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'AL MARA'L CAUDA': WOMEN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.
A STUDY OF THE CHANGING SOCIAL WORLD OF KUWAITI WOMEN

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Thesis
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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO
THE SOCIOLOGY-ANTHROPOLOGY-PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

BY

HALA AHMED HAMED EL NASHARTY

AUGUST 1976

المؤلف
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THIS THESIS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

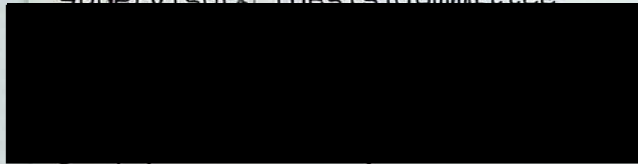
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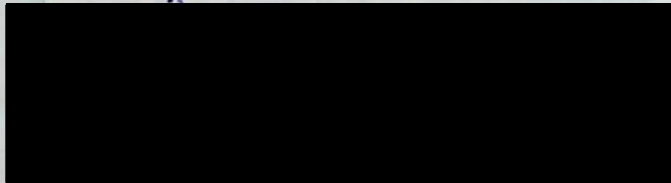
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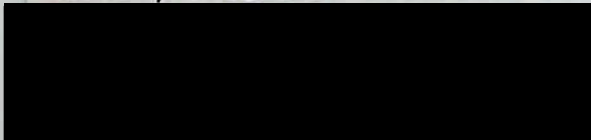
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an exploration into the roles and self images of a number of six middle-aged Kuwaiti wives and mothers. It is an attempt to understand, from the perspective of the older more conservative generation, the meaning of the contemporary processes of change. It is a phenomenological study which attempts to understand those women's typification of the social world.

Research findings have shown that there is a general adherence to the ethos of the superiority of the older women 'al mara'l 'C'auda', that a certain kind of division of labor has existed in pre-oil Kuwait which made it possible for us to perceive women roles as complementary to, rather than different from, men's roles.

Ethnographic evidence has also shown that women are differentiated within themselves in an internal social hierarchy which makes it possible for some of them to manipulate others in the social world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	
Objective	1
Background and Rationale	3
Theoretical Framework	5
Review of Pertinent Literature	7
II. TWO WORLDS: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL SURVEY	15
III. A. METHODOLOGY	34
B. FIELD SETTING	42
IV. THE LIFE HISTORIES	50
The Life History of Om Jassem	52
The Life History of Om Ali	77
The Life History of Om Khalaf	101
The Life History of Om Faysal	131
The Life History of Om Marzoug	150
The Life History of Om Nasser	184
V. INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS	
APPENDIX	273
GLOSSARY	274
BIBLIOGRAPHY	285

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVE :

The general problem with which this thesis is concerned is an exploration into the roles and self-images of a certain group of Kuwaiti women, specifically those who define themselves as wives and mothers rather than as working women. It is an attempt to understand, from the perspective of the older, more conservative generation, the meaning of the contemporary processes of change and the ways in which they define, perceive, and interpret the social world in terms of their own lived experiences.

My objective is to be able to grasp the meaning which a certain group of Kuwaiti women, as actors in an experiential world, give to their actions, and to be able to understand their everyday world and the common-sense reality which they, as individuals, share with other Kuwaiti women in a taken for granted manner.

Another objective of this thesis is to question the validity of some notions existing in the ethnographic literature on women of the Middle East, particularly those which emphasize that the social worlds of men and women are sharply segregated, and that women exercise little, if no influence on the decision-making processes in public spheres. It is my contention that despite the observable segregation of the sexes in two separate social worlds, men and women are in fact found to influence one another's worlds whether directly or indirectly; and that women may exert an emotional influence or may exercise social control over the men's social world through marriage negotiations or through their feminine social gatherings.

What I intend to argue, with supporting evidence, is that women do not feel as disadvantaged as the ethnographic image seems to describe them and that they are ordered within themselves in an internal social hierarchy which makes it possible for some of them, especially the older ones ('al mara'l Cauda') to manipulate social relations in the family and to influence decision-making processes of other members of the family.

This thesis is an attempt to utilize my advantage as an Egyptian female researcher, or as Cora Vreede-de Stuers puts it, to utilize my "female superiority," in being able to penetrate the "terra incognita" of the female social world in Kuwait (Vreede-de-Stuers, 1968: vii). It is an attempt to comprehend the way in which six Kuwaiti wives and mothers view their situation; for the image that has emerged, so far, has been to a large extent that which men have of society. Now, if we take the standpoint of the actors themselves, perhaps a different image would emerge. Thus some of the major questions which this thesis will attempt to answer are:

1. How does the Kuwaiti woman define herself and her social world?
2. What are her major roles in society and how does she perceive and interpret these roles?
3. What are the channels of influence open to her in the social world and how does she perceive her capacity to influence 'actions' of others in the patriarchal, polygynous, extended family structure.
4. What were the major life-crises experienced by the six women under study.

5. Does the Kuwaiti woman adhere to the strict codes of segregation? Does she adhere to the use of the 'abab' (women's black cloak), and what does it mean to her?
6. What were the traditional occupations of men and women in Old Kuwait? How were they perceived and how were they influenced by the broader social and historical changes in Kuwait?
7. What are her traditional assumptions about femininity and masculinity?
8. How does the Kuwaiti woman define herself in terms of a particular reference group?
9. How does she perceive the transformation which has been taking place in Kuwait, and how does she interpret the two social realities of which she was part (pre-oil and post-oil Kuwait)?

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

My interest in Kuwaiti society developed in two stages. The first stage was when I moved to live there in the summer of 1973. Being faced with the dilemma of a sudden change from an academic career, as a graduate student, to the role of a housewife, created internal conflicts which gave me a strong incentive to pursue my studies in anthropology. My presence in a society like Kuwait, about which I knew so little and could find so little in terms of written material or ethnographic data, made an understanding of this society an issue of primary interest to me. I observed that very little initiative was shown on the part of the Egyptians there to get to know the Kuwaitis, and that most of the latter lived in quarters of the city which were designated as Kuwaiti areas and in which other nationalities of Arabs and foreigners were not allowed to live. The fact that so little could

be known about Kuwaitis, except outward impressions, made me more interested to learn about them.

The second stage of interest came when I had a greater opportunity to contact members of this society. That was when I started working as a teacher of educational psychology at the Teacher's Training Institute which offers two-year diploma courses to female students above Thanaweya Amma-standing. All students were females and Kuwaitis; the great majority of teachers were Egyptians, followed by a good number of Palestinians and a smaller number of Kuwaitis.

During the time in which I worked as a teacher, I took every opportunity to talk to my students and to the one Kuwaiti teacher in our department. I was intrigued by many aspects in this society, among which were some aspects that appeared to me as contradictions, or as a sharp difference between what I may call "material" and "traditional" culture. It was easy to observe my students coming to the institute in huge limousines, wearing the traditional black cloak - the 'abat', which they took off as soon as they passed through the gates of the Institute. I could also observe that some students appeared unveiled in very modern clothes in modern areas of the city, while those same students went about veiled in older parts of the city. I was also intrigued by the fact that men held their summer evening gatherings 'diwaneya' on the pavements in front of their very modern air-conditioned villas - an act which was explained to me by Egyptians as a wish to re-live the old days of desert life. I was always amazed to see a pair of goats in a Buick Limousine more than once. I later learned that some families still have a number

of goats in small barns in their villas or in their courtyards. All these phenomenae have impressed me and have aroused my curiosity about this society which has been undergoing rapid changes toward modernization and industrialization. Such modernization trends have undoubtedly created similar contradictions in important aspects of social life like women's roles and their self definitions.

I could not, however, venture to make any conclusions about women in this society without setting out to do some ethnographic work which would permit an understanding of the ways in which some Kuwaiti women perceived and interpreted their unique experiences.

The significance of this research would be to provide basic ethnographic data about some women in Kuwait, an area which provides a fertile ground for research. It should be viewed as a pilot study which would give direction and basis for future research and not as material from which broad generalizations can be drawn.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Having defined the problem of inquiry, I will now set myself to review the theoretical contributions in social science that seem to be of value to my problem area and that would be of major use in my analytical stages.

In an attempt like mine, which puts as its focal point issues like: how do women of Kuwait perceive their own situation in terms of the substantial socio-economic changes that have been taking place, and how do

they define themselves and their roles as wives and mothers, it would be relevant to refer to concepts like the self, roles, self-other, and notions that are in general embodied in the overall body of symbolic interaction and role theories.

Contemporary role theory regards human conduct as the product of interaction between self and role. At the turn of the century, James Baldwin, Stanley Hall, William James, and John Dewey, began to give the self an empirical basis. Later, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead developed the notion of the self more widely and were credited for the widespread interest in symbolic interaction (Sarbin, 1954: 223-258).

Newcomb in 1950, used "role" as a central point in his socio-psychological theories. "It connotes not only overt actions and performances, but also covert expectations held by an observer or a group of observers, such expectations serving as the basis for judging the propriety of the enactment (Sarbin, 1954: 346). A big number of social scientists have utilized self, role, and interaction as focal concepts in their theoretical frameworks. Among them, are Newcomb (1950) McLeland (1951), Sarbin (1943), Merton (1940), Parsons and Shils (1951) and others.

To such symbolic interactionists is related the dramaturgical theory of Erving Goffman. "A role is what an individual expects of himself in different situations." In Encounters, Goffman states that "role consists of the activities the incumbent would engage in through reciprocal ties (through the rights and duties binding on the incumbent)" (Goffman, 1961: 85).

One of the major philosophies that is related to this theoretical frame of reference, and that can be of methodological significance in this thesis, is phenomenology. Alfred Schutz is one of the pioneering proponents of this philosophy. To him the cardinal problem for the social sciences was "the Study of the world of daily life, of common-sense reality that each individual shares with his fellow men in a taken-for-granted manner. As Schutz saw it, the task of the phenomenological philosopher concerned with social reality is to uncover, describe and analyze the essential features of this mundane world; and consequently, all of his writings beginning with "The Phenomenology of the Social World" (1932) take the reality of every day life as a point of departure and as a subject for detailed examination" (Natanson: 72). The first task of the methodology of the social sciences, he contends, is to explore "the general principles according to which man in daily life organizes his experiences, and especially those of the social world" (Schutz, 1963: 242).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the past decades, interest in women and women's roles in society has been pervasive. Despite the meagre literature available on Kuwaiti women, yet the general areas of women all over the world, and women in the Middle East, have been widely explored.

The Potential of Woman, edited by Seymour and Farber is a major work on women's roles and their self definition in terms of the substantial emancipation movements that have been taking place all over the world. In

an article in this book on "The Roles of Women," Ethel Albert argues that man and woman are different physiologically, but that the difference is a difference not the difference, and that what should be investigated is the behavioral significance of such physiological differences. "What any individual becomes," she asserts, "depends in part on nature, and in part on socio-cultural values and ideal role models, as these are worked out in the specific circumstances of each individual life history." This argument brings us close to Margaret Mead's position in her work Male and Female, 1949, which provides valuable anthropological data on ideas and ideals of the "feminine" in certain societies. Her work is of great use in understanding the interrelations of cultural factors with situational and behavioral realities (Albert, 1963: 108-109).

Simone de Beauvoir, the famous French writer presents a scholarly plea for the abolition of the myth of the "eternale feminin" in her two major works on women, The Second Sex and The Nature of the Second Sex (de Beauvoir, 1968).

Upon narrowing down my focus to Middle Eastern and Muslim countries, a wide variety of studies emerge as pertinent and significant. A brief review of such studies reveals that a good part of them presents us with the image that Middle Eastern women are inferior in status to men, that women are powerless and that their social worlds are strictly circumscribed by the veil and the harem. Among those who present this image are: Gabriel Baer: Population and Society in the Arab East; Jacques Berque: The Arabs; and D.F. Back's article: "The Changing Moslem Family of the Middle East."

In Population and Society in the Arab East, Gabriel Baer contends that "characteristic of Arab Society in the Middle East is the different status of men and women... women are in a greatly inferior position both materially and spiritually, and discrimination is clear in all spheres of life" (Baer, 1964: 34). Jacques Berque's: The Arabs: also asserts the same western, male view of Middle Eastern women. Giving a general profile of Muslim Middle Eastern women and emancipation movements in Egypt and Iraq, he denies any power enjoyed by the "female bearers of life." In trying to imagine a woman's life in a patrician home before W.W.I., we would find that she is isolated from the world and from society. "The veil, the gynaeceum, the moral code relegate into discontinuity this creature who incarnates natural forces and who is destined to perpetuate the race. The giver of life is cut off from the outside world and cannot even find in the education of her children a means of restoring the chain of being to her own advantage" (Berque, 1964: 175-176).

D.F. Beck (1970), while reviewing the changes that the Muslim family in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey has been undergoing in the last half century, refers to the veil among Middle and upper classes as an essential badge of social status and morality and to the "hareem" as a device for including women "within the hareem." In his article "The Changing Muslim Family of the Middle East," he contends that women were condemned to a restricted life. He adds that such forms are passing out with education, though the roots of the past still lie deep in the prevailing ethos and personality structure of the present generation (Beck, 1970: 57).

Such exemplary excerpts show that women of the Middle East have not been deeply approached by ethnographers who by virtue of their being westerners, and males, had no access to the women's social world. They have taken for granted as "true" the negative view which some men themselves hold about women. Women have thus been approached as powerless creatures, hidden behind the veil and confined within the "hareem."

Ian Cunnison's well-known work on The Baggara Arabs: Power and Lineage in a Sudanese Nomad Tribe, is another example of the available ethnographic data. However, it provides a welcomed change from what has been presented in the foregoing pages. Despite Ian Cunnison's contentions that "women play no formal part in Humur political life," that they have a separate existence and a socially and legally inferior position, and that women lead the private life while men's life is by and large public, he makes valuable comments about women's roles in the struggle for power suggesting in essence that; without women, men would not bother to acquire wealth or power; that they do have a profound indirect political influence as arbiters of men's conduct; and that the policy decisions of men are influenced by the reactions which women are likely to have towards them (Cunnison, 1966: 115-117).

L.S. El Hamamsy's article "The Changing Role of the Egyptian Woman," and I. Lichtenstadter's brief case study "An Arab Egyptian Family" refer to the positions held by women in society. While the former points out to the fact that the weak socio-economic status of women has made them develop their psychological powers to an extent which gives them an emotional stronghold over their families, the latter also contends

that some village women enjoy authority over the men in their family and that they are consulted and taken into confidence of their husbands and sons. (Lichtenstadter, 1970: 607-608; Hamansy, 1970: 594).

C. Nelson's work: "Public and Private Politics: women in the Middle Eastern world" challenges the view that the social worlds of men and women are "reducible to spheres of private and public with power limited to males in a so-called public arena." Using ethnographic data on the Middle East, she tries to demonstrate that women can and do exercise power in social life in a degree much more than what has been reported before (Nelson, 1974: 6).

Cora Vreede-de Stuers calls for the entry of female sociologists into the world of women. In her book: Parada: A Study of Muslim Women's Life in Northern India, she tries to understand the workings of Parada (veiling system), and views it as a symbolic curtain which is used to exclude men and protect the females from male intrusion. She reports:

"My first impression, that men were excluded from rather than women secluded in the female quarters was based on my freedom to go where I pleased. I associated the compulsory parada with a general phenomena that resembles it in certain respects; for women of any country there is a world of their own that remains "terra incognita" to the men because they do not and can never know its rules. Yet every girl automatically learns the rules as she grows up and the adult woman perfects them and evolves a network of specifically feminine relationships from which men are excluded" (Vreede-de Stuers, 1968: 42-43).

A lecture delivered by Professor Emrys L. Peters in Kuwait University in 1971 presented a review of "The Status of Women in Two Arab Communities: Lybia and South Lebanon." He attempted to dispel "the commonly held view sustained by the priority given to the ethos of male dominance in the Middle

East that the lot of women among the Arabs is one of unmitigated misery" (Peters, 1971: 1).

In a scholarly critique of Richard Antoun's article: "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages," Nadia Abu Zahra criticizes Antoun's suggestions that the Quran had a constraining effect on women. She argues that the stipulations in the Quran are the preliminary steps towards the emancipation of women. (Abu Zahra, 1970). Saneya Saleh's article: "Women in Islam: Their Status in Religious and Traditional Culture," also suggests that the low status of women is due to extra Islamic conditions and not due to the Quran (Saleh, 1972).

Alport's study of the Mozabite Algerians: "The Mzab (Algeria)" shows that the role of the Mozabite women is very important since it holds Mozabite society together. During men's absence in long trips of trade, women are the guardians of the hearth, not only of the family but of the whole city. He refers to the fact that an authority is set up to supervise women's conduct, and that this authority is vested in the guild of the "laveuses" who have a strong influence on family life and are feared, respected and consulted in all occasions. They exercise social control over women by their guidance and threats and act as an all-female clergy (Alport, 1970: 238-239).

A quick glance at the citations in the foregoing pages shows that most studies done by female anthropologists have concerned themselves either with criticizing the debased status attributed to females in the East, or with proving that females do in one way or another exercise influence and power in Middle Eastern socio-cultural structures.

L. Al Hamamsy, I. Lichtenstadter, C. Nelson, Nadia Abu Zahra, Cora Vreede-de Stuers, and Saneya Saleh are all examples of female scholars who attempted to demonstrate these points. This is by no means an attack against male ethnographers, but merely a remark that by virtue of their maleness, some ethnographers have failed to penetrate the "terra incognita" of women - a fact which precluded a deeper understanding of their experiential world.

Finally, I will turn to studies of Kuwaiti women which are very few and mostly in the forms either of documentary descriptive literature, or of exploratory research. Examples of available descriptive studies include the works of: Rasem Roushdy: Kuwait and Kuwaities: Studies in the Past and Present of Kuwait (1955), Safwat Kamal: Customs and Traditions of Marriage in Kuwait, Noureyeh Al Sadany: History of Kuwaiti Women (1972). A research which explores the views of Kuwaiti men and women about marriage, offering detailed statistical analysis of data, was conducted by Abdullah Hussein and Ezzat Ismail: Marriage in Kuwait.

A similar research on "Conditions and Attitudes of Kuwaiti women (1971)" was conducted by 'Al Nahda Al Osareya' Organization; data was analyzed by Dr. Saad Abdel Rahman, an Egyptian Professor in Kuwait University. It investigates the attitudes of Kuwaiti women towards marriage, divorce, education and work.

A report by Fatma Al Saddiq (a Kuwaiti in the Planning Board) refers to the status of working women in Kuwait and their status in the labor law. In a pioneering work on the Arab of the Desert: A Glympse Into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, (1949), H. Dickson presents a detailed description of

Badawin life in terms of social, cultural, economic and political aspects. This book served as a basis for understanding the socio-historical context of Kuwaiti women's lives.

Zahra Dickson Freeth followed up her father's work by two important books which have added substantial material to the meagre literature available on Kuwaiti society. Her two books: Kuwait was My Home (1956) and New Look at Kuwait (1972) emphasize the importance of oil development in Kuwait and its influence on socio-cultural change.

An article by Cora Vreede-de Stuers on "Girl Students in Kuwait," (1974), examines the social factors of influence in determining the attitudes and aspirations of university students in respect to marriage, family life and career.

In a dissertation thesis on Migration and Structural Change in Kuwaiti Society (1970), Mahgub analyses the structural changes that have taken place in Kuwait after oil development as a result of migration.

Al Romeihi, in an article called: "A Study of Reality and Social Change in Contemporary Gulf Societies," (1975) presents a critical review of the radical, abrupt, socio-economic changes that have been taking place in Contemporary Societies of the Arab Gulf.

Ghaus Ansari, in his First Report on the Socio-Cultural Research in the Island of Failaka (1969), collects cultural data on the social life of Kuwaiti women and refers to the important influence exercised by mothers and mothers-in-law in matters like marriage, divorce, second marriage and polygyny.

CHAPTER TWO

TWO WORLDS: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL SURVEY

Action is never isolated, unrelated or divorced from the world. Whether overt or covert, action is always perceived within its horizon, and is always deeply rooted in social reality (Natanson, 1967: XXXVII). In the light of this statement, a study of the social world of a number of Kuwaiti women presented herein should be appropriately prefaced by a survey of the socio-historical developments of the State of Kuwait. Only by means of such a survey, can the biographical situation of the women under study be fully grasped and contextualized.

* * * * *

The city of Kuwait is situated on the northwestern shore of the Arabian Gulf, and in the north-eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula. The State of Kuwait is named after its capital Kuwait, the name of which was derived from the Arabic word 'kūt' meaning fortress (Abū Hakima, 1972: 32).

The town of Kuwait originated at the beginning of the 18th century when members of the ^CAnizah Arab tribe known as Al Sabah moved there coming from the interior plateau of Najd, hoping to find prosperity in the natural harbour of Kuwait Bay where there were already some scattered

fishermen living along the coast. The rule of Kuwait started with Sabah the First (1752-1762); Al Sabah family has been the ruling family since then, until our present time (Habeeb, 1973: 142-146).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Turkish sovereignty was extended over the territory of Iraq and the northern shore of the Arabian Gulf - including Kuwait. Modern Kuwait history is said to have begun in 1896 under the rule of Shaikh Mubārak Al Sabah, now referred to as Mubārak al Kabir. Shaikh Mubārak was known for his political shrewdness, and under his rule, Kuwait emerged as a "securely-established state independent of her more powerful neighbours." During his reign, Mubārak actively drove Kuwait away from Turkey and turned to Britain for protection. In 1899, a treaty between Kuwait and Britain was signed, thereby recognizing Kuwait's independence from Turkey (Freeth, 1956: 22-29). It was not until the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, that Turkey recognized Britain's special position in the Gulf, and that Kuwait was declared a British Protectorate. Kuwait gained her independence in 1961, under the reign of Shaikh Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah, brother of the present ruling Shaikh His Highness the Amir Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah.

Kuwait's subsistence economy traditionally depended on the sea. Pearling, fishing, and sea-faring were the major occupations of the male inhabitants of pre-oil Kuwait.

Carsten Niebuhr, a Danish traveller who had sailed to the Gulf in 1764, described Kuwait as a seaport town in which the inhabitants lived by fishing and pearling, employing 800 dhows. The town, known for its sea-

faring tradition was left almost desolate in certain seasons of the year when large numbers of men left in their annual fishing, pearling, or trading voyages. (Freeth, 1956: 18). Kuwait's native vessels, the dhows, carried the bulk of the trade between the Ports of the Gulf and Basra, India, East Africa, and the Red Sea ports. Sheep, wool, hides, skins, dates, and horses left Kuwait in exchange for goods like sugar, tea, rice, ship-building materials, and teak wood (Kuwait Today, n.d.: 89). The building of those native vessels had become an important industry in Kuwait, and many members of prominent rich families owned shipyards along the waterfront of Kuwait town. Though Kuwait itself had offered little trade, yet its port had been the principal dhow-building and trading port in the Gulf, and its dhows made two voyages to India or one voyage to East Africa annually after being loaded in Basra mostly with dates (Villiers, 1940: 153-154).

The finest pearls of the world have for long been produced by the Arabian Gulf. About 5000 boats sailed in the Gulf annually in quest for the pearl oyster. A number of 700 boats came from Kuwait alone, and a number of 10,000 to 15,000 men were engaged in pearling at a time when the pearl trade was at its peak prior to World War I. But the economic depression, subsequent to World War I, and the introduction of the culture pearl of Japan "played havoc" with the pearl industry. (Dickson, 1949: 484). In the 1930's the pearl industry shrunk remarkably until it was overshadowed by the discovery of oil in 1939 and its production in 1946. The official diving season began approximately in May 15 and ended in September 15. There

were also amateur (exploratory) seasons which lasted for one month before and after the official season. The life of a diver in old pre-oil Kuwait was for sure a harsh one since it took place in the hottest months of the year (Dickson, 1949: 435). During the diver's absence, women were responsible not only of their homes, their children, and their daily chores, but also of the cattle and sheep, and other kinds of work which yielded some money, like grinding wheat and selling it to people in the neighbourhood, dress-making, or making dairy products. Women did not go out to peddle their products, they stayed in their homes while other women came to buy the products needed for their households. Women of those poor classes took their clothes to be washed in the sea, and went out to collect fire-wood from the shore. In all their outings, all women were heavily cloaked with their 'ebi' (pl. of abat: black cloak), and 'bushiyeh' (black face cover).

Before the official diving season, divers were given advances of 35 Rs. each by the 'naukhuda' (captain and/or owner of the boat). This sum was called 'salaf' (loan); the amount of 'salaf' was fixed annually by the Shaikh, and was bound to make it possible for the family to maintain itself during the man's absence in 'ghaus' (diving). Upon their return, divers were given another payment called 'tisgam', also intended to make it possible for the man to provide his family during the coming months. This kept the divers constantly indebted to the captains for whose service they were bound to adhere the following season. The diver got no direct pay for his work. Divers and haulers got a share in the money realized by selling the

pearls, while the 'naukhuda' got two shares.

The end of the diving season was called 'al guffal'. In this occasion the Ruler himself came out to his fleet and fired a gun signaling the end of the official 'ghaus' season. As the pearling craft arrived, a lot of drum-beating and gun firing took place. Women rushed to get dressed and adorned and went out to the beach. A general atmosphere of happiness prevailed as mothers, wives and children lined up the coast to meet their sons, husbands, or fathers. (Dickson, 1949: 484-488).

According to Al-Romeihi, the return from the 'ghaus' represented a frightening situation, for many were the women who lost their husbands in the adventurous diving occupation. Women of Old Kuwait, he contends, had an unfavorable relationship with the sea, which to them, represented the unknown. Each new season was bound to bring more debts to the divers, and each cry in the district meant disaster to one family. It was due to their constant fear of the unknown that women resorted to the use of magic, fortune-telling, 'zar', 'amal' (spells), and charms, and were thereby bound to develop sharp personality structures which ranged between extreme fatalism and excessive pessimism. (Al Romeihi, 1975: 83).

Women, in the traditional Gulf society, adds Al Romeihi, suffered together with men from the harshness and difficulty of life along the coasts of the Gulf. The meagre income provided by the poor divers made it necessary for some women to share in raising income, thereby having an important economically-productive role. Besides their daily chores and their respon-

sibilities as wives and mothers, they worked as dress-makers, traded in small commodities, made embroideries, and bred cows or goats which covered their daily consumption of milk and served in producing dairy products which were sold to people in the neighborhood.

Women's unfavorable relationship with the sea was augmented by the debt system through which divers were constantly becoming indebted to their captains. "To see the lean and worn-out divers return home successful from the dive" says Dickson, "is a pathetic sight, but to see the unsuccessful boat arrive is a tragedy. Not only does it mean that four months of the hardest labour imaginable have gone unrewarded, but for the 'diver' and the 'hauler' it signifies getting further into debt with the captain or the owner of the boat who by immemorial custom is entitled to deduct part cost of sails, ropes, food, water and general expenses of fitting out the boat, as well as depreciation, from the crew's earnings" (Dickson, 1949: 485).

Because fishing did not yield good income, some men worked in fishing when they were not engaged in 'ghaus' or 'safar' (trading voyages), only to secure the needs of their families and the neighboring families. Aided by women in the neighborhood, a fisherman's wife used to go out to the sea to help her husband in unloading the fish he had caught in his fishing boat. The helping women whose husbands were away were given shares of the fish as presents (Mahgūb, 1970: 105).

A small segment of the population which on the whole numbered 60,000 in 1930, worked as small-scale cultivators. It was only in Al Jahra, a small

oasis 20 miles West of Kuwait, and in Failaka, an island situated at the mouth of Kuwait bay, that the land was fertile enough to permit small-scale plantations, which included palm groves in Jahra and green vegetables, tomatoes, cucumber, beans, eggplant, and watermelon in Failaka. This provided the town with needed crops, and provided the cultivators with some income in addition to their meagre 'ghaus' earnings. Due to Failakian men's economic need to go out in 'ghaus' or 'safar', a certain kind of division of labor, whereby women assumed full responsibility of most of the agricultural work, was created in the household. (Mahgūb, 1970: 108). According to Al Romeihi, the wives of villagers were responsible of watering the plantations, fertilizing palm trees, collecting dates, or taking care of the cattle, goats, or chicken (Al Romeihi, 1975: 83).

It has already been noted that the inhabitants of Old Kuwait town were originally members of nomadic Arab tribes which had settled in the sea-port town around two centuries ago coming from Najd plateau and the interior desert of the Arabian peninsula. This group of 'hadhar' (townsfolk) lived within the walls of the city in juxtaposition to their nomadic and semi-nomadic cousins outside the city walls.

According to the tribal stratification system, the inhabitants of pre-oil Kuwait divided themselves into two distinct groups 'asīl' and 'baysary'. 'Asīl' families are those families which are the descendents of the powerful 'Sharif' tribes of Najd. Around 180 families in Kuwait which

claim 'pure' descent have moved there around two centuries ago. They are strictly endogamous and look down upon the 'bayasir' (pl. of 'baysari') who do not belong to powerful 'Sharif' tribes, who are not of pure stock and who have moved to Kuwait in later stages (Vreede De Stuers, 1974: 114). The word 'baysari' is derived from the Persian language and means "whose head is cut off," thereby referring to the 'non-asils' (personal communication: Kuwaiti historian Saif Marzouk Al Shamlan). The 'asil' families who belong to powerful tribes like ^CAjman, Mutair, ^CAnizah, and Shammar are considered the aristocrats of the desert. It is not considered dishonorable for an 'asil' bedouin to seek work in the town as long as he does not engage in certain kinds of work considered dishonorable to the bedouins like burning lime, or tanning hides or selling meat (Freeth, 1956: 70). It should also be noted that women of the rich well-to-do class of merchants, pearl-traders, land-owners were not permitted to perform the roles which women of lower classes had to perform. Their outings were restricted to visiting their friends or relatives. Unlike women of middle or lower classes of divers, fishermen, cultivators, or small merchants, they did not go to wash in the sea, to collect fire-wood, to shop or to take care of cattle and sheep. Such jobs were rather alleged to their women slaves. (Freeth, 1956: 84: Al Romeihi, 1974: 84).

A third group of Kuwaitis regarded by the 'asilin' as 'other' are the 'kena^{-C-}at' (pronounced 'Jena^{C-}at') who are very numerous in Kuwait. Their forefathers were said to have arrived to Kuwait 200 years ago probably from Northern Iraq. They are strictly endogamous and their ethnic origin is indicated in their birth certificate.

As clearly distinct from the native Kuwaiti 'Sunnis', there also existed a sizable community of 'Shi^Cahs' whose forefathers had migrated to Kuwait from Iraq, Bahrein or Persia since several generations. (Freeth, 1956: 42). The 'Shi^Cahs' represented a big group of those people who obtained their livelihood from the sea. (Freeth, 1972: 88). The 'ajam' (Persian 'Shi^Cahs') have been domiciled in Kuwait for several generations, adds Zahra Freeth. They have retained their language, but they are regarded as Kuwaiti citizens. All 'Shi^Cahs' do not inter-marry with 'Sunnis' (Freeth, 1956: 42).

Pre-oil Kuwait was characterized by its traditional patterns of social relationships in which families were strongly bound to each other by their kinship bonds in patrilineal, patrilocal systems. Members of the same patrilineal descent clustered near each other in the same district. Households were divided into patrilocal extended family units. Marriage of first cousins, a custom observed strictly by bedouins and townspeople, helped in maintaining the coherence in the family. In case of 'asil' families, this system preserved the purity of the family blood and prevented marriage from a different social stratum or ethnic group. Girls and boys were allowed to play freely together until puberty after which girls were veiled and restrictions were laid on their outings. But, both girl and boy cousins held clear recollections of each other which made marriage less of a step in the dark for them. According to Zahra Freeth, the system of first cousin marriage is a convenient custom in a traditional social set-up which makes it impossible for girls and boys to meet each other.

(Freeth, 1956: 89-90). Social life is perceived in terms of an elaborate kinship system. According to Donald Cole, the kinship terminology system reflects how people of a certain tribe conceive their kinspeople and how each member is an integral part of the kinship relationship. The highly descriptive kinship terminology allows a person to single out his exact relationship to kinsmen very precisely and easily - for example: Ibn ^CAm, Ibn Khāl, Ibn Amma, Bint Khala, etc. (Cole, 1975: 83).

* * * * *

Such, were the conditions of life in Kuwait before the phenomenal discovery of oil. In 1934 Shaikh Ahmed Al Jabir granted a seventy-five year concession to the Kuwait Oil Company and the Gulf Exploration Company. In 1938 the first oil well was tapped in Burqan. Oil could have been produced by the 1940's, had it not been for the delay caused by the outbreak of World War II. It was not until 1946, when the war ended, that oil was produced for exportation. In 1946, Shaikh Jabir Al Ahmed opened the valve through which the first Kuwaiti oil flowed to a tanker at sea. The world's largest oil loading pier was constructed in 1949. (Freeth, 1956: 38).

"Many indeed were the changes which were foreshadowed in 1946. That year was perhaps the last in which the stranger might have seen Kuwait in anything like her old traditional form. Since then, her aspect has changed almost beyond believing" (Freeth, 1956: 47).

The sudden change in the sources of national wealth due to the new oil boom and the decline of the pearl trade and the traditional ship-build-

ing industry has resulted in a change in the major occupations of the inhabitants of Kuwait. According to Mahgub, Kuwait has undergone structural changes exemplified in the emergence of new roles and more complex socio-economic institutions which were in sharp difference to the simple traditional institutions of pre-oil Kuwait.

With the need for more workers in the oil companies, sailors, fishermen, and pearl-traders were recruited in simple jobs in the oil industry. A great human influx of migrants from all over the Middle East moved to work in oil companies, in administrative, educational, or professional jobs for which the native Kuwaitis were not yet equipped. From Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, and administrative staff were drawn to Kuwait in ever-growing numbers by the prospects of finding well-paying jobs. Numerous unskilled labourers moved to Kuwait from Muscat, South Arabia and Aden, Egypt, and Iran. Indian and Pakistani migrants arrived to Kuwait to work as shop-keepers, servants, clerks, artisans, businessmen, or professionals. Last but not least, were the Iranian migrants who entered the Kuwaiti borders illegally to work as unskilled labourers (Vreede-de Stuers, 1974: 115). Many bedouins from high and low ranking tribes also moved into the city seeking employment in the new state projects. But due to old traditional values, bedouins still preferred to work as watchmen or guards, drivers, or labourers in government projects. They would not easily accept work as porters, or common coolies. Members of aristocratic families of the desert abandoned their nomadic lives to live in permanent houses in the city where they got employed.

Gradually, they accumulated wealth and started their own business enterprises (Freeth, 1956: 71-72).

In 1950, new city planning projects marked the beginning of modernization in the city of Kuwait. When Shaikh Abdullah Al Salim became the Ruler of Kuwait, in 1950, he embarked on city planning projects which were designed to make use of the great wealth of Kuwait. Streets were paved, new cosmopolitan buildings and modern air-conditioned villas replaced the old mud-walled houses, and the old city walls built in 1919 were removed to allow for the vast expansion needed to house the ever-growing population of post-oil Kuwait (Freeth, 1956: 49). Private entrepreneurs put up estates of new houses in desert sites. In the new welfare State, Kuwaiti citizens were dislodged from their old town houses. In compensation, the government estimated the price of the land lots over which the houses were built in a process called 'al tathmin', and paid them huge sums of money. These dislodged citizens, whose old houses were to be demolished according to new city planning projects, were allocated areas in the desert on mortgage basis to build their new residences. With the money of 'Al tathmin', Kuwaitis 'bought themselves' higher standards of living. They built new suburban villas, bought new cars, and sent their children to be educated abroad using the remaining money to start private business. From there, a new class of merchants and businessmen arose.

According to Cora Vreede-deStuers, the new oil wealth was not evenly diffused among Kuwaiti citizens since the beginning. When the municipality started the welfare project, she contends, a greater part of this new wealth

went to noble merchant families who got remarkably high prices for their land, thus enabling them to make further investments (Vreede-de Stuers, 1974: 115).

The welfare program which included projects for building hospitals, schools, and a water-distillation plant was already started in the 1950's. In the new suburbs, the government also built numerous blocks of houses which were sold to citizens of the limited-income group, in long-term instalments. Migrants were housed in certain residential areas in which multi-storied apartments were built by private entrepreneurs. The large residential areas were reserved for the original Kuwaiti families who lived in luxurious villas almost cut off from "effective connection" with the residential areas reserved for strangers or foreigners who tended to agglomerate according to nationality. (Abou Zeid, 1967: 12).

Large corporate kinship groupings were dispersed in the new city quarters as people were encouraged by the change in their socio-economic statuses to move into the more fashionable suburbs where neighbors hardly knew each other. The social cohesive functions which had for long been provided in the traditional social structure by strong kinship and family ties were gradually demolished. (Abou Zeid, 1967: 11).

The change has inevitably affected the old tribal stratification system so that the dividing line between 'asil' and non 'asil' is gradually being obliterated. The traditional system whereby people were ranked according to tribal or ethnic origin or ascribed status is giving way to a more

achievement-oriented system in which new Kuwaiti professionals who can compete with foreign know-how are given great recognition.*

When Arab and foreign migrants started occupying well-paying jobs, the Kuwaitis felt they were passed over; as such, a law was issued by the National Assembly in 1963 restricting the recruitment of foreigners and giving the Kuwaitis the priority in occupying jobs to which they were qualified. Students, who by the 1960's, had graduated could be appointed in office jobs, while manual labor was left to foreigners (Freeth, 1972: 33).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, both girls and boys received no formal education. It was sufficient for them to master the recitation of the Quran which was taught to them by the 'mutawa^ca' (female Quran teacher for girls), or the 'mulla' (Shaikh, male teacher for boys). The first boys school was founded in 1910, while the first girls school was not founded until 1937/38 (140 students). For a number of years to follow, girls schools did not follow a formal curriculum but offered diplomas in feminine education including courses like embroidery, cooking, handcrafts, etc. According to Noureya Al Sadani, an interesting incident was reported to have happened when this school was founded. Shaikh Abdullah Al Jabir who was then the Chairman of the Educational Sector in the government rent an old house, part of which was specified for classrooms and the rest was designed as a residence for the teachers which were brought from Palestine and Iraq. While people resisted the idea of sending their daughters to this school, the Shaikh encouraged them by sending his own daughter. One evening, some men

* A more detailed analysis of the social stratification system will be presented in Chapter III.

passed by across the street from the girls' school; they heard the voices of teachers who were singing aloud to pass their time. There was no reaction on the men's part that evening, but the morning brought about their unexpected response: None of the girl students showed up for their classes. The parents had forbade their daughters from attending courses in such a place where the teachers were 'ghaneyat' (women of ill-reputation). It was with great effort that the Shaikh could convince the parents to send their daughters once more (Al Sadany, 1972: 97). In 1938-1939, the girl students numbered 300. This number rose to 10,761 in 1957-1958 and to 66,219 in 1972-1973 (Al Sadany, 1972: 147-149).

In 1961, the first Teachers' Training School for Girls was opened for students of intermediate schooling. Similar schools were also opened for boys and were supposed to offer training for kindergarten and primary school teachers. A few years later, the Girls Teachers Training College was opened offering two-year study courses designed to produce secondary school teachers. In 1966/67 Kuwait University was inaugurated. Until 1966, 1967 male and female students had been regularly sent by the government in missions to Arab and foreign universities.

In 1967/1968 there were 251 female students abroad. The first female mission had left Kuwait in 1956 to Cairo University which had thus produced the first generation of female university graduates in Kuwait. In 1971 the first generation of Kuwait University graduates numbered 176 girls. In 1974, the overall number of girl students in Kuwait University outnumbered the boys: 2642 girls, 1803 boys. (The Statistical Diary, 1976).

As far back as 1938, the first Kuwaiti woman Mariam Abdel Malik Al Saleh became employed as a teacher. Having been educated first by the 'mutawa^c' and second by her progressive father at home, Mariam joined the first girls' school which was opened in 1938. But due to her advanced educational level, her knowledge was found to supersede that offered in the highest class. She was then invited to join the school as a teacher. Meanwhile, she pursued her studies and in 1945 received a diploma in Feminine Education. In the classroom, she strictly adhered to the use of the 'abat' and the 'bushiyeh' since there were a number of male inspectors.

During 1938-1944 there were only four Kuwaiti teachers in Kuwaiti Girls Schools. Between 1937-1949 there were five women who worked as assistant nurses in the Health Department. In 1955 women joined the field of social work, while in 1961 they started working as social researchers, broadcasters, and governmental employees (Al Nahda'1 Osareyya. n.d.: 100 338-41). At present, the number of working women has increased sharply, yet, it only constitutes 17.1% of the total Kuwaiti working power (1972 census). While the number of Kuwaiti women working as employees numbered 3250 (2624 out of which were teachers, the number of male Kuwaiti employees numbered 6371.

The 1972 census also revealed that the total Kuwaiti working power [governmental employees and personnel] was 4113 females, and 30,475 males. In 1972, the number of working women constituted 2% of the overall female population.

In 1973, the number of working women (employees and personnel) rose up to 5200 i.e. 2.7% of the female population. The Planning Board: 1975: pp. 15, 20.7 A study conducted by Dr. Saad Abdel Rahman for the 'Al Nahda'l Osareya' Women's Organization about Kuwaiti Women's Attitudes, revealed that out of a number of 731 Kuwaitis (1% of the female population) above 18 years old, 41% regarded work as valuable and important for achieving self independence; 33% regarded work as essential for material reasons, 23% regarded it as valuable for proving oneself. A number of 603 women regarded teaching as the most suitable occupation for women, followed by nursing and social work (Abdel Rahman, 1971: 54-55).

In the 1940's, female Arab teachers who were recruited from various Arab countries had to adhere to this strict code of veiling and cloaking in traditional Kuwaiti society. It was most unethical for a woman to walk uncloaked in the street. While such social norms were strictly adhered to in the 1950's and the early 1960's, remarkable change was bound to come in the late 1940's and early 1970's. Now, girls walk around unveiled in modern shopping centres in modern European attire. The first move towards freedom from the 'abat' (black cloak) dated far back in 1955 when a number of girl students in one of the largest secondary schools took off their 'abbas' in the school yard and burned them. Strongly condemned by the school authorities, they were asked to please themselves about taking off the 'abat' but to stop attending school. Faced with the choice between freedom of the 'abat' and chances of education, they opted for the latter. Though their historic revolt did not lead to optimum results, it did set the stage for ultimate freedom in the years to come. As they graduated

from school, these girls became among the first generations of educated women. They could thus demand freedom and break out of purdah. They could also realize their goals through their daughters for now 'C_{abbas}' are no longer compulsory for school or university girls. University education has been most girls' recourse for freedom from the cloak (Freeth, 1972: 36).

During the last twentyfive years, Kuwait has witnessed the most profound transformation in its short history. This radical change has inevitably created marked differences between pre-oil and post-oil Kuwait. Yet despite the fact that the old town has been almost wiped out by the bulldozers of progress, and has been replaced by the new modern city, it can be clearly observed that the old traditional styles of life still exist side by side with the new. The juxtaposition of traditional and modern ways of life in the changing society of Kuwait can be exemplified by the modern Kuwait University which has most advanced laboratories and equipment, a well-developed library, a huge theatre, and vast playgrounds. Despite its modernity, Kuwait University does not follow or recognize the co-education system. The traditional code of sexual segregation is strictly observed in the lecture rooms. Girls have an independent college called the University Girls' College. It is an exclusively women's college in which one of the formal gatherings can be shared by the two sexes. The same lectures are given by the huge predominantly foreign and Arab-teaching staff to men and women students at different times and in different places. This is regarded by certain sections of the population as an extremely odd situation since the segregation is not absolute, and since many girls own their own

cars and can move freely between their campus and the boys' campus for the use of the central library. Besides, a large portion of the students belong to the same families and are related to each other by kinship ties. Kuwaiti society is small, states Ahmed Abou Zeid, "but inspite of its imported sophistication, social relations are still personal and the social organization is based primarily on kinship" (Abou Zeid, 1967: 10-11).

This is but one example of the holdovers of traditionalism in a rapidly changing society. But the focus of this thesis will be to explicate more 'true to life' replicas of social life through the life histories of women. The image of Kuwaiti society as described by Zahra Freeth is no exaggeration:

The new Kuwait is replacing the old so that a description of the Kuwait scenes today may be invalid next month; and yet it may be years before the new town in its final form crystalizes from the dissolution of the old. (Freeth, 1956: 47).

It is in this sense that we can perceive women as being in between two worlds. It can never be ignored that the traditions and values of old Kuwait have not been keeping pace with material and technological change. The contrast between old and new is still vivid in people's minds, particularly in the mind of a generation which has been living in between the two realities: the generation of the older women: 'al mara'1^c auda'.

CHAPTER III

A. METHODOLOGY

In an inquiry which puts as its major focus the importance of understanding the taken-for-granted issues and assumptions which a number of Kuwaiti women hold about their position in the social world, their own self-definition, and their common-sense world, a phenomenological approach would seem most plausible.

For the phenomenologically-oriented social scientist, in Max Weber's sense, the person is viewed as a subjective interpretive actor. The social scientist, in this sense, seeks to understand the subjective meaning which the actor "bestows upon" his action (Schutz, 1963: 243).

A phenomenological philosophy attempts to develop methodological principles which underlie relationships between persons. The question at stake is how knowledge of other 'selves' can be attained. According to Schutz, a suitable approach is a descriptive analysis of the typifications of the common-sense world. This kind of descriptive analysis is made possible by the assumption that the objects and events of human experience are inter-subjectively available and are taken for granted as being the same for all normal perceivers, and that there is a reciprocity of perspectives in which the events of the world can be common to both researcher and respondent. The fact that there is an interchangeability of 'here' and 'there' between egos is a necessary condition for social reality.

Only by means of such an inter-changeability can one grasp the meanings bestowed by the participants on their actions. (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XXXI-XXXII).

Trying to reach an understanding of meaning, I have adopted the case study or life history method as the major method of data collection. The motives and goals of an actor, according to Schutz (1967) depend on his biographically determined situation. This implies that the actor alone knows "what he does, why he does it, and when and where his action starts and ends." Based on these contentions, I believe that the life history method is best-suited to the nature of a phenomenological approach. I have not used the fixed question as a technique of data collection since I believe that the stimulus-response situation created by such a technique does not only hinder the natural flow of communication but also precludes the generation of "true-to-life" replies. Since what I was after was a reconstruction of the actor's social world as they perceive it, I have used the life history method. I am quite aware of the fact that this approach may be criticized by more quantitatively-oriented sociologists for lacking the possibility of statistical measurability from which broad generalizations can be drawn. But, it is my belief that numbers and figures cannot be used to understand human experiences and that deep understanding of mankind necessitates an alternative approach.

Since the phenomenae of the social sciences are not qualitatively continuous with those of the natural sciences, then it can be argued that very different methods must be employed to study social reality (Natanson,

1963: 273). Natural science investigates "objects that are constructs of the first degree," whereas the social sciences are concerned with "second degree constructs i.e. objects that not only are themselves in a world, but that also have a world." Thus according to Natanson, "the phenomenological approach to social reality fulfills the method of 'Verstehen', since it offers a philosophy of the social world rather than techniques or devices in the narrower methodological sense" (Natanson, 1963: 284). It is not my purpose to discuss the epistemological issues inherent in the long-term debate between those who hold a naturalistic position and those who hold a phenomenological one, as long as my general methodological orientation has been clarified.

Besides being suited to a phenomenological approach, the life history method is also suited to a study of roles. According to Langness in The Life History in Anthropological Science, a role which is a behavior pattern accompanying a status can be easily analyzed out of a life history. "... Role provides the concept through which the interests of culture and personality intersect and is a natural area for life history research." The analysis of a life history is an effective way of getting at the number of defined roles an individual plays, attitudes towards roles and interaction with others. (Langness, 1965: 27-28).

In my use of the life history method, I have adopted the technique which George and Louise Spindler called the "Expressive Autobiographic Interview." As an "initial impetus," I have asked each informant to start by telling me about her life, as far as she could reconstruct it. I tried

to direct the autobiography at critical points so as to turn it to relevant considerations of the research or to turn it away from irrelevant issues, thereby permitting a more efficient use of time.

The "Expressive Autobiographic Interview," according to George and Louise Spindler in Fieldwork Among the Menomini, is a cross section between a structured interview and a chronological autobiography. It was chosen by the Spindlers because it proved capable of revealing the kinds of adaptations taking place in role-playing, value orientation, and self-concepts in the acculturative process. They have selected the roles of mother and wife and social participant as foci in their studies of women, and by such a method the informants were able with slight reinforcement to express their concepts of these roles in their own words. (Spindler, 1970: 293).

Apart from life histories, I have also relied on participant observation as a means of obtaining additional information about styles of life of Kuwaiti women. During a period of seven months, I have tried to attend female gatherings, to pay visits to Kuwaiti families and to interact with family members of my informants. This aided me in establishing 'rapport' and in feeling 'en famille' with my cases. My observations will be used as supplementary to the data generated in the life histories only when additional material is needed.

A good deal of my discussions with Kuwaiti key informants centered on the issue of social stratification. It soon became evident that a class

system in the western social theoretical framework does not exist. Kuwaiti people divided themselves into two status groups: The 'asīls' (of pure origin) and the 'bayasir' (of impure, inferior origin). While the 'asīls' claim origin to the well-known, Najdian tribes that have settled in Kuwait in the 18th century, the 'bayasir' are those people whose tribal origins are unknown, or who are the product of 'asīl'-slave marriages. We can speak of both as 'status groups' in Weber's sense,* since they constitute normal communities to which people are affiliated regardless of wealth or property ownership. Each group is strictly endogamous. Because of the social honor related to the 'asīls', a great number of them have acquired both economic and political power.

As distinct from the 'asīl' or 'bayasir' groups, the 'Shi^Cah' community in Kuwait emerges as a clear-cut ethnic, religious group which is characterized by strict endogamous closure. Another ethnic group is that of the 'Jena^Cāt' whose origin is said to have been north Iraq. The 'Jena^Cāt' are again a strictly endogamous ethnic group. A good number of 'Jena^Cāt' families have acquired economic power and wealth in the present social set-up.

According to Al Romeihi, a Kuwaiti individual's loyalty is to his family, his tribe, or his ethnic group rather than to his society per se. Differentiation between people is on the basis of tribal origin, kinship group or ethnic group, such differentiation is manifested in situations like elections for the National Assembly. It can be observed, contends Al Romeihi, that a 'Sunni' would never be elected in an area where the inhabitants are predominantly 'Shi^Cahs'. Differentiation between 'asīl/bayari'

* See Appendix I

or 'Sunni/Shi^cahs' are due to the lack of secondary social institutions (like syndicates) which would serve in providing social security to the members. The privileged group according to Al Romeihi (i.e. the 'asīls') perpetuate the status quo though they claim that it should be obliterated. (Al Romeihi, 1975: 79-88).

Furthermore, Al Romeihi refers to problems of citizenship whereby those who have migrated to Kuwait prior to 1920 have a first degree citizenship, while those who have migrated after 1920 have a second degree citizenship, despite the fact that the origin of these migrating tribes is the same: the Arabian Peninsula (Al Romeihi, 1975: 22). To this I can add that to be an 'asīl' a person should be 'Sunni', should belong to a well-known tribe and should have a long time heritage in Kuwait. On the whole, this area remains a delicate topic about which few people would accept to talk. Only in very vague terms can one talk of a class system as existing within the Kuwaiti social set-up, except perhaps according to arbitrarily defined income levels. With the new generation of university graduates who have occupied major posts in the government, a new class system is only beginning to emerge very gradually, though it is constrained by the strong adherence to endogamous marriages. Roughly speaking, we can divide the community into three classes according to monthly income levels. Lower class 200-150 Kuwaiti Dinars and below; middle class: 200-2000 K. Dinars, upper class: 2000-1 million K. Dinars (personal communication: Dr. Al Romeihi, Dr. Al Qotob, Sociology Department, Kuwait University).

My sample was composed of a number of six, middle-aged Kuwaiti women who, by virtue of being born between 1921-1938 (prior to oil production), have witnessed and lived 'through' the drastic transformation which has beset the Kuwaiti society after oil development in 1946. It was thought that this generation of women who were young girls or teenagers in 1946, would be able to remember pre-oil Kuwait. Their reconstruction of history through their lived experiences has given me access to issues like their attitudes to change and the way they perceive their roles as wives and mothers as opposed to the roles of their own mothers and the new roles of their daughters.

I have restricted my choice to non-working women who still perform the roles of wives and mothers because such women belong to a group which has been studied least, and because part of my endeavor is to show that the older women, could exercise a certain degree of power in the decision-making process in the family especially in relation to marriage negotiations, and that a certain kind of division of labor whereby women of low income families had a small share in economic production, existed in society.

Using one definition of class according to the income levels presented herein, I contend that the six cases under study belong to the Middle class income-level. It should be noted, however, that people who can at present be said to belong to a roughly defined middle-class, have benefited from the change by moving vertically from a somewhat lower stratum to a higher one. For the sake of more precision, I have

also abided by the informants' self definitions which were in all cases based on ethnic or status group identity. My six informants are composed of 3 'Sunnis' and 3 'Shi^Cas'. Out of the 'Sunnis', two are 'asil' Kuwaitis and one is 'Jena^Cat'.

Besides trying to obtain the informants' own definitions of the basis of social distinction, I have also attempted to talk to a number of Kuwaiti friends and have asked them to indicate their social status and to identify a number of families which belonged to the same status. This served in giving me some insights about the bases of social distinction and the subtleties of inter-group relations.

My choice of my informants was also based on their willingness to cooperate, their capacity to replenish me with the needed information, and their capacity to narrate consistently. The sole purpose of this approach is to describe "life situations" encapsulated in six human experiences.

B. FIELD-SETTING

This section is an attempt to clarify to the reader some important aspects of my 'human experience' as a field-worker, and to make explicit some of the subtleties of the field-situation.

ENTRY INTO THE FIELD:

During the months of September, October, 1975, I was involved in a frustrating search for suitable informants. I received many unfulfilled promises from Kuwaiti and Egyptian friends whom I had expected to be of help in introducing me to potential informants. I had also counted on the Kuwaiti wife of an Egyptian relative who had promised to introduce me to her aunts. Unfortunately, all replies were in the negative. At many points I reached a state of desperation.

It was not until I met 'mama' Ihsan, an old Egyptian family friend who works as the director of the Public Relations Office at the Faculty of Arts (College for Women) in Kuwait University, that I began to have some hope. It was 'mama' Ihsan who introduced me to Methal, who later became the most active and helpful intermediary to my key informants. Methal is a young Kuwaiti student of Psychology at Kuwait University. Her brother, who is married to an Egyptian, is also an old family acquaintance. Methal had participated in two university research projects as a volunteer and was eager to offer all possible help. After meeting her twice in the

university, she made an appointment for me with two middle-aged, non-working Kuwaiti women who were the sisters of her friend. I met the two women a few days later at 'Mama' Ihsan's Office. I could infer from our discussion that they had previously filled out a questionnaire for a research that was conducted in the university, so they were aware, to some degree of the nature of my interest. The two women had already been told by Methal that my research was about women in Kuwait. Hence they thought that the whole matter involved answering a few questions for an interview or a questionnaire. When I explained to them that I was interested in learning about their lives, and about Kuwait in the past, and that I had to visit them at home a number of times, their reply was that they were too busy for stories. One of them even questioned how their life-histories would be of interest to me. I made a quick justification telling them that I was interested in learning about social life in old Kuwait, about their attitudes to change, and about their own views of their social world. I added that through their life-histories I would be able to understand such issues. However, I had already realized that there was no hope in having either of them as cases since they still seemed reluctant to cooperate. As I thanked them, they offered to introduce me to other women who were more free (both of them had a large number of children). They took my telephone number, but never called.

At the stage wherein I was supposed to make my initial contacts with my cases, I was supposed to account for my interest in their culture. I explained to my intermediaries that I was interested in the life-histories of a number of Kuwaiti women, so as to get at their own reconstruction of

their experiences within context of the changing social world. This explanation was transmitted to the potential informants who perceived it as an intrusion into the arena of their personal lives. Believing strongly that the personal and the private levels should not be negotiated on the public level, those women refused the idea of talking to me altogether. Being confronted with this situation, I realized that I had to change my 'tactics'. I started asking my intermediaries to inform the potential cases that I was interested in learning about 'al hayat mal gabel' (life in the past - i.e. Old Kuwait). Since the 'past' always represents a domain of a person's life which is regarded with nostalgia, this approach not only seemed plausible, but also made women eager to recapitulate their reminiscences. I delayed the issue of asking the informants to tell me about their lives until later, when the inter-communicative process permitted some depth in the inter-subjective relation between me as a researcher and my informants as cases under study. Even then, the idea of asking a woman to tell me the 'story' of her life had some restraining effects based on her assumption that her life does not constitute a 'story', and that having a 'story' entails having had scandals and problems.

Thanking God for having had no such things, one of my informants, Om Nasser, informed me that she had no stories to tell me. I had to explain to her that I was only interested in the ordinary lives of women in everyday life (see chapter IV on the Case of Om Nasser p. 3).

A similar episode also took place with a relative of Om Nasser who was a potential informant. In this episode a number of attendants

questioned the purpose of my presence and later criticized Om Nasser and her relative for accepting to tell me about their lives. "Esh hagga tethachin ^Can hayatna, hayatna fiha'l zein wa fiha'l shein' (Why should you talk about our life? Our life has its good side as well as its bad side), commented an attendant. This episode which is cited in detail in the case of Om Nasser (p. 25) had circumscribing effects on the inter-subjective relationship that was already being established between me and Om Nasser's relative. Ultimately I had to drop Om Nasser's relative since she consciously tried to draw me away from whatever seemed to touch on her own biography.

GEARING INTO FIELD EXPERIENCE:

Eventually, Methal brought me the good news that she had found me suitable informants who were both eager and ready to cooperate. She informed me that Om Jassem, a family friend was waiting for our first meeting which was set on the 6th of November 1975. Later, Methal introduced me to 3 of my most cooperative informants: Om Ali, Om Faysal, and Om Khalaf who were members of the family of Methal's intimate friend Nasima. Hence it was through Methal that I was introduced to the majority of my cases.

It was Soad Kouli, my Palestinian friend and colleague at the Teachers Training Institute, who managed to introduce me to Om Marzoug after a few unsuccessful attempts with girl students at the institute.

The sixth case was supplied by my former student Nadia whom I met by coincidence in the market. Nadia introduced me to her mother-in-law Om Nasser.

Another intermediary who was of great help to me was my Kuwaiti friend Soad Al Fadel Al Sabah who by virtue of being a Graduate of the Sociology Department at Kuwait University helped in replenishing me with good information about the social stratification system, about women of the past, and many issues which were totally unknown to me. I always made it a point to check back with Soad about issues which were ambiguous to me.

Soad invited me to attend the 'noun' celebration of a friend of hers (a 'noun': is a special ceremony performed in fulfilment of a 'nadher' (vow). In this case a mother had vowed to celebrate a 'noun' party when her young two-year-old daughter had started walking). In this setting, I enjoyed feeling part of the Kuwaiti female society. I managed to get acquainted to one of the older women Om Salem who later became my 7th case. However, I had to omit the case of Om Salem in this thesis because her life-history did not add much information to the data presented in the other six cases and because the major life crises in women's lives were already expounded in the other cases. Thus to avoid redundancy, the case of Om Salem was only used as part of my observations; it served in giving a few examples in my analysis.

It should be pointed out, here, that most intermediaries who introduced me to my key informants were social science students who could appreciate and understand my endeavors. It was through this educated group of women that I got introduced to the elderly uneducated wives and mothers.

During the initial stages of my research, I tried to open up discussions about general issues; I also made it a point to tell my cases

about myself and my family and to show them some family photographs. In some visits I took my 8-months old son with me. This approach promoted rapport and made the informants feel acquainted with me to an extent by which in every visit there were series of salutations and inquiries about the health of each member of my family.

I also noticed that most of my cases never ceased to be curious about my personal life. Though living in the same city, the Egyptian community remains an alien group to the Kuwaitis except when it comes to impressions and images formulated through mass media (most films and programs shown on T.V. are Egyptian), or through contact with Egyptian school teachers. According to Rosalie Wax, "scientists sometimes forget that the more reputable aims of their profession, such as the search for truth, are nourished by an insatiable curiosity. Being himself curious about the informant's personal life, the ethnographer should reciprocate by satisfying the informant's curiosity." (Wax, 1960: 93). Throughout the inter-subjective communication which took place between my informants and myself, such curiosity was clearly manifested in their question about my 'style of life'. It was particularly with Om Marzoug and with Om Ali's husband that this curiosity was very clear. In all my answers I tried to be an authentic committed 'actor'. At times I gave full details and explanations about my life. My attitude turned out to be useful, for as my research progressed, a genuine friendship relationship developed between me and my informants, and rapport was established. It was more distinctly with the families of Om Marzoug, Om Khalaf, and Om Ali that I felt there was good rapport. This rapport was clearly manifested when

Om Marzoug took me as a bona-fide friend and asked me to interfere in a family problem which involved her role-relationship with her daughter (See Chapter IV on Om Marzoug's case pp. 27-31).

When Om Jassem gave me small bits of advice about the up-bringing of my son, our relationship seemed to have progressed from a mere ethnographer-informant relationship to something synonymous to a mother-daughter relationship. Here, as Wax suggests, our relationship improved as I received the advice with attention and care (Wax, 1960: 95).

A kind of reciprocity in exchanging small gifts in certain occasions was also useful in establishing rapport. At certain points I was delighted to find Om Marzoug's children calling me to remind me of my visits to them, or gathering around me to replenish me with some information about the elaborate Kuwaiti phraseology used on certain occasions.

An important feature which emerged in the field-situation was related to recording my data. In some cases I noticed that taking notes on the spot precluded the natural flow of communication. This especially happened when the informant was deeply absorbed in telling me something very intimate which, in her view, I would have no obvious reason to record. In such cases I made it a point to take notes in the car while I was driven back home. In contradistinction to this attitude, some women were delighted to find that I was writing down what they said. In fact I was often urged by the words: "Write it down, write it down." One of Om Marzoug's children was once very upset because I did not write what he said. Underlying this attitude is the whole cultural meaning related to writing something down

indicating its worthfulness and importance.

Based on the assumption that sex roles circumscribe the way in which actor and ethnographer interact with each other and that it is the interactive situation which generates the ethnographic data, I have found out that being a female ethnographer has made it possible for me to penetrate the 'terra incognita' of the culturally 'rich' female world in Kuwait in greater depth than would have been possible for a male ethnographer.

Furthermore, I would like to point out the fact that although my nationality as an Egyptian and not a Kuwaiti caused initial difficulty in finding my cases, yet, being a native Arabic speaker, no problems were encountered in the communicative process.

One of the major difficulties I met in this research was in relation to the informants sense of timing. Many a time have I gone to their houses upon previous appointment to find out that they were not in. As I got to know each of my cases, there was always the fear of being rebuffed as I had been many times before. Afraid to be put down, yet excited to have got hold of a 'willing' informant was always my feeling at the beginning. With mixed feelings I embarked on my first experiences of field-work.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIFE HISTORIES

This chapter is an extensive record of the data collected during seven months of research. It is a full presentation of the life histories and of my observations and interactions with the six Kuwaiti wives and mothers in real life situations.

It was my task here to discover "the essential structure of phenomena through recourse to the sources of subjective experience" (Nelson, 1976: 323). In order not to impose my own assumptions, I have let the informants lead the discussion; I have only interfered at crucial points, when additional information was needed. With slight encouragement, the information I needed came forth very easily. In many instances, the informants provided me with answers to questions which I was planning to ask them later on. Throughout the interviews, I made sure that the informants' narrations covered the questions (cited on pp. 2-3 of this thesis) which include the following themes: women's self-definitions and the traditional roles which they performed in old Kuwait; the channels of influence which they had over men's social world, their self-definitions in terms of particular ethnic or status groups, their major life crises; their adherence to the use of the 'cabat'; traditional conceptions of the ideal woman and the ideal man, attitudes towards marriage arrangements and polygyny; the meanings of freedom, education and work, and attitudes to the great transformation which Kuwaiti society has been undergoing.

With slight editing, I have presented the material as it came forth. Full descriptions of the field setting and of the situation in which each informant was launched into the reconstruction of her life history are also provided.

In transliterating the Kuwaiti-Arabic words, I have used the method followed in the Encyclopedia of Islam. I have tried, as much as possible, to transliterate the Arabic words as they are pronounced in Kuwaiti dialect. It should be noted herein that the Arabic sound 'kaf' is mostly pronounced as 'sh', for example: 'sharika' (co-wife) is pronounced 'sharisha'. The Arabic sound 'quaf' is pronounced 'g' as in 'quwwa' (strength) which is pronounced 'guwwa'. The Arabic sound 'ain' has been represented in this text by the letter ^c as in 'mutawa^ca' (Quran teacher).

I would also like to call attention to the fact that some descriptions of certain rituals have been omitted when mentioned by more than one case. The reader in this case is referred back to the first description of the ritual cited earlier in the text. Each life history is preceded by a descriptive profile which will serve in introducing the reader to the themes which each case highlights and to the major life crises experienced by the women under study.

It should also be noted that fictitious names have been given to all women involved in the life histories so as to disguise their identities and to protect them from the effects of publication. To preserve the anonymity of my informants, the names of all places mentioned in their narrations have also been changed.

PROFILE:

Om Jassem (Jassem), is a 47-year-old Kuwaiti woman who defined herself as an 'ajila' (belonging to a tribe of pure origin). Her father who had two wives, was a merchant who traded in pure Arabian horses. His trade made it necessary for him to stay out of town for long periods which sometimes lasted for three years. He died when Om Jassem was 10 years old.

A few years after her father's death, Om Jassem lost her eldest sister Wadha who died of serious fever at 15. Om Jassem and her sister had gone together to the 'madrasa' where they learned the Quran; they had also received some informal schooling for one year. Om Jassem attended the 'madrasa' until her sister's death.

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OM JASSEM

At 16, she moved to live with her in-laws. There, in the big family-house, she gave birth to her 8 children: Khalida (22), Fatima (20), Zahra (18), Salma (17), Jassem (15), Alida Aida (13), Fatma (12), and Zaki (10). Om Jassem's husband and his brothers owned two grocery stores. His share of the income was around 700 K.D. per month.

Khalida, Om Jassem's eldest daughter had recently dropped out of secondary school; Fatima is a student at the Commercial Institute, while the rest of Om Jassem's children are all in school.

Om Jassem leads a miserable life at her in-laws' house due to the continuous interference of her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law in her life. In 1970, her husband and his brothers broke the partnership and moved out of the big family-house. Om Jassem and her family moved to a new villa in a modern residential area. At present, Alida's income is around 1000 K. Dinars per month.

The life history of Om Jassem illustrates the way a Kuwaiti family lived during the oil boom; it also highlights the problem of mother-in-law / daughter-in-law relationship in the patriarchal extended family structure.

PROFILE:

Om Jassem (loulua), is a 41-year-old Sunni Moslem who defined herself as an 'asila' (belonging to a tribe of pure origin). Her father who had two wives, was a merchant who traded in pure Arabian horses. His trade made it necessary for him to stay out of town for long periods which sometimes lasted for three years. He died when Om Jassem was 10 years old.

A few years after her father's death, Om Jassem lost her eldest sister Wadha who died of serious fever at 15. Om Jassem and her sister had gone together to the 'mutawa^ca' where they learned the Quran; they had also received some informal schooling for one year. Om Jassem stopped going to school shortly after her sister's death.

At 18, she got married to Ahmed and moved to live with her in-laws. There, in the big family-house, she gave birth to her 8 children: Khalda (22), Fatima (20), Zahra (19), Salma (17), Jassem (15), Abdul Aziz (13), Faisal (12), and Zaki (10). Om Jassem's husband and his brothers owned two groceries. His share of the income was around 700 K.D. per month.

Khalda, Om Jassem's eldest daughter has recently dropped out of secondary school; Fatima is a student at the Commercial Institute, while the rest of Om Jassem's children are all in school.

Om Jassem lead a miserable life at her in-laws' house due to the continuous interference of her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law in her life. In 1970, her husband and his brothers broke the partnership and moved out of the big family-house. Om Jassem and her family moved to a new villa in a modern residential area. At present, Ahmed's income is around 1000 K. Dinars per month.

The life history of Om Jassem illustrates the way a Kuwaiti family lived during the man's absence in trade; it also highlights the problem of mother-in-law / daughter-in-law relationship in the patriarchal extended family structure.

OM JASSEM

Early in the morning of November 6, 1976, I was met by Om Jassem at the door of the small villa at 'Dahiat' Abdullah Al Salem, a modern residential area. I introduced myself as Hala, Methal's friend, Om Jassem made a motion that she knew and ushered me in to the drawing room, a huge rectangular room in which sofas were placed rigidly around 3 walls. Huge curtains separated the drawing room from an Arabian 'jalsa' (living room) in which there were huge carpets and floor mattresses all around.

Om Jassem introduced me to her daughter Fatma, a high-school student, and told me that she had four girls and four boys. She commented that she had to give birth to four girls until she finally gave birth to her first boy.

Trying to open up the discussion, I asked Om Jassem if she had ever gone to Egypt. Saying that she did, and that she enjoyed it, she commented that she suffered from servants, and that she had to cook for her children by herself since her children never accepted to eat any food which was not cooked by their mother.

- "I never leave the cooking to the servant," said Om Jassem. "A mother should always cook for her children. Here in Kuwait, I always cook by myself, I enjoy it because when you do something good heartedly, you never feel tired. You may feel more tired if you're not doing any work but feeling bad deep in your heart.

When we were in Cairo, I sent the servants out because they never worked hard. There, I always cooked and was always helped by my children."

- "Do you mean your daughters only?" I asked.

- "Not only my daughters," said Om Jassem, "but also my sons. One of my boys is always acting like a 'soufragui' (waiter). He's always making coffee or tea. When he's around, he doesn't ever let me get up. "Sit down 'hajjiyieh'," he would say, and he would get up to get me the tea. Sometimes he even helps in preparing breakfast for us."

I asked Om Jassem about the drawing-room where we were seated and whether it was used to receive both men and women or women alone.

- "It depends," said Om Jassem, "if a man comes along with his wife, the men sit in one corner of the room while we sit in another corner. This is only the case if the man is a relative or an intimate family

friend. If the visitors are strange men, women never join them. Sometimes if we're receiving many relatives, both men and women, the women prefer to sit together in the Arab-style living room."

- "If you are receiving men and women, do you put on the 'Cabat' (women's black cloak)?, I asked.

- "Yes, of course," came the reply. I always put on the 'Cabat' when men are around or when I am going out. My husband likes me to put it on, and I am convinced. I am used to the 'Cabat'. At the time when I got married, twenty-three years ago, I used to wear the 'thawb' (a black cotton overgarment), as was the custom in the past; underneath the 'thawb' I wore a 'dishdasha' (long silk dress). Over both, I put on the 'Cabat' and the 'bushiyeh' (light, black, muslin face cover). This is how women of the past used to go about: just full of clothes all around and jingling with the sound of necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings and gold ornaments. Sometimes we had loops of gold braided in our hair. We used to make a jingling sound as we walked around.

After marriage, my husband said that he did not want me to put on the 'thawb', I took it off and started wearing 'nafanif' (long cotton or woolen dresses); but of course I always put the 'Cabat' on when I went out or when we received male guests."

- "Did you ever think of taking off the 'Cabat' altogether?" I asked.

- "No," said Om Jassem, "it is not nice for a woman to take off the 'Cabat' at such an age. All my male relatives and cousins are used to seeing me in the 'Cabat'. If I would take it off, people would wonder what has gone wrong with me. My mother would also be very upset if I would take it off. When I was in Cairo, people advised me to take it off since nobody knew me there. But I wouldn't. Cairo was full of Kuwaitis, what would I have done if I would have met a friend of mine in her 'Cabat'? I would have felt very embarrassed for walking 'sufur'. Besides, people would have said that I took the chance of being away from home so as to go 'sufur'. I have always put on the 'Cabat'; I should always do.

My husband also likes me to put on the 'bushiyeh'. I do that only when he's going out with me. When I go out with my friends I take it off, but I don't tell my husband. When we were at the airport on our way to Cairo, I took off my bushiyeh, but when my husband asked me about it, I silently put it on."

- "What about your daughters," I asked, "do they also put on the 'Cabat'?"

- "Oh no," she replied, "they never did. Times have changed. They should be like all the girls of their age. They are young, so neither their father nor myself object to their going out uncovered."

* * * * *

Om Jassem voluntarily started a long detailed description of women's clothes in Kuwait. I was eager to get her started on her life-history but felt that at this stage, in which I knew little about Kuwaiti women's customs, any detailed description should have been most welcome. I left the course of discussion to go unguided since that was my first visit and since I wanted to get sort of acquainted with Om Jassem, first, before starting any serious talk. I found it more appropriate not to begin right away by asking about the woman's life, since this, when attempted at the first visit, might have made her sort of taken aback.

Since my first visit was rather long (3 hours), I asked Om Jassem to tell me about pre-oil Kuwait and found a good flow of ideas coming forth as she talked. From there, I could easily pick up the discussion the following time, and could easily direct her to her own life-history. I found this more appropriate and useful than just saying: tell me the story of your life. I was aware of the fact that I could get a reply similar to the one I got with the two women whom I had met before at mama Ihsan's office (see p. 43). In that incident one of the women said that she was too busy for stories. Thus with Om Jassem, I preferred to indulge in some general talk about pre-oil Kuwait, and about ways of life in the past. By that the conversation flowed in a more natural way. When finally the woman was put on the right track, I could easily direct her to, or away from relevant or irrelevant issues on the basis of the questions cited on pages 2 and 3. Here is a detailed record of the discussions that have taken place.

* * * * *

- "Have you seen the Kuwaiti 'thawb' which girls wear at parties or weddings?" asked Om Jassem.

- "I have seen the very colorful green or red Kuwaiti 'athwab' which are embroidered with gold thread. Isn't that right?" I inquired.

- "No," said Om Jassem, those are the Bahreini 'athwab' which Kuwaiti girls wear for variety. The real Kuwaiti 'athwab' are all black and are embroidered with gold at the edges around the face and down the front. A woman who does not wear the 'thawb' at a party, should always try to wear something glittering instead like jewels or golden bracelets, a woman's clothes should always glitter at parties or weddings. Each of my daughters has a lovely 'thawb'. It is something of the past," said Om Jassem.

When I asked Om Jassem to tell me more about the past, she said:

- "Oh it is different. What a difference there is between the past and the present!"

- "Which is better?" I asked, "now or before?"

- "Now is better," she said, "Kuwait has become much bigger than before. Do you know where the borders of the city were? They were right after Al Jahra street (a modern market street). There was nothing beyond. All was nothing but desert. My mother says that the borders of Old Kuwait were near 'Suk al thahab' (the old gold market).

But life was so different, and the women, like my mother, they were real women. All people at that time were good. Neighbours and relatives were all one family. People always called to ask about us. I remember our house; it was always bustling with people and noise. If anybody was ill, people from all over the neighbourhood came over to see him. There were good feelings and strong emotions. Look at now, how bad the people have become. If I am sick or even dying no family would call to ask about me. My in-laws live in the villa next to us. Can you imagine that if I fall ill they never call me by telephone to ask about me. Even 'ahli nafeshum' (my own folks) never call to ask about us if I don't call them myself. We have become dispersed all over the city; people are not as close to each other as they were before. I am sure that if I die, those people will only learn the news through television. (Obituaries in present-day Kuwait are usually announced either in the papers or on T.V., following the 9:00 o'clock news bulletin.) I don't know what has gone wrong with people these days. Is this modernity?! I recall our old big house and the big banquets which were always made. Can you believe that when we had a banquet mother was not supposed to do any work. All cousins and friends were responsible for the cooking and for washing pots and pans after lunch."

Om Jassem was interrupted by Khalda, one of her daughters, who came in to greet me. She kissed me on both cheeks and asked if I were

fine. Then, she asked her mother's permission to go and study at one of her friends' place. "Zein," replied Om Jassem meaning that it was O.K. Om Jassem whispered some words to Khalda who in turn went out to the kitchen and came in with a glass of Pepsi Cola and a small dish of salted nuts on a stainless-steel tray. The telephone inside the drawing-room was ringing. Om Jassem received the call.

- "Everybody is sick," she said to her friend, "my mother, my husband and my son are all sick with the flu. It is very cold these days."

When she hung up, she came again to her seat right next to me and said:

- "My mother is very tired these days. She has the flu. I usually go to see her for an hour or more every day. She feels very bad if I don't go. She lives alone with my unmarried brother, but now, my brother is in Cairo looking for a bride, so she feels more lonely. My brother is in his forties and is not yet married. Every summer, when he goes to Cairo, he says he will find a bride but he always comes back alone. 'All people find brides except me' he always says. Mother always wanted to find him a bride, but he wants to make his own choice like young men of those days who are of course much younger than he is; but mother still wants to find him a bride according to her taste. She thinks she still lives in the past.

When I got married I was informed only one week before my marriage. I saw my husband after marriage. This is how it was in the past. This method was unfair. How could the man know if his prospective wife was not "aura" (one-eyed) or "abda" (black)?! "A few months ago I was at the airport seeing my brother off, I saw a lovely young Egyptian girl married to a very old man. I gathered from the speech which I overheard, that they were man and wife. I could feel the unfairness of it; something inside me pushed me to approach her: "Is he your father?", I asked. The girls could not answer, but tears filled her eyes, she said: 'This is my husband. My parents are from Upper Egypt and they got me married for the money. I was forced to this marriage, what would the money do for me?' That is not fair," commented Om Jassem.

Om Jassem glanced at the wall clock in front of her. It was approaching 12:00. I realized that it was time for me to go since she still had to go to see her mother. I said goodbye to Om Jassem, thanked her and left.

November 10, 1975.

In my second meeting with Om Jassem I showed her the photographs of my son, my husband, my mother and some members of my family. This

was in response to her request in our first meeting. She admired the photographs and asked many questions about my mother, commenting every now and then that she will visit her when she goes to Cairo, and about my son and my husband.

- "Where do you leave your son when you go out?" she asked.

- "I leave him with his nanny who is very good and responsible," I replied.

- "But what about his feedings? Who feeds him?" she asked.

- "I usually feed him before I go out, otherwise, I prepare his bottle and his nanny gives it to him if I am late. However, I usually make it a point to fix my meetings somewhere between his meals so that I can give him one feed before going out, the second when I go back," I replied.

- "This is good," replied Om Jassem, "A mother should always take care of her baby herself and feed him herself. I have an Indian now, and even though my children are old, I still prepare the food myself. You should be very careful if you leave him with the servant. I know a mother who always went out visiting people and left her son with the servant - one day the Indian servant brought her friends in and left the baby playing on his bed. After a while, the baby got hungry and kept crying; he cried a lot and then fell off the bed and dropped dead. When the woman came back, she found the bad news awaiting her. I guess she deserved it. A mother should spend most of her time with her children. It is her duty. Why has she been created a mother, then?"

I don't like mothers who leave everything to the servant. Servants are eavesdroppers and like to repeat what goes on in the house to neighbours or outsiders. There is nothing wrong in doing housework by yourself as long as you are feeling happy and satisfied deep inside. This is how women of the past were; they were responsible and never threw their work to the servant as young women of these days do. Mothers of the past were like candles that lighted the way to their children."

- "Well," I said, "talking of the past, why don't you relate to me the story of your life in sequence and detail?"

MEMORIES OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD:

"My life," said Om Jassem, "my life is interesting and amusing. I lived with my mother and my father, my sisters and my brothers an

interesting amusing life.

We were four: two girls and two boys (now, we are only two since a boy and a girl have died). My father was a merchant. He never went diving like all the people of his time, because he used to go away for many years. He used to travel to Syria and Iraq and sometimes used to stay there for 3 successive years. He used to trade in pure Arabian horses. He had dealers which used to bring the horses which he bought from 'Al Sham' (Syria) over to Kuwait where they were sold; while he used to stay there to make more deals. Before his departure, he always gave some money to my mother. During his absence, he always sent us more money and goods. Because of his long absence, father used to return to find out that mother had delivered a new baby. Mother once told me that when father returned from one of his long trips, he was surprised to find out that she had delivered a baby who was, by then, a toddler!

Most men went on such long trips. Usually, those who were strong and sturdy enough either went on diving trips in summer or in long trading voyages to India and the Far East in winter. Some men married Indian wives whom they brought to Kuwait. While the men were away, women, young boys, older men, and of course all the small merchants remained in Kuwait. The divers stayed for 10 months, while the merchants who went in 'safar' to India stayed for a year. But the women never bothered. They were responsible for everything. They didn't mind that because they were all alike, i.e. if my husband leaves me alone, now, while other husbands stay home with their wives, I would of course be upset and unhappy, but if all the men go away leaving their wives back home while toiling for a living, then nobody would bother. It was just normal for all.

When I was six years old, father bought some land in Iraq. It was planted with palm trees which produced good crops of dates which father transported to Kuwait. After buying this land, father's trips lasted only for a few months."

- "Who was responsible for the household and for expenditure during your father's absence?" I asked.

Om Jassem replied:

- "A very close friend of my father, Hajji Ahmed, always passed by to ask if there was anything we needed from the market. Sometimes, he used to buy us food or vegetables. But mother was generally responsible for all the household: taking care of us, cooking, washing, and buying fire-wood. She always took the slave woman whom we owned to carry the fire-wood or the things she bought. Mother used to spend according to our needs from the money which father used to send to her. When father came back home, he always brought us lovely things from Syria and Iraq like 'ebei' (pl. of 'Cabat'), embroidered with gold thread, or scented

soap which he bought from Basra from the ships which sailed from India.

Our slave was the one who always took our clothes to be washed in the sea. When she came back mother always rinsed them again with well-water. At home, we had sheep and cows. Mother used to milk the cows and used to make butter, cheese and yoghurt. She did all that by herself, while the slave-woman helped her in cleaning the pots or in carrying them from one place to another. Mother also baked bread at home. At that time, it was 'aib' (shameful) to buy bread from the market. Women in the neighbourhood took turns in putting on their furnaces for baking. Each woman used to put on the furnace once per week. Her friends used to join her to bake their bread at her place. They made good gatherings while the bread was baked. Women of the past had big responsibilities lain on their shoulders.

We owned two houses: one was in 'al Quebla' (old district), while the other was in 'al Jahra' oasis. We used to spend summer in 'al Quebla' and winter in 'al Jahra'. Father loved hunting. He always went hunting in the desert. My sister and I were good friends with our father. He always took us along, when we were young, to the desert. As we walked together, he used to tell us stories about the past, about the Shaikhs, and about his trips to Syria and Iraq. My two brothers hardly joined us. They preferred to play with their friends in front of our house.

My mother was my father's second wife. From his first wife, father had two sons. Mother's 'sharisha' (co-wife, literally: partner), was a silly nervous woman. She hated mother and always tried to make father hate her. But father never listened to her. He always bought nice things for my mother without the other woman's knowledge. Father liked mother more than his first wife, because the latter was the nervous type who never stopped quarreling. Mother was also younger and more beautiful. Father used to spend one night with mother and the following night with his first wife. When he grew old, however, he stopped going to the other house at night; he only went there in the morning. With mother, he felt more comfortable and happy.

When I was 9 years old, I was sent to 'al mutawa^ca' (Quran teacher). Father did not object to that since there were 12 other girls who joined me, and since I was not learning how to write. Learning the Quran was accepted at that time, but learning how to write was considered 'haram' (sinful) for a woman. Father always told us that it was not nice for a woman to write. He always asked us to follow the example of the wives of the 'Sahaba' (Khalifs who followed Prophet Mohammed), who did not know how to write.

Problems arose between father and his first wife when he bought

a very big house at the Seif (coastline) and wanted us to move to live there. The new house cost 3000 Rupies which was too much at that time. My mother's 'sharisha', who lived in an old house close to ours, was mad at my father. She told father that it was a bad deal and that the house was not really worth what he had paid. She advised him to sell it, but he refused.

Unfortunately, father fell ill on that very year. Since a long time, he had suffered from rheumatism in his legs, but, he was never seriously ill. That time, he was, nearly paralyzed and could not walk on his feet. He was taken to the American Mission Hospital where he was treated for a few weeks. A few months later, he could start walking again, but had to use a cane. One day, he went to the nearby mosque for the afternoon prayers. There, he fell off on the floor and was carried home by two of his friends. He had to stay in bed; his health was gradually deteriorating.

My father's son from his first wife, took over father's business. My step-brother used to go to Basra to take care of the date plantations. One day, my brother came to see father and advised him to sell the new house. Father refused strongly and said that he was planning to move there as soon as his health improved. My step-brother did not give it up. He kept nagging at father and told him that he was too weak to move to the new house, that moving there at the sea-shore would make his rheumatism worse, and that he had a wonderful offer for the house. He told him that he had a customer who wished to buy the house for 4000 Rs. That makes 1000 Rs more than the cost price. Father accepted, and the house was sold. We were very upset, because we knew that it was my father's first wife who was pushed by her jealousy to do that. It was she who persuaded her son to coax father into selling the house. Obviously, they preferred to have the house sold before we moved in it, because if we had moved there, it would have become our property, and later, our share of the inheritance. They were worried about the inheritance and wanted to have the value of the house in liquid money.

After several months of illness, father died. He was probably in his early sixties. I don't know his age exactly. People of the past had no birth certificates; dates were marked by certain occasions. I was about 10 or 11 years old at that time. Father's death was a shock to my mother and to us. As girls, my sister and I were very attached to him. I still remember the good old days when we used to join him to the desert.

Bereaved and distressed, mother stopped doing anything in the house for 3 successive days."

- "Was that a custom related to mourning observance?" I asked Om Jassem.

- "Yes," replied Om Jasse," a widow, in mourning, is not supposed to do any housework. Her relatives and friends are supposed to take care of all the housework, especially of food preparation. A widow is not supposed to meet any male visitors and is not permitted to go out of her house for a period of four months and ten days during which she should observe the custom of wearing green dresses only. Mother always told me about an old ritual which was performed at the time of my grandmother. At the end of the mourning period, the widow was taken by her female relatives, her eyes banded, to bathe herself in the sea at night. She took off her green clothes, and put on an ordinary dress. When her eyes were unbanded, she could go back home. This ritual marked the end of the mourning period.

A few months after father's death, my step-brother came to tell my mother that he wanted his and his mother's shares in the inheritance. He wanted us to sell the house we owned at Al Jahra so that he would take his share. Mother insisted that the house should remain as it always was, and that it should not be sold. Finally, they reached a solution. Since there were two separate sections in the house, we asked them to sell their part only. A wall was built in the courtyard to separate the two houses. They sold theirs, while we kept ours till this very day. We all love to go there because it reminds us of father.

Shortly after my father's death, a teacher came over to our area and started giving reading and writing lessons to girls in the district. This teacher was not a Kuwaiti. I think she was a Palestinian who was later granted the Kuwaiti nationality. At that time, I was about 13; people were starting to accept the idea of girls' education; I think that was in the late 1940's. Some schools have already been founded, but they were not like the schools of today. It was enough for a girl to learn how to read and write and how to do some embroideries.

My elder sister Wadha and myself went to school together. Since I was young, I only put on the 'Cabat', without the 'bushiyeh'. This was acceptable since I looked particularly young and short. Wadha, who was a very beautiful girl who had blue eyes and blond hair, always put on the 'bushiyeh'. A young man in our district saw Wadha as she passed by on her way to school. Having heard from his sisters about her beauty, he sent his mother to see her in school. Wadha did not know the woman but noticed that she looked at her closely. A few days later, the woman came to our house and asked for Wadha's hand for her son Faisal. Mother asked the woman to give her a chance to think. She asked many people about him and in fact everybody praised him.

When mother told my step-brother about this proposal, he asked her if she had inquired properly about the young man. When she told him that everybody praised him, he accepted and blessed the marriage. The

following day, Faisal and his father came to meet my brother to propose formally. A very happy atmosphere prevailed in our house for a number of weeks.

This happiness gradually dissipated when Wadha fell ill, a few weeks after this proposal; she had serious fever. Mother was pretty worried about her. Wadha was only 15 years old, but her ailment seemed very serious. In a matter of days Wadha was dead. It was the second shock in our lives. For many days mother did not believe that Wadha was dead. She woke up at night to call her name. Wadha's fiancé was in a bad state for he had loved Wadha very much. For five long years Faisal remained in mourning and refused to get married, despite his mother's efforts.

After Wadha's death, I stopped going to school. I had gone to school only for one year. That was a very short period; however, I was happy for it, because now I know how to read and how to write my name. I stopped going to school after Wadha's death because mother needed me to help her in the house, and because my brother did not stop commenting on the fact that I had grown up and that I should not go out unaccompanied. It was mother who decided to stop sending me to school. She said that she did not want people to talk about us, and that the comments she heard from my brother and from some other female relatives bothered her very much. I was very upset for the fact that I stopped going to school. I knew that my step brother's comments were the direct cause. However, I could not talk, and could not disobey my mother. I felt jealous as I saw my two younger brothers going to school every day. Strangely enough, my step-brother who was always against girls' education, was among the first to send his daughters to school a few years later. His only justification was that times have changed and that people were not like before.

At home, I learned how to make embroideries, and how to sew. It was good for a girl to learn such things. My girl friends always helped their mothers in sewing. Some of them worked as dressmakers."

MARRIAGE:

"At the age of 18, I learned from the daughter of our neighbour that someone had proposed to me. I could not show my mother that I knew; I pretended that I knew nothing about this topic. It was a shame for girls to talk about such topics. Only one week before the wedding, I was told that I was getting married. I knew later that it was my husband's paternal aunt who had arranged the marriage. Since she knew of her nephew's desire to get married, she told him that she had a good bride for him. She paid a visit to my mother and told her that her nephew wished to marry me. After discussing the issue with my brother, mother informed Ahmed's aunt of her acceptance.

Ahmed's aunt paid us another visit. I think she managed to see me while I stood in the courtyard with my neighbour. She set a date for the menfolk to come and propose formally. Ahmed, my suitor came along with his brother and his uncle, and met my brother. My neighbour acted as my agent because her mother was the friend of my suitor's aunt. She always told me what was going on in our own house.

One day, before my wedding, 'al hawafa' (woman hired to attend to the bride's needs) came over to our place. She gave me a good bath, dressed my hair, and applied henna on my hair, my hands and my feet. In the afternoon of my wedding, I was dressed in a 'thawb' and a black 'Cabat'. I put on many golden ornaments.

In the evening, all the men folk assembled at the bridegroom's house. Together, they all walked to a mosque nearby where they performed the evening prayers. Then, they all walked in procession to our house. The bridegroom's friends were clapping and singing as he walked at the head of the group. There were some drummers and flute-players. In our courtyard, all the women gathered up to watch the procession as it came along. All women were of course veiled.

A special room, my mother's, was prepared for us. It was cleaned and perfumed with heavy essences and rose water. When the bridegroom was escorted to our room, it was my turn to be escorted by the women amidst songs and 'zaghareet' (special sound made by women in happy occasions). My face and hands were all covered with my 'Cabat'. I went in on foot not on a chair. Some people perform a special ceremony called 'jalwa' in which the girl is placed on a chair and carried by women. We did not perform the 'jalwa'.

When the door was shut upon us, I started feeling frightened. I had no idea about marriage except the little information which my girl friends told me. I only knew that I was supposed to resist him, and that he was supposed to take off my 'Cabat' to pray on it so that our marriage would be blessed by God Almighty. My bridegroom did not pray on my 'Cabat', apparently, he thought it was not the right time for it. Our marriage was consummated on that night despite the fact that I was quite frightened.

From inside, we could hear the singing and drum-beating which continued outside. The morning following my wedding, Ahmed gave me a sum of 50 Rs as a wedding present. This is a custom here in Kuwait. Ahmed's mother had given my mother 200 Rs as my 'dazza' (bride price). Before breakfast, 'al hawafa' gave me a bath and helped me to get dressed and adorned.

On the third day after my wedding, 'yaum al thaleth' a party was held for my bride-groom's family. All his female relatives attended. They were all seated on the floor, while I was seated on a chair so that they could all see me. I was dressed at my best and I was wearing a lot of golden ornaments. Coffee and sweets were passed around.

A week after my wedding, I moved to my husband's house where I was going to live. This night is called 'lailat al tehwal' (the night of moving). My mother and some female relatives joined me there, stayed with me for a few hours and then left. The third day after moving to my husband's house, a special party was held by my husband's family, for my family; this is called 'lailat al thweilath'. That was the last of the marriage rituals, and that is all about the story of my marriage," concluded Om Jassem.

November 15, 1975

After making the usual greetings, I asked Om Jassem to tell me about her life after marriage, i.e. after moving to live with her in-laws.

LIFE AS A WIFE AND MOTHER - LIFE WITH IN-LAWS:

"I lived with my husband," said Om Jassem, "in the big house which once belonged to his deceased father. It was a big mud house which consisted of many rooms. My mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and my married brother-in-law all lived with us in the same house. There was a slave-woman who helped in the house work and in washing clothes in the sea.

My mother-in-law was a very domineering woman. She interfered in everything I did or said. I often felt that I was not even free to have my own thoughts. She always talked ill about me and often blamed me for things which I never did. Our enmity started shortly after my marriage. I will tell you exactly how it all started.

CRISIS:

My sister-in-law was not on good terms with her husband. During the four years of her marriage, she and her husband led a miserable life together. The night after my marriage, she quarreled with him and left

her husband's house to her parents' house. She was in a bad state and was crying and shouting hysterically. A few days later, her husband divorced her. Since she was in a bad mood most of the time, she hardly talked to me; she ignored me completely. I excused her because of her unhappy circumstances and thought that her unpleasant attitude towards me was simply due to her disturbed state. I always tried to talk to her and to comfort her, but she always reacted very aggressively. One of those times, in which I tried to talk to her, I heard her murmuring to herself that it was all because of me. I did not understand what she meant and convinced myself that I have not heard properly. But the following day, to my astonishment, I overheard her telling her mother that my marriage was a bad omen, that my arrival to their house had brought bad luck unto her, and that seeing me around the house makes her feel pessimistic! As I heard those words I stood where I was and could not move! I could not believe how a person could be so wicked and how I could have ever had any relationship to her marriage which had almost fallen apart at the time of my marriage.

I started withdrawing into my own room, I never sat with her in the same place, and I always tried to avoid her. Nevertheless, she and her mother did not stop bothering me. They took the chance of my withdrawal to my own room so as to talk to my husband alone. Once Ahmed returned from work, they started telling him bad things about me. They criticized all my actions and caused many misunderstandings between me and my husband. Unfortunately, my husband always believed his mother and his mother could never be mistaken.

While the slave-woman was responsible for washing clothes, washing pots and cleaning the floor, my sister-in-law (my husband's sister), and me were responsible for the food preparation. The wife of my mother-in-law had no share in the work. She always claimed that she was sick. I felt that there was some kind of agreement between this woman and my mother-in-law, for the latter never blamed her for doing no work and was always on her side.

I never complained to my husband of this ill-treatment. I knew that if I complained he would tell his mother and that she would revenge from me when he goes out. I didn't want to raise more trouble, so I just remained silent.

Our expenditure was one of the major causes of trouble. My husband and his two brothers owned a grocery which yielded an income of about 5000 Dinars per month. A certain sum of money was allotted to each brother, while another sum was re-invested in the grocery. I think each of the brothers took around 700 K.D. per month. However, this was not always the same because it depended on the revenue they made each month. Since

I had inherited some land in Iraq from my father, I also received some money every month. My step-brother, who was taking care of the plantations in Iraq used to bring me some money once every few months. I used my income to buy anything I wished for. But, my mother-in-law always said that I spent too much of my husband's money. She always said that to my husband who apparently believed her. After some time, he started preventing me from buying anything from my own money because he was afraid to upset his mother.

I remember that in the 1950's when all people started buying air-conditions, I offered to buy one for our room from my own money. Ahmed refused, saying that his mother would think it was from his money. He was not even free to use his money as he wished. In the 1960's I wanted to buy a T.V. set. There was only one set for our big family. I had eight children, while my brother-in-law had 10 and my divorced sister-in-law had one daughter. The children always quarreled together and sat in front of each other as they watched T.V. My husband again refused to let me buy a T.V. set for our room. Again, he refused to let me buy a refrigerator. When I suggested that, my mother-in-law seemed to have found a new topic to talk about. It became her problem for several weeks. She said that I was not a good wife and that I was trying to spend their money for luxuries!

After years of suffering, I started to complain. Problems between my children and their cousins never stopped. When elders interfered, matters always became worse. At a certain point I found myself unable to keep things within my heart. I started telling my husband who wondered why I have never complained before. Eventually Abu Jassem started to believe me and I started telling me about their unfair accusations to me. I felt better that way because I could at least defend myself. Gradually, Abu Jassem began to believe me. It is true that his mother still had the final word in many matters, but at least I felt that I could discuss things with my husband; sometimes when I managed to convince him of something which his mother was opposing, I felt very triumphant."

- "But why didn't you ever complain before?" I asked Om Jassem who was very absorbed in her memories.

- "A good woman," replied Om Jassem, "should be polite and sweet. She should not complain all the time or shout a lot so as not to make her husband's life unpleasant. I never complained except very rarely. I learned this asset from my mother. My father always preferred to stay with my mother, his first wife was a nervous woman who was always shouting and complaining. Father preferred mother's company because she had a 'sweet tongue'; she was calm, and kind. A woman can always gain a man to her side by sweet-talking him; that way a man will enjoy her company more

than anyone else's. If a woman is the bullying type, she will drive her husband away from her.

I have also learned a good lesson from my neighbour who is a very nervous woman. Since she always gave her husband a horrible time, he married an Egyptian wife. When my neighbour knew, she lost her mind. She became more nervous and aggressive. Now, the two women live together in two separate apartments in the same villa. The man hardly stays with my neighbour for she's always asking for money and clothes. She's extra demanding and extra jealous. Her house is always messy; her nervousness gets reflected on her children who always shout and talk aloud. The house of the new wife, on the other hand, is very calm and comfortable. She puts her children to sleep at an early hour and when her husband comes home she is free to sit with him to play cards or drink coffee and tea. Of course, a man always prefers a woman who is a good companion.

My father used to tell my mother: 'what makes you dearer to me than my old wife is that you don't complain. You never blame me for staying more at her place and you never complain when I am late'. My step-brothers always thought that mother prevented father from staying more with their mother. Father used to tell them: 'W'Allah'l mara ma tat-hasha' (by God the woman does not talk); he used to come back to our home to relate such incidents to my mother. Father always took mother's opinion when he was going to buy new property. He was quite different from my husband who never takes my opinion; he either takes his mother's opinion or decides by himself.

My husband never allowed me to go to the market alone. I was always forced to go with my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law. I hated this because I felt that I had no freedom to choose my clothes according to my own taste. They either bought the same materials like me or criticized me for buying expensive materials. Sometimes I had to lie to them by pretending that I was going to my brother's house for a visit. I used to take my brother's wife with me and walk to the market. When I came back home, I used to hide what I bought under my 'Cabat'. Later, I used to pretend that my cousin bought it for me. Now, however, my husband had become more understanding. When we moved out of the family house, I felt that I have regained my freedom. At least I am now relieved from this battlefield!"

November 29, 1975

For a couple of weeks, I was unable to meet Om Jassem. Being busy with her visits to friends who were going off to Hijaz for pilgrimages, she forgot our appointments more than once. When I finally

succeeded to meet her, on the 29th of Nov., we picked up the discussion where we had left it two weeks before.

- "Now Om Jassem," I said, "Tell me about your decision to leave your husband's family and to live alone, whose idea was it? and how did your in-laws react to it?"

- "Of course it was difficult for the brothers to make this break-up" said Om Jassem, "The three brothers (one of whom was retarded and unmarried) shared two wholesale groceries and a building. The income was equally divided among them. All of a sudden, and without any direct misunderstanding, my husband's eldest brother told him: 'Ya' Ahmed, you have children and I have children. Each of us has different commitments and various expenses. It is time for us to break our partnership. Each of us should take his share in the groceries. We should also move out of the big house and sell it. The children are too many and they are growing up. We can apply for 'gasayem' (areas of land on mortgage basis) from the government; each of us can build a villa for himself." After a lot of argument, my husband accepted to buy his brother's share in one grocery. The partnership was broken; the second grocery was given to the retarded brother.

The old family house was evaluated by the government in 'al tathmin'. We applied for a 'gasima' (sing. of 'gasayem'), which we sold so as to buy land in the modern area of 'Dahiat' Abdallah Al Salem. My in-laws also brought another area of land right next to us. This land cost us 6000 K.D. Now, its price has gone very high. It is worth 40,000 K.D. at present.

After this break-up, my brother-in-law became employed in the government. This was in fact what he wished to do when he asked my husband to buy his share in the grocery. He could read and write, and there were many well-paying jobs in the government at that time.

The enmity between me and my in-laws increased after this break-up. My mother-in-law desired this separation because she never liked me. I was very happy for having moved out. It was all like a dream. I could not believe that it was all true. Since that time, I stopped seeing my in-laws. They did not come over to congratulate me when I moved to this house. They hardly visit us except when one of the children is ill. My sister-in-law is as impolite as she has always been. She has not entered my house since three years. As for me, I hardly visit them except in certain occasions when I have to. My husband likes me to visit his mother; I visit her only so as to please him. When I go there, my sister-in-law turns her back to me, she doesn't even say hello. Anyway, it was for her impoliteness that her husband divorced her."

Om Jassem turned her face towards me, sighed and said in a reflective attitude:

- "You know, Om Ahmed, my life with those people was the biggest problem in my life. When I moved to live there, after marriage, I felt the great difference between their home and ours. Life at my parents' home was calm and happy; while life at my husband's house was like a nightmare. I often cursed the woman who had arranged our marriage.

It is true that my husband is good and kind, but the fact that he always believed his mother's lies was the source of all the trouble in which we lived. My husband has changed a great deal ever since we moved to our own house. Occasionally, his mother causes some trouble, but I often prove my innocence of her accusations. On the whole, my husband has moved out of the realm of his mother's influence. Now, he only takes her opinion in matters which concern his relationship with his brothers. I have become equipped to face any problem which she tries to induce. My husband does not take my opinion in anything related to the grocery or to his work, but, he started asking me and the children if he wants to buy anything for the house. He always likes to fulfill his children's desires.

A few days ago, we were all sitting together when Abu Jassem asked the children if they preferred to buy a new car or to spend the summer in Cairo. We all agreed that we preferred to spend the summer in Cairo. Had we been still living in the old family house, Abu Jassem wouldn't have taken our opinion, he would have taken his mother's.

When we moved to this house, I faced the problem of being unable to furnish the house alone. I had no idea about furnishing or about the market since I was always escorted by my in-laws who always took me over to the places they wanted. Abu Jassem bought the air-condition, the refrigerator, and the television. I had to buy the furniture since he could not spare any more time to go around in furniture galleries. I called my nephew's wife and asked for her help. Together, we went down town and bought carpets, curtains, bedrooms, etc. This woman is young and educated. She knows the markets very well. My daughters also know the market perfectly well. I allow them to do their own shopping with their friends. I don't like to join them, because I want them to learn. I don't want them to be as inexperienced as I am."

Om Jassem was fully absorbed in her stories; she did not notice that there was someone who stood at the door watching her. It was a very dark woman whose face was almost hidden with the 'bushiyeh'. When Om Jassem suddenly noticed her guest, she laughed out loud and asked Om Saad how she had entered without noise. Om Jassem remained seated; her guest greeted her and sat next to her. Laughingly Om Saad criticized Om Jassem for putting on too many clothes and looking too cold. 'You're

always cold', said Om Saad, because you don't move around as I do. Look at me, I never stop working at home. I have many dresses to sew for my children. I never feel lazy or cold.' Om Jassem asked her guest if she had finished the dresses which she was sewing for Fatima (Om Jassem's daughter). Om Saad said that she was not yet through since she had a lot of work to do. She added that she loved sewing, told Om Jassem some news about their common friends, greeted us and walked out.

- "This woman," said Om Jassem, "is my husband's relative. She's among those good ones who are on my side. She always criticizes my mother-in-law. As you see, she is black. Her mother was a 'Cabda' (negro-slave). In the past, Kuwaitis used to go on long trips to Africa. Some of them bought slaves which they brought over to Kuwait to serve in their houses. Other people kidnapped slaves which they sold to rich men in Kuwait. When slavery became prohibited by law, people freed their slaves; but most of them still served in the same houses. Some Kuwaiti men married their freed slaves. Om Saad's mother was one of those freed slaves. Om Saad is a clever woman, she sews for profit. She's a clever woman. She's like those good women of the past. In the past, women worked as dress-makers so as to raise money. Other women made embroideries, or sewed dresses which were sold to people in the neighbourhood."

- "Was it acceptable for a rich woman to work as a dress-maker, in the past?" I asked.

- "Yes, of course," replied Om Jassem. "A woman who could do such things was considered a clever woman. Women in Old Kuwait were strong and clever. I know of a bedouin woman who helped her husband in building three houses. Together they dug themselves a well to provide them with the water needed to wet the mud. Then, while the man stood on a ladder, the woman shaped the mud and handed it over to him. They built three houses; they leased two of them and lived in the third. This was a real good woman. Because she could not bear children, she urged her husband to marry another woman who could bear him children. Despite her husband's assurance that he did not care for children, she insisted and actually engaged a girl for him. Now he has four boys and two girls. His first wife adores the children and treats them just like her children."

Om Jassem's eldest daughter came in. She kissed me on the cheeks and sat down next to me for a few minutes. When she left, Om Jassem looked at me and said:

- "You know Om Ahmed, I wish to get those girls happily married to good men. I want to feel comfortable. As you can see, not all young men are good, these days. I don't like those spoiled long-haired irresponsible boys."

- "What, in your view," are the characteristics of a good spouse for your daughter?" I asked.

- "A good spouse," replied Om Jassem, "is a man who is kind-hearted and good-mannered. He should not interfere in what does not concern him like other people's lives and problems. He is a man who promotes good work and talks well of others. He is the one who sacrifices for his wife, his children and his family. A good husband does not play around and does not drink. Now, lots of young men drink alcoholics and get drunk.

- "But aren't alcoholics prohibited in Kuwait?" I inquired.

- "Don't believe it," said Om Jassem. It is smuggled in, and all young men drink. It always shows when a man is a drunkard. It shows from his smell and the look on his eyes. My uncle started drinking when some people advised him to use alcoholics as a cure for his sore throat. Since that time, he never stopped. At first he did it behind his wife's back. But when she discovered it, he started drinking at home. At first she objected to that, but later she thought it would be better to be silent so that he would not go out with his friends only so as to drink. A good husband is supposed to go out with his family. He should not prevent his wife from going out, but should have an idea about where she is going. He should neither be too strict, nor too easy. He should give his wife reasonable freedom."

- "Do you take permission from your husband when you're going out?" I asked.

- "When I was young, I always had to take permission. That was at the time when I lived in the big family-house. Now, however, I don't have to take permission. I am old and my children are grown-ups. I only ask my husband to send me the car. He doesn't ask me where I want to go. He doesn't even ask his daughters. My daughters take my permission if they wish to go out. Now my husband trusts me. A good woman who respects herself can always gain the confidence of her husband."

- "What are the characteristics of a good woman?" I asked.

- "A good woman," replied Om Jassem, "is the one who takes good care of her children and her husband, and who manages her house properly. She is the one who is clever enough to make things like embroidery, or athwab, or to sew clothes. A woman can spend her time in cooking, taking care of her children, sewing or reading. Some women participate in social work and join women's organizations. A woman who takes good care of her house has no free time and does not feel bored. There are women who work, but neglect their homes. They only take care of their make-up, their clothes, and their friends, they leave their homes unattended to, and leave their

children with the Indian servant. Such women are not good.

'Al mara'l zeina' (the good woman), is kind and responsible. She does not go out a lot and does not gossip about others. She is simple and conservative. I don't like women who are over-dressed. Lots of women, these days, have become too showy and extravagant. In the past, women were never that way. They always put on their 'ebei' and could not even uncover their faces. Now, there are women as old as my mother who take off the 'Cabat' and go out 'sufur'. This is against religion and traditions. Some women just put the 'Cabat' over them, while all their hair shows. This is also wrong and 'haram'.

A good woman is kind and tender. She does not shout a lot and treats her husband kindly."

At this moment Fatima, Om Jassem's daughter came in and voluntarily joined in the discussion.

- "Do you want my view," said Fatima.

- "Of course," I said, "go ahead."

- "I believe that a good woman should be devoted to her husband and her children. She should not depend on servants. Many children in Kuwait are brought up by Indian servants, and can speak English with an Indian accent; but this is not good. I prefer to stay at home even if I get very well educated or if I receive my Ph.D. Home is more important than work. I only support work if the family needs the money. If a woman's motive to work is her economic need, then this is alright; but if she only works so as to show off, to attract attention, or to pass time, then that's not right. A woman who has all what she needs does not need to work. God has created women to be mothers and to take care of their children. Now, women are trying to compete with men. But, there are types of work which are only suitable for men. Men are physically more powerful.

A woman should be calm and should not talk in a loud voice like men. A nervous woman who shouts a lot does not look nice or feminine. The most important role in a woman's life is motherhood. A woman who neglects her children is most unfair; such children will grow up to be like their mothers."

- "Do you agree Om Jassem?" I asked.

- "Of course, replied Om Jassem," take me as an example. If I had the chance to be something different than what I am, I would not accept. I would still like to be a wife and a mother. The most important people in my life are my children and my husband."

Om Jassem was interrupted by a telephone call from her neighbour. When she hung up, she came to tell me.

- "This is my neighbour whose husband has married another wife. She's in trouble and she wants me to visit her this afternoon. She has quarreled with her husband again because of his new wife. I have often advised her to be calm because that way she's driving the man out of her house; but, she wouldn't listen. I wonder why this problem of marrying more than one wife is increasing these days.

- "What do you think is the reason for the increase in this phenomena?" I asked.

- "I think," said Om Jassem, "that the reason is money and free time. Men are having a lot of money which they don't know how to use."

- "But didn't this phenomena exist in the past, i.e. before oil?" I asked.

- "Yes, it did, but it wasn't that widespread. Only those who could afford to have more than one wife got re-married. This was not as prevalent as it is now. Men re-married when their wives were sick, or when their wives died. It is true that father had two wives, but this was because his first wife was an unbearable, nervous woman. Besides, father had money and could afford a second wife. Now men marry without reason. They have a lot of free time. In the past men went away for long months and did not have this leisure time."

Another telephone call interrupted Om Jassem's speech and directed the discussion to another topic. The call was from a friend of Om Jassem whom I knew. She was a 'Shi^Cah'. Om Jassem referred to this fact and said that the 'Shi^Cahs' were quite different from the 'Sunnis'. She asked me if I were a 'Sunni'. I replied in the positive. This stimulated me to ask Om Jassem the following question:

- "Can a 'Sunni' marry a 'Shi^Cah'?"

- "A 'Sunni' girl, said Om Jassem," should not marry a 'Shi^Cah' man. Perhaps the other way round is more possible.

- "Would you accept to get your daughter married to a man who is not an 'asil'?" I asked.

- "No, I would not accept; my husband also would never accept. As you know, we belong to a 'gabila asila' (tribe of pure origin). It is true that God says that the more pious men are the dearest to him, and that not all 'asils' are necessarily pious, yet, we cannot accept marriage between an 'asila' and a non-asil'. We wouldn't accept to get our

daughter married to a 'Jena^Cat' or a 'Shi^Cah' either. However, people are changing now, and some people are accepting such marriages.

December 5, 1975

I passed by Fatima, Om Jassem's daughter to pick up a book about Kuwait. Fatima was on the phone. As she talked, she asked her father who was at the other end if he was going to pick her up by the new car or not. When she hung up, she looked at me and said:

- "We have finally bought a new Dodge car. Father is going to pick me up **now** by the **new** car.

- "Does that mean you're not going to Cairo in summer?" I asked.

- "No, we are doing both," said Fatima. "Father has accepted to buy the car, and to take us to Cairo, this is what we wished for."

Om Jassem went to the kitchen and came back with a burner of incense.

- "I love the smell of your incense," I commented, "but tell me, Om Jassem, do you believe in the evil eye or in casting spells?"

- "Of course it is widely believed that the evil eye exists and that certain women can cast spells," said Om Jassem, "but deep in my heart, I don't believe in such things. I always tell my daughters that such things are mere superstitions, because if you really pre-occupy yourself with such things, your mind will never be at rest. I burn incense on Fridays. It is a habit which we all like to do. We like its smell. I remember that long ago, continued Om Jassem, there was an old woman in Jahra who was known for her ability to cast spells over men to make them love or hate certain women. A neighbour of ours heard the story and went to this woman who in turn gave her a liquid to pour over her husband's food. This liquid was supposed to make the man madly in love with his wife and hence unable to look at other women or to re-marry. Our neighbour was scared to use this medicine lest it would cause any harm to her husband. She gave it to the cat. The next day the cat became strangely attached to her. She walked after her and followed her wherever she went. She went in with her to the bathroom and slept below her feet. The lady was really starting to believe that the spell had worked. One day, she woke up to find the cat dead under her feet. She realized that if she had given the 'medicine' to her husband, he would have died. She told us all about it and said: 'don't let anyone tell tales like that to you'."

- "But why is it that the cat followed her?" I asked.
- "I don't know," said Om Jassem, "perhaps it was black magic."

December 13, 1975

On the second day of 'Id al Adha' I visited Om Jassem to wish her a happy feast. Four young girls dressed in latest fashions were seated in the drawing room as I went in. Two of them were Om Jassem's daughters, the other two were their friends. Om Jassem was very busy in the kitchen since she had an invitation for lunch. The house was stuffy and there was a heavy smell of broiled lamb's meat. As soon as I went in, Fatima called her mother:

- "'Yumma' (Oh mother), come quickly, she has the baby with her."

Om Jassem came in quickly, wished me a happy feast and took my son from me. Each of the girls kept admiring the baby. I could not keep track of him for he was taken upstairs by Fatima to be shown to her sisters. For a little while, Om Jassem talked to me and complained about the pain in her feet. She said that she was tired and that she had a lot of work to do.

When Ahmed, my son, was brought back, I could smell the heavy scent of burned incense in his clothes. Om Jassem took him on her lap and started arguing with her daughter about whether he resembled me or not. I was offered Arabian coffee and nuts. Then, she brought the burner of incense and passed it around Ahmed, saying that this will prevent the 'hasad' (evil eye). Om Jassem had previously contended that she did not believe in the idea of being afraid of the evil eye.

Om Jassem promised to visit me in Cairo. I thanked her, gave her my address, wished her a happy feast and left. The four young girls saw me to the door to say goodby to the baby.

PROFILE 1

Om Ali (Amira), a Shi'ah Muslim, whose great grandfathers had migrated from Bahrain to Kuwait, was born in Kuwait in 1925. She had one sister, Hakeyah, and one brother, Zaki.

In her early childhood, Om Ali lost her mother, and suffered from the ill-treatment of her stepmother. After several years of suffering, Om Ali was taken to live at her paternal uncle's house, where, again, she was ill-treated by her uncle's wife. It was not until she moved to live with her maternal aunt that her suffering came to an end. Om Ali's maternal aunt was a kind woman who loved her niece like a daughter.

At the age of 15, Om Ali got married to one of her father's maternal cousins, Hajji Yusuf, a widower who was 20 years her senior and who had four children: Zaki, Fayza, and Hakeyah. Om Ali and her husband had their first four children: Zaki (1945), Fayza (1947), Hakeyah (1949), and Selah (1951). When the family moved back to Kuwait, Om Ali delivered three more children: Khadija (1953), Khadija (1955), and Selah (1957).

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OM ALI

At present, Ali, works as an engineer; he had received his B.Sc. in engineering from the United States; Aleya, a Cairo University graduate works as a librarian; Ikbal is a student at the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University; Farida works as a secretary; Hakeyah is a student at Kuwait University; Khadija is in an Institute for the Mentally Retarded; Selah is a student at the Police College.

When Hajji retired, each of his children started paying him a regular sum of money every month. The overall income provided by the Hajji's children is K.R.S. 100. Om Ali and her family live in their own villa in a modern residential area.

The major crisis in the life of Om Ali was the crisis of growing up. In her childhood she was exploited by older women and was always maltreated. Her life history highlights the interlocking kinship network around the Shi'ah and its role in marriage arrangements.

It should be noted here that the following cases: Om Khalef is the maternal cousin of Om Ali, and that Om Fayza (Haw) is the step-sister of Om Ali (see pages

PROFILE :

Om Ali (Amina), a Shi^Cah Muslim, whose great grandfathers had migrated from Bahrein to Kuwait, was born in Kuwait in 1925. She had one sister: Mekkeyeh, and one brother: Zaki.

In her early childhood, Om Ali lost her mother, and suffered from the ill-treatment of her step-mother. After several years of sufferings, Om Ali was taken to live at her paternal uncle's house, where, again, she was ill-treated by her uncle's wife. It was not until she moved to live with her maternal aunt that her suffering came to an end. Om Ali's maternal aunt was a kind woman who loved her niece like a daughter.

At the age of 15, Om Ali got married to one of her father's maternal cousins: Hajji Yussuf, a widower who was 20 years her senior and who had four children: Daoud, Hend (Om Faysal), Saad, and Abdullah. Om Ali and her husband moved to live in Iraq where she delivered her first four children: Ali (32), Aleya (29), Ikbal (27), and Farida (25). When the family moved back to Kuwait, Om Ali delivered three more children: Nasima (23), Khaula (21), and Saleh (19).

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OM ALI

My second case was that of Om Ali to whom I was introduced by Methal al Aradi, my Kuwaiti friend. Om Ali, who happened to be the mother of Methal's closest friend Nasima, had showed her readiness to co-operate with me, and to tell me about her life.

Accompanied by Methal, I paid my first visit to Om Ali on the 27th of November 1975 in her western style villa in the suburb of 'Al Shameya'. When we arrived at the main iron gate in the all-enclosing wall surrounding the villa, we were admitted by an old female Indian servant who led us through the paved walk in the garden, to the inside of the villa. There, we met Nasima who greeted us and welcomed us to the drawing room in the second floor. In the second floor, there was a spacious marble-paved hall, the drawing room, and two small corridors which led to the bedrooms.

We were seated in the modern-style drawing room furnished with two dark green velvet sofas, two velvet armchairs, a number of small tables, a huge book case, wall-to-wall carpets and velvet curtains on French-style windows. After two minutes, Nasima's mother, a fair plump lady wearing a simple dress, came in to greet us and kissed both Methal and myself on the cheeks.

Since Methal had already given Om Ali an idea about the fact that I was interested in learning about pre-oil Kuwait, Om Ali started telling me how different life at present has become, and how difficult life has been in the past:

- "Now, everything is available," she said, "In the past, poverty was prevalent; we had none of the comforts of our present life. We had no water-pipes or water-taps, no cars, no electricity, no televisions or telephones, no refrigerators or washing machines. We had to do everything by our own hands. Water was brought to us by peddlers on donkey-backs. It was brought from Iraq in barges; then it was taken up by the peddlers in tanks or 'jerab's' (plural of 'jerba' - 'querba' i.e. goat water-skins). We also collected rain-water in cisterns and augmented this scanty supply by water from the 'jalib' (well). Our clothes were washed in the sea. I remember that until the birth of Nasima I used to wash in the sea; that was around twenty-three years ago.

But now, life has become much better. The old town is no more there, and most people have money and property. God bless the Amir; he has made everything available."

For a little while, Nasima and Methal chatted about university and about their studies. It was only when they both walked out that I

had the feeling that I could talk to Om Ali more freely. I asked her to tell me about her life, and about her memories of the past.

- "What shall I tell you," she replied with a smile, "I don't know what to say or where to start."

- "Just try to tell me about your recollections of the past, about your life when you were young; you can imagine yourself telling the story of your life to your daughter." I said.

- "I'm afraid most of what I have to say is 'kharabī' (nonsense).

- "No," I replied, "be sure that whatever you will tell me will be of great use to me."

MEMORIES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD:

"I was born fifty years ago to a weak sick mother who had only one daughter older than me. My maiden name is Amina, and my eldest sister's name is Mekkeyeh. One year after my birth, mother gave birth to my brother Zaki; the following year, she gave birth to Hussein who died shortly after birth. When I was around six years old, mother became pregnant again, and gave birth to female twins. After delivery mother became very sick and never parted from bed. I remember that I often sat beside her and wept because she was very tired. She remained in bed until she died, about one month after delivery. My mother's sister 'khalti' came to the house and all the family gathered up. I felt very sad and always sat alone in the corner of our room. Because Zaki was very young, my aunt 'khalti' took him over to live with her in my grand-parents big house. As for us, we stayed with father. Mekkeyeh was nine years old. She did some of the housework, but 'bint khāli' (my maternal cousin), came over to help her. Sheikha, my cousin, was around 15 at that time. She cooked for us and made most of the housework.

One day, Sheikha came fuming, she told me that my father kicked her out and said that he was going to get married. I was very upset because Sheikha was not going to come again, but father's re-marriage meant nothing to me until I started experiencing the misery of having a cruel, heartless step-mother. My step-mother was 'bint khāli' (maternal cousin), but this made no difference to her. I think she meant to give us a hard time so that we will get fed-up and leave the house.

At our own home, we were always hungry and deprived. This wicked woman cooked a lot of food but hardly gave us any. She used to shut us up at night in the drawing room. We slept there alone and always woke

up frightened at night. When she had children, she let them sleep with her and father in the bedroom; as for us, we were left alone. In the mornings, she gave us very tiresome work. She has really 'marmaratna' (made us suffer). We could not continue living that way and could not complain to our father for fear that he would beat us.

One night, father told us that we were going to move the following day to the house of 'Cami' (my paternal uncle). Life at my uncle's house was equally unpleasant. My uncle's wife was not happy about the fact that we lived with her. She misused us and forced us to carry very heavy loads. We used to take her clothes and her children's to wash them in the sea. I remember that once she pulled out water from 'al jalib'. My sister was very upset because we needed the water. When Mekkeyeh complained, 'marat Cami' (my uncle's wife) said that we should pull water for ourselves. We were upset because we were both young and were afraid to fall in the well; besides, we could not easily pull out water because the pail was too heavy for us.

As for my father and my uncle, we hardly saw them or talked to them. Men had their meals alone, so we never even saw them. 'Cami' was very strict. I still remember that one day he hit me so hard that I fell off on the floor; that was only because he found me standing at the door watching a bicycle that was passing by. 'We have no girls who stand at the door', he said. I was surprised and frightened; even his wife who hated me was surprised that he hit me so hard.

After a couple of years Mekkeyeh reached puberty and got married to 'Ibn Cami' (my paternal cousin) who lived with us in the same house. It was 'khalti, okht omi' (my mother's sister) who prepared everything for the wedding. 'Khalti' kept Mekkeyeh's bride-price untouched. She spent from her own money to buy the 'jihaz' (trousseau) for Mekkeyeh.

At that time, I became very weak and sick. The fact that I was always carrying heavy loads resulted in my having a bad hemorrhage. 'Khalti' asked my father to permit her to take me to live with her in the old family-house. 'Khalti' was a strong sociable woman whose strong personality was well-known to all the family. Father did not object to her suggestion, so I moved to live there.

Life with 'khalti' was quite different than what I had experienced before. She treated me very kindly and because she was a 'mutawa^a' (Quran teacher) she asked me to attend her classes. I never did anything in the house. In the morning I attended Quran classes and

in the evening I played with 'banat khāli' (my uncle's daughters) who were in the same house. 'Khalti' was a widow, who had no children; she treated me as a daughter. I was not clever in learning the Quran but 'khalti' never reproached me; she did not like to upset me.

A separate room in the big family-house was used by my aunt for her classes. Each week end, the children in her class brought her a few Rupies (around four). When a child completed the Quran (yakhtem) a special ceremony called 'khatma' was performed.*

I lived with my mother's family in the old family house for some years. My mother's father, who had already died, had been a rich man. He had had slaves, yes, he had a slave woman and two slave men; but later they were all released. In the big family house, there was a special shed for the cattle. It was my grandmother who was responsible for milking the cow and for producing cheese and butter. At first, those products were sold to our neighbours, but later, when life became better, we kept some for home-consumption and gave the rest to our friends or neighbours for free.

MARRIAGE: ROLE AS A WIFE AND MOTHER:

Eventually, one of my father's maternal cousins who was, at the same time, the brother of my step-mother, proposed to me. He was a widower who had four children. 'Khalti' said to my father that Al Hajji Yussuf was too old for me, but my father insisted. Of course I had no say in such matters. I had just reached puberty, but I knew nothing about marriage or what it meant. I cannot remember how old I was exactly, but I was probably 15, very young and innocent. The Hajji was around 36 years of age. I was informed about my marriage a week before it took place. My bride-price was a sum of 100 Rupies, which 'khalti' left untouched. She paid all the expenses of my 'jihaz' from her own money. She even left her room for us to stay in after our marriage. We stayed there for four nights after which we left to Basra where the Hajji worked. He traded in housewares made of brass and copper, and things like 'dlal' (plural of dalla: coffee pots).

LIFE AS A WIFE AND MOTHER:

In Basra, Iraq, I became pregnant, but after two months, I had a miscarriage. I was weak, sick and tired, so my husband brought me over to Kuwait for a 15-day holiday after which I returned again to Basra. I became pregnant again and had my 'beker' (first), son Aly. We stayed in

* For a description of 'al khatma', refer to Om Khalaf p. 108

Basra for six years during which I delivered Aleya, Ikbal and Farida, Nasima, Khaula and Saleh were born in Kuwait. I brought up my husband's children as well as mine. In fact I treated them all alike. I made it a point to make them feel that they were all my children. I did not want them to experience the horrible deprived feeling of being orphans. They all slept with us in the same room. Now, after all these years I can tell you that I reaped what I had sown. My husband's children treat me like a mother; they are nicer to me than my own children. Now, when they come over, they always kiss me on the forehead. At present, my step-son Saad has a very prominent post in the government. He is also a successful business man.

In fact, Saad is very generous and faithful. Ten years ago, the Hajji sold his two shops and felt like retiring. He stayed at home for about 9 months after which he felt very bored and unhappy. Consequently, Saad suggested that he would find a new project for his father. So he bought a weaving factory on his father's name. The Hajji started going to supervise the work nearly every day. But unfortunately, the factory did not bring in good income, and was sold to a Sheikh. It was at that time that our sons and daughters made us feel their great appreciation of what we had done to them. Saad gathered all his sisters and brothers, and they decided to take up the responsibility of the house. They told their father: 'It is now time for you to stop working. We all have good posts and earn good money. The expenditure of your house should be our responsibility. It is time for us to take the burden off your shoulders'. Since then, we have been receiving 100-150 K.Dinars from Saad, 50 from Daoud, 50-60 from Ali and 25 from Farida. Aleya also gives me and Nasima an allowance of 10 Dinars each. My youngest son Saleh who is now a student in the police Academy wanted to pay a share, but we refused. We asked him to keep his extra money for his marriage, or to buy himself a car like his brother's. He is too young to share in the responsibility from now; he is only 19.

Once every two years, Saad arranges a trip for us, either to Iran, or to Iraq and Syria. He has even taken me to a pilgrimage to Mecca. This summer we will probably take the children to Syria or Cairo, 'inShaa' Allah' (if God wills it). Parents should always try to make their children happy. They should not be stingy. One of my distant cousins works as a teacher and gets a salary of around 200 Dinars. Her husband who is a government employee gets a similar pay, but he refuses to pay a penny in the house. He hoards all his money in the bank and asks his wife to use her salary for anything she needs for the house or the children. Now, their eldest son has got employed and helps his mother, while the father pays nothing. He is a stingy man. I suppose one day he will need his children, but they will never help him.

Good work is never lost, it is always repaid. Look at the Hajji

and his children. When he had a regular income he always fulfilled their desires. He never said no even if he had little money. Now look at his children and see how they all treat him. The same goes for 'khalti' who has brought us up like a good mother. She has toiled for us and has spent her money on my and my sister's trousseau. Now she is paralyzed. She lives with 'marat khali' (my maternal uncle's wife). I have to visit her every day to see if she's fine and fulfill all her desires. I feel that I am obliged to see her every day; when I don't, I cannot sleep all night. Now, after you leave I will go to see her."

There was a pause, after which Om Ali felt like making a conclusion. It seemed to me that she assumed that I was most interested in knowing about the past. So she suddenly said:

- "Oh, the past, the past was different. You know, it is true that now everything is available and easy, but in the past 'shan fih rahet galeb' (our hearts were at rest). There was no worry about the children, their studies, or about accidents and such things. In the past, a mother used to have her boys beside her by sunset, but now, they stay out late, while the mother spends her night worrying. In the past, we just ate and worked and slept; there was no worry. But, don't write this down. God bless the Amir, he has done a lot.

The impression I took from Om Ali's concluding remark was that she had suddenly become conscious of my role as a researcher after speaking her feelings out. Having had a vague idea about social work through her daughter who was a student at the department of Sociology and Social Work in Kuwait University, she was aware that what she said may be recorded or used against her. This explained her final request not to record what she had said, as well as her blessings to the Amir. Before I left, I asked Om Ali for another appointment. Her reply was that she had said all what she knew, and that anything else would be 'kharabit'. Om Aly was obviously wondering how her life would be of use to me, as Methal later told me. I assured her that the following time I would help her by asking her a few questions. I also assured her that all what she said was not nonsense in any way, and that it was full of valuable and useful material about life in the past.⁷

November 29, 1975:

In my second visit, I found Om Ali seated on the sofa in the living room of the ground floor. She had her glasses on and was busy sorting out big quantities of rice in a huge tray. She complained to me that her Indian servant has become old and inactive to an extent that she leaves the rooms uncleaned.

- "So how are you," said Om Ali, "How are you doing in this cold weather ('Ishlonesh waya'l bard')?"

I replied that I was fine and asked about the Hajji, about Saad and his wife, and about Nasima (the only people I knew in her family). Then, I asked Om Ali to tell me more about her life in the past. I had to explain to her that her life story was relevant to me since it gave me a glimpse into life in Old Kuwait, and since it permitted me to be acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Kuwaiti people in general. Om Ali was satisfied with my explanation, and started recapitulating some of her reminiscences of Old Kuwait.

- "Oh, the past, the past," she said, "Did I tell you about our washing, or not? Well, in the past, we used to wash our clothes in the sea without any soap. We used to rub them with the white sand to clean away the dirt. Then, we used to beat them hard with a wooden stick. After that, we used to take them home to be rinsed in the well-water. In the past we worked a lot and worked hard, but we hardly worried about anything. Life was safe and simple. It is true that my responsibility was great, but I never bothered much. Everybody was like me."

I asked Om Ali about her responsibilities in the household; she said:

- "The children were all young; I had to take care of all of them. Hend, my step-daughter, stayed with us for four years during which she was of help to me in the household. But when she re-married, I was responsible for the cooking, the cleaning, the washing as well as the children. I used to cook in very huge pots everyday. We had no Indian servants like now, so sometimes I had to work until midnight. The wives of Daoud and Abdullah, my step-sons, also used to stay with us when they delivered. They are both Iraqis and had no relatives in Kuwait. Sometimes when I finished my work, I used to go out after lunch to visit my neighbours or my relatives.

Now, I only do the cooking, since I became sick about 10 years ago, I stopped doing any kind of heavy housework like washing or cleaning, and I hired the Indian for this job. I can never do any effort after the operation which I did 8 years ago. I had one kidney removed and stayed in the hospital for about 20 days. I had 15 stitches. Now, my responsibilities are much less because my girls help me in the house when they come back from school. My daily routine is as such: I wake up very early for the prayers of early dawn, then I sit with the Hajji after the children's departure to school or work, and we have a small 'tarweeqa' (break-fast), after which I go to see my aunt 'khalti'. Sometimes I go to buy her things from the supermarket. The driver drives me and the Hajji to the supermarket. I prefer it if the Hajji comes with me because I don't know the streets well, and I don't like to go alone with the driver to far-

off places. The Hajji also would not accept to let me alone except if I am going to visit my aunt or my brother whose houses are at a walking distance. But still, we always go by car. Nowadays we hardly walk on our feet."

- "That's remarkably different from the past, when you used to walk miles to the sea," I commented.

- "Yes, it's funny that we never walk these days even if we're going to a near-by place. We cannot walk like before, there are lots of cars and traffic, and besides, it is different then when we were in our old houses. Back in 'al dirah' (old Kuwait), houses were next to each other and all our relatives lived close-by. Now, people have become scattered in the new districts."

- "Now, shall we follow up on your daily routine," I said, when Om Ali's talk came to a pause.

- "When I return from outside, I prepare lunch. This is usually around 11.00 or 12.00 noon. The children don't come back from work until 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. We wait for them because we all like to have lunch together. In most cases we eat fish and rice. Fish is our favorite meal. After lunch we drink tea, and then I either have a nap, or I go to visit my cousins. Most of my visits are to my relatives and members of my family. I rarely go visiting friends except when I have to congratulate someone for a specific occasion, or to offer condolences. That is, I don't like to join in the gatherings which women make. When I first moved to this house, Om Jassem, my neighbour wanted me to join her in attending 'chay'al doha' (morning tea). I did join her for some time, but I did not like it and eventually stopped going altogether.

- "Why didn't you like it?" I asked.

- "I didn't like such gatherings because women do nothing but talk and gossip about each other, while they leave their homes and their children unattended to. Women are always jealous from each other. They try to imitate each other and can break many homes by their gossip. As they sit together drinking tea and eating 'sambusak' (pastries) they complain to each other and relate their personal problems, which become known to everybody as soon as they leave. I don't like such things. I believe that a woman who stays at her own home retains her honor and prestige (elli tog^Cod fi baytaha tog^Cod fi ^Cezaha). If she has to go visiting, she doesn't have to complain to others or to make it a 'gaa^Cda' (long sit-in)."

- "Personally, I feel that what troubles me should be placed between me and my clothes ('baini wa bain hedoumi') and deep inside my heart. God alone is capable of relieving me of this trouble, not other people. Why

should I give people a chance to mock me or to make me their 'talk'. Those women are free and they use their leisure time in gossiping about others."

- "What are the characteristics of 'al mara'l tekana' (the good woman)." I asked Om Ali. She replied:

- "'Al Mara'l tekana' should not speak ill of anyone. She should be kind and broad-minded. Besides, she should be fully responsible of everything in her house-hold. With her children, she should not be very strict; however, she should not give them extra freedom. It is the woman who can make her house proper because a house without a woman is no house. Nowadays there are women who work. Some of those women are careless and unable to cope with the demands of home and work. An ideal woman should be able to fulfill her obligations at home and at work equally well. Women now are different than before. They are asking for more rights and getting educated, while in the past they never bothered about anything as long as they ate well and slept well.

I wish I were educated, because education helps a woman especially in bringing up her children. If I knew how to read and write I would have helped my children in their studies. But despite the fact that I am uneducated, yet I think I am 'om sehheyya' (literally: a healthy mother, meaning a good mother). I am not praising myself, or being proud, but I just want to tell you that I am 'fahma, fahma' (I understand well). I cook by myself and I attend to my children's desires. We never accept to eat what the Indian cooks. If one of my children has something that worries his heart, I can tell immediately. I would talk to him or her quietly and, gradually, I would be able to know what is wrong. I never like to be unfair or unjust in the way I treat them. It is true that I am not one of those clever women who can sew or make embroideries, but I am the domestic, hard-worker type of women ('Ana shaghoulwa wa malet bait')."

Asked if she would have worked had she been educated, Om Ali said:

- "No, I would have only made use of my education at home. To be a mother, to stay at home and to keep your children proper is better than all work. But, I tell you it's education which makes the difference and which makes people understand more. Look at my step-son Abdullah. He has lately taken up a new wife though he had loved his wife very much. Had he been educated, like my son Aly, he wouldn't have changed his wife for a fortune. A man who is educated understands and knows that he should respect his wife. A man and a woman who are not educated cannot think properly. Now, my youngest son Saleh is in the Police Training College. They ask him to walk and run for very long distances to an extent that he comes home with swollen feet. But he knows his responsibility. He says

'Now both boys and girls look to their future and try to find work, they don't ask their parents for money'."

- "Do you accept the idea that your daughters would work?", I asked.

- "Yes," said Om Ali, "In fact my two daughters Aleya and Farida are employed. Aleya is a university graduate, why shouldn't she work and bring in more income to her family. Besides, Aleya's husband accepts the idea of work. As for Farida, she did not continue her university studies. She only had her Thanaweya Amma and then stayed home. But then her step-brother Saad said that he will find her a job as a secretary in a girl's school. So she started working, and now she is attending a secretarial course in a private school."

- "Did the Hajji accept to let Farida unmarried work?" I inquired:

- "Om Ali said: "He did not like the idea of work, but Aleya married had already been working, and Saad convinced the Hajji. The Hajji had to accept because life is changing now."

I asked Om Ali to tell me about the re-marriage of her step-son Abdullah. She related:

- "My step-son Abdullah worked as investigator in the Court of Personal Affairs, in the Ministry of Justice. A few years ago, he was transferred to a place near the Saudi-Arabian borders. His wife Zahra, a nice-looking woman, did not join him; she stayed in her house with her four children. One day all the family noticed that Abdullah had been away for a very long time. Zahra told his friends that he was away because he had a lot of work, but during this time, she was herself very worried. Later on, we discovered that he had been in love with a Saudi woman married to a Palestinian. She had 6 children but had problems with her husband for which she had gone to court. The investigator happened to have been Abdullah, so they fell in love. When her husband learned of this affair, he realized that she was not a good woman and divorced her. This woman who had a 'rayal' (husband) and six children, messed up the life of many people including her own children whom she threw to her husband. She has also harmed the children of Abdullah. She told Abdullah that she loved him and wanted him and coaxed him to go with her to Riyadh to marry her. Then, they moved to Kuwait and he leased an apartment for her. When his father, the Hajji, asked him about the reason for his long 7-months absence, he broke to him the news of his marriage.

During his absence, Abdullah only sent money to his children, but he never asked about their health. When Zahra knew, she got mad.

She spent days and nights crying. She kept saying that she had always been good to him and had never done him any harm. She was both surprised and disappointed. One day, after this news was disclosed, Abdullah went to Zahra and said that he could not keep paying the rent of the apartment in Nogra, (district in Kuwait) and that the new wife will come to live with Zahra. Zahra screamed and shouted at him. She even insulted him. So, he left the house.

Zahra felt very unhappy for being left alone in an area in which there were lots of Bedouins. She lived far-off at the outskirts of the city and was always frightened at night. One day, her father was taken to the hospital, so she took her children to her mother and went to the hospital where she stayed with her father for a few days.

Upon her return, she was shocked to find that Abdullah had taken the chance of her absence to bring the new wife to live in Zahra's place. Zahra refused to live in that house. She said 'I would never live with a 'sharisha' (co-wife)'. We took the children over, in this house, while Zahra went to her parents and asked Abdullah to divorce the new wife, but Abdullah did not accept. He went to court and said that he had arranged a proper house (bait shar^Ci) for Zahra. But when Zahra discovered that she was going to live in the same house at Feheihil with her co-wife, she refused to go. She kept her children from going to school for fear that their father would kidnap them. But finally, she gave it all up, and asked for a divorce. Because it was she who asked for it, she had to free him from all his obligations like 'Al Nafaqa' (alimony) and in fact Abdullah had insisted not to divorce her, so that she will be the one who would ask for divorce. He had no money and thought that if she asked for the divorce after being fed up, she would according to the 'shari^Ca' (law) have to give up her right in everything even the children's custody. The children now live with their step-mother. Poor children, they will never be happy, and their step-mother will for sure 'te^C-athei^Chum' (harm them).

Zahra had an offer for marriage from one of her cousins, but she refused to get married, and went back to continue her high school studies. It was all Abdullah's fault, and all through this trouble we have been on Zahra's side. Now Hend and Saad don't even talk to Abdullah because of what he had done to poor Zahra. It is wrong that a man who has children re-marries. He had a good-looking wife whom he loved, and four young children. He needed nothing more. Why should he spoil his children's future?

Now, Zahra sees her children every week. But had I been in her place, I would have sacrificed for my children's sake and would have accepted to live with my partner. It is true that Abdullah was mistaken in the first place, but I suppose she should have sacrificed. Now, we wish to talk to Abdullah, but we cannot because our hearts ache from what had happened.

I was told by one of my relatives that Zahra had suspected that Abdullah had got married when he stayed away for a long time. Consequently, she went to a woman who cast a spell ('amal') which was supposed to bring Abdullah back. However, the spell turned against Zahra and made Abdullah hate her and hate her children for no obvious reasons."

- "In this case," I said, "we can say that a spell can be effective whether positively or negatively, isn't that so?"

- "Well, yes. It was effective, but it seems it was not well done, so this is why it turned against her. It made Abdullah hate his wife whom he had loved."

- "What do you think of polygyny, and how would you account for it?" I asked.

- "I think that a man has the right to re-marry only if his wife does not bear children, or if she is sick. Otherwise, there is no reason for a man to mess his life by such a deed. This is what the Quran says. I believe in the saying which says: 'Al rayal lama tet-ghayar makhadetu, tet-ghayar mawadetu' (when a man changes his pillow, his affection towards his children and his wife changes). Now it has become very prevalent to find an old rich man marrying a new young wife when his first wife was faultless. In the past, very few men did that because they could not afford it. Only the very rich ones did, about 30 or 40 men only. But now money has increased in everybody's hands. Oil has enriched everybody. So men are spending their money on women. But, I guess all what results from polygamy is trouble."

We were interrupted by the Hajji, (Om Ali's husband), an old man in his early seventies who came in from outside. Wearing a clean white 'dishdashah', a 'ghotra' (head cover) and 'agal' (head cord) with a woolen brown 'Cabat' (cloak) on his shoulders, he walked slowly in my direction. I got up thinking that he was going to shake hands with me. However, he just nodded and made the customary 'salam' (greeting) by his hand saying: 'Al Salam-u-Calaikum'."

Om Ali invited the Hajji to join us in talking about the past, so he sat down on the floor, crossed his legs and put his narghile ('ghalioun' or gedu') before him. As the light smoke rose up in circles from the Hajji's 'ghalioun', I noticed him looking at me sharply. He then fired at me a series of questions about my husband's work, his salary and the rent we pay for our apartment. He said he thought my husband was a teacher and was surprised and delighted to learn that my husband works at the same place with his son Saad and that they are friends.

For a few moments he seemed absorbed in a thought which seemed to have crossed his mind. Then he said: "If you'd be interested in men's memories and not only women's, I would tell you a lot about the past at the time of the 'ghaus'. I welcomed the old Hajji to join in and to tell me his memories of old Kuwait. He seemed delighted as he spoke on and on. But I had to stop him every one or two sentences to make sure I understood what he said. Being an old man, his language differed from that of his daughter and his wife. In many instances his wife explained to me what he said in her own, much clearer, language.

- "When I was very young," he said, "I remember going to the sea with my father in 'rehlat al ghaus' (pearl-diving trips). Our trips lasted for about four months in the killing summer heat. My father was a diver, while I was a hauler. I helped to let the divers go down to the sea, and to pull them up by ropes. The crew on the diving boat consisted of around 70 to 80 persons, the head of which was the 'naukhuda' (the captain). In the very early morning we drank coffee with some 'tamer' (dates). We remained until the evening without any food.* To make it possible for divers to stay under water for long times, they were supposed to have small rations of food. When we could anchor at the shores of Bahrain, it was possible for us to buy meat from numerous shepherds who gathered up as soon as a boat was within sight. From such places we replenished ourselves with fire wood, meat or water. Then we waited for some wind in order to sail again to sea. When the diving season ended all boats went back to Kuwait. Women and children gathered up to meet their menfolk who returned after a long absence. I worked with my father only for a short time. It was a tiring job, but we enjoyed it. Later on, I worked with my cousin who later became my father-in-law; we worked in making 'dlal' or 'marash' (pots for rose water)."

Feeling quite absorbed in his reminiscences, the Hajji recited to me a song which they sang in the olden days about the 'ghalioun'. Nasima joined our gathering and showed me the photograph of her brother's bride (a Kuwaiti). I asked Om Ali about her son's marriage, she replied:

- "My son Ali stayed for two years in the States, where he was studying for a B.Sc. in engineering; he specialized in petroleum. Upon his return, he brought the photograph of an American girl whom he wanted to marry. I was not pleased at all, but I did not talk at the beginning. The Hajji told him that it would be better for him to marry a Kuwaiti girl: 'my son', said the Hajji, 'bint al Kuwait aslah lak' (the daughter of Kuwait i.e. the Kuwaiti), is better for you, at least she is of your own religion and adheres to your own customs and traditions'.

* It was customary among divers that no food should be eaten except very little. Their food was confined to some rice and fish in the evening.

"Aly did not reply," continued Om Ali. "He left to the States and kept the photograph with him. Two years later he came for good. At that time I decided to talk to him about marriage and pretended to have forgotten altogether the story of the American girl. I told Aly that his sisters had found him a lovely bride who is a student in university. But, Ali said that he was not ready for marriage. However, when his sisters showed him her picture, he seemed to like it. He had known the girl since many years because she was his sister's friend, but he had not seen her for a very long time. The girl's father is a very prominent merchant who is a friend of Saad my step-son.

When Nasima and Aleya talked to Ali, he said: 'sarat, ma y-Khalef' (let it take place, it's O.K.). Saad called the girl's father to tell him that Ali wanted to propose to Mariam. The girl's father said that he will ask her. Two days later, we called, they said you can come over. So Saad, the Hajji and Ali went over to visit them. Mariam's father informed them that she had accepted, and asked the Hajji to let the women go. But Saad's wife, an Egyptian, and a wonderful woman said to her husband: 'No, Mariam has to see Ali first, before making any other steps'. So Saad's wife went with Ali and Aleya to Mariam's house. Mariam was the one who offered them the juice. She was 'sufur' because she's a university student.

The next day, Saad called them again and was told that Mariam had accepted Ali as a husband. Saad had to tell her that Ali was the type of man who had always had his freedom and that he was the type who liked to go out a lot. Mariam's reply was that 'al mara te^c adel al rayal' (a woman can always change i.e. improve a man). We decided about the bride-price which was a sum of 1000 K.D.

'Al melshe' (ceremony for marriage contract) was performed in the house of Mariam's father. It was done the modern way. Men and women were seated in two big adjacent halls. The bridal couple were seated together on a sofa. They put on the wedding rings and Ali gave Mariam a beautiful diamond necklace as a wedding present. There was a big wedding cake around which photographs were taken. Then, all the youngsters joined the bridal couple to the Hilton where they all stayed until early dawn.

For two months Ali and Mariam went out together. He used to pick her up from university (for she had become employed as an assistant and was working for an M.A.), and they used to come here for lunch and then they used to go out alone. They were supposed to get married after one year, but they got accustomed to each other and said that they wanted to get married. So on the twenty-fifth of Ramadan this year, they got married and left to London for a honeymoon. Their 'jalwa' ceremony, supposed to be held prior to consummation of the marriage, was postponed

until their return. When they came back a real 'jalwa' was done at Saad's house. She wore a modern white dress but there was a green piece of silk held over her head. There were women who sang 'tawashih' for the prophet. They spent the night at Saad's house and then moved to their house in Ahmadi for he worked as an engineer in Kuwait Oil Company. They had chosen the furniture.

"Life has become so different nowadays," interrupted the Hajji, making a comment which Om Ali did not seem to appreciate: "When I married Amina, she was very young, while I was an old widower. I had proposed to many girls, but they all asked for a bride-price of 2000 Rs. which I could not afford. So I proposed to Amina who was my cousin, and they accepted a bride-price of a 100 Rs only. You see I married her for a good bride-price, a 100 Rs. only. I have married two, and both were 'banat' (girls, i.e. virgins)."

Om Ali seemed upset by the fact that her husband was alluding to the fact that her bride-price was relatively low. She retorted:

- "You should thank your God. You took me as a girl (i.e. virgin). It was only your good luck. Now if you want to talk, you don't have to talk nonsense." The Hajji smiled cunningly and seemed pleased to have annoyed his wife. Then, he started bubbling in his 'ghalioun' once more.

- "It is obvious," I said to Om Ali, "that the choice of marriage for a girl or a boy is quite different now than in the past."

- "God forgive the people of the past. They used to get their girls married to any men be they good or bad. It made no difference to them. Marriage was a simple thing. A man used to marry his cousin who lived with him in the same house. If the man and his bride were not living in the same house they were never allowed to see each other. A man could find himself married to a negro woman or a one-eyed woman, and so could the girl find herself married to a horrible man. But it was the parents' problem not theirs. It was their 'nasib' (fate). A girl's father could just throw her in fire (i.e. in an unsuccessful marriage), but nobody could object. If the father had already given word to someone, nobody could make him change it. Even his wife could not object, because for people in the past, a man's respect to his word, was his honour. Sometimes the mother used to go to find a bride for her son. She would tell her husband and would convince him. Then she would take her mother-in-law or sister-in-law and her married daughters (un-married girls were not allowed to join elders company), and would propose to the girl's women folk.

May God forgive them! Now marriage is not 'kharabit' like before. Girls and boys have a say in their marriage. They choose

their partners on a good basis, they ask about each other, see each other and allow themselves time to think. When they find that they can love each other, they marry. This is how it was with Ali and his wife. They saw each other and had the chance to think and decide. They were also allowed to get accustomed to each other before the marriage was consummated. Nowadays, a boy or a girl are not doomed to marry their 'bint am' or 'ibn am' like before. They can marry outside the family circle. Both Ali and Aleya are married to outsiders. It is true that they are Kuwaitis and Shi'ahs like us, but they are not our relatives."

I interrupted Om Ali to ask her whether she would accept to get any of her children boy or girl married to a 'Sunni'. Her reply was as such:

- "A 'Shi'ah' girl cannot marry a Sunni. She would only marry a 'Shi'ah' man like herself. I would not accept no matter what she does. A girl has no say in this case. Even if she's spoiled and if we fulfill all her desires, we would stand against this marriage. Yet if he is not from her folk, but is a Kuwaiti and a 'Shi'ah' like us, it would definitely be fine. My daughter Aleya is married to a 'khawsh rayal' (a real good man). He comes from Persian origin, but his parents had become Kuwaitis since a long time. As for us, we are real old Kuwaitis, but our far-off origin is from Bahrain. My son, on the other hand, can marry a Sunni; although I would not encourage it, yet I may allow it to happen because a woman always follows her husband. He can make her turn 'Shi'ah', and she can learn how to pray like him. My step-son Saad is married to an Egyptian. Of course she is a 'Sunni'; but we did not object to the marriage. Anyway, 'kullaha Omet Mohammed' (we are all the followers of Prophet Mohammed)."

Asked about Aleya's marriage, Om Ali said:

- "It was the sister of Hamad (now Aleya's husband), who had seen Aleya at the house of Wafeya, the wife of my step-son Saad. Hamad's sister was Wafeya's colleague. Hamad's sister arranged a meeting in which Aleya saw Hamad at Wafeya's house. When we asked Aleya what she thought of Hamad she said: 'Give me time to think'. One week later, she said that she accepted. Wafeya gave them a better chance to see each other by taking them out together in her car. Of course Aleya was 'sufur' (unveiled, uncloaked). Aleya had graduated from university and was working as a librarian in Kuwait University Library. She used to drive a car too. They liked each other and we made them a big 'jalwa'."

Om Ali excused herself and went to the kitchen to bring the tea pots so as to prepare some tea. She returned, put the coffee pot on 'al dowwa' and went out again to bring the glasses and the box of

'za'faran' (saffron used to flavour tea). Meanwhile, I busied myself by talking to the Hajji who had just finished reading the newspaper. I asked the Hajji about his opinion of working women. His reply was as follows:

- "I don't accept it, and I don't like it."

Nasima who had just come down from the second floor holding a notebook, retorted:

- "But father, why then have you sent us to schools and why do your daughters work?"

The Hajji answered his enthusiastic daughter calmly:

- "Time forces us to do many things which we do not like. It is caused by the change that has taken place in all spheres of life. But it is not right, everybody is doing it these days: all fathers are accepting to let their daughters learn and work. So I had to accept in order to be like others, and in order not to be blamed one day for having deprived you from work or education. Do you know that it is 'haram' (taboo) for women to learn how to write. Women should only learn how to read the Quran. They should follow the example of the wives of the Prophet and the wives of the 'sahaba' (followers of the Prophet) who only learned the Quran."

The Hajji asked me if I was a student in Kuwait University. When I told him that I am a graduate student at the American University in Cairo, he said:

- "The Americans are good, and so are the English." Recalling an incident in which he had contact with the British, he said: 'In the past, I worked as a merchant, I sold coffee pots made of brass or copper. English men were very generous. They used to ask me about the price of a certain item, then they used to pay me double the price. I also remember that in the feast, a British man in the British Consulate used to stand on the staircase and throw small coins to the young children who gathered up around him. Children used to sit on the floor to collect coins, and some of them used to collect good sums.

The British do such things so as to make the people like them. They are civilized people who have introduced new things in our country. They have taught the Kuwaitis many good habits especially in matters of sanitation and in the treatment of illness by medical ways rather than by folk-medicines.

After this talk with the Hajji, I drank a glass of tea offered to me by Om Ali and took my leave, thanking them for their remarkable co-operation.

December 10, 1975

In another visit to Om Ali, I was ushered in to the hall of the ground floor which was used as a living room. I noticed that a big wooden door, which had always been closed was opened wide revealing a dining room and a huge unfurnished marble hall. Om Ali closed the door as she came in, and explained that they had to remove the furniture from the hall because people were going to be sent by Ali to mend the walls which were spoiled with rain-water. Then she said that Ali whose salary is 300 Kuwaiti Dinars wanted to move in to the family house to save the 60 Dinars which are cut-off from his salary for housing, and to be with his parents in the same house:

- "Ali says that he wants to live with us, and that he does not like to live far away from us. He wants to renew this house altogether, although I think it is in perfect condition. Yet Ali says that he is going to install a central air-conditioning system, to close up the marble entrance and make it part of the huge reception hall and to paint the whole villa anew. This will cost him 20,000 Kuwaiti Dinars. He has applied for a loan from the government but they accepted to give him 8000 only. So he is now waiting, because he has applied for another loan of 8000 Dinars. The Hajji told him that this is way too much. We like the house as it is and we don't think it needs any repair. I will of course be happy if he lives here. But the Hajji has other children, and if Ali pays 20,000 then his brothers and sisters will loose their full right in inheriting the house. It will cause problems between them. Ali is 'zein' and his heart is also 'zein' (good). God has given him a wife who is also 'zein' (good). But I think he should better be independent because I don't need new responsibilities. Although we were told to remove the furniture in the hall, yet the matter is still being discussed." I was very happy when we moved to this house, because it is big and spacy. My daughters were also happy with the huge verandas. Besides, this house is 'mabruk' (fortunate brings good luck), and 'atabtu zeina' (has a luck bringing threshold), because the first year we bought it I went on a pilgrimage to Mecca with Saad who invited me to join him. After my return, my daughter Aleya got married. This house has really brought us good luck.

But unfortunately, after some time, an evil eye was cast upon us ('sar nafas mu zein - hasad). For quite some time we felt upset and depressed. We were also short of money, and the Hajji became sick. I realized that it was an evil eye which had caused our happiness to turn into depression and sickness. So we burned 'bukhur' (incense) for several days, right before sunset. [Incense constituted of 'harmal' + 'bokhour' and salt.] Our "dig" (depressed state) soon dissipated, and we became happy again."

When I commented that the villa was a very nice one, Om Ali told me that it had cost them 35,000 Dinars since they bought it all furnished. Then she took me upstairs to show me around. I noticed that it was all well-furnished with more or less modern style furniture. The bedrooms were all divided into three small suites. In each suite there were two bedrooms and a bathroom separated from the rest of the rooms by a door and a small corridor. One of the suites was supposed to be given to Ali after being enlarged by taking part of the terrace.

- "We are thinking of making a small kitchen in Ali's suite so as to make him and his wife feel independent."

- "Since when have you moved into this house? I asked Om Ali, and where did you live before?"

Our old house was in 'Sharg' (district of Old Kuwait). When the government estimated the price of our courtyards and gave us money, we moved out and took mortgaged government houses which cost 2000 Dinars each, as a down-payment. The rest of the money was paid in long-term installments. We lived in one of those houses, while Daoud, the Hajji's son, lived in the other. We stayed there for ten years, after which Saad suggested that we'd sell both houses and buy a new villa. The two other houses were the old Arab-style type. We wished to live in a modern type villa. So, four years ago, we sold both for 14,500 Dinars. Daoud took a separate mortgaged house and so did Abdullah. We added some money to this sum, while Saad added some more and we bought this villa for 35,000 Dinars. Saad, of course, owns a lovely villa. He is a successful businessman and has a lot of money.

When we first moved from 'Sharg' to the government houses, I was not happy. I did not like the house and felt bad for leaving our neighbours. But gradually, I got accustomed to the new house.

December 25, 1975

On the second day of 'Id Al Adha' (Qurban Bairam), I paid a short visit to Om Ali. There were two men and four women all in the national costumes be they the dishdashas or the 'cebei' (pl. of 'cabat'). All were seated on the sofa at the outer hall. Om Ali's daughters, Farida, and Aleya were seated on two cushions on the floor while Nasima and Khaula were helping Om Ali in the kitchen. Aleya's daughter Wafeya, named after the Egyptian wife of Saad Om Ali's step-son - was seated on a colourful baby relax. I greeted them all and we exchanged the common phrase 'Id mubarak' (I wish you a happy 'Id'). I sat down next to Aleya.

Nasima introduced me to Om Khalaf, Om Ali's maternal cousin who was supposed to be my third case. Om Khalaf expressed her willingness to receive me in her house so as to tell me about the past.

After a little while, Om Ali came out to greet me with a small 'mubkhar' (incense burner) in her hand. She kissed me on the cheeks, admired Ahmed and excused herself since she was very busy with the cooking and was expecting a big number of her relatives for lunch. Each of Om Ali's daughters carried Ahmed for a little while. I was offered tea and nuts as I sat down talking with Aleya. After a little while, I excused myself, wished them a happy feast, and left so as to have time for more visits.

January 17, 1876

It was not until two months later that I managed to see Om Ali again. In the first place, this was because I was busy with my regular visits to Om Khalaf, and in the second place it was because Om Ali was busy with the ritual mournings for the death of Al Hussein in Kerbalaa (around 12 centuries ago). This occasion called 'Ashura' is particularly remembered by the 'Shi'ahs' of Iraq, Persia, Iran, Kuwait and Bahrain. They renew the mourning for the Hussein, wear black, bring a 'mulla' (sheikh) who reads the Quran and preaches to the people about the death of their martyrs in special martams (religious houses). Big banquets are made, and huge amounts of rice and meat are served. Om Ali and her family carry on their rituals at the house of Om Ali's maternal aunt who was a 'mutawa'a', because in that house there is a big 'Husseineya' (martam, religious gathering place). A few days after the 10th of Muharram, (January 11) I managed to meet Om Ali.

I arrived at Om Ali's place and was admitted in by the Indian servant who informed me that 'mama' (the way Indian servants refer to their mistresses), was out. Half an hour later, Om Ali arrived and apologized for not being on time, since her aunt her 'khala' was very sick and unable to move from bed. Noticing that she had a 'bushiyeh' (light black face cover) on, under the 'abat', I asked her to tell me about her and her daughter's adherence to the use of the 'abat':

- "Of course I always put on the 'abat'. I never go out wearing clothes like the ones you see me wearing at home (coloured dresses). I always change into a black 'nafnouf' (dress) or a thawb (gown, women's dress, black). I always put on over them the 'bushiyeh' and the 'abat'. I wear it by my own will so I will never take it off."

- "What do you think of elderly women who have got rid of the 'abat'?" I asked.

- "I always criticize elderly women who after ages of adherence to the 'Cabat', suddenly go out 'sufur'. It is not right and is against both traditions and religion.

- "What about your daughters?"

- "My daughters have nearly stopped wearing the 'Cabat' since ten years. They only wear it when they are going to the market or the supermarket or to my relatives. But they never wear it to school or university or work. I lost a lot of money on 'Cebei' but they always came back without them. I think they deliberately forget them at school or in the school bus. If any of my daughters is going out with me to 'khalti', or to my brother, they have to wear it or stay back home. They know that well-enough. Nasima hates the 'Cabat' and often quarrelled with me so as not to wear it to university. As for Khaula, she is like me. She is the only one who wears it all the time. Nasima always took it off as soon as she went out and hid it in her handbag. I don't like her attitude. The Hajji does not like it either, but we are doomed to accept it because we know that this is one of the requirements of this age, and that if the girls are not convinced, they can always take it off as soon as they go out of the house. Now girls never listen to elderly people. They are never content with old people's talk."

- "On the whole," I said, "would you say that life is better now than in the past, or vice-versa?"

- "One is puzzled," she said. "It is difficult to decide which is better, because there are advantages and disadvantages to each. Now a mother's responsibility is bigger and she's always worried about who passed and who failed. Life was difficult in the past, but people were easy-doing and kind. Our neighbours were as intimate to us as our own families. They would pop up any time and would join us for lunch if it were lunch time. But now, we cannot visit our neighbours without calling them by the telephone. If they pop up at lunch time, we run quickly to clean up and get dressed.

Another problem is that in the past it was safe to send your children on errands. One could send the children to play in front of the house; now, we cannot even send the servant out in the street. In the past, we, the women, could go walking for very long distances, nobody could dare talk to us or annoy us as long as we were all covered up with the 'Cabat'. Now we cannot go out except by car."

Om Ali sighed and stopped talking. I was still writing when she said:

- "You know I am very worried about 'khalti', I feel that something is going to happen to her, because she cannot even tell who we are now. I

really pity her when I remember how dynamic and strong she was in the past when she worked as a 'mutawa^Ca'."

- "I was told by Om Khalaf," I said, "that your aunt had a strong personality in her middle-aged years and that she governed the house. Is that true, and is it true that an old woman is always respected even by men folk?"

"Al mara'l^Cauda, al shebira' (a big woman) like the mother-in-law or the grandmother were the first whose opinion had to be taken in the case of the marriage of any young member of their family. The wife on the other hand, could not interfere much as long as her mother-in-law was alive. A married man was always obliged to take his mother's opinion in any issue. 'Al mara'l shebira' should be respected. We all used to fear 'khalti and 'yedeti' (my aunt and my grandmother); their words were like men's words. The son's wife was only given orders by her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law was feared in the past by all women in the house whether her daughters or her daughters-in-law, and was respected greatly by her sons. Nowadays young wives govern their husbands and take them away from their families."

* * * * *

January 19, 1976

Two days later I paid another quick visit to Om Ali. The Hajji walked out from the bedroom to greet me. I shook hands with him; I noticed that after shaking hands to me, he went to the bathroom and came out with his elbows dripping with water. I realized immediately that I had spoiled the Hajji's ablutions which he had to redo. Certain acts are supposed to spoil a person's ablutions, among which, some people believe, is shaking hands to a member of the opposite sex.

Om Ali came in and sat down beside me. She seemed depressed and unhappy. When I asked her if she was tired, she said that she was feeling very very bad and depressed for many reasons which she cited as follows:

"Yesterday, a relative of ours passed out. He was only forty and had five children. I feel very sad for him. Yesterday was in fact an unlucky day because Saleh my youngest son made an accident with his brother Ali's new, 1976, Buick car. Saleh had borrowed Ali's car for a day or two. Last night, he found himself faced with a pick-up car which had suddenly appeared at the cross roads. Instead of depressing the

brakes, he depressed the accelerator. A bad accident resulted and the car was completely damaged. This was something which I always feared. Saleh has not slept at all last night. We told him that he should not bother and that he should thank God that he did not kill or injure anybody. A car is always replaceable.

Today in the morning, I quarrelled with Khaula who is very lazy in school. In fact she does not understand well and had recently dropped out of school to join an institute for the retarded where she is learning hair-dressing. But, everyday she complains and says that it is difficult. Today, she did not want to go to the Institute. She is always very slow and unintelligent. This girl is always making me nervous and breaking my heart.

There are troubles everywhere. I suffer from hyper-tension because all these troubles are falling on my head alone. I have become sick of problems, but what can we do? this is life."

For about half an hour I talked to Om Ali and tried to relieve her. I told her that all her troubles will soon dissipate and that she should take care of her health. We then talked in more general issues like holidays in Cairo, the circumstances in Beirut. Wishing her good luck, I thanked her for her great cooperation, and promised to send her letters from Cairo; we exchanged addresses, I kissed her goodbye and left.

... the year 1921, ...

... her husband ...

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OM KHALAF

... her husband ...

... her husband ...

... her husband ...

... her husband ...

PROFILE:

Om Khalaf (Sheikha), was born around the year 1921. She is a 'Shi^cah' Muslim who happens to be the maternal cousin (mother's brother's daughter) of Om Ali.

Om Khalaf lived with her parents, her paternal grandmother, her paternal aunt, and her nine sisters and brothers in the big family-house. Her aunt was the 'mutawa^ca' who gave Quran lessons to young girls in the area. As soon as she became 11 years old, Om Khalaf assumed her role as a young daughter and took over all the responsibility of the household: cooking, washing, baking, etc. When her brothers got married, each of their wives had a share in the housework, while the older women only governed the household, but Om Khalaf did never attend any of her aunt's Quran classes because she was always busy with housework.

Om Khalaf's father owned a shop for making coffee pots. When he got blind, his sons asked him to stay home and started giving him money every month.

At 25, Om Khalaf got married to her father's paternal cousin who was married and had a married son nearly as old as she was. Hajji Masoud was 50 years old. At her husband's house, Om Khalaf passed through lots of problems which emerged from her relationship with her 'sharisha', who was as old as her mother, and who always exploited her and gave her orders.

Throughout most of her married life, Om Khalaf was burdened by her husband's grand-children, and by the onerous tasks of washing, cooking, and doing the housework alone. Her life history accentuates the theme of co-wives rivalry, the ambiguous role of the 'sharisha', and the role of the older woman al mara'l^cauda in governing the household and in influencing the behavior of others.

Om Khalaf had four children: Aisha (22), Nuriyeh (26), Khalaf (24), Mohsen (22). Her husband owned a shop for ironing and mending men's cloaks.

In 1965 the family moved to the new villa in al Khaldeyeh. One year later, the Hajji got ill and died. Nuriyeh, joined university; when she graduated, she worked at the Planning Board, until she got married and left with her husband to the United States on scholarship. Before her departure, Nuriyeh earned 170 K.D. from which she covered some household expenses. Hussein and Mutlag, the step-sons of Om Khalaf, also helped their step-brothers Khalaf and Mohsen by paying for food and clothes. At present, Khalaf is a government employee whose salary is around 400 K.D. His brother Mohsen, is a student at the Teachers' Institute.

OM KHALAF

On the second day of the feast 'Id al Adha' (Dec. 13), I paid a visit to Nasima, my Kuwaiti friend. The drawing room was rather crowded with people who had also come to wish Nasima and her family a happy feast.

Among the visitors was Om Khalaf, a family relation to Nasima. Om Khalaf who was accompanied by her son Khalaf, her daughter-in-law, and her grandson Saleh, appeared to be a kind-hearted, sociable woman. She was delighted when my son Ahmed (8 months), whom I had taken with me, smiled at her. She immediately took him from me and put him on one knee; her grandson, being on the other knee. Apparently, she was enjoying the way in which the two babies reacted to each other's presence.

When Nasima came down from the second floor, she introduced me to Om Khalaf and said: - "Om Khalaf, this is the lady who will come to see you." Then, turning to me she said: - "Hala, Methal and I have talked to Om Khalaf about you; she's willing to receive you to tell you about her life any time you want." I was delighted to know that Methal, who had always been trying to help me had succeeded in providing me with another woman from the family of her close friend Nasima.

Before leaving, I made it a point to have a general conversation with Om Khalaf and her daughter-in-law. I felt sort of acquainted with them and promised to let Methal or Nasima fix a date for me to visit them right after the feast. Unfortunately, I had a flu which kept me home for a week. It was also a holiday season, so I could not fix an appointment in December. At the beginning of January, I was told by Nasima that Om Khalaf's daughter was sick and that Om Khalaf had gone to stay with her till she would get better.

It was not until the 14th of January, that I could meet Om Khalaf, The appointment was fixed by Methal at Om Khalaf's house in 'Khaldeyeh' (district of modern Kuwait).

JANUARY 14

Om Khalaf, an elderly woman in her early fifties, lived with her son Khalaf and his wife on the first floor of a small villa overlooking a main street in 'Khaldeyeh'. Om Khalaf met me at the inner hall and took me to a small drawing room furnished with a modern style sofa and modern velvet armchairs. The drawing room was not furnished in Arab-style but was rather simple and uncrowded.

The room next door was a huge room furnished only with cushions around the walls and a big carpet in Arab-style. Om Saleh came to join us and brought baby Saleh with her. She asked about Ahmed and we had a brief chat, after which Om Khalaf smilingly inquired:

- "Aren't you going to ask me about my life? I want to tell you about the past."

I was happy that Om Khalaf's eagerness made her open the subject herself.

- "Of course," I said, "Please do tell me about your life as a child as far back as you can remember."

MEMORIES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD:

Om Khalaf started telling me her story:

- "In the past, we toiled and worked hard, but to us, life was considered good and even better than now because people themselves were kinder and better. I lived with my mother, my father, my sisters, my brothers, my paternal aunt, and my paternal grandmother all in one house. We were nine brothers and sisters. The first boy was Mohammed, then Zeinab, myself, Jaber, Abdel Aziz, Amina, Hussein, Mahmoud and finally Eissa. My aunt was a mutawa^c (Quran teacher). She had a room in the house especially for teaching the Holy Quran to young girls in our area 'fareij' (district). My grandmother and my aunt had the upper word in the house. Their job was just to give orders. They did nothing in the house. My mother was responsible for the cooking, the washing, as well as taking care of the goats which we had.

As soon as I grew up and became 11 years old, I joined my mother in the daily chores and learned how to bake. In the past we never bought ready-made bread. We used to bake at home. When I was around 11 years old, I took over all the responsibility of the house. Mother had lots of children of whom she had to take care. My eldest sister Zeinab used to attend the Quran classes given by my aunt. She never did anything in the house, for in the afternoons she was always busy studying and reciting the Quran.

As for my daily routine, I always woke up at dawn to start baking for breakfast. Then, I lit up a fire to make tea. Sometimes I had to bake some sweet pastries for our breakfast. After breakfast, I washed the dishes and the pans used for supper the night before. Next, I gathered my mother's, father's and brothers' clothes and took them to be washed in

the sea. I used the sand to clean them - then I beat them hard with a big stick to clean away the remaining sand. At home, I re-washed them or only rinsed them in hot boiled-water. This was the drinking water which we bought by tanks. Once every while, I used soap (if it was available). I used to go to the sea twice per day, once for my parents and brothers, and the second time for my aunt and grand-mother. Because they prayed and were very religious, my aunt and my grand-mother never liked to have their clothes washed with ours, they were always afraid from najassa (pollution). I always went to the sea on foot, and before going, I always passed by my neighbours to see if any of the girls wanted to join me. When Amna grew up she started helping me a little in cleaning the floor. Of course it was all dust, not like now. We used to sweep away the extra dust and then sprinkle water on it and pat it to make it sticky and flat.

As you know, Om Ali is 'bint-^Cameti' (my paternal cousin). Om Ali's mother died while delivering twins. She had Mekkeyeh, Amina (Om Ali), Zaki and Hussein. Then, while delivering for the fifth time she died. Hussein had also died shortly after birth and so had the twins. Zaki 'ibn ^Cameti' (my paternal aunt's son) was only three years old, so my mother took him over to bring him up with her children. The two girls were young and could not manage with the house, so I started going to them every day to get their work done. After finishing up breakfast, and lunch at home, I used to go to bake and cook for them. When Amina and Mekkeyeh returned from their lessons with the mutawa^Ca, their aunt, I went back home to wash the pans used for lunch.

One day, as I was working in their house alone, before the girls came back from school, their father came home. All of a sudden I found him telling me: 'Look here, Sheikha, since today I don't want to see your face again. I am getting married'. I was very upset for his ill-treatment. I had been working for him and his children for over one year. I could not do anything but leave. But at home, I told my father who was very upset: 'Is that his way of saying thank you for all your efforts?' said my father.

Amina and Mekkeyeh were very unhappy when they learned about their father's marriage. Their step-mother was a vicious, wicked woman. She gave them a hell of a time; their life in their father's house was unbearable. She used to lock them up in their room without giving them food. The poor girls were always left hungry. She used to force them to carry heavy loads and to pull their own water from the well. When she had children, life became worse for the girls. As for the father, he was always on his wife's side despite what she did to his children. When the step-mother complained to her husband from the burden of the two girls, he agreed to send them to live with his brother. Thus, Mekkeyeh and Amina went to live with their uncle. But their uncle's wife was equally unhappy

with this new burden, so she also gave the girls a very hard time. After two years, Mekkeyeh got married to her paternal cousin who was living with them at the same house. Her mother-in-law and her father-in-law were very cruel to her. She led a miserable life. She got two girls and then a boy. But shortly after delivery, she got mentally ill, and died. At that time, Amina became sick and moved to live with 'Cameti' (my paternal aunt) who is also her paternal aunt. My aunt loved Amina very much. It was my aunt who prepared everything for Amina's wedding.

When Amina came to our house, we were very happy because we used to sit and talk together. She used to tell us lots of stories about what 'marat abouha' (her step-mother) used to do to her. During this time, a suitor proposed to my sister Zeinab who was 18 at that time, I was only 15 then. This suitor was 'weld khalti' (my maternal cousin). His mother (my aunt) asked my mother for Zeinab's hand. Mother said that she had to ask 'Cameti al mutawa^ca' (my paternal aunt). "It is her aunt who should decide", said my mother. But 'Cameti' and my grandmother did not accept. They said: 'we don't want her to get married now.' So the whole topic was closed for the time being. After a few months, my mother's sister came again to say that Hussein loved Zeinab very much and that he was not going to marry anyone but Zeinab. Mother told father and they decided to accept. As for 'Cameti' (my aunt) and 'yadeti' (my grandmother), they were very upset. Father told them: 'You should not object because Zeinab has no paternal cousins. (She has no uncles) and she is already 18. If she does not marry her maternal cousin she will not get married. Isn't he better than a stranger? After all he wants her.'"

"When a man wants a woman and loves her, it is always better than when she wants him, because she can be sure that he will make her happy," continued Om Khalaf. "But my aunt and my grandmother still refused. So mother and father, realizing how crazy the boy was about her, decided to accept the marriage. Of course Hussein had not seen Zeinab as a grown up, but when they were young kids they always played together; they knew each other since early childhood. But since she reached puberty, he did not see her. My aunt and my grandmother were very angry about this marriage. They did not join in the wedding and did not do anything for Zeinab. At home, my parents could not have drum-beating at the wedding because they knew that the two old women were upset. For many months after the marriage, my aunt and my grandmother did not talk to my mother or my father. They sent messages, and orders to my mother through me.

My eldest brother Mohammed was on very bad terms with my father. My father used to work in making and selling 'dlal'. Father never went diving. He had his shop and was very eager to let his boys join him in the trade as soon as they grew up. But to his dismay, Mohamed never

obeyed him. Being the first son, he was spoiled and stubborn and always wanted things to go his own way. He never did the work which father gave him in the shop, so they always quarrelled together.

One day, Mohammed told father that he wanted to marry the daughter of one of my paternal grandfather's cousins. My father was not on good terms with this man, so when my brother insisted, father said: 'O.K., go and marry her, but live in her father's house not in mine'. My mother, my aunt and my grandmother did not object to this marriage, so Mohammed was encouraged. He married the girl and lived in her father's house. For a few years he hardly came to our house. But, as I told you, he was a spoiled boy. He had two boys and three girls in the first five years of marriage. All the girls died after birth. Mohammed suddenly left his wife for whom he had upset his father, and married another. From his second wife he had two girls. After 6 years he married the third wife. Now, he has 12 children from the third wife who is the youngest and loveliest. The second wife and the third wife live together in the same house. As for the first, she lives alone with her two sons. (He did not divorce her, of course, because she is the mother of his children).

My brother Jaber also disobeyed my father and did not help him much in his work. He used to quarrel with father, used to go out of the house for some days which he spent at Mohammed's place, and then he used to return. He got married after me to a very good woman. Hussein and Abdul Aziz got married at the same year in which Mohammed got married.

After my brothers' marriage, father had some trouble with his eyes and finally got blind. Of course, he could not work anymore. So my brothers started working and giving money to my father. Three of my married brothers lived with us in the same house with their wives and children.

Their marriage relieved me from the tiresome work which was all my responsibility before. Each of the wives of my brothers became responsible for the work one whole day. For example, if it was Soad's day, then she had to prepare breakfast, to wash the pots, to cook for all of us. She had to wash the pots and pans after lunch and to do practically all the daily chores. The following day she could either wash, or take care of her children, or tidy her room up. The third day she could go out visiting her friends or relatives.

We were at that time four women: myself, and my three sisters-in-law; the work was divided between us. I had to wash for my mother, my father, my unmarried sisters and brothers, my aunt, and my grandmother. We used to have breakfast all together. Men sat on one side of the room in front of a very big round tray on which the food was placed in copper plates, while women sat on the other side around another tray. Mother was

responsible to pour the tea and milk for all of us and to distribute the glasses to each of us. Our breakfast usually consisted of bread, eggs or cheese and 'darabil' (sweet pastries). After breakfast my brothers went to work. One of them had to take father to a nearby 'diwaneya' where he spent his time with some old friends until noon. At noon one of my brothers brought him home for lunch. Lunch usually consisted of fish or meat, and rice. Sometimes we had cooked food for dinner. But dinner usually consisted of eggs, cheese and bread. Each 2 or 3 ate from one plate.

Concerning the expenditure, as I told you, my brothers worked hard and brought the money to my father. Father would take one of my brothers and go to the market to buy rice, sugar, fat, and all the necessary groceries in big quantities. In the feasts my father used to distribute money to his daughters and his daughters-in-law. He would say: "Here are some Rupees for your perfumes, some for your clothes, and some for your 'ideyya' (present for the feast). He would call us all together and distribute the money to each of us. It used to be a happy occasion after which we would go together to the market to buy new clothes. We took money for our clothes twice a year, once in summer in Ramadan Bairam, and once in winter; the clothes of the Ramadan Bairam 'Id el Feter' were usually kept new to be worn in the 'Id al Adha'. Our house was in 'Sharq' (a district of Old Kuwait) way behind Dasman Palace. We used to go to the market, to the sea or to the hospital on foot.

We used to cook in very big pots for all the family. But our aunt's and grandmother's food was cooked in separate pots and was sent to them alone. They had lunch together in their room. Their tea, their sugar and all their things were separate from ours. They did not like their things to be touched by younger children because they were always afraid of 'najassa' (pollution).

My paternal aunt was a widow, and did not re-marry. She had no children and busied herself with the children whom she taught the Quran. I never attended her classes, but I used to hear the girls chanting and reciting out-loud, and as I worked, I used to repeat after them alone. When my aunt went out of the room, I used to go in to sit with the girls; I always tried to learn from them. When I finished my work I always sat next to my sister and imitated her. After a few years, I could read the Quran alone. I read it all from cover to cover; this is called 'khatma' (i.e. completion of the Quran). As for my aunt, she never taught me a single word.

At the end of each week, i.e. on Thursday, my aunt's students used to bring her half a rupee each. The children used to bring her food and two rupies each in the months of 'Rajab' and 'Shaaban', as presents.

Some girls completed their study of the Quran after a year, some after a year and a half or two years. Upon completing the Quran, a girl's mother made a party for her called the 'khatma'.

The 'khatma' party indicated that the girl had succeeded in learning the Quran. A tray full of candy, herbs, incense, rose-water and around 50-60 Rs. was covered by a piece of cloth and carried by the mother over her head to the 'mutawa^ca', as a final reward for her effort. On that occasion the girl was also given a new 'bukhnug' (small girl's head cover), by her mother as a present. Nuts, candy, sweets and sherbet were distributed to people in the neighbourhood. This party was only performed by the rich, well-to-do people, while ordinary people used to promise to give the 'mutawa^ca' from the girl's 'dazza' (bride-price)* when she's getting married.

MARRIAGE:

"When I got married," continued Om Khalaf, "I was around 25 years old. This age was considered old for a girl in the past. My groom was 'ibn^c am obuy' (my father's paternal cousin). But, you know something? He had a wife and children. He even had a daughter-in-law who was almost as old as I was. The groom came alone to meet my aunt and proposed to me; she was his relative and their relationship was a good family-relationship. When he proposed to me, my aunt said: 'no, you are married and you have children, we don't want to get her married'.

But he insisted and said: 'but my aunt I want her very much'. He convinced my aunt, so she told him: 'O.K., go and talk to her father'. When my mother told me your cousin wants you I said: 'no. I don't want an old married man. I am not young, it is true, but I will stay unmarried to take care of my sisters and brothers'. He has a wife and also a daughter-in-law who lives with them at the same house. Everybody knows that she's bad and stubborn and nervous. This daughter-in-law of his talks and shouts a lot!' My suitor used to see me but in the 'abat^c'. He used to see my figure. I used to see him when my mother

* 'Al-dazza' (bride-price), consisted of two parts: the first was a specific sum of money ranging between 50-200 Rs. in the case of ordinary people who were not very rich. As for the well-to-do, this sum went up to 1000 Rs., the second part consisted of a number of dresses, 'ebi^c' and presents for the bride given by the groom and his family.

sent me on errands to their house to take them things. There were many others who proposed to me before, but were refused for reasons like being strangers or such things. My aunt and grandmother were very difficult in such matters. In the past, a girl belonged of right to her 'ibn ^cam' (paternal cousin), but I had no 'am'. My father talked to my mother and asked her to try to convince me. So mother came and told me: 'Khadija you are not young anymore and you should get married, your father and myself will not live for you. You have to be secured in wedlock. If we die, your brothers and sisters may not be good to you. They will always consider you a burden'. So I finally accepted.

At 25, I knew nothing about marriage or about what a man was like. My husband's first wife was in Iraq with her eldest son. Her daughter-in-law was at home in Kuwait. When the latter heard the news, she cried and screamed and asked her brother to take her to Iraq to tell her mother-in-law who also happened to be her mother's sister. When she went to Iraq, she informed her mother-in-law of her husband's plans to get married. My sister Zeinab was also in Iraq with her husband at that time. So the two women went to her and threatened her: 'We will kill you, we will beat you. Is it true that your sister will get married to Al Hajji?' My sister told them that she knew nothing about the whole matter."

The time was past 12 o'clock and since 5 minutes I had been hearing the horn of the car outside. The young baby, Om Khalaf's grandchild was screaming inside and Om Khalaf wanted to get up to see him.

- "Your story is very interesting," I said, "but it is time for me to go. You will of course tell me the rest next time." I left after a long meeting which lasted for about four hours.

JANUARY 17, 1976:

At 9.15 a.m. I arrived to Om Khalaf's house. After making the usual greetings, I asked her to continue the story of her marriage, which she had started the previous time.

- "In my wedding," said Om Khalaf, "we had no singers or drum-beaters, because my husband was a married man. My groom received his guests at his sister's house, and was marrying without the knowledge of his first wife. There, they were served tea, coffee and nuts. Then he was escorted to his house by a big number of men."

- "Isn't it a custom in Kuwait to perform the marriage ceremony in the house of the girl's parents, and to stay there four days following the wedding?" I asked.

"No," said Om Khalaf. "This is a custom of the Sunnis or the 'Jana^cāt'. We are 'Jaa^cfareyīn' ('Shi^cahs'), we don't do that. In marriage the girl goes to her husband's house the night of the wedding. I was dressed in an embroidered 'thawb' and a black 'abat'. I wore a lot of golden ornaments. My groom's sister went to my groom's house to meet the women's procession which was escorting me to his house. We had dinner at home before leaving. It is a custom that the groom's family sends big trays of food for dinner to the girl's family. But, in my case, there was no dinner, because there was no one in his house to cook it.

There, in his house we were both seated next to each other (my face still covered). The 'hawafa' brought a small bowl of rose-water. My groom then took off my stockings and his, and put his toe next to mine, while the 'hawafa' poured rose-water on our toes. Then, according to the custom, my groom gave her a tip of about 5 Rupees. During this ritual all the women were singing and chanting: 'Get her leg out... get her leg out'. The women continued singing and clapping their hands rhythmically, I was then taken to another room where I stayed till the 'adhan' of early dawn (the call for prayers at dawn). After the 'adhan', they took me to the bathroom where I was perfumed. My groom was at that time in his room alone. I was taken in to him.

This custom is observed by most 'Jaa^cfareyīn'. It is called 'Natara' (watching till the morning).^{*} Now there are men who say: 'give her to me and I will not touch her'. They do, but her aunt or mother-in-law should stay with her to be sure that he doesn't touch her before dawn. The 'Sunnis', the 'Jana^cāt' and other Arabs don't do this. They don't observe this custom, except very rarely. They send the girl in after sunset, following the evening prayers.^{*}

I was given a bride-price of 100 R.S. as well as a 'abat' and 3 pieces of 'kham' (material) for dresses. My sister's 'dazza' was 200 R.S. because her groom loved her very much.

Our marriage took place on the 26th of 'Sha^cabān'. Ten days later, on the 6th of Ramadan, we were at my mother's house when my sister's husband came from Iraq to tell us that the wife of Hajji Masoud, my husband was

* Among the 'Sunnis', the ritual of 'al Natara' is performed only if a young baby girl passes some blood from the vagina after birth. The girl is said to be 'aleiha natara' (under watching). If 'natara' is not performed to her she would die. The watching takes place on her wedding night. Consummation of the marriage is deliberately delayed by women from the family who perform the roles of "spoil sports" as Dickson calls them until the call for prayers at dawn. Among the 'Shi^cahs', 'Natara' ritual is almost always performed on the marriage night.

fighting with Zeinab, my sister. He told us that my husband's wife was coming to Kuwait. As we walked home, Hajji Masoud said: 'What are you planning to do, Sheikha, Om Mutlag (his wife) will be coming?' I said: 'Well, Hajji Masoud, I did not jump to your house over the wall, you came and took me from my parent's house. There is nothing to be done. All I can say is that I will be good and kind to her. I will help her and treat her like my mother'. In fact, the Hajji was a lot older than me. He was probably 50. I was 25, nearly as old as his eldest son. I am now 50'.

That very night, at dawn, we were awakened by a loud noise; someone was violently banging at the door. It was of course Om Mutlag my 'sharisha' (partner, co-wife). As my husband opened the door she went in screaming and shouting and tearing off her clothes. I was very scared and did not know what to do. When she saw me inside, she pulled me by the hand and shouted: 'Go out of my house, out!' I was very upset that Masoud did not even utter a word. He did not ask me to stop and did not talk to me. Weeping bitterly, I walked alone to the house of my husband's sister. The street was full of women and people who had gathered around the door to see what was happening. I could not see my way as tears filled my eyes. The nearest house was his sister's house, so there I went. His sister was on my side and was very upset of what happened to me.

In the morning, at about 11 o'clock, I went to my parents and told them all what had happened. I told them that he stood still and did nothing, and that I walked out of the house alone at such an hour.

After a few days, he came to our house and said: 'come back to my house'. My parents were upset and quarrelled with him for letting her do this to me. He insisted to take me back to his home, but I refused: 'She kicked me out of it', I said, 'I will not go there again after what she did'. Masoud said: 'You know she's an old woman and she's the mother of my children. She took the news of my marriage very badly. I don't have enough money to put you in a separate house. So let us go to my sister's house if you insist not to come home'. I accepted and we went to his sister's house. We stayed at her place for two months, after which I began to feel the early signs of pregnancy. Hajji Masoud used to go to his old wife ('sharishti') every one or two days.

One day, the Hajji came home to tell me: 'Now Sheikha, I cannot stay like this forever. You should either come back home with me, or go to your folks. I cannot stay at my sister's house all my life and you should forget what happened and come back with me'.

It was not easy to forget such an incident after two months only. I refused to go to his house and preferred to go home to my

folks. The Hajji's sister, a widow with 4 children did not insist to keep us. When he told her that we were leaving, she said: 'As you wish'. At that time I was always tired and nauseated. I felt I could not live through another crisis if I went to his house. So I went back to my parents and stayed there for about 7 months. Masoud used to come over to my parents' house, but never spent the night there. He used to come in the morning or the afternoon, spend some hours and return home.

After this long stay at my parents' home, Masoud came and begged my father to let me go with him. He kissed my mother's forehead and my father's forehead and asked them to convince me to go home with him. They came to tell me that he wanted me to go home. At first, I did not accept. But father said: 'My daughter, he does not have money enough to open another house for you. If he had money he would have taken you a separate house. He only married you because he wanted you'. So once more I moved to live in the Hajji's house. I was surprised to find that Om Mutlag had become better with me. She did not talk to me, of course; but did not shout and scream like last time."

LIFE AS A WIFE, A MOTHER, AND A 'SHARISHA' (CO-WIFE):

"My husband's daughter-in-law, however, was very bad to me. I used to do all the work. I used to clean and cook although I was in my 7th month of pregnancy. The daughter-in-law did nothing in the house. I stayed there for two months and then moved to my parents' home for delivery.

My baby was delivered by a midwife. I was put in a sitting position and was asked to look at the corner of the wall. The midwife said "keep looking straight there and if the wall splits in two it will mean that you have delivered. I got a baby girl and called her Aisha. My husband was very happy because he had only two boys from his old wife. She had had 3 girls but they all died after birth. After delivery, I was told that it was not good to drink water because if a woman drinks water her uterus would not return to its normal size. A woman should not drink liquids except very little so that her uterus would retract. However, I never listened to them, I used to drink water and even eat melons. On the third day after delivery, my mother gave me some salt to pack it inside myself (my uterus) to absorb the water and the dirt and to help the wound in the vagina to heal. I had a wound in the vagina caused by the baby's umbilical cord which cut me through as the midwife pulled it. The salt inside made it hurt very much, but after some time, it all healed up. My mother and sisters took care of me and the baby. We

slaughtered a cock for the girl's birth. Some people slaughter a lamb for a girl and two lambs for a boy. As for us, we slaughter a hen for a boy and a cock for a girl.

This took place on the 10th day after delivery. We had a big lunch invitation for our relatives. On that day the baby and myself washed up.

On the 40th day, I took my daughter and left with Hajji Masoud to his house. My 'Sharisha' knew that I was going to be of help to her in the house. I felt that she had become a little bit better because as soon as I went back home she took ^CAisha on her lap. Her attitude made me feel a little bit optimistic about my life in this house. However, she and her daughter-in-law still did not talk to me. If the girl cried, nobody picked her even if I was busy doing their work. I had a very big responsibility. I used to put the girl on my lap and bake the bread early in the morning. Then I used to gather all the dirty clothes (mine, my husband's and my daughter's) and used to take the baby to my mother to take care of her till I came back from the sea-shore.

My co-wife was not responsible for the cooking. Her daughter-in-law and myself shared this responsibility. Each of us was responsible one day. My co-wife's job was to give us orders and to help in the baking since her daughter-in-law did not know how to bake. Gradually, relations with Om Mutlag improved. She started holding my daughter and tried to keep her quiet while I went to wash. I started taking her clothes to wash them with mine. When Om Mutlag became good to me, her daughter-in-law became very jealous. I used to hear her quarrelling and shouting. 'Why should you talk to her', she would say, 'she is your partner ('sharishtech'). Two years after the birth of ^CAisha, I gave birth to my second daughter Nuriyeh.

Fatima, my husband's daughter-in-law 'al shenna' had three girls and two boys, but all of them died right after birth. They used to get a disease and in one night they used to die. She was always very nervous and was also jealous of me because I had two nice girls 'besm Allah ^Calleihum' (God bless them).

She was a wicked woman and always quarrelled with me and shouted at me. When she delivered, I always took one of her children and washed her clothes and the baby's. She had no family to go to because her mother was in Iraq. In all her deliveries I was the one who toiled and worked for her. But she never thanked me or appreciated my work. One day we had a quarrel over something trivial, so I told her: 'Insha'Allah' (If God wills it) your husband will marry another wife and desert you, because you are not good-hearted, and you don't appreciate my help. What

harm have I done to you? Why do you make out of yourself an enemy to me while I do nothing but help you, good-heartedly; anyway God will give you your proper reward'.

After my return home with Nuriyeh, my newly born baby, Fatima's newly born son died. That boy was the fifth of her children who all died in their early infancy. The following year Fatima had another boy. He was born a pre-mature baby (7 months), but was mentally deficient. He did not die but 'takhabal' (became mad or abnormal). At that time I had delivered a baby girl.

Om Mutlag, 'sharishti' (my partner) had got on bad terms with Fatima, so had my husband. My husband always shouted at Fatima for her rude behavior with me and her mother-in-law. So Om Mutlag called Mutlag one day and told him: 'What is wrong with you Mutlag, you seem miserable and unhappy'. Mutlag told his mother that he was unhappy and that life with Fatima who had become very nervous was unbearable. Om Mutlag told her son: 'Do you want me to find you a new bride? This niece of mine is bad and rude. Besides, she doesn't have normal children. I will look for a new bride for you. Take a new bride and let Fatima bring up her abnormal boy'.

After a few days Om Mutlag's mother found a beautiful bride for him. While Fatima was dark and thin, the new bride was fair and plump. Mutlag got married to Hussa, but he did not bring her home. He leased a big house for her for 100 Rs. Fatima heard the news from the neighbours and oh! what she did! She did a lot. She screamed and shouted and yelled at her mother-in-law and her father-in-law. She cried and yelled at her husband when he came home. At that time Fatima discovered that she was pregnant. Mutlag, on the other hand, stayed with his new bride, Hussa, one month in the new house, but he could not pay 100 Rs. every month. Since his old wife had already known of his marriage, he brought his new wife to the family house. The new wife gave Fatima a very hard time. In fact, I felt that she avenged for me from what Fatima had once done to me. I was happy that my wish came true and that Fatima was finally reaping what she had sown.

Fatima delivered a beautiful baby girl; but my partner still gave her hell. One day, the two of them were quarrelling, when Mutlag came and defended his new wife. Fatma got crazy, she threw her abnormal son to her mother-in-law, took her daughter and left to her brother's house. Om Mutlag was an old woman and never did any work, so of course the boy's responsibility was all thrown on my back.

Fatima stayed at her brother's house for a few months, after which Mutlag divorced her. Fatima stayed until 'shuhur al

Cidda** ended. Then, a young relative of hers engaged her. But Fatima received another disastrous shock just before her marriage; her beautiful daughter 'takhabalet' (became mad) like her brother.

When Fatima got married, she threw her 'mukhabala' (mad) daughter to us. Of course I was the one who took the whole burden of bringing her up.

Om Mutlag became very ill with Asthma, so she became unable to take care of any of the children. At that time, I had five children to take care of, my three daughters and the two others. I used to go to the sea twice: once for my husband and my children, the second for the girl and the boy. Because they were retarded, they always drooled and spilled the food on their clothes. They had no control over their bowels and were always dirty and smelly.

When my youngest daughter became 10 months old, I became pregnant again. Usually I never got pregnant except two years after delivery because I breast-fed. I don't know how I got pregnant 10 months after delivering my daughter. When I was 6 or 7 months pregnant, the little girl refused the breast altogether, so I weaned her. But she wouldn't take milk or anything else. I tried to put her on the breast, she still refused, so we took her to the hospital where she died."

- "Om Khalaf," I asked, "Why is it that so many children used to die in their infancy in the past?"

- "My third daughter died because I weaned her. People told me: 'how will you breast-feed two children? You have to wean her since you are now in the 7th month'. My partner was the only one who objected to weaning the baby who was about one year old. She said: 'God will give you milk for both'. But I listened to what my neighbours told me, and I weaned her. I tried to give her the bottle, but she refused it. For a whole day she took no milk. At night, I tried to breast-feed her again, but she wouldn't take the breast. In the morning, she was very sick and still refused the breast. I took her to the hospital and my mother slept with her. They gave her milk by the bottle. She stayed there for 12 days; on the twelfth day, they gave her the bottle, but after a little while, found her dead. Even the doctor didn't know why she died. I was very upset for her death. I knew that I was the cause of it. It was because I weaned her from the breast. For a long time I felt guilty about it. Before she died she kept crying and saying 'maihi, maihi'. I don't know

* 'shuhur al Cidda': a period of 4 months and 10 days' during which a widow or divorcee is prohibited by the 'shari'a' (Law) to re-marry for fear of having been impregnated by the deceased or divorced husband.

what it meant; but I wept a lot after her death; I wished that the baby in my belly would be a girl, so that I'd get a girl to replace her. But it was a boy."

- "What about Fatima's children? What was wrong with them?" I inquired.

- "Oh," replied Om Khalaf, "the case of Fatima's children was quite different."

- "The children of Fatima used to die as soon as they became 5 or 6 months old. Something would come upon them, and would shake them violently."

- "What was this something?" I asked.

- "It was 'ahl al gāa^c' (the people of the under-world)."

- "Do you mean 'al jinn'?" I asked.

- "Yes, her children were harmed by 'ahl al gāa^c'. They became sort of haunted. The child would shake; his hands and feet would shiver so that he would be all swollen up like a balloon. After a few hours he would become as rigid as a wooden log which cannot be lifted. This happened to Fatima's five children."

- "Did she do anything so as to prevent the repeated death of her children?" I asked.

- "Right before the death of one of her baby girls," said Om Khalaf, "she thought of taking the baby to a Shaikh who read verses from the Quran for her. That day, Fatima came back from the sea to find my husband standing beside the girl and not knowing what to do. Then, having faced this problem before, he carried the girl in his arms and took her to his brother who read verses from the Quran for the girl's sake. My husband's brother was a 'mulla' (Sheikh). After the morning prayers the girl died. In such cases, it is believed, a mother should not carry her child, because if she does, the child would be paralyzed. However, all this does not really happen. Such things are simply superstitious beliefs. Fatima also did a 'tab^caa' (charm) for each child.*"

* 'tab^caa' is a charm in the form of a long piece of paper containing verses from the Quran, wrapped and sewn in a small leather bag. It is to be placed in the child's clothes so as to exorcise the evil spirits or to keep away the haunting jinn.

This charm was done by a 'fattash' (a curer or spell-breaker). He always asked the one who went to him to bring him slaughtered cocks or slaughtered chicken. Fatima always put the 'yam^caa' in her clothes or under their pillows. However, she lost five of her children. The doctor said that the blood of the mother did not suit the blood of the father. I think he was right."

- "Well, let us go back to your story." I said after a few moments of silence.

Om Khalaf started narrating:

- "I was 7 months pregnant when my baby girl died, and for some time I felt miserable and unhappy. Husa, Mutlag's second wife was of no use in the house. She never touched the two 'mukhabalin' children. She was always nervous. I was tired, bereaved and exhausted, when Om Mutlag was moved to the hospital. This added to my burden because I had to take special food for her at the hospital every day. Her grand-child, who was then 7, had become most unbearable. It was a big responsibility. When I think back now I wonder why I never complained. But then I say to myself; it was God who made me devoted to these children. I considered them orphans. When I left them to their step-mother, she used to beat them and ill-treat them. I always thought that it was not their fault that they were abnormal, and that I should help them for God's sake and for the sake of doing good work. Al Hajji used to tell me: 'why don't you let Husa help you. She is their step-mother and it is she who should bring them up. But I could not see them ill-treated and neglected in her care'.

At my mother's house I gave birth to my son Khalaf. When I came back to my husband's house, the young abnormal boy had become like a devil. I suffered a lot from many things. If ever someone forgot the main door open, the boy simply disappeared. He ran out and I ran after him in the killing heat of summer. Neighbours always brought him from the sea-shore or the near-by market place.

This state of affairs lasted for three years. But when he was 10 years old, I felt that what I have done was enough. I could not bear it any longer. I was again pregnant and could not run in the streets every few hours. At last I talked, I told my husband and my 'partner' that I could not take care of the boy any more. Al Hajji talked to Mutlag and the boy was finally taken to the mental hospital.

When I left to deliver at my mother's house, everything in my husband's house was upside-down. Om Mutlag could not go to wash in the sea. Husa washed for her husband and her children only, so the old woman hired a poor woman to wash for them for 1 or $\frac{1}{2}$ a Rupy. I did not stay until al 'arbe^cin' (the fortieth) because I knew that the house was

not well-taken care of. I returned 20 days after delivery. I started taking my children's clothes to wash them in the sea and I took the baby on my arm and left him at my mother's place. Om Mutlag screamed at me: 'why are you leaving the rest of the clothes?' (i.e. hers and Baheya's). I told her that since she could hire a woman to wash, she could continue to do so. Om Mutlag refused, saying that there was no money and that I should take them myself. So I had to wash them, but in the afternoon. God had given me no 'tongue' at that time, and I could not reply. Now I wonder why I did all that, why I was responsible for those two children when their grandmother, their mother, and their step-mother were all alive? Why have I done all that? By God I don't know why or how.

To tell you the truth, a young woman in the past was always miserable; I was always given orders by my partner, because she was in the position of a mother-in-law. She was as old as my mother. It was her responsibility to decide upon our food. It was she who always cut the meat or the fish and said, 'this is for today, and this is for tomorrow'. If she needed anything she told the Hajji and he bought it; I could not interfere for she had the upper hand in the household."

- "Can you say then, that a woman acquires power in the house as soon as she grows old or as soon as her children get married?" I asked.

- "An old woman is never weak. She controls everything especially concerning the daughters-in-law. No one can object to her. If she asks her son to give money to his wife, he would, if she asks him not to, he wouldn't. As soon as a woman's children get married, and as soon as she has daughters-in-law, she gets released from the power of her mother-in-law and takes back by controlling her own daughters-in-law. Daughters-in-law in the past suffered a lot and did all the work. 'al khala' (the mother-in-law) did not serve her daughter-in-law like these days.

I gave birth, as I told you, to my youngest son Mohsen. He was naughty since his early infancy. In the past, we used to tie the baby up and fix his arms close to his body. We used to put a blue bead and something of gold in his clothes so that he would grow up to be calm. They say a blue bead makes the child calm, but actually calmness comes from God. Mohsen was naughty and noisy; he moved a lot despite the fact that he was tied up like all babies.

At that time around 1956, the government started 'al guass'.* We were moved to 'Kifan' temporarily till our new house was built in

* 'guass' i.e. 'guass': to buy houses or land owned by citizens for high prices, and to give them new cheap land instead to build more modern houses. Same as 'al tathmin'.

'Mansouriyeh' By that our house became very far from my parents. I was upset because I could not go there as often as before. Only once a week, the Hajji took me to my parents' house by taxi.

One day, Om Mutlag left to visit some old neighbours; I was alone at home with the crazy girl Bayeha, when all of a sudden, I looked around and did not find her. 'Baheya, Baheya', I called out. But there was no Baheya. I looked for her for two long hours. There was no hope. I returned home crying. What would her father do to me, I thought. Then, some people found her and brought her home. At noon I was putting on the fire for tea. She ran away again, but luckily I found her in our street. At 4 o'clock I was doing some work in the courtyard, when Baheya ran away for the third time. That time, she stayed from 4 to 6 p.m. I called and yelled and screamed in the street. I said to myself some boys must have kidnapped her, 'le^c bou fiha wa gattouha' (raped her and threw her in a deserted place). She doesn't understand and she could be easily fooled, I thought. What would they all say - I left her and neglected her? I nearly lost my mind and tore off my clothes. Finally, when it was dark a woman in the neighbourhood brought her in. That day I told them: 'either Baheya or I will stay in this house'. So, her grandmother, her grandfather and her uncle took her to the hospital. We bathed her and gave her some clothes and a new 'abat' and sent her. She was about 9 years old. When her mother knew, she got very upset. She insulted me and said that I have thrown her daughter away when I was the one who brought her brother up for 9 years.

Om Mutlag defended me. She told her: 'it was Om Khalaf who has brought her up and toiled for her and her brother. You have no rights over Om Khalaf. Isn't it enough that you haven't even tried to bring your daughter up. It was you who has thrown her on us!'

Fatima insisted on taking her daughter out of the hospital. But she treated her very badly. Om Mutlag saw her tying the girl with a rope to a piece of wood in the wall like a goat. The girl used to scream and her eyes were nearly blinded with tears, while the mother did not move. My husband used to tell them: 'get her a servant to take care of her. I have no money to get her a servant'. But neither his father, nor her mother moved. So Om Mutlag was bound to do something. She couldn't bear the sight of the girl tied up by a rope. She released her and put her in the hospital. It is said that she is still there till this very moment.

JANUARY 19, 1975

On the morning of January 19, 1976, Om Khalaf willingly and most enthusiastically continued her long narrative:

- "When my eldest daughter ^CAisha was 9 years old, it so happened that Om Ali's (Amina's) brother, Zaki, was not on good terms with his wife. As you may still remember, I told you that it was my mother and my paternal aunt, the mutawa^Ca, who brought up those kids: Zaki, Mekkeya and Amina.

Zaki had got married to Om Ali's step-daughter Hend (i.e. Om Faysal).^{*} Zaki and Hend were not on good terms. When she asked for a divorce, Zaki obstinately refused. They resorted to my husband who happened to be an old man in the family. He advised Zaki to divorce Hend and said: 'If you divorce her and let her go, I will give you my daughter ^CAisha. You only have to wait for three years. She is now nine years old. When she is 12, I promise to give her to you as a wife'. So Zaki accepted and it was a promise which had to be fulfilled.

So my eldest daughter, ^CAisha, got married at 12, even before she reached puberty. This is why she did not get pregnant except after three years.

We spent two years in 'Kifan', and in 1958, we moved to the new house in 'Mansourieh'. Mutlag had the right for a piece of land ('gasima') too, so he took one next to us. We stayed in there for 6 years. It was an Arab-style house. After six years, Mutlag's younger brother Hussein said that he wanted to move. He wanted his father to build a modern European-style house. So in 1964, we bought this land in 'Khaldeyeh' and built this house. Hussein got married when we moved to this house. He stayed here for 7 years and then moved to '^CEdeileyeh' in 1971. The upper floor of this villa, which belongs to Hussein was leased to some Kuwaitis. As soon as we came here, my husband became sick; his health was gradually deteriorating."

- "Tell me more about your husband, his work, your expenditure etc." I said:

- "My husband used to go to diving trips in his youth. He used to work as 'tabbab' (young helper in 'ghaus'). When we got married, he had a shop for ironing and mending 'bushut' (pl. of bisht, man's over-cloak) I always called him 'Hajji Masoud. He was very nice and kind to me. He

* For more details see the life history of Om Faysal, pp. 6-10.

always did all what I asked for. If I asked for clothes he gave me money to buy what I wanted. Sometimes I used to tell him: 'we wish to travel to Iran, or Iraq in summer. His answer always was: 'Ala Kheir, Inshaa'Allah' (If God Wills It). My word was always respected by the Hajji, but any of his children's requests meant much more to him. Of course he always respected Om Mutlag's word too for she was his first wife. I was responsible for the housework and the kids. But, my partner always interfered and gave me orders. Concerning my husband, I never recall that he refused anything I asked for. Mutlag, my step-son, used to help his father in the shop. When I delivered Mohsen, my youngest son, Hussein, my second step-son, was in his Thanawayya Amma. When he passed he was appointed as a clerk in the ministry of health. 'We don't want you to work anymore', Hussein told his father, 'it is now our turn to toil'. Mutlag also left the shop and started working as a clerk in the government.

Now, Hussein has become a manager in the Ministry of Health. The two boys used to give money to their father. The Hajji, in turn, used to buy the necessary supply in big quantities. He used to buy sacks of rice, sugar, fat, etc. When he stopped working, he had nothing to do, so he used to buy us chicken, fish or meat. Before, I used to buy it from the near-by 'sūk' (market). When the Hajji was out of town, I used to go on foot to buy the needed vegetables.

When the money was changed from Rupees to Dinars (early 1950's) Hussein used to give his father 150 K. Dinars. When we were in 'Kifan', Hussein bought a piece of land and made barns for cows and a small place for chicken. He sold chicken, eggs and milk products.

In 'Kifan', I had chicken in the house. The Hajji became sick as soon as we moved to this house in 1965. He was invited at Om Ali's place when he vomited blood. He was taken immediately to the hospital. He stayed in the hospital for one month and suffered from a bad stomach-ulcer. He came out of the hospital, but returned after one year to be operated on.

On the 9th of the Islamic Month of Al Muharram, I went to the Hajji. He seemed very exhausted. My 'partner' was also lying at the same hospital. I passed by to see her, but found out that the doctor had given her a permission to leave. So the Hajji's son took her home and dropped me at my folk's on his way.

At night, I went with my son-in-law to see the Hajji again. He was covered with a white sheet. When I removed it I found him dead. I screamed and wept and was pulled out of the room by force by the nurses and my son-in-law. The night of the Hajji's death was a religious occa-

sion. It was the night of 'Ashoura'.* His death on that specific night was good for him and meant that he will be blessed by God Almighty. We called my step-son Hussein who came and moved the Hajji to our house. The mourning ritual lasted for three days. The female mourners all met at the 'Husseineya' in my father's house because it was spacy, as for the male mourners, they went to another 'Husseineya' in our district. The women mourners wailed and beat their faces.** On the 3rd day, we slaughtered lambs and cooked rice which was distributed to the male and female mourners. During the first three days of mourning verses from the Quran were recited by 4 'mullas' so as to bless his soul.

When the Hajji died (in 1966) my youngest daughter Nuriyeh was in her Thanaweya Amma. When she graduated, she wished to join university, but neither her brother nor myself accepted. She said that she was not the type of girls who would mis-behave and that she was joining a girl's college. I argued and quarrelled a lot with her about this issue, but when she insisted, her brother accepted and later convinced me.

I really gave Nuriyeh a hard time until I accepted. I also gave her a bad time because of the 'Cabat'. Nuriyeh observed the custom of putting on the 'Cabat' since she was in Primary School till she was in 'Thanaweya Amma'. But when she joined university she said: 'I will not put on the 'Cabat', I want to be like my friends; they would mock me if I went in the 'Cabat' to the university'. When I insisted and said that we have no girls who would go 'sufur', Nuriyeh started leaving the 'Cabat' in the university-bus. She went out in the 'Cabat', but deliverately left it in the bus. When she returned home she was 'sufur' and said that her 'Cabat' was lost. All girls did the same thing. Om Ali's children were in the same school and she always suffered from this problem. How could we provide a new 'Cabat' every day?!

* During the first 9 days of the month of Al Muharram (1st month of the Islamic year), the 'Shi'ahs' hold a general mourning for the death of their martyrs Al Hassan and Al Hussein, 12 centuries ago. People gather up in martams (religious meeting-houses: 'Husseineya') and listen to the speeches of preachers or Mullas who tell the story of how Ali ben Abi Taleb and his family were set aside by the early Caliphs who followed Prophet Muhammed. By the 10th of Al Muharram (date of the murder of Al Hassan and Al Hussein), people are very worked up and reduced to tears. The speakers are usually so eloquent that they reduce the audience to tears for the mortifications inflicted on those who are regarded as the highest of mankind after the Prophet. (Belgrave, 1953: 89).

** Face-beating is looked down upon, and criticized by the 'Sunnis' in Kuwait.

When I started scolding her, she started borrowing the 'Cabat' of her neighbour and wearing it only before coming in. Sometimes she used to let the servant drop it to her from the window. I felt it was hopeless and useless to try to force her. She used to say: 'Mother, my professors* would mock me. No students go to class in the 'Cabat' whatsoever. The 'Cabat' has no place in university'.

I had to accept. Time forces us to accept many things which we don't like. The change has brought many evil things along. It is 'haram' for a woman to go out in front of men without a 'Cabat'. It is 'haram' that her arms and legs and hair would show. What would the people say? What worried me was that I was afraid the women would talk about her and say: 'Look at the daughter of so and so, look at the daughter of the Hajji, the pious man; she is walking sufur!' A woman without a 'Cabat' does not look nice. She wears slacks and shirts like men. Why? Why should she imitate men?

The 'Cabat' is more decent for her. Now girls want to be like men in everything. They work in the police, they drive and do all what men do. Of course I think this is wrong. If you want my real opinion I don't like it, but I am forced to accept it. Now people don't even talk about girls who don't put the 'Cabat'. It has become normal. It is true that Nuriyeh is conservative. She always wore maxi dresses with long sleeves; she never wore a low cut even in her wedding. But, it is still 'haram' that a woman's face and hair would show."

Saneya, Om Khalaf's daughter-in-law, came in, and joined in the discussion.

- "You know, Hala," she said, "I put the 'Cabaya' since I was in primary school, I asked my mother to buy me a 'Cabaya'. I liked it. Mother said, 'if you put it on now, your father will not let you take it off later,' but I told her that I was not going to take it off! I wear it to this day and I like it because I walk comfortable in it. I don't worry about the eager eyes of on-lookers!"

In weddings I wear long maxi-dresses. It is accepted in such occasions not to put the 'Cabat'. The girls are all seated together with the women. When the men come in to escort the bridegroom to the side of his wife, we remain seated 'sufur'. It is O.K. in such occasions. As for the elderly women like my mother-in-law, they don't even take it off in weddings because there are elderly men, who got used to seeing them that way. They don't take it off as long as men are around. Girls

* Most professors in Kuwait University at the time of its inauguration 66/67 were non-Kuwaiti Arabs, i.e. Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, etc.

who are going to dance in a Kuwaiti wedding wear the traditional 'thawb' embroidered with gold. Nowadays the coloured 'thawb' is fashionable. It is originally Bahreini. As for the real Kuwaiti 'thawb' it is black, even the bride in the past used to wear a black 'thawb' but it was embroidered and ornamented with golden thread and golden balls. "As for me," said Saneya, "I don't even own a 'thawb'."

- "Did Nuriyeh work when she graduated?," I asked Om Khalaf.

- "Yes, she did," said Om Khalaf with a sigh. "Nuriyeh was very clever all through the 4 years of university. She graduated with honors. After graduation, she said that she wanted to work at the Planning Board, I did not accept at the beginning, but Nuriyeh told me that she was going to be with four girls alone in one room, and that girls stay alone in rooms separate from men's rooms; so I accepted.

Until then, it was Hussein, my step-son, who toiled and spent on us. He was responsible for our food as well as our clothes. He was very good to us and actually brought up his step-brothers and sisters till they graduated and started working. He was quite different from Mutlag who only burdened us with his children. Hussein used to give Khalaf, his step-brother a sum of 50 or even 100 K. Dinars, with which Khalaf used to buy the necessary food supply for the house, like sugar, rice, margarine, tea, etc.

When Nuriyeh started working in the Planning Board, she took over part of the responsibility. Her salary was 170 Dinars. She paid for the food and the home-expenditure. She bought clothes for me and for herself. The rest of Nuriyeh's money was put in the bank on her account. As for Hussein, he paid money to his two young step-brothers Khalaf and Mohsen for their clothes in summer and in winter.

Nuriyeh worked for three years, after which she got engaged, and married. Her groom was the brother of my sister-in-law. We had never seen him or known him because he lived in Bahrein. One day, my sister-in-law was sick. I took Nuriyeh and we went to pay her a visit. There, we met Hamed who was in a short holiday in Kuwait. He was seated on a chair beside his sister's bed, but we did not talk to him. Nuriyeh always went out 'sufur'. However, she always put the 'Cabat' when she was going to any of her uncles' houses. She had the 'Cabat' on, that day, but of course, her face was not covered. Nuriyeh had bought a car at that time and had learned how to drive. She put the 'Cabat' on while driving. When we went home, my sister-in-law called and told Nuriyeh that her brother wanted to talk to her and that he had some comments to tell her about the car and about the fact that she drives. Of course, this was only an excuse for talking to her. He talked to her for a

little while on the telephone. They did this several times and it was always my sister-in-law, who called first. When I asked Nuriyeh, she said that they were talking about cars!

Two months later, my sister-in-law told me that Hamed wanted to marry Nuriyeh. He said that if he didn't marry Nuriyeh, he will not get married at all, and that he was in love with her. I told her brother and he said that Hamed was a good pious man, but he said that he had to ask Nuriyeh first. Her brother talked to her; he told her: 'You know Nuriyeh that you are a university graduate, while he is not. He only has a Thanaweya Amma. Your friends marry doctors or engineers, so don't come one day to say that he is below your educational standard! Nuriyeh answered: 'I neither want a doctor, nor an engineer, I want a good pious man who prays and fasts. I like him because he is pious and is different from the spoiled boys of these days'. She said.

Before Nuriyeh's marriage," continued Om Khalaf, "Hussein's villa, which was being built, was finished. Hussein and his family moved there and the upper floor which they had occupied until then, was leased to a Kuwaiti family.

Al 'Melshe'* of Nuriyeh was then performed. Hamed, Nuriyeh's groom sent 'al dazza' a few days before the marriage with his sister. It consisted of the bride-price 700 K. Dinars, 500 'mua'khar saddak', and lots of presents: 4 'ebei' and a big golden necklace as a wedding present. In the 'melshe', dinner was served and all the family was invited. It was here in our house. There were drum-beaters and lots of girls got up and danced.

Following 'al Melshe' Nuriyeh and Hamed started going out together. From her bride-price, she bought lots of new dresses, night-gowns and underwear. Together they bought the trousseau which consisted of the bridal bedroom, blankets, pillows, bed sheets, a big carpet and curtains. This was paid for by Hamed. Since they were planning to stay with us in this house, they only furnished one room. Nuriyeh was expected to get a scholarship from the government for higher studies abroad. She had had an offer from the government shortly after her graduation, but because she was not yet married, I did not accept to send her.

* 'Al melshè': the marriage ceremony in which the marriage is solemnized. It is considered something like a formal engagement. 'Al melshè' is synonymous to 'katb al ketāb' in Egypt. It makes it possible for the girl to go out with her groom more freely since she is legally considered his wife. It is a kind of solemnized engagement.

When she got engaged, she re-applied for a scholarship and was waiting for the results. She did not furnish a house of her own because she had it on mind that she wanted to leave. As such, her own room in this villa was painted and re-furnished.

Two months after 'Al Melshe', Hamed said that he did not want to wait any longer for the consummation of the marriage i.e. 'Yabi yud-khul' ('al dukhla': actual consummation of the marriage which thus far, was only a legal marriage on paper). We said that we wanted to make a 'jalwa'* for Nuriyeh. Nuriyeh's 'jalwa' was performed in my parents' house which is big and spacy. Nuriyeh was placed on a chair decorated with flowers amidst the sound of zaghareed singers, and drum-beaters which was carried to a big room where all the guests were seated. Incense was burned and rose water was sprinkled all over the place.

Following the 'jalwa', Nuriyeh was brought by car to our house right here. Lots of cars followed her car to make a 'zaffat sayarat'.**When she arrived home, she was seated on this very sofa on which you are seated. Hamed was brought in by the men folk who were clapping and singing.

He was seated next to Nuriyeh, he took away the candles which she was holding and kissed her on the cheek. Men and women congratulated the bride and the bride-groom. Everybody was singing and clapping and a couple of girls got up and danced (popular Kuwaiti dance in which the girl bends forward throwing her long unbanded hair before her). After sometime the groom took his wife by hand and they were escorted by the attendants who were singing 'Caleiki said wa mubarak' (may you be happy and blessed) to the bedroom which was prepared for them. They went in and locked the door behind them. The party continued outside. Some friends left, but most family members stayed until after midnight.

- "It is clear that Nuriyeh's wedding was different from yours," I commented, hoping to elicit some comparison between past and present.

* 'Jalwa': a marriage ceremony characteristic of old Kuwait; it is performed exclusively for the bride, and the hareem. In the 'jalwa' or 'yalwa' which is performed right after the afternoon prayers, the bride is seated on a chair carried by women. A big square piece of green silk is held by women from four corners over the girls' head. As the women sing and make 'zaghareed' the green silk is lowered and lifted with the rhythm of a specific song.

** 'zaffat sayarat': cars following the bridal procession, honking horns rhythmically.

- "Of course it is different," said Om Khalaf. "In the past the groom never had the chance to see his bride before the wedding night. His mother would tell him: 'Do you want 'fulana' (so and so)? Shall I engage her for you?'. It is usually his maternal or paternal cousin. He would ask his mother whether she was good looking, or not, and she would describe her to him. The mother would then visit the girl's women folk and propose to their daughter. The girl's mother would discuss the matter with her husband and if they accept, they would ask the girl's mother to let the men come over. When the men folk would meet they would discuss the amount of 'al dazza'. The groom's family would ask the girl's family how much they want as 'al dazza'. Usually the girl's family would refrain from specifying a certain amount. Three days after the men's visit the 'dazza' would be sent. It was the boy's mother who would take the 'dazza' to the girl's family. The 'dazza' usually consisted of candy and sweets put in a big tray, money tied up in a piece of cloth and placed over the candy, and a basket of 'cheswa' (clothes) for the bride.

When a woman wanted to celebrate this occasion, she used to tell one or two of her relatives or close friends to accompany her. Women in her 'fareej' (district) used to gather around her and clap their hands as she walked on. If the family did not desire to celebrate the occasion, the 'dazza' was delivered by the men to the girl's family. In my case, 'al dazza' was brought by the Hajji himself because there was no one else to bring it. He brought me a basket in which there were clothes, sweets, incense, rose water and herbs used for the tea. These days, the bride-groom also sends towels, underwear, night-gowns, brassiers, etc. This is what we did in my son Khalaf's wedding.

Saneya, Khalaf's wife is the daughter of Hajji Karim who was a dear Iraqi friend of my late husband. Saneya was the friend of my daughter Nuriyeh. She used to come with him to visit Nuriyeh. Khalaf used to tell them hello as he came in or went out, but he never knew which was Saneya. When Khalaf made it clear to us that he wanted to get married, Nuriyeh suggested Saneya as a candidate for marriage. Khalaf knew that Saneya's family was very conservative and that their girls were well brought-up. He said that this was a good idea. Nuriyeh was very happy because she felt that her old intimate friend was going to be her sister-in-law. At that time Nuriyeh was newly wed and she was feeling the very early signs of pregnancy. She had become impregnated since the first month of marriage. When she left to Cairo on her honeymoon, Nuriyeh was feeling tired and had to lay flat on her back according to the doctor's orders. Her illness delayed Khalaf's proposal to Nuriyeh for sometime, but as soon as she felt better, the topic was re-opened. It was decided that I should talk to Saneya's mother. So one day, when Saneya's mother came to see Nuriyeh, I told her: 'Would you give us Saneya for Khalaf?' She said: 'It's O.K. Khalaf is a good boy, but let me ask her father'. After a few days, we paid them a visit. I was

accompanied by my sister and my sister-in-law. When I asked Saneya's mother, she said that she and her husband had no objection and that Hajji Karim said that Hajji Masoud was his dear brother and that he could not find a groom better than Khalaf, Hajji Masoud's son. She added that we could let the men folk go to talk to Hajji Karim." Said Om Khalaf.

- "That very night," continued Om Khalaf, "Nuriyeh called Saneya by telephone and asked her opinion. Saneya was very shy. She said that she did not know Khalaf, but that it was enough that he was the brother of her dearest friend, and that what pleased her parents would please her. Two days later, Hussein, my step-son went with my nephew to visit Hajji Karim who was very nice and welcoming. When Hussein asked about 'the dazza', Hajji Karim refrained from answering and said that they don't discuss such issues.

The following week, Nuriyeh, her sister ^CAisha, and their cousin went down town to buy 'al cheswa' (clothes) for the bride. We, the harem took a big suit-case of presents to Saneya's house, as well as an amount of 500 K.D. and 600 K.D. 'sadag'. We decided that the wedding would be on the 3rd day of 'Id al Adha'.

Unfortunately, it so happened that my maternal cousin to whose brother my sister was married, passed away. We were very disappointed because everybody was really happy for Khalaf. The general feeling of happiness was spoiled by this sudden death in the family. Since we were all in mourning, no wedding was to take place. It was not appropriate to be celebrating in such unhappy circumstances. I told Khalaf that no ceremony was to take place, and that he had to wait. But he refused, he said that he had no patience to wait. So my sister and me suggested that they would get married 'silently' and leave to Lebanon or Cairo where they could have fun. Khalaf liked the idea but Saneya did not accept despite her parents' approval. She said that she was scared and that she would not go away from her mother. Finally, we decided to postpone the wedding 20 days and to have no singing or drum-beating. The wedding ceremony took place and everybody was there. We slaughtered three lambs and had a big dinner party.

A few months after Khalaf's wedding, Nuriyeh gave birth to a lovely baby girl. Nuriyeh's daughter was a pre-mature baby born in the 7th month. She was put in the incubator and soon became a lovely girl. Only a few months ago, Nuriyeh received the scholarship to the States. Her husband joined university on his own account. They left to the United States and took the baby with them. They put her in a nursery when they go off to college. Wait, I will show you her daughter's photo. She is really beautiful."

Om Khalaf got up and opened a square box which was placed over the TV set. She got out the photo, kissed it and gave it to me.

- "She is really pretty," I said.

- "Doesn't she resemble me?" asked Om Khalaf.

- "Yes, I think so," I replied. Om Khalaf took back the photo and kept it in her hand. She glanced at the photo every now and then, as we talked together.

- "It is good," said Om Khalaf, "that baby Saleh is with me here. He keeps me good company. I am happy that Khalaf is staying with me with his wife and son, otherwise, I would have been very bored. I would have felt bad about Nuriyeh's departure.

Saleh apparently woke up and was crying; Saneya got up to see him. As soon as she walked out of the room, Om Khalaf pointed to her and said: "Saneya is a good polite girl. It was a good marriage."

- "What, in your opinion," I asked, "are the characteristics of 'al mara'l tekana' (or the good woman)?"

- "'Al mara'l tekana'," replied Om Khalaf, "is the one who assumes full responsibility of her house." Saneya walked in carrying her son Saleh. Om Khalaf continued:

- "'Al mara'l tekana' is the one who helps her mother-in-law and feels responsible for the housework. She is the wise woman who does not fight or shout a lot. Take me and Saneya as an example, we are happy together, and good to each other. We don't fight and each of us works as much as she can.

As for the woman who fights with her husband, and does not help her mother-in-law, or her sister-in-law, she is not considered a good woman. A woman who is co-operative, who does not separate herself from her in-laws, who does not say 'abi jedri brouhi', (I want my own food cooked in separate pots), or 'I want a home for myself', who forgets the spoilt life at her parents' house and lives the way her in-laws live and treats her sisters and brothers-in-law as her own sisters and brothers, is 'khawsh wahda' (a real good woman). There are women who complain and tell their husbands 'I married you not your mother and sisters'. Such women are no good.

My neighbour who lives next door, had a daughter-in-law. Together they did all the housework and were very good to each other. The old woman has four girls who always helped in the housework as soon as

they came from school. They dish-washed and cleaned the floor of the whole house. When the second son got married, his wife started trouble in the house. A few months after her marriage she separated her food and refused to help. The older daughter-in-law was jealous, so she also stopped helping. A big fight arose between them and resulted in the fact that the older daughter-in-law left to her mother's house. After some time her husband went to her and they returned to each other but lived in another house. Now the younger daughter-in-law started working. She does nothing in the house and she even eats alone in the second floor. The mother-in-law cooks and has hired an Indian servant to help her, the son eats his meals with his mother, while his wife eats alone upstairs. "Such people," concluded Om Khalaf, "are not good."

- "What then," I asked, "are the characteristics of a good man?"

- "A good man ('al rayal al zein')," replied Om Khalaf, "is the one who is kind and faithful to his mother. He is the one who would not permit his wife to talk ill about his mother. If she criticizes his mother, he should put her where she belongs and should make it clear to her that it is his mother who had taken all the trouble to bring him up and to make him what he is; that it was his mother who had stayed up late, nights following nights, during his illnesses, and that it was his mother who should have the upper hand and the last word in the house. He should make it clear to her that this is his life and that she should make up her mind whether to take it or to leave it. If she doesn't like it, then the door is open wide. This way the wife will learn how to respect her mother-in-law. A good man should be fair in his judgments.

As for a man who is not good 'mou zein', he is the one who sides with his wife against his mother, or who believes what his wife tells him and disbelieves his mother. A mother's word should always be respected. A good man is responsible to take care of his family and to toil and bring money. A woman, on the other hand, takes care of the children and all the household. But you know, life has changed a great deal. Nowadays, a wife sits back and asks her husband to hand things over to her from here and there. She asks him to carry her baby or to put him to bed. In the past such things never happened. A woman was responsible to take care of such things. Men cannot bring up children; it is women's job. We, women of the past, used to take our children on foot to the hospital. We were sturdy and strong; we never complained from the burden. It was our job and we assumed full responsibility of it. This was not only the case with me and my friends. Such was the case with all of us 'ehna'l awaleyyin' (we the first ones, or the women of the past.) Men never helped their wives and never interfered. Women for sure had a bigger responsibility than nowadays. But life has changed remarkably since the discovery of oil in Kuwait. People have started to imitate the West."

PROFILE:

Om Fayal (Hend) is a 'shri'ah' Muslim who was born in 1902. She had 3 brothers: Ismail, Said, and Abdullah. She worked in making pots with her cousin the father of Om Ali. She was a clever woman who embroidered 'shamsa' which she sold in the area. At 5, Om Fayal (Hend) went to the 'madrasa' (Om Ali's, Om Khalaf's aunt), and learned how to read the Quran.

When Om Fayal was still a child, she moved with her family to live in Iraq. Eventually, her mother died, and her father got re-married to young Asma (Om Ali) who was his cousin.

At 15, Om Fayal was forced to marry Zaki, her step-cousin's brother whom she disliked. Her marriage soon ended by a divorce. Om Fayal stayed at her father's house for four years after which she was married to a second husband in her father's paternal village who had a daughter -

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OM FAYSAL

At the time of her second marriage, Om Fayal (Hend) was 21 years old. She soon regretted having accepted to marry a man whose wife had no children and thought what she might end up to be the same. Her anxiety ended when she delivered her first baby girl Asla. Now she has nine children: Asla (20), Fayal (18), Khalifa (16), Asad (10), Muna (10), Nura (11), Asad (8), Subala (8), and Mustafa (5).

Om Fayal's relationship with her 'shri'ah' was a good one. As explained by Om Fayal, that was due to the fact that her 'shri'ah' was disadvantaged by being childless. Now, Om Fayal lives with her 'shri'ah' in the same big villa in 'al Hurr'. Her daughter Asla is married and is at the same time pursuing her studies at the Teachers' Training Institute.

Om Fayal's husband works at the Ministry of Health and earns around 350-400 K.D. (though Om Fayal herself said that she does not know how much he earns). Each of his wives receives 50 Dinars per month, while he buys the necessary food supply.

The life history of Om Fayal particularly represents the trials and tribulations of a woman in a polygamous marriage. It also reflects the importance of the role of 'Om al 'Ajal' in the polygamous family set up.

PROFILE:

Om Faysal (Hend) is a 'Shi^cah' Muslim who was born in Kuwait in 1932. She had 3 brothers: Daoud, Saad, and Abdullah. Her father worked in making pots with his cousin the father of Om Ali. Her mother was a clever woman who embroidered 'athwab' which she sold to women in the area. At 5, Om Faysal (Hend) went to the 'mutawa^ca' (Om Ali's, Om Khalaf's aunt), and learned how to read the Quran.

When Om Faysal was still a child, she moved with her family to live in Iraq. Eventually, her mother died, and her father got re-married to young Amina (Om Ali) who was his cousin.

At 16, Om Faysal was forced to marry Zaki, her step-mother's brother whom she disliked. Her marriage soon ended by a divorce. Om Faysal stayed at her father's house for four years after which she was coaxed into a second marriage to her father's paternal cousin who had a childless wife.

At the time of her second marriage, Om Faysal (Hend) was 21 years old. She soon regretted having accepted to marry a man whose wife had no children and thought that she might end up to be the same. Her anxiety ended when she delivered her first baby girl Abla. Now she has nine children: Abla (20), Faysal (19), Khalda (18), Adel (16), Mona (13), Maha (11), Amal (9), Suhaila (8), and Mustafa (5).

Om Faysal's relationship with her 'sharisha' was a good one. As explained by Om Faysal, that was due to the fact that her 'sharisha' was disadvantaged by being childless. Now, Om Faysal lives with her 'sharisha' in the same big villa in 'al Nozha'. Her daughter Abla is married and is at the same time pursuing her studies at the Teachers' Training Institute.

Om Faysal's husband works at the Ministry of Health and earns around 350-400 K.D. (though Om Faysal herself said that she does not know how much he earns). Each of his wives receives 50 Dinars per month, while he buys the necessary food supply.

The life history of Om Faysal particularly represents the crisis of an undesired marriage. It also reflects the importance of the role of 'Om al ^caiyal' in the polygynous family set up.

OM FAYSAL

It was again through my Kuwaiti friend Methal that I was introduced to Hend (Om Faysal), the step-daughter of Om Ali, and the step-sister of Nasima; Methal fixed an appointment for me with Om Faysal at 9:30 a.m. on the 15th of February, 1976.

At 9:30 a.m., I arrived at the big iron-gate of Om Faysal's villa in the modern district of 'Al Nozha'. The villa was surrounded by a big courtyard and a built wall. Inside the courtyard was a 'diwaneya' (men's guest-room), a kitchen, and a few store-rooms.

Om Faysal, a thin pale woman in her forties (around 42), met me at the door and welcomed me inside. As we walked up the staircase of the three-storied villa, she made the customary greetings and asked about my health. I had met Om Faysal before in 'Id al Adha' at the house of her father and her step-mother Om Ali, but I had no chance to talk to her.

We walked in through a big empty hall in which there was only a big rug. Om Faysal opened a big wooden door leading to the drawing-room, and welcomed me in. I noticed that the drawing room combined both European, and Arab furnishing styles for on one side of the room, there was a European type sofa with comfortable cushions and four small armchairs, while on the other side of the room, there was a narrow mattress of a white checked design; on the mattress, against the wall stood about 4 or 5 cushions of the same checked material.

As we sat down, Om Faysal asked about the health of Methal, and about my son whom she had already seen at Om Ali's place. She told me that she had hesitated to accept the idea of telling me about her life because she lived with a 'sharisha' (partner, co-wife) who would complain if Om Faysal left her share of the house-work so as to sit and talk to me. She then added that she only accepted because Methal was a very dear friend to her sister Nasima, and because Methal had promised her to tell me not to come on the days in which Om Faysal was responsible for the housework (each of the two wives of Jaber took the responsibility of the housework for one whole day). I agreed with Om Faysal to see her only on the days in which she was free. Explaining to Om Faysal that I was interested in Old Kuwait and in the lives of Kuwaiti women, I asked her to tell me about her life starting by her early childhood.

MEMORIES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD:

"As far back as I can remember," said Om Faysal, "we lived in 'Sharq' one of the districts of Old Kuwait. I lived with my mother, my father and my brothers. Mother had six children, two of which died in early infancy.

My mother's first child was a boy whose name was Musa^Ced. In his early infancy, Musa^Ced fell off a high place and had a broken back. When he began to walk, he became a hunchback. At the age of 3, he caught the whooping cough from which he was not properly treated. For many months, he suffered from the complications of 'bu humayer' (whooping cough); he died when he was around 4 years old.

I was born in 1932, one year after the birth of Musa^Ced. I still remember that when I was 3, mother used to take me along with her when she went visiting. But, she used to lock Musa^Ced in a room till she returned because he was heavy and she could not carry him. When we came back, we used to find broken cups and glasses. He used to feel frustrated for being left alone and thus used to break anything he found before him. I was very young at that time but I still remember. It is because I am intelligent that I remember such incidents. After my birth, mother gave birth to Daoud, Saad, and Wadha.

After delivering Wadha, mother got sick with typhoid. It was a very bad disease; but mother continued to nurse Wadha. Mother got well and recovered but the young baby caught the disease. People of the past were backward and had no idea about preventing illnesses from spreading around. They used folk-medicines to cure serious diseases. There were people who made 'tab^Caa' (charms). There were others who went to the 'fattash' (a curer) who specialized in curing and fortune-telling; I personally do not believe in such stories.

I remember that mother had the baby in her lap and suddenly saw that her eyes looked strange. She shook her and patted her on the cheeks, but she realized that she was dead. So she started screaming; she got up and put her on the floor in the direction of 'Al Quebla' (Mecca). Mother was even more sorry for this girl than she was for the first boy.

My father used to travel to Iraq for many months. He was a 'saffar' (worked in making coffee pots or dlal; sing. dalla). He used to stay in Iraq for a few months, after which he used to return with food supply and clothes. I used to go to 'al mutawa^Ca' when I was around 5 years old. It was the aunt of my step-mother Om Ali who was a 'mutawa^Ca'. I was clever and I learned the verses of the Quran very quickly. My mother and father had also gone to 'al mutawa^Ca'. They went to the same 'mutawa^Ca' because in the past girls and boys went together. But during my time there

were schools for the boys, so it was only girls who went to the 'mutawa^C a'. I never helped mother in the house-work because I was always busy learning verses from the Quran. Mother used to bring two of her female cousins, aged 12, and 13, to help her in the house-work. They used to wash dishes and to sweep the floor. Every few days, mother used to give them some money as a reward; you see mother used to have her own money.

Mother was a very clever woman. 'Allah yerhamha' (God's mercy upon her), she was very intelligent. She could read and sew and make embroideries; by her own hands she sewed 'athwab' (pl. of 'thawb': black overgarment), and ornamented them with golden embroidery. Such 'athwab' were done by order for people in the neighborhood. Women came to mother to ask her to make 'athwab' for themselves and their daughters. In feasts mother was always busy, she used to forget herself in her embroideries sometimes until early dawn. Many times I used to make up to find out that she had been working overnight. When a 'thawb' was finished it was my job to deliver it to the owner who was always someone in the neighborhood. In the past, houses were close to each other in small streets and all people in the same 'fareej' (district) knew each other. Mother put the finished 'thawb' in a piece of white cloth and tied it up well. I put it on my head and walked to the house of its owner to deliver it. When I did, I was always given some nuts or sweets and some money as a reward. Then, the women passed by mother to pay her for the 'thawb'.

With the money, mother bought us clothes, nuts, or sweets. She kept the money with her and whenever she wished for anything she bought it. If they needed anything in the house she paid from this money. There was no difference between her and her husband. Father bought most of the food supply, like rice, sugar, tea and flour. Some women used to go to the market to buy fish, vegetables and meat. Concerning us, mother only did that when father was away. When he was in Kuwait, he always bought it for her. Sometimes she used to send one of the two cousins who came to help her to the market, because in our family women were not supposed to go to buy things like vegetables. In the feast, father used to give money to my mother for buying 'chaswa' (clothes). She would go with her sister or friends to buy it.

Mother used to go to the sea to wash. Most women used to do that in the past. She also used to bake our bread which was baked 'light' in summer and 'thick' in winter. Now people don't bake at home. People have changed. Mother used to make sweets ('halawa') in big trays which she sent to our relatives as presents. One day, she made a very big tray of coconut sweets (halawa) with cardemum. My brother Daoud came in to the kitchen and fell on the tray which was on the floor. Daoud's leg was burned. He still has a scar till this day. Mother ran quickly and threw away the 'halawa' in a small ditch in the courtyard (a ditch in which rain-water was collected). Then she put 'tamer' (dates) and water on the burn, but it was of no use, so she took him to the American Mission Hospital.

But you know, life in Kuwait was not like now. Now everything is available and life is much easier. People of the past used to have cows in their courtyards. This brought them in good income. My mother-in-law was one of those women who were very fond of cows. She spent all her life in breeding cows. She used to make butter, cheese and yogourt which she sold to her neighbors. Some people had a special 'shabra' (shade) for the cows, while others just tied them up in their courtyards. There were women who used to make pickles for their own use as well as for selling. This brought them some money. It is true that it was not too much money, but at that time it was good because every single 'fil' (smallest unit of the Dinar, i.e. penny) was needed. I still remember those days, 'ayam Omi' (when mother was alive); I was always playing. When I came from the 'mutawa' I used to play with my brothers. It is good of me that I can remember all that.

When father's financial position in Iraq improved, he decided to take us all there. As I told you he used to make djal (pl. of della, coffee pots). There in Iraq, people drank a lot of coffee, all big families had many sets of huge and small coffee pots. Father went to Iraq with the father of Om Ali (who later became my step-mother). In Iran, we rent a small house. My two brothers started going to school. At that time, father tried to examine me by asking me to read verses from the Quran; I couldn't read a single word for I had forgotten how to. However, I could still recite it all by heart. I only learned how to read as a grown-up. In Iraq, mother stopped sewing because people in Iraq did not wear the 'bukhnug' (girl's head cover), or the 'thawb'. So mother stopped sewing and only worked in the house.

We were staying in a place called 'Suk al Shuyukh' near Nasereyeh. Our neighbors were very good people who were very friendly to us. In Iraq, mother delivered my youngest brother Abdullah.

A few years after delivering Abdullah mother became sick. She had something like a swelling in her stomach. She went to a doctor who prescribed injections; but they were of no use. When she became very tired she asked father to send her to Kuwait to her folks. So father took her over to Kuwait, while we stayed here alone. Our neighbors were two old widowed sisters who were very kind to us. They used to come over to cook for us and to wash our clothes every day. The eldest sister was very fond of Abdullah, so she took him to her house during mother's absence. They were very helpful and gave us all their free time; they were mostly free because they lived alone, had no children or men folk.

In Kuwait, mother's illness became worse. Her parents took her to the hospital; the doctor recommended an operation. But in the past, people feared things like operations; they preferred folk medicines, so mother was taken to a woman who was specialized in curing such illnesses. Illnesses of the chest or the stomach were cured by branding (burning

with a hot iron rod). This was a very painful process. Mother was branded on the chest and stomach and was given a herbal ointment to be applied on the affected parts. There was no positive result, mother's health deteriorated quickly. Two months later she died in her parents' house.

When we received the bad news in Kuwait, I started screaming and weeping. I was very sad for her death. For a whole year our Iraqi neighbor helped us in the house. I started helping her with the house-work and learned how to cook. It was a sad period of my life. I was only 10 years old. One year after mother's death, father said that he wanted to get married. It made no difference to me; I was not upset, but our neighbor 'khala' (aunt) Khadija, the old woman who took care of us was very upset. She used to tell me that it was too soon for my father to think of marriage.

I travelled to Kuwait with my father, while my three brothers were left with 'khala' Khadija. Father had already sent a letter to his cousin asking the hand of his daughter Amina (later Om Ali) who had been living with her maternal aunt the 'mutawa'^c. Amina's maternal uncle had wanted her for one of his sons, (brothers of Om Khalaf) for she had been living in the same house with them. But her father did not accept for he had given a word to my father. A girl at that time could not say no, and had to accept whoever was given to her as a husband. He was much older than she was, he was a widower, and had children, but her maternal aunt (the 'mutawa'^c) was happy about the marriage. She even spent from her own money to prepare Amina's trousseau, the bride-price was left untouched and was given to Amina. Amina's mother was dead and her father was married to my paternal aunt who was not good to Amina and her brother and gave them a hell of a time. She used to leave them hungry and to give them heavy work until they left to live with their maternal aunt and uncle.

When we returned to Iraq, I was happy because I knew Amina and I liked her, but 'khala' Khadija was annoyed when she saw that we were both treating each other well. She did not like to see us happy; perhaps she envied us for being fine with each other. So she used to tell me that Amina was after all a step-mother and that I should not be friendly to her so that she will not overwork me or feel intimate with me. But I did not listen to 'khala' Khadija because Amina was young and kind and inexperienced. 'khala' Khadija who had become very attached to brother Abdullah took him to live with her most of the time.

My step-mother knew little about the house-work or cooking because her aunt never let her do any work. Her aunt was a very domineering woman who decided alone about everything. So together we learned about the house-work and cooking and we became good friends.

That same year, around 1943, Zaki my step mother's brother came to Iraq to live with us. Until then, he had been staying at the house of his maternal uncle and his maternal aunt the 'mutawa^ca'. In Iraq, Zaki stayed with us and even slept with my brothers and myself in the same room. After spending three years in Iraq (after father's marriage), we moved back to Kuwait. Father could not stay away from Kuwait any longer. But since our house in Kuwait was leased to some people since our departure, my father, his wife, and my step-sister and brother lived with Om Ali's maternal aunt the 'mutawa^ca' temporarily, while I stayed with my maternal grandparents. After four months, the renters left, and we all moved to our old house.

When I was around 16 years old, a relative of ours proposed to me. Father sent a letter to his cousin (who was also his father-in-law, Om Ali and Zaki's father) asking his opinion of the man who had proposed to me. Om Ali's father wrote back asking father not to accept this proposal since he wanted me as a bride for his son Zaki (my step-mother's brother). Father always respected the word of Om Ali's father. He thus accepted Zaki's proposal.

It was my mother's sister 'khalti' who informed me of the plans that were taking place for my marriage. I was very upset to learn this news because I did not like Zaki. For a number of years Zaki had lived with us in the same house. I could not help thinking of him as a brother and not as a husband. When I told my aunt that I was not happy, that I did not want to get married, especially to Zaki, she promised to tell my father.

'khalti' told father: 'Hend does not want to get married now, why don't you postpone her marriage for some time?' Father's reply was: 'A girl should not remain unmarried as long as she has reached puberty and started washing up ('gamet teghasel wa blâghat'). They said that I had to get married to Zaki, who was not even clever enough to earn his own money. Zaki worked in making 'dlal' but only as a helper, he worked for short intervals only and did not have an income sufficient to get married, to open a house of his own, or to have a wife. His maternal aunt (the mutawa^ca) used to toil so as to give him money. From her own money she paid most of the expenses of our marriage. Zaki's income, was not the income of a man who was on the threshold of marriage.

I was very unhappy and sad about this marriage, I kept nagging at my aunt to speak once more to father. When she did, he said: 'we don't have girls who 'yetcharratun' (give their own conditions) or who complain. There are four walls in the room, let her break her head against one of them'. My grandmother also talked to me. She said: 'He is your cousin, why don't you want him? Your cousin is better for you, much better than a stranger. My dear Hend, a ~~dress~~ is better when patched from the same material ('al thawb rog^ceto meno wa fih'). I was silenced by their words

to me. Nobody could understand my feelings. At that time I was staying at my grandmother's house. It was Om Ali, my step-mother who brought the 'dazza' (bride-price, dresses and presents to the bride). She brought some bottles of rose water, incense, sweets and sherbet in a basket. She also brought pieces of material and two 'C^cebi' all tied up with the money (bride price) in a white cloth which she carried over her head. She brought a sum of 600 Rupees as my bride-price. I wonder how Zaki found all this sum, but it was probably given to him by his maternal aunt and his father.

Our 'melshê' (marriage contract) was performed after a few days. The groom was in a 'diwaneya' in the house of some relatives nearby. The Shaikh 'al melish' made the contract with the groom, and then my father and the 'melish' came over to our house to carry on the rest of the rituals of marriage. These were the only men in the house while all the male guests and the groom remained in the 'diwaneya'. I was seated on a chair, the Quran opened on my lap, and a lump of sugar under my tongue.* A green piece of silk** covered me completely as I was seated facing the Quebla (direction of Mecca) as if in prayer. Al 'melish' said to me: 'do you accept to be married to Zaki for a sum of 600 Rupees?', I said: 'Yes'."

I interrupted Om Faysal to ask if a girl can ever say no in answer to this question. Om Faysal's reply came as such:

"No, it is not possible for a girl to put her folks down on that day. If she wants to refuse, she should do so beforehand, if she can; but it is impossible to do so when all the people have gathered for the wedding. It is a shame to do that. Marriage in Old Kuwait was by force.

'Al melish' and my father left while the women were clapping and singing and making zaghareed. Incense was passed around and rose water was sprinkled as the women brought in the trays of sherbet. The actual consummation of the marriage was going to take place after 15 days when my trousseau was going to be ready. My aunt and my grandmother sewed

* Putting a lump of sugar under the bride's tongue while writing the marriage contract is a symbolic practice performed among some Egyptians in marriage. According to my knowledge it is performed so as to make the bride's words to her husband loving and sweet 'tekhali kalamha helu C^cala galbu' (literally: to make her words sweet upon his heart).

** The use of a green piece of silk material may be thought of as a symbol of fertility. This is in a way synonymous to a practice in the Egyptian culture in which the bride puts her feet in a water bowl in which there are green leaves and flowers. Again this may be thought of as a symbol of fertility.

many dresses for me. They bought me golden bracelets and a necklace from the money of the 'dazza'. There were no wedding rings at that time, neither gold nor diamond; there was no 'shabka' (gold or jewelry given as present by the groom to his bride). A girl was to buy jewelry from her 'dazza'.

After 15 days my 'yalwa' (Jalwa) was performed at the house of Om Ali's maternal aunt 'al mutawa'a' who insisted to have my 'jalwa' performed in her 'Husseineya' (Martam: religious meeting-hall similar to a mosque but only for the Shi'ahs). The night before the 'jalwa', my aunt washed me up and cleaned me all over. Henna was applied on my hands, my feet and my hair. In the morning I was taken from my grandmother's house to the house of Om Ali's aunt. There, I was washed once more and perfumed. It was my aunt who did all that because it is believed that the one who washes a bride and applies henna for her should always be a woman who is happy in her marriage, who has children, and whose husband has no other wives ('malha sharisha').

In the afternoon, I was seated on a chair covered with green piece of cloth. I was wearing a white dress above which I wore the 'abat', my face all covered. The green piece of cloth was lifted and lowered as the women sang and clapped when I was carried from my room to another room where all the women were seated on the floor. Meanwhile, my groom was escorted by drum-beaters from the mosque to the house of his aunt where we were, after performing the afternoon prayers. My father was not present. It is said that he should not attend his daughter's wedding.* I don't know where he had disappeared. These days, everybody attends, even the girl's mother. The men danced 'al carda' (war dance performed in most celebrations, marriages or feasts), out in the courtyard. We saw them from inside. Then, Zaki walked in procession to a part of the house which had a separate door and was originally part of his inheritance from his mother. He had a share in it. He was taken there, and I was escorted after him by the women. It was known to my grandmother that the ceremony of 'natara' (watching) was supposed to be performed to me because I had passed some blood from the vagina after birth.**

* According to a number of Kuwaiti informants, neither a girl's father, nor a boy's mother was supposed to attend the wedding. This can be thought of as part of the modesty code, since a girl was not supposed to talk to her father during the few days preceding her marriage out of shyness and modesty. The ceremony of 'al thaleth' was designed for the groom's family. The boy's mother was able in this occasion to come to congratulate her son, while in 'al thaleth', the girl's father was allowed to visit her in her husband's house.

** For more information about the 'natara' ritual refer to the case of Om Khalaf, p. 110

When we were taken to the other house, 'al hawafa' washed my toe and my husband's in rose-water. Then, I sat down with the women while my groom sat alone until dawn. Women sat with me and whenever he asked for me, they refused. It is said that if a girl over whom there should be 'natara' goes in with her husband before dawn, and if 'natara' is not performed, a girl would die. However, I don't think this is true. At early dawn I was let in to my groom and the room was shut upon us for the marriage to be consummated.

CRISIS:

My heart did not love Zaki. I had said to myself: 'Perhaps I will love him after marriage', but, I could not forget the idea that he was like my brother. I had not wanted this marriage since the very beginning. I hated him and hated the idea that I got married to him. He was also not very good to me, perhaps he felt that I did not like him. Because I didn't like him, I never cared for him and never fulfilled his demands. This made him treat me badly. He was very nervous and we always quarrelled. After a few months we moved to live with Zaki's maternal aunt (the mutawa^ca) because the house wherein we lived was going to be leased. His maternal uncle, his sons and their wives lived in the same house. We had our meals with his maternal aunt. Om Khalaf and her sisters-in-law were responsible for their own cooking, washing, and cleaning, while I cooked and washed for my husband and his aunt. It was known that his aunt was a nervous domineering woman. She always gave me orders and shouted at me. My husband worked little and earned little. His aunt gave him money. I felt very bad. I did not want him in the first place and here was his aunt giving me orders and giving him money, encouraging him not to toil for a living.

One day, I quarrelled with Zaki for a stupid reason. He shouted at me and then he hit me; that was the climax of it all. It was like the straw which broke the camel's back. I could not accept it anymore, so I walked out of the house and went to my father. The problem was that my husband's sister was at the same time my step-mother. This made things difficult, but I did not care. I told my father: 'you have forced me to marry him, but now nobody can force me to return to him. In the past, I was young and I was ashamed to talk to you, now things are different. I will not live with this man no matter what. I do not accept him as a husband'. Father said: 'So, it is you who is asking him to leave you, you will have to return your 'dazza'. We have no money to give to him, it would be better if someone tries to make things better between you. Your aunt can talk to him and let him apologize'.

My reply was that I was forced to this marriage, that I did not like him and that if I was cut to pieces I would not return to him. My

step-mother was mad at me when I said that I didn't want him. She frowned at me and avoided me for some time. My father lost a lot in order to break this marriage. Zaki refused to accept the 600 Rupees which he had paid. He said he will not accept less than 1000 Rupees, which father had to pay; I was finally divorced.

For some months I lived with my father, my step-mother and step-brothers and sisters; but my step-mother was still upset. My divorce should not have upset her, because she knew that I did not want Zaki since the very beginning. When a woman does not love a man and when she hates him after marriage, she can never change. It should be all over. This unpleasant experience made me complexed from marriage. I did not want to repeat this experience once more. Three of our relatives proposed to me. They were all young and not married before. As you know I had had no children from my short-lived marriage to Zaki. Yet, I refused all proposals."

Om Faysal suddenly got up when we both smelled something burning. As she ran out, she said that it must be the chicken which was forgotten in the oven. A few minutes later, Om Faysal returned. When I apologized for the fact that I delayed her from finishing her housework, she said that it was her 'sharisha' (co-wife) who had put the chicken on the oven and forgotten it. The time was approaching noon, so I took my leave and promised to visit her the following day.

February 16, 1976

At 9:00 a.m. I arrived at Om Faysal's house. Om Faysal met me at the door and apologized for not offering me anything to drink the previous day. She said that she had got absorbed in her memories and had forgotten altogether to offer me anything. Saying that it was alright, and that I was no stranger, I started telling her about my son and showed her his photoes which she admired. After 15 minutes, Om Faysal got up and brought a couple of glasses of canned fruit juice and a small plate of salted nuts.

I asked her to continue the story from the point where we had stopped the previous day. She resumed her narrative:

"For four years following my divorce, I couldn't accept the idea of re-marriage and insisted on refusing all proposals. I stayed at my father's house. My step-mother gradually forgot the old story and we started talking to each other again. She became remarkably better when I took care of her children Ali and Aleya in their illnesses. Actually Ali and Aleya were very dear to me, and in their childhood I was the

one who always took care of them. My step-mother and myself shared the housework together; each of us was responsible for a whole day.

Four years after my divorce, Om Jaber, 'khalet obuy' (my father's maternal aunt), came to see him. Om Jaber was very dear to my father. In fact she was a good woman. Her children always respected her word and never disobeyed her. Om Jaber said to my father that Jaber wanted to marry me.

Later, I knew that it was she who had suggested to her son that he should propose to me. Jaber had a wife, but had no children. He waited for ten years until it was clear that his wife could not bear children at all. Om Jaber always noticed that her son was jealous of his brother who had many children, for he always carried his brother's children and cuddled them. Om Jaber yearned to see her son having children like his brother, so she told him: 'my son, I will find you a bride. God has not given you children from your first wife, perhaps he will give you from another'. When Jaber accepted the idea of taking up another wife, his mother asked for the hand of the cousin of Jaber's wife, a young unmarried girl, but her parents did not accept. So they proposed to me. It was my 'Qesma' (luck). My father did not give Om Jaber an immediate reply. He said: 'wait till I would ask Hend'. When he told me I refused, saying that I did not want to marry a man who already had a wife. Father said: 'ya bnaiti' (my daughter), it is not right to keep refusing proposals that way. You are leading a happy life now because I am alive. Your brothers are good to you, but you can never tell how they will treat you when I am dead. They may take all your rights; a brother is more a brother to his wife than he is to his sister, and when this happens to you, you will regret the fact that you stayed unmarried. This cousin of mine is good and will treat you and his other wife fairly. He is only remarrying because his wife cannot bear children. You will bring his children and 'Insha' Allah' you will be happy. 'Ya bnaiti', what do you say?' I did not reply. It seems it was God's will because although I had refused many unmarried suitors, I accepted to become a co-wife, to become a 'sharisha' (partner). It was God's will.

MARRIAGE TO A MARRIED MAN:

My second marriage took place in 1953. I was then 21. The wedding ceremony was simple, not like the first one. I wore a white dress and a white veil, not a 'thawb' as in my first marriage. Life had changed; 'zaman awal' (in the past), nobody was supposed to see the bride's face except her own family. On the wedding night, her husband's family was not permitted to see her face. If someone came in before the ceremony

started, the bride was closed up in a room by herself. It was only on the third day after the wedding that people could come to see her. This is how it was at the beginning, but when I re-married the women could see my face uncovered except with a white veil, for the old embroidered 'athwab' had become old fashioned. That time my 'zaffa' was by cars. I was in a car with the women folk and other cars in which the men were, followed us to my husband's house."

- 'You moved to your husband's house right away?' I asked.

- "Here in Kuwait," said Om Faysal, "people are divided into two groups who have different customs. Among people of our group, the bride goes to her husband's house after the wedding. But among the people of the other group the girl stays for one week at her mother's house."

- "Do you mean by those two groups the 'Sunnis', and the 'Shi^Cahs'?" I asked.

- "Yes," replied Om Faysal. "We are 'Shi^Cahs'. The 'Sunnis' have different customs."

LIFE AS A WIFE AND MOTHER

My husband lived with his mother, his wife (my partner) and his married brother. My husband's wife did not know of the marriage except two days before it took place. She could do nothing about it because she could not bear children. He had waited for 10 years and when he started feeling that he will never have a child he thought of re-marrying. When Sabicha, his wife, knew about his marriage she was very kind and gentle. She washed him and helped him to dress for the wedding. She was the one who prepared his 'dishdasha'. Then, she put on her 'Cabat' and went to her folks. She did not quarrel or anything, but she couldn't bear to see him with another woman, so she left the house to return after 15 days. Sabicha loved Jaber very much; this is why she did not mind to help in washing him up for the wedding. But of course, she felt sad about it.

My husband's family had lots of cows and goats. Since a very long time they produced milk and dairy products which they sold to the neighbours and distributed to the poor. The women in their family always did that. The men bought the food (barley) for the cows while the women put them the food, milked them, and sold the products.

During the first 15 days, I was fine and happy. But on the 15th day, my husband went to Sabicha and got her back. At once I realized what I had done to myself. That night, he slept with her, while I did

not sleep all night. I was very sad and miserable. I realized that I was still a child when I made this decision. I could not help regretting having refused all the young unmarried suitors who proposed to me. I wondered how I had accepted, and why I had not thought hard enough. I was not young, but it seems I was not mature yet. I realized that I would have been better off had I had a husband for myself alone. I thought that it would have been more rewarding than starting a life based on 'shersh' (partnership - co-wivery). At that time I lost weight and changed a great deal. I regretted the fact that I refused other offers, to accept marriage to a man who was already married and who was also childless. Perhaps it was he who could not have children. Perhaps it was his fault. What would my situation be then? I worried and wondered.

Sabicha proved to be a kind woman. I was surprised when I found her treating me well and talking to me nicely. It was she who should have been upset. It was her right not to talk to me. As such, I started talking to her and my fears gradually dissipated when I found out that she was kind to me. Gradually I got used to the fact that my husband slept in my room day on and day off. It became normal to me. The house of my husband was in 'Sharq' (district of Old Kuwait). It was a big house in which his brother and his wife had two rooms. Sabicha and myself alternated in doing the house work, while Jaber's brother and his wife cooked their food separately. My mother-in-law either ate with us, or with her eldest son. But mostly she was not with us. The two brothers were separate in terms of money and expenses since their wives quarrelled together. It was my mother-in-law who suggested that the two brothers should split. My brother-in-law used to give money to his mother to buy them what they needed. But it was he who bought the meat, poultry, or fish. The same took place with us. My husband bought 'al yeddam' (meat, fish, etc.) while sometimes one of us used to give money to our mother-in-law to bring us vegetables from the market. At first my husband used to give his money to Sabicha only and she gave me what I needed. But now he gives each of us a certain sum of money for the expenses of the house (around 50 Dinars each). We don't use them all because Jaber always buys the necessary supply; if any groceries are needed we order them from the grocer on account. Each of us was responsible to sweep the floor right in front of her room. We used to pull salty water from 'al jalib'. This water was used to rinse clothes after washing them in the sea. Then, we used to rinse them in rain-water which we collected in a small 'berche' (lake) through some pipes on the roof. In the past, we used to wash the clothes in the sea, but later, a man started getting us water in tanks which was poured in pipes. At that time we stopped washing in the sea. I don't remember when this was exactly, but perhaps it was 20 years ago (1950's). I never went alone to the sea. I always gathered up some women of my friends and neighbors. We all went together about 2 or 3 times a week.

Four months after my marriage, I became pregnant. My husband was delighted, but my co-wife was surprised. She thought that her husband was responsible for the fact that they had no children. Sabicha had wished very much to have children. She had gone to the hospital and had been treated, but it was of no use. I delivered a baby girl whom we called Abla, at the hospital. Sabicha seemed upset and not very happy when she came to see me at the hospital. She must have felt hurt that I got a baby while she could not. But, it was nice of her to come to see me.

After six days in hospital I left to my father's house. At home, my step-mother told me that I should pack my vagina with salt. It is said that the womb is never cured except with salt which helps to strengthen the tissues and to clean the uterus. I was also given some drugs which help to reduce the vagina to its normal size. I ate 'caseeda' (special food made of flour and fat) and a lot of hot foods. My step-mother and the wife of my brother Daoud took care of me until I moved, after 40 days, to my husband's house.

My co-wife started carrying Abla and was nice to me. She was always kind to my children. About a year later, I delivered my son Mohammed. But I returned from the hospital to my own home because I did not want to bother my step-mother and 'marat okhuy' (brother's wife) who had many children. My brother-in-law and his wife were in Iraq, so our house was calm. I was sure then, that I could be in the care of both my partner and my mother-in-law.

Now I have 6 girls and 3 boys. They are: Abla (20), Faysal (19), Khalda (18), Adel (16), Mona (13), Maha (11), Amal (9), Suhaila (8), and Mustafa (5). I always breast-fed my children. In most cases I got pregnant right after delivery. I used to wash up 40 days after delivery; but I never had my periods after that. I always got pregnant after the 40th. However, there was a pause between Suhaila and Mustafa because I nursed Suhaila for about two years. I had so many children because in the past nobody knew about things like the pill, besides, my husband is the conservative type who does not permit me to prevent pregnancy. In the 1950's, when I told him about the pill, he never accepted to let me use it. He always told me: 'haram aleish' (it is a taboo to do so). A child is 'ateyet Allah' (a gift from God). You should not try to stop it by any way. When I delivered the last two children I had become very tired of pregnancy. After 'saba butun' (7 bellies: pregnancies), I was too exhausted. My last two deliveries were not easy at all, because I had lost my energy. Now I stopped having children, just like that, 'min Allah' (from God). My menstrual periods have become irregular and I don't think I will get pregnant anymore.

But you know, although I have 9 children, and although it is difficult to control them, yet it is a great satisfaction for a woman to find

all her children around her. It is fun to bring them up. I just enjoy to sit down with my girls around me."

- "If you had the opportunity to change your role as a wife and a mother, what other role would you choose?" I asked Om Faysal.

- "A woman can be a wife, a mother, as well as something else like a teacher or an employee," replied Om Faysal, "there are women who are educated. I think that such women can work and serve their nation. If they can make the compromise between home and work, and fulfill all their obligations on both sides, then why not? However, I believe that this compromise is not easy. A working woman who comes back from work very exhausted throws the responsibility of her children to the Indian. This is wrong, because the Indian should only be responsible of the cleaning or the washing; she is not to replace the mother. A mother should cook for her children by her own hands.

Concerning me, I would not change my role as a wife and a mother. I am happy and satisfied. The most important thing in my life is to bring up my children well and to make my husband happy. I cherish my children and my husband, though each in a different way. You can say that I am 'min hezb al qane'in' (the contented type. I care for nothing but good health and happiness. I don't look at others or compare myself to them. I am satisfied with what I am as long as my husband, myself and my children, are together in good health."

- "What else are the characteristics of a good woman?" I asked.

- "A good woman," replied Om Faysal, "is kind and sweet. She should have a sweet tongue and should not be the nervous bullying type. A woman who talks nicely and calmly to her husband can get him to do all what she wants. If he loves her and is happy with her, he will always fulfill her desires."

- "Do you think that a woman should be submissive and weak?" I asked.

- "No, why should she be submissive and weak?" Om Faysal replied. "She is a human being and she is the one who bears, delivers and rears children. She should have her own personality. She can object to anything she dislike, but she should do that nicely so as to get a positive result."

- "Do you think it is unfair for a woman to be always at home, doing house-work and taking care of children?" I inquired.

- "No, it is not unfair," said Om Faysal "this is only normal. A woman's normal place is at home with her children. It is her obligation to bring her children up, and to teach them good manners."

* * * * *

February 18, 1976

When I arrived to Om Faysal's house, I was led in by her young son Mustafa (5). Om Faysal seemed to be busy with a guest who was sitting with her in the drawing room. I went in, greeted them and sat down. Om Faysal's guest, an old woman in her 60's seemed to have been discussing a serious matter with Om Faysal. I remained silent and observed the discussion.

I gathered that Om Faysal was telling her friend about her brother-in-law 'hamaha' who had taken a new wife.

- "Hamay," said Om Faysal, "had two boys and a girl from his first wife Hamda, but he and Hamda were never on good terms. Hamda was dirty and reckless and never did her obligations towards her husband properly. This is why he got re-married to this divorcee who is a real good woman. His new wife is really 'nadra wa habbet reih' (rare and as swift as the wind).

Hamda got very upset because at the beginning her husband slept with her every other night, but later, he stopped going to her altogether. Hamda often complained to her mother-in-law, until finally they had a quarrel because of the new wife. Hamda asked him to divorce her and left to her father's house. This week, he finally divorced her."

- "Men always put themselves in trouble when they re-marry," commented Om Mohammed (Om Faysal's guest).

- "Yes," said Om Faysal, "in most cases, a lot of trouble takes place, but when the woman is reckless and dirty, her husband is forced to look for another wife. On the other hand, a man is mistaken to re-marry if his wife is good and clever. If she's taking good care of her children, then he is mistaken to re-marry, because the wife tries to dominate the new one, and fights start between them."

- "Was that what happened in your case?" I asked. "Does your co-wife try to dominate you?"

- "No," replied Om Faysal. "My case is different. My partner does not try to dominate me, she is kind. Besides, she knows that the fault is hers. She had no children, and this is why she has to let things go. But if a woman has children and her husband re-marries without any reason, then anger, trouble and 'sharr' (evil) may come up."

- "I think" comments Om Mohammed, that a man should only re-marry if his wife is sick or cannot have children, otherwise he only turns his life into hell. It is better for a man and for a woman not be in 'shersh' (partnership, co-wivory); but people differ, not all your fingers are

alike. There are men who say: 'my first wife is the mother of my children, I would never change her if I was given a million Dinars'. Such men are really good," said Om Mohammed.

- "What do you think are the characteristics of a good man?" I asked Om Faysal, after her guest's departure.

- "A good man," replied Om Faysal, "knows his obligations towards his wife and is fair if he has more than one wife. He is good-natured and kind and does not play around. He is faithful to his wife and serious in his work. He is honest and has a strong personality. 'Al rayal al zein' sticks to his word, trusts his wife and gives her some freedom within certain bounds."

- "What does freedom mean to you?" I asked.

- "Freedom means that I have the right to go in and out as I please and wherever I please. I always go out either to my father's house, or to my brother's house. My husband never objects, as long as he is not home: but of course he wouldn't like me to go out when he's home. If he comes and finds me out he doesn't mind, but I cannot just leave him and go out. There are men who force their wives to take permission before going out, but we don't do that, especially since I became 'mara wa om 'aiyal' (a woman and a mother). When I was just married, I used to take permission before going out to my father's house; but now, I am not young and I have children. Now he does not object, and if he does I would be upset. I would tell him that I am old and that this is not right. On the whole, life has changed these days, women work and are asking for their rights and their freedom. Most girls don't even wear the 'abat'. My sisters don't wear it at all, but of course I do. We the older ones have to keep the old traditions. It is the younger generation who can do away with it. But an older woman cannot do that, for many reasons. First of all she should put on the 'abat' out of religiosity. Second, she should take it off because people will mock her and talk about her."

- "Women or men?" I asked.

- "No, all the 'hareem', not the men. Men don't notice such things. Perhaps a father may notice his daughter, but men in society hardly notice such things. It is the 'hareem' who notice and who make all the gossip. Besides, a woman feels comfortable in her 'abat'. She can wear any old frock underneath it. But if she takes it off, she has to be well-dressed, and her hair has to be properly set. Putting on the 'abat' relieves me from such obligations. My daughters go to school without the 'abat'. But if they are going out in a social visit, or to the market, they have to wear it. Their father is strict and he insists upon it. My eldest daughter Abla wears it, but takes it off as soon as she goes into the Institute.

A girl in university or in an institute feels 'mebahdela' (untidy) if she goes in her 'abat' because most girls don't wear it. But, 'kol wagt ma yestehi men wagt' (every age has its own characteristics! The change makes it possible for a girl to go out 'sufur'). Our time demands this. Life has changed in many respects."

- "Was life better in the past?" I asked.

- "No, now life is better because everything is available and there is no poverty. In the past, people were poor and had a little of everything. Now, there's money and food and ease. But life in the past was more simple and less complexed. The only thing that I regret about the past is that members of a family were always strongly bound to each other. People in the district always knew each other and were good friends. However, telephones and cars make distances short between people these days. When we first moved from our old house in 'Sharq', I was very unhappy because all people in our 'fareej' had already moved out. We were alone and had no neighbours for three years. When the government estimated our house for around 6000 Dinars, we were delighted. Jaber had a small shop where he sold vegetables. When we took the money, he sold it and bought a bigger and nicer shop where he sold housewares. We were very happy when our house in the new district of 'Da'eya' was finished. We could not believe ourselves. The house was nice and big. The floor was covered with tiles, not like the old house in which the floor was covered with cement. My husband's brother had a similar house next to us. There was a good bathroom and good sewage in the house. We were happy there, but after two months, we had a big disappointment. The house was built on the low side of the street. When the rainy season started, all the rain-water collected in the house. Our new furniture and carpets were all flooded with water. There was about half a meter of water in the house. It could not be drained. Even our clothes were spoiled. We called the water company and they drained the water out. The house became very humid. The rain water was dried, but a lot of mud was absorbed in the carpets. We had to put the carpets in the courtyard and could never use them again. We leased a house in the same district and moved there till summer. In summer, we returned to our house, but when winter came the same mess happened again. So we decided to sell the house and bought this house.

When we moved to 'Al Nozha', we were very happy with the house. But my step-mother, Om Ali, advised me not to show my pleasure all the time, to keep complaining to the visitors from what had happened in the other house, and to burn incense all the time so as to avert the evil eye. She said that all what had happened to us in the other house was out of 'hasad' (evil eye). I obeyed her so as to be on the safe side, but in fact I think that such things like the evil eye, spells, fortune-telling and magic are nonsense. Spells, and magic are never permanent, and as the saying goes, 'ma'ash walad elli bel neder, wala dam rayal elli bel seher'

(no son has ever lived by a vow (consecration), and no man has ever remained faithful by magic). But, no one can ever tell, for the friends of the devil are numerous."

Om Faysal excused herself and went to the telephone to call her daughter Abla. When she returned, I asked about Abla's marriage. Om Faysal told me that Abla got married when she was 18 years of age.

- "Abla was clever," said Om Faysal, "and wished to go on with her university studies, but when she attended the wedding of Nuriyeh, our relative, a young man from our family saw her. After a few days he sent his mother to ask for Abla's hand. I could not give his mother a word before asking Jaber. When I told Jaber, he was happy and said that he liked the young man because he was a pious man. But Jaber said that we could not give them a word before asking Abla, perhaps she wanted to continue her studies first.

When we asked Abla, she said that she wanted him and that she preferred to get married at an early age. I told her that marriage was a big responsibility for which she had to be ready. She said that she could bear this responsibility. So, we blessed the marriage. They gave her a bride-price of 900 Dinars, and got her many presents. After marriage, she left to Lebanon for twelve days.*

Now, Abla has joined the Teacher's Training Institute, and despite the fact that she has an eight-month old baby, she manages to study hard. In the morning, she leaves the baby in the care of her mother-in-law. She also has an Indian servant. I was very pleased by her decision to carry on her studies. Life has changed now and education is one of the very good advantages of the change. It is an opportunity which has not been offered to people like us. But women of these days are lucky, because they can be more broad-minded and can earn money. A woman who can earn money whether now or in the past is happier than a woman who has to open her hand to her husband to give her money. My mother was one of those clever women who could earn money by sewing and embroidering. I always regretted the fact that I never had the chance to learn from her. 'Allah yerhamha' (God's mercy upon her), she has died young.

* The details of the wedding ceremony are synonymous to the wedding of Nuriyeh in the case of Om Khalaf, who is also 'Shi^cah' and a relation to Om Faysal. See Om Khalaf p. 125.

PROFILE

De Marzoug (Alia) is an 'alla, 'Turki Muslim who was 1 in Egypt in 1926. Her father worked as a diar and had to flee, some time ago for long periods, during which his family was left alone in Egypt. De Marzoug's mother raised her sons by sewing dresses which are sold to people in the neighbourhood. De Marzoug had eight brothers and sisters.

At 17, De Marzoug (Alia) got married to her father's maternal cousin and moved to live in Koptia with her in-laws, who did not treat her well. The brothers of Fadel, De Marzoug's husband, paid 200 E.D. each for household expenses, while Fadel's father paid 200 E.D. per month.

Around 1952, De Marzoug's husband got re-married to an Egyptian. This marked a decisive point in De Marzoug and her husband's marital relationship. Enticed by this news, De Marzoug moved out of the family house to another house which is her father's maternal father-in-law.

THE LIFE HISTORY OF OM MARZOUG

De Marzoug has a long history of marital problems. Her husband's Egyptian women are brought her in to live with De Marzoug. Within the same household created rivalry between the two wives. De Marzoug asked her 'ghariba' to go out of her house.

De Marzoug has 13 children: Marzoug (15), Shaha (13), Hamed (12), Jamal (10), Fatima (7), Amal Hada (5), Hana (4), Fatma (3), Hana (2), Aiman (10), Ghislain (7), Ghada (6), and Salia (4). The first Egyptian wife of Fadel has 7 children, while the second Egyptian wife has 6 children. Thus Fadel has a total number of 20 children.

Marzoug is at present studying for a B.A. in the United States, Shaha is a student at the Teachers' Training Institute, Fatima and Hana are both students at the Commercial Institute, while the rest of the children are all in school.

De Marzoug has received no education. Her husband Fadel has a private office and earns around 1500 E.D. per month. The share of De Marzoug and her family of this income ranges between 400-500 E.D. per month.

The life history of De Marzoug highlights the crisis of early marriage and illuminates the issues of daughter-in-law / sister-in-law relationships, the ambiguous role of the 'ghariba', and the role of 'ghariba' Fadel. It reflects the problems that can arise between the first wife in a polygamous family set up, and the important role of the first wife in shaping the whole network of relationships within the family.

PROFILE:

Om Marzoug (Aisha) is an 'asila, 'Sunni Muslim who was born in Muscat in 1938. Her father worked as a diver and had to stay away from home for long periods, during which his family was left back in Muscat. Om Marzoug's mother raised some money by sewing dresses which she sold to people in the neighbourhood. Om Marzoug had eight brothers and sisters.

At 11, Om Marzoug (Aisha) got married to her father's paternal cousin and moved to live in Kuwait with her in-laws, who did not treat her well. The brothers of Fadel, Om Marzoug's husband paid 200 K.D. each for household expenses, while Fadel's father paid 300 K.D. per month.

Around 1962, Om Marzoug's husband got re-married to an Egyptian. This marked a decisive point in Om Marzoug and her husband's marital relationship. Enraged by this news, Om Marzoug moved out of the family house to another house given to her by her sympathetic father-in-law. This led to a partial separation between her and her husband for a long period. Two years later, Fadel married another Egyptian woman and brought her in to live with Om Marzoug. Living within the same household created rivalry between the two wives; Om Marzoug asked her 'sharisha' to go out of her house.

Om Marzoug has 13 children: Marzoug (25), Shaha (23), Nawal (22), Jamal (18), Fatima (17), Abdel Reda (16), Hussa (14), Fadha (13), Amina (2), Aiman (10), Suleiman (7), Ghanima (6), and Walid (4½). The first Egyptian wife of Fadel has 7 children, while the second Egyptian wife has 6 children. Thus Fadel has a total number of 26 children.

Marzoug is at present studying for a B.A. in the United States, Shaha is a student at the Teachers' Training Institute, Fatima and Nawal are both students at the Commercial Institute, while the rest of the children are all in school.

Om Marzoug has received no education. Her husband Fadel has a private office and earns around 1500 K.D. per month. The share of Om Marzoug and her family of this income ranges between 400-450 K.Dinars.

The life history of Om Marzoug highlights the crisis of early marriage and illuminates the themes of daughter-in-law / mother-in-law relationships, the ambiguous role of the 'sharisha', and the role of 'al mara'l ^cauda'. It reflects the problems that can arise between women in the polygynous family set up, and the important role of the first wife in shaping the whole network of relationships within the family.

OM MARZOUG

On the 26th of November 1975, I paid my first visit to Om Marzoug. I was accompanied by Soad, my Palestinian friend who happened to be Om Marzoug's neighbour, and who was supposed to introduce me to her as a researcher interested in Old Kuwait.

We were met at the gate of the simply designed two-storied villa, by Om Marzoug and seven or eight of her thirteen children. Amidst greetings and words of warm welcome we went in through one of the two gates in the all surrounding wall, to the paved courtyard and then to the inside of the villa. The high wall surrounding the courtyard, characteristic of most Kuwaiti houses, was designed to ensure privacy. I was later told by one of Om Marzoug's daughters that only the side gate was used, while the main gate was never used. This was done so as to prevent trespassers from peeping-in to watch any of the numerous daughters of Om Marzoug.

Jamal, the 18-year old son of Om Marzoug, took the lead and ushered us in to an ordinary living room furnished with a big carpet floor mattresses, and a T.V. set. Objecting to her son's action, Om Marzoug insisted to receive us in the drawing room on the opposite side of the corridor and commented that it would be more comfortable for us to be seated on sofas and armchairs than on the floor in the Arab-style room. Jamal laughingly answered that we should sit with them where they usually spend their evenings so that we would be able to imagine how they really live. But, upon Om Marzoug's insistence, we moved to the drawing room furnished with wall to wall carpets, two velvet sofas and four armchairs, despite the fact that the lamps were out of order. Since it was a few minutes after sunset, it was hard for us to see each other properly in the semi-darkness.

Soad, my friend, took the initiative to open up the discussion as soon as we were seated. She asked the children about their studies, then, a brief conversation went on about Soad's children. When Om Marzoug got up to offer us some juice and biscuits, Jamal asked me about the nature of my study, and offered to introduce me to women in his family. I learned that Jamal was a student in secondary school, and that he was aspiring to join the Faculty of Medicine in Kuwait which will be inaugurated in 1976.

Om Marzoug, a shabby woman in her late thirties, was dressed in a night gown and a 'robe de chambre'. Her hair was tied up with a thick white scarf which she had started putting on since she went to Hijaz on a pilgrimage in 1973. Most of her daughters were 'mutahajibat', i.e. put on the white head cover, worn tight all around the face, and long maxi

dresses. As for the boys, they all wore grey woolen 'dashadish' (sing: 'dishdasha', man's dress), without the traditional head cover.

In this short visit, which lasted only for an hour, we discussed general issues. When Soad asked about Shaha, Om Marzoug's eldest daughter, who was Soad's student at the Girls' Institute where Soad worked as a teacher, a number of voices rose to say that Shaha never joined the family downstairs, and that she always locked herself up in her room. Asked about the reason for her seclusion, the children replied that nobody knew and that all attempts to make her join the family had failed.

Promising to visit the family soon, I told Jamal that I was going to ring them up to fix a date for my next visit. As we took our leave and walked out to the outer gate, we could hear the young children timidly whispering "come again, please come again soon."

* * * * *

For more than three weeks I could not manage to meet Om Marzoug who had to move to the house of a sick relative whom she called 'Omi' Marriam (i.e. mother Marriam). She had to hire an Indian cook to be responsible of the cooking during her absence. During this time I managed to call her up once a week to ask about the health of her senile relative. I felt that this was very much appreciated on her part. Finally I succeeded to fix an appointment on the 20th of December 1975.

* * * * *

December 20, 1975

At 9:30 a.m. I paid my second visit to Om Marzoug. Welcoming me to the drawing room, she apologized for not being able to receive me during the preceding weeks. She commented that her children admired me very much and that I should pay them regular visits. "I prefer it if you'd come in the mornings," she said, "but the children want you to visit us in the afternoons so that they can meet you. Please try to come in the evening for the children's sake; they really admire strangers, much more than their own relatives. One's own relatives are not always good." I promised to visit them once in the morning and once in the evening so as to please everybody. I was delighted by this genuine welcome on the part of Om Marzoug, and felt that those were the early signs of rapport.

After a few moments, Om Marzoug hurried to the kitchen and came back with a lavish display of sweet and salted biscuits and cans of fruit juice. Sitting next to me, she smiled and seemed to be waiting for me to talk. I felt that this was the right moment to get her started on her life-history and asked her to relate to me about her life as far back as she could remember. Om Marzoug asked for no justification for my interest in her life.

MEMORIES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD :

With a big sigh, Om Marzoug started her long narrative:

"Ah... my life," she said, "Well, I was born in Kuwait around 38 years ago. I was my parents' fifth child. I had eight brothers and sisters. The eldest was Khalifa, followed by Mauza, Amna, Fatma, myself (Aisha), Mohammed, Ali, Khamis, and finally Husa. When I was an infant, we moved to Muscat* where my father wanted to seek better chances of work. 'Khali' (my mother's brother) had been living in Muscat since a long time. It was he who suggested to my father to move to Muscat and to join him in the big house where he lived alone with his childless wife.

My father who is a Moomary, from the tribe of Bani Omar, worked as a pearl diver. He used to go away in long diving trips which lasted for five months. During his absence, we were left in the care of my uncle 'khali'. 'Omi' and 'okhti' (my sister) Mauza had a sewing machine. Together they went to the market once every two weeks to buy the most colourful 'kham' (materials) which they sewed into long maxi dresses with long sleeves and cuffs. The dresses were then given to 'al dallala' (woman peddler who sells clothes and 'kham' to women). At the end of each day, 'al dallala' brought the money to my mother who in turn paid her for her work.

We lived in a big mud house just like the Arabian style houses in Old Kuwait. It had a massive two-sided door with iron bolts. We had two women slaves who were responsible for the washing and the cleaning. My mother and 'marat khali' (the wife of my uncle) alternated in taking the responsibility of the cooking and the baking. In the past, we had to bake our own bread by ourselves.

Mother was always busy, and never stopped working. When she was through with the cooking, she had to start sewing. She also had to take care of us. When father came back from his trips he always brought us lots of presents like candy, sugar, rice and clothes, from Dubai. At home we had a special shed for our sheep, horses and donkeys. If we needed something from the market mother went on donkey back to buy it. We had a shepherd boy who took the sheep to graze everyday for a small number of Rupees.

My sisters Amna and Mauza got married when I was around 9 years old. The following year, my sister Fatma, who was twelve years old, caught a contagious disease and died. Mother lost her head over her. She screamed and cried a lot, but the women in the neighbourhood told her that the Sheikh

*Muscat - is situated on the South Eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

always said that if mourners screamed for the loss of a dead person, this person burned up in his tomb. The women of Muscat screamed a lot for their dead, and the Sheikh always warned them. In the morning people came to our house. We offered no coffee or tea, in observance of the customs of people in Muscat. 'Marat khali' was the one who told us that neither tea nor coffee should be offered."

MARRIAGE :

"When I was 11 years old, I was to get married to Fadel, my father's paternal cousin. Fadel's father had sent a letter to my father asking if he had any girls of marrying age for his son. At first my father did not accept because he did not want to send me away. But Fadel's father was rich and had a lot of property. Mother told father: "why should we prevent her from having the chance of a better living? It is better for her to be far and rich than to be near and poor." Father's only reason for objecting was the fact that I had to move to live in Kuwait. But when mother succeeded to convince him, he wrote back to Fadel's father saying that he has a bride for Fadel.

A few days before the arrival of my groom and his father to Kuwait, my mother told me: "Aisha you will get married, and you will go away, what do you say?" I said: 'Oh mother, you are my guardians and the word is yours to say. Whatever pleases you should definitely please me.'

In a few days' time, Fadel and his father arrived to Kuwait and brought me a big suit-case full of lovely presents for my wedding. They got me many pieces of cloth, two cebee (pl. of abat) henna, perfumes and incense, nuts and sweets. Mother sewed many nice dresses for me. The morning before my wedding 'al hawafa' was brought to prepare me for my marriage. She groomed my hair, and applied henna and 'dehen' (hair oil) on it. Henna was also applied on my hands and feet. I was then ornamented with golden anklets, golden bracelets and necklaces; I was dressed and perfumed. Perfume and rose water were sprinkled all over the well-swept house and incense has burned. In the afternoon I was dressed in an ornamented thawb adorned with golden thread embroidery and a abat. Until then, I have been feeling happy because of all the care which was being given to me. In the evening, I started being scared and unhappy. I had no idea whatsoever of what was going to happen to me. I was only 11 years old, I had no breasts and had not even reached puberty. It was a custom in the past to get girls married at a very early age. The whole place was full of women and girls who were singing and clapping their hands in rhythm with the drum-beats. In the patio, men came in after performing the evening prayers. We had slaughtered two lambs and two big sacs of rice were cooked with meat. My mother was in the kitchen which was in one corner of the patio. She served huge trays and gave them to my brother who took them over to the men guests while women, helped by the two slaves, took trays to the 'harem'.

The bridegroom was escorted by the men into the bedroom which was set for us. Everybody came in to congratulate him. When they all walked out, I was then escorted to the bedroom. Women were singing as they took me in, and I was seated beside him, my face and head all covered up. The door was shut upon us.

My husband tried to approach me but I was very scared and tried to rebuff him. He kept trying for about half an hour, after which he walked out, according to the custom and spent sometime with the men outside. I stayed inside alone. When he came back, he took off his 'bisht' (over-cloak). He forced me to take my 'abat' off, and prayed on it. Then he took off his 'dishdasha' (man's dress) and tried to approach me once more. I was screaming and crying and fighting him until he hit me and pulled me by my hand. I was never as scared as I was that night.

Early in the morning, my husband called my mother and I overheard him telling her, "'baiyadh Allah wajehkum, taraha banitkum bint' (God whitens your face, your daughter is a girl (i.e. virgin), you can hang the white cloth." Mother was happy and overwhelmed as she prepared our breakfast which we were supposed to have alone in our room for a whole week.

Meanwhile, 'al hawafa' was told to wash me up and to attend to my hair, my garments and my atointment. I was dressed and perfumed and went back to my room to have my breakfast which consisted of cake, cookies, tea and coffee. After breakfast my husband went to the diwaneya with his father to join the company of my father, my brothers and his father.

Mother came over to ask me if everything was alright; her question put me to tears. I was scared and shocked and frightened. Mother tried to soothe me. Patting me gently on my back, she whispered to me that all women were like that, and that a woman is usually scared at first, but soon gets used to her spouse.

Twelve days after my marriage we left to Kuwait. In Kuwait, we stayed in my husband's big family-house. My in-laws had three houses. Two of them were leased. We lived in the third and biggest house in Mergab, the district of 'al Merguab'. It was an Arabian-style, mud house which consisted of 12 rooms and a big courtyard.

We lived with 'khalti' (my mother-in-law), 'ami' (my father-in-law), my two sisters-in-law, and my two brothers-in-law.

My father-in-law was a 'mulla' or a 'mutawā' (a Quran teacher). A separate room in the house was used for children who came to learn the Quran. 'ami' owned a lot of property, after oil discovery, he worked in the government as a clerk.

'ami' was one of those old people, who like my father, had gone to the sea in diving seasons. He always had stories to relate to me, and later,

to my children about the olden days. Such stories seemed to call up to him nostalgic memories of his youthful days."

LIFE AS A WIFE AND MOTHER :

"One year after my marriage, I became pregnant. I was rather late in getting pregnant because when I married Fadel I had not yet reached puberty. I reached puberty at my husband's house, not at my parents. I delivered my first son Marzoug at home, but of course not in my own room, but in my mother-in-law's room. A woman should not deliver in her own room. Actually, she should move altogether to her mother's house, but because my mother was not in Kuwait, I delivered in my mother-in-law's room. A woman, of course, should not be in the same room with her man until after the 40th day of delivery. Forty days after delivery, two lambs were slaughtered. It is a custom to slaughter one lamb when the new born is a girl and two lambs when the new born is a boy. Many relatives and friends were invited for lunch. Incense was burned. The baby was dressed in new clothes and a golden bracelet. He was bathed by 'Omo'l Cauda' (his grand mother). My husband was very happy that the newborn was a boy. He had wished to have a baby boy whom he wanted to call Marzoug. His brothers knew this and even before I got pregnant, they used to call him 'Bū Marzoug' (i.e. Father of Marzoug).

Life with my in-laws was very unpleasant. My sisters-in-law were two devils. My mother-in-law did not like me. She never took care of my children or cuddled them as a grandmother usually did. I was supposed to be responsible of the house and the cooking two days per week. Each of my sisters-in-law was also responsible for two days. Later, when the two boys (my brothers-in-law) got married, their wives shared in the housework; each of us cooked for one day. When I cooked, my sisters-in-law always complained that the food was not well-cooked. Because I was very young, I used to sit back in my room and cry. My mother-in-law always said to her friends that I was not a good housewife and that I did not cook properly. She would wink to her women friends when she suspected that I was listening.

I nursed Marzoug for more than two years. When I had Shaha, I used to breast-feed the two children. I had a small boy servant who used to carry Marzoug when I had a lot of work to do. My father-in-law had a shop down in the market, in which he sold sugar, rice, tea, etc. It was my youngest brother-in-law who directed the shop.

At the beginning of each month, each of my brothers-in-law paid 200 dinars. My husband paid 200, and my father-in-law paid 300. Some of this money was given to my father-in-law, while the rest was given to my mother-in-law who was responsible for the daily expenses. That was in the 1950's. My husband used to give me money to buy what I needed. I used to buy cocoa, chocolates, and biscuits for the children. But my in-laws used to be upset if I bought anything. They always bought the monthly supply of

the sugar etc. If I bought more things by myself they grumbled. My husband always realized that his mother and sisters were not good to me. He used to tell me 'nevermind, don't answer them, just let them talk...' He used to tell them not to annoy me. He often told them, 'she's young and has no experience in housework, you should excuse her.' My father-in-law, on the other hand, was very kind to me; he always defended me. 'Omi' Marriam, the sister of my mother-in-law was the kindest of all. She represented a mother figure to me especially in times of misery. To her I owe a lot, and this is why I was busy the past few weeks because I had to stay with her during her illness."

[I was about to ask Om Marzoug about what she meant when she said: "during times of misery," but she was called up by the carpenter who was fixing the door of the master-bedroom. When she returned, she repeated that she would like me to visit them in the evening when the children would be home.]

- "But what about 'Abou'l 'Caiyal'?" I asked. "Is he usually home in the evening?"

- "Home!" came the cynical reply. "Who? Fadel! Oh no! He is not free; he has his 'hareem!'"

- "Do you mean he has other wives?" I inquired.

Om Marzoug sighed, twisted her mouth and frowned, as she replied:

- "Yes, he has two other wives, besides myself."

Voluntarily, she started telling me the story:

LIFE AS A CO-WIFE :

"Thirteen years ago when I had only five of my children: Marzoug, Shaha, Jamal, Nawal and Fatma, Fadel said that he wanted to go to Cairo to fetch me a good servant who would relieve me of the housework. My children were all young and naughty. There was less than a year in age difference between them because I always got pregnant shortly after delivery, sometimes right after the 40th day.

Fadel left to Cairo, but, to my disappointment, he came back without a servant. I suspect that he never even looked for one, because twelve days after his arrival, his mother told me the bad news of his marriage to an Egyptian. When she disclosed this news to me she had an ugly grin on her face which gave me the feeling that she was either lying to me to drive me mad, or that she was happy for what had happened. My only response was that I shouted and cried a lot. It was a big disappointment because he always told me that he loved me. I felt that I was living in lies. He was lying

to me when he claimed that he loved me; he was lying to me when he said he will go to Cairo to get a servant; then I thought, perhaps his mother was also lying when she broke the news to me. The devil, she claimed that she shouted at him and that she was upset that he got married, although I later knew from Omi Mariam, who was not on very good terms with her sister, that my mother-in-law encouraged Fadel to get married. Perhaps it was all her idea. I don't know.

When Fadel came home, I was burning inside. I shouted and yelled at him, but he remained silent. His silence made me realize that he had really got married. He did not try to deny it or to answer back as I said: 'Go to her, I don't want you anymore, take your children and send me to my father's aunt in Gabla (district in Kuwait). I don't want to see your face and since you have decided to take up a new wife you can stick to her forever.' All through this outburst, he remained silent; when I was through, he said: 'But you are the mother of my children, and I desire you. I cannot live without you. I want to keep you.'

^CAmi, (my father-in-law) was very harsh on Fadel. He nearly kicked him out of the house and for a long time did not talk to him. Fadel had been keeping his new wife at one of his aunt's place. He stayed with her and for several days he did not come home. 'Omi' Marriam stood beside me during this crisis. She told me: 'you should not stay with them anymore. You should ask for a separate house, because after some time Fadel will bring the new wife to live with you, and you will lose the right to have a separate house. You should establish your right as the first wife by asking them to give you a separate house.' She promised to talk to my father-in-law.

That very night, she told my father-in-law that I had to be moved to a new house. '^CAmi' was actually very nice to me. He talked to me kindly and convinced me not to go away. He said he would give me one of his houses, and that he would register it on my name.

I thus moved with my children to the new house, and made it clear that Fadel was not to come there, and that if he wanted to see his children he could see them outside the gate of my house.

I had made up my mind to dedicate myself to my children, and no more. I realized that if I left and gave him the children they will lead a miserable life with their Egyptian step-mother. '^CAmi' convinced me that staying with my children in the house was the best solution.

For seven successive months we did not see Fadel nor did we hear from him. I learned from 'Omi' Marriam that one month following my departure, Fadel took his new wife to his parents' house against his father's will. '^CAmi' remained upset with him for some time, but then started talking to him. My father-in-law always came to see us, but my mother-in-law never did. She was happy for what had happened to me because she never liked me.

After seven months, Fadel's friends brought him home. They came in and told me that I should forgive him and that he could not live without me or the children. Although I was still upset, I felt that since he cared to come, it meant that he actually wished to see me. But deep in my heart, I still felt bitter.

When his friends left I told him that I accepted to let him stay only for the sake of his children, but that I was not ready to share a room with him. I had got used to sleep with my children and could not tolerate the idea of sleeping with him any more. Someone else could provide him with what he needed. He only said: 'it is up to you.'

The routine of my life changed once more. Fadel would come over to my place in the very early morning. He would have his breakfast with me and then leave at about 8:30 or 9:00 to his office. At 2:30 he would come for lunch. We would all have lunch together and would put on the fire so as to prepare the tea. At about 4:30, Fadel would leave. In the evening he would go to her, and would spend the night with her.

His wife was very jealous of me. She often argued with him and quarrelled when she knew that he came to my place. But Fadel never took heed of what she said. When he quarrelled with her he always spent the night here, which drove her more mad. But, no matter what she does, I am 'al mara'l cauda' (the big woman). I am the mother of his children.

- "Didn't she have children?" I asked.

- "She had seven children, but I am the first wife. I am the one who should be respected no matter what. When Fadel spent the night here," she continued, "I never slept in the same room with him. I cannot tolerate it; I keep thinking and I feel very uneasy. Eversince he got married I stopped being interested in sleeping with him. I don't care for it anymore."

Om Marzoug looked at me cunningly, smiled, and said:

- "You must be wondering how I had the rest of my 13 children."

"Yes," I said.

- "Well, for about two years I did not accept to let him touch me. I often rebuffed him. But, after some time, I said to myself that I should have more children to attract him more to my house. If I keep refusing him, he will stop coming to me. So, we started having marital relations only in the morning when all the children were at school. If there were any of the younger children at home, Fadel used to send them out to play with their friends. As for the night, it became my habit to sleep with the children. I rarely changed this habit. Now, I am using the pill for birth control. At first I tried to take the pill, but I was nauseated and felt always sick, I could never do the housework. So I stopped it. But now the lady gynecologist gave me a new brand and I'm not planning to have anymore children. My youngest son Saadun is now in kindergarten.

Om Marzoug excused herself so as to take a look at the food which was on the fire. "I have to look at the 'marag', she said, "so that it would not get overcooked."

- "Marag is meat broth?" I asked.

- "No," replied Om Marzoug. "It is a brown stew containing small lumps of eggplant, squash, ocra, tomatoes and meat. "We eat it with 'caish' (i.e. rice).

Om Marzoug stayed in the kitchen for about 10 minutes, after which I heard the sound of a car pulling up at the gate. It was time for me to leave for it was past 12:30; Om Marzoug had to look for her cooking. I called Om Marzoug and said good-bye. As usual, she saw me off to the door and kept repeating the customary greeting 'haiyash Allah' (i.e. God grants you life.) As I walked out, I murmured: 'Allah-i-hayish' (God grants you a long life.

December 22

On Monday the 22nd of December, I paid another visit to Om Marzoug. Having made the customary greetings and inquiries about the health of every member of the family, I said:

- "Om Marzoug, last time you said that your husband had two wives besides yourself. You told me about one of them. What about the other?"

- "The story I told you about Fadel's wife Magda, took place 13 years ago. But only two years after this incident, i.e. 11 years ago Fadel said to me: 'Om Marzoug, I wish to have another wife 'abghi a'arris' (to find a new bride).'

"That time was not like the first. Since he had done it once, he could do it twice or even thrice," commented Om Marzoug. "I said to him: 'alakhātrak' (it is up to you.) Of course I felt bad and bitter, but it was not like the first time. It didn't matter much to me now. My daughters, however, were very upset. They said: 'umma', why did you accept? Isn't it enough what he has done to you?"

But I told them: 'it is not your business, let him do what he wishes, and besides, my refusal in this matter will not make any difference.'

Fadel took his oldest sons Marzoug and Jamal and left to Cairo. He stayed for a month and returned to Kuwait with his third wife Amal. Amal is not as bad as Magda. She is kind and polite, while Magda is very rude and vulgar. Amal was given two rooms in the house where Magda lived. Magda had moved to a separate house about one year after marriage. Magda was crazy and

raised hell at Fadel when she knew of his marriage. But, who is she to talk? She has no rights over him. A second wife never has the rights of a first wife. She is not like me. I am the old one, and the first one.

Two years ago, Fadel quarrelled with Magda and divorced her. She was a wicked rude woman. She still lives in Kuwait and in his house, but she has a separate part of the house. He gives her money for her seven children, but does not go to her part of the house. Now he stays mostly with Amal. But you know, all his family was happy when he divorced Magda."

Om Marzoug was interrupted by a telephone call from her son Jamal who told her that he was very ill and wanted her to send him the car to pick him up from school. She said that the car was not available, since the driver has gone on an errand and was supposed to pass by Fadel in his office. She called Fadel, but was told that the driver has not passed by the office yet. A little while later, Fadel called to ask if the boy has been brought home. The reply was in the negative, Om Marzoug talked to him for a few minutes during which she listened attentively. Then she started commenting excitedly about the behavior of someone. She seemed quite displeased and critical of the whole issue.

When she hung up, she came to tell me in a more lowered tone: -
"Did you hear what I said?"

- "Yes, I did," I said, "But I did not understand what it was all about."

- "I will tell you," she said. "This is one of the scandals of Magda, my husband's ex-wife. A few months ago, she brought her brother over to Kuwait to look for work. She asked Fadel to help him to find work. Fadel promised to help him but actually did no active steps. Magda's brother stayed with her, for some time. But suddenly, in the 'Id al Adha', we heard the name of his being arrested by the police. The charge against him was that he had something to do with some hashish smugglers in Kuwait. Shame on him. He is a guest in our country and this is what he is doing 'astaghfur Allah' (God Forbid), they are both bad, he and his sister. He was imprisoned since the feast. Only now I knew that he was ordered to leave the territories immediately. He will be handed over to the Egyptian police. Fadel was just telling me that Magda went to the airport to see him off. My husband saw her as she went out of the house. She was dressed in a very colourful dress, was wearing a blonde wig, and her face was all made-up as if she was going to a party. One wouldn't say she was going to see her brother in such a disgraceful state. Fadel cannot bear her anymore. Doesn't she see how people like us go out, all covered up."

* * * * *

As she talked, Om Marzoug heard some noise at the outer gate. She rushed out to see who it was. It was her sick son Jamal who came in leaning on his cousin's shoulder. His arms and hands were stretched forward. He was bending forward, his face being very pale. The symptoms seemed to me something like an epileptic fit.

Om Marzoug ran to one of the bedrooms and brought a sponge mattress which she laid on the floor of the Arabian-style room while Jamal walked in slowly with his cousin. Jamal was bare-footed, all his body was shivering. When he was lain down on the mattress, his cousin, a young man of about 17 years old, ran to the car, brought Jamal's shoes and excused himself. Om Marzoug seemed to have been accustomed to Jamal's illness, for she seemed to take the matter rather calmly. In fact I was more scared and worried than she was. She was in the kitchen busy with the cooking for about 15 minutes during which I busied myself in taking notes of my observations.

When she was through, she went out of the kitchen and from the corridor yelled out to Jamal: "Jamal, are you feeling alright?"

Jamal replied in the positive but asked his mother to go to him. When she came out of the room where Jamal was, he slowly followed her. He looked very pale and weak as he found himself a seat close to me, and sat down crossing his legs on the chair. Om Marzoug walked in behind him and said: "when he knew that you are here, he insisted to come and see you. Didn't I tell you that my children like you very much."

I looked at Jamal who was hardly able to sit up and bid him to go and rest if he felt tired. He said that he felt better than when he was in school. Om Marzoug brought him a 'robe-de-chambre' and helped him to put it on. Then she sat down on the floor, pulled one of his legs on her lap and helped him to put on a pair of stockings. Patting him gently on the knee, she asked if he would like to have a glass of milk, which he refused.

When Jamal got more self-composed and stopped shivering, he looked at me and asked about my health and the health of my son Ahmed. Then he started telling me about his illness:

- "I don't know what's wrong with me," he said. "I had this fit three times before, always at a sudden. Today I was in class and I was quite interested in my lesson when suddenly I felt very uneasy and could not breath properly. I found my arms stretched and my muscles pulled up, and was unable to talk or move. I knew that it was the fit. I was taken to the clinic and was then referred to School Health Department. There the psychiatrist wrote down on my health card that I have a severe psychological problem."

I asked Jamal if there was anything in particular which worried him. He replied:

- "The first time I had the fit was right after the death of 'khali' (my maternal uncle) who lived with us in our house for about a year before his death. He was around 40 years of age when he died, and because he had become blind during this period, I had become quite attached to him. I was the one who always helped him to find his way around the house and we always had long chats with each other. Shortly before his death, he left to Muscat to visit his mother, but he did not return. He died there. His death affected me very much because we were good friends. Two months later, one of my friends lost his nerves in class because of the death of his paternal uncle. At this moment I remembered my own uncle and I had the fit for the first time. Since that time I had this fit twice. I will be seeing the doctor again tomorrow; mother will go with me for the doctor has asked to see her."

I wished Jamal good luck and asked him to relax, to try not to think, and to have a good rest. Om Marzoug came back from the kitchen with a big tray of uncooked rice which she had to sort out. I offered to help her and started sorting it out with her.

As I helped her, she asked me a series of questions:

- "Om Ahmed," she said, "Do you buy rice in big sacs as we do?"
- "No," was my reply, "because we don't eat a lot of rice."
- "You don't," she said, "Then what do you eat? How can you have lunch without rice?"
- "We eat rice, I said, "but in small quantities. My husband and myself prefer to eat more meat and vegetables."

Om Marzoug carried on a series of detailed questions about the quantity of rice we buy each month, and was surprised to know that it does not exceed a few kilos. She asked me a few more questions about who cooks and about the way we cook certain foods. When I was through of answering her questions which were fired one after the other, Jamal made a concluding remark: "So this is your life!" I smiled and said: "Yes, this is my life."⁷

Om Marzoug then started telling me that 'caish' (rice) was the main item in their meals, and that it was eaten with meat, fish or 'marag' and 'dakkus' (hot sauce). "You have to join us for lunch one day" she added. Jamal seemed to have remembered something which he wanted to say:

- "In the feast," he said, "we wished to invite you to our place, but mother had lost your telephone number. We had people from the faculty of Economics in Kuwait University and we wanted you to meet them."

- "You mean professors?" I asked.

- "No," he said proudly, "it was my brother Marzoug's fiancée who is a student in the Faculty of Economics. We slaughtered two lambs and had a big banquet. We usually slaughter lambs in the 'Id al Feter'. Incense was burned and rose water was sprinkled all over the house. We poured rose water from the 'marash' (pot for rose water). Lots of sweets, nuts, and cakes were offered. At lunch we had lamb's meat, 'caish', and 'marag'."

Jamal asked me a few more questions about my husband's job saying that he thought my husband was a teacher (a great majority of Egyptians in Kuwait work as teachers). He added: "My father works in the government in the afternoons as a part-timer. He is a clerk in one of the libraries. But, you know, he hardly works. He goes to sign and then leaves to his private office." Om Marzoug joined in: "He hardly works. He is a Kuwaiti," she said sarcastically. "Had he been 'ajnabi' (foreigner or Arab), they would have got every penny out of him. They would even cut off from his salary if he was late." Jamal asked me about my trips and the countries I have visited. Then he said:

- "Do you know that I have been to Cairo, when I was young?" I went with my father about 11 years ago, but I remember it very well, for we had a lot of fun. It was at the time when father married Amal his third wife. He took Marzoug and myself with him, and there, we rent a big villa in which the wedding took place. We brought lots of singers and had real fun. My father's third wife is good. She is not beautiful, but she's kind and polite. She's not rude and vulgar like Majda who screams and shouts like women of the streets. When we came to Kuwait, Amal lived with us in one same house."

- "Did she stay with you, and your mother in the same house?" I asked surprisingly, for Om Marzoug had said that Amal was given two rooms in the house where Majda lived?"

- "Yes," replied Jamal. "She lived with us in the same house. For about three weeks she was O.K., and then she started bothering my mother. One day we wanted to go out and she insisted that she wanted the car. Mother did not accept. They argued and the argument became a quarrel after which mother asked her to leave the house. At that time we were in the other house. Mother told her: 'this is my house and it is on my name, take your clothes and find yourself another place to live in.' That very night she gathered all her belongings and left. My father took her to live with Majda in the same house. They divided the house, and each of them had a separate part. There, the two women made life like hell for my father. Quarrels did not stop. Usually they were jealous of each other. Father used to sleep one night with Majda, and the following night with Amal. But if it happened that he forgot or was not fair in dividing, they quarrelled together and also quarrelled with him. When they had children, the mothers always interfered and fought together. One of those times," continued Jamal, "I was there, they quarrelled over a stupid issue and hit each other. I had to call a policeman to stop them. They are both horrid."

At this moment, Nawal walked in coming back from the Commercial Institute. As she walked in, she overheard Jamal's story; her face turned crimson. She looked at Jamal and said nervously:

- "Jamal stop insulting people behind their backs. It is haram to say such intimate stories about people and to insult them behind their backs. This is what I call 'ghaiba' (talking ill of someone behind his back). Even if they are bad, either say it to their faces or do not keep insulting them like that. It is not the first time."

Jamal did not reply. Although I was not taking down every word, yet, until then, I had been jotting major points in a notebook. As soon as I saw Nawal's attitude, I closed my notebook and stopped writing altogether. I assured her that the names of people involved were going to be changed. She said that what she was against was the fact that Jamal always talked ill about such people and that she considered this 'haram'.

When Nawal stopped, Jamal seemed to want to tease her, so without looking at her, he continued his story:

- "Do you know, Om Ahmed, that father finally divorced Majda, after one of those big quarrels. After her divorce, she was granted the Kuwaiti nationality. Any female foreigner married to a "Kuwaiti" for 5 years has the right to acquire the Kuwaiti nationality even if she gets divorced or widowed after those five years. Majda is now granted a pension of 50 dinars by the government, while my father is responsible for the expenses of her children who live with him in the same house. Each of the two women is given an allowance for winter and summer clothes by my father. Despite the fact that Majda got divorced, quarrels between her and Amal did not stop. Last year, father divorced Amal twice, but in both times he took her back. Now she has only one time left. If she is divorced once more, her separation from father will be finalized. Now, she is living under this threat, and hence, she is somewhat subdued. Apparently, an Iraqi fellow has lately proposed to Majda. If she marries him, her children will be in their father's custody, which of course will create problems in the house since their step-mother will take care of them. All of Majda's children are above eight and hence the right to their custody goes to my father except if he does not want to keep them. But of course if she takes them, nobody would accept to marry her."

- "Why do you think your father married those two women?" I asked Jamal.

- "It is money" he replied. "He has a lot of money and doesn't know how or where to spend it. He thinks this is a good way to have fun... Now, despite the trouble he is in, he would not hesitate to marry another woman if he has the chance," replied Jamal.

During this long conversation with Jamal, Om Marzoug seemed very occupied in her housework. She came in and out of the living room, but seemed inattentive to the discussion.

December 23, 1975

I called Om Marzoug more than once to confirm our appointment. There was no reply. At 4:30, her daughter Fadha called to say that they were expecting me, and that she was calling from the grocery since their telephone was out of order. "Please come," she said. "We are all dressed up, waiting for you."

I said that I would be there in an hour's time. I felt happy that Fadha made this call. In fact I felt it was good rapport, and looked forward for more progress in my following meeting which was to be in an hour's time.

* * * * *

My visit on the 23rd of December was a social visit in which I had little chance to talk to Om Marzoug alone. However, I felt that I was treated as one of the family and was gradually being taken into the confidence not only of Om Marzoug, but, also, of her daughters and sons. I was taken in, not to the guest room as usual, but to the Arabian-style room wherein the family spent most of its evenings. This room was also used for eating, the dining room being rarely used except in occasions when there were important guests.

We were all seated on the all-carpeted floor. A few cushions were brought by one of the girls to be put behind my back. The room was void of furniture. There was a T.V. set in one corner, a telephone on the floor, an electric heater, and the 'dowwa' (a rectangular container made of crude metal used to burn coal and incense, to heat up the house, and to make coffee or tea.)

Fatima asked if I preferred to sit on a chair. I replied that I was comfortable that way. A number of about 8 of Om Marzoug's children gathered around me in a big circle. They asked about my son, and whether I had got his photographs as I had promised them. I had them in my bag, but before I got them out, one of the young children helped herself and pulled them out from my purse. They passed them around, snatching them from each other, each wanting to have a look. Two of the youngest children were sitting down next to the 'dowwa' trying to warm up their hands and feet. A white pleasant scented smoke rose up as the coal burned and whitened. Om Marzoug, on the other hand, was busy watching T.V., and nearly sticking her feet to an electric heater. Nawal brought in a 'dalla' (small coffee pot with a lid), and put it on the fire to make Arabian coffee.

The ritual of preparing Arabian coffee is a common practice in Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia and Bahrein. Unlike Turkish coffee, it is not sweetened, and is boiled with 'hail' (cardamum) in the coffee pot. The preparation of this coffee is an elaborate process since the coffee beans are browned and ground on the spot. It is served in minute cups without

handles and has a strong bitter taste. The host holds 3 or 4 cups in one hand, and the 'dalla' in the other, and goes around pouring coffee to the guests. If a person is through and does not want more, he should shake the cup which is usually held between thumb and forefinger. If he does not shake the cup, it is a signal for the host to serve him more coffee.

I was offered a cup of coffee. Nawal offered a cup to her mother and went upstairs to fetch Jamal.⁷

I asked Om Marzoug about Shaha. She said that Shaha was still retiring in her room upstairs. Asked about the cause for her seclusion, Om Marzoug whispered to me with a sigh:

- "Shaha wanted to get married to someone whom we did not accept. Neither her father nor myself wanted him."

When Fatima and Nawal started listening in, Om Marzoug suddenly stopped talking. After a little while, Jamal came in. Eager to talk as usual, he told me about his illness, and about the psychiatrist who was treating him:

- "The psychiatrist asked me about my relationship with my parents, my sisters and my brothers, and she asked to see my mother. So mother went with me this morning and they asked her lots of questions."

Om Marzoug joined in to say:

- "I told the doctor that Jamal is very nervous and that he's always shouting at his younger brothers and sisters. The doctor asked me if the children help me in doing the house work. I told her that they do, but not very often, since they have their studies. You know what the doctor told me? She said: 'Om Marzoug, like all mothers you always sacrifice. You should take care of your health. Your children should learn to help you so that they will grow up to be good housewives. Besides, they should realize that your health is more important than their studies.'"

Om Marzoug had apparently taken the chance to give some bits and pieces of advice to her children, pretending that it was the doctor's orders. As she spoke, she looked at the children and addressed them in an advisory tone.⁷

- "That girl," she continued; pointing out to Fadha, was supposed to clean up the kitchen and to dish-wash after lunch. However, she busied herself in getting ready for your arrival, and in dressing up, and did nothing of the work. Excuse me, I will have to do it myself," said Om Marzoug as she walked out.

Jamal was seated beside the 'dowwa', slowly sipping his coffee. I was busy writing down some notes when he suddenly seemed to remember something which he wanted to say:

- "My grandmother, a very old woman has suggested that my parents should 'yebaitouli'.

- "What does that mean?" I asked.

- "It means that my parents should take any article of my clothes like my 'dishdasha' (man's dress), or my 'kaffeya' (headcloth) and would leave it overnight at the place of the Sayed (a Shaikh). The Sayed is an old man, an expert in treating illnesses like mine (a curer). The Sayed would take this article and would read on it verses from the Holy Quran, and some other readings. He would burn incense and should let its scented smoke rise around it. Then it would be brought back to me, but before putting it on, I should apply 'dehen' (hair-oil or vaseline) and some herbs on my body. This is said to have a curing effect."

- "But why didn't you do it?" I asked Jamal.

- "They say it cures, but I don't know, I think it is nonsense and only old folks' talk."

- "I will tell you something," interrupted Fatima, "'ameti' (my aunt) Marriam is very sick. She is old and suffers from all symptoms of senility, i.e. she is half-blind and cannot walk. Last night my paternal aunt Wasmeya, who is her niece went to see her. She told her that her illness might be caused by a jenny who is inside her. To exorcise this jenny, who is dead, aunt Marriam should be bathed in the blood of a slaughtered lamb. A black lamb," she added.

Fadha, who was sitting next to me murmured:

- "A black lamb?" "Yekfina'l sharr" (God keeps the evil away)."

- "Aunt Marriam," continued Fatima, "took off her clothes and was immersed in a basin full of lamb's blood. Then, she was taken out and when the blood dried up on her skin, she was bathed once more but in clear water. This, it is believed is supposed to help in exorcising the bad jenny out of her body, but it is very bad. Do you know what happened to her? Her sickness has increased. Aunt Wasmeya also takes her daughter to the Sayeda to make charms for her and to 'tebaiyet laha'. They leave a dress there and the Sayeda reads on it. When the dress is brought back, my cousin applies 'dehen ta ta' or 'dehen hal narine' (brands of hair oil), on her body. Sometimes, she is taken to the Sayeda who reads verses of the Quran and gives her rose water to drink. All this was done because my cousin has been waking up frightened and screaming at night. "I think," said Fatima, "that all this is 'kharabit' (nonsense)."

I was offered a small 'istikana' (minute glass) of tea from a 'gouri' (tea pot) which was put on the 'dowwa'. As I drank it, I discussed general issues with Jamal and Nawal. When I was through, Nawal called on

her younger brother Sulaiman to bring us more tea. She addressed him by the name of Bū Daoud. Asked about this nick-naming, I was told that this was a popular nick-name for Sulaiman. The children started telling me more of those nick-names like: Yacoub: Bū Yussef; Ahmed: Bū Shehab; Khaled: Bū Walid, etc.⁷

Realizing my interest in such topics, the children started telling me lots of phrases commonly said in specific occasions like marriage, death, etc. Here is a list of these phrases which were of use to me in talking to Kuwaitis:

- An ordinary form of greeting: 'Hayash Allah' (God grants you life). The reply is 'Allah yehayish' (God grants you life too).
- In the case of death, the relatives of the deceased are consoled by the following phrase:
'Atham Allah Ajrak' (God makes your reward or compensation great);
The reply is: 'Ajarna was Ajrak' (Our reward and yours).
- In the case of a sick person, a well-wishing statement is usually used: 'Ma tshuf sharr' (you shall see no evil); the reply is: 'Al Shar ma yijik' (Evil shall not come upon you).
- A congratulatory statement sometimes used in the case of the return of an absent person: 'qarrat ainak' (May you feel happy or satisfied); the reply is 'bwejh Nabik' (by the face of your Prophet).
- A customary greeting: 'Guwwa' short for 'Allah ya^c tik al GUwwa' (God gives you strength); the reply is 'Allah Yigawik' (God strengthens you).
- If someone sneezes, those in his company would say: 'Yarhamukum Allah' (God's mercy upon you); the reply is: 'Hehdina wa yehdik' (God should make you and us good).

The children seemed very happy as each of them made a contribution. If I wrote something down, it gave them the feeling that they said something important. I realized this when one of the boys said something which I did not write down. He looked at my notebook and said sadly. "But you did not write it down." I told him that I was keeping it in my mind, but was definitely going to write it.

While Nawal brought in a tea pot, which she put on the fire to make tea, she had a book under her arm. She opened it up and started telling me riddles of which I understood very little.

The young children who were all eager to say their lot asked if I have heard any Kuwaiti children's songs. I replied in the negative. They said that they'd like to sing me one. Together they sang a popular Kuwaiti nursery rhyme. When I caught up the words, I joined in, and started clapping

with them; this delighted them to an extent that when I had to leave they were very upset and said that they were all having a lot of fun. They asked me to have dinner with them, which I refused since the driver had already come to pick me up. They saw me to the door and yelled out: "please come every day and don't be late." One of the young girls ran to the car to tell me that the telephone was out of order, but that they will call me from the grocery next door to remind me of my following visit. Throughout this visit, Om Marzoug had remained in the background, joining in to say her comments and then watching an Arabian serial on T.V.

January 4, 1975

Telephone call:

On the morning of Jan. 4, 1975, I called Om Marzoug to wish her a Happy New Year. That was the first day after the holidays of the Christian, and the Islamic New Years, and the only chance in which I could get away from some family obligations.⁷

Om Marzoug seemed pleased to hear my voice and asked about my husband and my son:

- "'Eshloanesh, eshloan weldesh we Ra^Ci Beitetch'? (How are you, how is your son, and the guardian of your home?)" she asked.

- "We are all fine, how are you all?," I asked.

- "We are fine," she replied, "but Jamal is very sick. I did not sleep all night because of his illness. It is heart-breaking. He had the fit again and we got him doctors at night. They gave him two shots and asked him to eat. He is very weak. I know that there is nothing wrong with him. It is all because he does not eat. We've been feeling very bad, and this is why we did not call you. But why don't you come over?" she added.

- "I want to come to see Jamal," I said, "if you are free to meet me."

- "Yes," she said, "please come. It is your home, you are no stranger. You are neither shy from Jamal nor from others."

I hung up promising to be there in an hour's time.

January 4, 1976

Visit

I was met by Fatima at the door. She opened the door half way and hid herself behind it. A dog ran out as soon as the door was opened.

Fatima seemed upset and said that she didn't like to go out so that the men in the area could not watch her. "This is why we never open the main gate," she said, "because everybody looks in. They know that there are many girls in this house." Fatma ran inside to call her mother.

Om Marzoug, Nawal (22) and young Walid (4½) all came to meet me. Nawal and Fatima were at home in holidays since their exams in the Commercial Institute were supposed to start the following week. I walked in to the living room where we all sat on the floor. I noticed a new carpet and some new cushions placed orderly against the wall. I was later informed that they bought those new carpets and removed the old ones to be put in the upper floor.

I asked about Jamal's health and was told that he went to the hospital, to check with the doctor. Om Marzoug said that Jamal wanted to wait so that he could meet me, but his grandmother sent him the car, and he had to go.

I was told that Shaha was upstairs, locked-up in her room since she had the flu.⁷

Trying to provoke a discussion about Shaha whose continuous seclusion aroused my curiosity, I asked:

- "But doesn't Shaha ever join you downstairs?"
- "No," replied Nawal firmly, "Shaha is always upstairs."
- "You must have made her upset, then." I commented.
- "Yes, we have made her upset," replied Nawal sneaking a smile as she realized that her mother who had walked out, had come back to take a tray which was placed on the T.V.

When Om Marzoug left, Nawal looked again at her sister Fatima and smiled. Until then, I could not figure out what was going on. I had already been told that Shaha had been prevented from marrying a suitor which had proposed to her, and that since then, she had been secluding herself from the family. I realized that a family problem had arisen because of this issue, but could not figure out its details. When Om Marzoug came in, she asked about my husband. I said that he was fine, and asked if her husband was also fine.

Fatima jokingly pretended that she thought that the question was directed to her and said, "My husband?! Are you addressing me?"

- "Well," I said, "perhaps that's a good omen." Directing the speech to Om Marzoug, I tried to re-open the topic of Shaha's marriage, and said:
- "Aren't you planning to get any of your daughters married?"

- "If they get good suitors, I don't mind," replied Om Marzoug. Also if their father accepts."

- "What about Shaha?", I asked, "didn't she get a suitor?"

- "No, no," she said, "he is no good, he is no good."

Nawal started making eyes to Fatima again; lowering her head so as not to be too obvious, she started smiling.

- "Om Marzoug," I said, "was it you or Fadel who did not accept the suitor?"

- "I have nothing to do with it, nothing! It was her father Fadel who refused him," said Om Marzoug winking to me.

- "Mother!" retorted Nawal sarcastically, "Really!?"

- "Yes, Nawal," said Om Marzoug, "record, record." I looked at Om Marzoug inquiringly. Om Marzoug looked at me and said:

- "You see, Om Ahmed, Nawal repeats everything we say to Shaha. She's her agent!"

- "She's my sister after all," said Nawal.

- "My daughter Shaha, said Om Marzoug, wanted to marry a driver. He drives for people, like you and me. You see," said Om Marzoug twisting her mouth in great displeasure.

- "Was he a Kuwaiti?," I demanded.

- "No," came the reply. "He was an Indian."

- "Is that true?" I asked surprisedly.

- "Yes," whispered Om Marzoug to me. "I will tell you all about it later on."

Nawal pretended to be looking in her book, though I could see her eyes sneaking glances at her mother every few moments.

- "Call your father," said Om Marzoug addressing her daughter, "and ask him to send the car because I want to send the driver on an errand." Fatima looked at me and said:

- "Mother is always giving orders, and believe it or not my father always obeys her. If she does not, she makes a big quarrell; but she always claims otherwise. Yesterday she wanted the car, but father did not accept because he wanted to go out. Do you know what she did? She just walked out, put herself in the car, did her errand and came back."

- "What did your father do?" I asked

- "Nothing, he sat back home, and Nawal kept arguing with him. She kept mocking, and telling him: 'If it were your wife Amal who had wanted the car what would you have done?' She gave him some hard time until mother returned."

Awatef interrupted to say:

- "I always argue with father because I can bear neither of his wives. When she comes here I turn my back to her and go in to my room." Om Marzoug seemed to listen in. So I asked:

- "Didn't Amal live with you in this house?"

- "No," she replied.

- "Didn't she stay even for a month?" I said.

- "Yes," she did, "but I kicked her out."

Until then Om Marzoug had been ignoring this point so as to display an image of being in a position of power vis-a-vis her husband's second wife. She tried to put up a certain front, but when I confronted her by a direct question, she had to admit the fact that she could kick Amal out which still puts her in a position of power.⁷

- "I kicked her out," said Om Marzoug, "because she thought she was going to govern this house. Besides, she always adorned herself and applied all sorts of make-up and sat with him in her room laughing out-loud. At that time I was in bed, because I had just delivered my son Abdel Reda. When Fadel came from Cairo, he had come to me saying: 'Amal is good, and she wants to come and see you. She is different from Majda, and you will like her. She says she wants to come and kiss your forehead'.

So I accepted," continued Om Marzoug "when she came, I did not get up to meet her. I remained where I was. She came to me, kissed my forehead and sat next to me. For some days she was good, but I felt very bad when she started sitting back in her room and keeping Fadel inside with her. I used to hear them laughing and I used to get furious. Fadel always slept in her room since I had just delivered. I felt as though I was a puppet, and I could not bear it."

Fatima interrupted to say:

- "Both women were fighting for the man."

Om Marzoug continued:

- "One day, I needed the car to go to the doctor. Amal interfered and said that she wanted to go out. We had a quarrel after which I asked her to go out of the house altogether."

Fatima interrupted again:

- "At that time we were still in 'baytana al^caud' (the big house). Mother drove Amal out of it and father had to take her to the house in which Majda lived. But you know something, father always liked mother most. Once she was sick and had serious fever. She was very dizzy in bed and talked nonsense. Father was pretty worried and we saw a few tears on his face. He was very nervous and blamed us for taking it a little bit easy. We were young and did not understand. But he kept saying: 'She's your mother, haven't you got any feelings?'"

- "Yes," replied Om Marzoug proudly." He worries a lot about my health. He was like crazy when I was sick. I am the mother of his children, after all."

Om Marzoug got up, and Fatma came closer to me. She asked me a few questions about the way I dressed myself at home. She found it strange that I could work at home in slacks or in a skirt and blouse and added that a long maxi-dress is the most suitable thing for a woman to wear whether at home or outside. Fatma also told me about courses and her professors and wondered how I knew none of them. After a long dialogue with Fatma, Om Marzoug came in and seemed to be panicing because Jamal was very late. She kept telling me of how much she suffered for him the previous night, and concluded that she was sure that there was nothing wrong with him and that it was all out of hunger since he refused the food she offered to him. Nawal looked at me and said in a lowered tone: "It is a psychological case."

It was time for me to leave. I left promising to call the following day.

January 5, 1976

Telephone Call:

On the 5th of January, I called Om Marzoug to ask about Jamal's health. It was Fatma who replied:

- "Mother is not here," she said, "she's in the hospital, don't you know?"

- "Don't I know what?" I asked "Who is at the hospital?"

- "It is Jamal. They took him to the mental hospital. We were informed yesterday after your departure. Father called us to say that Jamal was very tired and was admitted to the hospital, that hospital, you know, of the mad people. When they took him he was in a bad state, he was shouting and screaming. Mother went to see him yesterday right after lunch. She's been crying all night.

- "I am sorry for his illness," I said, "but I am sure that he will get good treatment in the hospital. Please send him my wishes for a speedy recovery. I was planning to come tomorrow, but since he is ill, I think I should postpone it."

- "No, no," said Fadha, "please come, Mother asked me to tell you that she goes out only in the afternoons. It is your house, you are welcomed any time."

Promising to pay a visit to Om Marzoug the following day, I hung up.

January 6, 1976

At 9:00 a.m. I arrived to the house of Om Marzoug.

- "How are you Om Marzoug?" I asked, as I walked in.

- "I am fine," she said, "but not very fine. How can I be fine when my dear son Jamal is in the mental hospital. He doesn't want to go to school again and keeps saying heart-breaking things like: 'I am dead, I want to be buried'. My poor boy. 'Besm Allah Aleih' (God's Mercy upon him), he keeps getting the fit. Yesterday when you called, were all at the hospital."

- "Who was there with you?" I asked.

- "Everybody: Jamal's aunts, his grandmother, the wives of his uncles, his father and even 'sharishti' (my partner) Amal.

- "Did Amal also go to see him?"

- "Yes. I picked her up by car, and we went together. We stayed there until 8:30. Amal is good and always asks about Jamal. We are friends now. We have taken for Jamal a private room with a telephone."

The telephone rang, Om Marzoug received the call which was from Amal who told her that Fadel had just asked about Jamal and was told that he was better and did not get the fit the previous night after their departure. She also told her that he had his breakfast (a fact which seemed to please Om Marzoug more than anything else). Finally Amal told her that when Jamal recovers, she will send him to stay at her sister Aleya's place in Cairp to have a good change.⁷

- "Ashwa" (good) said Om Marzoug when she was through. Jamal is better. When he improves, Fadel wants to send him either to Cairo, or to London. But, I told Fadel, it is better to take him to Cairo where he can stay with Aleya, the sister of Amal, my partner. Yesterday, Fatima stayed home to take care of the kids. Poor Fatima could not see her brother.

- "What about Shaha, I asked, did she join you?"

- "Shaha! No, no! She never goes out of her room."

- "You winked at me yesterday when we talked about Shaha," I said, "was there anything in particular which you wanted to tell me?" I asked.

- "You see Om Ahmed, Nawal is very bad. She eavesdrops and reports everything we say to Shaha. Shaha is very very good. She's a polite girl, 'ma indeha haky wala shar' (she does not talk a lot, or anything of the sort); she's polite and calm. No, no, she's different from all other girls of these days; but it is Nawal who spoils her. That Nawal is really no good, and she encourages Shaha to carry on this attitude which she has towards us."

- "What is Shaha's story then?" I asked.

- "Om Ahmed, you are like my younger sister. I will tell you 'kol salfet-ha' (all her story), aren't we like sisters now? You see Om Ahmed," said Om Marzoug patting me gently on the knee, "the whole story started three years ago when Shaha was still a high school student. We had sold 'baytana'l aud' (our big house). With the money, we were building this villa. Meanwhile, we leased an Arabian style house in al 'De'eyya'. At that time, 'Besm Allah aleish' (God's Mercy upon you), we had hired an Indian driver. He was a kind good looking young man whom we always trusted to take the girls to school. We gave him the 'diwaneya' (Men's guest room) to sleep in. It was a different 'haush' (courtyard) and there was of course a special bathroom for him; he never came in our courtyard. I only gave him orders to take the children to school, or to bring them back, or to go on errands. He used to drive all the children together from school, with the exception of Shaha. Shaha finished her classes later than her sisters and brothers, so sometimes he used to go back alone to drive her home."

- "So," said Om Marzoug lowering her voice, "they fell in love with each other. My own daughter fell in love with an Indian, and a driver." She said, twisting her mouth with disgust. "We knew nothing of course, and we suspected nothing until Shaha asked her father to join her in her room. She said that she wanted to talk to him privately. He asked her what it was all about, but she refused to say, so Fadel and Shaha went upstairs together, and they shut the door. There, she broke to him her shocking news. She said, 'Father, Abdul Razak wants to marry me. I want him, and he wants to marry me'. Her father got furious: 'you', he said, 'you, want to marry a driver, who is hired by people to drive, you, love an Indian!' 'If I don't marry him', said Shaha, 'I will not get married at all'."

Fadel was out of his mind. He gave Shaha a good beating. He shouted like crazy and said: 'You will not marry him; not if you are both dead. I have no daughters who fall in love, and with drivers, after all, what a shame to you Fadel. O' what a shame!'

I heard him shouting and heard Shaha screaming. I realized that he was beating her, so I run up to the second floor to see what it was all about. Fadel was calling me. When I went in, Fadel was shivering, and Shaha hid her face by her hands and was weeping. When Fadel told me, I was shocked. I couldn't believe that my own daughter Shaha would do that: 'what a shame, what a shame; I screamed, 'What a scandal'. You are the relative of Sheikhs, Shaha and you come from a 'aila asila' (family of pure origin). Do you want people to mock us, do you want them to laugh at us. My daughter wants to marry an Indian driver, My God!'

When Shaha said that it was not a shame to love or to marry, I also lost control on my nerves and gave her a good beating. Fadel walked out to the 'diwaneyya', and grabbed Abdul Razak from his clothes. He slapped him twice on the face, and yelled at him: 'Don't you know who you are, you devil. You are a driver, you are hired by me; and you want to marry my daughter. Who are you to marry my daughter?' Abdul Razak's reply was that love was not haram, and that he wanted to marry Shaha. The two of them were equipped with the same statement that it was not a shame to love or to marry. Fadel gave him his salary and took him to the police. Three days after this incident he was requested to leave the country, and left to India.

This is the third year since this incident took place. Can you believe that Shaha hasn't been talking to any of us since that night. When she comes from the Institute, she goes up to her room and locks herself in. If I meet her on the way, as she walks in, she turns her face to me and hides it in her 'abat'. She never eats with us and never eats our food. The devil Nawal (Nawal al 'shaytana') buys food and clothes for Shaha. Shaha gets a monthly allowance of about 40 K. Dinars from the Institute.* As for Fatima and Nawal, they get 60 Dinars each, from the government. 'When Fadel brings big quantities of fruits, and asks one of the children to take some up to Shaha, she throws it out of the room, and locks the door. My heart is broken for this girl. I haven't hugged her or kissed her for two years. I haven't even talked to her. This is too much."

- "Didn't you try to talk to her kindly, as a friend, without shouting or blaming, or anything of the sort; perhaps she would listen to you if you do." I said.

- "I tried, I tried. We all tried 'mako fayda', 'mako fayda' (there is no use)," shouted Om Marzoug. "I talked to her. I said: 'yumma' (Oh mother), this is a driver, and a foreigner. Had he been an Arab, an Egyptian for example, it would have been easier. My daughter, you belong to a good family. The (al.....) are your relatives. What would they say. He is lower

*As an encouragement for education, the government pays a monthly allowance ranging between 40 and 50 K.D. to Kuwaiti students who join high institutes - both boys and girls.

than you - he works for you." I said lots of things, but she wouldn't even answer. She would turn her face away and would remain silent."

- "It is very hard to remain silent and secluded for over two years," I commented.

- "Yes," said Om Marzoug, "It's harder for me. I am her mother and I love her. Her father also loves her. She's our eldest daughter. Eleven days ago, she felt sick. She had a very bad cough. Jamal heard her coughing very badly. He told us, so Fadel went up to her, and begged her to open the door. He said that he wanted to see her, and to take her to a doctor. Her reply was that there was nothing wrong with her, and that she needed no doctors."

"But you know Om Ahmed," continued Om Marzoug, "I know that Shaha is a very kind girl; it is her sister Nawal who encourages her. She's on her side not on ours. Nawal is the only one to whom Shaha talks. Nawal is Shaha's agent. She takes her to the market and buys her food. When Shaha goes out, we feel so happy. We say perhaps if she goes out she will feel better. But she rarely does. All my children don't like to go out a lot.

When Marzoug came from the States, he brought a counting machine, perfumes, and many presents for Shaha. At first she let him in and was obviously getting better. We thought that Marzoug's presence will make it easier for her to come out of her exile. But she didn't. Before his departure Marzoug knocked her door and said that he wanted to say good-bye to her. There was no reply. When he lost hope, he came down and left, I was all in tears when he left. I was upset for his departure, and for Shaha's disobedience; I was sad because Marzoug's departure made me lose hope in gaining Shaha on my side again. I thought he would be able to convince her, but he could not.

Do you know that Shaha is very clever, and is always the first of her class. She had a very good average in her 'Thanaweyya Amma' and could easily join university, but she wouldn't. We knew, through Nawal, that she wanted to join the Teachers' Training Institute, which she did. Last year she was the first of her class. She is good but very stubborn."

Om Marzoug stopped talking and for a few moments seemed to be absorbed in a thought that had just come to her mind. The frown on her forehead accentuated the look of weariness on her face. She turned to me again and said, reflectively:

- "Please Om Ahmed, when you come over next time, make it in the afternoon so that Shaha will be home. I want you to go up to her and try to talk to her, maybe she would listen to you."

- "But would she let me in?", I asked.

- "Yes, yes, she would. You are the friend of her teacher and out of respect to you, she will have to let you in. But when you talk to her, pretend that you don't know the story, just tell her that it's not good for her to sit alone, ask her to come down with you to join the family. Perhaps she wants to approach me, but is shy to do the first move. You may be the one who will be able to help her."

I promised Om Marzoug to do my best to persuade Shaha not to seclude herself. Om Marzoug got up, and brought me a can of pine-apple juice and some biscuits. Young Sulaiman who had not gone to school, came to sit next to me. He kept coming close to me and kept playing with my purse. After a little while, he started patting my legs, which made me feel very self-conscious. I had been sitting on the floor without shoes, and bending my feet to the left. To distract Sulaiman from his naughtiness, I gave him an original looking pen which I was using to take down notes. He kept admiring it, then gave it back to me and kept struggling with his empty bull-point pen. I gave him mine and asked him to keep it. He kept refusing till his mother told him: "Take it Sulaiman, it is your right, she gave it to you." Then Om Marzoug smiled and asked him to go and buy himself a notebook. I had a spare notebook with me, so I gave it to Sulaiman who was extremely happy and laid flat, face to the floor trying to make a few scribbles which he came to show me every little while.

- "Om Ahmed," Om Marzoug said, "last night your son Ahmed was the topic of our discussion. Fatima was asking me if he was slim or plump because she wanted to buy him a play-suit from her own money. She has admired his photos very much."

I thanked Om Marzoug for her sweet gest but asked her not to let Fatima trouble herself. Om Marzoug asked about my address and promised to visit me when Jamal recovers, she would like to send me some meat. I thanked her saying that there was no need, and that it would be enough if she'd only come over to my place where we'd have a chat over a cup of tea.⁷

- "I want you to take me to your hair-dresser," she said, "because I want to have a hair cut. I haven't been taking care of myself, lately, and I know I look very pale and wearied. I never apply make up, and I'm always putting on this head-cover even at home. Fadel doesn't like it. He says I look like an old woman in it, but I never take it off. I never try to look nice. I don't know, I just feel uninterested. It is all over, it is all over."

- "What is all over?" I asked.

- "I mean I don't care anymore. I don't even like Fadel to sleep here. I feel uneasy when he does. I sleep with my children, and I feel

bad if I have to leave them. I know that I should please Fadel, but I cannot sleep beside him at night. Last night when we were on our way back from the hospital, I was weeping. He wanted to come and sleep here. He asked the driver to drive to this house, but I refused and asked the driver to drive to the other house. When he asked why, I said that it would be better and more comfortable for him."

"When Jamal recovers, she said, looking around the room and pointing to the carpet, "we are going to make some changes in the house. We will buy a new bedroom, and wall-to-wall carpets for all the villa. As you see now, not all rooms are furnished with carpets. The house is very cold in winter, so if we put carpets, it will for sure make it warmer."

- "Why don't you show me around your villa?" I said.

- "Would you like to?" she said delightedly, "come, come, I will show you everything."

I was first ushered to the children's room where Om Marzoug always slept. It was a small room in which there was a big closet and big green rug. About half a dozen mattresses were on the floor with a few sheets and blankets folded between them. Then I was taken to the girls' room which was furnished with a big rug, a couple of beds, a couple of desks and cupboards. Lots of huge posters and photographs were stuck on the walls, giving the impression that it was a teenager's room. Between the two bedrooms was a bathroom in which there was a bathtub and an Arab-style toilet. At the other end of the corridor was the kitchen which was rather small and crowded with a big oven, a frigidaire, a washing machine and lots of pots and pans and trays placed disorderly on the floor and on the shelves. Next was a small room in which there was a dining table and a small side-board, the room was locked and obviously was rarely used. The master bedroom was well-furnished with a big double bed, a cupboard, a big yellow rug and a couple of armchairs.

I was then taken upstairs, the staircase led to a balcony, a small door in the balcony led to a big unfurnished hall. Om Marzoug told me that they had carpets for this room, but that they have been removed in the store-room. She insisted to show me the carpets which were rolled up in the store-room. The store-room led to a big roof which, I was told, was to be used to build 2 rooms, and a living room for Marzoug who will get married as soon as he returns from the United States. As we walked out, Om Marzoug told me that her two sisters-in-law wished very much that Marzoug would propose to one of their daughters, but that she preferred to have her son married to a stranger. She has already had enough from her sisters-in-law (Fadel's sisters) and had withdrawn, limiting all social contact with them to formal occasions like feasts. She said that even in feasts she didn't go to her in-laws; they come to her if they wished.

As we walked on to the other side of the corridor, Om Marzoug showed me Shaha's room, holding the door knob to show me that it was locked. Jamal's room was rather improper. In the corner of the room which was furnished with a bed and a small desk, there were lots of big boxes. Om Marzoug pointed to them saying that in those boxes there was a coloured T.V. set, a recorder and many things brought by Marzoug. They haven't been opened since the house needed some reconstruction. Beside Jamal's bed, on the floor, stood a bottle of Vimto (a red, non-alcoholic drink) which had apparently been emptied and filled with whiskey (alcoholics are legally prohibited in Kuwait.) When we went down, Om Marzoug showed me a stereo-cassette recorder which she had bought herself.⁷

- "I asked Fadel for the money," she said, "took Awatif with me, and bought it myself. It is very good and has two amplifiers as you can see. Now, how do you like our house?" she asked.

- "It is very nice and spacy, but rather said," I said.

- "When we furnish it all with carpets, it will be warmer," said Om Marzoug contentedly.

We went back to the living room where we sat before the heater until it was time for me to go. As I walked out, Om Marzoug asked me if I could join them to the hospital, to see Jamal who wished to see me. I promised to do my best, but could not fulfill my promise.⁷

January 13, 1976

Om Marzoug was very happy because Jamal was coming back home. She told me, as soon as I went in, that the doctor had accepted to let him out on condition that he would rest at home. She also told me that there's an idea to send Jamal on the government's account for treatment in England, but added that she preferred it if he'd go to an Arab country like Egypt. Asked about her name, Om Marzoug told me that Fadel's brother, i.e. her brother-in-law, had lately proposed to her sister who lived in Muscat. Fadel's brother talked to Om Marzoug herself, but she told him that she doubted that they would accept, because Hussa, her sister was the type who was very attached to her mother, and wouldn't want to come to Kuwait, despite the fact that her sister and many of her relatives lived in Kuwait. Om Marzoug sent a message to her mother, with a relative, telling her about the proposal. However, she advised her not to accept because Fadel's brother was a spoiled boy. The reply came that the proposal was refused because they would not want Hussa to pass through the same problems through which Om Marzoug passed, particularly because she was going to live with her mother-in-law. Om Marzoug commented:

- "Fadel's brother is a spoiled boy. He is no good. They say a man may change after marriage, but there is no guarantee; besides, we

had enough from the trouble of my in-laws. My husband's re-marriage has drawn me away from them, especially from his mother for I still suspect that she was the one who persuaded him to take up a new wife, for she did not like me at all. As such, how can I encourage this marriage?

- "You said that Fadel's brother was 'rayal mou zein' (a spoiled boy who is no good), what did you mean?" I inquired.

- "Fadel's brother goes out a lot. He's not the settled, responsible type. He acts like the boys of today who wear their hair long and walk like girls."

- "What do you think, then, are the characteristics of a good man?" I asked.

- "A good man shows from the way he walks. He walks steady and pulls himself up. He is not girlish in the way he walks; even in the way he talks, he is firm. He is not 'banayouti' (girlish). A good man is responsible; he goes to his work and then comes back home to his family. He doesn't go playing around with women. He sits home with his wife and children, discusses their problems, or takes them to outings. This, is the man who has a strong character. As for a man who is no good, he is the one who drinks and plays around with 'hareem' (women). This is an irresponsible man who neglects his family."

- "What about a man who has more than one wife?"

- "A man who has more than one wife, is an ass. A good man is satisfied with one wife. But he who has two or three is rotten and it all falls on his head.

- "What are the characteristics of 'al Mara 'i tekana' (a good woman)," I asked;

- "A good woman is the one who is kind, polite, and responsible. By herself she cooks for her children and her husband. She is the one who takes care to keep her house always clean and tidy. She is honest and 'sharifa' (honorable) and is not always out in the streets. She is the one who stays in her house to take care of her children. A good woman does not talk or gossip a lot. Her problems are hers and her family's only. Nobody knows of her family except God Almighty. She does not go and spread her news and her problems to her neighbours who would make her a topic of their talks. If she goes visiting, she respects herself.

A bad woman (al mara 'l mou zeina), on the other hand, talks a lot to her neighbours and leaves her children untidy. She has no rules is stupid and is in a mess. A woman should take care of her children

even if they grow old. She should not depend on the cook or the servant. A bad woman leaves her cooking to the servant or the cook, but a good woman does it herself. A servant should only wash and sweep the floor. As for the working woman, she is always mixed up, busy and has 'no meaning'. It is of course good for a woman to work when she's in need of the money. If she works to help her husband, then it is perfectly alright; but, she should be able to manage the household, and should take care of the cooking when she's back. If her husband does not want her to work, she should obey him.

But you know, most women in Kuwait prefer to be mothers and wives. They like their homes. Working women are few. I myself prefer to be a mother and a wife. I wish to remain good and strong all the time, I wish that my children would always be with me, and I would just sit and see them before me. A woman who is good is trusted by her husband. I can go and come wherever I want, because Fadel trusts me. He knows me. If I ask for the car, he gives it to me without asking me where I want to go. As for the other wives, he never lets them go out without permission because he does not trust them."

Fatima who had just come in joined in and said:

- "Majda is bad and goes out a lot. Father is always afraid that Amal would act like her, so he doesn't accept to let her go out without permission. As for my mother, he always asks her to go out so that she will have some change and feel better. She is the mother of his children, and he cannot refuse her orders."

Om Marzoug continued:

- "I am the mother of his children. I have all rights, because I am the first wife. He took me as a wife long ago, so he can never object to my desires. If he does not do what I want, I stop talking to him altogether, so he comes back repenting what he did.

A woman's freedom is within her home. If she lives with her in-laws or with her 'sharisha' (partners) she has no freedom. But once she splits and lives alone, she regains her freedom, and does what she feels like within her home. A good woman is always trusted, but a bad one (al mara'l kharabit) is never trusted. It is by her behavior and by her tongue that a woman makes herself good or bad.

Om Nasser (Nasser) was born in Kuwait in 1923. She called herself as a 'Surrei' Malle she belonged to the 'Jand' tribe. Om Nasser lived in a big family house with her mother, her father, two sisters Sabina and Hafid, and her three paternal uncles (her brother's sons). Om Nasser's father worked in trade and used to go away for long months. Later, he got employed as a clerk in Qatar for 31 Rs. out of which 20 Rs. were sent to his family in Kuwait.

Since the money he sent was never enough for 7 persons, Om Nasser's mother used to sew dresses at 25 to 30 paise more every. She also earned some money by fetching fire-wood and water from the well herself instead of buying them for a high price from the market.

At 18, Om Nasser married a man named Rashid who lived with her in the same house as her father. Her two older sisters had also got married to the two brothers of Rashid.

Rashid owned a shop for making head-covers. After marriage, he sold the shop and worked at the port as an employee. Around the year 1950, he resigned and went into private business. Now he has his own office which, according to Nasser, Om Nasser's daughter-in-law, yields an income of around 750-800 S.D. / month. Om Nasser takes 200 S.D. which she uses for the house expenditure.

Om Nasser has seven children: Nasser (25), Sabina (20), Hafid (23), Adel (19), Kamel (17), Nora (15), and Hamed (14). Nasser works as a diplomat; Sabina who had received her B.A. from Kuwait University as well as a diploma in Economics from England, works in a bank and has her own shop for spare-parts; Kamel is a student at the Naval Academy in Cairo, Sabina is a graduate of the Teachers' Training Institute; Adel has dropped out of school while all the rest are in school.

Om Nasser's life is the least eventful of all the cases presented in this thesis. Her life history illustrates the way women lived during her long absence, and highlights Om Nasser's attitudes to a number of issues like polygamy, endogamous marriages, etc.

PROFILE:

Om Nasser (Sarah) was born in Kuwait in 1923. She defined herself as a 'Sunni' Muslim who belonged to the 'JenaCat' ethnic group. Om Nasser lived in a big family house with her mother, her father, her two sisters Sabiha and Mudhi, and her three paternal cousins (father's brother's sons). Om Nasser's father worked in trade and used to stay away for long months. Later, he got employed as a clerk in Qatar for 80 Rs. out of which 20 Rs. were sent to his family in Kuwait.

Since the money he sent was never enough for 7 persons, Om Nasser's mother used to sew dresses so as to raise more money. She also saved some money by fetching fire-wood and water from the seashore by herself instead of buying them for a high price from the market.

At 15, Om Nasser got married to her paternal cousin Rashed who lived with her in the same house, and who was 9 years her senior. Her two older sisters had also got married to the two brothers of Rashed.

Rashed owned a shop for making head-covers. After marriage, he sold the shop and worked at the port as an employee. Around the year 1965, he resigned and went into private business. Now he has his own office which, according to Nadia, Om Nasser's daughter-in-law, yields an income of around 700-800 K.D. / month. Om Nasser takes 200 K.D. which she uses for the house expenditure.

Om Nasser has seven children: Nasser (36), Salem (29), Sadiqa (23), Adel (19), Kamel (17), Mona (18), and Nahed (14). Nasser works as a diplomat; Salem who had received his B.A. from Kuwait University as well as a diploma in Economics from England, works in a bank and has his own shop for spare-parts; Kamel is a student at the Naval Academy in Cairo, Sadiqa is a graduate of the Teachers' Training Institute; Adel has dropped out of school while all the rest are in school.

Om Nasser's life is the least eventful of all the cases presented in this thesis. Her life history illustrates the way women lived during men's long absence, and highlights Om Nasser's attitudes to a number of issues like polygyny, endogamous marriages, etc.

OM NASSER

It was by sheer coincidence that I met my former student Nadia at the 'Salemiya' market street on the 15th of December, 1975. Nadia had been a student at the Teacher's Training Institute, but had dropped out shortly after delivering her first baby. When I met her, she was pregnant again. As we exchanged news, she kept interrupting every now and then to say:

- "Ya hleila, ya hleila' Hala," (i.e., how good it is to meet you).

When I told Nadia that I had resigned from my work at the Teacher's Training Institute, so as to work on my thesis on Kuwaiti women, she asked if she could offer any help.

I explained to her that I wished to be introduced to middle-aged, non-working wives and mothers. She suggested that she would introduce me to her mother as well as to her paternal aunt. In fact, I was happy with Nadia's offer, for I had been put down by other women who were either unwilling to co-operate, or unable to accept the idea of telling me about their lives. I had just given up two potential cases and was looking for new ones. Nadia's offer was a good relief. She promised to call me in the evening, which she did not. The following morning I called her and fixed an appointment at her mother's house two days later.

December 19, 1975

When I arrived at the house of Nadia's mother, I neither found her, nor her mother. I was told by Nadia's sister that her mother had gone to a visit, and that Nadia had forgotten all about our appointment, and had only remembered since five minutes. Nadia had worked matters out so that I would meet her mother-in-law instead of her mother, and asked her sister to join me to show me the house of Nadia's in-laws.

The villa of Nadia's in-laws was a modern villa situated in the residential area of 'Dahiat Abdullah Al Salem' (Dahia: district). Nadia and her husband occupied part of the upper floor of the two-storey villa, while her in-laws occupied the rest of the upper floor as well as the ground floor which served as a reception.

I was met by Nadia who apologized for her forgetfulness and introduced me to Om Nasser, her mother-in-law. Om Nasser, a tall, dark, curly-haired lady in her early fifties was dressed in a colourful maxi-dress.

- "'Khalti' (my mother-in-law)," said Nadia, "was the one who asked me to bring you over to meet her instead of 'omi' (mother), who is always busy."

I was admitted to a western-style drawing room in which there were two sofas and four armchairs. The adjacent room was a western-style dining room. For a little while, I talked with Nadia and her sister. Then, Om Nasser asked me a few questions about my job at the Institute and whether I had been in Kuwait since a long time. When we were all silent, Om Nasser looked at me, smiled, and said:

- "Don't you want to ask me questions? 'tafathali' (go ahead)."

Apparently, Om Nasser was under the impression that I only had a few questions to ask and go. I explained to her that I needed to sit with her for a number of times and that I preferred to talk to her alone in the mornings. She asked me about the nature of my questions and what in specific I was going to ask her, so that she would ask her mother to replenish her with some information about Old Kuwait. I made it clear to her that she would not need to ask her mother anything and that I wanted her to tell me the story of her life. This left her rather surprised, though she did not comment.

When I was about to leave, Nadia insisted to precede me by her car so that I would not lose my way since it was already dark and since I had not driven to this district before. While Nadia went up to dress her daughter, I was ushered to another living room that was remarkably different in style from the first, though typical of most Kuwaiti houses. There were cushioned sofas placed in a right-angled structure around three walls of the room, a T.V. set, huge red carpets, green curtains and a square table in the middle of the room. Om Nasser, who had taken off her shoes at the door, sat on the floor in front of a rectangular metal box that looked like a 'dowwa' and was making tea. I asked Om Nasser if that was a 'dowwa'. Her reply was in the positive.

- "But," she said, "this is an electric one. It is cleaner, quicker, and more practical than an ordinary 'dowwa'. It cost us two dinars only."

I was offered tea, and when Nadia came down, I left, promising Om Nasser to visit her two days later.

December 22 - 9 a.m.

As I walked in on the paved walk in the small garden, I saw Om Nasser approaching the door at the staircase and coming to greet me.

But, she suddenly ran inside and came back with a brown shawl which she recklessly put over her head. As we shook hands she said:

- "I have put this shawl on my head because there are workers outside. We are making some changes in the house. Nadia needed a new room for the coming baby, so we are closing up the balcony to construct a separate room for Amal (Nadia's daughter) and the baby. We're making it in aluminum and it's going to cost about 700 K. Dinars, if not more."

When we sat down in the living room, I told her about myself, my son, and my interest in Kuwait and its people. Seeming to have remembered something, she said:

- "Yesterday I was talking to Nadia about you. I told her that I had thought you wanted me to tell you about the past and that I was surprised when you said you wanted me to tell you about my life. What shall I tell you about my life?! It is an ordinary life: no great problems or upheavals. In other words, 'mako gessa' (I have no story). There are other people who can tell you stories and stories and scandals, but thanks God I haven't got any, so what shall I tell you?"

I explained to Om Nasser that I wanted her to try to remember her experiences of Old Kuwait, and that I was interested in her own views. I told her that I did not mean that she should have had upheavals, problems or scandals, but that I was interested in the ordinary life of people and how they lived in the past. Assuring her that none of the names she would mention would be written in my study, I told her that her life was of interest to me because it would shed light on how people lived and thought in the past. I also said that I was going to help her by asking her questions about issues which I want her to elaborate. Finally, I said that our talk was going to be mere 'sawalef' (i.e. chat) about life in the past.

That way, Om Nasser felt more at ease, though it was rather difficult to put her on the right track. As we talked, I gradually managed to direct the conversation to her own person so that she unconsciously started recapitulating her memories of her early childhood. Om Nasser started her talk by telling me about the districts of Old Kuwait:

- "Do you know the districts of 'Al Desma', 'Al Nogra', and 'Hawalli' (modern districts and residential areas at present), those places did not exist in the past, when I was a child. There was nothing but desert. We called it 'al barr' (the desert) and we used to go there on picnics which we called 'Kashta'. Most people lived in the old areas of 'Al Sharq', 'Al Qebla', and 'Al Mergab'.

- "Where did you live?" I asked.

- "We lived in 'Sharg'. The Amir lived in his palace at 'Dasman', by the sea-shore. There were no houses around his palace like now. By the sea-shore, there was also a big house which belonged to the English Political Agent Abou Saud (H. Dickson). He and his wife were fond of Kuwait. Their two children had Arabian names: Zahra, and Saud. Abou Saud and Om Saud used to go around Kuwait on horse-back. Their house was just next to 'fareij Al Nasef' (the district of Al Nasef family)."

- "Was your house close to theirs? I asked.

- "It was not far off, but it was way back, far off from the sea shore. Our house was of course in fareij Al Jena^cat in Sharg. Sheikh Yusuf Ben Issa Al Jena^cii (Al Quena^cii) Shaikh of Al-Jana^cat lived close to our house.

In the past, we made all our errands on foot. We used to walk to the American Mission Hospital or to the sea. The last day of the Islamic month of 'sha^cban' (before the appearance of the new moon which decides the commencing of the fasting month of Ramadan), a special festival called 'Greesh' in which all women carried the food on their heads, and went to the sea shore, was celebrated. There, the young girls swam and happily played around. We ate rice and meat and nuts. We even took the 'dowwa' along with us to make tea. I was around 9 years old at that time. Sometimes we used to forget the matches, so I used to go to the house of Om Saud at the shore to ask for some. She was kind and sweet. She used to talk to us and to offer us nuts and candy.

- "Tell me about your family, your home, and your parents." I said to Om Nasser.

MEMORIES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD:

"When I was young," started Om Nasser, "we lived in a very big house. My father and his brothers had inherited this house from their parents. It was a mud house which consisted of many rooms. There were two big courtyards with separate entrances, one of which was for women, while the other was for men. In the men's quarter there was a 'diwaneya' (men's guest room); while the women's quarters consisted of a guest-room and many bedrooms occupied by us, my parents and my cousins. In the best houses of Old Kuwait there was a 'ghorda' (room) in the second floor and 'lawawin' (arcades). We had a 'ghorfa'. Houses with no ghorfa or lawawin, were ordinary ones. We were among the first people to bring in electricity. I think this was in the late forties. We had two fans in our house. Many people had no fans or electricity until a long time later."

- "So your paternal uncles lived with you in the same house." I said.

- "No, no," came the reply, "My two uncles had already died when I was born. One of them had one married daughter who lived with her husband's family, while the other had two wives. One of my uncle's wives was an Indian who lived in India, while the second was a Kuwaiti who had re-married after my uncle's death. From his Indian wife, 'Cami' (my uncle) had one son, while he had two sons and a daughter from his Kuwaiti wife. My uncle's son from the Indian wife lived in Nibal with his mother until he was 13 years old, then he came over to live with us, while my other cousins lived with us in the big family house.

'Bint Cami' (my uncle's daughter) lived with us for short intervals only. She was much older than me, but I still remember that at the age of 14, she got married to a man who was 'mukhabal' (crazy). She did not bear any children. In fact, I was later told that he never even slept with her. She got divorced and eventually re-married. But her second husband was also not good. She had a baby girl who died in early infancy. Her husband was the type who wanted a lot of children and wished to have a boy first. Anyhow, he was 'mezwag' (the type of man who marries and divorces many women). He divorced 'bint Cami' and again she came back to live with us. At 18, she got married for the third time and had two girls and a boy. She lived with her third husband until she was 40 years old, after which she got very sick with cholera and died.

Whenever she was divorced, 'bint Cami' came to live with us. She was good and kind, but most unlucky. Her eldest brother who later married my sister Sabiha was very cruel to his sister. He used to beat her and insult her if his clothes were not properly washed.

Long ago, i.e. before my birth, my father used to work as a diver. But since my birth, he worked in smuggling 'shakh' (silver) to India. This used to bring him good money. His trips to India used to last for two or three months. Then he used to come home for two or three weeks, after which he used to leave again on another trip.

After some time it became difficult for my father and his partners to smuggle silver to India. They were caught more than once and their goods were expropriated. Gradually their revenue could not cover their expenses, so 'obuy' found work in Qattar as a clerk. His salary was 80 Rs. only. For 80 Rs. only he became estranged from his home and his family. Life was difficult those days. Every month, father used to send 20 Rs. to my mother. With these 20 Rs. we lived throughout the whole month. We were only three girls: Sabiha, Mudhi and myself (Sarah). I was the youngest. There were two other girls who died right after birth. Mother never bore boys."

- "Didn't your mother and your father wish to have boys?" I asked.

- "No," said Om Nasser, "'Omi' always said that she never wished for boys, and so did 'obūy'. My parents had my cousins 'awlad Cami' with them at the same house. They treated them like their sons. It was already decided by my parents that we, the three girls, were going to marry our three cousins."

- "Did you go to the 'mutawa C a'?" I asked.

- "No, I did not," said Om Nasser. "My sister Mudhi who is a year and a half older than myself used to go to Al 'Mutawa C a'. When she could recite the Quran by rote, 'she was sent to the house of Sayed Omar to learn how to read and write."

- "Did your father accept that she would learn how to read and write?" I asked.

- "Yes, my father was 'mutatawir' (progressive). He never forced us to put on the 'bukhnug' (girl's head covering), when we were young. He always used soap at a time when very few people did. We used it only in feasts, but father insisted to use it all the time. He used to buy scented soap from the ships that sailed through Kuwait Bay. Father used to ask us to eat water-cress and tomatoes. He always said: 'such food is very good'. None of the people around us knew the value of such vegetables.

I was supposed to be sent to 'al mutawa C a' and then to Bait Sayed Omar when Mudhi was through. Father could not afford to send us both at the same time. Besides, my mother needed me and my eldest sister to help her at home. Sabiha my eldest sister had also gone to 'al mutawa C a' before Mudhi. At home Sabiha and myself helped mother with the house-work. There were no servants at that time and a girl was always supposed to help her mother.

When Mudhi was through from school, it was my turn. But unfortunately, I had become tall and big and had reached puberty at about 12 years old. My father said: 'Sarah has grown up, people will talk about us if we send her out. We don't want to be mocked like 'bait' Yusuf or like the daughter of 'Hajji' Othman who goes out to the market and walks around while she's 13 years old and is well developed'. So, I neither went to 'al mutawa C a' nor did I go to school. I was very upset, but I could do nothing about it.

- "Didn't you complain?" I asked.

- "I told my mother that I wished to go like Mudhi, but she told me: 'We don't want to be subject to people's gossip'. But of course I could not tell my father, because in the past, girls had to obey their parents' orders and could not object like girls of these days."

- "What was 'baī Sayed Omar'," I asked, "was it like the schools of today?"

- "No, it was something like 'al mutawa^Ca'. Some prosperous families used to specify a few rooms in their houses for teaching young girls how to read and write only. They had two or three classes and one or two hired teachers. 'Awlad^Cami' had gone to the 'Mubarakiyeh' Boys school and to the 'Ahmadeyeh's school'. They had some education, but they did not continue their studies. Father had a big burden, because he was responsible for their expenses as well as ours. My cousins had no income; their only inheritance was a share in the big family house. When my two cousins reached 15, they started working. Boys in the past worked at an early age so as to aid their families in meeting the living expenses. But because their father was not alive, they kept their money for themselves and used it to buy clothes. The two boys Basher and Rashed worked on one of Shaikh Yussuf Ben Issa'l Quenā^Cii's vessels which transported trade between India, the Gulf and the Red Sea ports.

- "What about your father? Was he still in Qattar? Tell me about your life during your father's absence," I said.

- "Father worked in Qattar for 5 long years during which he only came to Kuwait three or four times. The money which he used to send to 'omi' was not always enough. We were seven persons and we had to live a whole month with 20 Rs. only. This is why mother used to help in bringing up some more money by sewing clothes for some simple Shi^Cites and Persians who lived close by. Mother had a sewing machine which father had brought from India. People used to bring her pieces of cloth which she used to sew for a specific sum of money.

When we had extra money, mother used to hire a poor Shi^Cite to wash our clothes in the sea. Rich women never went to wash in the sea, they either sent their slaves to do that, or hired Shi^Cites. But, we were simple people and we could not always afford to hire someone. So when we had no money, mother joined some of her neighbours and did the washing herself. Girls were never supposed to go to wash in the sea. In fact, girls could not go out alone. They had to be accompanied by older, married women.

In the **feast** we used to go out with 'Jadeti' (my grandmother) to buy new silk materials for the feast. From our 'Cideyya' we used to buy lots of things to eat, we used to buy nuts and sweets. In the 'Id', the 'sūk' (market) was a good entertainment place. We could stand-by to watch the men who danced the 'Carda'.* Mother never accompanied us in such occasions. It was always my grandmother who took us because mother was the type who didn't like many outings. She preferred to stay

* 'Carda': a traditional war dance performed by men in festivals. Until this very day the Amir of Kuwait performs the 'Carda' dance in the 'Id'.

at home to visit the neighbours or to stand and talk to them across the wall which separated our house from theirs. In summer and in winter, mother and grandmother went to the 'suk' to buy us 'Cheswa' (i.e. 'Keswa', clothes). My grandmother's house was close by. Every morning, during father's absence, she used to pass by us, on her way to the market. Mother used to give her money with which she used to buy us fish and meat or vegetables. When I was young, mother could send me to tell her what we needed, but when I grew up a little, I was not allowed to go out alone. In the past, people were strict and conservative. An unmarried girl could not even stand in the street to watch the passers-by. She could not even stand on the roof. There were no balconies like now and the windows were very small and high. All rooms were set around an inner courtyard, and there was a wall in front of the main door so that outsiders could not peep in."

- "There was a girl in our neighbourhood, continued Om Nasser, "who always stood on the rooftop. Gossip spread about her and people said that she stood there to watch men as they walked-by.

At that time, we had no gas or kerosine stoves. We used to buy fire-wood from the market. Women used to go to gather fire-wood from the seashore. When we had money, we used to buy it; but at the end of the month, when we were short of money, mother used to go to gather firewood from seashore. She always carried big loads on her head. 'Al mara'l Awaliyah kanet shedda'. (women of the olden days were strong). Women could do more work than men. They saved money by going to the sea to wash or to gather fire-wood. Bedouin women were even stronger. It was their task to pack up and put their packings on donkey back if the tribe was on the march.

It was also the responsibility of women to fetch water from the barges at the seashore. Omi used to bring water in a tank which she carried over her head. There were some persian peddlars who bought water and sold it to people at their homes. They used to bring this water in two large tanks which were hanged on the two edges of a stick placed on their shoulders. Then, they used to make a sign on the wall of every house indicating the number of tanks which the family consumed. Again when we had money, we used to buy water from those peddlars, but in most cases mother used to go to buy it from the barges since it cost us less that way. She brought it in a 'girba' (Girba, i.e. water skins). This water was only used for drinking; we used the salty water from 'al jalib' (well), for washing the pots and for bathing. Most people cleaned their hands after meals by rubbing them against the wall and then dipping them in some water. But father always scolded us when we did that. 'It would make you dirty and smelly', he would say. We either used soap or used the dried and pounded leaves of the 'sidr' tree for washing our hands and hair."

December 24, 1975

After having an informal chat with Om Nasser, I asked her to go on with her recollections of her adolescent years. She resumed her story:

"After a few years absence in Qattar, father returned to Kuwait for a holiday. One night, I over-heard my mother talking to her neighbour. She said that Sabiha was going to get married to Beshar, my cousin, in a week's time.

It was already known to us that the three of us were going to get married to our three first cousins: Beshar, Ahmed and Rashed. But none of my sisters knew that Sabiha's wedding was going to take place that soon, until I disclosed the news.

When I told Sabiha what I had overheard, she did not seem happy. When Mudhi went to sleep, I secretly asked Sabiha if she was happy about the news I had disclosed to her. She said that she was not happy because Beshar had always been cruel to his sister. I told Sabiha that Beshar loved her and wanted her, for I had heard mother saying that to her neighbour. But Sabiha started crying. She said that she hated him and feared him. However, she could not dare to express such fears to mother.

In a week's time, Sabiha was married to Beshar. She lived with us in the big family house. Unfortunately, all her expectations turned out to be right. After a four-year marriage, which resulted in a baby girl, Sabiha got divorced. Father did not object to her divorce because she had been leading a miserable life with this cruel man. Up to this day, Sabiha has not re-married, despite everybody's efforts to convince her that it was 'Caib' (shameful) for a young woman to remain unmarried. A few years after her divorce, Sabiha got a marriage proposal from a married relative of ours who was known for his piety and good nature. She was about to accept when some gossipers told her that her groom's children were crying all night and saying that the new wife was going to deprive them of their father. Sabiha, could not bear to be regarded as someone who would snatch away a man from his wife or a father from his children. So she refused the proposal.

MARRIAGE:

A year after Sabiha's marriage (1938), Mudhi got married to my cousin Ahmed (the son of my uncle from his Indian wife). At the same year, I got married to my cousin Rashed. I was around 15 years of age

at that time. Rashed, who was nine years my senior, was a good calm man. In fact he was the exact opposite of his brother Beshar. I did not feel that he was a stranger because we were brought up as sister and brother.

The morning of my wedding, I was washed, groomed and dressed by 'al hawafa'. My hair was greased and braided with loops of gold. I was perfumed and adorned with numerous necklaces, and gold bangles.

- "Is it true," I asked Om Nasser, "that 'al hawafa' should be a woman who is happily married?"

- "Yes of course," she replied, "she should have had no serious problems in her married life. A divorcee, a widow or a sterile woman can never be a 'hawafa' because she would be a bad 'fal' (bad luck, bad omen) on the bridal couple.

My groom Rashed gave money to my mother and asked her to bring the troupe of 'auda'l Mehanna'.* In Sabiha's wedding, mother could not hire any singers or drummers because Beshar had paid a small sum of money. As for Rashed, he gave mother 10 Rs. (app. 1 Dinar) for the singers and drum-beaters.

At that time (1938), Rashed earned good money; life on the whole was getting better than the days of the sea 'ayam al baher' (i.e. when people depended on 'Ghaus' (diving) for making a living). Most people started working as merchants and trade flourished. Rashed leased a small shop where he sold men's head covers.

In the evening, all the male guests assembled in the 'diwaneya' of our house; then, they took Rashed and walked in procession to the 'diwaneya' of Shaikh Yussef Ben Issa. Rashed was walking at the head of the group, while our male relatives and friends who walked behind sang and clapped their hands. I sat alone in my mother's room all dressed up. I was not supposed to meet any of the guests and only my sisters or my mother could see me with my face uncovered. The women assembled in the courtyard while the men, having performed the evening prayers at the near-by mosque, made their way, in procession, to our house. We could hear the music of the drummers and I was being prepared for the 'jalwa'. 'Auda'l Mehanna' sang as I was seated on a chair with a piece of green silk held over my head. I was of course all veiled and nobody could see my face. I wore a black gold-embroidered 'abat'. The women took me to the room which was prepared for us. I was left there, but could hear the party going on outside. The men brought Rashed in and the door was closed upon us. To tell you the truth, I was very frightened though I was accustomed to my cousin.

* popular female singer specialized in wedding songs of the 'Jalwa'.

Yet, I did not know or expect what was going to happen, I was very timid. Girls of the past were very timid and shy of matters like marriage. Rashed took off my 'abat' to pray on it. In fact he was very kind and gentle."

- "Did your father adhere to the custom of not attending your wedding?" I asked Om Nasser.

- "Yes, of course," came the reply, "'obuy' travelled for four days at the time of my marriage. My husband's mother who had re-married at 24 after 'ami's' death also did not attend the wedding. Both the girl's father and the boy's mother were not supposed to show up. The third day following the wedding was especially designated for the boy's mother and his family to come and see the bride 'yaum al thaleth'. In my case, 'yaum al thaleth' was not performed because my husband and my parents lived in the same house, i.e. there was no 'tehwal' (moving out to husband's house).

Shortly after my marriage, father returned from Qattar for good and got employed as a clerk in the government. A few months after my marriage, I became pregnant. I delivered my 'beker' son whom I called Nasser (36). Then, I gave birth to Salem (29), Sadiqa (23), Adel (19), Kamel (17), Mona (18) and Nahed (14)."

- "What accounts for this age difference between your children? Did you use any contraceptives?" I asked.

- "No, I did not use any at that time. First of all, such things were not available in the past. Besides, I thought it was 'haram' to prevent pregnancy, but later, after delivering Nahed, I became convinced. There is a big age difference between Nasser and Salem due to the fact that I had lost four babies. Two of them were twins which I lost in a miscarriage because I was afflicted with jaundice during pregnancy. One boy died in early infancy; he got sick, just like that 'min Allah' (from God), and died. The fourth baby was again lost in a miscarriage."

- "Didn't you do anything to prevent your repeated miscarriages?" I inquired.

- "No, in the past, people never cared to seek a doctor's help. They resorted to different kinds of folk medicines, which were not always effective."

- "Some people also believed in being possessed by jinns," I said, "isn't that right?"

- "Yes, but this is in the case of incurable illnesses not in cases of pregnancy. Some people believe that an old woman called 'Om'

al Hubūsh' can cure illnesses. They say that a sick person is possessed by jinni which they call 'zar' (fihum yinni i.e. yinni yessamouno zar). When a patient was taken to 'Om al Hūbush', she applied 'dehen' (local hair oil) all over his body. A lot of drumming and dancing took place for 4 days. Incense was burned and a lamb was slaughtered as a sacrifice. People do not seek the doctor's help, because a 'jinni' does not need doctors. Up to this very day there are people who believe in such superstitions.

I personally do not believe in such things. 'Obūy' always told us that a 'jinni' cannot possess a human being because he is created out of fire. If he enters a human being's body, he would burn it up at once. People only imagine such things. We say it is only 'shedda' (difficulty).

When I was 3-months pregnant with my son Salem, 'obūy' was very afraid that I would lose my baby again. One day, he expressed his fears to a friend of his from Al Neseef family while they sat at the 'diwaneya' of Shaikh Yussuf Ben Issa. This man advised 'obūy' to take me to the American Mission Hospital where there was a good lady gynecologist. I was thus accompanied by 'omi' to the hospital where I was given a few intra-veinal shots to prevent miscarriage. I delivered by the help of 'al wallāda' (midwife)."

- "I was told that a woman had to resort to the use of certain drugs, and to abstain from eating certain foods after delivery. Was that true in your case?" I asked.

- "Yes," said Om Nasser." After delivery, I was not supposed to drink water except in very small quantities. My breakfast consisted of 'aseeda' made of fat, flour and sugar for 10 days after delivery. I had a small portion of 'raggi asfar' (i.e. yellow melon) at noon. 'Raggi ahmar' (water melon), oranges and any watery fruits were forbidden. At night, I was given a dinner which consisted of chicken stuffed with onions, salt, pepper and lot of spices, or 'marag'. All the food I ate was supposed to be seasoned with hot pepper and spices. It was believed that such foods help in reducing the vagina to its original size. Every morning and every night I packed my vagina with salt for 8 days. A few months after delivering Salem, I had a hemorrhage and felt very tired. I went to an Egyptian female gynecologist who thought that I had had no children before. She said that my womb was very small and tight. When I told her that I had been packing myself with salt, and that this is why my womb was small, she reproached me and said that this was very harmful. She said that the use of salt had closed me up. I told her that we did that so that the flesh would not spoil or turn loose. Her reply was that only the flesh of a dead person would 'yekheis' (spoil).

Since then, I refrained from using salt after delivery. When Nadia delivered, her girl friends advised her to pack herself with salt. Despite their education, they listened to their mothers. They told Nadia that she will get sick and not 'zeina' (good) if she did not use salt. But I advised Nadia not to and she listened to me. I remained tired and did not get pregnant for 5 years after Salem's birth because my periods were irregular. Then, I delivered Sadiqa; but that time we brought a nurse at home to take care of my delivery. For five more years after Sadiqa's birth I had miscarriages, and then I got my last four children successively. After Nahed's birth my maternal cousin convinced me that the pill was not 'haram' (sinful). She said that it is only 'haram' to have an abortion or to kill a baby after it has been formed. She said that we would both start using the pill together. I talked to Rashed and convinced him. I was also tired of too many deliveries and miscarriages, so I used the pill until I reached my menopause only a few years ago."

- "Does Abu Nasser still own the shop for selling head-covers?" I asked.

- "No, Rashed sold the shop long ago. That was after I delivered Nasser. Then, he got employed as a worker at the Oil Company. The Oil Company was boring its first wells in the northern part of Kuwait Bay. When no oil was struck, they started drilling in a different place. When oil was struck in the late 1930's, the company started hiring workers to help in building shades. Rashed worked there and earned 30 Rs. a day which was very good at that time. But suddenly, the drilling stopped and he was out of work, so he found a job at the Port. About 10 years ago, he resigned from his work and went into private business. Now he owns an office for imports as a partner with another Kuwaiti. He has good income, but it varies every month."

Asked about the over-all family income, Om Nasser said that she did not know how much her husband earns, but that her husband gave her 200 Dinars monthly for daily expenses. She proceeded:

- "Thanks to God, my husband is good. He never puts any pressures on me, in terms of money. He gives me more than I need. This is his nature: every 'fil' in his hand is spent on his home. He has no expenses outside like other men who drink alcoholics or have private expenses. In the past, some men used to put pressures on their 'hareem' in terms of money. But this is no more, there's a lot of money in Kuwait nowadays. Husbands buy cars and hire drivers for their wives these days."

As we talked, Adel came in flipping the keys of his car. Adel, a huge plump young man of 19 years was wearing a white 'dishdasha', high heeled shoes, and no head cover. He wore his hair rather long and nodded to me as he passed across to the room and went upstairs.

- "This is Adel," said Om Nasser. "He has become so tall and big, yet he is very lazy. His younger brother Kamel (17) has surpassed him, and is now a student at the Naval Academy in Cairo, whereas Adel dropped out from school at the preparatory stage. We are tired of him. When we talk to him he closes his ears by his hands and sings. His brother Salem told him: 'look at the girls who try to get educated even after marriage', look at your younger brother who has joined the academy. Go and join evening classes if you don't want to go to school'. But Adel never listened. This year we thought that it would serve him well to join the army. At least it would make a man out of him. We are still waiting for his admission to the army. We also applied for him at the Institute for Occupational Training. When we did, he said that he would not attend unless we'd buy him a car, which we did. He was not accepted, and now, he is always going around by car with spoiled boys. At exam times, he always says: 'I am lucky, all my friends have exams and are studying while I am going around with my car and having fun'. He is the biggest problem and the heaviest burden in my life. The rest of my sons and daughters are quite different. Nasser works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a diplomat, whereas Salem is a graduate of Kuwait University, Faculty of Commerce and Economics. He had gone to England on scholarship and has received a diploma. Now, he works in a bank and has lately opened up a private shop for selling spare-parts. Lately, his salary has become 500 K. Dinars besides his income from the shop, for the enlargement of which, he has applied for 10,000 Dinars loan from the government. He is now very well-off. Lately, he bought land so as to build a villa. My daughter Sadiga is a graduate of the Teachers' Training Institute and is now working as a teacher. I wonder why Adel does not try to be like his brothers or sisters. Today, Kamel is leaving to Cairo. He has been here on a holiday. His plane will be departing after two hours. But I still don't know if I will join him to the airport or not."

I apologized to Om Nasser for taking her time on such a busy day. I assured her that she could go with Kamel while I could wait for the car to pick me up at 12.00. At that very moment, Kamel came in wearing a 'dishdashah', and a 'ghatra' (head cover). He greeted me by saying 'Al Salamu alaikum', he came close to his mother and told her that he was going upstairs to get dressed. When Kamel came down, I could have mistaken him for someone else. He was dressed in beige fashionable trousers, a brown checked shirt and a plain brown woolen jacket. His hair was rather long and the cap of the navy was in his hand. Om Nasser decided not to join Kamel when a car full of his young friends came to take him to the airport. With tears in her eyes, she hugged him and kissed him. Then she put on her 'abat' and joined him to the paved walk in the small garden. Standing close to the gate, she waved bye-bye and came back rather distressed.

Trying to distract her from her apparent distress for her son's departure, I commented on the fact that their villa was nice and asked

when they had moved to it.

After a few moments silence, Om Nasser said:

- "This house is very good because its rooms are quite spacy. We have moved here 5 years ago. After delivering Sadiqa, 23 years ago, we sold our share of the big family house. My mother and father also sold their share. It was in fact 'al tathmin' and it was the government which paid us. We moved to 'Hawalli', and so did my mother. We bought two small Arab-style houses which were right next to each other, using the money of 'al-tathmin'. Then, all people started talking about how beautiful the new districts of 'Dahiat Abdullah Al Salem' and 'Al Nozha' were. So we bought this house in 'Dahiat Abdullah Al Salem'. Remind me to show you around the different rooms of the house. Nadia and Salem's part of the house is very private. A door separates our part from theirs. Theirs is a small apartment, but they have their own kitchen and living room. I don't like to go inside their apartment a lot so as not to intrude on their privacy. Even if we needed some butter from Nadia's frigidaire, during her absence, we don't like to go in.

The only thing I don't like about this house is that our neighbours are not sociable. We've been here for five years now and I don't even know their children's names. The opposite villa belongs to Palestinians who have acquired the Kuwaiti nationality. We don't know them either. I regret having lost the good old neighbours which we had when we were in the old house. But you should see our 'fareej' now. It is frightening, and heart-breaking. All the houses are now leased to poor foreign workers like Indians, Pakistanis, and Omanis."

* * * * *

December 28, 1975

When I went in, Om Nasser was talking over the telephone. Her dialogue indicated to me that she was discussing an issue of co-wivory in which an Egyptian woman was involved. I thought it would be a good opportunity to discover her attitudes towards polygamy. When she was through I asked her about the problem she was discussing. She said:

- "This was my sister Mudhi. We were discussing her daughter's problem. You see, her daughter Amna had been married seven years ago and has 5 children. This year, she saw her husband in his car with a woman. When she told him, he denied it and said that she must have mistaken someone else for him. But, when Amna kept crying and shouting, he admitted that it was a girl friend of his whom he was intending to marry. Amna, furious at her husband's actions, took her children and left to her mother's house. She was then told by her friends that this

woman was his wife. She asked Abdul Hamid, her husband, to divorce the other woman, who was an Egyptian, and who was formerly a servant in his uncle's house. Abdul Hamid claimed that he would divorce the Egyptian wife if Amna went back home. But when she did, he refused to divorce the second wife. That time Amna took the chance of her husband's absence and left to her mother's house again. Abdul Hamid claimed that he was encouraged to marry the other woman when Amna first left the house. But I don't think this is right. I think that he had been having a relationship with this woman since some time and when she got impregnated, he was forced to marry her. This is what people say. Abdul Hamid insisted that his children should not be informed of his deed. He said that he would fire a gun at anyone who told his children about his re-marriage. Once every week, he takes them out and buys them lots of toys. But they cry all the time and ask their mother to return home. The eldest boy is now 8 years old.

After a few months' stay at her mother's house, Amna was persuaded to go back. Abdul Hamid was crazy about her. He used to say: 'just let me see her and talk to her, let her even look at me from the balcony'. Finally, Amna accepted to meet him and he begged her to go back home for the children's sake. He said that he did not want his children to hate him (if they knew of his marriage).

Amna accepted to return, but told Abdul Hamid that she was returning only for the sake of the children who needed their father, and not for his own sake. It has only been three days since she returned. Abdul Hamid promised to divorce the Egyptian wife a few months after she delivers her baby. Now, he spends one night at Amna's place and the following night at the Egyptian wife's place. But I believe that everything had happened with the Egyptian wife before Abdul Hamid married her. (i.e. sexual relations). Abdul Hamid is now buying Amna very expensive presents. I think he is feeling guilty for his deed."

- "What do you think of a man who marries more than one wife?" I asked.

- "I think he is 'mahbūl' (unstable). If a man re-marries for no logical reason like his wife's sterility, infidelity, madness, or illness, then he is not a good man. He is 'ainū zaygha' (looks at, and desires any woman). Such a man can never be happy or satisfied because he keeps desiring every woman he sees. A woman whose husband is like that is most unlucky."

- "What are your conceptions of a good husband?" I asked.

- "A good husband," she answered "is the one who is faithful to his wife and children. He sacrifices for their sake by not going out a lot or staying out late with his friends. It is not enough for a

woman to be supplied with food, money, a car, and other luxuries, because a woman needs a husband whose attention is directed to herself, to her children, and to their home, not outside. A man who goes out a lot, who plays around is not a good husband. A good husband is honest and devoted to his wife and children, and when a woman trusts her husband her heart can always be at rest.

When I got married, I used to feel bad if my husband went out to join his friends at the 'diwaneya'. I used to feel jealous. When a young inexperienced wife hears her friends talking about men who get married in secret, she feels insecure and becomes always on the lookout for any signs. She starts suspecting and doubting. This approach is not good because it may drive the man to re-marry. In fact, if he is not already married, a man may say to himself: 'since she's doubting me anyway, I might as well do it'.

When I was young, I used to feel uneasy when Rashed went out to join his friends at a 'diwaneya' or a café, but I never expressed my fears to him. But gradually, when I got to know him well and I began to trust him, my fears dissipated. Now, I never worry or suspect if he stays out late. He always tells me where he is going, and whenever I need him, I can call him by telephone at his friend's 'diwaneya'."

- "What else are the characteristics of a good man?" I asked.

- "A good man is manly and strong-willed. He is not fooled or dominated by his wife. A good man should be strict, though not unfair. Sometimes a wife persuades her husband to leave his family house and to live alone. She invents stories to him about the way her mother-in-law treats her. A man who is fooled by his wife that way is weak and has no will-power. The best man is the one who remains kind and loving to his mother and his sisters and brothers. There are men who take their wives and forget about their own families. A man who is really complete and ideal is the one who is devoted to his family."

- "What then are the characteristics of a good woman?"

- "A good woman sacrifices for the sake of her husband and children. She accepts her husband's faults and adjusts herself to them. She takes good care of her husband and her children. If she's a working woman she should be able to manage her home properly. There are working women who refuse to quit work if their husbands ask them to. Such women are not good, because a woman should sacrifice her work if her home needs her.

I know of young working women who leave their houses messy and dirty. My nephew's wife is an example of such women. She is bad and lazy. Last year, she was working as a secretary. She used to leave the house uncleaned, while the Indian took care of the children. She

used to go out while her husband slept alone at home. In most cases there was no food in their house. My sister, her mother-in-law, who lived close by, used to send them food because that woman was never free to cook. Food was always brought from his mother's or her mother's house, or from a restaurant. When her husband complained, she said that she had no time to cook and that their house needed four servants. Such a woman is not a woman. Women of the past never acted like that.

'Al Mara'l awaliyeh' (the woman of the past) was patient and clever, and this is why she was better than 'bint al yum' (the girl of these days). She was patient and never complained from staying at home. Girls of these days are always complaining. If they are left alone they say: 'we are imprisoned between four walls', or they say: 'we have 'digat kholg' (are depressed or in a bad mood). They think a husband is only there to sleep with them, give them children and bring them money. They cannot realize that they have certain obligations towards their husbands, which make it essential for them to take care of their husband's food, clothes, comforts, besides providing good company. A good woman is delicate and feminine. She does not have to be weak, but she should not try to be very domineering. Women who walk and act like men are not good."

- "Om Nasser, do you always put on the 'Cabat'?" I asked.

- "I cannot walk without it," said Om Nasser, "because it is 'haram' to let my hair show. People who wear the 'Cabat' and show their hair are mistaken. They only use it in adherence to customs and traditions. In the past, we even covered our faces with the 'bushiyeh'. We used to put it in four folds and still used to be afraid lest our faces were seen. Now, if I ever use it, I put it in one layer. I prefer to use the 'bushiyeh' if I am going to the market, because I don't like my face to be visible to men. Sometimes I hide my face with the corner of my 'Cabat'."

- "What is your husband's opinion about your use of the 'Cabat'?" I asked. "Does he insist that you'd put it on?"

- "No, on the contrary, my husband wants me to take it off, when we are out of Kuwait. He keeps telling me: 'you have always burdened yourself with the 'Cabat', while many women are taking it off'. But, I never accept."

- "It is 'haram' if your hair shows," I said to Om Nasser, "but is it also 'haram' if your face shows?"

- "No, it is not 'haram' if my face shows, she said: "When we go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, we do not cover our faces. But our use of the 'bushiyeh' is only out of habit. I don't mind taking the 'bushiyeh' off in some cases, but I will never abandon the 'Cabat'."

- "What about your daughters?" I asked, "have they abandoned the 'Cabat'?"

- "My two youngest daughters are just as conservative as I am in this matter. As for Sadiqa, my eldest daughter, she does not always put it on. She goes to the school where she works as a teacher without the 'abat'; she even meets her husband's friends 'sufur' (uncloaked). Nadia, my daughter-in-law also goes out 'sufur'. But you know, the 'abat' is very useful because one can put on any old dress underneath it. It makes all people alike; this is how it was in the past. Rich and poor were the same. There was no showing-off by wearing expensive clothes. Now look at Nadia and her sisters; they always buy the most expensive ready-made clothes and my daughters try to imitate them. The 'abat' makes a woman feel comfortable as she walks. No one can keep staring at her and no one can know who she is."

- "Tell me about your daughter Sadiqa's marriage," I said to Om Nasser.

- "Sadiqa," said Om Nasser, "was a student at the Teacher's Training Institute when a young man from 'jamaatna' (from our folks, kins), proposed to her. Sadiqa had seen him at her cousin's house and she seemed to like him. But Rashed my husband, did not like him and neither did I. So both of us refused the proposal."

- "Why didn't you like him?" I inquired.

- "Because we don't like 'tariqat-hum' (their way). The women of his family meet men and talk to them while they are 'sufur'. The young man's mother does not even cover her hair. She talks to men and goes uncovered before strangers. 'kullu wahed indaha' (all is the same to her). The boy's father drinks and his daughters go out where they please. Although they are from our own folk (i.e. Jenaat), yet they are very liberal. So we told Sadiqa that we could not accept this person as her husband. She was rather upset, but she did not act like girls of today who insist or say: 'it's either this one or no one at all.'

Right before graduation, Sadiqa went with her brother Nasser and his wife to the cinema. Khaled, a distant relative of ours had got employed in the reservation desk of the cinema as a part-timer; he had another job in the morning as a laboratory assistant in the Sabah Hospital. When Khaled saw Sadiqa with Nasser, he talked to him and said: 'Isn't this your sister Sadiqa? I want to propose to her. Would she accept me?' Nasser asked him to wait until he would ask her. When he did ask her, Sadiqa refused. She said that she did not like his family because although it is known that they respect their women very much, yet it is also known that they are very 'secretive' people. They never tell anything concerning their family to other families of the Jenaat. She also added that they are not frank people and that they always keep things within their hearts. Sadiqa refused Khaled. She graduated and got employed in a Girl's primary school.

Khaled's sister is married to my sister's son Fouad. One day Fouad, my nephew called Sadiqa and chattered with her for a while, then he told her that Khaled, who was next to him, wanted to ask her something. Khaled told her that he wanted her and that he had been waiting for her to finish her studies, hoping that if he approached her in person, she would accept. He told her that he would make her happy and that he would buy her a nice villa where they would live alone. He also said that he would not let her do any work and will hire many servants to relieve her of the work. Sadiqa was at her grandmother's house when she made this talk with Khaled. I did not know except later when she came to tell me that Khaled was 'khawsh rayal' (a very nice man), and that she was thinking of accepting his proposal. But she said that she wanted to meet him once more before giving a final word.

The following day, my nephew Fouad called and I told him Sadiqa's opinion. So in the evening Fouad, his wife, and Khaled took Sadiqa to the cinema. Sadiqa came to tell me that she wanted to marry him. I told her: 'Well Sadiqa, of course a mother always wants the best man for her daughter. I actually wished to get you married to a better person who would have a good job like an engineer or a lawyer. But we have refused a man whom you had wanted before, so this time, we will not refuse Khaled who seems to be a good person. You can take anyone you want, whether Khaled or other than Khaled'."

- "Would you really accept to let any of your daughters marry the man she wants, even if he was not a 'jena^{-C}at'?" I asked.

- "We, the 'Jena^{-C}at' don't like our children to get married to other people. If my daughter chooses someone who is from our own blood, we would accept him, if he has no serious defects. But if she chooses someone who is not 'Jena^{-C}at', we would be very unhappy. Yet we would accept it only if she insists, or if she's in love with him and refuses to marry any one else. In this case, to tell you the truth, we'd only accept so as not to lose her, but we'd be forced to do that. We definitely prefer to have our daughters married to men from our own people.

In this 'zaman' (age, time), people have changed. In the past, a girl belonged of right to her first cousin and could not discuss the issue of her marriage. These days, girls have become very daring; they refuse their destined cousins and try to marry outsiders. Though some people have become rather flexible and accept their daughters' marriage to outsiders, yet, most people still run into trouble if their daughters insist on marriages which they do not desire.

The son of a rich Kuwaiti from the family of Al.... fell in love with a 'Jena^{-C}at' girl who was his colleague at Cairo University. His parents did not accept this marriage and vowed on their lives to stop it. This is because such Kuwaiti families like Al.... and Al.... consider

themselves 'asilin, and consider us not 'asilin'. We also consider them not 'asilin' and wouldn't give them our daughters. The boy's parents forced him not to marry the girl he loved. They put a lot of stress upon him until they drove him mad. Now, he has become mentally disturbed and goes to a psychiatrist for treatment."

"Would you, if forced it, accept a daughter's marriage to a 'Shi^cah' or a 'C^eeimi' (of Persian origin)?" I asked Om Nasser.

"I would rather die than see my daughter married to a 'Shi^cah' or a 'C^eeimi'. A relative of ours has a daughter who fell in love with a 'Shi^cah'. When she insisted to marry him, her father got so nervous and crazy about it that he got paralyzed. When that happened, the girl said that she had given up the idea of marrying this person. But two years later, she brought up the issue once more. She said that they should let her marry him, otherwise she would elope. Her parents could do nothing about it. She married him and now has two children. But, we don't accept anything as such. A 'Sunni' marrying a 'Shi^cah' is too much. The 'Shi^cahs' still beat themselves upon the chest in mourning for Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein. They scream and wear black in mourning, and their prayers are even different from ours.

Such problems are new in Kuwait. We had no issues as such in the past. It bothers us and annoys us that girls have become that way. They have turned loose and went to marry whomever they choose."

- "Which, in your opinion, is better, the past or the present," I asked.

- "There are advantages and disadvantages to each," said Om Nasser. "'Al hein' (the present) is better because everything is available and easy. Getting our things done at home has become much easier and quicker. Now, I have a washing machine, a mix-master and a sewing machine. Nadia has a dish-washer, such things get our work done quicker. In the past, it used to take us half a day to get our clothes washed in the sea.

Education is another advantage of this age. I always regretted not having had a chance to learn the Quran or to learn how to read like my sisters. I have often yearned for a school education. Ten years ago, I joined women's evening classes. It was my maternal cousin who urged me and encouraged me to do so. My husband also encouraged me. He said: 'I want you to be relieved of the housework and to enjoy yourself with the other women'. We studied Arabic reading and writing, and arithmetic. But when they started giving us English and Science, I had to quit. I could not understand them at all, and all what I needed was to be able to read and write, to make my accounts, or to write a telephone number. Besides, my daughters were still young and I felt bad for leaving them at home with the Indian. This was another reason for which I stopped. Girls and boys of this age are lucky, because they have chances which we did not have in the past.

One of the disadvantages of the present time is that people have become estranged from each other ('al nas a tazlat'). In the past Kuwait was a small city and most people knew or heard of each other. Neighbours of the olden days were just like relatives. All members of a family lived together in the same district, and one could find all kinds of help in cases of illness. Now if one dies, his neighbours would not know. When my daughter Sadiqa delivered, none of our neighbours came to see her. Whereas when I delivered Sadiqa, the neighbours filled our house.

Nowadays, girls have changed a lot than girls in Old Kuwait. They wear tight slacks and transparent blouses which show all their bodies off. They talk to boys, go with their friends to places like the Hilton or the Sheraton or talk to boys over the telephone. Such actions make me most annoyed, because girls imitate each other. Now my daughters are always trying to imitate Nadia's sisters by wearing expensive clothes. They do not accept materials which cost 2 or 3 Dinars anymore, they want what costs 4 or 5 Dinars. We have good income, but we are not rich, we cannot afford such expensive things. Girls who belong to the rich class are starting the habit of studying at each others' homes and of spending the night at each others' places. Sometimes, girls and boys study together. The parents accept it; our neighbours are like that; their children go to study in groups. I don't accept such things.

Thanks God that my daughter's values are like mine. They don't talk to strangers and don't sleep at their friends' places or even study with friends. I even feel very annoyed if any of my sons wants to bring his friends over to study with him. They keep playing and calling girls over the telephone and they don't study. A few days ago, Kamel was talking to a girl over the phone. I noticed that he was talking in a very low voice for a very long time. I pulled the receiver from his hand and when I said: 'Hello', no one answered. I thus became sure that it was a girl and I ran crazy. I pulled him and hit him with my hands and feet; I insulted him and cursed him. 'Those girls to whom you are talking', I said, 'belong to families like your sisters. Do you want your sisters to act like you!'. Before he left to Cairo, Kamel apologized to me about this incident.

To tell you the truth, neither girls nor boys of the past did such things, because girls of the past were real girls. They respected their parents and obeyed them. They respected elderly women and men and used to call them 'khalti fulāna' or 'ami fulān' (so and so). A married woman always respected her husband. Now, all that is no more. Girls don't bother to greet old women properly, they rather mock them in their presence. Mothers and fathers are neither obeyed nor respected.

In the past, a young man always brought the money he earned to his parents. In most cases, it was the mother who dominated the house and controlled the budget. A married man always gave his money to his mother, who in turn was supposed to give her daughters-in-law and to set aside some

money for home expenses. In the past, men used to vow on the life of 'om fūlān' (yehlef 'ala ras om fūlān). Women of the past were strong and wise, but did not have the freedom or education of today's women."

- "Would you say that women of the past were imprisoned inside their homes?" I asked.

- "No, said Om Nasser, they were not imprisoned. They could go out to the sea, to the market or to the neighbours. But, they adhered to their customs or traditions more than the present generation. A woman could not just stand on the roof to watch people. If she went out, she went visiting people or washing in the sea; she could not go out just for the sake of an outing like girls of these days who go in car-rides. In the past the mother and the father controlled their children whether boys or girls. Now, parents cannot even interfere.

In the past, the daughters-in-law were supposed to take over the burden of the house from their mothers-in-law. The function of a mother who had married children was nothing but giving orders to her daughters-in-law and to her unmarried daughters. Now look at Nadia, she's very lazy and very slow. She does nothing in the house, and does not know how to cook. This is how she was brought up. She goes out daily to her parents house. She says she enjoys herself more over there, because they always have lots of guests. She simply has nothing to do with the house. Despite the fact that she has a private kitchen, yet she and her husband always eat with us. If they don't, we send them their food upstairs.

Even at night, Nadia does not bother to prepare supper for her husband. I do that for him, while she sits upstairs with her daughter. She hardly joins us downstairs. Salem likes to sit with me every night. We don't ask Nadia to join us because she does not like our food. She dislikes most of the food we eat, and in most cases, she has her dinner at her mother's house before she returns. Salem comes back at 8:30 a.m. Nadia returns about an hour before him. Now, can I complain about her behavior? Of course I cannot, because if I did, she can easily take my son and move out of the house. Now, they are building their own villa which they will probably lease. If I would force her to work she would ask her husband to move there. This is what I fear. Mothers-in-law cannot ask their daughters-in-law to share in the housework any more.

Life has changed; and girls have also changed. They are all cold and slow. If Nadia's daughter spills something on the floor, Nadia looks at it and stares, while I run to clean it. We, women of the past, are warm-hearted and quick ('ehna harīm gabel, galebna hāmī').

- "What do you think of working women?" I asked, "and do you think there are certain kinds of work more suitable to women than to men?"

- "A working woman," replied Om Nasser, "acquires a good name and

a good status 'makana' in society. But if she says that she does not want to take care of her house, then she is not good. There are certain jobs which are not suitable for women like working in the police or in industrial factories. Such jobs are not suitable for women because they keep them out of their homes for a long time. Women should not try to replace men in their roles, because each of the sexes has different roles. Women can work as teachers, secretaries or employees, but they should not try to compete with men. However, they should have their own personalities and their own free will."

January 30, 1976

It was not before some weeks that I could meet Om Nasser again. Nadia had delivered a baby girl and was staying at her mother's house; while Om Nasser had gone to 'Al Hijaz' on a 'comra' (visit to Mecca and Medina, religious).

On the 30th of January, I paid a congratulatory visit to Nadia at her mother's house. I was received in a big hall in which there were sofas as well as floor mattresses. Om Mustafa, Nadia's mother came in to greet me. Having had an idea about my research, in which she was supposed to take part, she sat cross-legged on the mattress next to the arm-chair on which I was seated. She said that she would not mind to help me by telling me her memories.

After a little while, I was admitted to an Arab-style room in which there were rectangularly shaped sofas. One of the sofas had been removed so as to give space for a bed placed for Nadia, a baby pram, and a carry-cot. As she breast-fed her baby, Nadia extended her hand to greet me. I sat in for a while, during which Om Mustafa burned incense in a 'mekhar' (container).

As I talked to Nadia, lots of guests flooded in. Women came in, greeted Nadia and her mother, drank coffee and left. One of the guests was an old woman who seemed pretty curious about my identity. I could easily notice her looking at me and making signs to Nadia. Nadia smiled, and could not hide her embarrassment when she realized that I could see the woman's signs. I thought it advisable at this moment to save the woman the anxiety of wondering why I was there and who I was. I explained to her that I was Nadia's teacher, and that I was writing about Kuwait with the help of Nadia and her family. The unsatisfied visitor looked at Om Mustafa sharply, and said:

- "What does she write about Kuwait?"

- "She is writing about the past ('gabel')," replied Om Mustafa, "she wants to know about the way we lived in Old Kuwait."

The visitor did not comment, but I could notice her frown which was augmented by the many wrinkles on her aging face.

Om Nasser who had just returned from 'al ^Comra' a few days before, came in, at that moment. A lot of kissing and hugging and congratulating took place. When Om Nasser greeted me, and asked about my baby, the unsympathetic visitor looked at her and whispered repugnantly: 'Do you know her'?

- "Yes," said Om Nasser, "she was Nadia's teacher. She visits me regularly because I tell her my memories. I tell her about life in the past."

- "Why should you?" said the visitor nervously. 'Esh hegga tet-hashin an hayatna' (Why should you talk about our life?)."

Nadia's mother seemed to have grasped the visitor's point. Defensively, she said:

- "But, she does not write names. She only learns about our traditions and customs. She has promised Nadia to write false names."

- "It does not matter! 'hayatna fiha'l zein we fiha'l shein' (Our life has its good side as well as its bad side). Why should you tell her about it?" said the visitor who made the least effort to be indiscreet about her aggressive comments. As she talked she kept glancing at me to watch the reaction on my face, which, with great effort, remained expressionless.

Neither Om Nasser, nor Om Mustafa attempted to answer this attack. They remained silent, while another visitor took the initiative to shift the talk to another topic:

- "Well," she said, "let us change the topic, it is not the time for it. We want to know the news of Nadia's baby."

I was glad that the topic was changed, but had the feeling that I had lost Om Mustafa as a potential case. Om Mustafa was a sweet lady and had, so far, seemed willing to co-operate. But, the next three visits I paid her after this incident were unquestionably futile. Om Mustafa seemed self-conscious and deliberately tried to draw me away from whatever was too personal. She was trying to furnish me only with the most general material about life in the past. I wondered how the comments of a visitor could be as effective as to impede the communication process between me and Om Mustafa. My wonder dissipated when I asked Om Mustafa about the identity of the visitor. She was her mother-in-law!

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

Taking social reality as a point of departure, this chapter will attempt to outline and to analyze the manifold features of the common-sense world of the six Kuwaiti women whose biographical situations have been presented in the foregoing pages. In my analytical interpretation of the data presented, I am intellectually indebted to the phenomenological philosophy of Alfred Schutz which served as my basic frame of reference.

Although each individual woman is in herself a unique being who defines and interprets the world subjectively according to elements of her own biographically determined situation, yet as a social being, each individual is rooted in the inter-subjective reality. In the paramount reality of everyday life each woman is enmeshed in different situations which she define in context of her life. An actor's definition of her situation is meaningful to us in as much as it is meaningful to her and in as much as it is an essential part of the structure of daily life (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XXXVI - XXXVII).

The world of daily life is defined as the inter-subjective world which existed before an individual's birth and which has been experienced and interpreted by others (predecessors) as an organized world. "All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it;"

an individual's experiences and those handed down to him by his parents in the form of stock of knowledge at hand function as a scheme of reference (Schutz, 1967: 208). Each of the six Kuwaiti women under study perceives herself as part of the on-going process of daily life. Common-sense reality is given to a person in "historical and cultural forms of universal validity, but the way in which these forms are translated in an individual life depends on the totality of the experience a person builds up in the course of his concrete existence" (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XXVII - XXVIII). The following part of this thesis is an attempt to reach a typification of the common-sense world shared by the six Kuwaiti women.

In the course of my analysis the six Kuwaiti women will be referred to as the 'actors' or the Kuwaiti 'actors'. Since I am claiming no representativeness of my data, my analysis is only intended to encompass the six Kuwaiti women under study. With this point in mind, I propose to speak of this thesis in terms of exemplary literature which serves as a basis for understanding society at the micro-level with the aim of gaining more insight into the macro-level of the Kuwaiti actors' modes of existence. For purposes of clarity and organization, I will deal with a number of themes which have emerged from my analysis of the life-histories, and will refer to the typifications of the Kuwaiti actors' social world, giving reference to each case only in terms of her biographically determined situation or her life-crises.

ROLES AND SELF IMAGES

The individual presents himself to society, to his fellow men, with varying sides or aspects of his nature, realized in the form of social roles; but he remains in a problematic relationship with himself as well, for he sees himself in a partial way and comprehends merely a fragment of his being. All projects and roles are permeated with the underlying imperfection of self knowledge and knowledge of other selves. Each of us is destined to play a multitude of roles in the everyday world; yet the full meaning of these roles remains latent in experience" (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XL).

THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER:

Once we begin to examine the roles and self images of the Kuwaiti actors it becomes evident that they all define themselves and perceive their roles as wives and mothers as the major roles in their lives. Taken for granted as part of the essential structure of daily life, those roles constitute 'finite provinces of meaning' based on certain sets of assumptions which have been handed down to the actors through their mothers (predecessors or contemporaries). To the Kuwaiti actors the "stock of knowledge at hand" handed down to them by their mothers, functions as a scheme of reference in terms of which the actions of fellow women, of the actors themselves and of their daughters, are evaluated. Thus a young wife in present-day Kuwait is judged and evaluated according to the degree by which she performs her role as a wife and a mother, and according to the degree by which she conforms to their own typifications of the common-sense world. A working woman who leaves her children to be taken care of by the

servant is viewed as 'om mou zeina' (a bad mother), and hence 'mara mou zeina' (a bad woman). As expressed by Om Jassem: "women of the past, women like my mother, were real women." This raises the question of what a 'real' woman 'is' in fact, and how she is defined by the actors.

To the Kuwaiti actors 'al mara'l tekāna' (the real, good woman) is defined in terms of an adherence to the historically and culturally defined forms of validity. Yet let us see how each of the actors defines herself and interprets the meaning of the 'real' (i.e. good) woman in terms of her own life situation. According to Om Faysal, a woman can occupy the role of a teacher or an employee, but the kernel of her reality and her existence is centered in her role as a wife and a mother. Motherhood is a situation of everyday life which gives to a woman great enjoyment and satisfaction. As Om Faysal says:

Although I have 9 children and although it is difficult to control them all, yet it is a great satisfaction for a woman to find all her children around her. It is fun to bring them up. I just enjoy sitting down with all my girls around me... I cherish my children and my husband... you can say that I am 'min hezb al qane^c iin' (the contented type). I care for nothing but health and happiness. I don't look at others or compare myself to them. I am satisfied as long as my husband, myself and my children are together in good health.

Within this scheme of reference, a childless woman like Om Faysal's co-wife was in an unprivileged position in which she could not object to her husband's re-marriage as other wives who had children could do (ex. Om Marzoug), and could not manipulate her situation by exploiting the other wife. In the typical life situation of Om Faysal, 'Om al^c aiyaal' (the mother

of the children) emerges as gaining importance and prestige in the household, as we shall see later while discussing the issue of polygyny. 'Al mara'l tekāna', according to Om Faysal should be clever, active, calm, sweet, responsible and devoted. She should play the role of a comforter to her husband.

The idea of motherhood is closely related to cooking and food preparation. While the servant's role is restricted to cleaning tasks, the role of the mother is to cook for her children 'by her own hands'. All six actors emphasized this point as a necessary requirement for being a real woman. Om Jassem asserts the importance of the fact that a woman should cook for her children, by saying:

I never leave the cooking to the servant. A mother should always cook for her children... I always cook by myself, I enjoy it because when you do something good heartedly, you never feel tired. You can feel more tired if you're not doing any work but feeling bad deep in your heart. I don't like mothers who leave everything to the servant. Servants are eavesdroppers and like to repeat what goes on in the house to the neighbors or outsiders. There is nothing wrong in doing housework by yourself as long as you're happy and satisfied deep inside. This is how women of the past were; they were responsible.

This association between motherhood and food preparation calls to mind the image of the mother as the one and only nourisher of her child, whether during pregnancy or after delivery. While during pregnancy a woman is asked to 'eat for two' and while after delivery she nurses her baby for the longest time possible, this role remains operative as the child grows up. The mother remains the sole person who is responsible for the preparation of food; a servant can only be substituted under certain circumstances.

This idea is part of the "culturally inherited forms of universal validity," and is taken for granted as part of the natural attitude (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XXVII - XXVIII).

A woman, according to Om Jassem's teen-age daughter, has been created to be a wife and a mother. Though she is a student and may continue her studies, Om Jassem's daughter asserts to us that even if she has a Ph.D., she would stay home to bring up her children. This shows that there is still an adherence, even among the younger generation, to the beliefs of their mothers. This is not to assert that Om Jassem's daughter is representative of the rest of her generation.

In the patriarchal polygynous social structure of Kuwaiti society, women were in most cases obliged to take care of other women's children. It was always the younger wife who took care of her co-wife's grand-children or her step-children, as in the cases of Om Khalaf and Om Ali. To Om Khalaf her obligations to her 'sharisha's' grandchildren was a sacrifice but was associated to a great moral value. She interpreted her over-burdened situation as such:

It was a big responsibility. Now when I think back, I wonder why I never complained. But then I say to myself: 'Allah sakharani hag hal yahhal' (God has dedicated me to those children). I considered them orphans.

To Om Khalaf, the routine of existence which made her obliged to be fully responsible of her sharisha and her 'sharisha's' grandchildren, and which made her carry the heavy load of the household alone was simply assumed, presupposed, and taken for granted as a 'given' part of daily life. It was

only when the 'taken for granted' became the object of her inspection that she questioned the validity of her actions and began to doubt the veridical character of her actions. Her interpretation drew her away to a more satisfying nationalization based on fate and God's will.

Om Khalaf defined the good woman ('al mara'l tekāna') from a subjective level which bears upon her relationship to her daughter-in-law. Perceiving the situation in terms of its relevance to her deep convictions and interests 'at the moment', she characterized the good woman as the one who assumes full responsibility of the household, the one who helps her mother-in-law, does not try to draw her husband away from his mother and does not ask to have her food cooked alone. A woman who would say to her husband "I married you, not your folks;" is defined as "no good." Underlying this view is a characterization of the social world as being essentially patriarchial / patrilocal.

Using her own system of relevance, Om Ali defined 'Al mara'l tekana' in terms of the inter-subjective nature of the social world. She criticized modes of social relations in which women gossip and talk ill about each other, or complain to their friends of their personal problems. To Om Ali, a woman who stays at home retains her honor and prestige. A woman should keep her problems to herself and "between her and her clothes." Defining herself as 'Om Sekheyya' (literally: a healthy mother, figuratively: a good mother), Om Ali emphasized the fact that though uneducated she was 'fahma-fahma' (understands well). She cooks for her children and can tell if anything worries them. She

goes on to show that though she cannot sew or make embroideries, yet she is 'shaghula wa malat bait' (the hardworking, domestic type).

To Om Marzoug, the role of a mother was more important than the role of a wife. Being unwillingly put in a 'shersh' (polygynous) relationship, Om Marzoug gave up her role as a wife minimizing most obligations toward her husband and maximizing her obligations toward her children. Having discovered that the taken-for-granted fidelity of her husband was untrue, she compensated by relegating her role as a wife to a low level priority and dedicating herself to her children.

Om Nasser's characterization of the 'good woman' focuses on the husband-wife relationship. A good woman is the one who sacrifices for her husband and children, she accepts her husband's faults and adjusts herself to him. She does not neglect her home and relies on no one for the cooking. Women who buy food from restaurants or bring it over from their parents' houses are 'no women'. Om Nasser refers to the difference between 'al mara'l awaliyeh' (women of the past), who was patient, clever and uncomplaining, and 'bint al yum' (the girl of today) who always complains, and who does not fulfill her obligations towards her husband. In this sense Om Nasser perceived herself and her female predecessors as 'al mara'l awaliyeh'.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE SEXES:

Besides their roles as wives and mothers, women of pre-oil Kuwait were responsible for a whole range of activities in the everyday working

world. Their daily chores included cooking, cleaning, baking (for their own families as well as for people in the district), milking cows, sheep or goats, fetching water, collecting fire-wood and washing at the sea-shore. There were also some other activities of an economically productive nature like: producing butter, cheese, or yogourt; manufacturing baskets, sewing dresses, or embroidering 'athwab'. All such products, made by some women referred to by the actors as clever women, were sold to people in the 'fareij'.

During the males' frequent, long term trips in 'ghaus' or 'safar', Kuwait town was more or less an 'all-female' community. Elderly men, artisans, or small merchants remained in town, but many houses were totally 'run' by females under nominal supervision sometimes by elderly male relatives or family friends. Before his departure, a man always supplied his house with rice, sugar, wheat and the necessary supply of grain as we have seen in the case of Om Nasser's father who obtained a job in Qatar and left his family in Kuwait. It was Om Nasser's mother who was responsible not only for the household and for her three children, but also for her husband's three nephews who lived in the same family-house. While an income of 20 Rs sent by the father to his family was not enough, Om Nasser's mother had to raise money by sewing clothes for people in the neighbourhood. Thus besides her maternity role and the tedious daily chores, she took part in raising money.

The same took place with Om Faysal's mother who embroidered 'athwab', Om Marzoug's mother who sold dresses, Om Khalaf's mother and grandmother who

produced milk and cheese, and the 'mutawa^ca' Om Ali's aunt who gave classes in Quran recitation to young children. Om Jassem makes an interesting remark with this respect, telling us that when her father used to go to Syria and Iraq for 2 or 3 years he would return home to find that his wife had born him a new child. He would come to find out that he had a new child "running on his feet!"

Men's absence was taken for granted by women as an essential part of the structure of daily life. It was a social reality which constituted part of their shared common-sense world and was nothing 'out of the ordinary'. It is only on certain occasions, says Schutz, that the taken for granted becomes the object of one's critical inspection, and that doubt arises as to the veridical character or the philosophical significance of our everyday life (Natanson in Schutz, 1967: XXVI). Thus it was only when Om Jassem looked back at her life from the perspective of a new social reality in which men no longer went away in long trips, that she realized that men's absence was taken for granted as an essential structure of daily life. Recapitulating her experiences, Om Jassem says:

Most men went on such long trips. Usually those who were strong and sturdy enough either went on diving trips in summer or in long trading voyages to India and the Far East in winter... while the men were away, women, young boys, older men, and of course all the small merchants remained in Kuwait. The divers stayed for 10 months, while the merchants who went in 'safar' (trade) to India stayed for a year. But the women never bothered. They were responsible for everything. They didn't mind that because they were all alike, i.e. if my husband leaves me alone, now, while other husbands stay home with their wives, I would of course be upset and unhappy, but if all the men go away leaving their wives back home while toiling for a living, then nobody would bother. It was just normal for all.

As noted earlier in the socio-historical survey (p.20) a small segment of the Kuwaiti population which numbered 60,000 in 1930, worked as small-scale cultivators. While the men, living in the Island of Failaka had to go in 'ghaus' and 'safar' for economic reasons, it was the women who assumed full responsibility of most agricultural work during their husband's absence. Thus a certain kind of division of labor whereby men worked in diving fishing, or trade and women took over the responsibility of watering the plantations, fertilizing palm trees, collecting dates, taking care of their cattle, goats, sheep or poultry, was established (Mahgūb, 1970: 108). The participation of some Failakian women in agricultural work was according to Dr. Mahgūb due to economic factors related to the division of labor within the family. While 'ghaus' and 'safar' absorbed the male working power, and while men could not take part in both sea activities as well as cultivations, it was therefore necessary for the women to take this work over. This idea is supported by the fact that women in Al Jahra Oasis did not participate in agricultural plantations due to the fact that men did not leave in 'ghaus' or 'safar' and could thereby take over the responsibility of cultivating, cattle-breeding, and sheep herding (Mahgūb, 1970: 108). Om Salem (whose case is not included here) asserts the fact that women of low income families helped their husbands in building their mud houses. Forced by economic need not to hire any builders, both husband and wife worked together to build their homes. Such was probably the case with nomadic groups which were settling in the outskirts of the town. According to Om Salem, women used to shape the mud, pat it

and hand it over to her husband, who stood on a ladder building the walls of his mud-house. Om Jassem also cites a story of a Bedouin woman who cooperated with her husband in digging 'al jalib' (well); she used the water to wet the 'mud' to make it into 'laben', shaped the mud, and handed it over to her husband. This woman and her husband built three houses. They lived in one and leased the other two. This kind of division of labor between the sexes (though uncommon among the well-to-do families who owned slaves and could afford to hire servants), shows that at least among some low-income people, there was some kind of complementarity between the sexes. Despite their segregation into two outwardly separate social worlds, the two worlds impinged on one another and were tied together in the over-all structure of daily life.

As mentioned by an elderly woman in Failaka, men used to go away in 'ghaus' for three months. Before leaving they always provided their households with the necessary supply of sugar, tea, rice and grain, and gave their wives a sum of 10 - 15 Rs. The very poor men gave their wives 5 Rs. only. If the money was finished - the woman could borrow from her neighbor till her husband came back. Another woman says that during the man's absence, it was his brother, his father, or his wife who took care of the house (Ansari, 1969: 48, 58).

Because the money sent by Om Nasser's father to her mother was insufficient, she had to help in raising money by working as a dress-maker. She could not hire anyone to wash for her and took her washing to the sea, accompanied by other women. At the end of the month, when she was short

of money she never bought fire-wood from the market or water from the peddlers. She walked on foot to the sea-shore where she collected fire-wood and carried it over her head. She bought sweet water from the barges at the sea-shore and took it home. That way, she could save a few Rs. to survive by till she received more money. Om Nasser commented:

'Al mara'l awaliyeh kanat shedda' (the woman of the olden days was strong). Women could do more work than men. They saved money by going to the sea to wash or gather fire-wood. The bedouin women were even stronger. It was their task to pack up and put their packings on donkey back if the tribe was on the march.

This calls to mind Dickson's characterization of the Bedouin wife:

The position of women is far more freer and happier one (if we except the hard life and privation that is their lot), than that of their Arab sisters of the twon... where the Bedouin wife has distinctive rights is in the tent; she is 'um al 'aiyal' (mother of the family as well as 'raiyyat al bait'). She holds the honor and the good name of her husband in the hollow of her hand. Upon her falls the duty of providing for the guest, of cooking choice and of tasty dishes, of turning good 'leben' and generally bringing the good name of her husband into prominence among his fellow Arabs... The mistress of the house never sees or mixes with stranger guests, but she knows all that is going on, for only a certain partition separates the women's from the guests' quarters. Women encourage their men to go forth and fight bravely. She it is, if the tribe has to be rallied, who uncovers her face, lets down her hair, and mounts the 'markab' of the tribe wildly to encourage the young and the old men to victory once more (Dickson, 1949: 124).

Despite the existence of segregated spheres of activity, the social worlds of men and women can be found to touch upon each other in many ways. What emerges as important here is the interdependence between the sexes which is based on the symbiotic relations arising out of the division of labor. Women's control over the performance of certain tasks (like household chores,

and economically productive roles) makes it possible for them to manipulate situations in the 'world within their reach' and gives an example par excellence of Durkheim's social solidarity. Evidence of such situations will be recurring in the course of this analysis as they touch upon various themes.

Women within the 'segregated' courtyards negotiate the social order and levy sanctions which influence their behavior as well as others. The relevance structures of men and women intersect at various points (Olesen in Nelson, 1974: 583). As women carry on their daily chores in communal form (washing, collecting firewood or fetching water), they come into contact with each other and socialize to a great degree which makes it possible for them to exchange views, complain, gossip, or give advice." Though gossip is commonly viewed by people as a futile passtime activity, it can in this context be seen effective in establishing social control and perpetuating the social order.

Om Khalaf's insistence that her daughter should adhere to the use of the 'abat' and her fear of gossip illustrate this point:

What would the people say? what worried me was that I was afraid the women would talk about her and say: 'look at the daughter of so and so, look at the daughter of the Hajji, the pious man; she is walking 'sufur'.

Similar fears with regard to the 'abat' were expressed by Om Jassem:

When I was in Cairo, people advised me to take off the 'abat' since nobody knew me there. But I wouldn't. Cairo was full of Kuwaitis; what would I have done if I would have met a friend of mine in her 'abat'? I would have felt very embarrassed for walking 'sufur'. Besides, people would have said that I took the chance of being away from home so as to go 'sufur'.

Om Marzoug's fear of gossip was clear in her reproaching statements to her daughter Shaha who wanted to marry an Indian driver:

What a shame, what a shame... you are the relative of Sheikhs, Shaha, and you come from a 'aila asila' (family of pure origin). Do you want people to mock us? Do you want them to laugh at us?

In most of my observations, women discussed cases of polygyny and gave each other recipes about how to act, how to manipulate the situation vis-a-vis the co-wife, or how to solve a problem by resorting to 'al fattash' (curer) who can discover the existence of any spell or 'amal'. To mention one example, we can recall Om Ali's story of her step-son who married a second wife. Faced with this situation Zahra resorted to a woman who caste a spell on Abdullah to bring him back. But the spell turned against Zahra and made Abdullah hate her and her children for no obvious reasons.

In their communal activities, women negotiated marriages and brought certain families into contact. The role of women in marriage negotiations was very clear: in the case of Om Marzoug, whose husband was thought to have remarried upon his mother's advice; or in the case of the mutawāḥa, Om Ali's, Om Khalaf's and Om Faysal's aunt, who encouraged the marriage of Om Khalaf's brother against his father's will because she was on friendly terms with the girl's family, and who took pains to punish Om Khalaf's father and mother for accepting the marriage of their daughter Zeinab to her maternal cousin by not talking to them and practically making them unable to celebrate the marriage properly, and who supported Om Faysal's first husband, provided him with money to get him married and interfered in his marriage which eventually ended by a divorce.

THE ROLE OF "THE BIG WOMAN" OR 'AL MARA'L CAUDA':

Here the role of 'al mara'l cauda' (the big woman) emerges as very effective in governing and directing social relations. Each of the actors described here has cited at least one or two examples of the domineering older woman interfering in the lives of their sons or brothers or the lives of all male or female family members living within the same household.

Within the household, women in the patrilocal, extended family system came into different kinds of relationships with each other on the basis of kinship or marriage or both. As actors in the social world who shared face-to-face relationships with 'alter egos', they depended on each other and co-operated in situations like marriage, or the birth of a child, (here we can call up the example of Om Khalaf who was responsible for her co-wife, her co-wife's daughter-in-law and her co-wife's grand children). Despite this 'situational dependency and co-operation', the routine world of daily life reflects a certain kind of division of labor between the women whereby the younger wives and unmarried girls took over the responsibility of the house while the older women occupied dominating prestigious ranks.

In the system of social relations, as suggested by Eleonor Kelly, women can be seen to be differentiated according to certain social ranks on the basis of age, matrimony and maternity (Kelly, 1972: i-ii-iii). In this sense an old woman or a married woman whose children are of marrying age occupies a higher, more important rank than a young unmarried girl.

While the latter has no role in the decision making process, and is excluded from the company of the older married women, the former can occupy positions of significance in the family and can thereby influence the actions and decisions of both men and women not only in the family group but also in the whole kinship network. Here it can be seen that a girl has a chance of moving in due time to a position of influence as she grows older or gets married.

Writing on "Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle East," Nelson suggests that we may define the notion of "power" as a "particular kind of social relations." "Assuming that men and women are involved in 'negotiating the social order' - i.e., the rules and roles of social interaction," we can define the notion of 'power' implied in the negotiated order as "the potential for levying sanctions, the potential for influencing further actions of others (as well as one's own). Sanctions are not just threats of physical force but capacities for influencing the behavior (actions) of others. They are ways of creating possible lines of action for others as well as for oneself" (Nelson, 1974: 553-554).

Keeping this definition of 'power' in mind we can proceed to see how the 'matrons' or 'al mara'l 'auda' according to the typical Kuwaiti expression could in fact influence the behavior of others. As expressed

by Om Khalaf:

As soon as a woman's sons get married, and as soon as she has daughters-in-law, she is released from the grip of her mother-in-law and reverses the order by controlling her own daughters-in-law. A daughter-

in-law ('al Kenna' pronounced: 'shenna') in the past, suffered a lot and was burdened with all the work. 'Al khala' (the mother-in-law) did not serve her daughter-in-law like these days... 'Al mara'l ^Cauda' was never weak. She controlled everything in the household. No one could object to her. If she asked her son to give money to his wife, he would, if she asked him not to, he wouldn't.

Om Ali also expresses her views of 'al mara'l ^Cauda' or 'al mara'l shebira' (the old woman) by saying:

Al 'maral ^Cauda al shebira' like the mother-in-law or the grand mother was the first whose opinion had to be taken in the case of the marriage of any young member of the family. The wife (the girl's or boy's mother) on the other hand, could not interfere much as long as her mother-in-law was alive. A married man was always obliged to take his mother's opinion in any issue. 'Al mara'l shebira' should be respected. We all used to fear 'khalti' and 'ya-deti' (my mother's sister and my grand mother). Their words were like men's words. The son's wife was only given orders by her mother-in-law.

According to Om Faysal, it was Om Jaber (later her mother-in-law) who suggested to Jaber that he should marry another wife in addition to his first one, who could not bear children. Om Jaber always pitied her son and yearned to see his children. She urged him to find a new wife and eventually talked to Hend's (Om Faysal's) father, who convinced his divorced daughter to accept marriage to a married man.

Similarly, Om Khalaf's paternal aunt, the 'mutawa^Ca', refused all suitors who proposed to Sheikha (Om Khalaf) either because they were strangers or because, as Sheikha interpreted the situation, she did not want to lose her as the most active 'helping hand' in the household. But the 'mutawa^Ca' finally accepted the proposal of a 50-year old married

cousin who wished to marry the 25-year old Sheikha. Because the 'mutawa^ca' and her mother had a good family relationship with this suitor, they accepted and asked him to proceed with the formal steps by talking to Sheikha's father.

It was also the aunt of Ahmed, Om Jassem's husband, who mediated their marriage with Om Jassem's mother. It can thus be observed that the family relationship is an important criterion in accepting or refusing a suitor. At the same time, this affinal link can bring families together in structured relations. The decision-making process involved in marriage impinges on the relations that develop between men in the kinship system. Mediated by women, marriage can form an 'alliance of interests' as Emrys Peters calls it. Marriage in this sense opens up new ties and changes the relations of people involved and the internal hierarchy of the women's world itself. The arrival of a new bride in the house opens up new ties with the girl's family. "A whole new element is injected into the women's world by the formation of a marital bond." (Rosen. n.d.: 14).

A good number of marriage negotiations in the six actors lives have been informally mediated by women. The formal steps were then carried on when the boys' fathers visited the girls' menfolk. We cannot, however, claim that all marriages were mediated, only by females, for in some situations (Om Nasser) men promised their daughters to the sons of certain kinsmen even since infancy. Yet, the facts given herein, show that there are repeated incidents of marriage negotiated by women. Those facts also emphasize the difference between the role of a young wife and the role of

'al mara'l ^Cauda' who in many instances was treated as 'superior' in the household.

The routine structure of everyday life within the household of Old Kuwait reflected the differentiation between the sexes as well as the differentiation between women on the basis of age. "My aunt and my grandmother had the last word in the house" says Om Khalaf. "Their job was to give orders. They did nothing in the house." As work was divided in the household, each woman in the extended family set up was 'ra^Ceyat al bait' (guardian of the house) for one whole day in which she was responsible of cooking, baking and dishwashing. Each woman cleaned her own room and washed her clothes or went out visiting when she was not 'ra^Ceyat al bait'. While differentiation between the sexes is clear in the fact that men ate alone around a separate tray, the two older women in Om Khalaf's case were also differentiated by eating alone in their room. Their food was cooked in different pots and served to them alone in their room. Their washing was also washed separately. It is worth noting, in this context, that food has an important function in demonstrating the differentiation between the sexes, and within the female sex.

Being in dominating positions, those elderly women could manipulate situations within the household. In the cases of Om Marzoug, Om Jassem, Om Khaled, the sons gave the money for the house expenditure to their mothers, who in turn controlled the budget by distributing certain amounts to their daughters-in-law. They decided about what to cook. I was told by a friend that her mother-in-law used to give her rations of butter or fat every day

to be used for the cooking and that the young wife had no say in the cooking choice. Om Marzoug's and Om Jassem's mothers-in-law controlled the way by which their sons and daughters-in-law spent their money. "In the past," says Om Khalaf, "a young man always brought the money he earned to his parents. In most cases it was the mother who dominated the house and controlled the budget. A married man always gave his money to his mother, who in turn was supposed to give her daughter-in-law and to set aside some money for house expenses."

OTHER FEMALE ROLES:

Within the wide range of social relations established among women, certain women gained status and were consulted in matters of family law and custom. The 'mutawa^ca' (Om Khalaf's aunt) was an example of such women who were respected and regarded as 'al maral^l'l^cauda' and who were consulted by mothers in matters of their daughters' marriage since they (the elderly women) were said to be acquainted with all families in the neighborhood (personal communication with Kuwaiti girls). The superior role of the 'mutawa^ca' in the neighborhood was also manifested by the fact that they could ask girl students who were clever in studying the Quran to help in cleaning the house or washing the pots without pay (Al Sadani, 1972: 97).

The role of 'al hawafa' (woman who attends to the bride's attire at the time of her marriage and gives her advice about how to act), 'al khatba' (matchmaker), and 'al wallada' (midwife) are examples of roles

which have been operative (in Old Kuwait) in negotiating and perpetuating the social order, and which can be regarded as "structural links between kinship groups in societies where family and kinship were the fundamental institutions of everyday life." Simultaneously the woman as daughter, sister, wife, mother, or as 'al hawafa', 'al khatba', or 'al mutawa^ca' can act as an "information broker" who mediates social relations within the family and the larger society (Nelson, 1974: 559). As suggested by Nelson:

The implications for power (reciprocity of influence) are obvious in that by these networks of relationships, the woman is in a position to channel or withhold information to the male members of the kindred. And in this position the woman influences decision-making about alliances, actually sets up marriage relations, and informs male members of the household what is going on in other homes. But of course the 'home in question is not that of a tiny nuclear family, but of a wider family group. And this family group is one upon which many of the affairs of the society - social, economic, political - turn.

THE MEANINGS OF SEGREGATION: THE 'HAREEM' AND THE 'ABAT':

Emerging as typically discordant with the ethnographic image presented herein, are the statements made by some male, western ethnographers about women of the Middle East. Jacques Berque describes women's life before W.W.I, as such: a wife was not so much a person or even a child-bearer as an extraordinary assemblage of relationships, qualifications and taboos. The Arab woman adds to nature by the children she bears, the food she prepares, the pleasure she affords in her youth. There is a lot of vitality and steadfastness in her, but formidable taboos curtail her fulfillment. She

is isolated from the world and from society. She is alienated from city life. "The veil, the gynecium, the moral code relegate into discontinuity this creature who incarnates natural forces and who is destined to perpetuate the race" (Berque, 1964: 175-176).

Similarly D.F. Beck refers to the purpose of the veil in middle eastern societies. He says that the main purpose of the veil is to hide the hair and the face and to prevent feminine appeal in public. He also views the veil as an essential badge of social status and morality. Furthermore, he refers to the hareem and the high outer walls around houses as other seclusive techniques (besides the veil) by which women are condemned to a restricted inactive life." Zahra Freeth, on the other hand, accounts for the special circumstances which have made the existence of the 'hareem' not only "tolerable but often happy:"

Even in former days of strict seclusion the Kuwaiti woman was not evidently discontented with her lot. The westerner imagining the inevitable boredom of a life passed mostly within four walls, must remember the special circumstances which have made existence in the 'haram' not only tolerable but often happy. Arab families are always large, and the lady of the house is surrounded by children of various ages, not only her own, but often those of a married daughter who will be living with her, and those of the servants... living thus in a community, Arab women never suffer from loneliness and in some ways, I believe that the companionship of the 'hareem' gives a woman a basic contentment that a childless western wife, for all her freedom, might not find in the solitude of her home.

The spacious courtyard which forms the centre of the women's quarters is also a factor of importance in lessening the ennui of the secluded life. Here the women may sit under the sky, or perform their tasks in the open air, while their children play (Freeth, 1956: 84).

By such statements Freeth gives us the 'inside view' of the segregated social worlds of Kuwaiti women from a female ethnographer's point of view. Trying to discover the inside view and the meaning of the 'abat' to the six Kuwaiti women, several interesting factors emerged as important, making it possible to perceive the 'abat' as much more than a technique designed to condemn women to a secluded life.

As already described, women who could not afford slaves or servants, had to perform certain roles which made it necessary for them to go out of the house and to walk for long distances. As they pursued the onerous tasks of fetching water, gathering fire-wood, or washing in the sea, they could go out as long as they were 'married', accompanied, and above all heavily cloaked. Besides their religious-traditional functions of hiding the body or the face, the 'abat' as well as the 'bushiye' (face cover) were also useful in hiding women's garments. A woman could thus walk out of her house in an ordinary dress which she wore at home without worrying about her appearance as long as she 'threw' her 'abat' over her. According to Om Faysal:

A woman feels comfortable in her 'abat'. She can wear any old dress underneath it. But if she takes it off, she has to be well-dressed, and her hair should be properly set, putting on the 'abat' relieves me from such obligations.

Similarly Om Nasser comments:

But you know, the 'abat' is very useful because one can put on any old dress underneath it. It makes all people alike; this is how it was in the past. Rich and poor were the same. There was no showing-off by wearing expensive clothes. Now look at Nadia and her sisters, they always buy the most expensive ready-made clothes and my daughters try to imitate them. The 'abat' makes a

woman feel comfortable as she walks. No one can keep staring at her and no one can know who she is.

In this sense the 'Cabat' is perceived by those two actors as practical, as effective in masking social class, and as useful in ensuring anonymity. Such values can be seen to relate directly to the nature of the simple homogenous society of old Kuwait in which people could easily identify each other. Inherent in all actors' statements about the 'Cabat' is the strong belief that it is 'haram' to go 'sufur' (unveiled or uncloaked), that it is more decent for a woman to go cloaked ('astar laha': more decent: Om Khalaf), and that people would talk about her if she went out 'sufur'. Om Khalaf expresses her fear of what people would say about her daughter who wanted to go out 'sufur'. Trying to conform to the public image related to the daughter of a pious Hajji, Om Khalaf stressed on 'what the people would say'. Om Ali criticized women who took off the 'Cabat' when they were old mothers while Om Marzoug, reflecting her self-image and her view of Caireens criticized the exaggerated dress and attire of her co-wife saying: "doesn't she see how people like us go out, all covered up."

While the use of the 'Cabat' was taken for granted by all women of old Kuwait as an essential part of the structure of daily life, and was regarded as a particular 'province of meaning' having its own accent of reality, its use has been rendered questionable by the great change that has beset the Kuwaiti community after the discovery of oil. Thus the generation of mothers to whom the use of the 'Cabat' was a natural reality, were not ready to abandon their old attitudes or to shift their account of reality into a different 'province of meaning'. From there a lot of conflict arose between the mothers

who wanted a strict adherence to the 'cabat' on the part of their daughters, and the daughters who lived in a different reality wherein women were getting educated, were attending classes in university, were going abroad and were getting in contact with other Arabs who were not cloaked in the heterogeneous structure of modern Kuwait. From here came the conflict between Om Khalaf and her daughter Nuriyeh and Om Ali and her daughter Nasima about the issue of adherence to the 'cabat'. The after-effects of this conflict can perhaps be seen in the exaggeration on the part of some young girls nowadays in using make-up and perfume and in wearing elaborate hair-does, an exaggeration which can seem to the observer to be in great contradiction to the simple black cloaks of the older women.

THE AMBIGUOUS ROLE OF 'AL SHARISHA' (THE CO-WIFE)

Another important theme revealed in the life-histories is the role of 'al sharisha' or the co-wife. In various situations in the world of daily life of the Kuwaitis, the co-wife can be observed to influence the pattern of social relationships and the inter-communicative processes among members of the female sex as well as between the sexes. The introduction of 'al sharisha' to the marital situation creates new social relationships, results in a kind of differentiation among women themselves, and leads to a series of negotiations and consequences. As such a number of questions emerge as important. How does the Kuwaiti woman perceive her role as a 'sharisha'? How is work divided in the household? How does she perceive her co-wife and how does she rank herself in the internal social hierarchy resulting from the polygynous situation?

Om Marzoug, Om Khalaf, and Om Faysal define themselves either as first, or as second wives to their husbands. Though the three of them share the common-sense reality of being co-wives, each of them interprets her situation and defines herself differently according to her own unique experiences and according to her particular location in the social world. Each of these three women plays a multiplicity of roles and comes into contact with different 'alter egos' with whom different kinds of relationships are established. While Om Marzoug was a first wife, Om Khalaf and Om Faysal were second wives; to each of them co-wivery had a different meaning.

To Om Marzoug, the young inexperienced 'Om al ^caial', the husband's re-marriage was experienced as a big disappointment:

When she (my mother-in-law) disclosed the news to me, she had an ugly grin on her face which gave me the feeling that she was either lying to me to drive me mad, or that she was happy for what has happened. My only response was that I shouted and cried a lot. It was a big disappointment because he always told me that he loved me. I felt that I was living in lies. He was lying to me when he claimed that he liked me; he was lying when he said he will go to Cairo to get a servant; then, I thought, perhaps his mother was also lying when she broke the news to me....

When Fadel came home I was burning inside. I shouted and yelled at him, but he remained silent. His silence made me realize that he had really got married. He did not try to deny it or to answer back as I said: 'Go to her. I don't want you anymore, take your children and send me to my father's aunt in Gebla. I don't want to see your face and since you have decided to take up a new wife, you can stick to her forever.'

This experience of shock and disappointment in Om Marzoug's life, emerged from the fact that she had (taken for granted) as true, the love and

fidelity of her husband. Discovering that her marital relationship, was not the sole 'finite province of meaning', Om Marzoug's taken-for-granted convictions were put into doubt; she realized the inconsistency between her husband's words and his actions and the dissimulative character of their relationship. She thus developed a new kind of consciousness or 'attention a la vie' which made her turn her system of relevance to her role as a mother, and to the manipulation of situations in the 'world within her actual reach'. Om Marzoug minimized contact with her husband and lived in a situation of separation, though not divorce. Since this crisis, her relationship with her husband altered remarkably; she did not bother when her husband considered a third marriage. She only tolerated her new situation, though she never became as dedicated to her role as a wife, as she was beforehand. Since the repeated marriages of Om Marzoug's husband lay in a domain which I may call 'the world beyond her reach' being deeply embedded in the 'Shari^ca' Law which gives a moslem man the right to marry four wives,, Om Marzoug's only alternative was to turn her attention to the 'world within her reach' by manipulating social relationships in her social world. Thus when Amal was brought to live with Om Marzoug in the same home, the latter could kick her out after the first misunderstanding. This act is underlied by the culturally defined rights of the first wife who is 'al mara'l^cauda' as well as 'Om al^caiyal'. This common-sense typification in which the second wife was in deference to 'Om al^caiyal' was expressed in Fadel's words:

But you are the mother of my children and I desire you. I cannot live without you. I want to keep you."

It was also manifested by the fact that upon her arrival Amal was taken to

Om Marzoug to greet her and to kiss her on the forehead. In this situation Om Marzoug remained seated, while Amal walked in to greet her. The fact that Fadel could not object to Om Marzoug's act when she kicked Amal out of the house asserts his adherence to the 'ethos' of al mara'l^cauda and Om al^caiyal, and to the culturally defined rights of the first wife. We may perhaps go as far as to view Fadel, in this situation in particular, as being in deference to his first wife. He acknowledges Om Marzoug's right in her home and realizes himself as being 'at fault'. In Om Marzoug's case in particular, the husband's situation is synonymous to a situation wherein a person 'looses the round' to another. Thus Fadel could not claim any rights from his first wife who perceived the situation as such:

... I told him that I accepted to let him stay only for the sake of his children, but that I was not ready to share a room with him. I had got used to sleep with my children and could not tolerate the idea of sleeping with him anymore.

Later, she adds:

Ever since he got married I stopped being interested in sleeping with him. For about two years I did not accept to let him touch me. I often rebuffed him. But after some time I said to myself that I should have more children to attract him more to my home. If I keep refusing him, he will stop coming to me. (See chapter VI, Om Marzoug, p. 8)

The slight change in Om Marzoug's attitude reflected in these two quotations shows that she was in a problematic relationship with herself and was in a situation wherein her self-image was not clearly defined. While she insists not to share a room with her husband, she still thinks of binding him to her by having more children. Underlying this belief is the strong cultural

meaning related to motherhood and to the ethos of 'Om al ^caiyāl'.

Interpreting her relationship with her co-wives in terms of the typifications of the common sense world, she asserts the importance of her role as a mother, as 'om al ^caiyāl', and as the first wife. (Om al ^caiyāl is used to refer to a first wife even though the 2nd or 3rd wife may also have children). Referring to the way by which she can manipulate the 'world within her actual reach' Om Marzoug asserts the importance of her role as 'om al ^caiyāl':

I am the mother of his children. I have all rights, because I am the first wife. He took me as a wife long ago, so he can never object to my desires. If he does not do what I want, I stop talking to him altogether, so he comes back repenting what he did.

Om Marzoug's daughter also asserted this fact:

Mother is always giving orders, and believe it or not my father always obeys her. If he does not, she makes a big quarrel; but she always claims otherwise. Yesterday, she wanted the car, but father did not accept because he wanted to go out. Do you know what she did? She just walked out, put herself in the car, did her errand and came back.

Within the polygynous situation, a man has to negotiate between wives in a way which would please them all. Thus Fadel spends one night with each of his two Egyptian wives (Om Marzoug being excluded due to her special situation of partial separation). Trouble is bound to arise between the wives if their husband forgets and spends one night more with any of them. Finally, Om Marzoug summarizes her view of her husband as a man who has more than one wife:

A man who has more than one wife, is an ass. A good man is satisfied with one wife. But he who has two or three is rotten and it all falls on his head.

Om Khalaf's situation as a 'sharisha' differs from Om Marzoug's. While Om Marzoug was the first wife, Om Khalaf was the new young wife who was almost half the age of her 'sharisha' Om Mutlag. Thus due to seniority, and to her being the first wife, Om Mutlag was perceived by Om Khalaf as a woman who dominated all decision-making within the household. Om Khalaf perceived herself as being exploited. The initial shock received by Om Mutlag upon learning of her husband's marriage was reacted to with extreme violence which ended by sending the new wife out of the house. The Haggi could do nothing about this situation and did not even interfere when Sheikha was sent out.

Each of the two wives of the Haggi, living in the paramount reality of everyday life, defined herself in terms of her particular position in the social world. As suggested by Schutz "that ... there is not only a multiplicity but a relativity in the definition of a situation by different actors... is part of the essential structure of daily life." While Om Mutlag perceived Sheikha as an intruder who was trespassing in her private world when she said: "'Go out of my house'," Om Khalaf perceived herself as having the right to be treated like a wife. She expressed the situation to the Haggi by saying:

Well, Haggi Masoud, I did not jump to your house over the wall, you came and took me from my parents' house. There is nothing to be done. All I can say is that I will be good and kind to her. I will help her and treat her like a mother.

Implicit in Om Marzoug's, Om Khalaf's statements are the ideas of having the right to be treated like a wife, but at the same time accepting the fact that she will have to help her co-wife. All through her life Om Khalaf was exploited. She was always dominated not only by her 'sharisha', but also by her 'sharisha's daughter-in-law. Due to her seniority, and her

role as Om al ^caiyāl - Om Mutlag was in a position to arrange for herself by exploiting her 'sharisha'. In this situation the overall image is one whereby women exploit women and manipulate situations to their favor according to a certain hierarchy present in the household.

Om Mutlag's daughter-in-law, who was her niece, also sided with her mother-in-law against the new wife. Looking at her life in retrospect, Om Khalaf wonders why she has never complained about her situation. The motives which could explain conditions related to her actions remain obscure and 'marginal to her awareness' (Natanson, 1967: XXXIV).

God had given me no tongue at that time, and I could not reply. Now I wonder why I did all that. Why was I responsible for those two children when their grandmother, their mother and their step-mother were all above. Why have I done all that? By God I don't know how or why...

To tell you the truth, a young woman in the past was always miserable. I was always given orders by my partner, because she was in the position of a mother-in-law. She was as old, as my mother. It was her responsibility to decide upon the food. It was she who would cut the meat or the fish and would say: 'this is for today, and this is for tomorrow. If she needed anything, she used to tell the Hajji and he would get it. But I could not interfere. She had the upper hand.

Such, were the taken for granted assumptions which Om Khalaf held about her routine world. Only as she related the story, looking back at her once 'real' experiences, did she begin to doubt their meaning and to question their significance.

The case of Om Faysal presents a third variation on the role of the 'sharisha'. Because Jaber's first wife was childless, a different kind of relationship emerged between Om Faysal (2nd wife) and her 'sharisha'. Being

disadvantaged by the fact that she could not bear children, Om Jaber's wife could not cause trouble like other wives who had children. She accepted the situation more calmly. It was she who dressed him up for the wedding, but she could not bear to see him with another woman so she left the house for 15 days. In this situation the two wives had to accept each other. Om Faysal was not dominated by her 'sharisha'. In Om Faysal's words:

My case is different. My partner does not try to dominate me, she is kind. Besides, she knows that the fault is hers. She had no children, and this why she has to let things go. But if a woman has children and her husband re-marries without any reason, then anger, trouble, and 'sharr' (evil) may come up.

While Jaber's first wife had to accept the reality of her husband's remarriage, she felt bitter when Hend had her first child. Yet due to her good nature, she cuddled the baby and took care of her. Hend, on the other hand, had experienced the crisis of an unsuccessful marriage to a man who did not meet her image of a good man. To her a good man is perceived as one who should be the 'provider', and who should be responsible. Having accepted to marry a married man, Hend put herself in conflict with herself. She questioned the validity of her decision to marry a married man, and wondered if she will ever have children.

The role of 'Om al ^caiyal' emerged as important when Om Faysal had her first child; she immediately acquired a higher status. The fact that she was not exploited by her 'sharisha' can be explained both by the good nature of the 'sharisha' as well as by the fact that Om Faysal was the one who could bear children, which put her in a higher rank than an ordinary 'sharisha'.

Thus the daily chores were equally divided between the two wives. Their ranking in the internal social hierarchy was not as sharp as was the case with Om Khalaf.

The (situation of) rivalry between wives was also exemplified in the case of Om Jassem's mother who was the second wife. Om Jassem's father preferred his second wife since she was calm and good. His attitude towards his first wife was one of dislike. In fact, she did not conform to the common sense typifications of a good woman, since she was the nervous bullying type. The first wife of Om Jassem's father could manipulate situations and could exercise power over her husband by the use of her son as a mediator. In one case, she urged her son to convince his father that a house which he had bought for his 2nd wife (Om Jassem's mother) was an unsuccessful deal. Using her psychological powers to manipulate the 'world within her actual reach', the first wife succeeded, and the house was sold.

On a more general level, each of the women under study expressed her views of polygyny. According to Om Jassem, marriage to more than one wife has been increasing. While in the past, men remarried only if their wives were sick, or could have no children, now, men are marrying for no reason except that they have a lot of money which they don't know how to use. According to Jamal, the son of Om Marzoug, the reason is also money:

It is money, he (his father) has a lot of money and doesn't know how or where to spend it. He thinks this is a good way to have fun. Now despite the trouble he is in, he wouldn't hesitate to marry another woman if he has the chance.

According to Om Faysal a man should only re-marry if his wife is reckless, dirty, or childless. If she is clever, takes good care of her

house and has children, then it is a mistake for a man to re-marry because the first wife will try to dominate the second, and fights will start between them.

Om Nasser perceives a man who marries more than one wife for no logical reason (wife's sterility, infidelity, madness, or illness) as being unstable ('mahbul'). He is perceived as a person who is never satisfied. He is 'ainu zaygha' i.e. he desires every woman he sees.

Om Ali perceives the situation in a slightly different way. She introduces the factor of education:

But I tell you it's education which makes the difference and which makes people understand more. Look at my step-son Abdullah. He has lately taken up a new wife though he had loved his first wife very much. Had he been educated like my son Ali, he wouldn't have changed his wife for a fortune. A man who is educated understands and knows that he should respect his wife.

Later Om Alia adds that a man has the right to remarry only if his wife is sick or sterile. She interprets the situation as such:

I believe in the saying which says: 'al rayal lamma tet-ghayar makhadatu, tet-ghayar mawadetu' (When a man changes his pillow, his affection to his children and his home changes). Now it has become very prevalent to find a rich old man marrying a new young wife when his first wife was faultless. In the past, very few men did that because they could not afford it. Only the very rich ones did, about 30 or 40 men only. But now, money has increased in everybody's hands. Oil has enriched everybody. So men are spending their money on women. But I guess all what results from polygyny is trouble.

In a school textbook on Kuwaiti Society, Kanawaty, Ismail, (et. al), contend that the problem of polygyny is one of the major problems of the modern Kuwaiti family. They see the increase in polygyny as being the result

of ignorance of the Shari^c laws by which polygyny was institutionalized only as 'remedial law' to be resorted to in certain circumstances only. The authors criticized situations whereby the men abandoned their old wives who have shared with them the difficult days of the past, and married new wives, thereby neglecting the need of their children to their attention. Such situations endanger the stability of the family institution (Kanawati, Ismail, et. al. 1974: 116; Saleh, n.d.: 10).

A quick survey of statistical data on the issue of polygyny reveals that out of 52,878 married males (above 15 years old), 4,324 were found in 1970 to be married to more than one woman. This number constitutes 9.4% of the total number of married males above 15 years old. Recent statistics also revealed that polygyny and education are universally related. The number of males married to more than one wife decreases with the increase in the degree of education. Thus out of the same 52,878, the number of males married to more than one wife according to degree of education was distributed as such: 2223 illiterates, 1753 literates, 513 holding primary and preparatory certificates, 45 holding secondary school certificates and 12 university graduates (The Planning Board, 1975: 5, 8). I can infer from the data presented herein that while there was an increase in polygyny with the sudden increase in wealth, this increase was basically spread among the newly moneyed yet uneducated men. I believe that with the spread of education, polygyny will be likely to decrease.

LIFE CRISES

Within the elements of each actor's experiences of the outer world

are individually-defined sets of meaning. Each of the actors, looking at her life in retrospect perceived certain points in her life as problematic, and as representing a 'life crisis'. Defining a 'life-crisis' in Turner's sense (Turner, 1967: 7) as an "important point in the physical or social development of an individual," it can be seen that certain problematic situations related to growing-up or marriage emerged as major life-crises in the lives of the six Kuwaiti women.

The crisis of growing up was most clearly expressed in the life-history of Om Ali (Amina). Amina recalls that after the death of her mother, she always sat sadly alone at the corner of her room. When Amina's father got re-married, she was only upset because her maternal cousin Sheikha (Om Khalaf) who used to help Amina's sister in doing the housework after the mother's death, was not going to go there anymore. Being only six years old, Amina could not anticipate the future experiences which were likely to result from moving into the new social reality of having a step-mother and of playing the new role of a step-daughter. The fact that there was a taken-for-granted 'apathy' in the (step-mother) - (step-daughter) relationship was not accessible to Amina's intentional life:

I was very upset because Sheikha was not going to come again, but father's remarriage meant nothing to me until I started experiencing the misery of having a cruel, heartless step-mother.

Hungry, deprived, frightened and over-worked, Om Ali experienced her new unanticipated reality as a step-daughter. "She has really 'marmaratna we azzabatna' (made us suffer)," says Om Ali as she describes her step-mother's ill-treatment. When Amina moved to live at her paternal uncle's house, she

experienced the same feelings of deprivation and exploitation. It was not until she moved to live with her mother's sister the mutawa^ca (Quran teacher) that this critical period in Om Ali's life came to an end.

Such conditions of life show the extent to which women who had a higher rank in the social hierarchy (in this case by age) could exploit young women or girls. Since Amina could not complain to her father for fear of being beaten, she had to comply with her reality until she had a bad hemorrhage as a result of over-work. Only then, she was moved to live with her maternal aunt upon the latter's suggestion.

When Amina herself became a step-mother she could place herself empathetically in her step-children's situation. As she projected her actions, her 'in-order-to motives' centered around trying not to make them suffer as she had. The result was to her favor:

Now after these years, I can tell that I reaped what I had sown. My husband's children treat me like a mother... When they come over, they always kiss me on the forehead.

Om Marzoug's life crisis started on the night of her marriage. At the age of eleven and with little or no prior knowledge of what it meant to get married, Om Marzoug (Aisha) was shocked and frightened. Her marriage continued to be problematic to her as she moved to live with her in-laws in Kuwait. Trouble reached its climax when her husband married a second wife. This marked a decisive point in her life: she decided to dedicate herself to her children and nothing more, and she consciously drew herself away from a shared marital relationship.

Om Faysal's case highlights a life crisis related to an undesired

marriage. Having made several attempts to stop her marriage to her step-mother's brother, Om Faysal (Hend) was constantly rebuffed by her father and her grandmother. While her father asserted that young girls had no right to interfere, her grandmother persuaded her of the fact that her cousin was better than a stranger and that "a dress is better when patched from the same material." Being bound by those strong kinship ties, and by the taken-for-granted fact that a girl had to get married once she reached puberty, and that a girl should not interfere in her marriage, Hend got married to Zaki. Zaki's qualities did not, however, conform to Hend's ideal image of a husband: "Zaki's income," she says "was not the income of a man who was on the threshold of marriage... His maternal aunt the mutawa^c had to toil so as to give him money." Her situation after marriage was defined in the following way:

My heart did not love Zaki. I had said to myself: 'perhaps I will love him after marriage', but I could not forget the idea that he was like my brother... I did not want this marriage since the very beginning. I hated him and hated the idea that I got married to him.

When she finally got divorced, Hend had moved to the status of a woman who had the right to refuse suitors. She refused many proposals for four years until her father finally persuaded her to get married to a kinsman who had a childless wife. Deeply rooted in her father's statements, as he tried to convince her, was the taken-for-granted assumption that marriage meant security for a woman. Hend accepted the proposal, but soon began to regret her decision. For a few months she experienced inner conflict. She regretted the fact that she had refused many unmarried suitors and that she accepted a marriage based on 'shersh' (partnership i.e. polygyny). When

she had her first baby and was assured of her husband's potency, and when she found out that her 'sharisha' was a kind woman, Om Faysal, accepted her new reality and assumed her role as a 'sharisha'.

To Om Khalaf, the major life crisis was her position as a second wife who was constantly exploited by the 'sharisha' in the extended family structure.

Om Jassem and Om Nasser had less eventful life histories than all other actors. Despite the fact that Om Jassem described her life as 'wanasa wa marah' (interesting and fun-giving), yet she perceived her life with her in-laws as seriously problematic and unbearable. Regarded by her sister-in-law as someone who has brought misfortune to the house, she was not well-treated and was sometimes over-worked. Her mother-in-law always blamed her for things she never did. Her husband, on the other hand, always listened to what his mother told him. It was only when she moved out of the big family that she felt she had regained her freedom in a world of her own. At some instances Om Jassem cursed the woman who arranged her marriage. On the whole Om Jassem's life-history highlights the issue of female power exercised by the mother over her son and by the sister over her brother.

In contrast to all, Om Nasser's life-history was the least eventful. Perceiving her life as an ordinary one in which there were no major crises, she said that she had no story ('mako quessa').

THE ROLE OF KINSHIP IN MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS

All the women expressed the idea that they preferred endogamous marriages. Defining the lineage as a group whose members are bound together by descent, with some degree of corporateness, it can be seen that it includes both maternal and paternal kin and both affines and consanguines. Among the Kuwaiti actors under study, father's brother's daughter marriage (FBD) is preferred, though it is not necessarily the rule. As Millicent Ayoub contends in a study on parallel cousin marriage and endogamy in a Middle Eastern village, everyone was found to prefer endogamous marriages; FBD was only found to be an expression of this preference (Keyser, 1974: 296).

The data presented in the life histories show that only one woman (Om Nasser) was married to her father's brother's son (first cousin). All other cases with the exception of Om Jassem (who was married to her neighbor), were married to second cousins either maternal or paternal strict endogamy within the status group or the ethnic group, as well as preference for marriage to kinsman, can be clearly seen in the six cases. As expressed by Faysal's grandmother, "a cousin is always better than a stranger, and a dress is better when patched from its same material."

Actors who belong to 'asil' families (of pure origin), like Om Jassem and Om Marzoug assert the fact that their children should only marry 'asils'. While Om Jassem asserts the fact that she would never accept a non-'asil' suitor for her daughter, she tries to "put up a front" as she concludes that all people are alike and that men should be judged by their piety and not by

their origin. Underlying her statements are the beliefs that such issues like status-group stratification are delicate topics which should not be discussed (Goffman: 1). The delicacy of this topic was also clear when I asked a prominent Kuwaiti historian to give me some names of 'asil' and non-'asil' families. He gave me a long list of 'asil' families, but refrained from mentioning names of non-'asils' saying, "no, no it is 'ehraj'" (i.e. it is embarrassing to talk about this issue)."

Om Marzoug's case accentuates the problem of endogamous marriage and the extent by which parents adhere to the over-all pattern of preferred endogamy. Using Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical" approach in describing social interaction, it can be seen that Om Marzoug and her family remained a "team" united in its performance with regard to keeping the story of Shaha's love-affair with the Indian driver from being known to me as a researcher. This performance was presented in my first meeting with the family when the children of Om Marzoug said that none of them knew the reason for Shaha's seclusion. As rapport developed, a lot of "back region" information became accessible to me in the "front region." (Berreman, 1962: 11-14; Goffman, 1959). I was taken into the confidence of Om Marzoug who expressed the fact that her daughter's wish to marry an Indian driver was perceived as a shameful scandalous act. Being the relative of Sheikhs, Abu Marzoug's reproaching statements to the driver were as such: "who are you to marry my daughter?!" Underlying this statement is a strong conviction in the superiority of the 'asils' as a status group, and a strong adherence to endogamous marriage patterns (See Om Marzoug, pp. 28-30).

The extended family of Om Ali, Om Faysal, and Om Khalaf represents a stricter endogamy and a stronger preference of cousin marriage. The three cases illustrate the great degree of inter-marriage within a 'Shi^Cah' kinship group. As Om Ali perceives the situation, "marriage in the past was a simple thing." In most cases a man used to marry his father's brother's daughter who lived in the same house. If the bride was not the groom's cousin, he was never allowed to see her. Thus a man according to Om Ali could find himself married to a 'Cabda' (negro, slave), or a one-eyed woman. Similarly a woman could find herself married to a horrible man. Om Ali's definition of the situation reflects the meaning of cousin-marriage to the participants. Living in the extended family structure which includes man and wife, their married children and their grandchildren, makes it possible for the girl to grow up with her future husband and her future in-laws, and to be able to have some anticipation of future experiences on the basis of her stock of knowledge at hand. Furthermore, living under such circumstances makes marriage "less of a step in the dark" for the boy and the girl, as suggested by Freeth (Freeth, 1956: 90). According to that writer, the marriage of first cousins is a convenient custom in a social context where men and women have no opportunity in choosing their partners, and wherein girls are veiled as soon as they reach puberty. First-cousin marriage in this sense serves in preserving the coherence of the family, and usually prevents marriage outside the social stratum. Since there cannot always be first cousins to pair off all girls and boys in the family, marriages can be arranged with a slightly distant relative (Freeth, 1956: 40). This was clear in the case of Zeinab (Om Khalaf's sister) who at 18 got married

to her maternal cousin. When her grandmother and her aunt objected, Zeinab's father told them that since Zeinab had no paternal cousins, it would be better for her to get married to her maternal cousin. That way she would be much better off than if she married a stranger. As Freeth puts it: "... a mate can usually be found among the devious ramifications of every family, when a first cousin is lacking" (Freeth, 1956: 20).

In the light of Om Ali's statements that a man could find himself married to a 'Cabda', marriage to first cousins prevents cheating in the marriage market. According to Patai (1959), marriage between girls and boys living in the same household makes it less traumatic and disruptive. Keyser argues that "if it is possible for people to like each other only if they know each other, it is also possible for people to hate each other only if they know each other" (Keyser, 1974: 294). In this respect it can be argued that equal chances of liking or hating 'alter egos' may exist whether there is pre-acquaintance or not. The fact is that besides preventing deception which most often took place through the false image conveyed to parents about the bride or bride groom by the matchmaker, marriage within the same household reduced the experience of shock which befalls the inexperienced girl on the night of her marriage.

Al Sadany refers to the role of the matchmaker in traditional Kuwaiti society with respect to 'cheating' in the marriage market. (Al Sadany, 1972: 55-56). The matchmaker here can be perceived as having access to some backstage information which she does not reveal to the audience. In her impression management she conveys a certain "front" which would be expected to

lead to the desired decision. Thus first-cousin marriage can be regarded as a system which within the specific cultural constructs existing in Kuwaiti society provides safe grounds for marriage, and brings its elements within the domain of all participants' intentional life.

THE "WE-NESS" OF KINSHIP:

Presupposing the existence of a common world which is historically and culturally given to fellow men in terms of certain typifying constructs, it can be inferred that men and women who share a spatio-temporal existence within the kinship system can transcend their unique biographical situations and their private experiences to a common world of shared meanings in which communication is possible. This creates a "we"-relationship within the extended family structure or within the kinship group which, in turn, leads to the existence of certain obligations on the part of different participants to each other. The data presented in the life-historian show how people play different roles and how occupants of each role have different obligations towards each other.

In times of crises like delivery, marriage or death, the help of kinsmen is immediately called upon. Situations wherein there is family co-operation in terms of raising income are clear in all cases whether between the sexes or within each sex. Thus the obligations felt by the brothers of Om Khalaf towards their father in terms of expenditure and the co-operativeness of Om Ali's step-children in paying regular sums of money to their father who as they perceived him had done enough for them, show how far the inter-locking family networks are underlied by a "we" relationship. Situations of family

backing in cases of marital problems are suitable examples. Here a girl can always seek the help of a brother or an aunt whose cooperation is taken for granted.

The attitudes of Om Ali, Om Jassem, and Om Marzoug to older women who represented mother figures to them reflect the strong loyalty towards one's own kinsmen. Due to the fact that those mothers or mother figures suffered from senility, Om Marzoug, Om Ali and Om Jassem had to pay them regular visits even when they had to upset their daily routine. Their visits were perceived as signs of gratitude towards those women who had previously sacrificed for them.

The "we"-relationship based on kinship identity is best expressed by the elaborate kinship terminology system characteristic of most Arab, tribal communities. This terminology system is highly descriptive and reflects how people conceive each other and how they place their kinsmen in the integral kinship networks. Thus we find in the life histories constant reference to 'weld al ^cam' (father's brother's son), 'weld al khal' (mother's brother's son), etc. Such a system, according to Donald Cole, "allows a person to single out a specific kinsperson and precisely state what relationship exists" (Cole, 1975: 83). Cole also refers to the classificatory system whereby larger numbers of people are included. Thus anyone in a mother's position can be called 'omi' as was the case with Om Marzoug who referred to her mother-in-law's sister as 'Omi Mariam'. Such systems serve as a basis for establishing strong ties between actors who come into face-to-face relationships within the kinship network.

'AL RAYAL AL ZEIN' (THE GOOD IDEAL MAN)

'Al rayal al zein' was defined by the actors in terms of their typifications of the common-sense world and their own systems of relevance. They all defined the good man as the one who is kind-hearted, good-natured, faithful and devoted to his wife and children, as the man who sacrifices his outings so as to stay with his family and the man who is honest and serious in his work.

Other characteristics of the good man were deeply rooted in the taken-for-granted meanings of masculinity. 'Al rayal al zein' is supposed to be the provider and should be responsible for his wife and children. According to Om Nasser it is not enough for a woman to be provided with material luxuries, for she emotionally needs a man. According to Om Marzoug, a man should be manly, strong and firm. He should not be 'banayouti' (girlish), should walk up straight, and should have a strong character, he should stick to his word and should not be dominated.

Each woman's subjective interpretation of the meaning of 'al rayal al zein' focused on her own experiences of the social world and her individual life crises. Thus Om Faysal, Om Marzoug and Om Jassem emphasized the fact that a man should be fair to his wives, that he should not play around with hareem, and that he should not be a drunkard ('la^c endu mal^coub wala mashroub' Om Jassem).

Om Nasser and Om Khalaf, on the other hand, defined 'al rayal al zein' in terms of their individual concerns. They both emphasized the fact that a man should be devoted to his mother, should not be dominated by his wife,

should not be more loyal to his wife than to his mother. Perceiving men from their own stance as mothers-in-law, both Om Nasser and Om Khalaf believe that a man who listens to what his wife tells him is weak characterized. A good man should make it clear to his wife that his mother is the one who has made him what he is, and that his mother should have the upper hand in the house. "If a wife does not like this situation," says Om Khalaf, "then the door is open wide." This way, thinks Om Khalaf, a girl will learn how to respect her mother-in-law (see Om Khalaf p. 27). Implicit in the beliefs of those two women are notions of power exercised by the mother over her son and her son's wife, and are taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of the mother-in-law 'al khala' and 'al mara'l ^cauda'.

It should be noted in this context, that a lot of impression management and staging took place by Om Khalaf as she expressed the preceding views. Perceiving her daughter-in-law Saneya as an audience, Om Khalaf tried to present to her a certain definition of the situation. This includes her own conception of her roles, her conception of her audience and assumptions concerning the 'ethos' of respect to the mother-in-law (Goffman, 1959: 2 38).

WOMEN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Commonsense thinking simply takes for granted until counterevidence appears, not only the world of physical objects but also the socio-cultural world into which we are born and in which we grow up. This world of everyday life is indeed the unquestioned but always questionable matrix within which all our inquiries start and end (Schutz, 1967: 326-327).

To the six actors under study, the traditional world of pre-oil Kuwait in which they lived and grew up was accepted and taken for granted as an unquestioned reality. Geared into the everyday world of working, they experienced certain situations which constituted "finite provinces of meaning" having their own peculiar cognitive styles. Having reviewed the various typifications of the commonsense world of these women and having presented a survey of the socio-historical changes that have been taking place in Kuwait (Chapter II), it is now important to attempt to find out how those actors define the change in terms of their own lived-experiences and in terms of the broader socio-historical context.

The world of everyday life has presented itself to the actors in the form of two radically different realities possessing different cognitive styles. The passing from one reality to another made possible by the discovery of oil and the radical transformation into a different style of life may be viewed as a Kierkegaardian 'leap' which is defined as "a radical modification in the tensions of our consciousness, founded in a different 'attention a la vie'" (Schutz, 1967: 232). This kind of 'attention a la vie' (attention to life) is "the basic regulative principle of conscious life." It defines the world relevant to the participants, it articulates their stream of thought; it determines the span and function of their memory and it makes the actors either live within their present experiences, or turn back in a reflective attitude to the past experiences to ask for their meaning (Schutz, 1967: 212-213). As they reconstructed their life-histories, the actors were 'wide-awake'; they were looking at the world with full attention and the memory of "finite provinces of meaning" which were no longer

relevant was vivid in their minds. Looking at their past experiences from the present Now, they perceived their actions as meaningful and realized the difference between the two realities in which they have lived.

* * * * *

Looking at their lives in a reflective attitude, the six actors expressed the idea that life in post-oil Kuwait is more comfortable and is in fact better than life in pre-oil Kuwait. Perceiving the world in terms of the material changes taking place in what Schutz calls "the world of physical things," they all agreed that availability, comfort and technology were the advantages of the age. As Kuwait moved from a subsistence economy to an affluent society, people could afford all technological devices and innovations which made their lives remarkably easier and which had great implications on their styles of life.

With the introduction of waterpipes, drainage systems, electricity, cars, telephones, televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and other accommodations of modern life in western style, air-conditioned residences, people had to abandon their old life-styles. The routine work of everyday life which made it necessary for women to fetch water from the sea port, to collect firewood, to wash in sand and sea water, to walk on foot for long distances and to perform a whole range of economically productive activities like making embroideries, sewing dresses, producing milk or cheese and baking, were bound to disappear as soon as people were moved out of the old town to the new city - planned residential areas. As expressed by Om Ali, the chil-

dren were happy because there were gardens and balconies in the new houses, in contrast to the high iron-barred windows of the old mud-houses. She refers to the comforts of modern life and adds that in present-day Kuwait all people have money and property.

As the daily chores of women became facilitated by modern accommodations, their traditional roles changed and their leisure-time increased. Men's occupations have also changed with the discovery of new oil wealth. Traditional diving or sea-faring occupations disappeared and men found rewarding chances of employment in the expanding governmental services. Such changes in traditional roles of men and women were bound to bring about serious changes in the actors outlook to life and their perceptions of their new socio-cultural reality. As men got employed, their leisure-time increased in contrast to the old days of long diving and sea-faring voyages. At the same time, money increased and was used to acquire higher standards of living. It can be hypothesized, in this respect, that the new conditions under which men earned more money and remained at home, might have led to an increase in polygynous marriages.

Such was the attitude of actors to the material changes subsequent to oil discovery; the attitude of most actors to some socio-cultural aspects of the change was one of mere tolerance, if not criticism. To the six women the elements of the new reality seemed incongruent and inconsistent with their stock of knowledge at hand. Issues like girls' going 'sufur', girls' wish to marry exogamously, lack of respect to older women, dispersion

of corporate kinship groups in suburban areas, loss of emotionality between kinsmen, represented problematic areas to the participants.

Looking at the past with nostalgia, Om Jassem recalled the days when her family house was always bustling with people and when anybody's illness brought all relatives along to be of help. She criticized the impersonal nature of modern life wherein people have become isolated, and wherein strong family relationships have become weakened. She critically added that if she dies her folks would hear the news in the news bulletin.

Om Nasser, Om Faysal, Om Ali and Om Khalaf refer to the fact that the new residential areas have made people isolated and have estranged them from each other. In Om Nasser's words, this dilemma is expressed as such:

One of the disadvantages of the present time is that people have become estranged from each other ('al nās e tazlat). In the past Kuwait was a small city and most people knew or heard of each other, neighbours of the olden days were just like relatives. All members of a family lived together in the same district, and one could find all kinds of help in cases of illness. Now if one dies, his neighbours would not know. When my daughter Sadiga delivered, none of our neighbours came to see her. Whereas when I delivered Sadiga, the neighbours filled our house.

Indeed, the changes have been great and have brought about a different outlook to the social world of the six women. As expressed by Om Ali, people at present hardly walk on their feet. She refers to the fact that she has to ask the Hajji (her husband) to join her if she wants to go to any distant area because she does not know the streets and does not like to be alone with the driver. This implies that the new way of

life has made it possible for women to come into contact with occupants of new roles which did not exist before. Women of the past could go out together and as long as they were veiled, it was safe for them to walk together for long distances. Their communal outings have disappeared and have given way to the more private outings by car with a driver. The case of Om Marzoug's daughter who was in love with the Indian driver is another example of new relationships with persons occupying new roles which did not exist in the simple homogeneous society of old Kuwait. The new environment is "dangerous" and unknown to older women who do not drive their own cars like young girls. Communal washing and public outings disappeared. Such activities became privately pursued at home with more time-saving devices. As such it can be suggested that the change has brought the older women into more seclusion. Now if a woman wishes to go out she has to be driven by car, whereas in the past she could just call upon her neighbours. The economic forces which had made it necessary for women to perform their economically productive roles, do not exist anymore. Older women who were not equipped for employment like their young daughters were bound to the limits of the household. Such a condition which can be seen as a transitory stage within the boundaries of the new social reality, will inevitably disappear in the years to come, among future generations.

To the younger generation, however, the change was bound to bring more freedom. While young girls in old Kuwait were not allowed to go out as soon as they reached puberty, modern life, education and work have made it possible for girls to go out to the market alone, to drive their cars and to visit their friends. Thus while the change has in effect restricted the

traditional outings of the older more conservative women, it meant more freedom to the younger generation. According to Om Nasser:

Nowadays, girls have changed a lot than what girls were in the olden days of Kuwait. Some people still wear long conservative clothes, but others wear tight slacks and transparent blouses which show all their bodies off. They talk to boys, go with their friends to places like the Hilton or the Sheraton or talk to boys over the telephone. Such actions make me most annoyed, because girls imitate each other... Girls who belong to the rich class are starting a new bad habit, which is to go to study at each other's homes and to spend the night at each other's homes. Sometimes girls and boys study together. The parents accept it. Our neighbours are like that; their children go to study in groups. I don't accept such things.

Most women were displeased by the fact that their daughters were going out 'sūfūr'. Such conditions had to be tolerated as the inevitable results of the change. According to Om Khalaf:

Time forces us to accept many things which we don't like. The change has brought many evil things along. It is haram for a woman to go out in front of men without a 'cabat'. It is haram that her arms and legs and hair would show. What would people say?... A woman without a 'cabat' does not look nice. She wears slacks and shirts like men. Why? Why should she imitate men... Now girls want to be like men in everything. They work in the police, they drive and do all what men do. Of course I think this is wrong. If you want my real opinion I don't like it, but I am forced to accept it.

In a state of 'attention a la vie', women were constantly turning to past experiences and comparing them to their new experiences of the social world. Their experiences of a reality which has gone are still vivid in their minds. Women's experiences of the old reality were no longer taken for granted, they were put in question as women realized that "the world of working in standard time" was not "the sole finite province of meaning but was only one of many others accessible" to their intentional life (Schutz, 1967: 231).

The actors perceived the old reality as one in which there was much hard work. Yet in their own descriptions of it they assert that life was simple and easy going. They had no problems to worry about. At present women worry about their children's studies, their late outings, car accidents and other hazards of modern life. According to Om Khalaf life in this sense was better. Om Nasser also asserts the fact that women of the past were patient and never complained of boredom or 'digat kholg' (depression) like girls of 'al hein' (the present).

The change has also touched upon traditional social institutions like marriage. While girls and boys of the past had no role in the choice of their partners, it has become possible for them to meet each other and to make their own decisions. While Om Nasser perceives this as a disadvantage which makes girls unwilling to accept parental authority, Om Ali perceives it as a step forward. Om Ali perceives marriage in pre-oil Kuwait as 'kharabeet' (nonsense) since "a father could easily throw his daughter in fire (i.e. in an unsuccessful marriage)." Om Ali's daughter and son were allowed to give their opinions in their marriages. Her daughter Aleya was allowed to meet her spouse and to go out with him after the marriage contract, and before the consummation of the marriage.

Education is perceived by all actors as one of the great advantages of the change. The actors repeatedly expressed their regret that they had not been educated. According to Om Ali, education "makes people understand more." All six actors informed me that they were illiterate and that they had received no formal education. Some of them have received some lessons in the Quran, which were all forgotten. (Om Faysal, Om Ali). Om Nasser attended some evening classes for the elimination of literacy. However,

she did not continue since she found it enough to be able to write her name, or her telephone number.

While Om Ali perceived education as an advantage of the age, the Haggi, her husband asserted to me that he neither liked it, nor accepted it. His basic justification is rooted in the fact that the wives of the Prophet did not read or write. To him it is 'haram' for a woman to learn how to read. He has, however, accepted his daughters' education and work only because he was forced to, only because times have changed and everybody was getting educated.

Though the six women accept education and perceive it as an advantage, they still believe in the fact that women should work only if they need the money. The role of wife and mother is still perceived as the kernel of women's existence. All actors' daughters are now receiving an education whether in Kuwait or abroad. The sudden openness of Kuwait to the outer world and the government's welfare policy has made it possible for girls to receive a free education and to be sent abroad to pursue higher education. Om Ali has a daughter who is at present a student at Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University; her son Ali has received a B.Sc. in Engineering from the United States; her daughter Aleya is employed as a librarian. Om Khalaf's daughter has joined her husband to the United States on scholarship, and is now working for a Ph.D. Om Marzoug's son is also in the United States, while her eldest daughter is a student at the Teachers' Training Institute. Om Nasser's eldest daughter is a teacher, Om Faysal's eldest daughter is a student at the Teachers' Training Institute.

De Stuers gives a description of the situation of girls in modern Kuwait. She contends that the Government's welfare policy has taken place in a short span of 15 years. Those young girls who are now being educated had been toddlers when their parents started moving to their new homes. As young children they have experienced the new surroundings, the houses, the flats, the asphalt and the accommodations of modern life as taken for granted. They had not experienced the world of their mothers. They have been sent to school as young children and, as they approached the age of twenty, they were sent away for higher education. To them the world presents itself as a different reality, the understanding of which would need to be investigated in terms of their own lived experiences.

C O N C L U S I O N

The data presented in the foregoing pages has illuminated a number of themes which have been implementary in grasping the meanings which some Kuwaiti women bestowed upon their actions, and in gaining insight into those women's perceptions of their social world.

One of the recurrent themes was that related to the important value bestowed by the six women on their roles as wives and mothers. Such roles, to which great cultural meaning is related, represent the kernel of those women's realities, and give them great satisfaction and enjoyment.

Another important theme is that along with the differentiation between the sexes, there is a certain kind of differentiation within the female sex whereby women are ranked according to age, matrimony, and maternity in an internal social hierarchy. This hierarchy makes it possible for the occupants of particular roles like 'al mara'l ^Cauda', 'al sharisha' who is 'om al ^Cayal', 'al mutawa^Ca', or 'al hawafa' to manipulate situations in the 'world within their reach', to levy sanctions and to influence the behavior of others especially in matters like marriage negotiations. There is repeated incidence in the life histories, of male and female adherence to the ethos of the superiority of 'al mara'l ^Cauda', who controls the household in terms of the budget, the choice of food, and the choice of wives for her sons. The younger wives and unmarried girls are constantly being exploited by the older women. Similarly, the second wife is often seen to be in deference to the first wife who is 'om al ^Cayal'.

Inherent in women's self definitions and their interpretations of the social world, are taken for granted assumptions about the social world as being essentially patriarchal, extended, and polygynous. They define their world in terms of culturally defined and culturally transmitted constructs of reality. Thus a good wife is defined by her mother-in-law as the one who does not attempt to drive her husband away from his parents, a good husband is defined as the one who respects his mother's words, and a good marriage is

perceived as one which is based on strong affinal links. Marriages, as such, can be seen to strengthen family ties, to preserve the relationship of kinship, and to prevent marriage to partners of different blood. The six women who belong to different ethnic or status groups define their social world from the perspective of closely knit networks of kinship relationships in which there is a marked trend towards endogamous closure. Within the extended family structure, women are constantly coming into contact with each other in different kinds of relations. Their attitudes to each other are clearly dominated by a 'we'-relationship.

While the ethnographic literature on women in the Middle East emphasizes the fact that women are disadvantaged, and secluded within the strict seclusive techniques: the veil and the harem, the ethnographic image presented in this thesis gives evidence to the fact that the women under study do not perceive themselves as disadvantaged. They even view education as a means of improving their performance as wives and mothers.

Once the roles of women were examined from their own standpoint, it became clear that the ethnographic image about Middle Eastern women is misleading. To the participants themselves, the veil and the harem are meaningful. Besides its religious, traditional value the 'abat' is perceived by the actors as being functional in covering up women's simple garments, in masking social class and in preserving anonymity. Similarly, women's quarters are perceived as techniques

for lessening the ennui of secluded life and for providing open meeting places wherein women can pursue their economically productive tasks in commercial form, can gossip, arrange marriages, exchange news, or act as information brokers.

During men's long absence in 'ghaus' or 'safar' many houses were totally run by females. Women shared in raising income by performing some economically productive tasks. This revealed some kind of complementarity of roles between men and women. Women's control over some productive roles made it possible for them to manipulate situations to their benefit.

The previous analysis has also revealed that the life crises of the six women under study centered on: growing up, marriage, and the ambiguous relationships between women in the patriarchal, polygynous extended family structure.

A major theme emerging out of the life histories is the change which Kuwaiti society has been undergoing. To the Kuwaiti women, the social world has presented itself in terms of two radically different social realities. Despite their appreciation to material changes, all women did not appreciate the fact that old corporate kinship groups have become dispersed. The new technological innovations had great implications on the life style of Kuwaiti women. Their old economically productive roles and their communal public outings disappeared and gave way to more private outings. Here, the change can be found to have brought about more freedom to the younger generations, where-

as it has brought about more seclusion to the older women. This generation of older women which has experienced the radical transformation of Kuwaiti society from a small fishing community to a modern city, can be viewed as a marginal group. Such women regard the old reality with nostalgia, yet, they perceive the new reality as a great advantage. The memory of times that have gone is still vivid in their minds. Indeed they are: Women between two worlds.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

The United Nations designation of the year 1975 as International Women's year, has undoubtedly triggered interest in the issue of women, women's status, and position especially in newly developing societies, the socio-cultural conditions of which have not, as yet, been expounded. The significance of this research lies in the fact that it provides basic ethnographic data about an area which has not been widely investigated. This research, which claims no wide generalizations is supposed to serve as exemplary literature, to provide basic ethnographic data on women in the changing social world of Kuwait, and to be of use in understanding society at the micro level with the aim of gaining more insights into the macro level of the Kuwaiti actors modes of existence.

One of the fundamental implications for ethnography emerging from this thesis rest on the assumption that the sex role of the ethnographer can be found to circumscribe the way actor and ethnographer

interact with each other. This actor-ethnographer relationship is important because it can influence the quality of data generated in the ethnographies. My role as a female observer has made it possible for me to penetrate through the 'terra incognita' of the female social world and to be able to understand 'the inside view' of the participants themselves and their own constructs of meaning. This research invites further research by women on women and calls for a drawing away from misleading descriptions provided by male ethnographers.

The life histories presented in this thesis have provided some descriptions of ceremonies and rituals performed in relation to certain individual life crises. The symbolic meaning of such rituals to the participants is an area which needs to be investigated in greater depth.

This research also calls for more research on a generation of women which will be passing out, because this generation has witnessed the change and has experienced a reality which is not there anymore. Kuwaiti society is changing rapidly so that a description of it today would not hold true next year. Hence, more studies and more descriptions should be provided to record this important period in Kuwaiti history.

APPENDIX

STATUS GROUPS

Status groups are defined by Max Weber as normal communities of an amorphous kind. A 'status situation' is defined as "every typical component of the life/fate of men that is determined by a specific positive or negative, social estimation of honor." "This honor," says Max Weber, "may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality, and of course it can be linked to a class situation." (a class situation is purely economically determined). "Both propertied and property less people can belong to the same group. A 'status group' stratification is based on conventional 'styles of life'," which restricts social intercourse and confines marriage to an endogamous closure. (Weber, 1946: 186-188).

- al-ghaybi : Paratun Shi'ah
- al-ghaybi : foreigner, Arab
- al-ghaybi : it is up to you
- Allah : God
- al-ghaybi : spell
- al-ghaybi : father's brother, i.e. paternal uncle, or father-in-law
- al-ghaybi : father's sister, i.e. paternal aunt
- al-ghaybi : head cord
- al-ghaybi : the fortieth

GLOSSARY

This glossary includes all Colloquial Kuwaiti-Arabic words mentioned in the foregoing pages, with the exception of the long phrases which have been defined only in the text. It should be noted here, that due to the length of the material, some of the words which were frequently used, were defined in the text more than once; this is supposed to serve as a reminder to the reader.

- ^Cabat : women's black cloak, also men's brown cloak
- ^Cabda : negro and / or slave
- adhan : the call for prayers
- ahl al gāa^C : people of the underworld - Jinns
- ahli nafeshum : my own folks (themselves)
- ^Caib : shameful
- ^Caila asila : family of pure origin
- ^Cainu zaigha : looks at, and desires any woman
- ^Caish : rice
- ^Cajam : Persian Shi^Cahs
- ajnabi : foreigner, Arab
- ^Cala khatrak : it is up to you
- Allah : God
- ^Camal : spell
- ^Cam, ^Cami : father's brother, i.e. paternal uncle, or father-in-law
- ^Cameti : father's sister, i.e. paternal aunt
- agal : head cord
- arbe^Cin : the fortieth

- ^Carda : traditional war dance performed by men in festivals, feasts and most celebrations
- ^Caseeda : special food made of flour, fat and sugar
- asīl : of pure origin; descendants of the powerful sharif tribes of Najd, claim pure descent to tribes which have moved to Kuwait two centuries ago
- astaghfir Allah : God forbid
- astar laha : more decent
- ^Catabtu zeina : has a luck - bringing threshold
- ^Cateyet Allah : a gift from God
- athwab : plural of thawb : black cotton overgarment
- ^Caud, ^Cauda : big
- ^Caura : one-eyed
- awaleyin : the first ones, of the past
- bait : house
- banat : girls, virgins, or daughters of
- banat khali : my uncle's daughters
- banayouti : girlish
- barr, al : the desert
- baysary : of impure, inferior origin; people who do not belong to the powerful Sharif tribes, who are not of pure stock, and who have moved to Kuwait in later stages
- beker : first
- berche : lake
- bint ^Cameti : my paternal cousin; daughter of father's sister
- bint ^Cami : my paternal cousin; daughter of father's brother
- bint khali : my maternal cousin; daughter of mother's brother

- bisht : men's over cloak
- bu humayer : whooping cough
- bukhnug : girls' head covering
- bukhur : incense
- bushiyeh : light, black, muslin face cover
- bushut : plural of bisht, men's over cloak
- chay el doha : morning tea
- cheswa : i.e. keswa - clothes
- dahia : district, suburb
- dakkus : hot sauce
- dalla : plural dlal - small coffee pots with a lid
- dallala, al : woman peddler who sells clothes and kham materials to women
- darabil : sweet pastries
- dazza : bride-price, presents, and dresses given by the bridegroom to the bride
- dehen : hair oil
- dig : depressed state
- dirah, al : Old Kuwait
- dishdasha : women's long silk dress, or men's dress
- diwaneya : men's guest room, or summer evening gatherings for men
- dowwa : a rectangular container made of crude metal used to burn coal and incense, to heat up the house, and to make coffee or tea
- dukhla, al : actual consummation of the marriage
- ebi : plural of abat

- fahma : understands
- fareij : district of
- fattash : curer
- files : smallest unit of the Dinar
- fulana : so and so
- gā^cda : long sit-in
- gabīla asila : tribe of pure origin
- gasayem : areas of land given to citizens on mortgage basis
- ghaiba : talking ill of someone behind his back
- ghaneyat : women of ill-reputation
- ghaus : diving
- ghorfa : room
- ghotra : men's head cover
- girba : i.e. girba - water skins
- greesh : special festival in which women go together to the beach
- guffah, al : the end of the diving season
- hadhar : townfolk
- hail : cardamum
- halawa : sweets
- hamaha : her brother-in-law
- haram : sinful
- hasad : envy
- haush : courtyard
- hawafa : woman hired to attend to the bride's attire at the time of her marriage and to give her advice about how to act

- hein, al : the present
- Husseineya : martam, religious meeting hall similar to a mosque but only for the Shi^Cahs
- ibn^C am : father's brother's son, i.e. paternal cousin
- ibn^C ameti : father's sister's son, paternal cousin
- ^CId al adha : Qurban Bairam
- ^Cideyya : present for the feast, usually money
- insha' Allah : if God wills it
- istikana : minute glass
- jalib : well
- jalsa : living room
- jalwa : marriage ceremony characteristic of Old Kuwait performed exclusively for the bride and the hareem right after the afternoon prayers; the bride is seated on a chair carried by women. A big square piece of green silk is held from four corners over the girl's head. As the women sing and make 'zaghareed', the green silk is lowered and lifted with the rhythm of a specific song
- jamā^{-C}atna : from our folks, kins
- Jenā^{C-}at : ethnic group, people whose forefathers have arrived to Kuwait many years ago, probably from North Iraq
- jerba : plural: jerab i.e. guerba: goat water-skins
- jihaz : trousseau
- kaffeya : head cloth
- kashta : picnic
- kenna, al : sometimes pronounced shenna: daughter-in-law
- khal, khali : mother's brother
- khala : aunt, mother's sister; mother-in-law

- kham : materials
- kharabit : nonsense
- khatba, al : the matchmaker
- khatma : completion of the Quran; special ceremony performed when a child completes the Quran
- khawsh rayal : real good man
- khawsh wahda : a real good one (woman)
- kūt : fortress
- lailat al thaleth : third day after marriage; special party held by the bride's family for the groom's family
- lailat al tehwal : the night on which the bride moves from her parents' house to her husband's
- lailat al thweilath : special party held the third day after lailat al tehwal, by the groom's family, for the bride's family
- lawawin : archades
- mabruk : fortunate, brings good luck
- mahbūl : unstable
- mako faida : there is no use
- mako quessa : there is (I have) no story
- marag : brown stew containing small lumps of eggplant, squash, ocra, tomatoes and meat
- mara : woman
- mara^c auda, al : the big woman, the older woman
- mara'lawaleyeh, al : women of the past
- mara' l kharabit, al : the bad woman
- mara' l mou zeina, al : the bad woman

- maral shabira, al : the old woman
- maral tekana, al : the real, ideal woman
- maral zeina, al : the good woman
- marash : pot for rose water (made of brass)
- marat abouha : her step-mother
- marat^c ami : my paternal uncle's wife
- marat khali : my maternal uncle's wife
- marat okhuy : my brother's wife
- marawa om^c aiyal : a woman and a mother
- marmaratna wa azzabatna : made us suffer
- mebahdela : untidy
- melshé : marriage ceremony in which the marriage is solemnized, ceremony for the marriage contract
- al melish : shaikh, who writes the marriage contract
- mezweg : the type of man who marries and divorces many women
- min Allah : from God
- mubkhar : incense burner
- mukhabal : crazy
- mulla : Shaikh and / or male teacher for boys
- mutahajibat : put on the white head cover worn tight all around the face and a long maxi dress - local usage of the word 'hijab'
- mutatawir : progressive
- mutawa^c a : female Quran teacher for girls
- nadher : vow, consecration

<u>nadra</u>	: rare
<u>nafanif</u>	: singular: nafnouf: long cotton or woolen dresses
<u>nafaqa</u>	: alimony
<u>najassa</u>	: pollution
<u>nas</u>	: people
<u>nasib</u>	: fate
<u>natarā</u>	: watching, special marriage ceremony
<u>naukhuda</u>	: captain and / or owner of the boat
<u>noun</u>	: special ceremony performed in fulfillment of a vow
<u>obuy</u>	: my father
<u>okhti</u>	: my sister
<u>okhūy</u>	: my brother
<u>om al ^caiyal</u>	: mother of the children
<u>om mou zeina</u>	: a bad mother
<u>omi</u>	: my mother
<u>omo'l ^cauda</u>	: his grandmother
<u>om sehheyya</u>	: literally: a healthy mother, figuratively: a good mother
<u>quebla, al</u>	: the direction of Mecca
<u>qouri</u>	: tea pot
<u>quesma</u>	: luck
<u>quwwa</u>	: sometimes pronounced guwwa, strength
<u>rayal</u>	: or rajal: man, husband
<u>rayal al zein, al</u>	: a good man
<u>rayal mou zein</u>	: a spoiled boy who is no good

- ra^cayat, or ra^cu : guardian of
- raggi ahmar : water-melon
- rehlat al ghaus : pearl-diving trips
- safar : trade, trading voyages
- saffar : someone who makes coffee pots 'dlal' and other items made of brass
- sahaba : khalifs, followers of the Prophet Mohammed
- salaf : loan
- salam : greetings
- salfet-ha : her story
- sambusak : pastries
- sawalef : chat
- seif : coast line
- shabka : gold or jewelry given as a present by the groom to his bride
- shabra : shade
- shakh : silver
- Sham, al : Syria and Lebanon
- shenna, or kenna : daughter-in-law
- sharisha : literally partner, co-wife
- sharishti : my partner
- sharifa : honorable
- sharr : evil
- shaytana, al : the devil
- shedda : difficulty

- shersh : partnership, co-wivery, polygyny
- shi^Cah : sect of Islam
- shuhur al^Cidida : period of four months and ten days during which a widow or a divorcee is prohibited by the Shari^Ca law to re-marry.
- soufragui : waiter
- sufur : unveiled, uncloaked
- sūk : market
- sūk al thahab : the old gold market
- Sunni : sect of Islam
- tab^Caa : charm
- tabbab : young helper in 'ghaus' trips
- tafathali : go ahead
- takhabalat : become mad
- tamer : dates
- tariqathum : their way
- tarweeqa : breakfast
- tathmin, al : process in which the government estimates the prices of land lots over which the old houses of citizens were built; the government paid huge sums of money to the people in compensation for land which was used for city planning projects. Same as guass
- te'-atheikum : harms them
- tehwai : moving out of parents house to husband's house after marriage
- thawb : black cotton over-garment
- tisqam : a sum of money given to the diver as a loan
- wallada, al : mid-wife

- weld al^cam : father's brother's son, cousin
- weld al khāl : mother's brother's son, cousin
- weld khalti : my mother's sister's son
- ya hleila : how good, how lovely
- yaum : day of
- yeddām : meat, fish, etc.
- yadeti (jadeti) : my grandmother
- yekheis : spoil
- yet charatum : give their own conditions
- yumma : oh mother
- za^cfarān : saffron used to flavor tea
- zaffat sayarāt : cars following the bridal procession, honking horns rhythmically
- zaghareet : special sound made by women in happy occasions to express happiness
- zaman awal : the past
- zein, zeina : good

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