from the rapidly changing world of Kuwait. Their emotional distress and sense of isolation, produced a form of deprivation and exclusion experienced most acutely by these particular women, as a result of the specific configuration of factors which has produced contemporary Kuwait. These factors, and how they singly and together produced this category of 'victims' is the subject of this thesis.

This emotional distress, and feeling of alienation and confusion found and continues to find expression by this category of 'middle aged' women, in attendance at traditional curing rituals called zār, rituals which are thought by most contemporary Kuwaitis as archaic and no longer appropriate to modern life. Consolation, temporary 'cures' and mutual support are experienced in these ritual activities, but possibly more importantly for these women, a reassuring and positive sense of self, of self worth and of identity is restored, when their particular circumstances in Kuwait have produced isolation, alienation and confusion. Before discussing in detail these zār rituals, in chapter 4, it is necessary to locate these women in their social context, a context which has undergone such profound changes since they were young and newly married in the early 1950s. This chapter outlines the transformation of Kuwait, the social composition of its population and how the changes in Kuwait have affected and 'discriminated' against these women, isolating them both from their husbands and their more educated children.

Extensive use is made of census data produced from the 1980 census, which confirms the social context over the past 35 years, as contributing to the isolation of these women.

## 2.2 THE TRANSFORMATION OF KUWAIT

In 1980 Kuwait was listed as the wealthiest country in the world, with a per capita income (at 1976 prices) of 14,000 dollars <sup>18</sup>. According to the Government Census of 1982, in 1980 the estimated population was just over 1.3 million, of which 565,613 only were Kuwait citizens. The majority of Kuwait's population is now made up of foreign immigrants, primarily though not exclusively from other Middle East countries.

The social services of Kuwait are the envy of the world. In spite of the fact that the rights enjoyed by Kuwaiti nationals exceed those enjoyed by non-Kuwaiti. Kuwaities and most foreign nationals alike benefit from free education and free health services. As pointed out in the 1982 census:

"Kuwait has achieved remarkable progress in education. This progress is pointed up by the very rapid growth in the numbers of students and teachers in the last 25 years. The total number of students in public schools increased from 4,665 in the year 1948/49 to 322,512 in the year 1981/82. The number of teachers increased from 198 to 24,367 during the same period.

The total expenditure on public education in Kuwait in 1981/82 on both current and capital account was



around KD 222 million (Kuwaiti Dinar) and on University education, around KD 38 million" 19.

Medical services, subsidised by the Government are another source of pride in Kuwait:

"Kuwait has a highly developed and comprehensive Health Service, which is extended mostly without charge. In terms of its range and quality, the Medical and Health Services of Kuwait can be favourably compared with those of any other country in the world.

Remarkable progress has been achieved during the past 25 years. The number of doctors employed by the Government was 4, in 1949. In 1981 the number of doctors in the Government Health Service reached 2,336. The number of private doctors in 1981 was 224. There is now one doctor in the country for every 567 persons. Public expenditure on health services in 1981/82 was approximately KD 162 million" 20.

An extensive hospital building programme was completed in 1983, adding another 3,000 beds.

Unlike education and health services, provided free by the Government, only Kuwaiti nationals have benefitted from the subsidised housing policies of the Government. As part of its early policy to transform the old town of Kuwait, by encouraging people to move out of the old town into enlarged residential areas, the Government bought up the old traditional houses at higher than market prices, and provided land, at lower than cost price, for these displaced Kuwaitis to build new and more modern houses and villas, outside the boundaries of the

old town. Low cost mortgages were provided to enable modern houses to be built, by those who could afford to do so. For those who could not, a system of protected renting was established.

The Government also established a system of offering new housing at subsidised prices, called "Government Limited Income Houses". Between 1953 and 1981, 25,070 such houses have been distributed, and there are 22,088 applications from 1967-1979 still pending. Housing is thus guaranteed by the Government <sup>21</sup>.

Employment is also guaranteed to Kuwaiti nationals by the Government, in the civil service, armed forces or the police force.

Public expenditure of utilities such as electricity and water is extremely high, since after decades of dependence on Iraq for pure drinking water, extremely scarce in this part of the world, Kuwait has now become independent through massive expenditure on the construction of desalination plants.

In 1981/82 public expenditure on electricity and water came to KD 237,800,000, outstripping that on Defence and the National Guard which was KD 203,429,000. Expenditure on Defence has escalated since the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war.

While not all Kuwaitis are rich, by any means, the growth of Kuwait City since the 1940s has thus not been the typical story of urban depriva-

tion, ill health, undernourishment and 'bidonville' or shanty town living conditions. In this sense Kuwait is quite unlike those Middle East cities with their appalling urban problems, inadequate social services, poor or even no sanitation, and minimal urban facilities <sup>22</sup>.

People migrate to Kuwait from all over the Moslem world to get more highly paid work, to get the benefits of social services and to send remittances home to their families because the income from manual labour for example, is much higher in Kuwait than many other Middle East countries.

Thus, drawing analogies from other contexts in the Middle East is problematic, because unlike Kuwait many of the huge urban cities have grown on very old traditional urban centres, such as - Cairo, Tunis, Fez, Rabat, Damascus and of course, Jerusalem. Elsewhere in the oil rich Gulf nations, cities have grown out of the desert, where nothing existed before. Kuwait, like many of these Gulf cities, was a small trading centre urban, but not cosmopolitan. Kuwait is, as pointed out, a town become modern, an incredibly wealthy city - totally transformed, but unlike Cairo, or Baghdad.

Above all it is virtually totally protected from the appalling urban poverty, malnutrition, under-nourishment found in the shanty towns, and bidonvilles, inhabited by rural immigrants, so common in all other Middle East cities, from Baghdad to Casablanca.

The composition of modern Kuwait, and its rapid growth, has been primarily through international migration. Not so much the migration of rural villagers or tribal Kuwaitis, but of specialists, managers, teachers, doc-

tors and labourers from non-Kuwait societies.

The Kuwaitis proper, that sector of Kuwait society with which I am exclusively dealing in this thesis, are not dislocated, impoverished peasants, with insecure jobs, unemployed, deprived of medical and social services, deprived of education, and with the inadequate diet so typical of other urban centres. Kuwait does not suffer from massive overcrowding, or from the desperate dislocation of social relations to the extent that other Middle East cities do. Kuwait is a luxury society - at least for the Kuwaiti section of population.

Since the health and social services as well as education are provided free to most by the state and since employment is guaranteed, the impact of modern education, of new values and of modernization, is much greater and pervasive in Kuwait than in most other cities. Modernisation, technological benefits, comfortable housing and labour saving devices, easier shopping, refrigeration and constant water supplies, which are adequate for health and sanitation, have resulted in the impact of modernism being much greater in Kuwait society generally than virtually anywhere else, except other similarly developing Gulf cities. The Material conditions of life have transformed beyond imagination since the 1940s. TV, radio cassettes, videos, refrigerators, air conditioning, constant water, good housing, a massive range of consumer goods, the acquisition of possessions, cars, international travel, good schools, University, colleges, superb medical treatment, shopping and marketing made easier, with an immigrant labour force to do all the 'dirty' jobs, cheap servants,

expansion of entertainment and leisure activities, all are now characteristic of Kuwait.

Many of the changes referred to above have had a direct impact on the private lives of women. Their domestic labour and the hours spent in domestic work have both been affected. The labour saving consumer items have elevated the conditions of their life remarkably, compared for example to many of their sisters in other cities in the Middle East. The restrictions on the movement of women in public places are not so arduous as previously, for example, because of the construction of many convenient shopping centres, and the storage of food by refrigeration now freely available •

The position of women in terms of their domestic labour has been tremendously improved or at the very least, made much much easier. Moreover, women now have access to entertainment within the privacy of the home, such as TV, and video films, which they never enjoyed before. Thus the quality of their private lives in the home is markedly improved - again far beyond the dreams of a Berber villager moved to Rabat, or of Bedouin Jordanian women living in Amman's shanty towns.

While the benefits of modernism in Kuwait are undoubtedly enormous, these material benefits and greater financial security have not been universally beneficial for all Kuwaiti women.

The reality of the lives of women is as specific and varied as is their socio-economic position in society, a position defined by their natal family and/or that of their husband's family. As will be discussed later in this thesis, while women are defined primarily through their relationship with men - fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, the worlds of men and women are kept separate, with women being far more segregated from direct participation in the modern public world. Thus, taken as a category, women on the whole have only restricted and male regulated access to the contemporary world. The range of these restrictions and how they affect women as a category are discussed below. Such restrictions and the male regulation and control of women are found in varying degrees and forms throughout the Middle East as is reported in the wealth of varied literature on Middle Eastern women <sup>23</sup>. However, as is clear from the most recent of this literature, a growing awareness of variation in the position of women, in part under the influence of 'feminist' approaches to the study of women in Muslim society, has developed. Judith Tucker writes:

"While we cannot ignore the role Islam or other religions, play in undergirding the structures which oppress women, and men as well, neglect of the many and varied dimensions of women's lives lead to facile conclusions about women, Islam and the path of change. To see Middle Eastern Women solely as the oppressed victims of a benighted society is to deny them a history and culture, to greatly underrate their ongoing contributions to economic and social life <sup>24</sup>. (emphasis added)

The particularities of Kuwaiti women in Kuwaiti society differ in some respects from women in other Middle East cities, as will be seen below, but they also vary within Kuwait, in terms of the social composition

of Kuwait society as a whole.

Historically, Kuwait society has been socially differentiated on a number of ethnic as well as tribal criteria, which make the analysis of Kuwaiti society in terms of social class somewhat problematic and is beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover the massive infusion of wealth has inevitably complicated the interplay of tribal, ethnic and emergent class interests during the past three decades <sup>25</sup>, in spite of the fact that class distinction is still prevalent. However, since the status of women is primarily defined and articulated through the status of their families, it is essential to give a brief account of the traditional social categories relevant still in Kuwait.

### 2.3 THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF KUWAIT

Historically the major criteria of social differentiation in the Kuwait population have been based on descent, place and nationality of origin, reflecting the process of settlement in Kuwait since its founding.

The criterion of descent, defines status and prestige in terms of the notion of ASL, (descent) and is based on the tribal groups of the Arabian peninsula for whom the notion of nobility was articulated in terms of a genealogical model of lineages, linked to a common ancestor. Nobility, expressed in terms of this model, in terms of descent, was often achieved through political success, and this achieved position subsequently 'legitimated' in the idiom of 'noble descent'. Nobility, was thus the

attribute, and sign of political power. Par excellence, the camel herding BEDU of the desert epitomised such nobility, expressed not only in political independence, but through the value system of honour, warriorship, and hospitality, a complex of tribal values grounded in a community of kinsmen, and above all family.

Four different categories can be discerned, associated with descent, place and national origin.

- 1) asīl, or pure-blood Arabs, of noble origin, originating from various tribal groups of Arabia, mainly from the central region of Najd. The elite Kuwaiti families of today are primarily of asīl origin belong to the super affluent elite.
- 2) Non asīl Arabs and their descendants. Members of this category came from Saudi Arabia, but are either from inferior tribes, or are of obscure origin, and therefore, by definition, not noble. They are not regarded as having pure blood, and thus not genealogical kinsmen of those of asīl descent. Many also came from other Arab Countries, Iraq, Bahrain, or the Gulf States. This category includes those of ignoble origin, and descendants of families within asīl tribes occupying low status occupations, such as artisanal work, blacksmithing.

Such occupations excluded them from the asīl category. Neither of these categories are defined in economic terms. The non-noble



category includes many extremely wealthy merchants for example.

- 3) Non Arabs, mostly Persians, who migrated to Kuwait at different times over the past two hundred years. The descendants of these longstanding immigrants vary in the way they handle the requirements of living in an Arab society. Some now consider themselves essentially Arab, and no longer speak or know Persian. Others still retain their Persian Language, and/or speak Arabic with a strong Persian accent. This latter is particularly true of the older generation, while their children, often born in Kuwait, now speak Arabic only. Many such families are regarded in social terms as not being Kuwaitis at all.
- 4) Ex-slaves and their descendants, originating from many parts of black Africa, and now emancipated. This category is considered Arab, and speak Arabic, having long since lost any knowledge of their language of origin - usually Swahili. It is from this category for example, that the mamas, the ritual specialists in zār rituals discussed in chapter four, are typically found.

Cross cutting the above criteria, to a certain extent, are religious differences. The majority of population are Sunni Muslims. However, the major minority group belong to the Shi<sup>h</sup> sect of Islam, and comprise between 30% and 40% of the population of Kuwait. The state religion of Kuwait is of course Sunni Islam.

If we combine categories 1-4 above with differences in religious affiliation the Kuwaiti population can be represented as follow:

- a) Arab Sunni Muslims - by far the majority of Kuwaitis, drawn from categories 1,2 and 4 above.
- b) Sunnis of Persian origin.
- c) Shi'ah of Persian origin, from category 3, the largest non Sunni category.
- d) Arab Shi'ah, again a small minority originating from Iraq, Bahrain and the Ihsa region of Saudi Arabia, these latter known in Kuwait as the Hassawis.

However, as has been pointed out in the previous sections of this chapter, the status distinction which prevades contemporary Kuwaiti society and permeates the entire social structure is concerned with legal rights to full Kuwaiti citizenship and nationality. The four categories outlined above are mainly, but not all comprised of Kuwaiti nationals; a point which requires further elaboration below.

A fifth category must be added, and as already pointed out, in fact forms the majority of population of Kuwait, and have done virtually since 1962. These are the recent immigrants.

- 5) Recent immigrants have entered the county since the early 1950s to provide Kuwait with the labour force, following the development of oil and the modernisation of Kuwait. This category is of mixed origin, from all over the Arab world, from Iran, Pakistan, India and Korea, and range from short stay, fixed contract temporary migrant labour, to long stay highly skilled professional immigrant workers, mainly Palestinian and Egyptian, who are particularly prevalent in the education sector for example. In the early 1960's in particular, a considerable number of these migrant workers were illegal, especially the flood of Persian labourers who came in search of higher wages.

The citizenship law of 1959 (the Amiri Decree 157) and subsequent amendments, was enacted as a result of uncontrolled immigration of the 1950s, and concerned with people in my fifth category, with the economic and political implications of being so overwhelmingly dependent on an alien labour force. However, it in fact affected categories 1-3 in diverse ways. According to Article 1 of the Amiri Decree Kuwait, nationality is recognised for those and their descendants who were resident in Kuwait before 1920 and maintained residence up to 1959, the year the citizenship law was brought into force. All others were classified as non Kuwaitis.

"By 1975, 16.4% of the non-Kuwaiti population had been in Kuwait 10 to 14 years, and another 12.7% had been in Kuwait 15 years or more ... By 1975, in fact 29.9% of the non-Kuwaiti population had been born in Kuwait.

In spite of this they remain classified as non-Kuwaitis and have little option of change this status because of the restrictive naturalisation requirements.

The requirements of naturalisation - Articles 4 to 8 - provide that naturalisation for non-Kuwaitis of Arab origin requires a 10 year residency before application for citizenship decree: for immigrants from other Arab origins the residency requirement is 15 years. Time spent prior to publication of citizenship law does not count towards the residency requirement." 20

The process of naturalisation is difficult, by law only 50 naturalisation per year are allowed, and require considerable political influence to be obtained. When the parent is naturalised, the law does not allow for the first class nationality of the children, and naturalised citizenship could be passed on the offspring.

Naturalised citizens are second class citizens, and suffer a number of disadvantages. They are not allowed to vote until they have been citizens for 20 years, (this remains inapplicable, as those who have been living in Kuwait for 20 years or more are still not allowed to vote in 1985 parliamentary elections), and are debarred from certain government positions. Under certain political conditions, their citizenship can be revoked and they can be deported.

Both first and second class citizens qualify for the full benefits of the Kuwaiti welfare system, but those classified as non Kuwaitis do not, to

the same extent, and in particular do not qualify for the subsidised housing scheme discussed earlier. They of course do not have guaranteed employment, nor job security as do full Kuwaiti nationals.

The effect of the citizenship law, and the difficulties of the naturalisation process, have affected members of categories 1-3 in a number of ways and for different reasons. If, for example, a family from Persia settled in Kuwait in 1920 and had remained resident, then they obtained full citizenship rights.

If a family of Arab origin arrived in Kuwait in 1921 and remained resident, they did not qualify for first class nationality and after 1959 would have to wait until 1969, 10 years residence after the law was passed before qualifying to apply for citizenship. Moreover, as is discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter, many Kuwaities were and remain illiterate, and many did not fully understand the implications of the citizenship decree, considering themselves Kuwaiti, and consequently did not register in the proper fashion at the proper time, or had no means of proving when they did in fact originally come to Kuwait. It is thus possible to be third generation Kuwaiti, but still be classified as non Kuwaiti because one's grandparent could not prove the date of initial migration to Kuwait, or did not register properly.

The social distinctions of status and prestige outlined in categories 1 to 4, in conjunction with 1st and 2nd class citizenship and with non.

Kuwaiti status, are obviously not clear cut, and the interpretations put on these criteria are not accepted by all members of society in the same way. For example, a Kuwaiti of Arab origin often considers those of Persian origin, no matter how many generations they are resided in Kuwait, as not being 'proper' Kuwaitis, and the perjorative term ajam, meaning Persian is commonly used. In turn Kuwaitis of Persian origin commonly express similarly pejorative sentiments about Kuwaitis of Arab origin, regarding them as merely badu, nomads and as such are intrinsically 'uncivilised' in contrast to Persians, who belong to a sophisticated civilisation. Considerable confusion and doubt about rights to citizenship are commonly expressed and carry with them social tensions and differences.

The loyalty of those of Persian origin has always been in doubt for many Arab Kuwaitis, a doubt which currently is of considerable political importance as a result of the nationalist and militant form of Islam espoused by the new Islamic Republic of Iran.

In turn many of Persian origin, but third or fourth generation Kuwaiti regard their right to Kuwaiti identity as greater than those of Arab origin who came later. Resentment between first and second class citizens is common and inevitable.

Within the Arab sector of the population, the criterion of asTi ascription is also not accepted as valid any longer by those who do not enjoy such 'noble' status.

Thus we can see the social composition of Kuwait society is both complex and in social terms by no means clear cut. Wealth is by no means the only or even the major criterion in defining status and social position. Descent, length of residence, country of origin, nationality and citizenship have pervasive social consequences, and to a considerable degree determine the social context in which and within which the subjects of this thesis, middle-aged Kuwaiti women, whose families have 1st or 2nd class citizenship, are found. These women are primarily from categories 1 and 2, and few from category 3, and the ritual specialists coming from category 4, the ex-slave category of black Arabs.

Having discussed the transformation of Kuwait, its social composition and its increasing cultural diversity, I turn now to the more private sphere of lives of the women I am concerned with.

#### 2.4 SEPARATE AND SECLUDED: A CONTAINED WORLD

Today's middle-aged and elderly women were the youth of pre-oil Kuwait, the population of which was around 60,000 in the 1930's and 100,000 in the 1940's

At that time towns lacked amenities such as electricity, running water and sanitation. Houses were built in what is now called the "Arabic Style" (as opposed to modern villas), from clay and other basic materials.

All the members of the family would share the house, ownership of

which passed from father to son. Sons would bring their wives on marriage to live in the house. The women's part of the house, haram, was separate.

Al Qina<sup>C</sup> T (1968) describes Kuwaiti houses thus:

"Kuwaiti houses have changed only a little since Kuwait was first established. Some places remain in their original conditions. Rooms are small and lack windows or any access to the sun. Until very recently houses did not have windows facing onto public roads. Even now it is considered dishonourable to open these windows as they may allow the women's voice to be heard from the street. It is strange that, in spite of this sense of honour when mentioning a woman in conversation one should always say "Akramk Allah".\* 27

Women were segregated from society even from their own menfolk and only the poorest women went out into the world.

Most discussion of important issues of the day took place in the mosques or in the sug (market place), both more or less prohibited to women. Female slaves might be sent to the sug to shop, and poor women might go there to sell home products such as vegetables, or kohl.

Poorer women might also do their own shopping, which had to be done more regularly than today, as then there was no electricity of refrigeration. Women of course, had no place in the mosques. An exception to this were Shi'i women who were allowed to go during the religious months of

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\* This phrase means literally "God be Kind with you", but its use here signifies that the mention of women is humiliating, and it is a form of apology.



Muharam and Safar to the hussayniah (Shi'i religious buuilding). Even then women were normally chaperoned by older female relations, and had their separate rooms in the building.

Outside their homes, women were forbidden to speak to men, except in matters concerning their shopping. They were also veiled. Hence they could not participate in the discussions taking place in the cafes or in front of the shops. Women's voices were not meant to be heard by men, as a woman's voice was thought to be <sup>C</sup> awra, or 'defective'. Even at home men never discussed public affairs with women.

In pre-modern Kuwait this separation was accepted and lived as a natural fact of life. Women were restricted to life in the home in the haram\* where they lived with their children and their husband's extended family. However, men were kept aware of events, not only in their own country, but in other countries known to be more modern, such as Iraq, India, and East African countries. Kuwait was a famous port with international travel common amongst merchants, sailors and ship owners. Thus, through the spread of news, most men were familiar with the differences between their own and foreign societies.

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\* The haram is the part of the house excluded to men and is the secluded domain of women.

However, trade and familiarity with outside world, while bringing many innovations such as radios, furniture and clothes, especially to well-to-do families, made little impression on traditional values in Kuwait. This well-structured and regulated society rejected outside changes, and considered them immoral. Even those men who had travelled abroad themselves were quickly reabsorbed into their own society, and remained loyal to its requirements, particularly its moral requirements. The relationships with their wives usually remained unchanged and unaffected. Their wives were never expected to understand or imitate "foreign women". The age category of young women, in the 1950's, suffered most from the changes brought about by the oil industry. Much contradiction and tension was brought into their lives. Only a few lucky women had received the benefit of education, and these had been to the traditionally-run schools, to study the Quran. These young women (now today's middle-aged women) usually married very young - some claim to have married at the age of 10 or 11. According to tradition their marriages were arranged, and before marriage, any relationship whatsoever with men was inconceivable. For the first years of their marriage they were left to cope almost alone, as strangers in their husband's families. Two dominant females usually featured in the lives of these young wives. The mother-in-law, and their own mother. Mothers-in-law were often domineering and restrictive, wielding their power through their sons. A son's most important religious and social obligation is to obey his mother, and his wife must do the same.

The woman's own mother, although she might be very kind and affectionate, would never allow her daughter to complain about her marital

situation. This might have encouraged her to ask for a divorce, or even impose her opinions on her husband and his family. Both reactions were socially condemned.

A virtuous daughter-in-law was supposed to observe all traditions, be very modest, and avoid contact as far as possible with her brothers-in-law or any other men in the household. She had to obey orders from any members of the husband's household.

In the past, houses were physically very much close to each other and neighbourhood relationships were of great importance in people's lives. Everyone knew virtually everyone else, as well as their own kin relations, in the neighbourhood community. Most people preferred to live in such kin dominated small communities. In addition, households were mostly of extended families, with the typical characteristics of such extended family households - a noisy, bustling social life-style. Life in the home was invariably very social, where only rarely, if ever, would an individual find himself alone. Life in traditional Kuwait was lived amidst a host of family, relatives and friends.

Interpersonal relations between women were informal, simple and central in the lives of women. With the separation between the sexes in Kuwait, women spend most of their time with other women. During the day, women in the neighbourhood, visit each other regularly while their menfolk are in the sug or going about their business. Visiting between women living in adjacent houses, who were often close relatives as well, was frequent

and regular, since they could visit each other without entering the street, through specially constructed, connecting doorways. Female relatives and neighbours eat in each others' homes regularly, while their husbands visit their male friends. Many houses had low walls on their roofs, and women could easily jump the walls into each others houses, via the rooftops.

A wide social network by traveling along the rooftops was maintained by women, whose access to the streets was strictly limited by the values which keep women firmly within the seclusion of the domestic world. A woman abroad on the streets was restricted to the narrow, winding streets of the immediate neighbourhood, during the daytime only, when men were rarely to be found in the neighbourhood. Old Kuwait town consisted of only main districts (Sharq and Qiblah) within easy walking distance of each other so long distance visiting between women was rare, but when it was necessary, women had to be accompanied either by their slaves or servants or by an older woman. Women were prohibited from moving alone and unaccompanied in public places, where men could be encountered.

Many of the older generation, in particular the middle-aged women we are concerned with in this thesis, bemoan the changes in people's attitudes and feelings towards relatives and neighbours and blame the material and physical transformation which has overtaken their society. The physical transformation of the old town into the modern city of today, with its different style of housing, has resulted in the spatial separation of houses, disrupting the old easy visiting patterns. The traditional daily life of

constant social encounters, a rich and varied social life, in a society of women sharing domestic dramas and daily chores has been radically dislocated, producing isolation in many cases, a totally new phenomenon in the lives of women. Loneliness and isolation, in the midst of material benefits, modern housing and labour saving domestic appliances, has replaced the simpler life style, but one in which social relations were continuous and vibrant.

## 2.5 MIDDLE-AGED IN A THREATENING WORLD

While social changes have had many effects on and brought advantages for, every group in society, the women who are now (1984) middle-aged appear to have been on balance adversely affected by the transformation of their world. Modern requirements have been in sharp contrast to the upbringing of this age category of women. Norms and values taught to them for the first twenty years of their lives emphasised, for example, the modesty of women. Most women lived with their extended families and were not exposed even to their male in-laws without having their hair, and virtually every part of their bodies covered. Very few women were allowed to go out into the public world (this considered elsewhere in the thesis). Sexual segregation was emphasised, with the result that the lives and concerns of women and men were totally different - a division which is still apparant in Kuwait today.

The inability to cope with the new values, norms and conditions brought or rather imposed on them by socio-economic change, can be per-

ceived in the way these particular women find for themselves still, an outlet which is traditional, considered archaic and old-fashioned if not shameful, by the younger women of contemporary Kuwait - this outlet is zar.

The husbands of these women tended to be better educated and far more experienced in the modern world than their wives. Their children too are much better educated than their mothers. The mass media also addresses an audience which is assumed to be an educated one, presenting within the home, a world still strange and found alienating by these women, a world in which they had never been able or allowed to fully participate.

Today's middle-aged women were young wives in the early nineteen fifties, and so were subject to the full force of socio-economic change, particularly in the form of pressure from their husbands. These women were, for example, suddenly asked to go out unveiled and to socialise with their husbands' friends. This was a great shock after being brought up to be confined to the house and spend one's life raising children.

One woman described her problem when her husband asked her to abandon her veil, dress in western fashion, wear make-up, and attend mixed parties. Her husband had used the argument that everything should have some ornament to make it more beautiful - "did not the mosques look more beautiful for their coloured lamps and motifs?" She, however, refused, and her husband subsequently took another wife. "My husband did not want to understand that the mosque was like that from the very beginning", she said, "but I am not, and I'm not prepared to become like that. How could I change myself?"

(The case of this woman, encountered as a patient in a zār ceremony is mentioned below in section 2.9)

Marital problems certainly exist, and may not always be the consequence of social change, but the social outlets for women in pre-oil Kuwait, by and large do not exist now. In particular, traditional life revolved around the extended family and close community which resolved or absorbed many problems. In the newly-built residential areas, community life had collapsed and this has increased the strain on young couples by forcing them more into each other's company, something quite new and often found alarming.

Family life still takes up a lot of time for the middle-aged women. Aged forty or more, most are now grandmothers while still having one or more unmarried children living with them. They also have very little domestic work to do, as almost all Kuwaiti families now have servants.

Within this category of middle-aged women, some have been more affected by changes in life-style than others. They can be divided rather loosely into three groups: the aristocratic, the middle-class, and the middle-class poor with illiterate husbands.

Women from aristocratic families have tended to be the least adversely affected by the social changes, since their pre-oil lifestyle had somewhat prepared them for the changes to come. Some of them had been used

to travelling with their husbands or fathers, mainly to India or the Westernised Arab countries. They were also relatively used to the company of foreigners in Kuwait. Girls from these families were among the first to go to modern state schools, and had access to Westernised Arab magazines. Education was undoubtedly their biggest advantage in coping with social change, but familiarity with other life-styles also made the transition to modern life easier. The intellectual gap between these women and their husbands was less pronounced and they have not suffered any alienation or discontinuity in identity due to culture shock. In fact families from an aristocratic background tended to be in favour of social changes as it held many advantages for them\*. 2<sup>8</sup>

The middle-aged, and middle-class women, many of whom are now wealthy, experienced a double feeling of alienation, both from the transformed society and from their husbands. Their husbands had higher levels of education (many were self educated) and were ambitious, with new and different expectations of their wives, during this period of rapid modernisation. The wives themselves, in stark contrast to their husbands, were mostly illiterate, remaining entirely unfamiliar and inexperienced with modern conditions. These women form the majority of zār patient, often with the opposition and scepticism of their "modern" oriented husbands and children.

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\* It was most probably this elite group about which Freeth was writing, describing their access to modern facilities, in the late 1930's. Social mobility, brought in with social change, has shifted many pre-oil middle and lower classes to other classes. Many are now rich. The terms middle-class, poor, etc. are used here in their relative sense. Pre-oil social classes are not necessarily equivalent to post-oil social classes.



The lower middle-class or poor women with illiterate husbands have, in some ways, been better off. Old fashioned husbands are illiterate, religious, and less demanding of their wives. The intellectual gap between husband and wife is not so acute. Although these women may still feel alienated from modern society, at least they do not suffer from feeling of estrangement from and great inferiority to, their husbands. Husbands in this group still have opportunities to become more modern - to buy a house away from the extended family, a car, or other modern facilities - but the gap between them and their wives is still less than in the case of literate husbands with higher social expectations.

Mainly because the men in this category are less familiar with the less attracted to more modern styles of life, and also because they are illiterate, their view of women is still highly traditional, where women are expected merely to be "the mistress of her house", as the Arabic expression has it. This last factor made life with this type of "traditional" husband easier, since the expectations of husband and wives are virtually shared.

For this category of poorer women attendance at zār rituals is taken as quite natural by their husbands. However, being freer of the tension between husbands and wives of the middle-class category, it appears that fewer women of the lower class category actually attend zār. And those who do are often ex-slaves.

Having discussed life in traditional Kuwait concentrating on the

middle-aged category of women, who were then young, I would like to discuss two important issues closely connected to understanding the social phenomenon of the continuity of zār curing rituals, as a type of treatment for women, still prevalent in contemporary Kuwait - these are changes in health and education.

## 2.6 TRADITIONAL HEALING OR MODERN MEDICINE

As we are mainly concerned in this thesis with the effects of change on middle-aged women and the involvement of a large number of these women in zār ceremonies, it is important to discuss the attitudes of this category towards health, particularly mental health. With the modern development of Kuwaiti health service, treatment of all forms of illness had changed beyond recognition.

The process of treating the sick in old Kuwait was done by following the principles of classical Arabic medical practice, accompanied by a host of traditional herbalists and healers, such as religious men or women and religious teachers, practicing time honoured folk techniques.\* Moreover in the old days, people somewhat stoically accepted fate as it came, sustained by their indisputable faith in God's will.

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\* See Chapter 4.5 for a discussion of traditional methods of treatment.

The first modern medical hospital to be established in Kuwait was the American Missionary Hospital, set up in 1911. This was scarcely welcomed at the beginning by the Kuwaitis, who at that time were unaccustomed to foreigners. The only formal clinic in Kuwait prior to this time was the Syrian Clinic.

Melrea, who was himself a physician in the American Missionary Hospital, has written of this period. He records that he was stuck by the indifference and 'laissez faire' attitude he found among Kuwaitis at the beginning of the establishment of the American Hospital. Yet people's attitudes were slowly changing and their acceptance of modern facilities regarding health was obvious in the first half of this century. As Melrea wrote:

"It is comforting to know that for some years past, a change has been gradually taking place in Kuwait in this respect. The old lethargy is giving way to a measure of alertness. Modern medicine, of which the keynote today is prevention, is having more and more influence on the community, vaccination and inoculation are becoming increasingly popular. In the market place merchants now habitually take out insurance policies, thus safeguarding themselves against possible future disaster"<sup>2</sup>

From 1949, when Kuwait had only four doctors working for the Government, through the early 1970s, when there were more than 1000 physicians in the country, to the present, Kuwait has developed one of the most comprehensive and largely free Health Services in the world. In 1981 the total number of Physicians was 2,336, and the number of hospitals in Kuwait had risen to 14, with innumerable clinics, child and mother care centres,

health centres and school clinics available. Each residential suburb has a dispensary, and many have dental, diabetic, dermatological and gynaecological clinics available.

Such services are by now regarded by Kuwaitis as essential and taken for granted.

Attitudes towards mental health and its treatment however, are rather more circumspect. Psychological and psychiatric treatment is looked on with some suspicion, if not fear.

There is one Neurological and Psychiatric Hospital in Kuwait, with 18 neurologists and psychiatrists and 40 analysts on the staff. The hospital has 637 beds, with 4,356 patients admitted in 1981.\* 39,564 patients attended Psychiatric clinics at the hospital in that year. Unfortunately, the census data on these particular patients is not broken down into the main category breakdown for Kuwait, into Kuwaiti/Non Kuwaiti, male/female. However, by applying the breakdown of the total population of Kuwait into these categories, proportionately, where Kuwaiti females form 20.3% of the population, the 8,031 psychiatric patients would be Kuwaiti women. While this assumes attendance at psychiatric clinics to be equally distributed unlikely, this rough figure of 8,031 gives an indication of the numbers involved. The census data breaks down the population into age categories, and the 1981 estimates for Middle-Aged Kuwaiti women (between the

\* The statistical data is collected from the Annual Statistical Abstract, Ch.16 Health Services, Tables 274-281, pp. 331-343, Kuwait 1982.

ages of 35-50), are that they form 10.9% of the Kuwaiti female population. between male/female, Kuwait/non Kuwaiti categories, which in fact is rather unlikely, this rough figure of 8,031 gives an indication of the numbers involved.

Again using this proportion of the middle-aged Kuwaiti females, to the estimated figure of 8,031 psychiatric clinic patients, we arrive at an estimate of 875 of these patients belonging to the category of women this thesis focuses on .

The argument presented in this thesis, that this particular category of women suffered particularly from the processes of change, suggests that rather a greater proportion of these women, than the equal proportion used, suffer psychiatric/emotional complaints so the estimated figure is likely to be proportionately higher. Adding 15% would bring the estimate to around 1,000.

During the field research period, many of the middle-aged Kuwaiti female patients encountered in the dūr at zār curing rituals, had been referred for psychiatric treatment at the psychiatric clinics by their general physicians. Regulations concerning psychiatric treatment are similar to those in England, where, with the exception of serious cases of mental illness, admission is with the patient's consent. Typically many of these women claimed that they had been forced to attend the psychiatric clinics against their will, by their children, in particular by sons, who,

like most of the male younger generation, do not believe in or accept the efficacy of the traditional zār treatment. A deep aversion to hospital treatment was commonly expressed, many agreeing that the psychiatrists asked 'irrelevant' questions, and the prescribed tranquiliser pills, which made them feel 'even more tired'. The standard electro-convulsive therapy treatment applied in Kuwait was one which alarmed the women, and in their assessment it had either done them no good at all or may even have made them worse.

Many of these patients had had zār curing rituals performed for themselves, before, during and often after their hospital treatment. Understandably these women preferred by far the traditional zār treatment, being convinced that zār was much more satisfying and effective.

Even with a variety of psychotherapeutic forms of treatment now available, the women would rather have the familiar surroundings of the traditional zār rituals in the dūr, and much preferred putting themselves in the care of their much respected and loved mamas.<sup>\*</sup> It is on this issue that the middle-aged women come into conflict with the younger generation

of educated women in Kuwait (their own daughters often), who see the modern psychological and psychotherapeutic treatment as a better and more appropriate alternative, to curing emotional and psychosomatic disturbances, than the traditional and in their eyes 'archaic' zār rituals.

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<sup>\*</sup> Mamas are the traditional healers who conduct the zar curing rituals - the 'mistress of ceremonies' see Chapter 4.8).

The mamas themselves however, illustrate the real efficacy of their own zār treatments by referring to how unsuccessful hospital treatment in fact was. One particular mama pointed out that the more ineffective the doctor's treatment, the more convincing it was that the illness was caused by jinn (spirits)\* . Many of this mama's patients had failed to be cured by doctors or psychiatrists, but had been cured by one or other of the zār rituals.

A detailed discussion of zār is the subject matter of Chapter 4, but it is relevant at this point to emphasise the contrast in experience, in the treatment by zār and that provided in the clinics. The former have a social dimension lacking in psychiatric treatment, where women regularly meet, not only to obtain treatment, but to enjoy a satisfying social as well as sacred occasion among a supportive group of similarly afflicted women. The expressed isolation, alienation and fear experienced in the often unwilling encounters in the psychiatric clinic are not conducive to healing and reassurance.

Moreover, although a breakdown of the psychiatrists and analysts, specifically in terms of sex is not given in the census, proportions for physicians as a whole are given. Of the 2,336 physicians in Kuwait only 17% (403) are Kuwaiti, made up of 11% (258) Kuwaiti male doctors and only

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\*\*See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of jinn

6% (145) Kuwaiti women doctors. Of the 551 female doctors (23.6% of the total), 51% are Egyptian, Jordanian or Palestinian\*. The reluctance which the traditionally oriented middle-aged women would have, being faced with the likelihood of a foreign male doctor, and being expected to talk about private often intimate emotional problems is again understandable.

Thus, for middle-aged women at least, traditional healing rather than modern psychiatry continues to be preferred and practised. Although I have no precise figures for the total number of women attending zār, and the mamas themselves could give no precise number, many of the dūr have over 100 patients and at least 22 dūr were discovered during the field research. The number of women attending zār thus is far greater than the number attending psychiatric clinics, is in spite of the pressures from husbands, sons and daughters, to concede that such rituals are old fashioned and inappropriate in the modern world.

## 2.7 EDUCATION: THE RELATIVE DEPRIVATION OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN

### 2.7.1 TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

The traditional system of education in pre-oil Kuwait was grounded in the cultural as well as socio-economic needs of the then small scale commercial and trading society. Education was entirely within the framework of Islam. The role of religious learning was of course central in all traditional Islamic societies and was male dominated.

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\* Ibid, Table 277, P.341



All rudimentary-level education used the Quran in the Kitatib (sing. - kitab), schools, under a religious teacher known as mutawa<sup>c</sup>, mula, or if he was a descendant of the Prophet, sayid. While male children attending such kitab schools, were taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and learned the Quran, by rote, the few girls who attended the Quranic school were restricted to learning to read and recite the Quran. Girls were taught by a female teacher, mutawaa<sup>c</sup>.

The role of both these male and female traditional teachers, primarily specialists in the Quran, was not restricted to reading, but included traditional healing and the prescribing of herbal remedies for both physical and psychological ailments. Children as well as occasionally adults, when ill, would be taken to these teacher/healers to be "read over".\* Since the establishment of the modern education system these traditional teachers no longer function as teachers. Some of them have however preserved their roles as healers.

The first formal school for boys only in Kuwait, called al Ahmadiya was set up to replace the traditional kitab, in 1921. It was not until 1926 that the first establishment for girls, for the teaching and reading and writing, was opened. The teacher in this establishment was called a mulaya, who, unlike the traditional mutawa<sup>c</sup> a who taught only the Quran, also taught reading and writing. Prior to this establishment opening,

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\* When someone falls ill, he or she is taken to a religious healer who reads verses of the Quran 'over' them, thought to have curing power.

writing was an advantage confined to male, since as was popularly said:

"Whenever a girl learns to write, she will start to write love letters."

From the establishment of the "al Ahmadiya" school for boys, the number of schools slowly increased, but 16 years passed, before the first modern school for girls, "al Wusta" was opened in 1937, when 140 female pupils registered.

By 1950 there were 15 primary, 1 secondary and 2 technical schools for boys, with 5 primary schools for girls. There were three times as many male pupils.<sup>30</sup> Freeth, commenting on the education of girls in the late 1940s and early 1950s wrote:

"Within the last ten years there has grown up young women who have a new 'savoir faire', and other interests than their predecessors, who lacked formal education, and had no access to new ideas from books and periodicals. The young Arab wives in the town today are dressing in European fashion, a change that reflects the influence of the Syrian and Palestinian school teachers, who have taught them to make and wear clothes of Western style, and they are eager to gain information on modern dress, and similar topics, from women's magazines published in Egypt and more westernised countries".<sup>31</sup>

Although this statement applied only to the elite and very affluent families of Kuwait, since girl's education was by no means fully accepted by all classes, the introduction of education for girls laid the ground for the development of further education for girls in the following years.

### 2.7.2 MODERN SCHOOLING

The modern public educational system began to expand around 1954, when there were still only 41 schools in Kuwait. In 1955 the present educational system was established under Egyptian guidance, with kindergartens, primary, intermediate and secondary schools being set up.

Thus the modern educational system was not established until after the very youngest of the now middle-aged category of Kuwaiti women with whom we are primarily concerned, were past primary school age and most were in fact already married. Not surprisingly therefore the census data for 1980 reveals that these women were mostly illiterate (80.1%), with a further 10% listed as being able to read and write. Presumably these latter were those few elite women who had attended the early established girls primary schools, or had learned to read at the traditional Quranic schools.

With the very rapid development of Kuwait in the post oil period after the early 1950s, Kuwait embarked on an urgent and very necessary modern educational programme, to provide educational and technical skills in its own population to deal with the demands of the modernising economy.<sup>32</sup> Initially, however, Kuwait was almost totally reliant on an imported non-Kuwaiti labour force who had the skills and technical knowledge required. By the mid 1960s 76.5% of Kuwait's labour force was non-Kuwaiti and educational expansion became a necessity. Compulsory education was established in 1965 for 6-14 year olds (primary and intermediate levels). Popular resistance among the Kuwaiti population to compulsory education,

particularly for girls, was common, inspite of the fact that at every level, education is strictly segregated, with separate schools for girls. By 1981/82 the number was 50% of the pupils. The proportions of male/female are reported at 52% male, 48% female for Kuwaitis, a more or less even balance between males and females. The percentage of Kuwaiti 5-19 year olds attending schools was 73.1% male and 63.1% female.\*

To meet the demands of this rapidly expanding public education service, Kuwait had to import virtually its entire teaching staff. In 1957, 89.6% of all teachers were non-Kuwaiti. Kuwait obtained its teachers from neighbouring Arab countries, particularly Egypt, - as mentioned above, it was Egyptian educationalists who designed the development of Kuwait's educational system. By 1981 28% of all teachers were Kuwaiti nationals, while 43.1% were Egyptian and 22.5% were Jordanian/Palestinian.\*\* When these proportions are broken down into the different levels of education the proportion of foreign teachers at intermediary level rises to 79.5%. Kuwaitis in turn form the major proportion of Kindergarten (64%) and Primary level (52.6%) teachers.

The division of teachers according to sex provides a relatively more equal 52.7% female, 47.3% male split. However, of the 28% Kuwaiti teachers, 66.9% are female, and 33.1% male. The female figures are inflated since all kindergarten teaching is done by women.

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\* Ibid. collated from Table 247-249, pp. 308-10

\*\* Ibid. collated from Table 251, Teachers in Government Schools. Annual Statistical Abstract, 1982. Kuwait, p.312.

The significance of the predominance of foreign teachers and their effect of Kuwaiti youth is highlighted when we point out that these foreign teachers come predominantly from the most politicised of Arab nations; Egypt and Jordanian Palestine, a point which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

### 2.7.3 ADULT EDUCATION AND ILLITERACY

This extensive development of the educational service transformed the educational attainment of the growing Kuwaiti population.

As part of this programme, adult educational facilities were established to increase the level of literacy among those too old to benefit from the compulsory education scheme. The level of illiteracy dropped steadily for the Kuwaiti population as a whole since the modern education system was established.

Census Year	Female	Male	Total
1957	74.2	46.4	59.7
1965	69.5	39.4	54.0
1970	62.7	32.0	47.2
1975	59.1	30.0	44.6
1980	49.6	22.7	36.4

Table 1

Percentage of Illiterate Kuwaiti Population by Sex, (10 years and over). From Annual Statistical Abstract, 1982, Kuwait, Table 28, p. 312

The most striking fact concerning the rates of illiteracy is the discrepancy between females and males, a discrepancy which has been virtually eliminated by compulsory formal schooling of children. In 1981 more than twice the numbers of adult women than men remain illiterate. The adult education programme, as well as having literacy classes, includes education to intermediate and secondary levels of schooling. The decade 1972-82 saw a total of 109,353 Kuwaitis participating in adult education of whom 33% were women and 67% men. Of these, 32.5% women and 17.5% men attended the literacy classes.\*

The Proportion of females attending the higher secondary level classes was 33% and 40.3% male. Once again the extent of female illiteracy remained higher, while their educational achievement was lower.

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\* Collated from Table 262, p. 326 in, Annual Statistical Abstract, Kuwait, 1982.

The statistics for the year 1981/82 reveal this contrast even more markedly. In that year 19,754 Kuwaitis participated - 40% women and 60% men.

	Female	Male
Literacy classes	48.9	18.7
Intermediate level	26.6	29.8
Secondary level	24.5	43.3
Religious education		8.2
	100	100

Table 2

Adult Education Programme, by school level and sex, Table 261. p. 325, adapted for Annual Statistical Abstract, Kuwait, 1982.

The disproportion between the sexes is readily apparent from table 2, where almost three times more women than men attended literacy classes, while their numbers halved at secondary level, with men more than doubling at this level. Clearly not only is the literacy rate among men improving more than women, but their educational achievement is much greater.

The census material does not give any more detailed breakdown of the composition of those attending Adult education. However, data on educational achievement and illiteracy is given in the census, for the population, divided into 5 year age categories. This data is presented in Table 3 below.

Age	Illiterate		Read/Write		Primary		Intermediate		Secondary		University	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<u>'Younger Generation'</u>												
20-24	38.2	11.8	5.4	8.6	7.5	14.0	20.8	33.4	25.0	29.6	3.2	2.4
25-29	50.2	15.1	6.9	12.2	7.1	14.8	12.6	23.6	16.8	25.1	6.4	9.0
30-34	60.6	21.0	8.7	16.9	7.4	15.3	8.9	17.0	9.7	19.6	4.7	10.2
Average 20-34	47.9	15.9	6.8	12.6	7.3	14.7	15.0	24.6	18.3	24.8	4.8	7.2
<u>'Middle-Aged'</u>												
35-39	74.3	30.5	10.1	22.1	5.2	15.3	5.5	14.4	3.1	9.7	1.7	7.9
40-44	80.9	38.4	10.1	27.2	3.6	12.6	3.3	11.9	1.5	5.2	.6	4.7
45-49	85.0	47.7	9.9	28.3	1.9	9.6	1.6	8.5	.8	3.7	.3	2.2
Average 35-49	80.1	38.9	10.1	25.9	3.6	12.6	3.5	11.6	1.8	8.3	.9	5.3
<u>'Older Generation'</u>												
50-54	90.2	55.7	7.6	28.5	1.1	9.6	.6	8.5	.5	3.7	.1	2.2
55-59	92.0	63.2	7.0	27.3	.4	3.5	.3	3.2	.2	1.9	-	.8
60+	96.0	75.7	3.6	21.4	.2	.9	.1	.9	-	.7	-	.4
Average 50+	92.7	67.8	6.1	24.3	.6	2.9	.3	2.7	.2	1.6	-	.7

**Table 3** Illiteracy and Educational Achievement (20 years and over) of Kuwaiti Population by Gender, Age and Educational Status. (1980 Census)

Adapted from Table 23, and converted into percentages; by collating Table 23 with Table 17, Population by Sex and Age Group, and Table 18, Percentage Distribution for Population by Sex and Age Group, *ibid.* p. 38.



Up to this stage, the term 'Middle-aged' has been used without any attempt to clarify the boundaries of this category. As said earlier, in 1983 when field research was carried out on zār rituals, the women who attended zār were predominantly between 35-50 although exact ages were impossible to obtain, not least because many of the women only knew roughly how old they were. These women were married young, either just before, or in the early part of the post oil period of Kuwait's development. They were also predominantly illiterate or had minimal schooling. 'Middle-age' however, also has social and cultural rather than merely chronological connotations, and here refers to women who have more or less come to the end of their child bearing age. Many women of this category have had 10 children, and usually other pregnancies which either miscarried or produced still born children. Having a child every year, between the ages of 15 to 35 virtually ensures 'middle-age' sets in early, and it is typical of many of these women that, while still having relatively young children of their own, they are already grandmothers by the time they are 40. This category spanning 15 years and more, since the upper limit has to be open ended, may and does include instances of a mother and her eldest daughter both being zār patients. The census data used, from 1980, to produce Table 3, has been presented to include 'average' percentages from three generational categories, the 'young generation' from 20-34 years of age; 'middle-aged', from 35-49 years of age; and the 'older generation' those above 50. Thus the women of the 'middle-age' category were women between 35-49 in 1980, and it is to this category, in 1983, then aged 38-52, that term 'middle-aged' used throughout this thesis refers. The women encountered in zār mainly are found in three age sub-categories within the

'middle-aged' category of the census.

The trends, and contrasts between generations and between the genders in terms of education experience, confirm, in this sphere, the isolation from and tension with husbands and children so commonly reported by the women in the zār rituals.

To simplify the discussion of Table 3, it is presented for each level of education in turn. While a great deal more could be said about this data, my intention is primarily to discuss the difference between the generational categories and between the sexes.

- a) Illiteracy: The illiteracy rates for Kuwaiti females and males given in Table 1, showed rates of 49.6 and 22.7 percent respectively for 1980. Table 3's breakdown shows that for women from 20 to 60+ years of age, the range within this 'average' goes from 38.2% at the lowest age category to 96% for 60+. The averages for the three delineated 'generations' are 47.9% (younger), 80.1% (middle-aged) and 92.7% (elder).

Male illiteracy rates, likewise show a progressive increase with age, from 11.8 to 75.7 percent, and again showing a generational difference, while having markedly lower rates than women for every single age category.

The largest contrast between the sexes is found within the 'middle-aged' generation, with the greatest difference - 43.8% and 42.5% in the 35-39, and 40-44 age categories respectively. The

figures reveal that those women, of between 38-47 in 1983, our middle-aged women, fall within the category showing the most marked difference in literacy, to men in the same age range.

- b) Read/Write: This column again shows interesting differences, not so much between the generational categories, or between age categories, but more between the sexes, for the middle-aged and older generations in particular, where the latter has 4 times the proportion of men able to read and write. The literacy classes in the adult education programme would appear to be frequented by more than a few 'elderly males' (life source).
- c) Primary level: Here the trend for both females and males is for a decrease in primary education with age. The imbalance in favour of males increases with the middle-aged and older generation. Again this suggests the effects of the adult education programme.
- d) Intermediate and Secondary level: It is here we see major 'generational' differences. The younger generation of women, particularly those between 20 and 29 years of age, show rates of 16.7% and 20.9% respectively, and of men, 28.5% and 27.4%, whereas only 3.5% and 1.8% of middle-aged women have achieved these respective levels of education.

Exposure to modern education of the younger generation is one of the critical factors separating 'old-fashioned', 'middle-aged'

sons. The youngest age category, 20-24, shows a more even distribution between the sexes at secondary level. This age category is the first of the children 'compelled' to attend school under the compulsory education act of 1965.

- e) University: Kuwait University was founded in 1966, and commonly students do not complete their school education until between 18-20. The census data in Table 3, reflects in the youngest category 20-24, the fact that many of this age would not yet have entered University, hence the higher proportion of 25-34 years olds.

Marital tension between husbands and wives is discussed below in sections 9 and 10 of this chapter, but as has been pointed out, Table 3 reveals the disjunction between the sexes in terms of literacy and educational achievement, particularly for the middle-age generation. When a comparison is made between women and their husbands, commonly between 5 and 10 years older, the discrepancy decreases somewhat, but remains at least 20% in terms of literacy, and as much as 2 or 3 times greater in formal educational attainment. Moreover, in the past, women tended to get married much younger than is the case at the present time. Data from the 1980 census shows 20% of the men in this age category are married, and only 39% of men married before they were 29. According to the 1965 census\*, 43% of Kuwaiti women at that time between the ages of 15-19, were married, and 3% of men.

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\* cited in *ibid.*, data collated from Tables 35-38, pp. 50-53

Census data is not available for marriage ages in the early 1950s, the period during which our 'middle-aged' category of women were married, but it is clear from their personal statements, that marriage before the age of 15 was perfectly common, to men considerably older than themselves.

When one includes consideration of the relevant cultural and social factors, that husbands operate in the public, political and social world, their education plus experience contrasts starkly with the world in which women live, whose minimal education, younger age and confinement to the secluded domestic world is dominated by childbirth and child rearing. The experienced world of wives and husbands is widely divergent. The lack of education or opportunity to operate in the rapidly changing world outside the home produced tension between mothers and their increasingly educated children. Many of the middle-aged illiterate women summed up by the impersonal figure "80/85% illiterate", have educated and sophisticated husbands, and sons and daughters undergoing University training either in Kuwait or abroad. The particular and individual circumstance of some of those '80% illiterates', is the subject of later sections of this chapter, and in particular of Chapter 4 on zār, which reveals a 'world' in which these women find release, some sort of satisfaction, and support.

#### 2.7.4 ADVANCED EDUCATION

Since its founding in 1966, with an intake of 500 students, Kuwait University has expanded enormously, along with education in general, to cope with the increasing complexities and skills required in contemporary

Kuwait. By 1981 the total student body had grown to 20,438, of whom 15,280 were Kuwaitis. The proportions of Kuwaiti female to male students was 60.5% female to 39.5% male.

With the consolidation of university education in Kuwait, traditional notions of appropriate education for women has undergone some change. A university degree, particularly one from abroad, brings prestige. Speaking of the Gulf States generally, Ansari wrote:

"In the male dominant and traditionally-rooted societies of the Gulf, women's higher education entitles them to almost equal status with men."  
(emphasis added) 33

The distribution of choices of fields of study inevitably reveal a gender difference. 52.7% of Kuwaiti female students study Literature, with Commerce and Economics, at 15.6%, slightly ahead of Science. 38.5% of Kuwaiti male students study literature, 28.2% study Commerce and

Economics and only 9.4% study Science.\* While exact proportions of students between the sexes varies, as does the choice of subject, by sex, since 1969, female students have outnumbered male students every year, and women have vastly outnumbered men in the study of literature, science and to a lesser extent commerce in Kuwait University.

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\* *ibid.*, Tables 266-268, pp. 329-331

This apparent reversal, to female 'dominance' in advanced education quickly loses much of its apparent force, with the fact that a far greater range of advanced educational opportunities is available to males. Vocational education, a variety of Technical colleges and the Court Maritime College are, for example, all male only establishments. The most revealing alternative, in terms of status, is that of studying abroad - 90% of students studying at Universities outside of Kuwait are male.

The preponderance of female students studying literature reflects the fact that Kuwaiti women scarcely appear in the active labour force in Kuwait, although having an 'education', a University degree in literature, rarely provides women with training for the labour force, it does provide her with 'status', particularly in the one market almost guaranteed for women - marriage. According to the 1980 census figures, only 5% of females enter the labour force, and of those that do, 90% are in the Social Service sector.\*

Of the 1,116 graduates of Kuwait University in 1980/81, 60% were women, and of these, 56% graduated with a degree in literature, 23.4% in Commerce and Economics, and 13% with degrees in Science. This group, born roughly around 1955, are the children of our 'middle-aged' women, some of whose individual life circumstances and predicaments are described below. Those mothers, born and married before the post oil prosperity, were edu-

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\* *ibid*, Table 78, 89, p.95 and 107.

cated, if at all, in the traditional kitab schools discussed earlier. What reading and writing had once been laboriously acquired, was now, as they said, quite forgotten amid life's responsibilities as they fulfilled their traditionally defined and circumscribed female roles within the home.

## 2.8 THE LEGAL POSITION OF WOMEN: CONTINUED VULNERABILITY

In discussing the legal position of women in the Arabian Gulf in general, we need to remember that in these countries Islam is the state religion, and the laws, especially those relating to marriage and other family affairs, are derived from the Islamic law (Sharīʿah).

As a daughter in her father's household, a girl has the right, according to Islamic law, if she is adult and mentally valid, to choose the man she wants to marry. She can refuse to marry a man she does not want, and can stipulate the right to divorce herself whenever she wants, or under certain conditions, for example, when her husband takes a second wife.

A woman is entitled to inherit half of her brother's share in the inheritance. Men are permitted by Islamic law to have up to four wives at the same time (polygamy). They may divorce any one of them whenever they



wish, and the state laws of most Moslim countries have done nothing to change this. Hence no woman in a Moslem country is entirely safe from the threats of polygamy and divorce.

Rights in law and the ability to exercise these legal rights are however, two different things, particularly for women <sup>34</sup>. In order to exercise her rights in law, women are forced, in public, to confront the male dominated judiciary, thus flouting conventional behaviour and customary values which so rigorously control the behaviour of women in public. Moreover, issues of personal and family tensions and disputes are not easily discussed or revealed by women, who inevitably are made to feel extremely vulnerable in such an exposed context.

This situation is mainly due to the dominating influence of tradition in Moslem countries. For many, tradition is more important than the law. Very few women would insist on their rightful share of an inheritance if they were deprived of it by their brothers. As a Muslim myself, I have never seen or heard of a woman who insisted on adding to the marriage contract the stipulation that she claimed for herself the right to divorce.

No man would be ready to take such a woman as his wife - she may of course subsequently use her power after marriage to lay down many other conditions. These privileges are men's privileges, and in male-dominated Islamic society, no man will take upon himself the stigma of being treated like a woman.

From a woman's point of view it is extremely difficult, when living under the authority of a father or other eldest male, even to consider having the right to divorce herself. This would demand a certain level of independence and awareness of freedom of choice. Even if we are to disregard the force of tradition, in some cases the State laws deprive women of what has been allowed to her by Islam. Referring to this point Authman Abdul Malik stated that:

"State laws may in fact be even stricter and more unjust towards women than Islamic laws. Paragraph 12 of the Kuwait Personal Statute deprives a woman of the right to choose her own husband. Islamic law gives a woman the right to vote, but this does not exist in the Kuwait constitutions".<sup>35</sup>

The force of tradition in determining women's inferior position is so pervasive that it may even reverse improvements established by modern thinking. Enormous changes began to occur in society's attitude to women in Kuwait in the late sixties and early seventies. Yet these changes were not sufficient to influence the patriarchal structure of the family and government.

In 1981, the issue of the election of women to Parliament was raised. The attitude of women themselves to this chance was extremely passive, and some even went as far as to suggest reasons why women might not be suited to political life. They did not uphold their rights on this occasion.

The concept of the inferior position of women can perhaps be better understood by considering Khalda Said's opinion, expressed in a magazine article "Al Mwaqif". Said stated that:

"Women exist not through themselves, but through others. Their identity is dependent on their status as the wife, daughter, mother, and so on, of a particular man."<sup>36</sup>

In such a male-dominated society, where the reputation of the family and the upholding of social traditions are all important, very few women are able to attain psychological, social or economic independence whilst retaining the support of their menfolk.

The effect of tradition is mainly obvious on the life of the category of middle-aged women. In many cases, a woman of this category might need to use her legal rights against her husband, but she would never do this. The principal reason is that suing one's husband is regarded as a disgrace, the traditional concept of society, still prevalent and held by this category of women. However, not all young women share this view. There are many young women who nowadays fight as hard as they can for a 'better life'. If a woman is not happy she can ask for a divorce and have her own life. Some such cases do exist. It would be very difficult if not impossible for a woman who does not work or does not have the support of her family to make such a decision. This was the position of the middle-aged, who, because they did not have a job of their own, and lacked both

the support of the family and of a society, stricter on women in its traditions than Islamic law. They have had to live unfulfilled, unhappy lives without hope of change in their situation. The most miserable of all were the women with an unsuccessful marriage, which they had no option but to endure.

The issues of health and education , law and tradition have been discussed because they are major factors, both brought by change and which themselves also promote change. As has been illustrated, this category of women had minimal education, and their understanding of the value and purpose of psychological treatment was limited. Both of these factors led to the alienation of this category of women. Among other factors which have contributed to the sense of alienation these women express, is the loss they feel in community and extended family life, which served as an important safety valve for their familial and marital problems; the impact of mass media which addresses itself most of the time to a supposedly educated audience; and changes in norms and values which were brought about by the rapid and extensive modernization. All these are factors which alienated this category of women and serve to maintain their allegiance to and preference for traditional zār ceremonies. The alienation of this category of women will be clearer if we examine the two following and typical personal life histories.

## 2.9 THE REALITY OF ALIENATION: CONTRASTING EXAMPLES

The impact of change on society was less for women who were born

after or during the discovery of oil, or for the elder generation of women who were not expected to assimilate to the new social order. It is necessary for women to break the lifelong wall of sexual separation if they are to cope with, and reap the benefits of, the new society. Unfortunately many women find it impossible to adapt to the new situation, as one interviewee, a woman of about 45 told me.

"I was brought up in an ordinary family, we were not rich, but we never needed any financial help. I used to go to the Quranic school, where I had many friends, including boys, but I was too young to notice the difference between girls and boys. One day, when I was only 12 years old, my mother told me I would have to stop going to school, and I had to prepare for my wedding. Soon after this I was married.

Time passed very quickly and I had a child every year. While I was still having children, "the whole world changed" (This is the expression she used to signify the sudden changes associated with oil production.) My husband used to travel, and even when he was in Kuwait, he used to come home very late. I began to get suspicious about his behaviour, so I questioned him about it. He answered very harshly and cruelly: 'Life has changed I can't stand this old life of yours any longer. You'd better change if you want me to take you to my friend's parties or travel with you'.

But it was too difficult for me to mix with men. I had never even met a man's eye before. The hardest thing of all was to take off my cloak in front of them, as my husband wished. I felt, and still feel naked if so much as an arm or leg is visible to a man. How could I do as he wished? I did not agree with his new ideas, and for the first time I could not even believe that he had changed so quickly. A few years later, my husband went away again and returned with a new wife, who did whatever he wanted. Now he lives with her in one house, and I live with the children in another. He visits us twice a week."

This case is typical. Women now in the middle-age category have benefitted least from the changes in society. Men at least were aware that alternatives were possible. Some were able to speak English and had visited countries which were exposed to western influence like the Indian subcontinent, either for business or pleasure. Men, of course, were free to travel, unlike women. Their greater literacy has also made the changes easier for them - even reading magazines is a useful source of information. Women are years behind in this respect. One exception worth noting is that of women in a very few aristocratic families, who were used to travelling and mixing with foreigners. Mostly they would be encouraged by fathers or brothers, rather than husbands. Hence the separation between husbands and wives, already very clear in pre-oil Kuwait, became even wider.

It is not surprising that nostalgia for "the good old days" is most frequent amongst middle-aged women.

Another interviewee from this age category told me about life before the oil industry. Although descriptions of this nature often tend to be exaggerated, one can understand that this is a result of the women's alienation from the present situation.

"In the old days, we did not feel insecure or lonely. Our houses were never empty because we always had visitors. Young women used to visit each other with their families, accompanied by older women. The town was very small and all the houses close together. Sometimes we even crossed the roofs to visit each other. People were always careful to look after each other, whereas nowadays everyone is too

concerned with their own lives. Our menfolk might travel once a year and stay with us for the rest of the time. Naturally we did not see them very often during the day, as it was not a very socially desirable thing for men to stay at home during the day except for their afternoon siesta, but we were sure that they would not do anything immoral.

People were very pious and religious then, and men would never go for illegal relations with bad women. Those who did were immediately detected in the small Kuwait city, and no one would let such a man marry his daughter. sometimes a man would take a second wife, and bring her to live in the same house with his first wife, and that was it. I never used to hear of men leaving their wives to travel all the time, or trying to live like young men of 20, until after the oil. In the old days these things were not allowed".

A third example, of another middle-aged patient, in this instance an ex-slave, who is not divorced, but whose husband has taken another, much younger wife, illustrates different tensions.

Her husband is also an ex-slave and spends his nights alternating between his two wives. This woman does not blame him at all for seeking another wife. As she said, it is very important for every man to have at least one son. It appeared to her that "god did not wish her to have a son". Her daughters are now all married, except for the youngest, and have children of their own.

She has her own house, which she shares with her unmarried daughter. She hopes that when this daughter marries, her new husband will agree to live in their house. If he does not, she plans to invite one of her grandchildren to live with her. Presently she has one female servant, who

lives in the house and does all the household duties, including the cooking. In the mornings this woman usually goes to work voluntarily in the mama's house - she is also a patient of this mama - especially when there is to be a sufra (ritual meal) in the afternoon. She has the opportunity to meet and talk to the women who gather there who in many cases are her neighbours or friends. They may smoke some karaku (special tobacco smoked by patients afflicted by jinn). Her daughters, who all work during the mornings, have asked her several times to stop going to see the mama, and to stay at home so that she can look after the grandchildren, who do not yet go to school. They feel that this would be safer than leaving the children with servants. However, she will not agree to do this. She states that she is too old to be looking after children, and does not want the responsibility. She did not mention that this would stop her going to the mama's house. In fact, her daughters visit her almost every evening with their husbands and children.

The tensions in this woman's life typically find expression in the idiom of possession by jinn (singular jinni). "She has had them in her" since she was a child, though she does not recall the exact time of her first possession. She states that her family have a history of possession by jinn. Her mother was possessed by ordinary jinn, whereas her natural grandmother was possessed by powerful, great and pious jinn. Although this grandmother was not a mama, she was sometimes called upon to treat some other women. She no longer falls ill as often as she used to, possibly due to her almost daily visits to the mama.



On the days when a sufra is held, she will dance and will sometimes "come down". This comforts her body and satisfies her "Masters", the jinn.\*

In considering this particular woman's marital life, we can speculate that, had her husband re-married in the pre-oil period, he would probably have brought his second wife to live in the same house. In this case, the separation between her and her husband would not have been as pronounced. As another woman explained,

"We never really needed a husband in the old days, because we lived in our big extended families and were hardly ever left alone. In addition our community life and daily informal gatherings left us no time to consider whether we needed our husbands. In any case, our husbands only came home at midday for lunch and a short nap, and at night to have dinner and go to sleep. These days life is different. Community life is not as close as it used to be. Our children are growing up now and they are always busy with their studies or their own families. We have servants and cooks who do all our housework. If it wasn't for our meetings in the mama's house, and visits from our children's families, I don't know how we would pass the time. A woman in our age is lucky nowadays if she has a kind and loving husband; at least she has some company and can keep a shadow over her head.\*\* In this life no one cares for anyone".

In addition to the poor marital life commonly experienced by women in this age-category, they lack the community life that used to absorb both their time and unhappiness. Many of these women explicitly wished that they had been born after the oil boom.

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\* A fuller description of possession is found in Chapter 4.

\*\* Has someone to protect her.

They realise that they have missed out on many things, such as education, employment, and the more fulfilling marital life experienced by their daughter. Modern husbands accompany their wives on social visits, travel with them, and even go shopping with them, which never happened in the pre-oil period. It is the comparison between these different lifestyles which makes these women feel that they are left behind, inferior, and deprived of love and attention from their husbands. This is accentuated by the existence of a few older women who have been able to shed the old traditional view of women's modesty, and now enjoy a contented life with their husbands.

Most women are, however, unable to understand or cope with the intrusion of new concepts into their traditional lives. They are left only with feelings of alienation and nostalgia for the "good old days". They wish, in vain, that they had been born in a harmonious world, whether this was in the old, pre-oil Kuwait or in the Kuwait after the oil boom. They have been unfortunate in having to live through a period of social upheaval, whilst being expected to maintain their old values. To make this point clear we now need to examine life in modern Kuwait and to contrast the life of this category with that of their daughters.

## 2.10 GENDER AND GENERATION TENSIONS

Today's younger generation, at least, have had greater opportunities to mix with boys while they were at kindergarten or while playing outside

the schools or on their way home. The older generation too, tend to be able to mix more freely with men, as their present age renders them sexless in the eyes of society. They would neither be threatened by men nor represent a threat to them.

Middle-aged women not only look much older, particularly as they have usually borne a succession of children, but welcome old age for the great social respect it brings.

On the other hand, men in their 40's or 50's may look much younger and perhaps feel younger, than their wives, who are in fact physically younger than themselves. This phenomenon of the widening of the age difference as it is felt and experienced rather than as it really is, with the tension this brings, may partially explain the enthusiasm of some women for Moslem revivalist movements, (we will return to this subject later)

Unlike their mothers, women in the younger generation are well educated. As seen above most have attended high school while some have been to university and may even hold higher degrees. Many are employed. Not all of them are married, a situation which would have been unthinkable in their mother's youth.

Those who marry generally do so between the ages of 18 to 30. They were born, or at least grew up, after the enormous socio-economic changes brought about by the oil industry. Culturally, as women they suffer various constraints, but these are minimal compared with the

restrictions under which their mothers lived. They no longer are required to live in the haram, in seclusion. They were allowed to go to school (even to talk to boys), and attend university - perhaps even abroad - the opportunity to work and travel taken for granted, while within the town. Women now may sometimes even travel alone. It is hardly surprising that many mothers view these young women as irresponsible and 'childish', when at their age, they already had a large family to look after - commonly between 6-10 children.

In contemporary Kuwait, men still have their own gatherings which are not open to women. The separated worlds of male and female persist. One example of such gatherings is the diwaniya, which is a room in one of the houses in the neighbourhood, where men gather to talk every night. Every suburb has several of these places, and men visit the nearest or one with the same political or tribal orientations as himself. During national elections the diwaniyas become particularly important and are visited by all parliamentary candidates. Many issues of politics and commerce are discussed here and they form a major part of the Kuwaiti information grapevine. Sometimes newspapers publish news which has circulated in the diwaniyas in order either to confirm or to deny the rumour. Diwaniyas may also favour a certain age group. The mainpoint to note, however, is that discussions in the diwaniyas are taken very seriously by both sexes, unlike that of the various women's gatherings, which are assumed to consist mainly of idle chatter. Men's social lives may also involve visiting each other's homes or meetings in offices, shops or cafes. Some men may accompany their wives to do shopping or on family visits. However, unless the family is

particularly liberated, or the husband's and wife's families are very close (the couple may even be related) the psychological barriers between men and women remain as strong as ever. Any reception room in a Kuwaiti house will reveal men and women sitting in separate corners or even in separate rooms, and conducting separate conversations.

Women also have their own special gatherings, such as the "forenoon morning tea" which might be compared with the English coffee morning. These teas take place between 10.00 - 12.00 a.m. in each other's homes. Here they discuss marital problems, fashionable clothes and furniture, local news, health matters, their children's education, or the latest party or film.

Similar gatherings take place in many work establishments, but particularly those such as schools, which have a large female workforce. Discussions would be similar, but would also involve work matters. However, a women's discussions are necessarily limited as they are denied access to and participation in the "real world" of men. Women may discuss religion, however, in that there are certain women known for their knowledge of the Quran, and these women may be asked to explain the meaning of a sura (verse), or some question of everyday religious affairs. This phenomenon became increasingly obvious after the Islamic movement became so pervasive throughout the Muslim world in the late 1970's.

In the sixties, young school children in Kuwait were mainly taught by Egyptian or Jordanian/Palestinian teachers, themselves deeply influenced by

the then current nationalist ideas, which amongst other elements rejected the idea of female subjugation. Nationalism endorsed the right of women to work and be educated, but did not systematically discuss the position of women in other fields. At this time all schools books were printed in Egypt. Hence the school curricula tended to advocate the same ideas. Young girls returning home from this sort of education were faced with their mothers still living a traditional life, and accepting concepts and values having no relation to nationalist and socialist ideals. This contradiction between education and socialisation, was followed in the seventies by further contradictions. The death of Nasser of Egypt contributed to the decline of nationalism, and then to the Islamic 'revival', with its rather different ideas. Many women have found that this Islamic 'revival' provides the easier path to follow.

NOTES

1. For accounts of the settlement and history of Kuwait prior to the discovery of oil see H.R.P. Bickson.1928.

For a comprehensive discussion of this period see in particular J.S. 1982, chs 1-3.

2. F. Halliday, 1974, p432, and The Middle East Yearbook, IC Magazines Ltd., London, 1980, p 156.
3. F. Halliday, *ibid.*, p432.
4. J.Ismael, *op. cit.*, p 93.
5. The Middle East Yearbook, 1980, p156.
6. *Ibid*, p 156 and J. Ismael, *op.cit.* pps 97-99 for a more detailed discussion of the complexities of oil production and revenues for this period.
7. See Halliday, *op. cit.* in particular which deals with the whole Arabian Peninsula, and J. Ismael, *op. cit.* which discusses social change in Kuwait within the model of social change derived from dependency theory, and which I hav especially drawn.
8. Annual Statistical Abstract, 1980 Kuwait, 1982, Table 9, p 25.
9. J. Ismael, *op. cit.* p 118.
10. *Ibid.*, p 119.
11. Annual Statistical abstract, *op.cit.*, Table 78, p 95.
12. J.Ismael, *op. cit.*, p 132.
13. See MERIP, "Women and Work in the Middle East", J. Tucker, Intro. p 3-4, No. 95, 1981, for a discussion of such stereotypes.
14. J.Ismael, *op. cit.*, p 140.
15. *Ibid.*, p 140.
16. The First Five Year Plan, p 133, quoted in *ibid.*, p 140.
17. *Ibid*, p 140.
18. The Middle East Yearbook, 1980, *op. cit.*, p 39.

19. Annual Statistical Abstract, 1982, op. cit., p 304.
20. Ibid., p 338
21. Ibid, Table 76, p 88.
22. See J. Ismael, op. cit., p 105 and for a discussion of the modernization of the city of Kuwait, see Kuwait: Changing environment in a Geographical Perspective, B.S.F.M.S.B. Vol. (11) No. 1. A. Al Mousa.
23. See in particular the collection of articles in Beck, L. and Kiddie, N.(eds.) 1978, which draw largely on first hand research. For a recent collection of articles dealing with the volatile context of Iran see G. Nashat (ed.) 1983; also A. Al Hibri (ed.) 1982. For a radical perspective see Forbidden Agenda, Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East, Zed. Press, 1984, which includes a number of articles on Arab and Palestinian Women, reprinted from the journal Khamsin. For data on women in the labour force, see MERIP Reports, "Women and Work in the Middle East", No. 95, 1981 and "Women and Labour Migration", No. 124 1984.
24. MERIP Reports, op. cit., p 4.
25. Abdul Mu'ti, attempts such an analysis, but remains at a level of descriptive generality rather than providing a theoretical analysis.
26. J. Ismael, op. cit., p 118
27. Al Qina <sup>C</sup> i, 1968, pp 66-67.
28. Freeth, 1958.
29. Melrea, unpublished memories written in 1945-1951, p 154.
30. For more details on the development of female education in Kuwait, see M. Saleh.  
  
For history of education in Kuwait in general, see A. Hussein, 1960.
31. Freeth, op., cit., p 83.
32. J. Ismael, op. cit. pp 136-143 discussion of the development of modern education service in Kuwait in general terms, but does not deal with the education of women in any detail.
33. G. alAnsari, 1982.



34. For a general discussion of this issue, see N. Coulson and D. Hinchliffe, "Women and Law Reform in Contemporary Islam", and E. White, "Legal Reform as an Indicator of Women's Status in Muslim Nations", in Beck and Kiddie, op. cit., and K.D. "Islamic law in contemporary N. Africa: a study of the laws of divorce in the Maghreb" and in A. al Hibri (ed.) 1982.
35. A Abdul Malek, p 197.
36. Quoted in "Social System And its Relationship to Women's Cause", H. Barakat, In The Arab Future, vol. 34, p 53.

## Chapter Three

### THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

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### THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter sketched out the number of social contexts in which the impact of the transformation of Kuwait society, can be seen to have had a detrimental affect on the lives of some women. The Kuwaiti middle-aged and middle-class women were adversely affected in ways which left them isolated, not only from modern Kuwait itself, but increasingly from husbands and children more attuned to, and educated in, the values of the contemporary modern world. These women remained illiterate, vulnerable and faced with the fragmentation of their domestic social network. Their growing sense of alienation, confusion and isolation was illustrated by the three contrasting examples of women from this category, who recounted typical life histories of women left behind by husbands and offspring embarrassed by their 'tradition' bound archaic wives and mothers, adhering to a cultural life style now thought old fashioned. The contained world of traditional old Kuwaiti middle-aged women, segregated and secluded has left these women without the ability to adapt to the world of their men, and with an impoverished and diluted social network of female relatives and kin.

However, the almost total transformation of Kuwait into a leisured

and wealthy society has not been accompanied by concomitant changes in moral and cultural values, particularly concerning the perception of women.

The destructive features of modern society, with its different demands and possibilities, has, in Islamic communities, produced deep ambivalence concerning the role women should play in contemporary society. Characteristic of the transformation of Islamic societies in the Middle East generally, has been the tension engendered by such aspects as women in labour force, the education of women, and women appearing publicly. As pointed out in the previous chapter Kuwaiti women scarcely appear in the labour force, and when they do are virtually confined to a type of work thought suitable for women - education, nursing, secretarial work, and the service sector. Women's 'public' appearances are still circumscribed - although cars provide more mobility. It is in education that Kuwaiti women have benefitted - at least the younger generation have.

While the religiously conservative, let alone the religious extremists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are extremely vocal in their condemnation of women as anything but reproducers of children, even the most, 'modern' and most western oriented of Muslim men apply a different standard when it comes to the crucial personal aspects of their womenfolk. Male authority and control over the bodies of women, over education, marriage, childbirth, divorce and through all State Government and bureau institutions, define and determine the behaviour of women. Much of the 'freedom' of modern Kuwaiti women, their education and participation in public life is illusory, since in matters concerning their personal identity and sta-

tus, authority and control lies always in the hand of their male relatives.

Confusion of identity as women is common at all levels of contemporary society and at all levels of education. Given this it is not so surprising that many women find relief and comfort in the 'return' to Islam currently evident in the modern Middle East.

However, this is not the popular folk Islam such as zār, so much as a rather new style of 'ressurgent' Islam, or rethinking Islamic religious and cultural values for the contemporary world.

It is essential to examine the extent of which Islam, as a set of prescriptions about moral life and proper social relations, defines and determines the lives of women. Interpretations of how women are imaged in the Quran and the Sharia differ, some seeing Islam as a protector and liberator of women, others seeing the Quran diametrically opposed implications, with Islamic institutions seen as the key element in maintaining the subjugation and oppression of women. <sup>1</sup>

Most writers agree, although the implications drawn are very different, that there is a gender division of human attributes and abilities along lines detrimental to women, and which justify the necessity of controlling and containing, if not dominating and oppressing women. Male and Female are thought to have different rational potential. Reason (<sup>C</sup> aql) is thought to be primarily a male attribute, while passion is that of the

female. While women do have the ability to develop rational thought, they are constrained in the achievement of this by the nature of their being, which is regarded as being dominated by their sexuality, by emotional and passionate desires (nafs). Men have <sup>c</sup> aql - reason, women are dominated by nafs <sup>1a</sup>. Nafs in more philosophic terms is often translated as the 'carnal soul'.

This chapter deals initially with the concept of knowledge, <sup>c</sup> ilm, rational ability, <sup>c</sup> aql, bodily desires and sexuality, nafs, and in particular with the concept fitna, disorder, or the capacity to bring about disorder, which is thought by many Muslims, to be a prime attribute of the female, to be intrinsic to the nature of women.

Following this brief discussion, I then turn to the concept of jinn in Islamic cosmology conceived of as disorderly being followed by a final section describing how belief in jinn finds popular expression in Kuwait, revealing the primary association of jinn with women, who are also seen as sources of disorder.

### 3.2 KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM: CONTROL BY REASON

The concept of "knowledge" in Islam, as it is idealistically described by Nasr, the influential Iranian Islamic scholar, has several levels.

"In its universal sense, Islam may be said to have three levels of meaning. All beings in the universe,

to begin with, are Muslim, i.e. "surrendered to the Divine Will" (A flower cannot help being a flower; a diamond cannot do other than sparkle. God had made them so, it is theirs to obey). Secondly, all men who accept with their will the sacred law of the revelation are Muslim in that they surrender their will to that law ... Finally, we have the level of pure knowledge and understanding. It is that of the contemplative, the gnostic (arif), the level that has been recognised throughout Islamic history as the highest and most comprehensive. The gnostic is Muslim in that his whole being is surrendered to God; he has no separate individual existence of his own. He is like the birds and the flowers in his yielding to the Creator; like them, like all the other elements of the cosmos, he reflects the Divine Intellect to his own degree. He reflects it actively, however, they passively, his participation is a conscious one. Thus "knowledge" and "science" are defined as basically different from mere curiosity and even from analytical speculation. The gnostic is from this point of view "one with Nature;" he understands it "from the inside", he has become in fact the channel of it "from the inside", he has become in fact the channel of grace for the universe. His islam and the islam of Nature are now counterparts." <sup>2</sup>

This method of differentiating the levels of knowledge has been and continues to be very common in Islam, as we shall see.

In everyday life a reflection of this notion is seen, for example, in Gilsenan's (1982) study of a Lebanese village, where he discusses two different domains of people's life in terms of the concepts batin and zahir. Zahir is described as the surface reality, in which men live out their daily existence. Beneath this surface lies the hidden world of batin. This latter domain is primarily known only by those knowledgeable and learned in religion.<sup>3</sup>



The attitude of Islam towards the attainment of knowledge is complex. On the one hand those who have the virtue of ʿ aql (reason, intellect) are praised. Islam exalts the use of reason generally, and insists on the virtue of necessity of learning.

"Are the wise and the ignorant equal? Truly, none will take heed but men of understanding." <sup>4</sup>

Belief in God itself postulates the existence of ʿ aql (intellect) and it is for people possessing ʿ aql that the Quran encourages consideration of phenomena in the world, as proof of the existence of God.

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alteration of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean with cargoes beneficial to man, in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and with which He revives the dead earth, dispersing over it all manner of beasts; in the movement of the winds, and in the clouds that are driven between earth and sky: surely in these there are signs for rational men." <sup>5</sup>

(emphasis added)

On the other hand this knowledge can never be complete, as God alone is omniscient and also controls all knowledge. Reason, in Islam is placed under the control of revelation, and is thus not divorced from morality.

"He knows what is before and behind men. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills" <sup>6</sup>



The containment of reasoning within revelation, however, is not to be taken as an excuse not to exercise reason in thinking about God - the possession of ʿaql is, in itself, a virtue.

The influential 11th Century Islamic philosopher and theologian al Ghazali differentiated people in terms of the degree to which they possess ʿaql. al Khassah are those people with the ability to think of God and his attributes, the literal meaning is "the upper class". al ʿamah, meaning literally the commoners, simple people, or the majority, are not able to think in these terms. Although these terms appear to be based on both intellectual and economic criteria, it is clear that al Ghazali means them in more purely intellectual terms: the acquisition of knowledge and learning is not to be attained except when both the body and the personality have been prepared for it.

al Ghazali went to the lengths of writing two types of books: one for al ʿama and one for al Khassah.<sup>7</sup>

We can see from this distinction that the possession of knowledge is always appreciated and learning highly valued in Islam, particularly as it is not possible for everyone. One of the reasons for this is the condition that one must ignore or control physical desires. This related to the concept of al nafs, (the 'carnal soul') the reservoir of emotional and sexual desires in all people, in opposition to ʿaql, (reason).

"Learning may only be truly attained through the perfection of the nafs, which can be beautified by mental images and purified from its

bodily vices." 8

al Ghazali is of the opinion shared by most Asharite\* Muslim philosophers over the centuries that the attainment of science or knowledge is one of the paths towards God and his angels, that reason is contained within revelation, and is attained through the necessary containment of nafs, the bodily passions.

"Real perfection, which requires nearness to God and his angels, is knowledge and freedom. Knowledge, as we have mentioned, is the knowing of God, and freedom is the freedom from, and control over desires and life's problems. In this way we come to resemble the angels." 9

### 3.2.1 'FITNA': AN IMAGE OF DISORDER

Women are believed to arouse bodily desires and themselves to possess strong if not uncontrollable sexual desires, which through Islam are tamed and controlled. Women represent fitna - disorder. Women are seen as being in their very natures the embodiment of disorder, not only a threat to intellectual order, but also a threat to the social order itself.

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\* The Asharite scholars emerged in the 9th Century, A.D as a counter movement to the Mutazilite scholars who placed reason above revelation. The Asharites, who came to dominate and among whom were outstanding scholars, such as al Rhazi, al Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, placed reason within the framework of revelation and religious beliefs.

As expressed by Mernissi, this notion of fitna is one of the assumptions underpinning Islamic social structure.

"The assumptions behind the Muslim social structure - male dominance the fear of fitna, the need for sexual satisfaction, the need for men to love Allah above all else - were embodied in specific laws which have regulated male-female relations in Muslim countries to the day." <sup>10</sup>

Yet it should not be imagined that natural sexual satisfaction for men prevents closeness to God, as in this sense, sexual satisfaction does not involve forgetting God.

In Islam men are seen as instruments for the keeping of order and the practising of worship -however, even then it is not all men, but only Ghazali's category of al khassah, a minority of intellectual "upper class" and religiously learned men.

Women are not only, by their nature, denied access to knowledge, but are themselves a source of mystery. This is an image of women not only commonly expressed in classical arabic poetry, but found for example in the idealised interpretation of Islam by F. Schuon, a distinguished scholar of Islam.

"Islam makes a sharp distinction between the world of man and that of a woman, between the community as a whole and the family which is its kernel, between the street and the home, just as it sharply separates society and the individual, or exotericism and esotericism. The home, and the woman who is its incarnation,

are regarded as having inviolable and so sacred, character.

Women even in a certain manner incarnates esotericism by reason of certain aspects of her nature and function; "esoteric truth", the haqiqah, is "felt" as a "feminine" reality, and the same is true of barakah. Moreover the veil, and the seclusion of women ... present a certain analogy with the forbidding of wine and the veiling of the mysteries".<sup>11</sup>

It is thought important that distance be kept between men and women in order that men may protect their capacity for rational thoughts from the ever present threat of bodily passions, from emotions. A man may either control his natural sexual desires completely, or satisfy them with his wife, but he must leave her afterwards and confine himself to contemplation.

The woman has no other role in the search for knowledge. According to Ali, the fourth Caliph, the woman herself lacks both mind and religion.

Hence the nearer a man gets to God, the further he must be from women; thus in a society where the love and knowledge of God is all-important, the result is the restricting of woman to a marginal existence. It is in this marginality that her danger lies.

"To have been in the margin is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power." <sup>12</sup>

Women are credited in Islam with enormous power to create disorder, in the strict and highly ordered world of men. This is a major distinction

between their two worlds, and the social status of each. The man's power is ordered, defined and controlled, the woman's is seen as disordered, undefined and uncontrollable, hence more threatening. This is expressed by M. Douglas as follows:

"... Those holding office in the explicit part of the structure tend to be credited with consciously controlling powers, in contrast with those whose role is less explicit, and who tend to be credited with unconscious, uncontrollable powers, menacing those in better defined positions." <sup>13</sup>

It should be mentioned that we are not concerned here with whether women are active or passive sexually, but with the denial of the possibility of attaining knowledge because of their intrinsically sexual nature. They are thus denied or allowed only limited access to knowledge, and traditionally to education.

Attributing disorder, fitna, to women's nature results in her being seen as a threat to the attainment of knowledge.

Even the world of men has been subdivided according to the criteria of knowledge, into those who can know, al khassah and those who cannot al 'ama. And it is not unusual to hear those in government in Moslem countries defending totalitarianism with the claim that if democracy is given to the common people, they will destroy it.

It could be argued, therefore, that the nature of the relationship between man and woman is mirrored in the relationship between man and the

world itself. The world itself is divided into weak and strong, have and have not, inside and outside, who may know and who may not. This point is expressed by Tarabishi as follows:

"In a patriarchal, eastern, backward, retarded, loaded to the very depth with a puritanical, rigid, restricted society, the notion of masculinity and femininity becomes a notion which is not only directed to the relations between men and women but also the relations between the human being and his society."<sup>14</sup>

The result of these concepts was that the worlds of men and women in Moslem countries are sharply separated and their roles are defined in such a way where interchangeability is rendered difficult. This separation in terms of gender pervades Muslim society, and culture to the present day in varying degrees. At its most extreme in Iran's revolutionary form, women have been forcibly removed from those sectors of traditionally male preserves into which some women had penetrated under the modernizing period of the Pahlavi regime. One area in which this has been most conspicuous has been that of education. <sup>15</sup>

### 3.2.2 SEPARATION: CONTAINING DISORDER

The emphasis in Islam on the separation of women from the public world of men has obviously helped to deny women, until recently, much real access to the public world of men. Perhaps this sort of separation is nowhere more obvious than in the Moslem world. Rosen puts it as such:

"Although the nature, extent and consequences of the actual separation of the sexes vary according to economic standing, familial relations and local practice, this division is of basic significance to the social and cultural lives of most Moslems." 16

An extreme recent example of this separation, again can be found in Iran. Women played a very important role in the overthrow of the Shah, as described in Yeganeh (1982).

"For the first time in the history of political struggles in Iran, women took part side by side with men and in similar numbers. The most passive and domesticated section of the population was out in full force. In this process, all political forces in Iran "discovered" the potential within half the population as they have never done before". 17

Unfortunately this heroism was not sufficient to maintain the advance made by women in Iranian society, and ruthless return to strict segregation and a traditional Islamic, purely domestic role was imposed under the new Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Ayatollah Kohmeini first praised the women as "pillars of Iranian Society" and then attempted to Islamise their position. By imposing the "hejab" (Islamic dress) and pronouncing motherhood as their primary duty, he tried to change women's position to that, within his conception, of the proper Islamic one." 18

Khomeini is but one of many Moslem theorists who have emphasised the separation of women from men. I shall briefly discuss some other theorists

who, although writing in different historical times and on different parts of the Muslim world, and with different concepts and usages of Islam, all agree on the necessity of separating and "specialising" the roles of the sexes. These disparate examples are by no means exhaustive, and have been chosen to illustrate how pervasive, through time and in space, these attitudes towards women in fact are.\*

Wansharisi was Mufti\*\* of fifteenth century Algeria. He stressed the necessity of keeping women away from public places, such as mosques, markets, cemeteries and picnic spots, particularly if they are wearing make-up and perfume. These women cause fitna (disorder) <sup>19</sup>.

More than four centuries later, al Khuli edited a book in a series of writings by the Moslem brotherhood in Egypt. His work reflects the thinking of this movement, which is presently enjoying a revival in the Arab world. al Khuli attempted to show that the different sex-roles are reinforced by the different natures of the sexes. He stressed the importance of the veil in preventing fitna and claimed that the division of labour in Islam ensured the happiness of society. A woman's domain was in the house, teaching traditional values to her children.<sup>20</sup>

Nasr, a contemporary western educated Iranian writer, idealistically states that Islam views the roles of men and women as complimentary and not

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\* A fuller discussion of Islamic writings on this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis.

\*\*Mufti - religious scholar, who pronounces on religious affairs.



competitive. He is against any interchange in the positions of the sexes. Nasr is a scholar of many aspects of Islam. <sup>21</sup>

This dilemma of the perception of women and their subsequent control by men is summed up in a poem by Mohammed Iqbal (1876 - 1938), the Indian Moslem philosopher and reformist:

"I, too, am most sorrowful at the oppression of women; but the problem is intricate; no solution do I find possible".<sup>22</sup>

However not only do Muslim theorists constantly pronounce on the necessity of sex segregation, but ordinary religious people also find it essential. Not only that, but they insist on making separation applicable in everyday life. An instructive example of this is taken from contemporary Kuwait where with the emergence of new style housing where the encounter between sexes is more possible, there is a tendency among religious people to build their houses in a way where this encounter is less possible and traditional sex segregation can continue to be enforced. The Kuwait weekly "Al Mujtama", an outlet for the Moslem brotherhood movement in Kuwait, recently wrote:

We have to admit that our present houses are not suitable for a Moslem couple, because of its strange architecture which does not suit us as Moslems. So we have to look for another new architecture which answers the accommodation requirements of a Moslem house.

Let us start with the entrance of the house. There must be an entrance for the members of the family, and

another for men's "diwaniya", where the husband can meet his friends without causing any disturbance for his family." 23

This thus argued that contemporary physical space in modern Kuwait needs to be re-structured to maintain the appropriate traditional ordered relationship between the sexes, with the female and thus fitna suitably controlled and contained.

### 3.3 JINN IN ISLAM

In the Pre-Islamic era people worshipped a variety of gods, including jinn (demons). One clan, called the Bani Khuza, were known to have worshipped jinn 24 . This belief in jinn is mentioned in the Quran.

"Yet they regard the jinn as Allah's equal, though He Himself created them, and in their ignorance ascribe to him sons and daughters. Glory to Him! Exalted be He above their imputations" 25

People also used to seek protection from jinn.

"So man has sought the help of jinn, but they misled them into further error. Like you they thought that Allah could never raise the dead." 26

Jahiz interpreted this sura by saying that when people were lost in a

valley and afraid of harm from jinn, they used to say,

"We take refuge in the Lord of this valley." <sup>27</sup>

This recourse to jinn is strongly condemned in formal Islam. As God is regarded as the only omnipotent creator, and even created Satan, to lead man astray, people now say,

"I take refuge in thee (God), from the evil of Satan".

This phrase may be used when one is tempted to do something evil, as temptation is thought to come from Satan, and is also spoken at the beginning of every Quranic Sura.

The development of monotheism is behind the condemnation of the Pre-Islamic belief in kinship with jinn or with multiple gods. <sup>28</sup>

However, people continued to believe in a relationship between jinn and God after the introduction of Islam.

"They assert a kinship between Him and the jinn. But the jinn well know that they will all be brought before him, except Allah's true servants." <sup>29</sup>

A clan called Bani Si<sup>l</sup>lat were believed to be descended from a she-demon (Si<sup>l</sup>lat), from whom their name was derived. She supposedly married the father of the tribe, but disappeared on seeing a flash of light.<sup>30</sup> Solomon's wife Bashiba, (the Queen of Yemen), was believed to

be the offspring of the marriage between a man and a she-jinni.

"And they said that Al Hedhad has married the daughter of the King of the jinn in Yemen, and she brought him Bashiba" <sup>31</sup>.

Islam condemns the idea of any kinship between God and jinn or men, and refused to attribute any powers equal to that of God to any other creature. In Islam, Allah is believed to be the one, only and omnipotent God, Creator not only of the world itself, but of everything on it.

"Praise be to Allah, to whom belong all that the heavens and the earth contain.' Praise be to Him in the world to come. He is the Wise One, the All-knowing. He has knowledge of all that goes into the earth and all that springs up from it; all that comes down from the heaven and all that ascends to it. He is the forgiving One, the All-knowing. He has knowledge of all that goes into the earth and all that springs up from it; all that comes down from heaven and all that ascends to it. He is the forgiving One, The Merciful."<sup>32</sup>

While the jinn and their powers are still believed in by many Muslims, particularly Muslim women, they are strictly subordinate to Allah. Lewis states:

"Of course, Islam insists on the uniqueness of God as a single omnipotent creator deity, and vigorously excludes all conflicting sources of power which could in any way impair His absolute dominion. But once this, and as long as God's lofty pre-eminence is not

compromised, the Quran itself provided scriptural warrant for the existence of the host of subsidiary powers and spirits. These may not all be equally legitimate, but their existence and effectiveness, whether malign or beneficial agencies is not disputed." 33

Polytheism or the seeking of power through any other being or god is strongly condemned in Islam.

"Men, serve your Lord, who has created you and those who have gone before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil; who has made the earth a bed for you and the sky above, and has set down water from the sky to bring forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not knowingly set up other gods beside Him." 34

"Say: allah is One, the Eternal God, He Begot none, nor was he begotten. None is equal to Him." 35

In Islam God has no children to "compete" with him, or to represent him on the earth. Monotheism does not, however, negate the notion of dualism in morality and nature. Islam has only one God. But God himself created Satan, the propagator (not the God) of evil, to represent the everlasting struggle and dichotomy between Good and Evil.

### 3.3.1 JINN: DISORDERLY BEINGS

The numerous citations in the Quran concerning jinn, have been commented upon and given interpretation as well as being elaborated on by a variety of Islamic philosophers, theologians and scholars. Ibn Hazm com-

ments that:

"It is not possible to perceive the existence of jinn with the senses; neither can the power of the mind alone discover whether or not jinn exist. But we must believe that they exist as they are created by Allah, The Great, who has infinite powers." 36

Jinn themselves have hierarchy, described by Khalil a contemporary writer as follows:

Pure <u>jinni</u>	<u>Al Jinni</u>
<u>Jinni</u> which live with people	<u>ʿAmer</u>
Evil <u>jinni</u>	<u>Satan</u>
A Strong <u>jinni</u>	<u>Marid</u>
<u>Jinni</u> stronger than <u>Marid</u>	<u>Ifrit</u>
<u>Jinni</u> stronger than <u>Ifrit</u>	<u>Iblis</u> 37

Jinn, of course, were created by Allah, and inhabited the earth before man 38, and it is clear from the Quran that jinn were created from a different substance from that of man, or the angels.

"He created man from potters' clay, and the jinn from smokeless fire." 39

It is clear that Allah had created man from clay, jinn from fire and the

angels from light.

Al Razi also states:

"The theologians say that they (angels, jinn, satans) are subtle bodies capable of taking on various shapes. The philosophers and the early Mu<sup>t</sup>azilites denied their existence, because, they said if their subtlety was that of the air they would not have power to perform any actions ... Should they, however, be denser (than air) we would assuredly be able to see them ... The Answer to them (these philosophers) is to ask why their subtlety might not consist in absence of colour rather than in fineness of substance. Let us admit that they have a certain density, yet it is clear that we do not have to perceive some dense things when it is present with us. The philosophers claim that they (jinn) are not spatially confined nor do they subsist in any special portion of space.

Apart from that the philosophers differ among themselves. The majority teach that they are different in species from human spirits. Others among them teach that they are mortal spirits whose bodies, if they are evil, are strongly drawn to those human souls which resemble them, so that in a way they attach themselves to their bodies and thus aid them in the doing of evil deeds."

Al Tusi adds a commentary:

"It has been handed down about the Mu<sup>t</sup>azilites that they taught the angels, jinn and satans are one in species but different in accordance with their varied ways of acting. Those who do nothing but good are the angels, those who do nothing but evil are the satans and those who do sometimes the one sometimes the other are the jinn". 40

Jinn inhabit marginal places, although it is believed they used to be more widespread. They live in deserts and deep valleys, sparsely inhabited

by humans.

"It might be that fear and dissillusion have the greatest effect on assigning the places of Jinn, and their houses, for the Arabs. Otherwise, why should the attacks of Jinn take place more frequently on dry deserts and in deepest valleys?" 4<sup>1</sup>

al Jahiz relates that Umar Benkhatab, the second Caliph asked a man who had been lost and seduced by jinn what they ate. He was told that their food was faeces, and their drink, wine. He was told that they also eat corpses, and anything that God's name was not mentioned over. They ride some animals, and birds, such as the ostrich. 4<sup>2</sup>

God gave jinn many attributes. They are believed to be able to take on any shape they wish, and can perform many supernatural tasks. Solomon was given power over the jinn.

"To Soloman we subdue the wind, travelling a month's journey morning and evening. We gave him a spring flowing with molten brass, and jinn who served him by leave of his Lord. Those of them who did not do our bidding, we shall perish in the first of Hell. They made for him whatever he pleased: Shrines and statues, basins as large as watering troughs, and built-in cauldrons. We said, 'Give thanks House of David'. Yet few of my servants are truly thankful." 4<sup>3</sup>

Solomon is again associated with jinn when he asks for the throne of Bashiba to be brought to his palace:



"And to his nobles he said: 'Which of you will bring her throne, before they sue for peace?'

A demon from among the jinn replied: 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your seat. I am strong enough and faithful'. But he who was deeply versed in the scriptures said 'I will bring it to you in a twinkling'

And when he saw it set before him, solomon said; 'This is a favour from Allah, with which he would test my gratitude.' 44

The fact that a jinni can bring Bashiba's throne before Solomon rises from his seat, shows the ability to perform tasks which are not possible for man.

There are many different types of jinn, given by moslem authorities within the general category of jinn.

"Al ghūl is the name for everything in the group of jinn which appear to travellers. It is seen in many different forms and clothes, male or female, but usually female. Al Si'lat is the name of one of the Jinn's women, which can turn into many shapes in order to seduce travellers." 45

"According to the people, God enabled jinn, Satan, ammar and ghūls to transform themselves into any shape they want, except alghūl. She transforms herself into a being with all the features and clothes of a woman, except her feet will always be those of an ox." 46

According to il qazwini,

"the most famous sort of jinn is the ghūl, which is an anomalous, disfigured animal which has not been disciplined by nature, and did not feel happy going out alone. So it sought out deserted places where it

might appear to people travelling along, at night, or when it was quiet. In this way travellers thought it was human, and it was able to stop them from continuing their journey." 47

The ability to make men dance is attributed to al si'lat. Other types of jinn are al Ghaddar, al Shaq, al Delhab and al Medhib. It is believed also that everyone has a garin, a jinni which accompanies a man or woman at all times. Some jinn converted to Islam after listening to the Quran:

"Say, it is revealed to me that a band of jinn listened to Allah's revelations and said we had heard a wondrous discourse giving guidance to the right path." 48

In an extended discussion of jinn, in his book Asrar al-Jinn (Secrets of the Jinn), published in Cairo in 1935, Mustafa Fahmi elaborates on many of the qualities of jinn.

"The jinn were created from smokeless fire, so they were created from something quite different from the clay of which men were created. Now if we understand that we who belong to mankind were created from clay, yet today there is not a trace of this clay visible in our bodies because it has been transformed into blood and flesh and bones, we can likewise understand how the jinn, though they were created from fire, now become such that not trace of it is perceived in their bodies. Nevertheless, after passing away they return to their origin, which is fire, just as man after his passing away returns to his origin, which is dust.

In any case, the bodies of the jinn resemble vapour particles, so delicate are they, and thus we do not see them. Indeed no one can see them save for those

for whom the evil has been drawn ... Nevertheless they can see us and hear us ... These jinn transform themselves into shapes of various kinds and different forms, may be into the shape of a dog, or take wings ... or they may be in the form of vipers ...

Now though we agree that the jinn come in various forms such as those we have mentioned we do not go as far as to say that they ever come in authentic human form." 49

### 3.3.2 ANGELS (MALA'IKA)

It is not possible to assess the position of jinn in Islam without comparing and contrasting them with the other creatures in the hierarchy.

I will first discuss the position of Angels who were created by God as his messengers, and may have two, three or four pairs of wings. The multiplicity of angels' wings is reputed to have caused the prophet Mohammed to faint, when he asked Gabriel to show himself as he really was.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike jinn, angels are all perfect and good willed.

"They do not disobey God's orders and always believe according to His commands. Their food is the glorification of God and their drink is sanctity 51."

Although angels are mentioned many times in the Quran, no mention is made of their substance.

"None know the worriors of your Lord but Himself" 52 .

However, in the Hadith it is said that they are made from nur (light).<sup>53</sup>

Jinn and angels contrast in many ways. Jinn have no ascribed individuality while a number of angels have individual names and may even have specific roles to accomplish. Jinn are divided into male and female, and may marry and propagate, but angels have no gender and do not reproduce. Both may be used by God to facilitate tasks not possible for man. It is thought that everything has one or more angels.

"It is said that every atom of this world's atoms has one or more angels as its agents. There is no drop of water which falls without having its angel fall with it and lay it in its place, which is assigned by God. 54"

Everything which exists has its own angel, but also man is said to be accompanied by two angels, one on his left who writes down all his vices, and one on his right who writes down all his virtues. This is somewhat different from the idea of the gar T n, referred to earlier.

"Angels act as intermediaries between God and His prophets and pious men. They impart God's messages by means of inspiration and revelation. Angels make God's servants aware of the signs of His creation."55

They may appear in many shapes like jinn. It is said that Harut and Marut were two angels who became humans.

The lowest position in the Islamic hierarchy is assigned to Iblis (Satan). According to the Quran, Satan was an angel who refused God's command to bow down to man, his new creation, and was expelled from heaven.

"We created man from dry clay, from black moulded loam, and before him Satan from smokeless fire. Your Lord said to the angels 'I am creating man from dry clay, from black moulded loam. When I have fashioned him and breathed of My spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate themselves except Satan. He refused to prostrate himself. 'Satan', said Allah, 'why do you not prostrate yourself?' He replied: 'I will not bow down to a mortal created of dry clay, of black moulded loam.' 'begone', said Allah, 'you are accursed. My curse shall be on you till Judgement Day.' 'Lord,' said Satan, 'reprieve me till the Day of Ressurrection'. He answered: 'You are reprived until the Appointed Day'. 'Lord', said Satan, 'since you have led astray, I will seduce mankind on earth: I will seduce them all, except those that faithfully serve you.' He replied: 'This is the right course for Me. You shall have no power over My servants, except the sinners who follow you. They are all destined for Hell.'" 56

Compare this story of the origin of Satan with another, told by al Qazwini:

"The jinn, who lived throughout the valleys, mountains and seas, saw the abundant gifts sent by God. They neglected the advice of the prophets and revolted, spreading corruption over the earth. So God sent an army of angels who defeated the jinn and drove them to the fringes of the islands, capturing many of them.

Among the captured was Azazil. He was then a young boy, who grew up among the angels and learned their knowledge, and began to seduce them. He lived among them for a long time and became their chief. This lasted until the events described in the Quran, when all the angels prostrated themselves before Adam, except Satan (Azazil). He refused to prostrate himself". 57

The origin of Satan has been debated. He may be a jinni, or an angel.

There has been considerable debate over Satan's disobedience. In popular belief and in the orthodox religious mind, he is the source of all evil, and the furthest from God. However, some have tried to show that he is innocent of this disobedience as it was to an order given by God, rather than to God's will. 58 However, Satan is still an image of evil and represents one element in the dualism prevalent in almost all Eastern religions. Satan however, is not God, having been himself created by God. After this discussion of jinn, angel and Satan we arrive at a certain cosmological hierarchy.

This hierarchy in which Jinn and other creatures are classified might be represented as follows:-

Allah	- The Creator
Angels	- Good - created from light (nur)
Man	- Good and Evil - created from clay

Jinn	- Good and Evil )	
		created from fire (nar)
Satan (Iblis)	- Evil )	

In the Quran, jinn are described as both good and evil, but in most instances it appears that they are considered evil.

Men are themselves ranged on a parallel hierarchy, in popular belief, with pious men such as the Sufis and Imams nearer to God, and those disobedient to God's will nearer to Satan. Sufis and Imams are believed to be able to talk with angels, while sorcerers are known to have a relationship with jinn.

In pre-Islamic times the image of jinn remained unclear. They were seen as relatives of humans, or they were elevated to the status of Gods and worshipped, or turned to for protection.

The references to jinn in the Quran and subsequent commentaries, now provide the foundation for legitimate belief in jinn, for those who have no other 'scientific' reason for believing in them. Belief in jinn is now a part of Islam, with their existence as created beings attested to in the Quran, while their position is now clearer but less significant, than in the pre-Islamic era.

Yet in Islam the concept of jinn remains ambiguous, except for the substance they are made of (fire), that they live underground or with

people, can look like any creature, and adopt any religion. Above all they cause "disorder" and chaos.

Following this discussion of 'ilm, knowledge; 'aql, reason; nafs, carnal soul; fitna, disorder; sex segregation and jinn, I would like to illustrate the way these concepts are interrelated and form a distinctive and culturally powerful complex of ideas.

### 3.3.3 WOMEN: EMBODIED DISORDER

Knowledge as the attribute of men, demands that man, who is also known to be very active sexually, satisfy his sexual desires. And in order to be able to accomplish his worldly and religious duties, woman, who is known for her sexual attractiveness and her ability to cause fitna has to be kept out of man's sight or if she has to be seen by him, she should observe modesty and be veiled. This is justified in modern day life by Ayatullah Mutahari, one of the leading ideologues of the present Iranian regime as follows:

"When would a man be more productive, where he is studying in all male institutions or where he is sitting next to a girl whose skirt reveals her thighs? Which man can do more work, he who is constantly exposed to arousing and exciting faces of made-up women in the street, bazaar, office, or factory, or he who does not have to face such sights?" 59

Hence for the benefit of society and tranquility of man, separation is imposed, this fact reinforced the already underlying concept of the dif-



ferences between man and woman, which attribute disorder to women and knowledgeability to man. This provided a criterion for the division of interest and the value given to each sex.

Therefore, men were given the capacity and opportunity to think of and come to know God, his higher creatures - angels, religion, and the moral social order. While women, who are confined to the "lower" things, concern themselves with child bearing, the domestic world and the satisfaction of their husbands.

Women's concern with metaphysical matters, with the exception of the few women learned in the Quran, is generally relegated to the level of jinn, the creatures of the earth, as opposed to the angels, who live in the sky.

Angels, malaika, are the concern of religious men, the most obvious case of which is the relationship of Sufis with angels, revealed in their mutual dialogues and sufi prophecies.

If the superiority of angels corresponds to the superiority of men in the earthly world, the inferiority of jinn in the world of spirits corresponds to the inferiority of women. Moreover, both jinn and women are regarded as disorderly creatures and are sources of disorder, fitna in the intellectual, moral and even social spheres. It is not surprising then that women are generally associated with jinn, that women are particularly

vulnerable to affliction by jinn and women are kept separate from, and controlled by the spiritual, religious, moral intellectual and worldly concerns of men. This does not mean that men are not subject to affliction. Few men get afflicted by jinn, but these few are from an inferior social class, and not active in the socio-economic and political domain.

### 3.4 POPULAR BELIEFS CONCERNING JINN IN KUWAIT

People in general think of jinn as a separate category of creatures. Just as God made men out of clay, so He made jinn out of fire. Jinn are transparent and invisible until they choose to reveal themselves. In the meantime, they continue to live their own lives, as we do. Jinn have an existence parallel to human existence.

Jinn are commonly known by a number of other names. Frequently they are referred to as ahl il-ard (the inhabitants of the earth), as they are thought to live underground. In general conversation jinn are referred to as Asyad "the masters" or simply as "they". In the case of someone being possessed by a jinni, it is called "the one who is in him". Another term used for jinn in the Kuwaiti dialect is Kibariya which means "the great ones".

Jinn are believed to live underground in the seventh layer of the earth, but they can surface whenever they wish and also inhabit certain places above the ground. There is a particular house, well known in Kuwait, which has been uninhabited for many years because jinn are known to

live there, and to appear there during the night. The reason for choosing the house is unknown. It might be that someone with a strong jinn was living in that house for some time. Jinn like dark, damp places and in pre-oil Kuwait, they were often thought to inhabit rubbish dumps.

Formerly, areas of land were walled off for the disposal of rubbish, later to be collected or burnt. Jinn are usually malevolent, and anyone entering or passing any such place should pronounce the name of God, and be careful not to fall lest he hurts a jinni living there.

Jinn are associated with a certain kind of tree, and thought to live by the trees or sit or lie in their shadows, particularly in summer. This tree is known as sidr (*Zizyphus spinachristi*. bot.) in Kuwait. The belief that the sidr is inhabited by jinn is not as strong now as in former times, but on enquiry, one is told "I don't know, they say that jinn are always found under that tree".

Saidi mentions that the peoples of the islands and coastal towns of southern Iran (a mixture of Arabs, Iranians and Africans) are always careful not to step on the shadow of this tree in case they step on a jinni.<sup>60</sup>

Trimingham tells us that in Zanzibar, the country of origin of most black people in Kuwait, the tree is known by the same name, sidr, and the spirits of the dead are believed to sit under it. <sup>61</sup>

A second type of tree treated the same way is called Athal. In the old days in Kuwait there used to be a special summer zār ceremony, known as

sidr-il-arba c , or, "the four sidrs"\*, outside the town. Every group of people had their own special sidr tree. First there was a three day ceremony called "hibshi moussem". On the third day the journey was made to sidr-il-araba c and a special meal was prepared. The food, rice and meat, was eaten under the sidr in a big Walima (ceremony). Then a seven day sufra began; the trees were fumigated with incense and their leaves cleaned. Afterwards there was singing and dancing. Today these practices no longer exist and on the site of the trees two schools have been built.

Jinn are classified either by their religion and/or by their social status. According to their religion, jinn may be muslim or kafir (kafir means literally an atheist, but in popular use it refers to non-moslem). Muslim jinn are usually kindly disposed towards men, but even if they are malevolent, they can easily be driven away.

Kafir jinn are usually malevolent and are much harder to get rid of. Many people believe that the same prophets were sent to the jinn as were sent to Man. In the after-life jinn, too, will be rewarded or punished - non-believing and wrong doing jinn will be burned in hell. For the omnipotent God this does not represent a contradiction. Even though he made the jinn from fire, he is capable of burning them too.

According to their social status, jinn are divided into the same categories found in Kuwaiti society, badu desert nomads, urban dwellers, and non-Kuwaiti. When they possess someone, this person will manifest the same characteristics, and use the same accent, as the social group from

which the jinni comes. Hence a badu jinn will not have the same characteristics and reserve of a "gentleman" than an urban jinni has. By the same token, jinn naturally have their own language and when a person becomes possessed, he speaks the language of the jinni who is in him. This phenomenon is used by some people either to justify or to reinforce their belief in jinn. One of my interviewees told me of a neighbour who used to speak Indian whenever she was possessed, although she had never learnt, or spoken, Indian before in her normal life. It was necessary to call a local merchant who spoke Indian to translate what she was saying.

Jinn are considered only to affect people, and not events. If someone develops fits or convulsions, and especially if these or any other chronic illness resist medical or religious treatment, they are thought to be possessed by a jinni. If the person shows many nervous movements or convulsions, the jinni, in him is thought to be "hot-headed". It is believed that everybody has a personal jinni, which accompanies him everywhere although it is not seen.

This jinni, is called a garīn. An interviewee told me that her father had died aged 28, and that for two years preceding his death, he frequently complained of seeing a young girl in his bedroom. (Men have female jinni and women have male jinni, unlike the Western concept of having a "double"). This girl sometimes used to sleep beside him. After a while he fell ill, and soon died. They believed that his garīn had killed him, by driving him mad, first because of his love for her, and then he became ill and died.

The common belief is that jinn actually enter the body of the person by possession, although people do not know where here the jinn come from to do this. They usually have no idea of how possession by jinn is cured, and regard the jinn as creatures which form part of the possessed body.

Mamas believe that jinn have a separate existence and do not actually enter the body. They believe that a jinni, being made of fire, would burn a body if it entered it. They believe that jinni accompanies the person and images him, and will hurt him as long as his needs are not satisfied. It is to satisfy the jinni's needs that zār ceremonies are held. Mamas think that the jinni causes a person harm through a habūb (wind). This invisible and unfelt wind enters the body and causes pains all over the patient's body.

Mamas are themselves possessed by jinn but have "satisfied" them and now have a direct relationship with them. Mamas are never spoken of disrespectfully, in case they should transfer their personal jinni to the person who is unkind to them. People believe that jinn used sometimes to marry humans, although this does not happen today. Some of the people so married were known personally to a number of elderly informants interviewed. They believed that these marriages have always taken place, having heard about them from their parents or elderly neighbours.

When a woman suffers a series of miscarriages, she is believed to be afflicted by a particular type of jinn. This is known as tabā<sup>6</sup>. A story of a woman was told to me by a mama. This woman had a taba who caused her

many miscarriages. The mama said that this had been caused by pouring hot water onto the step of a room late at night, without saying the name of God. This act had caused the death of a jinni, whose family were taking revenge by sending the tabā. The tabā killed her children before they were born. To satisfy this jinn family the patient was told that, when she becomes pregnant, she must take a lamb and feed it every day, by putting the food in her lap. She must hold the lamb while it eats.

She must continue to feed it until her child is born, and then slaughter it, as an act of satisfying the jinn. The woman followed the mama's instructions, but when she was better after six months, she decided she was tired of this "nonsense" and had the sheep slaughtered. The next day, she had a miscarriage. Of course, the next time she became pregnant she followed the instructions until her child was born. Since then she has had no trouble having children.

It is said that neither mother nor child should ever be left alone during the first few months after birth. The mother is protected by keeping a big knife under her pillow. If the child is left alone, the jinn may take it and replace it with a jinni child, called a mbadal, (changed). A child who is difficult to control and always running around may be described ironically as a jinni. Even today, though many people do not believe that jinn exist as they used to, they are still very careful to observe these precautions.

Jinn are famous for their ability to achieve tasks which are dif-

ficult or impossible for humans. They are thought to move very quickly and to be able to disappear from one place and appear in another. Usually they disappear as soon as they feel they are discovered. Anyone who encounters a jinni can use the opportunity to ask for something, and it will be done as long as he or she does not tell anyone about the jinni. Jinn can take any shape they want, especially black cats. Cats can of course move very quickly. In the following story the jinni appears as a cat.

A poor woman saw a black cat limping in the courtyard. When she found out its leg was wounded, she treated the cat and discovered that it was a jinni when the cat asked her by talking to her as a human being, asking if there was anything she needed. The woman asked for help in running her family's life. The cat promised to bring everything she needed, provided she never told anyone. From that day on, anything the woman took from her storeroom was immediately replaced by the cat. Unfortunately her husband eventually became suspicious, and when he insisted, she told him about the jinni. From that moment all help ceased.

In another interview I was told about a couple who had a jinni living in one of the rooms of their apartment. The couple were careful to fumigate the room with incense every Thursday night to keep the jinni happy.\*

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\* In Arabic the western Thursday night is called "Friday's night", Friday is a sacred religious day.



The jinni was never seen but sometimes the couple heard the jinni reciting the Quran in the room, or noticed some change in the room the next day. The jinni appeared to be very kind, as since they had been living there, they had been happy and lucky and were getting wealthier. In this way the jinni had brought them il baraka (good fortune). This story should not suggest that all jinn are kind, as people in Kuwait usually regard attempts to contact jinn with cautiousness and sometimes fear. A story is told about three men, still alive today, who tried to make a jinni appear. One did appear and they were all so frightened that their minds were unbalanced. One of the men became psychologically disturbed and another developed fits. This may have been because the jinni was malevolent, or simply because he was unhappy to be made to appear.

Jinn can appear in human form but are thought always to be distinguishable by having the hooves of a donkey. The type of jinn known as il Ghūl is also known as Shaho or Um-i-hmar.

The expression um literally means "mother" but is used to signify a woman by something she is known for, for example, an unknown woman in a red dress might be called the um of the red dress. Um-i-hmar literally means "the mother of the donkey" but seems to mean the creature with donkey's hooves. It may also have the legs of a cow. A popular myth tells of how um-i-hmar came into being. An ordinary woman, the mistress of sīlow<sup>c</sup>, another legendary creature, was imprisoned in his palace. She could wander freely, apart from one room. One day she decided to enter the forbidden room, and found the remains of human bodies that sīlow<sup>c</sup> had eaten. She tried to

conceal her discovery but was found out by traces of blood on her feet. As a punishment <sup>c</sup>silow made her choose either to be killed, or to have her feet turned into a donkey's hooves, and she chose the latter.

Although most people claim not believe this story, they may still describe anyone thin, black and ugly as silow, and may still scare their children into obedience by telling them that um-1-hmar will come for them if they go out on the street.

It is obvious that some belief in jinn is widespread in Kuwait, but it is expressed in many different ways. Many claim not to believe in the myths and stories about jinn, but still adhere to the traditional safety precautions, and are respectful towards the mamas. Today when someone falls ill they are immediately taken to a doctor, but if medical treatment should prove to be unsuccessful (especially in certain illnesses such as convulsions or depression), they may then be taken to a mama. Once someone has been treated by a mama they will tend to return to her if the same symptoms return.

#### 3.4.1 CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS JINN

Some people feel that jinn no longer exist as they used to, because there are fewer dark and dirty places. Now everywhere is clean and well-lit, and most houses contain some iron, of which jinn are afraid. No one could tell me the exact reason for this fear, but some said that iron, especially manufactured iron, is clean and bright and that frightens the

jinn. Other, more educated people told me that in the old days, people had simple beliefs and tended to attribute any unnatural or inexplicable phenomenon to jinn.

Of those who still believe in jinn, some say they cannot imagine them, but feel they must exist, since they are mentioned in the Quran. Some more discerning people attempt to explain their belief through recent scientific discoveries of substances invisible to the unaided eye. Yet other believe that jinn are only used metaphorically in the Quran.

However, many seem still to be very careful to mention the name of God on entering dark places, not to slip down in bathrooms or kitchens, and not to pour hot water over the steps of rooms or houses.

When I asked women about the existence of jinn, I could not find one who claimed that they did not exist, even amongst the most highly educated women. (Two of my interviewees were studying for a Ph.D. in Europe). The main differences occurred in the women's expression of their beliefs.

Middle-aged women tended to back up their belief in jinn with many stories of people who had seen jinn, or even married and lived with them. Other women may even claim to have seen jinn themselves, particularly if they have been patients of zār. A few said that they see jinn frequently in their dreams.

Amongst the younger generation, belief in jinn was rarely substan-

tiated by stories like these. More often, young women quoted Quranic suras which support the existence of jinn\*. Older women did not use these suras as evidence, not because they were illiterate, as many would have learned to recite parts of the Quran by heart, but because they accepted the existence of jinn, as a natural fact. As was mentioned previously, middle-aged and older women attend zār ceremonies frequently even although they may be healthy. The younger women found this hard to understand, except in a case where a patient needed the treatment urgently. Some of the younger women were very cautious and fearful of zār, and said they would never consider attending themselves, unless they had no other choice. Young women tended to believe there was only a small chance that they would be afflicted by jinn.

Older women hold jinn in such esteem that they are referred to as "Masters", and most older and middle-aged women always speak of zār ceremonies, and everything relating to them, with great reverence.

It appears that women of all ages believe that zār is effective. Young women, however, tended to think that zār should be the last resort, after doctors and psychiatrists, while other women had a stronger belief, having seen or participated in zār ceremonies themselves. In day-to-day experience, middle-aged and older women are likely to relate any unexpected or unpleasant experience to jinn, such as a sudden shadow or an unclear voice. Younger women would hardly ever offer this interpretation.

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\* See Section 3.3.1 above

As we have seen, although all women share a belief in jinn, to some extent, zār ceremonies are mainly used by the middle-age group. This is not only because they are more often afflicted, but because they have additional, social reasons for wishing to attend. Both younger and older women have more outlets for their needs, or are not under such strain. Younger women are particularly reluctant to admit to affliction, and if they attend a zār ceremony, may do so in secret. They feel there is a stigma attached to it, and in fact, if it is known that they have been afflicted by jinn it will be harder for them to marry. It is thought that such women are vulnerable to repeated afflictions, and so will not make efficient wives and mothers.

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, the existence of jinn is accepted as fact and the numerous citations to their created existence in the Quran is taken as proof of their reality. Thus total scepticism about their 'reality' is rare. However, the relevance of the purported activities of jinn for human beings is interpreted very differently by different sectors of society. With the development of modern education and the introduction of 'scientific' explanations of natural phenomena, along with the development of modern medicine, the image of jinn being the 'cause' of illness, strange events, miscarriages and the like, is seen as wrong, if not ridiculous by the younger generation and also by most educated males. For 'modern' Kuwaitis, the sphere of relevance of jinn has shrunk, and their 'existence' reduced to the level of an irritating and irrelevant 'superstition'. However, denial of their reality, of their existence is not possible, since the proof of their reality is to be found in the Quran.

Thus the religious establishment, while finding the activities of zar, the rituals to be described in the following chapter, inappropriate and even threatening in their not so covert sexuality, finds it difficult to condemn outright. This 'ecstatic' activity, in such stark contrast to the controlled life of the intellect and of reason of 'formal' Islam, dominated by males, is grounded firmly within the Islamic world view, and this thesis argues, can only be so understood.

Female nature, as we have seen, is culturally constructed in Islam primarily in terms of sexuality, which inhibits the female's powers of reason. Thus Islam relegates the female to the world of the body as opposed to the world of the mind. Through a variety of techniques of control and containment, in physical, moral and spiritual space, women are kept separate, even secluded to a degree which makes the contemporary conditions of modern life that provide new 'freedoms' to women, highly ambiguous.

The clash between deeply entrenched cultural values, where women are perceived intrinsically as being a "threat to the idea of order" and a source of fitna, and the new complex of modern education, changing moral values and the participation of women in public life in new ways, has produced what I have described in this thesis as a category of 'victims', middle-aged women in particular, largely illiterate, alienated from their children and their husbands. For these women, the reality of jinn is both overwhelmingly true and distressingly real. Jinn are the idiom through which their experience is interpreted and their experienced world known.

The placating of these troublesome jinn is accomplished in the zār rituals. Zār is commonly found in the Muslim world and it is to this that I now turn in the following chapter, before discussing zār as it is practiced in contemporary Kuwait.

NOTES

1. For more details on the imagery of the female in Islam the reader is referred to J. Smith and Y. Haddad "Eve: Islamic image of women"; A. Schimmel "Women in mystical Islam", In A. al Hibri, (ed.) Women and Islam, Pergamon Press 1982.
- 1.(a) For an anthropological treatment of 'nafs' see L. Rosen "The negotiation of reality: Male and Female Relations in Sefru, "Morocco", p566,567, in Beck and Keddie. 1987 For a more poetic interpretation Jalal Uddin Rumi images "Nafs" (carnal soul) as an ugly old crone who paints her ghastly face to seduce men.
2. S. H. Nasr, 1968, p23.
3. M. Gilsenan,
4. The Quran (39:9)
5. The Quran (2:223)
6. The Quran (2:255)
7. See the introduction of al Ghazali's Al Ma'arif al'aqliya, written by A. al'Uthman, pp 3-7.
8. Abu Hamid al Ghazali, al Ma'arif al'aqliya, Damascus, 1963, p75.
9. Abdu Hamid Al Ghazali, Ihya ulum addin, Egypt, 1939, Vol. (3), p277.
10. Mernissi, 1975, p41
11. F. Schuon, 1963, p37.
12. M. Douglas, 1979, p97
13. M. Douglas, Ibid., p101.
14. G. Tarabishi, 1977, p5.
15. For more details on the position of women after the Iranian revolution the reader is referred to: G. Nashat 1983, A. Tabari and N. Yeganeh (compiled). 1982.
16. Rosen, op. cit. p562.
17. N. Yeganeh.



18. A. Tabari, and Yeganeh, op. cit. p
19. A. al Wansharisi "al Mustahsan min al bida" Algiers, 1946
20. B. al Khuli, 'al Marā biyn al Bayt wal Mujtama' (Women between home and Society), Egypt, 1953.
21. S. Nasr 1981.
22. Alfred Guillaum, 1983, p163.
23. Kuwait weekly "Al Mujtama" Vol.656, Jan. 1984, p45.
24. A. al Kalbi, 'al Asnam' Egypt, 1927, p34.
25. The Quran (6:11).
26. The Quran (72:6)
27. al Jahiz, al Hayawān, Egypt, 1966, pp66, 67.
28. For the semitic and pre-Islamic notion of Kinship between man and his Gods see W. Smith 1927, Lecture (2) pp28-83, A. C. Black, Ltd., 3rd ed.
29. The Koran (37:156).
30. W. Smith op. cit. p50 quoted from Ibn Duriyd.
31. A. Daynuri al AkhbarrAl Tewal, Egypt, 1330, p21.
32. The Quran, (37:1).
33. I.M. Lewis 1980, p60.
34. The Quran (2:21).
35. The Quran (112:107).
36. Ibn Hazm. Al Fasl fil Milal wal Ahwa' wal Nihal, Egypt, 1321 (AH) pp12, 13.
37. K. Khalil, Madmoun al Austura Fil Fikr al Arabi (The Meaning of Myth in Arabic Thoughts), Beirut 1980, p38.
38. Ibn qutayba al Daynuri, al Ma'arif, Egypt, 1934, p8.
39. The Quran (55:15).
40. Quoted in Islam A. Jeffrey, (ed.) Liberal arts press, New York, 1958, p111.

41. M. Al Hut, Fi Tariq al Mithulugya C ind al'arab (Towards An Arab Mythology), Beirut, p211.
42. al Jahiz, op. cit. Vol. 6, p64.
43. The Quran (27:40).
44. The Quran (27:40).
45. al Jahiz, op. cit. p48.
46. al Jahiz, op. cit. p68.
47. al Qazwini, 'ajaib al makhluqāt Wa Ghraib al Mawjudāt, pp308-309.
48. The Quran (72:1)
49. Quoted in Jeffrey, op. cit. p119, 120.
50. Abu al Qassim al ZamaKhshari: al Kashaf 'an hagaiq Atanzīl wa 'uyūn al Aqawīl fi wujuh Ataeweel, Egypt 1318, pp454, 455.
51. al Qazwini, op. cit. p52.
52. The Quran (74:31).
53. Both al Razi and Ibn Hazm relate this Hadith to the prophet's wife Aisha, see al Razi, op. cit. Vol. (1) p282, 283 and Ibn Hazm op. cit. p.3.
54. Al Qazwini, op. cit. p53
55. N. Al Baidawi Anwār al tanzīl wa Asrar al ta'wīl, Leipzig, 1878, Vol.(2), p148.
56. The Quran (15:25).
57. al Qazwini, op. cit. p304-305
58. al Azam Nagid al Fikr al Dini (A Critique of Religious Thought), Beirut 1970.
59. Quoted from G. Nashat, op, cit. p204.
60. G. Sa'idi Ahle-i-hawa 1976
61. J. Trimingham. 1964, p80.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FORMS OF ISLAM

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FORMS OF ISLAM

In the previous chapter we discussed the notion of fitna and the way women are regarded in Islam as possessing nafs rather than ‘aql which, according to Islam, is a male characteristic. In this chapter we will show how this notion is manifested in different forms of popular religion. It was thought important to trace these forms in order to compare it with zar which is also a popular type of Islam. Also to compare zār as a predominantly sunni practice with some shi'i practices, although some practices mentioned in this Chapter are prevalent among sunni women as well. A short account is given on forms of Islam as practiced by men, only for the purpose of comparing them with those practiced by women. Women's involvement in these practices is usually scorned by men, and even considered anti-Islam.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss hussayniyah visiting during the two shi'i mourning months of Muharam and Safar, visiting Imams shrines outside Kuwait, and some other forms of Islamic practices, prevalent among shi'i women.

In the second part I will discuss tomb visiting, vow making among Failakan's sunni community, and malid.

Many consider Islam, at least in theory, a religion which consists of

a uniform and well integrated ideology, but neither at the level of theory, nor practice, does this fact hold true.

The numerous sects and schools in Islam which have emerged since the death of the third caliph are only one example of differences and points of disagreement among moslems. (1)

In practice, this issue becomes even more complicated. In Saudi Arabia, a strict Moslem country with a native shii population, the shii religious practice during Muharam and Safar is highly restricted. Yet in Kuwait, also a country whose official sect is sunni Islam, and Saudi Arabia's neighbour, during these two months, and also during the year, the shi'a are free to practice their religious rites, without any intervention by the authorities\*.

Besides, there are many differences in the practice of Islam, within the same country, between shii and sunni sects. A great degree of difference is noticed in practicing Islam between men and women, within the same sect. So, for instance, the popular moslem practice of making vows for Imams and some dead shaykhs, is largely practiced among women especially from shii sect and Failakan women from both sects. This practice is very rarely observed among men, especially sunni men.

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\* For more details on shii community in Kuwait see 2.3.

Another example of this diversity, is the way the religious shi'i ritual of commemorating Hussayn's martyrdom is performed by each sex. In spite of the fact that during the night sessions of the religious gatherings held on this occasion, the same male shaykh recounts the religious stories, and poems connected with Hussayn's martyrdom, yet women react in a different way to these recitations.

So while men listen carefully to what is being recited, and in some cases weep very reservedly, beat their chests occasionally, except on the night of 'ashura where they beat their chests very strongly, women weep very profoundly, beat their chests and heads and sometimes scream in a very high voice.

Hence the way Islam is practiced differs in different moslem societies, and within the same societies, according to the sects, and even within the same sect it differs according to the sex.

#### 4.1 HUSSAYN'S MARTYRDOM

In this section, an account will be given of the story of Hussayn's martyrdom which took place on the tenth of Muharam year 61 H.D., which since then, the two first months of hijri calendar (Muharam and Safar) are considered mourning months by the shi'i community around the world, and special recitals and mourning ceremonies are held on this occasion.

After the death of Mu'awiyah ibn abi Suffyan, the first ousawit kha-

liph, his son Yazid assumed power. He was known for being a drunkard and a non observer of Islam. Hussayn,\* also called "the master of Martyrs", on the other hand, was decent, religious and very courageous. When Yazid asked him to approve of his Khalafat, Hussayn firmly refused. A short time before the beginning of pilgrimage (Haj), he gathered all his family (ahl-il-bayt) and let all the moslems who were congregating for pilgrimage at Mecca know that he was going to meet his followers in Iraq, to fight the tyrant and Godless Yazid. In Karbala in Iraq he met Yazid's soliders who, among many other ways of torture, prevented Hussayn

and his followers from gaining access to water, in the hot and arid desert of Karbala. During the ten days of fighting many members of Hussayn's family and followers died, among them some children. Yet the most tragic event in this war took place when Hussayn himself was martyred at the age of 57, on the tenth day of Muharam, year 61 after Hijra. (1) And his head was taken to Yazid's court.

From that day onward the day of Āshura (the tenth day), is commemorated by shi'i symbol of self sacrifice and seeking justice in the face of tyranny.

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\* Prophet Mohammed's grandson of his daughter Fatima and his cousin Ali. Along with his brother Hassan he was the favourite of the prophet.

This is the story as it took place in Karbala, but the origin of this story dates back (in the shi'i version) to a short time after the prophet's death. This story or event is the final outcome of the struggle between two different wings in Islam: the left led by Ali, the prophet's cousin and his son-in-law, and later to be the fourth Khaliph, and the right presented by Abu Bakr (the first Khaliph), Omar (the second Khaliph) and 'Uthman (the third Khaliph), the latest being a rich and an important member of Umawit family. (3) Two main stories are told about this disagreement: during his life the prophet had a village called Fadak. When he died, his daughter Fatima asked for her share in the village, but Abu Bakr who was then the first Khaliph refused to give it to her on the basis that the prophet has said that the prophets leave nothing for their descendants to inherit, and their belongings go to the poor people. Fatima, and apparently her husband Ali, were not convinced and took this as an act not only against them but also against the whole prophet's family. (4)

Fatima's ownership of this village has been a point of disagreement among the Khaliphs for a long time. Some Khaliphs accepted Fatima's descendants' right to this village and gave it back to them, only for it to be taken by other Khaliphs. This process continued, until the 'Abbasi Khaliph (al-Mutawakil) took the village back for good during his reign.

The other story is concerned with Ali's right to the moslem Khaliphate following the prophet's death.

The shi'a believe that the moslem khilaphet should have gone to Ali



after the prophet's death, on the basis that the Prophet during his life had uttered many sayings (hadith) which indicated that Ali was the most suitable to succeed him. When he was dying, moreover he wanted to have his testament written down, in which it is believed he was going to name Ali as his successor. This was refused by Omar and others, on the basis that the prophet was not in a healthy enough condition to have his testament written and pronounced accurately. (5) So the Khilaphet went to Abu Bakr to be followed by Omar and 'Uthman. This feeling of being deprived of his right to be a Khaliph, reached its peak during the Khilaphet of 'Uthman, the third Khaliph, when many facilities and privileges were given to Uthman's family members.

Hussayn's martyrdom, it could be argued, was a final outcome of this struggle, and the peak of the accumulation of many injustices done to "ahli-il-bayt".\* i.e. the member of the Prophet's family.

#### 4.2 THE HUSSAYNIYAH

The hussayniyah is the building where the occasion of commemorating Hussayn's martyrdom takes place, during the two months of Muharam and Safar.

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\* It should be stressed here that to make an objective assessment of this struggle is beyond the scope and the field of this thesis. What has been written in this thesis so far, on the subject of Hussayn martyrdom, is an interpretation of the shi'i version of this subject. This version does not contradict the view of Hussayn's martyrdom as revolutionary and a real attempt to conquer tyranny and injustice.

Hussaynias are usually founded by shi'i families in Kuwait. Among these families there are some who are sayid (the offspring of the prophet) or shaykh and mullah (having a traditional religious education), both known for their ability to recite on religious occasions. So, these families make a contract with a shaykh or a sayid who can recite in the hussayniyah during Muharam and Safar.

During other months of the year these hussayniyachs are kept under the supervision of a full time porter, and one or several members of the family who owns the hussayniyah. The expenses of the hussayniyah are usually paid by the rich members of the family, or by collecting the vows, which are not always money, but could be anything that could be of use in the hussayniyah, like a piece of furniture or cutlery.

In this type of hussayniyachs men usually recite during the evening (with the exception of 'ashura day when recitals and chest beating last for the whole day). In these hussayniyachs there are two entrances, one for women and another for men. Men usually sit in a big hall and the courtyard. The walls of the hussayniyah's hall are usually ornamented by pieces of the Quran and saying of the Prophet and Imams. Women sit on a big terrace overlooking the hall and on the roof. Men and women are placed in such a way that women are not necessarily stopped from seeing men. But the opposite (i.e. for men to see women in the hussayniyah) is not possible. Men cannot see women. During 'āshura night hussayniyachs get so crowded that people (men and women each taking a certain place) sit on the pavements surrounding the hussayniyah, and the police are

always called in to organise the traffic around the hussayniyah. Naturally, loudspeakers are provided so that everybody will be able to hear the recitals clearly.

Another type of hussayniyahs are those run by women of sayid origin (sayidahs) and mullayahs the feminine form of Mullah, the congregation of which are exclusively women.\*

Many hussayniyahs are named after the families owning them and/or the origin of the family. So, for instance, a hassawi hussayniyah is a hussayniyah which is founded by a hassawi family, and the dwellers of which are mainly hassawi. Yet it is important to point out that there is no discrimination between those who own the hussayniyah and their relatives, and those who do not belong to the family which own the hussayniyah, who may have a different origin. In all cases hussayniyahs are considered places of religious and public worship, open for everyone.

The preference for family hussayniyahs was more prevalent in the past. At present people usually prefer the hussayniyah in which a good Mullah or shaykh recites,\*\*

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\* This will be discussed in 6.3

\*\* This judgement about the quality of the recital depends largely on one's age, religious orientation, education and probably many other factors. So, for instance, a mullah who recites religious pieces and interprets the story of Hussayn's martyrdom in an intellectual way, might be seen by a young religious man as a very good mullah, yet the same Mullah might be taken as complicated and difficult to follow by a middle-aged or old woman. Observation shows that women of this age usually prefer sad recitals to which they can weep. Shi'i (men and women) who do not understand Arabic prefer Persian recitals, and vice-versa.

In some cases, some women, who have always been with a certain sayidah or Mullayah, prefer to go to her hussayniyah, even if it is not in their neighbourhood.

Women's hussayniyahs resemble to a great extent a dar (see 4.8), especially during Muharam and Safar, as they are very busy and crowded. This is mainly true in the case of hyssayniyah, which are originally the houses of the Sayidahs and Mullayahs, but during these two months are turned into hussayniyahs, by allocating two or three halls and the courtyard for the recital, without disturbing the order of their houses.

During these two months there are two or three sessions of religious recitals for women. One in the morning, and another in the afternoon, and a third in the evening, depending on the hussayniyah. Usually in these two sessions hussayniyahs (which hold two sessions), men's sessions are held in the evening only. In this case both men and women (who occupy two different places) listen to a men's recital, which is performed by more than one man at a night.

In women's hussayniyah, the attendants of the morning session usually consist of middle-aged and old women, who in fact do not work. Those who work during the morning, are usually younger middle-aged and young women. This group attends the afternoon and evening sessions.

Women of the former category (middle-aged and old women) usually attend all sessions depending on their household and family respon-

sibilities. The only exceptional day is the day of 'ashura, where everybody (men and women) attends the whole day. In addition to that, the 'ashura night, which is the night of the ninth day of Muharam, is also attended by everyone, even those who do not attend hussayniyah during other days.

On 'āshura day no shi'i goes to work or school. Although there is no written leave for students or employees, 'āshura day is paid, and no exams are held at school on this day.

Usually, women's hussayniyah s are also the houses of the Sayidahs or Mullayahs. The women who attend these hussayniyahs during the morning and afternoon, go to men's hussayniyah in the evening, sometimes accompanied by mullayahs. Some hussayniyahs have both mullayahs and mullahs or sayids. Sayid is believed to be the descendent of the prophet's family, through his cousin Ali and his daughter Fatima. In this chapter the word Sayidah is used mainly to indicate the woman who is the descendant of the prophets family and also participate in religious activities. Many members of sayid families do not participate in these activities. In these hussayniyahs which belong to sayid's family three sessions a day are held, but these are very few in Kuwait. In most cases women's hussayniyah consists of one or more big halls in their houses, a front courtyard for the attendants and a back courtyard or a big kitchen, where tea and coffee are prepared and food is cooked.

The woman who recites first whether a Sayidah or a Mullayah usually sits in a central place in the room, against the wall (some use a pulpit to

sit on while they recite), other Sayidahs, mullayahs and elderly women sit around her.

Some women bring their children with them, especially during the afternoon session, when children are not at school. However, this phenomenon is not as usual as it was in the past, due to the availability of housemaids.

Usually, every mullayah and/or sayidah has a group of women who accompany her on her visits to other hussayniyachs. Even if they have their own hussayniyachs, some sayidahs and mullayahs recite in other hussayniyachs, in return for a certain sum of money or on a voluntary basis. This process is arranged in such a way that it does not overlap with the hours during which they have recital sessions in their own hussayniyachs. The women who accompany the sayidah and mullayah are from different classes and families. Yet in spite of this fact they participate in the work done in the hussayniyah during Muharam and Safar, and especially in the 'ashura day and other wafāt\* days. Not only because of the respect they have for Hussayn, but also because of the work they do in the hussayniyah they

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\* During the Muharam and Safar there are many wafāt occasions (wafat literally means death, but here it is used to indicate a mourning day). The most important of these is Abbas and Ali asghar's and Ali Akbar's (Hussayn's children). Another important wafat, outside Muharam and Safar is Ali's. For these three mourning days are held in Ramadan. These three days are the days on which Ali was injured by Ibn-il-Muljam in his attempt to kill him by the sword, on the third day Ali died. During these three days mourning ceremonies are held in all Hussayniyachs.

will be highly rewarded by God in their after life. This is especially so with the work they do, especially the cooking in the 'āshura.

Nevertheless, there are a group of women in every hussayniyah who are more active than others, and these are the women who are mullayah's close freinds or who live in the neighbourhood and have more time to be in the hussayniyah than others.

It is important to point out that socio-economic change has affected hussayniyahs. Some Sayidahs and mullayas have housemaids (usually Indian or Philipinos, who are certainly moslem, as sayidahs and Mullayahs (who are supposed to be the most observant of religious doctrines) are not supposed, and in fact do not, employ non-moslem such as Christians or Buddhists, who in shi'i Islam are considered defiled. In spite of the fact that most of the maids are not shi'i, they are the ones who take care of the hussayniyah whereas, in the past, this task was entirely done by the women who come to the hussayniyah. However, the work done in the hussayniyah, especially during the first ten days of Muharam are too heavy to be done by one or two maids, so it is inevitable that some other women should participate in it.

Before and after the sessions tea and coffee are served. Also hubble-bubble is served for those women who smoke. In 'āshura the lunch is cooked in the hussayniyah. The 'ashura lunch consists of rice and mutton. It is eaten by the people in the hussayniyah, and also taken to people's houses, especially of the mullayah's relatives and friends, the relatives and friends of the owner of the hussayniyah, and the people who

have contributed to the money collected for the hussayniyah. The meat and rice are brought by the owners of the hussayniyah and the people, some of whom might bring a sack of rice or a sheep in order to fulfill a vow that they have made during the year.

During Muharam and Safar women might also make a vow called "hallal-il-mashakil" i.e. "the problem solver", and this vow is fulfilled by bringing an amount of candies, enough to distribute a handful to each woman (usually in one night, in any hussayniyah the minimum number of women reaches 200). This vow is devoted to Imam Ali who himself is described as "the problem solver".

During the time they spend in hussayniyah, women discuss many issues together (before and after the recital and also during the breaks). They discuss their family problems. They ask each other about the solution for many religious difficulties and problems they might encounter in their everyday life. In this case they ask the mullayah, or a certain woman who might be known for her ability to interpret the "hadiths" i.e. sayings of the Prophet, and difficult religious points. At present, the young generation of women, influenced by the so-called religious resurgence do act as kinds of religious "sources" for the older ones. This may be because being educated and religiously oriented they have more access to religious books, or because, some of them are also active in a shi'i society called "the socio-cultural society". Here they can contact men, some of whom are renowned for their ability to interpret the prophet's and Imams sayings and to give the appropriate solutions for many religious problems. This



young generation of women thus act as mediators between the old and middle-aged women, and the "knowledgeable" men.

In addition to this role, hussayniyahs have a social role. For many, Muharam and Safar are the most bustling and somehow eventful months of the year. This applies to all age categories, including the children, as some mothers take their children with them to the hussayniyah, especially those mothers who do not have governess at home. (There is usually a place in the hussayniyah, where children can play together, either a place in the same hall or courtyard where women sit, or in the less affluent areas children usually play in the streets around the hussayniyah.)

For many young girls, especially those who have religious and restrictive families, Muharam and Safar are the only months in which they can go out and enjoy the company of their friends, in the hussayniyah. Usually young girls choose a certain corner in the hall or the courtyard or the roof to sit in, and there they discuss many subjects. These subjects are not necessarily religious, they discuss the subject of the latest television film, the design of a certain dress, or the latest cooking recipe, or they might simply discuss their own personal problems, or gossip about a certain girl or teacher. This usually takes place before and after the sessions, or even while the recitals are on, but at this stage they have to speak in a soft voice or even whisper, in order not to be heard. Among this category and also the middle-aged category, there are some who might bring

cakes and candies that they have cooked at home, to distribute among the women.

For other age groups, going to hussayniyah also represents a social occasion, as well as a religious one. Many women who used to live in the same community before the socio-economic change but were then scattered into different and distant suburbs, are able to see each other frequently (almost every day), and renew their old friendships during these two months. They might also meet women who live in their actual neighbourhood but who they had no time to exchange visits with before. They might therefore, start visiting each other in future.

In addition to that many new friendships are made, and many marriages are arranged. Many women chose their future daughters-in-law, during these two months, and this takes place in a very careful and, to some extent, slow and secretive way, as the girl is put under her future mother-in-law's observation for two months, without her being aware of it. Sometimes one girl might be "observed" by several women who are contemplating having her as their daughter-in-law. Also a hussayniyah is the best place, since many women are gathered there, to make enquires about a certain girl and her family, the latter being most important for a successful marriage in most moslem societies.\*

\* Only the process of choosing a future daughter-in-law is made during these two months, but no proposals or even simple discussions are made during this period, as Muharam and Safar are considered to be months of mourning during which no marriage or any other kind of parties or ceremonies take place.

Hence it is not a coincidence that many men believe that the mourning months of Muharam and Safar are women's id.\*

It is worth mentioning that among Shi'i community, smoking hubble-bubble, called in the Gulf Gidu, is considered a normal practice for women, in most families. Whereas in sunni community it is considered outrageous for women to smoke, but not men, the same thing applies to smoking cigarettes. Smoking Karaku (a special hubble-bubble, frequent among zār patients) is also considered as a disrespectful act. Yet female zār patients justify this act as being a demand of their assyad i.e. jinn. At present smoking Gidu in Shi'i community is considered "old fashioned", hence few young women smoke it, and it is now a habit more common among middle-aged and old women. It is worth mentioning that Gidu is smoked by Shi'i women and also served to visitors (usually women, as men, especially young and middle-aged, smoke cigarettes). Unlike Karaku which is smoked more frequently in the dūr (sing. dar), and except for some old patients it is not smoked freely at home. It should be mentioned that for both Shi'i and sunni communities smoking cigarettes by women is considered an outrageous and disrespectful act.

Two comparisons might come to one's mind at this stage. One is the comparison between the hussayniyah and the dar. And the other is the com-

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\* A moslem celebrating occasion. The two moslem ids are id al-adha and id-al-fitr.

parison between men's and women's hussayniyahs.

As for the first, it is important to point out that the feeling of sisterhood, which is so obvious among the patients of a certain dar, is not frequent or even existent among the goers of the same hussayniyah. This is mainly because the women who go to the hussayniyah are not ill; in fact going to hussayniyah is a sign of social conformity. Dar goers, however, are considered ill. And also going to the dar has in many cases a concomitant stigma. So the feeling of sharing the same illness, which is prevalent among the same dar patients is not existent in the hussayniyah.

The other factor is the ease with which attendance at a hussayniyah is changed. It is a religious obligation for shi'i women to go to the hussayniyah, but there is no obligation to visit the same hussayniyah, except in very few cases such as being the owner of the hussayniyah or an old and close friend of the mullayah or the owner of the hussayniyah. In fact many women visit several hussayniyahs in Muharam and Safar.

In the case of the dar freedom of movement is restricted to some extent - as the dar of the mama who treats the patient has always an absolute priority. Another important factor is that dar is a place open to the patient for the whole year while hussayniyahs are open only for two months in the year. The exception is the syidahs and mullayahs houses which are open to syidahs' and mullayahs' close friends and relatives, but even then it is not like a dar.

As for the comparison between men's and women's hussayniyah, it should be mentioned that emotionality has always been taken as an attribute of the female sex, in moslem culture. This fact is nowhere manifested more clearly than in the hussayniyah, and during death ceremonies.

In hussayniyah some men weep when the tragic events of Hussayn's martyrdom are told, but they weep quietly and in a reserved way. Many men, especially those who hold important positions, must be known to be in control of their emotions. And in fact weeping is not an obligation. Yet it is very rare for a shi'i woman to attend hussayniyah and not to weep. However, there are two different attitudes towards weeping among men. Some, usually the educated young men, think that the purpose of going to hussayniyah and commemorating Hussayn's martyrdom is an act of reminding the shi'i community of the origin of their own sect, and the suffering Hussayn and his followers have gone through to save the sect. Hence for them going to hussayniyah should not necessarily include weeping. The purpose is to educate and to raise one's awareness. This category thinks that women weep in the hussayniyah because they are emotional and do not know the real reason for going to hussayniyah. Also because they have many problems in their life, the only place where they can discharge the sadness caused by these problems is the hussayniyah. According to this view when a woman weeps for Hussayn, she is actually weeping at her own misfortune and crying out her sorrow concerning other things. However, it is noticed that after the recital session many women keep on weeping, while mentioning a deceased person who was dear to them. Some women, when talking about a certain woman who has a recent death in her family, would say, describing her inability to forget this death even after some time "The poor woman did not stop weeping at all in

the hussayniyah".

Another category believes weeping in hussayniyah, especially in 'ashura, to be obligatory and a highly virtuous act. Yet they (men) do not weep as vigorously as women. The most enthusiastic men would beat their chest on the ninth and tenth ('ashura) night of Muharam, for a long time - sometimes, chest beating lasts for three to four consecutive hours, during which a certain group take a break, while another group continue or start beating their chest. In a few hussayniyabs chains are used for this purpose, yet those who use them are not Kuwaiti, they are either Iraqi or Iranian. The process of chest beating to the rhythm of special poetic recitals, in many hussayniyabs lasts from midnight until dawn.

No matter what men think about women, it is obvious that hussayniyah visiting has a social as well as a religious role for both sexes.

#### 4.3 THE SYIDAH AND THE MULLAYAH

The syidahs enjoy more respect than mullayahs due to their descent. They are of the shi'i sect. Those syidahs and mullayahs who live in Kuwait, and are proper Kuwaiti residents, are of Iranian or Iraqi origin. But there are many mullayahs, mainly Iraqis, who live in Kuwait, without being Kuwaiti residents. Like many others they hold Iraqi passports, and their residency is arranged through a relative, usually a son or hus-

band or father who works in Kuwait. But through their positions as mullayahs\* they lead a better life compared with other non-Kuwaitis.

The sayidahs enjoy great respect among the shi'i community in Kuwait, but unlike mamas this respect is not a result of their powerful jinn (assyad), i.e. their control over superhuman or spiritual force, but merely because of their descent. But the difference between a mullayah and a sayidah is that the former holds religious sessions in either their own hussayniyahs, or other people's hussayniyahs. And it is usually the mullayah who recites. In fact, mullayahs gain their position, due to their ability to recite in hussayniyahs, and also to read and write.

The implication of sayidah ancestry is most important whenever a vow is made. As it is very frequent, among the shi'i community (especially among women), to make a vow whenever a problem, such as a marital problem occurs or the occasion of a relative's illness, and other problems. When the problem is resolved the vow is fulfilled by taking a present to the sayidah, if she is not in need of money. This takes place when the sayidah is still alive. When they are not, sometimes the money is given to their children.

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\* The term Mullayah was also used in the past for women of both shi'i and sunni sects who were teaching Quran and sometimes preliminary writing to girls in their houses.

In other countries, the same money could be distributed among the poor who gather usually in the graveyard in which the tomb of the sayid or sayidah is situated. Or, otherwise the money is given to a man whose job is to recite Quran on the tombs in return for a certain sum of money. This is not done in Kuwait as the shi'i community bury their adult dead in Najf, a religious city in Iraq.

The importance of ancestry emerges from the "power" laid in it. This "power" is manifested through the ability of a sayid to make a certain vow come true. In this case, people usually describe the sayid's "power" by saying "this sayid's Jad (grandfather) is strong".

In this matter one notices that, as in the case of the mama, one's power is attributed to agents outside the person himself. But while in the mama's case her power is taken from her jinn, who are not known by people, and have many mysterious and unclear attributes, in the case of sayids their "grandfather" is the prophet himself. One might wonder why, since all sayids have one single jad i.e. one shared ancestor, people should describe a certain sayid who has the ability to make vows come true as having a strong jad and another one who has not this ability as having a weak jad. In fact this expression does not imply the physical ancestry, it rather means that the jad shows more affection and respect for him than for

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\* Some years ago, there was a tomb of a pious man called shaykh Gharib, in Kuwait's shi'i cemetery, to which shi'i people used to make vows. These vows were fulfilled by distributing fruit and money among the beggars who used to gather in the cemetery, or to have Quran recited on his tomb, these were done every Thursday afternoon. But this is no longer performed as these practices are banned, and even usual visits to the cemetery are restricted to certain days of the week.



other sayids. It is also important to note that there is no certain sayid or a group of sayids who are known to have the strong jad. It usually depends on individual experiences; so for instance, if a certain woman has made several vows, for certain sayid, the majority of which have come true, she is more likely to believe that this sayid has the strong jad. And probably she will encourage other people to make their vows to this certain sayid, mentioning her vows as examples.

In spite of the fact that sayidahs still enjoy respect due to their descent, they had a more notable position in the past. Being brought up in a religious family, and being descendants of a sayid family,\* Which have always had in Kuwait a religious and educational role, sayidahs were among few females who were capable of reading and writing. Some of the sayidahs held Quranic schools at their houses, in which they taught girls to read Quran, in return for certain sum of money. This factor, along with their religious descent, gave them an active role in the community in the past, and they do still have an important position at present.

In the past they were the only ones to turn to whenever a religious problem was encountered by a woman. In this case either the sayidah herself would answer women's questions or consult one of her male relatives.

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\* Many sayid families have a genealogical tree through which they claim their descent.

In addition to their ability to read Quran, their possession of "barakah", i.e. religious spiritual power has allowed them to "read on the sick", especially the children. It is believed that Quranic pieces, having "subjective power" in themselves, will be even more powerful when read by a member of a sayid family who also possesses a "subjective power" due to his descent. This explains the act of having the sayidah or the sayid touching the sick, especially his head, when he "reads on him", because it is believed that the sayid's curative power is transmitted to the sick person.

In the past a child was immediately taken to the sayid whenever he felt sick. Nowadays, this process is not practiced very frequently, due to the availability of health clinics and hospitals.

The other curative method which is practised by the sayidah, also more frequently used in the past, is the writing of hijab i.e. amulet. This amulet, which usually contains Quranic pieces or religious recitals, and sometimes unclear phrases, was either hung around one's neck or placed in one's pillow.\* It is believed that this amulet protects the sick person from evil forces, or an evil eye, which have caused the illness. It is worth mentioning that the illness is not always manifested in physical ailments. In the case of adults, it might be an inexplicable feeling of depression, a nervous or mental breakdown or an inability to bear children. Amulets are also used in the case of social problems, like continuous failure at school, or a marital problem or any other similar problem.

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\* For more details on traditional treatment see chapter 4.

Sayidahs (especially the pious and old ones) are beleived to have the ability of foreseeing the future, even without using any special method. They are believed to have this ability given to them by God, due to their piousness and pure descent. So they might just dream of a certain thing taking place, and this event will come true. Or they might see in their dream a certain Imam telling them that a certain thing will take place in the future, and later this thing comes true.

It is important to point out that only very pious sayidahs and sayids, and pious ordinary people can have the privilege of seeing an Imam in their dream.\*

Some sayidahs are able to foretell their death. When the prophecy about one's death comes true, the sayidah gains even more respect, after her death, and her prophecy will be taken as a proof of her piousness, and religious power. The sayidah's relatives, especially younger sisters and daughters recount this prophecy, only to add to the reliability of their

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\* The way the Imams are recognised in the dreams, depends on their clothes, and the things they are carrying. So a man who is dressed in green is mostly Abbas, Hussayn's brother. The one who dresses in white and carries a sword is mostly Imam Ali. A white, quiet woman dressed in white is mostly Fatima, the prophet's daughter. All Imams appear in the dreams, in white and with a bright and pure face. When dreaming of an Imam one wakes up suddenly, sweating and frightened.

ability and power as religious people. And it is more likely that after such a prophecy women make more vows to the relatives of the deceased sayidah.\*

Usually when a sayidah dies her closest relative (a daughter or a younger sister) takes her place. This position does not need to be allotted by the sayidah. But so often the relative who has taken many responsibilities in the hussayniyah, and who is able to recite, is the one who is more likely to take the sayidahs place after her death, or when she gets too old to be able to recite or to carry out the responsibilities of the hussayniyah.

Nevertheless, by getting old or weak a sayidah does not lose her position or her spiritual power in society. She will still be respected, yet her activities will naturally not be as great as they used to be during her youth.

It should be mentioned that the factors which play an important role in creating a mama are not the same in the case of sayidahs and mullayahs. In the case of sayidahs, the main factor for the respect they enjoy is

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\* At the end of Safar 1406 H.D.(1986 A.D.) a sayidah, age around eighty, and known for her piouness, told the women who were gathered in her hussayniyah to listen to her last recital at the last day of Safar, that she will not be alive next year, and she has chosen her relative to read in her place, and asked the attendants to forgive her. Seven months later, she died, and her prophecy was taken as a sign of her piouness.

their ancestry, for the mullayahs it is their ability to recite religious verses, and also their ability to read and write and to interpret Quran. While mamas enjoy the respect and devotion of their "daughters", and are considered their spiritual mothers, the mullayahs and sayiddahs do not enjoy love and respect to the same extent by these who frequent their hussayniyahs. Due to their ability to treat their patients mamas leadership is felt by their daughters. This element of leadership is very rarely felt in the case of sayyidahs and mullayahs.

In addition to their spiritual role the sayidahs participate in many social occasions. There is a famous vow among the shi'i community in Kuwait called shay-11-'Abbas ('Abbas tea) which is a vow dedicated to 'Abbas, Hussayn's cousin. It is a sort of traditional tea party. In these parties tea, cakes and candies are served. The mullayah attends these parties not to perform a certain recital, but only because they are socially accepted as women of high status. And it is rather prestigious to invite a mullayah or a sayidah to any social occasion.

Marriage parties are another occasion to which sayidahs and mullayahs are always invited, especially when there is a Jalwa in the marriage party. The Jalwa is a ceremonial ritual which is performed in the following manner:

The bride, at the beginning of the marriage ceremony, is situated in the middle of the hall in which the party is taking place. She dresses in green, her traditional golden jewellery should be worn. The bride's

friends hold a big green cloth and sway it over the bride's head, while singing certain songs in which the mullayah or the sayidah takes the lead, and others repeat some pieces after her. These songs have religious connotations and they usually praise the prophet and his family members. In the sunni marriage parties the Jalwa is also performed but instead of the mullayah, there are certain popular female singers who sing. Jalwa represents only one stage in the marriage, after which the bride changes into a white dress and the usual ceremony continues. The sayidah or mullayah sing in the Jalwa sometimes as a courtesy for either or both celebrating families.

The sayidah herself might play a certain part in arranging a certain marriage, as it is a very prestigious act for a would-be-mother-in-law to take a sayidah with her when she goes to ask for her future daughter-in-law's hand. It is not only a sign of respect that the man's family have for the girl's, but also it means that the girl's family has less opportunity to refuse to give their daughter to that family. The sayidah's presence also gives this marriage a brakah i.e. a spiritual blessing.

The above briefly discusses the sayidahs role in happy social occasions. Yet the sayidah's and mullayah's role is more noticeable in sad occasions. It is important to note that on bereavement the shi'i family receive condolences for three consecutive days, the seventh day and the fortieth day following the death of one of their family members. In these days the family of the deceased gather in the deceased's house, women usually stay at the house while men stay for this purpose in the family's

hussayniyah or any other hussayniyah.

On this occasion one or more sayidahs or mullayahs are brought to read religious pieces incorporating Hussayn's martyrdom and other relevant stories. The younger the deceased the more sad the stories recounted. During the recital women weep and sometimes subject themselves to self-mutilation, especially those who are the close friends and relatives of the deceased, mainly the mother, the wife and sisters. Following the weeping, which sometimes lasts the whole day, especially when the deceased is young, the mullayah who has been reciting for one or more hours stands up and starts to recite rhythmic religious poems, also recounting stories concerning Hussayn's martyrdom, to which women start chest beating. This process is performed as follows:

The close relatives and friends (especially the middle-aged), being the most concerned, sit close to the sayidah or mullayah. When the chest beating starts those women stand up and start chest beating while they sway backward and forward. Many women bare their heads at this stage. Chest beating lasts between half an hour and one hour. At the end many women fall down or faint. Towards the end of the recital, the syidah or mullayah raises her voice and recites faster. The older and weaker stay sitting while they weep and beat their chest to the rhythm of the recital. At the end the mullayah recites prayers and hymns praising the prophet and his family members. During the whole session some women while they weep loudly call the names of their own deceased relatives, who might have died some years ago. Other women may simply read the Quran, many copies of which are

distributed among them. When chest beating stops and after paying condolences to the family some women start to leave.

Other women (close relatives and friends) stay. Even at this stage there might be some who still weep.\*

The other occasion in which the sayidah and the mullayah participate is when fulfilling a vow to recite Hussayn's martyrdom. This is performed in the same way as in the hussayniyah, yet in less sad way.

The other vow is to recite from the Quran, usually for three days. This is called a complete Khattmah.\*\*

A few days before the Khattmah starts, the woman who is fulfilling her vow makes time arrangement with the mullayah (usually the mullayah, or the sayidah who is chosen for this occasion is the one who is very close to

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\* In contrast to the shi'i death ceremony, the Kuwaiti sunni death ceremony (which last for three days), is very quiet and solemn, the Quran is merely read inaudibly by the visitors. The deceased relatives sit in the hall while wearing the 'abayah. The mother usually sleeps on a mattress in the hall and is strongly forbidden to weep, as it is believed by the sunni community that every tear which comes down from the mother's eye is transformed to piece of fire which burns her dead child in his tomb. The shi'i community does not believe in this notion. Also it is important to note that shi'i men death ceremony is also very quiet, in spite of the fact that there is a religious recital. Except in a few cases, men do not weep.

\*\* Khatmah, means literally concluding, in this case it means to finish reading the whole Quran.



the woman). When the date is fixed the woman calls her relatives and friends and ask them to attend her Khattmah recital. The sitting room and, if the room is not big enough, another room is prepared for receiving the visitors. In the days of the Khattmah, the mullayah and the visitors start coming to the house around 3 o'clock in the afternoon and stay until 8 o'clock in the evening. During these days Gidu, tea and coffee, and on the third day cakes and candies, are served.

The Quran is read by every woman who is capable of reading. Each one read a part of her own Quran (for Khatmah, parts of Quran, each in a separate copy, are brought from a hussayniyah or mosque). The books which are read, are set apart so that the women will know which parts have been read, so as not to read them again and be able to know if the Khatmah is completed, as sometimes more than one Khatmah is completed during three days. During these days the mullayah sometimes reads some parts of the Quran in a loud voice for those who are not able to read and usually recites some hymns during the break, when the other women repeat some of the hymns that they know.

Another type of Khattmah is called (Surat-il-in<sup>6</sup>am) i.e. the cattle sura which is the name of a Quranic chapter. This Khattmah is held by a woman who has a relative or a close friend suffering from a dangerous illness, the purpose of this Khattmah is to prevent death or any other kind of misfortune. During this Khattmah the cattle sura is recited by the sayidah or the mullayah in a loud voice. No reason is known for choosing this particular sura.

These represent the majority of islamic parctices performed by shi'i women in Kuwait. In addition to that one might add ziyarah\* travels. In these travels, which are usually arranged in groups of women or family members, the famous shi'i shrines\*\* in Iraq, Iran and the shrine of Zaynab, Hussayn's sister in Syria are visited. Usually the same group of women stay in a hotel near the shrine, and go three times to the shrine for the prayer. There is always a native shaykh who accompanies the women and read for them certain religious pieces, when entering the shrine. Women can travel without a male accompanying them to these shrines. Since the Iraq-Iran war these visits have decreased.

At the end of this section it should be noted that the women who frequently visit the shrines and hold religious sessions in their houses are considered very religious and pious. Hence the more religious a woman, the more respect she is to expect from society. Not only because she is expected to be rewarded in her after life, but also because, in general, people think that the closer the person is to God, through religious practices, further she is from devious and vicious practices.

Yet this does not necessarily indicate that such a woman is a reasoning person. She might even be described as a simple minded person who spends her time, money and energy on superficial religious activities.

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\* The literal meaning of the word is visiting.

\*\* The most famous shrines are Ali, Hussayn and Abbas in Iraq. & Imam Redha and Masumah in Iran.

#### 4.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS SAYIDAHS AND MULLAYAH

People differ in their attitudes towards sayidahs and mullayahs according to their social classes, their education, age and sex.

As explained above, mullayahs and sayidahs are highly respected by ordinary people and have a reputation for being modest, religious and kind to people. Sayidahs and mullayahs, being themselves in command of religious teachings, are believed to be "frightened of God's punishment" in their after life.\*

Being the descendants of the prophet's family, the sayidahs are supposed to be treated very kindly. In addition to their pure descent, this is due to their ability to hurt the people who are not kind to them, by complaining about them, during their prayers, or at any other time to God, or to their Jad, the prophet.

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\* There is a popular belief among the shi'i community in Kuwait (held mainly by old and religious people) that while ordinary guilty people are burned in fire, in hell, the sayids are also burned but in ice, a different substance, yet more painful, the reason for that is the fact that sayids who are the descendants of the prophet and also the bearers of his teachings have more responsibility before God, hence their punishment is more severe. This notion does not seem to contradict with other notion which implies that prophet and his family members will defend their offspring in their after life, for the minor mistakes that they might have done during their life and ask God to forgive them. This act is called "Shafa'ah", literally means "to stand for somebody". This notion is strictly condemned by Sunni Orthodox islam, as a result of which shrine visiting and vow making are banned. We will come across this notion later on this chapter, in the section on tomb and shrine visiting.

This act will anger God or his prophet, and bring harm upon the person who has hurt them. This explains people's fear and their care not to make any sayid bear any ill feelings against them.

These two factors also explain why a sayidah, whether she participate in religious activities or not, is highly respected by her husband, whether her husband is a sayid or not. She is also respected by her children and her husband's family.

There is nevertheless, a different view of sayidahs and mullayahs among some men whose wives always accompany sayidahs and mullayahs in their religious or social visits, outside the Muharam and Safar religious occasions. This category of men tend to describe sayidahs and mullayahs as "gossiping women", who use their religion for their own personal interest, use their position to compel people make a vow for them and invite them to every single occasion, and make them interfere in people's lives. The reason behind this attitude is these men's wives absence from home, and their inability to answer their children's and husband's demands. A somehow simple middle-class and responsible husband and father of nine children told of his discontent concerning his wife's absence from home due to her continuous, almost daily visits to a mullayah who lives in their neighbourhood as follows:

"My wife claims that she is religious and this is why she is so keen to go to the mullayah's house and accompany her on all her visits. But I know that what they are doing is not religious at all, as every time my wife comes back from the mullayah's house she has a hundred items of gossip and bad and sometimes hurting news of the whole world. I have always known gossiping about people as one of the most inhuman

acts one could ever do to someone else and our prophet has always advised people not to practice it, to the extent that he declared that a fasting person breaks his fast, if he gossips. And imagine that these women do gossip all the time, in a supposedly religious place on occasion. The other thing is that God and his prophet have always advised us to care for our family and our children, but what my wife and similar women are doing is exactly the opposite of this doctrine.

My wife always leaves the house unattended, especially during the mornings when the children are at school; except for the servants there is nobody at home. In the afternoons she leaves the children in their older sisters' care, who as you know are too young to take these responsibilities. Not only that, but she also orders my eldest daughter who is now in her last year in University, to take her and her mullayah and friends in her car to wherever they want to go in the afternoon. In a way she is being an obstacle to her daughter's academic success. Sometimes I feel embarrassed when visitors come to our house, and I have to tell them that my wife is not at home, she is in mullayah's house, and I have to send one of the children to call her. Many times she could not be found at the mullayah's house, as they had all gone somewhere else. You know, as a man I cannot stay at home and take care of the children and the house, I have my work in the morning, and in the afternoons, I have to go to the suq to see my friends. And besides, it is the woman's responsibility to take care of her house and children. But who can tell that to my wife. She would call anyone who argued with her on this subject an atheist and nonobservant of shi'i doctrines. She thinks that she is the only religious person in this house, and we are all godless. I am a religious man, I go to the hussayniyah every night during Muharam and Safar, and that is it. I can never imagine myself neglecting everything in my life and following the mullahs and sayids, who are in many cases, only idle and parasitic creatures of this society."

Some women, even those who consider themselves very religious, are against continuous visits to the hussayniyah and mullayahs houses, when these visits interfere with their family role. They think that the really religious woman is the one who carries out her religious tasks without allowing them to interfere with her family responsibilities. However, the women who themselves frequent the hussayniyahs and mullayahs houses do not seem to think that they are neglecting their families. Many of them think

that they are capable of running their homes and caring for their children while they continue visiting the sayidahs and mullayahs, which for them means performing an important religious obligation. Accompanying the sayidah and mullayah on their religious and social visits is also considered a religious obligation.

They regard their husbands's complaints as baseless. One woman told me that when husbands have nothing to complain about, they take our hussayniyah and mullayahs visits as a pretext for complaint.

The wife of the same man whose complaint is mentioned above claimed that:

I do not neglect my house for the sake of anything, no matter how important this thing might be. I have given all my youth to him and his children, and now that they are grown up and old enough to take care of themselves, it is my time to do something for my after life. Before I come to the mullayah's house I cook the lunch and make sure that everything is in order. And I tell the servants what to do while I am away. I come back before lunch and before anybody else. I see my children, the youngest of whom is eleven years old, at lunch time, and until four o'clock, then I leave them with their sisters. They do their homework, while I am at the mullayah's house. And I can only read Quran, and have no knowledge of what they do at school to be able to help them. And after all, it is not every day that I come to the mullayah's house. Sometimes, I come only once or twice a week, and that is it."

Sayidahs and mullayahs, like mamas, are subject to much controversy. Some regard them with high esteem and respect, yet some do not hesitate to call them charlatans and parasitic creatures. Generally, in the past, they had a more obvious role, due to the services they paid to society, but with the changes brought about by the new socio-economic conditions, their role has become less important. Hence while in the past they had a cura-

tive and religious role, at present their role is mostly confined to the social and religious fields. Nevertheless, with the emergence of young women's religious orientation, the mullayah's position has regained strength, as young women, are now, more than ever, increasingly willing to participate in religious occasions.

This importance given to religion has positively affected the mullayah's position. In spite of the availability of religious books, mullayahs are becoming more in demand to answer people's religious questions, especially those asked by old and middle-aged women.

Young religious women are now capable, mainly through the use of religious books, to find the answers for their religious problems. Many religious occasions, as Khattmah, are more frequently performed nowadays than in the past. The reason for that might be the relative freedom women have at present to perform and attend religious occasions than in the past where the whole extended family household was living in the same house. And also the economic situation has changed, now every middle-class woman can pay for the expenses of the 'Abbas tea, or Khattmah, without affecting her income.

Yet there is a category of women, who regardless of their social class and level of education, (as this category comes from different levels) who considers itself modern and rejects the old life style. The members of this category are usually westernized women. They consider the sayidahs and mullayahs and their "followers", as they call the women who

visit regularly the sayidahs and mullayahs, old fashioned. This category sarcastically calls any girl or woman who tries to look religious and preoccupies herself with religious matters "the mullayah".

Having discussed the most important forms of Islam among shi'i women in Kuwait, I will discuss the forms of Islam found among sunni women.

There are two main Islamic practices among sunni women in Kuwait:  
11 Malid and vow making for pious men's tombs in Failaka.

#### 4.5 MALID

Malid, more often known in other arab countries as Mulid, is the occasion of the prophet's birthday. In spite of the fact that the origin of the word is the same, Malid is used in its Kuwaiti context to designate the fulfilling of a vow, or the celebration of a certain event, like the birth of a child or the success of a certain medical operation by hiring a certain person who sings religious songs. In Kuwait there is a blind man,\* in his sixties, who is famous as a malid singer. He attends malid parties and sings certain songs, usually praising the prophet, and usually other women who attend the party also participate in the songs.

The woman who is holding a malid invites her friends and relatives in the evening, or less frequently in the afternoon. Usually women come in

\* The same man sings at zār ceremonies..



their best dresses and jewellery, as they might do when going to any other party. Women who attend the malid know why it is performed, so on entering the house, they congratulate the hostess for the happy event which the malid is celebrating.

In the malid tea and coffee, and sometimes dinner is served. Usually it is middle-aged and old women who hold malid, even if it is for their younger children, for example when a daughter gives birth to a son or one of her young sons has passed a difficult exam, or got an important degree. This son does not attend the malid, however, as men do not have access to this kind of women's ceremony.

Malid could be compared to any other social occasion, as the only religious element is that the songs which are performed are all sung in praise of the prophet and have a religious connotation.

It is important to point out that malid ceremonies are not as often as they used to be in the past. and one individual woman might not even hold malid more than three to four times in her lifetime. Some have never held malid.

All age categories attend malid ceremonies and while it has a religious role for the old and those who are in their late middle-age, for young women it is considered as a social occasion like any other occasion.

The other form of Islamic practice is vow making for pious men's

tombs in Failaka. This habit was as prevalent among Kuwaiti women as among the Failakan, but in the following section more stress has been put on the Failakan women's role in this practice, the purpose of this being to study the phenomenon in its social context.

I will trace in this section other beliefs prevalent among Failakans, and then continue to discuss tomb visiting, which is a female practice usually scorned by men.

#### 4.6 FAILAKA THE SACRED ISLAND

Failaka has always been known among Failakans and Kuwaitis to be a very sacred island. It is said so often that the land is full of "barakah". It is believed that dogs and snakes have never survived on this island. It is worth mentioning that those two animals are considered malignant in muslim culture. Yet the island was very famous for rearing rabbits and deer. The people of the island are considered very "superstitious" because they have many pious men's "maqam" i.e. the tombs of the pious men. These tombs they regard as very sacred and pay visits to them.

They also believe in the existance of some fabulous creatures on the island, the most famous of which are "baba darya" and "shaho".\* This point

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\* Notice the existance of the same creature in South Iranian islands, as mentioned by G. Sa'di. 1976

attracted Dickson's attention when visiting Failaka, even though in the pre-oil period mainland Kuwaitis themselves, especially the non-aristocrats, were strong believers in the same or similar creatures.

He wrote:

Most of the islanders firmly believe in the existence of a malignant demon, called Bu-Darya, who is said to frequent the sea around the island, especially between it and Maskan, and to entice the unwary out of their depth and drown them. Many also believe in Shahu, who is described as being like a woman with donkey's feet, hands like a cow's forefeet, and hair like a camel-load of brushwood. Shahu is also to be found, so it is declared, in Kuwait town." (5)

Surprisingly, the Failakan tendency to believe in "supernatural spirits" has not escaped the writers of "Failaka Touristic Guide", even it might have occurred to them that this point might be considered as a "non-progressive" attitude among the Failakans. The following piece is taken from Failakan Touristic Guide.

"The inhabitants of Failaka believe that their island is the home of a number of evil supernatural spirits. They believe, for example, in the existence of malignant sorceress named Umm Shahu who is half animal. She is thought to have her home in three large flat stones, level with the desert, some distance to the north of Al-zor, and is reputed to molest lone islanders after dark. The islanders also believe that a strange creature named by them Abu Darya or Baba Darya lives in the stretch of sea between Al-zor and Maskan island. He is said to leap from the sea and devour anyone who may happen to be sitting too close to the waves. As well as these, the islanders believe that a ghoul of type commonly met in Arab folk mythology lives on Failaka, they call him Tantal. Many islanders today disclaim any belief in the existence of any of these spirits and insist that they are all tales invented for the sake of the children to scare them from wandering too far alone, especially after dark." (6)

The legends which exist in Failaka are the same as those in Kuwait. Those stories which corresponds to jinn are also the same. Yet there is one point that should be mentioned here, and it relates to the Kuwaitis attitudes towards Failakans concerning Failakan's "superstitious beliefs". Although Kuwaitis do not deny that they do believe in the existence of "supernatural creatures" yet they think Failakans are so "simple" that they might believe anything that they are told. They are considered more "fatalistic" than Kuwaitis.

Now I will proceed to another point concerning Failkans' belief: The belief in the power of pious men\*, as a result of which, they have kept these pious men's tombs as places to be visited either to make a vow or fullfill a vow. These places are called "Maqam" or "Mazar".

The most famous Maqams are those of Khidre, Mohammed al-Badai, Shaykh Gharib, Shaykh Murad, Sa'ad, S'id and Sayid il Grayniyah. We will leave Khidre as the last Shaykh to be discussed and will start with the other Shaykhs.

#### Mohamed al-Badawi

His tomb is visited by the people. It is believed that he was a pious man during his life time and when he died the people noticed that he was wearing a ring on which his name was printed. They tried to take it

\* This belief is strongly condemned by orthodox Islam, as we will see later in this chapter.

off his finger before burying him, (as in the religion of Islam one must be buried naked, except for the shroud), but they could not take it off, so they buried him with his ring on his finger. This resistance of the ring to being separated from the dead body was considered as an additional sign of the piousness of that man.

#### Shaykh Gharib

The same story which was told of Al-Badawi is told of him. He had also acquired many devotees, and many vows were brought to his tomb.

#### Shaykh Murad

His tomb was next to Khidre's trace and people used to visit his tomb and consider him very powerful in achieving people's vows.

#### Sa'ad, S'ad and S'adah

The tombs of Sa'ad and S'ad (who were brothers) are at the South West of the island and the tomb of their sister (S'adah) is in the North West. The legend indicates that Sa'ad and S'ad quarrelled with their sister, and as a result of that, they deserted her and left her and moved to the South West. They stayed there until their death and they were buried in that part of the island while their sister was buried in her part.

### Sayid il Grayniyan

Grayniyah was thought to be the residence of a big tyrant who used to wear golden shoes. One day he needed to examine the sharpness of his sword, and in order to do that, he cut a child in two halves. As a result of that God punished him by ruining his residence which some old people still describe as his town. In Grayniyah there is the tomb of a Sayid called "Sayid il Graniyah", who was given the name of the place he was buried in. There is a story told about three knights dressed in white who came out of the tombs of Sa'ad and S'id at night and go to Grayniyah where they disappeared. It should be mentioned that the story of sayid il-Graniyah is not related in any way to the tyrant's.

### Khidre

The most current story about Khidre is that he is an immortal "wali" i.e. saint. He symbolizes fertility and greenery.\* His name is usually connected with Prophet Moses and Ilyas as it is said that when Moses returned to Egypt, his followers asked him if there was anybody who was more knowledgeable than himself. Moses answered no, but God blamed him for this answer, and told him that there was someone in the archipelago of Bahrain who possessed more knowledge than Moses. So Moses went to meet him there.

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\* Khidre is a derivative of akhdar, which means green.

The "mazar" or "Maqam" of Khidre, sometimes called "Khidre bu Mohammad" is not a tomb which belongs to him, as he is supposed to be still alive. It is his "athar", i.e. the place where it is believed that he walked, or even only put his foot. This trace of his foot is believed to have been printed on a rock. People think Khidre put one foot on this rock, as it is believed that he was a very huge, giant, even supernatural. When he took a step, he placed one foot on the site of the building and what was later the American Hospital, and the other on what was his "maqam", (the distance of this step is over ten miles) to cross the sea. The hole left from his stick is believed to be near his foot trace. The "maqam" is right on the shore, and people in the past used to know that they had arrived to Failaka by seeing it from a distance. It was for this rock that people made their vows. Around it the people used to stick wet henna, and pour rose water and candles. This rock was situated in a small room which was about 3-5 meters high and people used to go there using rocky stairs.

It is believed that Khidre visits Failaka every Thursday and stays the night there and leaves on Friday morning. This is why people who want to have their wish come true, especially when it is an important wish like having a sick person treated, used to spend the whole Thursday night (in Arabic it is called Friday night and it is considered a very sacred night) in the "maqam". They believe that Khidre might pass there and he might appear in their dreams while they are asleep and make their wish come true. This "maqam" was very famous and many pilgrims used to visit it from Kuwait, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Khidre is also known to have left

traces in other areas like Iraq and Abadan in Iran.

The rituals performed around the "maqam" were as follows:

The people used to go inside the room, sprinkle rose water over the rock, put some candies, read the Quran, give the poor some money and take a green ribbon for "luck" from the person who was the caretaker of the "maqam",\* and give him some money in return. People who had made a vow to slaughter a sheep, slaughtered it either inside the room or outside and put some of the blood on the rock. Some beggars used to gather there and take money from the visitors. The most important vows that people used to make were usually concerned with the problems and misfortunes they encountered in their everyday life. A woman might make a vow to get a child. In this case she goes to Khidre and, while having the lower part of her dress tied to the lower part of a dress of a woman who has children, they both walk around the rock. During this time she makes a vow, which might be to bring a sum of money or a sack of rice and distribute it among the poor, or to slaughter a sheep, or to give anything else as a vow, when she gets a child.

If a ship (usually) gets into difficulty on its way to or from the island, the travellers might make a vow in the hope of reaching their destination safely.

In the case of a very sick person he or his family might make a vow

\* The last and the most famous caretaker was a woman called "Salha".



to seek treatment. In this case the sick person was taken to Khidre on Thursday night to sleep there. The family and friends (usually only a small number of people accompanied the invalid as the place was very small) spent a part of the night reading Quran and then slept, hoping that they might see Khidre in their dream and ask to achieve their wish.

Other vows were made for a relative or oneself to get married or pass an exam, or get promotion.

Khidre was known to perform many miracles, such as giving a child to someone who has not been able to have one for a long time, treating hopeless cases of sickness and saving ships in stormy and violent seas.

A Failakan woman has told of this "miracle" of Khidre that took place for her fifteen years ago:

"My daughter was in Kuwait on a visit to her aunts, when she had a very bad car accident. When I heard about it, I went immediately to Kuwait. In the hospital I found my daughter covered by bandages, she could not talk or move or even open her eyes. I stayed with her for over a month. Her injuries were treated and the bandages were lifted but my daughter could not talk or even realise what was going on. The doctor told us that there was nothing he could do for her, as the accident had affected her brain and she would probably remain paralysed for ever.

I took my daughter and came back to Failaka. That day every Failakan came to see her, and they all thought that she would never recover. They were very sorry for both of us, because I as well was very sad to see my young daughter in this situation. My friends advised me to take her to "Khidre bu Mohammed Peace be upon him". So I decided to take her to him on the following Thursday. We went, my sister, my 'half dead, half alive,' daughter and myself.

My sister and I spent a long time that night reading Quran in the "maqam" and made a vow. My sister slept, but I could not sleep except for a very short time, just before the dawn. I dreamt that somebody whom I could not see was telling me to get up. This is called "Tawgidah".\* I got up and stayed awake until the dawn prayer. We prayed and went home. The next day my daughter started to recover, and after several days she was quite well. I took all my friends and relatives to Khidre to fulfill my vow. And there I told them my dream. They all considered it a miracle, the one who had awakened me was Khidre."

Another miracle of Khidre is the fact that nobody can steal anything of his Maqam. Should he attempt to do so something bad might happen to him. Or if some people took something of his "maqam" like a pot or a glass, without knowing, their boat would not move until they took this thing back.

Khidre of course was the most famous "maqam" in Failaka, and Kuwaitis as well as Failakans consider him superior to and more powerful than other pious men, to the extent that some people consider him an Immortal prophet.

In spite of the popular belief in "walis" and "Imams", and most people's respect for the memory of those pious men, and their (Maqams), and the existence of many rituals connected with them, orthodox Islam is strongly against the "fetishizing" of human beings or objects. This applies to all human beings, ordinary ones or even prophets. The simplicity in which the tomb of prophet Mohammed is kept is only one sign of this attitude, and among many points that are considered to be a point of disagreement between Shi'i and Sunni Islam is refuting of the latter of the Shi'i and popular Sunni practice of "human worshipping".\*\*

\* It is meant for somebody who makes somebody wake up deliberately.

\*\* This word is used by orthodox to describe the practice of visiting shrines.

As for the people of Failaka, (the majority of whom are Sunni) the maqams of the pious men there are held in great respect by both Sunni and Shi'i. Many Kuwaitis of both sects used to go to Failaka especially to fulfill their vows. The most important of all walis was Khidre. Yet, in spite of these facts, or one should say, due to these facts, the shrine of Khidre was demolished in around 1974.

Prior to the demolishing of this most famous "maqam" in Failaka, a book which was a result of a religious action was published. (7)

This book contains eight fatawi\* of religious shaykhs from Kuwait, Najd (in Saudi Arabia) Egypt and Syria, regarding the religion point of view concerning Khidre's maqam. This book also consists of a short chapter written by the author of the book who is a religious shaykh and an introduction by the publisher, all condemning this and other shrine's visiting.

It is important for a full understanding of this subject to quote this part of the introduction.

"... It has proved for the men of Science, that the Islamic nation "Ummah", was strong, as long as its monotheism was strong, and when the monotheism has become defective, weakness started to eat away the Ummah, to the extent that it was almost about the ruin this Ummah if it had not been for the virtue of some people who worked for the unification of God. The worst thing that has stricken this Ummah is sacrificing to men. So everything that should be given to Allah alone, like love, fear, hope, pleading and calling for help, all these things were given to those men, not to God. So you see a man makes a pilgrimage to Hussain's tomb, and another to Zeinab's and

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\* Interpretation or opinion by a knowledgeable moslem authority concerning a certain problem or issue.

another to Badawil's. In this way, you see some members of this Ummah pray to God by their bodies, yet their hearts are directed to these ruined rocks. And shrines were built in the muslim world, and the wearer's of "Amamah"\* do their best to take care of them and to create stories about them for the purpose of abusing peoples's money.

And God has created in every time some men who take people back to real monotheism. The most devoted tombs worshippers are the sufis and "al-rawafid"\*\* then some laymen who have followed them.

In Kuwait the tomb worshippers have taken care of a place that they call incorrectly the maqam of Khidre. And they make pilgrimages to this place and there they sacrifice animals. You even see them more in awe when they are around this place, than when they kneel in praying to God." (9)

On this chapter "on the visiting of the tombs" the author differentiates between two kinds of visiting the tombs of prophets and pious men. The first kind of visiting is "shar'iyah" the legal or lawful visit, and the other is "bid'iah" which means innovative.

"The legal visit is meant for greeting them, and reciting religious prayers on them, it is also meant for the sake of performing funeral prayers on them, the purpose of which is taking lessons and remembering the after life. This visit is legal.

The second kind, is to visit these tombs, the way the idolators and the people of innovations do in order to pray for dead men and ask them to fulfill their wishes, or when someone believes that praying on the tomb of one of those men is better than that done in the mosques and houses, or to swear by their names and to ask God for something

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\* Turban worn by men. This phrase is used to describe the popular muslim shaykhs.

\*\*The word is a derivative of the verb "yarfud" i.e. refuse and it is currently given to shi'i muslim.

through them, and believing that this practice is legal, and it would lead to the fulfilling of this prayer. This kind of visiting is innovative, and it is strongly condemned." (9)

This chapter written by the author, and the "fatawis" sent to him upon his request are concerned with the refutation of this "primitive" and "atheist" habit. The main points discussed in all these "fatawis" are similar, although they have been sent for different parts of the world, yet the orthodox Islamic points of view have always the same essence. The points are as follows:

The first point which is discussed is concerned with the notion of immortality of Khidre. This point is refuted on the grounds that if there was any one who is immortal, he would be certainly mentioned in Quran, as this fact would have been considered as one of the strongest evidence of God's miracles.

The second point is that the fact that he was born prior to Noah and is still alive is clearly untrue, as it is mentioned in Quran that after the drowning of Noah's ship, the people's of Noah, or the race of Noah were the only ones who survived.

The third point is that if he was alive he would have come to meet prophet Mohammed, as it is known that the prophet has said if Moses was alive he would have followed me.

There are some other points which are mentioned to refute the notion

of Khidre's immortality. The points that have been mentioned here are the most prevalent and most important.

The second subject which is mentioned in that book is the subject of "tombs visiting" in general. And as we have seen in our previous discussion, this was also condemned and considered a "bid'ah".

If we regard only the word "Islam" as meaning submission, in this case submission to God, we can easily infer that in a society where shrines and tombs are regarded as sacred places, and pious men are highly respected and considered as "mediums" between people and God, the notion of total submission could not govern.

It was not long after the publication of this book that the "maqam" of Khidre was demolished. Many people in Kuwait and Failaka were furious, but as the great majority of these people were women, nothing was done about it. This maqam has stayed for a long time as an ordinary tomb, flattened on the earth. Yet women continued to go there and make their vows, perhaps less enthusiastically and with less ritual and festivity. If for example a woman wanted to slaughter a sheep in an act of fulfilling a vow, she would slaughter the animal at home and distribute its meat among the poor and later in the day she would go to the tomb and recite some Quranic surahs and sprinkle some rose water on the tomb.

In 1985 at the place of the tomb a military observation post was placed and people are strictly prohibited from approaching the place yet

some people, especially women, still make (perhaps less frequently) some vows to Khidre without visiting the tomb.

The rituals and visits on social occasions to Khidre, like the visit of bridegroom with the guests and relatives to Khidre on the night of his marriage, are now non-existent, and they are told as stories which belong to the past.

Failaka is no longer what it was as regards tomb visiting. It was regarded as the place full of tombs of "awliya", although not all of them were regarded with the same degree of respect and devotion. On a section on Failaka which was probably written in the late fourties, Dickson estimates the number of the "awliya" tombs at sixty to seventy. He writes:

" Failaka is remarkable for its ancient ruined villages, its tombs and shrines. Of the first, SUBAIHIYAH is situated on the south-eastern shore, about two and a half miles from the southern end. A mile and half to the north-east of Zor in the deserted site of SA'IDI, and, about a mile farther on, is a similar place called DASHT.

Scattered around Zor are some sixty or seventy graves of the 'auliyah' (saints), who play a large part in the traditions of the island. About a mile to the south of Zor are the tombs of Sa'ad and Sa'id. That of Sa'ad is to the west of the other, and they stand out conspicuously as Failaka is approached in a boat from Kuwait. It is principally to visit these tombs, said to commemorate two brothers and a sister who were murdered here, that pilgrims from Yemen and India, and more frequently from Afghanistan and Baluchistan, visit Failaka. There is another tomb, also visited by pilgrims, said to be

that of Muhammad al Badawi, whose only claim to distinction is that after death his finger resisted the removal of his signet ring."(11)

More details are told of Khidre who has always been the most important "wali" in Failaka.

One last point should be added concerning tombs visiting. And that is the fact that Failakans have been always known as being more superstitious and in some respect more romantic than Kuwaitis. The reason for that is very difficult to understand as it needs a comprehensive, and in some respect, in-depth study of the people. Yet one can assume that the fact that they have different origins, which in general, were not so much opposed to popular beliefs (Oman, still very well known for its people's belief in Jinn, and witchcraft, Kharg, an Iranian island, Faw, an Iraqi southern district, which like other Iraqi places must have the same beliefs, the existence of a Shi'i community which was not secluded from other members of community) has helped in the emergence and continuity of these beliefs.

One can also assume that in addition to this factor, poverty, and difficulties due to the harsh environmental factors, which were the main characteristics of Failaka, have also helped in giving rise to these beliefs. Yet I would like to leave these reasons and motives as assumptions rather than to confirm them as facts.

We find that both Failakan and Kuwaiti, sunni and shi'i, women share



many religious practices. These practices are alike in some ways yet there are differences which deserve mention. These differences reveal both the animosity between Muslim sects in Kuwait and the differences between men and women within the same sect.

ZĀR is an old tradition still practical by middle-aged women. this seen as old fashioned by many and as anti-Islamic by some. Attending Hussayniyah is a long-standing respectable part of shi'i culture, yet it is not regarded (except by a few) as old fashioned.

Both provide in additon to the healing and religious purposes, some social contact for women. Both allow an escape for pent-up tensions. Hussayniyah is attended by both sexes (although separately) and ages whereas zār is mainly women and mostly middle-aged and older women at that.

Both practices were subject to change due to the new Islamic resurgence. While Hussayniyah are experiencing a degree of revival due to the new shi'i Islamic revival following the Iranian Revolution\*; zār on the other hand has been attached and criticized by the followers of the new Islamic (sunni) revival and is experencing a decline in terms of respectability.

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\* It should be mentioned that in Kuwait the context and the teachings of many shii doctrires have taken a different view after the Iranian Revolution; although this is not always openly expressed.

The following shows the difference in religious practices among the same sex of two different sects and also the difference in these practices between men and women within the same sect:

In contrast the shi'i death ceremony, the Kuwaiti sunni death ceremony (which lasts for three days), is very quiet and solemn, the Quran is merely read inaudibly by the visitors. The deceaseds' relatives sit in the hall while wearing the abayah. The mother usually sleeps on a mattress in the hall and is strongly forbidden to weep, as it is believed by the sunni community that every tear which comes down from the mothers' eye is transformed into a piece of fire which burns her dead child in his tomb.

The shi'i community does not believe in this notion. Also it is important to note that shi'i men's death ceremony is also very quiet, in spite of the fact that there is a religious recital. Except in a few cases, men do not weep. Women, on the other hand, are encouraged to express their feelings.

NOTES :

- (1) For more details on "secret sects" that emerged in Islam at this period see M. Isma'il, 1973.
- (2) For more details on the story of Hussayn's martyrdom see Ashkuri 1947, Gulpaygani 1962, Kashif al Ghita" 1950, H.Khurasani 1957, M. al-Khurasani 1967, Mughaniyah 1956, and Rahnama 1968.
- (3) For more details on the two major trends in Islam, which emerged after the death of the prophet, Ali Shari'ati's books, especially his compiled essays on shi'a 19 are good references on this subject, and contain to some extent, a new interpretation of Hussayn's martyrdom. And in fact, although Hussayn's martyrdom has been always taken as a symbol of uprising against tyranny, this symbol has never been used so actively in real life as in the Iranian revolution. For more details on how this story was told in such a way to prepare people for revolution, shortly before the actual revolution took place see also Gustav Thaiss 1972.
- (4) For more details on this subject, see al-'aqad's book (Fatima al-Zahra' wa al-fatimiyun) Cairo - no date.
- (5) For more details on this study, see H. Khurasani op. cit.
- (6) Dickson H., 1956, p.59.
- (7) "Failaka Touristic Guide."
- (8) Al Husayn. 1393 H.D.
- (9) Op. cit.
- (10) Op. cit. p. 14.
- (11) Dickson op. cit. p. 57. Also for more details on the story of Khidre see Al Shaykh Ali Bin Zein Al-Abdin 1984 pp 13-96. And also Al-Nisaburi 1981 pp. 217-231.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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ZAR

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ZĀR

5.1 ZĀR IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: A REVIEW

Zar rituals and cults are commonly found in many parts of the Islamic world, among nomadic, tribal, village and urban populations. These often ecstatic rituals take a variety of forms, but typically involve primarily, though not exclusively, women. Scholars have interpreted these rituals and cults in a number of ways, some for example, emphasising psychological and psychoanalytic factors, others more concerned with the social context and circumstances in which these cults are found. Spirit possession, deprivation and oppression are frequently used explanatory terms.<sup>1</sup>

Lewis distinguishes in his excellent work on spirit possession and shamanism between two types of cults the peripheral and the central: the spirits of the former do not play direct part in upholding the moral code of the societies in which they received attention. These spirits are believed to originate outside the societies of the afflicted, and their favourite victims occupy a peripheral position. The spirits of the central cults of "main morality possession religions" involve ancestor spirits and autonomous deities which are not sacralized versions of the living.

Lewis, refers to the oppression of people, the pressures of their environment, and their low social status. These are the reasons he gives for finding escape in ecstatic religions.

"These societies in which central possession cults persist are usually those composed of small, fluid, social units exposed to particularly exacting physical conditions, or conquered communities lying under the yoke of alien oppression. Thus, as in

peripheral cults, the circumstances which encourage the ecstatic response are precisely those where men feel themselves constantly threatened by exacting pressures which they do not know how to combat, or control, except through those heroic flights of ecstasy by which they seek to demonstrate that they are the equals of the gods. Thus if enthusiasm is a retort to oppression and repression, what it seeks to proclaim is man's triumphant mastery of an intolerable environment."<sup>2</sup>

People under stress might even use their cult of possession as a means whereby they can attack their masters or superiors.

"Those men and women who experience these afflictions, do so regularly in situations of stress and conflict with their superiors, and, in the attention and respect which they temporarily attract, influence their masters. Thus adversity is turned to advantage, and spirit possession of this type can be seen to represent an oblique strategy of attack."<sup>3</sup>

According to Lewis, possession rituals also serve as a means of role-reversal; this is another strategy by which the weak may seem stronger and less vulnerable.

In Southern Somalia, where each sex has its own cult, a possession society called mingis is formed by the free-born women and excludes ex-slaves. Ex-slaves have their own society called numbi.

Lewis, while referring to 'possession cults' from all over the world and not only in Islam, places great emphasis on the concept of deprivation. However, as has been pointed out by several critics, deprivation itself scarcely provides an adequate explanation. There are many examples of "deprived" sectors of many societies in which such cults do not appear. Moreover as is apparent from the earlier discussion of the wealth of Kuwait, deprivation, at least in the material sense, scarcely applies, without considerable further elaboration, in the case of Kuwaiti women who frequent zār rituals.

A lengthy, but purely descriptive study by Saldī of zār ceremonies in Southern Iran, and the Iranian Islands in the Gulf reports that most of the performers and healers in possession ceremonies were ex-slaves of African origin. Patients, in most cases, were those subjected to the severe economic circumstances and cruel climate of work at sea. In these improverished islands, people believe in certain winds, known by many names.\* These winds are described by the ritual healers as the causes of damage and discomfort, and are not be cured by any medicine other than their own rituals of singing, dancing and the sacrifice of sheep.

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\* One malevolent wind is called zār although in the rest of Arabia zār or ziran is the name for the whole cult of possession.

Saidi recounts the information given to him by his elderly interviewees:

"The blacks, the poor and the miserable are likely victims of these winds. Fishermen, seamen, and the women who work on the palms are more than anyone else prone to catch these winds. But those who have a good and comfortable life, such as tradesmen, and the captains of larger ships, are never subject to these winds. The one who feeds the poor is never harmed by the winds. But the poor, who have no money to give to charity, fall victim."<sup>4</sup>

In his sympathetic way Saidi seems to see the low standard of living of these people i.e. their poor economic life and their ignorance, to be the main reasons for their involvement in these cults. Yet his books needs more analytical data, to explicate the host of descriptive data given.

Fakhouri<sup>5</sup> describes two types of women's zār ceremonies in Egypt. The public ceremony is conducted every Friday, except during the month of Ramadan, at the shrine of a famous sheik of the village. Under the supervision of the healer, women sing and dance, and may go into trances, and ask, through the spirits possessing them, for something like a sacrifice or a piece of jewelry which could have been bought by her or one of her relatives. (Each spirit is renowned for making particular demands.) These public ceremonies give women an opportunity to release pent-up energy, repressed sexual urges and emotions, and also to make



social contacts and share emotional experiences. Each woman participating in the public zār must contribute a small sum of money.

In the private zār the activities are similar, but attention is concentrated on one, or a few, women for whom the zār is held. These women pay all the expenses which are correspondingly higher.

Any zār ceremony aims to satisfy the spirits which have caused physical or psychological illnesses.

Socio-economic modernization has led to a decline in interest in zār ceremonies, as today there are not only state medical services and education, but also other diversions such as radio and television. However, this was not the case in our study in Kuwait where in spite of accelerating social change, the number of dūr has actually increased. Many mamas declared that the number of patients in their case has not dropped since the discovery of oil, but remains almost unaffected.

Crapanzano has done considerable work on possession cults. In his study of the Hamadsha of Morocco<sup>6</sup>, a Sufi brotherhood, he emphasizes the importance of psychological factors in the cult. He does not, however, ignore cultural and socio-economic influences.

In this cult, men are usually thought to be possessed by Aisha Qandisha a legendary female demon. The ceremony performed for her is

called a hadra, and involves singing, dancing and music. The Fatiha, a Quranic sura, is recited and the possessed man may fall into a trance and perhaps mutilate his own body.

Many legends are associated with the Hamadsha and it is suggested that these reflect tensions inherent within both the cult and the surrounding culture. These tensions may themselves be responsible for the man's illness, and the form it takes.

Crapanzano compares the shanty-town dwellers with Medinas (the old town) of Meknis<sup>7</sup>:

"The shanty-town orders are too recent a phenomenon to provide their inhabitants with complete social networks. The average 'bidonville' dweller and his family came from the countryside, without a profession that was in demand, and without family, friends, or other contacts in the city. He often settled into a neighbourhood in which he had no contacts, and looked for work wherever he could find it. The single thing he had in common with other people in his 'bidonville' was devotion to the Hamadsha. It is not unusual to find that many of the shanty-town devotees were actually inactive as Hamadsha before coming to the city. Although their sudden recommitment can be explained away on psychological grounds - increased tensions and pressures, feelings of isolation, loneliness and unworthiness - the facts suggest that the status of devotee provided the newcomer with a means of enlarging his social network."

One important point raised by Crapanzano is the significance of the Moroccan's belief in the inferiority, treachery and insatiable sexual

appetite of women, in the origin and concepts of illnesses treated by

Hamadsha:

"This belief probably reflects an unarticulated, if not altogether unconscious, fear of women - a fear which finds expression in the segregation of the sexes in Morocco and elsewhere in the Arab's world, and is probably compensated for by the Arab's extreme emphasis on male virility. "Male" and "female" are, however, more than labels of sexual identity; they refer to a whole complex of behavioural traits, and symbolize feelings that are experienced at some level of consciousness by both men and women, and are not, it is suggested, insignificant in the aetiology and conceptualization of illnesses treated by the Hamadsha.<sup>8</sup>

The context of male rural migrants, moving to impoverished conditions in the 'bidonvilles' of Moroccan cities, contrasts with Kuwaiti women, whose traditional old town was transformed into the contemporary wealthy city they now find themselves in. The physical spatial move of the former can, however, be seen as analogous to the temporal transformation of the latter. For both, although for different reasons, their original social networks were lost, or fragmented and both were increasingly involved in 'possession' by jinn. Both express feelings of alienation and loss, which would appear to find amelioration in their separate and rather different social relationships within the context of zār.

Moreover, Crapanzano's discussion of the implicit and underlying fear of women in Moroccan culture, finds an echo in the perception of women as being in themselves sources of fitna, dangerous disorder, as discussed in the previous chapter. Mernissi's work on Moroccan woman, also referred to in the previous chapter places emphasis as well on the concept of fitna, and the consonant association of women with the 'disorderly' estatic behaviour exhibited by women in zār dances.

J. G. Kennedy includes a psychological perspective in his examination of possession cults<sup>9</sup>. The women of the Egyptian Nubian village concerned were exposed to many problems due to the economic and social conditions they were subject to. The population of this village consisted of a racially mixed population, who share a basically common cultural pattern. The economy of Nubia depends on migrant labour in cities as a main source of income.

In this village, women who are believed to be subject to jinn affliction are treated in zār ceremonies. The means by which jinn are pacified are not vastly different from those practiced in other parts of Arabia in the basic steps. Yet these ceremonies answer particular needs of women, who are not only subject to anxieties and stresses from being women in a Moslem community, but also because of the economic features and special conditions of this part of the world.

On the medical aspects, Kennedy mentions also that modern psychiatry would label most of the women treated by zār as neurotic, and some of

the severe cases as psychotic or schizophrenic.

Although Kennedy's study stresses the psychological and economic aspects, it would have been relevant to the study if he had examined the effect of the separation of these women from their husbands as a result of poverty, and the way this lack of a partner is expressed in the zār cult. In our study, it was found that incompatible marital relations had a certain role in women's alienation from society and hence involvement in the zār cult.

Another study, revealing the significance of psychological factors in zār beliefs is Fatima Almessri's<sup>10</sup>. This study is mainly descriptive, and tends to show the zār cult as a 'superstitious' system which should be eradicated by the law. However it gives interesting details on the history of zār and types of ceremony throughout the world.

Almessri offers many reasons for women's belief in jinn and zār ceremonies: the suppression of sexual desires; a low education level; the concept of female inferiority; and the fact that men may have several wives, or get divorced. They suggest that zār ceremonies are effective in psychosomatic cases, because the ailments are imaginary anyway, and in physical illnesses, because awareness of the symptoms is suppressed, by the healer's suggestions, together with the emotional atmosphere and music of the ceremony.

Lucie Wood Saunders<sup>11</sup> studied the experiences of women from different

socio-economic backgrounds in zār ceremonies, in an Egyptian Village. She states that affluent women can afford the expense of a ceremony perhaps once a year, while poorer women have too many commitments and insufficient funds, and may cease to attend zār ceremonies altogether. For every woman the zār cult has a different function.

"The different ways in which two women participate in the zār reflects its different social functions. On the most overt level it functions as a curing society. Beyond that, it may provide sociability in a place where large gatherings are few, loneliness is abhorred, and interaction highly valued.

"It also offers the pleasure of dressing up to make a fine appearance, music, which is appreciated but is not heard regularly, the lights of candles, and the fragrance of rosewater. In addition, it is one of the few group religious rituals open to women. In sum, the multiple functions of the zār permit women to react to it as a therapy, religious experience, or party, while using it for different ends in specific relationships."

In this study Saunders shows the interaction between economic and social aspects of life, and how zār ceremonies are used as a means to answer patient's social needs. In Kuwait, women usually from rich and middle class attend zār ceremonies. In spite of the fact that each woman has individual needs, the overall analysis suggests that they all find zār ceremonies as an outlet to express their feeling of alienation and loss of identity.

Morsey explored the relationship between sex roles and illness in an Egyptian village, Fateha<sup>12</sup>. The village is, male-dominated, and women endure many stresses and disadvantages which make them prone to "uzr" (possession illness).

Relations of power differentials are not confined to male-female interactions. Women may find themselves subordinated to the authority of females, and men are likely to fall victims to the domination of more powerful males. On the basis of data collected in Fateha, it is hypothesized that Lamsa Ardiya (touch by supernatural being) resulting in "Cuzr", would be a significant aetiological category among both males and females who occupy a subordinate social role, which may change in a lifetime. According to this postulate, the frequency of possession illness among women, as among men, may be expected to vary in relation to different stages of the life cycle and development cycle of the family.

Cuzr is a symptom which afflicts people who are disadvantaged and have a less secure role in society. This fact was also obvious in our study where it was found that men are seldom afflicted, and the women who are frequent patients of zār are among the less advantaged people in the process of socio-economic change.

Ahmed Al-Shahis<sup>13</sup> study of the zār cult among the people of Northern Sudan, reveals that this cult which is considered anti-Islamic by religious authorities and religious people, has many disciples from the subordinated categories in society, such as women who have an inferior position in this

society, and ex-slaves who still retain an inferior position, and are subject to constant frustrations in their attempt to achieve any improvement in their socio-economic and political conditions. However, this inferiority in actual life is reversed in zār ceremonies, where the ex-slaves act as the mistresses of zār i.e. the healers, and exert their power through their healing ability on their patients, who could well be of much higher position.

Al-Shahi's study is interesting in that it relates people's involvement in this cult directly to their socio-economic situation, and illustrates a combination of reasons behind their involvement.

An earlier published article<sup>14</sup> by Al-Shahi, concerns the male religious orders found in the same region of Sudan. In his article on zār he noted that the religiously orthodox regard the religious activities of the women (zār) as being anti-Islamic, a clear example of the exclusion of women from participation in 'formal' Islamic institutions and a denigration of female forms of religious activity, again a common factor in the Islamic world.

Constantinides, in her study of zār among women in Sudan, has revealed the relationship between women's involvement in zār and their inability to produce children, especially sons. This is highly significant in a male dominated moslem society like Sudan where so much importance is given to women's fertility.



Although Constantinides deals with a different age category, apparently younger than our middle age category, yet in this thesis it was found out that zār provides an outlet for various problems, some of which are sexual. However, these women's problems are mainly caused by menopause and an unfulfilled sexual life in their past.

The most recent study on zār among sudanese middle aged women, (is by S.I.Rahim (16). Although his approach is more psychologically orientated, he points out that there is a link between psychosocial factors and the rate of increase in involvement in zār, due to many factors. The ones which are shared with our Kuwaiti category are as follows: rapid socio-cultural changes associated with urbanization, dispersal of extended family, weakening of communal social support and loneliness. Another of his findings which is of great relevance to our study is the impact of the cultural generational gap between the younger generation and their middle age mothers which elevates the tone of psychosocial stress among the latter.

## 5.2 THE ZAR RITUALS OF KUWAIT

With the exception of work currently in progress at the Centre of Kuwait Folklore, no systematic research has yet been carried out on zār rituals in Kuwait. I am greatly indebted to Mrs al-Agrouga for permission to draw on her as yet unpublished work, on the history of zār and the now defunct traditional houses where these zār rituals took place. The data

on contemporary zār rituals was gathered during a four month period of field research in Kuwait during 1983, when I attended many zār rituals and interviewed several mamas as well as many of the mamas' patients.

While ziran is the traditional term more familiarly used by older patients, the term zār is now generally used and accepted in Kuwait. Zār refers not only to the rituals performed for individuals afflicted by jinn, to placate the jinn, but is also used more generally to refer to the jinn themselves. Thus the familiar expression in Kuwait: "She has zār in her" means that the individual concerned has "a jinn in her".

Formerly Kuwaitis took the existence of jinn for granted, as natural, and regarded zār as the necessary and proper traditional treatment to placate, or as is said in Kuwait, to "satisfy" the demands of the jinn. Individuals thought to be suffering from the various ailments accepted as being caused by jinn, freely consulted local healers and underwent zār curing rituals. Even after the introduction of modern medical facilities and hospitals in Kuwait, many cases which modern medicine failed to cure, or to satisfy the patient, were cured when the patient turned to the traditional zār treatment.

Dickson<sup>16</sup> relates cases which he himself witnessed in the late 1930's, and two of these examples are given here.

In the first case, Saud Ibn Agab, a Badu, was diagnosed by an English doctor as having a brain tumour. There came a time when the

doctor told Dickson that Saud might only have a few hours to live, and the patient returned to his family to die. Fifteen days later, Dickson and his wife saw Saud in a tent, accompanied by a negress. The negress had cured him by exorcising the jinn from his body.

In the second case, a lady called Bath was diagnosed as having tuberculosis and was not expected to live long. Her husband had even purchased her a chiffan (burial shroud). She, however, was cured when an old woman exorcised two jinn which were possessing her.

There is also a brief account of a tambūra zar ritual which does not differ significantly from my own field observations in material details. However, the public image of zār and the reverence with which both healer and instruments are held has certainly changed in recent times.

The elderly today remember many other stories about the ability of the healers who can free the afflicted from their jinn. There is no published work on the origins of zār in Kuwait, and it is very difficult to infer that it was introduced at a particular time. Whenever questioned on the history of zār, the typical answer was that it has always existed in Kuwait.

In her research on zār at the Centre of Kuwaiti Folklore, Mrs Al-Agrouga<sup>18</sup> discusses the old Kuwaiti dūr, (the plural of dar) the rooms in which zār ceremonies take place. Literally the word dar means a room or a house. The oldest known dūr of Kuwait are:

1. Dar Rugayah al Fayruse
2. Dar Umm Saidah
3. Dar Hissah Bint Tug
4. Dar Aminah il <sup>C</sup>Umani
5. Dar Fatima al Mirraisheed
6. Dar Umm Rhama
7. Dar Umm Fahad
8. Dar Galliah
9. Dar Umm Yuniss

Each dar is named for its mama.

At present there are about 22 dur where zār rituals are performed. The present state of research suggests that some dūr specialize in only one type of zār such as the dar il tambūra, which specializes only in tambūra music, and still preserve their old traditions.

Tambūra is the most important form of zar music and is regarded as very sacred. In an interview, the mama of dar il tambūra, in her late 70's, told me that this particular dar had been established by her father, who was a slave, some 60 years ago. He was known for his ability to cure people. Many other dūr were established at that time, with the permission of her father, who was also their spiritual head or father.

It should be mentioned here that most of the mamas, and singers, of Kuwait's dūr are ex-slaves. This is true not only in Kuwait but also in

other parts of the Arabian Gulf, and even in other Arab countries. Often not only the zār ceremonies, but also the singing and dancing at marriage parties, are performed by former slaves and their descendants.

Sa<sup>c</sup>idi<sup>19</sup> writing on the former slaves of the South Persian Islands states:

"The majority of blacks were brought from Africa, Somalia and Zanzibar to be sold as slaves. Now, I can assume slavery to be abolished, the blacks go fishing and do work with no distinction from white people. Every aspect of their lives is as if they were natives of the area: all speak the Southern Coast Persian dialect, of course with an Arabic or Swahili accent. But what they have not forgotten are the memories which they brought with them from their home land. In the house of every Black Iranian, drums, large and small, are found, to be used for singing from time to time.

It is the blacks who sing and dance in the streets and at marriage parties. They are also the babas and mamas of zār. And at night when the voice of the drums is raised from every place and even in every hut, the shadow of the black African spirits are felt. The South Iranian blacks are familiar with different types of drums, and singing. They not only treat their own sorrows, but also those of the whites".

It can be argued that while culturally familiar with how zār curing rituals were performed in their home lands in Africa, there were social factors which perpetuated the performance of zār by these "blacks". The main factor was their status as slaves, which put them on the lowest rung

of society. (This, in my view, has nothing to do with the way they were treated, as being treated well did not alter the fact that they were slaves and the property of their masters). This low status meant they were employed in occupations that were not permitted to people of "good family". as they were thought to spoil the reputation of the family. One example is singing and dancing - the main ingredient of zār ceremonies.

In addition no one can disregard the nostalgia naturally felt by these newly-arrived blacks, and their desire to find their indentity in a new and strange society by practicing the rituals of their own original cultures.

It is worth mentioning that slaves were originally purchased to act as domestic servants or as pearl divers for their masters. The most active slave trade occurred in East Africa, and especially in Zanzibar. According to Islam, slaves should be treated well and the emancipation of slaves was encouraged, and seen as a way of asking for God's forgiveness when mistakes were made by the slave owner.

Kelly<sup>20</sup> wrote:

"The Shariah law distinguishes between an absolute and a qualified state of bondage, and a slave in the latter category may eventually, under certain conditions, obtain his freedom. Manumission is specifically recommended in the Koran as a praise-worthy act. The Koran also enjoins the owners of slaves to treat them well, and in general this injunction is observed in Muslim countries, as several Europeans intimately acquainted with Muslim life have at various times attested."

In fact it is very difficult to find evidence of how slaves were treated in Old Kuwait. It is, however, obvious that slaves always identified themselves as such, and some (particularly elderly) former slaves still do so, giving their own name followed by that of their ex-owner (Abdullah, the slave of ...)

I have here given a short account of the history of zār in Kuwait, and those who were and still are known to be the performers of zār ceremonies. In the following section, the various types of zār are outlined.

### 5.3 THE CLASSIFICATION OF ZĀR RITUALS

Six different types of zār ritual can be differentiated, and are named: Qadri; Hibshi; Samri; Tambūra; Laywa; and Bahri. At this point a brief schematic description of each type of zār is given, while a more detailed discussion of a seven day zār comprising both Qadri and Hibshi types, as well as a Tambūra zār is given at the end of this chapter.

1. Qadri: In this zār the only musical instrument used is the tambourine. Participants stand and beat on tambourines, while others clap. The dancing involves turning the body left and then right, while singing. The exciting rhythms used produce an almost ecstatic type dance.
2. Hibshi: Similarly the tambourine is the only instrument used, although a tabl (drum) occasionally is used. The women clap to the rhythm of the song, which is slow and staid.

3. Samri: In this zār the instruments used are tambourines and large drums. The songs sung are also very popular outside the context of the zār. This consequently, is a popular form of zār, since the rhythms are well liked.

4. Tambūra: This zār takes its name, not from the rhythms used, but from its major musical instrument, the tamboura, a string instrument, superficially rather like a harp. It is triangular, with the strings running from the base to the shortest side. The tambūra is placed on the ground in front of the player. As mentioned above tambūra music is considered the most sacred zār music and the instrument itself is regarded as sacred by its owner and the other members of the dar. As a sign of respect, on entering the room where it is being played, everyone touches the tambūra and passes the same hand over their face.

The other, rather different instrument used in this type of zār is the manjūr. This is a percussion 'instrument', made of pieces of hard goat hooves, fastened by strong string, and hung in several layers round the waist. The hips are shaken from side to side producing a rhythmic jangling sound. The dancer's feet are kept still, while he balances himself with a stick held in both hands. The instrumentalists are male. Drums are also used. The tambūra zār is attended by both men and women, with the women wearing their cbaya outdoor cloaks, and dancing sedately at one end of the room. The men dance separately. The songs are sung in Swahili, which are not understood or known except to the singers and instrumentalists and some members of the dar.



Individuals in a state of ritual impurity can 'cause' the strings of the tamboura to break, which can also be the sign of the recent death of a devotee of tamboura zār.

5. Laiwa: This zār is no longer performed according to several of the mamas interviewed, or as they say is no longer 'asked for' by patients. The major instrument in this type of zār is a wind instrument, the sirnay, of the shawn family, rather like a small trumpet. A huge drum as well as two or more smaller drums were used. The songs sung are said to be of African origin. In the old days this type of zār was performed in a large room, or more often in the courtyard of the old dur, in the middle of which was a large flagpole flying the flag, sari a of the dūr, round which the male participants danced.

6. Bahri: As in the Laiywa zār, the instruments here are the sirnay and large drums. The male dancers danced in a different style to the different rhythms used, usually holding sticks which they threw gracefully into the air. Again, like the Laiywa this type of zār is no longer performed.

It is perhaps significant that of these six types, the latter two, involving men more predominantly, are no longer performed. The involvement of men (usually ex-slaves) with zār rituals, in contemporary Kuwait appears to have markedly diminished, whereas, as this thesis shows, this is not the case of the category of middle-aged Kuwaiti women which has been delineated.

These six types of zār rituals thus differ in terms of the musical instruments played; the language of the songs; the style and rhythms of the dances and the extent of participation in the ritual by the patients. The three zār rituals with a mixed clientele are either no longer performed at all as in the case of Laiywa and Bahri, or infrequently as in the case of Tambūra. The other three vary in 'popularity'. The Hibshi zār has controlled rhythmic dancing, less evocative than the Qadri music, and has Swahili songs. The Qadri zār style of dancing is almost ecstatic in mode, and the driving rhythms induce very physical mobile dance movements which can induce trance. The songs are in Arabic, and the songs commonly used in other women's religious gatherings, such as the malid\* gatherings, and as therefore familiar, even for those women who do not frequent zār rituals regularly. In some ways, the Samri zār is the most popular of all, verging, as some mamas now lament, on entertainment only, since the songs used are extremely familiar and popular quite outside any religious or zār context.

The choice of which zār is to be performed is believed to be that of the jinn, speaking through the patient. The jinn asks for a particular zār ceremony, and it is thought that jinn have preferences for different musical rhythms. Occasionally an afflicting jinn may ask for more than

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\* Malid: the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet. These gatherings are held at any time, to fulfill a vow - for example one made to seek the recovery of a child from illness.

one type of zār to be performed, as is the case in the extended example presented later in this chapter, where the jinn asked for a zār lasting seven days, the first two days to be of Qadri zār and the next five days of Hibshi zār. All types of zār can vary in length, from a simple one day zār, to the most elaborate of all, lasting seven days. These longer zār include a day or days in which a cooked meal is served, usually of meat from a sheep sacrificed for the jinn during the zār. Zār rituals, of whatever type chosen by the jinn, which include a meal of sacrificed meat, also demanded by the jinn, is called a sufra. It is thus the jinn who may 'ask' for a sufra (meal), which involved the sacrifice of a sheep as well as a specific type of zār. A full sufra, lasts for seven days. Sometimes the jinn may ask for only half a sufra, lasting three days. The example of a seven day sufra described in detail was chosen to illustrate all the stages involved in the most elaborate of the zār curing rituals.

The zār rituals in Kuwait are not exorcisms. The jinn, while thought by the patients as being 'inside' their bodies in some way, are not exorcised by the zār performances. They are rather placated, or appeased, by the rhythms of the music, by the dancing and by the ritual meal. Jinn are never got rid of, once and for all, which is why many of the women continually return to the particular zār preferred by their jinn. The jinn is thought to 'recognise' the music, and be 'pleased' or 'satisfied' by the music. Thus women who have a jinn which asks for a Qadri zār, will attend, as a member rather than as a patient at any Qadri zār ritual being held for someone else.

The presence of the jinn is particularly manifested in the dances. The movement of the women, particularly in the more ecstatic Qadri rhythms, are thought to be 'caused' by the jinn. The jinn are believed to be responsible for the often excessive and hysterical dancing which can take place as the patient becomes 'possessed', and moves into a trance state. Such disorderly writhings and tremblings characteristic of this stage is described as nāzil: the patient is "coming down". In the term most often used, the jinn is being 'satisfied'. Once 'satisfied' in this manner, by the zār, the jinn is placated and pacified and will then stop tormenting the patient.

It happens frequently, that members of the audience may become 'possessed' during the dancing. In such cases, their own jinn have recognised and been pleased by the music.

#### 5.4. CHANGING ATTITUDES TO ZĀR RITUALS

These traditional methods of cure are no longer used as frequently as they once were. Modern medical treatment by the now highly developed and free medical services in Kuwait have made an impact on traditional medicine and practices. In particular men think little of these 'old fashioned' rituals, and the younger, more educated generation say that they are simply 'superstitious' and should be abolished. However, in spite of the advances of high technology medicine, many people, particularly women, refuse to accept any other form of treatment, for what are often emotional disturbances with social causes. While this attitude

tends to be more prevalent among the middle-aged and elderly, it is also found on occasions among both young and educated women who not only still believe in zār but prefer it to modern medicine. Yet it should be noticed that men and women from different ages and classes visit the doctor whenever a physical illness, with no emotional or psychological symptoms or connotation is felt. Among dar members can be found a few young women afflicted and possessed by jinn, which will not leave them, except when a zār ceremony is held. The main difference between the young and elderly believers is that the former feel the need to have their ceremonies performed in secret, and of course their numbers are not significant compared with the latter. It should also be mentioned that the devotion with which the middle-aged regard and attend these ceremonies is largely absent from the patients of other generations. It is believed that women are mostly, afflicted by male jinn and men afflicted by female jinn.

Zār rituals are not only curative and sacred occasions but also serve as social gatherings for the women concerned. (Since, as we have seen, in Kuwait nearly all zār concerns women only).

Before the ritual, during the prayer breaks, as well as afterwards, the women gather and discuss their children, husbands and family problems, or any other subject. Also important is the smoking of the special tobacco, karaku. The dar is the only place where this can be enjoyed by women without fear of social stigma. Most women, especially if married to strict men or having grown-up sons living with them, cannot smoke at home.

Karaku is a tobacco imported from Irān. It is usually soaked in honey, date juice, cardamom and rose water. The tobacco is smoked by being heated between two tin plates over a small pottery bowl of charcoal. The smoke is sucked through a jar of water and out through pipes. It is smoked by both men and women, but in women, smoking is thought to give them a bad reputation. Those women who smoke karakoo justify the act by saying it is not their fault. It is the jinn, "the one who is in them" who asks for it.

In every dar there is always a mangala, or big metal pot containing charcoal for the karaku. Underneath this is another pot containing the tobacco, and karaku water pipes are available for every woman. Many friendships are made in these gatherings, especially during the seven-day sufra ceremony.

Men are not allowed into most modern Kuwaiti zār rituals, it is a women's world. The women often make fun of men. In this respect the zār gatherings resemble the qat gatherings of Yemeni women. As described by Makhlouf, these qat gatherings have a special role in getting women closer to one another. Although women are largely excluded from the running of the everyday men's world, in the qat, men are totally excluded and have no place. (21)

Women are more intimate in zār gatherings than anywhere else, not only because they are all the mama's "daughters" (patients), but because they have other things in common - they are ill, having jinn in them, and during

the zār rituals they are prone to perform acts which are thought not decent for women, such as spontaneous dancing, screaming and crying. This vulnerability makes them secretive about what happens in zār rituals and brings the women closer to each other.

There is no doubt that many things have changed in zār ceremonies. The mama of tamb ūra described how in the old days, when a zār party was held, a flag was flown from the "house of tamb ūra" as it was then called, so that everyone with zār in them could attend. There were always many participants. People had more respect for zār parties, and never allowed photographs to be taken of the sacred tamb ūra instrument. Now there are many pictures in magazines.

Another mama told how formerly, patients were almost certain of a cure, but today many patients doubt the ability of their mamas if they are not cured immediately. She said today there are few young patients and they always want their visits to be kept secret. Also they never show off in the dar, while older patients do not care. Many mamas agree that they no longer have as many patients.

Some older mamas, and some mamas who no longer practice, feel that mamas now are not as honest as they used to be. They do the job only to gain money; whereas formerly all mamas spent their money buying whatever the zār parties needed, now many have amassed fortunes which can only have come from their profession. And as one mama said, in the past, zār rituals were held for the sake of the "masters" (jinn), and in order to cure the

patient. Now many people have zār parties as an entertainment and simply to enjoy themselves. This was thought by this particular mama to be mainly because the mamas now are not as serious as the older ones. In fact it is doubtful that even in the old days, zār ceremonies were not taken partly as entertainment, except that people also held the occasions to be sacred.

#### 5.5 OTHER TRADITIONAL TREATMENTS

There were many methods of treatment available before it was thought necessary to consult a mama. Patients with chronic problems - perhaps fits, continuous headaches or nightmares - were taken directly to a mutawa<sup>C</sup> or mula. This was a religious man known for his chastity and piety, often a traditional teacher of the Quran, or a muaden (who calls people to prayers) in a mosque, or an Iman. (prayer leader) Sometimes it was simply someone known for their good will and healing ability. These people had a significant role in old Kuwaiti Society.

The method of cure depended on the symptoms and on what the mula thought suitable. For example the patient may be thought to be subject to the evil eye. The healer would first read some suras of the Quran, then advise the mother or another relative to bring some earth trodden on by that person suspected of having the evil eye, which caused the patient's illness. The earth is placed in a heated pot and the patient stands astride the pot. Water is poured into it and as vapor rises up, the evil eye is thought to be conquered and the cure effected.



A second cure for the evil eye, is as follows. A substance called shab (alum) is burned and may take on various shapes. In these the patient can recognize the face or eyes of the person causing his illness. Then the piece of shab is thrown out of the house. People particularly prone to illnesses from the evil eye were given a yamCa (amulet) to hang round their necks. This is worn all the time, even at night. The yamCa consists of a piece of paper inscribed with verses of the Quran and some other writings, unintelligible to any but the healers who write them. Many simpler ailments were cured by herbs and there were many people in pre-oil rich Kuwait who were renowned for their ability as herbalists.

Even when a patient is believed or believes herself to be possessed by a jinn, she is not immediately taken to a mama. All that was needed was someone with some knowledge of these methods of treating jinn, possibly someone who has been possessed herself. Treatment is undertaken at a place where the person is most harmed by the jinn. For example, if someone falls down in a bathroom, not at all uncommon, and seems to be in a state of fear, the other members of the household immediately make a fidwa (sacrifice), in this place. This fidwa consists of either three eggs or a black hen. The eggs should be broken, or the hen slaughtered, in the place, and the person conducting the sacrifice should say, Bism-i Allah ikhdufidwatkum, wa fukun: min adiyatkum, "take your sacrifice and let us be free of your harm". The literal meaning of bism-i Allah is in the name of God, but in the Kuwaiti dialect it also has the connotation "help yourself" as said when asking someone to share your food. It is strictly forbidden to say Bism-i Allah al rahman al rahim as this means "In the

name of God the merciful, the compassionate", since the jinn are afraid of the name of God and will run away and reject the sacrifices. Hence they will continue to torture the person who fell down.

If the bathroom is not tiled or concreted, the sacrifice should be buried. If this is not possible it should be thrown out of the house. The place should be fumigated with incense. Some people prefer to leave the ritual offering in its place, and the next day, the offering would be gone because the jinn came in the night to take the present. After giving a fidwa, if the person is not cured and is still frightened or if the situation should worsen in any way, another procedure follows.

The patient's fingers are tied with wool so that all their fingers and toes are connected. Then a piece of cloth (preferably woolen) is burned and the patient inhales the smoke. While it is burning the patient, or rather the jinn inside her, is asked to promise not to return and harm the patient. The person (or her jinn) then replies, "I promise and swear by God not to return". If she does this she is thought to be cured.

In certain instances these sorts of cures do not work and the patient must then be taken to a mama. The symptoms may resist treatment or worsen. The patient may develop fits, nervous movements or headaches, nightmares, general pains, or loss of appetite. Her behaviour may appear morally to degenerate and her friends perceive that she is not acting at all normally.

The patient is certain to be possessed by a jinn when her symptoms worsen after visits to religious men, or the reading over her of Quranic suras or after a number of visits to healers, which do not bring about a cure. These are thought to be undisputed signs of possession although it is more likely that the patient's family perceive her possession than that she sees it herself. It is important to realize that being cured does not always mean driving out the jinn. Usually it means simply that the jinn is satisfied, is placated and no longer hurts the person. Often the patient is presumed always afterwards to be inhabited by the jinn. In this sense "possession" does not entail being in a trance state. Such trance states occur in the context of the zar rituals only, when full possession is induced.

#### 5.6 THE LANGUAGE OF POSSESSION

When a person is thought to be possessed by jinn, it is said that she is mīnzar or that she has durūrah in her. Durūrah is derived from dhar or darar meaning harm or damage. When possession occurs in zār ritual or any other occasion when the music she prefers is played, this is called stinzal. The person is said to be misstanzil or nāzil, that is "descending" or "coming down". Jinn are almost never called jinn. They are called assyad, the "masters" or ahl-il-ard the "dwellers of the earth" or the "ones who are in her". The patient is called the arūs (bride).

#### 5.7 Diagnosis by the Mama: Interpreting Dreams

The mama of a dar will give various forms of treatment for jinn in

addition to holding zār rituals. After asking the patient about her complaints, the mama may prescribe for example the following plan of action. The patient is given some incense and sometimes a bottle of rose water. If possible she puts on a necklace of mashmum a strong-smelling herb similar to mint. The incense is lit and the patient says, before falling asleep,

"In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate, I depend on you and I know the pain. If it is from God, it is welcome; if it is from you, ask for whatever you want and we are ready to fulfill your demands."

She then tries to fall asleep while the incense still burns. This she has to do for three consecutive nights. On the following day she returns to the mama and tells her anything she has dreamt.

If the patient cannot remember any dreams, which is very rare, she is asked to repeat the course. If she still does not dream, she is said to be empty of jinn. As an added precaution she may be taken to a dar where a ceremony is being held for someone else. If she does not demonstrate the presence of jinn by "coming down", it is almost certain that she has no jinn in her and her condition cannot be cured by zār or at least, not by the same mama.

All the mamas when asked agreed that it was impossible for a patient not to dream if she had jinn in her. Some had never seen a

patient who claimed not to have dreams. The interpretation of the dreams usually depend on recognizing the people who come in them. For instance a patient may dream of a knight on a horse, wearing white robes, who says he is Shiyk so-and-so. The name is interpreted as being that of the jinn. If a patient dreams of a religious man talking to her, this means that the jinn in her is a pious and respectable man. If the patient dreams of something cooking or of bread or crockery being distributed, this is a sign of the patient's death and the mama may tell her that she cannot cure her jinn or that there is nothing wrong with her.

An alternative method, taby i ta, uses the mama's own dream. This method is frowned upon by most mamas, especially the oldest most successful mamas, who call it quackery and consider it an easy way of getting money from "stupid" people. The patient is asked to bring a piece of her clothing wrapped around some money. The mama places this under her pillow and recites some suras of the Quran. The next day she tells the patient about the one possessing her.

In the consultation following dream analysis when the mama has discovered which jinn is possessing the patient, she takes considerable time fumigating her with incense and sprinkling rosewater over her, especially over her head. During this she addresses the jinn in the patient.

"What do you want, talk, say why you are harming our son/daughter, tell us and we are ready to bring whatever you want."

The patient, or rather her jinn, then replies. The requests vary from person to person. Some ask for a sufra, which is the most complete performance of zār ceremony, taking seven days. Some ask for half a sufra which lasts three days. Some only ask for one day performance of a certain type of zār music and the sacrifice of sheep. Others may ask simply for dihan bun, which is three or more body massages with a special oil prepared from cardamon and coffee beans fried in butter.

Occasionally a patient may ask for a special ring called a rashim. These rings are set with a precious stone, usually turquoise or emerald. She may even ask for a ‘asa (stick) to dance with in the zār ceremony which is to be performed later. This stick will be kept in the mama's dar, and the patient can use it whenever a ceremony is held.

There is no preference for the days on which zār ceremonies can be held, but they must not be during Ramadan, the month of fasting, due to the belief that in this month all jinn and devils are restrained from coming out. If a patient is brought to the mama during Ramadan, she usually asks her family to bring her back on the first day of ‘id, that is, the following month. Meanwhile she may massage her, or fumigate her and sprinkle her with rosewater. In addition to this restriction a woman must not have sexual intercourse with her husband during a sufra, and the zār party should not be held while she is menstruating. In Chapter 5 I will discuss fully the personality of the mama, along with the description of il mama ceremony, which is held in the hijri month of "Sha'ban", the month preceding the fasting month of Ramadan. The purposes of this ceremony are

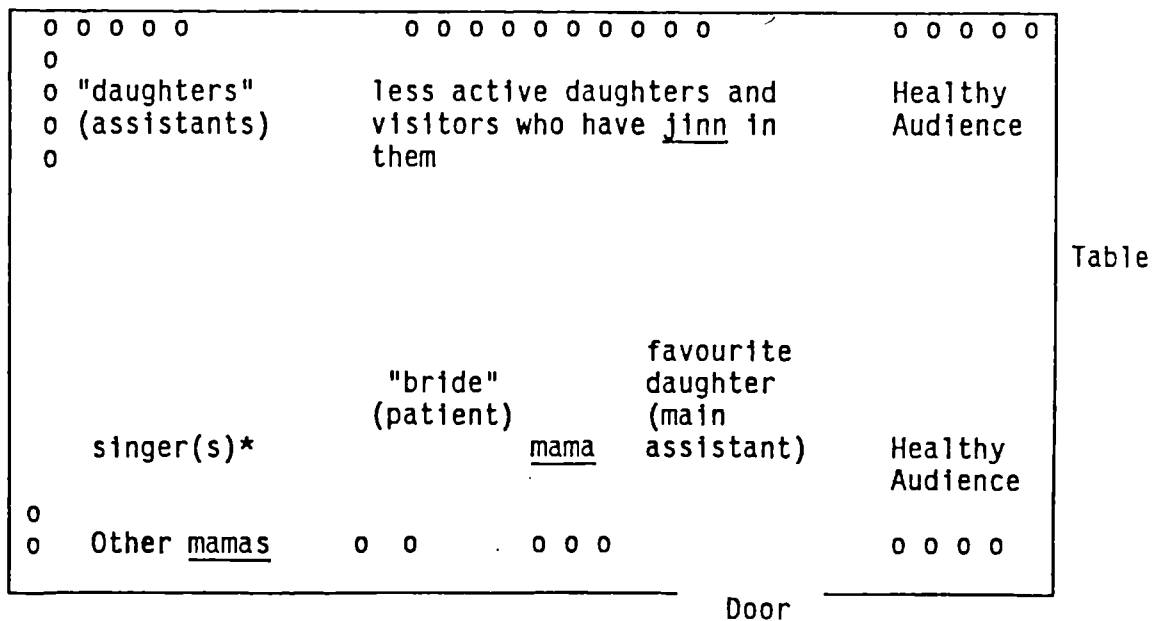
to have the "daughters of the dar" rejoined and get the chance for those who have not "come down" during the year to "come down", it is also considered as a means by which thanks are given to the jinn of the dar, this ceremony also represents a mamas' congregation.

#### 5.8 THE DAR

Dar (room, or house) has come to signify the place where zār rituals are held, in Kuwait. In the old days an entire house, regarded as very sacred, was often required for the performance of the zār rituals. The nine oldest dur, cited at the beginning of this chapter were such houses. A guard was appointed to protect these old dur, paid for by the 'daughters of the dar'. Nowadays these dur no longer exist, and mamas now use a room in their own homes for the performance of zār. There is no longer the need for special guards, and nor is there sufficient room for all the special clothes of the 'daughters', which are kept now at their own homes. The word dar is now used by implication to mean the mama's own home. The dar must be large enough to accommodate approximately 30 - 40 people with sufficient room for the dancing, which forms an integral part of the rituals.

Diagram 1 sketches the positioning within the dar of the various participants in a typical zār ritual.

Diagram 1



The mamas usually sit in the corner but sometimes sit facing the door.

Along one wall of the dar is a long metal pole, and on this all the isi(dancing sticks) of the daughters are hung. Most daughters have their own asa(stick) and each can recognise it either by colour, decoration, or the stones with which they are adorned. In some dūr the number of sticks exceeds a hundred. Among these might be some that belonged to dead women - these are the most sacred, especially if the dead woman was possessed by powerful jinn. The sticks will be fumigated with incense and sprinkled with rose-water. They must not be touched by any "impure" person and this applies particularly to sticks belonging to dead women. An impure person may hurt both herself and the spirit of

\* On occasions, the mama herself sings, otherwise one or more specialist singers may attend.



the dead woman.

One or more drums and other instruments hang on one of the walls. These instruments are usually inherited from previous mamas or other past participants in the dar; these past owners are regarded always as important people, in the sense that their jinn were powerful. The dar is also carpeted and has many cushions.

In the dar 11 tambura, many tamburas and a tabl (big drum) hang on the walls. The drum is covered with a large cloth. All the instruments are very sacred and belonged to important men. The mama or tambura told me that if there is no one to succeed her, when she feels she is soon going to die, she will take all the instruments and put them in a coffin. This she will either sink in the sea or bury in a separate tomb, to prevent these sacred instruments from being defiled.

The dar table normally carries the pots of incense and the bottles of rosewater. The whole dar must be kept clean and regularly fumigated, as it is a sign of courtesy to the jinn thought to be always present in the dar to fumigate them. Fumigation and sprinkling with rosewater are used to purify the dar, the ritual objects used, and the participants.

#### 5.8.1 PREPARATION FOR A SUFRA ZAR RITUAL

When a zār ritual is to be held, the mama calls her 'daughters' to her house. Not all the 'daughters' will come, as some only visit

socially, not to be treated. Every mama has a number of 'daughters' who act as assistants - usually less than ten. They may shop for the mama if she is too old to do so herself, buying the sheep and whatever else is needed for the zār ceremony. The older the mama, the more the 'daughters' become involved in the affairs of the ceremony.

All the helpers participate in cooking the food. There is usually one 'daughter' who will serve the coffee, and another who will fumigate with incense and sprinkle rosewater on the women's heads. Also all the sticks and instruments are fumigated and sprinkled the day before a zār ceremony. These women also participate in the singing and playing during a ceremony, so learning the songs and how to play some of the instruments such as the tambourine. The 'favourite daughter', or main assistant who is closest to the mama, may even help her to massage the patient. When dancing starts she will be the first of the 'daughters' to be invited to dance with the mamas and the patient. When everything is arranged, the patient is told to come the following afternoon, before any other mamas who may be invited and also before any other 'daughters' or their relatives and friends.

In the case of a serious disorder, or if the mama is still using very traditional methods, the patient stays with the mama in the dar for the whole of the sufra ritual period (seven days) or half sufra (three days) and does not leave the dar at all. It is thought that the jinn accompany the patient closely during the whole period of treatment, and the mama must be near her patient in case the jinn want anything.

Nowadays very few mamas keep their patients in the dar.

The day before the ritual commences, the patient brings her special clothes and jewellery and leaves them in the mama's own room, where she will change her clothes during the sufra. I attended a sufra where the patient's clothes were as follows: A long white cotton dress; a thin white thub (over-dress) and a qitra (a large headkerchief). These special clothes were worn on the first, fifth and seventh days of the sufra. On all other days the patient wore ordinary dresses, although these were all new and beautiful. On the second part of the second day she also wore a beautiful long green dress with gold embroidery, and a thin black thub also with gold markings. The thub is always made of very light material. The qitra (headscarf) is usually only worn by men, and is part of the national costume of the Arabian Gulf. The Badu i.e. bedouin of other parts of Arabia also wear them. Most patients' clothes to be worn during the course of the zār consist of between four and six dresses, the quality of which varies according to the economic means of the patient.

Patients pay all the expenses of the dar directly through the money which they give to the mama for the ritual. Money is also given to the mama as a present of aidia during the two main moslem religious feasts, Cid al Fitr and Cid al Adha. The money for zār expenses is needed not only to buy sheep for sacrifice, food to eat, incense and rosewater, but also for the people who play the music, even if these are the 'daughters' of the dar. Some, but not all, mamas pay them in return for their participation. Money is also needed to pay for sticks and rings which the

patient's jinni may ask for.

Healthy women, those who are not troubled or possessed by jinn, are not encouraged to visit the dar. Most of those who attend zār ceremonies are those who "have jinn in them". Healthy women are discouraged, because they can become ill during the zār ceremony. Too close proximity to the power of the jinn activated in the ritual is dangerous. This is especially likely to happen if they try either to criticise the assistants, the mama or the patient, or attempt to gain favour with them. It may also happen if they try to assist the 'daughters' in anything, such as cleaning the table, carrying dishes, or holding the patient's pillow while she is massaged. It is especially prohibited for healthy women to dance, though they may clap and sing, or to be splashed with blood when the sheep is slaughtered.

## 5.9 A SEVEN DAY SUFRA

The sufra is a zār ritual lasting seven days. This patient whose ritual I now describe chose to have two days of qadri zar and five days of hibbshi zār

### 5.9.1 THE BRIDE

The patient, the woman for whom the ritual is held, is called the "bride" during the seven days of the sufra. On this occasion it was an illiterate married woman aged about 45 with a wealthy but mean husband who was a businessman. She had five unmarried sons, four of whom worked in respectable jobs and the youngest, aged 16, was a student. She has no daughters. After

the birth of her youngest son she started to suffer from convulsive fits. Medical doctors could do nothing for her. Her family then decided that she must be taken to a mama, and brought her to Mama S., who diagnosed the patient as being troubled by jinn, and has been treating her ever since. The patient still suffers occasionally and comes to the mama for a massage or to ask for a sufra - she has had about ten sufra in the past sixteen years. Like so many of the middle-aged women discussed in this thesis she has never been happy with her husband, who is very strict and has never allowed her to go out of his home without his permission. She is not allowed to spend money freely, apart from the expenditure for the zār treatments. The husband has had to pay for all ten sufra for his wife. She has always been very obedient to her jinn's requests. She has bought as many rshum (rings) as they have asked for and naturally she wore these rings for the sufra. On some fingers she wore two rings.

#### 5.9.2 THE WEEK OF RITUAL

##### Day One

On the first day, the zār ritual started an hour after the afternoon prayers. The patient, the 'bride', arrived and greeted her mama, kissing her shoulders and head. Then she greeted all the other mamas who were visiting, in the same fashion. After changing into her special clothes, the 'bride' then sat in the dar amongst the mamas and the 'favourite daughter'.

When all the 'daughters' expected to come, have arrived in the dar, one of the 'daughters', whose special task it was, served sweet coffee. This

is made with saffron, cardamon, sugar and water. The mamas are served first, then the 'bride', the assistants and the rest. Bitter coffee was served after the sweet coffee. Another 'daughter' fumigated all the women with incense and sprinkled rosewater over them, to purify them. The mamas are served with karaku tobacco at the same time as the coffee. The other women smoke it before or after the party and during the breaks, in the courtyard or in another room.

Music then started and the mamas (and the special singer) started to sing. The assistants joined in some parts of the songs. The singer for the first two days of the qadri was a famous blind man, (his blindness renders him exempt from the rule excluding men) noted for a certain kind of folk song called Malid. This type of song praises the prophet Mohammed. Half a dozen women played tambourines and one beat rhythmically on the big drum with a special stick. As the singing progressed and the voices became gradually louder and higher, the women became more involved in the music. The 'bride' started to tremble and then to dance in the strange way peculiar to zār rituals, with creeping movements, dancing on hands and knees, swaying her head from side to side in time with the tambourines. She asked for her qetra (head scarf) to be brought to her. . . Other women began to dance, and some became "possessed" and started shivering and dancing. The mama sprinkled rosewater on anyone in trance. Characteristic continuous shivering or rapid irregular movements and creeping dancing signify that the patient (or any other woman) is "coming down", meaning that the 'bride' is now directly under the influence of her afflicting jinn. During the zār rituals many women "come down", in this way, or in their own personalised manner. For example,

some lie on the floor, twisting their bodies to right and left, open breathing very rapidly and sweating profusely, in their trance states.

After the music stops and the bride has "come down" she must then greet the mama and the other women again. Usually she does this by kissing them on the shoulders and head as previously described. They return the greeting, saying ʿwafi (good health). Sometimes the mama and her favourite 'daughter' are greeted differently: the 'bride' kneels in front of them and humbles herself by putting her forehead on the ground. Then the mama kisses her on the right and then the left shoulder. The bride then gets up and greets those dancing with her first, followed by the other women in the room. When a "great woman" (possessed by powerful jinn) "comes down", from a deep trance and feels too tired to greet the participants, they must get up and greet her. While the 'bride' dances she is always spoken to as if she was a man. It is believed that "it is the one in her who dances", the jinni, rather than she herself. Male jinni enter or afflict women and whenever the 'bride' speaks in zār rituals, she always does so in a deep masculine voice.

The music lasts about an hour and a half, then stops for the maghrib prayers (evening prayers). After the prayers the women smoke karaku or sit talking. The music and singing re-starts after approximately half an hour.

In the second phase the singer and other participants stand. Occasionally one of the tambourine players moves from her place into the middle of the room. The bride dances the same creeping dance. Towards the end of this particular session, half a dozen other women were dancing in the middle of the room. One

danced like the 'bride', the rest danced normally, holding their hands in front of them, turning and swaying gently from side to side.

During a zār party, if a mama finds that singing a certain song makes the bride "come down" successfully she always continues to sing this song because she then knows that the bride's jinni likes it. Towards the end of any singing session the voices always get higher. Most women have a preferred type or types of zār with their particular music which makes them "come down". At the end of this second hour and a half of singing, the singer prepared to leave. The other women began to leave the room, some to go home, others to sit with the mama and the 'bride' and smoke karaku.

#### Day Two

This started in the same way and at the same time as the first day (although the sweet coffee was not served), and progressed along similar lines. The same music was played and the singer sang the same songs. The 'bride', wearing a different, beautiful pink dress, danced in the same way and as usual she was the first to start dancing. Most of the singing was conducted standing up and was rather livelier than on the first day.

The first session ended after nearly two hours for prayers, and special foods - sattat. The favourite 'daughter', brought in a small table and placed it in the centre of the room. Then she and two other women brought the large metal plates of food that had been on the dar table and put them onto this smaller table. They placed three large jugs of sharbat under the table, with glasses set on metal trays. Sharbat is a sweet beverage made with saffron,



water, sugar and lemon. The food on the plates was a mixture called mukhalat, which consists of sweets, cooked and dried beans, chocolate, unskinned peanuts, chick peas and almonds. On top of the table were placed five candlesticks with lighted candles. In a separate dish was a Masqati\* sweet, halwa. This sweet originates in Muscat in Oman and is made from flour, saffron, oil and sometimes pieces of almond. It is greenish yellow or orange. Also on the table were placed a large pot of incense burning on top of charcoal which filled the room with smoke, purifying the room. The term sattat refers to all the elements making up these various dishes.

When prayers had been said and smoking karaku finished, the women returned to the dar, followed by the 'bride', who had changed into a green silk dress and a black thub, both with gold decorations. She wore large earrings and a heavy gold necklace. The music and songs started and while everyone sang and swayed to the music, the mama took the 'bride's' hand and led her in a dance around the table; the 'bride' was in front of the mama. The mama invited the other women to dance beginning with an aged retired mama, who may have been a hundred years old, then another mama, and then the rest until all the women were dancing round the table, while the tambourine players played. The singer never dances and neither do those women who do not have jinn in them. From time to time the mama fetched rosewater and sprinkled those women who were thought to be "coming down". Then the music stopped, and the greetings over, the women sat in their places.

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\* Originally brought from Masqat in Oman.

The favourite daughter then dished out halwa and mukhalat in paper bags so that they could take it home after the session. A second helper served sharbat. When everyone had drunk the sharbat and received a bag of sattat to be eaten at home, they began to leave the dar.

### Day Three

This was the first day of the 5 days of Hibbshi zār. The style of music differs from the previous two days in qadri zār, and consists mainly of clapping rather than instruments. For the whole five days the mama sang - there was no special singer. The mama an old woman of eighty, sang loudly and continuously, and was able to remember all the words of the songs which were in Swahili. Fewer women were there because, as one woman put it, "Hibbshi is less moving and the women do not like it". Before every session of the ritual the women were served with bitter coffee, fumigated and sprinkled with rosewater, and karaku was served for the mamas. The first session of singing and dancing proceeded as on the previous day. The mama sang and the other women clapped and repeated some parts after her. The bride danced her creeping dance. The first session ended with the maghrib prayer. Two assistants fumigated the mama with incense and sprinkled rosewater over her.

Two sheep were kept at the entrance to the house. One sheep was much larger than the other. The zaffat il kharūf, "procession of the sheep", now takes place. The term zaffah, is exclusively used for the formal procession of a bride and groom, as they are brought to the groom's home for the consumation of their marriage.

When the women returned to the dar, a plastic mat was placed in the centre of the floor. The two sheep were brought in and stood on the mat. The 'bride' entered, wearing an ordinary, old dress and thub. Accompanied by the mama, she went to the mat. She stood beside the larger sheep and held its horns, and began to sway to the singing of the mama and to move her head from left to right. As she danced the mama brought a white cloth and covered the 'bride's' head. Other women began to clap and repeat parts of the songs. Many held lighted candles. The women stood around the 'bride' and the two sheep in a circle. The favourite 'daughter' handed the 'bride' her stick so that she held her stick in one hand and one of the sheep's horns in the other. Several times as she danced she threw her stick into the air.

The mama sprinkled rosewater over the 'bride and the other dancers as she sang. The singing and dancing around the sheep lasted about twenty minutes, then the sheep were led out and the mat removed. Another mat for food was laid and the women sat in their places. This food mat is also called a sufra. Six plates were set on the mat, containing shamuh consisting of chick peas and black-eyed peas boiled together. To drink there was a special sharbat which has a rather acid taste, made from dates and lemon. It is brownish-yellow in colour. When the sufra (mat) was set, the mama took the 'bride's' hand and stood beside her. The mama began to sing and the 'bride' to dance. The mama invited the other mamas present to dance, and then the other women. All the women danced in the ordinary way. The 'bride' began to dance around the sufra first by skipping, and then reverted to dancing normally. After ten minutes singing and dancing the women sat down to eat.

It is important to remember that no-one starts to eat before the 'bride'. This is out of respect for her jinni, who had asked for the whole 7 day sufra, and it is for him that the food is cooked. During the eating no-one must leave the dar.

When everyone had finished, the mat and dishes were removed and the 'bride' then asked for karaku. The mama turned to her, and addressing her as a man, in other words addressing the jinn, said:

"Listen, it is only here that you are allowed to smoke, because you know her husband, don't you. He does not allow her to smoke. He does not even know she smokes, so do you promise that you will not ask for karak when she is at home?"

The 'bride' replied in a very low masculine voice, "I agree". The karaku was then brought. After the smoking period everyone disperses to their own homes.

#### The Fourth Day

The smaller sheep was slaughtered on the fourth day, before the 'bride' arrived at the dar. The meat is prepared, to be eaten by all the day's participants in the evening. The first half of the day proceeded in the same way as the third day, with singing and dancing.

After the maghrib prayer a sufra mat was laid. This is a more

substantial ritual meal, with five large plates on which slices of bread were soaked in meat broth, and covered with some of the mutton. The plates in front of the 'bride' must contain a piece of every part of the sheep's body and the 'bride' is supposed to eat it all. If she cannot, she must at least taste something from each part of the sheep. Another plate in front of the 'bride' held the sheep's head. The 'bride' is obliged in particular to eat at least some of the brains. Around the soufra were six rosewater jars and some jars of sharbat and dishes of tamarind soup. There were also dishes of a pudding called dabuh, made from flour, sugar and eggs. Not everyone has this food on the fourth day as some only bring one sheep. Before eating, there was singing and dancing around the sufra.

#### Fifth Day

The larger sheep is slaughtered on the fifth day. The first part of the day proceeded as usual, apart from the fact that a different incense was burned. Normally, after fumigating the participants, the incense bowl remains for several hours, and fresh incense is added every half hour. On this day a kind of incense called yawī or jawī was used instead. It has a very strong smell like burnt chewing-gum, in fact some people add a special chewing-gum to the incense to make it smell even stronger. After the maghrib prayer, the large sheep was brought in and stood on a plastic mat. The bride wore ordinary clothes and covered her face and hair with a large white cloth, not the qitra headscarf. She stood beside the sheep and held its horn. The mama, holding her stick,

began to sing, and the other women (some holding candles) joined in. After ten minutes or so the bride was asked to stand astride the sheep and sit on it. On this particular occasion the 'bride' did so with difficulty, since she was distinctly fat. After a few minutes sitting on the sheep she got off and stood beside it again.

Suddenly the mama stopped singing, and turning to the 'bride', asked her in a loud voice "What is your name?" The 'bride' did not reply so the mama repeated the question. The 'bride' answered, "Sa'id", a man's name. The mama then asked "What is your son's name?" The 'bride' replied, "Faraj". During these questions the mama continuously tapped the 'bride' gently with her stick. The mama then said,

"We want you to promise that you will leave her forever, and you will not come back to her again. The poor thing has done whatever you asked, and she has had you in her for a long time. So, promise that you will never return - heh! What do you say, do you promise us?"

The 'bride' replied "Yes, I swear by God, I will promise you".

This process is called "The promise". It is the procedure by which the jinni is identified. Usually the 'bride' has the same jinni every time, but it is safer to ask the jinni's name whenever a zār ritual is held. The questions about the name, and son's name, are of course addressed to the jinni himself, and it is the jinni who replies, through the patient. After the 'promise' was complete, the women began to sing

again and ululate.

The sheep was then taken outside, purified by fumigation with incense, and given a drink of water. The butcher, who had been waiting in the courtyard, tied the sheep up and put its head over a sink on the ground. The 'bride' came out, wearing her Cabaya cloak. She knelt by the sheep and as the butcher opened the vein in its neck, drank the blood which gushed from the cut, directly from the sheep's neck.

The 'bride' was then taken back into the dar, where a bed had been made up for her on the floor. Four assistants held a blanket up and the 'bride' undressed completely, out of sight of the other women present. A bowl of the sheep's blood was brought in and with this, the mama and one of her assistants massaged the now naked 'bride'. After the massage, the 'bride's' body is completely covered in blood. It is most important, of course, that all who help the mama are her daughters, and themselves possessed by jinn. The blood covered 'bride' is then covered by two blankets, which induces profuse sweating, an important part of this cure. The blood remaining in the bowl was used by one assistant to sprinkle the 'bride's' stick. Then it was taken by the same assistant round all the women present who had jinn in them, and they dipped their little fingers into it. After two hours, the bride was taken to the bathroom and washed from head to foot by the mama and her assistant. That night the 'bride' always sleeps with the mama in her house, in the same room.

### The Sixth Day

The first half of this day followed the pattern of the three preceding days. Following the maghrib prayers, a sufra was laid on the floor, and on it were placed four large plates of rice and the meat from the sheep slaughtered the day before. Sharbat, tamarind soup and dabouh pudding were again served. In the centre of the sufra was a large metal plate of rice again with a piece of every part of the sheep's body as well as the sheep's head, as on the fourth day. Singing and dancing around the prepared sufra again lasted about ten minutes, after which the 'bride' and the other women began to eat. When they had finished they left the dar. Any food remaining from these meals is taken home the same day by the assistants.

### The Seventh Day

On this day the bride again as on the first, wore her white dress, thub and a qitra headscarf. The singing and dancing followed the pattern of the preceding days.

After maghrib prayers, a table was brought into the middle of the room. On it were put two large metal plates. On each of these were three dishes of bun, coffee beans and cardamon fried in butter. There were also large pieces of sugar called qand, lighted candles in candlesticks, bottles of perfumes, and a large pot of burning incense. When the table was ready the mama began to sing, and the 'bride' and



other women to dance. Some of the women knelt down as if praying.

After a quarter of an hour's dancing, the assistants served the bun, taking the dishes round so that each woman could put some in her hand with a spoon. The women ate the bun slowly. When they had finished, the ritual was over and the 'bride' was massaged with the special oil left over from the bun. She must then go to bed, still covered in the oil, and sleep on clean sheets. The next morning the mama and her assistant massage the 'bride' again, and the third and final massage with oil is in the afternoon, after which she must immediately take a bath and say her afternoon prayers. The mama then fumigates her and sprinkles her with rosewater.

This is the end of the sufra and the patient thanks the mama, and any assistants still remaining, and says goodbye. The mama wishes her good health.

On day one sweet coffee is served, which means that the beginning of the Sufra is a specially important occasion, that the jinn who is to be placated is important and that all hospitality must be shown to him .

On that day, the music starts in a controlled, structured and rhythmic way, with the rhythm heightening at the end of each song. The women dance freely within the rhythm. The "bride's" movements themselves were irregular. She was dancing in circular patterns most of the time, using virtually every part of her body.

There is no other context in which a woman's body would be allowed such freedom of movement, particularly for middle-aged women, who not only are always completely covered when outside, but even in the privacy of their own homes, have to be dressed modestly. In the zār ceremony and from the first day this contained and controlled body is given the chance to move freely, even to be partly naked. The more frantic and seductive the movements, the more they are taken as an indication of the presence of a jinn. From the first day the "bride" is encouraged to express herself by dancing as freely as possible.

By the second day the ceremony is less formal, as the sweet coffee is not served and the attendants are more relaxed. On this day food is served for the first time and it is uncooked. The active rhythm of music is generally thought to be necessary at this stage, because the patient has not danced for a long time (at least during the period prior to her visiting the mama) so she is in need of a real "shaking out" at the beginning of the ceremony in order to be able to complete the ritual successfully.

On the third day the sheep is sacrificed. The women address the sheep as a male and occasionally pronounce phrases like, "poor thing you will be slaughtered". Sheep are usually sacrificed in Moslem societies on a number of occasions; At the two Ids, at weddings, on the birth of a child and also when the foundations of a building are laid.

The sheep is brought under the "brides" control through the use of the stick and by holding the sheep's horns. At this stage we could argue that

the sheep represents animal nature, perhaps even the animalistic sexual nature of man and that by holding the sheep's horns the "bride" gets control over this sexual nature. This notion would be clearer if we then consider that these women are normally controlled and ruled by men and that the Zār ceremony allows them the opportunity to reverse this situation in a way that would never happen in real life.

The meat of the slaughtered sheep is cooked and it is essential that the "bride" tastes every part of the sheep. This is because the jinn has asked for the sheep but has not specified which parts he prefers. When I asked the mamas why they particularly insisted on the boiled brain being eaten by the "bride", they replied that it was because the brain is the most important part of the sheep. It should be mentioned that the brain is a common meal for Kuwaitis and has no special significance.

Thus the ongoing process of control is carried out from the third day to the fourth day. This control is developed by eating every part of the sheep.

On the third day it was noticed that the sheep represents animalistic nature. On the fifth day the second sheep represents the jinn and the jinn is identified through the process of pronouncing his name. Previous to this he has been controlled by the "bride" straddling the sheep.

This notion of control is heightened through the fifth day when the "bride" "rides" the sheep. Infact in Arabic when someone is controlled by

another it is said that the latter is riding him. The act of promise is carried out while the sheep is present in the dar. The act of promise reassures the "bride" and her mama that the "bride" will be cured at least temporarily since by identifying the jinn, the ambiguity of the "bride" illness and the ambiguity of the jinn himself is dispelled (the act of naming someone, has somehow always been associated with gaining power over him, this is especially the case in the process of producing spells and amulets in moslem culture).

When asked about the "bride's" drinking of blood and being massaged with it, the mamas said that it is because the jinn likes the blood. However, it is worth mentioning that blood in moslem culture represents strength and the life force. Slaughtering, controls the animalistic nature and the jinn himself, but blood gives life and strength to the "bride" in this way the force of nature and jinn has been transferred, both internally and externally, to the "bride".

Days three, four and five represent the high point of the ritual. Days one and two, although not so eventful, are livelier in terms of music and dancing.

In days six and seven the ceremony begins to wind down. On day six the food is the same as is served on day four. Day six is the final day on which food is taken in the form of a shared meal. At this point the women and mamas, who have constantly supported and comforted the bride throughout the ceremony express their solidarity with and concern for the

"bride's" future well being by advising her against submitting to her problems. In this way she is prepared for the return to her everyday life.

Day seven is the final day of the ceremony and on that day the most respect is shown to the jinn and the dar. This is manifested in the way. The women dance, which at this stage resembles praying. The ceremony is ended by serving a special "savoury", bun which is particular to zār ceremonies the "bride" is massaged with the oil in which the bun has been roasted, this oil is thought ideal for this kind of massage because it has been preheated, and also cooked with coffee (thought to be hot by nature) and the "bride" when massaged with this oil will be helped to sweat out the tiredness, tension and "winds" from her body.

Throughout the ceremony it was noticed that the days were structured by the introduction of different types of food the first day started with sweet coffee and the last day with bun, in between there was a variety of dishes ranging from uncooked vegetarian food to cooked meat and rice.

This process of structuring the ceremony was further maintained by the use of music which encouraged the women's participation at the beginning of the ceremony and then helped them to express themselves throughout.

#### .5.10 A TAMBŪRA ZĀR

The sufra described above was held for a particular patient, but as

we have already seen, tambūra ceremonies may be held every Thursday as a kind of karama (courtesy) to the dar and its inhabitants the jinn. It also preserves the sacredness of the dar.

Tambūra dūr may be owned either by the mama or by a man. The expenses of the tambūra dar are paid by the mama's patients. The money is needed for incense, charcoal, coffee and rosewater. There are not very many tambūra dur held nowadays, and they are the only type of dar where the patients are mixed, both men and women. Every Thursday the dar's patients will gather to sing and dance, as has been described in an earlier section, and occasionally a patient will "come down", and afterwards be sprinkled with rosewater and fumigated by the mama. Male patients are usually ex-slaves. The number of women exceeds largely that of men. The same mama treats both men and women.

When men "come down" they do not do this in the same way as women. They do not scream or cry or lie down, or show any of the ecstatic uncontrolled body movements common for women. It takes an experienced person to tell whether or not a man is "coming down". A man is believed to be "coming down", when he repeats a movement of the dance repetitively, continuously, if he begins to sweat and if his gaze is fixed on one spot.

As has been previously mentioned, men do not greet the mama in the usual way, but instead, greet the tambūra instrument itself by touching it and passing the same hand down over their faces. A man also greets everyone in the room by saying "peace upon you". As each guest arrives he

will be fumigated by the mama's male helper.

Men dance differently from women. They do not move about much, only progressing one or two feet. They mainly move their shoulders and heads, and their hips when dancing with the manjūr. Their hands are kept rigidly by their sides. Women, too, dance differently in the tambūra. They are very modest, wearing not only cloaks but sometimes a bushiya thin crepe black cloth over their faces. The mama will be the most modest of all. The women dance simply by walking a metre and a half forwards, and then back again. Sometimes they may dip their bodies as they walk forward.

The tambūra dar which I shall describe was owned by mama N., famous for her piousness and her ability to treat cases of possession. She had inherited this ability from her father, who had the most famous tambūra dar in Kuwait. Mama N. had brothers but her father told her a short while before his death that he preferred her to have the job, and gave her his ability to heal people. She already had exhibited her own healing powers when she had helped him in the dar. Mama N's father told her always to be honest and to cure everyone who needed it, whether or not they could afford it. She refuses no-one, even if they come to her in the middle of the night.

On the walls of this dar hung many tambūras belonging to those now dead, and a large drum covered with a brown cloth. The instruments all now belong to the mama and are kept pure by being fumigated every week.

By the door stood a table holding many pots of incense and bottles of rosewater. The incense is of the special strong-smelling type called jawi. Women sat with their backs to the table and door, facing the men at the other end of the room. The two groups were separated by about three metres.

In front of the group of men sat the tambūra player behind his tambūra. He was also the singer. On either side of him were two men wearing manjūr, two players played small drums, and a third had a large drum. The group of men consisted of some who were Mama N's patients and some who simply loved tambūra music. Any man who knows how to dance can wear the manjūr if he wishes.

When the dancing finished and all the women had greeted the mama as usual, all returned to their places and performed a special greeting, for the jinn inside them and also for the tambūra. To do this they hooked their hands behind their heads and pressed their elbows together, then pressed their hands onto their head and forehead. The tambura dar is very sacred amongst dūr and those with tambūra zār in them are respected most of all, by those with jinn in them. Both men and women must be "pure" (bathe after sexual intercourse) when they attend this zār.

Men, when in trance states, "coming down" during a tambūra ritual are occasionally known for exhibiting extreme forms of behaviour. One, well known case is that of "Cithalmin" who used to drink huge quantities of salt water from a well outside the particular dar. Another was famous



for eating burning charcoal, afterwards remembering nothing and showing no signs of burns in his mouth.

The atmosphere of tambūra rituals is dominated by the male attributes of control and reserve, contrasting with that of the exclusively female zār rituals. In tambūra the dancing is very controlled, with no ecstatic or sexually suggestive movements. The power and sacredness of tambūra is such that devotees of zār generally hold these rituals in great respect, even fear. Attendance at a tambūra zār is never for frivolous reasons.

The predominantly male patients of tambūra zār also come to see their mama on major religious feasts ('Cid al Fitr and 'Cid al Adha) and at the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan. In the case of patients needing a dihan (massage with special oil), they go to the mama's house where, in the case of Mama N, cited earlier, her male assistant would perform the massage. Mamas, because of the sacredness attached to their persons, as the "mistress of zār" do not touch the male body.

The mama of the tambūra zār encounters male patients only in these contexts, whereas the mamas who perform the female zār rituals are also involved constantly in the regular, social visiting by her patients.

Male social life is of course centred mainly around popular cafes, clubs and diwaniyas, and men would, at most, visit the tambūra zār once a week. Men do not use the dar as a social centre in the way women do.

NOTES

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- 1) For a recent and comprehensive bibliography on zar see al-safi & Amin 1988.
- 2) Lewis 1971, p 35.
- 3) Lewis, op. cit., p 117.
- 4) G. Saïdi, 1976. p 47.
- 5) Fakhouri, 1968, p 49 - 52.
- 6) Crapanzano, 1973, p 127.
- 7) Ibid., p 127.
- 8) Ibid., p 213.
- 9) Kennedy, 1967 p 185 - 194.
- 10) al messri, 1975.
- 11) Saunders 1977, p 190
- 12) Morsey, 1978, p 559 - 616.
- 13) al Shahi, 1984 p 29 - 44.
- 14) al Shahi, 1981 p 13 - 29.
- 15) Constantinides 1977.
- 16) Rahim 1988
- 17) Dickson, 1956.
- 18) al Agrouga, unpublished manuscript.
- 19) Saïdi, op. cit. p 91.
- 20) Kelly, 1968, p 411.
- 21) Makhlouf, 1979.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE MAMA AND IL MAMA

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE MAMA AND IL MAMA\*

#### 6.1 THE MAMA: MISTRESS OF ZĀR

Mamas, as we have said before, are usually black women of African origin, from former slave families. They are usually at least middle-aged, are more commonly elderly. Their age varies between 50 - 80.

The mama is regarded by her patients, called "daughters", as their spiritual mother (patients are in fact usually women), and great respect and affection is shown to her. When visiting the mama, a "daughter" kisses first the right, then the left shoulder, then the mama's forehead or head. Although a mama is shown respect by her patients' families, neighbours, and by society in general, it is her patients who show the greatest respect. This description naturally excludes all those who regard belief in jinn as superstition and zār as quackery.

On all social and religious occasions the mama's 'daughters', or

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\* When inquiring about the meaning of the word "il mama", I noticed that nobody, including mamas themselves, know the meaning or the origin of this word, and this applies to some other words like il-barkh which is the name of the first day of il mama ceremony. Nevertheless, some people prefer to call il mama ceremony Kibariyah, which means the great jinn, as il mama ceremony is performed mainly for the purpose of paying respect "Karamah" to the jinn of the dar.

patients, should visit her, and sometimes bring presents. It is very similar to the obligations that exist between a daughter and her natural mother. In fact those women, who are not very intimate with their real mothers, show an extreme affection and loyalty to their mamas. Also the 'daughters' regularly gather in the mama's house especially on Friday afternoon, where the mama fumigates them with sandal incense and sprinkles rosewater over their heads, and serves coffee and karaku.

Tha mama takes on, to a large extent, the role of an ideal mother, even when her patients are old, or of the same age as the mama. They usually talk to their 'daughters' very kindly, ask about their families and advise them on many domestic problems. The 'daughters' can stay with the mama for several days, whenever they wish. It is important that 'daughters' consult the mama, or at least ask her opinion, on important personal matters such as getting married, or finding a wife for a son.

The mama is the most important person in a zār ceremony; she leads the patient to dance, and she massages the patient's body with the special oil or with sheep's blood. In many case the mama herself dances and sings. If she cannot sing, she brings in people known for their ability to sing zār songs, and joins in with them. The mama's daughters may also accompany her in singing or playing.

A mama usually attains her position through inheritance - from her mother, elder sister, mother-in-law, or even grandmother. Sometimes she

is given the position by her own mama, whom she used to serve as an assistant during the former's lifetime. The following two examples illustrate these points.

Mama S., aged around 80, was not from a family known for its healing abilities, nor were they possessed by jinn, but she herself was possessed during her youth, and was taken to a famous mama, who cured her. Mama S. was a very helpful patient for her mama, and lived most of the time with her, helping her. She learned all the techniques of treatment and all the songs. As her jinn were of a very high rank, and because she was very honest with her mama, she was given tawk il, that is, the authority to replace her mama after her death. Mama S. then opened her own dar and began to treat patients.

Mama R. was the eldest daughter of a very famous mama. She helped in the dar during the mama's lifetime, and she herself was possessed by jinn at that time. When her mother died, however, she did not open a dar although she had inherited the ability to cure.

She recalled that for about 15 years after her mother's death, she had many dreams in which her mother told her to open a dar and start to treat patients. She suffered many misfortunes and fell sick many times, due to her delay in opening a dar. Her mother's patients also fell sick many times. This was significant because a mama's patients usually become the patients of her successor. If there is no successor, the patients still should not go to another mama unless their case is extremely

urgent or serious. Eventually mama R. decided to open a dar, and took back her mother's former patients and many others.

A mama herself is necessarily 'possessed' by jinn, but these are of a higher rank than the jinn in ordinary people. For this reason when a mama is ill, or is thought to have problems with her jinn, she must be treated by a mama higher than herself. It is only a higher or more powerful jinn that can satisfy a lesser one, the opposite is impossible.

A mama must always be clean and pure, that is, she must bathe immediately after any sexual intercourse with her husband. Ordinarily she must take a bath at least once a day, fumigate herself with incense and sprinkle herself with rosewater.

A mama must wear her special zār jewellery all the time. There are many rings called rshum (plural of rashem). The most desirable stone for these is turquoise. Some mamas wear a mi'sab, a golden headband. This is very heavy and looks rather like a belt, consisting of square pieces of gold with a stone in the centre of each square. The whole is attached to the mama's headkerchief by two small hooks. One mama, for example, wore her mi'sab while she was alone at home having her tea. She said that the mi'sab had been her mother's. It was very sacred and should not be put anywhere except on her head while she is awake and under her pillow when asleep. When she took it off for a day, she said she had a bad headache.

The respect felt for mamas is sometimes taken to the extent of fear.

They are never criticised or laughed at even in their absence, because they may still know what has happened and who has criticised them.

It is said that whenever a mama's jewellery is stolen, the thief will get into trouble, and will never be able to sell the jewellery. Many mamas are able to tell who has stolen their things, or even those of another mama. They are in contact with the jinn, who can tell them about the thief. Sometimes they can also find people who are lost or who have left their families without trace. Not all mamas have such abilities however.

One particular mama told how she identified thieves.

"It was not me, my daughter. It is my 'masters' who have given me this ability. Whenever I want to know something, before I go to sleep I ask first God, then my masters, to tell me about it. They come to me in my dreams. I have two jinn 'masters', both religious sheiks. Both appear to me in white robes; they have bright faces and are very pious".

Mamas have an "unwritten agreement" amongst themselves not to take one another's patients. When a patient consults a mama for the first time, she always asks whether she has been treated by another mama, and if so whether she was sent by her previous mama. If she was not sent by her, the mama usually refuses to treat the patient, unless the case is extremely urgent. A mama will only send her patient to another mama, a more powerful mama, when she is not able to effect a cure.



The mamas all know one another and visit each other's houses. Several mamas may attend a zār ritual and may help the mama who runs the dar with some songs. They are the most respectful of all the visitors at the zār rituals. Generally, the older mamas have the highest rank, or those who are known to have cured many patients and are very experienced. However the highest ranking of all mamas are those whose families had many mamas, particularly on the maternal side. A family history of healing is very important.

Mamas do treat men as well as women, although this is quite rare.

#### 6.1.1. BECOMING A MAMA

To illustrate the forceful personality, determination and strength of character typical of the mamas of Kuwait, two life histories reveal a number of the social factors relevant in the 'choice' of this profession, virtually the only profession open to women in traditional Kuwait. While the tradition of having mama in the family is apparent, social circumstances may 'force' a woman to develop this skill.

##### Mama Umm Husain

"I was brought up in an ordinary household fifty years ago. I was the third child of a large family. When I was sixteen, I was married to my cousin. We were both illiterate and shared the same family background.

My life was very unstable. He was always unhappy, nothing could cheer him up and we had frequent quarrels. One day while we were fighting each other I fainted and had a very severe fit.

"My paternal aunt, who was also my mother-in-law, was in the house. We were living in an extended family, sharing the house with my in-laws. My aunt was herself a mama, and she came and fumigated me and splashed me with rosewater, assuming I had a jinni in me. Events proved that in fact I was possessed by a powerful jinni.

"I began to help my aunt, the mama, in her work. I was about twenty years old when I had my first fit, and I had three children. Later I had nine other children. When I began working with my aunt, I stopped worrying so much about my husband's behaviour. I still washed his clothes, made his bed and prepared his meals, but I no longer bothered to discuss things with him, or to attach much importance to his complaints. He continued to lose his temper and act badly; the difference was that I had other things to keep me busy, so I didn't have time to sit thinking about him.

"I also now had some money, as my aunt paid me from time to time for my services. I no longer had to ask my husband for money, which was one of the occasions when he always used to quarrel with me. I continued to deal with his problems but I was less careful about them.

"When my aunt was dying, she asked me to take her place. From that day on, I paid less and less attention to my husband, and at the same time I brought more money into the house. So, when we moved to a new house, on our own, it was I who furnished it with my money, that is, the money I earned from my job as a mama. When my children grew up and wanted cars, it was I who paid, and still pay, for them. Now I pay for everything at home. Even my children hesitate to ask their father for money, as they consider me the sole supporter of the family.

"Now I don't need my husband any more. Now I don't get nervous whenever I notice something childish about him. He has always been childish and unreasonable. I don't know how I've put up with him for so many years."

This life history shows us many of the factors leading to the creation of a mama, and illustrates how becoming a mama is the means - perhaps the only means - of overcoming difficulties. It is also one way of taking revenge on a domineering man. This woman used her job as a mama, and perhaps also her earlier position as a patient, to run her family. She used her wealth to overcome her difficult situation.

#### Fatima the Healer

A second life history, of a local healer, shows how this position can also be used to overcome a disadvantageous social situation.

This woman is sixty years old. She has a large family, and one of her sons and his family still share her house with her.

At the age of fourteen she was married, to a poor man, and they lived in her father's house for twenty years. Her husband's parents were not rich enough to afford a room for her in their house, and her husband could not afford to rent a room in someone else's house.

When her father died, she inherited her share of his wealth and

bought her own house which was modest compared to her sister's. Her brothers were rich, and her sisters were married to rich men, so she was the only one to lead a poor life and had needed her father's help in almost everything. This may be the reason for her rather domineering personality. She controlled the family affairs and it was she, rather than her husband, who made the important decisions.

This woman's husband was very 'simple', but he did have some knowledge of healing herbs, and some skill in massage and setting broken bones. She learned these skills from him, and also learned from a woman neighbour, a dāya (midwife). This woman used to deliver babies, and also helped women during their pregnancies, diagnosing their physical troubles, and treating them with herbs.

While her father was alive and she lived in his house, she did not practise the job of a healer, but after his death and the move to a new house, she began to treat women and children in the new neighbourhood. She proved to be very successful, and gained a reputation as a good healer, respected by everyone. Even her brothers and sisters, so much above her in terms of wealth, also respected her position.

This woman is now rich herself, partly owing to the earnings of her fifteen children, and partly owing to gifts from patients. She claims she does not accept money in return for her services. Almost anyone does whatever she asks, particularly if they are patients. She is well known for her powerful and respectable personality.

This woman's position as an influential healer has facilitated many things for her. For example, none of her four children completed their high school education, and they would not have the jobs they now enjoy, if it were not for their mother's influence. She managed to get jobs for her children by asking patients who were wives of other influential people.

This case history gives us further insight into the reasons for becoming a mama, or in this case, a healer. In this particular case according to what she told me, this woman felt her family treated her unfairly her sisters were married to rich men, but she was left to face her destiny with a man lacking both money and intelligence. If her husband had become rich during the early development period of oil, as so many did, she might not have felt deprived materialistically, relative to her sisters. This feeling of deprivation undoubtedly provided the impetus to develop an independent career, the only one available to a woman in her situation that of traditional healer. When the healer spoke of her sisters and sisters-in-law, it was with great emphasis on their wealth and easy life. Now it is quite remarkable, the way in which her children respect her and refer to her in all their personal affairs.

Obviously, mamas are very proud of their respectable position. In fact, it is clear from their daily lives that they are considered important by almost everyone.

In the mornings, particularly between 10.00 - 12.00 a.m., the

mama's 'daughters' (patients) visit her socially, especially if they live in the neighbourhood. They drink tea and coffee and get fumigated. One or more of the 'daughters' do the mama's shopping, with her or for her. There is often shopping to do for an impending zār ceremony.

Before lunch the 'daughters' return home, although occasionally one or two of them might stay to lunch with the mama. In the afternoons, the 'daughters' may again come to the mama's house, to visit her, to help her prepare for a ceremony, or conduct a ceremony, or to visit another zār ceremony with her. In fact, mamas are rarely seen alone being usually accompanied by one or more of their patients who might drive.

In the evenings, or occasionally in the mornings, a mama may have patients (new or old) brought to her for fumigation or for urgent treatment, for example if they have a serious fit.

It should be stressed that when the 'daughters' visit the mama, it is not necessarily because they are ill, but because their visits show respect, affection, and a desire to help.

Zār ceremonies usually finish between 8.00 - 9.00 p.m. and mamas the return home unless the ceremony is held in their own home. Some ceremonies (sufra) take a whole week. In any social occasion the mama will be among the first to be invited.

What requires emphasis is that the vocation of mama, and to a lesser extent, of healer, is still full-time. It is not, like a medical post in a hospital where patients are only seen at certain times and in special places. A mama's work is practised every day of her life, if not every hour of every day. This is the reason why she commands such respect and appreciation from the people, particularly her patients. And this is why it is very important for a mama to remain active as long as she is alive.

#### 5.1.2 MAMAS AND THEIR 'DAUGHTERS'

Middle-aged women are married at a very early age. Some of them claimed to have married at the age of eleven or twelve. Regardless of what the women at present say, the fact is that as a social norm at the time, girls were married immediately after having their first menstruation and some girls were married even before menstruating. One might be tempted to think that since this was a normal social practice, and it should not be thought very cruel or at least difficult for adolescent girls to be married at this age, but this view is totally at variance with the facts, since these middle-age women themselves still remember many instances, especially of the first years of their marriage, when they were unable to grasp anything of their new marital life, and felt extremely ignorant and vulnerable. Many of them were transferred promptly from a happy peaceful childhood to a responsible marital life where, as daughters-in-law, they were expected to be modest and above all obedient.

In fact mothers commonly wanted their sons to get married so as

there would be someone at home to help them with the household tasks. Given the customs of the time these girls were married into extended families.

The personality of the mother-in-law was always domineering, her orders were immediately obeyed by her daughter-in-law; it was socially unacceptable for a man to stand up for his wife against his mother. Yet this same mother-in-law, who might be very domineering, would in turn be helpless to solve the problems or even intervene in her own daughter's marital problems, as it was taken for granted that a young wife must adapt to her new life without complaint. In fact neither the real mother nor daughter could have an effective role in the latter's marital life. The mother's interference or daughter's stubbornness might even make things more difficult, as the husband then might decide to divorce his wife, a disgrace which was very difficult for old Kuwaiti society to accept easily. To sum up, during their adolescence, and even later, these now middle-aged women were deprived of support, safety and protection. They were deprived of their mother at an early age, and then faced with a domineering mother-in-law. Later in life this dilemma was resolved by establishing a most affectionate and long standing relationship with the mama, who is not only respected but also loved. The mama also shows her "daughters" love and affection. A problem brought to her by one of her "daughters", is carefully listened to, the possible ways of solving it are discussed with the "daughter". The mama always asks her "daughter" not to worry too much, especially because this worry might affect her health. There is some sort of physical contact between mama and her "daughter". As was mentioned



before, there is a special way of greeting the mama, which requires that the "daughter" kiss the shoulders and the forehead of her mama.

Apart from the ceremony itself, when the patient feels unwell, on other days, she might visit her mama and have a body massage of "bun oil" by the mama herself.

## 6.2 THE AUTUMN OF DISCONTENT

In 4.4 we have discussed people's attitudes towards zār, and that included a short account of their attitudes to mamas. In this section I will discuss some attitudes mamas themselves have towards each other and towards present zār in general. And then the attitudes of two experienced women towards past and present mamas will be discussed.

Usually the experienced people, those who have lived with or seen elderly mamas within the social structure of old Kuwait have more respect for old mamas and consider their "real" mamas. Some of those committed and respectful mamas are still alive, although few of them do hold zār ceremonies very frequently. The younger generation of mamas, even though some of them are real daughters of the older mamas, do not enjoy the same respect. Mainly because many of them do not keep the same old traditions and rules. Some of them treat cases which are not entirely zār cases, some insist on getting a large amount of money from the patients. As far as their illnesses is concerned the patients themselves are not as serious as the old generation. This is how elderly mamas and patients describe the present situation.

This aspect of discontent was obvious in several interviews I had made with three elderly mamas whose ages range from 75 - 85+. Two of them have given up zār ceremonies as a continuous practice, and only hold zār ceremonies for very urgent cases. But they are still visited by their daughters every Friday afternoon and during other week days. They occasionally massage their daughters with "Bun" oil.

One of these mamas told me that she has decided to give up zār because she had noticed that her old 'daughters' are getting old and they no longer need zār ceremonies, as it is an unquestioned fact that when someone gets very old he loses the power and mood to participate in very active ceremonies, and also because when somebody who has pious and kind assyad when he gets old, he comes to terms with his assyad, and they do not hurt the patient or ask for ceremonies. Her other reason for giving up zār ceremonies and even to stop treating or accepting some patients in her dar was that she noticed that some women, especially the younger ones, are not ill at all and they just "act". In addition to that there have been some cases brought to her, which have no relation to zār. As an example, she mentioned a case of a woman of forty years of age, whose monther has brought her to mama's dar. This woman was experiencing homosexual love for her neighbour who was a married woman. The latter was abusing her and getting all the "so called" patient's salary.

The mama explained that this was the most disgusting and shameful case she had ever heard of. When I asked the mama whether she knew if there was any kind of sexual relationship between them she answered

that this might have existed, because the way "this woman" was describing her love to her neighbour was more like a heterosexual love. The mama was told that the women had dreams of her neighbour, and her continuous worry was that her neighbour might leave her one day. The mama concluded:

"This kind of love is a cursed and "dirty" love. My assyad are great, they treat real ailments, depending on the power of Allah. They are pure and pious assyad. This case and the similar ones are not to be treated by a mama like myself. So I threw her out of my clean and blessed dar and told her and her mother that such cases should be taken to a brothel and not a respectful dar."

Many elderly mamas criticise the so-called new dur (sing. dar) on the basis that these dur are not serious and respectful. But the fact is that the age variable has an effective influence in this attitude.

The elderly mamas' patients consist mainly of relatively elderly ones (their ages range between 55 - 75+). These patients are accustomed to the old zār traditions, either because of their age requires that such a woman should be serious and modest, or because of their old and stable conviction that a dar is a respectful and blessed place. These factors give the dar a formal and "grave" state, which might not appeal to some of the younger middle aged patients.

The most formal and sacred type of zār is tambūrah. And no wonder that the majority of tambūrah zār patients are men and elderly women. The tambūrah mama is among those mamas who think that present zār does

not possess the same degree of respect and devotion it used to have, in the past. Although she insists that this applies only to other types of zār and dūr, and does not include her dar, as all her patients are real tambūrah devotees and have a great respect for their zār and their mama.

While the elderly patients constitute a minority, the middle aged represent a great majority. Yet it is not true that all types of zār and all dūr are not taken seriously, as there is a great number of middle aged women who do respect old zār traditions, and not all dūr are considered disrespectful.

Nevertheless, it seems that elderly mamas are sticking to their old traditions and rules, and consider their dūr much superior to other types of dūr, as a result of their inability to keep pace with the changes, and to some extent, uneasiness toward new dūr which inevitably have younger patients with a more 'modern' outlook. The other factor is contained in the age variable, which as was mentioned in the previous interview, the older the patient the less demand is made for zār ceremonies. And as many of elderly mamas' patients are old, the demand for zār ceremonies is, naturally, less, which means less income for the mamas.

To show the difference in mamas' attitudes I will discuss the case of two different mamas, both are Failakan, yet one is very old and traditional, she lives in Failaka and has less demand for zār ceremonies. The other is younger, lives in Kuwait and has many patients. To make this

point clear I will discuss the difference in both attitudes along with the particularities of Failakan zār and two mamas life history.

### 6.3 ZĀR IN FAILAKA

There used to be a big "sidre" tree in Grayniyah which was called "Sidrat al-Grayniyah", this "sidre" was considered very sacred and in the old days, especially during summer and dry days, all zār ceremonies were conducted under this tree. All necessary things for the ceremony was prepared in the dar, and then they were taken on the back of the donkeys to al-Grayniyah. It was around this "sidre" that the ceremony used to take place. And just before the "maghrib" prayers the procession of the 'sidre "zafat il sidre" took place. This procession consisted of cleaning, fumigating and sprinkling rosewater on the tree while other women sing and dance under it.

This tree was of considerable importance for "il mama" ceremony as all food remnants were thrown under the tree. It is worth mentioning that beside this "sidre" tree there were a big number of palms, and this place in general was considered a very fertile and green place in Failaka. And sometimes it was used as a summer resort for the shaikhs of Kuwait. At the present there are only a few palms, no more than seven, and two "athal" trees. The sacred "sidre" of Grayniyah has died, six to seven years ago. This is the result of neglecting it for a while and also because the rain is not as frequent as it used to be. When I asked the mama of Failaka about the reason why the "sidre" has died, she answered

as follows:

"This island was, and still is a sacred place. The rain in this island was always abundant and we used to grow everything on this land. We had many palms and sidres in the island, thanks to God his "barakah" was always containing this island. And also because the people were simple and had a pure "niyah", every-

thing was available on this island. Grayniyah "sidre" has died because the people of this "sidre" have died. Those pious people and women who had pious "kibariyah" in them have died, those people used to love this "sidre" and care for it. Now that they have died, nobody cares for it. And who knows perhaps it has grown old and died. Everything is in God's hand."

People, especially the old ones, still regard this place as a sacred place. And some stories were told to me of the people who happened to be there at night, and who heard the sound of many people singing and playing tambourines in spite of the fact that the place was empty and nobody could ever think of going there at that time. Many people were shocked and scared when hearing these voices. Sayid il-Graniya's magam\* was not far from where the "sidre" used to be.

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\* Shrine

Failaka had, in the past two mamas, the older one still lives in Failaka and has very few "daughters", as most of her old "daughters" have either died or moved to Kuwait. The younger one has many "daughters" who are mostly from Failaka. She is around sixty years old, and settled in Kuwait. Married, but she has not had any "marital relations" with her husband, who has another wife and four children aged between 5 - 9.

The mama of Failaka, who lives in Failaka, is around seventy five to eighty years old. She is from slave origin, black and looks very old. She has been the mama of Failaka for a long time. She received the position of mama after the death of her aunt (her father's sister). Prior to that her mother and her aunt, were mamas so when her mother died her aunt alone became the mama of Failaka. During her mother's and her aunt's life she used to be the main helper for both of them. Her aunt died, she became the mama of Failaka. During her life time, her aunt has given her "tawki".\* She was married twice. From her first marriage she has got one son, who is now about forty years old. He lives in Kuwait and has a family. Her first husband has died, so she was married for the second time and has no children of this marriage. She lives in a modest house. She has got a dar in which zār ceremonies are performed. Her dar is situated in the modern Failaka. It is called dar il hibush. Naturally before the modernizing of Failaka her dar was in old Failaka. Her house is very modest compared with other dūr that

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\* Authorization

I saw in Kuwait. The room in which she received me was a very small and modest room. Her rosewater pots were very old, and the essence she used was not of an expensive kind. She was wearing a very simple yet clean dress, her jewellery consisted of three gold rings studded with turquoise stones. As she is very old a niece of hers is living with her.

I asked her about the difference in zār ceremonies in the past, and in the present. She told me that the "daughters" in the past were very faithful to their mamas, they had great respect for their dar and their "Kibariyah". But now they have changed, they are all the time busy with their own lives. They do not come to visit her as frequently as they used to.

She was also complaining that the cost of a whole "sufra" was once very little, but today it is very expensive.

Failakan zār is not different in sequence to any other zār. The five day ceremony consists of : first day, sattat, zaffah, wallage and the last day.

The women who participate in this ceremony, the "daughters" of the dar, are all from Failaka and all moved to Kuwait after the discovery of oil. For them the gatherings of the dar, whether in zār ceremonies or the purely social gatherings at the dar, outside zār provide the best occasion for seeing each other and, in a way recreate a past that they have been detached from to a more devastating extent than that which



took place in Kuwait itself. It is not only that economic and social circumstances have changed for them, but they have also been moved from a small island that had its unique characteristics to a new city. Here is a more modern and more complicated and sophisticated way of life.

The Failakan mama herself has moved to Kuwait because she was "deprived" of her "daughters" and she found out that they really need her.

The way women participate in zār ceremonies in the Failakan "dar" is in some respects different. Older women have a more explicit role in these ceremonies, they dance and sing very actively. The way middle aged women dance is more "hysterical" and involves in some cases beating their feet vigorously on the ground.

The way all women dance has a close similarity to maritime dances of the divers and fishermen of Failaka. This fact is not merely coincidental, as women in this maritime society, were less isolated from their men and in many cases participated in the old traditional "Labour market", as was mentioned previously.

I asked the Failakan mama who lives in Kuwait, why her patients do not drink blood. She answered that blood is only drunk by "ardi" i.e. earthly jinn, who could sometimes be very malignant. Her daughters all have benign jinn.

Failakan dar, like any other dar, is a place where many different women are gathered. The only thing that they share is a deep alienation. The least alienated of all is the present Failakan mama. She lives in Kuwait but when there is a demand for a zār ceremony in Failaka she goes there and holds the ceremony there. While she is in Failaka she stays in the patient's house for the whole time required for the ceremony. This time sometimes extends to a week or ten days. Her trips to Failaka are very frequent.

When I asked her about the difference between present zār and the past one, she said:

"Zār is always zār, there is no difference between the past and present zār. As long as this earth is inhabited by human beings there will be jinn, good and vicious jinn, and there will be a way to treat the afflicted patients.

"It is not true that the patients act, as long as there is jinn there would be zār and patients. These patients will always be grateful to their mama, because they need her, and also because she is a pious and blessed person.

"The only difference is in people's "niyah", nowadays, people especially young and educated ones have many doubts in zār. But this is only so because they have so little experience."

No other complaints were mentioned.

Having discussed the mama's attitudes, I will discuss the attitudes of two experienced women who are themselves relatives of old mama's and both during their childhood and later on have attended many zār ceremonies. They compare past zār and mamas with the present.

A woman of about forty years of age told me about her mother who was a very famous mama, and compared her with her sister who is an actual mama.

"My mother was brought up with "il sada i.e." the prophet's dissidents". She was a very pious and "committed" mama. She had "tawktl" i.e. authorization from another mama who was her mama, and not a relative of hers. Unlike my sister who spends her time gossiping with her "daughters" my mother never gossiped or told anyone something that may hurt them. She used to take "zār" very seriously and respected her "assyad". My sister takes "zār" as a means of enjoyment. My mother's zār ceremonies usually lasted for three to five days. But nowadays we see that zār ceremonies extend to seven days. Of course that does not mean that they are always unserious, sometimes the "assyad" ask for a seven day ceremony. But my sister for instance, her zār ceremonies are always seven days, that can never be justified. She takes zār for fun. And all her "daughters" have nothing to do but to attend zār ceremonies to dance and sing.

"My mothers' assyad were very powerful. One day the members of a very well-known family decided to go to camp in the desert. They took with them my mother and her "daughters". There, my mother's stomach grew bigger, first people thought that she might have had a certain disease, but when this symptom

had persisted, they thought she has become pregnant by the head of the family who was a very rich, aristocratic and at the same time pious man.

"This continued along the five months that they spent in the desert. Just a few days before they left the desert my mother fell in a pool near the camping site. They tried to carry her to the tents, but that was not easy, until fourteen men gathered and could carry her with difficulty to the main tent, which was the tent of the head of the family. Being very familiar with my mother's zār he started to fumigate her and read some prayers over her. My mother then started to tremble and a flood of blood started coming out of her womb.

"Then people came and apologized for they thought that she was made pregnant by the head of the family. While the fact was that she was pregnant of her "assyad". And had a miscarriage".

Another lady comparing the actual zār with the past one, told me the following:

"Both my grandmother (my mother's mother) and my mother were mamas.

"My grandmother was the best mama in Kuwait, she used to cure the most difficult cases, what you would call these days, the mentally handicapped, and those who have nervous paralysis.

"She was very pious, her prayers were always said in time. If in any zār ceremony there was a woman who was not "pure", i.e. having her period, while attending the zār, she was always able to know this

woman and tell her to leave the dar immediately. Nowadays all the mamas, or at least most of them are practising zār for the sake of having a good time and to enjoy themselves.

"My mother also was a great mama, she never agreed to treat women who she might think were not serious, or the jinn they have are not the ones she can deal with. Even if the patient was ready to pay her an enormous sum of money. The actual mamas these days treat all sorts of ailment, or at least pretend to do so, just to gain money, and most of their patients remain ill.

"The present mamas, except very few of them who still hold the old zār tradition, are not serious and they perform zār ceremonies just to sing and dance."

#### 6.4 IL MAMA

Il mama, also known less frequently as "Kibariyah", i.e. the great ones relating to great jinn, is a ceremony which takes place in the hijri month of Shaban, which preceeds the month of "Ramadan", as was explained elsewhere in this thesis, the jinn are believed to be imprisoned as a result of the religious practice of the people which is manifested in fasting during the day for the whole month, extra prayers during the night and also feeding poor people who might not be attended to during the year.

Il mama is meant to be a ceremony, in which every "daughter" of the dar gets a chance to participate, whether this "daughter" has participated

in other zār ceremonies during the year, as an attendant or patient, or whether she has not. In fact the main purpose of 11 mama, is to give the chance to all participants to "come down", as they might not have had this chance during other ceremonies. A mama has told me when I asked her about the reason for adding two days of qadri (A type of zār in which lively music is played.) to these days, while in the past she used to have 11 mama days all hibshi:

"In the old days zār was taken very seriously, the type of music was not a problem. The "coming down" of the patients was a real zār assigned to them by their "assayad". It had very little to do with women enjoying themselves through music and dancing. "Well, what can I do, my daughter, after all they might be right, nobody knows".

The preparation for 11 mama takes place at the beginning of sha<sup>6</sup>ban i.e. about a week before the ceremony. The preparation includes the collecting of money. This process is called "11 gattah". Every "daughter" of the dar gives her mama a certain sum of money which varies from KD 20 - KD 100, each according to her financial standing. Some "daughters" might bring a sheep in addition to a sum of money.

The sequence of the days of 11 mama are almost the same as five day zār ceremony. Very few people think that 11 mama should be seven days. Yet the best known type of 11 mama consists of five days.

The first difference between 11 mama and a zār ceremony, is that while a zār ceremony is meant to be a ritual treatment for a particular

patient, il mama is an occasion for the "daughters" of the dar to have a chance to "come down" and it is also a Karamah for the dar itself, i.e. an act of honouring the dar and thanking the jinn who are believed to be the dwellers of the dar.

The second difference lies in the fact that there is no patient for which the ceremony is held, there is no "bride", and the mama of the dar while riding the sheep is not considered as a "bride", it is only an honour, which, in this case, is assigned to the mama, who has the leading role in this occasion.

The third difference, is in the ability of the mamas to hold il mama ceremony. Not all mamas are capable of doing this, as it is believed that all the "daughters'" jinn are present in the ceremony of il mama. And some of the "daughters" who might be senior "daughters" and have been for a long time accustomed to zār ceremonies, and also capable of treating some patients as they might have "tawkīl" i.e. authorization from their mama. As such their assyad are very strong and cannot be pacified, by any mama, in the case that any such "daughter" "comes down" in il mama. Hence not every mama can take the responsibility of holding il mama.

In addition mamas themselves who attend the ceremony of il mama, to which they might be invited by the mama of the dar, might "come down" and in this case if the mama in whose dar ceremony is held, is not a capable and a senior mama, the act of pacifying the assyad will be a great burden for her. But usually the "coming down" of both mamas and "daughters".

are very "light" during il mama, because il mama ceremony is rather a ritual mainly performed as a act of paying respect for the dar, and not a curative ritual as zār ceremonies.

The third difference is in the way food is treated: while in zār ceremony good remnants are thrown away as any other kind of food, in il mama food is treated very carefully, and the remnants of the food, especially the last day's, are kept in a sack or a bag, and the mama, and one or several of her helpers take it to the sea and throw it there, after reciting the name of God over it. The reason why the food is treated carefully is because il mama is a big and great ceremony, in which all the great jinn are present, and this food (although eaten by women) is made for them i.e. for the jinn. And it is extremely rude to throw the remnants in dirty places. The best place at the present is the sea. In the old days the food remnants were taken to sidr-il-arba', and amid women's clapping and dancing this food was thrown under (lotus) trees, which had previously been fumigated and sprinkled with rosewater. It was believed that within a few days this food was eaten by the jinn.

#### 6.5 IL MAMA CEREMONY

Few days before the beginning of il mama, the mama with one of her main helpers goes to the market to buy the sheep (sometimes the number of sheep exceeds 10). The following day she buys the food and other things needed for il mama.



Day One:

The house in which the il mama ceremony I take as an example took place is in a middle class urban district. The mama herself is around 70 years of age, and has been a famous mama for over twenty years. She is well-known in Kuwait for her ability to treat difficult cases.

On entering the house, there were many "daughters" to be seen in the courtyard. Some were preparing the Karaku or setting fire for the coffee. Some were gathering in a small circle, chatting together.

In the dar itself, which was a big room of about 13 m x 6 m, the mama was sitting against the stick wall, facing the door. On her right sat three mamas and on her left one mama and then her main helper. In the dar itself there were forty women. Five women were smoking Karaku.

The first day is called "il barkh". In the old days this day was assigned for the collecting of money and arranging the dar. But at the present this process takes place, ten days or even more, in advance, the reason for that might be the long distance which separates the houses, which makes it difficult for all the "daughters" to meet at one time in the same day, (as was the case in the past), for money collecting. In addition to that, the old sug in which everything was available, (for less sophisticated ceremonies), was situated within walking distance from the houses.

The first day 11 barkh is now known as a day in which women sing and dance, it is the first of the five day ceremony.

The only thing served today is coffee and karaku, sweet coffee was served first. The mama is the first one to be served, then other mamas, and then the attendants. Then bitter coffee was served, and immediately after that, the mama stood up and took the pot in which the incense was burning, from one of the "daughters" and took the rosewater pot from another, and started to fumigate the guests and sprinkle rosewater over them. Then she returned to her place, and from there called the "daughters" who were in the courtyard and asked them to come in. The mama started to sing in a clear and loud voice, the guests started to clap and repeat some parts of the song after the mama. One woman who was a descendent of slave origin, was beating rythmically on a big drum, using a stick for that. The drum is the only instrument used for the first three days. The music played in these three days is hibshl.

The mama then stood, while the others were clapping and singing, and reached the centre of the room and started to dance, several women ullulated and one mama fumigated the mama who was still dancing and sprinkled rosewater over her. The tone of the songs got gradually higher. Then the mama while still swaying, invited other mamas to dance. At one time six mamas were dancing, when three of them sat down a number of women joined the others and started to dance. Now the mama has stopped dancing and returned to her place. Every single guest including other mamas queued up to kiss the mama's shoulders and forehead. Three women

who were in the courtyard also came in to kiss the mama.

Almost ten minutes later, the singing and the clapping started. Although the mama started the singing, there was a singer in the dar, and this was an ex-slave woman who used to sing during the five day ceremony.

The first session of the ceremony was over, when the adan of il ʿisha prayer started.

It is worth mentioning that it was in mid summer 1985 that this ceremony was performed, and due to the hot weather, although the house was air conditioned, the ceremony started after maghrib prayers and there was a break of il ʿisha prayer.

In the second session the songs were livelier and women's participation was more obvious. The mama insisted on her "daughters" dancing. And at one time there were over fifteen women dancing. All of them were believed to have "come down". The mama and other mama s who were also participating in the dancing, fumigated the women who were dancing, and sprinkled rosewater over them.

In that day almost half of the "daughters" of the dar or even more danced and "came down".

Around ten o'clock the singing stopped and women started to leave.

Five "daughters", two of them are main helpers, stayed that night with the mama. The two helpers stayed with the mama during the five nights of il mama.

Day Two:

The first session started with serving bitter coffee, and then the mama fumigated the attendants and sprinkled rosewater over their heads. At this day also she has started the dancing, yet danced for quite a short time, and then invited the others to dance.

Following il<sup>6</sup>isha prayer, the table was laid for sattat, which consists of the same elements as the one mentioned in Ch. 4. But on the table there was a large number of long candles and two vases of roses (a new phenomenon in zār ceremony as a friend who was accompanying me indicated).

The mama started to dance around the table and then other mamas followed her and then the helpers and other "daughters". This dance lasted for over twenty minutes, during which two women "came down". The mama stopped dancing whenever one of them "came down" and fumigated them and sprinkled rosewater over them and took them to the corner of the room.

When the dance and singing around the table stopped, the mama and four of her helpers dished out the sattat in plastic bags. The first one to be given the bags were the four mamas, starting with the one who

seemed to be the oldest. Sharbat was then served in crystal glasses. The ceremony ended by women saying goodbye to their mama and other attendants.

### Day Three

In the mama's house there is a small backyard in which five sheep were kept.

On that day after serving bitter coffee and karaku women were fumigated and sprinkled with rosewater.

Then women started to sing and clap, some danced and "came down". Every day the time spent by every woman in dancing increased. Even the way the dances were performed had gained more harmony. This fact was more obvious in the fourth and fifth days where the music played was qadri, a more lively and rhythmic type of music.

After Maghrib prayer a big plastic mat was laid and five sheep were brought to the middle of the room, they were all led by the mama, who also fumigated them and sprinkled rosewater over them. Women started to enter the room, and then gathered around the sheep and started to clap and sing.

The mama was holding the biggest sheep's horns. Two mamas were holding another's sheep's horn, three other mamas each were holding one

sheep's horns. Five of them were swaying to the left and right, while other "daughters" were singing and clapping, five "daughters" were holding candles and trying to be as near as possible to the sheep. The mama then sat on the sheep while holding its horns, other mama's did the same thing, yet stayed on the top of the sheep for a very short time. While the mama was still "riding the sheep" some women started to ullulate, another woman, who was one of the main helpers took the tambourine which was hanging against the wall and started beating it in very rhythmical yet loud beats.

The mama got off the sheep and took her 'asa, and other mamas and "daughters" took their 'isi "sticks" which were on the hanger against the wall, and they all started swaying their 'isi in the air and danced around the sheep. This lasted for about half an hour. When the dancing stopped, the mama was greeted by every "daughter" and also by other mamas.

It was believed that during the stick dancing, the mama has "come down", and when she sat down on her cushion, she was still in the "coming down" phase, which was over after a short time. When the mama sat down, the eldest mama among the guests fumigated her and sprinkled rosewater over her. The mama then stood up and led the sheep outside. While doing so, she spoke in a loud voice, addressing the sheep:

"Listen: my "daughters" and myself, have done all we can do for you, we wish to thank you and insha' allah\* we will do this ceremony, if we are alive, next year and every year."

\*            God willing.

She then led the sheep outside, and returned to smoke Karaku with other mamas, while some "daughters" were starting to leave.

Day Four:

This was the first of two days, during which gadri music is played. And although it was not usual in the past, to play any type of music other than hibshi. Nowadays in il mama ceremony, sometimes more than two types of music are played.

The first session started with singing and dancing. The main singer started to sing, while five women of slave origin were playing the tambourine and one woman was beating on her drum with her stick. Women's participation was very obvious, they danced in a harmonious way, it was seen that they all loved this type of music.

In the second session, the meat of the three sheep which were slaughtered the night before was eaten. When the sufra was laid, the mama started to dance alone around the mat and then she was followed by other mamas and "daughters". On the plastic mat 8 big metal plates were laid, a big metal plate was put in front of the mama, that plate consisted of the sheep's head. The mama must eat the sheep's brain. And then she turned to the other plate which consisted of other parts of the sheep's body, and ate a small piece of each part. Then the four mamas started to eat in the same way, as the mama, from a big metal plate which contained three sheep's heads.

Then all other attendants started to eat. Other plates consisted of rice, mutton and tamarind soup. Many jars of sharbat and iced water were laid on the mat.

After eating, all the remnants were taken to be thrown in the sea. They were collected very carefully and put in plastic bags.

Day Five:

The music today was also gadri. In the first session coffee was served and women danced and "came down". On the second session, a big mat was set on the floor and different kinds of dishes were laid on it. The main dish was called Jirish which consists of boiled maize mixed with some vegetables.

There were over ten dishes of dabuh\*, several pots of mashmum for ornament, fresh thyme was put in several pots to be eaten. In several other dishes, there was a boiled herb called barbeer, that was to be eaten. Small pots were laid on the table three full of Nabat very sweet sugar cubes and three pots were consisting of a very bitter substance called Mura\*\*. There were also three pots containing jawi incense. Several rosewater pots and candles were spread on the mat.

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\* A sweet mentioned in Ch. 4.

\*\* In Arabic the word mur means bitter.



The mama danced around the mat first alone, and then she was accompanied by other mamas and "daughters". Some of them were singing and using tabourines.

After about ten minutes, the mama sat down and started to eat, other mamas followed her, and then the "daughters" etc.

When everyone finished eating, some women took some mashmum herb and put it in their hair, this herb is known for its nice and strong smell.

Then all the remnants of the food were collected very carefully and placed in plastic bags to be thrown in the sea.

That night, everyone kissed the mama and thanked her. More than ten "daughters" stayed with the mama, to help her putting to some order and tidying up her house after the five day il mama ceremony.

#### 6.6. IL MAMA, AND CHANGE:

The preceding description was an account of a "typical and somehow "traditional" il mama, as the mama is very keen to observe old zār rules. This ceremony was held in a house of an elderly mama. She is seen by her "daughters" and other women who know her, as a very sincere and conservative mama, respecting the traditions of her work and her position as a mama. Her "daughters" and helpers also regard their jinn and zār ceremonies and traditions with great respect. Hence it is natural that

every single step should be taken in accordance to their old traditions, in a way where any neglect or respect for these traditions will not be allowed.

Yet this is not the case with every il mama ceremony.

In the summer of 1986 I attended an il mama ceremony in a house of a mama who is known among many women, especially old mamas, for her "flexibility" in her zār ceremonies, and for using her position as a mama and her dar in order "to enjoy herself and her daughters". But this statement does not include all her "daughters", as she has some elderly "daughters" known for the seriousness of their jinn. These "daughters" were the "daughters" of the mama's mother, before the latter's death. Unlike her daughter, the mother was known for her seriousness and piousness, she was mainly known for her ability to cure many difficult cases. As for her "daughters", they became the patients of their mama's daughter. This was inevitable as their mama gave tawkil i.e. authorization to her daughter before her death, hence her patients became - automatically - her daughters'. It is important to note that even for this category of conservative and old "daughters", their actual mama is an ideal mama. Returning to this mama's il mama ceremony and comparing it with the previous one, it was clear that most of the "daughters" were more relaxed and "extrovert", they were dressed in bright colours and had expensive jewellery on them. Among them there were some "younger ones" in their early or mid forties.

The mama who was in her early fifties, dressed in a very extravagant way. She wore all her zār jewellery which consists of eight rings, studded with turquoise, four in each hand, a heavy and long necklace and her golden Misab (headband).

The sequence of the days and the main processes were the same as in the previous il mama. Except that there were only two mamas who attended only the first and second days. Which indicates that mamas hold less respect for this ceremony than they do for traditional ones held in elderly mamas houses, like the previous il mama described above.

The younger "daughters" were - according to zār criteria - very "cheerful", they were smiling continuously, and sometimes exchanging jokes and laughing in a rather loud voice. They participated in the dances and songs in a lively way which makes their dancing more like young girls' than middle aged womens'.

The mama herself was not exempted: Hence when the mama (who in this case, was herself singing, with the help of three women who were playing tambourine) "came down" while she was singing, she did not stop singing, and nothing changed in her movements or features, except that she moved from her place against the wall to the centre of the room.

At this stage my friend, who used to accompany me during il-mama ceremony, and who is very familiar with the rules and principles of zār turned to me and said:

"This is not a "coming down", she is just acting. When a mama, who must have "great ones" on her "comes down", her facial expressions, her voice, her movements and even her features change. It is not a joke the "great ones" can change the person entirely.

"How can a person, and in this case a mama "come down" and still be able to sing in the same way as she was singing before she "comes down".

Apart from the fact that this statement has a particular reference to a certain person, it is certain that the way in which anyone "comes down" has a great significance as to the degree of "realness" of the "coming down" process. The change which occurs on somebody who is "coming down" is a very important condition and is even sufficient proof that the person is "coming down". And the more strong, active and even hysteric the state of "coming down", the more convincing it is that the "coming down", is serious. While this factor applies to almost every patient, in the case of a mama, who is known for having pious jinn "on her"\*, her credibility depends highly on her physical power and resistance to what might happen to her while "coming down". So, when a mama "comes down" she might subject

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\* The expression "on him" is used to refer to the pious jinn who are possessing someone also known for his piouness. This reveals the high position of both the person possessed and the Jinn. Nevertheless it indicates that the jinn have a higher status than the person possessed, hence the jinn are "on" or "above", i.e. having a higher position than the person possessed, even if this person is a mama.

herself to self mutilation through throwing herself on the ground or beating herself or hitting her head or any other part of her body against the wall, but when she comes out of this state\* there would be no sign of self mutilation on her body like a swelling or a fracture.

In fact, this belief suggests two points: first, it means that mama's body is created due to the "barakah" of her jinn, and her pioussness in a way where physical harms that might, or certainly do hurt other people do not have any effect on her. Second it indicates that "the great ones" who are "on the mama" are so kind and pious that when they "visit" her, in spite of their power and strength they are very cautious not to cause her any harm of any kind.

A Mama's position is derived largely from the "quality" of her jinn, who in all cases, would never hurt the mama. But are always able to harm the one who has caused her - intentionally - any kind of discomfort, or insulted her. This act of retaliation, might not always appear as a physical illness, it might be manifested in the loss of a fortune, or getting into troubles with authorities, or the illness of a friend or relative.

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\* The state of coming out of the "trance", "possession" could sometimes be reached at or "just happen" spontaneously, and in this case it is believed that the jinn have left the person's body without being placated by anyone. But usually, the people who might be around the person who is "coming down", sprinkle rosewater over him and fumigate him while asking the jinn to leave the person.

## Chapter Seven

### DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO CHANGE

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO CHANGE

In previous chapters several issues concerning women were discussed, yet the main emphasis was on socio-economic change. It was mentioned that different categories of women reacted differently to the socio-economic change according to their age, social class and their social conditions.

In this chapter the circumstances and main features in the life of three different categories of women will be discussed. Each one of these categories had a different life style and was subject to different social and economic opportunities or constraints.

The first category is that of Failakan women, mainly middle aged. Due to the fact that this category had a different life in the past as a result of certain particularities of the island and the social structure of the mainland society, a short account on the island and people's life in the past is included : Also the past and present socio-economic life of women in this category, the way they reacted to change and their attitudes towards several aspects of modern life are discussed. A short account is written on zār in Failaka. These above mentioned factors are discussed in reference to those women who live in Failaka and those who live in Kuwait. The latter category, it is argued, is more alienated than are Kuwait middle aged women.

The second category is that of middle aged women, who had some

advantages in the past, and these advantages were carried forward into the present, compared with other women, a fact that made them more prepared to accept change and welcome it. In this section three women will recount their history and throw some light on the factors that affected their life.

The third category whose reaction to change will be discussed, is the category of young religious girls and women. In spite of the fact that they are not middle aged, yet it is argued that this category has turned to religion as a result of feeling alienated, due to the factors brought by unplanned socio-economic change. It is argued that this category of young women will in ten to fifteen years constitute a category similar to our contemporary category of middle aged zār patients. Not only because, we predict, the second generation (the daughters of these young religious women) will be unable to endure the restrictions imposed on them by their religious mothers, in a world so strongly subject to modern and western influences, but also because of many reactionary factors inherent in the ideology of this group, which makes any accommodation to the inevitable process of change almost impossible.

## 7.1 FAILAKA

### 7.1.1. A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Failaka is the only inhabited island belonging to Kuwait. It is a small island, some fifteen square miles in area. The distance between Failaka and Salmiya (Kuwait) port is 20 Km, yet it comes next in size to Bubyah, which is the biggest Kuwaiti island. Other islands are : Warbah,



11-Grain, Kubbar, Umm 11-Maradim, Garuh, Maskan and Uha.

There is no information on the date when Failaka was first inhabited. When interviewing some old Failakans, they could trace the origins of some Failakan families, but they could not state whether there have been some people living on the island in the past who had been there before recent settlement. The general and expected impression was that there could never have been permanent settlement because the island has suffered in the past from several disastrous plagues (1), to the extent that the island was almost evacuated. Hence, it is certain that some new families have come to the island and made their living there. The most important settlement was that of 40 families who immigrated from Kharj island in the years 1841 - 1842.

Yet Failaka is known for having a long history of occupation. The first evidence to suggest the historical background of the island was the archaic stone found in 1937 which consisted of a dedication sent by the Greek captain Estolius and his crew to the God of the Sea Posiedon, and the protector of the sailors Artemis, for they saved them from drowning.

Archeological research was subsequently conducted on the island. The first expedition was Danish, and worked in the island from 1958 to 1963. They have obtained some evidence which suggests that the island had links with some old civilizations, especially the civilization of Delmon. The expedition has found some evidence which suggests that the island was occupied five to six thousand years ago. The second expedition

is French, which started work in 1983, and has confirmed the Danish findings.

It has been established that this island had a link with the Greek civilization of Alexander the Great, and also Mesopotamian civilization. Yet there are many questions that are unanswered concerned the historical background of Failaka, that might be answered in the future. Regarding this point D Sapsted wrote:-

"Although Kuwait can trace its roots as a nation for little more than two centuries, excavations on Failaka Island have uncovered some fascinating links with ancient civilization stretching back more than four thousand years. Indeed, findings at Failaka indicate that the island was the focal point of a flourishing community between 3000 and 1200 B C and that it was once part of the "lost nation" of Dilmun, which now generally accepted as being centered on Bahrain. The Failaka discoveries have added weight to theories that the Gulf formed an early civilization contemporary with those of Mesopotamia and India, and have shed new light on our understanding of the earliest days of civilization."  
(2)

The existence of the remnants of some castles suggest that by the beginning of the sixteenth century the Portugese had used this island for their martial purpose (3). It is also believed that Failaka was always used as a commercial station between Kuwait, Basra and Bahrain. In the present day there is a big museum in Failaka in which many archeological pieces which were found in Failaka are exhibited. There are also archeological sites, the most famous of which is the remnants of a Roman Temple.

### 7.1.2 THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF FAILAKANS

Contemporary Failakans have various origins:-

1. The majority of the people have come from some parts of the Iranian coast, mainly Kharj and Linga. These people are named al-Hwila (4).

It is worth mentioning that this category belongs to the Sunni sect. They speak Arabic, although it was frequent to find some of them who also spoke Persian. The most important settlement of this group was that of 40 families who moved from the Iranian island Kharj to Failaka in the years 1841 - 1842. A more recent settlement was that of some families of Iranian islanders who moved to the island after imposition of the unveiling law by Reza Shah in the early nineteen thirties. These people were not able to accept the requirement that their women should take off their batulah (5). Among the Sunni sect there are some families who are originally from Arabistan region. They have moved to Failaka as a result of the continuous fighting that used to take place between Persian Khans and Arab Shaykhs.

2. Adherents of the Shi'i sect settled in Failaka at different times. They came originally from the Qatif and Ihsaa region of the Arabian Peninsula. This category is locally called il Baharnah, to indicate their Shi'ite affiliation and Arab origin, although the Shi'ite people who are originally Persian are less frequently so called.

3. The third category is the Persian Shi'i people. This category has integrated with the local community, although they represented a minority group. They have their own hussayniyahs, the older generation is able to talk Arabic frequently, unlike the Kuwaiti Shi'i of Persian origin (6).

In recent years there was only one person of Bedouin origin living on the island. And he was brought to take care of Kuwaiti Shaykhs' sheep. The Bedouin tribe of al Awazim used to go to Failaka for fishing and they had a small place to rest during their fishing journeys to Failaka, but they have never settled there. They were Kuwaiti citizens.

As for ex-slaves, there are two brothers who have brought their families to Failaka, they are called blal family. The mama of Failaka belongs to this family. They were once the slaves of Shaykh Mohammed Al Jaber Al Sabah. Another ex-slave family was that of Shdayid. They were a liberated family, and they lived on the island as free people. The Failakan themselves, never owned slaves.

The people of Failaka have always lived very peacefully. Although there were no inter-marriages between the Shi'ite and Sunni categories, yet religious prejudice was always kept to the minimum. People had their own communities, yet these communities, assigned either according to the sect or to the family, were adjacent. And people have always had very close relations with each other. One can suggest some factors which could have promoted integration:

The island was, in the past, subject to many dangers, among these dangers were plagues and the natural dangers which the sea posed to the people, either drowning or foundering of their boats which usually threatened the entire family. This factor, together with the general poverty of people, has given this island a very distinctive type of co-operation. Yet a third factor, seems to be more important. This related to the nature of the origins and sects of the people, which gives them something in common. Both Arab Sunni, or at least the majority of them, and Persian Shi'i have come from one place i.e. South Iranian islands. The Arab Sunni had the factor of language to share with the Shi'ite Arab. And this latter category had the sect factor to share with the Persian Shi'ite category. There is less of a sharp distinction between the sects and origins of the Failakans, than is the case in Kuwait.

It is significant that Failakans are socially classified according to their sect, not their social or genealogical origin. Hence they do not use the concept of asl i.e. origin, among themselves. Nevertheless, according to Kuwaitis all Failakans are classified as non asil (non noble). The population of Failaka is approximately 5,000.

### 7.1.3 FAILAKA IN THE PAST :

Failaka has always had an Amir, who was either a member of a famous Failaka family, or a member of the Royal Family (7).

Prior to 1831, the whole island was inhabited. Many villages, in different parts of Failaka, have been inhabited, and they were still used after 1831, because of the fertility of the soil in those villages, which made cultivation easy, and also because there was a number of fresh water wells. As a result of the most disastrous plague that this island suffered in 1831, the people who survived moved from their villages to the western coast of the island i-zur. Probably there were some other factors which had participated in making life easy for the people there, among these the proximity of the western coast to Kuwait.

There were many famous "gardens" in the scattered villages of Failaka, in which date palms and lotus trees were cultivated. Failaka was also famous for its fresh water wells which people mostly depended on. Vegetables and wheat were also cultivated during spring and water. The majority of the people were fishermen or boat owners, had a simple commerce, or were local craftsmen.

The people of the island were very co-operative and many works were done on the Faz'ah basis, a type of voluntary co-operation. This type of co-operation was manifest principally in the following fields: house building, fishing and agriculture. The whole island acted as a support group for families who lost their father, or had a disabled head of family.

One characteristic of the old Failaka was the existence of baraha, a square piece of land surrounded by the houses. Usually every community had

its own baraha. Barah's were also available in Kuwait, but in relatively small numbers. The baraha had a very important role in people's social life (8). Children used to play in their baraha during the day. Young men used to gather there every night, or at the sea side. Diwaniyas have also had an effective role in the social life of Failakans.

Failakans seem to have had more elaborate customs in celebrating the social religious occasions, like the welcome or farewell of the month of Ramadan. And also they used to celebrate their marriages in a more spontaneous, social and less sophisticated way than that known in Kuwait. When a marriage took place almost everyone in the island attend, and those who were closer to the bride or bridegroom helped their families in preparing for the marriage party.

Two principal features of life in old Failaka are very obvious for everyone who studies the island.

First: Failaka formed an entity of its own, enjoying a certain level of independence in its economic life. If it were not for the small population and the small area, Failaka had the necessary factors for the formation of a State. Self-sufficiency in old Failakan life was more obvious than that of Kuwait. People used to depend on the sea to maintain their living. That was done either by fishing or pearl diving or by travelling to other countries to bring wood and other necessary substances.

They had an access to cultivation as their soil was very fertile. It was also known for its fresh water wells, and there was no deficiency in water to the extent known in Kuwait. To build their houses, they used the mud which was always available in a place called il mutinah.

Second: The participation of women in the labour market, and their visibility in the public life was a striking feature of Failaka. This is attributable to the absence of aristocratic families which were opposed to women's public appearance, and compared with Kuwait, the economic situation and the standard of living were very modest. (This subject will be dealt with more elaborately on the section on Women's Life in Old Failaka).

In general, Failakans are famous for their generosity and their concern to maintain social life, especially neighbourhood relations and kin relations. The effect of socio-economic change on these aspects of life appears slight to a visitor, although Failakans themselves complain of the change brought to their island after the discovery of oil.

#### 7.1.4 FAILAKAN WOMEN IN THE PAST

Many factors might have contributed to women's important role in the labour market. The first factor is the absence of an aristocratic class in Failaka, as the tradition was that merchants and foreigners were prohibited from settling in Failaka, for fear that they might oppress



the original population who were generally poor and simple people.

The second factor, - quite distinct from the first, - is the general poverty of the island concomitant with a certain degree of self sufficiency.

The third factor is the vulnerability of the island, regarding its geographical and natural position. The death of the head of the family, the foundering of a boat and all other similar accidents have given this island certain characteristics, the most important of which is social solidarity and the emergence of women as active members of the labour market.

The works that women used to do were essential to the community and could not be dispensed with. Women were active in agriculture, wood gathering, fish drying and in other fields.

In agriculture, women used to help their husbands or other male members of the family, performing the same role as a brother or a father. In harvest time women had also a very effective role, they used to help in harvesting the crop, and also in moving it to their houses, usually done with the help of a donkey. Following the harvest, it was time for threshing the wheat. This was done collectively. Either donkeys were used or women used to gather in one house and thresh the wheat communally. Women also used to help their husbands in carrying vegetables from local fields and selling them. In the time men used to go for fishing, women

used to wait for them at the sea side, even if they came back late at night. They used to help their husbands to bring the fish out of the boats and carry them back to their houses, where women used to clean, salt and dry the fish to be sold. They also used to help in preparing and cleaning fishing nets and bring the boats to the shore.

The hardest work done by women was bringing wood from distant parts of Failaka. This wood was either brought from uncultivated parts of the island or collected from the shore, as there were some pieces of wood left by some passing ships. They used to bring the wood in groups, with the help of pack animals. This work usually took a long time, depending on the place chosen. Sometimes the whole day was spent for this purpose.

K.S Mohammed writes:

"... The process of bringing wood was performed by groups of women ... if they wanted to go to Bar il 'uad (9) they used to go early in the morning and return shortly before sunset. Some women were accustomed to use animals in carrying wood. And some used to carry wood on their heads in big bales" (10).

Carrying water, was also women's work. There were a number of fresh water wells in Failaka, especially in il Mutinah, where women used to bring water in groups.

In addition to that women also did their domestic work. The most enjoyable work that women used to do was baking the bread. They used to bring the flour and gather in one of the neighbourhood houses, after noon prayer. This process was done in a very organized way, as the eldest women used to stand near the oven and take the kneaded flour from other women. At the same time there were other women who made sweets. Some houses in Failaka were famous for making and selling sweets which were among the specialities of Failaka.

Women were of great assistance to each other and, in some respect they acted as a mutual support group, so if a mother of a family fell ill, it was the responsibility of her relatives and neighbours to do her domestic work, bake the bread, and care for her children. If a woman had some visitors or held a party, all her friends used to go to her house and help her with cooking and preparing the party. The most remarkable occasion was that of a marriage of one of the children. Some women used to stay for some days in the house of a friend whose child was going to get married. Preparation for the marriage party was done some days in advance. That included cooking the food, making several kinds of sweets, decorating the house in some cases, and also receiving the guests. The night preceding the marriage night, was called Henna night. In the morning women used to gather in groups and paste the henna, while singing special songs. Then henna was left to soak until night when women start to use it on their hair, hands and feet.

When talking to Failakan women, specially those who are middle aged

and old, the most important thing which emerges from their conversation is the loss of the old life, the most remarkable characteristic of which was the grouping of women, and their social solidarity.

As it was mentioned before, Failaka was very famous for its maqams, around which many rituals used to take place. Many visits were paid to these maqams. These visits could take place at any time. They were not only performed in order to make a vow, but also for obtaining baraka (good fortune). So it was very usual to pay these visits, especially to maqam-11-Khider, in all social and religious occasions, like id-il-fitr and id-il-adha. (11) Even picnics were held at Khidre and other maqams. Women (who were among the most enthusiastic of these visits), used to go there in groups. These groups consisted of women of the same community or the same neighbourhood. They could be daughters of the same dar, or they could be simply women relatives. Men also used to visit maqams, but women were more enthusiastic and probably better known for their belief in awliya and faith in religious Shaykhs.

In fact women's participation in the labour market, and the freedom of making more elaborate relationship among themselves not only has given them some experience in public life, but also provided them with more chance to enjoy social encounter, and deeper understanding of life, this understanding extended to the male domain. The tendency to share men's problems did not only have an emotional connotation, but also a realistic effort to overcome certain relational problems.

Unlike her sister in Kuwait, the Failakan woman enjoyed more open and mature relationships with men, simply because this relationship was integrated with everyday life events, and included almost every aspect of public life. Nevertheless, this fact has not made women forget that they are women, and not men. Hence as middle aged and old women they have the right to meet their male neighbours and relatives, as they used to do in the past. But they deprive their "educated young daughters" of the opportunity to do the same thing on the grounds that "time has changed now".

A young lady told me this story:

"My grandmother who is now around seventy is used to having some of her old male friends coming to visit her. These men were either her neighbours or her far relatives. When she expects them, she puts on a new dress and puts on "coh1" and "dayram" (12), fumigates herself, and tries to be at her best. When she talks to them, she is very spontaneous and natural. Yet she does not allow us to put make-up on and talk to men, even our relatives, for a long time. When we ask about the reason especially that she used to talk about her old "male friends", she says "we lived in a different time, women were so busy and have too many problems to be able to regard men with reserve, (or suspicion) men were also so decent. Now times have changed."

Not only have male - female relationships changed, but also other aspects of life have been subject to socio-economic change. In the next section, I will discuss in general the changes brought about by the process of modernization, with some emphasis on women's life. I will start with a general discussion of health and education in Failaka

and then proceed to the specific situation of women.

#### 7.1.5 HEALTH SERVICES AND EDUCATION IN FAILAKA

There is little to be written on that subject in Failaka. As it has always been influenced by development in these two fields in Kuwait itself. So if, for instance, somebody needed an operation, and as there was only one clinic in Failaka, he was sent to the specialized clinic or hospital in Kuwait. Education was also subject to the same constraint, hence after finishing their high school Failakan students move to Kuwait to continue their education. Change in every aspect was first introduced to Kuwait and then, after many years, was introduced to Failaka.

In the past, patients in Failaka, like those in Kuwait, were treated according to popular methods, using herbs, burning a certain part of one's body, performing a zār ceremony or making a vow. Yet in 1954 a clinic was established in Failaka and people started to get treated there. At present there is one clinic, and a centre for preventive health. The clinic has one general practitioner and one dentist. Every Monday an eye doctor and gynaecologist visit the island. The urgent cases are transferred to Kuwait by a helicopter specially made available for this purpose. Otherwise, in less urgent cases, like child delivery, patients are sent to Kuwait by boats, which Failakans used to call the "health boat", provided by the Ministry of Health. As in the case of child delivery, Failakans recount many incidences of child delivery in the boat on its way to Kuwait.

Due to this women usually prefer to stay with a relative or a family friend in Kuwait, around the period that they expect birth of a child. One feature of the health service apparent to anyone who comes from Kuwait, is the intimacy and close relationship which exist between the Failakans and the clinic doctor or nurses. As for education, in the past people used to send their children to Katatib where they were taught Quran, the principles of Islam and some preliminary knowledge in arithmetic and Arabic. In 1937 the first boys' school was established in Failaka under the name of il Madrasah al Isalahiyah al Amiriyah. The number of students reached in the first year was sixty. As the school became too small to accomodate the increasing numbers of students, another school was built in 1941 under the name of il Madrasah il Failakwiyah al-Amiriyah, and all the students were moved to it. Until the academic year 1956 - 1957, education was not very organised and the classes were not sharply divided from each other. But in 1957 secondary education was introduced to the boys' school in a more organized and systematic method.

As for girls' education, the first girls'school was opened in the academic year 1953 - 1954. It has suffered the same gradual and unsystematic way in education. Until 1968 girls who continued to secondary education were sent to Kuwait. They were placed in a female dormitory, and visited their families once a week and during holidays.

At present there are three schools in Failaka: a kindergarten for male and female children, a boys' school and a girls' school which

teach to all educational stages. Students of both sexes move to Kuwait to continue their education in colleges or university. During this time they either stay in university and college dormitories, or with their relatives in Kuwait. (13)

#### 7.1.6 FAILAKAN WOMEN TODAY

In the past Failakans were generally poor. Foreigners and rich people were banned from settling in Failaka.\* Hence the ground for socio-economic change was not laid in the island as it was in Kuwait. Even when the government launched economic projects, Failaka had to wait some ten to fifteen years to get the same privileges, and it was not until the early sixties that the island received more attention.

Many things have changed in Failaka. The once peaceful and romantic island has started to become like any one of Kuwait's cities. Old Failakan houses have been either demolished, and prepared to have new houses built in their place, or left for foreigners who are incapable of paying high rates to live in. New houses have been built for Failakans. The distance between old Failaka, which consists of old "Arabian" houses, and new Failaka which consist of modern villas, is within five to ten minutes walking. It is in old Failaka that small grocery shops, laundry

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and occasionally a clothes stores of a shoe shop is found. Houses are very old yet the inhabitants, usually of Indian, Egyptian Palestinian nationality, with their families, do enjoy modern facilities in their houses, like television, refrigerator, washing machine and other facilities. Compared with Kuwait, where bridges and traffic lights are almost everywhere, there are no traffic lights on Failaka and streets are narrower and much quieter and probably safer. There are many modern villas which have been built around 1967, they are far smaller than the huge big villas and even palaces in Kuwait. Council houses are also built in Failaka, and it is easier for the newly married families to get a house in Failaka than it is in Kuwait, where some couples have to wait for ten years or more to get a council house. There are three museums in Failaka, the ethnographic museum, Failaka museum and scientific museum. Other famous modern places in Failaka are: a big public garden, Failaka public coffee house, fishermen's diwaniya which acts as a kind of club for fishermen, a big co-operative supermarket and also the tourist complex which consists of 472 chalets in addition to other facilities. A coffee shop and restaurant and an olympic size swimming pool. The tourist complex gets very crowded in summer, especially in the holidays and weekends.

There is convenient maritime transport between the island and Kuwait. Using well equipped hovercrafts, this has made transport much easier and safer.

The island, especially from the islanders' prespective, has

changed enormously, new houses have been constructed, streets are built and it has very little similarity with its past.

Yet change has also brought discontent. Although people are no longer in need, yet they do not enjoy the old spontaneous and natural sincerity. They have more money, but the old crafts on which they depended in the past have disappeared, and exist now only in the form of hobbies.

In spite of its poverty the island was self-sufficient. At the present time, the island is completely dependent on Kuwait. Agriculture has ceased, the old freshwater wells have been deserted a long time ago. Socio-economic change has effected every aspect of Failakan life. In Failaka people used to be known for their hospitality, generosity, social co-operation and friendliness, yet things have changed dramatically, and women suffer from this change more than men.

While Kuwaiti middle aged women suffer from socio-economic change which has deprived them of the safe and contained world they enjoyed in pre-oil Kuwait, and suddenly exposed them to an inhuman and materialistic world, Failakan women also suffer from socio-economic change, but for a different reason. In the past they were free to move about, they had more chance to meet each other, to mix with men during their daily activities. The island was full of maqams and tombs, around which many social and religious activities were performed. There were no foreigners

in the island although at present there are more open relationships with the foreigners, than those existing in Kuwait, and people were modest and humble. An old lady lamenting the past, told me:

"In the past, everyone in the island was his own master. People used to work the whole day, and at the end of the day were proud and satisfied. They used to appreciate everything. People were very close to each other. Not in terms of distance, the island has not extended, it is the same island, but the hearts have changed. Of course we are not as Kuwaiti women, we still visit our friends and neighbours almost every day, but it is not as it used to be. People in the past were satisfied with the little they used to get, and were modest and sincere. Now people, even in their visiting and social gathering, try to show off. Although we were poor in the past but we thanked God and were happy. Now people never feel satisfied, the more they get the more they want. It is this greediness that has changed people's feelings towards each other. Money has changed people. In the past we used to see our neighbours and friends during our daily work, or at the "magams" or even on the beach as Failaka beaches used to be crowded at night in summer. Apart from that, we used to see people of our community, our neighbours and relatives every day, during our informal visits. Now the whole day passes, and only one neighbour or friend comes just to sit for half an hour and then leave. They always claim that they are busy. I cannot understand that, I know that houses are bigger now, but there are fewer people living in one house than there used to be, but then in the past we used to work outside and inside our houses, we had many children and no servants. Now everything is available, and life is becoming easier, but they still say they are busy. The hearts have changed."

Not only neighbourhood relations have changed. A woman of fifty years compared her marital life with that of her daughter.

"My husband was very kind and responsible. He used to love our children, and care for them. Never in his life, he slept without making sure that the children are in their beds and they are healthy. He used to touch their foreheads while they were asleep, just to ensure that no one has a fever. He worked the whole day to make his family happy and never needed anybody's help. And although we were poor we never needed anything. Thanks due to God, when he died all my children were grown up and they all worked, and some of them were married. I gave my last and favourite daughter to my nephew, thinking that by doing so I will guarantee her well-being and happiness. He is not a bad man, but he is not the ideal husband I wanted for my daughter. Since they got married, he has indulged in his religious activities (14), he goes every day to this Islamic society, and leaves my daughter and her children at our house until twelve or even one o'clock in the morning. Of course during the morning he works, at noon he sleeps and in the afternoon onwards he spends his time in the society. "The most depressing thing is that he does not allow my daughter, who was very coquettish, to dress up nicely, of course she wears "hijab", as he wanted her to do, but he does not allow her to put make-up even if it is only some cohl, he does not allow her to wear bras or high heeled shoes, claiming that these things are meant to change the real state of God's creation and they are all innovations. I do remember very well that my husband always wanted me to use oil perfumes, to put cohl and dairaim, it is in the nature of men to love seeing their wives beautiful. But this nephew of mine is not a normal man, yet he claims to be the only religious and pious man in our family".

This daughter who - according to her friend - was a very beautiful and slim girl, is now turning into a fat, and to some extent a nonchalant women, she looks older than her age, and is totally indulgent with her children. It was obvious that her husband was not the type of man she wanted to marry. But commenting on her mother's words she used to say:

"What can I do, after all he is my husband, and the father of my five children".

The tendency to have the husband living at home with his family most of the time was more frequent in Failaka, than Kuwait. Kuwaitis in general were very famous for their continuous travelling to countries as far as Madagascar in Africa and many countries in the Indian ocean. Failakans were also used to travel but not as extensively as Kuwaitis. Men lived most of the year in the island, except in the diving season when some men used to go for short "diving trips". Kuwait itself had a commercial class, mostly dependant on its commercial dealing with other countries like those of Africa and India. In Failaka men were usually working as fishermen and craftsmen. Few dealt in commerce, and it was a simple commerce which took place between Failaka and Basra in Iraq, or the Iranian islands. The trips to all these places were very short.

This explains why it is that middle aged and old women regard busy husbands, as irresponsible. Another problem to emerge for women after the discovery of oil, is the moving of their children to Kuwait, either to work there which in many cases means that they are settled in Kuwait, especially those who are married; or to join the university and other colleges in Kuwait. There are also some young Failakan women who are married to Kuwaitis. In this case they go to visit their families twice a month, or even once a week in the weekend. Mothers usually worry for their children, especially if their trips to and from the island take place on stormy days, which are very frequent especially in the summer.

In spite of all that, Failakan women who live in Failaka are more content than those who live in Kuwait. They still feel themselves "at home". They are familiar with the island and its people. The most unhappy category could be that of Failakan women who live in Kuwait. In the early sixties, some Failakan families moved to Kuwait, either because their husbands worked there as a government employee or as business men. Some Failakan families, especially those who had children, found it more convenient for them to go and live in Kuwait, in order to be with their children while they got their education in Kuwait. This category of people have never forgotten their island, and in spite of many years away they always visit it, and usually stay with relatives. The parents, especially the mothers, consider Failaka their home. And their links with the island have never diminished. Even when they are in Kuwait, they find most of their friends among Failakan women. The best example of Failakan women's social gathering is the Failakan dar in Kuwait. (This will be discussed in a section of zār in Failaka). Failakan middle aged women in Kuwait have problems which are more obvious than those of Kuwaiti women of the same age, and also more serious than those Failakan women who live in Failaka.

While Failakan women in Failaka suffer from the changing world around them they still have the safety and comfort provided by the fact that they are in a place that they know, they are among their people. Their alienation is more specific. They are in a world which has changed. As for Kuwaiti middle-aged women, the same fact is true. They are in their own country even though everything in it has changed. In the case

of Failakan women who live in Kuwait they have a feeling of "double alienation". They are deprived of their "old home" and move to another place, yet even this place is changing. The most devastating fact for these women is that they feel inferior compared to Kuwaiti women.

Kuwait was always known for Failakans as a big, crowded and modern city. Some Failakan women who live in Failaka told me that they hate Kuwait, because they usually get lost in its huge department stores, and when they are in the street they can never know where they are. This fact is also true for Failakan women who live in Kuwait. They find Kuwait very modern and westernized. Kuwaitis, in their opinion do not respect neighbourhood relations. Everyone is busy, nobody cares for his family and relations. They also complain of their children, who are either so engrossed in their study or work, or joining religious societies and starting to preach to their parents and "tell them what is wrong and what is right". Some of them complain that their husbands are also changing, they are so busy accumulating money for their future.

A lady of fifty years old (a zār patient) told me her story as follows:

I moved to Kuwait 25 years ago, at that time I had been married for about eleven years and had six children. The government has valued our house in Failaka, and many people, thought that living in Kuwait will be more convenient, as it is the mainland, and the country was already starting to develop and expand. My husband was among those who thought that his future lay in Kuwait, and there will not be

much change taking place in a small island like Failaka. So when our old house was valued in Failaka, we bought a house in Kuwait. I was not very enthusiastic about getting rich. From the beginning I was worried about the move to Kuwait. I had seen it several times and I did not like it. It had several towns and communities, and it was not as "compact" as Failaka. In those days there were not such comfortable and well-equipped ships and hovercrafts. The journey to Kuwait could be very long and even dangerous. I was also worried and very sad to leave my family and relatives behind. Our life in the past was very intimate. We considered our community as a family. I knew that this type of life was not possible in Kuwait. Especially that I was to be considered a "foreigner" there. The only thing that persuaded me to go to Kuwait was the fact that my children were growing up. My eldest daughter was ten years old and there was no secondary or high school for girls then in Failaka. That meant that she would either have to discontinue her education after finishing primary school or to go to Kuwait and live in a students' dormitory there. And I also thought that my other children had to face the same problem. My husband was more concerned about his financial life. He had the chance of getting a good job in maritime service in Kuwait, especially as he was very good at guiding ships. He had also some plans to start a business in Kuwait.

"So we moved to Kuwait. The first five to six years were very difficult, I had only one Failakan friend in the community where we lived. People were very kind, but I had the feeling that they were more modern and educated than Failakans. Especially as my husband who then got a very good job in the ministry, used to talk everyday, at noon, while we were having lunch, about new projects and plans that were to start in Kuwait. I was very intimidated and could not grasp how the country was going to expand more, and how buildings were going to be higher, and streets wider. On the other hand my husband was very happy and excited. I knew from the beginning that more change would mean more money. After six years passed, my older sister moved with



her family to Kuwait, and that was a great release for me. In that time other Failakan families also moved to Kuwait. I started to get used, not to Kuwait itself, but to the fact that my life in Kuwait is a destiny that I have to accept. During the first ten years of my stay in Kuwait I gave birth to three children two sons and one daughter. I now have five girls and four boys. They are grown up now. They all live in Kuwait. They are all busy. My oldest daughter is busy with her family, but she is the kindest of all of them. She calls every day and comes almost three to four times a week to visit me. The three boys and two daughters (following their husbands) are all adopting these new Islamic concepts and they call everything that I used to do all my life "innovation". Making vows is innovation, zar is innovation. They have even dared to tell me that my dress is not Islamic, although I wear 'abaya and milfa (15). My husband is busy all the time accumulating money. After all, even when he was in Failaka he was always busy and very ambitious.

"There is nowhere like Failaka, for me its old and mud houses are more beautiful than the most elegant palaces in Kuwait".

Most Failakan families who moved to Kuwait in the early Sixties, after land estimation (the first land estimation in Failaka took place in 1957), settled in one of the first modern suburbs that had been established after the expanding of the city. This suburb is called "Kayfan". Now this is a mostly middle-class suburb. The children of the first Failakan families who moved to Kuwait, after getting married and hence separated from their families of origin have also moved to one suburb, called "Rumaythiya". This demonstrates that among Failakans a sense of social solidarity still exists. Although it means a continuation of an old tradition, it also indicates a sense of alienation and a relative loss felt in Kuwaiti society.

### 7.2.1 ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN AND CHANGE

It has been mentioned in Chapter 2 that socio-economic change had a different effect on women from aristocratic families. This is due to the different life they led in the past. They had the chance to mix with men, they had access to education, either traditional or formal. The main factor facilitating this life style was the availability of one or several men in these families who encouraged young women to read and to accompany them on their trips abroad. Hence for this category socio-economic change was not accompanied with embarrassment or social shock.

In addition to economic affluence and a liberal tendency among male members, there is another factor which has also helped this category to breach the traditional barriers, the social descent of these families. Arab families of non-najdi descent were less reluctant to accept new norms and values. They were also familiar with less restrictive life in their country of origin, mainly Iraq. Nevertheless, some women to whom this second factor does not apply have also succeeded in achieving a certain level of social adaptation.

The middle-aged women who are involved in the activities of charitable societies are among this category.

The following interview with a middle-aged woman will reveal the advantages this category of women enjoyed in pre-oil Kuwait. This lady, when interviewed was 50 years old, married to a non-Kuwaiti, and

had two children. This lady has encountered many events that made her life different from other women of her age category, not only compared with women who could not adjust with change but also with those who had a certain amount of education and had a moderate type of freedom in the past. In her youth she was what one could call a revolutionary woman, regarding her life style and in the ideas and principles she was adopting and influenced by. She was the first girl to be granted a scholarship to continue her last two years in secondary school in Egypt, and one of the few Kuwaiti girls who were married to a non-Kuwaiti. She was also among the first Kuwaiti women who wrote in newspapers, in the early sixties.

"My grandfather (mother's father) had a great role in convincing me to continue my studies abroad. He was encouraging me along with other girls in my family to read and develop an interest in books and current political events. As a result of his encouragement I decided to go to Halwan in Egypt to complete my secondary studies, as I decided to study science, and this section was not available in Kuwait in the early fifties. I had no choice but to complete my studies abroad or to change my option to literature, so I went to Egypt with another group of girls in 1955.

"We had a government grant. There was another group of girls sent by their families who went to Egypt to study in Victoria College in Alexandria, privately.

"People used to admire us, due to the fact that we were very serious in our studies and in our life in general. We had political awareness and felt responsible for our society, especially its women, as we were always encouraging them to go to schools and continue their education. For us the situation was not only

a matter of education, but also a political responsibility towards our society. We were aware that this society must be changed.

"In Cairo we used to mix with male students and teachers, we participated in political demonstrations, and attended political meetings. The issue of Palestine was then at its utmost fervour, and everyone was trying to make it a universal cause and participate in its success. Our group were receiving 15 Egyptian pounds a month from the government, we used to donate 5 pounds of it to the Palestine Fund.

"In Kuwait we had also a serious task. We were trying to make women develop political awareness, to realise their political reality and to fight colonialism and zionism in the Arab world. We tried to explain to them that zionist plans are not confined to Palestine alone. We tried to convince them that women should be decent in personality and that this is not determined by dress; that a woman's face covered by Bushiyah does not reveal her decency but her fear of confronting people. By so doing we convinced many women to get rid of their Bushiyah.

"After completing my high school education, I joined the Faculty of Philosophy in Cairo, and got my degree from there. On returning to Kuwait I worked as a teacher, and in spite of my devotion to this job, I could not accomplish what I had in mind, merely because of the traditional administration of the school and their resistance to change in their old policies. It was so difficult for me, as a girl so much influenced by nationalist ideas and full of ambition, to be confined to such a reality. So I decided to fulfill my ambitions by writing in newspapers, while teaching at the same school.

"After a while I got married to a Syrian man who was highly educated. You might be surprised to know that I did not encounter any kind of refusal from my family. I think that nowadays a marriage between a Kuwaiti girl and a non-Kuwaiti man is not accepted socially,

not because of ethnic difference but due to the difference in wealth. When I got married, Kuwait was not a rich country and people were not very demanding. Of course I know that there are other less important factors which might lead some families to give their daughters to non-Kuwaitis.

"There were many factors that had an important role in shaping my personality. As I told you my grandfather had a very important role in my life. Also, the milieu in which I was brought up was very effective. As a big family, we had a different life style. We were more progressive than other Kuwaiti families, which were then very conservative and led a traditional life mainly on sex segregation. We did not have the same restrictions on our relations with men. We used to be more open and mix with men in our family, during our social visits and our frequent excursions to the desert, where we used to hold poetry competitions and several discussions on various subjects. I know of many love relations (purely romantic love relations) that took place between young men and girls in our family, which all ended by marriage. We regarded these relations as a healthy and reasonable way of knowing each other, we never considered them sinful as other families did.

"As for my view on the present generation, I am very optimistic, although I think they are not as enthusiastic and hard working as we are. It is very nice to see youth becoming aware of their religion. Yet I am against all types of prejudice, including the accusation that anyone who tries to question some religious practices and beliefs is an atheist. As in spite of the importance of the spiritual side of life, it is inevitable that everyone should have freedom of thinking, adopt whatever religion or ideology he wants, and if he is Moslem, he should have the freedom to practice Islam the way he considers proper for him. It is complete ignorance to confine the role of religion to rituals and adopting Islamic dress, as I see among young women. There are many essential problems that should be solved in a democratic way, and these problems have priority over hijab and growing beards. In general, I think hijab and other aspects of religiosity, as practiced

these days, is a temporary current which has its ups and downs. Yet it is obvious for me that women in this society have not turned to hijab as a mere religious aim in itself, but that the general economic state of this society, the unfair division of wealth, has an enormous role to play. When a women wears the Islamic dress, she does not have to look elegant and hence spend so much money on her clothes".

Beside familial or ethnic descent, there were other factors which made some women decide to get education, and to struggle against many social traditions and norms which acted as obstacles in the way of many women in their attempt to adjust to change. One of these factors is adopting the norms of some aristocratic families, in spite of the fact that some women doing so were not from aristocratic families. Given the fact that aristocratic norms were made possible by the socio-economic conditions of these families, one may assume that adopting these same norms by a different class, which live a different reality is a difficult task. For a girl from a rich family to be educated, (given that she has her family's approval) it would not be a difficult task, merely because her labour is not needed at home. Girls from poor families, especially the older ones, were accustomed to help their mothers from an early age, in household chores and in bringing up their younger brothers and sisters, for whom many of these girls were acting as substitute mothers. It should be mentioned here that their mothers (women who are at present in their late sixties and over) had many consecutive pregnancies. For families of this class girls' education meant the loss of essential labour. Social approval for education was also more prevalent among rich families. Men in this class were more

influenced, by new ideas and life styles, as a result of which they encouraged the women in their own families to get educated. This was not the case in poor and middle class families. A woman from this class who could reach a certain level of education under difficult circumstances, would have more appreciation of education and work as a means by which she could achieve a better life, and as an adult or middle aged person would have less difficulty in accepting socio-economic change.

The following is an interview with a women whose life reflects the previous discussion. Age : 50, a widow, has three sons and two daughters one of which is a mother of one girl. The children's age varies from 16 to 27. She is much admired by her sons (one is a government employee, and the two others are university students), and this admiration was my main incentive to meet her. This is how she talked about her life:-

"My life in the past was *not different in any way* from the life of the majority of the girls in my age and class. There were many restrictions imposed on my life. It was taken for granted that once a girl reaches adolescence, she was to be kept at home and if she had to go out, she must wear a cloak (abayah) and be accompanied by an adult member of the family. Girls used to spend their leisure time, if any, talking to each other through the roof walls or through a hole that might exist between the walls of the houses. Our talks were informal and simple as' our other aspects of our social relations in the past.

"I always wished I could go to the school and learn to read and write. But I was deprived of this privilege in my youth, because I was the eldest in the family and I had to stay at home and help my mother in bringing up my brothers and sisters, and doing other household chores. Nevertheless, I learnt to read and write through my sisters who went to school. I was very keen to finish all my work at home before they returned from school. While they were doing their homework I used to pick their books and ask them to read certain words, which I in return repeated, until I got familiar with the Arabic alphabet, and eventually I learnt to read. Then, I started copying the words and memorizing them until I learnt to write. It was not easy because I did not have a teacher or someone who could teach me in a systematic way. Even my sisters were very reluctant to teach me because they feared that one day I might want to go to school and that would mean losing my work at home. I was more enthusiastic about learning than my sisters. I used to read books that they borrowed from the school library and finish them before they even opened it. I also saved the money my mother used to give me from time to time and buy some books with it. That made my mother angry, as she thought that I should buy some gold jewellery which could be more useful than a bunch of paper. The only one who encouraged me to read, to broaden my knowledge, was my eldest brother who had some contact with some rich families who were encouraging their girls to go to school. I remember very well that he was astonished when he saw me reading a book of poetry for Ma'ruf Al-Rasafi, a famous Iraqi poet. From day to day he very often brought me books and magazines.

"My marriage was an important turning point in my life. My husband was a self-educated man, with a vast wealth of general knowledge. Although he was older than myself by 12 to 15 years, he was a very affectionate husband, and I lived very happily with him. He asked me to take off the bushiyah and to learn driving, which was not an ordinary thing among women. We used to go out together, to social visits or desert excursions. And he encouraged me to go to school. So I went to adult education classes. In the first two years after our marriage, we lived in my father's house, with my family, but we moved



to our own house when my husband noticed that I exhausted myself in working at home for my brothers and sisters, whose demands seemed to be endless.

"I continued my education, but I was not regular. Everytime I became pregnant, I had to quit school to stay with the baby. Nevertheless, I finished my secondary school, while I was working as a secretary in a girl's school (\*), although I did not need the money, and I still work at the same school. I have no intention of retiring in the near future. I intend to continue my education as I am now in the first class of high school. I know one day all my children will get married, and I have to prepare myself for this situation. I think the best way to do so, is to keep my job and continue my education.

"Our life in the past was very inhumane especially for women. Yet, in spite of that I sometimes long for it. Not because I think of it as an ideal and romantic time. But mainly because I long for a childhood and adolescence, I have never lived as I should. This might be the reason why I want my sons and daughters to live their own life as happily as possible. And I try to give them whatever they want without spoiling them.

"The present generation is happier than our generation. They have many facilities that we as an older generation could never dream of. Yet, sometimes I feel that they are not as responsible and committed as we were at their age. Some of them do not have a clear purpose in life, as a result of which they became easy targets of religious movements, which take advantage of youth's emotional and psychological instability. These movements are not really religious

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(\*) About 10 to 15 years ago, it was very easy to find such a job if a person had primary school certificate and knew how to type.

and do not try to think and act according to the realistic and flexible doctrines of Islam. These movements very intentionally ignore people's real problems. They try to turn youth's attention from their present and future issues to superficial subjects. I am a religious person, but I do not agree with the claims of these religious movements. I am against prejudice, and do not believe that people should be forced to believe in a certain faith. The purpose of these movements is a pure terrestrial political purpose".

It is obvious from the last two examples that there is a category of women, with certain distinctive characteristics. They have in fact achieved some success, mainly through education and the breaching of old traditions, that was and still is difficult for other women to achieve.

Following the discovery and marketing of oil in Kuwait, education became compulsory and at present, the average young Kuwaiti woman has a certain level of education. Yet the important question which emerges at this point, is to what extent women were able to obtrude men's world. In other words, to what extent has a woman who succeeds in fighting alienation from a modern society, also combatted alienation from a man's world? To what extent has education made women equal to men in Kuwait. Can a woman occupy the same political position as her male counterpart, can she become a religious leader or even a judge?

In spite of the fact that in Kuwait, there are more than a few women who hold the scientific qualifications which qualify them for all these previously mentioned positions, up to the present day there is no female ambassador, minister or judge.

The following interview has been conducted with an unmarried woman aged 38, a member of the royal family, a doctor in modern languages and the Rector of the Centre of Languages in Kuwait University. Her main ambition was to become an ambassador, but in spite of the fact that she obtained qualifications higher than that owned by the majority of men who occupy this position, yet she was not given the same chance, mainly because she is a woman.

The following interview reveals many facts concerning this category of successful women:-

Two people had an effective role in my life. My father who believed, and still does, that women can be as intelligent and productive in their work as men. And my mother who is a self-educated woman, from an aristocratic family which had some ambitions regarding their girl's education. It was my father's decision to send me to England to be educated in an English school as a child. I continued my education there until I got my GCE. It was my own decision to continue my university education in modern languages. But even then my parents' response was very positive. I completed my university studies in 1970 and returned to Kuwait. I was then 21 years old. I worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was there where I met sex discrimination at its most intense, regarding each sex's job opportunities and promotions. So, for instance, a man becomes a diplomat, just because he is a man, while a woman who might have higher qualifications than her male counterpart would become a research assistant. This discrimination was a real shock for my ambitions, as a result of which I decided to continue my higher education, so I went abroad again and came back in 1977 with a PhD. degree. I tried the Ministry of Foreign Affairs again, and there they told me that there is no job to match my qualifications. A friend of mine who worked there said to me that as a woman I would never have the chance in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet

my ambitions just because I am a woman. So I worked in the university as an Assistant Rector in the Language Centre, and then as a Rector of the same Centre and actually I am a Rector.

"I do not think that marriage is very essential for an educated and working woman, who is economically well off. As the more educated the woman is, the more criticism she encounters. She would not be content with an arranged marriage because, for her, psychological and mental agreement and concordance are very important. It would be very difficult for her to accept marriage and regard it as a social tradition and to live with someone for all her life, as a piece of furniture. It is even more difficult for a woman who is educated and rich at the same time, as marriage is regarded as a kind of protection, both social and economic. For such a woman, marriage not only fails to answer these needs, but also becomes a burden and a heavy responsibility that the woman would do better without. In this case the man who might be accepted as a husband for such a woman must be a superman in order for a woman to sacrifice the privileges she enjoys and become his wife.

"Regarding the so-called Islamic resurgence and new Moslem movements, I cannot predict whether they are going to continue as they are, because these movements get in such a mess that any prediction is very difficult. Many have been deceived by the allegations of these movements that they represent the only refuge in the face of westernization, and that they represent the only attempt to return to the roots. This claim could be sometimes true, but not in the way these movements are proceeding. They have diverted the movements from their religious orientation to pure politics. The danger lies in this last act. I think there are many mistakes in these movements, the most important of which is the way some of the leaders try to infiltrate through these movements to political ambition, this ambition has nothing to do with religion. In general, if the person is a religious and political leader, he has to dispose of his religious and ethical principles and that leads to loss of his religious veneration, and sometimes to the choice of a different direction to

the original religious one. Unfortunately, women are the best target for these Moslem movements, due to their socialization. As for men, I think joining these movements give them the chance to accomplish their ambitions in reaching a certain religious or economic position and provide them with social prestige".

It is obvious from the previous discussion that there is a category of middle aged women who could breach social barriers and achieve a better position in society. The main credit goes to the government policy of providing education for women shortly after the discovery of oil, which has been the most effective role in changing women's position. It gave Kuwaiti women a certain level of freedom and social status which it took women in other Gulf Countries a longer time to achieve. In some of these countries oil was discovered earlier than it was in Kuwait. Yet in spite of this fact, it is obvious that in Kuwait there are many illiterate women, especially middle aged and old. The so-called Moslem resurgence have brought into being a second category of young women who refuse the very privileges that some middle aged pace-makers have fought for. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

#### 7.3.1 YOUNG RELIGIOUS WOMEN AND CHANGE

During the late sixties and early seventies the Islamic Movement began to increase in strength at the expense of the nationalists. This

was especially the case after the dissolution of the Kuwaiti National Assembly in 1975. People were deprived of access to democratic processes. This situation laid the ground for the development of the Islamic Revival Movement, due to the fact that this movement, in all its different factions, has used non-democratic ways of spreading its ideas. One typical example of this movement's practices was the circulating of a leaflet by the Moslem Brotherhood faction in the University. This leaflet was addressed to the female students who were not dressed in the Islamic way. The type of punishment awaiting them in afterlife were elaborately described. This and other activities based on the use of fear and simple religious feelings as a means of imposing their ideas and policies, have accelerated the spread of this movement (\*).

A major factor which added to the popularity of this movement, as far as women are concerned, especially young ones, is the presence of a number of contradictions in their lives. These contradictions have accumulated as a result of non-systematic and unplanned change. It was inevitable that sooner or later a clash would occur between the lifelong values concerning women, and the new westernised life-style. Islamic

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(\*) Many local and international factors were behind this success, but in this thesis I am trying to confine myself to the factors which are within the scope of my study.

movements have promoted this clash and provided, according to its advocates, an alternative for a corrupt process of change. Even under the umbrella of religion, many contradictions might exist, and co-exist, yet not for a long time.

The Fundamentalists have promoted their cause in a skilful way, by stressing two different points, to their own benefit.

First : that Islam (in the case of the New Moslem Movement, i.e., Islam as revised by them), is a religion which allows women a moderate type of freedom, that is to the extent that, it does not harm her self-respect by exposing her to the harshness and toughness of the men's world (16), so when there is economic need for her job, she can choose the job which suits her nature.

Second : That all other ideologies which have prevailed and still prevail in the Moslem World, mainly nationalism and westernization caused great degregation for women, through their allegations concerning women's emancipation. Hence in the new Islamic Society, women are not always confined to the privacy of their homes, as the image of women under Islam has always supposed. Some young religious women consider themselves both religious and political activists. They are not like their mothers, who lived all their life without knowing anything about their husband's job and ambitions. They are now, in general, not only familiar with their husband's work, ambitions and expectations (this mainly applies to those women whose husbands are religious activists), but also have a

great role in helping and supporting them to achieve their religious and political goals. The ironic aspect is that all these women's activities do not, at the end, refute the Islamic rule which states that women lack mind and religion.

Nationalist groups have also allowed women's participation in political and social activities. Yet those groups committed two mistakes which Islamic Movements avoided:

On the one hand the criteria and rules used by the Nationalists concerning women (repudiation of the veil, introducing women to the labour market, launching female free collective education) did not always correspond to established social values. On the other hand they retained some ideas and practices in contrast with their aforementioned ideas and policies, for instance women's legal and marital status (17). This contradictory, weak and uncertain position has caused much confusion regarding their understanding of women's position.

This facilitated women's easy acceptance of the Islamic Movements' ideologies. These movements recalled the old saying (which, in fact, was never completely forgotten) : women lack mind and religion, hence they could never be treated on the same level as men. Yet this does not negate the fact that for the first time in Arab history women have been given the chance of collective education, on such a large scale, and occupied an important part in the labour market. The new generation was educated, had a good knowledge and sometimes experience of the public world, hence



the only way to deal with this educated force was through containing it.

This process of containment took place through changing this category's attitudes and viewpoints to bring about a noticeable and even a radical change in their behaviour and personality.

This change was made easy by exploitation of all the contradictions and misfortunes that were felt by the actual and older generation, and by proposing the return to religion as the only way to solve all these contradictions and problems, specially those problems which emerged as a result of the corruption (in the new Moslem revivalist view) brought about by westernization and socio-economic change. Many women have, therefore, turned to Islamic revivalist movements, thinking they offer them some support and protection against the incomprehensible and, particularly in the view of those who support this movement, corrupt modern ways. For them Islamic Movements provide women with a moderate and acceptable solution to their problems. Women have always been regarded as inferior, and those ideologies which tried to deceive women by making them believe that they are regarded by men as their equals, have made women subject to the most undignified situations.

For this category of women, the new ideas means that they could practice Islam without being illiterate, alienated and isolated, as were their mothers, who were subject to the atrocities of the old, ignorant and traditional version of Islam. This, of course, is how these young girls perceive the old Islam.

Men's return to Islam, also meant that a new generation of pious men is emerging. For young women this new generation promised more security and confidence in their life, and provided them with more stability in their life in general. In spite of the fact that these men, as devout Moslems, in many cases do not disagree with the notion of polygamy, very few are able, due to life's complexities and to economic difficulties, to get a second wife. Other local factors effective in women's conversion to the new Islamic movements are the pressure to social conformity and the economic difficulty in keeping pace with the latest fashionable dresses.

The main outward feature of the new Islam conversion, among women, is the adoption of Islamic dress. In spite of this, adopting Islamic dress does not nowadays necessarily indicate that the woman is religious, as it is to some extent getting fashionable to wear hijab, which varies in colour and shape and is, in some cases, adopted to the latest fashionable designs. Many factors behind the adoption of Islamic dress are not stemmed from mere belief in religious doctrines. Some adopt the dress for social and psychological reasons; in some cases they are merely a reaction to a defect in one's body such as continuous loss of hair, or chronic skin rash.

Nevertheless, there are some differences in attitudes, in life style and in the depth of belief, between the woman who wears Islamic dress as a kind of social conformity or physical disguise, and the woman who regards it as an entirely religious act. The interview below will

deal with the category of young religious girls.

The following interview took place with a young woman, aged 25, a mother of a one year old daughter, married to a young religious activist. Her family of origin is rich, known as modern and not very religious.

"I was the youngest child in my family which consists of three girls and one boy. I used to have my family's attention and care, to the extent that my relatives were telling my father that I would grow up as a spoilt child. All my requests were answered immediately. I had always the finest clothes and used to travel abroad with my girl friends once or twice a year. I was a member of several social clubs, in short I had a very luxurious and extravagant life. My parents used to act as if they were the happiest couple on the earth, they had and still have, many friends. Our house used to be full of them all the time. My mother is a very westernized woman, she had completed her secondary school in Kuwait but attended English classes and she is able to speak English very fluently, a thing that she always shows off about. My father is rich and very extravagant, he never refused a thing to my mother. All her demands were promptly answered. It was not until I became twenty years old, that I discovered the reason behind what I thought was the control my mother had over my father. I was twenty, very young (this is the literal expression used by her) full of life and could hardly find anything that could upset me. I was in my first year at University, when one day I came back home rather early, my mother was talking to my grandmother on the phone, she was weeping and telling her about my father's several affairs, how she had endured them for twenty years and cannot take it any more. I guess my grandmother was telling her that there was nothing wrong with that as long as my father answers all her demands. My mother answered that it is only because he (my father) is such a coward who cannot stop having affairs with women that he tries to make her happy, by spending so much money on her and her children.

"I know that everyone suffers one shock in his life that he regards the most disastrous. In my case it was this terrible thing I now knew about my parents. It was not until I met my husband and knew life as I do now, that I could overcome it, but whenever I remember that day I feel as if the whole world is going to collapse, and it certainly did, for some time.

"After that incident (my parents did not know that I knew anything about it), I started to question many things. My empty life, my uselessness as a human being, the hypocrisy which prevailed in my parents relations with each other and with their friends. Even their friends whom I used to call Aunty and Uncle and were very attached to them, started to seem mere dolls or at best talented actors. Among many "things that I started to question was my personality. To what extent, I asked am I honest with myself, family and the world in general. I discovered inside my self an empty creature, with no real interest in life. All my time was spent in the shops and hairdressing salons, I realized that I was not very different from my parents whom I started to criticize at that time. I became very introvert, antisocial and even aggressive. At University, I had many friends, most of which had the same life style I had. Not a single girl among them was interested in the views of the Islamic Student Movement, which was very active then. They regarded them as old fashioned and reactionary. I used to think the same way. But then I realized that the girls within this movement are very active, they were even more enthusiastic than the boys. They looked very happy and reflected a high degree of self-content. Neither girls nor boys have ever tried to convince me of their views, because the way I used to dress would have certainly reflected the fact that I was hopeless, as a would-be religious convert. After a while I started to read some of their publications and other Islamic books, and I realized that Islam is the best way for refining one's soul and obtaining strength to combat the problem and complexities of the modern life. I then approached a girl whom I knew to be very active in the Student Moslem Movement. I was still not convinced of my views and in my mind there was chaos. In one of their meetings I met an enthusiastic and religious young man. After a short while we became friends, I felt that I could really love him, he seemed so honest,

sincere and protective, and it was this pure and clean love that made me (amid my friends and family's astonishment and disapproval) adopt Islamic dress and get involved in the Moslem Student activities. After a short time I got married to this young man. Of course my parents did not easily consent to our marriage. They regarded him as an old fashioned man who would regard my life style as corrupt and pure westernization. But after all, this is the reality, the kind of life I had in the past was a complete aping of the West. It is a great loss to forget our Islamic heritage and run after strange and odd norms. My mother is still unhappy about my marriage, simply because I cannot have a life full of travel and parties like hers. I tried to make her understand that what I enjoy in my life as a Moslem woman, married to a committed Moslem is far more important than the superficial life many women lead. I enjoy the love and affection of an ideal husband who feels responsible for his society, who does not drink and does not think of having adulterous affairs with other women. The most important thing is that, for the first time in my life, I do not feel irresponsible and empty. I participate in all the activities of the Islamic society. As a student I used to have a very important role in student activities and as every day in my life passes, I feel I have achieved something. I also care for my daughter and try to teach her religious obligations and make her a good and useful adult. This life is but a short journey, no matter how much misfortune we suffer from, at the end it is in our after life that we will be rewarded. Yet, the more we serve our Moslem folk and obey the doctrines of our God the more certain we can be that in our afterlife we will be rewarded. The most important factor in doing so, in my view, is to neglect the superficiality of this modern and corrupt life and return to the truth, fullness and simplicity of Islam.

"Through my discussion with my religious "sisters" I came to question many aspects of my life. For the first time in my life I realized that I have been for all my life a beautiful puppet in my parents' hands.

"They had crushed my identity, which should have been the identity of a Muslem girl behaving and

thinking in harmony and great accordance with her culture and its main stream : Islam. I realized that the "Western" hobbies I had, my unreasonable spending of money, were just means to escape from the deep and unsatiabale emptiness which I carried within myself. This emptiness is now filled with great doctrines of Islam".

In the previous case it was the emergence of a man in one's life following an emotional shock, the feeling of a confused identity, or having an empty life, that laid the grounds (at least on a psycholological level) for conversion. In the following case it is the loss of a dear member of the family which caused the shift to religion. A thirty year old married women, with three children recounts her story :

"I never though of becoming religious, in fact religion had a very slight role in my life. As a child I used "to pray until I got to the age of fourteen, but in fact I did that with much reluctance and only to avoid my parents' reproach. I used to fast in Ramadan, but this was only a kind of social act rather than a religious observance.

"The main event, (perhaps I should say tragedy) that made me turn to religion was the death of my nephew. He was young and kind, I preferred him to all my other numerous nephews. He died of bone-marrow cancer. For about three weeks before he died, he had such painful convulsions that every half an hour he was given a morphine injection. Although he died three years ago, I still remember this period, when we were all helpless to assist him in any way. He suffered a lot; whenever I see a sheep slaughtered I remember his suffering and his convulsions.

"After his death I came to my senses, and started to question my aspects of life in general, and my

individual life in particular. I always thought that life would be beautiful and easy, I would never need a greater power to help me to get through the difficulties of life. But then, I had no difficulties no misfortunes. Now I believe that there are many tragic instances in life, which if we are not supported by our belief in God, we will never be able to overcome. As human beings we are very weak, and no matter how educated, rich and capable we are, God is always more powerful. And we are still his weak slaves. My nephew had the best care and the most famous doctors, yet they could not make him live. Their knowledge, science and technology could not interfere with God's will. Not only now, I think, but until the end of this life, the only power which will reign is that of God.

"My nephew's death has taught me that life on Earth is but a short journey, it is the afterlife which counts. I never thought of death before this happened to my nephew, but now, every night before falling asleep, I ask God to give me leave to die in peace, unlike my nephew whose last month of life was a continuous agony.

"I always remind my children of their cousin's death, that they become religious and have a real fear of God in their souls. I want them to be religious in order for them to achieve happiness in this life and the afterlife.

"The technological facilities we have in hospitals are not only unable to solve people's problems, but also deceive them and make them put their confidence in something which is not Godly, something which has come from a Non-Moslem society. Of course medical treatment is sometimes effective, but nowadays we have many diseases that were unheard of in the past. This is mainly because of the new technological progress. The disease and problems we have outnumber the advantages brought about by socio-economic change and so-called technological progress. In the old days people who were thought to have my nephew's disease, were burned on the areas where the pain occurred, and

they were cured, not because the method itself was effective, but because people had real and deep belief in God. Our generation has lost this confidence in God. It is only by retaining this belief that we will be able to overcome our actual problem."

Yet, life does not have always to be so tragic for someone to turn to religion. Sometimes merely boredom, emptiness and lack of purpose are the main factors. These feelings could not be felt more strongly than by a girl of around twenty nine years of age, with very little share of beauty, and a middle class status. This is how she recounted her story.

"During my life as a student at school and university I was very busy with my studies, in fact I was always one of the best girls at school and university. When I finished my university I worked as a teacher in a secondary school. I expected that I would be as busy in my work as I used to be during my studies. But unfortunately I had so much time to spare, although the subject I used to teach and still teach is a very heavy subject : Arabic.

I was the fifth child in my family, I had four brothers older than myself. By the time I finished university they were all married and lived in separate houses. One year after I finished university, my younger sister got married, and I was left alone with my mother as my father died when I was at high school.

"As you know, during the mid to late seventies many girls adopted Islamic dress, and as where I was working, many girls dressed in the Islamic way. I too wore the hijab, but to tell the truth my motivation was not religious, it was, I think, a kind of seeking



uniformity with other people and social conformity. Two years later, a new teacher was employed in our school. She was a very religious woman, her husband was a religious activist, she too was a very active woman in the islah society although she was a mother of four children. I admired her very much, and hoped to be like her, so busy and responsible. After a short while, we became friends. She introduced me to a new life. She gave me many books to read. I accompanied her to their meetings and (I) made many friends. My social life has changed, I had in a short time so many concerned friends. But the most important thing was the change which took place in my mind and personality. I always prayed, fasted and read the Quran occasionally, but I was never introduced to Islam in this way. There were many things in Islam that I did not know. Now I feel completely happy and content. I am so busy in the society's activities. I feel responsible for making people aware of their real religion. When I think of my life I feel guilty for not observing Islam when I was very young. When I think of the past couple of years, I cannot believe that it was me. I really feel purified by my conversion to the real Islam."

The most general interpretation of women's return to the new Islam could be their failure to adjust to innovative and new technology and indiscriminate imitation of the West. This is more or less expressed by Minai as follows:-

"The young women's return to Islam made a deep impact on the secular majority everywhere in the Middle East, challenging them to reassess their heritage and their society's mad rush to catch up with the West. They have ended with a world of steel, concrete and nuclear wastes, which left the majority of women as vulnerable as ever, if not more so, given their persisting legal and socio-economic disadvantages. In a society affected with crumbling extended family systems, urban isolation, unemployment, exploitation of the human body, devaluation of the aged and others, bringing no immediate cash profit to

the industrial cause, the ill effects strike women first. The majority of women do not seek remedies in a sanctuary of harems and veils, but they have lost their undiluted faith in the West which did not, after all, have all the answers to their problems. The disillusionment, however, has broken the dictatorship of a single set of values and freed women to look into their own heritage with an open mind. It is impractical and unwise to try to recreate the past, but the early Islam of Khadijah and Ayshah, and the best of Moslem scholarship, which stressed the need for ecological balance in society as well as in nature, could inspire fresh solutions for a world out of balance." (18)

In spite of the fact that the general situation, i.e. urban isolation, human exploitation, etc, is not the same in Kuwait as in some other Arab countries. In Kuwait, and probably in many other Moslem countries, where although social norms have undergone much change, they still retain their effect in people's lives, yet from the point of view of the proponents of the new Islam, this quality of corruption is always emphasised.

A more comprehensive interpretation of women's return to Islam has been given by one of the first female enthusiasts. In her book "Kuwaiti Women's Alienating Movement" she recounts three reasons for women's return to Islam:-

1. The emptiness of Non-Islamic life, and the positive effect of the Iranian Islamic Revolution.
2. The decadance of the life of Western women, as perceived by

Moslem women.

3. God's will that Islam should regain strength (19).

In spite of the effect the two first factors had in women's return to Islam in general, there are some particularities in Kuwait's case. These particularities are to be found in the policies of socio-economic change, : The emptiness of the new rich and affluent, rather than Non-Islamic life, the unsolved contradictions in a passive consumer society and of confusion of identity.

In this discussion of three different categories of women, we notice that these three categories differ in the way they react to the socio-economic change.

Our category of middle-aged middle-class women cannot keep pace with the aristocratic middle aged, due to the latter's "modern" outlook. Neither do they have the knowledge that the younger generation possesses. Even those women who felt happy about their daughters turning to religion soon found out that this religion is far beyond their scope of knowledge.

Middle-aged women cannot agree with their daughters in the way they regard Islam. This is because these women regard Islam as a religion that has always been practised blindly (ie. without being allowed to question any of its doctrines). They were taught that women should not argue in matters concerning religion and they regarded Islam as a religion

that would never change.

The change in the young girl's religious outlook was one result of their being, unlike their mothers, educated.

However, if we compare our category of middle-aged women with the category of Failakan women we see that, despite the fact that these two categories empathize with each other, our category are less alienated than the Failakan category. Of course the Failakan category has a different reality and different historical circumstances.

NOTES :

- (1) The most famous plagues took place in 1635, 1773, 1831.
- (2) Sapsted D. 1980. P. 36.
- (3) Some have suggested that the origin of the name "Failaka" is "Failsha" which means in portugees fresh air. See, K.S. Mohsmmed, 1985, PP 15-19.
- (4) It is believed that this word is derived from the arabic word "Yuhawil" which means "To move", and it is given to the people who are believed to have moved from Iraq and Arabian Peninsula to southern Iranian islands, and then returned at the begining of the 20th century to Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.
- (5) Batulah is a hard black piece of cloth, which covers women's face, except their eyes. It is slightly protruding over the nose. At present, it is mostly used by the women of United Arab Emirates and Qatar.
- (6) Some few families could be placed in one of these three categories, and those are the people who have come from "Faw" in Iraq, or Oman, according to their sect and language.
- (7) For more details on the subject of "Amirs" i.e. princes in Failaka see Mahjub, 1972, PP 136-150.
- (8) For details on Failaka's old social life and other information on Failaka see K.S.Mohammed 1980,1983,1985.
- (9) The word means the vast and far desert.
- (10) K.S.Mohammed, 1985 P.75. For more details on women participation in public life, see op.cit.pp. 40,41.
- (11) Two moslem feasts.
- (12) A coloured piece of wood, which resembles cinamon. It is used to colour lips in a dark red colour. In the old days it was used as a lipstick. Women in the gulf still use it for the same purpose.

- (13) For more details on Education in Failaka see K.S.Mohammed 1983.
- (14) She means the society of social reform, which is a sunni religious society.
- (15) A light black scarf used to cover the hair.
- (16) See al-Nifisi 1986. al-Qattan 1985. Shalabi 1979. al-sadiq 1971. al-Majdub 1390 H.D.
- (17) For a critical view on Arab nationalism in general see. al-Said 1979. and for a critical view of nationalism regarding their position on women's question see, Salman.M. 1978.
- (18) Minai N. 1981. pp 244-245.
- (19) al-Mahmid K. N.D.

## CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

The main subject discussed in this thesis is the problems of middle-aged women in Kuwait and their subsequent involvement in ZĀR as a way of expressing their feelings of alienation. To put this problem in perspective it was necessary to study the effect of socio economic change in relation to this category of women and to compare these effects with those on other categories of women who had different lifestyles. It was found that different women reacted in different ways to the process of socio economic change.

As Islam is, besides being the state religion also deeply rooted in muslim every day practices, it was felt necessary to examine the image of women in Islam. Also, as this thesis deals with ZĀR it examines the Islamic understanding of jinn as causing affliction. Of the utmost importance for our thesis was men's perception of women and the attribution in Islam of knowledge to men and emotionality to women and the way Islam regards women as fitna (disorder) and how this notion is manifested in ZĀR and in forms of Islam practiced by women.

However, in our study of ZĀR it was found that these male images of women are enacted but in a different way. These women, helpless and out of place in an ultra-modern society, use these images in an active and beneficial way.



Our category of middle-aged women were born before the discovery of oil. They were socialised and brought up to fit into a society similar to that into which they were born. Yet this was not the case. When these women were young women, recently married and perhaps mothers, Kuwait underwent a vast socio-economic change. This change manifested itself most in the material world, but at the same time it has also affected people's value systems and cultural norms. Because of their traditional upbringing these women's cultural norms consisted of such things as; modesty, obedience, social conformity, sexual segregation and devotion to their (usually extended) family. These norms have played as an obstacle in their adjustment to the new life. Their husbands were much more familiar with, the new world. Many husbands wanted their wives to follow the styles of foreign women, but the only category which could answer their husbands requirements were those from aristocratic families. These women were among the first to be educated and were familiar with lifestyles in more modern countries even before the discovery of oil.

Our category of middle aged women it is argued, is suffering from a sense of alienation and loss of identity and finds an outlet in ZĀR ceremonies.

The concept of fitna which underlies male perception of women is manipulated collectively in the ZĀR ceremony.

The woman is brought to the mama to be cured on the assumption that she is ill, uncomfortable, feeling ill at ease, unhappy and sometimes approaching the state of collapse. The woman is in a state of disorder. she has been brought to the mama because, in the eyes of society, she is neither healthy in body nor in psyche. The female patient (conceived by her culture as a disorderly being) is also possessed by an ambiguous and disorderly creature, jinn. Throughout ZAR ceremonies this concept of Fitna (disorder) is heightened at the beginning of the ceremony through different rhythms and types of music through which the patient is encouraged to show her disorderly state.

She is encouraged to dance in a very evocative way, even to become partially naked, move around, weep, scream and even to inflict pain on herself. The more the patient succeeds in doing all of these things the more it signifies the presence of jinn.

The women in fact, and this includes the mamas themselves, think that it is the jinn who is causing this disorder, and here they are again provoking the two sided moslem notion concerning women. On the one hand she is the source of disorder but on the other hand this disorder should be controlled by society, including the woman herself. One way, for a woman of doing so is to ignore her physical needs and sexual desires which are the main cause of disorder.

The disorder is at its utmost height during the days in which the ceremony is held. In the sequence of days, this disorder is heightened in

the first days and expected to calm down in the final days. In ZĀR the ailments and problems are taken to their original source, encouraged to show up and then calm down. Throughout the ceremony the patient is reminded not to do certain things, for example smoking karaku at home.

The way in which the patient is led by her mama, and the different rhythms used in the music, to a deeper insertion into disorder is a move from the particular and individual circumstance and experience of the patient into a more generalised and abstract experience of disorder, where the patient is brought to the point of recognising the possessing Jinn in the mode of the ZĀR, and under the control of the mama is led back from this deep trance of disorder to an improved state of order and health. The transformation is achieved by locating the particular patient within the broader field of disorderly Jinn.

The ZĀR ceremony is also used as a means to re-enact these womens' past experiences especially those concerning their sexual life yet in the way these women probably wished it had been rather than the way it really was.

The atmosphere of the ZĀR ceremony is very similar to that of the wedding ceremony, especially those performed in the old days which were more elaborate and sometimes took about seven days. Both ceremonies include such things as; singing, dancing, music, food, rosewater, incense, candles and candies.

This category of women got married very young, some of them even when they were children. They were young, inexperienced and perhaps even frightened when they were taken from their own family into another family. The foremost characteristic of this family could be that of hostility, especially on the part of the mother-in-law towards the new bride even in the case where the former was the aunt or close relative of the latter. These women had no experience in relationships with men and some of them might even have envisioned marriage as a frightening experience, especially in the aspect of their sexual lives. It stands to reason that a girl aged between thirteen and eighteen with no contact with men would feel distressed and even horrified at the prospect of the sexual relations.

Most of these women complain that their mothers were not consulted as to the circumstances of their daughters' marriages. So these women when married were helpless and had to simply accept their marriage, with a person that they had in all probability seen for the first time on their wedding night, as an inescapable fate.

During the ZAR ceremony these experiences are enacted. The patient is addressed as the 'bride' and changes into several colourful dresses throughout the ceremony. Unlike the time of her real wedding, the 'bride' now enjoys the support, devotion, attention and concern of her mama who (unlike her real mother) is playing the leading part. The 'bride' is helped and encouraged by her mama and by the daughters to go through each step of the ceremony without fear or even simple embarrassment. Whereas when she was married she was inexperienced, a virgin, helpless and had to succumb to the

control of her husband, in the ZĀR ceremony she brings the male image (the sheep) under her control. On her real wedding night she was left to face her first frightening experience alone; in the ZĀR ceremony she is encouraged to strengthen her control over the male figure.

It is through this re-enactment of her real life crisis and experiencing it in a different way, that a transformation occurs. This transformation of the "bride's" state, achieved through ZĀR, finds a parallel in the transformation which occurs after marriage. During the marriage ceremony a young virgin is transformed into a respectable, ordered woman. After marriage a woman's life is expected to be more ordered and structured - the same is expected from her after her ZĀR ceremony. Just as after her wedding ceremony she is expected to start her new life with so many hopes and aspirations for her new family, after her ZĀR ceremony she is also expected to start a new and healthy life. This is the reason why she is always reminded, especially by her mama, that she should not return to her old habits and attitudes (which helped to cause her illness). She is also made aware of the fact that she is not the only one who is causing all these misfortune; the Jinn, the male figure, is also having a role in this unhappiness. This is why during the ceremony, but especially on the 'promise' day, the Jinn is asked not to come back again and not to hurt the patient.

The introduction of music, the changing into different dresses, and the consuming of different types of food on certain days create an analogy between the wedding and ZĀR ceremonies and also helping to create a

gradual, ordered and structured transformation.

The alienation these women feel is due, to some extent, to the rapidity of change, and the loss of many advantages that they had enjoyed in pre-oil life. In spite of the fact that the materialistic advantages were beyond the expectations, or even dreams of this category of women, the luxury brought about by socio-economic change was not enough to compensate for their loss of social and emotional fulfillment.

When these women reminisce, they tend to idealise their past life to the extent that even the bad points are seen as good points. The following comments made by a women of this category reveals the extent to which the materialistic advantages are not appreciated.

"In the old days it is true that we didn't have all this new technology, all these hospitals and clinics but then we didn't have all these diseases. We had never heard of such things as diabeties, high blood pressure and cancer. So, in a way, hospitals are not always a good thing because they mean that diseases have increased and this made people lose their faith in God and put it instead in the new health technology. In the old days we had our good Niya which helped us in overcoming many difficulties and treating many diseases. "

This is one lady's reaction to change and new technology.

Another lady, expressing her disillusionment with new habits brought

by change (although these habits and lifestyles are admired by many of the young people) said.

"You boast about the freedom and independence given to women after oil. It might be true that a modern wife has not got the problems we had when we were newly married. They don't have to worry about being on good terms with their in-laws but then she does not enjoy the family atmosphere that we did. Also, their children are not as sociable as they themselves were because they have been brought up by Indian and Phillipino maids. Some of these children cannot even speak Arabic and the strange thing about is that some of these mothers claim to be 'real' moslems and they wear hijab. Tell me how these mothers are going to teach their children to be good moslems if they cannot speak Arabic, which is the language of the Quran and are brought up by non-moslem maids."

These women are caught in retreat from the contemporary changed world of strange new social and material things; the collapse of communities as they knew them, and the new 'aggressive' forms of Islam. These women are caught in contradictions brought about by change. Owing to their inability to adjust to change, these women have developed a negative self-image and feel presistently inferior. They have difficulty understanding their children who are either getting involved with the new Islamic movements or else are very 'modern' and westernized. They are no longer compatible with their husbands. In a male-dominated moslem society the way in which men perceive women has a great impact on women's self-image. In spite of the fact that the demands of these men on their wives have changed, their underlying attitudes are nevertheless the same as before. Hence, even when a man asks

his traditional wife to abandon her veil and mix with his friends, it does not mean that he is regarding her as an equal to him. In fact, a woman is expected to be modest; observe the social rules; and keep the 'honour' and the 'good name' of her family whether veiled, unveiled, modern or traditional. The demands of this category of men on their wives to dress in a Westernized manner does not mean that they have granted her the same type of freedom which would usually be given by a Western husband to his wife.

The ambiguity of male attitudes towards the female governs almost all aspects of male/female relationships even among young people. This ambiguity also adds to the tension between these women and their husbands though most of this tension is released (albeit temporarily) through ZAR. This ambiguity, the roots of which are found in Islam, underlies every kind of relationship between men and women and it is the cause of much of women's confusion of identity. This confusion of identity is accelerated by the process of change and while young women have found some resolution in joining moslem movements and re-adopting Islam, the category of middle-aged women resolves the same tensions yet in an active, and traditional way, which is ZĀR.

Not only are these women alienated from their past and from their husbands but also from their future, this is illustrated by examining their relationships with their daughters. Their alienation from their daughters is exacerbated by the fact that these women were subject to unsuccessful sexual experiences in the past and they are also ignorant of, and alienated from the sexual reality of their daughter's lives .



One middle-aged patient described to another woman how she had watched a pornographic video film in her married daughter's house, which showed a woman completely naked during an act of love with her male partner. She added that she could not believe that this was real life, as no woman would ever dare to make love in such an audacious way. As for herself, she had never dared let her husband see her naked. After all he had never tried it. This patient had several children and grandchildren.

In one such conversation the possibility that a woman was physically able to have an orgasm was discussed. Among about twenty women, only one said that it is possible. She was met with surprise and disbelief from the others.

Many women spoke about their past experiences only, since in the present, they were almost desexualized as a result of consecutive pregnancies, age and perhaps most important of all by disillusioned and unhappy experiences with their husbands.

Middle aged women are also alienated from their own bodies. For them their bodies are an object made to satisfy and please their husbands. Their own share of this pleasure is very little, if any. This alienation is not felt (at least not to the same degree), by their daughters, to whom oil wealth has brought many advantages. Among these advantages is access to sexual information through books and sexually explicit films, which although they are available in the country, are officially illegal.

One middle aged patient aged around fifty who was scorned by other patients for being very fat was justifying the irrelevance of her weight watching and looking after her appearance.

"Why should I care for my appearance and body? Who's going to look at me? During the day my husband is always busy. He is always out. At night he comes back tired and as soon as he gets into bed he's 'dead to the world'. Even when we were young he never paid any attention to my figure anyway. We should leave these things to the young generation who, although covered from head to-toe are all the time busy going to exercise classes and following certain diets".

Another patient commented:

"At our age it is not even appropriate for a woman to bother about these things (i.e. her appearance) all that much. You should be beyond that sort of thing. During our youth we never had these exercise classes or fashions of diets, but even if they had existed when would we have gone? We were always busy with our families or we were pregnant. We didn't have maids to help with the housework, we were occupied all the time. Perhaps that, and the fact that we didn't have as much food then, is why we weren't as overweight then as we are these days. Still, we should watch our weight anyway because it can lead to health problems".

During their conversation these women used certain expressions to describe themselves, especially their physical appearance and their ignorance of modern life which reveals these women's negative self-image. One such expression was, "I'm as heavy as a mountain", another was , "Whenever

I regard my body I feel as if I'm drowning in a sea of fat". Another expression which reveals their ignorance of modern life is, "I am as dumb as a cow".

When women go to the ZĀR ceremonies it is not simply to be treated for real or psychosomatic ailments. The problems of these women are a combination of 'complex' ailments which involve the whole lifestyle of these women. The ZĀR ceremonies help, the 'cure' is the coming together in these associations and re-enacting having the experiences they have had. It involves self worth, sense of self and identity, and psychological aspects of health it also involves these women doing something active, not just being passively treated, as in a mental hospital or by an 'alien' psychiatrist.

These women suffer a deep alienation from their society as a whole. They are caught up in a society full of contradictions, they see their aristocratic contemporaries, who lived in a traditional old Kuwait, adjusting very well, even to the point of being almost at ease with this ultra-modern society. In spite of the fact that they sometimes admire this stability they nevertheless find it somewhat out of context. Their younger daughters are proclaiming themselves to be the most rigorous defenders of Islam. They even think that their mother's traditional dress is not Islamic and their mothers involvement in ZĀR is also seen as being anti Islamic. Yet these younger girls themselves employ non-muslim maids and travel to non-muslim countries. Occasionally their mothers have discovered them even to have indulged in watching sexually explicit movies.

The old mode of life has changed enormously for these women. Their bustling life surrounded by a large extended family has turned into a quiet, lonely life. Their small, close-knit community where every one knew everyone else has changed to big modern, residential areas where people do not even know their next-door neighbour. In ZĀR these women relive their old traditional lives and sense of community spirit, this is especially so in the case of Failakan ZĀR. The ZĀR ceremony not only allows the patient to satisfy her need for the motherly feelings provided by her mama but also allows her to recreate the feelings of concern and solidarity which existed in her old community. ZĀR also provides these women with an opportunity to regain the self-image which has been crushed by socio-economic change.

Although during ZĀR ceremonies and during these women's presence in the dar, they re-enact an active image, in general these women replicate male images of themselves, hence although ZĀR leads to a temporary transformation and replaces many aspects of their past life, it does not lead to a radical change in these women's personality and outlook. The same thing could be said of other forms of traditional women's practices like hussayniyah and tomb visiting.

This unhappy web of contradictions made them conceive change as bringing to them discontent and unhappiness. These women are not materially deprived of appropriate forms of living for the context of Kuwait is that of wealth and luxury, they are deprived of personal, social and cultural identity. ZĀR replicates a past tradition and an identity which has been

lost, but then the search for identity through fundamentalism is the same sort of thing. The ZĀR ceremony possibly confirms for these women the reality of the world as they know it. It changes how they feel about the world, albeit temporarily. They begin to be aware of the existence of new ways of being a woman. ZĀR is of course not the same as the womens revolutionary Islamic movement but such an option was never open to these women in the way that it is to their young daughters.

Change also brought discontent and unhappiness to this category of young women. They were brought up mainly by our category of middle-aged and had fathers who were usually more modern than their mothers. They grew up with the oil boom and so have always been used to the materialistic aspects of life. However, at the same time the old values and traditions were still in evidence. They were allowed to be educated, to work and to travel but all this took place within a male dominated framework. Hence, for these young women change has brought about many advantages but these advantages were not sufficiently explained, understood and experienced, education has provided these women with a new outlet to understand the world. Wealth along with access to the western world, has encouraged many young women to adopt (although temporarily ) many modern and Westernised values.

Modernisation and westernisation have changed many attitudes but rarely that of male dominance over women, especially institutional dominance over women's participation in the modern world. This category's return to Islam has provided them with an escape from these contradictions.

In this respect (although their alienation is of a different sort from and less severe than their mothers) their return to Islam is like their mother's involvement in ZAR a search for identity. Although this search is regarded by many young girls as more intellectual, modern and dignified than that of their mothers, yet it is still in line with the ambiguous and negative male attitudes toward women. These women are again contained yet this time Islamically and sooner or later there will be a new category of young religious girls who will question the long-standing notion of male dominance over female. It is argued in this thesis that, due to the inability of the moslem movements to keep pace with change in its local and universal aspects, this category of young woman will suffer in the future from a different type of alienation but one similar to that felt by their mothers at the present time.

It is hoped that this thesis has so far given an understanding of the effects of Islam and the underlying notions concerning women and the effect it has on women's position so as to lead to a better understanding of the moslem woman.

The findings of this thesis it is hoped would be of some importance and use when launching new plans of socio-economic change, or when making alteration to existing plans. It is also hoped that for the first time in

Kuwait a victimised category, the category of middle aged middle class women has been represented and that some light has been thrown over the particularities of their lives.

I hope that this study will lead to further understanding and will encourage further research into their case, eventually leading to some assistance and understanding being given to them. This help could be in the form of starting a fully organised adult education, social clubs which are in line with their values and norms, and a part of the mass media being given over to them, It is hoped this would lead to a better understanding of the category of women by the world and on the part of our category of middle aged a better understanding of that world which would be reflected in their improved relationships with their husbands, daughters and sons. It should be stressed that any study concerning women should not make the general assumption that all moslem women are victims as the fact is as this study has shown, that different women have different realities and some women could be victimised not only by their men but also by some other categories of women, as in the case of the category of middle aged middle class women who are victimised by their daughters.

When all these achievements have come to pass will ZĀR be rejected and will it be available in Kuwait for this category of women and perhaps for the young category of women? The answers will be negative as the ambi-

guity of male/female relationship is one main source of these women's underlying needs for ZĀR and as long as this ambiguity and contradictory perception is in existence then ZĀR will persist. Yet it might take other forms and experience innovation and, if the Islamic movements strengthen perhaps it will become a clandestine practice.



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