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2017

https://doi.org/10.25595/2726

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Rajakumar, Mohanalakshmi; Bengali, Mariam; Shahzad, Rumsha; Kane, Tanya: *Education, Marriage, and Professionalization: The Modern Qatari Woman's Dilemma*, in: Gender : Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft, Jg. 9 (2017) Nr: 1, 82–98. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2726.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://doi.org/10.3224/gender.v9i1.06

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE
UNIVERSITÄT
BERLIN

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Education, Marriage, and Professionalization: The Modern Qatari Woman's Dilemma

Zusammenfassung

Bildung, Ehe und Arbeit: das Dilemma moderner katarischer Frauen

Anhand zweier Datensätze von Interviews, die mit katarischen Studentinnen und Professorinnen durchgeführt wurden, werden die Hindernisse auf dem Weg hin zu einer geschlechterinklusiven Erwerbsbeteiligung untersucht. Der erste Datensatz ist das Ergebnis eines Projekts, das die Disparitäten zwischen Bildungsabschluss und Erwerbsbeteiligung unter katarischen Frauen untersucht. 274 junge Frauen im Alter von 17 bis 25 Jahren wurden mit dem Ziel befragt, einige der Gründe nachzuzeichnen, warum katarische Frauen nicht ins Berufsleben treten. Der zweite Datensatz bündelt die Ergebnisse von 350 Fokusgruppendiskussionen und Interviews mit Studentinnen. Hier wurde die Auswirkung von deren höherer Bildung auf deren Heiratsfähigkeit untersucht. Ihre Bildung hat – im Vergleich zu den Generationen ihrer Mütter und Großmütter – zu einer Erhöhung des Heiratsalters geführt, aber die sozialen Erwartungen an Frauen, die Rolle der Ehefrau und Mutter zu erfüllen, führen weiterhin dazu, dass eine Heirat die Arbeit einer Frau außerhalb des Hauses einschränken kann.

Schlüsselwörter
Frauen, Geschlechternormen, Ehe, Heirat, Golf von Arabien

Summary

We offer observations about the obstacles to promoting a gender-inclusive labor force based on two sets of data on female Qatari students and professionals. Data set 1 is the result of a project pertaining to the disparity between education and employment among Qatari women. We surveyed 274 young women between the ages of 17 and 25 with the aim of understanding some of the reasons why Qatari women were not entering the workforce. Data set 2 derives from 350 focus groups and interviews with female students to assess the effect their tertiary education had on their marriageability. While education has delayed the age of marriage when this generation of women is compared with that of their mothers and grandmothers, the social expectations of becoming a wife and ensuing motherhood mean that marriage can restrict a woman's working outside the home.

Keywords
women, gender norms, marriage, Arabian Gulf

 https://doi.org/10.3224/gender.v9i1.06

1 Education, Marriage, and Work: The Modern Qatari Woman's Dilemma[1, 2]

The rapid economic development of the rentier states in the Arabian Gulf raises an array of social and cultural questions regarding the relevance of traditional values for contemporary Gulf societies. Oil wealth has afforded unique economic and political stability in the Middle East for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. A high standard of living is accompanied by the conspicuous consumption of Western products. Indoor ski slopes exist in a desert climate where pearl diving was once the main industry and the Indian rupee was the main currency. Prior to the discovery of oil, schooling in GCC countries consisted of boys learning to read and write in Qur'an classes held in mosques. Girls of wealthier families were privately tutored in their homes by Islamic scholars. In Qatar, the first formal boys' schools opened in 1948, offering a curriculum of Islamic studies, Islamic history, math, geography, English, and Arabic (Al-Kobaisi 1979: 34).

The discovery of oil in the region in the 1970s transformed these national economies on account of their focusing exclusively on the petrochemical industry. Developments in the petroleum sector triggered simultaneous projects offshore and on the fringes of capital cities such as Doha, Qatar. Most GCC rulers created welfare states, offering their citizens free health care, education, water, and electricity, paid for by the exponential budget surpluses from the newfound oil wealth. Mehran Kamrava (2013: 35) explains how these funds were used to

> "invest substantial sums in human development, most notably tertiary education, health care, and the fostering of knowledge-based economies in preparation for the post-oil period. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this type of investment has been in the establishment of new universities, or the attraction of branch campuses, which resulted in the growth of universities in the GCC from 1 in the 1950s (in Saudi Arabia) to 13 in the 1970s, 29 in the 1980s, 40 in the 1990s, and 117 in the 2000s, an increase of over 290 percent in a decade."

This early stage of national development focused on infrastructure expansion rather than changes to the social order. Traditional Gulf social conservatism persisted despite meteoric economic growth, which was accompanied by increased interaction with other countries and a variety of contemporary lifestyles. In *Qatar: A Modern History,* Allen Fromherz (2012) juxtaposes Qatar's rapid economic development with a lack of social change as unique among nation-building developmental trajectories.

Economic change is often a catalyst for social change, as seen in the way social mobility in Britain was made possible by the Industrial Revolution. Yet, Qatar's change in economic circumstances did not mirror such social transformation. While Qatar's economic investment in infrastructure projects has ushered in unprecedented opportunities for its citizens and – through necessity – embedded them in global networks, these projects are intended first and foremost to build and strengthen its domestic situation rather than cultivate a new generation of cosmopolitan actors. In fact, the increased

1 Study 1 discussed in this article was made possible by a grant from the Undergraduate Research Experience Program as part of the Qatar National Research Forum.

2 Interview protocols cited in this article were approved by the Qatar IRB Board IRB HM20001017.

visibility of an affluent and cosmopolitan Qatari elite corresponds with a number of measures that have been implemented to keep Qatari values intact.[3] Despite their global commercial acumen and involvement in transnational ventures, Qataris are making a concerted effort to preserve their culture and adhere to traditional expectations. Feminist scholar of Arab studies Miriam Cooke (2014: 16) draws attention to the pace of change and generational differences:

> "Sons and daughters of illiterate parents have been catapulted into a new world of global business, culture, and politics. Skipping over the Gutenberg Revolution, they have jumped directly from orality to IT literacy, from the tribal to the modern, and in the process have combined them."

Cooke's description of the mercurial trajectory of change in the Gulf highlights the economic disparity between the GCC countries and their close Arab neighbors such as Egypt, Lebanon, or Syria. Socially, however, Gulf society mirrors much of the rest of the Arab world in the expectation that "a woman will marry early; her contribution to the family will be as homemaker; [while] the man leads, financially supports and protects his household" (OECD/CAWTAR 2014: 120). The insistence on gender segregation in schools, the workplace, and social life further separates Gulf societies from the more mingled social orders in the Middle East region. What effect does such rapid economic modernization within a conservative society have on female citizens? To what degree does an increase in wealth and access to higher education afford women more agency in their personal and professional lives? We examine these questions against the backdrop of arranged marriage practices and university education in the emirate of Qatar.

Since gaining independence from the British in 1971, the advances in modern Qatari women's autonomy are promising yet remain framed by widely accepted patriarchal notions of gender roles. Gender and modernization for female Qataris is a delicate balance between access to education, hopes of professionalization, and the unavoidable obligation to become a wife and mother. While petroleum wealth have made conspicuous consumption of Western material luxuries a part of everyday Qatari life, traditional gender roles and expectations undergird this higher standard of living. Although the physical tasks expected of Qatari women have changed, attitudes to their role as wives and mothers have not: "[W]hereas Bedouin women worked with their hands and were given responsibilities in overseeing the household or childcare, female nationals of these emirates now have the assistance of maids, cooks, and drivers to attend to their daily tasks" (Rajakumar 2014: 127). Although these women were fortunate enough to have the ability to purchase any material goods they desire, most of their choices are largely informed by familial obligations and opinions. How can female Qataris express personal agency in their conservative society? Other than their purchasing power, what has changed for female citizens in this wealthy postcolonial state? This balancing act, wherein women express their individuality within the strictures of social norms, is performed in other aspects of daily life. Qatari women demonstrate their individuality through a myriad of

3 For example, financing is available to fund a *mahram* to accompany a female student while she pursues training abroad. According to Islamic law, *mahram* is a male chaperone whom the woman cannot marry (i.e. brother, father, grandfather). The state apparatus has implemented a number of privileging strategies and codified structural arrangements that target women's behavior in particular, including the inability of Qatari women to grant nationality to their offspring.

choices, refuting the assumption that covered women are uniformly indistinguishable from one another. We set out to answer the above questions in two studies about the lives of contemporary Qatari women with a threefold agenda of quantitative online questionnaires, in-person focus groups, and content analysis of legal marriage documents. This is done in four steps. First we will discuss how the Qatari state frames gender identity and the role of the family in official documents such as the national development goals and 2030 vision. Secondly, we sketch out the differences between contemporary female Qatari students and the experiences of their mothers and grandmothers. Thirdly we suggest how an increase in educational opportunities influences post-graduate options for female students. We conclude with a discussion of an increasingly educated female citizenry manages the often conflicting personal and professional expectations of their families and society.

1.1 Gender and the State

The gendering of Qatari society is embedded in consistent references to the nuclear family as the building block of the nation. As stated in the Qatari constitution (Article 21):

> "The family is the basis of the society. A Qatari family is founded on religion, ethics, and patriotism. The law shall regulate adequate means to protect the family, support its structure, strengthen its ties, and *protect maternity*, childhood, and old age." (Emphasis added)

The Qatari family operates as a social and cultural unit from which individuals find orientation in the rest of the community and the world. More explicit references to family and fertility are found in Qatar's *National Development Strategy Report:* "[T]he continuity of cohesive families and large households [is] crucial to the national vision." State sponsored programs such as the Qatar Charity "Zawaj," or "Marriage," "…offer pre-marital counseling and financial assistance to Qatari couples" (quoted in Fenton 2013). Women's agency within such a structure is based on gendered expectations and restricted by attitudes and mores established by the extended family, including aunts and cousins.

The most recent articulation of the next stage in the country's development is found in the Qatar National Vision 2030, which focuses on the four pillars of economic, social, environmental, and human development. An explicitly stated goal within human development is "an educated population" (Pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030 2015). This aim is qualified by statements such as "appropriate to each individual's aspirations and abilities" (Pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030 2015). A great deal of money and national energy has gone into transforming Qatar into an internationally competitive knowledge-based economy through the Qatar Foundation and the development of Education City, which currently houses nine universities (six American, one French, one British, and one Qatari, as well as other centers for research and industry). The preferential treatment given to males is not acknowledged in official statements on national development, which limits the extent to which women can actualize the promises made in the name of development. Qatari men maintain a position of privilege afforded them by their society (see Paschyn 2014):

"Boys grow up knowing that they will inherit family businesses or easily find high-paying government or military jobs that may not require a degree. Men have more social freedom than women, which helps explain their low university enrollment rates. . . . Boys have their cars, their friends, their own lives. Girls don't get that at all."

Male privilege is not unique to Qatar (nor indeed the Middle East). Within the GCC context, Caryle Murphy deems these differences in male and female attitudes toward education and change an "aspiration gap." Her study of young people in Saudi Arabia across a variety of social issues reveals that young Saudi men are also

"ambivalent about greater opportunities and freedoms for their female peers. They do favor women being educated, having careers and participating in public life – but not to the same extent that women favor these things. And men are less convinced than women that the sexes should be equal in the workforce." (Murphy 2013: 96)

Qatari women are taking advantage of in-country educational opportunities, while many of their male counterparts opt to join the army or police force in lieu of tertiary higher education. Entry-level positions in the military and police force offer job security and lucrative salaries. These government jobs are available to Qatari men regardless of their educational experience. Male employment is assumed rather than pursued by the majority of the population:

"Guaranteed a job in the public sector, fewer men are motivated to attend university as compared to women; for example, at Qatar University 75 percent of students are female. According to a 2007 report by the government's Planning Council, Qatari female workers have 14.1 years of education compared to 10.7 for male workers." (Kamrava 2013: 159)

The onus is on Qatari women to juggle the state's twin aims and their families' needs with their personal aspirations. Female citizens toggle between these conventional social expectations for them to marry and the privileges afforded them through higher education, such as personal autonomy, financial freedom, and broader employment prospects. As such, Qatari women's success in their expected roles as wife, mother, and professional is an indicator of the state's ability to achieve its human capacity-building project, a cornerstone of its development strategy. We seek to understand the ways in which various national ventures, including the Qatar National Vision 2030, affect the everyday lives of female citizens. Our discussion is based on two related studies investigating Qatari women's empowerment as understood through the choices available to them when it comes to professionalization and marriage.

Our qualitative research projects capture the changing social landscape and the impact these shifts are having on traditional Qatari institutions, including women's employment and marriage. This article brings together two studies on modern women in Qatar that contribute to the extant literature about marriage and the professionalization of female Qatari nationals. In a country with one of the highest GDPs in the world, more women than men occupy university classrooms, but the reverse is true of professional offices. By what measurement, then, can we track female participation in the creation and circulation of Qatari nationalism? In examining this, we construct a picture of how tertiary-educated Qatari women are balancing the demands of modern and traditional roles.

1.2 Male and Female Students

The emphasis on developing the education system in Qatar has contributed to providing citizens with a world-class education. The first girls' public school was established in 1956. When the national university opened in 1973, 93 out of the 150 enrollees were women, establishing from the outset a trend for more females than males in the classroom. Yet not all women in Qatar participated in undergraduate education even a generation ago, as we discovered during the first stage of this study when Qatari women indicated their educational levels as well as their mothers' and both grandmothers'. This initial phase of investigation included short, online questionnaires for female Qatari respondents in order to glean demographic information about Qatari women's educational levels and marital status compared to that of their mothers as well as both maternal and paternal grandmothers. Our respondents indicated that in the 1970s, the average age at marriage for brides was 14; in the 1980s 18 to 25; and since 2000, over 25. Among the current generation of female Qatari students, pursuing a university degree is more pervasive than for their mothers or grandmothers. The age at marriage for brides has risen for the generation of university students currently enrolled. It is unsurprising then that for every male Qatari undergraduate student there are six females enrolled at university (Qatari Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics 2015).

However, this upward trend does not translate into more women in the workforce. In most educational systems, those seeking to complete a tertiary-level education do so to gain credentials to work after graduation. This is not the case for female Qatari graduates. While women may have the upper hand in education, life after graduation is full of competing obligations. Central to these is finding a man of acceptable stature who wants the same type of marriage that a woman does: "Tribal marriages depend, above all, on women who uphold the purity of the lineage by not marrying down" (Cooke 2014: 39). Negotiating post-marital life is key in a society where the majority of marriages are still arranged by relatives, and most women marry someone in their extended family, including first cousins. A university-level education may not necessarily translate into full-time employment because of familial expectations when it comes to fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. As we will demonstrate, Qatari women have also developed strategies for articulating their individuality and preference in two other important arenas: their professional employment and choice of husband.

2 Methodology

Two research teams comprising a gender specialist, an anthropologist, a historian, and undergraduate research assistants wanted to investigate how educated Qatari women approach traditional expectations of womanhood. Our multicultural, interdisciplinary research team encompasses different specializations and backgrounds, allowing for a broader consideration of marriage attitudes in young Qatari women and for a holistic, solution-oriented approach to the tasks involved in collecting such personal and con-

fidential responses. Additionally, the research teams have spent a combined 20 years living in GCC countries, which helps to inform the context of their work.

What, if any, are the advantages of a university-level education? Is there any way to adapt the practice of arranged marriages as employed in Qatari society? And if so, what were the strategies women use to express their desires regarding postgraduate or post-marital life? These two qualitative research projects captured first-person reactions to the changing social landscape and the impact these shifts are having on traditional Qatari institutions, namely marriage. The female participants hail from a range of tertiary institutions across Qatar, ranging from coeducational American universities in Education City, the female campuses of Qatar University, and the Community College of Qatar. Current students at varying stages of their degrees and recent graduates of these institutions were recruited on a voluntary basis. The range of institutions reflects a broad socioeconomic demographic of women of diverse ages, marital statuses, and educational backgrounds.

All the surveys, interviews, and focus groups for both studies were conducted in English, which is the language of instruction used in the various universities and the primary language of the research team. In total 629 female Qatari participants aged 18 years and older were surveyed. Our discussion allows female nationals to give voice to their own experiences of juggling societal expectations, cultural traditions, governmental policies, and initiatives geared specifically to mobilizing Qatari nationals.

The first project discusses the disparity between the number of women who get an education and the number who then go on to participate in the formal workforce after university. A total of 274 female university students studying at the national university and branch campuses in the capital Doha completed an online questionnaire containing 52 multiple choice questions and eight open-ended questions. The first 52 questions tried to gauge what sort of career plans female Qatari students had prior to graduation; whether they wanted to work or study further; what sort of working environment they preferred; and whether their home environment was conducive to a working life and, if not, what were the sorts of obstacles they faced or thought they would face should they start working. The open-ended questions attempted to understand the participants' perspectives on matters like the balance between a marriage and working life. These questions solicited more in-depth responses to the initial issues. The data collected was then analyzed using Excel to generate a quantitative summary and percentages of the different responses. According to the majority of responses, Qatari women have been successful in finding ways to seek autonomy outside of mixed-gender work environments that may be objectionable to their families and spouses.

The second aspect of this study was a content analysis of three salient categories of 62 marriage contracts from a broad range of Qatari families as archival evidence reflecting changing bridal expectations. These contracts were translated from Arabic into English. Evidence of the *shurti*, or conditions to the marriage stipulated by the bride, indicate the degree of women's agency while negotiating marriage contracts. During the proposal stage of marriage, women are afforded the right by cultural and religious practice to stipulate conditions for married life in their marriage contract. The irony, of course, is that these rights are based on the principle that a woman must be given an opportunity to state her post-marital expectations because as a wife she must respect the decisions made by her husband.

Comparing these studies allows us to consider the extent to which attitudes toward gender identities are changing. We show how improved access to education is a partial victory for women because of a lack of postgraduate initiatives aimed at integrating women into their roles in public life while maintaining their obligations toward their families. Our data and literature examine attitudes of young Qatari university students and graduates to modern marriage practices in light of the social and economic changes their generation face. Through a qualitative and quantitative approach, the primary and secondary data investigate the relationship between higher education and attitudes toward marriage and Qatari working women. The collected data expand our understanding of the broader topic of gender in the Gulf family, allowing for a deeper consideration of social and cultural issues that influence family planning and choice of partner, including tribalism, socioeconomic factors, and the role of the family in the negotiation process.

2.1 The Disparity: Education versus Employment

The online questionnaire was distributed at Qatar University (the national university) and the six branch campuses at the Qatar Foundation, including Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, Texas A&M University in Qatar, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Georgetown University in Qatar, and Northwestern University in Qatar. The goal of these surveys was to see what factors participants mentioned as considerations against pursuing a career. To the degree that these were self-imposed, we hoped to gain more insight into the various considerations that led to such a decision.

Most of the respondents in the first study show there is a generation of Qatari women who were very willing to work and who have a positive, uplifting attitude toward their prospects in Qatar's labor force. However, while Qatar has taken positive steps in advocating the education of women and has therefore encouraged this positive, career-oriented mindset, the widening pay gap between Qatari women and men was a dangerous factor that seemed to inhibit female workforce participation.

According to the 2011 Qatari labor force survey, "Qatari women are paid 25 to 50 percent less than men, despite the fact that their working hours are comparable – and sometimes higher" (2011: 12). This worrying trend was exacerbated by mindsets that encourage occupational segregation, which feeds socially constructed ideas about a woman's supposedly predominant role as a wife and mother. There was also a lack of graduate opportunities available to women, as demonstrated by 63 percent of our respondents saying they wished to go abroad to engage in further studies. A lack of post-undergraduate opportunities, both in terms of vocational training and schooling, also seemed antithetical to the Qatari government's efforts to increase female workforce participation.

All of the 274 Qatari women surveyed across six universities wished to pursue a career after graduating, but when asked if they would actually work after graduation, 36 percent believed they would not. The significance of these results shows how breaking societal norms is stigmatized to the extent that women feel they are restricted. Thus, while wishing to pursue careers after having received a university education, the surveyed women felt they would be unable to do so. It is important to note that the obstacles

in the way of Qatari women pursuing careers may not just be externally imposed but could stem from internal inhibitions as well. This can be seen in the answers to subsequent questions in the survey, which asked what the participants would do if they had to choose between compromising on family life or their career.

When contrasted with family and cultural values, employment did not seem to be a priority. Since the majority of the participants chose family life over their career, it seemed that they too subscribed to the traditional idea that women are caregivers, while men serve as their family's breadwinner. However, while this understanding of the different roles of men and women does exist, the social construction of gender roles seems to not completely obstruct women's increasing roles in the public sphere. As the frequency of modernization initiatives increased, both in the public and private sectors, more women considered entering the job market. 56 percent of survey participants agreed that it was easier for their generation to join the workforce than that of their parents. Their responses indicate a change in attitudes towards women's participation in the workforce.

Another main study aim was to determine Qatari women's reasons for participating in the workforce. Existing data suggested that a large percentage of Qatari women were financially well off; thus, their desire to work had little to do with income. This idea was reinforced when the participants were asked if they felt their family income influenced their decision to work. 71 percent of those surveyed believed their familial income did not affect their decision. The participants instead pointed to a different reason for wanting financial independence: to empower themselves. Empowerment, for this particular socioeconomic class, was not about having more money but more about self-fulfillment. Out of our respondents, 62 percent of women felt they needed a job in order to feel empowered.

Career paths generally favored by women included social entrepreneurship, teaching, and participation in professional development programs. 54 percent of our participants believed that there were certain jobs that could be done only by women and certain jobs that could be done only by men. This may be due to occupational self-segregation, by which women consider the demands of the roles in the oil industry – including time spent offshore on oil rigs, the need to wear form-fitting jumpsuits on-site, and working with mostly male colleagues – as inappropriate activities for women. Otherwise, respondents were generally positive about their intent to enter the workforce. This is likely the result of the state's aims to modernize translating into some gains in the diversification of the workforce, as well as less gender segregation in the private sector. While several positives came out of this study, more initiatives are still needed in order for the vision of the QNV to be fulfilled.

2.2 Overcoming Obstacles during Postgraduate Life

One of the major obstacles cited by female respondents to the questionnaire was the lack of female role models and mentee programs: 33 percent of participants indicated that the lack of female role models discouraged them from entering the workforce. However, the few role models present in the public sphere did have considerable impact on the younger female generation's notions of public roles for women. Sheikha Moza bint Nasser is the mother of the current emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Khalifa Al Thani, and wife

of the former emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, who was emir from 1995 until 2013. She is consistently one of the female Qatari leaders other Qataris mention when asked about role models. In her years as chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, Sheika Moza oversaw the establishment of Qatar-based American branch campuses and European accredited graduate programs. Having educational programs based in their own country allowed large numbers of Qatari women to receive international degrees by sidestepping the taboo of traveling abroad (Anderson 2015). Other female role models that women identified included their own mothers and senior female members of their household, which 81 percent of respondents did. As long as family pressure to get married and stay at home subsided, many women believed they had the potential to pursue a career outside the home.

The lack of training programs designed specifically for female professional development was another major obstacle respondents mentioned they repeatedly encountered when they sought employment after graduation. From a young age, girls were refused opportunities awarded to their male counterparts. Few young girls were exposed to work in technical fields such as engineering, computer science, and medicine. Once again, occupational segregation may prevent women from pursuing their interests, as 54 percent of those surveyed believed there were certain jobs specifically created for men and women. This reiterated the idea that gender segregation has been largely encouraged in Qatari society. Shareefa Fadel's study on vertical occupational segregation indicated 80 percent of Qatari families believed in gender segregation as a benefit for the social well-being of their daughters (quoted in Paschyn 2014).

Qatari women's motivations for professionalizing extend beyond financial remuneration. In fact, 71 percent of those surveyed believed income did not affect their decision to work. Jobs taken on by women are not necessarily male dominated but are ones that best suit their interests. Homegrown businesses and local start-ups were some of the short-term careers women pursued independently. For many young women with degrees empowerment meant pursuing their dreams. Of those surveyed, 62 percent believed they needed a job to feel empowered. Many have accepted the fact that roles for men and women are different in society. Now economic independence and limited social freedoms have driven many women to pursue a career.

3 Educated and Empowered

The second study in our discussion demonstrates that educated women do reap other benefits that can enhance their lifelong empowerment. One of the main questions asked during focus-group interviews in the second study was whether respondents had noticed any difference between what university-educated brides-to-be demanded in contracts and what others asked for. The general responses indicated that participants felt someone with a university education was more likely to be "aware of her rights." One respondent even suggested that those who were getting married at a younger age were doing so because they had no aspirations apart from marriage. Another subjective reason given for earlier marriages was that women who married at 18 or a little older felt

they could get more freedom after marriage, while a woman aged 23 realizes she will have more responsibilities to deal with (Rajakumar, personal interview, June 25, 2014). It is interesting to note, however, that the respondents in this interview were quoted as saying that women sometimes had more freedom to do things such as travel and drive after marrying. Thus, even while a woman might have been prevented from doing certain things in her own family, her marriage might be a liberating space for her.

At the heart of differences between university graduates and other females is how they approach marriage proposals. Among the sample in the second study, 20 brides indicated in their marriage contracts that they wished to study, to live apart from in-laws, or to be permitted to work after marrying. The reason the women cite these conditions can be traced directly to their goals of educational advancement. While asking to be able to continue further studies after marriage is important in and of itself, it is also symbolically important since it grants the Qatari woman an identity separate from her husband and his family. Her ability to study and work after marrying points to the possibility of greater economic independence in the future. The request for a neolocal house – apart from the in-laws, as is the custom in Qatari society – is also an indication of independence from the extended family.

One hundred and fifty female focus-group participants in the second study were also asked to indicate whether there were any differences between the post-marital expectations of university-educated women and those of high school graduates. Their answers largely indicated that university graduates are more likely to negotiate the conditions of their post-marital life – though this right is religiously applicable to any bride, regardless of her educational status:

I: Do university graduates ask for something different than girls who didn't go to university or who are not yet in university?
P5: But she might be more educated, so she will ask for guarantees.
P3: Because she is more educated, so maybe she is more aware about her rights. So she would, she would say, "I want to have that." But the one, non-educated, "Okay, it is just marriage," she's not aware.
P5: For example, to ask, "Can I drive, can I . . . ?"
P1: "Yeah, I want a maid." It could be written in the contract. "I want a separate house from my in-laws."
P5: About the work and about the study, and about even the driving, it happens.
P3: Most of them [brides and their families] don't write that.
P3: Because men believe in other men's word. (Rajakumar, personal interview, May 25, 2014)

Women using the marriage contract to defend their rights and interests is an established practice in the Muslim world. The Islamic marriage contract is a legally binding contract between a husband and his wife that needs to be signed by two witnesses. In order to understand the relevance of the marriage contract to women's empowerment, it is important to know what the marriage contract usually includes. Marriage contracts in the GCC are considered a private affair between the wife, the husband, and their immediate families (Wynn 2009: 210). Each party determines its own contractual conditions, which are then subject to negotiation. Typical conditions stipulate the post-marital residence, whether the wife agrees to her husband having additional wives, and divorce settlements. Brides may also specify a range of behaviors that they hope to continue after marriage, including driving, completing their education, or working in a mixed-

gender environment. Contracts also include a place to indicate the "bride wealth," commonly referred to as the dowry, that is to be given to the wife by her husband. Feminist historian Amira El-Azhary Sonbol challenges the assumption that "marriage in Islam is an unequal relationship in which the man has full agency and the woman has very little" by tracing the evolution of the marriage contract through the pre-Islamic Egyptian era to the Ottoman era and then on to contemporary times (Sonbol 2009: 88). Marriage contracts have traditionally, and in contemporary times, been used to "gradually shift [women's] role in socio-economic discourse" in Qatar as in other parts of the Arab world (Sonbol 2009: 87). However, the family "still plays an important role in mediating the woman's demands in her life after marriage" (Sonbol 2009: 87). The interplay between the bride, her male relatives, and the groom's willingness to accept her conditions is what we will focus on in this part of the discussion, though the marriage contract is the final step in a series of complicated criteria for Qatari partner selection. If brides and grooms engage in the give and take of negotiating specific details of their post-marital lives during the engagement process, this may be a dynamic of exchange that sets the tone for the marriage. The possibilities for spousal autonomy and agency increase in a neolocal home, where couples are shielded from shared living spaces with parents or members of the extended family.

3.1 The Right to Ask: Islamic Marriage Contracts

We collected and conducted content analysis on 62 marriage contracts. The marriage contracts are official civic documents registered with the Ministry of Justice and written in formal Arabic. Two key areas were translated into English by a native speaker of Arabic. The two aspects of the contract most relevant to our discourse are (a) the conditions that the bride sets for marriage and (b) the bride wealth, or goods and monies she receives at the time of her marriage. Both of these determine the amount of autonomy and input the bride could potentially have in her marriage.

The conditions for the marriage are known as *shurut*, and the money or possessions given by the groom or his family to the bride as her property is known as *mahar*. There is also the *muaj'aal*, or area where the couple can indicate a divorce settlement in case the marriage is terminated. The spaces for each of these specific terms are left blank on the form that legally records the marriage. In most cases, the corresponding entries for the *mahar* and the *muajaal* are numerical values. As regards the *shurti*, people use sentence fragments that outline specific conditions related to post-marital life.

We also conducted brief follow-up interviews with our respondents to clarify certain provisions in the contracts. In many instances our interviewees were reluctant to reveal all the information in the contracts and the conditions stipulated in them, especially the amount of the *mahar*. We used a snowball sampling, beginning with students enrolled in universities at the Qatar Foundation and expanding outward into their network because of the private nature of Qatari society and the personal nature of our questions. We invited participants by email, word of mouth, and surveys in university classrooms. Those whom we were referred to via sisters, cousins, or close friends, were the most willing to disclose particulars about marital negotiations. The further out in the referral circle we went, particularly with interviewees who were acquaintances of our initial respondents,

the more difficult it was to gather specific details about the engagement process. However, despite this reluctance to offer information, almost all the respondents listed two demands that had become common among most women who had received a university education: the guarantee that they would be able to finish their studies and/or to work after marrying.

A contemporary shift in the conditions stipulated by the bride and her family in the marriage is also evident. Ten of the contracts in our sample of 62 were from the 1970s. During this time, none of the women who married after turning 21 stipulated conditions in their contracts. Since marriage at later ages for women was much rarer in this period, it might have been difficult to stipulate further conditions in the marriage contract. In 1998, one bride (out of the five contracts collected in this period) put in writing that continuing her education was a precondition for the marriage. After 2000, only one participant in our sample was 19 when she got married. Of the 16 contracts dated between 2000 and 2010 in our sample, one bride requested that the couple live in their own house, while two indicated their preference for working after marrying, and three women said they would like to complete their university degrees. Also, in this ten-year period in our sample, eight of the contracts had no conditions at all and two respondents indicated that their conditions were agreed verbally with the groom and his family. The major difference in contracts can be seen between 2011 and 2013, the last year of our sample, when brides listed more than one condition. Of the 20 contracts concluded in this period the most frequent request was to complete university studies; interestingly, as the average age rose to 23 in this period, two brides requested the right to continue working. Two brides also requested their own house along with being able to complete their studies, and one bride made three requests – to finish her degree, have her own home, and work after marriage. While these changes may be small, they do demonstrate a tangible shift in the bridal conditions stipulated over a 43-year period.

4 Family Tradition

While the brides' demands in the contracts were progressive and reflected a desire for more autonomy, they were still shaped by their parents' wishes. For example, while brides asked for conditions such as being allowed to drive or work, these conditions had to be preapproved by the family. One respondent said she needed her father to "confirm that he allowed [her] to drive", even to obtain a license, while another said, "you cannot even work in your career without your father's consent." This suggests that the women who make bolder, more empowering demands in their contracts are ones who already had some level of autonomy in their pre-marriage lives. The terms of the contract are debated and decided by the bride's family and the groom's family as opposed to an understanding being reached only between the bride and the groom – thus the bride's family dictates the sort of freedom the bride can demand from her husband, limiting her freedom in a fundamental sense:

P: But just to go back to the contract, I think a lot of fathers do put things for their daughters . . . you know some fathers say to the husband: "If you happen to marry a second wife, this and this happens. If you happen to divorce, she can raise the kids until a certain age." Some fathers do this just to protect their daughters because they know how things are. He might, you know, he might ask to include some things.
I: What kind of fathers are those? Are those more legally minded or do they have lots of daughters, or how would you categorize them?
P: I think those are the kind of fathers that are in more the traditional kind of jobs, but more conventional workplaces.
I: Government employees? Why do you think that would be?
P: They hear a lot of stories. (Rajakumar, personal interview, March 3, 2014)

Her family's influence shapes many of the decisions a Qatari woman makes, particularly with regard to her marital and professional choices. Such influence and the factors that underline social customs are largely absent from national discourse but abundant in widely circulated notions of acceptable social codes.

4.1 Conclusion and Further Studies

Across our samples, participants repeatedly noted a discrepancy in their lived experience as opposed to the state's aims for Qatari society, according to which women are to "increase their role in all sectors of their country's economy" (Pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030 2015). While it is not possible to claim a causal relationship between higher education as the cause of delayed marriage and decreased fertility rates, a relationship is emerging between higher education and Qatari women's aspirations. Continued study of these factors, soliciting women's experiences and offering evidence-based data are essential to understanding the complexities of the pressures of modern cosmopolitanism.

For the women in our study, the dominant social expectation is for female citizens to take their place as wives and mothers in the nuclear family. In Qatari society, where familial alliances and relationships are cemented through kinship, personal choices are informed by one's larger network, particularly for women. In such a scenario, choices such as one's field or place of work have important social ramifications. The institution of marriage maintains and reinforces a myriad of social expectations in this patrilocal, patrilineal society. Despite Qatar's recent and rapid physical and socioeconomic development, familial influence continues to play a central role in women's choices. Although efforts to optimize the Qatari labor force have necessitated the greater inclusion of women in the public sphere, as is the case elsewhere, a patriarchal, gendered attitude toward females still prevails.

Nor is Qatar the only GCC nation to address these concerns on a national level. Much of the established and current research about the Arabian Gulf focuses on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. These two countries were among the first to develop their oil infrastructure a decade or so prior to the discovery of oil in the United Arab Emirates or Qatar. Yet the pressures to marry for the sake of the nation are echoed in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. National campaigns in both of these countries explicitly urge young people to marry and contribute to the stability of the nation. In what ways do these direct campaigns affect Saudi and Kuwaiti female agency?

Tangible state intervention in marriage practices includes the Kuwaiti "Marriage Comes First" campaign in 2012 which encouraged young citizens not to delay marriage

(Fattora 2012; Saligram & Moussa 2013). The campaign responded to a 10 percent decrease in marriage rates among Kuwaitis and a resulting decrease in fertility.[4] "Marriage Comes First" encouraged Kuwaitis to "think about matrimony before material goods, studying, a career, travelling or having fun with friends." Kuwait is not the only GCC country to be concerned about the number of delayed marriages, the overall decrease in marriage rates, and the related decrease in fertility rates. Other GCC countries have launched similar campaigns to encourage its young citizens to marry earlier, offering more tangible assistance with the practicalities of getting married, such as dowry payments for the bride. Saudi Arabia has "specialized government entities that advocate against costly traditional marriages and facilitate 'mahr and shabka' for youth who wants to marry" (Rashad 2015: 15). The state's willingness to provide financial assistance to citizens wishing to marry is an overt attempt at social engineering that needs further study – particularly to understand the ways in which such programs shape Saudi women's agency. Students in particular are targeted. The King Abdul Aziz University, for instance, has also begun a project called "Tayseer el Zawaj," or Facilitation of Marriage, under the umbrella of its Scientific Fund Agency (Rashad 2015: 15). The immediacy and contemporary nature of these campaigns demonstrate the ongoing attempts to define Gulf women's participation in the nation through traditional gender roles. How do Kuwaiti women reconcile competing demands for professionalization and marriage? Are there similarities to the strategies used by Qatari women? These are some of the questions that could be investigated in future comparative studies.

Feminist scholars studying such trends in Saudi Arabia have established a body of research from which we can expand to break apart notions of a monolithic Gulf experience (Doumato 2003; Pouseny/Doumato 200; Le Renard 2014). Many of the trends we currently see in Qatari society Dumato explored in the context of female experiences in Saudi Arabia. She traces the rise in citizen affluence and increased mobility for women through education. Her work, and that of others, examines the advantages and challenges modernization brings women in the Arab world vis-a-vi globalization (Pfeifer/Pousney 26). Feminist scholars have pointed out the need to interrogate the ways in which we examine women's agency in the GCC, using the case of Saudi women as an example of hypersexualizing and moral superiority by the media but also by scholars (Le Renard vii). In this discussion we aim to understand Qatari women's lived experiences through their own words and within the context of their society.

Expanded studies of gender roles in this region would benefit from a comparative approach, contrasting the social development of Qatari women alongside their counterparts in the GCC as well as the wider Middle East. Studies into modernization and gender in the United Arab Emirates also represent an emerging body of scholarship that will contribute to the ongoing examination of women's experiences. Going forward, longitudinal studies of female GCC nationals, from their university years through to their employment experiences, would also be useful in tracking how an individual's goals are supported or overridden by the larger social structures.

4 In 2011 there were 359 marriages per 100 000 inhabitants, a 10 percent decrease compared to 2007, according to figures from the Ministry of Justice. See "Marriage Loses Its Sparkle in Kuwait", access at www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/10/us-kuwait-marriage-idUSBRE8990XP20121010.

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