

THE WOMEN'S CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SOCIETY (WCSS):  
ITS ROLE IN SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
IN KUWAIT (1963-2010)

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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THE WOMEN'S CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SOCIETY (WCSS):

ITS ROLE IN SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

IN KUWAIT (1963-2010)

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated first of all to the memory of my father, Quwaidi Gh. Alazmi, you taught me that to build my goals with thoughtful prayer and honor, and you taught me also do my best to do what needs to be done without wasting time complaining about what I think I cannot do. Also, it is appropriate to dedicate this study to my mother who is important in my life, both now and in the future.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Feminism and women's rights movements are often seen as concepts and activities that originated within the West. As it is important to examine sociological concepts where they occur, this study reviews these concepts within a particular culture and social context: that of the Kuwaiti society. Specific sociological and cultural features, which are important in shaping the petition for political participation of women in Kuwait are identified and examined. The focus of this dissertation is to understand the role and impact of one organization, the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), in the struggle to bring about women's political participation in Kuwait. The main strategies and methods used by the WCSS between 1960 and 2010 are emphasized. Data sources include interviews with members and leaders of the WCSS, members of the general population, primary documents and secondary (historical) documents and observations of activities organized by the WCSS. The findings of the study are: the WCSS is perceived as a liberal feminist organization in Kuwait and has an orientation that is quite different from that of the more conservative Islamist or Tribalist associations. The study also identified the various strategies and methods used by the WCSS in its drive to obtain political participation for women. Its strategies and methods changed over time due to specific social and political events occurring in the country. Finally, WCSS members and leaders felt the organization did have a significant impact over the period under discussion, but members of the general population felt that the organization had minimum impact.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **The Aim of the Study**

The Arab world, including Kuwait, remains a pressing concern. While many nations have signed numerous international treaties that guarantee women political rights, the process of actualizing these has been very slow. One strategy of the women's movement around the world has been to develop organizations that focus more strongly on achieving equal political rights for women (Hawkesworth, 2012). Over the course of the twentieth century, there was a substantial increase in the number of women's organizations across the globe that have been instrumental in spreading feminist ideology and ideas about gender equality (Moghadam, 2005). As in other regions, the Middle East has seen a growth of women's organizations. In most Middle Eastern nations, these organizations are taking their place in the social, cultural, and political structure of each country as they work to gain full rights for women in the societies in which they have been formed. The focus of this study is the oldest women's organization in Kuwait--the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS). The WCSS was established to increase the political participation of women. Specifically, I wish to study the role and impact of the WCSS with regard to developments in the political participation of women since the 1960s.

In Kuwaiti society, women's organizations emerged because of perceived problems in both the status and role of women in society. Some of the earliest organizations focused on charity work among women and children. A wide variety of organizations have long worked in the public sphere on issues of widowhood, divorce,

health, religion and the welfare of children. Such organizations include the WCSS, Girl Club, and the Byader Al-Salam. Some organizations like the WCSS also focused specifically on the role of women in politics and the media because they viewed these as important avenues through which women could participate in changes necessary to gain rights for women (Freeman, 1975). Directly and indirectly, all these organizations have been working to improve the position of women in Kuwaiti society. Women's organizations represent a significant dimension of the social movement that aimed to impact gender relations in the social, economic, and religious spheres of the nation. Their activities are consistent with social movement literature, which argues that, “mass based support has served as a social resource for people throughout the world seeking to achieve equality (Rizzo, Meyer, & Ali, 2002).” Women's rights remain prominent issues in Kuwait with participation of women growing throughout the public sphere.

According to Meyer, Rizzo, and Ali (1998), women's organizations characterize the first stages of women's efforts to bring about change for women in the Middle East. However, organizations working to create social and political change were often unable to do so because of the lack of political reform. This is believed to have slowed the growth of the women's movement (Al-Mughani, 1993). What was needed was for women to organize for political reform that would allow greater participation in public decision-making.

The decade of the 1960s was a watershed era as women began agitating for change and established many social organizations in order to work towards the changes they wanted. The WCSS was in the forefront of this agitation as it was formed soon after the ratification of the 1962 constitution. Article 43 of the 1962 Kuwaiti constitution

noted, "Freedom to form associations and unions on a national basis and by peaceful means is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and manner specified by law. No one may be compelled to join any association or union." This provision provided the freedom for women's organizations to be established without fear. Some of the initial organizations included: 1) Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) established in 1963, 2) the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS) established in 1963, (disbanded by the Kuwaiti government in 1980), 3) the Girls Club (GC) established in 1975, 4) Bayader Al-Salam (the Threshing Fields of Peace) established in 1981, and 5) the Islamic Care Society (ICS) established in 1982. Kuwaiti society is recognized as the first State in the Arab Gulf to implement a constitution and government recognizing social organizations as a legitimate channel for the attainment of citizen rights.

I focus on the work of the WCSS from its inception in 1963 to 2010. I hope to contribute to the understanding of, Kuwait's position within the global context during this time of expansion of liberties across many nations. Included within this period are the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the Iraqi war (2003), events that sparked changes in Kuwaiti political and social systems and are connected with the attempts of women to expand their civil rights. The period after 2005 is important as well as the year in which women gained the right to vote and run for parliament. In carrying out this study, I employed historical methods which included primary and secondary documents, qualitative methods of interviews, conversations, and observations of the activities of the WCSS.

Before I proceed, I would like to address the issue of my social position as it relates to the study including the potential methodological impact. I am Kuwaiti, Muslim and an educated female. In addition, I am a member of the Women's Cultural Social

Society (WCSS). Because of this position, I am uniquely able to bring firsthand insights to its role in gaining political rights for women. My position as a Kuwaiti woman has exposed me to a number of experiences of gender inequality and political participation. I have voted twice in the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections in June 2006 and May 2008. During the elections of 2009, I was unable to participate because I was studying in the United States, although I closely followed these important elections in which four women won seats in the National Assembly. In the more recent elections of 2013, I was again unable to participate because I was in the United States. I have studied sociology for approximately five years in the United States. This experience has exposed me to particular views and thoughts regarding the main concepts of this study such as "gender", "feminism", and "women's rights movements" within the Western culture. Nonetheless, because of my Kuwaiti nationality, I consider myself to be an insider of sorts as a member of both the WCSS and Kuwaiti society.

### **Research Question(s)**

In this study, I focus on the role of the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) to improve women's political participation in Kuwaiti society. I am therefore interested in the following research questions:

- (1) What type of feminist organization is the WCSS?

The WCSS is accepted as a feminist organization in Kuwaiti society. Therefore, it is relevant to study the organization's particular approach to feminism.

(2) What strategies has the WCSS used to address women's political rights?

This question focuses specifically on the methods utilized by the organization such as campaigns, protests, media, and so forth. In addition, it would be interesting to know which groups the organization targets as allies.

(3) As part of the women's movement, what impact has the WCSS demonstrated regarding women's political participation?

This impact can be assessed by both objective and subjective means. Objectively, have its candidates for political office been successful, has the organization directed specific policies? Subjective evaluations will come from organization members and community members regarding WCSS's impact.

### **Significance of the Research**

This study is unique because it situates the WCSS and its structure within the political and social changes occurring within Kuwait during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I examine critically, the attempt of this organization to increase women's consciousness of their rights and positions in public life. It is important to understand how WCSS was positioned in Kuwaiti society, including its base, relationship to various power structures, and how it sought to improve Kuwaiti women's rights. It has been noted that due to the emphasis on kinship and the familial system in Kuwait, many organizations prefer to focus on the private sphere of women's lives including domestic roles, religion, and marriage (Al-Mughani, 1993). This study draws attention to the public sphere of women's lives and the work of an organization such as WCSS to increase women's political participation in the public arena. Research on the domestic sphere of

women's lives is generally considered safer territory, contributing to a lack of information regarding the struggles to expand women's political activities. I wish to target activities within the much-neglected public sphere.

Research on women's organizations around the world suggests that many different types of groups are involved in seeking women's rights, including religious, secular, feminist and non-feminist groups with increasing international collaboration across and within regions (Moghadam 2005; Rizzo 2005). This study draws attention to the type of regional collaborative work throughout the Middle East. Outside of Kuwait, much of the research on women's organizations focuses on women in the United States, England, Sweden, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco.

There are few studies on the political rights of Kuwaiti women and all were conducted before 2005. These include the work of: Haya Al-Mughni (1992), Katherine Meyer, Helen Rizzo and Yousif Ali (1998), Mary Ann Tetreault (2001), Helen Rizzo, Katherine Meyer and Yousif Ali (2002), and Helen Mary Rizzo (2005). This study adds to the body of knowledge by conducting a case study of the oldest women's organization in Kuwait. It is important to understand the role this pioneer organization played in the struggle to gain rights for women in Kuwaiti society.

In Kuwait, the WCSS is often viewed as a liberal feminist organization that focuses on issues of equality for women within the prevailing social, political and economic structures in Kuwaiti society.

Because members of the WCSS tend to come from the upper-class, are well educated, and generally hold more western views regarding "equal rights" their ideas will be influenced by the West, but perhaps also interwoven with ideologies that come from

their experiences in Kuwait. Thus the form of liberal feminism may not be identical to that of any western society. Information from this study should provide material on the perspective of the first women's group in the nation.

### **Brief History of the Status of Women in Kuwait**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kuwait came under the control of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I (1914-1918), it emerged as an independent sheikhdom under the protection of the British Empire (1899-1961). Kuwait is basically a city-state composed of urban residents, rural farmers and nomads. The population is estimated to be between 3 and 3.5 million people, which include approximately 2 million non-nationals. Non-nationals are essentially immigrant guest workers, but there is also a small group of stateless nomads, known as *bidun* (Tetreault, Rizzo, & Schultziner, 2012) who may hold foreign passports even if their families have lived in Kuwait for generations. Of the nation's 1,054,598 citizens, 516,632 are male and 537,966 are female. Approximately 85% of the Kuwaiti population is Muslim with 75-80% identifying as Sunni Muslims and 20-25% as Shi'as (Kuwait Government).

Kuwait's large oil fields were discovered in 1938 (Kuwait Government). After independence was gained from the United Kingdom on June 19, 1961, the State's oil industry saw exceptional economic growth. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country underwent great political, economic and social development. On November 11, 1962, Kuwait instituted a constitution changing the country from a traditional city government to a constitutional monarchy and establishing the first elected National Assembly in 1963. Kuwait soon after developed several laws based on the new constitution, which

calls for justice and equality. It is important to note that this first constitution was developed by the Royal family and men, without input from women. The official language is Arabic, and the Kuwaiti constitution recognizes the Islam religion; specifically, article (2) of the Kuwaiti constitution states: "Islam is the state religion and Islamic law the main source of legislation." The constitution is therefore rooted in the Islamic religion.

Over the years there have been important changes in the status of Kuwaiti women, much of which can be attributed to the nation's economic development. I address the changes in women's status in Kuwaiti society as four stages of development. The first stage was the period before the discovery of oil in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second stage began after Kuwait gained independence from the British in 1961 and lasted until 1990. The third stage consisted of the period of 1991 until May 16, 2005, the beginning of the fourth stage, when Kuwaiti women gained their political rights.

During the first stage of development, Kuwaiti women stayed at home with the responsibilities of housework, childcare and were denied even basic education. Women's roles in society began to change over time and they gained access to education.

According to Peteet and Harlow (1991), economic development has been an important factor in the changing roles of women in the Middle East, including changes in family structure as well as legal, political and educational institutions. In 1938, the discovery of oil increased educational and career opportunities for women. By the 1950s, Kuwaiti women were studying abroad and developing careers paths in areas such as teaching and the media, being exposed to and influenced by the women's movement in other countries. They began to agitate informally for equality and rights. According to Helen Mayer

Rizzo (2005) this specifically helped Kuwaiti women to improve their position and increase participation in social and political structures, developing democracy from within Kuwaiti society. Economic changes also resulted in a shift in Kuwaiti society: a focus on modernization, the development of nationalism, and the increase of voluntary organizations (Al-Mughani, 1993). All of these factors affected the status of women, encouraging an interest in social movements and organizations.

The Kuwaiti Oil Company (KOC) exported the first shipment of oil to foreign countries in the 1950s, becoming an impetus of initial societal changes in Kuwaiti society, including an increase in educational and career opportunities for women. This increased women's ability to work outside their homes and their status within the society. This is consistent with the findings of Inglehart et al., (2004), who argued that economic development and modernization are important causal factors in changing gender norms and are necessary to bring about gender equality. Shafeeq Ghabra (1997) discussed modernization in terms of women's education, employment, desertization, and independence; all seem to be important factors for demanding gender justice. Ghabra defined *desertization* as "the transfer of the desert's customs, traditions, beliefs, dress codes, and mentality into the city" (1997: 367).

Another part of the modernization process, according to Mary Ann Tetreault (2001), was the 1962 constitution, which gave more social rights to women, allowing for increased rates of participation in public life as workers and members of voluntary organizations (Al-Mughani 1993). Despite the new constitution and the changes it allowed, the society remained segregated on the basis of gender. Women were still expected to be submissive to men, who still held positions of power. Much of this has

persisted to the present. Sociologist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (2005) reminds us that gender inequality remains an unresolved issue in Kuwait as in the rest of the Middle East. Just like several other nations in the Middle East, some women in Kuwait must seek permission from their fathers, brothers, or husbands to work outside the home. There are also some women in Kuwait who stay at home and do housework for their husband and children because their husbands refuse to give them permission to work outside the home. Generally, the men are concerned that their wives will have contact with other men in the workplace. Regardless of societal changes noted above and slowly increasing numbers of women in the workplace, Kuwaiti women are still considered to be economically dependent on Kuwaiti men. The ability to work has not altered the general belief that women should be subordinate, a similar problem to that in many Western societies. According to Gilman (2005), “They work under another will; and what they receive depends not on their labor, but on the power and will of another. This is true of the human female both individually and collectively (209)”. This is certainly still the case in many countries within the Arab Middle East.

Another issue that Gilman (2005) discussed is the fact that within the home, women are expected to defer to their husband's wishes and do not have the right to make decisions about their own lives nor the lives of their children. Outside the home men still have more political advantages. For example, there is a law stating that if a Kuwaiti woman marries a non-Kuwaiti-man; her children will be denied Kuwaiti citizenship. Another impediment to gender equality is that some men, because of culture and traditions, interpret the Holy Qur'an in such a way that does not promote gender equality. For instance, Saudi Arabia is fundamentally opposed to equal political rights for women.

Countering this fundamentalism is the fact that Kuwait has adopted some political ideas traceable to France via Egypt, which are more liberal than Islamic fundamentalism. As a result, Kuwait civil and religious law sometimes conflicts. It is important to understand how an organization such as the WCSS views this conflict.

### **The Significance of Gulf War 1990-1991**

Many women played a heroic role in their resistance to occupation during the Gulf War, and helped to usher in the beginning of a new era with changing attitudes towards democracy in general and towards women's political rights in particular (Meyer, Rizzo, & Ali, 2007). Unfortunately, however, Kuwaitis' support for women's political rights has not shown a steady increase since the Gulf war, but rather a fluctuation in support of women's right to vote continued through the 1990's. Not all of this opposition was from men; some of it was from women's groups, as will be noted below.

The struggle for women's political rights in Kuwait reached the peak in the mid-1990s, during which time two opposing perspectives influenced attitudes. One perspective was more traditional and focused on Islam and tribal/ ethnic issues, with the other perspective coming from the more liberal and secular groups in society. After the end of the Gulf War of 1991, the Islamist and tribal resistance combined into a larger social and political movement to rewrite Kuwaiti history rejecting the significant roles of women during wartime (Meyer, Rizzo, & Ali, 2007). According to Islamist views, a woman's main role is to be a wife and mother and she is prohibited by religious instructions from becoming involved in politics. Surprisingly, some of the highly educated women in Kuwaiti society resisted expanding political rights to Kuwaiti women

because they feared that men would lose political power if women were enfranchised. As a result, in 1993, the Women's Culture and Social Society (WCSS) prepared the first post-liberation women's conference, the National Assembly; spotlighting gender discrimination and bringing the issue of women's rights into national consciousness (Meyer et al., 2007).

By 1994, Kuwaitis had become more receptive to women's rights, due to women's participation in the Iraqi resistance. However, two years later in 1996 support for women's rights decreased due to the backlash coming from the increased power of Islamists and tribalism. Custom and social structures such as families continued to ensure that women were treated as if they were inferior to men.

In 1998, a parliamentary committee once again dismissed the draft of a law that would have granted political rights to women. However, a compromise was made and women were given the right to vote but not to run for office. In May of 1999, the Amir issued a decree granting full political rights to Kuwaiti women, but the National Assembly rejected this request in November of the same year. According to Shafeeq Ghabra (2002), the decree was thrown out by two forces that came together in Parliament. The first was the "conservative force," which opposed women's rights in principle. The second was composed of a "group of liberals," whose opposition was not based on their rejection of women's rights, but on the fact that they claimed Parliament was closed at the time that the Amir issued his decree, making the decree, according to them, not valid. The inability to vote at this late date indicates that the constitution, which gave equal rights to women, was not being upheld. Even though the liberals opposed the decree for technical reasons, it is to be remembered that most social reformers and

activists believe in equal rights between the genders, and consider women's rights as human rights (WCSS, 1994). They insist that there should be no difference between Kuwaiti men and women under the legal system or within the social structure, maintaining that women should be able to work outside their homes. Many liberal upper class and middle class women rigorously defend their political rights and call for equality; a sharing of power with men based on the liberal perspective as enshrined in the constitution. In their view, social justice is lacking when men have social, economic, and political control over women, dominating women and subordinating them to male control. The rationale for opposition to this view, however, is that Kuwaiti women do not have enough experience in political life, ignoring women's experience in public life as employees within both public and private sectors.

### **The WCSS and its position within Kuwaiti Society**

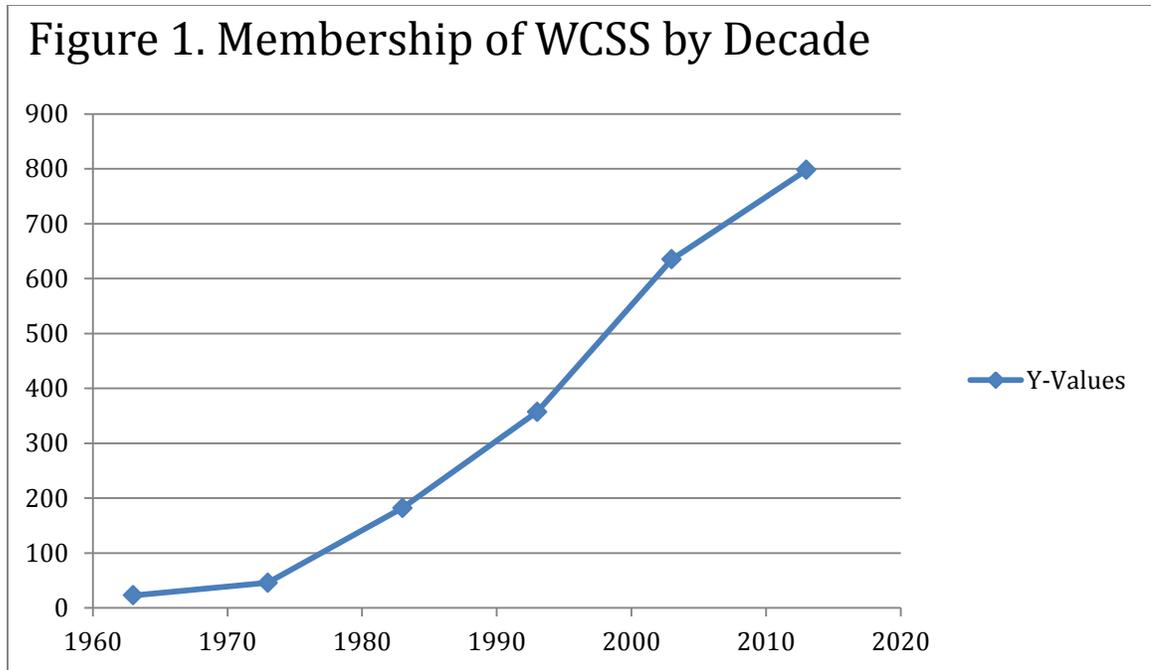
Women's organizations have been, and continue to be, very important for Kuwaiti women concerning the promotion of women's rights and ideas of gender equality. However, there are different types of women's organizations in Kuwaiti society and each has differing goals and strategies (Al-Mughni, 1993). Some Kuwaiti women's organizations, founded within the social climate of the 1960s, are described by Al-Mughni as those with "feminist attitudes and values", while others, originating in the 1980s, she identifies as having "religious values". As a result, each type of organization deals with women's rights differently. For instance, liberal women's organizations (i.e., those with "feminist attitudes and values") focus on political rights for women while women's organizations emphasizing religious values retain the idea of the importance of

a woman's gender status and emphasize the natural difference between women and men in society (Al-Mughni, 1993). The most prominent liberal women's organization in Kuwait is the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), established in 1963. The goals of the WCSS are to (1) Protect women against suffering and promote awareness of their legal rights, (2) Claim constitutional rights for women, (3) Modify the conditions, laws, and descriptive social norms which affect women's rights, (4) Engage in public activities that lead to the strengthening of participation of women within society, and (5) Promote the perception and awareness of women in social and cultural development (The March of Society WSCC, 1994). These goals are aligned with what is known as a liberal perspective in Kuwait and call specifically for gender equality. The WCSS supports women in political life, which is quite different from associations formed by Islamist and Tribal groups. The WCSS believes that women should have equal political participation. For the organization, this means, that women should have equality in decision making in both private areas within the home and public matters in the work place and political arena. Examples of private matters within the home would include allowing women to make decisions about traveling abroad to obtain education or working outside their home without having to obtain permission from their husband or other men in their family. Examples of equal political participation in the public sphere would include women's ability to vote and stand for office just as men do. However, the Islamist and Tribal groups do not support equal access for women in private or public spheres because they believe that men should control each of these spheres.

The WCSS is funded and controlled by the Kuwaiti government. It receives an annual subvention from the government. This is not unusual for Kuwait as many

organizations are also publically funded. The WCSS consists of persons from the elite and upper classes who are generally educated abroad and have often been influenced by both Western (e.g. American) and Arab (e.g. Egyptian) ideas about equality and the empowerment of women. The WCSS was also influenced by their association with international organizations such as Freedom House, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Development Program (UNDP), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). These organizations helped the WCSS gain recognition from the Kuwaiti government as well as develop some international presence in the discourse on political participation of women and gender equality. The WCSS has been strongly impacted by these organizations. This I feel has been important social capital that has assisted the organization in putting forward its views within the context of the Kuwaiti culture.

Membership of the WCSS has grown appreciably from its inception in 1963 to the present. According to organizational records, membership increased from 23 members in 1963 to 46 members in 1973. By 1983 there were 182 members on the rolls with continued growth through the next decades. The WCSS reported 357 members in 1993, 635 members in 2003 and 798 members in 2013. Figure 1 below illustrates this rate of membership growth. The majority of WCSS members are middle aged or older, middle and upper class women (The WCSS, 1994). The WCSS organizational structure consists of a board of directors with an elected president. The president serves for a term of four years. The following committees are appointed by the board: Cultural, Social, Health, Zakat, and Accounting.



*Resource: Women's Cultural and Social Society, 2014*

The most famous Islamic women's organization in Kuwait is Al-Bayader Al-Salam and was established in 1981 (Al-Mughni, 1993). Al-Bayader Al-Salam identifies with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and focuses primarily on three matters: 1) roles and duties of Muslim women, 2) female qualities in private life, and 3) women's good manners. The Al-Bayader Al-Salam as an Islamic women's organization is positioned in opposition to the "women's movement" in Kuwaiti society and the "new definition of womanhood". The organization holds that "the differences between sexes are both natural and sacred since they reflect God's will; sexual inequality is rooted in biological differences and as a result excludes women from the labor market". The main difference between the two women's organizations in Kuwaiti society is the issue of "gender equality" (Al-Mughani, 1993) that each seeks. The leaders and members in the Islamic women's organization seek to:

. . . revive the traditional role of women and to support the model of a woman who is pious but not fanatic, who appreciates modern life but is not too (westernized). Also, it has become more oriented towards educating women and providing services rather than acting as a pressure group to bring about changes in the woman's position (Al-Mughani,1993).

According to Ray and Korteweg (1999), "The rise of religious nationalism in the Middle East is closely related to the outcome of nationalist struggles. Among religious conservatives in many countries, Islamist movements arose as a populist reaction to Western domination on the one hand and failure of the nationalist project for the poor and lower middle classes on the other hand" (Ray and Korteweg 1999: 58). I feel these organizations were influenced by the Iranian revolution in 1979. This marks the time when many of these societies first became more Islamist and began to use the Holy Qur'an as a method to interpret private and public problems. Indeed, Chase (2006) argues that Islamist movements should be seen as part of a political project, a grab for power, rather than just religious. Tetreault, Rizzo, and Shultzine (2012) similarly note that one should make a distinction between Islamic organizations whose basic focus is religion and the Islamist organizations that, according to Chase, were focused on the political project of improving their power. In addition to the liberal and Islamic organizations in Kuwait, there are others that attract members of the conservative tribes. These Tribalist informal groups include, for example, kinship and family relationships because there is no formal political organization among these people.

In conclusion, there is a struggle between the liberal, Islamic, Islamist and Tribalist grouping in Kuwait. These women's groups have different historical roots, strategies, functions and goals. Part of the reason for these differences is the diverse

political ideology and identity of each woman's organizations or informal groups in Kuwaiti society. This study only addresses the interests and political role of the WCSS.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter two contains a review of the literature and Chapter three presents the theoretical framework of the study. The methodology is presented in Chapter four and Chapter 5 contains the study findings. The last chapter is a discussion of the findings and the conclusion of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

Eric Walberg (2013) argues that over the past century Islamic countries have witnessed serious debates as to the need to reform and bring their citizens into the 'modern' age. This involves many aspects of society and has meant different things to different groups and regimes. Social reform movements have covered a wide spectrum of issues, including religious, educational and social. The emphasis of this study on the growth of women's political participation in Kuwait draws attention to the role of social movements in the demand for equal rights for women.

Excluded groups use social movements to strategize and hope to realize their goals of equality. Equality within the political sphere brings to the forefront two other issues besides feminism: democracy and governance. These issues will be discussed in this chapter. Social movements, democracy, governance, and feminist theorizing are all closely intertwined when discussing women's political participation in any region, including the Middle East. These issues will be the main focus of this review of literature concerning the changes that have occurred within the Middle East and Kuwait.

### **Democracy and Governance in the Middle East**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to an end, democracy and liberalization became part of the political dialogue in the Middle East. People of several countries sought democracy through multiparty democratic participation in social and political life. Efforts were made to include women in public life in general and in the political arena specifically. Nevertheless, there were numerous impediments to democracy, including poverty and

inequality, illiteracy, border and resource disputes, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts. According to Gudrun Kramer (1992), democracy, or more specifically liberal democracy, came from the West to the Middle East. While Western ideas and practices of democracy as an institution are generally accepted, there is a fear among many groups within the Middle East, of adopting un-Islamic values and beliefs into local democracies. Much of the rejection of democracy comes from Islamic organizations, the tribal system and social customs. Many Arabs and Muslims perceive Western political and cultural traits as dangerous to the survival of Islamic values. Despite this resistance the movement toward liberal democracy is continuing in Kuwait and women remain hopeful because other nations, including Muslim countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Indonesia and Malaysia have already borrowed ideas from liberal democracy.

Regarding women's rights and political participations, the Arab world believes itself to be under pressure from the West. The leaders often do things or change the laws in order not to be seen as backward. Even so, this region ranks at the bottom of the list in terms of democracy because women's political representation is less than in most democratic countries. Data from the United Nations show that few women hold political positions within the Arab world. For instance, in 2009, women's representation within the Kuwaiti National Assembly "parliament" was only 8% of the total number of memberships in this body. Four females won membership in Kuwaiti parliament's "National Assembly" via elections. This is important because these women were not appointed by the Kuwaiti government, as in some Arab countries. Many scholars question Kuwait's commitment to democracy (Inglehart, 2004) due to such a low percentage of women in the parliament. However, 8% is a significant amount

considering that Kuwaiti women only recently gained political rights and access to parliament. This is in contrast to countries such as the United States, Japan, France and Ireland, where women still represent a minority in governmental offices, although they have had political rights for a much longer period. In the USA, women won the right to vote on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1920, yet they still hold only 21% of Congressional seats (UNDP 2012). Valentine Moghadam (2004: 2) argues that women's empowerment is a significant element of the development of equality and democracy in any society, noting that:

The quality of democracy is determined not only by the form of institutions, but also by the extent the different social groups participate in these institutions. In this regard, the gender of democracy matters profoundly. The absence of women from political life results in democratization with a male face.... an incomplete and very biased form of democracy. (2004: 2)

It is clear that Kuwait, as many nations, still has far to go on the issue of the gender and governance. Governance is concerned with who makes decisions as well as the procedures and institutions developed for decision-making. Men still control structures of governance and are still very much in power across the region. Therefore, many groups in the Arab world are pushing for liberalization of the laws and for more females to be elected to political office. More women are taking seriously the wording of the constitution, which states that the rights and responsibilities of all Kuwaiti citizens are equal. However, in Kuwait, as in much of the Middle East, “democracy” is often an empty slogan. Democracy defends the freedom to express ones thoughts, opinions, and views, respecting the right of minority groups to express their opposition to the majority. Both governments and the people of the Middle East need to translate democracy from

the abstract into something concrete. There has been little translation from attitudes to action. Action requires laws and policies that ensure women's rights in the social, economic, and political spheres. Valentine Moghadam (2003) and Ronald Inglehart et al., (2004) have taken up this important topic in their respective works, discussing how gender equality and democracy in the Middle Eastern means empowering women and increasing the percentage of the women who play an active role in the political system.

There is a debate as to whether democracy is compatible with Middle Eastern cultures, specifically with Islamic culture. It is important to remember that the shape of democracy and its institutions differ from culture to culture and even in Western nations, democracy has changed over many centuries. In my opinion, it is possible for us to expand the process of democratization through increasing the political rights of marginalized groups, including (but not limited to) women. To this end, it would be useful for us to explore the idea citizens have about the process of democratization. All across the globe, feminists argue that increasing the number of women in government would be a positive step in the process of democratization.

As a result, several feminists have turned their attention to the issue of the 'gender of governance' (Brush 2003; Hawkesworth 2012). The gender of governance deals with the degree to which each gender participates in governance. Lisa D. Brush (2003) argues that there are two issues here: the number of women in government institutions and "gender power" in governance (which gender really controls the institutions). For example, even though there are women in Kuwait who work in the government, they do not make decisions like men, because women are usually not appointed to the top positions and they are still few in number. The advantage of having

more women in Parliament is that they are more likely to attend to women's issues. For instance, after Kuwaiti women became members of Parliament, they passed legislation that allowed women to obtain government housing. However, governance is still viewed as a male activity and therefore "leadership" is masculine even when women become ministers and members of parliament. The gender power in these institutions still belongs to the male in Kuwaiti society.

### **The Importance of Social Movements in Social Change**

Social movements are a form of group activity in which people are united in the pursuit of some ideal. They coordinate their activities in the search of a goal. Those involved in the movement believe there is some defect in the system and proceed to call for change to amend the strain in society. The problem might be located in any social sector (economic, gender, racial, or sexual injustice) in which some group feels aggrieved. Social movements are composed of a wide variety of activities and associations, including protests, demonstrations, strikes, formal organizations, networks, and lobbying. Not all of these activities are carried out formally in the public sphere; there is a lot of maneuvering and informal action that occurs in the private sphere out of sight. My focus on the WCSS is as one organization within the larger context of the women's movement in Kuwait.

The decade of the 1960's was a very significant time in Kuwaiti history, according to Arenfeldt and Golley (2012). There were many societal changes, including the movement from traditional to modern views, changes to the Kuwaiti constitution, and new developments within the economic and social spheres. One significant change,

which took place during this time, was the establishment of formally recognized women's organizations as a part of the women's rights movement (Arenfeldt & Golley, 2012). The purpose of these organizations was to address women's issues and problems within society. The women's rights movement was a global movement helping to effect social change for women in Kuwait and many societies around the world, even though the strategies and methods used were different within the specific societies. The movements, including the Arab women's movement, called for opportunities for women to increase their educational levels, their awareness of civil rights, gender quality, and social change in the whole society. As Freeman (1975) stated:

Social movements are one of the primary means of socializing conflict; of taking private disputes and making them political ones. This is why a successful movement provides an intersection between personal and social change. Personal changes can be a vehicle to more concrete social changes, and are also often a result; but if a movement restricts itself to change purely on the personal level, its impact on society remains minimal. It is only when private disputes that result from personal changes are translated into public demands that a movement enters the political arena and can make use of political institutions to reach its goals of social change. (1975: 5)

Public issues such as gender inequality, specifically women's rights within the political arena, were foundational tenets of women's organizations as they demanded equal rights to achieve the important goals of political and social change within society. As Arenfeldt and Golley (2012) expressed, "the Arab women's movement is not, as often alleged, a (foreign import), but has been shaped by the specific characteristics of the societies in which it has been active" (2012:2). As a result, the Arab women's movement has been formed by the precise situation of the country in which it developed. For instance, the first women's rights movement in the Middle East occurred in Egypt. The

Egyptian women's movement consisted of two parallel trends expressed through the context of Islam and nationalism. Both of these trends, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, remain visible today.

It is well known that the truth of any grievance is not enough to ensure the success of a movement to address the grievance. Several theories have been developed to explain the rise and fall of movements. Some of this material is important to understand the women's movement activities occurring in Kuwait. Two perspectives on social movements are of interest to me in this study. These are 1) resource mobilization theory (Morris & Mueller, 1992), and 2) political process model (McAdam, 1999).

Resource mobilization theory was developed to discuss social movements in the United States. McAdam (1999) expresses the concept in this way, "resource mobilization describes social movements as collections of political actors dedicated to the advancement of their stated substantive purpose" (McAdam, 1999). Resource mobilization theorists contend that social movements must be successful in obtaining resources to survive. Therefore, theorists study the behavior of participants in their attempts to get resources, as well as how participants are affected by other groups. Specifically, they "take account of the effects of external groups on the development of social movements" (McAdam, 1999). Regarding this study, it is necessary to understand the sources of WCSS support, including financial support and to whom the organization is accountable: the state, members of the population at large, external funders or its own members.

Social support or acceptance is an important resource in society. In the Kuwaiti society, there seems to be a growing backlash against the goals of secular women's

organizations. This is very similar to what Salime (2003) found within the women's movement in Morocco. Some critics, specifically those from Islamist and tribalism groups as well as Islamic women's organizations, believe that political reform and adoption of political rights for women will create social, economic and political chaos. Further, they do not believe women's political rights are an important societal issue for Kuwaiti. Because of this controversy, there is a serious debate between women's organizations such as the WCSS and conservative individuals regarding women's rights and gender equality. In addition, fundamentalists and Islamic women's organization (i.e., Al Bayader Al-Salam) argue that Kuwaiti women already have separate but equal rights, much like Afro-Americans were told during the era of "Separate but Equal" Jim Crow laws. However, like Afro-Americans, many Kuwaiti women argue separate but equal is not true equality.

Doug McAdam (1999) contends that the "political process" model deals with the "social movement" as a "political" rather than "psychological" phenomenon. Political process is believed to affect the goals and strategies of a social movement much more than the experience or the daily life of leaders and members within the social movement. Therefore, "political action" is an important key to build political identity among members of a social movement. According to McAdam (1999), political process theory rests on this statement:

Social movements are an ongoing product of the favorable interplay of both sets of factors. The specific mix of factors may change from one phase of the social movements to another, but the basic dynamic remains the same. *Movements develop in response to an ongoing process of interaction between movement groups and the larger sociopolitical environment they seek to change.* (1999: 40)

Several scholars have attempted to document women's struggle for their political rights in Kuwait (Meyer et al., 2007; Al-Mughni, 2000; Al-Zu'bi, 2006). The WCSS first began to pursue political rights in earnest during the resistance to occupation which occurred in the 1990's. In 1993, the WCSS organized a conference focusing on gender discrimination and bringing the women's rights debate into the national spotlight. This study is interested in uncovering other activities and strategies the WCSS used during its campaign for women's rights. It was within this cultural climate in 1993, that the oldest member of Parliament suggested granting Kuwaiti women all (or at least most) of their political rights, but the National Assembly did not act upon this suggestion. The National Assembly used religion and traditional customs to rationalize its refusal. Many men of that era felt the increased participation in the work force by women represented a threat to their opportunities in the competitive job market. Islamic women's organizations (Al-Bayader Al-Salam) were not interested in political rights for women; rather, their interest was in helping women become good Muslim women who would focus on care of their children, husbands and homes. It is quite clear that the WCSS has worked within a political era which requires them to contend with much opposition. Understanding the political and social climate is important to help comprehend how the organization has been successful or not in gaining support and equity for women.

### **Feminist Theorizing in the Middle East**

The concept of feminism for Muslim women within the Middle East is said to differ significantly from feminism within the Western culture (Badran, 2009). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, feminism in many Middle Eastern societies grew within

the environment of increasing modernity. Also the impact of Islam cannot be ignored, when one is discussing the various types of feminisms, including liberal, radical, Islamic or secular feminisms. This is consistent with Badran's explanation: "feminisms are produced in particular places and are articulated in local terms." (Badran 2009: 243). Thus feminist perspectives are strongly affected by each nation's historical, cultural and religious context. Many however do blame Islam for women's lack of political participation in the Middle East. For instance, there are various groups of people in the Middle East who do not believe that the feminist movement has any place within their nation. Among both men and women, tribal groups and conservative Islamic groups are often accused of holding women back. However, as Marry Rizzo (2005) notes, Islam is "A complex set of beliefs and behavior patterns; there are aspects of Islam that are both compatible with improving the status and rights of women and interpretations that are a barrier to increasing women's political rights" (2005: xi). Therefore, I would venture to say that the problem is not "Islam" but the practice and understanding of Islam among the Muslim population around the world. Many Muslim women within Middle Eastern societies define the expression and encouragement of the Holy Qur'an as a proponent of gender equality, women's political rights and social justices. This approach has been labeled "Islamic Feminism" (Badran, 2009).

However, as previously discussed, Muslims women do differ in their orientation to feminism. In other words, women who espouse the Islamic religion do not all speak with the same voice when it comes to the issue of feminism. Some believe in "Islamic feminism" and others believe in "liberal feminism" within the Kuwaiti society. Differing interpretations of "Islam" are apparent across women's organizations within Middle

Eastern societies. For example, in Kuwait the WCSS, which is often referred to as a liberal group, pursues political rights for women throughout society (i.e. in both the private and public sphere), whereas the attention of Al-Bayader Al-Salam is focused on supporting women within the private sphere. In regards to these differing views, Rizzo contends:

Embracing Islamic beliefs (orthodoxy) should produce support for the participation and inclusion of women in politics because it is influenced by pristine Islam (the ideal). The early teaching of the prophet Muhammad and the Holy Qur'an (Chapter 2, verse 187) stated that [Both sexes were equal under the eyes of God] and thus they both needed to be treated with justice and respect. Furthermore, women in Islam are seen as equal partners in sin and equal and independent persons in prayer, which puts Muslim scholars in a position to interpret women's status in the Holy Qur'an in a favorable light. As a result, there is an unmistakable egalitarianism that runs through the Qur'an, which explains why many Muslim women and men insist Islam is NOT sexist. Thus, holding Islamic beliefs should lead to greater participation and support for women's rights among the members. And following Islam should lead to greater political participation because followers are connected to a network that is socially, culturally and politically in the Muslim societies. (2005: 29)

Rizzo provides a positive viewpoint of a non-conflicting relationship between the cultural and religious tenets of Islam and the expansion of women's rights across public and private spheres. However, with the growth of fundamentalist Islamic movements in Iran after 1979, the public perception of Islam as it related to women's public and private roles changed to a more conservative and narrow view within Islamic organizations. Currently, some Islamic women's organizations in Muslim societies prefer not to be publically involved with gender issues, particularly women's political rights. Conversely, the work of liberal women's organizations is often focused on the empowerment of women in political, economic and social systems. Liberal organizations feel this is more effective than strategies used by groups who focus on private "consciousness- raising" in

order to gain women's rights and their entrance into the larger society (Arenfeldt & Golley, 2012). As a researcher studying women's organizations within Kuwaiti society, it is important for me to understand the different ways "Islam" is viewed and how each approach is used to formulate different feminist ideologies and identities in the country. It is important to understand this, even though I do not personally believe that Islam is counter to women's rights in the public and private systems.

The WCSS has also been described as a secular organization, which is liberal in orientation; and as such is interested in equality between all people. However, this would also mean respect for the traditions and customs of the Kuwaiti society and Islamic teachings. This perspective of liberalism may differ from the understanding of liberalism in Western societies. Afonja and Pearce (1986) argue that any imported philosophy, perspective or activity is absorbed by the host environment in its own unique way. In other words, western liberal ideas are likely to be contextualized within the local culture. An important goal of this study is to understand how liberal feminism has been defined by the WCSS, since this organization developed within an Islamic nation. There are indications that the Western liberal perspective and liberal feminism, in particular, is viewed with some concern in the Middle East. Various religious groups as well as many individuals working within traditional structures view the amount of agency accorded each individual by western liberals as too radical. For instance, in many Muslim nations, wives are expected to obey their husbands, and daughters have less personal freedom than sons. Western liberal individualism is seen as too extreme. These issues require one to explore the particular approach to liberalism assumed by the WCSS and what impact the local environment has had on the WCSS. In the theoretical framework that follows, I

will discuss more fully the different feminist perspectives that are being developed within the Kuwait society.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss in more depth the two issues that are relevant to my research on women's political participation in Kuwait. These two issues are the discourses on the growth of different forms of feminisms in the Kuwaiti society, and the problem of governance as it relates to gender. I believe that these issues offer insights into the nature of political participation in Kuwait. As has been noted elsewhere, my research focuses on the role WCSS has played in shaping women's political participation in Kuwaiti society. The problem of equal political rights for women in any society deal with a variety of issues, including the number of women in political positions, the ability of women to express their thoughts freely in the public sphere, make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their children, both at home and at work, as well as the right to vote and be voted for. It is clear that all of this makes it appropriate for us to examine the concepts of feminism and governance specifically in Kuwait. In the following section, I show how these concepts apply to my work as I focus on the problems of women exercising their political rights in Kuwait.

### **Feminism in Kuwait**

Similar to other countries in the Middle East, feminism in Kuwait is complex. Feminist perspectives within the Kuwaiti society accept the idea that there is need for change in the status of women. However, the degree of change that various groups wish to see differs and the role to be played by Islam also differs. Different types of feminisms

have borrowed ideas from Western nations, particularly the USA, as well as other Middle Eastern nations. Broadly speaking, the women's movement in Kuwait is composed of conservative (e.g. Islamic), liberal, and secular feminists. There are also conservative groups that reject feminism and are often referred to as anti-feminists. Members of the anti-feminists include Tribalists and Islamists. Thus the conservative wing of the women's movement in Kuwait is composed of some groups that are feminists and other groups that reject feminism. Liberal feminists are also a complex group in Kuwait. The degree to which activists wish to include the beliefs and laws of Islam differs quite a bit. In this study, I am concerned with how the members of the WCSS view the relationship between Islam and feminism. Finally, there are the secular feminists who believe that religion should be kept out of state matters altogether. For instance, Moghadam argues that "Religious beliefs should be respected, and religious institutions should have a place in civil society, but religion should not dominate the state and the law" (2002: 1164). Next, I compare the ideas of groups I have discussed above, as they exist within Kuwaiti society. I will begin with liberal feminists because they appear to be the largest group in Kuwait. The liberal perspective that is associated with feminism in the USA is quite familiar to feminists in Kuwait. It supports capitalism and liberal democracy. It emphasizes that people are autonomous, rational individuals who can make political choices for themselves. Based on these ideas, liberal feminism seeks gender equality between men and women largely through legal and policy changes and the protection of women's legal status in both the public and private (family) sphere. Liberal feminists in Kuwait would like to see changes in family structures, they feel that in Kuwait, men exercise authority over women, and men are thought of as superior to women. Liberal

feminism in Kuwait challenges gender hierarchy in this area of life and are interested in family reform. In fact, the family is considered to be the first unit in which to teach about difference between the sexes, and often teaches that boys are rational, strong, aggressive and independent. Since liberal feminism believes that government policies should support a higher status for women, female activists in Kuwait agitate for change in family policies. Now, for example, the Kuwaiti government has agreed to allow women who marry non-Kuwaitis are permitted to give Kuwaiti nationality to their children. Women who hold positions in parliament have been working hard to improve the status of women. I would argue that most of these women could be classified as liberal feminists (Alazmi, 2012). However, in an Islamic state like Kuwait, one cannot assume that all the beliefs of Western liberal feminists are acceptable to liberals in the nation. It is therefore important to find out what aspects of western liberalism an organization like the WCSS accepts or rejects.

Islamic feminism was established as an accepted perspective in 1979, beginning with the Iranian Revolution and the questioning of the Islamic State. Islamic feminism begins by reviewing the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an. Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as "a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an and seeks the practice of rights and justice for all human beings in the totality of their experience across the public-private continuum" (1996: 5). For many, including myself, this viewpoint means that arguments of equality must be based on what can be found in the Quran and the laws of society must be based on Islamic laws. As Moghadam (2003) stated, Islamic feminist scholars and activists want to show that Islam is compatible with feminism and that it encourages

gender equality. However, Islamic feminism is still a minority viewpoint within Kuwait, and has not yet reached a level of dominance, although it is gaining ground. Some scholars believe that a larger number of people espouse liberal feminism, as opposed to Islamic feminism, believing that the liberal view is a better way of building arguments about gender equality and social justice. Islamic feminists are hampered in arguing for equality and justice because the majority of people who interpret religion are male and their ability to present a sympathetic view and provide a good position for women in society is suspect. Nonetheless, Islamic feminism tries to focus on concepts like justice and point out that Islam is the best way to democracy .

An additional problem for Islamic feminism is the many religious interpretations of women's place in society. Sharia laws are not identical across the Middle East because the laws are an interpretation of the Qur'an and different societies with different histories and culture develop different interpretations. For example, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are said to be Islamic states and each nation's interpretation of the Qur'an is the basis of its legal systems. Therefore, there are important differences between their legal systems. Saudi women, unlike Iranian women, do not have political, economic and social rights. Moghadam argues that, Islamic feminism, which developed in Iranian during and after the revolution in 1979, developed as "... a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminist" (1998: 1143). I believe this has led to some give and take in ideas and some recognition of the need to borrow new ideas. The fact that the Sharia legal system can be so different in two states only supports my view that forms of liberal feminism will not be identical in cultural contexts that are different, for example the USA and Kuwait. There are Islamic feminists in Kuwait represented by groups such

as Al-Bayader Al-Salam. This group believes that there are equal societal rights between men and women based on Qur'an and Sharia.

Anti-feminist groups also grapple with issues of gender equality, power, and the patriarchal system in Kuwait. Masoud Kazemzadeh (2002) points out those anti-feminists contend that women and men are so different, psychologically and biologically, that their roles in society should be different. Anti-feminists believe that society ought to create laws, which protect women who work outside the home and should require men "to take care of women". As a result, men and women must have different social roles with distinct economic, political, rights and responsibilities. Equality is out of the question because biological differences are natural and gender roles must reflect those differences. Clear boundaries must be kept between men and women in all areas of life. In my view, this supports the idea of the patriarchal system, and the idea that women should not transgress their place in nature and society.

It is important to ask who is likely to be an anti-feminist. According to Kazemzadeh (2002), anti-feminists may include conservative men or women of any religion. Groups with this viewpoint are not limited to Islamic countries of the Middle East. One example being the late Reverend Jerry Falwell, a leader of American anti-feminist Christian fundamentalism, who noted that different genders have different roles and must fulfill their different responsibilities. If women love their children and husbands they must stay and work inside the home; men have the responsibility to work outside the home, securing a good income for their families to protect the women of their family (Kazemzadeh: 2002). Anti-feminists in the Middle East have similar ideas to Ayatollah Morteza Mottahari, Chairman of the Revolutionary Council in Iran, who stated:

It is quite natural that man protect woman and woman seeks protection from man. It is not necessary to look for a social or historical reason on which to base this. Why are men physically stronger and the woman weaker and more delicate? This physical difference does not exist only between man and woman, but between cock and hen, lion and lioness, stallion and mare. This was the intention of God, an intention that was totally left out of accounts by Western feminists who believe that both sexes should receive the same training and assume the same professions and social responsibilities. But the truth is that woman is distinct from man in various ways. Every cell of her body, her entire organism and especially her nervous system, is characterized by her female gender. Physiological laws like astronomic laws are fixed, immutable principles. The human will has no influence upon them whatsoever. We must accept them as they are. Therefore women should attempt to develop the innate capabilities that correspond to their own nature.

(Quoted by Kazemzadeh, 2002:43-44)

Mottahari's emphasis on the natural difference between the sexes is problematic because he does not take into account the way cultures construct these "natural" differences. In addition, he compares humans to animals in their natural state. But humans have developed political, economic and religions systems that take them out of "the state of nature."

Kuwaiti liberal feminists would argue, for example, that biological differences should not be used to imply that women cannot be equal to men in the political, economic and social spheres. Another problem is his statement that, "man and woman in Islam do not have identical rights." But many feminists believe that Islam grants Muslim women the same rights and duties as men. Muslim women, in the Prophet Mohammed's time, shared public life and duties with men and even went to war. They participated in the economy, making decisions with the Prophet Mohammed about family life, individuals and personality (Ahmed, 1992). While one cannot dispute the fact that male and female biology differs, I believe that women can be equal to men in political, economic and,

social life. After the death of the Prophet and the growth of new states in the Muslim world, the status of women fell significantly.

In review of the above theories of feminism, I observe both that the liberal and Islamic perspectives support, in varying degrees, dimensions of women's empowerment and want to achieve equality between women and men. However, the anti-feminist view is against gender equality. The latter base their thoughts on the idea of physical differences between sexes, but do not focus on the mind or intellect. The different arguments among Middle Eastern scholars regarding women's position in society remains complex, making it difficult for ordinary people to have a clear idea of the way forward. Nonetheless, having noted some of the complexities of feminism within Kuwait, I use the above framework to guide my study of the WCSS: what do members of the organization as well as those outside of the organization say about the form of liberalism espoused by the WCSS, and what is its relationship to other groups?

The emphasis on the gender of governance draws attention to the fact that not enough women hold decision-making positions from the local level to the national level. In an earlier study (Alazmi, 2012) I examined the extent to which members of the general population, specifically, students and government workers feel that political power should only be in the hands of men. I found that younger people and those groups identified as liberal were more likely to favor more female political participation. The present study focuses on the specific work of the WCSS in attempting to increase the number of women in government. Activists in Kuwait are still struggling to get women elected into office. I do recognize that this does not solve the problem of women and decision-making because often those who first get elected are pioneers and often face

many battles. They may include only women from the upper classes or wealthy families, or women who have been supported because of their conservative views. Thus getting women in office does not guarantee change. Nonetheless, as organizations like the WCSS fight for women's political participation, gender of governance issues are of concern to them. Specifically, what strategies have been used to try and alter the degree to which women are elected to office? Does the WCSS use different strategies to target different segments of the population? What do members of the organization see as the most successful and least successful strategies? How have strategies changed over time?

Finally, this study emphasizes the fact that WCSS is a part of the women's movement in Kuwaiti society. For that reason it is important to know what specific impact the organization has made regarding its goals and the political culture within Kuwait. Mohammed Olimat (2009) discusses the issues of "rivalry, animosity, and division within the Women's Movement" in Kuwait (2009: 207). It is important to understand the extent to which the political rivalry discussed by Olimat has affected the impact of the WCSS's work.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study is first and foremost a case study of the largest and oldest women's organization in Kuwait: the Women's Cultural Social Society (WCSS). Case studies fall within qualitative methodology and have both advantages and disadvantages. A major advantage is that a case study is a detailed analysis of a 'case' allowing the researcher to examine both the activities and context of the case/project. It provides for the study of 'real-life' situations in which empirical information can be gathered on both the project and its relationship to the environment. However, volume is a problem with case studies. Numbers are few; findings apply simply to the particular case (or perhaps others with similar characteristics) and may not be generalizable even within the same society.

### Methods

I used the historical method to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the WCSS over three periods: beginning in the 1960s until before the Gulf War II in 1990, continuing in 1990 until 2005 when Kuwaiti women gained their political rights, and last, from 2005 to 2010. This method can best answer my second research question concerning strategies and methods used by the WCSS (see chapter five). I studied Kuwaiti society because of the rich historical information about the struggle of women's rights and organizations in the Middle East since the 1960's. Longitudinal analysis requires the observation of social phenomena in discrete moments over a lengthy time period, drawing on data from particular historical periods in order to compare developments within different societies,

institutions, or regions (Haydu, 1998). This approach allows one to compare the sequence of events in different periods of time, explaining the connections between the events of each period (Haydu, 1998). As previously stated, this study specifically focuses on the WCSS. Because the societal position of Kuwaiti women has changed repeatedly as a result of policies and different events in society, longitudinal analysis is an appropriate method for understanding these changes. This method will allow me to examine how the events of the first period shaped and created the events of the later periods within the social structure and culture of a society. Furthermore, longitudinal analysis uses data concerning social, political, and historical events not just to describe the social phenomena but also to explain specific outcomes. Thus the most significant feature of longitudinal analysis is the ability to analyze events from one or more periods of time with explanations of the differences between them.

Before beginning my study, I received the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July 2013 to apply a mixed method approach to my dissertation. The methods I used included in-depth interviews, participant observation and the use of secondary documents. The sampling frame for this study is Kuwaiti citizens living in Kuwait who speak the Arabic language. Participants were drawn from two samples. The first sample consisted of female WCSS leaders and members. The second sample was drawn from male and female faculty within Kuwait University (KU); I personally conducted the interviews over a one-month period: July through August 2013. I conducted 20 interviews in all. Eleven of these were with 3 leaders and 8 members of the WCSS, and 9 interviews were conducted with Kuwaiti citizens who were professors at Kuwait University (KU). This was purposive sampling, as the study was interested in

individuals who were familiar with the activities of the WCSS. I gained access to the population of the WCSS through the organization's leader. I contacted the president of the WCSS, Lulwah AlMulla by email, describing the study and requested that any members who were interested contact me. The president then e-mailed my letter of invitation explaining the study and their opportunity to be involved to the participants. The interviews were conducted during the regular work hours of the participants, at their convenience. Members of the WCSS were identified through the snowball technique beginning with colleagues at Kuwait University (KU). Leader and members of the WCSS allowed on-site, structured, in-depth interviews providing information about the backgrounds, goals, structure, activities of their organization as well as their views about the political participation of women and the role of the WCSS in helping to shape Kuwaiti society. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. The time needed for the participants to complete the interview questions was between 30-45 minutes per interview. The instrument for this study was designed by me and included four sections. Section (A): Demographic- this section of the interview asked questions concerning particular characteristics of each individual such as gender, marital status, educational level, religious affiliation and age. Section (B): this section included questions on the WCSS as an organization. I asked questions on whether the feminist ideology of the WCSS is accepted or rejected by Kuwaiti citizens in Kuwaiti society. Section (C): this section dealt with the methods and strategies used by the WCSS in its work. The study was also interested in whether these strategies had changed over time. Section (D): The last section was concerned with the impact the WCSS on Kuwaiti society.

I also participated in the workshop entitled "Leadership in Decision-making," between July 21-22 (2013), this workshop was intended for women leaders to help promote the objectives of the WCSS and hopefully affect the future. Altogether 8 participants attended the workshop. The workshop dealt with leadership training through experimentation to create effective community partnerships. The participants were also encouraged to come to a better understanding of themselves by the diagnosis and analysis of their own experiences. During the workshop a variety of methods were utilized including public debates, mini workgroups, individual exercises, case studies and audio-visual media. The course took place during two days, beginning at 4:00 pm on the first day, 4:30 pm on the second, and ended at 9 pm on both days. The activities of the first day focused on self-development for leadership with the activities of the second day centering on communication skills. I attended this workshop on both days and observed the participants. Although the workshop was free and open to all Kuwaiti women in the society, it was not widely attended, only 9 women were there. The attendees were young women and most were university students. There seemed to be a general lack of interest, but the WCSS members who attended this workshop felt it was important to follow up with attendees to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the events. This workshop was the only WCSS event that I attended during my time in Kuwait because of the time restrictions. Finally, I used documents from the WCSS archives located in the WCSS office. These are historical documents pertaining to the evolution of women's rights within Kuwaiti society. Specifically, the most important events of interest to this study are the development of the Kuwaiti constitution in 1962, the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and in 2005 when women gained their political rights. The president of the WCSS,

Ms. Lulwah AlMulla, graciously granted permission for me to access the WCSS' documents. They provided important information on the structure, activities and ideology of the organization and were relevant for developing a historical perspective on developments within the WCSS. Noteworthy are the ways in which the organization has changed since its inauguration .

Initially, I analyzed the interview data from the WCSS leaders, its members and the general population using descriptive analysis. I then proceeded to compare responses from the two sub-samples that is, between the WCSS leaders and members and the general population on the activities and impact of the WCSS.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present the results of this study regarding the role of the WCSS in shaping Kuwaiti women's political participation since 1960s. This chapter is ordered as follows: the first section discusses whether the WCSS is a feminist organization. I will use two samples, which consist of the leaders and members of the WCSS and the general population, to understand if the WCSS is considered a feminist organization in Kuwaiti society. The second section discusses the methods and strategies used by the WCSS to obtain and promote the political participation of Kuwaiti women. Documents of the WCSS and the responses of WCSS member and leader participants are utilized are used for this purpose. The last section concerns the impact of the WCSS upon Kuwait society. Responses of participants from both samples are used to answer this question.

### **The WCSS is the Feminist Organization**

My first question focuses on whether or not the WCSS is perceived as a feminist organization in Kuwaiti society. I used both samples to understand their views regarding a feminist organization. Also, I would like to know the particular approach of the WCSS to feminism particularly within the context of Kuwaiti society.

Table (1): The WCSS is a Feminist Organization in Kuwaiti Society (Leaders and Members of the WCSS)

Questions/ Answers	Numbers
Gender:	
- Male	- 0
- Female	- 11
What is your role in the WCSS?	
- Leadership	- 3
- Membership	- 9
Marital Status:	
- Single	- 2
	- 7
- Married	- 1
	- 1
- Divorced	
- Widowed	
Educational Level:	
- Less than high school	- 0
	- 0
- High school	- 6
	- 2
- B.A	- 3
- M.A	
- Ph.D.	
Religious affiliation:	
- Muslim Sunni	- 10
	- 1
- Muslim Shia	- 0
- Other	
Age	41-79
The WCSS is called a feminist	

organization?  - Agree  - Disagree	- 10 - 1
Which of the following approaches to feminism do you feel best describes the WCSS as an organization?  - Islamic Feminism  - Liberal Feminism  - Socialist Feminism  - Other	- 0 - 10 - 0 - 1
Would you describe the WCSS as a secular organization?  - Yes  - No	- 3 - 8

Table 1 presents information concerning demographic characteristics of the 11 participants who were members of the WCSS. I interviewed 3 leaders and 8 members of the organization. The three leaders all served as WCSS president, past or present. One participant served from 1967 to 1992, the next from 1992 to 1998, and the third took office in 2013 and was currently serving. Of the 11 participants 7 were married, 2 were single, 1 was divorced and 1 was widowed. All of these participants were university graduates, with 3 of them holding a Ph.D. It is interesting to note that those with a Masters or Ph.D. all obtained these advanced degrees outside of Kuwait. The doctorate degrees were all awarded at U.S. universities. All respondents were Muslim and divided between the Sunni (10) and Shia (1) sects. This was to be expected since Muslims

comprise 75-80% of the Kuwait population, and Sunnis are in the majority. The participants in this group were middle aged or older, with ages ranging from 41 to 79 years, and a modal age of 55 years.

When asked what type of non-governmental organization the WCSS is, all but one of the participants responded that the organization is a feminist association. The only participant who felt that the WCSS is not, was in fact the current president. She pointed out that the WCSS welcomed both males and females saying, "That's where the WCSS has attempted to break the barriers between men and women and has always promoted activities that consist of both sexes". Perhaps the president assumes that only women can be feminists. Another participant described the WCSS as a feminist organization in Kuwaiti society and noted that the WCSS's goal is to raise the awareness among Kuwaiti women regarding their rights, specifically "because the WCSS is interested in women's issues in various fields." She also stated: "the illiteracy rate among women is high in Kuwaiti society and therefore women's awareness of their rights is low. The WCSS works for this purpose to raise awareness of women's rights".

When asked what kind of feminist organization the WCSS is, all but one individual described the WCSS as a liberal feminism organization. Again, the current president of the organization felt she could not describe the WCSS as either a liberal feminist or an Islamic organization, expressing her views in this manner:

"I cannot, in general, restrict my response to any of the previous categories. I see that Kuwait is civil society and includes all the ideas, trends and beliefs. Our goal is to promote the public interest of the state and the topic that we are working for. But I refuse to classify the WCSS as Islamic organization; Muslims also care about the Islamic religion."

The president described the WCSS as a civil society organization (an NGO), however, she did not want to limit it to just one type of feminism. The president emphasized that she did not want to classify the WCSS as Islamic-oriented either, even though all of the members are Muslim. She felt that as Muslims, the members' beliefs will be important to them; however they still recognize and respect the differing ideas and trends of civil society. She used the word "civil society" because it refers to the respect she felt should be given to all the different trends in the intellectual society.

The remaining 10 participants described the WCSS as a liberal feminist organization. The words of one participant, former president of the WCSS (1967 to 1992), and expressed this view particularly well:

"Kuwaiti laws exist which criminalize social affairs and the establishment of any organization on the basis of religion. Because we (the WCSS) defend, discuss and desire women's rights, especially political rights, the WCSS is compatible with the Kuwaiti Constitution which is liberal. It doesn't promote religious fanaticism or extremist thought. The WCSS wants to better all members of the society. Customs and traditions are important, but we (the WCSS) must develop, and help women to have the same opportunities to work in the society as men."

It became clear during the interviews that the meaning of "liberal" within Kuwaiti society differs from that of the West when discussing feminism. The response of one participant explains what liberal feminism means in the Arab world. She said what she adheres to is:

". . . Arab-style liberalism, not Western-style; it is important to understand this first. The direction of the WCSS is always opening minded and does not call for segregation or discrimination between men and women in society since Kuwait is a civil state and is governed by the Constitution, which provides equality and justice between segments of society human religion and faith in something special to the individual."

Another participant also emphasized the fact that the WCSS is a liberal feminism organization based on an Arab perspective, specifically:

"The WCSS is open to intellectual differences. European and Arab liberalism are quite different. The WCSS has also rejected the call of the Islamic organization which confined Islam to a certain category. We reject this outright because we are Muslims and conservatives, too, but we call for equality and support the cause women in Kuwaiti society."

Similarly, a former president of the WCSS (1992 to 1998) noted that the organization could be described as a liberal feminist. She explained that there is such a thing as "liberal Islamic" thoughts which differ from liberal Western thoughts. She said that: "The WCSS is liberal, but not like the West with the idea of liberalism. Western liberalism means unbelief in some of the other Arab and Islamic societies. The WCSS is trying to maintain its Islamic foundations." These statements about liberal Islamic thought tend to support the ideas of An Na'im (2008) and others who argue that Islamic liberals occupy a middle ground between secularists and Islamists. Liberals trend to be pragmatists who are not averse to allowing religion to have a role in public affairs. Many do not believe that there should be absolute separation of religion (church or Mosque) and state.

Finally, 8 of the respondents did not feel the WCSS should be described as a secular organization in Kuwait. However, the one participant who felt the WCSS should be described as a secular organization said that:

"Secular refers to the political situation where it is not religious and whose decisions have an earthly focus and stay away from religion. I see that the pioneers and their members that do not want religiosity or the introduction of Islamic religion in laws and decisions. You can tell that the WCSS is secular."

Nonetheless, this was a minority view. Most of my respondents felt that the WCSS does not operate as a secular organization. One noted that: Secularism rejects religion, and we are religious, but we do not represent the national political party. We (the WCSS) are neither a secular nor an Islamic organization”.

Table (2): Is the WCSS a Feminist Organization in Kuwaiti Society? (General Population)

Questions/ Answers	Numbers
Gender:	
- Male	- 6
- Female	- 3
Marital Status:	
- Single	- 2
- Married	- 7
- Divorced	- 0
- Widowed	- 0
Educational Level:	
- Less than high school	- 0
- High school	- 0
- B.A	- 1
- M.A	- 8
- Ph.D.	
Religious affiliation:	
- Muslim Sunni	- 7
- Muslim Shia	- 2
- Other	- 0
Age	35-67

<p>Is the WCSS a feminist organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agree</li> <li>- Disagree</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 9</li> <li>- 0</li> </ul>
<p>Which of the following approaches to feminism do you feel best describes the WCSS as an organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Islamic Feminism</li> <li>- Liberal Feminism</li> <li>- Socialist Feminism</li> <li>- Other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 0</li> <li>- 8</li> <li>- 1</li> <li>- 0</li> </ul>
<p>Would you describe the WCSS as a secular organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes</li> <li>- No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4</li> <li>- 5</li> </ul>

As noted earlier, 9 members of the general population (3 females and 6 males) were also asked the same questions as the WCSS members regarding the characteristics of the WCSS. Their responses appear in table 2. Regarding the demographic characteristics of this group, 7 were married and 2 were single. All had advanced university degrees, including 8 doctoral degrees obtained in the USA, one doctoral degree from Egypt, and the master's degree is from Kuwait. The members of this subsample were Muslim: 7 Sunni and 2 Shia. Finally, the age of the participants ranged from 35 to 67 years with a modal age of 45.

All of the participants in this group felt the WCSS is a feminist organization. One participant, who is a member of an Islamic organization, expressed her views in this way:

"The WCSS should be considered a feminist organization because of the nature of the activities related to women it supports. The WCSS also supports activities related to cultural awareness always with the focus centered on women. The WCSS must have an advanced feminist perspective especially since men as well as women are accepted as members if they have an interest in these issues from the perspective of the well-being of women."

Also, one male participant described the WCSS as a feminist organization based on its activities and the goals, specifically:

"The WCSS has supported Kuwaiti women's empowerment in various fields, for instance, women's political rights, helping to defend those rights since 1970. The WCSS aims to strengthen the role of women in society through greater social and political rights, educational opportunities and healthcare."

One participant who seemed to have a more Islamic point of view, also perceived the WCSS as a feminist organization. He said that: "The WCSS focuses on women's affairs and is interested in women's issues, contributions and especially women's right to be politically active and mobile in the Kuwaiti society." This participant expressed his Islamic views in the following manner: "The WCSS does not use the Islamic religion to claim the rights of women and not to use the religion in their justification women's political participation".

Another female participant viewed the WCSS as a feminist organization because it was the first of its kind in the Arab Gulf region. She said that: "I believe the WCSS is a feminist organization because it was the first women's organization of its kind in the region that was established by women, for women, under the umbrella of women's rights from a human rights perspective".

Since most of these participants had studied in the U.S.A., one assumes that they have a breadth of knowledge regarding women's organizations and rights, based on their readings and experience within the West. They also seem to be aware of differences between organizations based on their goals, membership and activities within the society. The majority of these respondents described the WCSS as a liberal feminism organization. One participant who also belongs to an Islamic organization felt the WCSS operates as a liberal feminism organization within Kuwaiti society. She said that:

"The WCSS does not talk about the application of Islamic Sharia. The leaders describe their programs as liberal, and always announce the WCSS as a strong, liberal-oriented body despite their respect for Islamic law. They say that the Islamic Sharia is the choice of individuals and not the program of the organization. The views expressed are liberal as well as the activities and provocative programs supported for the society. I believe that the most important program they have worked on is "the Political Rights of Women" in sixties. Most of the members were of Kuwaiti society against them, but there was the same flexibility with the political rights of women. Most Members did not wear hijab and dressed in modern, foreign clothes. There was a lot of discussion in the 1960s concerning the rights of women and the WCSS was described as liberal. The WCSS was influenced by the Arab nationalism that came from Egypt".

Here we see that feminism within Kuwait was influenced at the beginning by liberal perspectives of Arab nationalism in Egypt. The participants also felt that Muslim women who wear the hijab do so to emphasize their conservatism, and since the leaders and members of the WCSS do not wear the hijab, they must be (according to her perception) liberal.

Only one participant believed the WCSS to be a socialist feminism organization. This participant stated:

"I believe it is a socialist feminist organization because the main reason for the establishment of the WCSS and the main goal of the

organization was and is to raise awareness of women to have an active part in the society. This is despite the fact that most of the WCSS members as individuals were and are closer to the liberal side overall."

She did not want to describe the WCSS as a "liberal feminism organization" because it works within the conservative Kuwaiti society. She also thought that there is a difference between the member backgrounds. She emphasized that the organization focuses more on "raise[ing] awareness of women" more than "equality" between men and women within society .

Within this subsample, there was an interesting difference of opinion regarding whether or not the WCSS was liberal in the Western sense. It will be recalled that members of the organization were emphatic that it operated within the Arab perspective. However, among the university sample, there were those who felt that the WCSS was a liberal feminist organization based on Western perspective. One male respondent said that:

"The WCSS adopts issues associated with freedom and democracy and believes it is a human right to express individual desires and attitudes. The WCSS is against the monopoly of power in the hands of a man. Feminist liberals aim to achieve a kind of equality between men and women in society life."

Finally, a slight majority of the university respondents (five of the respondents) did not feel the WCSS should be described as a secular organization in Kuwait. However, almost half of did. Thus there was a fairly even split. One participant said that:

"The WCSS is secular in its decisions and principles and does not work from a religious point of view, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish. However, members are Muslims on a personal or individual level, but often display in public social or political discussions more secular leanings."

Another participant also felt the WCSS is a secular organization, stating:

"From my point of view all organizations are secular. In other words, you must deal with certain necessary details and requirements of everyday life. Valtala are secular and I see that the Shia have Islamic phrases for several different interpretations of secularism. I think secularism is in some ways a trendy term."

It is important to note here that respondents were aware of the fact that the word secular may mean different things to different people. For some it's a trendy word, for others it is off-putting. One male even noted that there is some confusion between the words 'liberal' and 'secular' within the Arab world. For many, but not everyone, liberal means secular. He expressed it this way: "Secularism means rejecting all dimensions of religion within political activities".

Among those who said that the WCSS is not secular, one participant, a female member of an Islamic organization, stated:

"Secularism means the following: that the person who is not a believer in God has a very bad image in the Kuwaiti society. Secularism means the separation of religion from politics, but people fear this separation and fear people who don't believe in God."

This remark suggests that regardless of how individual members feel about secularism, they are likely to assume the organization will not accomplish much if it alienates the general population, most of who believe in God. As with most organizations around the world, the WCSS has to work within the national context.

Finally, two other participants also noted that secularism means the separation of religion and politics. One male who had an Islamist point of view said that the WCSS cannot be called a secular organization because "Secularism means separation between religion and state, but the WCSS members believe in the Islamic religion.", and another

male respondent believed that it is difficult to separate religion from anything within Muslim societies, stating:

"Where an organization is secular, it is not religious and does not enslave someone because of religion. Also, it is a means of separating religion from politics keeping the state and religion as separate and independent entities; this is what has emerged as secularism in the West. In the West, an ecclesiastical control exists on everything in the public and private sectors, and calls for the separation of ecclesiastical thinking in public life. I find very difficult to separate religion from politics in the Arab world, where they are completely intertwined."

In summarizing the responses of the participants, I would argue that it is clear the members of the WCSS believe their organization to be a liberal feminist organization that has an Arab style of liberalism; it is viewed as more influenced by countries like Egypt than say Western nations. However, members of the public were not convinced that the WCSS did not hold western views of liberal feminism.

### **Methods and Strategies of the WCSS (Documents)**

My second research question focuses on the strategies and methods used by the WCSS to obtain political rights for Kuwaiti women in different time periods. One would expect that the strategies would change over time due to changing situations and adjustments made by the organization. I would like to emphasize that there are three important events in Kuwait that affected the political lives of women. These are: 1) the development of the Kuwaiti constitution in 1962, 2) the Gulf war (1990-1991) and 3) the attainment of political rights for Kuwaiti women in 2005. This project is interested in finding out if the WCSS utilized different methods after each of these events. To answer this question, this section analyses two sources of data. The first sources are secondary

documents and material about the WCSS and the second are the interviews conducted among the organization's leadership and members. These are then compared.

The use of secondary sources allows one to study a range of viewpoints on any event. Additionally, these secondary documents provide a historical perspective because information has been collected on the same population over several different time periods permitting scholars to study events and activities taking place over time. I focus on three broad time periods that follow the historical events noted above, to investigate activities of the WCSS and the different strategies they used to obtain the political rights of women. The first time period is from 1962 to 1990: the inauguration of WCSS and the beginning of the Kuwaiti women's right movement, the second period is from 1991 to 2005: the peak of women's rights movement, and the last period is from 2005 to 2010 when women began participating in political matters in earnest. I begin by analyzing the private documents of the WCSS to review its history and steps taken to accomplish its political aims. These documents include minutes of meetings, conference communiqués, and correspondence of individuals and other organizations, and newsletters. I then compare the information and opinions expressed in these secondary sources of the WCSS to the responses given by my interviewees on the issue of the organization's strategies.

### **The WCSS Documents**

I was able to secure two books published by the WCSS on its activities: "*Fifty Years of Work for Women and Society* (The WCSS, 2013)" and "*Political Rights for Kuwaiti Women and the Role of the WCSS to demand the Political Right* (The WCSS 2009)". These documents discuss the different strategies and methods used to demand

women's political rights within Kuwait. The material indicates that during the first period (1960 through 1990) the strategies used by the WCSS were not always successful because it was difficult to convince the population of the need for women to have political rights. Further, looking across all three time periods, one can argue that even when the organization's strategies were successful, success was more often at the individual level rather than the societal level. For example, there were many references to the fact that even though individuals may have been convinced of the need for women to have political rights, social policies were difficult to change. Nonetheless, the two books clearly indicated that different strategies were developed by the organization over the three time periods. The WCSS was able to develop specific methods and strategies to fulfill women's political rights in Kuwaiti society over time.

Between 1960 and 1990, the organization sought to introduce the idea of women's political rights to Kuwaiti society. At this time the general attitude of the Kuwaiti people concerning women's rights was extremely negative and there were laws restricting political activities of women. For example, the election law of 1962 did not give women the right to vote or run for office, rather, this right was reserved only for men. In addition, the Kuwaiti society was very conservative and upheld an Islamist view that prevented women from participating in public affairs, particularly as political participants. Therefore the main focus of the WCSS at this time was to focus on the cultural dimension of Kuwaiti society. A major strategy used by the WCSS to build awareness was organizing conferences, lectures, seminars and workshops within the country. However, the WCSS did not develop private consciousness raising groups in the homes of members, a strategy developed by activists in the USA at the beginning of

second wave feminism. I think that the WCSS did not use this strategy to obtain women's political rights in Kuwaiti society because it considers the issue of political rights a public matter. I would argue that women do not like to deal with such issues in the privacy of their homes. Also, unlike the U.S.A., the Kuwaiti society is very small and the WCSS can better reach members and people through public events. In addition to organizing these local conferences, the WCSS also participated in international and regional conferences on women's rights as a way to shed light on the political rights of Kuwaiti women and socio-economic developments within the society .

I now focus on actual strategies used during the three separate time periods. Between 1960 and 1990, certain activities were developed that brought attention to women's political situation. These included a seminar on women and elections in 1964, organized specifically for educated and elite women in Kuwaiti society. There was also a seminar organized entitled *Women and Political Rights* in 1973, to discuss giving Kuwaiti women political rights; men were invited to this seminar. In 1981, a conference was organized on *Women's Rights and Parliament* and in 1982 another conference was held on *Women and Development*.

Unlike "*Fifty Years of Work for Women and society*" (The WCSS 2013), the book entitled "*Political Rights for Kuwaiti Women and the Role of the WCSS to demand the Political Rights*" (WCSS, 2009) mainly focused on activities taking place during the late seventies and was written from the perspective of a group of women concerned with the political rights of women as set out by the Kuwaiti constitution. The Constitution called, for equality between people of the society and these women held on to this promise as a way to draw attention to the fact that women were yet to be treated equally. Its

publication helped to intensify the activities of the WCSS in raising women's issues and the problem of political rights through local and international conferences, workshops, and training courses to gain skills.

During the second time period, between 1990 and 2005, the organization expanded its scope with regard to outreach. The documents showed that the WCSS saw this as a time to keep up the pressure to gain political rights for women. For instance, there were statements about the need to "gain Kuwait women's political rights because of their hero role in the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and the international media focus attention on Kuwaiti society especially on women's issue" (The WCSS, 2009: 3). The first conference during this period was entitled: *"The Role of Women in the Development of Cultural, Social and Economic"* (1994). It was a huge international conference held at the 1990s in Kuwait. This conference was adjudged by Kuwaiti feminists to be more significant than any of the earlier conferences because it was held under the auspices of the Kuwaiti government and drew the attention of international groups, particularly Arab women's organizations. There was also significant media coverage. More than 50 international participants were invited, of which 25 were from the Gulf States and other Arab nations. Participants from Kuwait included representatives from various government institutions and civil organizations. Altogether, more than 150 individuals were invited to this conference. This conference was viewed as a landmark. These were many things that came out of the conference that were important for the goals of the WCSS: There were 1) Recognition of political rights for Kuwaiti women and work to increase the participation of women in all economic activities and the availability of equal opportunities in front of it to assume leadership positions, 2) The call to Arab countries that had not signed the

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to sign and the need to withdraw the reservations on some of the items on the importance of women's political participation, and 3) The enactment of legislation and laws that guarantee the equality of women in public life. The next three activities: *Women's Forum and Decision-making* (1996), *World Congress for Cultural, Social and Economic Development towards the Active Participation of Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2001), and a workshop on *The Convention on the Cancellation of Discrimination against Women* (2002), built on the earlier activities and established the credibility of the WCSS.

Another document *Political Rights for Kuwaiti Women and the Role of the WCSS to demand the Political Rights* (The WCSS2009) discussed the methods used by the WCSS between 1990 and 2005. Members and leaders of the WCSS worked ceaselessly in an effort to get women the vote. In 1992, a group of women from the WCSS registered their names at one of the polling stations. The media coverage of this event helped to shed light on women's political rights for the first time in Kuwaiti society. In 1994, the first women's demonstration took place in front of polling stations and continued throughout the day. There were demonstrations and protests conducted by the WCSS in front of the National Assembly. The Council of the National Assembly was meeting at that time to prepare the nation for the new developments on women's political participation. The demonstrations were covered by local and foreign media and help to provide greater momentum for the fight for women's political rights. Furthermore, in 1995, the WCSS continued to work to increase the number of women involved in politics. The WCSS formed the Committee of 24 for "women's issues". This was a

Kuwaiti Association for the benefit of all Kuwaiti citizens, not only women. This group made an important stand denouncing “anti-political violence against Kuwaiti women” (The WCSS2009) as well as focusing on the advancement of Kuwaiti women. The association continued to press for an improvement in the status of women and the need to apply the principle of equal rights as outlined in Article 29 of the Constitution. Recourse through the courts was another strategy used by the WCSS members and leaders in 2000 to demand legal rights after using various political means to raise issues concerning propaganda against the election law raised by seven Kuwaiti courts.

Finally, during the last period of my analysis (2005 to 2010) after women had gained the right to vote and be voted for, the organization developed training courses as a method to help women be ready for the political arena. For instance, there were a number of four- month training courses, included special sessions lasting one week each that dealt with specific issues relating to the problem of discrimination against women. Women were also being trained to participate in campaigns including activities leading up to elections. These educational activities attracted the attention of many women, especially educated women and the elite class of women who live in the capital city. The activities of the WCSS during this time took place only in the capital city with no branch operating in other cities or rural areas. While these training programs were going on, the WCSS continued to organize seminars for the purpose of increasing the awareness among women and other members of the population to these issues.

Once the first Constitution (1962) was inaugurated, the WCSS used it to point out discrepancies between Article 29 on "gender equality" and the election laws, which discriminated against women. In order to gain support for its cause, the WCSS took

advantage of the media and published newspaper articles to promote communication concerning the decisions of the ministers and members of parliament. Further, the organization targeted candidates requesting that they allow members of the WCSS to participate in activities at the electoral headquarters and in election campaigns. During this period, the WCSS was also active through marches and protests; and sought to raise issues in the courts in order to highlight women's political rights. The WCSS continued efforts toward the political rights of Kuwaiti women even after women had gained the right to vote .

It needs to be stated that the WCSS did not work alone in organizing the courses and seminars for women. They worked in conjunction with many well-known international organizations such as Freedom House, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Development Program (UNDP), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). One example was the session entitled "*Skills of Political Action*" organized in conjunction with UNDP to strengthen women's political capacity (2005). The WCSS worked with UNIFEM and UNDP in a media campaign that focused on the fact that women's voices were still marginalized. The campaign was entitled "*Overriding Your Voice*". It urged women to participate in the electoral process and attempted to make them aware of the importance of their role and involvement in the political process.

In the summary of this part, I found that the WCSS started slowly in the first period time (1963-1990) with seminars and local conferences. Then it moved on rapidly in the second time period (1991-2005) here they used different of strategies such as international conference in Kuwait, use of the media locally and internationally

demonstrations and attempts to register. It also sought the assistance of Amir and male member of the National Assembly who believe in women's political rights. Finally, when Kuwaiti women gained their political rights in the last time period (2005-2010) the WCSS changed its strategies into training programs to develop women's skills and knowledge about candidates and the voting process.

### **Responses of members and the leadership**

In this section, I focus on the views of leaders and members of the WCSS whom I interviewed about the strategies used by the WCSS to help women achieve the goal of political participation. The responses supported the idea that WCSS was very active in terms of raising awareness during the early period. For instance, the first president (1967-1990), noted the organizing "Seminars, during the time of parliamentary elections. It was important for us to visit political headquarters and enter into discussions with the male candidates. This promoted more political discussions as well as contact with decision-makers." She talked at length about her time as president and what she did to demand women's political rights and the strategies used during the era of her presidency, which was early in the women's rights movement.

Another participant, who is the current president (2013-present), drew attention to the protests and demonstrations that took place particularly after 1991: "After the Iraqi invasion (1991), specifically in 1994, the WCSS organized a demonstration for the political rights of women." She insisted that the protests and demonstrations used after the invasion were a new type of strategy among women fighting for rights. She believed that this strategy became more salient during the years between 1990 and 2005. Others

agreed with this, for instance, another member of the WCSS argued that: “Going out into the street and going to places of nomination and election and the electoral headquarters to demand their political rights, this was a strategy used in the second time period of the demand of women’s political rights.” Another leader of the WCSS who was a past president of the WCSS (1992-1998), stated that: “There were weekly demonstrations in front of National Assembly demanding women's rights and equality policy with a youth and men’s group to support women's issues, especially the political right, because it helped to achieve societal equality for all.” Her emphasis was on the demonstrations in the front of National Assembly and she spoke about the problem of equality between people in the same society.

When I presented the same question to another member of the WCSS, she responded thus: "Raised awareness, presented training courses for women to understand their rights and the important role in society they have through political participation, voting, and being involved as well as the importance of political participation of women in elections." Although she discussed strategies in different time periods of the struggle to obtain women's political rights, she particularly emphasized the second and the third periods: “Members of the WCSS also focused on the media and its role in bringing women's issues to the local and international communities." She also felt that using media outlets was a good strategy to gain political rights for women and she emphasized the fact that the WCSS worked closely with the “international community" such as UN and UNDP.

Given my interest in outlining the different strategies used by the WCSS, I asked my interviewees to indicate which strategies listed below were used by the WCSS: 1) -

Hosting lectures, Seminars or workshops, 2) Organizing protest demonstrations, 3) Seeking the assistance of the Amir, 4) Using the media to reach the public, 5) Other. All the participants of the WCSS checked every one of the listed strategies. This made it clear that the WCSS had used a wide variety of strategies to obtain women's political right. Unlike some of the stereotypical views about women from the Middle East, my data from Kuwait show that female activists have been bold and use many of the same strategies that Western feminists have used in staking their claim for political participation.

Lastly, I asked the participants whether or not there were any special strategies the WCSS has used to ensure that the Kuwaiti Constitution is implemented. The following types of answers were given. One participant noted that they emphasized the "Equality between men and women, as found in Article 29 of the Constitution 1962". Also another participant agreed with that and she noted " Article 29 of equality between citizens and there is no difference between them in color, language, or sex." All my respondents noted that the 1962 Constitution was an important landmark and was used as leverage to get attention for women's political participation.

As a result, I found that the answers' of leaders and members of the WCSS and the secondary sources are concerned with demanding women's political rights in Kuwait. I found that they focused on the constitution, protests in the front of National Assembly, going to visit the Amir and talking about women's issues, equality between women and men and the great role of women during the invasion in 1990-1991. Also there was concern about international agencies such as the UN and UNDP, seminars and lectures about women's political rights and a rising of awareness about their rights in Kuwaiti

society. Overall, I found that not only were there many strategies and methods used to obtain the political rights of women, but that the strategies became more audacious as time went on.

### **The impact of the WCSS in Kuwait**

My last research question focuses on the impact the WCSS has made on Kuwaiti women's political participation in Kuwait by comparing data from two samples. Specifically, I compare the perspectives of the leaders and members of the WCSS with those of the general population. As I discussed in chapter 2, an organization such as the WCSS competes within the political arena with other groups that have their own ideologies and strategies regarding women's roles in Kuwait. Therefore, it is important to consider not only the amount of impact in comparison to 'tribal' groups and Islamic organizations, but also the areas of political life impacted by WCSS in comparison to other groups.

I asked the participants of each sample if they thought the WCSS had influenced government decision-makers regarding their demand for Kuwaiti women's political participation. The sample consisting of the WCSS leaders and members (11) all answered in the affirmative, indicating they felt the WCSS was able to influence government decision-makers. An important strategy towards the attainment of their goals, the members believed, was obtaining the confidence of the Head of State, the Amir Sheikh Jaber Alahmad Alsubah. A meeting held in 1999 between the WCSS and the Amir seemed to work greatly in their favor. One participant, a leader in the WCSS noted:

"Yes, our discussion with the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad made a great impression on him regarding the problem of women's

political rights in Kuwait. We were able to point out to him that women were already playing significant roles in all other sectors of the society including social, economic and educational spheres. Women had rights in all areas of life except in the political arena. They needed to be given the same political rights as Kuwaiti men."

The opinion of another member was consistent with the leader's comment:

"Indeed, the leaders of the WCSS have influenced decision makers concerning their demand for women's political rights, especially through their visit to Amir." The WCSS discussed the issue of political rights of Kuwaiti women with the Head of State because they knew the Amir had more power than other decision makers in Kuwaiti society.

Within Kuwaiti society, the Amir is similar to a Monarch or Supreme leader. All political decisions must have his support. This is why the WCSS decided to go straight to the top and obtain the support of the most powerful person in the nation, similar to the strategy used by feminists in Morocco (Salime, 2003). She argued that many of the concessions obtained by the liberal wing of the women's movement in Morocco resulted from their discussions with the Monarch.

However, other branches of government have their own power. Some members of the WCSS focused on influencing members of the National Assembly because this body has legislative authority to pass laws. As the former leader of the WCSS mentioned, "the WCSS discussed with the National Assembly Speaker Jassim Al Kharafi and emphasized the importance of granting Kuwaiti women the right to vote and stand for elections." The comment of another WCSS participant supports this view: "Yes, the WCSS has influenced political decision makers. We put a lot of pressure on the legislative authority regarding the approval of women's political rights." When asked to specify how the WCSS applied this pressure, she noted:

“We meet with the National Assembly and Members of Parliament weekly, talking with them about the importance of passing laws concerning women's political rights through parliament. This will present a good image of Kuwaiti society to Western societies and it is how the democratic process is conducted.”

It is interesting, however, that participants who were not members of the WCSS, but members of the general public, disagreed with this view and felt the WCSS has not exhibited influence over decision-makers, neither the Amir or the National Assembly, regarding their demands for political participation of Kuwaiti women. One participant, a 47 year old male, strongly rejected the notion of the WCSS impacting the views of decision-makers, since, according to his view, the organization represents a small portion of society, making it difficult to judge what impact they might have had on decision makers. He was insistent that women could not have had such an impact; rather, rights given to women could only have come from men who had the power to change things. He commented:

“I do not think women could have had an impact on decision-makers. The WCSS is a small group within the society, representing the views of a single class of women, not the whole of society. It was men, like me, who gave women their political rights.”

This participant is an activist and a member in the Brotherhood Society in Kuwait. I feel this man refuses to give women credit for fighting for and defending their political rights because members of the WCSS are upper-class with a generally liberal viewpoint. He felt the change in the law was brought about by men who serve as members of parliament and work within other areas of government. He further did not believe the WCSS members and leaders worked hard to change men's mind regarding the political

rights of women. Another participant (male, age 53), agreed with him and also felt national and international pressure was important:

“I do not think so, because the change came because of the many pressures on Kuwait at that time, for example, pressure from the UN and human rights organizations.”

According to the view of these participants, international pressure and the government's desire to present a positive image to the Western world, rejecting the idea of inequality between men and women in Kuwait was responsible for the attainment of political rights for women. Kuwait is a Middle Eastern nation and a prevalent stereotype held by Westerners is that there is no equality between men and women in Middle Eastern nations. Kuwait is thought to be the same in this regard as other MENA nations. The participants (9) who were not members of the WCSS felt the WCSS had no impact upon the decision- makers regarding Kuwaiti women's political participation in Kuwait .

Members of the WCSS, many of who were older and longtime participants in civil rights activities, clearly held a very different perspective from non-members. The majority of the non-members (90%) felt the WCSS has had little impact on Kuwaiti women's political rights. I believe this may be because this group consists largely of younger outsiders who are not privy to a historical view of the activities of the WCSS. Secondly, it is possible that members of the WCSS place more emphasis on their interaction with policy makers during the period of 1960 through 2005 than the general public does .

I asked both samples if they felt Kuwaiti women's political participation since 2005 has contributed in any way to changes in the status of women in Kuwaiti society. The majority of the WCSS sample (95%) felt that the status of Kuwaiti women changed

with the acquisition of political rights and the subsequent increase in their activity within the political system. This was a very different view from that held by the majority of the general population (80%) who felt the status of Kuwaiti women has changed very little because Kuwaiti men still hold the bulk of political power. In the words of one participant from the general population (48 year old male) : "Since 2005, we see a few changes in the status of women in society, but men in Kuwait still resist involvement of women within political life." Another participant, (59 year old male) responded: "Not much, women have entered parliament, but men still have significant power in many things and will not forgo their authority." Also, according to the view of another participant (53 year old male), Kuwaiti women still face many problems and little has changed in their status in society. Specifically, he noted: "The right to political participation has not changed much in this society. There are still problems facing women in Kuwait." In contrast, the WCSS sample perceives the status of Kuwaiti women as improving over time with increased participation within society. One participant (79 year old female) stated that: "Kuwaiti women have begun to act more as partners in the development process, for instance, in social, cultural, economic and now in the political systems." Another female participant also viewed the status of women as changed after the Kuwaiti women gained their political rights noting: "Of course, the status of women has changed, especially after the attainment of women's political rights for in 2005, we now see women in decision-making roles. For example, there has been a woman serving as a member of parliament and a minister in the government since 2005." According to these views, the increase of political activities since Kuwaiti women gained their political rights in 2005 has influenced their societal status. WCSS members felt this improvement

in women's societal status will continue over time as women gain more political experience.

Significant differences in perspectives exist between samples regarding the changing status of women within society. The members of the general population did not acknowledge a change in women's political status because they generally oppose the involvement of women in political matters, which they see as a male venue. However, their view contrasts heavily with that of the WCSS members and leaders who feel that political experiences positively influences the societal position of Kuwaiti women.

Next, I queried both samples concerning their view of the role, which tribal organizations have played in the fight for women's political participation. These responses surprised me. Both samples, leaders and members of the WCSS and men and women within the general population, clearly felt that tribal groups have a long history of being critical of women's attainment of political rights. According to a female participant (48 years of age) from the general population, the tribal organization holds the position that any increase in public activities of women, particularly in the political arena, would only heighten the problem of gender conflict in the society:

“The position of tribal groups has been to reject women's political participation because they fear an increase in social unrest what would occur with the granting of women's political rights. They feel women should stay at home for their own protection and the security of society in general. Also, they do not like what they perceive women's changing status in the West. This fills them with fear and horror. They also feel women's access to political rights disempowers men and devalues the culture.”

Another 47 year old male from the general population stated: "The tribal position is strongly opposed to women exhibiting themselves in public and still refuses to

allow participation of women within the political sphere.” This participant is a member of a tribal organization and strongly rejects participation of women within the political arena. Contrasting with this response, a member of the WCSS contended:

“The tribal groups are a problem in Kuwaiti society because they refuse to allow women's participation in political life or give women any rights. They absolutely refuse to acknowledge women’s political rights or even other social rights. I believe these people are religious fanatics and things are very difficult for them.”

She felt the tribal view is “a problem” because the tribe rejects any rights for women in social or political systems. They are highly religious and they find it difficult to support women’s rights, especially within the political sphere. Participants from both samples indicated that tribal organizations do not believe women should have political rights. They held this view before and after 2005 even though women have now received the right to vote .

Islamic organizations are distinct from either liberal groups such as the WCSS or the aforementioned tribal groups, as I discussed in chapters two and three. Because of these differences I was also interested in the participant’s views concerning women’s Islamic organizations particularly since Kuwaiti women have obtained the right to vote in Kuwait. It is general knowledge that Women’s Islamic organizations are strongly opposed to the types of changes advocated by the WCSS. One member of the WCSS noted that Islamic groups are being forced to change their views in the face of new developments taking place in the nation. She contended:

“Women’s Islamic organizations were against women's political rights, but ultimately these organizations became aware of the changes occurring in society and they are now very organized, mobilizing the voice of women and targeting our male candidates from an Islamic legal perspective.”

She felt that the position of women's Islamic organizations has shifted from opposition to women's political participation to that of supporting male candidates in the elections. She clearly felt, however, that *real differences* exist between Islamic organizations and groups such as the WCSS. Islamic organizations only support male candidates. While grudgingly accepting the idea that women should be allowed to vote, they still hold strong opposition to the idea of women standing for office. Their views on women's political participation remain quite conservative.

Members of the general population answered this question differently. They believed that women's Islamic organizations are now becoming supportive of women's political rights. One male participant (47 years old) commented:

“Women's Islamic organizations are not opposed to political participation of women. Many supported women before 2005 and even more after 2005. Evidence of this is seen by the presence of the Islamic candidate Bayader Al-Salam.”

This individual felt the women's Islamic organizations support women, and have recently participated in women's movement, recognizing political rights of Kuwaiti women. Another male participant (67 years of age) added:

“Before 2005 Islamic attitudes were strongly against women's political rights with the exception of the Shiite. Muslim Sunni groups were generally not supportive of this right. Now attitudes are changing. Now the women's Muslim Sunni are among the most supportive of this right. Today, they even support the idea of women being elected for office.”

However, Muslim Sunni men still refuse to accept the presence of women in the political sphere. He insisted that the Sunni women's Islamic organizations are changing, before 2005 they opposed women's political participation, after 2005 they began supporting the new ideas, but only to a very limited extent.

Finally, I asked the interviewees if they felt the WCSS has had more impact than either the women's Islamic and tribal organizations. Here also I found that there was a distinct difference between the two samples. The participants who are members or leaders of the WCSS feel the WCSS has had a greater impact than the other two types of organizations. As one member indicated:

“Yes, the WCSS has had an obvious effect from 1963 to the pre-invasion period. It impacted many different areas of society, but now we find that the tribe and Islamic organizations are beginning to have real impact in several areas in society. Personally, I believe that they are ruining things, because of the role they now play as decision makers in many departments and agencies.”

This participant was clearly focusing on the impact of the WCSS from 1963 to 1990. During that time there was no doubt the WCSS impacted Kuwaiti society more than tribal and Islamic organizations. This was the pioneer period in Kuwait. However, after the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and after Kuwaiti women gained voting in 2005, these other groups, who benefitted from the pioneer work of the WCSS, were able to hold public positions and promote ideas that are actually more conservative than the WCSS would like to see. As another participant from the WCSS expressed:

“Surely, the WCSS was the only social organization in Kuwait calling for women's rights, especially political rights, and pushing for women’s participation in decision-making equal to that of men in Kuwaiti society. The strategies of the WCSS were many and varied in order to obtain political rights. They used petitions, complaints and conversations with the senior leadership who were originally against political rights for women.”

This was another example of the visible impact the WCSS had on political participation before 2005 when Kuwaiti women had not yet gained their political rights.

No effort was being made at that time by any other women's groups, concerning women's political participation.

The views given by members of the WCSS above were contrary to those of participants from the general population who felt that the WCSS did not have a greater impact on the fight for women's political rights than the other two types of organizations.

One female respondent, who is a member of the Islamic women's organization, mentioned:

"I do not see that the WCSS has more impact on society and people, rather, it's the opposite. Islamic organizations now have greater influence on society. Before 2005, the WCSS was the lone voice for women's political rights and at the forefront in the media, but now Islamic organizations have emerged, perfecting the art of rhetoric. Men who belong to Islamic movements and are more vocal than men who belong to or are sympathetic to liberal or open organizations are the proof of this."

The point this participant made concerns the impact of the WCSS on society before 2005 when women did not have the right to vote. Once women obtained this right, Islamic organizations were able to have a much greater impact on the society than organizations such as the WCSS that held liberal views. Another male participant (47 years old) stated:

"I do not think that any group has that much influence in society. To begin with, tribal organizations were not interested and had no effect on women's political participation. Secondly, all political rights came from the executive authority, not from any other source, and especially not from the WCSS."

Clearly this respondent was quite unaware that the executive officials and other politicians had to be persuaded to change their minds and grant women political rights. Apparently, he thought this happened without any pressure from any women's organizations, and he is only concerned with the final edict, or the changed law that

allowed women to vote. However, one must note that events between 1960 and 2005 are as important as those occurring after 2005. This study was attempting to evaluate the activities of the WCSS during three time periods. Members of the WCSS are very conscious of the fact that life did not change for women without the background work of their organization. Nonetheless, it would appear that after the vote was given to women in 2005, other groups were able to seize the opportunity and work for the kinds of changes they, the other groups, wanted to see in society. Thus both the Islamic organizations and the tribal organizations now have increasing impact on the society, but WCSS members point out that these new developments could not have occurred without the foundation laid earlier by their organization.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the WCSS in women's rights including the impact of the organization on participation of women in Kuwaiti politics since the 1960s. There were three specific research questions developed. These questions were rooted in the women's movement, feminist literature, which focuses on the political participation of women, and my own interest in issues surrounding the problems of women in the Kuwaiti society.

The first research question focused on the WCSS as a feminist organization in Kuwait. My results indicate the WCSS can be designated a feminist organization: one that advocates for gender equality and the political rights of women through political participation of women in political institutions generally dominated by men. Political participation would include being able to vote, standing for elections and serving as a member of the National Assembly and other governmental offices.

Members of the WCSS generally felt that the organization is a liberal feminist organization in terms of its goals and activities, some members of the general population suggested, however, that the WCSS has had too much influence from West. Members of the organization did not feel this was true. The organization's objective has been to promote an understanding of the political rights of women within an Arab Muslim framework. Information given by my interviewees indicated that there are many strands of the liberal perspective within the Kuwaiti society. This is an issue that requires further research. Nonetheless, the WCSS appears to be one of those liberal organizations that does not subscribe officially to the use of the Qur'an (Sharia laws) or the tenets of Islam

as a basis or justification in demanding political rights for women; rather this organization focused on legal rights as embedded in the constitution. An Na'im, the Sudanese scholar, has argued that any constitution can be seen as a legal document that is different from those legal documents developed from the Qur'an and that each type of law has a different role to play in the construction of an Islamic society (An Na'im 2008). It would appear members of the WCSS do not see the need to choose between Islam and the political rights of women. They are members of a liberal organization and the same time Muslims in their private lives. The study did reveal that this is not the view of conservative women who belong to other groups and who believe that the Qur'an and Sharia laws already protect women's rights and can be used as the basis of laws on political participation. I would argue that in Kuwaiti society the liberal view, as upheld by the WCSS, is the predominant approach, although Islamist and Tribalist approaches exist, as I have argued in chapter five.

The second research question focused on the methods and strategies previously used by the WCSS to demand that women be allowed to participate in political activities. According to my findings, women's political participation in Kuwait was earned after fifty years of hard work through the women's rights movement. This marks an important step forward in the struggle to gain political participation for women over time. As part of this movement, the WCSS used many strategies to secure the right of political participation for Kuwaiti women. The information gained from the members and leaders of the WCSS indicate they believe that the attitudes held by the Kuwaiti people on the political rights of women are still traditional and people view women's political participation quite negatively. Nonetheless, new laws have been put in place, particularly

between 1963 and 2005; the point at which women won the right to vote. The most successful strategies employed by the WCSS were between 1963-1990, when they worked on raising awareness within the population, and 1990-2005, when they staged protests/ demonstrations, held meeting with the politicians, visited with the Amir, and organized international conferences. However, the WCSS became less effective after women gained their political rights in 2005. They were not as vocal, and therefore did not stand out as much from the rest of the society after 2005 as they had in the earlier years. This creates a problem when examining the methods and strategies, the WCSS used over time a long period of time (1963-2010). I would submit that the heyday of the organization was between 1963 and 2005.

Finally, my third research question concerned the impact of the WCSS upon Kuwaiti society in general. The results are clear that the WCSS supported suffrage for Kuwaiti women and has called for political participation of women since the early 1970s. However, it does not appear that the WCSS has attempted to influence persons who live outside Kuwait City, the capitol of Kuwait, or men and women outside of the upper or upper middle class. It is therefore difficult to assess the impact of the WCSS on the entire Kuwaiti society. I would suggest, however, that given their own class affiliation as noted in chapter five, this group of women has had a lot of impact on the upper classes and the educated elite. It would appear that they have not had an impact on the Tribal or conservative Islamist groups. These latter groups are now making headway within the general population.

In reference to the theories of social movements discussed in chapter 3, I want to suggest that, the resource mobilization model supports the findings of this dissertation

regarding initial success of the WCSS, particularly during its heyday. First, the organization was able to use the political, economic and symbolic support of the Amir, once it had convinced him to accept the idea of political participation of women. These resources cannot be over emphasized in its attempt to consolidate its position.

Additionally, the positive working relationships between the WCSS and international organizations allowed the WCSS to be seen as a legitimate organization within the Kuwaiti society. The support received from both the Amir and international organizations were important in raising the status of the organization.

The major findings in this study include information regarding the role and impact of the WCSS and how this has shifted in Kuwaiti society over time. The WCSS worked effectively with positive results concerning developments in the fight for women's political participation from 1963 until their political rights were obtained in 2005. Today, the WCSS faces problems and conflicts with other social groups in Kuwait. The different organizations, the WCSS, Islamic, Islamist and Tribal groups have had greater difficulty working together since Kuwaiti women gained their political rights in 2005, largely because of the more liberal views of the WCSS. In actuality, the Islamic, Islamist, and Tribal groups opposed women's rights before 2005; however, they are now attempting to use the new rights fought for by the WCSS to influence legislation in the Kuwaiti Parliament. Many of their ideas are more conservative than those of the WCSS. Also, these groups seem to have a stronger impact on the general population than the WCSS. Their reach within the society, particularly among the less educated and rural segments, appears to be wider.

A major limitation of this work is that it has used one case study for understanding the struggle for political rights in Kuwaiti society. My findings cannot be generalized to all the women's organizations in the Kuwaiti women's movement. As I have noted consistently there are differing ideologies across organizations with different perspectives, views and attitudes regarding women's political participation in society. More work is needed in this area. Furthermore, some WCSS documents were destroyed during the Iraqi invasion of 1990-1991, particularly the documents relating to the period of 1963 through 1990. The lack of these important data makes it difficult to have a broader understanding of some of the activities that occurred during that era. My information comes almost completely from members and leaders of the WCSS who lived and worked during that period. Another major limitation of this study is the sample size. Additional work using a larger sample from the general population, and stratified along important regional and educational lines would be beneficial. Examples of such samples would be Kuwait University students and members of tribal and Islamist organizations, as well as rural individuals. This would allow a better understanding of what the general population knows about the role of the WCSS in society. It would also be interesting to find out if different groups see the WCSS as a feminist organization and to understand liberal feminism from their perspectives .

The results of this study provide many implications for future research, including various aspects of Kuwaiti women's status and political participation. Thus, in addition to studying the views of various groups on the WCSS, comparative studies need to be done on the perspectives and activities of other groups: liberal, Islamic, Islamist and Tribal groups. Since women's groups and organizations in Kuwait are not united in their goals

and activities, future studies can be conducted to compare the history and work of the other groups mentioned in this study. How different groups view their position within the political landscape of Kuwait and their plans for the future are all interesting studies waiting to be done.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

My name is Marzouqah Q. Alazmi and I am a Ph.D student in the Department of Sociology, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA. I am writing to tell you about the study I am conducting: "THE WOMEN'S CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SOCIETY (WCSS): IT'S ROLE IN SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN KUWAIT (1963-2010)". I believe this study is important because women's rights are important social and political issues and political participation of women is growing throughout the public sphere. One strategy of the women's movement around the world has been the development of organizations that focus more strongly on achieving equal political rights for women. The specific focus of this study is the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) because it is the oldest and largest women's organization in Kuwaiti society, and it is focused on increasing the political participation of women. Specifically, I wish to study the role and impact of the WCSS in shaping the political participation of women from the 1960's until 2010 .

#### **SECTION (A): DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

- 1) Gender:
  - ( ) Male
  - ( ) Female
- 2) Marital Status:
  - ( ) Single
  - ( ) Married
  - ( ) Divorced
  - ( ) Widowed
- 3) What is your educational level?
  - ( ) Less than high school
  - ( ) High school
  - ( ) Diploma
  - ( ) B.A (In Kuwait/ Abroad)
  - ( ) M.A (In Kuwait/ Abroad)
  - ( ) Ph.D. (In Kuwait/ Abroad)
- 4) What is your religious affiliation. \_\_\_\_\_ :
- 5) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ Years.

#### **SECTION (B): THE WCSS IS FEMINIST ORGANIZATION**

- 1) Are you a member of the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS)?

( ) Yes ( ) No

A- How long have you been a member?

B- Do you hold a leadership position in the WCSS? ( ) Yes ( ) No

C- What is your role. \_\_\_\_\_ ?

D- Why did you join to the WCSS?

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2) Why was the WCSS established in 1963, by what group?

3) The WCSS has been called a feminist organization. Do you agree with this statement?

( ) Agree ( ) Disagree

A- Why or why not?

4) Which of the following approaches to feminism do you feel best describes the WCSS as an organization?

( ) Islamic Feminism

( ) Liberal Feminism

( ) Radical Feminism

( ) Socialist Feminism

( ) Other If other, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

A- Why do you describe the WCSS as a \_\_\_\_\_ feminist organization?

B- What is the ideology of the WCSS?

C- What are the main activities of the WCSS?

D- How is the WCSS different from other women's groups in Kuwait society?

5) Has the WCSS ever worked with any feminist group outside of Kuwait?

( ) Other MENA women's group

( ) American women's group

( ) European women's group

( ) Other If other, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

A- What project did WCSS do with them?

B- What was the outcome?

6) Would you describe the WCSS as a secular organization?

( ) Yes

( ) No

A- Describe what you mean by "secular" organization?

7) Does the WCSS sometimes disagree with laws derived from the Qu'ran?

( ) Yes ( ) No

A- How do you feel about that?

B- How did it seek to solve the problem?

8) What does women's political participation mean to the WCSS?

A- What specific political rights do you feel women still do not have in Kuwait ?

B- What does the WCSS think is stopping women from gaining these rights?

- C- What is the WCSS presently doing to solve this problem?  
 D- What other aspects of women's political participation has the WCSS worked on since 1963?
- 9) How would you describe the social environment in which the WCSS works? Please give examples .
- A- Does the social environment affect how the WCSS goes about doing its work? Please give examples.
- 10) In your view has the WCSS changed over time since 1963:  
 - In structure? ( ) Yes ( ) No  
 Explain what changed?  
 - In ideology? ( ) Yes ( ) No  
 Explain what changed?  
 - In activities? ( ) Yes ( ) No  
 Explain what changed?
- A- Why do you think these changes over time have occurred?
- 11) Do you have anything more you want to tell me about the WCSS, please?

**SECTION (C): METHODS AND STRATEGIES OF THE WCSS.**

- 1) Does the Women's Cultural and Social Society works with fundamental religious groups in order to obtain the political participation of women in Kuwaiti society?
- 2) Do you feel the role and activities of the WCSS are restricted in any way? Why or why not?
- 3) What strategies of the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) do you feel have been most successful to help achieve political participation for women?  
 A- Which one was most successful?  
 B- Which one was least successful?
- 1) Are there any other strategies that you feel the WCSS could be using to obtain its goals?  
 A- What would you say stops the WCSS from using these strategies?
- 2) Has the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) organized any of the following activities as part of its work?  
 ( ) Hosted lectures  
 ( ) Seminars or workshops  
 ( ) Organized protest demonstrations  
 ( ) Sought the assistance of the Amir  
 ( ) Approached the media to reach the public  
 ( ) Other, please list \_\_\_\_\_
- A- Which of the above activities were successful and which were not successful?  
 B- Why or why not?
- 6) Kuwait now has a constitution. What strategies has the WCSS used to make sure the constitution is being implemented?

7) If the WCSS wanted to have women complete in the Olympics, what strategies would it try to use to obtain this goal?

**SECTION (D): THE IMPACT OF THE WCSS IN KUWAIT:**

1) Do you think that the Women's Cultural and Social Society has influenced government decision-makers concerning their demand for women's political participation? If yes, give an example, please.

2) Do you think that the Women's Cultural and Social Society has had an impact on women's political participation in Kuwait?

( ) A lot

( ) Some

( ) Neutral

( ) Not Much

( ) None

3) Which has been the most difficult goal to achieve?

4) From your point of view, has women's political participation contributed to the change of the status of Kuwaiti women and their participation in society?

5) What is the tribal position regarding Kuwaiti women's political participation?

6) What is the position of women's Islamic organizations regarding Kuwaiti women's political participation?

7) Do you think that the WCSS has had more impact than either the women's Islamic or tribal organizations?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW IN THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

### اسئلة المقابلة

انا مرزوقة قوبيضي القوبيضي, طالبة دكتوراه في قسم علم الاجتماع, جامعه ميسوري-كولومبيا, الولايات ( : دورها في تشكيل WCSS المتحدة الامريكية. اقوم بإجراء دراسة عن: "الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية) المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في الكويت (1963-2010). اعتقد بأهمية هذه الدراسة حيث ان تعتبر حقوق المرأة و مشاركتها السياسية من القضايا الاجتماعية و السياسية الهامة في المجال العام و ايضا تعتبر الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية من اقدم و اكبر جمعية نسائية في المجتمع الكويتي. و من احدى استراتيجيات الحركة النسائية في جميع دول العالم هي تطوير التنظيمات التي تدعم و تسعى لتحقيق الحقوق السياسية المتساوية للمرأة. و في هذه الدراسة اركز على دور و تأثير الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية في تشكيل المشاركة السياسية للمرأة و تزايد مشاركتها سياسيا من 1960 الى 2010.

### القسم الاول: الاسئلة العامة

- النوع: (1  
( ) ذكر  
( ) انثى  
الحالة الاجتماعية: (2  
( ) اعزب  
( ) متزوج  
( ) مطلق  
( ) ارمل  
المستوى التعليمي: (3  
( ) اقل من الثانوي  
( ) ثانوي  
( ) دبلوم  
( ) بكالوريوس ( الكويت\ في الخارج)  
( ) ماجستير ( الكويت\ في الخارج)  
( ) دكتوراه ( الكويت\ في الخارج)  
(4) الديانة:  
(5) العمر: \_\_\_\_\_ سنة

### القسم الثاني: الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية هي منظمة نسائية

- هل انت عضو في الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا (1  
أ- منذ متى و انت عضوا؟  
ب- هل لديك منصب أو دور قيادي في الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا  
ت- ما هو دورك؟ \_\_\_\_\_

ث- ما اسباب الانضمام الى الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟

اي طبقة اجتماعية قامت على انشاء الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية, و لماذا؟ (2)

هل توافق بتصنيف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كمنظمة نسوية في المجتمع الكويتي؟ (3)  
( ) اوافق ( ) لا اوافق  
لماذا او لماذا لا؟ أ-

من وجهه نظرك, اي من الاتجاهات الفكرية النسوية التالية تصف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كمنظمة نسوية؟ (4)

- ( ) النسوية الاسلامية
- ( ) النسوية الليبرالية
- ( ) النسوية الراديكالية
- ( ) النسوية الاشتراكية

( ) اخرى يرجى التوضيح  
لماذا تصفون الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كمنظمة النسوية ؟ أ-

ب- ما هو الاتجاه الفكري للجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟

ت- ما هي الانشطة الرئيسية للجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟

ث- بماذا تختلف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية عن غيرها من مجموعات نسائية في المجتمع الكويتي؟

هل سبق للجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية العمل مع جماعات نسوية خارج الكويت على سبيل المثال؟ (5)

- ( ) المجموعة النسائية في مصر و شمال افريقيا
- ( ) المجموعة النسائية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية
- ( ) المجموعة النسائية في اوروبا

( ) اخرى يرجى التوضيح

أ- ما هو المشروع الذي شاركت فيه الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية معم؟

ب- و ما كانت النتيجة؟

هل تصفون الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كنظمة علمانية؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا (6)

أ- ما هو مفهومك للمنظمة العلمانية؟

هل هناك بعض اهداف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية لا تتوافق مع القوانين المستمدة من (7) القرآن الكريم احيانا؟

( ) نعم ( ) لا  
أ- ما هي وجهه نظرك حيال ذلك؟

ب- ما هي اقتراحاتك لحل هذه القضية؟

8) ماذا تعني المشاركة السياسية للمرأة لدى الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟

أ- هل هناك بعض من الحقوق السياسية لم تحصل عليها المرأة الكويتية حتى الان؟

ب- ما هو موقف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية من تعطيل حصول المرأة الكويتية على هذه الحقوق؟

ت- ما هو الدور الفعال الذي تقوم به الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية لحل هذه القضية في الوقت الراهن؟

ث- ما هي الجوانب الأخرى من المشاركة السياسية للمرأة لدى الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية عملت عليها منذ عام 1963؟

9) ما هو وصفك للبيئة الاجتماعية التي عملت من خلالها الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟ يرجى إعطاء أمثلة على ذلك.

أ- هل أثرت البيئة الاجتماعية على عمل الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟ يرجى إعطاء أمثلة على ذلك.

10) من وجهة نظرك، هل الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية تغيرت مع مرور الوقت منذ عام 1963 حتى الآن:

في الهيكل؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا  
- اشرح ما تغير؟

في الاتجاه الفكري؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا  
- اشرح ما تغير؟

في الأنشطة؟ ( ) نعم ( ) لا

اشرح ما تغير؟

باعتقادك, ما هي اسباب هذا التغير مع مرور الوقت؟ أ-

هل تود ان تضيف معلومة عن الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية؟ (11)

### القسم الثالث: طرق واستراتيجيات الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية

هل عملت الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية مع الجماعات الدينية من اجل الحصول على (1) المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في المجتمع الكويتي؟

هل تشعر ان دور و أنشطة الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية مقيدة او محددة باي شكل من (2) الاشكال؟ لماذا او لماذا لا؟

من وجهة نظرك, اي من الاستراتيجيات التي عملت بها الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية (3) كانت الاكثر نجاحا لتحقيق المشاركة السياسية للمرأة؟

ايهم الاكثر نجاحا؟ أ-

ايهم الاقل نجاحا؟ ب-

هل تقترح استراتيجيات اخرى يمكن للجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية اتباعها او استخدامها (4) لتحقيق اهدافها؟

ما هي الاسباب التي منعت الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية من استخدام او اتباع بعض من أ- الاستراتيجيات المقترحة؟

- اي من الانشطة التالية نظمتها الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كجزء من عملها: (5)
- ( ) استضافة المحاضرات
  - ( ) ندوات أو ورش عمل
  - ( ) اقامة المظاهرات او اعتصامات
  - ( ) طلب مساعدة من امير البلاد
  - ( ) الاستعانة بوسائل الاعلام للوصول الى الجمهور
  - ( ) اخرى يرجى التوضيح

اي من الانشطة المذكورة اعلاه كانت ناجحة و التي لم تكن ناجحة؟ أ-

لماذا او لماذا لا؟ ب-

بما ان الكويت دولة دستورية. ما هي المواد التي استعانت بها الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية (6) كاستراتيجية لتطبيق الدستور بشأن المشاركة السياسية للمرأة الكويتية؟

من اهداف الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية هي حصول المرأة الكويتية على المشاركة الرسمية (7) في دورة الالعاب الاولمبية, فما هي الاستراتيجيات التي يمكن اتخاذها لتحقيق هذا الهدف؟

القسم الرابع: أثر الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية في الكويت

هل تعتقد ان الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية قد اثرت على متخذي القرار بشأن حصول (1) المرأة الكويتية على المشاركة السياسية؟ اذا كان الجواب ب (نعم) يرجى اعطاء مثال على ذلك من فضلك.

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هل تعتقد ان الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كان لها تأثيرا على المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في (2) الكويت؟

- ( ) كثيرا  
( ) بعض الشيء  
( ) محايد  
( ) ليس كثيرا  
( ) لا يوجد

ما هو كان الهدف الاكثر صعوبة للجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية في تحقيقه؟ (3)

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من وجهة نظرك, هل ساهمت المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في تغيير وضع المرأة الكويتية و (4) مشاركتها في المجتمع؟

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ما هو موقف القبيلة بشأن المشاركة السياسية للمرأة الكويتية؟ (5)

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(6) ما هو موقف التنظيمات النسائية الاسلامية بشأن المشاركة السياسية للمرأة الكويتية؟

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هل تعتقد ان الجمعية النسائية الثقافية الاجتماعية كانت لها تأثير اكثر من التنظيمات النسائية (7) الاسلامية و القبيلة بشأن المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في المجتمع الكويتي؟

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شكرا جزيلاً لك على وقتك وتعاونك. سوف تكون ردودكم مفيدة للغاية.

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## VITA

Marzouqah Q. Alazmi was born in Kuwait City. Alazmi is a sociologist interested in gender and social equality issues in Kuwaiti society and has studied in the United States to develop a better understanding of the social phenomena of gender inequalities. This study has allowed a deep exploration of gender and social equality issues, creating a desire to continue research of these issues in her home country of Kuwait. Alazmi will do this by following carefully the current developments of key issues in women's rights movements within social and political circles of Kuwait and the broader area of the Middle East.

Alazmi's study has evoked questions within herself concerning the meaning of inequality, gender and sex in the Middle East. Although there are necessarily differences between the understanding of gender inequalities in the Middle East compared to the way these issues are defined by Western scholars, Alazmi's understanding of these issues have been affected by her studies in the United States. Alazmi will apply these insights to her future studies of gender inequality and the women's right movement in Kuwaiti society. Currently Alazmi is interested specifically in the relationship between dominant masculine and subordinate feminine groups. Many scholars, including Alazmi, are affected by Western studies, through their study of these phenomena in specific cultures, and strive to glean insights and experience in order to apply them to the Middle East.