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The Challenges of Qatari Women in the Workforce

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By

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my parents and husband. Without their support and help this work would not have been achieved.

Chapter.1: Introduction

Throughout history, women around the world have faced many obstacles regarding their life and work environments. Even in the present, women have not got as equal opportunities as men. According to Fischer women in Germany are not paid equally¹. Although, women in the Arab world are educated, they make up only 23% of the workforce, whereas in East Asia and in the Economic Cooperation Organization the percentages are very much higher where women constitute 65% and 59% of the manpower respectively². Therefore, the Arab world has the lowest ratio.

Islam gave women equality with men in the aspect of working. However, men and society have deviated from this religious right. Some of them do not allow women to work, which is a cultural and family obstacle that adversely affects the economic development and impacts negatively on women empowerment in particular. Some cultural obstacles in the Gulf are obvious in co-education and mixed work environments. A case in point is the University of Kuwait co-educational system. When it started, some people were against it. As Riza states, "Kuwaiti women challenged the customs and traditions, in spite of their importance, and demanded to overturn and replace them by modern ideas that fit the evolution of the contemporary thoughts"³.

Qatar has been developing rapidly over the past few decades. Qatar National Vision 2030 was articulated to guide and steer the country's procession towards that point in time. The Vision attaches more importance to the role of

¹ Eva Fischer. "The importance of women's economic participation". *UN* (2013): 5.

² *BBC*. http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2013/03/130308_women_saudi (October, 2013)

³ Mohammed Riza. *Admixture Battle in Kuwait: A Study of Kuwaiti Social Thought*. (Kuwait: Al Rabiyan for publication and distribution, 1983), 23.

people and the role of women in particular in accomplishing the vision. The Constitution of Qatar addresses the role of women in numerous paragraphs.

In 2012, foreign workers increased to form 94% of the workforce in Qatar⁴. Because Qatar has huge resources with a relatively small number of nationals it depends on expatriates. If women did not work, the economic balance would further deteriorate and the country would have to recruit more workers, which would exacerbate the problem. From another point of view women's work is sine qua non to be economically independent and empowered and to be on the contributing side in the society.

Women can and are fully capable of occupying high positions. Some of the positions are new to the society; therefore some of the people would be against them. The public sphere of the society and families negatively or positively affect women's job opportunities.

The development of women is the development of society, because they are essential part of the community and development needs both genders to participate. This research will focus on three or four women in the three sectors, of television (TV), radio, business, and the Foreign Ministry as diplomats. These three sectors are important, because in the past women were not allowed to travel on Foreign missions; only a small number of women could open their own business, and TV and radio did not have many Qatari women as broadcasters.

Qatari women in other traditional sectors, such as education and health have been visible for quite a long time and their role in these two fields was sufficiently researched. By comparison women just recently joined the

⁴ Rohan Soman. "Expatriates constitute 94% of the labour market in Qatar". *BQ Magazine*, 2013. <http://www.bqdoha.com/2013/09/expatriates-constitute-94-of-the-labour-market-in-qatar> (March, 2015)

aforementioned three sectors: diplomacy, business and media. This development deserves to be researched to illustrate how women overcome the societal and family restrictions and made their way in these three fields.

The purpose of this research is to examine the changes that have taken place regarding work opportunities for women over the years in Qatar, and to explore the efforts made by these women to change the traditional way of society's thinking to achieve these positions.

The study is important to highlight how the society entertained those developments and changes. The study may add to the existing theoretical knowledge by providing empirical data from different setting. It also may be helpful to enlighten the policy and decision makers to advance and guide these developments.

Literature Review

This section is dedicated for reviewing related literature. There are large numbers of studies on women in the Arab world; most of them cover a large number of theories on women. This literature review focuses on women in the work force, the obstacles and barriers they face, the issue of public sphere, the social changes and the issue of empowerment. While this literature review presents these topics in a variety of perspectives, the paper will mainly focus on their application in the work force.

Al-Ghanim conducted a study to investigate the *Impediments to Women Assuming Leadership Positions in Qatari Society*⁵. The author found that women

⁵ Kaltham Al-Ghanim. "Impediments to Women Assuming Leadership Positions in Qatari Society." *Supreme Council for Family Affairs* (2007)

have developed and are eager to stand on their own, and to be qualified to get decision-making positions as men. Women have made a high leap which gave the impression that women do not experience any problems that detract from the overall development process. However, in reality, women face many challenges to get leadership positions compared with men, as they assume only 3% of the workforce in these positions⁶. This study is to examine the main reasons for the limited opportunities for women in the decision-making positions and jobs in new fields. Al-Ghanim started her study with theoretical aspects inter alai: the human development and the empowerment issue, the size of human resources as determinant of economic developments, the investment in human resources as another determinant, the investment in the skills and capacities that reflect on the performance and the productivity at work. According to Al Ghanim empowerment is a new definition, which emerged from the human development. Women empowerment which was widely used in the 1990s was an important factor in the female workforce development process. This led to the decrease of all the discrimination against women and enabling them to strengthen their capability and self-reliance. Women empowerment includes social empowerment, economic empowerment, legal empowerment and political empowerment.

In 1976 a decree was issued to organize women's participation in public jobs, and this decree helped in the development of women's situation, by making them legally equal to men. A statistical survey conducted by Dr. Al-Ghanim in 2005 showed that Qatari women made up 18 % of labor force in the country,

⁶ Ibid, 18

with 33.6 % in public sector -mostly in education and health divisions⁷. It also showed that 71% percent of women have high qualifications, but nevertheless, the statistics from 2001-2004 showed that only 456 women assume leadership positions, which represents only 3% of the overall labor force and 9% in public sector⁸.

The study of Dr. Al-Ghanim also concluded that the social status may affect the women's jobs. Most of the people who responded to the survey were employed. The number of women exceeded men as supervisors in high administration based positions, while men were mostly managers, directors, policemen and in the army. Fourteen percent of the people agreed that women faced difficulties in working, and many women agreed on that point, but the men did not. The percentage of 26% agreed that the traditions are obstacles for women. Many men and women agreed that the education sector is the best sector that enables women to have leadership positions because of their high ambitions and qualifications. Nevertheless, some women declined those jobs in order to take care of their families, or because husbands or their culture doesn't allow them.

In *Women's Activism and the Public Sphere*⁹ Haberman's definition of public sphere was quoted as "a modern institution and a set of values that brings private person together in public to engage in a can text of reasoned debates"¹⁰. Fatima Sadiqi and Valentine Moghadem continue their discussion by highlighting the fact that in the past, the public sphere and civil society mostly consisted of

⁷ Ibid, 17

⁸ Ibid, 18

⁹ Fatima Sadiqi, and Valentine Moghadam. "Women's Activism and the Public Sphere: An Introduction and Overview." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2006)

¹⁰ Ibid, 1

males. In some of the MENA region countries that had changed, as women became heads of organizations and networks. Moreover, women started to use media to change the public sphere, such as, print media, poetry, film making. Also, as a political factor, women started to have movements, demonstrations, which stood up for feminism.

Jolanta Gladys and Katarzyna Gorak's article *Women of the Gulf: The Situation in the Labor Market and Business*¹¹ highlighted the gender aspect in functional structuralism and explained that the whole society follows the same values and structure, "the social system is composed of elements related to one another, which operate together in order to maintain equilibrium"¹². Another concept is gender discrimination, but the key issue of the article is the concept of power. According to Gladys and Gorak males in the Western countries gained universal status and women were subordinated. The authors addressed women in the Gulf and the role of religion, the limitations and opportunities for women in the work force. As for the role of religion, many people have a stereotype that Islam might be an obstacle for women to work. In spite of this, many women manage to keep a balance between an Islamic day-to-day routine and work; Islam can support and encourage women to participate more in the economical growth and development and even though culture and family are closely related to the religious values the latter can be the main barrier for women to work. Against all the odds described above, the number of businesswomen has increased rapidly; women can establish their own businesses and companies, females are now free to choose their employees and contact potential clients

¹¹ Jolanta Gladys, and Katarzyna Gorak. "Women of the Gulf: The Situation in the Labour Market and Business." *Kobieta I Biznes* (2007).

¹² Ibid, 18.

without assistance of a male family member. Businesswomen will be more satisfied with their job compared with the past as previously their choices were pretty much limited to working in the public sectors. As an example, in the United Arab Emirates, 44 percent of small businesses are owned by women¹³.

*Women and Globalization in the GCC*¹⁴ was discussed at a workshop held in United Kingdom. Dalia Abdelhady, May Aldabbagh, and Ghalia Gargani, authors of this article presented several definitions of globalization, such as the interconnection between products, people and information within the world and the consequences of this interconnection. According to the authors the majority of the women in the Gulf work in the public sector. However, there is also a significant number of females working in the private sectors or having their own businesses. The workshop was attended by many female writers; one of them was Marwa Al-Obaidly who wrote about empowerment of women in Bahrain. Al-Obaidly argued that globalization is the best thing that happened, because it helped women to succeed in the economical, political and social life. Women public participation started since 1924 in Bahrain. Moreover, the Bahraini government is trying to provide education to everyone and to increase the economic, social and political opportunities for women.

Another participant was Salma Al-Derazi, who wrote about modernity and traditions along with globalizations. She discussed traditions regarding the situation of family, marriage, work, and education as obstacles to globalization. For instance although females over number males in the higher education system in the GCC (58.7 % to only 20%), many families still do not allow females

¹³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴ Dalia Abdelhady, May Aldabbagh, and Ghalia Gargani. "Women and Globalization in the GCC: Negotiating States, Agency, and Social Change." *Dubai School of Government* (2012)

to study abroad. Although women's job opportunities increased, there is still a gap between the genders, because the number of working women is less than the number of the graduating women. Thanks to globalization, according to the author, gender roles changed and women secured place in the workforce"¹⁵. So, globalization gave women empowerment.

In their article *Qatari Women: A New Generation of Leadership*¹⁶ Louay Bahry and Phebe Marr state that Gulf States are reforming socially, economically, and culturally, and women are part of this reform. The article focuses on the achievements and obstacles that women still face. One of the main aspects that Bahry and Marr addressed is the issue of education. Education in Qatar started in the late 19th century, when people were educated by Mutawa, to teach them Quran and Islamic lessons. The first Mutawa woman in 1940s was Amna Mahmoud Al-Jaidah. In 1950, Qatari government offered free schooling, to encourage education for both women and men. At the university level, women over-numbered men by 70 percent¹⁷. The irony is that families are still reluctant to send their daughters to study abroad. Moreover, women were not working in the past, but this started to change and reached higher levels in the 1990s till it became 41 % in 2012¹⁸. The first job for women was teaching. From 1996 till 2001 women teaching in public schools were 90%¹⁹. Still, women cannot enter any work sector that they may want to due to the lack of social acceptance.

Another issue that Bahry and Marr address is the change of social behavior in the Gulf. It started with accepting foreign workers, males and

¹⁵ Ibid, 21.

¹⁶ Louay Bahry, and Phebe Marr. "Qatari Women: A New Generation of Leaders?" *Middle East Policy*, VOL. XII, NO. 2 (2005)

¹⁷ Ibid, 106

¹⁸ Ibid, 108

¹⁹ Ibid, 110

females, who were recruited to contribute to the economical development despite having different culture and behaviors. Another aspect of social change was allowing both men and women to decide on marriage issues, and to marry from outside the clan or cast. In the past it was endogamy the prevailing type of marriage.

Empowerment was the thrust of Sherifa Zuhur's article entitled *Women and Empowerment in the Arab World*²⁰. As Zuhur puts it, empowerment “just like the term liberation, is a complex and relative notion that implies a scale of power, and a linear progression from one scale to another”²¹. Empowerment to Zuhur means that women should gain educational and political rights equal to men’s rights. Moreover, empowerment should involve legal rights that give women access to education and jobs with paid maternity leave. This concept of empowerment may not be congruent with the patriarchal Arab society.

Zuhur points to the fact that religious men have more power than religious women, as people listen to them rather than to women. She gave the example of dr. Yosouf Al-Qaradawi and Mohammed Sha’arawi. Furthermore, she evaluated the success and failure of empowerment. As an example of success, there is a new law of “*khul*” introduced in Egypt that makes divorce easier for women²². Another example is from Morocco where in 2002 some parliamentary seats were reserved for women²³. An example for failure of empowerment is in Saudi Arabia where in 1990, 47 women were arrested while in driving

²⁰ Sherifa Zuhur. “Women AND Empowerment in the Arab World.” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2003).

²¹ Ibid, 17

²² Ibid, 20

²³ Ibid, 20

demonstration because of Bin Baz Fatwa²⁴. Another Fatwa in Saudi Arabia declared that women can't *postpone* marriage to continue their education, as they only need primary schooling²⁵. In Egypt many young girls died because of the genital mutilation (FGM) practice²⁶.

Nama's article *Human Recourses Development: The Case of Qatar*²⁷ starts by giving general background about Qatar, such as government policies, manpower utilities, and industrial developments. The industrial developments consist of petrochemicals, fertilizer companies, cement, steel, agriculture and fishing. As for manpower utilities, the Qatari government tries to put more Qataris in the work places, however, because of the industrial developments; the government will still need to bring foreign workers. In the petrochemical companies, the priority is for Qataris to fill the managerial positions. The article addressed the population, labor force and manpower problems. According to Nama population size should be related to socioeconomic environment and manpower. And the demographic factors can affect this structure. The issue of labor force is that they have small amount of human resources "anywhere else, industrialization has been made possible by a great number of unemployed, or through a transfer of labor from traditional sectors to modern sectors in the economy. No such possibilities are available to Qatar"²⁸.

Nama also discussed the status of women. The Qatari traditions and the religion combined to not allow women to work in a mixed environment with men, therefore the percentage women in the workforce falls between 18 % and

²⁴ Ibid, 21

²⁵ Ibid, 21

²⁶ Ibid, 21

²⁷ Nama, Ahmad Mohammed. "Human Resources Development: The Case of Qatar." *Claremont Graduate School* (1983)

²⁸ Ibid, 63

22 %²⁹. Nevertheless Qatari women started to enter the labor force, but with a low marginal percentage. Nama concludes that many administrative jobs filled by men, can be filled by women, so the male would be available to do the jobs that are performed by men.

Michael Ross, in an article entitled *Oil, Islam, and Women*³⁰ argued that the oil and gas industry does not just affect the government and the economics, but also the social structure. One of those effects is women's participation in labor force. In theory, men and women can keep good relation if they work together, by contacting and sharing information. Moreover, participation in the workforce means participation in politics, which in turn affect the women's political views, as well as the social level by increasing women's number in labor force, and lastly, the economic level will be improved.

Ross also discussed the oil production and its effect on the participation of women in the workforce. If any country discovers oil, in theory called Dutch Disease, which is the rise of exchange rate, this will affect the foreign currency and will increase the demand of non-tradable goods like construction and services. This will increase women wages, which in turn brings more women to enter the labor force. However, a number of women who are fit to work and have the skills needed to be employed will not enter the market, as their family's income is high and they do not need to work.

In the previous decade, many "women studies" were initiated around the world showing the change in the women's status. The changes taking place in the Gulf States are discussed internationally. May Seikaly in an article entitled

²⁹ Ibid, 66

³⁰ Michael Ross. "Oil, Islam, and Women." *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 102, No. 1 (2008).

*Women and Social Changes in Bahrain*³¹ focused on the Arab World which have similar features of culture, history, religion and values. However, the socio-economic features are different. Since the discovery of the oil in the Gulf, the economics changed to the better, especially in the 1970s after the oil boom. Therefore, the Gulf States started to build up infrastructure, and provide health, education and social services.

When the oil was discovered in Bahrain in 1932 people moved away from traditional economics, such as pearl diving. They quit the pearl diving jobs, because men went to work in the oil industry. With the modernization of the economy, the politics changed too, and Bahraini government established own parliament. Women were excluded from the parliament, but nevertheless started working in education, health, administration and industry sectors.

The situation changed in the 1970s; women drove cars, abandoned Abaya, started political demonstrations, and engaged in politics, joined political groups, sport clubs, and other organizations. Moreover, they wanted to be equal to men and competed with them to in the jobs and scholarships. They were ambitious to be leaders, but they were not able to reach out to all the society classes, because women in the rural areas are conservative. However, this changed few years ago as they used education and health as tools to reach them.

In the article *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere*³², the World Bank found that there were factors that influenced empowerment in MENA countries. According to The World Bank women in MENA countries have less empowerment and participation from

³¹ May Seikaly. "Women and Social Change in Bahrain." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 26, 1994, No. 3 (1994).

³² "Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa Women in the Public Sphere." *MENA Development Report* (2004).

1950s to 1970s than any other region. Even though, the status of women has progressed and women started to get better wages many families did not want a second income, which slowed down the participation of women in the work field. In the 1980s onwards women's participation steadily increased. Women's achievements in health and education increased as well. So education and health sectors are well developed in MENA. In the last decade, the GDP average was 5.3 % in education and 2.9 % in health³³. This helped women to enter the education sector with greater numbers. The average changed by 0.5 since 1960s to become 4.5 in 1999³⁴. With regard to the participation of labor force, since the 1960s, it increased by 50 %³⁵. However, comparing these rates to the rest of the world it is still the lowest. The high unemployment rate along with the fragile growth performance, led to low labor market outcomes. Most of the businesses preferred to hire men. Moreover, the economic growth suffers from government control, public sector domination and low investment climate.

The traditional perception can explain the low participation of women. First, the families are the center of everything. Second, the men are the only wage earners of the family. Third, the reputation of women can depend on a code called 'code of modesty' that differentiates between men and women. Fourth, the private sphere of the families can impact on women's entrance of public sphere.

According to Joshua Haber and Maria Saab in their article *The Slow Pace of Female Empowerment in the Gulf*³⁶, women are still marginalized in the workforce. Therefore there should be reforms in the private and public sectors

³³ Ibid, 5

³⁴ Ibid, 5

³⁵ Ibid, 6

³⁶ Maria Saab, and Joshua Haber. "The Slow Pace of Female Empowerment in the Gulf." *Open Democracy: Free Thinking for the World* (2014).

in the form of more female-friendly policies. However, some policies have been introduced. Bahrain signed a UN convention regarding the law that gives equal rights for women. The government encourages the education for women, the literacy is only 84 %³⁷, and university graduate women are more than the men. Although GCC states accomplished a lot for men there is still a way ahead to empower women politically and economically and to lift women from political and economic marginalization so that they do can assume key or high positions, and become visible in all sector and be influential in decision making.

In the 2013 Global Gender Gap report Haber and Saab pointed to gaps in education, health, politics and economics. Although Gulf countries have good education, they are still ranked as the lowest countries regarding political and economical aspects. Moreover, GCC policies lack family-friendly policies, as most of the companies do not have good benefits or flexible working hours, or sufficient maternity leave or parental leave or childcare programs. Women mostly fill positions of limited decision – making and less strategic positions.

The above review of related literature shows that empowerment is still lacking in the Arab World, and that the theory of public sphere has effects on women. However, there are few studies on the public sphere related to work force issue. Although women are educated, the percentage of workingwomen is still small. Many other relevant studies will be employed in coming chapter.

³⁷ Ibid

Research Methods

- Research design:

This study adapted a qualitative method, because it is not intended to conduct surveys or arrive at generalizations. The study employed interviews. “Qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis.”³⁸

Interview method is important to understand the experience of the interviewees in details and to demonstrate and discuss the questions with them better than having surveys. In surveys the participants would only answer the questions without any discussion, therefore, some main aspects might not been addressed, because it requires knowing the detailed story and experience of the interviewees. This qualitative study included both primary and secondary sources. Primary source contained interviews with Qatari women, and the secondary sources included scholarly articles, dissertations, and books. Interview is a good way to interact with the interviewees to know and analyze their experience along with the secondary sources.

- Sampling:

The interviewees in this research were three Qatari women in three sectors, diplomats from the foreign ministry, TV and Radio broadcasters in the media, and women entrepreneurs in private sector. The research was supposed to evaluate the experience of the women since they started to work in these sectors and the challenges that they might have overcome. The reliability and

³⁸ Michael Patton, and Michael Cochran. “A Guide to Using Qualitative Research Methodology”. *Medicines Sans Frontiers*, (2002): 2-28.

accuracy of the data collected were considered. The reliability is to ensure the quality of the research and that it gives the best results, which would be generated from the interviews and analyzing the data.

The sample is a purposive one. Only 21 women agreed to be interviewed. Many women were picked to secure the highest data accuracy possible. It was not easily to get the approval as some of them are public figures. All of the embassies were contacted to get the approval of the diplomats. Channels managements requested to email them officially. The business sector did not reply quickly. The age of the interviewees ranged between 25 and 58, however, 5 out of 21 did not want to mention their ages, because for some women this is a sensitive and private issue.

- Ethical issues:

This point is important to give the participants freedom to do the interviews or not, with the consent letter that they should sign. There are several ethical related issues. The first one is autonomy, which means to respect the interviewees and the reader. Second, it is important to be beneficent as to make a good work for people to benefit from. Third it was a concern not to write or ask any point that would hurt anyone. Fourth, to give equality for everyone and not giving the privileges for some people and some people not.

- Research tools:

Interviews were used for data collection. The type of interview used in this research is called unstructured or in-depth. This type is used to know the details the interviewee's own perspective about the issues discussed. They were constructed of 7 main questions; which were the same for all the interviewed women and aimed at addressing these issues in details with each interviewee as

in-depth conversation. The questions present three general themes: the challenges that face women in work field and whether or not they overcome these challenges; the public sphere theme which is meant to understand whether or not the public can express their opinion in many issues, whether social or political, and the State's policies theme which are concerned with the policies of the State and whether they encourage or discourage women. These themes will be elaborated upon in the next chapters. The interviews were conducted by using three means of communication; email, phone, and face-to-face. This is because it was not easy to reach all interviewees, especially -those who work in the diplomatic missions and have limited time slots for activities, which are not work related. The length of the interviews was set to a maximum of 25 minutes.

- Data analysis:

Data management is important to get the best results. The interviews were done in Arabic, because all of the interviewees were Qataris. Therefore, it required translation into English. The collected data was compared with the secondary sources from the literature review. It also compared each sector, to see whether they had faced different obstacles. The data were organized and documented. The interviews by phone and face-to-face were recorded and written in papers and the interviews by e-mail are already organized.

The analysis is a thematic one. First, each interviewee was listed and the main answers were written and summarized for each answer. Second, the data were separated by themes, which compared each answer to see if there was any similarity or contradictions. The thematic analysis is easier to use in this research, because some the interview questions have similar ideas, which would

make it easier to analyze the data. Then, some of the answers were chosen as quotations.

- Limitations and challenges:

There were a number of limitations faced during the research. Firstly, the issue that came up right at the start of the research was choosing candidates who would approve and take part in it without major restriction or boundaries. Some sectors from which candidates were chosen, involved lengthy process to get the approval of the officials. Some of the interviews were with managerial positioned women, so an appointment in advance had to be arranged. This hindered finishing the thesis in time, because some of them took a long time to respond and agree with answering and meeting. Some interviewees especially from the diplomatic sector required official emails to make interviews. Some of the interviewees agreed to have the interview by email, but never sent their answers. Other challenges were to find previous studies similar to my subject, especially in the case of public sphere, which was mostly about theories and not on the Gulf States in particular.

Outline of the study

This study consists of 6 chapters. This chapter provided general introduction about working issues in Qatar. It also presents the research methods and how the study is conducted. Moreover, the chapter used important studies as literature review, to avoid any repetitions in the research later. Chapter 2 is about the issue of public sphere in the case of the Gulf States. It discussed the public sphere in theory in general, public sphere in the Arab countries, and public sphere and the issue of women. Chapter 3 is dedicated to

the case of Qatari women, especially in the workforce. It gave a general account on working women in the past. Moreover, women's perspective about their work and the perspective of the society on women's work were addressed. Chapter 4 presents the findings generated from the 21 interviews and were organized about 4 themes, social aspect, public sphere, challenges, and legislations. The study concludes with Chapter 5 which is dedicated to the discussion and analysis.

Chapter 2: Women in public sphere of the Gulf

It is important to examine the public sphere in general, before narrowing the review of it in the Gulf, to understand the nature of the Gulf States and how they think of women. To know the meaning of public sphere is also important, in which it will help to analyze the interviews and findings later. Moreover, it would help the reader to understand the main themes of the research. This chapter will discuss the definition and general theory of public sphere, public sphere in the Arab countries, and public sphere and Arab women.

The definition of the public sphere is important to conduct and understand the study. Social scientists and other academic intellectuals have defined the public sphere in many ways. One may wonder at times why such term became so controversial as public sphere in a lay people's thought may simply mean the community circle and what is open about it. But the public sphere is more than that, it is an important theory that has come extremely needed in the rational stimulation of verbally influential expressions, such as class, race, and gender to cite but a few examples and explanations from the earlier four decades. The scholarly analysis of the public sphere started in the 1960's with the proposition of Jürgen Habermas regarding the shape and qualities of a field of association and conversation interceding between private life and the state³⁹.

There is distinct idea about the public sphere in its relation to the state of affairs. Several researchers and social scientists such as Habermas

³⁹ John Brooke. "On The Edges of the Public Sphere". *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 2005, Vol. 62, No. 1, 93.

conceptualized the need of the public sphere -as the collective body- to form an association where the members can freely express their outlook on topics of mutual interests. The creation and growth of the public sphere started in the 1960s with Habermas's proposals about the outline and potentials of a field of association and discussion that intervenes concerning private life and the government. The public sphere according to his initial structure was firmly limited in time, space and content. The public sphere according to the study of Habermas was primarily developed and based in the period of Enlightenment and the American and French uprisings and how these events encouraged political dispute. Habermas came up with his analysis surrounded by the perspective change from the phase of economic state during the nineteenth century until the development of monopolistic capitalist strategy in the early twentieth century. "The theorist separates four phases of the public sphere: the ancient, the medieval, the bourgeois, and the degraded or transformed"⁴⁰. It is in his periodization that Habermas based the theoretical starting point and historical development of public sphere.

The idea of Habermas about the public sphere is highly political and concerns the relationship of the masculine society with the state, his emphasis is on the intervention of the public into the affairs of the government. His strong emphasis on the role of the public sphere in relation to the state's political affair made his theory on it appealing to the people. Despite the criticism successive works about the public sphere are often based on

⁴⁰ Peter Lake, and Pincus Steve. "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England". *The Journal of British Studies*, Volume 45, No. 02, (2006): 273.

Habermas's concepts, looking at identical terms such as "public", "publicity" and "civil society"⁴¹.

The challenges to Habermas public structure come from the different sectors of the society. Women and diverse labor groups raised their voices against the restrictions of membership in public spheres, as they face up to the assertion that the only matter that is noteworthy of public discourse was rational communication. The argument against the theory of Habermas on public sphere comes from his delivery of a well thought structure, but is strongly confined in social space and time. James Van Horn Melton challenged the chronology of Habermas public sphere recounting it as forums peppered with obscurities. According to Melton, the setting by which Habermas based the theory of public sphere is not applicable to that of the modern society we have today. Another author, however, said, "For all its empirical shortcomings and possible teleologies, the idea of the public sphere furnishes an enduring way to think about the early modern past and its connections to the present"⁴².

Public Sphere in Arab Countries

It is important to investigate the definition of public sphere in the Arab world and compare it to the prevailing concepts in other parts of the world. In the Arab world people generally cannot disagree with their leaders due to the hegemony of the authoritarian rule. But some Arab countries gave some freedoms for the people thus resulting in the emergence of the public sphere.

⁴¹ Ruth Bloch. "Inside and Outside the Public Sphere". *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2005): 99.

⁴² Brooke, "On The Edges of the Public Sphere," Page 94.

Some countries especially in the Gulf are developing in this direction which changed the way of thinking and opened the public sphere more and more. The public sphere plays an important role in clearing the confusion in many societal and political aspects. It allows voicing concern as to what is needed for development in Arab countries. There are diverse matters that are important to focus on in the case of Arab public sphere:

A. One of the top development agenda of Arab countries is the growth and development of their economy. But as with any other country that wanted to progress in terms of economy. Arab countries need to consider the diverse factors in order to achieve its desired economic growth. One of the factors that should be reflected on is the central role of social cohesion and its effect to sustain the growth of economy. Social cohesion is achieved through homogenous factors such as religious beliefs or ethnic belongingness. "However, in socially diverse societies, strong institutions are required for mediating conflicting, even if not necessarily violent, interests among social groups"⁴³. The social cohesion in the Arab region is impaired by low standards of political rights throughout the region and high social diversity in a few others. According to Elbadawi, improving political rights is a means to enhance social cohesion in the Arab region. He believes that such method of improving public policy and popular activism would result in a high return in terms of economic and political development. The enhancement of the political rights in the Arab world is supportive of the goal of preserving regional integrity and peace.

⁴³ Ibrahim Elbadawi. "Growth in Reviving the Arab World". *Forthcoming in Economic development and Cultural Change*, (2005): 321

- B. The deep aspiration of Arab governments to achieve a high level of industrialization and improve living standards is coupled by their intense faith in the influence of education. It is widely believed that the educated populace is a contributory factor in the achievement of social and economic development⁴⁴. This belief is supported by examples of industrially advanced countries, where most technological and scientific advances are the result of educational accomplishments. Notable economists showed that economic progress is not solely expounded in terms of financial investments, but also in terms of the investment in manpower and intellect. Modern theorists agree on the importance of education in assisting in the imparting of knowledge, acquisition of new skills, as well as a means to come up with rationalized behavior.
- C. The rich resources of the Arab world made it surprising that the health development in the region did not reach the expected level that needs to be accomplished. The reason may be because of the consequences of war that made its toll resulting in the regression of health improvement. The Arab countries have made considerable progress in its health care program however there are still public health challenges that needs to be met. The case of maternal mortality and malnutrition, as well as the emphasis on curative rather than preventive cure should be taken in consideration by the policy makers of the Arab countries.

There are strategies that should be followed in order for the Arab countries to push the health development to higher level. Jabbour outlines the

⁴⁴ Baha Abu-Laban, and Sharon Abu-Laban. "Education and Development in the Arab World". *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 1976, Vol. 10, No. 3, 286

need for freedom, empowerment of women status and knowledge. It is suggested that the health development in Arab countries must be expanded to include effects of conflict and the political climate. In addition to that, public participation in the development of agendas and community projects is important. The role of the citizens cannot be underscored as their involvement is significant in setting the right and needed agenda. The problem is exasperated because the average Arab citizen is occupied with the procurement of food, liberty and liberation so much so health matters becomes not a priority to him and his family. This can be solved by increasing education and knowledge about health issues⁴⁵.

The Arab population must be enlightened and empowered by a responsive government. The representation of the citizens should be one of the concerns of the government. While the Arab government is sensitive to issues of liberties and transparency, it's want for reform should start on a less sensitive area such as health development. It can encourage public participation advocacy to promote the health of its citizens⁴⁶.

Arab Women and the Public Sphere

The Arab women have been assigned their “women” role, and have been confined in running the household and serving the family since time immemorial. While other women in other countries have been exercising and enjoying their rights, the Arab women are left out, largely because their effort is forcefully met by negativism and resistance from the patriarchal society.

⁴⁵ Samer Jabbour. “Health and Development in the Arab World: Which Way Forward?” *BMJ*, 326 (2003): 1143.

⁴⁶ Jabbour, “Health and Development in the Arab World: Which Way Forward?,” 1141.

There are several factors that hinder the Arab woman's involvement in the society. The inability of Arab women to associate in the public life is dictated by various reasons. One is the need for her to conform to custom and tradition. The social system in most Arab countries is largely dictated by male dominated structure "Apart from citizenship, women also face gender-based restrictions in labor laws, can legally be denied employment in certain occupations, and are discriminated against in labor benefits and pension laws"⁴⁷. This is in addition to the understanding of religion that likely favors the male while relegating the women to subordinate roles. Another aspect that hinders the women's participation in political fields is the unhealthy political culture, coupled by the absence of interest of both men and women in being involved in the nation's public and political affairs. The woman's duties as a wife, mother and household keeper also limits her involvement in the social and political society. Most often, the social life of the Arab woman is acknowledged only through the assigned role by her kinship⁴⁸.

In addition to the difficulties she faces in her home country, the Arab woman has to struggle with stereotypes that the outside world had casted on her. To the outside observer, the backwardness of her culture is seen in her being severely dominated in her country. There are many works published containing the word "Arab women", and how the structural content view them as inferior in many aspects. "For a very long time, the dominant mode of thinking has been framed by binaries that relegate the Arabs and Africans to

⁴⁷ Sanja Kelly. "Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights in The Gulf Arab States". *Freedom House*, 7.

⁴⁸ Adab-Yehia, "Reflections on the Conference on Women and Development," 326.

an inferior status"⁴⁹. Being a reflection of her cultures, the Arab women are trapped with the stereotype held by people from other culture. This status of Women is a function of their culture. Women should seek to empower themselves not only for the good of their family, but for the good of their country as well. "The oppression of women can harm both women and men,"⁵⁰. This statement reflects the truth, that the circumstances that affects women, whether knowingly or unknowingly, affects men in a direct manner as well. In year 2000, Cairo hosted a women leader's conference that for the first time brought together diverse women group leaders and gender equality crusaders from the nineteen Arab League member countries. The symposium concentrated on the state of the Arab women and their part in dealing with the concerns their country is facing these days. What is presented in the conference are the trepidations the women in Arab society are facing today, the impact of custom and morals on women role in contemporary culture, the influence on women of the continuing economic fluctuations and the need for women involvement in public life⁵¹. The involvement of the Arab women in conferences and feminist movements has been affected by women's movement from other parts of the world. Another example was in UAE, in 2002, the first Women and Media Forum, the participants were calling for large transformation of the social, legal, and intellectual dimensions⁵².

⁴⁹ Shereen El Naga. "New Politics, Old Identities: Arab Women in (Their) English Words". *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No. 54 (2002): 60.

⁵⁰ Anna Mansdoller, Lars Lindholm, Michael Lundberg, Anna Winvist, and Ann Ohman. "Parental Share in Public Spheres: a Population Study on Gender Equality, death, and sickness". *BMJ (J Epidemiol Community Health)*, 60(7), (2006): 620

⁵¹ A Kumar. "Arab Women: New Voices". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol - XXXV No. 51. (2000): 4454

⁵² Loubna Skalli. "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA Region". *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Volume 2, Number 2 (2006): 43.

The tenacity of patriarchal ruling in the Arab world, especially Gulf States, hinders the development of women empowerment, as it interferes with the development in vital areas such as health, education, labor and equality. Patriarchy, as a context defined in the Arab environment is the value of giving priority to males and the elderly in almost every aspect, as commonly reinforced by their religion and long-time tradition. It is customary that in the patriarchal context, the men are superior to women in terms of being administrators, professionals, politicians and religious leaders. The male is almost always in full control over the family resources, justified only by the tradition of being financially responsible for the women and younger members of the family. The Arab women may contribute to the costs of running the household, but their input may never be part of the nationwide statistics. The research and development that are periodically conducted in the Arab world are often concentrated on variables that are tilted on the male dominated structures. This reflects the under emphasis of the women's impact to the societal and economic progress of their country.

Civil and political lobbying women groups have become more assertive in many Arab countries, and the challenge to the patriarchal system is apparent on the cry for the empowerment of women. "Developments and programs for any sector of society have to be carefully designed, so that they do not reinforce gender and age privilege"⁵³. Moreover, Arab women were given the chance to educational rights as proven by the fact that Arab women's marrying age increased due to longer time devoted to acquiring education. The

⁵³ Suad Joseph, "Patriarchy and Development in the Arab World". *Gender and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1996): 18.

delay of marriage is interpreted as an indication to the empowerment of women as increasing educational attainment and entry into the work force gives them self-fulfillment in addition to the chance to acquire new skills and assets. The women empowerment in the Arab Countries saw a slow development that may be caused by the effect of the patriarchal system deeply embedded in their society. For instance, a single woman, despite her education is expected to live under the control of father until marriage. Improved education mirrors the slow but steady progress in the direction of gender equality in the Arab world, but much needs to be done, as many workplaces remain closed to the women. This is in addition to the fact that the women's input to the economy is highly hidden or compromised by the husbands reluctant to account for the value of the woman's input. "Women's access to this sphere is contested because of the male-domination of the politico-religious centers of power in Muslim societies. These men remain ambivalent in their positions toward the scope of women's mobility as well their visibility"⁵⁴.

The progress in Arab women's status is still unfolding. The current situation does show some improvement such as the access to education and entry into the labor force, however, there is much left to be desired in elevating the roles of the Arab women except to that of being a mother and a wife. "The relationship between women's status and development is complex, and must be understood in an interrelated historical, cultural, social, and economic environment"⁵⁵. For instance, between 1970's and 1980's, when

⁵⁴ Skalli, "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere," 38.

⁵⁵ May Ahdab-Yehia. "Reflections on the Conference on Women and Development". *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change*, No. 1, Vol. 3 (1977): 329

Oman was in the stage of nation building women started to sense the barriers and the control over their entering the public sphere. Through the decades, women started to form groups and organizations, however, in 1990's the government prohibited them from forming more groups and prevented them from some educational programs. In the mid-1990's many educated women were encouraged to work beside men to build a modern society.

The reality at this point in time regarding the role of women in the Gulf countries is that their involvement in the political and government aspects is greatly dictated by the prevailing social as well as cultural standards. In UAE, women are underrepresented in appointed and elected positions. This points to lack of confidence in the capability of women in making important economic and political judgments. However, there is a rise in the numbers of women in government offices. In the Ministry of Education, for instance, women assume major positions.

It is with relief that there is hope for the Arab women to have their voice heard and become involved in many aspects of the society. Despite the obstacles, the women are slowly gaining participation in the public domain that is highly male dominated. Some are no longer contented with the assigned roles, but wanted to be more active in civil and political matters. It is with hope that soon, more women will share their vision as they participate in the making of a better society.

As a vital communication tool in any country, the public sphere is an important aspect that affects any countries. Arab countries can benefit from the opinions of their people that are openly shared in the public. Such practice

should be encouraged in order to show the governments the intent to involve the public in the process of decision-making.

The women, especially those in the third world countries, benefitted from the use of public sphere as it allows them to be involved in the society. There are many ways by which members of the public sphere can communicate with each other. The Internet for instance, is vital in countries where women are not allowed to be involved in the public and political affairs. The cyberspace has opened up opportunities to freely communicate and it has served its purpose as more and more people share their opinions, albeit, anonymously. Anonymous or not, what is significant is that people are given the chance to have their opinion heard, a privilege that was denied to others several decades ago.

Chapter 3: Nature of Qatari women in the work places

Women's work outside the house needs to be studied. As countries differ from each other in terms of the social environment, education status and family status every country should be studied independently. This chapter will focus on the case of Qatar. Women in Qatar participated in many work fields and got high positions. Women work in education, health, charity, art, law, media and many other fields. The attitude of Qatari society has been changing toward women and will change more because of the availability of international media. Women in Qatar proved their ability to perform their jobs in any field in the best ways.

In 1997, Qatari women got their right to vote in the municipal elections. When Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa became the ruler, he gave women their rights and started allowing them to participate in the society. For instance, in 1998, Investment Company for women was established and Sheikha Hanady Al-Thani was the head. The women working in business are 15% and in the public sector are 70%⁵⁶.

The International Labor Organization stated that the participation of women in the work force is increasing in the GCC countries. Qatar is in the first place, which is 52.1% and Saudi Arabia is the lowest with 17.4%⁵⁷. Qatar unlike many countries in the region had maintained and modified educational and social systems. It enabled women to have more roles and provided them more work opportunities. However, many women in Qatari society experienced

⁵⁶ Ashgal Website. <http://www.ashghal.gov.qa/ar/AboutQatar/Pages/women.aspx> (February, 2015)

⁵⁷ Ranya Ghanem. "Traditions are not obstacle toward the success of women". *Al-Raya Newspaper*, 2013

difficulties to work in non-traditional areas, and still there is the domination of men in the highest echelons, and few women are bosses of men.

The aim of this chapter is to provide background of Qatari women and will consist of some sections about number of Qatari women working in public and private sectors in Qatar, as well as number of women involved in business, women's perceptions of themselves, official policies, and the perceptions of Qatari society of working women. This chapter will help to understand the situation of Qatari women with the analysis in next chapters.

The Beginning of Women's Jobs

Before the discovery of oil the society was simple. Education was simple and jobs were focused on basic day-to-day skills that are related to hand-made crafts, selling patterns and teaching Quran. The pearl diving was an important source of the economy. Men in this sector used to leave their homes for months. Women in these months were taking care of their houses; also, they were working on handicrafts, agriculture, and trade. There are no figures to show the percentage of women working in these fields. However, after the discovery of oil in 1949, the State started to take care of education and opened first school in 1952 for male, and for female was in 1955. This was the beginning of regular educational system as the first junior high school for men was opened in 1960 and for women in 1967. The first university college was established in 1973 which became later Qatar University. After that date education expanded unabated.

The education sector was one the first sectors that women worked in. Women later worked in nursing and medicine sectors.

Number of Qatari Women in the Workforce

The labor force in 1982 and 1996 was 14% and grew in 2003 to be 40%. In 2004, the percentage of Qatari women was 53% in education sector, but it decreased with time, and in 2006 it became 21%⁵⁸. That's why the government is trying to encourage the Qatari women to go back into teaching with some new policies, such as increasing their salaries, but still many women do not want to teach. In 1986, Qatari women working in the public sector were 98%⁵⁹, and it decreased in recent years, which became 70%⁶⁰. In private sector, women reached 37% in 2013⁶¹.

Table 1: Labor force participation rate of ages 15-64		
Year	Female	Male
1990	44.40	94.50
1991	45.30	94.20
1992	45.10	94.10
1993	45.40	94.50
1994	45.40	95.10
1995	45.10	95.70
1996	44.10	95.40
1997	41.70	94.50
1998	40.90	93.80
1999	40.70	93.30
2000	40.10	92.70
2001	41.10	92.50
2002	42.00	92.90
2003	43.70	93.70

⁵⁸ Vouollo, Mirka; & Dell, Felder. Qatari Women in the workforce. Rand-Qatar, 2008. Page 17

⁵⁹ Al-Atiya, Amna. Women and public jobs in GCC countries with the focus of case of Qatar. Egypt: Cairo University, 2000. Page 212

⁶⁰ Ashgal website

⁶¹ Abbas, Manal. *The percentage of women in the national workforce, Qatar*. 2013

2004	44.50	94.30
2005	47.30	95.10
2006	48.80	93.50
2007	49.80	93.10
2008	50.80	93.70
2009	52.40	94.60
2010	53.00	95.60
2011	52.70	95.60
Source: http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/qatar/labor-participation-rate		

Table 1, shows the percentages of workingwomen since 1990 to 2011. The percentage of female increased from 44.4% to 52.7%, it is almost 10%. Even if it increased, it is slightly slow since the state is developing and encouraging women to work in different areas. On the other hand, the male percentages were more than female, which shows the domination in the workforce. The state should provide more jobs for women as they deserve to have jobs as the laws give these rights.

	2009 (000)	Percentage	2011 (000)	Percentage
Private	992,7	78.6	954,8	75.1
Government	150,1	11.9	146,0	11.5
Domestic	80,3	6.4	131,5	10.3
Mixed	39,1	3.1	28,3	3.1
Source: "Labor force: Sample Survey". <i>State of Qatar: Statistics Authority</i> , (2001): 11.				

Table 2 gives percentages of all Qataris in work field. In the private sector, the percentage decreased to become 75.1%. The reasons of this reduction might be

because of the reluctance of male to join this sector. The public sector does not defer in both years, it is almost the same.

A field study on jobs work in Qatar according to gender shows that in 2011, the percentage of women exceeded men in the private sector (69% female and 31% males). By contrast the public sector employs male percentage more than women (56% and 43% respectively)⁶².

From 2003 and 2005, Qatar Chamber of Commerce gave 1,360 licenses for women's owned businesses. In 2013, almost 1,000 businesswomen had 1,500 projects and businesses in services, real estate, and general trading. Moreover, the women having facilities and capital management were 13.4%⁶³. In the stock market Qatari women share 50% overall. One thing helped women in the businesses field is that many families owned businesses in the first place. "Active women in the economic domain amount to 13.4% of the total number of business domestically. Their percentage in government jobs amounts to 32% of the total number of employees. As many as 70% of these women are holders of college degrees"⁶⁴.

The number of women in media has also increased in recent years though this sector is still dominated by males. As Al-Malki, stated that the society nowadays does not disagree with women's appearance in media as much as in the past. According to Zakarya, the percentage of female in 2011 was 15.8% in media⁶⁵.

⁶² Khudur Zakarya. "A field study: Qatari trends towards working in the private sector". *Permanent Population Committee*, (2013): 46.

⁶³ Nihad Amar. *Qatar: Contemporary democracy*. (Cairo: Al-Raya for publictaion and distribution, 2013), 322.

⁶⁴ Salah Al-Mannai. *Women in Contemporary Qatar: Their Rights and Welfare*. (UK: University of Leicester, 2006), 55

⁶⁵ Zakarya, "Qatari trends towards working in the private sector," 47

Al-Khulaifi stated that there was a survey by media major students in Qatar University. The survey shows that 43% agree on state's policies encouraging women to work in this field and 46% agree that women get the encouragement from the institutes in Qatar. Moreover, 32% agree that the tradition and customs are obstacles to work in media⁶⁶.

Table 3: Number of Qatari nationals in media 1999		
	Male	Female
Official media	1048	69
Private media	49	16
Total	1097	85
Source: Zakarya, Khudur. "A field study: Qatari trends towards working in the private sector". <i>Permanent Population Committee</i> , (2013).		

The unemployment issue is another problem that faces nationals. The unemployment rate is increasing according to Dr. Al-Tumimi, because people are more prone to work in public sector, which resulted in a surplus in this sector. Therefore, the State should find more jobs for the people, open more areas for women and apply Qatarization laws. The unemployment rate in 2011 was 0.1% for males and 3.3% for females⁶⁷.

Qatari Women Perception of their Work

As mentioned above, the percentage of Qatari women is increasing in the work field. The young generation is more open about their future and jobs. "Although females who graduated in 1998 considered working in single-gender

⁶⁶ Ahisha Al-Khulaifi. *Qatari women proved themselves in media*. Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2012. <http://www.mohamoon-qa.com/Default.aspx?action=DisplayNews&ID=8903> (February, 2015)

⁶⁷ "Labor force: Sample Survey". *State of Qatar: Statistics Authority*, 2001.

work environment as relatively important, 95% of the female students graduating in 2006 had no reservations about working in a mixed-gender work environment”⁶⁸. In present, women are more concerned about their goals, education and career. It is not the same as in the past, when society controlled women and even though females still face obstacle, they are not as major or significant as before. “All women admitted that they struggled with negative stereotype by both men and women, and 85.5% said they were fighting to prove themselves”⁶⁹.

There are some motivations for women to work to show their perspective about their work:

- Economic motivation: women are getting more independence and want to control their income. The society is developing and women as well as men have needs to be accomplished.
- Independency and Security motivation: in the past, women depended on men more than now. However, it is changing that women need to have their own income to feel more secured and not depending on others.
- Social motivation: women have the right to have a social life and to meet other people and not to only stay at home and just take care of their families. This is why working will provide the environment of meeting new people and having new friends.
- Self-respect motivation: this point is important in a psychological way as when women achieve their goals and get well in their work this will give

⁶⁸ Krystyna Golkowska. “Arab women in the Gulf and the narrative of change: the case of Qatar”. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2004): 57

⁶⁹ Ibid, 58

them a good impression of themselves, which will create more productivity.

Even though there are still barriers to overcome, women still have good experience while being employed and working. Najat Abdulraheem who is working in Ooredoo, stated that success is not conflicting the nature of women, and said “My work does not contrast with being a married woman or a mother, I do my chores in the best way and my husband and children support me”⁷⁰. It is good to see examples in the society, where the family supports women to do their job in the best way, and they feel that they are not neglected.

Another example, Aisha Al-mudaihky is working in INJAZ Qatar Institute, states that the first obstacle that faced her was studying abroad, but with time her father supported her, “My appearance in media was a problem to my brothers, but with time they realized that it was not for fame, but to show my work and achievements”⁷¹. This example is opposite of the first one, which Aisha’s family did not support from the start. As she said that her work is not for fame, this shows the typical stereotype of men toward women in appearing and working in some work fields.

Society Perception of Working Women

The society’s perceptions of working women have impacted on their self-confidence. Stereotyping women as dependents gave the privilege to men as the ones who should work and spend on family. As Almuftah and Sulaiman put it, “Culture always has a profound impact on the way that individual perceive

⁷⁰ Ghanem, “Traditions are not obstacle toward the success of women”. 2013

⁷¹ Ibid

themselves. In the Arab world: "The prevailing masculine culture and values see women as dependents. As a result, men take priority both in terms of access to work and the enjoyment of its returns"⁷². Moreover, to some people, the family does not need extra income whether the woman is married or not. Nasser gave an example of 1970s era when the oil prices were high so the families were in good shape, but it changed in 1980s, the reduction of oil prices gave the women the chance to work and help the family⁷³.

There are several social barriers that face women interalia tribal traditions and culture, the attitude of men, family pressure, and the domination of men⁷⁴. This shows that the society is still in early stage to see women taking some responsibilities and positions they never had before. One of the problems that men do not like is that women generate more income than them. As for the issue of family pressure, still some families do not want their female members to work in areas that they have not been there before, because to them, these women are breaking the norms and values of the culture. As Dr. Al-Tumimi stated there are still people who have a backward mind toward women who are seen by them just as 'pudenda'⁷⁵, which must lock herself at her home⁷⁶. Nevertheless, there are many families who encourage their daughters to work and take high positions and to develop themselves. Therefore, it cannot be generalized that all of them have positive nor negative perceptions. This way of thinking has changed in the younger generations, who agree and support women

⁷² Hind Al-Muftah, and Noor Sulaiman. "A Qatari perspective on women in the engineering pipeline: and exploratory study". *European Journal of Engineering Education*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (2010): 509

⁷³ Naseer, Naem. *The role of Qatari women and her participation in the workforce of the public sector*. (Qatar University, 1991), 229

⁷⁴ Al-Mannai, *Women in Contemporary Qatar*, 166.

⁷⁵ Abdul-Malik Al-Tumaimi. "Oil and women in the Arabian Gulf". *Kuwait Magazine*. <http://www.kuwaitmag.com/index.jsp?inc=5&id=148&pid=2091> (May, 2014).

⁷⁶ Ibid

to work and to get higher education. Since the development of the country and the increasing needs, men and women should share their lives together to get a good life. "The modernization of the new State has created a social structure that has placed pressure on individual women to move from one social value to another, depending on the social activities involved"⁷⁷.

Many people disagree with working women for three reasons. First the society believes that woman might neglect her children, her husband, and her home. Second, she might offend her dignity and chastity that Islam provided to her, as AlMuftah and Sulaiman stated that "The Arabian Gulf tradition (Bedouin values) considers women's chastity as the main factor of family honor; thus, women are physically secluded at home"⁷⁸. Third, the women would be subjected to psychological issues due to the pressure from work and home. This statement might give support to the first argument that women's work would result in neglecting the family. However, it is a weak statement, even if she faces pressure, the husband must take into account his wife's feeling and help her to get through any obstacle.

On the other hand, people agree on women's work also for five reasons. First, to help exploit women's potential and capacity; secondly to develop sense of responsibility and decision-making; thirdly, to highlight the good qualities of women's personality and character; fourth to attain income to contribute and spend on the family along with the husband as life has become more expensive and more needs are required so the husband and wife should share their income to get a decent and good life; fifth to reduce the use of expatriate workers. The

⁷⁷ Al-Mannai, *Women in Contemporary Qatar*, 182.

⁷⁸ AlMuftah and Sulaiman, "A Qatari perspective on women in the engineering pipeline," 509.

last statement is almost right as many companies would bring expatriate workers because citizens would not work in certain jobs.

For the State, it encouraged the private sectors to employ women due to lack of employees. To empower women, the governments should establish social, political and economic decisions. Nada Jafar stated that the solution is to “allocate a field quota for women and train them to work in these fields”⁷⁹.

State Policies Toward Working Women

Since the emergence of Qatar, the state tried to increase the number of women in workforce by increasing and supporting them in education. Even with the social barriers, the state is trying to provide more jobs for women and to increase Qatar nationals in the workforce. As mentioned before, Qatar’s vision 2030, considered women as a vital part in the society. The vision emphasized increasing job opportunities for women and supporting them. Another point in the vision is to empower women in their participation in the economy, politics, and especially decision-making. One of the important articles in the Constitution of Qatar is article 34 that states that the citizens of Qatar are equal in public rights and duties. Therefore, in laws, women and men are equal in everything and should not be differentiated in any right.

The Qatari government articulated Qatarization policy in 1997, which intended to increase Qatari citizens' percentage in the workforce. The percentage should be at least 20% in all sectors. This policy does not

⁷⁹ Mohammed Al-Jubaly. “The role of Qatari women in the economic development process is increasing with time”. *Al-Arab Newspaper*, 2013.

differentiate between genders; both men and women can meet Qatarization goals, which gave women same opportunities as men.

Moreover, there are several laws, which gave benefits to women. The Pension Law of 2002 gives women retirement benefits. In 2004, new law was enacted to replace the old one. The new law gave equality to women and men in working rights, such as training opportunities, payment, job advances and maternity leave. The latter however was too short, only two months and many women were forced to take unpaid leave.

Even though the state tries to equal between genders, the salary issue is still not equal. The table bellow will show the difference between both genders.

Table 4: Average monthly wage and working hours		
	Average working hours	Average monthly wage
Male	39	20,721 QR
Female	38	15,313 QR
Source: "Labor force: Sample Survey". <i>State of Qatar: Statistics Authority</i> , (2001): 14		

Therefore, even if the policies insist on equality, it is not applicable in practice, with almost 5000 riyals difference between the salaries of men and women to the favor of men. As Dr. Al-Muftah states "the definition of equality is only in papers, and not practiced in reality"⁸⁰. The inequality is not only in terms of salaries, but also in terms of promotions and increments. 53.3% of women are experiencing inequality in promotion.

Even if the laws show that there is no difference between the genders, women should get the approval of their guardians to work in any sector. Huwail

⁸⁰ Child protection Institute Seminar. *Qatari women suffer a stifling working environment*. <http://www.mohamoon-qa.com/Default.aspx?action=DisplayNews&ID=8295>

pointed out that there is a “requirement for parental consent of women to work in all fields, and it appears that the action is a routine that the parent or guardian does not object to, but in many cases remains an obstacle to employ a woman whose guardian may arbitrarily not agree. Hence come the slogan ‘my work is my right’, is it my right to work after guardian’s consent? or it is only my right?”⁸¹. Huwail brought a very important issue, which contradicts Qatar’s laws to have gender equality. If the state gave the right for women to work as men, they do not have to get their guardians' approval to work as an equality issue. This shows again that some laws are not applied in real life.

In conclusion, one of the first jobs that women worked in the past were the education sector because the conservative society preferred non-mixed work fields, such as education. However, nowadays this point of view has changed as women intend to find job that suits their abilities, whether in mixed or non-mixed sectors.

Since the rule of Sheikh Hamad in 1995, and the enactment of new laws and establishment of institutions to help and support women, the percentages of women has increased in workforce. Even with this increase in the percentages of working females, male percentages are still much higher, since they got their rights even before Sheikh Hamad’s rule, and as a defined reason of a male dominate society.

Qatari women faced many social obstacles some of which are family related. They still face some barriers from the start of their career, but it might change with time if their family supports them. The State is trying to increase the

⁸¹ Ibid.

number of Qatari nationals in the workforce by establishing some policies and laws, such as the Qatarization Policy.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will exhibit the results of each interview, as the research is employing a qualitative design. The best way to answer the research questions was to do interviews with a view to have insights on the experience and story of each interviewee. The participants in the interview were 21 from three sectors, media, business, and diplomatic. The interviews were done by three methods, by email, phone, and face-to-face. The interviews were done in Arabic, because all of the interviewees' first language is Arabic, therefore, all of their answers are translated by the researcher.

The answers of the questions will be presented in four themes; social aspect, public sphere, challenges, and legislations. Some themes would have sub-sections, to make it more organized and more detailed. Of course, each interviewee has a different experience, whether it is negative or positive experience. Answers will also be compared according to sectors.

1. Social aspect

As mentioned above, answers will be presented according to sectors, because each sector has a different perspective therefore, each participant may have a different experience.

1.1 Family and social restrains:

1.1.1 Business sector

Most interviewees mentioned that they did not face any family restrain. However, they faced some societal restrains, as it is a male job rather than a female one. Naila Al-Durwaish, Sameera Fakhri and Asma Al-Mulla, said that they

got the support and encouragement from everyone since they started the business. Buthaina Al-Ansari, stated that she never faced any problem, because her family believe in the importance of women in the society, furthermore, she stated that her father always say “women are not half of the society, but they are all of the society, and through her we will see the future leaders, because women are not only workers, they are also mothers.” Ibtihaj Ahmedani, stated that she faced some problems in the beginning but this decreased gradually with time as people around her started to see that it is serious job and not a funny one. The fact that her father was a businessman helped her to overcome the problem.

1.1.2 Media Sector

Some of the interviewees faced a problem in their career and some of them did not. Aisha Hassan, Duaa Al-Fayad, and Hanan Al-Fayad said that everyone encouraged them to enter this field. Hessa Al-Suwaidi said that at the beginning, her family was supporting her, but some people were afraid that she would appear on TV. Naila Al-Mulla and Nora Al-Mannai said that they faced some problems. Naila Al-Mulla stated “at the start my family was against the idea, as it was part of the conservative society, so they were afraid of people’s reaction, but when I started they supported me as Qatari girl who represents my country.”

1.1.3 Diplomatic sector

Since it is difficult to reach women in diplomatic sector, only five women answered the questions. Each one of them has a different experience. Fouzia Al-Sulaiti stated that she did not face any difficulties and she got the support from

her family, especially her father. Noor Al-Sada said that she struggled when she started her career, but her family agreed on it after understanding the nature of her job. Sara Al-Sulaiti said that her parents and aunts did not disagree with her job, but her brother did, “At first I did not really encountered any restrictions, particularly from my father and mother and I have been getting their support and also the support of aunts and cousins, and this explains the extent of their support for me and how much they are proud as one of the first Qatari diplomats who works abroad, but I ran into some problems with my Brothers because of their fanaticism and the understanding that women’s place is at home and to be married only. As you know, their friends can affect their views. At the beginning they were supporting me but as soon as the decision to move me to Austria was decided they changed their standpoint. This explains how the male domination of the society is still the same and did not develop.” Sara Al-Mudadi said that her father did not approve this career in the beginning, but with her insistence, he agreed to it because he did not want to stop her ambitions.

The table below will show if women faced any societal and family restrains or not. The marked sections are the ones who faced any problems when they started their jobs or businesses.

Table 5: Social and Family Restarins		
Business Sector	Family restrains	Societal restrains
Buthaina Al-Ansari		✓
Naila Al-Durwaish		
Aisha Al-Fardan		✓
Sameera Fakhri		✓
Ibtihaj Ahmedani	✓	✓
Asma Al-Mulla		

Nora Al-Kuwari		
Najla Al-Shafae		
Mariam Ahmed	✓	✓
Media Sector		
Duaa Al-Fayad		
Hanan Al-Fayad		
Naila Al-Mulla	✓	✓
Hessa Al-Suwaidi		
Aisha Hassan		
Asma Jabir		
Nora Al-Mannai	✓	✓
Diplomatic sector		
Noor Al-Sada	✓	
Sara Al-Sulaiti	✓	✓
Sara Al-Mudadi	✓	✓
Fouzia Al-Sulaiti		
Moza AlThani		

1.2 Social Structure:

This part displays in general the opinions of the interviewees regarding the social structure and its influence on the work of women. Some of the interviewees agreed that the social structure has an influence on the work of women and where they should they work. Others did not agree. Others said that in the past it did influence women's work, but it changed in the present with the development of the country.

1.2.1 Does not influence women's jobs:

Noor Al-Sada and Asma Jabir explained that the social structure used to influence the work of women, but it changed nowadays. She gave an example of

appointing the first Qatari women as the Chief executive officer at QNB 'Qatar National Bank'. Hanan Al-Fayad said that the structure does not influence jobs, "It is her scientific and professional potentials and her ambitions, and ability to work in any field that is appropriate to her nature." Ibtihaj Ahmedani stated that nowadays the societal structure never impact on the work of women. She gave the example of her situation as a businesswoman "the market does not differentiate between man and woman, the funding criteria applied to everyone whether a man or a woman."

1.2.2 *Influence women's jobs:*

Conversely Naila Al-Durwaish said that social structure is still influencing women as this social structure designates some jobs that women cannot work in because they do not suit their nature. Sara Al-Mudadi agreed that the society sometimes disapprove some work fields, but she stated "for me, I see that women can assume any job they want." Aisha Hassan looks positively on the said influence as it is meant to maintain and protect women's reputation rather than to impede pursue of ambition and dreams.

1.3 *Definition of conservative society:*

Interviewees were asked about their opinion of the meaning of conservative society. Despite differences there were many ideas in common. Some of the answers were based on the religious perspective which is actually mixed with religion. Other answers were based only on the traditions which according to them should be respected. Some interviewees distinguished between religion and traditions as they should not be combined together.

The table below will provide the definition of each interviewee about the conservative society.

Table 6: The definition of conservative society	
Name	Definition
Naila Al-Mulla	“To maintain the traditions and customs, no matter what happens, the traditions should be preserved and we should not cross the line and go beyond the traditions”
Buthaina Al-Ansari	“We have to distinguish between the religion and traditions, because Islam gave the women their right and the traditions sometimes conflict with religion. While we should preserve the traditions we should not utilize religion as a pretext for a conservative society. Religion is the basis of a successful society”
Sara Al-Sulaiti	“The society in which is characterized by moderation and balance, which is not imprisoning women and support them in every field that serves the country”
Sara Al-Mudadi	“The society that maintains the local traditions and customs that are built on the basis of respecting the freedom of individual and conscience”
Naila Al-Durwaish	“Women should maintain the traditions, no matter how prosperity and urbanized the community is, especially in our conservative society, which emphasizes women decency in all respects”
Hessa Al-Suwaidi	“The society which is committed religiously and is modernized at the same time, and which are aware of duties and is flexible for all the ages and minds”
Duaa Al-Fayad	“The society which is committed to religion and stick to its doctrine”
Hanan Al-Fayad	“The society that is committed to the religion without being fanaticism”
Aisha Hassan	“Society that clings to its values, customs and traditions, and

	religion. At the same time it does not close the doors of communication and development around the world”
Noor Al-Sada	“We are still a conservative society, which is good to stick to its traditions and values”
Fouzia Al-Sulaiti	“The society which is committed to its traditions, values and religion, and preserve the historical legacy, at the same time support the debate and dialogue within certain controls”
Sameera Fakhri	“Community with the best moralities and teaching based on the religious values without being intellectually intolerant”
Aisha Al-Fardan	“Maintaining the original tenets of the religion, customs and traditions, abandon the Inner and worn Traditions”
Nora Al-Mannai	“The society that is committed religiously, but gives the character of traditions and customs. Whenever the community is religious, whenever it is far from the social strife”
Ibtihaj Ahmedani	“Islamic religion maintains women, men and everyone in the society, and sets standards in life so that no one faces injustice. We can say it is a male dominant community, but the Qatari men are rational and democratic, and treat women with transparency and respect”
Nora Al-Kuwari	“Society that respects religion, laws, customs and traditions”
Reem Ahmed	“To adhere the teachings of religion in all life areas”
Asma Jabir	“To be conservative through thoughts before being in words and deeds”
Najla Al-Shafae	“To be coherent in acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, etc in addition to ethics and values and proper uprising”
Asma Al-Mulla	“The society which is still maintaining traditions and customs”
Moza al-Thani	“A society that maintains the social traditions in the cultural and civilizational context, taking into account the historical development of other communities, which is called gobalization”

2. Public sphere

This section is about the public sphere and its impacting on women. Some of the answers were positive and some other were negative. At first many interviewees did not know what is the meaning of public sphere, therefore, the question was paraphrased to be 'do you think the way the society look at women has an influence or affect on their jobs?'

2.1 *Negative thinking*

According to Nora Al-Mannai it certainly had bad influence on women, because some people in the society still think that their daughters or wives should not work in a mixed environment. Mariam Ahmed agreed with Al-Mannai's statement and added that this negative influence together with the lack of families' encouragement of women might adversely impact on their productivity in work. Asma Al-Mulla stated that the influence might affect women negatively, but women should be strong to surmount these obstacles. Sameera Fakhri said that the society discriminate against women and does not give women what they deserve.

2.2 *Positive thinking*

The positive way of thinking is that the public sphere is giving women what they deserve and does not impede their ambitions. Aisha Hassan and Fouzia Al-Sulaiti said that with the development of life, women achieved the highest levels of education and thus became capable of undertaking duties in any field they want. Sara Al-Sulaiti and Duaa Al-Fayad said that it does not impact on

their jobs and to the contrary, but it opens the doors for women in all the areas and expands their stimuli. For Hessa Al-Suwaidi, the public sphere would have an impact on the female if the woman herself wants to be impacted; “it is starting from the house and anything I do will impact back on my house.” Nora Al-Kuwari stated that the public sphere does not influence badly because she is the one who has chosen this field, so no one should enforce anything on her.

2.3 *Negative and positive thinking*

Each interviewee has either a negative or a positive point of view. Only Buthaina Al-Ansari expressed mixed feeling. She said that the private sphere is a main part of the public sphere, the society –public- is made of several blocks – so, the society is combined with these blocks might influence women whether negatively or positively.

Table 7 will provide the idea of the interviewees, if they think the public sphere has a bad or a good influence on women.

Table 7: The influence of the public sphere		
Name	Negative	Positive
Naila Al-Mulla		✓
Buthaina Al-Ansari	✓	✓
Sara Al-Sulaiti		✓
Sara Al-Mudadi	✓	
Naila Al-Durwaish		✓
Hessa Al-Suwaidi		✓
Duaa Al-Fayad		✓
Hanan Al-Fayad	✓	
Aisha Hassan		✓
Noor Al-Sada	✓	

Fouzia Al-Sulaiti		✓
Sameera Fakhri	✓	
Aisha Al-Fardan	✓	
Nora Al-Mannai		✓
Ibtihaj Ahmedani	✓	
Nora Al-Kuwari		✓
Mariam Ahmed	✓	
Asma Jabir		
Najla Al-Shafae		✓
Asma Al-Mulla	✓	
Moza Al-Thani		

3. Challenges

This part is explaining the challenges that the interviewees experienced when they started their career or business. Only three of them said that they did not face any problem or challenge. Others said that they faced some challenges, although some of them overcame the difficulties.

3.1 *Have not faced any challenges:*

The three women who have not faced any challenges are working in media. Aisha Hassan stated that she did not face any challenge entering media sector, but she was afraid at the beginning, as it was a new field to her. Hessa Al-Suwaidi also is working in media; she stated "I was so concentrating on my work, which is something I love to do and one of my dreams to accomplish. Also as I got these chances I felt I have to take the advantage of them." Nora Al-Mannai said that she was used to lecture, as she works in Family Counseling Centre.

Moreover, she mentioned that media sector is encouraging people to work in it, so people should not face any problem entering this field.

3.2 Faced some challenges:

In this section the results are presented according to each sector independently as each sector might face different challenges.

3.2.1 Media sector

While the three interviewees mentioned above did not face problems, others reported that they experienced some problems. Duaa Al-Fayad said that she might have faced small challenges. She worked in several areas as TV broadcaster which is a very sensitive job as any mistake would be shown to all watching people. Naila Al-Mulla moved from radio broadcasting to TV broadcasting. The radio for her was more difficult than the TV, because she should be a charismatic to attract people. As for the TV, it was difficult for her to do field broadcasting, which is not in studio. The difficulty that faced Hanan Al-Fayad was to balance between work and home.

3.2.2 Business sector

The interviewees in business sector face more challenges than the media. Buthaina Al-Asnsari faced so many difficulties, not from her family but from the legal structure. She faced difficulties regarding the commercial registration, bringing expatriate workers, wages, visas, bank loans and stores. One of the things she was depending on was the free-lancer, which helped her with her worker's wages. Nora Al-Kuwari also mentioned that bringing workers was the

most difficult issue. As for Sameera Fakhri, she faced first a 'private sphere' problem, that is leaving her children for a long period of time, and a 'public sphere' problem that is the lack of support from the society. As for Naila Durwaish and Asma Al-Mulla the administrative regulations and finishing the business papers were the main problems. As shown above, the business sector challenges were mostly finishing the papers and starting the business.

3.2.3 Diplomatic sector

The diplomatic sector is the one where women face the most challenges, because it is a new sector that is opened for women and requires to work abroad. Sara Al-Mudadi said that men are the ones who get in the way of women's ambitions, but Sara Al-Sulaiti has different opinions as men in her work supported her. Fouzia Al-Sulaiti and Noor Al-Sada point to the lack of faith of the managers in women. Fouzia pointed to the fact that she was denied the chance to be a diplomat in an early stage, and did not receive any training and development after she joined the Foreign Ministry.

4. Legislation

This section is dedicated to state policies and Qatar National Vision 2030, whether or not the interviewees see state policies encouraging to them and how do they see their future within Qatar's vision and whether or not it is a bright future? Different views of interviewees will be presented.

4.1 Have not been encouraged

Two interviewees have not been encouraged by state policies. Naila Al-Durwaish stated that she found the encouragement only from her family and relatives, but never received encouragement from state policies or legislations. She wants to go global but did not see her future within Qatar's 2030 vision.

Buthaina Al-Ansari said that despite excitement and elation the experience is hard", and despite the existence of state policies and encouragement to work in business is not easy. As for the national vision, she said "we were hoping to get 20% for small and medium businesses, but we got nothing. As for the vision, there are four principles, education, health environment and investments in human capital. For the investment there is women empowerment, so I was happy that women got their chances". "The strategic plan of the vision is perfect, but it is hard to execute." She added. She concluded that she reached high position but still aspires more.

4.2 Encouraged

Other interviewees were optimistic and said that they sensed the encouragement from the state. Hanan Al-Fayad, Sameera Fakhri, and Aisha Al-Fardan believed that their future is related to the future of the next generation, so they must work according to Qatar's vision, to provide the best future for younger generations. Aisha Hassan said, "Thanks to God and the wise policy of the country, it opened the doors of science and knowledge and gave us the opportunity to participate in the workforce and be part of the development."

Moreover, she stated that “Our steps are deliberate and our goals are clear and our achievements are concrete, then we are in a successful journey.”

Sara Al-Mudadi said that there still are obstacles in the diplomatic sector, but they should be patient and be strong to achieve the 2030 vision. Sara Al-Sulaiti, Fouzia Al-Sulaiti and Sara Al-Mudadi, the three of them are working in the diplomatic sector, want to achieve the highest positions in the diplomatic sector with the support of the State and applying within its vision.

In conclusion, each interviewee faced different experience and some of them have faced the same difficulties and obstacles. The families of some participants are still conservative and according to them their daughters still should not work in some areas. They attribute this position of the families to the traditions not to the religion although they confuse traditions with religion.

As for the social structure issue, some of the interviewees said it used to impact on women, but it changed now with the development of the country, and women now are working in fields they have not worked in before. Others believe that there are still women in the country who face some difficulties. For example, some families are still conservative and do not let women work in certain places.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

This chapter aims to discuss the main findings and results of the study. For this purpose it shall employ resources other than the ones used in the previous chapters. The presentation in the previous chapter shows that many people are still against the work of women, but there are people who agree on that. Some people tend to confuse Islam with traditions to legitimate their objection to women's work. Others hold that Islam encourages both men and women to work. This chapter will discuss the finding and analysis in three main sections, social aspect, public sphere, and the labor laws in Qatar. These sections constituted the main aspects of the interviews.

Social aspect

Social restraint means a situation that limits person's decision in any part in his/her life. In regards to workingwomen, social restrains are different, depending on the area the women work in. The three sectors in this research are totally different from each other. In Qatari society, many people are conservative. Some of them confuse religion with traditions so much so that what is not acceptable due to traditions becomes religiously not acceptable. The fact is that religion converges and diverges from religion. Religion does not necessarily impede women's work. To the contrary it encourages them to work. Many women throughout Islamic history were working women. For example, Khadija bint Khowailid was a business woman when the prophet Mohammed married her. Aisha bint Abi Baker was teaching men the Islamic principles. Of course examples abound. Traditions in most of the Gulf societies, particularly in Qatar,

can create serious problems. Some people for example tend to respond to certain acts that are forbidden for women by using word *Eib* (shame). This word means that there are certain acts would be fault and shameful for women to do. For instance, there are large number of families prevent their daughters to go outside their houses without brothers or husbands.

Another issue with the traditional society is the interference of the family members in women's life or decisions, especially in work. Buthaina Al-Ansari, one of the interviewees, stated that as she is a manager in Ooredoo, many men come to her and say that they want their wives to work at back office and not in the customer service or any position to deal with customers. If a woman is not married, her father or even brothers would interfere with her decisions and sometimes they decide for her in such issues regarding her work, marriage ...etc. However, this case cannot be generalized as some families encourage women to work. These families are open-minded, let their daughters work, go out, or even study and work abroad.

But generally speaking the society is still male dominated. If a woman was married, the husband would interfere with her decisions and sometimes would choose the work place and some of them would not allow their wives to work. In such a male dominated society women should ask or negotiate their decisions with the male members of the family in many issues.

Another example of the male-dominant society is that according to law women should take the approval of guardians to work. This law shows that despite development women still depend on men. Women in Qatar are educated and could be independent but still they do not have the ability to be 100% independent.

From another point of view there is a generation gap. But while the old generation would not object to the male ambitions it may do so with women. For instance, if a girl wants to study abroad, some families will not allow her, as she is a girl and cannot depend on herself, but if it was a boy, all of the family would encourage him to do so. Not only studying abroad but also working abroad, such as diplomats and ambassadors. One of the interviewees Sara Al-Sulaiti is a diplomat in Vienna. Her brothers were against her to go and work abroad, but her parents agreed for her to go and work there. This shows that even if the woman is an adult, her brothers would interfere with her decisions. So it is not only the parents and husbands but also brothers who interfere in women's decisions in a male-dominant society. May be because working abroad is still new to our society people are criticizing women who work abroad.

Another issue is the age of woman and whether or not she is married. If she just graduated from high school the family would still see her young and cannot travel alone. If she is in her late 20s but not married this would represent a big problem for them. This issue is frustrating, because people see the details of her life more than her character and if she is capable to do it on her own or not. According to Sara Al-Sulaiti everyone is asking her if she is married or single, and how come her parents allowed her to go abroad by herself. Some women or even girls can do too, as the statement "she is as 100 men," which means her character is strong enough to deal with any issue.

The social structure is another issue that can affect women's work environment. The society in Qatar can be called a tribal society where people would think more according to the traditions rather than religion. It goes also with the concept of *Eib*. Some people will not allow women to work at all and

some of them would object to the work of women in some places. Most of the Qataris share the same values and traditions, and because of the living status Qataris have, most of them want to have a decent job with offices and they do not want to have a field job. This applies to men and women. Nevertheless, some Qataris whether a woman or a man works in field jobs, such as engineers and TV broadcasters. Women in the engineering field tend to wear overalls the same as men.

Public Sphere

The issue of public sphere is an important factor to understand the nature of the Arab countries. Habermas theory of the public sphere is about a political view and the relation between the society and state, however, according to Brooks, this theory is inapplicable in present. Of course it is inapplicable, because the public sphere should not focus only on politics, it should also see the details of the individuals of the society and how they think in many issues, such as working. Moza Al-Thani, one of the interviewees stated “Humans longed to express their views regarding many concepts, where some believe that it will be meaningless unless the culture in which they expressed has individual or collective frameworks”. Women in the Arab countries are more educated than men, but in the work percentages, women are less than men, as Zakarya stated that men are 56% and women are 43% in the workforce⁸². This shows that families still control women regarding work. “The woman’s duties as wife, mother and household keeper also limit her

⁸² Zakarya. “Qatari trends towards working in the private sector,” 46

involvement in the social and political society. Most often, the social life of the Arab woman is acknowledged only through the assigned role by her kinship”⁸³.

The older generation still sees the influence of public sphere in a negative way, however, the younger generation has changed this attitude. One of the main issues that people talk about is the mixed work environment. The society in Qatar is changing. In every work place men exist. Even in schools men go inside and talk to the administrations or even expatriate workers. Some people still do not want their wives or daughters to work in a mixed environment; they want them to be in separated offices or to put partitions to veil them. The society still does not believe in the relation between men and women at work, because they say that the openness affect negatively as they talk to men or laugh with them which is bad for women. Ibtihaj Ahmedani is one of the interviewees said that her family was against her opening a business, but gradually tolerated it because she showed them that the business is a serious plan and not for fun.

Dr. Abdulla Al-Nufaisi talked about women in his book *Women work in the Gulf: Reality and Hope*. He discussed and criticized Dr. Nawal Al-Sadawi’s point of releasing women from male domination, as releasing Arab countries from the West and global capitalism⁸⁴. He criticized the statement of separating men from women, as men are the main reason for women suffering. Moreover, he points out that Dr. Al-Sadawi wants to separate religion from the state, as many people would disagree and would attack women more. Both of them are wrong, as for Al-Sadawi, the Muslim countries cannot separate Islam from state policies, as the countries would become secular states. This would create many problems,

⁸³ Ahdab-Yehia, “Reflections on the Conference on Women and Development,” 326

⁸⁴ Abdulla Al-Nufaisi. *Women Work in the Gulf: Reality and Hope*. (Kuwait: Al-Rubaiiaan Publications, 1987), 14

especially in the Gulf as they are more conservative than other countries and combine religion with traditions in state policies. As for Al-Nufaisi, he disagrees with Al-Sadwai's point that men are part of the problem. But in reality men are part of this problem, because in the Gulf States, men are dominating women, and do not give women free space to think or work. Men should not be separated from women as they are part of the society, but they should give women some space to allow them to think as adults, and to do what is suitable for them without crossing the line.

On the other hand, the younger generation does not see any problem in working in mixed environment. Globalization is one of the factors that helped to change the way of thinking of the new generation. Media, phones and internet changed the way of thinking as the access to these factors opened the eyes to the changes in the world and how the people around the world are living, therefore, the younger generations do not want to stick to traditions. One of the jobs is to work abroad as a diplomat. Most of the female diplomats are young, since the country allowed them to work abroad recently, however, their families disapproved their work at the beginning, it is not only a new thing to the State but also a new issue for the society to accept. One of the diplomats Noor Al-Sada said that her family was against her work and they needed time to approve it.

Another issue is that the family still decides whether woman works or stays at home and raises the children. Men usually decide on that as they are the ones who pay for the family. As discussed in the previous chapters, some people object to the work of women as that may adversely affect her children and husband. It may also reflect badly on her dignity as the pressure from work might affect her attitude at home. These three reasons are not based on strong

grounds. Women can balance work and home duties and even if they are under pressure, the husband should be supportive, because marriage is a sharing experience and not everything should be the woman's responsibility. These men should give their wives some allowance, because they have needs. The wife has the right to get money from her husband. On the other hand, some men want their wives to work, to help him and to be independent and control their own money. Loubna Skalli stated "Women's access to this sphere is contested because the male-dominate politico-religious centers of power in Muslim societies remain ambivalent in their positions toward the scope of women's mobility as well as their visibility"⁸⁵. The male, politics, and religion are factors that affect women according to Skalli. However, religion rather than impeding women's work it is encouraging them. People in the society, however, are combining religion with traditions. Actually traditions not religion may be the factor that impede women's work.

Car driving is another issue. People in the society still consider that women cannot handle driving, as men might harass women. Maybe this thinking is true when women started to drive, but nowadays the attitude has changed and men are more accepting that women should drive. However this cannot be generalized as some families still do not allow their daughters or wives to drive.

Working laws in Qatar

There are many laws that State of Qatar enacted to ensure giving the rights for the all nationals in the workforce. Among the laws that concern women

⁸⁵ Skalli, "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere," 38

are the Maternity leave law, Qatarization, vision 2030, pension law, salary, laws of 2004, and the approval of the guardian.

Maternity leave is a law to give women 60 days leave after giving birth. This leave is too short, because they need to take care of their baby, and the two hours per day for feeding is not enough for women to watch their babies. Al-Raya Newspaper conducted a survey on this issue. The survey found:

- 86% confirmed the maternity leave time period is unfair.
- 79% assert that leave deny them bonuses and promotions.
- 59% believe that some managers punish women by not giving them their promotions and bonuses, and demanding the law be amended.
- 56% of the managers refuse to employ women because of maternity leave.
- 89% of women assert that the hours of feeding is not applicable, because they need time to go back home, which is counted with the two hours.

Many women see that the leave is not applicable, as they demand to change the law. The managers in the workforce should be aware that women need this leave and even the feeding hours are important to them. The leave should be at least 2 or 3 months, to take a good care of their children. Moreover, because the leave is too short, women are forced to take an unpaid leave. As the country is encouraging women to work, it should enact laws and apply them to encourage more women to work.

Qatarization law is an important one, because it equalizes between genders, as gives women the same right as men. It was enacted in 1997 when the percentage of Qataris was 20%. Despite the importance of this law men are

outnumbering women in the work places. Women should get the same opportunities as men. Dr. Kaltham Al-Ganem holds that women still face challenge in the leadership positions, compared to men. It is true, as most of the managers are men.⁸⁶ People might still not trust the ability of women to work but trust men more. However, women are more serious to do any work, even if it is not their specialty.

Pension law of 2002 was enacted to give the right for men and women to get their salaries after retirement. It is to get the retirement salary after 15 years of work. The pension salary is calculated on basis of the basic salary. This law is good to guarantee that people would still be able to lead decent life after retirement. As for the salary issue, Qatari men get more salaries than women. It is approximately 5000 riyals gap between both men and women⁸⁷. In the Gulf States, men are the ones who spend on the families. But some women despite being divorced or widows need the salary to spend on their children. Therefore, men and women should get the same salary or be closer to each other.

2004 laws consist of 5 articles⁸⁸:

- Women should get the same opportunities as men.
- Women should not be employed in a dangerous work fields.
- Women should not exceed working hours.
- Women should get maternity leave and 2 hours feeding.
- The Employer may not terminate the Employment Contract of a female Worker by reason of her marriage or receiving the leave provided for in Article 96 of this Law. The Employer may not notify the female Worker of

⁸⁶ Al-Ghanim, "Impediments to Women Assuming Leadership Positions in Qatari Society."

⁸⁷ *Labor force: Sample Survey 2001.*

⁸⁸ "Law No. 14 of 2004 on the promulgation of Labour Law". *Al-Meezan Website.*

the termination of her service Employment Contract during this leave, or send her a notification, which ends during the said leave.

The above laws should be applied in all sectors, however, women do not get the same chances as men, also, some women work overtime as they need to finish their work. Moreover, women should not take their work home, since they need to stay with their children and husband, so, they should finish it at work.

Vision 2030 has two principles regarding women, to increase work opportunities to women and to empower women. However men get more opportunities than women, since they are more in the workforce. Buthaina Al-Ansari said that she did not get the encouragement from the state, and she hoped that the vision would provide more opportunities for the business sector.

The last law is to get the approval from the guardian to work. Since the country is developing, it should give women some space to choose her career, and not to let their family choose for her. Women are adults to choose for themselves, in any field that is suitable for them, as every woman has a different tendency.

In conclusion, many people confuse religion with traditions in order not to allow women to work. The issue here is that religion in fact encourages women to work but the traditions sometimes get in the way. Some concepts such as *Eib* are used for this purpose. Therefore, the family interferes with women's decisions regarding many issues, such as, marriage and work.

Nowadays, the new generation is trying to take their decision by themselves; however, the families still are not getting used on this issue. Women should get some space to decide, because they know what is right and what is

wrong, as they are adults and can think for themselves. Although the laws in Qatar give women their full rights they still face challenges in the workforce.

Conclusion

Many scholars discussed the issue of women in the Gulf. However, they mostly focused on education and health sectors. This study selected three new sectors namely diplomatic, media, and business. The education and health sectors were the first sectors to accommodate working women. As the three sectors that are used in this study are new to the Qatari society some problems emerged. In particular there are people who do not want their wives or daughters to work in a mixed environment or abroad.

However, with time, some of the families allowed their daughters to work and supported them to get their chosen jobs. Even if the families cannot accept these fields, the state legislation encourages women and men to work by introducing new working fields. Therefore there is nothing wrong with the laws but in the way this conservative society would behave.

Before the discovery of oil, women used to have jobs. Men used to work as pearl divers, so they used to go away for few months. In these few months, women worked to get their allowances and feed their children. They also were taking care of their homes. The working fields were trade, agriculture, and handcrafts. In 1940s and 1950s, Qatar government started to take care of education, which helped the society to be more educated and opened more jobs for people.

The male domination is one of the most important characteristics of the Qatari society. Men are the ones who decide whether women would work or not. They do not give women the freedom to think or choose for themselves. In particular men might have conditions if women work in the mixed environment as the example of Buthaina Al-Ansari and her experience with workingwomen in

Ooredoo. Some women who work in Ooredoo let their husbands choose whether they work with the customers or at back office. There is still law that gives the privileges for men to choose for women, such as the law that makes it a condition for women to get the approval of the guardian to work.

Some of the interviewees state that their families did not want them to work in certain fields, especially in the diplomatic sector. However, over time, they could change their families' way of thinking so to allow them to work abroad.

Workingmen outnumber women in Qatar although women are more educated and pursue their higher education more than men. Since 1990, the percentage of women has increased but too slowly, by almost 10%. In 2011, women percentage was 52.70 and men percentage was 95.60. The State should provide more jobs for women as men. Previously the education sector was the big employer for women. Nowadays women work in private and public sectors. The percentage in education sector has decreased, so the Qatari government is trying to encourage Qatari women to go back to this sector by increasing the privileges, such as high salaries.

To understand public sphere is to understand how the society think and act. Many scholars discussed this issue, and Habermas was one of the first to talk about it. His idea of public sphere is the relation between state and people in a political point of view. This view is not applicable in the present, because social aspect is important too. People are part of the society, and it is important to know how they think, which would influence all the individuals. Customs and traditions influence the life of people and their thinking. In the Gulf, traditions are very influential so much so to impede women of doing or achieving what

they want. However, the State encourages women to be visible in the public sphere to the maximum possible.

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[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%86](#) (February, 2015).

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Name:

Age:

job position or business:

1. Did you face any societal restraints to work in this field?
2. Does the social structure have an influence on what women should work in?
3. What is conservative society means to you?
4. Do you know what public sphere is? Do you think it can affect on women's job?
5. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome all the challenges seeking work opportunities?
6. Did the state policies and vision encourages you to work in this field?
7. How do you see your future in work force in the view of Qatar's 2030 vision?

Appendix B: Interviewees information

Number	Name	Age	Job/Business
1	Buthaina Al-Ansari	38	Chairwoman of Qatariat Institute
2	Naila Al-Mulla	25	Al-Rayan TV channel, Al-subah Rabah program
3	Aisha Al-Fardan	N/A	Vise chairwoman in Qatari Businesswomen Association and personal advising in Al-Fardan Group Holding Company
4	Duaa Al-Fayad	31	Al-Rayan TV channel, Al-subah Rabah program
5	Hanan Al-Fayad	38	Al-Rayan TV channel, Al-Dana program
6	Naila Al-Durwaish	47	Cupcake and food business
7	Sameera Fakhri	N/A	Fashion businesses and member of Qatari Businesswomen Association
8	Hessa Al-Suwaidi	38	Al-Rayan TV channel, Al-subah Rabah program
9	Noor Al-Sada	26	Second Secretary, Qatar Embassy in Geneva
10	Sara Al-Sulaiti	27	Third Secretary, Qatar Embassy in Austria
11	Nora Al-Mannai	58	Qatar TV channel, Noon program
12	Aisha Hassan	N/A	Qatar Radio Channel
13	Asma Al-Mulla	28	Business in making clothes and food
14	Sara Al-Mudadi	26	Third Secretary, Qatar Embassy in Rome
15	Asma Jabir	33	Qatar TV channel, Fai Al-Duha program
16	Nora Al-Kuwari	55	Reflection for occasions business
17	Najla Al-Shafae	40	Business of conferences and exhibitions organizing

18	Fouzia Al-Sulaiti	44	Counselor in Qatar Embassy in New Delhi
19	Moza Al-Thani	N/A	Qatar's Ambassador to Croatia
20	Ibtihaj Ahmedani	N/A	Chair person of Al-Ahmedani Medical Centre
21	Mariam Ahmed	37	Abaya business