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Girl students in Kuwait

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GIRL STUDENTS IN KUWAIT

The data presented in this article represent the results of an investigation carried out at the beginning of 1971 among girl students of the University of Kuwait.¹ The purpose of the study was to examine the social factors of influence in determining the attitudes and aspirations of these girls in respect to marriage, family life, and career. The sample of girls selected for study consisted exclusively of Kuwait nationals who were registered in the various faculties of the recently opened university (1966) and in the Teachers Training College.

A stratified random sample was obtained comprising ninety-six students of the several faculties in their first, second, or third year of study, and thirty students of the Teachers Training College in their first or second year. This selection was made possible through the mediation of Miss L. A. Al Qatami, who as Registrar of the University College for Women had free access to the student registration forms, and who was also very helpful in many other respects.

Personal interviewing and participant observation were the research techniques used. An interviewing schedule was first discussed with Professor Dr. Ghaus Ansari of the Department of Anthropology of the university.² When the interviewing was actually started by a team of five

¹ Invitations to this effect had been extended to me by the Secretary General of Kuwait University, Mr. Anwar al-Noury, and by the President of the Women's Social and Cultural Association, Miss Luluwa A. Al Qatami. Travelling expenses were met through a subsidy from W.O.T.R.O. (Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research). The University of Amsterdam allowed me leave of absence from my duties as Reader in Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of South and Southeast Asia.

² I am also deeply indebted to Professor Ansari for his willingness to elucidate a number of questions I addressed to him in writing after I had returned home. The statements and conclusions of this article, and the errors contained herein, are of course my own responsibility.

of his more advanced female students,³ regular, almost daily, meetings were held at which their interview data were thoroughly discussed. The problem of translating the findings was constantly present, not in the least because the interview schedule contained a number of open-ended questions so as to permit shadings of feelings and opinions to be expressed freely. While this has no doubt added to a better understanding of each individual girl, the group was homogeneous enough to permit generalization in regard to their main problems, which arise from the changes that are taking place in their family life.

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The Sheikhdome of Kuwait is situated in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Gulf. Like the other principalities along the western shore of the gulf, Kuwait's subsistence economy traditionally depended on sea trade, pearling and fishing. For centuries its native vessels, designed for ocean travel, carried the bulk of the trade between India, East Africa, and the Red Sea ports. The building of these *dhow*s became an important industry, and the waterfront of the town of Kuwait was covered with shipyards. The captains of these ocean vessels usually came from prominent families, and more often than not they were the owners as well. Since the discovery and the subsequent exploitation of oil, these shipyards, once so conspicuous on Kuwait's waterfront, have almost all disappeared. The enterprising owner-captains of the rich trading-fleets were the first to foresee and profit from the tremendous changes that would take place.

Until Kuwait became the largest crude-oil producer in the Middle East, it was characterized by traditional tribal life. The substantial houses of the well-to-do merchant families were situated right on the lanes or streets of the old town, which today forms the centre of modern Kuwait. Unadorned on the outside except for massive teak doors with iron bolts, these houses were built around inner courtyards, one of which was invariably the centre of the women's quarters. The men's section had its permanent, exclusively male gathering-place (*divānīyah*), named after the family to which the head of the house belonged. In the women's section much of the life of the household took place in or around the open courtyard, with a small garden where herbs were

³ Their names are mentioned here: without their cooperation I would have been unable to carry out this enquiry. They were: Muna Barakat, Munira Al Fawzan, Fawziya Al 'Isa, Shaha Khalil, and Fawziya Al 'Omar.

planted. Servants looked after the poultry and cattle housed in separate sheds. When a man had more than one wife — polygyny being not uncommon in these wealthy homes — the women's quarters comprised separate rooms for the various wives with their children, but all looked out on the same courtyard. Women could go out, duly covered, and visit each other; no man would accost them. Children, male and female, used to go to the seashore nearby and swim together.

On the flat rooftops of these houses wind-towers caught the breeze from any direction and funnelled it down to the rooms below. Rain-water was collected and stored in cisterns. This precarious supply could be augmented by water bought from peddlars who transported their precious cargo on donkeys from the barges berthed daily at one of the jetties, having brought their full gallons to Kuwait from the Shatt Al Arab in Iraq, a hundred miles away to the north.

The happy picture of this life in old Kuwait, as it was described to me by daughters of its former privileged residents, was called up by the memory of a carefree and sheltered childhood in the old family-house, which they had left before they had grown into adulthood. They tended to forget whatever they had witnessed of their mother's worries and anxieties, their restricted freedom and self-reliance. The nostalgic reminiscences of these daughters, who live today in the modern suburbs of Kuwait and lack none of the modern amenities of an affluent society, betrayed their continuing inability to adapt themselves completely to the radical change from pre-oil to post-oil Kuwait that had occurred in their lifetime.

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The old town is no more. It has been transformed into the modern governmental and commercial centre of the new Kuwait — a boom city enjoying the full benefits of the oil exploitation. Although the industry itself, including the administrative offices, has been kept some thirty-five kilometres south of the town in Ahmadi, the old Kuwait has been replaced by a fully modern city with a vast network of double-lane, asphalted roads and roundabouts laid out according to a far-sighted master plan. New residential quarters have been erected outside the old town walls, which were razed to permit a green belt of trees and gardens between the centre and the new suburbs.

With the money paid them by the government as compensation for their in-town property, the dislodged Kuwaiti built new residences on the lots allocated to them in the desert. At the same time the government

devised new neighbourhood units and initiated a welfare programme, including hospitals, schools, and a water-distillation plant. When in 1960 the first eight neighbourhood units of different types — but all complete with kindergarten, playground, shopping centre, dispensary, and mosque — had filled the desert space between the green belt and the third ring-road surrounding old Kuwait from the northern beach to the southern, new residential quarters were developed on the sands between this third ring-road and the fourth.

In between the houses of the better-off in the new suburbs, the municipality has built blocks of air-conditioned houses of various sizes for Kuwaiti citizens of the limited-income groups. These so-called Council Houses, about nine thousand of which had been completed at the time of this investigation while others were under construction, are being sold on easy-term installments.

Within this vast residential acreage and outside the neighbourhood units and blocks of Council Houses, for which non-Kuwaiti are not eligible, the foreign population — drawn to Kuwait in ever-growing numbers by the new prospects of finding employment — were housed in their own apartments. The conglomeration of these multi-dwelling constructions resulted in quarters more congested than those of the Kuwaiti.

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Kuwait is reported to have had no more than ten to 12,000 inhabitants in 1900. After the oil exploitation began, in 1937, their number increased to 75,000. This artificial increase, due to the influx of foreign labourers, business men, and professionals, was accelerated with the expanding oil exploitation and the subsequent building boom. In 1957 the Kuwait Emirate counted 200,000 inhabitants; by 1971 this figure had more than tripled, to 733,000.

Whereas in 1957 the majority was still autochthonous, today the number of foreigners (387,000) exceeds that of Kuwaiti citizens (346,000). The greater part of this foreign population, which includes about 70,000 Palestinians, originates from the Arab countries. Americans and Europeans, who form the smallest group of about 4,000, live and work mainly in Ahmadi.

Of this total population, approximately 375,000 live in the capital (about 145,000 Kuwaiti and 230,000 non-Kuwaiti).

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The pace of change is visible not only in the outward appearance of this ultra-modern city with its expanding residential quarters and unending flow of motorized traffic. It is apparent as well in social relationships. In the new villas and apartment houses, designed for small family units, people no longer know their neighbours. The courtyards of old Kuwait had been the centre of family industry and socialization. In the air-conditioned new homes with their handy watertaps and easily switched-on electricity, their refrigerators filled with fresh drinks and canned food, patios have become irrelevant. Female activity and interest is drawn outside the home, to dress-makers, beauty parlours and shopping centres, or to seasonal benefit bazaars. *Divānīya* according to the traditional rules of social rank continue to serve as gathering-places for men, where public opinion is formed. But the topics discussed have changed with the changing work situation now based on individual competition. Children of the older generations had plenty of playmates in the courtyards of their large families. Today they are sent to near-by kindergarten or by car to more distant schools. A centrifugal tendency in the social life of the Kuwaiti has affected the cohesive family activities centred around the old courtyards.

Tribal mores had dominated the social life of old Kuwait. For instance, the qualities of ascribed status were predominant in the conclusion of marriages. A strict endogamy prevented families belonging to tribes considered less prestigious than others, however rich they might be, from linking themselves through marital unions to those considered superior. Up till very recently the most superior of these old families have most jealously guarded their purity of blood. About 180 such families are recognized as *āsīlīn* — as the true descendants of those *sharīf* Arab tribes that came up to Kuwait from the Najd plateau more than two centuries ago and settled there as overseas traders and shipbuilders. The descendants of this proud group of outstanding merchant families have remained very exclusive. Daughters have to marry within their own set. Bridegrooms are still chosen from the own family or related families. The girls of these *āsīlīn* always have their mother's name stated in their birth certificate along with that of their father, as a proof of their flawless ancestry.

Such is not the case with those who have an *āsīl* father but a non-*āsīl* mother; they belong to another social group, the so-called *bayāsir*. This *baysir* group is formed by the descendants of those who, though of Arab stock, migrated to Kuwait at a later stage, and by those who are mixed — *āsīl* and non-*āsīl*.

The prefix *āl* often mentioned before the family name and meaning "belonging to" (not to be confounded with *al*, the article), is used by families of the two groups, including families that comprise both *baysir* and *āsīl* elements.

Looked upon by the families of Arab Bedouin stock as "other", if not lower, are the *Kanā'āt*, who are very numerous in Kuwait. Their forefathers are said to have arrived there long ago from northern Iraq. Their alleged social inferiority is evident, for instance, in the fact that they have to mention their *kanā'āt* origin in the birth certificate of their children.

A fourth group of Kuwaiti citizens is formed by Iranians, who began coming to Kuwait only recently, that is, about sixty years ago. Their number has increased continuously and amounts today to 30,000. Many are merchants or shopkeepers, but the majority are labourers who entered the Emirate illegally and, having therefore no rights, are easily exploited.

While the new oil wealth has been diffused among the citizens of Kuwait through public expenditure, it was not spread evenly from the beginning. When the municipality started its welfare project, the greater part of the new wealth had already gone to the mighty merchant families of noble blood, who had sold their land to the state for handsome prices, enabling them to make new investments. They were the first to send their sons abroad for further education. But when the phenomenal expansion of free educational opportunities started to be realized at home, the social fabric of Kuwait underwent a drastic change.

This change had already set in with the physical dispersion of Kuwait's population and the ensuing problems of ecological adaptation, causing the disintegration of the large corporate kin groupings of the former Kuwaiti society. More than any other factors, schooling and the mass media have continued to expose the individual to alternative sources of information and satisfaction. In transmitting the knowledge necessary for the attainment of a new social status, the school has replaced the family as educational agency. A progressive specialization in the occupational sphere has been instrumental in bringing about a new value structure that gives greater recognition to achievement than to birth. Formal training is beginning increasingly to be appreciated more highly than family connections. The traditional dividing lines of an ascription-oriented society are steadily being obliterated and replaced by those of an emerging class society with new values. The growing interest in personally achieved prosperity and prestige, together with

a sharpened desire for indigenous know-how to supersede the foreign skill and competence on which Kuwait mainly depends for the running of its affairs and the instruction of its future citizens, has also greatly contributed to the emancipation of the Kuwaiti women.

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Education from the kindergarten level to that of the university is free for all Kuwaiti, and includes not only tuition but also midday meals, books, clothing for school, and transport. Other nationalities have to provide education to their children through their own private schools. A restricted number of non-Kuwaiti (not exceeding 10 percent of the total Kuwaiti school population) are admitted to government schools. Health services are provided free, including hospitalization and medicines, to all residents.

Compulsory education stretches over the two stages of the primary and the intermediate school, together totalling eight years. During these two stages separate but about equal educational facilities are provided for both sexes.

Secondary education, again in separate schools for boys and girls, and providing a four-year course of study, is of two types:

1. qualifying students for admission to the various faculties of the university;
2. vocational, either commercial or technical.

The University of Kuwait was inaugurated in 1966, starting with the College of Sciences and the College of Arts and Education, for male students, and the College for Women providing the same facilities. Up to that year the Kuwait Government had regularly sent a number of students, male and female, to other Arabic or European universities for further qualification.

Out of a total of 886 Kuwaiti students who entered the university in the first year, 170 were girls, who attended courses in the College for Women established in separate buildings with their own dispensary, dining hall and playing fields, the whole surrounded by walls and situated at some distance from the central university buildings. By the academic year 1969-70 their number had grown to 838, almost equalling that (875) of their male counterparts, and distributed over the several faculties as follows:

Sciences	102
Economics, Political Science and Commerce	146
Arts	553
Law and Shari'a	37

(Source: *Statistical Abstract 1970*, published by the Planning Board of Kuwait)

In addition, the number of Kuwaiti female graduates returned in the same year from abroad amounted to 66 from the United Arab Republic (compared with 88 male graduates) and to two from the United Kingdom (20 males).

In the academic year 1970-71, when the present enquiry was carried out, the number of female students at the University of Kuwait had increased to 1040. Out of this total, about 10 percent were non-Kuwaiti, mostly from the Arabian Gulf Principalities, who were enabled to study here thanks to scholarships granted by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. A boarding-house on the premises of the University College for Women has been built especially for these foreign students.

As far back as 1961, the first of several Teachers Training Schools offering a three-year course had been opened for those who had completed their intermediate schooling. In these schools boys and girls were trained for teaching in the kindergarten and primary schools. When the secondary schools had expanded sufficiently, Teachers Training Colleges were opened, admitting boys and girls who had successfully finished their secondary schooling to a two-year study for teaching in secondary schools. (This course will be extended to four years.)

The increased number of secondary schools, showing a proportionately greater increase in girls' schools (from one compared with three for boys in 1963-64 to five compared with eight for boys in 1969-70), had its immediate effect on the growing number of girl students at the Teachers Training College.

Secondary School Population	1963-64	1969-70
numbers: boys	1422	4321
girls	699	2998
percentages of total: boys	67	59
girls	33	41

Teachers Training Institutes Population

male students	261	955
female students	159	1592

(Source: *Statistical Abstract 1970*)

Whereas during the sixties boys were being attracted by all sorts of new economic opportunities enabling them to move out and up, the teaching profession became increasingly popular with the Kuwaiti girls. At present, however, the number of female teachers is still being exceeded by that of their male counterparts, while both categories are overwhelmingly outnumbered by non-Kuwaiti teachers, mainly from Egypt, as may be seen from the following table.

Teachers in Government Schools

	Kuwaiti		non-Kuwaiti	
	m.	f.	m.	f.
1964-65	120	143	2263	2075
1969-70	879	608	3356	3367

(Source: *Statistical Abstract 1970*)

In 1970 this whole programme of the government's welfare policy had taken place in the short span of about fifteen years. At the time the girls selected for the present enquiry were born, desert had covered the area where they now lived. They had been toddlers when their parents had started to make their new homes. All their lives they had taken the new surroundings, the houses and flats, the asphalted roads with motorized traffic for granted. They had never known anything but running water from taps, electric lights, air-conditioning. As a matter of course they had been sent to school; and, approaching the age of twenty years, they went in for higher education instead of being married and tied to the responsibilities of motherhood as their mothers had been at that age.

While all but one of the these undergraduates of the university (hereafter UG) and students of the Teachers Training College (hereafter TTC) were single, their mothers had been married either immediately after the onset of puberty (namely, 32 percent of the mothers of the UG and 47 percent of those of the TTC, between the ages of twelve and fourteen) or before the age of eighteen (49 percent and 33 percent respectively, between fifteen and seventeen). A number of girls did not know their mother's age at marriage, and could only say that "mother had been married rather young". The relatively young age at which mothers of the TTC married may be an index of a slightly more conservative family background of this group, but on the whole the general trend was clearly towards a higher age at marriage. This rise in the age at marriage is due to the increasing spread of formal training. The education of these girls was far more advanced than was deemed necessary for their mothers when they were young.

The schooling of all these mothers had often been informal or neglected. It had mainly consisted in the recitation of the Qur'ān, as part of their religious education. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of these mothers were illiterate in the modern sense of the term. However, a surprisingly high number of these mothers (about 28 percent for both categories of girls) had availed themselves of the facilities provided by the government to eradicate illiteracy, as part of its Adult Education Project started in 1961. The rapid increase in the number of illiterates attending the evening classes of the Study Centres for Women, organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, prompted these centres to raise their standards. Education was split into primary and intermediate stages, where women were taught Arabic, English, and other general subjects. Considering the fact that even in the year 1969, when school education and adult education had been in full swing for several years, 70 percent of the Kuwaiti female population above the age of ten was still illiterate (*Statistical Abstract 1970*), it is evident that the families of these girls belonged to the privileged section of Kuwait society.

Other indexes of the socio-economic status of the families of these girl students were the profession and income of their fathers or guardians. Those of 40 percent of the UG and of 43 percent of the TTC were employees of the state or municipal government. Some had attained high rank, while others remained in lower but not in the lowest echelons. (The monthly salaries in the Kuwait civil service range from 300 to 400 K.D.⁴ for the superior posts, and from 120 to 275 K.D. in the senior posts.) Roughly 46 percent of the fathers of the UG and 57 percent of the TTC were in business or trade. The income of all these fathers varied as follows:

Monthly income (Kuwaiti Dinars)	UG fathers %	TTC fathers %
100—175	20	20,3
200—375	30,5	23,3
400—575	16,5	17
600—975	6,3	—
1,000 and above	14,7	—
unknown	12	39,4

⁴ At the time of the investigation the Kuwaiti dinar was quoted at \$ 2.80.

The percentage of TTC who did not know or did not want to disclose their father's income was far higher than that of the UG. This may be partly attributed to the fact that a greater number of TTC fathers were occupied in trade and business with irregular earnings, which — had they been known — might have fallen within the brackets of 600 to 1,000 K.D.; this is, however, mere conjecturing.

In the case of the civil servants with fixed salaries, there was little or no room left for ambiguity of this sort. It became evident that the number of UG fathers who held high offices in government service exceeded by far that of the fathers of the TTC (Eighteen UG-fathers against one TTC-father with a salary falling within the brackets of 300 to 400 K.D.). From this, in combination with the fact that 10 percent of the UG fathers held posts in the Kuwait Oil Company or were members of Parliament or landowners, may be concluded that the UG came from families with a higher social status than those of the TTC.

The composition of the households in which these girl students lived seems to point in the same direction. While the conjugal family was represented by a large majority in both cases (UG: 85 percent; TTC: 97 percent), the number of UG living in a joint family (7 percent) was more than twice that of the TTC (3 percent). While none of the households of the TTC included dependent kin, 5 percent of the UG mentioned the presence of one or two relatives living with them.⁵ It was also remarkable that two UG made mention of polygynous households, but none of the TTC.

During the many informal talks I had with various girl students and young women outside the formal interviewing, I came to understand that polygyny in Kuwait, once very frequent in their milieu, was less common today and condemned by public opinion. It occurred mainly among the upper-strata families of the *asilīn*, who were less inclined to divorce than the newly rich bourgeois society, where it seems to occur with some frequency.

The number of servants and of cars, television sets, and refrigerators in each household provided an additional index to the prosperity of the families of these girls. While the average number of servants (often non-Kuwaiti) was two (UG: 26 percent; TTC: 21 percent), the percentage of those households that had to do without domestic help was higher

⁵ In the case of this small sample there is of course no room for a statistically relevant explanation of more or less slight differences between percentages. Those mentioned here and at some other places in this paper are, therefore, meant only to indicate a possible trend.

in the case of the TTC (20 percent) than of the UG (13 percent); in both cases, however, four servants were not uncommon (7 percent).

The families of both categories of girl students had at least one big car (24 percent and 21 percent), but more often two (34 percent in both cases). It was not unusual for a family to have three cars (25 percent and 10 percent) or even four (8 percent and 17 percent), none of which a small one. As a matter of fact, one sees hardly any small cars in Kuwait.

Not a single one of these families was without at least one television set (16 percent and 10 percent), but the majority had two sets (42 percent and 43 percent), while three or four sets were not uncommon. The same holds good for refrigerators, which were nowhere absent. In most cases the houses were provided with at least one large-sized fridge (46 percent and 43 percent), while quite a few counted three or four (27 percent and 36 percent).

As may easily be imagined, the quantities of standard and portable radios were in proportion with those of the above-mentioned amenities. It should not be forgotten, however, that the families of these girls were also richly blessed with children. In the case of the conjugal households, to which the majority of the girls belonged, the average number was six children, while few families had less and many had more children, even up to twelve or thirteen.

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There has been mention, so far, of separate schools for girls and separate evening classes for women, implying separate spheres of activity for men and women. Yet not long ago women of the upper-strata families never left the house except for occasional visits to relatives and once a year for picnics with their families in the desert during spring-time. On all these occasions they were invariably veiled with the large *'abāya* that covered them from head to foot. The fact that this veil is no longer in use among these families (although I still saw some older ladies using it) should not lead to the inference that the segregation of the sexes had also disappeared.

With the present profusion of automobiles, most of the families of these girl students are able to place a car at the disposal of their women. In this way, without mixing with men, the mothers are enabled to go to their own social gatherings for the promotion of a number of cultural and welfare activities. Thus, apart from a limited group of prominent

and wealthy families, who lead a mixed social life and go abroad frequently, women's movements are still very restricted in public life.

The students, whom time and again I observed strolling about in the courtyards of the Women's College between their lectures, wore clothes — mini or maxi — after the latest fashion. They had up-to-date hairdos and were experienced in modern make-up. Their behaviour seemed entirely uninhibited. Yet all these grown-up girls had to wait inside the gate of the college grounds for the college bus or their family's private car to pick them up and drive them home. Nobody could enter the premises without the permission of the gatekeeper, who sternly guarded the entrance. The teachers, professors at the university, had to come the long distance from the central campus to duplicate, for the girls' sake, the lectures they had given to the male students. The lecture halls of this Women's College are fully equipped with reading-rooms and laboratories.

There is a seeming contradiction between the freedom these girls enjoy in making full use of the new educational facilities for women and the strict control maintained over their use of time outside the college and the home. Yet both facts express the preoccupation of their families with the marriage chances of their daughters. Formal education is being increasingly regarded as a means to raise the value of a girl as future wife. The idea of education as social insurance for the girl herself may come as an afterthought. In a world ruled by men, who tend to see the ideal woman mainly as a devoted housewife and mother, it is not at all surprising that the worry of parents about their daughters' reputation keeps pace with the desire to give them the best possible education. Therefore, a far from imaginary fear of "being talked about" prevented the parents from allowing greater freedom, and the daughters from openly defying public opinion.

To conclude, however, that the above restrictions on free social intercourse are absolute and all-pervading would be erroneous. The many contradictions in the girls' academic life were evidence to the contrary. The girl students attended various mixed functions of the university. They were even eligible to join, and become officers of, the Students' Union, although I did not hear of any mixed gatherings of male and female students. It was evident that the egalitarian ideology accompanying higher education for all was carried out by the university authorities with conviction as well as with great prudence, taking account of the prevailing social prejudice in the matter. Public opinion had as yet to go a great distance before the girls would be regarded, and

would regard themselves, as equals of their male counterparts, without need of special "protection". Being part of this society, the girls themselves were not free from the traditional prejudices regarding women, but the influence of their academic training as well as the changing relations between the members of their families in a predominantly conjugal household pattern, was discernible in their attitude towards the life problems with which they were immediately confronted. Not inclined to reject indiscriminately the traditions of their culture, but rather assessing them along with the new alternatives offered by the changed opportunities, the girls carefully weighed the pros and cons of new values.

So, for instance, when asked about the desirability of coeducation, they were found to hold opinions in many cases subtler and more complex than a simple in favour of or against, as is shown in the following table.

Attitudes concerning coeducation	UG	TTC
	%	%
in favour of, at all stages	56	23
partly in favour of	30	40
not in favour of	11	33
no opinion	3	4

These figures show a marked difference in attitudes between the two categories. While the UG tended to be more in favour of coeducation at all stages, the TTC showed greater reserve in their judgements on this matter. This may be partly due to the fact that on the whole the university students came from more emancipated families, whose male members, as we have seen, often hold high positions in government service or business, and have acquired a more liberal outlook and are more realistic about the inevitable consequences of the present education of their daughters. In the case of the TTC, the reason for their more evenly distributed opinions may lie in the fact that they were all preparing themselves for the teaching profession; they would, therefore, be confronted immediately with the problems implied.

Whether they would actually work as teachers after having finished their studies depended not only on their own wishes and likings, as we shall see. What is relevant here is the fact that, to a question of what kind of work they would like for themselves, almost all the TTC (90 percent) answered that they preferred teaching as a career. Naturally, the UG,

with their interests in several fields of study, formed a less homogeneous group. They were more divided in their choices of eventual careers. Yet, even among them, a substantial proportion of the votes went to the teaching profession (48 percent), while other preferences were expressed in far smaller proportions for the civil service (13 percent), business (7 percent), and social work (4 percent), none of which were opted for by the TTC girls.

It was to be expected that the teaching profession should attract the majority of votes. In the present-day Kuwait society this profession not only has the guarantee of being exercised in an exclusively feminine sphere, but it is related most closely to the traditional role of the woman as mother and educator. And it was this role that remained the ideal prospect for the majority of these girls. When asked what they considered to be the first and foremost destination of a girl today, 66 percent of the UG and 53 percent of the TTC answered marriage and motherhood. This destination was taken for granted by those who answered that a woman must get an education so as to be able to bring up her children (or the next generation) to become useful citizens (32 percent and 40 percent, respectively). But they acknowledged the necessity of schooling as a new element in the preparation for this role, deviating completely from the traditional criteria of feminine accomplishments applied to their mothers.

This altered role of the mother will no doubt contribute to putting her on an equal footing with the father, and will change her relations with her children. The pace of change is so great that the present generation of modern educated girls may soon be regarded by the males as dangerous rivals in the occupational world. At present, however, with separate schooling and the persistent segregation of the sexes, the threat of competition is felt only by the many foreigners, men and women, who hold responsible positions in the fields of education, government service, and business. The present educational facilities so lavishly offered to Kuwaiti boys and girls aim first and foremost at the replacement, in the near future, of qualified foreigners by citizens with similar abilities.

In the meanwhile, the girl students of this well-to-do class are still in a vulnerable position, as appears from the answers in the negative to a question whether they were as free in their movements as their brothers. About 82 percent of both categories of girls said that they were allowed less freedom. The fact that about 54 percent accepted this situation, and explained why they agreed with it, may be regarded as evidence of their sense of reality in respect to the present social

ideology; it is further corroborated by their qualified judgements on the matter of coeducation. Those who disagreed (20 percent in both cases) were unable to give a consistent explanation of their disagreement. But their dissatisfaction with the present differential treatment of brothers and sisters pointed to an incipient protest, which could not yet find an outlet but which indicated as well a deviation from the traditional family pattern.

This was nowhere more obvious than in the case of the changing attitudes regarding marriage. It has already been reported that practically none of the girls, with a median age of 19-20, was married. The students expected to be married after having finished their present studies, that is, at about the age of twenty-three or later.

All admitted that their marriage would be arranged by their parents; except for four girls, all expected to be consulted beforehand. But whereas no girl had any objection to the marital state, a definite majority (UG: 70 percent; TTC: 77 percent) disagreed with the custom of arranged marriage, accepted by the minority (30 percent and 23 percent, respectively). The latter rationalized their acceptance by repeating that a girl was too inexperienced to choose for herself, that parents knew better what was good for their daughters and were better informed on the potential candidates than they could ever be themselves. Indeed, although their college education not only postponed their marriage to a later date and widened their intellectual horizons as well, these girls had only chaperoned contact with eligible young men. An established system by which the unmarried young of both sexes can meet each other on socially approved and relatively informal terms without commitments for the future is still lacking in Kuwait.

Although the impact of traditional views and customs regarding the conclusion of marriage was discernible from the answers of this minority of students, the substantial majority gave evidence of more independent thinking in their protest against the arranged marriage, arguing that they were able to bear their own responsibilities and were in a better position than their parents to choose the right life partner. But all these vaguely rebellious girls at the same time thought it wise to consult their parents before deciding. There are, it seems, two possible reasons for this attitude: (a) These students were level-headed enough to weigh the real possibilities of the existing situation, and (b) they did not equate marriage with "romantic love" as they knew it from novels and films. They may have dreamt of "falling in love", but they knew all too well that this feeling and marriage were still separate and often irrecon-

cilable concepts. Therefore, the majority thought of marriage with a certain preferred type of man rather than with one man in particular.

We have already noted a departure from the traditional criteria of feminine accomplishment, started when girls were sent to school. This phenomenon, of course, does not stand alone, as I have tried to explain, and is linked with an altered evaluation of the qualities desirable in the male marriage partner. Once formal education was recognized as the main channel to well-paid jobs for men, it logically developed that family status was no longer primarily determined by birth. Therefore, the girls, while still mindful of such ascriptive qualities as good family background (*min 'ā'ilah ma'arūfah, min 'ā'ilah asīlah*),⁶ placed greater emphasis on personal achievement of the future partner, thus adapting themselves to the rapidly changing circumstances.

Beyond this, the girls hoped to find husbands with such qualities as strong character and good morals (*akhlāq ḥamīd, akhlāq hasanah*), often adding explicitly that prospective marriage partners should be faithful Muslims. Good looks were also appreciated.

Whereas it may be assumed that the preferences enumerated thus far by the girls coincide with the criteria used by their parents for a good spouse, one quality required by a number of girls revealed greater independence on their part. Their wish that a future husband should respect them not only gave a distinct impression of the persisting asymmetrical relationships between the sexes in family life, but also showed that, as in the case of coeducation, these girls had come to question this situation.

In the table below are listed the qualities and the frequency of the preferences, alone or in combination, mentioned by the girls.

Qualities and Achievements desired in the Marriage Partner		
	UG %	TTC %
<i>qualities:</i>		
good family background	18	27
strong character and good morals	36	73
good Muslim	7	17
good looks	28	27
who respects me	13	13

⁶ The transcriptions of these and following terms, as well as their exact meaning, I owe to Drs. Musa Suudi, Senior Research Associate of the Institute of the Modern Near East at the University of Amsterdam who also helped me with the correct reproduction in English of many other passages of the girls' statements.

	UG %	TTC %
<i>achievements:</i>		
(university) educated	47	27
gainfully employed	8	27

If we may — without conjecturing about the extent to which these girls deviate from the criteria accepted in their society — assume that they are still strongly marked by the ideology of their milieu, the above outcomes reflect a changing society insofar as they show a new preference pattern emerging within the over-all framework of the normative system, namely a shift from the former stress on attributes of an ascriptive nature to a more equal distribution of both ascriptive and achievement attributes.

A difference is discernible in the proclaimed preferences between the UG and the TCC. While both groups seemed in basic agreement on the personal respect desired from the future spouse, the TTC were more inclined to stress the qualities of an ascriptive nature, thereby revealing a more conservative social background. At the same time they were more aware than the higher-status UG of the desirability of a well-paid job.

We have noticed that a high proportion of the students disagreed with the custom of arranged marriage. Almost as many strongly opposed the high *mahr* (bridal gift) customary in their families (UG: 67 percent; TTC: 70 percent).

The bridal gift, which is established in accordance with the modest amount allowed by the Prophet for his daughter Fātima (*mahr shari'a*), was accepted by a number of girls.

Mahr is a "must", for it is mentioned in the Qur'ān; it is also one of the rules of marriage. (UG 5)

Religion demands a *mahr*, but only as a symbol. (TTC 4)

But, as in many other Arabian and Islamic countries, the customary *mahr*, fixed according to the social status of the bride's family, prevails in the milieu to which the Kuwaiti students belong. And it was against the fabulous amounts of this customary *mahr* that many girls of the sample revolted. The majority felt acutely humiliated by — and therefore categorically denounced — the fact that, more than male contemporaries, they were being manipulated within a marriage system that allowed only passive choice.

Mahr must remain a sign of respect towards the woman. Marriage is not a matter of selling or buying. Therefore high *mahr* should be brought down. But I agree with the habit of *mahr* as it is our custom and it honours the girl. (UG 75)

As in the case of the arranged marriage, the segregation of the sexes may be said to enhance the persisting influence of family control and prestige, and to emphasize the exchange value of marriageable daughters expressed by the *mahr*.

Some girls blamed the customs of exorbitant *mahr* for the growing habit of educated Kuwaiti young men either to remain bachelors or to marry non-Kuwaiti girls, with whom they had become acquainted during their studies at home or abroad. In this way, the girls argued, these young Kuwaiti managed to avoid the threat of extravagant demands for a *mahr* that would be placed upon them if they wanted to marry in their own set.

I disagree with high *mahr*; they should be neither high nor low. Men take this custom of high *mahr* as an excuse for marrying a girl from outside the country. (TTC 9)

Whether this argument is well-founded must remain unanswered, so long as it is not confirmed by other evidence. According to present regulations, a foreign woman married to a Kuwaiti has to establish several years of permanent residence in Kuwait before she can acquire Kuwaiti citizenship and thus be regarded as having the same rights as a Kuwait-born girl.

The deeper cause for rejecting the high *mahr* that impede their marriage chances seems rather to be that these Kuwaiti girls were unable to make friends with their masculine coevals during their studies, while the latter had many opportunities to mix freely with educated non-Kuwaiti girls at home and abroad.

It has already been remarked that the teaching profession for women received the greatest support of the students, one of the reasons for this preference being the fact that this profession can be exercised in an exclusively feminine sphere. The question whether the girls would actually be allowed to take a job after their studies remains to be answered.

All the girls, except two UG, said that their parents would allow them to take a job before marrying. They were more hesitant about what would happen thereafter. While a number of them (UG: 14 percent; TTC: 10 percent) thought it impossible to hold a job after marriage because of the children that would arrive, others said that it

would depend on the in-laws or husband whether they would be allowed to work or not (UG: 13 percent; TTC: 20 percent). But an overwhelming majority (UG: 71 percent; TTC: 67 percent) was confident that they would not be prevented from having a job, provided proper care was taken of the children and the household. Only a few girls mentioned financial need as an incentive for holding a job.

There was, however, a marked discrepancy between the outcomes of the answers of the girls taken as a whole and of those of the girls belonging to the lower-income groups of the sample (K.D. 100-375), and between the two categories of students mutually.

It may be inferred from the figures in the table below that, in the case of the higher-status group of UG, considerations of family prestige increase with the decrease of income. Higher education for women had now been accepted as a valuable asset in the marriage market. But a job, carrying the implication of economic need, would lessen or undo the prestige attached to a university degree.

The TTC of the lower-income group seemed less inhibited by considerations of family prestige than were their UG counterparts; they were also more progressive than their group as a whole.

Will you be allowed to take a job after marrying?

	UG %		TTC %	
	total	low income	total	low income
yes	71	> 60	67	< 81
no	14	< 16	10	> —
depends on in-laws	13	< 19	20	> 9
in case of financial need	2	< 4	3	< 9

The question why all these girls would be allowed to take a job before marrying, despite the fact that they were being educated separately and denied other opportunities of meeting men freely, finds its answer in their choice of the teaching profession (UG: 64 percent; TTC: 76 percent) or employment in such fields as medical or social work or nursing as most suited for women: these professions, they say, agree with the nature of a woman and can be performed without mixing with men. For the same reason professions in the fields of secretarial work, civil service, politics, theatre, and film were generally rejected as unsuited for

women in the present situation. This reasoning is summed up in the following statement of one of the UG:

Teaching is the most suitable profession for a girl. The situation in our Kuwaiti community does not give sufficient freedom to girls. Suppose they take other jobs, they are easily talked about.

This girl, therefore, did not approve of coeducation, saying that "society does not accept mixing of boys and girls". The conforming attitude reflected in this statement was corroborated by many other answers. Some of the girls blamed not so much their society as the behaviour of the girls themselves. "The present situation", said another UG,

is confusing for Kuwaiti girl students. They believe they are behaving like modern Western girls and do not realize that, by adopting some superficial traits of Western culture, they have failed to detect the fundamentals. That is why their behaviour is unbalanced and may easily give offense.

This analysis, which makes unwitting use of A. L. Kroeber's distinction between reality ingredients and value ingredients of a culture in a contact situation such as Westernization presents, throws some light on the problems of these girls and the frequent inconsistency of their behaviour and reasoning. The Kuwaiti girl students were still so marked by the lag caused by the emotional attachment of their families to traditional values, imposing taboos on their freedom, that they became confused by the conflicting situational developments that had taken place at an unprecedented pace in this part of the world.

Another aspect of this kinship culture reacting to the disruptive forces of urbanization was discernible in the women's organizations, such as the Women's Cultural and Social Association and the Al-Nahdha Women's Society, both founded in 1963. As the primary relations are still mainly conditioned by kinship, these ties of blood are still a very strong element in the formation of such associations, satisfying the unmet needs for identity of married women. However, mass media are increasingly exposing them to alternative sources of socialization and new values. The original organizations, based primarily on kin (*āl*) are gradually growing into modern women's associations, thereby lessening the gap between the older generation and the younger.

* * *

As the aeroplane bringing me for the first time to the Emirate was about to land late at night on the airfield southeast of Kuwait, I became frightened by the sight of big fires all around. Upon arrival I was told

that the licking red flames that roared in the silence of endless expanses of desert sands were the proud tokens of Kuwait's present source of prosperity. When the car brought me to the guesthouse near the shore northwest of Kuwait, where I would be accommodated during my stay, I was stunned by the profusion of glittering lights along the wide streets around the centre, itself ablaze with electricity.

This dramatic first impression of Kuwait's dazzling oil-richness impinging on the austere Arabian desert was symbolic of the impression given by many women — young and older — whom I met subsequently. They were the persons who had gained most by the sudden transformation. But a persistent sense of female inferiority, inherited from the near past, seemed often to prevent them from making proper use of their newly acquired liberties and responsibilities, and explained the frequent inconsistencies noticed in the behaviour of the girl students.

When in the early spring I was about to leave Kuwait, the morning sunrays were diffused by a premature *tauz*, one of those sandstorms from the desert that afflict Kuwait frequently during the scorchingly hot summer months. The car reached the airfield through an orange mist of fine sand that concealed the activities of this super-affluent cosmopolitan society, which within two decades had superseded the closely knit community of desert dwellers and sailors of old Kuwait.

Many ways of life still exist side by side in this dynamic city, where standards have not yet been crystallized, thus creating conflict and confusion in the minds of these educated girls. The greatest transformation in their society has been that they were given education by the elders. Whatever may be in store for their future, this new educational patrimony, giving them a wider perspective than their secluded mothers have ever dreamt of, can be lost no more. It has also created desires that must remain unsatisfied as long as the society at large remains ambivalent in its attitudes towards the emancipation of its women.