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**The *Diwaniyya* in Urban Kuwaiti Society:
A Reflection of Socio-Spatial and Diplomatic Realities**

Clemens Chay

**A thesis submitted to the University of Durham for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the School of Government and International Affairs**

2019

Abstract

Diwaniyyas, also known in colloquial Kuwaiti Arabic as *diwawin* (pl.), are places of social gathering for Kuwaiti men to discuss issues relevant to them. The term ‘*diwaniyya*’ refers to both the physical confines of this reception room, and the practice of congregating in this designated space. The *diwaniyya* culture has its roots in tribal customs, and later became entrenched in Kuwaiti society owing to the country’s maritime past. More recently, scholarly attention accorded to the *diwaniyya* revolves around its political potential, featuring notably as spaces for electoral campaigning.

This study aims to provide an overdue elucidation of the *diwaniyya*’s persistent and changing social roles, which run in tandem with the fabric of Kuwaiti society itself – the family. By looking beyond the bifurcation of Kuwait’s historiography (pre-oil and post-oil eras), this study locates the *diwaniyya* practice across different time periods during which Kuwait undergoes a series of socio-spatial changes, including the advent of oil wealth, modernisation and urbanisation. The malleability of the *diwaniyya*, as an interlinked space and practice, maintains social networks and bridges generations, allowing for the constant circulation of social and cultural ‘capitals,’ key theories of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. By further employing Jürgen Habermas’ concept of the public sphere which invokes the feasibility of discursive institutions, this study also examines how public participation is fostered from the physicality of space, to the intimate sphere of the family, and then projected onto the mediating role of the *diwaniyya* between public and private realms.

The *diwaniyya* is equally appealing to foreign diplomats who recognise its social qualities and political potential. In this light, this study seeks to challenge the mainstream definition of diplomacy, often situated in the European canon emphasising professionalisation and bureaucratisation. By exploring how human agency is transplanted from the grassroots level into the diplomatic realm, this study finds that the *diwaniyya* represents a fascinating hybrid of state and non-state ‘diplomacy’ rooted in cultural tradition.

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Declaration

I, Clemens Chay, hereby confirm that the composition of this Ph.D thesis is entirely my own work. None of the materials in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree qualification in this or any other university.

Clemens Chay

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Clemens Chay

Dedication

Norman Chay, Tracy Lim, Germaine Chay

My family

Life's greatest blessing

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This thesis is not only a product of five years of work, but also an accumulation of thoughts, ideas, narratives, advice, and feedback from countless people. I am indebted to several figures in academia, notably to my supervisors Prof Anoush Ehteshami and Prof Steve Lyon, who have both been phenomenal in providing logistical support, academic feedback, and words of encouragement. Despite their busy schedules, they have never refused me entry when I popped up randomly in their offices. Embarking on this Ph.D journey was a big decision, and being awarded the H.E. Khaled Al-Duwaisan Doctoral Fellowship ultimately testified to the value of my research. For that, I am thankful for the support and funding by the H.H. Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah Research Programme. I am also grateful to Prof James Piscatori for his invaluable advice in the early stages of my research, and equally to Dr Farah Al-Nakib and Dr Hesham Al-Awadi who are both sources of inspiration and two of the foremost academics in Kuwait.

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To my family: We are not the most expressive bunch. Words certainly cannot describe our love, but actions can, and they always have. This thesis is also dedicated to my maternal grandma, who has had to put up with my absence all these years.

Aunt Selina: Our obsession with karaoke never ceases. I am thankful for your listening ear, and for the lemon chiffon cake and cookies. A cake always helps in trying times.

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The next chapter of my life awaits. Thank you all for making it happen.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This study uses a simplified system of transliteration without diacritics, inspired by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)*.

Family names and citations containing Arabic last names introduced in this study employ the capitalised form throughout, for instance, ‘Al-’ as in Al-Sabah. Where interviewees have provided me with their business cards, or in cases when they have specified a particular spelling of their names, I have reproduced the English transliteration as requested.

Names of places and objects are kept in Kuwaiti colloquial Arabic whenever possible, for example, *nig’a* (private jetty). Other nouns naturalised into the English language (for example, sheikhs) have been kept consistent throughout the study, except when it is used as a title (Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah) indicating royalty.

All translations are mine, unless otherwise cited from another source.

ARABIC TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Consonants

ء	' (except at the beginning of words)
ا	a
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	h (without diacritics)
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	s (without diacritics)
ض	d (without diacritics)
ط	t (without diacritics)
ظ	z (without diacritics)
ع	'
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k

ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	a (in construct state: at)

Short vowels: a, u, i

Long vowels: ا – a, و – u, ي – i (without diacritics)

Doubled: يّ – iyy, وّ – uww

Diphthongs: وَا – aw, يَا – ay or ai

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Introduction

I was expected to make courtesy calls on the *diwaniyas* of at least a dozen or more leading families of Kuwait and to drink at least one cup of coffee and one cup of tea at each stop
Strong kidneys were needed.

François Dickman, US Ambassador to Kuwait (1979-1983)

The *Diwaniyya*, An Introduction

During the formative years of Islam, the Umayyad caliph Umar (reigned 634-644 AD) was the first to establish a *diwan* (the office of tax collection) in an earnest attempt to modify the primitive system of administration. The *diwan* is not an Arabic word but one of Near East origin, originally meaning ‘register’ or ‘finance’ (Kermanj 2010: 44). The conception of the *diwan* expanded to encompass a department of administration, similar to the present idea of a ministry, which the administrative machinery of later Islamic dynasties adopted rigorously.¹ Throughout Gulf States today the *diwan* continues to denote a governmental department: the offices of the ruler or the Emir, for example, are identified under the umbrella of the Amiri Diwan. Thus during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Amiri Diwan of Kuwait headed by the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed persisted with the convening of temporary governmental meetings in Saudi Arabia (Amiri Diwan 2015).

Amidst the familiarity of the *diwan* across Gulf States, the idea of the *diwan* in Kuwait permeated society to the extent that it came to be known locally as the *diwaniyya*.² The difference between both terms, besides orthography, lies with the *diwaniyya*’s connection with the various echelons of Kuwaiti society, compared to the *diwan*’s association with official government diplomacy. Weir (2008: 256) argues that the *diwan* is a place of decision and of social intercourse where the decisions made are “the outcome of processes of information exchange, practised listening, questioning and the interpretation and confirmation of informal as well as formal meanings”. The Kuwaiti *diwaniyya* transcends Weir’s definition by

¹ For more information on the representation of the *diwan* in a system of administration, see Weir (2008: 256-257).

² The word ‘*diwaniyya*’ has many orthographic variations in English such as ‘*diwaniya*,’ ‘*diwania*,’ ‘*dewaniyeh*’. In Kuwait, the plural of ‘*diwawin*’ is also commonly heard. For consistency, this thesis will employ ‘*diwaniyya*’ (sing.) and ‘*diwaniyyas*’ (plr.) throughout.

ingraining the aforementioned processes in households and the everyday lives of the Kuwaiti people.

What appears to be more significant is the *diwaniyya*'s embedded role in Kuwaiti culture and society. *Diwaniyyas* are places of social gathering where Kuwaiti men sit together to discuss issues relevant to them. The term '*diwaniyya*' refers to both the literal space of the room, and the practice of gathering. Owing to Kuwait's history of desert trade and, more importantly, its maritime past, the *diwaniyya* culture became firmly established in Kuwaiti society. Unlike the 'Orientalist' portrayal of the *diwan* as a type of low couch on which partly-clothed females lounge about while Sultans bask in such a profligate scene, the *diwaniyya* situates itself in practicality and simplicity (see photograph below).³ *Diwaniyya* visiting has traditionally been a male activity which allows discussions of business affairs and the resolution of neighbourhood disputes. This trend of socialisation in the *diwaniyya* has persisted in the face of oil wealth, modernisation and urbanisation.



The traditional Roudhan *diwaniyya* (taken by author on 5/6/2014)

Pre-oil Kuwait was a bustling port-town; wealthy and influential merchants had their *diwaniyyas* constructed close to the shoreline to monitor the port activities in which they were

³ Edward Said (1995) coined the term 'Orientalism' to explain the "subtle and Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture".

major stakeholders.⁴ The wider residential landscape (known commonly as the *farij* or the neighbourhood, plr. *firjan*) comprised densely populated areas packed with low-rise interconnected houses surrounding a courtyard in the middle, linked by its winding streets and blind alleys.⁵ Catering to a communal residential culture, the *farij* and, by extension, the *diwaniyya* helped facilitate interaction between and within extended families of the neighbourhood. Being one of the rooms surrounding the courtyard of a house, the *diwaniyya* was the meeting place for the men. A family's day in Kuwait's pre-oil quarters involved the separation of men and women from lunch till the evening meal, which the men often took in the *diwaniyya* with their friends (Scarce 1985: 48). *Diwaniyya* visiting remains prevalent in Kuwaiti society today, albeit with a modern touch:

At home men continue to entertain their friends in either the separate *diwaniya* apartment or in one of the many sitting rooms; the atmosphere is that of a social club where the members take refreshments, watch television and video programmes, play cards, discuss business and neighbourhood affairs, or sit in companionable silence. *Diwaniya* sessions usually begin in the early evening after work and may continue late into the night, when a meal will be served [...] Patterns of *diwaniya* visiting are variable as Kuwaiti men do not necessarily spend every evening there. (Scarce 1985: 107).

The striking feature when comparing patterns of *diwaniyya* visiting in both pre-oil and post-oil contexts is the *diwaniyya*'s continued role in everyday urban governance, although this role is more prominent in the *farij*. In the absence of a strong state, pre-oil Kuwaiti community, akin to the quarters of Manama, operated in networks of patronage and mutual dependency (Fuccaro 2009: 94-95). Today, these networks remain crucial in an urbanised landscape where *diwaniyyas* are found in the modern-day Kuwaiti home (usually a villa) or in the form of an entire building converted into a *diwaniyya*. Social networks built through *diwaniyyas* counter the effects of impersonality and anonymity engendered by Kuwait's rapid urbanisation. The importance of the *diwaniyya* reflects Lewis Mumford's (1937: 87) argument that "social facts are primary, and the physical organization of the city [...] must be subservient to its social needs". The following excerpt succinctly describes the physical appearance and the evolving role of the *diwaniyya* in Kuwait:

⁴ Pre-oil Kuwait usually refers to Kuwait in the period leading up to the discovery of oil in 1938. However, Kuwait did not start drilling operations until 1946 due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁵ The same form of neighbourhoods was found in Cairo and Damascus. For a better understanding of such a residential landscape, see Raymond (2001) and Khoury (2004).

In modern parlance, it (the *dīwānīyah*) refers to a secluded room that is part of the house but with its own entrance to the outside. The room is used for guests or as a place for gathering. All of these meanings and connotations revolve around a common concept: to meet, discuss, and exchange views. Despite their modernization and urbanization, societies in the Arabian Gulf States still retain a private *dīwānīyah* for each tribe or family. [...] They are now a distinguishing cultural and political characteristic of Arabian Gulf society as they play an important role in spreading political awareness among citizens and fill a vacuum in some of those societies where there are no political parties and, hence, no real political participation. [...] This is true particularly in Kuwait, where the *dīwānīyah* played a very important and unique role in the politics of the country. (Alhajeri 2014: 268-269)

The aforementioned excerpt ascribes the *diwaniyya*'s importance to its place in politics. This view subscribes to the dominant strand of the current literature on Kuwait which contends that the vibrancy of Kuwaiti politics, if not quasi-democracy, is attributed in large part to its dynamic civil society and non-associational, kinship-based groups (see Tétreault 2000; Ghabra 1991).⁶ Falling under the category of informal, non-associational groups, the *diwaniyya* is given due credit as an alternative political institution. However, its pivotal role as a *socio-cultural anchor* that ensures social cohesion in Kuwait has been severely overlooked. This study therefore aims to make sense of the *diwaniyya*'s social functions to provide an overdue elucidation of its persistent and changing roles in both Kuwait's and its historical trajectories.

Research Site

Diwaniyyas in Kuwait are the focus of this research. These spaces usually serve as reception rooms for male hosts and a general male audience, with some exception. Currently these rooms vary in size and design, depending on the owner's tastes and preferences. However, traditionally as a room in the courtyard house,⁷ the *diwaniyya* used to have a separate entrance/exit for male visitors, in order to shield the family from the prying eyes of outsiders. This salient physical feature is maintained in today's *diwaniyya*, regardless of the room's form. Another essential furnishing for any *diwaniyya* lies in the equipment for preparing cardamom-

⁶ The political regime of Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy. Due to the presence of a parliament that includes the representation of the opposition, Kuwait is usually seen as the most democratic among all Gulf States (see, for example, Kinninmont 2012 and Williamson 2015).

⁷ Since the decades of rapid urbanisation (the sixties and seventies) when the physical landscape was revamped as part of the state's new urban vision, most courtyard houses were demolished and are now few in numbers.

flavoured Arabic coffee and tea, usually served by the servant or the host.⁸ The *diwaniyya* can be an annex to the house, a massive tent for electoral campaigning, a standalone building fully converted into a *diwaniyya*, or a room in a building with its own entrance. Owing to the advent of oil wealth and urbanisation, the locations of *diwaniyyas* are now scattered across different neighbourhoods, moving inland and away from the coast – the former primary site of commercial activities. The persistence of a handful of *diwaniyyas* along the coast (now known as Gulf Road), untouched by urbanisation and belonging to prominent merchant families, indicates the space’s socio-political importance. *Diwaniyyas* are generally accessible to the public, but families may allocate a specific day of the week to hold their gatherings.

According to Al-Naser (2001: 15, see also Al-Kandari 1995: 37), the number of *diwaniyyas* in the past amounted to approximately 250, and if we were to generate a percentage from the number of families, approximately 75 per cent of Kuwaiti families have *diwaniyyas* attached to their houses or someplace close by. As described earlier, the functions of *diwaniyyas* fall along a wide spectrum, though it is generally used to hold gatherings for male family members. Other functions include entertainment purposes, socio-political discussions, and catering for a specific religious/ideological audience. For this reason, it is imperative to combine a series of qualitative strategies in order to make sense of the diverse uses of the *diwaniyya*, which stem from the physical elements of the room and the attitudes of its users. These methods, elaborated later in Chapter One, fall along a range of completely uncontrolled techniques in natural settings to fully controlled techniques of observation (see Douglas 1976: 12). As Berg (2007: 9) suggests, the analysis of qualitative data “allows researchers to discuss in detail the various social contours and processes human beings use to create and maintain their social realities”.

Research Objectives

In his analysis of the cultural practices associated with the *diwan*, Weir (2008: 256) contends that “much of the contemporary literature suffers from an attempt to explain the organizational practices of this milieu in terms of Western models and modes of explanation that are inappropriate to the physical and spatial structures as well as the cultural framework”. The limited amount of material written on the *diwaniyya* has indicated similar struggles faced by academics to explain the interconnected “structures of social, family and political life [that]

⁸ See Al-Naser (2001: 6) for a vivid description of the *diwaniyya* in preparation for the reception of visitors (including greetings, hot beverages and incense).

are replicated in managerial settings”. Elsewhere, I have argued that the *diwaniyya* must be viewed first and foremost as an interlinked space and practice (Chay 2015, 2016). This perspective runs along similar lines to that of urban sociologists who have attempted to find the connection between space and society; they have argued that, as man-made spaces, built environments are “more than physical” and provide a set of cues that “trigger appropriate behavior” (Rapoport 1982: 60-61). George Simmel’s (1997: 143) dictum goes further to insist that the “boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially”. A small built environment comparable to the *diwaniyya* therefore represents “an ongoing dialogue between past and present” through its constant interaction with the city and its inhabitants (Dennis 2008: 1).

Reflecting Socio-Spatial Realities

Departing from the premise that the *diwaniyya* is an interlinked space and practice, this study will demonstrate that, as a microcosm of Kuwaiti society, the physical confines of the *diwaniyya* and the social interactions played out in this room *reflect wider societal dynamics*. Here societal dynamics refer to specific trends in social networking, status, cohesion and cultural heritage, rather than a flurry of haphazard social characteristics. By analysing the interactions of participants in the *diwaniyya*, a localised perception of the space is obtained, as well as an understanding of its historical significance to Kuwait. Such findings demonstrate how smaller built environments are governed by social rules and personalised according to social needs, making them ‘personal spaces’ (Sommer 1969: 3-11). The primary aim behind this study’s focus on socio-spatial aspects is to initiate a *redirection of current research* on the *diwaniyya*, which has adopted the narrow angle of evaluating its role in Kuwaiti politics.

Any evaluation of the *diwaniyya*’s social functions must go beyond descriptive parameters that present the physical appearance of the space; rather, the same description should substantiate the consolidation of Kuwaiti culture and heritage in the wider social context. Similarly, an emphasis on seniority in the *diwaniyya* etiquette should be linked to the broader patriarchal governance of Kuwaiti society. According to Weber (1978: 1007-1015), the exercise of patriarchal authority is “not discretionary and not enforced by physical coercion,” but based on personal loyalty and on the sanctity of tradition and allegiance towards the ruler. The social relations in *diwaniyyas* exemplify the respect of patriarchal authority, with the *family unit* being a central variable in such a space and across Kuwaiti society. Thus an objective of this study is to relate the *diwaniyya*’s ‘family-ness’ to the overall family structure of Kuwaiti society, deciphering the ‘unique amalgam’ of two allegedly contradictory concepts;

“Kuwait for the Kuwaitis” and the Al-Sabah as the heads of this Kuwaiti family (Rabi 2000: 164, see also Tétreault 1995).

Social networking opportunities present in *diwaniyyas* sessions will be analysed as the transfer of social capital between participants, in contrast with the cultural capital located within the family structure. The concept of capital will be explained in greater detail in Chapter One. Crucially the flow of capital, whether social or cultural, identifies the individuals and families in possession of varying amounts of such capital, which in turn provides an indication of the family’s social standing (see Chay 2015: 12). By qualitatively assessing the capital possessed by individuals and families inside (or outside) the *diwaniyya*, this study will show that the social cohesion generated from Kuwait’s family structure must also be nuanced by instances of division: these include generational disparities, tribal influence, class and gender differentiations.

Another objective of analysing the *diwaniyya* as both space and practice is to demonstrate that Kuwait’s historical trajectory and by extension, the *diwaniyya*’s cannot be seen as a unilinear process made up of dichotomies such as pre-oil and post-oil, or pre-urban and post-urban. While it is true that such distinctions help readers to locate Kuwait chronologically, adopting a tradition-modernity dichotomy would falsely suggest that modernist development eliminates the role of tradition. Fuccaro (2009: 11) correctly warns against viewing the historical experience of Gulf countries akin to Kuwait as a “tale of transformation from ‘rags to riches,’ the story of an economic miracle which created a more uniform landscape, and a ‘rational,’ disciplined and affluent society”. Instead of using the intervention of oil to create two diametrically opposed historical eras, Kuwaiti historian Farah Al-Nakib (2011: 14, italicised in original text) suggests that the city is built *in the context of* (rather than *in contrast to*) its pre-oil past.

The social functions of the *diwaniyya* will therefore be analysed in view of Kuwait’s fluid and diverse historical development. The aim of situating the *diwaniyya* in such a developmental context is to demonstrate that old and new can exist side by side; and where the social functions of the *diwaniyya* can remain largely intact despite changes in its physical appearance and location. The historicisation of the *diwaniyya* will thus be explained through “multiple readings of history,” of which urbanisation is one of the many watersheds (Çelik 2000: 161; see also Thys-Şenocak 2008). Mapping contextual development onto space would also allow an appreciation of emergent social groups across different time periods; a corollary

of this study's focus on societal dynamics is to investigate inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics through the *diwaniyya*. Traditionally the most prominent *diwaniyyas* were owned by affluent merchant families, and these *diwaniyyas* remain situated along Gulf Road, once the shore where ships docked. The advent of oil wealth and its redistribution among nationals signalled a levelling of the playing field in terms of purchasing power, as most Kuwaiti households can now afford a *diwaniyya* within the confines of their homes. From a Habermasian perspective, this socio-economic transformation would signify a shift from the state and its nobles (in this context the ruling family) towards the creation of the 'bourgeois public sphere' (via the *diwaniyyas*); "through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society" (Habermas 1991: 30-31). The broader base of *diwaniyya* ownership could, on the one hand, signify a greater expression of public opinion in a welfare state that favours the nationals (the bourgeois) relative to the non-nationals. On the other hand, the Kuwaiti context must be considered against the backdrop of Habermas' thesis – the development of a bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe from the eighteenth century. Firstly, although socialisation in *diwaniyyas* leading to decision-making may be seen as 'consultative' and 'participative' as defined in Western studies of leadership, the autocratic and patriarchal forms of governance set by the ruling family remain consequential. Contextual comparisons mean that the same middle class in Kuwait may not exert the same pressure on the state in the decision-making process. Weir (2008: 263) describes the sophisticated patterns of decision-making in the *diwan*, which are equally relevant in the *diwaniyya*:

The Diwan is in essence a dynamic listening machine through which diversity and difference may obtain their opportunity equally with hierarchical authority. In the Diwan, the claims of authority are recognized and ultimate authority may be clearly identified. Decisions and judgements made by fathers, presidents, kings and CEOs are located and owned. All such social actors may be dignified by the designation of "Shaykh," and such decisions may be quite specific and decisively unambiguous, but the process of decision-making are characteristically prolonged because the swirl of the Diwan imposes its own pace and the assemblage of persons may vary both situationally and temporally.

Secondly, the growth of the middle class in Kuwait should not be overstated, as this study will point out, taking into account the aforementioned social disparities present in Kuwait, that even acute differentiations exist within the 'middle class' status. The importance of the family linked to the *diwaniyya* will then highlight how different groups within the Kuwaiti population possess varying amounts of capital, where only specific families are associated with

social prestige. Ultimately, in order to find coherence in the evolving social aspects of the *diwaniyya*, a multi-disciplinary approach must be employed with a constant sensitivity to contextual factors unique to Kuwait maintained throughout this thesis.

Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy

By arguing that the *diwaniyya*'s social functions are *precursors* of its expanded role in politics, this study will show that socialisation in the *diwaniyya* is similarly an indigenous form of diplomacy. Far from the formalisation and bureaucratisation that dominate much of the discourse on the diplomatic corps, the *diwaniyya* acts as a platform for informal, grassroots diplomacy that builds on the tightly-knit community of Kuwait families. Furthermore, records indicate that *diwaniyyas* have acted as spaces where Kuwaitis may cast ballots and votes, functioning as polling stations in elections for the municipality council and other organisations (Al-Kandari 2002: 111, see also Alhajeri 2010). Instead of viewing *diwaniyyas* as literal polling stations, they should be viewed as spaces that record the opinion of the general public.

As spaces geared towards discussion, conflict resolution and the transfer of capital, *diwaniyyas* promote 'public diplomacy,' a term established by a distinguished retired US foreign service officer named Edward Gullion. Public diplomacy refers to "a form of influence over public opinion which would in turn have an impact upon the conduct of diplomacy" (Pamment 2014: 52, see also Cull 2006). *Diwaniyya* visiting in Kuwait is a unique and internalised practice that, if used appropriately by both local and foreign diplomats, can allow the apparent autocratic decision-making style "to be tempered with an emphasis on [public] consultation" (Weir 2008: 256). By spending time at different *diwaniyyas*, local and foreign diplomats alike have a chance at influencing and understanding citizens who might in turn influence their governments, contributing to the success of overall foreign policy goals (Cull 2008: 259-260). Yet, to claim that, in the presence of foreign diplomats, Kuwaitis at *diwaniyyas* are under the sway of wider public diplomacy goals is far-fetched. Owing to the informal and interactive dialogue harnessed in *diwaniyyas*, indigenous diplomacy cuts across traditional diplomacy where both local and foreign participants are susceptible to influence. Therefore, an objective of this study is to highlight how the *diwaniyya* provides a conducive and interactive environment that engenders a consultative style suitable for a *unique* brand of public

diplomacy,⁹ and in the process diplomats and officials alike conform to local traditions in order to reach foreign policy decisions through such a bottom-up, non-Western approach.

Literature Review and Problem Statements

This study on the evolving social roles of the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya* seeks to fill a gap in the historiography of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf, in which too much emphasis has been conducted on the political potential of the *diwaniyya*, whereas the limited literature on its social function has tended to overlook the long process of acculturation that led to the *diwaniyya*'s well-entrenched role in Kuwaiti society and culture. Crucially, studies on Kuwait's built environment and society alike have failed to establish the link between the social and the spatial; nor has existing material explained how the longstanding social functions of the *diwaniyya* contribute to both social and political governance. Analysing small built environments akin to the *diwaniyya* in this study will express Kuwait's transition to the modern in a more specific manner, through the fragments of society that pass through the space as participants (see Simmel 1968). Anthony King's (2007: 8) argument that "spatially locating the city within different sets of boundaries generates very different questions and very different answers" reasserts this study's contribution. The space of the *diwaniyya* operates on very different physical and social boundaries as compared to the immense city scene. Examining the *diwaniyya* would thus offer fresh, and at times, contradictory perspectives on wider social and political realities; the same space spirit of gathering in *diwaniyyas*, which binds Kuwaitis can also lead them to form exclusive groups. Accordingly, the absence of a single theoretical framework within which to interpret the form, character, and culture of built environments justifies this study's multi-disciplinary approach, in order to make sense of the *diwaniyya* and urban Kuwaiti society altogether.

Much of current literature conducted on the *diwaniyya* focuses on its political nature, while little has been said about its social function. What has stood out in recent literature is the constant mention of the 'Monday *Diwaniyyas*' which emerged in the 1980s when the parliament was dissolved and Kuwaitis found it imperative to use the *diwaniyya* as an alternative venue for political discussion. In Shafeeq Ghabra's (1991: 200) piece on the political contribution of associational and non-associational groups in Kuwait, he identifies the *diwaniyya* as a "platform for unofficial political groups and parties" and envisages a new

⁹ See the quote by former US Ambassador François Dickman at the start of the chapter.

political system based on greater popular participation. Here he describes the watershed in Kuwaiti politics found in the form of the Monday *Diwaniyyas*:

Beginning in December 1989, a public meeting was held every Monday involving several hundred thousand citizens who expressed the popular demand that the country's parliament be restored. This Monday diwaniyya represented the new cooperation between the various forces of society. It was led by the 32 former parliamentarians from the Islamic, nationalist, and secular forces. It was supported by the associations, their organizing committees, and many sectors of society. Each week the chairman of the dissolved parliament, Ahmad Al-Sa'dun, announced the venue for the next diwaniyya and the news spread throughout the community by way of family diwaniyyas and associations. (Ghabra 1991: 212)

Examining the above excerpt closely allows us to infer two attributes of Kuwaiti society: first, social fragmentation caused by groups with differing beliefs and ideologies; second, the communicative importance of the family. Yet, neither of these two observations was associated with the *diwaniyya*; rather, Ghabra's article focused on how the movement reshaped 'established political foundations'. Similarly, while listing the challenges of Kuwait's representative system of government, Alhajeri's thesis (2004: 192) contends that "there is a strong belief among Kuwaitis that success in the National Assembly elections depends – to a great extent – on the number of supporters a candidate can muster from among *diwaniyya* owners". The two aforementioned writers are Kuwaiti scholars whose concerns are political and have thus overlooked how the social function of the *diwaniyya* may be converted into political potential.

Perhaps the social phenomenon of the *diwaniyya* is viewed as a given by Kuwaitis, but at the other end of the spectrum, two other Kuwaiti writers have concentrated on the social aspect of *diwaniyyas*. One of whom is Fahad Al-Naser (2001), who, despite mentioning a few events in Kuwaiti history that affected the *diwaniyya*, employs a simplistic dichotomy (historical versus modern *diwaniyyas*) and is more interested in the *diwaniyya* etiquette. Yagoub Al-Kandari's M.A. thesis (1995) is more helpful in delineating the *diwaniyya*'s social functions but remained narrative rather than discursive.¹⁰ Al-Kandari's (1995: 30-31) definition of the *diwaniyya* is as follows:

¹⁰ This thesis was later developed into an Arabic book in 2002 which was cited earlier in this chapter. The book title is *Al-Diwaniya Al-Kuwaytiya: Dawruha Al-Ijtima'i wa-Al-Siyasi (The Kuwaiti Diwaniya: Its Political and Social Role)*.

It is considered a cultural symposium in which all matters concerned with daily affairs are discussed. It is a place for expressing opinions and exchanging speeches. It deals with all social, literary, sport, political, and scientific matters of the country as well as the outside world. It has the status of a parliament, as opinions are frankly expressed and officials are evaluated.

The above definition is later challenged by Alhajeri (2004: 190) who insists that the *diwaniyya*'s "true significance lies in its function as an outlet through which political debate and opinions can be expressed". While Kuwaiti academics appear to be torn about the functions of the *diwaniyya*, Al-Nakib (2011: 28) alludes to the undersized canon of Kuwaiti historiography, of which indigenous literature,¹¹ according to her, "has not yet adequately ventured into the realm of in-depth historical analysis". Admittedly, Al-Naser, Alhajeri, Al-Kandari and Ghabra have been unsuccessful in uncovering clear links between different aspects of the *diwaniyya*; whether it is between the social and the spatial, or between the social and political. The widespread politicking in *diwaniyyas*, for example, should be attributed to the *diwaniyya*'s long-established social role of ensuring congregation and discussion.

The wider scholarly interest in Kuwait took a positive turn since the 1990 Iraqi invasion, allowing for a review of the processes of oil modernisation and rapid urbanisation during the previous decades. Pioneering works on Kuwait include: Jacqueline Ismael's (1993) book on the rise of the welfare state, Khaldun Al-Naqeeb's (1990) examination of the evolving relationship between state and society, Mary Ann Tétreault's (2000) study of democratisation and civil society, Jill Crystal's (1995) analysis of the merchant-ruler relationship and Anh Nga Longva's (1997) ethnographic study of Kuwait's citizenship laws and local perceptions. The 2000s represented a shift in focus in the field of Gulf studies, with research themes on transnationalism, migration, globalisation and cultural identity formation being examined under the lens of the city's urban development (see Al-Nakib 2011: 30-32). Published edited volumes which cover a wide range of Gulf-related themes, such as that by Madawi Al-Rasheed (2004) and another by Paul Dresch and James Piscatori (2005), testify to this 'urban refocus'. While it is true that recent years have witnessed the mushrooming of in-depth studies on Kuwait, mentions of the *diwaniyya* remain subservient to the greater themes of politics and urbanisation.

There is a general scholarly unanimity on the *diwaniyya*'s political potential. Yet, in confirming the *diwaniyya*'s value as a political institution, authors unintentionally comment on its social aspects without exploring them in depth. A prime example is found in Alhajeri's

¹¹ 'Indigenous literature' here refers to the historical studies produced by Kuwaiti scholars.

(2010) article describing how *diwaniyyas* have been encouraging political participation and thus contributing to Kuwait's democratisation since its early stages of state formation. He writes:

No doubt the *dīwānīya* at the very beginning of the Emirate establishment had an important role in making various political decisions. [...] It thus helped the general populace to adopt new political beliefs [...] In spite of all this, the *dīwānīya* has never received official recognition as a political institution. The *dīwānīya* has always been considered an unofficial social institution representing the Kuwaiti civil culture, and some wealthy and influential Kuwaiti families continue to own and run *dīwānīyas* to this day. (Alhajeri 2010: 28)

By identifying the *diwaniyya* as an 'unofficial social institution,' the above excerpt by Alhajeri contradicts the opening line of his article describing the *diwaniyya* as the first democratic institution of Kuwait. Later he briefly explains how the Kuwaiti family "represents the most fundamental unit in Kuwaiti society" and helps in our understanding of the *diwaniyya*; yet, this explanation is not developed beyond a paragraph. In a similar fashion, Eran Segal's (2012) article contends that the inter-family and tribal relations, which cut across political mechanisms such as the *diwaniyya* and parliament, help guarantee political participation in Kuwait. However, his narrow focus on the family remains politically oriented and revolves largely around the ruling Al-Sabah family. As such, the recurring social theme of the family is subsumed under the larger theme of politics in the ongoing discussion on the *diwaniyya*; whereas the family and tribal units merit a central role in this discourse.

Elsewhere, other social aspects of the *diwaniyya* surface when writers attempt to explain how the space is appropriate for electoral campaigning. For instance, Tétreault (2003: 38) argues that regular attendance at *diwaniyyas* produces a significant amount of 'face time'. This face-to-face communication in turn leads to the mobilisation of voters by political candidates who host these *diwaniyyas*. In another article, she identifies the *diwaniyya*'s protected status as stemming from its ability to "straddle the public-private divide" (Tetreault 1993: 279). This overlap between the family and public realms allows for political exploitation, and other academics such as Alnajjar (2000), Kapiszewski (2006), and more recently Al-Hamli (2013) have gone further to observed how the *diwaniyya* is legally exempt to provide notice to local authorities whenever there is a gathering. This exemption makes up the *diwaniyya*'s protected status, allowing it to be safely used for political activities. Hence, taking apart all the political intricacies of the *diwaniyya* would reveal that it must be first understood as a social and cultural anchor in Kuwaiti society.

For all the emphasis on the *diwaniyya*'s political potential, there is much left to be explored in a cross-cutting analysis of its social *and* spatial aspects. As already mentioned academics have taken interest in the spatial changes in Kuwait City due to its experience of the rapid urbanisation in the 1970s. Mohammad Khalid Al-Jassar's (2008, 2009) works have shed light on the reasons behind the courtyard house's disappearance and the *diwaniyya*'s persistence in Kuwait. Of greater relevance is Al-Jassar's (2009: 128) observation of the changes to Kuwaiti homes as a result of urbanisation; his remarks on the correlation between spatial size and affluence are proof of how spatial changes can indeed reflect social qualities. While Al-Jassar's focuses mainly on physical form rather than social qualities, Al-Nakib's (2011: 15) thesis regards "the relationship between public space and public life" as central to her historical analysis of the urbanisation process in Kuwait. Although her work draws on the macro trends of urban life, in her short section on the *diwaniyya* she correctly points out that the *diwaniyya* "fostered a relatively distinct type of semi-public exchange" when men are allowed to speak "frankly and openly about their political opinions, misgivings, and grievances" in such a space (Al-Nakib 2011: 159-160). Drawing inspiration from earlier works by architects who have analysed changes in Kuwait's buildings before and after urbanisation such as Saba Shiber (1964), Stephen Gardiner (1983), and Evangelia Simos Ali (1988), recent literature on Kuwait has attempted to establish the socio-spatial connection but only within the wider purview of Kuwait City (see also Albaqshi 2010). Few have used this connection to delve into an analysis of smaller built environments and their unique historical trajectories; hence the sparse information on the *diwaniyya* in this aspect.¹²

In terms of using the *diwaniyya* to reveal greater social disparities, limited writings have explored this theme in-depth despite a general awareness of the social problems in Kuwait, some of which are triggered by the state, and others by events or individuals (see Al-Nakib 2014c; Chay 2015). Lindsey Stephenson (2011) examined the malleability of the *diwaniyya* and the participation of women in the same space. Although she argues that *diwaniyyas* have offered support for Kuwaiti women by expanding their access to pre-political spaces, women's "incorporation into public political action occurred from the top down without support on a foundational level" (Stephenson 2011: 197). Men's *diwaniyyas* followed an 'organic growth' that gradually consolidated their role in public political action, while women's use of

¹² Besides Al-Jassar whose work can be considered to have analysed the courtyard house from a socio-spatial perspective, the other most recent work is by Behbehani (2015) on the case of the Jabriya neighbourhood in Kuwait.

diwaniyyas became more relevant only after they had been re-granted the right to vote in 2005.¹³ Stephenson's study highlights a more immediate point: a major gender disparity persists despite some advancement, as will be reaffirmed later in this study. Beyond Stephenson's study of gender through the *diwaniyya*, the discussion on social discord leaves much to be desired.

Despite these problems, an appreciation of current literature leads to a redirection of research on *diwaniyyas*. Instead of dwelling on political and gender aspects, it is equally, if not more important to consider the social dynamics created by the *diwaniyya*, as well as the wider societal dynamics it reflects. Instead of focusing solely on domestic politics, studies on the *diwaniyya* should also turn their attention to diplomacy as a refreshing perspective, rather than being enveloped by topics such as civil society and democratisation. That everyday, grassroots diplomacy occurs in the *diwaniyya* is further justification for this study to adopt the *diwaniyya* as an interlinked space and practice. By appropriating work of academics from different disciplines a more holistic understanding of the *diwaniyya* may be conceived.

Space and Social Relations

The study of space has long been discussed in tandem with its users, particularly in a time and age where man-made spaces dominate the physical landscape. As indicated earlier in this chapter, built environments are 'personal spaces' customised according to the tastes and needs of its users. As Madanipour (2003: 230) argues, personal space locates individuals "in physical space and, together with other forms of territorial claims, positions them in social space, enabling a sense of identity to be developed and rituals of communication and recognition to take place". Examining space without any consideration of its users would therefore provide a parochial perspective of the space's 'character' and its corollary usefulness. A form of built environment as simple as a house, is equally a human fact that, "even with the most severe physical constraints and limited technology man has built in ways so diverse that they can be attributed only to *choice*, which involves cultural values" (Rapoport 1969, italicised in original text; see also Rapoport 1994). Maintaining a similar understanding of this logic would allow us to recognise the importance of tracing the *diwaniyya*'s historical trajectory: observing how its physical form has altered through the decades, and consequently, the evolution of cultural values that influence the manner in which this reception is being used.

¹³ Female suffrage in Kuwait was first granted in 1985, but was later removed.

Such a unique trajectory is therefore enmeshed in Kuwait's own historical development, and the experiences of its society – a reflection of much wider socio-spatial realities.

It is within the same purview of the above socio-spatial connection that we may understand Lefebvre's (1991: 26) quixotic notion of how space is a social product. Despite his suggestions that 'social space' resists analysis because of its very complexity, Lefebvre's discussion (1991: 33) eventually produces a conceptual triad:

- 1 *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.
- 2 *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
- 3 *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).

At once, Lefebvre's conceptual triad highlights how social spaces have potential political and economic implications by virtue of the interactions that occur within them. These spaces, "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose," reveal themselves in terms of status, gender, wealth, and other notions of otherness and hierarchy. In this manner, space "reifies social cleavages, limits mobility and intensifies cultural polarisation". Smaller spaces akin to the *diwaniyya* would therefore provide more acute observations of inclusionary and exclusionary relations. What is further suggested in the first point of the triad is how space generates a certain degree of cohesion given the user's relationship to that space. The same can be said about the *diwaniyya*'s role in a Kuwaiti society with a high regard for socialisation. Owing to the importance of the family unit in Kuwait (and how governance is particularly familial in nature), it is of relevance to delve deeper into the specific clockwork of interactions and interpersonal relations encouraged by the *diwaniyya*.

The above illumination on cohesion presents further insights on two accounts. Firstly, understanding space through cultural values not only enlightens us on how people perceive their environment and the objects ordered in it, but such a worldview equally produces a congruent

perception that leads to cohesion (Pinxten et al. 1983: 8-38). How Kuwaitis consciously regard the *diwaniyya* as a universal platform for mingling is also an indication of the common acceptance of the space as the platform to unite them. Secondly, the rules of sociability that generate sufficient cohesion are being called into question. Madanipour (2003: 116) differentiates the ‘modern urban society’ from the ‘pre-modern society’ by arguing how the former induces “sociability as performative exchange among strangers,” whereas the latter relies on the “interdependent notion of the self, ties of blood and kin, and strong rootedness of individuals in communities”. Despite the watershed in the form of urbanisation and the consequent state planning of the physical landscape, the “ties of blood and kin” remain as salient as ever, with the *diwaniyya* being the medium that challenges the assumption of their diminution. The strength of traditions, adaptable in a changing landscape, acts as the anchor for the *diwaniyya*’s continued existence as a cultural platform of socialisation. The allowance for personal, face-to-face exchange, as Madanipour (2003: 117) admits, remains “the most potent form of communication” in spaces such as the *diwaniyya*. As a result, the cues or the ‘complex symbolisms’ that are found in such spaces as Lefebvre suggests, must be scrutinised to unearth the specific cultural attributes of any given society. What is crucial in the evaluation of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad is a complementary assessment of Bourdieu’s capital and the flow thereof in the next chapter: this provides greater clarity on the hierarchy of relations and the types of sociability arising from instances of inclusion and exclusion.

Following the above discussion is the tension between anonymity and community in an urban setting, which requires a closer examination at how traditional spaces, revamped in the urbanised city, carries along with them the ‘life of community’. This ‘life of community’ is the vanishing counterpoint to urban life, and the longing for community carries an implied critique of the city (Tonkiss 2005: 9). The shift from an integrative community to urban anonymity has been a longstanding research focus in sociology (see Engels 1993; Tönnies 1957; Simmel 1950). As Tonkiss (2005: 8) observes, two responses to earlier community forms arise as a result of the modernising and rationalising push of urban processes: the first was to treat such community forms as a ‘non-urban’ residue in the city, a social adaptation to new urban environments mimicking familiar spatial and cultural arrangements, and transplanted older social and economic ties; a second response lies in the pull of assimilation, understood as the erasure of both cultural difference and spatial divisions between groups, only to be just as “anonymous as anybody else” in the modern city. It will, however, be increasingly evident that, in spite of the rapid urbanisation that Kuwait had undergone, a mixture of state policies and city planning had

left their mark on a Kuwaiti society by raising the awareness of Kuwaiti identity (that is to say, cultural differences remain prevalent). In the same reasoning, the ‘life of community’ takes a turn towards identity strengthening to the extent that urbanised life is equally characterised by a dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Ethnicity and class, as the twin analytical frames of sociology, prove to be crucial in describing both distinct social groups and segregated spaces in the city, questioning whether being part of a community should be seen as a badge of social advantage/disadvantage (Tonkiss 2005: 9). A debate therefore ensues on the *diwaniyya*’s nature: is it an inclusionary or exclusionary space? For whom is the space perceived as inclusionary/exclusionary? When critically examined, space and spatial relations yield “insights into unacknowledged biases, prejudices and inequalities that frequently go unexamined” (Low 2014: 34).

From a wider perspective, the development of the city and its dwellers, in other words, society, are vital in providing clues to evolving trends in traditions and the socio-political climate of the country. Zooming into the microcosm of smaller built environments such as the *diwaniyya* would, by contrast, allow for a re-examination of these trends through the specificities in human behaviour and architectural forms – a decisive method for analytical nuances. As architectural critic Mumford (1937: 87) argues, “it is in the city, the city as theater, that man’s more purposive activities are focused, and worked out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations”. Yet, he refines his statement by observing how the city, despite being a constant site for economic life and cultural processes, remains “a related collection of primary groups and purposive associations”: the former being common to all communities (family and neighbourhood); the latter being especially characteristic of city life (Mumford 1937: 86-87). As will be increasingly evident in this study, the *diwaniyya* is an overlap of both types of groups, cutting across both private and public realms. While an appreciation of the city offers insights into social realities, the exigencies of daily living are found in spaces that remain “beyond the control of local residents,” but tap on “a strategy of generalized self-management which unites ownership and control relations in the workplace with those of the home” (Gottdiener 1994: 285). The necessity of cross-examining both macro and micro levels of socio-spatial relations is reasserted by Lefebvre (1991: 34) who, besides agreeing that social space works “as a tool for the analysis of society,” argues that special, symbolic places¹⁴ exist at society’s disposal where one can

¹⁴ In Lefebvre’s argument, he draws upon religious and political sites that are comprehensible to anthropology, ethnology and sociology.

observe the creation of social dynamics – a process that develops ‘self-presentation’ and ‘self-representation’. Space, both as a platform of action and a driver for action, has been proven in various case studies, ranging from Munn’s (1996) inquiry into the exclusiveness of the Australian aboriginal landscape, to Rockefeller’s (2010) study of the rural Quirpini community in Bolivia. A more relevant account of socio-spatial dynamics is found in Vasey’s (1990) assessment of the social interactions found in the English pub and how its historical use as a space for congregation instilled a sense of belonging among members of the same neighbourhood. Striking similarities may be drawn between the English pub and the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya*, albeit in different cultural contexts, and drawing from different socio-economic and political climates. These differences in similarities simultaneously reaffirm the applicability of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad while emphasising on the need to consider differing historical and cultural milieus.

The aforementioned precedents lend weight to the need to explore smaller built environments and the individuals that frequent them. It becomes more intriguing to examine a built environment established in a non-Western context such as the *diwaniyya*, as “culture controls behavior in deep and persistent ways,” to the extent that what is normal to the regular users (and the host/owner) is noticeable and significant to a foreign eye (Hall 1959: 35). Here the sociability of the users needs to be evaluated in clashes of class, gender, purpose. In particular, diplomatic exchanges involving foreign diplomats and local hosts become highly intriguing as the former must come to terms with indigenous customs and adapt to fresh social rules. All these while having to remain true to the scripts of the diplomat,¹⁵ in other words, a juggling of national interests and the respect for a foreign culture.

¹⁵ The scripts of the diplomat, or his/her responsibilities, were accounted by Neumann (2008, 2005). An elaboration of these scripts will be provided in Chapter One.

From Public Space to 'Counter-Space'

Thus far it has been apparent that society must be filled out by the investigation of the forms of social interactions whose totality it constitutes; that we may study any of these interactions through which a number of individuals become a social group, and 'society' would be identified as the aggregate of these relations (Frisby 1992: 11-13). One of the manifestations of social relations includes politics, which according to Tonkiss (2005: 59-60), unfolds "both *in* and *over* space," tracing a line from the 'ordinary' experience of urban individuals to wider conceptions of social inclusion and urban order. This goes beyond the symbolic nature of physical form – architecture that offers a profile of power relations – and delves into the struggle for power. Lefebvre (1991: 386) indicates how the city is not just the 'setting' of struggle, but also the 'stakes' of that struggle. The purpose of this section is thus to raise the possibility of an alternative form of spatial politics: that the geography of protest and demonstration, when given expression in *public space*, runs against the dominant statist organisation of space.

That space is tied to the 'relations of production' in the Lefebvrian sense indicates its potential for politicisation. A non-exhaustive array of meanings is associated with 'public,' suggesting its dormant, yet catalytic nature for mobilisation. These include:

The range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall, the United Nations, national governments and local neighbourhoods. "Public space" envelops the palpable tension between place, experienced at all scales of daily life, and the seeming spacelessness of the Internet, popular opinion, and global institutions and economy. It is also not a homogenous area: The dimensions and extent of its publicness are highly differentiated from instance to instance. [...] Public space includes very recognizable geographies of daily movement, which may be local, regional, or global, but they also include electronic and institutional "spaces" that are every bit as palpable, if experienced quite differently, in daily life. (Smith & Low 2006: 3)

As described in the above definition, 'public space' refers to 'accessible places' with a sense of inclusiveness (Madanipour 2010: 1; Smith & Low 2006: 3-4). It is also implied that the role of public space becomes, simultaneously, "a medium promoting pedestrian movement, a location for social interaction, a tool for urban management, a showcase, a selling point for the developer, a system of signs to assert different identities" (Madanipour 2003: 238-239). Tonkiss (2005: 67) goes as far as sketching three ideal-types of public space: (1) the square – representing collective belonging; (2) the café – representing social exchange; and (3) the street – representing informal encounter. More importantly, the ability of public space to harness social

resistance through its accessibility forms the crux of this section. Such accessibility allows for the creation of what Lefebvre (1991: 381-382) calls ‘counter-spaces’ in the city:

What runs counter to a society founded on exchange is a primacy of *use*. What counters quantity is quality. We know what counter-projects consist or what counter-space consists in – because practice demonstrates it. When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing developments, when it demands ‘amenities’ or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality.

Counter-spaces are spatial criticisms of conventional spatial arrangements and challenge the stronghold of the state. They also recreate the purpose of a particular space, giving it new or extra meaning as opposed to its original, intended use. While Lefebvre (1991: 167) touches on the transformation of the central market in Paris from a workplace into a festive place of gathering, this study explores the *diwaniyya* as an alternative site of political action, and on certain occasions, a space for diplomacy and foreign policy decisions, worlds apart from its usual communal functions.

The work of Manuel Castells (1977, 1983; see also Lowe 1986) has been instructive in unfolding a particular strand of urban theory – urban social movements. While decisively breaking urban politics down into *urban planning and policy* in its various forms and *urban social movements*, Castells (1977: 261-263) defines the latter as:

A system of practices resulting from the articulation of a conjuncture of the system of urban agents and of other social practices in such a way that its development tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system or towards a substantial modification of the power relations in the class struggle, that is to say, in the last resort, in the power of the state.

In this manner, *diwaniyyas* comprise the system of ‘urban agents’ and ‘social agents’ that challenge “the power of the state,” as the Monday *Diwaniyyas* (explained in the Literature Review) of the eighties have proven when formal institutions of political representation – the parliament – have failed. What is of greater importance is the publicness of the *diwaniyya*. Its accessibility to the general public, regardless of whether the visitor’s relation to the host (if any), qualifies the space as an overlap of at least two of Tonkiss’ ideal-types – in particular the café and the street. The unpredictability of informal encounter and the knowledge transfer from social exchange make catalytic ingredients for a potent social movement. As a reception room usually located within the confines of the house, or the private realm of the family, the

diwaniyya is equally accorded a protected status by default, being exempt from the Law of Public Gathering (see Alhajeri 2010: 36). This renders state control of the *diwaniyya* difficult, as Harvey notes how the state's spatial strategy aims to "locate power in those spaces which the bourgeoisie controls, and disempowers those spaces which oppositional movements have the greatest potentiality to command". The propensity for the manifestations of social movements in *diwaniyyas* thus remains high with minimal state intervention, owing to its extended reach into both public and private spaces.

Yet, at the same time, the *diwaniyya* is a space "which the bourgeoisie controls," considering how wealth in Kuwait is largely concentrated in the hands of the national population.¹⁶ This must be viewed in a demographical context: as of June 2016, non-Kuwaitis make up approximately 69.48 per cent of a population size of 4.3 million.¹⁷ The advent of oil wealth and consistently generous state welfare policies have ensured that Kuwaiti nationals attain a middle-class status, if not higher. Here the observations of Habermas (1991: 32-33) are befitting of a cross-examination between the Western European and Kuwaiti contexts: just as the *grande bourgeoisie* met with the nobility in the French *salons* "on an equal footing," it is worthy of noting how prominent merchant families in Kuwait continue to meet members of the ruling Al-Sabah family in their family.

While Habermas' conceptual ideas will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, as preliminary discussion it is vital to point out two findings. First, the 'bourgeois public sphere,' as coined by Habermas, exhibits similar characteristics to public space such that it is both a space of assembly and runs against the monopoly of governance. Habermas (1991: 27) explains this in his opening statements of his chapter entitled "Social Structures of the Public Sphere":

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of reason.

¹⁶ Kuwait holds a GDP per Capita of \$29,000 according to Forbes' statistics as of December 2016 (see <http://www.forbes.com/places/kuwait/>).

¹⁷ Statistics are provided by Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information (found on http://www.indexmundi.com/kuwait/demographics_profile.html).

From the above excerpt, we are able to draw parallels between eighteenth century Europe and the urban cities of today: (1) in public space, cities provide an informal spatial infrastructure for political action and association; (2) cities offer information and mobilisation networks that support pressure groups and social movements; (3) cities bring together the social networks through sites that enable the exchange of information; (4) cities are conducive to communities of interest (in identities, ideologies or tastes), providing critical mass to locate politics in space (see Tonkiss 2005: 65).

However, for all the overlaps between public space and public sphere, often their literatures indicate how both domains are mutually exclusive. According to the scrutiny by Smith and Low (2006: 4), public space comes about as a specific expression of civil society but does not remain contained within it; rather it emerges, according to Habermas' (1991: xi) account of the public sphere, "between civil society and state". Literature on the public sphere has given considerable weight to its mediating role between state and society, with reference to the institutions and practice that generate public opinion, and with a similar line of thought as that of Habermas, this research strand is historically grounded in the emergence/evolution of bourgeois social relations.¹⁸ The distinction between public space and public sphere is further consolidated with Smith and Low's (2006: 5) assertion that the ideal public sphere is deemed universal and spatially undifferentiated, whereas public space is explicitly spatial, uncovering "the ways in which social and political, and economic and cultural processes and relations make specific public places and landscapes, and the ways in which, in turn, these geographies reaffirm, contradict, or alter their constituent social and political relations". It is no wonder that Fraser's (1990: 64) critique of the Habermasian public sphere specifically attacks the misplaced assumption that this sphere "is or can be a space of zero degree culture".

Bar the coalescence in isolation of the two types of literature, this section has shown how aspects of both literatures can also be mutually reinforcing. The *diwaniyya* is a prime case study of how space can articulate the politics of the public through its accessibility, and embody the spatiality of the public sphere as a bridge between state and society. It is therefore imperative that Chapter Two considers the history of such a space, within a divergent trajectory from the

¹⁸ As Susen (2011: 45) correctly points out, the discursive nature of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere manifests itself in three forms of critique: (a) the critique of the absolutist state, (b) the critique of the democratic state, and (c) the critique of the public sphere as a mediating force between state and society. Literature concerning the public sphere includes the critical works of Fraser (1990) and Cheah & Robbins (1998).

European one. A befitting closure to this section would be indicative of how socially produced public spaces naturalise the assumptions by public sphere scholars:

It is important to recognize that many constituents of public space are privately owned, managed, and regulated elements of the public sphere: the preponderance of media outlets, access to the Internet, many rights of way in the city and countryside alike [...] By the same token there is considerable public (as in state) regulation over many aspects and uses of private space [...] The state is not by any means coterminous with the public sphere, but rather the product of specific power relations in any society – power relations that can exclude as many parts of the public as they include – yet many of the state’s actions do indeed mold and frame what specific societies take to be the public. (Smith and Low 2006: 5)

The above description serves as a reminder of the potential complementarity between public space and public sphere. Additionally, it draws reference to ‘power relations’ which echo the Lefebvrian concept of the representations of space – that ‘relations of production’ impose a particular order both on and within space.

Conclusion and Chapter Overview

This chapter has been a prelude to the qualities of the *diwaniyya*, much of it owing to its malleability as a space, having underscored its capacity to act as a socio-cultural anchor, a counter-space and, presumably, a ‘middle-class space’. Often but not, it is an interlinked space and practice caught in dichotomies: public/private, local/foreign, state/society. The *diwaniyya*’s qualities must, however, be viewed in historical context, in order to justify its continued relevance throughout Kuwait’s history, and its ability to adapt in urbanised surroundings – the city. As will be evidenced in the coming chapters, the *diwaniyya*, as a microcosm of wider Kuwaiti society, reflects domestic trends and the persistence of traditions, while simultaneously answering the needs of immediate realities (whether maritime trade or crises). Its impact on Kuwaiti society will be discussed within a broader theoretical framework developed in Chapter One. Specifically, by piecing together a series of concepts, the framework will demonstrate the transition of the *diwaniyya*, from physical space to diplomatic instrument. In order to better understand the familial governance structure of Kuwait and other kinship ties, Bourdieu’s concepts of capital will also be expounded in conjunction with the emergence of a middle class. This sets the stage perfectly for Chapter Two that traces the origins of the *diwaniyya* and following its historical trajectory, underscoring its effectiveness in mirroring the trends of the different time periods. The metamorphosis of the *diwaniyya* in form will be evident in this chapter, whereas its social and political roles remain relevant as Kuwait undergoes major

changes. Chapter Three provides a strong case for the family unit and the governance of Kuwait ‘as a family,’ where the *diwaniyya* acts as the organising medium between and within families. The *diwaniyya* as a force for social cohesion is then qualified in Chapter Four, where the *diwaniyya* is shown to serve the agenda of different, in some cases, emergent social groups. Taking this interlinked space and practice into the twenty-first century also means that the *diwaniyya* has to contend with new communicative practices in the form of social media. Finally, Chapter Five delves into the unexplored use of the *diwaniyya* by a group of unexpected users – foreign diplomats. Challenging the conventional definitions of diplomacy and, more recently, public diplomacy, this chapter additionally underscores the importance of indigenous diplomatic mechanisms in helping foreign diplomats to navigate a society bound by firm kinship ties.

1

The *Diwaniyya*, From Space to Diplomacy

In pursuing this problem of how one culture differs from another [...] I first decided that there was no single touchstone which could be used to explain any given culture. In this I found myself in disagreement with many anthropologists who look upon culture as a single category.

Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language*

1.1 The Gulf, Kuwait and the *Diwaniyya*: Qualifying Exceptionalism

The search for overarching trends and patterns may be at the heart of the work produced by scholars seeking to make sense of a region, but these efforts are often met with criticism, scepticism and counter-arguments. Research on the Middle East has warned against immersing in the Western Orientalist repertoire which distorts our perceptions of Arab society and culture.¹⁹ To go further, the notion of ‘mosaic’ was first deployed by Carleton Coon (1951) to describe the diversity of identities found in the Middle East gelled together by the religion of Islam. This was reprised by Cohen (1977: 385) two decades later who insisted that the ‘mosaic’ remains, except that “new boundaries are formed are forged and older ones reassert themselves in new disguises”. In a critical piece, Shami and Naguib (2013: 24) denounce the use of such a metaphor and its representation of the region as “ahistorical, stagnant and unable to experience real social transformation or to accommodate changing, fluid, or multiple identities”. Crucially, metaphors occlude differences: they obscure “the deeper inlay of the static *objet d’art* that is society”; the production of modernity and processes of circulation, representation, negotiation and communication when trends are oversimplified (Shami and Naguib: 25, italicised in original text).

In a similar vein, academic discourse on the Gulf has widely viewed the sub-region as an anomaly in the wider Middle East, owing to the wealth generated by oil and the consequent rapid development. Four primary reasons, according to Kamrava (2011: 4-9), are behind the Gulf’s ‘strategic significance’: (1) petroleum and petroleum-related products as a stabilising force of the global economy; (2) its location and ‘global positioning’ where a number of regional states seek either ‘superpower’ or ‘middle power’ status; (3) the Gulf’s relationship with external powers; and (4) the “relationship between culture and international relations in

¹⁹ The primary source that explains the West’s patronising perception of the Middle East is Edward Said’s (1978) ground-breaking work entitled *Orientalism*.

general and Islam and politics”. Using the pace of economic growth in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) to distinguish the Gulf region from the rest of the Arab world, Elshestawy (2008: 8-10) calls Gulf cities ‘newly emerging,’ hinting at an apparent sense of ‘exceptionalism’ in their historical experience. It is undeniable that modernisation has had its impact on Gulf societies, but to apply *solely* the dichotomy of pre-oil and post-oil periods to the Gulf context would wrongly suggest rigidity in memory, or even an absence of one. The suggestion that Arab Gulf cities face a loss of memory is therefore parochial at best. While the discovery of oil is an important watershed in Gulf history, having drastically changed governance and lifestyles across the region, the idea of memory should remain situated within “sociohistorical and political processes through which meaning is produced and transformed,” and where places and times are actively constituted and reconstituted in multiple ways on an ongoing basis (Duncan & Duncan 1998: 117; Winter 2007). In that sense, oil wealth should be seen as *one* of the many readings of Gulf history. The propounded myth of the Gulf being ‘unburdened by history’ (see Elshestawy 2008: 2) should also be dispelled as it implies not only the erasure of the old city (along with the modes of living), but also provides a ‘clean slate’ narrative that disregards the points of inflexion that make historiography rich and fulfilling. Adding to the pivotal role of historical trajectories is the reiteration of the point made in the Introduction that the city is built in the context of the past, as “a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, [and] a theater of social action” (Mumford 1937: 87).

The recent, fortunate ‘urban turn’ in Gulf studies offers a more complex and nuanced view of the Gulf that challenges the exceptionalism in both popular and academic discourses (Prakash 2008: 2). The latest studies on the Gulf, ranging from Fuccaro's (2009) extensive work on pre-oil Bahrain, to Limbert's (2010) ethnographic study of the impact of oil in Oman, to Kanna's (2011) analysis of Dubai's strategies aimed at disassembling its political nature, and to Menoret's (2014) exploration of Riyadh's class divide and youth culture, provide both historical and ethnographic focus, at times disputing what is ‘conventional’ about the region. Even if the temporal partition (between pre-oil and post-oil eras) of these studies remain, there is a concerted effort at providing an acute examination of the elements that shape these eras, be it social, economic, political, or cultural factors. Yet, this study, while riding on the momentum of the recent ‘urban turn,’ has argued thus far that it is equally important to go beyond such a bifurcation of literature – that scholars must not be fixated on the pre-oil versus post-oil dichotomy. Or, to put it more concisely, each ‘era’ can be broken down further into many eras which deserve analysis in their own right, as Chapter Two will expound on.

Kuwait itself as a research subject has undergone a profound re-evaluation. Three areas, relevant to this study on *diwaniyyas*, are worthy of mention and of further examination in the coming chapters. First, Kuwait's overtures to democracy have paved the way for academic, if not popular, discourse to cast a positive light on the country's governance as the liberal exception among other Gulf countries. Kuwait's democratisation, which has dominated a large part of the literature on its politics, has gained considerable attention as scholars attempt to decipher the motives for and reasons behind this phenomenon. Salamé's (1994: 86-87) contention that Kuwait's political system is a 'democracy without democrats,' one that is able to prohibit authoritarianism and invite the "voluntary pluralism of open political competition," offers a critical eye by disputing "the validity of the valorizing discourse of democracy". His reassertion that democratising forces can coexist in an authoritarian environment not only offers hope to problems of the Third World, but also helps "re-valorize the analysis of democracy as the involuntary result of relations between yet to be defined forces rather than the idealized incarnation of philosophical thinking" (Salamé 1994: 86). Arguably the most referenced book when discussing Kuwaiti politics, Mary Ann Tétreault's *Stories of Democracy* (2000: 4) invigorates the democratisation discourse further by normalising Kuwait's exceptionalism, arguing that it shares a common 'functional experience' with the West by virtue of moving from 'traditional' to 'modern' political institutions and practices (see also Foley 2001). Equally strong is her insight into how political space in Kuwait contribute to state-society relations particularly in the citizens' tussle with the state over civil and political rights, and in the process highlighting the agency of individuals (Tétreault 2000: 5-7). More recent work has attempted to tame the idea of exceptionalism, considering the particularities of Kuwaiti democracy in the context of wider governance. Besides reasserting that the usefulness of political space, Nonneman (2006: 3-4, italicised in original text) has been especially careful in balancing traditional and modern elements of political participation:

There have been two opposing but equally 'exceptionalist' approaches to the question of democracy, or political participation, in the Arab monarchical polities in the Gulf. The first, as already suggested, painted these polities as anachronisms stuck in traditional authoritarian absolutism or oligarchy. The second equally stressed their traditional nature, interpreting them as reflecting the traditional Arabian features and values of egalitarianism, personal access, and 'desert democracy,' with *majlises* (Arabic singular: *majlis*; plural: *majalis*) as the functional equivalent of participatory channels. Neither are particularly useful. [...] Some traditional values remain prevalent in society [...] yet this is all taking place in societies and polities whose size and complexities, technologies and

administrative systems, and linkages to the outside world, have changed beyond recognition. The most accurate representation of these polities would therefore be to label them *post-traditional states using neo-traditionalist forms and methods*.

By calling Gulf regimes “post-traditional states using neo-traditional forms and methods,” Nonneman concurrently recognises their ‘traditional nature’ and warns against viewing their democratic tendencies in absolute terms. Herb (2016, 2014) adds an extra layer of complexity to the equation by arguing that Kuwait’s political vibrancy must be viewed in context; that the timing of events in Kuwait’s political history matter.²⁰ The 1962 constitution, according to Herb (2016: 15-19), provided both an impetus and an opportunity for various actors (internal and external) to acknowledge the need for political participation, and setting off a path dependent argument wherein the culture of public participation became widespread and the National Assembly gradually became a well-entrenched institution. Even if this study on *diwaniyyas* does not deal with Kuwaiti politics *per se*, the wider political climate (one of vibrancy) envelopes the functions of the *diwaniyya*, especially considering its possible metamorphosis into a counter-space. The *diwaniyya*’s contribution to public participation, in Ghabra’s (1991: 200-202, see also Section 1.4) words, as a “platform for unofficial political groups and parties,” can then be put into context as the 1962 constitution and the corollary national assembly had set the stage for the legitimacy and influence of associational groups.

The second area of exceptionalism that needs to be tamed lies in the instances of inclusion and exclusion. Once again at the heart of this exceptionalism we find rentier state theories and state planning which create socio-spatial segregation, to the extent that Gulf scholarship has conceived two key terms to illustrate the divide. ‘Ethnocracy,’ referring to a society built on ethno-national hierarchies (for the Kuwaiti context, see Longva 1997, 2013), and ‘*kafala*,’ the system wherein individual migrants are required to obtain a sponsorship by a national or a company, have been omnipresent in Gulf literature that seeks to make sense of the expatriate community. Grievances and hardship notwithstanding,²¹ Vora and Koch (2015: 540-542, italicised in original text) propose the radical idea that Gulf states are “rather normal in their forms of nation-building and governance in that they are societies of differential *inclusion*,” asking readers to broaden their understanding of “*who* constitutes a subject in Gulf

²⁰ Herb (2016) specifically lists Iraqi claims to Kuwait in 1961, and Kuwait’s need for international legitimacy as a newly independent state, as two plausible reasons that drove Kuwait into setting up a national assembly. Such a move made it easier for the ruling family to demonstrate support from its own citizenry and boosted Kuwait’s global image (Kuwait subsequently won admittance to the UN in 1963). Herb also gives credit to the leadership of the then-ruler Sheikh Abdullah Salim for his openness to reform.

²¹ Andrew Gardner's (2010) observations on the labour camps in the Gulf provide a case in point.

societies” in order to understand ways that “non-citizens feel belonging and perform their identities as ‘insiders’”. In this manner, the focus on social stratification introduced by ethnocracy and *kafala* is balanced by a normalisation of non-citizens and their assimilation to the host country. At face value, although the *diwaniyya*’s participants are generally male Kuwaiti nationals, the smooth running of the *diwaniyya* session also owes itself in part to the servant’s mastery of social skills and his competence in providing guests with *gawa* (coffee) and snacks at the right time. While inclusionary and exclusionary instances remain relevant, there is a similar need to consider the complementarity of roles between citizens and non-citizens, bearing in mind the possibility of different social groups being ‘differently inclusive’ (see Brubaker 2004: 142). Another readily apparent form of social stratification found in academic discourse on Kuwait is the *hadar* versus *badu* differentiation; historically the former refers to sedentary groups like villagers or townspeople while the latter refers to the nomadic Bedouin tribes. The advent of state planning and modernisation has relocated this dichotomy along citizen/non-citizen lines, classifying *hadar* as settled and permanent while the *badu* are seen as fleeting and ‘temporary,’ particularly in aspects such as citizenship and housing (see Al-Nakib 2014; Partrick 2012; Longva 2006). While the *hadar-badu* binary is real and relevant from a bureaucratic perspective, this study will point out that the indiscriminate tradition of *diwaniyya* visiting across both groups in Kuwait can reconcile the apparent differences illustrated by current studies. The ‘right to the city’ in the Lefebvrian sense, entailing a right to participate in urban life, which Al-Nakib (2016: 16) employs to illustrate the demand by various social forces in Kuwait to restore the urban life wiped out by oil-induced modernisation, can be equally applied to the purpose behind visiting *diwaniyyas*, *hadar* and *badu* alike.

Finally, if the ‘urban turn’ and the taming of social differences have been punchy in neutralising the exceptionalism that dominates much of the literature on the Gulf, the latest breakthrough revisits Kuwait before the discovery of oil and calls the source of its prosperity into question. The established and well-documented fact that Kuwait’s port activities, and its pearling industry in particular, contributed to its success as a coastal town can be summarised as follows:

The relationship between the merchants and the ruling family had always been based on interdependence and mutual respect. The rulers provided stability and almost entirely free port by charging minimal custom duties, and the merchants kept the economy alive. Apart from a far-flung maritime trade, and a thriving ship-building industry, the basis for the economic strength and prosperity of Kuwait lay

in the pearling industry, which was organised on a profit-sharing basis and not on wage earning. (Shuhaiber 2003: 104)

Underpinning the riches of the sea is the ruler-merchant equation that has long dominated the historiography of Kuwait, yet Robert Fletcher's (2015a: 54, 2015b) pioneering work on desert administration and its economy re-orientates the longstanding scholarly attention on the coast by reconsidering 'vacant' desert and steppe environments as "forgotten arenas of activity". Kuwait's desert connectivity would also make sense to the historical development of the *diwaniyya*, judging from the fact that its origins stemmed from the tribal custom of holding a *majlis* (or council) in a tent (see Casey 2007: 24-25). Further, as the next chapter will underscore, the Al-Sabah ruling family's rule was originally legitimated by a tribal ideology, played out in the aforementioned desert *majlis*. Ismael (1982: 18-19) contends that this constituted "the political history of the desert," where:

Kinship ideology served as both the legitimation of cohesion and cleavage in the continuous competition for scarce resources. In the long view, tribal genealogies served as the dogma of the powerful tribes and the ideology of ascendant tribes. [...] While the position of shaikh was hereditary to a family, the order of succession was arbitrary, depending essentially upon tribal consensus of the most able of the potential successors, and the issue of succession itself was often a catalyst to tribal segmentation.

Both 'tribal consensus' and the 'arbitrary' nature of succession provide substantial clues to the style of governance that modern-day Kuwait adopts. Crucially, if former desert politics were to be considered in the balancing act in governance, then the ruler-merchant equation in Kuwait must make some room for the Bedouins. By extension, launching an inquiry into the current Bedouin customs of holding *diwaniyyas* may well be enlightening.

1.2 Political Science, History or Anthropology

Although this study is not an anthropological one intrinsically, the frame of references and methods used revolve around the ethnographic aspects of social and cultural anthropology, which focus on "the shared symbols and interlocking patterns of meaning generated, maintained, modified, and reproduced by persons in a given society to make sense of the world about them and to act in it" (Eickelman 1998: 20). Yet, as mentioned from the onset of this study, lively theoretical debates on the *diwaniyya* cannot reach their full potential without cutting across different disciplines. Taking context into consideration when analysing societies equally means that notions of time, space and person are imperative to both anthropological

inquiry and historical discourse. The complementarity and interchangeability of both disciplines differ more in the degree of abstraction than in kind. What Evans-Pritchard (1962, see also Lewis 1985) calls the difficulty in “the translation of cultures” refers to the problems in discerning a social act, making explicit its shared meaning and, as Aron (1970: 345) insists, “to render social or historical content more intelligible than it was in the experience of those who lived it”. Eickelman (1998: 22-23) provides a substantial explanation of how both anthropologists and historians undertake the common goal of making sense of cultures and societies:

Thus historians, just like anthropologists, principally (although not exclusively) concerned with contemporary societies, including their own, seek systematically to infer what is known or knowable about the beliefs and the social order of earlier periods. [...] The historian’s primary goal is to elicit the circumstances that are unique to a given event or to a sequence of events. [...] Unlike scientific explanations, which can be tested and confirmed through success with replicable cases, historical explanations cannot be “tested.” Instead, the best historical explanation is the one that is “most consistent, plausible, and in accordance with all the evidence.” The historian may seek primarily to explain specific events but he must still rely on sociological (or anthropological) abstractions about the nature of religious beliefs, political relations, and the like in a given society to proceed with his narrative. The anthropologist is primarily interested in attempts to elicit and to confirm recurrent regularities in a society [...] such explanations are closely intertwined with the understanding of specific historical events.

That Eickelman, an anthropologist with an interest in the Middle East, dedicates a significant portion of his introductory chapter to justify the linkages across disciplines speaks volumes. In so doing, he unwittingly (or wittingly) confirms the relevance of being in close proximity to the research subject – a prominent feature of anthropological work. The ‘recurrent regularities’ in society that the anthropologist seeks, together with consistent historical explanations, make up a more complete and coherent representation of society.

Peter Lienhardt (2001: xi), a British anthropologist who conducted a study of Gulf states in the fifties, concurred with the relevance between politics and anthropology; his study of politics related to “the sense of structures in terms of which political behaviour could be related to the way in which people lived, their physical circumstances and their values”. The ‘recurrent regularities’ emphasised by Eickelman earlier is equally important to Lienhardt (2001: 17), who noticed how “repetitions, revealed both in field information and in history, suggest a pattern which is not simply one of sequence but [...] ‘structural’”. ‘Structure,’ according to Lienhardt

(2001: 18) is “a construct of the writer’s imagination” that suggests where he regards to be the interrelationships of social and other facts in society, intending to embrace as many available facts as possible and represent them in appropriate proportions. In this regard, anthropological studies target a similar degree of consistency that historians seek to achieve, even if the site of fieldwork remains far from what theories of his time suggest. Lienhardt (1993: 35) wrote about his trip to Kuwait in 1953:

I had set out for Kuwait with the idea of studying a society that was changing, but it proved quite unexpectedly difficult to think of the local population of Kuwait, indigenous and immigrant, as anything coherent enough to be called a society. Moreover, though there was certainly a Kuwaiti community at the centre of things, Kuwaitis were not easily accessible to immigrants, and I too was, in a sense, an immigrant. Without getting to know a large number of people well, starting with the Kuwait community, it would be impossible to form an idea of existing social relations, let alone to find how they were changing. Hence, it was even more necessary than I had supposed to start with a smaller place.

The above excerpt confirms the need for a “microsociological technique of fieldwork” as Eickelman (1998: 24) puts it, in order to understand larger units of society. It is because of this very reason that this study adopts the small built environment of the *diwaniyya* to intensively analyse wider political, economic, symbolic and historical processes. Processual analysis, is based on “an individual and specific population studied in a multidisciplinary frame of reference and with a stress on specific human behavior rather than generalised norms or averages” (Benett et al. 1975: 179, cited in Turner 1985: 153). Thus far, it is made evident that even if a cross-disciplinary methodology is adopted, the context of the research site and subjects must also be taken into account.

Even theories in political science such as institutionalism, as we will examine later, are constantly reviewed after sustaining critique from a range of quarters. Institutionalism, was traditionally synonymous with political science, covering “the description of constitutions, legal systems and government structures, and their comparison over time and across countries,” but gave in to demands for the inclusion of the socialisation and organisation of political life (Lowndes 2010: 60-61). Much like the ‘recurrent regularities’ that anthropologists seek, institutions, political or not, are now concerned with ‘stable, recurring’ patterns and behaviour (Goodin 1996: 22). The emergence of new institutionalism as a remedy to traditional institutionalism also highlights how there is a sense of rapprochement between disciplines –

political science and approaches of other disciplines. Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 11-12) evaluates this sense of rapprochement as a maturation of the profession:

Political scientists no longer think in the either/or terms of agency or structure, interests or institutions as the driving forces: now, virtually all serious students of the discipline would say it is a matter of a judicious blend of both [...] it is a matter of analysing behavior within the parameters set by institutional facts and opportunity structures.

Political methodology, as Goodin and Klingemann (1996: 22) observe, is experiencing a 'postmodern turn' toward particularity and situatedness instead of generality and universality. While this section has suggested a complementarity between history and anthropology, the case of political science is slightly different. The process of cross-fertilisation to include aspects of political science is better known as hybridisation, involving "a combination of segments of disciplines, of specialities and not whole disciplines" (Dogan 1996: 99).

Hybridisation in this study on *diwaniyyas* becomes necessary, because area studies give priority to topics which seem important to understanding a particular country, in this case Kuwait (see Dogan 1996: 115-117). Innovation in political science is especially important to understanding a non-Western frame of reference because of the difficulty in constructing a yardstick to measure non-Western forms of social phenomena; it is in this respect that the borrowing and lending of theories across disciplines becomes vital. Symbols unfounded in Western references, but taken for granted in indigenous societies, need to be deciphered. Anthropological methods become apt in uncovering meanings "assigned verbally through speech and nonverbally through ritual and ceremonial action" (Turner 1985: 154); qualifying a space as an institution lies in the domains of political science and sociology; history is needed to locate the circumstances acting on the space.

As such, the *diwaniyya* cannot be simply dismissed as a mere physical space, a reception room. It is a complex socio-cultural anchor that requires a selective choice of theories and concepts to understand its primordial and dominant role in Kuwait, even if these theories and concepts have Western roots. The combination of these elements is not a piecemeal, haphazard methodology, but a meticulous innovation. As such the methodology of this ongoing study beginning from the spring of 2013 is best described by Lambert's (1990: 731) argument for area studies:

Area specialists who are in the social sciences are likely to have a great deal more contact and shared intellectual activity with humanists than do most of their

nonarea-oriented disciplinary colleagues. This tie to the humanities presents an unusual opportunity for intellectual cross-fertilization through dialogue with scholars in disciplines with which they normally have little contact.

It is at the conjecture of anthropology, history, political science and sociology that interdisciplinary work on the *diwaniyya* occurs, requiring an integrated approach that pieces together selected segments of the aforementioned disciplines.

1.2.1 *A Multifaceted Approach²² to Understanding the Diwaniyya*

The previous chapter explained how the *diwaniyya* is an interlinked space and practice, employing Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product to further our understanding of such a reception room. The contextual basis on which he analyses physical space lies in the notion of everyday life:

The study of everyday life affords a meeting place for specialized sciences and something more besides; it exposes the possibilities of conflict between the rational and irrational in our society and in our time, thus permitting the formulation of concrete problems of production (in its widest sense): how the social existence of human beings is produced, its transition from want to affluence and from appreciation to depreciation (Lefebvre 1971: 23).

As Lefebvre suggests above, an anthropological, if not community-based, perspective of an everyday phenomenon offers a connection with more theoretical or abstract works ('specialized sciences'). The relevance of Bourdieu's concepts of capital, as the next section will unravel, also hints at how the *diwaniyya* constantly shapes and reshapes the 'social existence' of Kuwaitis. Departing from the premise that the *diwaniyya*'s social functions are *precursors* of its expanded role in politics, this chapter will elaborate a framework that demonstrates the transition from the physical space of the *diwaniyya*, and onward to its utility as a diplomatic method.

Here, the focus of this study adds an extra layer to the *diwaniyya*'s social qualities, by establishing the *diwaniyya* as a diplomatic conduit that can run into foreign policy. The dividing line between diplomacy and foreign policy, as Harold Nicolson (1974: 164) insisted, ought to be made clear:

²² Stetter (2012) underscores how there is a tradition of drawing from broader social science theories, and concepts originally intended for the study of other regions, when studying the Middle East. The call for systematic linkages between theoretical ambition and area expertise resonates with this study.

Foreign Policy is based upon a general conception of national requirements; and this conception derives from the need of self-preservation, the constantly changing shapes of economic and strategic advantages and the condition of public opinion as affected at the time. [...] Diplomacy [...] is not an end but a means; not a purpose but a method. [...] It is the agency through which foreign policy seeks to attain its purposes by agreement rather than by war.

The *diwaniyya* further advances the claim that there can be a balance between the private and public spheres of a given society, through the use of this space for both social purposes and for multi-level diplomacy. This runs contrary to the Western manifestation of the diplomatic practice in which the evolution and expansion of diplomacy are entrenched in formality, technicality and bureaucracy, as will be shown later in this chapter.

The malleability of the *diwaniyya* provides a sense of uniqueness in the conceptual understanding of the space; no single theory is able to fully capture the complexities of such a social space. Instead, this chapter seeks to synthesise elements of different theories in order to fully grasp the nitty-gritty of the *diwaniyya*. The diplomatic aspect of the *diwaniyya* stems first from its potential to resolve a conflict, then follows its entry into the realm of domestic politics by acting as a space where Kuwaitis may cast ballots and votes, functioning as polling stations in elections for the municipality council and other organisations (Al-Kandari 2002: 14, see also Alhajeri 2010). Yet the passage from space to politics and diplomacy must be understood in relation to the Habermasian concept of the ‘public,’ expounded in the coming sections. Drawing from the striking similarities between the rise of the bourgeoisie in the European context and the financial empowerment of Kuwaitis (through oil wealth), one observes the *diwaniyya*’s uncanny resemblance to the European salon that sat on “the line between private and public sphere [which] extended through the home” (Habermas 1991: 45). The use of the Habermasian ‘bourgeois public sphere’ in this study must, however, be qualified in a non-European context such as Kuwait’s due to the focus on strong family ties with an eye for the well-being of the same community (See Yassine-Hamdan & Pearson 2014: 7). In an Arab society akin to Kuwait, the family acts as form of mediation or “a pre-emptive quality mechanism [that] can generate both effective performance and societal harmony” (Cunningham & Sarayrah 1994: 38). Such familial intercession, entwined in the circulation of both social and cultural capitals, is peculiar in Kuwait where we observe an almost uniform bourgeois population unlike the Habermasian bourgeoisie, with the exception of the ruling family and other well-established merchant families. The notion of the ‘public’ must therefore be reviewed in the Kuwaiti context where the *diwaniyya* functions as a feedback mechanism to ensure the ‘effective performance’ of

granting favours, and the ‘societal harmony’ found in the interconnectedness of different families.

Alexander Wendt’s groundbreaking work, *Social Theory of International Politics*, provides useful insight into the link between diplomacy and ideational structures. The latter form a crucial component of constructivist theory, which focuses on “the intersubjective dimension of knowledge, because they wish to emphasis the social aspect of human existence – the role of shared ideas as an ideational structure constraining and shaping behavior” (Copeland 2000: 189).²³ Wendt (1999: 185, emphasis in original) stresses that structure “*exists, has effects, and evolves only because of agents and their practices*”. Similarly, a social structure like the *diwaniyya* persists because (1) families have internalised, ritualised and routinised the ideational structures of such a practice (ranging from mannerisms to implicit rules while in the space); (2) the interactions of Kuwaitis within the space perpetuates the expansion of social networks that transcend local boundaries. Despite the relevance of Wendt’s theory of social construction, Wendt’s (cited in Copeland 2000: 192) argument remains “founded on the notion that states are the primary actors in world politics,” leaving little room to explore the importance of the actors of ‘everyday life’ that shape the nature of space as Lefebvre saw it.

Crucially, while unwittingly acting as a critique of theories from different disciplines, such a study equally questions the orthodoxy of disciplines such as IR in its tendency toward reductionism. Apart from suggesting that Eurocentric approaches should be treated with caution, this study will show that broader approaches to understanding conflict resolution and diplomacy may be more effective in understanding diplomacy and conflict, particularly “from the perspective of grass roots directly involved and not just from the perspective of states and elites” as IR often suggests (Richmond 2010: 14). Burton (1972) proposed using sociobiological needs as bearings for policymaking, thereby giving agency to individuals, and as Azar (1985, see also Gurr 1971) furthers this claim, policymaking requires taking into account the needs and expectations of individuals in their social context. In this light a multifaceted approach is needed for this study in order to first cherry-pick the most relevant components of theories that best explains the *diwaniyya*’s social connection with diplomacy, and to avoid, as Paul Salem (1997: 11) warns, the dangers of generalisation in the distinction between Arab and Western cultures.

²³ For more information on the turn towards constructivism in IR theory, see Wendt (1992), Adler (1997) and Checkel (1998).

1.3 The Circulation of Social and Cultural Capitals

Underpinning this study is the notion of capital that helps us to evaluate the social qualities of the *diwaniyya*. The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu will be the primary reference used, but the dynamic nature of the field means that it is important to review other influential currents on capital. Arguably, Bourdieu's (1979: 1) work on capital drew inspiration from previous research on Algerian society, in which he argues that the change in cultural models and values are both "the consequence and the precondition of economic transformations," and to understand such changes requires "the mediation of the experience and practice of individuals differently situated with respect to the economic system". He would build on such understanding to introduce the manner in which capital, whether objectified or embodied, governs "the structure and functioning of the social world," and takes time to accumulate with the potential to produce profits and to "reproduce itself in identical and expanded form" (Bourdieu 1986: 241-242). The culture of socialisation through the *diwaniyya* can therefore be explained through the distribution of capital both horizontally and vertically in Kuwaiti society, and, with the *diwaniyya*'s malleability exists the propensity to institutionalise into different forms. Two forms of capital, cultural and social, will be invoked throughout this study to comprehend the horizontal and vertical transmission of capital.

First, cultural capital is an asset or investment, which may be transmitted hereditarily. Existing in three forms, the embodied state in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the objectified state in the form of cultural goods such as pictures and documents; and the institutionalised state which needs to be set apart as it "confers entirely original properties" on cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986: 243). Bourdieu (1986: 243-244) used cultural capital to explain "the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes" in the French education system, owing to the investment made by parents. While the family's background acts as a form of invested cultural capital to boost their child's academic performance, the same can be said for the resources found in a Kuwaiti family's legacy. The ostentatious display of the family name at the *diwaniyya*'s entrance is a simple indication of such invested cultural capital. As Reed-Danahay (2005: 38) puts it, Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital was in its widest sense, "including both formal and informal modes of cultural transmission," as well as the circulation, valuation, and transmission of knowledge. The preservation of other customs and practices in the space of the *diwaniyya* that trigger a sense of nostalgia is further proof of this continued transmission of cultural capital,

not only as a means to ‘remember one’s roots,’ but also, as evidenced by the later chapters, to maintain a certain status in society.

Bourdieu’s cultural capital is equally useful in explaining the wider family structure that shapes Kuwait’s governance and society, in which the *diwaniyya* plays a pivotal role in maintaining kinship ties. Besides stipulating that the family is a social construct, Bourdieu (1996: 22) identifies the modern state as responsible for creating the normative category of the family, through rites of instruction that:

aim to constitute the family the family by constituting it as a united, integrated entity which is therefore stable, constant, indifferent to the fluctuations of individual feelings. And these inaugural acts of creation (imposition of family name, marriage, etc.) have their logical extension in the countless acts of reaffirmation and reinforcement that aim to produce, in a kind of continuous creation, the obliged affections and affective obligations of family feeling [...].

It is within the family unit that cultural capital is passed down from one generation to another, and, in the Kuwaiti context, the *diwaniyya*, as a congregational space for the family, has continuously mitigated the effects of change. The continuous practice of *diwaniyya* visiting is undoubtedly both the ‘reaffirmation and reinforcement’ of affection. Yet, the organisation of Kuwaiti society as a family of families *predates* the creation of the modern state, and such contextual differences transports Bourdieu’s conception of the family into another dimension. The organic growth of Kuwaiti society before the emergence of the state, as we will observe, signifies at once a closely knitted community, and the intricate network of families that make up this very community. While cultural capital helps to explain the resources passed down vertically from one generation to another, the networks that expand horizontally require a different approach.

Social capital, which Bourdieu (1986: 243), initially calls ‘social obligations’ or ‘connections,’ also has the potential of being converted into economic capital. He later develops this line of thought:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially

instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them [...]. (Bourdieu 1986: 249)

At once a plausible link is observed between the *diwaniyya*'s capacity for expanding networks and the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources" that social capital denotes. Situated within a complex network of family connections, social capital is useful in helping comprehend "the application of a common name" – in this case family, class and tribe all matter in the Kuwaiti context – wherein the *diwaniyya* acts as the medium for the "material and/or symbolic exchanges" that help to maintain these family-to-family networks. Increasingly evident in this study are the benefits derived from *diwaniyya* visiting, and by extension, the 'credential' gained by means of socialisation, particularly useful in a society that operates more effectively on a face-to-face level. The volume of social capital possessed by a Kuwaiti in this case would depend on "the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize" and on the volume of the capital possessed in his own right by each of those *to whom he is connected* (see Bourdieu 1986: 249). The network of relations in the user's possession is also available to be tapped on by those related to the user himself; in other words, even if the principal users of the *diwaniyya* are male Kuwaitis, the social capital that they possess can be tapped on by female family members – an act that Bourdieu (1986: 250) calls the 'alchemy of consecration'. Subject to one's interests, users "become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality," because they decide on the networks that are helpful and leave others out for future use (Bourdieu 1990b: 65; see also Reed-Danahay 2005: 109).

Two alternative currents dominate the literature on social capital.²⁴ First, Coleman's (1988: S116-118) formulation of social capital comes close to Bourdieu's, but differs in how the former sees social capital as a form of public good. While this reaffirms the value of social capital as a bonding mechanism – "that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interests of the collectivity" – Coleman's (1988: S104-105) argument overlooks the possibility of how social capital may also perpetuate social inequalities, part of the reason why Bourdieu analysed the French education system in the first place. Nevertheless, Coleman's (1988: S95-100) work pushes the boundaries established by Bourdieu through his focus on the effect of social capital "within the family and in the community outside the family," and his introduction of 'human

²⁴ For a more detailed comparison of the different currents of social capital, see Tzanakis (2013) and Harper (2001).

capital' that embodies the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual. Another impactful current stems from the work of Putnam (1993, 2000) which launches an inquiry into the democratic-ness of American society. For Putnam (1993, italicised in original text), social capital is “*not a substitute for effective public policy but rather a prerequisite for it and, in part, a consequence of it*”. In this manner, Putnam associates social capital with civic engagement, and to an extent, civic engagement (see Tzanakis 2013: 6-7). While Putnam’s work delves into US political culture, it presents a strong case for the *diwaniyya*’s potential politicisation, even though Putnam’s (2000) subsequent work putting forth a causal relationship between social capital and political involvement may not hold true for the *diwaniyya* considering its malleability. The table below nicely summarises the different strands of social capital:

	Definition	Purpose	Analysis
Bourdieu	Resources that provide access to group goods	To secure economic capital	Individuals in class competition
Coleman	Aspects of social structure that actors can use as resources to achieve their interests	To secure human capital	Individuals in family and community settings
Putnam	Trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit	To secure effective democracy and economy	Regions in national setting

Table 1.1 Definition, purpose and analysis of social capital (Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2000, cited in Winter 2000)

A final point has to be made on the institutionalisation of capital, which Bourdieu addresses time and again in material terms, or in an objectified state. In educational terms, Bourdieu (1986: 248) uses the example of academic qualifications, or “a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture”. The same can be said for the *diwaniyyas* which grant Kuwaitis identification with their own family grouping. The family name associated with the *diwaniyya* is an institutionalised and objectified form of cultural capital, conferring on the space a set of qualities historically associated with the family name, and on the individual his position in generational terms and within segmentary lineage. Other symbolic features will also be discussed later. Institutionalised social capital, however, is discussed in the forms of delegation which concentrate the totality of social capital; Bourdieu (1986: 251) uses the title of nobility to illustrate this. This concept becomes clearer when making sense of social inequalities, since,

in a web of social relations there are groupings that are stronger or more prominent than others. In the Kuwaiti context *diwaniyyas* owned by members of the royal family and prominent merchants become strategic bearings to build social networks.

Yet amidst the circulation of capitals the recurring theme of the family cannot be discounted. As Bourdieu (1996: 21-22, italicised in original text) puts it, the family is “the product of a labour of *institutionalization*, both ritual and technical, aimed at durably instituting in each member of the instituted unit feelings that will tend to ensure the *integration* that is the condition of the existence and persistence of the unit”. Perhaps the family unit feelings invested in the *diwaniyya* have allowed for the space’s persistence over time, furnishing it with important social qualities that will be examined in Chapter Three. The microsociological perspective of observing family connections and actions that transmit capitals within the space of the *diwaniyya* provide valuable insights into how participation in larger entities is experienced (see Eickelman 1998: 25-26). The *diwaniyya* may be a natural given to Kuwaitis, but tracing the actions of its users also unearths the “*practical dispositions* that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties that emerge from acting *through time and space*” (Schwartz 1997: 100, emphasis added).

1.4 Institution, Field or Habitus?

Building on the relevance of capital to this study is the concept of institution. Bourdieu’s (1982, 1986) work on capital has pointed to the potential conversion of capital, of which institutionalisation is a possibility. On the network of connections that social capital seeks to expand, he specifically argues that it is “not a natural given, or even a social given” but:

constituted once and for all by an act of institution, represented, in the case of the family group, by the genealogical definition of kinship relations, which is the characteristic of social formation. It is the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites – often wrongly described as rites of passage – mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits. (Bourdieu 1986: 249)

Besides the repeated mention of ‘institution,’ the above excerpt underscores how social capital is initiated by an ‘act of institution,’ to which Bourdieu uses the family as an example. Unwittingly, the family involvement in the *diwaniyya* embodies a similar constitutive practice of institution, and to which it can be added that the *diwaniyya*, as interlinked space and practice, qualifies as an institution in itself.

The ‘institution rites’ highlighted by Bourdieu are equally mirrored by the stable and recurring patterns of behaviour featured in institutional concepts. As set out in Section 1.2, a ‘new institutionalism’ emerged to counter criticism of the ‘undersocialised’ character of dominant institutional approaches in political science; new institutionalists are not only concerned with the “informal conventions of political life” in addition to the formal constitutions and organisational structures, but also with the “*interaction* between institutions and individuals” (Lowndes 2010: 61, italicised in original text). The shift towards new institutionalism unshackles institutional analysis from the political science domain and opens it up to broader theoretical frameworks. Far from equating political institutions with political organisations rigidly, institutions are further analysed by those on the normative ‘wing’ as rules that provide behavioural guidelines, following a similar line of thought that analyses space as a social product (rather than a mere physical form) (see March & Olsen 1984, 1989). New institutionalism also suggests a more dynamic conception of institutions: to view them as processes influenced by human action (see Lowndes 2010: 68). In the same vein the *diwaniyya* can be conceived as an institution that regulates the flow of social and cultural capital in Kuwaiti society; the volume of capital received by its users depends wholly on their actions and behaviour. The malleability of the *diwaniyya* subjects the space to potential politicisation, echoing the argument of new institutionalists that political institutions are ‘embedded’ in particular contexts, at times producing path-dependent decisions (see Krasner 1984; Granovetter 1985).

Yet, it is the normative strain of new institutionalism that best complements this study on *diwaniyyas*. More than just stressing the organisational factors in political life, the normative branch argues for the importance of norms and values in defining how those organisations should and would function (see Peters 1996: 208). The usefulness of normative institutionalism in explaining the political potential of a social entity akin to the *diwaniyya* also lies in problematising formal political institutions. March and Olsen (1984: 735) summarise these criticisms perfectly, arguing that theories of politics have been:

- (a) *contextual*, inclined to see politics as an integral part of society, less inclined to differentiate polity from the rest of society;
- (b) *reductionist*, inclined to see political phenomena as the aggregate consequences of individual behavior, less inclined to ascribe the outcomes of politics to organizational structures and rules of appropriate behavior;
- (c) *utilitarian*, inclined to see action as the product of calculated self-interest, less inclined to see political actors as responding to obligations and duties;
- (d) *functionalist*, inclined to see history as an efficient

mechanism for reaching uniquely appropriate equilibria, less concerned with the possibilities for maladaptation and non-uniqueness in historical development; and (e) *instrumentalist*, inclined to define decision-making and the allocation of resources as the central concerns of political life, less attentive to the ways in which political life is organized around the development of meaning through symbols, rituals and ceremonies.

The extra room for human agency and reflexivity offered by normative institutionalism bridges the gap between sociological and political traditions; incidentally, the above excerpt from March and Olsen's seminal article also summarises the main theoretical concerns that this study seeks to address. Establishing the *diwaniyya* as first and foremost a socio-cultural anchor differentiates this "polity from the rest of society," where the rules of this space and institution are intended to govern behaviour and to fulfil the 'obligations' and 'duties' of another institution – the family. Hence the need to trace the *diwaniyya*'s 'historical development' as a microsociological inquiry into possible 'maladaptation,' and deciphering the meaning from the 'symbols,' 'rituals' and 'ceremonies' of the space and its users. In this sense, as Giddens (1984: 24) puts it, "institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life". This is also because, as Miller (2010: 5) explains, members of institutions identify with 'the institutional ends, constitutive activities, and social norms that are in part definitive of those institutions'. Thus the sense of group feeling ('*asabiya* in Arabic) must not be dismissed, as medieval North African intellectual Ibn Khaldun (1969: 46) emphasised that the meaning of civilisation revolves around social organisation. Although notions of group are likely to be found in tribal contexts, they need not depend on 'blood' relationships, but the bonds of solidarity must take precedence over all other bonds of association (Eickelman 1998: 28, see also Ahmed 2005). The *diwaniyya*'s social functions must therefore be measured against the aforementioned features of normative political institutions, while constantly bearing in mind that it is still primarily a social institution that instils a sense of solidarity in its participants.

By virtue of the *diwaniyya*'s malleability, it is helpful to consider less systematic concepts (other than institutions) that account for an element of spontaneity and the presence of opportunity structures. Bourdieu's (1990b: 53) concept of habitus encompasses these characteristics without a similar commitment to institutionalisation:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery

of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

Based on the above definition, the *diwaniyya* provides fertile ground to generate a habitus encompassing the ‘transposable dispositions’ of its users, for purposes that can be far from political. Entertainment activities as simple as the playing of cards in the *diwaniyya*, particularly among younger Kuwaitis, could build social bonds “without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends” (see also Bourdieu 1984: 170). Habitus helps to explain how patterns of conduct such as *diwaniyya* visiting can develop over time without being the product of obedience to rules (Schwartz 1997: 95). Instead, it is the pattern of regular visiting and congregation that matters more – as an “internalized, embodied disposition” resulting from inculcation via the family and peer groups (Reed-Danahay 2005: 46). The reproduction of cultural and social capitals is equally present in habitus despite these seemingly mundane activities. Opportunity structures are perpetuated each time a user repeats the disposition of immersing himself in the *diwaniyya* tradition (see Schwartz 1997: 103); it is the building of networks, as will be evident, that brings the Kuwaiti back to the space time and again. In an apolitical context, the *diwaniyya* can continue to sustain a habitus involving a “system of circular relations which unite structures and practices” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: 203). Crucially, such malleability allows the *diwaniyya* to weave in and out of tight spots, all this while maintaining the habitus. It is from the hotly discussed ‘state of exception’ that the *diwaniyya* has the ability to wriggle itself free, that is, the state wherein the government acquires political power which allows it to operate well beyond the limits of the law (see Agamben 2008).²⁵ Thus far the example of Monday *diwaniyyas* mentioned offers some insight into how the ‘state of exception’ may be circumvented; other significant periods of conflict will also be discussed later to stress the *diwaniyya*’s adaptability.

In relation to contextual differences that have an impact on the habitus or the institution, Bourdieu conceives the spatial metaphor of ‘field’ as:

a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determination they

²⁵ Agamben argues that the government’s acquisition of extra-judicial powers in times of crises goes beyond the question of a provisional and practical measure, rather, it is increasingly becoming a normal paradigm of government in the twentieth century. This ‘state of exception’ also marks a “threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference” (Agamben 2008: 40).

impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other position (domination, subordination, homology, etc). (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 97)

Put simply, fields are the wider situational circles that act on both habitus and institutions, to the extent that agents modify their dispositions in order to better compete for capital and “access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field”. Moncrieffe (2006: 37) specifically explains “how people can resist power and domination in one [field] and express complicity in another”. In this manner, the concept of fields helps to account for differential power, particularly in themes where the *diwaniyya* demonstrates social dislocation and disunity rather than cohesion. Gender relations, generational gaps, political and religious affiliations are a few themes for which fields can help explain variations in individual behaviour and interpersonal relations. For instance, a female Kuwaiti member of parliament is allowed to hold a *diwaniyya* (especially during the electoral campaigning period) by virtue of her political status as a representative of the people, whereas a regular Kuwaiti female would hardly be seen in *diwaniyyas*. Obligations to the family, when compared with those to the people, present two different fields/positions that shape attitudes and actions. As Schwartz (1997: 119) indicates, fields are based upon “the relational mode of reasoning” by encouraging the researcher to seek out “underlying and invisible relations that shape action”.

To conclude this conceptual triad of the relationship between institution, habitus and field, it could be provisionally argued at this stage that the *diwaniyya* produces a set of recurrent dispositions to the extent that these dispositions are internalised and amount to a habitus. The accumulation of social and cultural capitals by the *diwaniyya*'s users are susceptible to institutionalisation; yet the *diwaniyya* is primarily social in nature. Where the field of family forces are prevalent, the *diwaniyya* is taken to be a social institution. Elsewhere in the field of governance the *diwaniyya*'s political potential is harnessed such that socio-cultural values and norms are politicised and become guidelines that orientate the space toward a normative socio-political institution. In such cases, as this study will show, social capital has an increasingly greater stake as the *diwaniyya*'s owner seeks to extend his reach in Kuwaiti society. The *diwaniyya*'s malleability remains its overarching characteristic which allows it to function in different fields.

1.5 The Public Sphere and the Middle Class

Thus far, the transition of the *diwaniyya* from social to political milieus has been grounded on the space's feasibility for socialisation and, by extension, politicking. Yet the same space's ability to "straddle the public-private divide" (see Introduction) is another feature worth providing theoretical furnishings. This division of public and private realms follows three ontological pairings: society versus individual ('collective' versus 'personal'), visibility versus concealment ('transparent' versus 'opaque'), and openness versus closeness ('accessibility' versus 'sealed') (see Susen 2011: 40-42). Scholars approach the public/private dichotomy having drawn significant inspiration from ancient Greek thought. For Arendt (1958: 198), the publicness of the *polis* (the city) stems from "the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be," thus differentiated from the private sphere of the *oikos* (the family). Nevertheless, the writings of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1991: 3), central to our understanding of the public sphere, insists that status in the *polis* must be "based upon status as the unlimited master of an *oikos*". The relative, and paradoxical autonomy of the private and the public was, as Susen (2011: 39-40) argues, "contingent upon their reciprocal determinacy" which is in turn derived from the "material and ideological specificity of each society". It is the same specificity that this study seeks to clarify through the *diwaniyya* practice.

The historical underpinning of the Habermasian public sphere is founded in the European Renaissance (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) which saw the proliferation of salons, clubs, coffee houses and newspapers. Capturing the significance of these spaces new to its time, Habermas (1991: 45) observed how "privatized individuals stepped out of their living rooms into the public sphere of the *salon*"; the salon serves not the house, but society. The salon, or the reception room, acquires a prominent role in Habermas' rational-critical discourse in that integration is to be "based on communication rather than domination" where reason is advanced by debate itself (Calhoun 1992: 29; Roberts & Crossley 2004: 4). In this manner, Habermas' public sphere transcends the physical delineation of public and private spaces by offering an 'in-between' entity. Despite being a physical component of private property (the house), the salon simultaneously acts as a public *space of appearance* produced "wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action" for the purpose of deliberating about matters of public concern (see Arendt 1958: 198-199). In a similar fashion, the *diwaniyya* will be presented as the overlap between private and public albeit in a Kuwaiti context.

The structural transformation of seventeenth century European societies as Habermas analysed was reflected by two concurrent changes: on the one hand, private organisations began increasingly to assume public power; on the other the state penetrated the private realm (see Calhoun 1992: 21). As a space holding the middle ground, the public sphere is posited as a space that helps both the state and society reach consensus when thorny issues arise. Habermas (1974: 49) describes the qualities of the public sphere as:

a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. [...] Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest.

The ability of the public sphere to generate public opinion on matters of ‘general interest’ has advantages on two accounts. First, with the increasing pervasive state influence on private life, public opinion allows the citizen to reclaim his ‘right to the city’ in the Lefebvrian sense (see Section 1.1). The public sphere can therefore be discussed in tandem with the civil society groups that mediate between the private concerns of individuals in familial settings, and the demands of social life. When the state encroaches on individual rights, the public sphere provides the nurturing ground for the sprouting of ‘counter-spaces’ (see Introduction). An embodiment of the public sphere, this study will demonstrate how the *diwaniyya* acts as a unofficial watchdog of the government, alongside its official counterpart – the parliament. Conversely, the state is able to tap on public opinion as a form of self-evaluation in governance. Foucault's (1991: 91-92) idea of governmentality explains this art of governance as a task to establish a continuity, “in both an upwards and a downwards direction”:

Upwards continuity means that a person who wishes to govern the state well must first learn how to govern himself, his goods and his patrimony [...] It is the pedagogical formation of the prince, then, that will assure this upwards continuity. On the other hand, we also have a downwards continuity in the sense that, when a state is well run, the head of the family will know how to look after his family, his goods and his patrimony, which means that individuals will, in turn, behave as they should.

Foucault's philosophy of governance not only lends credibility to the Habermasian public sphere, but also provides a case for the *diwaniyya* in a Kuwaiti society organised in a family-

like structure. As will be shown in more specific examples, the ruler and the ruled are able to meet in the *diwaniyya*, where mutual consultation between both parties signify the mediating function of the public sphere and the imperatives of governance.

The second advantage of public opinion lies in its usefulness to explain the politicisation of social institutions in the public sphere. According to Roberts and Crossley (2004: 5), argumentation and debate become increasingly “subordinated to the logic of the competition for power between parties,” in that views tend to be strategically manipulated by politicians in order to win votes from citizens. This ‘stage show’ undoubtedly compromises the mediating function of the public sphere, but is adequate in explaining how an institution like the *diwaniyya* becomes susceptible to political manipulation when elections are just around the corner. Habermas (1991: 203) himself lamented how modern parties are “organized supralocally and with a bureaucratic apparatus aimed at the ideological integration and the political mobilization of the broad voting masses”. Genuine representative publicity is therefore better understood in the modern sense by means of diplomacy at the grassroots, and between local and foreign officials who require an assessment of the host country’s public opinion.

The compatibility of the public sphere with the Arab world must also be raised, if contextual specificity needs to be addressed. As an intrinsically Western-oriented concept, the public sphere may not be a concept to which the Arab world is sympathetic, because public statements could “degenerate into ethnic, tribal or communal strife with negative consequences” for the Islamic community (Ayish 2008: 49). Yet, the socio-political foundations of Kuwait, as established up to this point, have pointed to political vibrancy by means of public participation. What remains antithetical to the public sphere is the state, or more specifically, the predominant power that steers the state – the ruling family. In maintaining a delicate balance between wielding the stick and dangling the carrot, Yom (2005: 15) argues that Arab states have leveraged “a cyclical strategy of liberalization-repression to control swells of civic activism”.²⁶ Similarly, Brumberg (2002, see also Kamrava 1998) attributes guided pluralism, controlled elections and selective repression to the ‘survival strategy’ adopted by authoritarian regimes (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Kuwait), which he insists have adopted only ‘cosmetic reforms’. These pessimistic views notwithstanding, the *diwaniyya* and its malleability will

²⁶ The recent episode of the Arab Spring has also had its effect on Kuwait, whose government used “economic stimulus to head off public protests”; it is also worth noting that instead of attempting to overthrow the government, protests in Kuwait are concerned with “the recalibration of the balance of power between existing institutions” (Lucas 2014: 320-323).

prove to be, in subsequent discussion, a real and flexible platform for the guarantee of the social contract between the ruler and the ruled in Kuwait.

A more meticulous examination of Habermas' public sphere will notice its association, historically and conceptually, with a specific class – the *bourgeoisie*. The concept is paradoxical in its universal call for civic-mindedness while serving the interests of a particular societal group. As Fraser (1992: 115, italicised in original text) advances, the bourgeois public sphere is a “discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies [...] deployed as a *strategy of distinction*”. In his description of the rise of the *bourgeoisie*, Habermas (1991: 32-33) writes:

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, after not only tea – first to be popular – but also chocolate and coffee had become the common beverages of at least the well-to-do strata of the population, the coachman of a Levantine merchant opened the first coffee house. [...] Just as Dryden, surrounded by the new generation of writers, joined the battle of the “ancients and moderns” at Will’s, Addison and Steele a little later convened their “little senate” at Button’s [...]. Thus critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economics and political disputes [...]. The fact that only men were admitted to coffee-house society may have had something to do with this, whereas the style of the *salon*, like that of the rococo in general, was essentially shaped by women. [...] The coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers.

The narrative tone of the above excerpt accentuates two aspects of the public sphere discussion. Firstly “projects of self-cultivation” were important to the constitution of the public sphere, pursued through literature and art, and contributed to the privatisation of subjectivity in Habermas' view (see Roberts & Crossley 2004: 2; McKeon 2004). Secondly, more than being aware of the class-specific nature of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas is also quick to identify differences in taste. Taste falls within the same domain as Bourdieu's (1984: 466) habitus, both of which are explained to “function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will”. Bourdieu's work as we have previously analysed sets the stage for social stratification and “the appropriateness of ‘class’,” to the extent that the notion of a class is a construct created by the same individuals who wish to identify themselves with that particular class (see Robbins 1991: 61). Like Habermas, Bourdieu (1984: 175) established social classificatory schemes wherein taste ‘transforms objectively classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into

classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position'. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (2001: 37) takes these schemes of perception in order to "set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure" and results in symbolic domination (whether ethnic, gender, cultural, or linguistic, etc.). As such, the bourgeois public sphere lays a conceptual trail for further examination of the differences not only in class, but also in gender. By the same token, the association of the *diwaniyya* with the public sphere must take into account these social classificatory schemes, in light of the wider contextual transformations involving oil wealth and rapid urbanisation. The representativeness of public opinion, the taste of the younger generation, the advent of new social media, the emergence of a middle class, are all valid and relevant offshoots of the public sphere that this study will attempt to address.

1.6 Challenging the Mainstream Definition of Diplomacy

Diplomacy, according to the often quoted definition of the British scholar and diplomat, Sir Ernest Satow (1932: 1), "is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states". While Satow suggests that the interests of states are paramount in diplomacy, Neumann (2005: 72) dives deeper into the topic to argue that the state representative, or the diplomat, is required to juggle "three scripts of self against one another": (1) the bureaucratic script tells the diplomat to focus on quotidian concerns and to follow previously established routines; (2) the heroic script tells him or her to focus on the task at hand in order to make a difference to the world; (3) the 'mediator' script asks of the diplomat's expertise to dovetail what happens both inside and outside of a political entity. At first glance, it would seem that diplomacy remains a primarily statist institution, but the nature and role of such an institution, and of the individuals who enjoy the status of being diplomats, is dynamic and variable. Sir Henry Wotton (1604, cited in Binyon 2012), three-time ambassador to the Venetian Republic for King James I and occasional envoy to The Hague and Savoy, famously described a diplomat as "an honest person sent to lie abroad for the good of his country".²⁷ That this definition was coined over five hundred years ago highlights that diplomacy is a durable and socially embedded practice that has been legally codified over the years. The idea of diplomacy as providing a vital line of communication between governments and playing crucial roles in collecting information and providing advice on the activities of the state run like a constant thread in diplomatic practice. Barston (2013: 2) identifies the six broad areas of the state's diplomatic functions: ceremonial, management, information and

²⁷ Sir Henry Wotton intended for the pun on 'lie' – also meaning reside.

communication, international negotiation, duty of protection and contribution to international order. Yet, for all the primacy of governments in diplomacy, the practice remains equally carved by the agency of individuals.

In today's world where information is abundant and instantaneously available and where communication has never been more accessible, the nature and extent of diplomacy has been consistently debated. The diplomatic landscape must not be looked upon in a rigid manner, as Barston (2013: 1) observes:

Certainly, what constitutes diplomacy today goes beyond the sometimes rather narrow politico-strategic conception given to the term. Nor is it appropriate to view diplomacy in a restrictive or formal sense as being the preserve of foreign ministries and diplomatic service personnel. Rather, diplomacy is undertaken by a wide range of actors, including 'political' diplomats, advisers, envoys and officials from a wide range of 'domestic' ministries or agencies with their foreign counterparts, reflecting its technical content; between officials from different international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations (UN) Secretariat, or involving foreign corporations and a host government transnationally; and with or through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 'private' individuals.

Barston's examination of diplomacy recognises the complexity of foreign policy challenges, which requires a multi-agency approach that takes the challenge of cultures, resources and 'outsiders' into account. Consequently the sprouting of new concepts such as 'oil diplomacy,' 'knowledge diplomacy' and 'heritage diplomacy' reflects the changes in the substantive forms of diplomacy. The dynamism of diplomacy offers an avenue for analysing alternative diplomatic methods which would have otherwise been overlooked. The strand of public diplomacy, for instance, provides for a more inclusive approach of dispute resolution, as exemplified by the *diwaniyya*, rather than the traditional, top-down form of diplomacy. At the same time, activities in the *diwaniyya* conflates a range of communicative practices – culture, advocacy and branding – also found in the aforementioned tasks of the diplomat, all of which bearing the intention to attract and persuade other individuals (see Pamment 2014: 52). The differing constellations of diplomacy are indications of how this practice should be tailored according to context; the Kuwaiti context and the *diwaniyya* thus offer a refreshing perspective of diplomatic activity.

Neumann (2005:72) points out that the memory of diplomacy carries with it a 'Western history'. Nicolson (1961, see also Barston 2013: 5) elaborates on how such a history witnessed

the transformation of small international élite in old-style diplomacy to a new, ‘democratic,’ and ‘open’ diplomacy. The nineteenth century saw the gradual professionalisation of ‘old’ diplomacy in a European continent that was dominated by five to six great powers, and where statesmen were willing to “subscribe to the notion of a concert of Europe” (Hamilton & Langhorne 2011: 94). In an age of European Imperialism and various conflicts, a total of twenty-six conferences took place between 1822 and 1914 at which great powers were represented, what was known as ‘conference diplomacy’ adopted by the European sovereigns (Hamilton & Langhorne 2011: 98-99). The institutionalisation of diplomatic management was compartmentalised into missions, rank and language, all of which were established at the Congress of Vienna; the French language, for instance, acted as the language of diplomacy and intellectual hegemony (Hamilton & Langhorne 2011: 109-110).

World War I acted as a watershed for diplomacy in two areas: (1) by responding to the demands that diplomacy should be more open to public scrutiny and control; (2) and allowing for the establishment of an international organisation (the League of Nations, later the UN) which would act both as a forum for the peaceful settlement of disputes and as a deterrent to the waging of aggressive war (Hamilton & Langhorne 2011: 142). The strong reaction against the pre-war “aristocratic *internationale* of diplomatists” who were part of ‘old’ diplomacy was coupled with the advent of fully fledged mass democracies after the war (Otte 2001b: 157). Yet, the essence of diplomacy remained in the “element of representation – the essential necessity in any negotiator that he should be fully representative of his own sovereign at home” (Nicholson 1919: 4, cited in Otte 2001b: 157). The representative nature of diplomacy had to be complemented by the need for efficiency in the conduct of diplomacy, hence the persistence of its institutionalisation. Summarising the nature of modern diplomacy in the age of diplomacy, Nicolson (1939: 82, cited in Otte 2001b: 159) noted:

The diplomatist, being a civil servant, is subject to the Foreign Secretary; the Foreign Secretary, being a member of the Cabinet, is subject to the majority in Parliament; and Parliament, being but a representative Assembly, is subject to the will of the sovereign people.

It is this bureaucratisation of diplomacy that continues to characterise its ‘Western history,’ only now being aimed at satisfying “the will of the sovereign people” rather than the sovereign. The nature of diplomacy being variable over time, even in ‘Western history,’ should be proof of how a non-Western context may completely disregard the whole hierarchy of diplomatic ranks. At the height of European Imperialism, in Africa and Asia the European powers had to

“reckon with political structures and values which could not easily be reconciled with a system based upon the equality of sovereignty states and clearly defined territorial borders” (Hamilton & Langhorne 2011: 116). That the Europeans faced resistance from foreign countries to establish diplomatic contact is testament to the need to consider non-Western styles and methods of diplomacy.

The American diplomat, Henry Kissinger (cited in Otte 2001a: 184-200), makes three points relevant to this study of the *diwaniyya*, and to non-Western forms of diplomacy in general: (1) he refers to bureaucracy as an ‘iron cage’ that tends to fetter the conduct of politics and observes how bureaucratic rationality requires a policy to be legitimised within the governmental apparatus; (2) that history is not a “morbid obsession with the past,” but the consciousness of a common history and by extension, every policy choice is “an accumulation of previous decisions reflecting history or tradition and values”; (3) informal channels hold the potential to expedite negotiations and rendering diplomacy more flexible. In the Kuwaiti context, the *diwaniyya* observes locally constructed rules and etiquette but the space is neither situated in a bureaucratic ‘iron cage,’ nor does it resemble the formal spaces of Western diplomacy found in official conferences, summits and official forums. Its emergence and persistence in history are results of tribal practices and of the communal living found in Kuwait’s maritime past. As mentioned earlier, the Kuwaiti tradition of adopting a consultative style of decision-making continues even today, where the ruler maintains the custom of *diwaniyya*-hopping in order to make informed decisions. As a space located within the private sphere of the family house, the *diwaniyya*’s status as an informal space is compounded by its openness to male visitors, young and old. In this sense, it is a space representative of the Kuwaiti people, interacting with domestic developments, much like the Western compliance to popular interests. The ‘efficiency’ of diplomacy, as Nicholson (1937, cited in Otte 2001b: 161) explained to be transacting diplomatic business in order to reach the exchange of written documents, is a definition that must be qualified in the Kuwaiti context. Despite conforming to international norms and having a Ministry of Foreign Affairs of its own, diplomacy in Kuwait remains, as Chapter Five will detail, equally enmeshed in the informal channel of the *diwaniyya* which refuses to be fixated on written documents, but remains an art of conversation, congregation, socialisation.

In terms of looking at diplomacy as an institution, the *diwaniyya* paints a very different picture to what is presented in the academic study of IR. This study has used physical space as the starting point in the conceptual flow toward an understanding of the *diwaniyya*, thereby

developing the theoretical approach from the *diwaniyya*'s status as a socio-spatial institution. Yet, arguably the most frequently explored IR theory on diplomacy – the English school – presents a different assessment. Jackson (1992: 271) summarises the English school as:

A variety of theoretical inquiries which conceive of international relations as a world not merely of power or prudence or wealth or capability or domination but also one of recognition, association, membership, equality, equity, legitimate interests, rights, reciprocity, customs and conventions, agreements and disagreements, disputes, offenses, injuries, damages, reparations, and the rest: the normative vocabulary of human conduct.

That the English school considers the “normative vocabulary of human conduct” to be important highlights the potential connection with diplomacy. Little (1995: 15-16) breaks down the English school into three concepts: international system, international society and world society. Here, the idea of institutions is best reflected by the concept of international society, which postulates the institutionalisation of shared interest and identity amongst states, and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory (Buzan 2004: 7). Also known as the ‘society of states,’ international society fits into the earlier statist definition of diplomacy by Satow as states are argued to form a society in which they are “bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the workings of common institutions” (Bull & Watson 1984: 1).

International society is further divided into ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ institutions, with the latter being bodies commonly known as international institutions (such as the UN and NATO). Primary institutions, on the other hand, are “durable and recognised patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies, and embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles” (Buzan 2004: 181). For the purposes of this study, the idea of ‘primary’ institutions is more important as it confirms the centrality of embedded social practices and also links institutions to both *interests and values*. The *diwaniyya* as a Kuwaiti social institution at its most fundamental level, contain values that place individual loyalties to the family at the same level as the loyalty of citizens to the state. This is a result of the way Kuwait is governed, as a family of families, and by the ruling Al-Sabah family situated at the top of the family chain. Values therefore help explain the consultative diplomatic style used in *diwaniyyas* in order to maintain social cohesion, rather than values that stem from cost-benefit analyses (for example, rational utility maximisation). Like the evolution of mainstream diplomacy, the concept of international society and its corollary must still be touched upon with

the understanding that the main unit of analysis is the state. The *diwaniyya*, by contrast, holds the individual and the family as its primary units. As such, this justifies the multifaceted approach used in this study: in order to connect the concepts of everyday life (space, society, the family) with those found in foreign policy (diplomacy, international society), relevant theories with differing units of analysis must be reassembled to provide a holistic understanding of the *diwaniyya*. The evolving canon of diplomatic studies further reinforces the notion that, for all the “consensual theoretical assumptions and generalizations,” the mainstream definition of diplomacy still fails to account for (1) the reality of modern, plural diplomacy; and (2) its philosophical, sociological and psychological underpinnings (Murray et al. 2011: 720). In turn the *diwaniyya*, epitomising an indigenous and grassroots diplomatic practice, is equally a reflection of the multi-track diplomacy (elaborated later in Section 5.3) that deviates from the traditional theoretical approach.

1.6.1 Elements of Wendtian Constructivism

Alexander Wendt’s brand of constructivism reinvigorates the discussion on *diwaniyya* diplomacy in three main aspects: ideational structures, social interactions and interests. For Wendt, shared ideas must be considered alongside material forces in any empirical analysis; whether a system is conflictual or peaceful is a function of the shared culture created through discursive social practices (see Copeland 2000: 188). This becomes immediately clear when we consider how the *diwaniyya*’s evolution has been influenced by the advent of oil wealth, and how the longstanding custom of congregating in the *diwaniyya* has helped to resolve disputes. Wendt (1999: 78, emphasis in original) sets out how ideas “constitute social situations and the meaning of material forces”. The ideational structure has a constitutive and not just a regulative effect on actors; that is, the structure leads actors to redefine their interests and identities in the process of interacting (Copeland 2000: 190; Wendt 1999: 171-178, see also Onuf 1989). Copeland (2000: 188) draws the connection between social interaction in ideational structures and diplomacy by arguing that:

because each actor’s conception of self (its interests and identity) is a product of the others’ diplomatic gestures, states can reshape structure by process; through new gestures, they can reconstitute interests and identities toward more other-regarding and peaceful means and ends.

Drawing from the above argument, the *diwaniyya* can act as a space where foreign diplomats are placed in an indigenous social structure (and space), thus having to learn the ‘diplomatic gestures’ of *diwaniyya* visiting. This in turn allows for a re-evaluation of Kuwaiti society and

in certain cases reviewing the diplomatic task at hand. Recalling the opening quote by former US Ambassador François Dickman in the Introduction, he admitted that he was “expected to make courtesy calls on the *diwaniyas* of at least a dozen or more leading families of Kuwait”.

The importance of ideational structures, as seen thus far, must also be discussed in connection with its actors. Structures constitute actors in terms of their interests and identities, but are also “produced, reproduced and altered by the discursive practices of agents” (Copeland 2000: 190). This relationship has a striking similarity to that consisting of social interaction and physical space, in so much that the two variables have a reciprocal effect on each other. This is also true of the *diwaniyya* as interlinked space and practice which has been so routinised in Kuwaiti society, that at times been taken abroad to show Kuwaiti solidarity. Wendt (1999: 163) takes this argument further by explaining how shared ideas persist:

Group beliefs are often inscribed in “collective memory,” the myths, narratives, and traditions that constitute who a group is and how it relates to others. These narratives are not merely the shared beliefs held by individuals at any given moment (though they depend on those beliefs), but inherently historical phenomena which are kept alive through the generations by an on-going process of socialization and ritual enactment.

Thus shared ideas, like diplomacy, continue to exist because they are historically contingent and constructed. The actor’s role here in “socialization and ritual enactment” lies in his act of will to ensure continuity (see also Sárváry 2006: 161-163).

In Section 1.4, we have seen how institutions are linked to “interests and values,” having explained the usefulness of the latter. Interests and values, as a whole, suggest potential connections between the English school and social constructivism. Among the efforts made by English school theories who seek to address their own methodological gaps, Buzan’s (2004, see also Copeland 2000: 194-196) reassessment of the English school approach offers a highly plausible link to the version of constructivism closely associated with Wendt. In explaining the range of institutions, Buzan (2004: 190) follows Wendt by explaining any institutional model can “in principle be held together by any mix of coercion, calculation and belief”.²⁸ These three modes are explained as follows: in the first states are coerced into the acceptance of the institution; in the second they calculate that their interests are maximised by compliance with the institution; and in the third they comply out of an internalised acceptance of the *value* and

²⁸ See Chapter Six of Wendt’s (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics* for his explanation of the three modes.

virtue of the institution.²⁹ Buzan's three modes are important, not only because they advance the Wendtian relationship between structures and agents, but also because they explain why there is a propensity to comply with these institutions that may operate at different geographical scales. It is especially telling when the *diwaniyya* concept is taken as far as to Zanzibar when Kuwait, as a port town, established limitless transnational connections. The notion of the *diwaniyya* is at once a combination of space, institution, interests, values, interactions, diplomacy and therefore requires a broadening in the selection of concepts for this study.

Like the English School, Wendt's constructivism has also been critiqued as he "brackets off domestic processes to focus on the effect of interaction between states" (Copeland 2000: 203, see also Wight 1966). Wendt (1999: 245) himself admits the limits of the constructivist hypothesis:

the strength of the constructivist hypothesis that can be entertained at the *system* level [...] still leaves plenty of room for processes of social construction at that level, of both the causal and constitutive variety. Causally, the fact that states' bodies are constituted by internal structures in no way precludes them forming identities and interests by interacting with each other [...], anymore than the fact that people are constituted by nature precludes them acquiring identities and interests through socialization.

In addition to the tendency to take the state as the main unit of analysis, the dominant accounts of the evolution of diplomacy as a specific institution of international society continue to assume that the Western manifestation of such a practice is largely unchallenged. The internalisation of diplomatic rules and norms by non-Western and post-colonial states is indicative, on this account, of the extent which what was once a narrowly European practice has come to achieve the level of global acceptance. The professionalization and bureaucratisation of diplomatic functions, as explained in the last section, reasserts the claim of such an internalisation. Informal channels of communication are typically seen as being exceptional, or as pre-negotiation platforms.

The marginalisation of embedded social practices which play diplomacy-like roles but sit outside the formal institutions, and whose practitioners are private citizens, should be rethought. Buzan (2004: 18) argues that there is "a lot of room for differentiating between global international/world society on the one hand, and subglobal, and particularly regional, international/world societies on the other". In particular the constructivist notion of shared ideas

²⁹ See Buzan (2004: 190-195) for the range of institutions conceived by the three modes.

should not be confined to states, as an everyday social institution such as the *diwaniyya* is also both an idea and diplomatic method that is widely recognised by the Kuwaiti population. Regional differentiation, in this case Gulf societies, can likewise operate on the basis of internalised ‘consent’ to the common values they manifest and the common interests they enable, and should be regarded as a serious element of contemporary regional society. This is the position adopted by this study in relation to the *diwaniyya*.

Consideration of the *diwaniyya* as a distinctive socio-political and diplomatic practice also reinforces the need for an elucidative stance toward academic analysis of such institutions, helping us to ask questions about in whose interests these establishments operate in and which types of politics or actors they leave out, as well as those which they enable. Using the *diwaniyya* as a case study, one recognises the dilemma in Wendt’s systemic constructivist theory: it is “the very mutability of politics as emphasized by domestic-level constructivists – that states may change because of domestic processes independent of international interaction – that makes prudent leaders so concerned about the future” (Copeland 2000: 188). In the Kuwaiti context, for all the interactions that occur in the *diwaniyyas* by virtue of the consultative nature of domestic politics, the eventual decision-making power rests in the hands of the ruling family. Thus the primacy of the state (and its sovereign) must not be discounted, despite the influence of “domestic processes independent of international interaction”.

In this sense, issues off the formal diplomatic agenda may well reflect power structures embedded in social practices. The *diwaniyya* serves as an example of these aspects of critical potential. The idea of informal diplomacy for private individuals also forces us to rethink the politics of many international negotiations, particularly the division between the national and international levels. Putnam’s (1988: 434) famous approach of the ‘two-level game’ is a reflection of such a division:

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.

Unlike Putnam’s metaphor of a ‘two-level’ game, the *diwaniyya* presents a more fluid flow of ‘interests’. Private individuals can act as local diplomats in the space of the *diwaniyya*, while foreign diplomats – part of the globally accepted institution of diplomacy – are too allowed in such a localised space and acting in their own interests. This is a firm indicator of, not only the

diwaniyya's malleability, but also of the entwined interests to use the space whether we are approaching it from a top-down or a bottom-up angle. As state and non-state diplomacy rooted in a cultural tradition and practice that appeals to a non-Western frame of reference, the *diwaniyya* has developed from a shared idea that has been internalised over time and space.

1.7 Diagram of Conceptual Flow

Prior to discussing the methods utilised in this study, this section provides a diagram that encapsulates the overall theoretical framework discussed thus far:

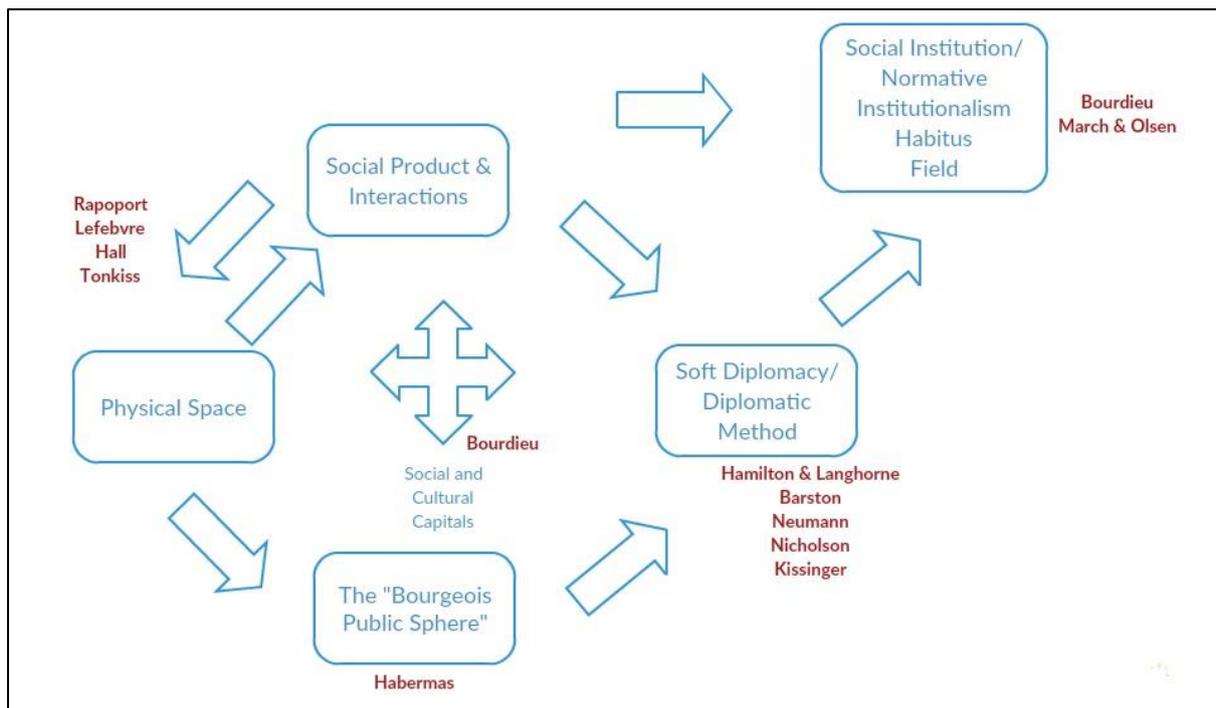


Figure 1.1 The conceptual flow of this study and the authors (in red) of the relevant theories used

1.8 Research Methods: Justifying Process-Oriented and Qualitative Approaches

This section concludes this methodological chapter by identifying and justifying the research methods that will be employed in the course of this study, having established the key theoretical concerns and elaborated on the corollary conceptual flow. The overarching methodological concern has been reiterated time and again as locating the historical trajectory of the *diwaniyya*, and tracking the socio-spatial and diplomatic changes amidst the wider realities that Kuwait had experienced and has been experiencing. The dynamic evolution of society throughout history means that “a sound sociological analysis always has to be process-oriented, focusing on an explanation of social processes” (Baur & Ernst 2011: 125). In other words, the temporal focus play a crucial defining role in explaining *changes* to macro and micro social phenomena.

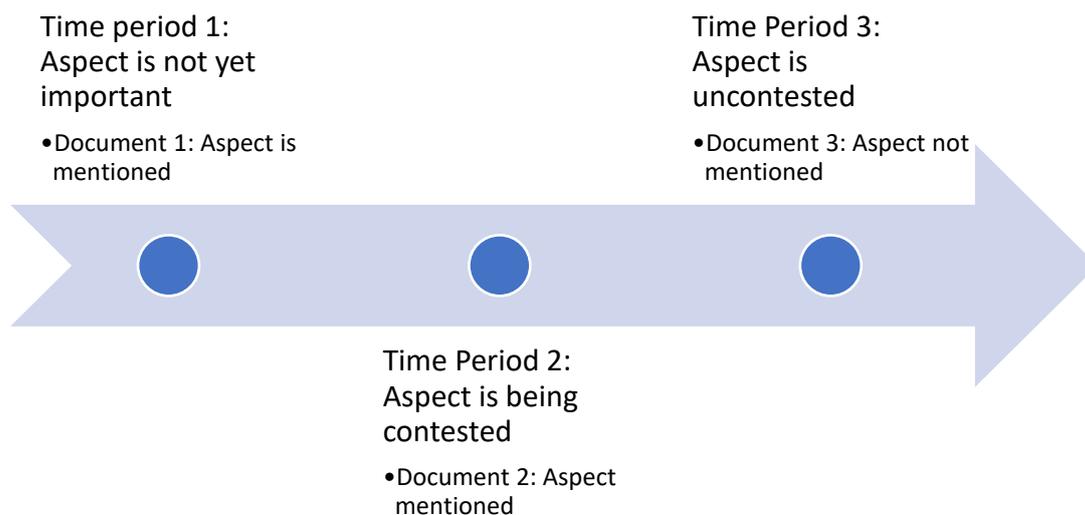


Figure 1.2 Identifying change in a process-oriented approach over different time periods (inspired by Baur & Ernst 2011: 133, see also Elias 2009)

Incorporating the temporal element, a *process-oriented* approach has the capacity to evaluate the consistency of an aspect of society over time, while identifying the type and source of data that supplies relevant and extensive information on the issue at hand. By the same token, there is a need to divide the period of analysis when analysing the *diwaniyya*: going beyond the conventional pre-oil and post-oil dichotomy, historicising the *diwaniyya* (in Chapter Two) in epochs such as the Iraqi Occupation, and Kuwait as a British protectorate, offers a closer look at both macro and micro changes to society and the individual respectively. Additionally, concepts such as capital and the public sphere can then be better explained in terms of emergence, continuity and discontinuity.

By analysing change over time, a process-oriented approach complements this study's fundamental research design anchored largely on qualitative methods. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011: 35-36) argue, qualitative views on the nature of social reality agree on the importance of subjective meaning individuals bring to the research process, underscoring a need to observe the 'dynamic dance' between the research problem and the literature review; such observance triggers a process of *analytical induction* (see Figure 1.3) between data collection and data analysis and theory generation. Concepts used in this study akin to habitus and institutions require close examination of human behaviour, coinciding with the *interpretive strand* of qualitative practice. The interpretivist stance generally seeks "accurate summaries of historical detail," but, more importantly, it seeks to explain the meaning of actions and interactions from the members' own point of view (King et al. 1994: 36-37, see also Holstein

1993; Gubrium & Holstein 1997). An interpretative account, as Moon (1975: 173) explains, provides “maximal coherence or intelligibility to a set of social practices, and [...] should be consistent with other practices or traditions of the society”. In this light, the interpretive practice aids the constant review of literature, data and ideas found in analytical induction, and contributes to the wider process-oriented approach by validating historical evidence.

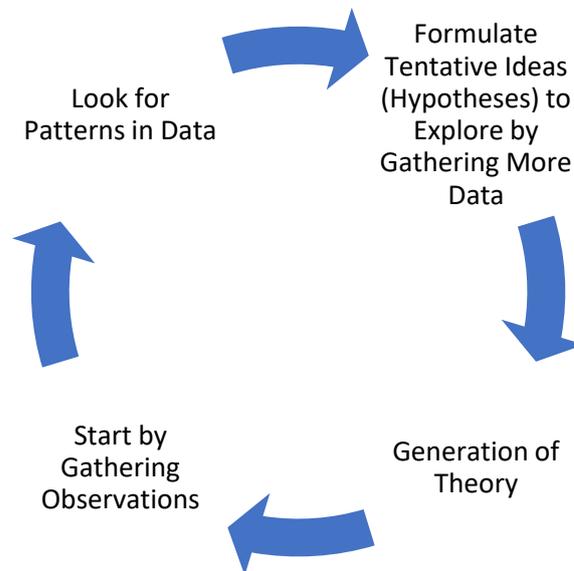


Figure 1.3 The dynamic dance: the process of induction in qualitative research (taken from Hesse-Biber & Leavy: 35)

The socially constructed character of lived realities, as this study seeks to elucidate through the *diwaniyya*, can therefore benefit from the interpretive inquiry of the *hows* and *whats* of social reality; its empirical purview relates to both how people “methodologically construct their experiences and their worlds and the contextual configurations of meaning and institutional life” (Holstein & Gubrium 2013: 255). As seen in Section 1.6, locally constructed interests and values can challenge what has been deemed as ‘universal’ values embedded in international society. In this manner, realistic interpretations of the public sphere and the conflicting perceptions of diplomats are but a few of the areas in this study that necessitate the qualitative nature of interpretive practice and its associated research techniques.

Consequently, the qualitative methods of data collection employed in this study can be further broken down into three types: processed-produced, macro and micro. As a general guideline these methods are triangulated, so data results collected from two or more different methods are compared in order to identify “patterns of convergence to develop or corroborate an overall interpretation” (Mays & Pope 2000: 51). While triangulation can ensure the quality of field research, Bailey (2007: 76-77) warns against rejecting data and conclusions that arise

from the inconsistencies of triangulation, as these anomalies may provide useful nuances to one's research.

To begin with, drawing process-produced analysis from the data gathered allows for a more holistic appreciation of the research subject across time. As explained earlier, each epoch has a knack for supplying extensive information for that given time phase, thereby only presenting “only phenomena of medium duration”; empirically reconstructing the timeline from the various data sources allows the researcher to decipher the subject's *becoming, change and ending* (Baur & Ernst 2011: 132-133). The considerable evolution of the *diwaniyya* concept, from its tribal and Islamic origins, to being a space of consultation in desert, maritime and urban context, necessitates process orientation. Identifying distinct changes in the concept provides a clearer idea of what remains constant, and enables the formulation of a plausible definition. The family, as we will uncover, provides a strong case for the *diwaniyya*'s persistence across different time periods. Ultimately, constructive research aims to improve the quality of theories “until we can claim that we have managed to break away from the limitations of common sense, from which position we can engage in criticism” (Cooper 2008: 17).

Second, macro research methods involving the analysis of built environment as a data source provides for insightful details about daily routine (see also Baur & Ernst 2011: 127). Likewise, this method demonstrates *how* space is a social product – also this study's point of departure. Maps, floor layouts, city master plans are all sources that this study will rely on because they provide clues to social structures and hidden rules. There is a similar academic precedence of such sources: Bourdieu (1979), for example, examined the floor plan of a the Kabyle household in Algeria, drawing on living arrangements to understand specific lifestyles. These spatial methods were usually complemented by more visual sources in the form of photographs. As Robbins (1991: 56-57) notes, Bourdieu had been a “keen photographer in Algeria,” whose photographs offer a “powerful visual supplement to the written text”. Bourdieu (1990a: v) himself admits that the study of photographic practice and of the meaning of these images is “a privileged opportunity to put into operation an original methodology which attempts to grasp a complete understanding both of the objective regularities of behaviour and of the lived experience of this behaviour”. In a similar vein, I have photographed different *diwaniyyas*, both as a purely physical space and when in session, in order to help readers visualise and therefore comprehend the value of the space well beyond its physical form. Housing blueprints of the wider physical landscape and of a single residential unit in Kuwait are also consulted in order to understand the *diwaniyya* in relation to broader living

arrangements. In order to reassert the validity of such sources, I have further triangulated with other types of data sources, including historical and archival documents (diaries, letters, telegrams) obtained from a variety of locations including the British Archives (in London), the India Office Records (in the British Library), the Middle East Centre at Oxford University, the Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait and from different *diwaniyyas*. The intertwining of spatial and historical data indicates the importance of context to any researcher by doing justice to “the milieu in which his or her observations and interviews are conducted” (Bryman 1988: 64-65).

Finally, King et al. (1994: 28-29) insist on “using observable implications to connect theory and data,” in other words, connecting theory with empirical evidence and distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts. The socio-spatial scope of this study, as we have seen thus far in this chapter, can be broken down into multiple, but selective theoretical concerns. The conceptualisation (theory) of common objects (empirical evidence) means that the same seating arrangement in a *diwaniyya* can also provide different theoretical strands. To Goffman (1959, see also Hesse-Bieber & Leavy: 18-19; Shulman 2017) who examines “individual social experiences as a process of performance,” the proximity of the participants in the *diwaniyya* indicates the level of social interaction among them. To Foucault (mentioned in Section 1.4), however, the *way* participants sit implies a form of social hierarchy as his interests lies in differential power relations. These variations in insights implore this study to engage in a series of micro-level qualitative methods, as described in the next two sub-sections.

1.8.1 Participant Observation and Field Notes

Researchers conducting qualitative observation acknowledge that the data they gather are a product of the intersubjective process between themselves and what they are observing (Nicholls et al. 2014: 245). Data obtained from observations must, however, be qualified in a continuum with varying degrees of the researcher’s involvement. The researcher’s fieldwork can involve three different roles: (a) the complete participant who becomes a member of the group without letting on his researcher status; (b) the participant observer who is an outsider participating in some aspects of life around them and recording as much as possible; (c) the complete observer who follows people around and recording their behaviour with little, if any, interaction (see Bernard 2013: 313-314). For the purposes of this study, I have taken up the roles of (b) and (c), with the former being more frequent. From September 2012 to June 2013, I lived in Kuwait and undertook classes at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) as part of a Certificate in Gulf Studies, during which I undertook a research project on social cohesion

in Kuwait, initiating my visits to *diwaniyyas*. The knowledge acquired prompted further research on these *diwaniyyas*, consolidating my role as a participant observer when I returned to Kuwait multiple times in the years after. As a frequent visitor to *diwaniyyas*, my presence became less and less of a curiosity, built trust and, in Bernard's (2013: 317) words, reduced 'the problem of reactivity'. The process usually begins with my role as a complete observer, as a 'fresher' to the space, but gradually settles in as a participant observer (see also Gold 1958). This is most noticeable as I began delving into the official diplomatic uses of the *diwaniyya*, shadowing foreign diplomats during their *diwaniyya* visits.

The benefits of conducting participant observation are largely social in nature. Besides confirming theoretical claims, I have found that this method has enabled the research to collate a variety of data – in my case, ranging from family trees, to details on seafaring and pearl diving and even political documents. In particular, historical evidence passed down through word-of-mouth is best obtained through social interactions in *diwaniyyas*, prompting a need for face-to-face contact. While it is essential to be selective about the use of data, participant observation provided me with thick details about the research site and the interaction between its users. The validity of the data is compounded by making references to theories (see Bernard 2013: 317-318): the reference made to institutions, habitus and field in this study is better illustrated when looking out for recurring patterns of behaviour and implicit rules (see also Lowndes 2010: 73-74). In particular, the circulation of the social and cultural capitals, though intangible, is best observed through human interaction in the *diwaniyya*. Participating in *diwaniyya* sessions led equally to a realisation that *diwaniyya* visits constitute a social visit in itself; the people you meet in a *diwaniyya* will often invite you to their *diwaniyyas* or refer you to another one.

Arguably one of the main challenges of participant observation is to vacillate between the two extremes of the complete participant and the complete observer. Not only do these roles hinge on the difficulty of avoiding research bias derived from emotional attachment/detachment, but there is also "some uneasiness about the issue of interpretation" arising from finding congruence between the researcher's "worldview of their subjects" and their subjects' understandings (Bryman 1988: 76-78, see also Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011: 204-207). For this reason, I have kept field notes as a form of reflexivity. While fieldnotes act as a log that records observations and the schedule of fieldwork, it can also act as a diary that to make one aware of personal biases, allowing researchers to "best understand bodily praxis through their own adoption of routine bodily habits in the field" (Reed-Danahay 2005: 127, see also Bernard 2013: 347-349). The content of these fieldnotes, as Bernard (2013: 350-352) remarks, is for

descriptive, methodological, and analytic purposes. Although all three types are found in my field journal, the methodological bits have been particularly useful in reminding me of the when and where each *diwaniyya* is being held. Finally, linguistic issues need to be raised as discussions in *diwaniyyas* are usually in colloquial Kuwaiti dialect, deviating significantly from the Modern Standard Arabic that I had learnt over the span of three years. However, private training in colloquial Arabic and Kuwaitis' generally good command of the English language have eased my communication difficulties in fieldwork.

1.8.2 *Semi-structured Interviews and Free Listing*

Semi-structured interviews, or in-depth interviewing, have also been crucial to this study, following an interview guide but are also open ended; this allows for probing to obtain more information from the interviewee, especially from people “who are accustomed to efficient use of their time” (Barnard 2013: 182-183). As a general guide, I have prepared a list of forty questions that I mixed and matched in relation to the interviewee's background. This study draws its quotes from approximately forty-eight interviewees; where useful information has been provided in personal conversations, this has been recorded in my research notes. Besides combining structure with flexibility, semi-structured interviews also identify interviewees who have “knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest” (Rubin & Rubin 2012: 3). Participant observation, which seeks a general understanding of what the *diwaniyya* means in everyday Kuwaiti life, is complemented by interviews which seek instead the specific perspectives of academics, diplomats, businessmen, female Kuwaitis and members of the royal family. Knowledge gained from the interview is a product of both interviewer and interviewee, and the depth of the answers is dependent on the self-reflection of both parties (Yeo et al. 2014: 178-180; Gubrium & Holstein 2011). I have often found that answers from interviewees become increasingly complex when our interaction establishes the fact that I am not new to Kuwaiti history and *diwaniyya* visiting.

Adding a layer of analytical rigour to the semi-structured interviews used in this study, I employed the method of free listing as part of my interview questions. The main question posed to interviewees is to ask them to list different words that best describe the *diwaniyya*. As a “deceptively simple but powerful technique,” free listing provides the researcher with a ranking of themes associated with the research topic, while confirming poignant aspects of a cultural domain (Bernard 2013: 264-265; Brewer et al. 2002). Free listing also adds a quantitative touch to qualitative interviewing when examining the frequency of words

mentioned by different informants. For example, ‘networking’ appears repeatedly in informants’ answers on the *diwaniyya*, indicating how social capital is a highly relevant concept to this study.

One of the challenges of interviewing as a technique is gaining access to the people you want to interview. For example, there was a fair amount of difficulty in making headway in the diplomatic field on my part – arranging interviews with foreign diplomats can arouse suspicion linked with espionage. This problem was resolved by establishing relationships with central figures who become ‘key informants’ (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011: 202-203). In my case, two contacts have been crucial to expanding my network of informants: the British Embassy and a prominent member of the Shamlan *diwaniyya*. Generally, however, informants have been obliging particularly upon understanding that their answers are for research purposes; Kuwaiti interviewees are usually enthusiastic about sharing their own culture. Interpreters were also used on occasions when an interviewee felt more comfortable expressing in local dialect. Finally, there is a general danger of the over-reliance on the interview as a research method, being “reflective of contemporary social and cultural trends” – interview in the media, the cult of celebrity and confessional television (Yeo et al. 2014: 181-182). Yet, bearing in mind the paucity of historiography on Kuwait, robust qualitative interviewing is a vital instrument in finding out how participants construct or had constructed their lives, and adding discursive value that is often missing in narrative local literature.

Other difficulties arise from interviewing people of prominence within government, ranging from MPs, ministers and diplomats. Besides overcoming inaccessibility, it is the nature of the interview that requires a careful, if not tactful, approach. The background of the researcher often provides the first impression to high-profile interviewees, who tend to be suspicious of the motives of my research. With the backing of the British Embassy and other prominent individuals who have presented my credentials as intermediaries, the air of suspicion usually dissipates. Even if all of the above obstacles are overcome, interview answers must be treated with caution, as prominent figures tend to provide ‘official’ answers on the record, and are more candid off the record.

2

Historicising the *Diwaniyya*

Of course people talk to me about *diwaniyyas*, and they talk about Arab hospitality and Kuwaiti hospitality, particularly the family and tribal linkages within society between the ruling family and the other major trading families. The structure of Kuwaiti society in a fashion that is actually both broad, but also, and this may sound strange to say, in some aspects very hierarchical, and in other aspects quite flat.

Interview with HE Matthew Lodge (2016), UK Ambassador to Kuwait

2.1 Prelude: Points of Inflection

This chapter aims to draw on key periods in the history of Kuwait in order to analyse the *diwaniyya*'s evolution over time, particularly its growing importance as an interlinked space and practice. Even if the title of this thesis suggests that the *diwaniyya*, as a microcosm of Kuwaiti society, reflects wider socio-political patterns, the reality is far from simple. Kuwait's growth from a humble, maritime town, into a modernist, oil city is riddled with complex internal and foreign affairs that dribble down to its built environment and the traditions of its people. As Good (1993: 48) points out, we tend to identify significant events in historical studies, also known as *points of inflection* which are a "basic and natural way of constructing narratives," because the event may "either be seen as a choice point which determines the future course of events, or as a trigger for the crystallisation of previously latent tendencies". As such, this chapter adopts a dissimilar approach from the subsequent chapters, in that history is repurposed to underline the socio-political functions of the *diwaniyya* that have, over time, consolidated (and in some ways, persisted) in spite of numerous changes in the country. In this manner, the delicate historical-sociological balance is also maintained by means of a regressive/progressive approach, that is, "both a historical analysis of the conditions of possibility for the present, and a revolutionary, progressive analysis that opens us to the future, to the possible" (see Elden 2004: 38). The historical trajectory of Kuwait itself is not straightforward, and while this chapter sets the stage for the coming chapters built on salient themes related to the *diwaniyya*, it also expounds on spells of political mobilisation, maritime dealings, struggles against foreign powers, urbanisation and influential personalities.

2.2 Debate on the Origins of the *Diwaniyya*

Little has been said in academic literature about the origins of the *diwaniyya*, and so often has it been taken as a given in Kuwaiti society that Kuwaitis themselves react with perplexed looks

whenever they are asked about how the *diwaniyya* had come into being. Scholars themselves speculate about its origins: in personal conversation with a group of academics from the history department at Kuwait University, none could provide a concise reply, instead, I was redirected towards the developments in Islamic history. Even Alhajeri's (2014: 268) entry in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics* traces the *diwaniyya*'s past back to its etymological origins; the word '*diwan*' refers to "a registry or a logbook containing army personnel, scribes, and poets". Elsewhere, fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldun (cited in Daghir 1961, see also Al-Naser 2001: 4) identified the origin of '*diwaniyya*' as Persian, given by Persian monarchs of old and alluding to the bureau of their clerks, who are known by a derogatory name – '*diwana*' – or madmen. Centuries later under the Ottoman Empire when a more substantive bureaucracy was established, the Imperial Divan or Council was where high ranking officials met with the Sultan, and oversaw further *divan* offices that had been set up for specific functional purposes (Ágoston & Masters 2009: 486, see also Lewis 1963). Elsewhere in the Arabian desert next to a town in Saudi Arabia named Shaqra, the British army officer Captain George Sadleir (1866: 77-78), who was inquiring for the tent of the Pasha (Ottoman governor) to obtain safe passage toward Basra (in Iraq), recounted how he could only speak to Mahomed Effendi, "entitled the Dewan Effendissa or Chief Secretary of His Excellency's court". This example not only highlights the expansion of civil administration geographically, but also the increased usage of the word '*diwan*' into the Gulf. Today in Kuwait, the Amiri Diwan (*Al-Diwan Al-Amiri*) is the term for the ruler's bureau since the country's independence in 1961, responsible for the official coverage of his activities, which includes receiving guests in his own *diwan* in the Bayan Palace (see Photograph 2.1). Unsurprisingly, the move towards bureaucratisation occurred in tandem with Kuwait's admission into the United Nations in May 1963. The respect of bureaucratic structures universally accepted across the globe also meant that a list of ministries was set up. Henceforth, the ruler's office, known as the Amiri Diwan, confirms the bureaucratic element of the word '*diwan*' in the aforementioned historical examples.

Yet, at the same time, members of the ruling family remain free to play host to a myriad of visitors in their own *diwaniyya*, and, in their own personal capacity (see Photograph 2.2). The *Abridged Encyclopedia of Kuwait* testifies to this personal aspect, by differentiating the *diwaniyya* from the *diwan* through the indication of how the former refers to the part of the house allocated to men as a club for discussing daily, and not official, affairs (Al-Saedan 1993). The affix '-iyya,' or '-ya,' when added to the word '*diwan*' at the end, therefore sheds the official nature of the space, and in its place a layer of informality takes shape.



Photograph 2.1 Members of the ruling family receiving well-wishers in the Al-Sabah family *diwan* at Bayan Palace: (clockwise, starting from top-left) the ruler Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Parliamentary Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim; (top-middle) Citizens greet senior Al-Sabah family members; (top-right) Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Wang Di greets the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah; (bottom) Al-Sabah family members enter the *diwan* (Source: Kuwait Times, 29/05/2017)



Photograph 2.2 Ahmadi governor Sheikh Fawaz Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the Austrian Ambassador Sigurd Pacher in his *diwaniyya* (Source: Arab Times, 10/11/2016)

Amidst much speculation about the *diwaniyya*'s beginnings, the wider links to Islamic history and culture are telling of the space's emergence. These Islamic trails lead back to the life of Qusayy ibn Kilab ibn Murrah, ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, and a prominent member of the Quraysh tribe. The early Muslim scholar Al-Tabari (1989: 24) writes of Qusayy's authority in the pre-Islamic period as:

[...] a religion which people followed. They always acted in accordance with it, regarding it as filled with good omens and recognizing his superiority and nobility. He took for himself the council house (*dar al-nadwa*) and made the door which (later) led from it to the mosque of the Ka'ba. The Quraysh used to decide their affairs in that house.

This *dar al-nadwa*, the sitting place of tribal leaders from the Quraysh, suggests that spaces for congregation go back a long way in the history of the Arab peoples (see also Peters 1994). Yet, it was the rise of the caliphate that gave birth to the word '*diwan*'. The Scottish Orientalist Sir William Muir (1883, 1915) wrote in his annals that Omar, the second caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, felt the need for a tribal register, which would serve both as a census and monitor of the blood lines in Arabia at that time.³⁰ He said:

The blue blood of Arabia was universally recognised as the aristocracy of the Moslem world. [...] The progeny of the Arab sire (whatever the mother) was kept sedulously distinct with the conquered races. [...] Even after the new-born zeal of the Faith had evaporated, the chivalry of the Arabs as a race wholly devoted to arms was, owing mainly to Omar's foresight, maintained in full activity for two centuries and a half. [...] To carry out this vast design, a Register was kept of every man, woman, and child, entitled to a stipend from the State – in other words, of the whole Arab race employed in the interests of Islam. [...] The Roll itself, as well as the office for its maintenance and for pensionary account, was called the *Dewan* or Exchequer. [...] We are not told the number enrolled on the *Dewan* of Omar, but the population of Kufa and Bussorah may give us some idea of the vast exodus in progress from Arabia [...]. (Muir 1915: 158-160)

The vast reach of the Arab caliphate may offer a plausible explanation of how the *diwan* as an idea was carried to the Arabian Peninsula. More importantly, situating the *diwaniyya* within the Islamic domain confirms its historical role in civil administration, however it may have metamorphosised. After Omar and the Umayyad dynasty, the 'Abassids "inherited the traditions and the personnel of Umayyad administration," routinising the business of the government and developing three types of *diwans*: the chancery (*diwan al-rasa'il*), the bureaus for tax collection (*diwan al-kharaj*) and the army bureau (*diwan al-jaysh*) (Lapidus 2012: 95-96). It can be thus argued, that the cultural capital of maintaining order in solidarity, inherited by one generation after another in Arabo-Islamic history, leaves its imprint on the *diwaniyya*.

³⁰ For a more comprehensive account of the Caliphate under Omar, see the works of Nu'mani (1939, 1957), who also described Omar's provincial administration, notably the *Katib-ud-Diwan* or the Chief Secretary of the army secretariat in volume II (p. 26).

It is also of no coincidence that the term ‘*diwan*’ appears in the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, referring it to a guard defending Muslim borders of the Islamic state (Ali 2004: 273; Alhajeri 2010: 26). The *diwan*’s functions, or for the purpose of this study, those of the *diwaniyya*, are almost inextricably linked to the wider Islamic context. Most *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait today reserve an area for prayer purposes, whether a room adjacent to the *diwaniyya* itself, or within the building. When I was invited to a barbecue party in Wafra, the southernmost area in Kuwait known for private farm plots, the men had set up an area for sitting; carpets were laid across the grass, and couches placed against metal backrests arranged in a square configuration similar to what is currently found in *diwaniyyas*. At dusk, one of the men stood up voluntarily performing the call to prayer, and the rest of the men stopped chatting at once; the solemnness was then followed by the performance of prayer (see Photograph 2.3). Practical reasons notwithstanding, it is clear that religion follows spatial logic in the Arab world, and Kuwait is no exception.



Photograph 2.3 Men performing the Maghrib prayer at a Wafra farm plot (taken by author on 07/04/2017)

By virtue of its Arabo-Islamic context, it is also apt to consider tribal customs when discussing the *diwaniyya*’s origins. As Alhajeri (2010: 25-26) remarks, *diwaniyyas* in Arab culture go back hundreds of years and initially took the form of the ‘council,’ which was “the dominant political concept of the earliest Islamic state – elders of the tribe or the clan used to meet in order to discuss the most important issues facing them”. So vital was tribal allegiance that the Islamic dynasties after the death of the Prophet Muhammad depended on tribal pacts as a “long-standing source of political and social identity” (Esposito 1998: 8, see also Kennedy 2001). Yet, Eickelman and Piscatori (1996: 46-48) recommend a closer reading of the historical

record, which shows the bifurcation of the legal system over time (between religion and politics), with *shari'a* courts (Islamic law courts) operating alongside the *diwan al-mazalim* (board of grievances). In the same vein, the *diwaniyya*'s existence, though necessitates an examination of the Islamic context, should lend more weight to its functions. The tribal custom of pledging allegiance to the chief is, nonetheless, of paramount importance, as many commentators have explained how the choice of the '*shaikh al-qabila*' or the leader of the tribe is one of the *diwaniyya*'s enduring functions (Al-Awadhi 2013; Al-Jassar 2013; Davidson 2014). The same tribal custom accompanied Kuwait's future rulers, the Al-Sabah who were part of the larger umbrella tribe called the 'Utub, (sing. 'Utbi), who migrated from the Aflaj region of Central Arabia to the Gulf coast in the early eighteenth century to escape from harsh climate conditions (Abu-Hakima 1988: 48-49; Slot 1998: 117). The division of labour in tribal societies, compounded by a general consensus among the different tribal groups, as Eickelman (1998: 128) suggests, accounted for the organisation of groups where no permanent 'government' authority existed. Kuwaiti historians seem to be in agreement that, among the three biggest tribal factions of the 'Utub (Al-Sabah, Al-Khalifah, and Al-Jalahimah), Al-Sabah I was chosen unanimously, in a *diwaniyya* meeting, to govern Kuwait town (Kha'zal 1962: 43, see also Al-Qanai 1957). Such a model of decision-making, developed from these beginnings in tribal customs, provided the foundation for Kuwait's socio-political order, as we will see in the coming sections, trickling down to the lower echelons of Kuwaiti society.

Freeth and Winstone (1972: 56) maintain that each tribe normally maintains a trading connection with one particular town; Kuwait has traditionally been the 'supply town' for the Mutair, Harb, Shammar, 'Awazim and northern Ajman tribes. The tribal connections of the seventh ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, were similarly observed by the British diplomat and colonial administrator John Gordon Lorimer (1908c: 1075-1076, italicised in original text), who wrote:

Management of tribes, etc. – The Bedouins are held to their allegiance partly by gifts and kindness, partly by fear of the untoward results which would ensue, either directly or indirectly, from a rupture with the Shaikh. Mubarak has allied himself matrimonially to the Mutair tribe, who are of importance in Najd and are generally represented in Kuwait territory by encampments in Summān or, in the hot weather, at the head of Kuwait Bay.

From tribal customs arose the need for spaces that could ensure a continuing cohesion among different Arab groups, particularly in pre-oil Kuwait, under the banners of '*asabiya* (solidarity),

the Islamic principle of *shura* (consultation), and of Arab hospitality (Shuhaiber 2003: 96). The *diwaniyya* was one of these spaces.

Holding councils or the *majalis* (sing. *majlis*) was also practised by the male heads of important ‘Utbi families when they first arrived in Kuwait, and this later influenced the nature of governance. The social pact established between the ruler and the ruled indicated a consultative face – the principle of *shura* mentioned previously.³¹ In the mid-nineteenth century:

The Government of Shaikh Subāh, – who in 1863 was described as a fine, stout, hale old man, more than 80 years of age, rough in appearance and manner but kind of heart, – was patriarchal; and he sat daily at the gate to superintend the affairs of his subjects (Lorimer 1908b: 1010)

Even if the Al-Sabah enjoyed “political predominance over the other divisions of the tribe” since the founding of Kuwait town, the stability of their rule was reflected by an astute awareness of their people’s needs (Lorimer 1908b: 1000). The holding of the *majalis* therefore exemplifies a sense of public participation that runs counter to the idea of absolutism by the sheikh. Both Segal (2012: 130-131) and Herb (1999: 16) agree that the term *majlis* denotes multiple types of gatherings differentiated by their degree of institutionalisation and formalisation. While this is true, and that the *diwaniyya* is situated on the most informal end of the spectrum, the malleability of this social institution also means that it is equally susceptible to formality, particularly in times of contextual need. The *diwaniyya* model, as a professor of political science at Kuwait University remarked to me over coffee, has lost its ‘spine’; having served a purposeful, socio-political role since Kuwait’s inception, the *diwaniyya* now has a much looser connotation. The evolution of the *diwaniyya* concept will be further explored in Chapter Four. Nonetheless, its historical links with administration, both in the Arabo-Islamic and Kuwaiti historiographies, remain clear, as evidenced by the master plan in 1953, drawn for Kuwait’s urban development, which marked out the locations of the ruler’s *majlis* or *diwan* (see Figure 2.1).

³¹ An even earlier account of tribal customs was provided by Slot (1993: 61), who described how the authority of the tribal Sheikhs in the 17th and 18th centuries was ‘based on consent’.

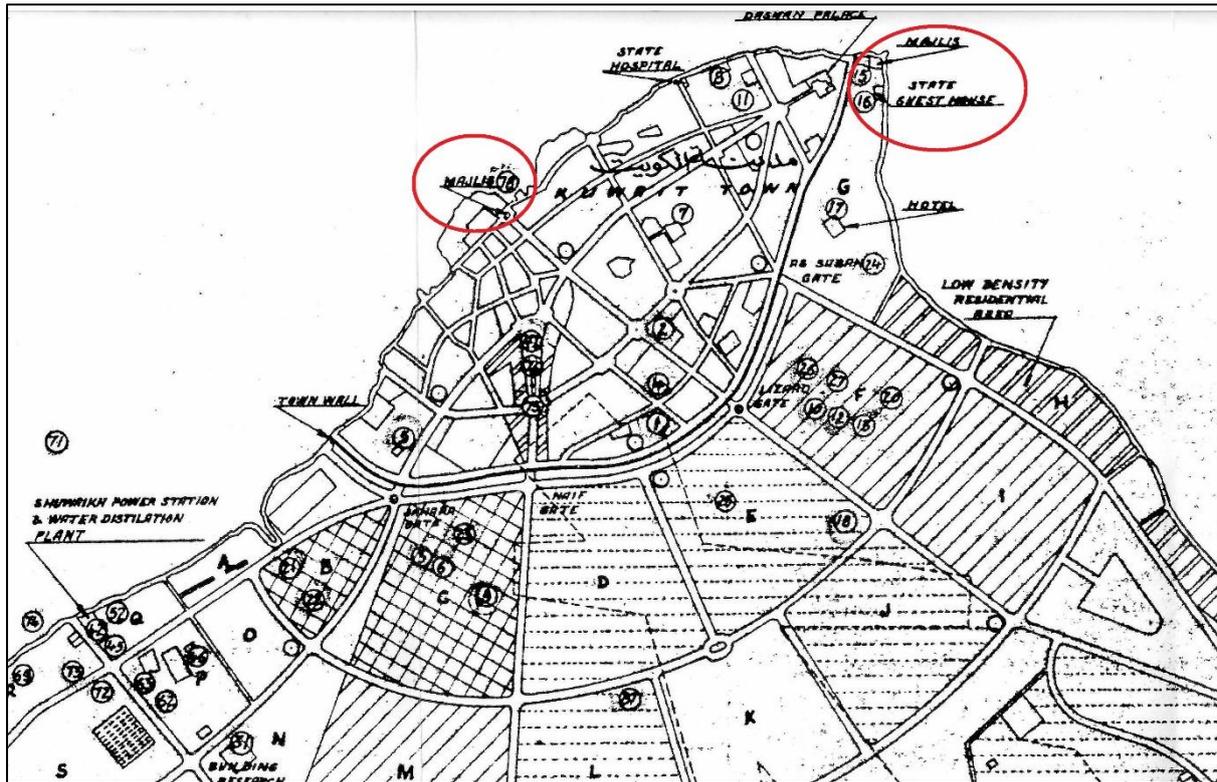


Figure 2.1 Planning proposal for Kuwait Town, 1953, cropped and magnified, showing the allocation of land for official *diwans* encircled in red (Original map found in: Rush 1989, *Record of Kuwait Vol. 8*)

2.3 The *Diwaniyya* in Living Spaces in Kuwait and the Gulf

The *majlis*, as mentioned earlier, was where the ruler received his guests, and, as the Lefebvrian conceptual triad in the Introduction suggests, representations of space are tied to the ‘relations of production’; the *majlis* represents the ruler’s prestige. Understanding the *majlis* in the Gulf would provide a comparative perspective in relation to Kuwait’s *diwaniyya*. Valerie Robinson (2014), who served as the personal assistant in the office of the Political Residency Bahrain from 1968 to 1972, recounted in her memoirs:

Visiting the Sheikhs was quite an eye-opener. The Ruler would receive the Political Resident in his *majlis* (audience hall), which was often quite a modest affair. Often the hall would be lined with local tribesmen, armed to the teeth, each having a *kunja* (dagger) in his belt and an ancient rifle over his shoulder. One got quite used to this show of arms, as no tribesmen would care to be seen without those tokens of manhood. The audience with the Ruler would usually be followed by a lunchtime ‘fuddle’. In the less sophisticated Gulf states, the food would be served from an enormous dish in the centre of the room, while we all set round on the floor.

Robinson speaks of the *majlis* as a lavish spatial construction, akin to the Kuwaiti ruler’s *diwan* in modern times, as shown in Photograph 2.1. Yet, a relook at architectural trends would

suggest that the *majlis* in the Gulf evolved from humble beginnings. Fortified housing in Oman, known as the *muraba'a*, comprised both defensive architecture that protected residents from Bedouin raiders, and a *majlis* that could accommodate visitors (see Figure 2.2).

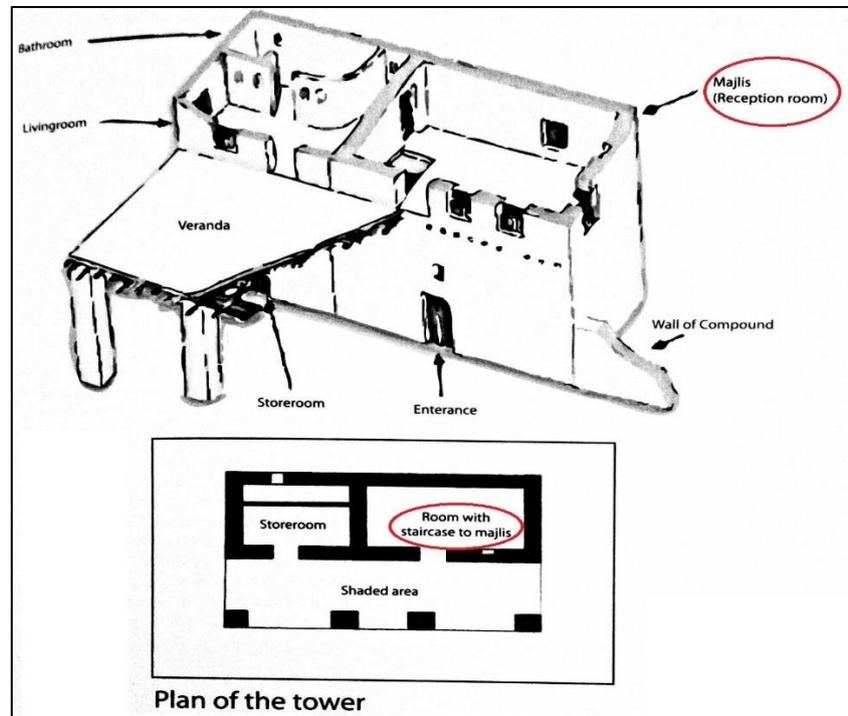


Figure 2.2 Sketch and floorplan of the *muraba'a* tower in Oman (taken from Hawker 2008: 65)

More relevant to this study are the woollen tents in the Northern Gulf, woven of sheep and camel wool, and used by tribes that travelled to the north from Kuwait through northern Saudi Arabia; the woollen tent was a later arrival in the lower Gulf (Hawker 2008: 61). Owing to the nomadic nature of tribes, it would be logical to conceive of tents as the most mobile form amongst other living spaces. The British Political Agent to Kuwait, Harold Dickson, who was very attached to the nomadic peoples, felt compelled to record his observations in the desert. He wrote:

An average shaikh, for instance, will have a tent of, say, six extra-broad strips, each seventy feet long and supported by four poles, while a poor man may have cheap narrow strips to his tent, each twenty-five feet long, with only two poles, possibly with one. The true Badawain shaikh does not go in for bigger tents than the one described, as his movements from camp to camp would be hampered thereby. Among the leading Shaikhs of the 'Anaizah and Northern Shammar, such as ibn Shalan, ibn Hathal, Ajil al Yarwar and also among Arabian princes like the Al Sa'ud, the Shaikhs of Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, tents of enormous size are the fashion. These, however, are practically used only when the owners are going

out for the spring months to certain standing camps, from which they will sally forth and hunt gazelle, or hawk *hubara*. (Dickson 1949: 66)

Even if the end of the excerpt seems to suggest that tents were also used for recreational purposes, its basic social functions must not be overlooked. The pitching process itself, as Dickson (1949: 74-75) describes, involves a division of labour: the head of the family directs the operation, the daughters of the house usually do the hammering of the pegs, and the manservants attend to the poles and supports. The tent is also divided into men's (also the guest's) and women's quarters (known as the *muharram*), where completely different objects are found in each portion implying a differentiation in daily routines (Dickson 1949: 76-79, see also Figure 2.3). As anthropologist Donald Powell Cole (1975: 64-69) observed, tents were highly regulated even when multiple conjugal families travelled and clustered together; household items were piled up within tents as a barrier between one conjugal family and another.

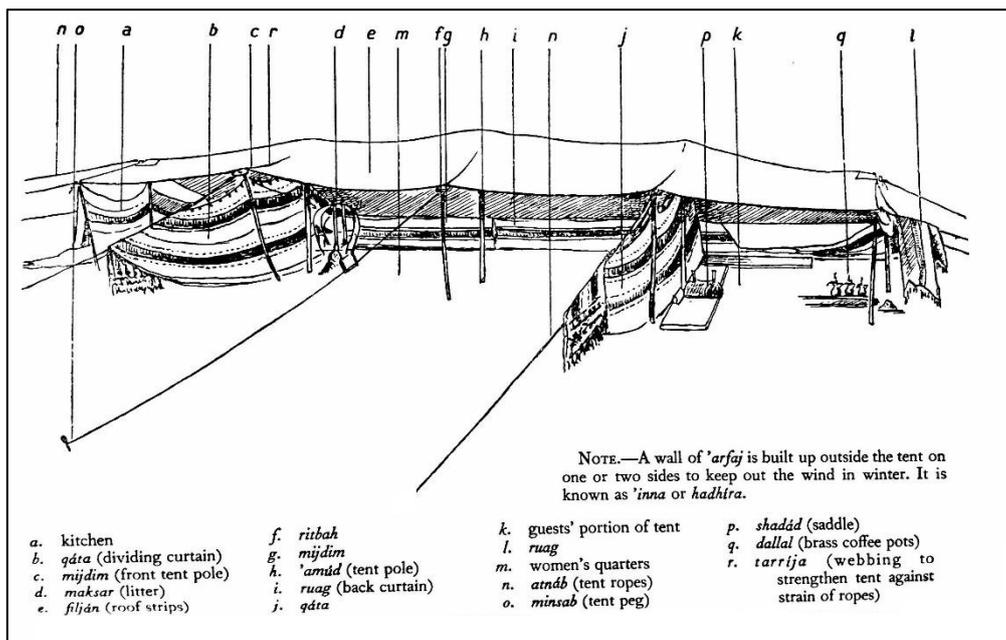


Figure 2.3 Layout of a three-poled Bedouin tent (taken from Dickson 1949: 68)

Sources that document the *diwaniyya* within the confines of a tent are few in numbers, but as a result of Kuwait's growing reputation as a trade hub during the nineteenth century, foreign interest in Kuwait translated into important chronicles. The first British Political Agent to Kuwait, Captain Stuart George Knox (1906: 29-30), while doing his rounds chanced upon a Sheikh of the Al-Sabah family, and wrote: "He gave us an excellent pillau of fowls in a decent little *diwaniya* facing the sea at Funtass and was very anxious to know if everything was to my liking". Judging by how deep Funtass (spelt today as Fintas) was in Kuwait's hinterland, away

from the maritime chaos in the town centre, it is almost certain that Knox's encounter was with a *diwaniyya* tent. Around the same period, Stanley Mylrea (1951: 67), a pioneer medical missionary of the American Mission in Kuwait, provided a vivid description of his visit into the *diwaniyya* tent of Ibn Saud, the first monarch of Saudi Arabia:

I alighted from the carriage and we entered his tent together. There was no one in it. It was superbly furnished in the desert Arab style. The floor was completely covered with carpets, and at intervals against the tent wall and at right angles to it were camel saddles covered by beautiful white sheep-skins. These are very comfortable to lean against when sitting on the floor. Hanging up against the walls were plenty of good rifles, shiny and bright. Everything was business-like, orderly, and handsome. Somehow that tent breathed security, confidence and efficiency, just as did its master as he and I greeted each other.

Understandably the charm exuded by the *diwaniyya* tents belonging to the sheikhs of Arabia was also a symbol of status. Their tents are spaces customised by the sheikhs' taste and power, whereas the more modest tent (as shown in Figure 2.3) in which only a small section is used as the *diwaniyya*, caters more for the family. From a theoretical perspective, the tent is a social product: while it embodies the Arab hospitality (towards his guest) and the tribal organisation of labour (all codes of 'representational spaces' in the Lefebvrian sense), the 'complex symbolism' of power, stemming from the allegiance to the leader, is reflected by objectified marks of prestige in the tent.

Spatially, the social and tribal organisational functions of the *diwaniyya* tent were later reinforced in the architecture of the courtyard houses of 'Utbi settlements near the coast, as Kuwait's maritime importance became increasingly unmistakable. As Hawker (2008: 44—58) remarks, whether it was of Arab or Persian masonry, the courtyard house, made of coral and mud and gypsum plaster, was the most common house form in the Gulf by the turn of the twentieth century, consisting of: a courtyard (*al hoosh*); a range of buildings planned around the central courts; a roof terrace (*al saathi*) accessed by a staircase from a courtyard; and single room apartments on the first floor approached along the roof terrace. Lorimer's (1908c: 1050): first-hand observations confirm the existence of courtyard houses, explaining how the better ones are "stone-plasted [...] and have high-arched gateways". It is instructive to note how terms referring to the aforementioned tribal functions later became absorbed into the terminology of architecture. Architecturally speaking the *majalis* came to refer, widely across the Gulf, to the men's reception rooms of the courtyard houses (Memarian & Brown 2006: 21). The most plausible explanation for the difference in naming these reception rooms, as the later sections

will bespeak, lies in the needs of the locality – the *farij* – and its ties with the sea. What is striking about the reception rooms, is how the “primordial act of enclosure and construction” of such spaces also resembles the section of the tent originally used to receive guests (Petruccioli 2006: 3). In the pre-oil Al-Ghanim courtyard house (see Figure 2.4), for example, one notices a division of space similar to the division of labour inscribed in tribal customs. Dickson (1949: 81) provides advice to the visitor of the *diwaniyya* tent, insisting that he “must never approach or halt his camel near the women’s end of the tent”. Similarly in the Kuwaiti courtyard house, the *diwaniyya* gave the men their own space, with a separate entrance and passage leading to their *diwaniyya* allowing privacy for the rest of the family, while women were free to use to use the household courtyard, away from the stranger’s prying eyes (see Islam & Al-Sanafi 2006: 84). The female section of the courtyard house was known as the *harim*. Zahra Freeth (1978: 2), the daughter of the British Political Agent, who grew up in Kuwait, equally reaffirmed this gendered separation in spatial terms, recalling affectionately how:

The *diwaniyah* was the more open and accessible part of the house, usually fronting on a main street, while the *harim* lay behind. A feature of the *diwaniyah* would be its handsome double doors of carved and studded teak, which were frequently left standing open, revealing a wide passageway with benches of masonry on either side where the owner or his servants might sit. [...] The *diwan*, where male guests were entertained, was usually next to the entrance, with access from the court, and this was the only part of the house which might have windows on the street side, unglazed, but with bars and shutters. [...] It was in the men’s reception rooms that the plasterers created pleasing scalloped edges to decorate a cornice, or cut geometrical flower-patterns to reveal the brown mud underneath, though such detail was found only in the finest houses. If the coffee-hearth was in the *diwan*, where it would be always placed at the end furthest from the door, it was commonly adorned with an array of burnished brass pots in graduated sizes.

From Freeth’s intricate description of the *diwaniyya* it is clear that the tribal custom of hospitality was taken from the tent into the courtyard house, as did the gendered spatial division. How the *diwaniyya* in the courtyard house, both spatialised and internalised these customs from the tent, is an indication of a *habitus* encompassing the ‘transposable dispositions’ that can be “objectively adapted to their outcomes”. The thick description of the *diwaniyya*’s architectural features by Freeth also points to status differentiation, comparable to the distinction of the sheikh from the rest of the tribe. The revitalisation of the *diwaniyya* as an integral part of

contemporary housing will be discussed in the next chapter, underscoring some similarities, but also a breakaway from the past, particularly in its implications for the Kuwaiti family.

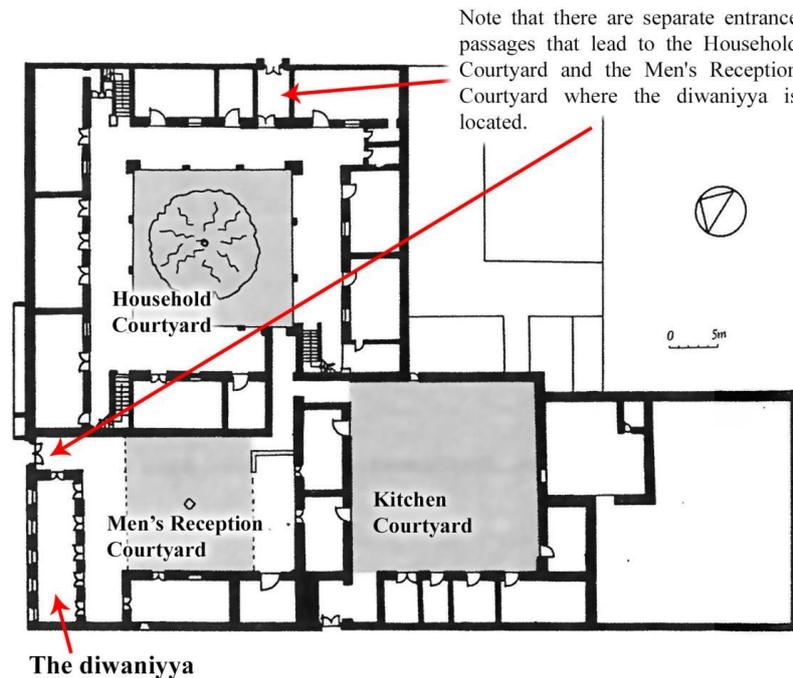


Figure 2.4 The pre-oil Al-Ghanim courtyard house (taken from Al-Bahar 1984, emphasis added)

2.4 The Rise of a Port City

Arguably the bulk of Kuwait's historiography delves into its maritime past and the seafaring nature of its people, which are usually situated in the wider Gulf context:

The Gulf's commercial role and the importance of the Strait of Hormuz on the route to India aroused the greed of the western seafaring countries quite early in history, starting with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, and soon followed by the Dutch, before the English had time to consolidate their supremacy over the sea and maritime trade in this strategic space in the nineteenth century. (Cadène & Dumortier 2013: 9)

Yet it took some time for Kuwait to rise to prominence as a port town: in the mid-eighteenth century, its sea activities were described as 'obscure and insignificant'; a report analysing foreign trade for the years 1763-1797 later concurred that the two principal ports of the region being Masqat and Basrah, whereas "Bushehr and Kuwait were sometimes used as bases from which to smuggle goods into Turkish 'Irāq and even across Turkish 'Irāq to Europe" (Lorimer 1908a: 135, 166). Abu-Hakima (1983: 97, see also Lorimer 1908b) takes this argument further to attribute Kuwait's commercial success in this period to transit trade, arguing that caravan trade (involving the payment of tribute) and smuggling were more important sources of income.

Two reasons saw a turn in Kuwait's fortunes at sea: (1) British relations in Kuwait opened in the 1770s as the English East India Company used Kuwait as a postal hub instead of Zubair; (2) the occupation of Basrah by the Persians diverted the whole Indian trade with Baghdad, Aleppo, Smyrna and Constantinople, to Kuwait (Lorimer 1908b: 1002-1003; Abu-Hakima 1983: 97-98). The British traveller James Silk Buckingham, who visited Kuwait around 1816, wrote:

The town itself is chiefly inhabited by mercantile and trading people, who engage in all the branches of commerce carried on throughout the Gulf. The port sends out, at least, a hundred sail of vessels, large and small; and the people who navigate them, as well as those for whom they sail, have the highest character for probity, skill, firmness, and courage. (Buckingham 1829: 463)

The fact that Kuwaitis became adept at maritime activities, giving rise to the port's prosperity was noted by John Lewis Pelly (1863: 24) in his comprehensive report on the Gulf littoral:

Here is a clean, active town, with a broad and open main bazaar, and numerous solid stone dwelling houses [...] containing some 20,000 inhabitants; attracting Arab and Persian merchants from all quarters by the equity of rule, and by the freedom of its trade. [...] The sailors of Kowait are highly reputed, and there may be some 4,000 of them afloat; but Koweit sends to Muskat for boat-builders as they are esteemed superior worksmen.

Kuwaitis would soon master the crafts of shipbuilding and pearl-diving, as an economic boom ensued with the British suppression of sea piracy, the global demand for pearls, and the establishment of Kuwaiti merchant agencies in India and other places around the India Ocean, after the port town had obtained British protection as a signatory of the Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement in 1899 (see Al-Nakib 2016: 27-28). It is no wonder that most commentators have a vivid connection to pearling and seafaring when asked about their memories of 'old Kuwait'. Ismael (1982: 25) takes Kuwait's commercial success down to a more practical level, highlighting the direct relationship between capital accumulation from pearling and the development of commerce: pearling provided the capital for commerce, which in turn perpetuated the pearling industry and the subsistence of its stakeholders.

With Kuwait's prominence in maritime trade guaranteed, the role of the *diwaniyyas* became a necessity for further economic growth, and the administration of both commercial, political and affairs. Access to the seas established transnational connections that bred an open and tolerant climate in Kuwait. The local-foreign links needed a physical infrastructure, locally

and sometimes abroad, that supported the extensive reach of Kuwait's trade networks, in particular, the circulation of vital information concerning pearl trade. Pelly (1863: 27) was surprised to "find that the Sheikhs at Kuwait well-informed as to distant politics," and later Political Agent Shakespear (1906) met Bishr bin Roomi, "the father of Koweit pearl merchants," who questioned the former about the Ceylon pearl fisheries. Kuwait's oceanic connections with India were substantial owing to Bombay's status as 'the region's metropolis' and the "administrative hub of the British Empire in the western Indian Ocean, including the Gulf, South Arabia and East Africa" (Bishara & Risso 2016: 175-176; Mylrea 1951: 32; Ismael 1982: 24). In 1905-6, the total sea-borne of Kuwait in both direction was divided as follows: about 30.75 per cent with India, 26.77 with Turkish Arabia, 14.66 with Britain and 9.31 with Persia (see Lorimer 1908c: 1057). Dr Ali Al-Shamlan (2013), whose family background was heavily involved in the pearl trade, testified to the establishment of *diwaniyyas* in Zanzibar³² and Kenya for commercial purposes. If one were to think of Kuwait's trade networks of that era as multiple concentric circles, with the innermost circle being the *diwaniyya*, and the outermost being the furthest source of trade geographically, then the transmission of trade information eventually finds its way to the innermost core of the *diwaniyya*, which is then responsible for the dissemination of the said information locally.

The interconnected courtyard houses that made up the *farij* were also home to a series of smaller spaces constructed organically in support of the flourishing maritime trade. Sea captains used to watch their ships come and go from the *datchas*, coral and mud benches that were built out from the front walls lining the *diwaniyyas* on the seafront (Freeth 1956: 105; Chay 2015, see Photograph 2.4). The tidal jetties (*inga* ' , singular *nig* 'a), privately owned by merchants who had the "ability to pay [...] according to the number and size of the boats in his possession," served as workplaces where Kuwait's pearling fleet could moor and undergo repairs (Al-Shamlan 2001: 57; Lorimer 1908c: 1049, see Photograph 2.5). The open climate also witnessed the mushrooming of cafés, such as the famous Bounashi café, where men would gather after working hours to relax and exchange news (see Photograph 2.6). The pearl divers, shipowners, wholesale traders, sea-captains were all bound by a working relationship, for example, divers are in indebted financially to the merchants or sea-captains well before they risk their lives at sea (More 1923, Al-Shamlan 2001). Whenever a problem arose between these

³² See also "Report 1877-78" by Lieutenant-Colonel Ross, 8 July 1878, in *Persian Gulf Administration Reports (Vol. I)*, p. 129: "Arabs are known to have left the mother-country during the year to permanently settle there [in Zanzibar]".

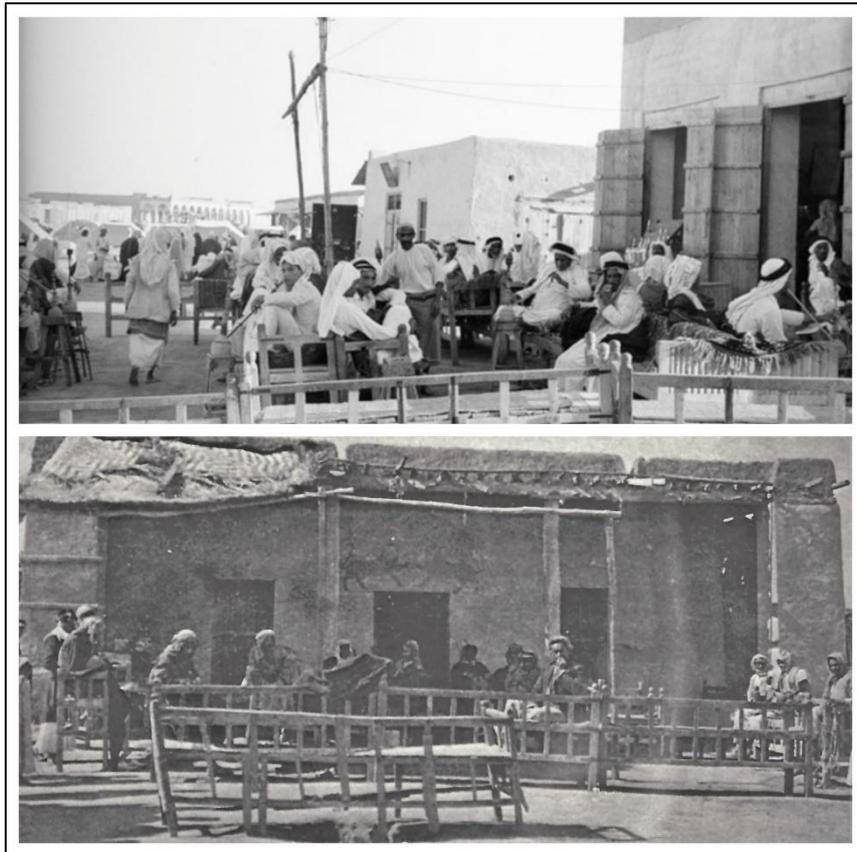
stakeholders, the *diwaniyya* was often used as a meeting place for conflict resolution. *Bas ya Bahar* (1972), a film directed by Khalid Al-Siddiq, roughly translated as *The Cruel Sea*, recounts the hardship of pearl-diving. A scene is filmed in a *diwaniyya* showing how a pearl diver, injured by a shark during his diving trip, approaches the merchant to seek his assistance. The above spaces of ‘unplanned urbanism,’ as coined by Al-Nakib (2016: 36-43), reflect not only functional diversity, but also a physical landscape “intimately linked to the town’s port economy”. It takes us back to the Introduction that highlighted how the physical organisation of the city remains subservient to its socio-economic needs, making a case for the *diwaniyya*’s significant role in Kuwait’s age of sail, until the decline of the pearling industry from the late twenties due to the Great Depression and emergence of the Japanese cultured pearls.



Photograph 2.4 The preserved *datchas* of the remaining courtyard houses in contemporary Kuwait (taken by author on 16/02/13)



Photograph 2.5 Aerial photo of Kuwait's tidal jetties (*inga*) in the pre-oil period (Ali 1988)



Photograph 2.6 A street café filled with merchants and sea-captains in 1938-9 (Top: National Maritime Museum, London); A café located at the *souq* in 1915 (Bottom: Abu-Hakima 1983, p. 137)

2.5 The Desert, Kuwait's Hinterland

As a research subject that has been overshadowed by the sea (where Kuwait's historiography is concerned), the historical role of the desert is undergoing a major reorientation, pioneered by the recent work of Robert Fletcher (2015a, 2015b). The historian Abu-Hakima (1983: 91-92, see also Abdulmoati 2003: 54-59) uncovers evidence of the seventy-day ancient caravan route that ran from Kuwait to Baghdad and Aleppo, an operation he says "had its effect on Kuwaiti trade and together with sea-borne cargoes, was vital to the expansion of Kuwait as a power in the region". When asked about the importance of desert trade, the former Minister of Higher Education, Dr Ali Al-Shamlan, who, despite his family's background of sea traders and captains, explained how the sea, the bazaar and the desert lay on the same axis (Chay, research notes 2017). Goods imported from the sea were taken inland, where they were either sold at the bazaar, or taken by caravan towards *ash-Sham* (meaning 'the north'), a desert region where Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan intersected. Later, the Al-Shamiya area in Kuwait, with its '-iya' affix indicating a smaller version of the original form, referred to the desert oasis or a transport hub where merchants and travellers rested at before making further headway toward *ash-Sham*.³³ Conceivably, families of desert origin have particular concerns, but these differences should not be exaggerated. Nawaf Bushaibah (2016), the First Secretary of the Kuwaiti Embassy in the United Kingdom, related the anecdote of Sheikh Saad Abdullah Al-Sabah, who as Crown Prince in 1982, took it upon himself to visit various *diwaniyyas* all across Kuwait. Puzzled by such a peculiar habit, Sheikh Saad's advisor, also Nawaf's uncle, questioned the Sheikh who explained how city dwellers were concerned about the stock market (*Suq Al-Manakh*), while the Bedouins were more eager to know if there were government subsidies channelled toward sheep feed!

More recently, Fletcher (2015b: 71) contends that thinking with the 'desert corridor' as a unit of analysis prompts the ideas that (1) histories of communication by land is grounded in agency, contingency and power, and that (2) discussions of trans-desert communications have largely neglected the implications for imperial relations on the ground. The two aforementioned points are vindicated by historical facts, notably the Saudi blockade imposed by Ibn Saud on Kuwait in 1920, "a measure deliberately thought out for the purpose of increasing Bin Saud's

³³ For a more elaborate history of the Al-Shamiya area in Kuwait, see Freeth's (1956: 72-73) vivid description and KUNA (2015): <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/history-of-al-shamiya-area/>

revenues” according to British officials (Political Agent Bahrain 1920).³⁴ Further British intelligence then revealed that Ibn Saud had given orders to his subjects to draw their supplies from Hasa and Ojair instead of Kuwait after Ramadhan that year, causing distress in Kuwait since “almost the whole of Nejd trade is controlled and financed by Kuwait merchants” (Political Agency Kuwait 1920, see also Freeth & Winstone 1972: 90).³⁵ Later the then ruler of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber (1929: 420-428) wrote to the British Political Agent:

I would further ask you to make report on the seizure of the goods exported for poor Bedouin tribes, whether these were taken out by their subjects or by the subjects of my or other states. All this and more is due to the strictness of (Bin Saud’s) blockade of Kuwait, and to the activities of his forces near my city. To such an extent has trade between Nejd and Kuwait been interfered with that my revenue has been reduced from its former figure by 70%.

There is more to the desert than meets the eye, as the above episode has shown; desert trade also consists of a power struggle that has far-reaching effects, in geographical, political and economic terms.³⁶ Learning the tricks of desert trade, can be equally, if not more important than keeping a lookout at the harbour, at a time when Kuwait had not found oil.

The founding of Kuwait itself has desert origins. As we have seen in the early sections of this chapter, tribal customs matter and Kuwait’s ruling family, the Al-Sabah, were a subset of the Dahamsat section of the Amarrat tribe, which fell under the Anizah, an aristocratic Muslim group that held *sharif* status (Casey 2007: 21). The *sharif* status, an indication of a noble or honourable lineage, refers more widely to the title of Sheikh, with which the Al-Sabah themselves are endowed. Also worth mentioning are the merchant families that migrated to Kuwait with the Al-Sabah, such as the Al-Ghanim, Al-Shamlan, Al-Saleh, Al-Qatami, Al-

³⁴ For a more in-depth analysis of the Saudi blockade, see Toth’s (2005) article. The handling of the Saudi blockade by the ninth ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Salim, resulted in local resentment against him due to the loss of trade (see IOR:R/15/5/94, *Political Agent, Kuwait to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad*, 28 August 1920). A report on discontent in the country remarked how “the non-arrival of Nejd caravans in Koweit during the past few months [in 1918] is attributed to Salim’s doings” (McCollum, 1918: 691).

³⁵ See also CO 732/46/8, *Dickson to Political Resident, Bushire*, 18 March 1930. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber submitted claims for lost customs revenue and lost trade with the trade of Arabian interior, both caused by the Saudi blockade. Sheikh Ahmad estimated the loss of trade by Kuwaiti merchants, “who deal exclusively with the inland cities of Nejd in normal times,” to average Rs. 800,000 per year.

³⁶ The political implications of the Saudi blockade spilled over into areas of foreign policy, which at that time, were managed by the British. Any attempt by tribesmen to work around sanctioned areas (to trade or obtain provisions) was met with severe punishment. Four armed motors patrolled along the Kuwait Neutral Zone, and any unsanctioned activity was immediately reported to the British Political Agent and Bin Saud’s trade agent in Kuwait. See the “Administration Report of the Kuwait Political Agency for the Year 1931” in the MEC Archives (DN3/5/87-92).

Roumi and Al-Bader,³⁷ who not only share a common ancestral heritage with the Al-Sabah as descendants of the Anizah, but are also known as *asil* or noble families (Sagher 2004: 57-58). In personal conversation with Kuwaiti historians, and even senior members of merchant families, *sharif* and *asil* families are widely perceived as almost equals. The election of the Sabah I, according to local historians, was finalised after lengthy discussions in a *diwaniyya* or a tent meeting (see Khazal 1962: 42-43; Al-Qanai 1957: 15-16; see also Photograph 2.7). Modern-day governance still rests on the hierarchical relations determined by the *sharif* and *asif* differentiation in former desert politics. The relevance of the desert as a socio-political impetus, therefore, should not be overlooked in place of the sea when relating to the *diwaniyya*.



Photograph 2.7 A sheikh's tribal *majlis* or *diwaniyya* tent, a desert parliament in progress, captured by Captain Shakespear on his 1910 journey (taken from Winstone 1976: 80-81)

The desert offers a more plausible explanation for the *diwaniyya*'s emergence, owing to the flurry of tribal activity and the ties of tribal kinship. The landscape of the Arabian Peninsula offers some insight into the day-to-day nature of tribal activities. British traveller Joachim Hayward Stocqueler (1832: 18-20) who visited Kuwait in the early nineteenth century, described:

Koete, or Grane as it is called in the maps, is in extent about a mile long, and a quarter of a mile broad. [...] A wall surrounds the town on the desert face, but it is more for show than protection, as it is not a foot thick. [...] Beyond the wall nothing is to be seen but a vast sandy plain, extending to a distance of more than sixty miles. [...] Koete within the walls is equally sterile, it literally yields *nothing*; and when to this is added the fact of the water being far from sweet, it is difficult to conjecture how such a site could have been chosen for the establishment of four

³⁷ This list of merchant families with noble status is not exhaustive.

hundred families. [...] While I was at Koete a body of Wahabee Arabs, with their black tents, camels, and white asses, were encamped without the walls.

Expanding on the points made in Section 2.2 about the *diwaniyya*'s origins, the tents in the Arabian desert had many purposes, ranging from the basic function of shelter, to the holding of councils. These tents, home to a myriad of desert tribes, were also both an indication of prestige and economic activity. Sagher (2004: 173, see also Freeth 1956: 68-69), analysing the tribal hierarchy, describes how tribes (such as the Al-'Awazim and the Al-Rashaida) that farm are placed in the lower echelons of the ladder (non-*sharif*), because their reliance on sheep and goats meant that they were "less mobile in the desert" and "a soft sort of semi-townsmen". In contrast, the nomadic tribe has its own *dirah* or tribal territory, through which its tribal strength is measured.³⁸ The *dirah*, vital to the tribe for its wells, its pastures for summer watering and grazing, is considered almost sacrosanct and exclusive to the tribe. Dickson (1949: 46-50), in his explanation of the tribal *dirah*, used the example of the Mutair tribe (see Figure 2.5) to describe its geographical stronghold:

This Mutair *dirah* is approximately 120 miles broad by 180 miles long, and may be taken as a typical example of an average tribe's homeland. [...] The tribes surrounding the Mutair, who own *dirahs* similar to theirs, are as follows:

The 'Awazim and 'Ajman on the east and south-east.

The Sbei and Sahul on the south.

The Harb, Shammar and Dhafir on the west, and Kuwait territory on the north, which in olden times, and before boundaries of western conception were introduced, all belonged to the Mutair, except for the narrow coastal strip which was included in the 'Awazim *dirah*.

Another example of a nomadic tribe is the Anizah tribe whose lineage includes the Kuwaiti ruling family, the Al-Sabah. As a *sharif* family, "all Bedouin recognized the Anizah tribe as the wealthiest of them all," and their fighting strength was "estimated at thirty-seven thousand males of military age, and collective tribal wealth totalled approximately 1 million camels" (Casey 2007: 21). In terms of geographical coverage, the Anizah *dirah* spanned across Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria (see Figure 2.6). The socioeconomic status of the Al-Sabah family remains unchanged today, even if much of the halcyon tribal *dirah* landscape has been drastically transformed.

³⁸ A more detailed description of the various tribal lineages across Arabia is found in Chapter III of Dickson's (1956) book, entitled "Tribes and Families of Arabia".

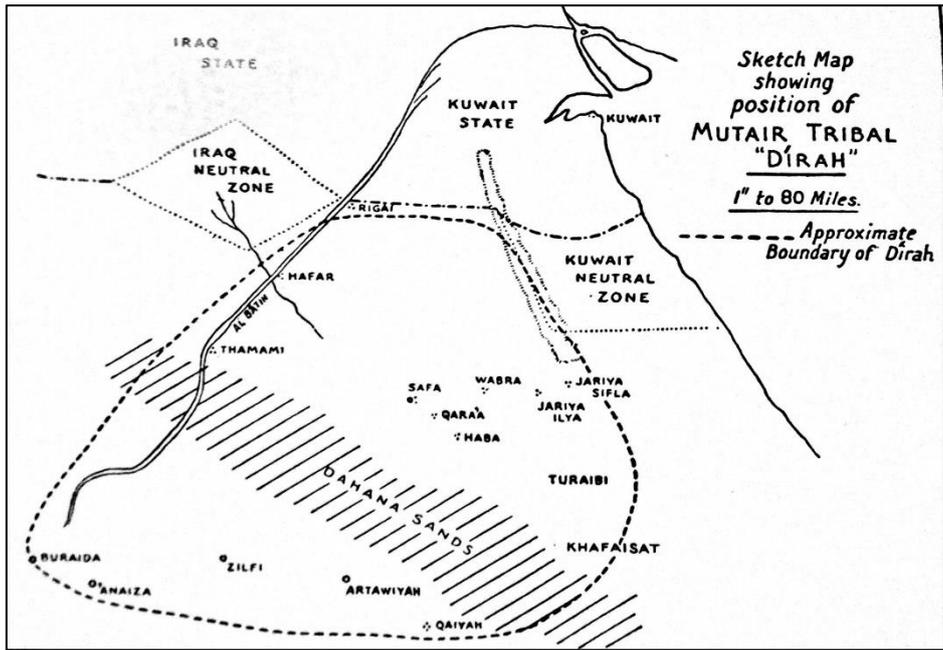


Figure 2.5 The Mutair tribal *dirah* (taken from Dickson 1949: 47)

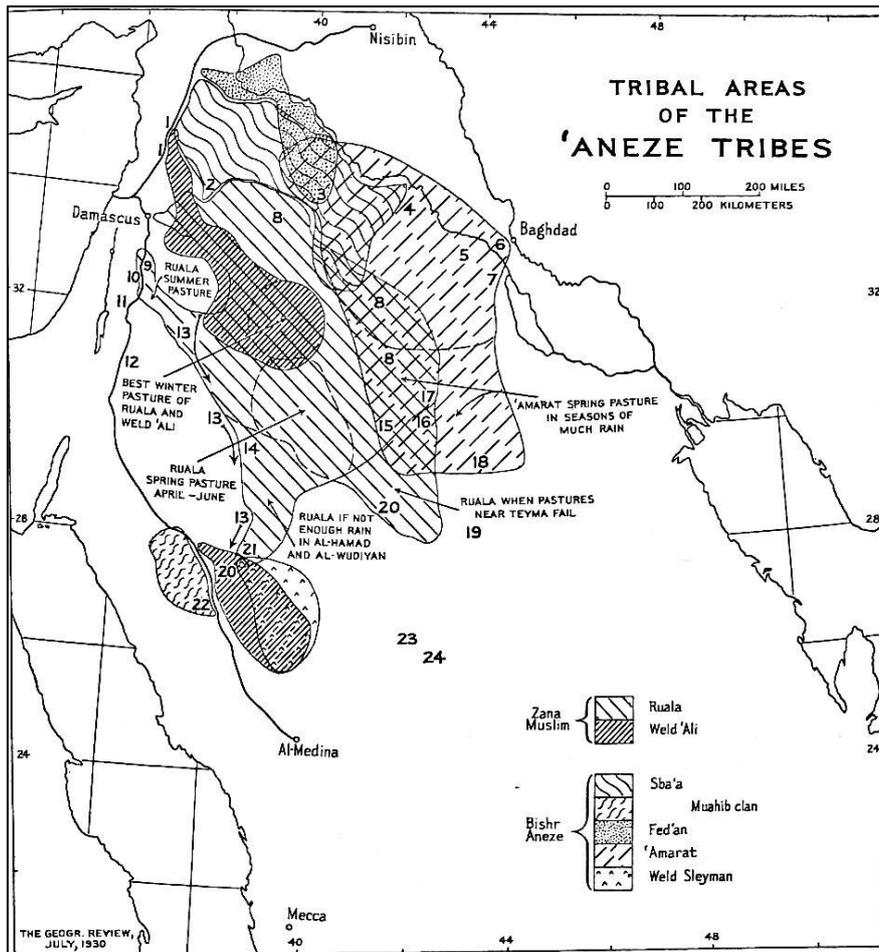


Figure 2.6 Tribal areas of the Anizah tribe and its clans (Raswan 1930: 499, found in MECA DN3/1/40)

As mentioned previously, trading connection with a major town supplies tribes with their wants. This movement to market towns, as noted by Dickson (1949: 49), is known as *musabilah*; each tribe has its special or favourite towns which it visits for its necessities, for instance, the Mutair, Harb, Shammar, ‘Awazim and northern Ajman did their *musabilah* to Kuwait. These movements meant that town authorities were able to exercise control over the Bedouin tribes, demonstrating how the tribe-town relationship is more than mere economics.³⁹

The defence of Kuwait reflects the intricacies of the above tribal relationships. Lorimer (1908b: 1028-1029) recorded that the Kuwait force was “composed mainly of ‘Awāzīm, Rashāidah, Mutair, Mutair, ‘Ajmān, Bani Hājir, and Bani Khālid Bedouins”. Later in 1920 when the forces of Ibn Saud attacked Jahra, an agricultural oasis village in Kuwait, Kuwait’s cavalry led by Shaikh Salim was besieged and struggled to fend off the attackers, until “some six hundred Shammari tribesmen [...] had suddenly arrived from somewhere” to Kuwait’s aid (Mylrea 1951: 91). The tribal connections of the ruling Al-Sabah family have been crucial in securing the position of both Kuwait and its rulers. As one commentator (Aborgobh 2017a) points out, the Sabah sheikhs have always chosen wives from the noble tribal clans: of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah’s four wives, two came from the princely Duwish clan (part of the Mutair tribe), and one from the famous Bin Hathlain clan (of the Ajman tribe).⁴⁰ Lorimer (1908b: 1029) particularly noted how Sheikh Mubarak “strengthened his position among his Bedouin adherents by espousing a daughter of Sultān ad-Dawīsh, a leading chief of the Mutair”. Such a move ensures continued tribal allegiance by blood and reinforces a wider banner of *‘asabiya*.

Of particular interest is the persistence of tribal customs reflecting both hierarchy and consensus at once, which continue to be imbued in both the space and the practice of *diwaniyyas*. The paucity of desert historiography (with reference to Kuwait) requires the researcher to visit *diwaniyyas* hosted by Bedouin-oriented families, to speak to people with strong tribal affiliations, and to experience first-hand the aforementioned customs. Historically, travelogues have provided insight into such customs. Carl Raswan (1935: 150), who lived with the Bedouins not as a foreigner, but as one marked by the rite of blood-brotherhood with their

³⁹ A British official described how, in 1930 Abdullah bin Jiluwi, the Amir of Hasa, sent a detachment of fourteen men to the Kuwaiti frontier to prevent tribesmen of Nejd from trading with Kuwait. This indicates how trading ties involving “camel-loads of clarified butter” hinge on tribal and wider political relations (see IOR:R/15/2/1499: *Diary Weekly Kuwait*, 1st to 15th March 1926. Also available at: http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100031125979.0x000010?utm_source=testpdfdownload&utm_medium=pdf&utm_campaign=PDFdownload).

⁴⁰ Alan Rush (1987: 104), who produced a genealogy of the Al-Sabah ruling family, found that Mubarak’s wives included Wasmiya Falah Rakan Al-Hithlain (of the Ajman tribe), Al-Jazi bint fahad Asqa Al-Shugair Al-Duwish (of the Mutair tribe), and a daughter of Sultan Al-Humaidi Al-Duwish (also of the Mutair tribe).

Sheikhs, recounted how, while visiting the grounds of the Tai' Bedouins, the "black outline of the largest tent which showed from behind a ridge some distance away" was identified as the Sheikh's and equally, the *diwaniyya* tent. In another similar account the British Political Agent Captain Shakespear (1915, reprinted in Winstone 1976), on his trip to Central Arabia to meet Ibn Saud, described the camp:

Left and right, the black tents of the badawin tribes; at the centre, the great white marquee of the amir, the *majlis* tent, and around it the dwellings of the princes of the blood.

In personal conversation, members of the Aborgobh clan recount how the "Amir's *diwaniyya* tent is always [situated] at the highest point" of the *dirah*, for two purposes: (1) rendering it unmistakable to visitors who will then proceed to that tent; (2) to allow the Amir himself to overlook the entire tribal encampment. A senior member of the Aborgobh clan, himself a sheikh, explains that the chain of command within the tribe of old runs in the following order: (a) sheikhs, (b) knights and religious leaders, (c) commanders, (d) workers, (e) slaves. The seating layout within the *diwaniyya* or *majlis* tent is therefore implicitly organised to the aforementioned hierarchy, depending on the size of the tent, bar the slaves who are usually stationed just outside the tent with the camels, tasked with serving those higher in the chain (see Figure 2.7). A simple act of serving coffee, the staple drink obtained from Yemen and consumed by the desert peoples, adopts a similar hierarchical protocol; tribesmen of senior ranks are served coffee, and so are distinguished guests. Raswan's (1935: 151) account of such hospitality is entertaining to say the least:

The coffee made the round. The favoured guests, whom the negro served first (unhappily I belonged to them) were the victims of especial politeness; before the coffee he spat first into the cup and wiped it dry with his shirt-sleeve. Three times I had to endure this rite at the hands of the punctilious coffee-priest, who waited on us with the utmost solemnity on each occasion. Only then might I waggle the cup between my finger-tips in token of thanks and satisfaction and hand it back to him.

Ensuring that guests are served coffee and dates, is a sign of tribal, and by extension, Arab hospitality that continues even today. Mannerisms such as the cup waggle persist in *diwaniyya* etiquette today, internalised among *diwaniyya* hoppers. The strategic location of the Sheikh's *diwaniyya*, reflecting hierarchical values and the man's stature, persists, albeit in a different physical landscape. For example, the Emir (Prince) of the Aborgobh clan, Sheikh Mutlaq

Aborgobh, sits at his *diwaniyya* on the first street of the Hadiya area.⁴¹ His nephew, Abdallah Aborgobh (2017a) reaffirms the support of his fellow tribesmen who will “do whatever it takes” to have his *diwaniyya* built as prominent as possible, even if they are “not necessarily rich people”. Understandably the tribal Sheikh’s authority is distinct and he continues to give his tribespeople an audience in order to address various grievances.

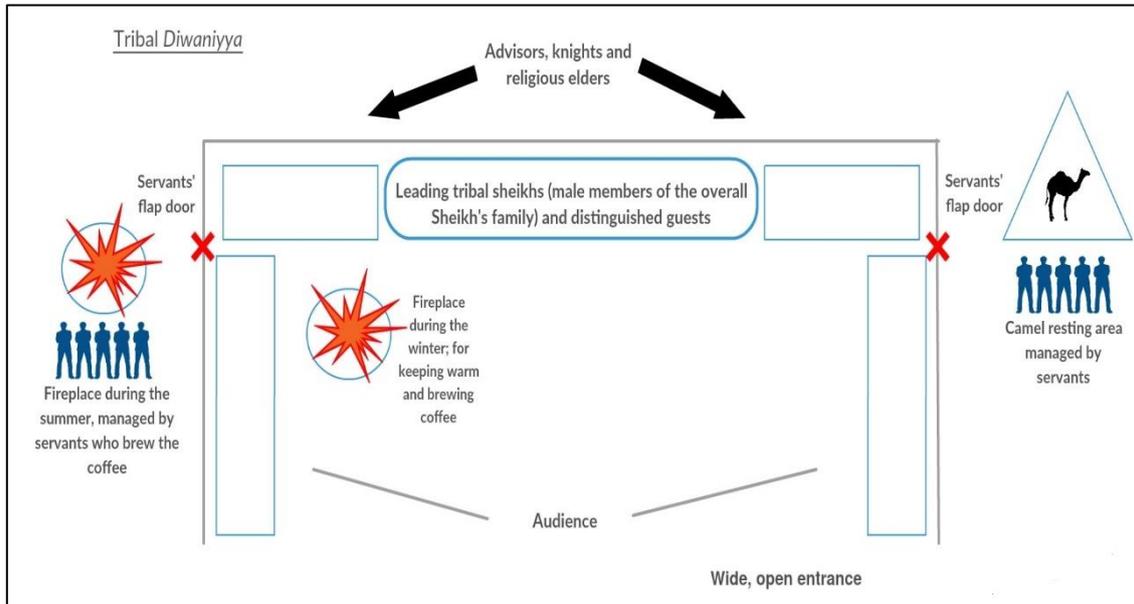


Figure 2.7 Layout of a *diwaniyya* tent (digitised version is a derivative of an original sketch provided by Abdullah Aborgobh)

Yet amidst this hierarchy lie consensus and equilibrium. Camel-raiding (*ghazzu*), once an endemic part of Bedouin life, was described as the ‘breath of life’ almost comparable to a sport, denoting everything that is ‘manly and sporting’ (Dickson 1949: 341). As camels were never bought or sold, the only method of circulation among the tribes was through raiding, and the dispossessed would make up for their losses on another tribe, resulting in the ‘natural equilibrium’ of the desert (Leatherdale 1983: 96-97).⁴² What draws further attention is arriving at a consensus on which tribe to raid. The principle of *shura* is upheld in such an instance. As explained by Sheikh Sultan Aburgobh (2017b), the swordsmen gather in the *diwaniyya* tent to conduct a rather primitive voting system of whether or not to fight, and the resultant decision requires a secondary approval by the Amir of the tribe. This equilibrium of hierarchy and

⁴¹ The Aborgobh clan falls under the Barqa line of the ‘Otaibi tribe; its wider clan is named Al-Nef’ah (see Appendix for the ‘Otaibi tribe, its clans, and sub-clans).

⁴² Camel raiding can be traced back to as recent as the 1930s when Dickson’s book was still in the making. “File 16/6 Diary Weekly Kuwait” in the India Office Records, contains fortnightly reports which observe a recurrent pattern of camel raiding during the period of 1926 to 1930. On the 5th of October 1926, an incident was recorded when a party of hundred Shammar tribesmen raided Kuwaiti camels grazing near Kabd about fifteen miles south of Jahrah, and a pursuit party was dispatched to recover them.

consensus is maintained till today. The Amir's *diwaniyya* continues to act as medium for dispute resolution and decision-making, at a tribal, if not communal level, more so than those of the urban elites.⁴³ Freeth (1956: 69) made a pertinent remark about the assimilation of tribespeople in Kuwait town during the forties and fifties, which remains very much relevant to today's context:

Today the educated town Arab of good family is proud of his badawin ancestry, and holds in respect the present-day tribesman of noble quality. Nevertheless, his respect is tinged somewhat with condescension, for the wealthy merchant with his education, his knowledge of world affairs, and his westernised outlook considers that he has progressed far beyond the noble, but primitive and illiterate, tribesman. He sees also that in the eyes of the rest of the world his success in the realm of commerce brings him greater respect than the high breeding of his badawin ancestors.

The internal struggle of Kuwaitis with a strong Bedouin background cannot be downplayed, even if the socio-economic gap today has been reduced. What remains crucial is how tribal customs still permeate the *diwaniyya*. The influence of the tribe on urban Kuwaiti society will be explored further in Chapter Four.

2.6 British, American and Foreign Influence

Since the founding of Kuwait in the late eighteenth century, the Sheikdom has drawn interest among foreign powers, only to settle for a close relationship with Great Britain from the late 19th century, and later with the USA following its liberation from the Iraqi occupation in 1991. Lorimer's *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* provides some of the earliest insights into Kuwait's connections across the deserts and seas. Yet, it is Slot (1998: 84; 2003: 99) who identifies the first foreign contact with Kuwait as a Dutch one – Baron Tiddo Frederik van Knipphausen was in the Gulf from 1750 to 1760. Subsequent historical accounts of Kuwait's foreign relations are best summarised as a tussle between the British and Ottoman Empires as each side sought to establish a sphere of influence over eastern Arabia:

The principle of territorial expansion by which the Turkish Government, notwithstanding the precarious state of the Empire, were inspired was well illustrated by their restless proceedings with regard to Eastern Arabia. One of its chief exponents was Mid-hat Pāsha, the reforming Wāli of Baghdād. In 1866, there were indications that the Porte intended to assert and enforce their authority over

⁴³ A deeper understanding of how tribal justice is dispensed may be found in Dickson's (1956) work entitled *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, in particular Chapter XVIII.

Kuwait; [...] and early in 1871 it was understood that an attempt would presently be made to establish Turkish sovereignty in Central Arabia, Bahrain, Masqat, and the Arab tribes of Southern Arabia generally. [...] In the summer of 1871 Hasa was occupied by Turkish troops sent by sea from Basrah; while Kuwait, from which armed assistance and marine transport had been borrowed for the operations in Hasa, was considered to have been incorporated in Turkey on the same occasion. (Lorimer 1908a: 242-243)

Anscombe (1997: 28-29) further outlines how the strategic tussle over the Arabian Peninsula was a measured one, noting that the British had “no conception of itself as an offensive, hegemonic power” and “no wish to assume territorial responsibilities (and certainly shuddered at the thought of its European rivals – notably Russia – taking control of the Balkans and the Middle East”. Indeed, the British preference of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire (as a buffer to the Russians) meant that there was a vague question mark hanging over Kuwait. Lorimer (1908b: 1012) noted that “in 1863 Shaikh Subāh assured the [British Political] Resident that the rulers of Kuwait had always been tributary to the Turkish Government”.⁴⁴ Later in 1898, Russian interest appeared in the form of “an application for a concession to build a railway from Tripoli to Koweit,” and shortly after, the Germans on account of their railway schemes proposed to construct a line from “Konia in Asia Minor [...] to Kuwait Bay” (Saldanha 1904: 19. Lorimer 1908a: 346).

Such ambiguity over the independence of Kuwait ironically assured its relative autonomy while the foreign powers squabbled. Fortuitous for Kuwait was the period of ‘strategic decline’ endured by the Ottomans, as their governor, Midhat Pasha, was caught in a time of Tanzimat or reform (Casey 2007: 28). Yet historians have also attributed Kuwait’s autonomy to Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah’s tactical shrewdness in “his dexterous manipulation of Kuwait’s international position” (Slot 2005: 420; Al-Ghanim 1998). Sheikh Mubarak had first approached the Ottomans following his violent accession to the throne, attempting to win acceptance and appointment as *kaymakam* (title for an Ottoman provincial governor), by

⁴⁴ Casey (2007: 27-28) describes how the Sabah leadership was decided, by families of notables, upon the candidate’s ability to “pacify the local Ottoman governor in the nearby seaport of Basrah”. As early as 1829 it was stated that the Sheikh of Kuwait “acknowledged the authority of the Turks, to whom he paid an annual tribute of 40 bags of rice and 400 Frāsilah of dates, and from whom he received every year a dress of honour” (Lorimer 1908b: 1007). In 1847 the Sheikh of Kuwait declared himself “a vassal of the Porte” that had “always been tributary to Turkey,” with the Sublime Porte referring to the central government of the Ottoman Empire (IOR:Mss Eur F126/48, ff1-29, *Report detailing the tribes, trades and resources of the Gulf Littoral*, 13 April 1863, available at: https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100022698109.0x00001b; see also IOR:L/PS/18/B391, *British political relations with Koweit*, 29 March 1922, also available at: https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000833.0x0003c1).

buying his way through his connections in the Ottoman administration (Anscombe 1997: 94-99). His efforts proved to be futile and he turned to the British, whose initial apprehension dissipated upon noticing the aforementioned German and Russian interest. In January 1899, a discreet agreement was struck between British official Lieutenant-Colonel Meade and Sheikh Mubarak, which made Kuwait a British protectorate, and later ratified officially on 16th February (Saldanha 1904: 19-22). As Slot (2005: 417) argues, Mubarak “acted as a sovereign ruler, never countenancing any interference by the Ottomans or the British in the affairs of Kuwait,” and being diplomatically astute, he was able to guarantee not only British protection, but also their ‘good offices’ regarding the Sabah estates in Ottoman territory (see Meade 1899).⁴⁵ Kuwait’s newly protected status would fend off interest from the Germans and the Ottomans in the year that followed, and reaffirmed British control over the trading sea routes that ran toward India. On Kuwait’s part, the ruler was not to cede any part of territory except to the British, nor was he allowed to enter into any agreement with other powers, or entertain foreign officials without British permission. What is most salient to our discussion on *diwaniyyas* is ascertained on two levels: (1) the continued autonomy of Kuwait coincided with its open maritime trading climate that in turn allowed for the persistence of local ways and traditions without foreign interference;⁴⁶ (2) any foreigner on Kuwaiti soil would be *more* inclined to immerse himself in local customs in order to further understand public opinion and administration.

It would then come as no surprise that the first British Political Agent Stuart Knox was received by a sheikh of the Sabah family in his humble *diwaniyya* (see Section 2.3; see also Lorimer 1908b: 1039). His successor, Captain Shakespear, Knox’s successor, was invited by Sheikh Mubarak to join him at his daily *diwaniyya* in the bazaar on their first meeting (Winstone 1976: 69-70). Indigenous support was vital to the British, and informal diplomatic practices meant that a great “level of local collaboration and mediation” was needed to sustain the British Empire (Onley 2004: 135). The post of the British Political Resident in the Persian

⁴⁵ The earlier secret agreement struck by Sheikh Mubarak with Lieutenant-Colonel Meade saw some apprehension on the latter’s part, but Meade would eventually convince the British government in India that it was necessary to secure Mubarak’s trust, thereby adding the clause on the Sabah assets that would have otherwise been left out (see also Al-Ghanim 1998).

⁴⁶ Later in November 1914, the British gave Sheikh Mubarak in writing a reassurance that “Koweit shall be recognised as an independent principality under British protection” (see IOR:L/PS/18/B431, *Appendix B: Obligations of His Majesty’s Government towards the Sheikh of Kuwait*, 11 October 1933, available at: https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000833.0x000031; see also IOR:R/15/1/739, *Treaties and Understandings in Force Between the British Government and the Rulers of Kuwait, 1841-1913*, created in 1914).

Gulf (PRPG) from the 1850s was meant to oversee Britain's relations with the region; and subordinate political agents were placed in each sheikhdom to cultivate close ties with the rulers. While the British largely managed matters in foreign policy, they paid great attention to domestic affairs even if these were left in the hands of the local rulers. From the ruler's perspective, the Resident was a Gulf ruler himself, to the extent that the local rulers gave him the titles of *Ra'is Al-Khalif* (Chief of the Gulf) and *Fakhamat Al-Ra'is* (His High Presence the Chief) (Onley 2009: 24). William Rupert Hay (1959: 20), a former Political Resident, puts it:

The close personal contact maintained between the Political Agents and the Rulers is an outstanding feature of the British position in the Persian Gulf. They meet each other frequently, and more often socially than for official talks. Possibly the social meetings are more important than the official ones, as a hint dropped here and there in the course of a casual conversation is often more effective than formal advice, and the Rulers, being Arabs, are quick to resent any attempt to teach them their business. Usually, the relations between a Ruler and his Political Agent are, outwardly in any case, those of personal friends [...]

It is in this light that informal indigenous diplomatic methods akin to the *diwaniyya* are essential to maintaining relationship since Kuwait came under British protection. "Social meetings" were casual in nature, but were by no means perfunctory. They were, and still are, important in gathering intelligence and expanding social networks, as will be explored further in Chapter Five.

Up till Kuwait's independence in 1961, British officials visited *diwaniyyas* with great intent despite the social nature of their visits. Arguably the most well-known British Political Agent among Kuwaitis, Harold Dickson, was not one who shied away from visits to the *diwaniyyas*. His diaries indicate frequent visits to the Al-Mulla family's *diwaniyya*, undoubtedly because one of the family members, Mulla Saleh Mohammad Al-Mulla, was the Secretary to the Ruler (1904-1938), and his son Abdulla Mulla Saleh continued his father's legacy thereafter.⁴⁷ It was Abdulla Mulla who informed Dickson of the *Baladiyah* (Municipality) election results in a letter dated, 4th April 1938, even after Dickson had finished his official term in 1936.⁴⁸ The social capital acquired by the various British agents was an

⁴⁷ See in particular MEC Archives, DN4/1, Dickson's diary for the year 1937. He called on Abdulla Mulla several times, and was also invited to the house regularly. The diary also indicates how Dickson paid regular visits to different Kuwaiti residences. See also the British official Rose's (1951) note on Abdulla Mulla.

⁴⁸ See MEC Archives, DN4/2, Dickson's Diary, April 1938. The Al-Mulla family's political legacy lies in producing confidants to the rulers: not only were Mulla Saleh and his son Abdulla secretaries to the ruler; Abdulla's son, Badr, was also the Official Representative to the Ruler in 1958 (see MEC Archives, DN6B/5, Dickson's Diary, 1958, p. 42).

accumulation of social capital, and the social networks meant that relationships were often reciprocal. The A'soussi *Diwaniyya* today still boasts a framed document of a dinner invitation by Dickson on the occasion of King George V's birthday.⁴⁹ Needless to say that the visits to *diwaniyyas* helped in building friendship between the British and the Kuwaitis (see Photograph 2.8), even if there were occasional disagreements.⁵⁰ What remained important was the *diwaniyya*'s informality that encouraged a social environment, one comparable to Bourdieu's habitus that "predispose[s] actors to select forms of conduct that are more likely to succeed in light of resources and experience" (Schwartz 1997: 106).



Photograph 2.8 The Ruler Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber (1921-50) with the British Political Agent Arnold Galloway, (Source: Royal Museums Greenwich, photo by Alan Villiers)

The independence of Kuwait in 1961 raised the question of its defence, and the overall stability of the region, particularly after Iraq had laid claims to Kuwait in the same year. The crisis was averted due to a renewed commitment to Kuwait's defence (and the other Trucial States), which "strengthened Anglo-Kuwaiti friendship" and "bolstered British prestige in the rest of the Persian Gulf" (von Bismarck 2013: 49-51). While Kuwait was later admitted into the United Nations in May 1963, signifying its absorption into the international system, talks

⁴⁹ Dickson, *Letter of Invitation to King George V's Birthday Dinner*, 11 Safar 1352/3 June 1933, A'soussi Dīwāniyya, Kuwait City.

⁵⁰ During my interview with Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah (2016), the former Foreign Minister, he was visibly upset at how a former British Political Agent had been biased against the first Emir Sheikh Abdallah Al-Salem (also his uncle) over a number of issues, but refused to give names. Freeth and Winstone (1972: 79) also described how one political agent was so disliked by the ruler that after his departure, street cleaners were hired to sweep the road between the Agency and the Seif Palace, so that "the dust he had trodden should no longer pollute Kuwait".

began between the UK and the USA about regional stability. The intimate US-Kuwaiti relationship that we know of today did not materialise in the sixties; the State Department prepared a paper entitled “Oil and Interdependence in the Middle East” that presented the US’ vision for the region.⁵¹ According to the paper, British presence helped to prevent a power vacuum in the region; its highly-personalised system of allegiance with the Gulf rulers allowed direct influence on their decisions.⁵² It was not until the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when the US played a key role in ending the Iraqi occupation, that a close defence relationship was formed.

Prior to the Iraqi occupation, the CIA (1981: 4-5) produced an assessment of Kuwait’s foreign policy, stating that “Kuwaitis are ambivalent toward the US role in the area,” and even if the US presence is ‘not large,’ the US was “Kuwait’s second largest source of imports”. In the post-liberation era, the US-Kuwaiti relationship warmed considerably through a series of defence pacts, stationing about 13,500 US troops in Kuwait since 2011 (see Katzman 2005, 2018). It is therefore no coincidence that the American embassy, together with the British one, makes up two of the largest missions in Kuwait. US diplomatic personnel take interest not only in military affairs, but are also active in the promotion of human rights and democracy. As Middle East Specialist Katzman (2005: 6) notes, US diplomats “attend *diwaniyyas* and conferences to promote rule of law, civil society, women’s empowerment, labor rights, and democratization”. American and British diplomats are well-aware of the interactional benefits in visiting *diwaniyyas*, particularly in influencing and understanding public opinion. The practice of *diwaniyya* visiting, to US and British ambassadors, is a system, a habitus, of an ‘internalized, embodied disposition’ that enables opportunity structures, “without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends” (Reed-Danahay 2005: 46; Bourdieu 1984: 170). These visits by diplomats, American and other nationalities alike, do not necessarily entail a concrete objective; they can simply be friendly, social calls. In times of need, *diwaniyya* visits help foreign diplomats make more informed decisions, as was seen when then American Ambassador to Kuwait, Edward Gnehm, was advised to ‘hit the *diwaniyyas*,’ when he tried to make sense of public opinion on what eventually became the 1992-1993 enforcement of a ‘no fly’ zone over Southern Iraq (Al-Shamlan 2013). Chapter Five will take a closer look at the conduct, intentions, and activities of foreign diplomats during their *diwaniyya* visits.

⁵¹ See FO 371/162783, *US Policy in Persian Gulf*, 1962.

⁵² See also von Bismarck (2013), Chapter Six for the debate on Anglo-American cooperation in the region.

2.7 Socio-Political Mobilisation

Periods of socio-political mobilisation have transformed the nature of governance in Kuwait, while highlighting both the proactive and reactive nature of social groups. As Tétreault (2000: 60-62) puts it, social groups are able to use informal spaces such as the *diwaniyya*, which are crucial to political participation in Kuwait because of their ‘superior capacity’ and ‘transparency,’ allowing the strength of ‘citizen outrage’ to moderate regime behaviour. The *diwaniyya*, being situated within the confines of the home, is reassured of its protected status (as already mentioned in the Introduction). Articles 38 and 44 of the 1962 constitution have guaranteed the formal protection of the home and, by extension, the *diwaniyya* (Constitute 2018). The usage of the *diwaniyya* for wider mobilisation purposes needs to be traced back to pre-oil politics, specifically on the power balance between the Al-Sabah family and the mercantile elite (see Crystal 1990, Herb 2014). Commentators (Al-Asoussi 2014; Al-Nakib 2014; Al-Shamlan 2014) have described in a matter-of-fact manner how members of the ruling family continue the tradition of visiting the preserved merchant *diwaniyyas* on a regular basis. In May 2014, I attended the A’soussi *diwaniyya*, open to the public on Sunday evenings, and witnessed the visit of former Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah, who leaned over casually and told me how “news still travels fast from the *diwaniyyas* to the ruler’s office”. Herb (2014: 66-67, see also Yom 2011) adopts a path-dependent argument to explain how constitutionalism survived in Kuwait owing to the conditions in the period, specifically highlighting the councils set up by the ruler, and later the National Assembly, which he says “shaped the political life of Kuwait in ways that constrained the ruling family’s ability to return to absolutism”.

Yet, the earlier sections of this chapter, on the sea and the desert, have highlighted the great degree of openness of the port city, the tribal customs of the desert, and the social contract between the rulers and the ruled. These factors, together with the nature of governance in Kuwait before and during the time of the councils (in 1921 and 1938), also provide a strong case for a path-dependent agreement with an earlier point of departure, even if Herb (2014: 71) insists that “variation in the method by which ruling families came to power [in the Gulf] does little to explain Kuwaiti exceptionalism”. In 1918 a group of notables, led by a merchant named Hamad Al-Saqr, went to the ruler to request for the establishment of an advisory council to advise on the administration of the country (see Crystal 1990: 41; Said-Zahlan 1998: 33-35).⁵³

⁵³ See also IOR:R/15/5/180, *Political Agent to Hickinbotham*, Baghdad, 1921, pp. 7-12.

Among the clauses stated in the petition for the establishment of the 1921 Consultative Council was the wish to have a say in the appointment of the next ruler (after Sheikh Salim Al-Sabah), and this decision was to be submitted to the British government for approval (Al-Rumaihi 1987: 1). Even if the experience turned out to be a failure as the council was eventually dissolved, it represented “the beginning of constitutional development in Kuwait” (Al-Rumaihi 1987: 2, see also Al-Rashid 1978: 277-278). More relevant to this study is that the town notables convened in Nasser Al-Badr’s *diwaniyya* during this episode, in order to select the three potential candidates to Sheikh Salim (namely Sheikh Hamed Al-Mubarak, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber). The document recording the proceedings of this meeting remains framed in A’soussi *diwaniyya* today along Gulf Road.⁵⁴

In 1938-1939, merchants who remained disgruntled with Sheikh Ahmad, the eventual successor of Sheikh Salim, formed an organised movement that succeeded in “electing two prototypical assemblies that wrote Kuwait’s first constitution and passed progressive legislation” (Tétreault 2011: 75).⁵⁵ Yusif Al-Marzuq, a leading merchant who was involved in this *majlis* movement, offered his *diwaniyya* as a meeting place to elect a Legislative Assembly of fourteen, among the heads of 150 leading families.⁵⁶ It is by no coincidence that the families of some of these fourteen members still hold *diwaniyyas* today that are visited by many.⁵⁷ Such a proactive move on the part of the merchants was in response to Sheikh’s Ahmad increasing authoritarianism – the Political Agent “ranged him on the side of dictators”.⁵⁸ The selection of Sheikh Ahmad in 1921 by the merchants in the Badr *diwaniyya* was used as a clear reminder in a letter to the ruler himself, to which he was “most bland [and] agreed immediately in

⁵⁴ “Nominations for the Succession of Shaikh Salim Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah,” 23 February 1921, A’soussi Diwaniyya, Kuwait City.

⁵⁵ A draft of the constitution provided by the 1938 council can be found in the MEC Archives, DN4/2, Dickson’s Diary, July 1938, p. 57. See also IOR:R/15/5/205, *Translation of Declaration Concerning Kuwait Council*, 12 July 1938.

⁵⁶ Crystal (1990: 47-55) provides a very comprehensive account of the 1938 episode that left an indelible imprint on the politics of Kuwait. See also IOR:L/PS/12/3758: KIS, 16-30 June 1938; IOR:L/PS/12/3894A, *Coll 30/158 Kuwait: disturbances 1938*; and IOR:R/15/5/468, *File 45/23 I (D 140): Kuwait Reforms*. The last reference is also available at: https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001b9. An overview of the *majlis* movement is also found on: <https://www.qdl.qa/en/kuwait%E2%80%99s-majlis-movement-national-and-regional-developments-brought-focus>.

⁵⁷ The list of members on the 1938 *majlis* can be found in the MEC Archives, DN4/2, Dickson’s Diary, Sep/Oct 1938, p. 79. The members are: Shaikh Yousuf bin Issa, Mohammed bin Shaheen Al-Ghanim, Hamod Ad-Daood Al-Marzook, Sulaiman Al-Adsani, Mashari Al-Hasan, Masha’an Al-Khudhair, Sayed Ali As-Sayed Sulaiman, Abdulla Al-Hamud As-Saqur, Khalid bin Abdul-Latif Al-Hamod, Yousuf Al-Marzook, Yousuf bin Saleh Al-Humaidi, Abdul-Latif bin Muhammed Ath-Thunayan, Saleh bin Othman Ar-Rashid, Sultan bin Ibrahim Al-Kulaib.

⁵⁸ See IOR:R/15/5/205, Political Agent, de Gaury to Political Resident, Fowle, Kuwait, 13 June 1938.

principle” to the formation of the 1938 council.⁵⁹ On the 4th of July 1938, the notables and the ruling family assembled in the Sheikh’s *diwaniyya* for the “usual morning coffee-drinking, but with every intention to come to a definite conclusion before they left”. The 1938 council created problems for the Al-Sabah and attempted to reduce the “degree of privilege the family enjoyed,” but only lasted as far as it incurred the ire of the British when attempting to intrude in foreign affairs (Crystal 1990: 49-55).⁶⁰ This short-lived council may be an “assertion of authority by civil authority” as Tétreault (2011: 75) puts it, but as far as this study is concerned, it demonstrated the usefulness of the *diwaniyya* as a pre-political space that enabled public participation for arbitration and decision-making purposes.

Other periods of political importance to Kuwait also underscored the importance of the *diwaniyya* in being the bridge between the ruler and the ruled, and a means of self-organisation for Kuwaiti citizens when expectations were not met. Sheikh Ahmad’s successor, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem was the first Emir of Kuwait, and was far more open and tolerant than his predecessor (see the next section). His rule saw the inception of the National Assembly, which did not diminish the role of the *diwaniyya*. Rather, amidst a more open socio-political climate, the *diwaniyya* became a tool for the spread of new ideas, and mobilising the masses in times of crises. As the wave of Arab nationalism swept across Kuwait in the fifties and sixties, and when Cairo was seen as the ideal place for higher education by Kuwaitis (Al-Gharabally 2017), the domestic situation saw the emergence of reformists and nationalists alike. Under Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem’s more open reign, the Kuwait Oil Company President Southwell (1955) noted a more tolerant socio-political climate, with the ban on the publication of local newspaper lifted, in conjunction with the proliferation of clubs such as the Graduates Club and the National Cultural Club (NCC).⁶¹ As political parties were outlawed, it was not surprising that political activities were pursued under the banner of social clubs (Smith 1999: 70-71; Crystal 1990: 82). In particular, Ahmad Al-Khatib, who led the NCC, became a partisan of Arab nationalism and later a leading opposition figure; he was particularly active in campaigning for public freedom despite verbal threats by the ruling family (Bell 1956). Part of Al-Khatib’s campaigns included holding audiences in *diwaniyyas* throughout his political career. In his memoirs, he mentions how preparations for his election to the Constituent Assembly in 1962

⁵⁹ See in particular IOR:R/15/5/205, *Political Agent, de Gaury to Political Resident, Fowle*, Kuwait, 24-29 June 1938, and 6-12 July 1938.

⁶⁰ See the correspondence between the Political Agent and Political Resident, and, between the ruler and the Political Resident, from 5 October 1938 to 27 February 1939, in IOR:R/15/5/205-206.

⁶¹ Southwell (reprinted in Rush 1989, *Internal Affairs* 3) also mentioned in his notes dated 20 January 1958 that “the education system in Kuwait and the social clubs are completely Egyptian influenced”.

consisted of “visiting the *diwaniyas* of the families in the area,” which he admits to be the ideal method of garnering support (Al-Khatib 2007: 225). This trend of electoral campaigning via the *diwaniyyas* continues until today, as the *diwaniyya* lives up to its more affectionate name of a ‘mini parliament’ (see Photograph 2.9). The *diwaniyya*’s usefulness in harnessing the social networks present in Kuwait cannot be understated, as it provides a means for social movements to obtain a wider reach of the Kuwaiti population, particular in today’s suburbanised landscape.



Photograph 2.9 A campaign *diwaniyya* of Kuwaiti MP Mohammed Al-Sager in Kuwait City on July 13, 2012 (Source: Yasser Al-Zayyat/AFP/GettyImages)

In times of crises, Kuwaitis have rallied themselves in a more orderly fashion through the *diwaniyyas*. In particular, the dissolution of the National Assembly in the country’s political history has rattled its citizens more than elsewhere in the Gulf, considering the path-dependent argument of an entrenched culture of public participation. Yousef Al-Mubarak (2008) recorded the series of events in the 1989-90 Monday *Diwaniyya* movement that protested against the unconstitutional dissolution of the parliament in 1986. For seven weeks, *diwaniyya* gatherings were conducted on Monday evenings in the private *diwaniyya* of a different MP of the disused parliament. Although authorities had attempted to disrupt these gatherings, they were forced to respect the legal sanctity of the home. On the 8th of May 1990 Ahmad Al-Khatib’s *diwaniyya* was stormed by security forces, which led to his and twenty other former MPs’ arrests, but he was released five days later (Al-Naemi 2012). Where the administrative system is concerned, one will find these topics discussed in *diwaniyyas*, including the 2006 Orange Movement where activists sought to change the number of electoral constituencies, and

the 2012 demonstrations that prompted the change in the number of votes allocated to citizens. Parliamentary affairs aside, *diwaniyyas* have been increasingly used for a variety of objectives that sometimes spill over into foreign affairs. Recently, for example, Kuwaiti men was seen dropping banknotes into boxes at *diwaniyyas*, in a campaign to arm anti-government fighters in Syria, indicating how the circulation of ideas in *diwaniyyas* remain relevant today (Westall & Harby 2013). Episodes of mobilisation using the *diwaniyya* make salient two observations: (1) the path-dependent argument outlined by Herb (2014: 66-67) is supported by the *diwaniyya*'s ability to instil a mentality of public participation that "constrained the ruling family's ability to return to absolutism"; (2) oil may have tipped the ruler-merchants equation in favour of the former, but it also levelled the playing field across the national population – the *diwaniyya* can now be used by a wider social circle. Crystal (1990: 6) argues that oil revenues "weaken the links between state and society," but I argue that they equally empower new social groups that use the *diwaniyya* to great effect. The aforementioned mobilising efforts have shown to produce concrete changes.

2.8 Leading Personalities

In the southernmost area of Kuwait named Wafra, I was in the company of historians from Kuwait University who had decided to hold a gathering at one of the farm plots over the weekend. When approaching my research topic, one of the professors lamented on the limits of the *diwaniyya*. His complaints stemmed from an incident personal to him: during the electoral campaigning period, the police entered his *diwaniyya*, ordering him to remove the chairs placed outside his house as that space belonged to the public (and the state), resulting in a highly controversial argument (Chay, research notes 2017). Even though the practice and space of the *diwaniyya* have become socially-embedded over time, the extent to which *diwaniyyas* are allowed to thrive is contingent on the amount of liberal room they are allowed to operate. This is particularly evident when social venting is transformed into politicking, and where sensitive issues surface, the attention of the government is sucked into the *diwaniyya* scene. In 2013 a youth activist was sentenced to five years in jail for insulting the Emir on Twitter, who is described as 'immune and inviolable' in the constitution.⁶² While this misdeed occurred on a virtual platform, it is clear that the authority of the ruler is considered sacrosanct. By extension, the ruler's choice of dangling the carrot and wielding the stick also does determine the amount of freedom that the *diwaniyya* enjoys in politics. Brumberg (2002: 58)

⁶² See Reuters (2013) for a more elaborate reporting of the incident: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-kuwait-twitter/kuwaiti-gets-5-years-for-insulting-ruler-idUKBRE91207E20130203>

explains how liberalised autocracies akin to Kuwait endure because rulers “implicitly or explicitly allow some opposition forces certain kinds of social, political or ideological power – but things must never reach a point where the regime feels deterred from using force when it deems fit”. Indeed, the attitudes of Kuwaiti rulers, past and present, indicate how far they have gone to honour the social contract between the ruling family and the Kuwaiti people, and how much socio-political power the *diwaniyya* can possess.

In Section 2.2 one of the first rulers’ tradition of holding public audiences was mentioned, and his style of governance was described as ‘patriarchal’. Later in 1899 the usurpation of Sheikhship brought Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah to power, whose method of government was described as ‘personal and absolute,’ and “in the town he exacts absolute submission” and “the country is content with general loyalty and obedience” (Lorimer 1908c: 1074-1075). While this presupposes a form of social contract with a strong ruler in place, Mubarak’s political arrangements were also made with precaution, where “the heads of his departments are mostly slaves; his near relations are excluded from his counsels; even his sons wield no executive powers” (Lorimer 1908c: 1075).⁶³ Evidently, his policies saw political stability as a prerequisite for economic prosperity, which Tétreault (2011: 75) labels as ‘precocious economic neoconservatism’. Yet the absolute nature of Mubarak’s rule must be qualified, as Slot (2005: 421) cautions, explaining how his rule necessitated “extreme prudence in external affairs [which] made him internally more autocratic”.⁶⁴ Like his predecessors (and ancestors), Sheikh Mubarak honoured the social contract through his accessibility to the people, often sitting in public to address specific concerns – holding his own *diwaniyya* (see Photograph 2.10). Various other sources have confirmed this regular practice, as Raunkiaer (1912: 40-47) observed Mubarak’s presence in the bazaar each afternoon, while Mylrea (1951: 38) described his entrance into the bazaar, as he was driven through slowly through the street “in a beautiful Victorian carriage drawn by two horses [...] halting at the old coffee-shop (now, alas, demolished) for a formal mejlis”. As Slot (2005: 421) argues, Mubarak’s behaviour was “most untypical of real tyrants”. During his reign not only were *diwaniyyas* encouraged to allow for the exchange of news and information, but also for intellectual talk, festivals were cast into the public limelight as Kuwaitis would “stop working for the whole week of Eid, and

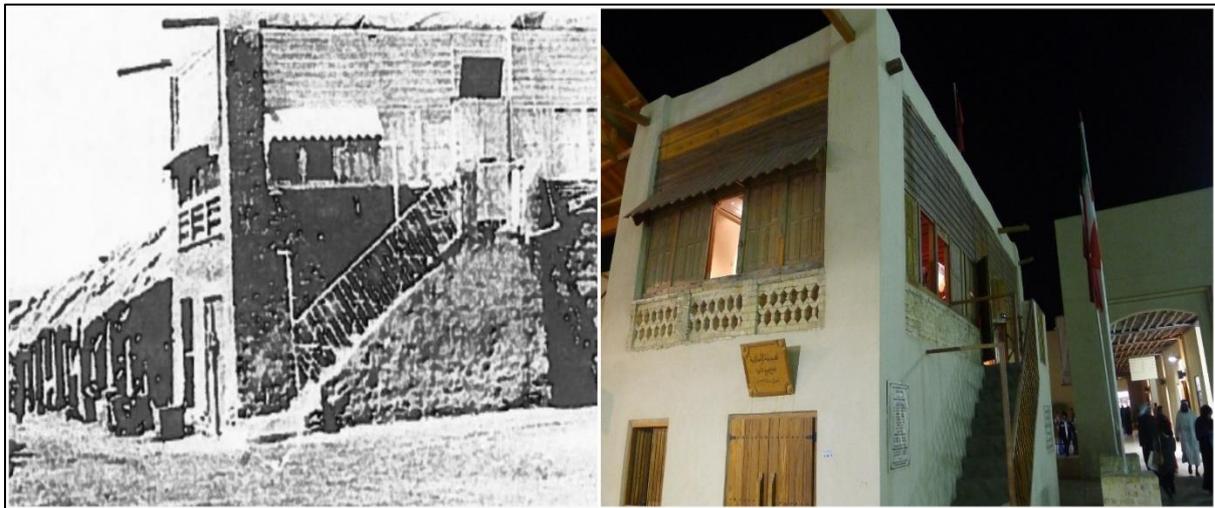
⁶³ As Mubarak approached his twilight years, he privately communicated with British official Cox (1915), requesting the British government “to farm from him or manage for him, now and in future, all sources of revenue, and simply pay him the income [as part of the Anglo-British agreement]”. The letter goes on to indicate the ruler’s prudence in order to avoid “a family scramble for the patrimony on his demise”.

⁶⁴ In Vol. 3 of *Political Diaries* (1908: 190), evidence is shown that Mubarak’s son Jabir took charge of finances and international business, due to the ruler’s frequent absences.

play war games all day” (Al-Sabah 2014: 100-101). While it is worth noting that the idea of the *diwaniyya* spans over a long period of time, it is equally important to understand that however strict governance was in Kuwait, the freedom of expression goes back a long way – and the *diwaniyya* exemplifies one mode of doing so. The *Kishk Al-Mubarak* (Mubarak’s office), still standing in the oldest *souk* (market) of Kuwait, serves as a constant reminder to Kuwaitis of Mubarak’s strict, yet open system of rule (see Photograph 2.11).⁶⁵



Photograph 2.10 Sheikh Mubarak holding his public *majlis* or *diwaniyya*, 1907-9 (Photograph by Lt-Commander A. N. Gouldsmith, National Maritime Museum, London)



Photograph 2.11 Mubarak’s office, then and now, in Kuwait’s oldest bazaar, Souk Mubarakiya (left: Alloughani (2008: 208); right: taken by author on 01/02/2013)

Arguably Sheikh Mubarak’s rule, among others, is the most documented in Kuwait’s historiography, by virtue of the Anglo-British agreement concluded during his term. Yet a

⁶⁵ His office is preserved until today, and also acts a mini heritage museum for interested visitors.

comparison of the nature of governance adopted by different rulers provides a good indication of the amount of freedom accorded to Kuwaiti citizens. The successors of Mubarak, first his eldest son Sheikh Jabir, then his second son Sheikh Salim, had very different personalities. As the British Political Agent Hamilton (1917) observed, the former was “way too easy going and the country close to Kuwait was gradually becoming unsafe,” whereas the latter “being a man of character and some constancy will be an improvement upon Jabir” despite his “straightlaced Mohammadan with Wahabi leanings”. Yet Salim’s reign was described by Mylrea (1951: 83) as ‘a troubled one,’ as his quarrels with Ibn Saud led to the Saudi blockade, which eventually led to internal dissent due to the loss of trade. The British Assistant Political Agent McCollum (1918, see also Loch 1918) noted how Kuwaitis were unhappy with how Salim managed the loss of trade, refusing to help his people and misrepresenting their case to the British:

The people dislike Salim personally. He is unfriendly, unsympathetic, and miserly, he will not listen to their petty troubles and never gives them private audiences which his father always did. [...] Salim told Hillal (a well-known anti-British merchant) to call the leading merchants together and tell them they should say in Salim’s maglis that they would only be content with free trade. Subsequently when in Salim’s maglis many of the merchants stated the terms under which [trading] passes were to be issued were certainly severe but nevertheless they were prepared to abide by them. Salim was very angry [...]. Later when some of the merchants approached him with a view to obtaining passes he refused to have anything to do with them [...]

The above episode indicates a time when the *diwaniyya* was perhaps less open than it should have been, even if Salim’s legacy remained intact following his victory at the Battle of Jahra.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, as successor to Sheikh Salim, was welcomed by the people onto the throne in 1921 and whose reign was marked by the establishment of two official councils (see Section 2.7). In his initial ruling years, Sheikh Ahmad had said he would “welcome his people every day if they had anything they wished to discuss with him, and that he on his part promised always to send for them when anything important arose” (see More 1921). As his reign progressed into the thirties, he faced some tumultuous years with not only demands from the mercantile elite to establish a council, but to allow for greater freedom of expression, to which he began to tighten his grip. In December 1926, a Kuwaiti named Abdul Hamid As-Sani was arrested by order of the Shaikh for “writing objectionable articles to the Arabic Press,” including a letter which “dealt with His Excellency’s love of sport and

consequent neglect in the administration of the town” (More 1926).⁶⁶ The British Political Agent Gerald de Gaury (1938: 117-119) wrote that “the dislike of the Ruler and his administration has crystallized [...] as a result of the flogging [...] of one al Barrak, guilty of anonymous wall writings, ante-autocratic propaganda and intrigues, by the Sheikh’s town lieutenant”. The eventual dissolution of the two councils (1921 and 1938) presumably marked the ruler’s stamp of authority.

In contrast, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim, the ruler after Sheikh Ahmad, has been more affectionately by Kuwaitis as ‘the people’s ruler,’ despite his quarrels with his predecessor (See More 1921: 78, 80). As president of the 1938 council and later Kuwait’s first Emir, Sheikh Abdullah later spearheaded the writing of the Kuwaiti constitution on 26 August 1961. Herb (2014: 96-99, 2016: 16) attributes Kuwaiti exceptionalism in part to the rule of Abdullah Salim. His liberal inclinations, meant that he “embraced the idea of [a parliament], not grudgingly but out of conviction”. The constitution was “not – like most Gulf constitutions – a grant by the ruler to his people,” rather, it had a separate Constituent Assembly elected by the people, which then worked together with the Emir to draft the constitution (Herb 2014: 97). The eventual constitution included a clause that allowed a majority of the elected deputies to remove confidence in a minister.⁶⁷ Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib (2007: 259), a revered opposition and nationalist figure, was part of the twenty Constituent Assembly members, and in his memoirs observed how, following the dissolution of the 1938 council, members of the ruling Al-Sabah family began to behave in a manner that did not fall short of princes who come into power ‘by the sword’. Admittedly, oil wealth in the hands of the ruling family did not help the case for more individual liberties. Yet it was Sheikh Abdullah’s promise of a constitution and the resultant parliament that revitalised the public sphere. Al-Khatib, in personal conversation, explained that *diwaniyyas* have been essential in pushing for reforms, as was his in pushing for a reformist agenda during the time of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim and those of his successors.⁶⁸

In the subsequent years, the various Emirs had to contend with the tussle between their grip on power and remaining true to civil liberties, particularly as the establishment of the

⁶⁶ See IOR:R/15/2/1499, *Diary Weekly Kuwait*, 1st to 15th December 1926. Also available at: http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100031125979.0x00005c?utm_source=testpdfdownload&utm_medium=pdf&utm_campaign=PDFdownload

⁶⁷ Articles 101 and 102 of the Constitution allows for the interrogation of a minister, which may lead to the casting of a vote of confidence at the National Assembly. See: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en

⁶⁸ This was during a visit on 23 September 2017 to the Tabriya newspaper office building, where Al-Khatib regularly receives guests.

National Assembly laid down the foundations of further public sphere activities – the *diwaniyya* being one of them. In this regard, politicking became borne out of the social functions of the *diwaniyya*. The third Emir, Sheikh Jabir (1977-2006), adopted an “over-centralised style of Government” which was accompanied by “measures of political repression,” and yet British officials indicated that he was “not in principle opposed to democracy” as he reopened the previously dissolved Assembly in 1981 (see Prentice 1982). His rule was marked by a second dissolution of the Assembly in 1986, which led to the Monday *diwaniyyas* movement (see also Tétreault 2000). While this study does not delve into the governance of each and every ruler of Kuwait, it takes us back to Brumberg’s point on the ‘trap’ of liberalised autocracies – that rulers understand the need to dangle the carrot. The *diwaniyyas* and its formal version – the councils and the National Assembly – are testament of the social contract and provides Kuwaiti citizens with openings for channelling grievances, even if their expectations are not always met.

2.9 Suburbanisation and City Planning

The discovery of oil in 1938 handed an enormous pot of newfound wealth to the ruling family, which, as we have seen in Section 2.7, resulted in a socio-political upheaval. Spatially this played out in city planning, as Kuwait, like the rest of the Gulf, metamorphosed into a global, modernist oil city. Thus far, it has been shown, despite the abundance of literature indicating how Kuwait was primarily a port city in the pre-oil period, that this distinction is a blurred one (particularly as more light is shed on its hinterland activities). As Murphey (1989: 228, italicised in original text) puts it, the ‘multiple nature’ of cities lies in providing “a *range* of goods and services to a wider area tributary to it”. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (1965: 23), during its 1961 mission to Kuwait, found that oil production in that year alone “was 7 per cent of the world output and nearly 30 per cent of the Middle East,” having increased exponentially since 1946 (see also Table 2.1). These new economic realities financially empowered the state, which intervened heavily in all aspects of urban planning, with the 1952 Master Plan being the centrepiece of such pervasive spatial planning (see Figure 2.8). Lefebvre (1996: 126-127, italicised in original text) labels such a spatial product of the state an ‘*oeuvre*’ that “unmakes and remakes itself under our very eyes”; and where ‘state bureaucratic rationalism’ is involved, “a feeling of monotony covers these diversities and prevails, whether housing, buildings, alleged urban centres, organized areas are concerned”. The immense changes engendered by the Master Plan was described by Gardiner (1983: 21-22) as follows:

And so with Kuwait, [...] the lengthy processes of industrial evolution are completely absent, and there is an extraordinary picture of one civilisation superimposing itself on another. Bedouin tents, mud-brick, the pearl trade, fishing boats, tracks; are superseded by oil, concrete, motorways, tankers, sophisticated structures – in a sequence of jumps that cover great distances in time like slides at a lecture depicting the story of Middle Eastern man from the Sumerian courtyard house of the third millennium to the apartment block or garden suburb of the mid to late twentieth century, all in the space of a mere thirty years.

In comparison to the “mixed-used nature of the pre-oil landscape,” Kuwaiti historian Al-Nakib (2014: 104) describes urban life after as “highly differentiated and separated out into discrete zones”; city development in the post-fifties era was “primarily those of the state and economic elite that shaped the urban centre”. The demolition of the old town led to the establishment of a road system planned within the old boundary wall (called the Green Belt) and the New Town was regarded as a suburb; the initial city plan followed a road plan consisting of three intersecting ring roads, applying the “familiar stamp of the New Town’s concentric system” (Gardiner 1983: 37). It is at this juncture that we restate Lefebvre’s (1996: 142) question on the ‘right to the city’: can the powers and institutions at the top dispense with this relay, this mediation, this city? Urban life as a socio-spatial production leads to two ‘obsessional themes’ in the Lefebvrian sense – integration and participation – both central themes in the subsequent chapters.

Oil Production and Revenues ^a

	Production (Million Metric Tons)	Estimated Oil Revenues ^b (Millions of Dollars)
1946	0.8	About 14
1947	2.2	
1948	6.4	
1949	12.4	
1950	17.3	11.2
1951	28.2	16.8
1952	37.6	56.0
1953	43.2	168.0
1954	48.1	194.2
1955	55.3	281.7
1956	55.8	293.7
1957	59.0	307.9
1958	72.4	356.0
1959	72.6	419.4
1960	85.6	445.8
1961	87.5	467.4
1962 ^c	98.7	484.4
1963 ^c	106.0	

^a Includes Kuwait's half-share of the Neutral Zone.

^b Prior to 1954, includes KOC payments only.

^c Fiscal years 1961/62 and 1962/63.

Source: Figures prior to 1957 are estimates based on production data. Figures for 1957-62 are Kuwait government data.

Table 2.1 Oil production and revenues in Kuwait (adapted from IBRD 1965: 23)

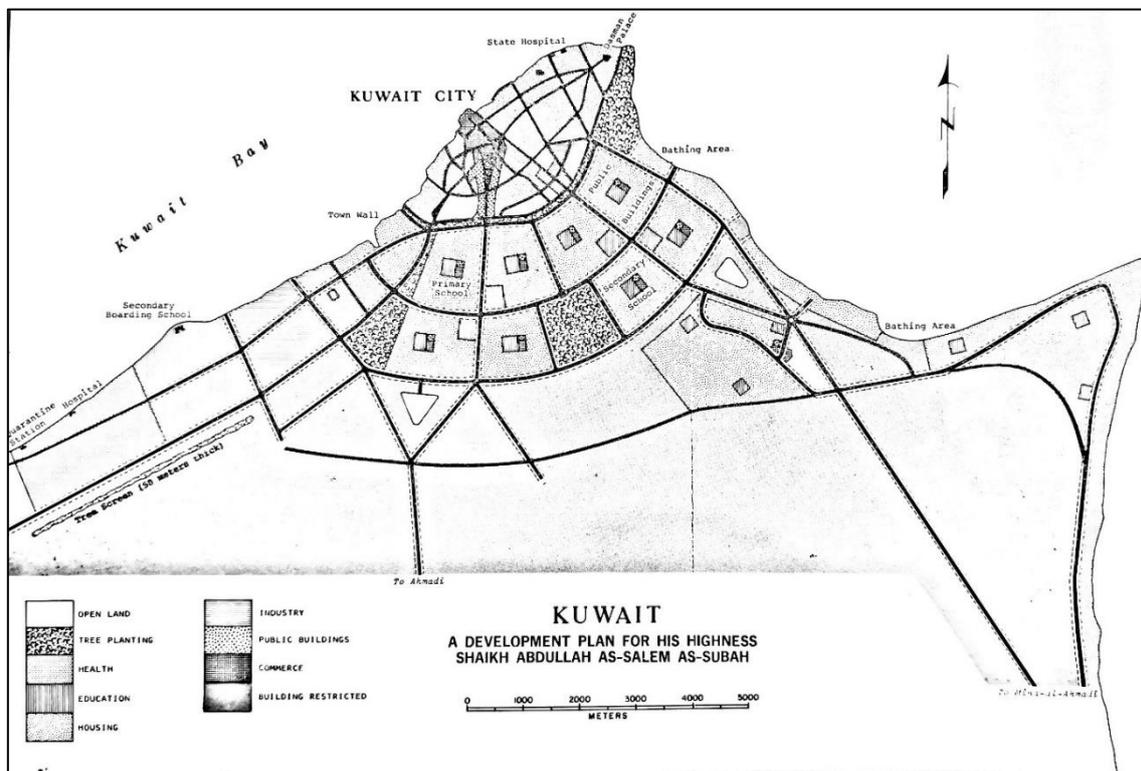


Figure 2.8 The 1952 Master Plan (taken from Shiber 1964: LX)

Here we refer to the seminal work – *Kuwait Transformed* – by Farah Al-Nakib (2016) which not only provides a decade-by-decade account of Kuwait’s urbanisation process, but also a deeper insight into the changes in the Kuwaiti way of life over time. Her observations of the spatial-behavioral ‘overlapping’ in a city are especially enlightening, as she treads through different pockets of the city, in order to understand how smaller built environment organically shape the attitudes of its inhabitants (Al-Nakib 2016: 71). What is useful to our discussion on *diwaniyyas* is the wider scheme for suburbanisation under the 1952 Master Plan, which reshaped housing patterns drastically, and, in turn had implications for the *diwaniyya*’s role (since this space was part of the courtyard house previously). She notes that new neighbourhoods were designed as “homogeneous residential areas, emphasizing detached single-family living on allocated plots”; the overall planning discourse contained “no expressions of the social values or norms these areas were expected to represent or promote” (Al-Nakib 2016: 122-123). As suburbs became enclaves that facilitate the distribution of services by the welfare state, they also drew social boundaries between different segments of the population, segregating non-Kuwaiti immigrants and formerly pastoral Bedouins from the rest of the Kuwaiti national population, while effecting a growing social distance between the townspeople and members of the ruling family (Al-Nakib 2016: 134-143).⁶⁹

These socio-economic inequalities resulting from state policies were compounded by the land acquisition scheme (LAP, *tathmin al-arady* in Arabic), whereby the state purchased land within the town wall and enabling the relocation of families into the suburbs (see Figure 2.9). Ghanim Alnajjar (1984: 121-124, see also Al-Nakib 2016: 103-104), whose doctoral thesis expertly dissects the LAP, shows how the scheme gave the ruling family “economic independence from the traditional merchant elite” by having the freedom to invest in stocks and real estate speculation, while also guaranteeing “the support of the most influential groups in society”. What this means in today’s context is that the *diwaniyyas* hosted by the most influential families of Kuwait tend to be situated in the neighbourhoods nearest to the old boundary wall (and some still within the wall). As Al-Nakib (2016: 137) indicates, the neighbourhood units bordered by the First Ring Road to the north and the Fourth Ring Road to the south were intended exclusively for Kuwaitis. It is no wonder that my *diwaniyya* exploits reaffirm the aforementioned locations of prominent family *diwaniyyas*: for instance, Shamiya (Al-Sager, Al-Marzouk families), Dasma (Al-Marafie family), Abdallah Al-Salem (Al-

⁶⁹ The only former townspeople who did not move from the old town to the new neighbourhoods were members of the ruling family (see Al-Nakib 2016: 136).

Ghunaim, Al-Gharabally, Al-Jarallah, Al-Nusf families), Daiya (Al-Ghanim, Al-Roumi families), Faiha (Al-Mojil family), Nuzha (Al-Babtain, Behbehani families), Qadsiya (Al-Khaled family), Mansouria (Qabazard family).⁷⁰

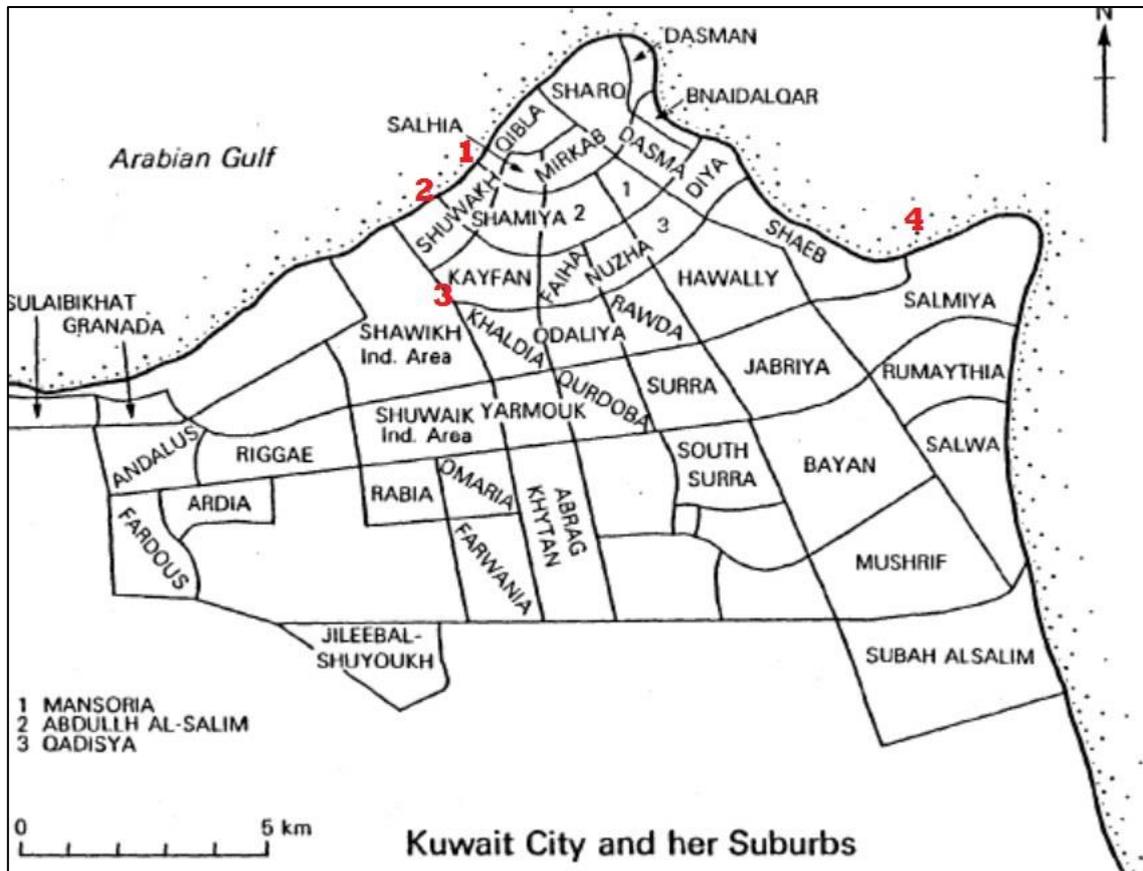


Figure 2.9 Map of Kuwait City and its suburbs, with the numbers in red indicating the ring roads (adapted from Alnajjar 1984: 141)

City planning, which was previously a communal responsibility shared between the *firjan* and the Municipality (from the 1930s), saw increasing levels of intervention by the ruling family (see also Chapter Two of Al-Nakib 2016). In a trade report by Political Agent Dickson (1933), the Municipality was described as having taken “great pains with the cleanliness of the streets, and public sanitation generally,” and oversaw the “electrification of the Town”. Yet the direction of the Municipality took a turn for the worse.⁷¹ By 1938, the British noted that the ruler took “little interest [...] in the Municipal administration” in which its administrator was the ruler’s cousin and son-in-law, and who had old and distinguished merchants as his ‘staunch

⁷⁰ This is not an exhaustive list of the prominent family *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait. Some families have split into key branches, each having a designated *diwaniyya*. Refer to the map in Figure 2.9 for a clearer idea of the exact locations.

⁷¹ See MECA DN3/8/1-13.

supporters'.⁷² Not only did the ruler fail to visit the newly constructed fish market in 1937, he was also observed to have “spent less and less time at work,” and more time in “the area of pavilions and places of amusement, where they play billiards”. That this period coincided with the advent of oil, meant that the Al-Sabah family also became “consumed with an extraordinary land hunger” that was reflected in the subsequent land reforms (see also Al-Khatib 2007: 33-34).⁷³ Crystal (1990: 46-47) equally identifies the Municipality’s mandate in “a variety of public health functions, and rudimentary planning,” highlighting how the tampering of such a mandate by the ruling family eventually led to the 1938 *Majlis* movement discussed in Section 2.7. In this manner, the spatial organisation of Kuwait town unmistakably reflected new socio-political realities. With the increasing power of the Al-Sabah and their corollary intervention in all avenues of public life, the *diwaniyya* became a viable medium for keeping such power in check, and even more so in the post-independence era, owing to its ability to “straddle the public-private divide”.

With suburbanisation, the *diwaniyya* came to play an even more important role in maintaining the social fabric of Kuwait. *Diwaniyya* visiting enabled Kuwaitis to recover their ‘right to their city’ by avoiding the passive acceptance of the drastic physical changes to the residential landscape, where many writings on the Gulf have pointed to the sense of powerlessness among local actors (Sassen 2005: 38; Elsheshtawy 2010: 135). Across the Gulf, urbanisation meant that the control of the roads was central the new engineering of urban space on the part of the government: while roads became part of modern facilities *par excellence*, they were antithetical to the seemingly messy layout of the pre-oil *firjan*, and the car, became the new private space for citizens (see also Fuccaro 2009: 198). From the Kuwaiti perspective, the *diwaniyya* is testament to the preservation of the previous communal spirit by remodelling itself physically in a newfound residential landscape (see Photograph 2.12). Oil wealth also made the *diwaniyya* more affordable to citizens, while the car becomes a means of transporting Kuwaitis from one *diwaniyya* to another, even enabling several *diwaniyya* visits on one evening, sometimes tens in a week. In a report published by Global Finance where each country’s GDP per capita is adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), Kuwait is ranked the sixth richest country in the world (Gregson 2017). It is no wonder that when asked about his fondest memory of a *diwaniyya* visit, a senior member of the Misbah family, Wajdi Al-Misbah (2016), hesitated

⁷² See IOR:R/15/5/205, *Administration of Kuwait*, unsigned, 8 July 1938.

⁷³ See IOR:R/5/15/194, Political Resident, Bushehr to Secretary to Government of India, Simla, 22 April 1941.

and replied instead that it was an ‘amazing day’ when the construction of his standalone family *diwaniyya* was finally completed.



Photograph 2.12 Fahad Al-Salem Street, Kuwait, midway through urbanisation in 1961 (Source: Aljamea 2010)⁷⁴

2.10 The Iraqi Occupation: Liberation and Liberalisation

In August 1990, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait threatened to upheave the longstanding social governance by the Al-Sabah family. Given that the entire ruling family fled the country, Kuwaitis who remained were aggrieved by this act, evident by the resistance groups’ slogan “shame on whoever deserts his home” (Sassoon & Walter 2017: 611). The historical pretext for the occupation of Kuwait may be traced back to the time of the Ottoman Empire, when Kuwait’s autonomous status was ensured by British protection – an act deemed ‘artificial’ by later Iraqi leaders when staking their claims on Kuwait (Lauterpacht et al. 1991: 78-80; Sluglett 2002).⁷⁵ Crucially, the invasion has been widely accepted in academic discourse as a catalyst promoting liberal values in Kuwait thereafter, which in turn entrenched the role of the country’s National Assembly. Mary Ann Tétreault (2000: 76-77) dedicates an entire chapter in her book to explain how the invasion “effected a shift in the balance of power between pro- and anti-democratization forces in Kuwait,” owing to three reasons: (1) regime failure as a result of placing executive powers in the hands of a ‘closed group’; (2) the unity of Kuwaitis outside the

⁷⁴ Photo found on: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/aljamea/4866922768>

⁷⁵ Further sources that elaborate on Iraqi claims to Kuwait include Bahbah (1992), Alazemi (2013), and material from the Durham University Middle East Documentation Unit, such as Dann (1990) and Abideen (1995).

country helped mobilise support for the liberation campaign and “pry concessions from the ruling family” in terms of post-liberation governance; (3) the invasion altered the psychology of Kuwaitis who embraced the experience of the occupation, which in turn gave them clearer visions of freedom and agency. Herb (2016: 102-103) takes these arguments further to attribute Kuwait’s potent parliament in part to the invasion which “forced the ruling family to demonstrate to the powers that protected it, and to international public opinion, that it enjoyed the support of Kuwaiti citizens and that the citizens fully supported the survival of Kuwait as a sovereign state”. The result was the prevalence of a tradition that favoured broad political participation, which in turn meant upholding the social contract between the ruler and the ruled.

In a similar vein, the *diwaniyya* was used as a vehicle to mobilise local support, this time not against the incumbent government, but against an external threat to the very existence of Kuwait. As a ‘counter-space,’ it is interesting to note the *diwaniyya*’s role in promoting liberal values before the invasion (during the Monday *diwaniyyas* movement), during the occupation (as a form of resistance), and after liberation (to restore the constitution and the National Assembly). The type of opposition (internal and external) notwithstanding, the *diwaniyya* watches over that Foucauldian governmentality in times of crises. In particular, the people-led resistance during the occupation presented the *diwaniyya* two channels of mobilising support – inside and outside of Kuwait. Within Kuwait, the *diwaniyya*’s malleability transformed the space into one of necessity that provided a range of essential functions that served Kuwaitis whose ruling family was in exile, even if it had to operate clandestinely. In an interview with Dr Yagoub Al-Kandari (2016), a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Kuwait University, he explains how the *diwaniyya*’s functions also included the distribution of money and, in certain cases, a base for the neighbourhood night watch system. Such self-help structures, reminiscent of the pre-oil *firjan*, ran in tandem with the cooperative societies that helped distribute foodstuffs, and with the merchant families that provided resources to “carry out subversive actions” (see also Tétreault 2000: 88).⁷⁶ Sheikh Sabah Naser Al-Saud Al-Sabah (cited in Al-Damkhi 1992: 108-110), formerly the Assistant Under-Secretary of Defence for military engineering installations, recalled how he was constantly on the move during the occupation: “I moved house altogether fourteen times. All Kuwaiti homes were open to me and I moved at will. I carried an incredible range of papers, driving licences, civil I.D., passports and nationality cards”. Helping to orchestrate the

⁷⁶ See Documents No. 41, 42 and 43 (pp. 148-150) in *Kuwait Resistance As Revealed By Iraqi Documents* by the Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait (1994).

resistance, Sheikh Sabah said that the shadow administration was managed between three sources: the government-in-exile (in Ta'if) and internal intelligence that was further divided into Iraqi personnel, and officers of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The space of the *diwaniyya*, albeit acting in a constrained manner, was equally responsible for the circulation of information. The Mojil family *diwaniyya* is one such example, as its owner Fahed Al-Mojil revealed to me how his *diwaniyya* had a concealed satellite dish that enabled communications with Jeddah during the occupation (see Photograph 2.13). During this difficult period, this *diwaniyya* also distributed food and medicine to Kuwaitis living in the area.



Photograph 2.13 The Mojil *diwaniyya* in Faiha (taken by author on 04/10/2017)

Dr Ali Al-Damkhi (1992: 11), who fought in the siege of the Jiwan Camp during the invasion, remarks how debates over the probability of invasion dominated the Kuwaiti *diwaniyas* two weeks before the Iraqi invasion. During the occupation, this fervour of Kuwaitis was demonstrated especially outside of Kuwait, not only as a plea for international support, but also as a demonstration of national solidarity. The Kuwaiti capacity for self-government during this period led to the proliferation of numerous lobbying groups, and the *diwaniyya* concept presented itself as a viable space for publicity and organisation. The government-in-exile financed two of these groups, notably the Washington-based Citizens for a Free Kuwait (CFK), and the London-based Free Kuwait Association (FKA) (see Tétreault 2000: 84). Another London-based group, the all-volunteer Free Kuwait Campaign (FKA) organised activities

aimed at the British public and Kuwaitis living in the UK.⁷⁷ Part of this campaign included the formation of the Kuwait People's Committee (KPC), which met daily in a *diwaniyya* on Dorset Square for exchanging news and discussing the crisis (see Photograph 2.14). Another group known as the Kuwaiti High Committee (KHC) rented a building on George Street, using one room as a *diwaniyya* (see Photograph 2.15). These groups invited speakers to share their thoughts on the occupation, ranging from members of the ruling family to victims who had managed to escape from Kuwait. Dr Adel Essa Al-Yousifi, a Kuwaiti businessman and photography-enthusiast, managed to capture images of these *diwaniyyas* in an effort to put together a documentary of these campaign efforts, and even attended a *diwaniyya* in Dubai held by Kuwaitis who mobilised to protest against the Iraqi occupation (see Photograph 2.16).⁷⁸ The sudden proliferation of these acronyms that represented different lobbying groups, each with their own designated *diwaniyya* outside of Kuwait, demonstrated how the *diwaniyya* concept transcended local boundaries, and yet, remained uniquely Kuwaiti. Commentators (Al-Shamlan 2013, Al-Khatib 2017) have gone as far as suggesting that the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya* concept was picked up by citizens of other Gulf states following the Iraqi occupation, by virtue of the publicity accorded to *diwaniyyas* during the ordeal.



Photograph 2.14 The KPC *diwaniyya* held at Dorset Square, London (taken on 25/11/1990 by Adel Al-Yousifi)

⁷⁷ Al-Yousifi (2012) captured the activities of the FKPC in prose and photos at: <http://freekuwait.org.kw>

⁷⁸ An interview with Dr Adel Al-Yousifi was conducted by Shaikh (2014), see: http://www.timeskuwait.com/Times_Adel-Al-Yousifi--A-picture-is-worth-a-thousand-words



Photograph 2.15 Kuwaitis listening to news broadcasts in the KHC *diwaniyya* at George Street, London (taken on 26/02/1991 by Adel Al-Yousifi)



Photograph 2.16 Kuwaitis gather in a *diwaniyya* in Dubai to protest against the Iraqi occupation (taken on 14/12/1990 by Adel Al-Yousifi)

Following the liberation of Kuwait in February 1991, the *diwaniyya* became the antecedent to the National Assembly that was restored later in late 1992, as the ruling family attempted to reorganise themselves in face of disgruntled Kuwaitis who were extremely vocal about the resumption of parliamentary life. Kuwaiti activism displayed throughout the occupation in *diwaniyyas* resulted in what Tétreault (2000: 87-100) calls the ‘transformation of consciousness,’ as they were hardened by the experience and “less intimidated by their government than they were in the past”. An article in the *New York Times* describes how then Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Sabah’s *diwaniyya* was used for administrative functions in the

immediate post-occupation days, but it is the description of the mounting criticism against the Al-Sabah that highlighted how *diwaniyyas* persisted as counter-spaces against autocracy:

Indeed the talk of the other diwaniyas is a meeting that Prince Saad is said to have held a few days ago with 40 important Kuwaitis, including representatives of major families and clans, to ask for their support.

While such support might once have been unquestioning, this time 39 of the men present bluntly refused, the story goes, saying they would back the Government only if the Crown Prince set a firm date for elections to a new Parliament.

At a diwaniya of Anwar Al-Sultan's prominent merchant family the other night, the discussion centered on criticism of the ruling family. "They want to rule as they did before," Mr. Sultan said. "They had same manner, the same mentality as before." (Kifner 1991)

The amount of pressure placed on the ruling family, generated by the *diwaniyya* meetings after liberation of Kuwait, culminated in the inevitable return to parliamentary life. It highlighted how a 'continuous tradition' aged '300 years old,' in the words of former minister Dr Ali Al-Shamlan, revived political vibrancy and manifested the social contract in Kuwaiti governance.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has underscored the malleability of the *diwaniyya* as both space and practice; its social qualities have proved to be crucial in explaining its persistence as a Kuwaiti custom. Contrary to popular contemporary belief about the political potential of the *diwaniyya*, its historical trajectory is far from simple, imbued with elements of the desert and the sea, on top of a more plausible, religious bygone. In times of crises the *diwaniyya*'s social functions have been shown to extend into the political realm, whether to prevent an uneasy balance between the ruling family and the citizens, or to safeguard the sovereignty of the country. Examining the *diwaniyya*'s use in different episodes of Kuwaiti history discounts the rigid pre-oil and post-oil historical dichotomy, which oversimplifies the *diwaniyya*'s and Kuwait's rich past. Freeth and Winstone (1972: 193-218) argue that a comparison between the economics of pre- and post-oil Kuwait is meaningless, rather, what is more important is that "few nations can in the nature of things have jumped the wide gulf which separates hereditary tribal rule from universal suffrage with as much alacrity".

The *diwaniyya*, as first and foremost as a microcosm of Kuwaiti society, allows us to both zoom into the behavioural patterns of Kuwaitis, and zoom out onto to the wider dynamics in social, political and economic dimensions. In this manner, the process-oriented method

discussed in the last chapter has been useful in demonstrating how the relevance of the *diwaniyya*'s functions varies across time, via different forms of historical documentation. In the nineteenth century, for example, the *diwaniyya* could be said to be permeated with more desert traditions owing to the rulers' tribal affiliations and the importance of caravan trade, whereas the economic boom in the pearling industry pushed the *diwaniyya* towards the seafront and to the outside world, particularly after Sheikh Mubarak's had secured British protection.⁷⁹

Salamé (1994: 101) describes Kuwaiti governance as alternating between models of 'tribal authoritarianism' and 'oligarchic republicanism':

Constitutionalism, free elections, the preponderant weight of the chamber of the chamber and industry, a free press, are the demands of the merchant families, and they are sometimes granted. On the other hand, suspension of the constitution, dissolution of the assembly 'because it threatens national unity', appointment rather than election of representatives, the retention of key posts by the members of the Sabah family, a press muzzled 'because it reflects on national security', are the current practices of the Sabahs when they can manage to impose their will.

This chapter, like the excerpt, has reflected the tussle between rulers and merchants across different periods, with the *diwaniyya* being the medium for mobilisation in the public sphere. As the next chapter will show, governance in a familial style with the Sabahs as the patriarchs, means that the other 'members' of this wider family can contest the rule of the 'heads'. Here again, *diwaniyyas* act as the perfect alternative space for contestation. It is equally, if not more important, to show how within the individual families the *diwaniyya* shapes the attitudes of Kuwaitis, as will be the additional aim of the next chapter. The structural transformation of Kuwaiti society with the advent of oil, much alike the European societies in the seventeenth century (see Section 1.5), reinforces the *diwaniyya* as an 'in-between' space acting between an increasingly pervasive state, and the voice of the people – reminiscent of the Habermasian public sphere.

The embedding of ideas does not come as a new phenomenon to Kuwaitis as far as the discussion on *diwaniyyas* go. As this chapter has shown, maritime trading has taken the *diwaniyya* concept across the seas; the Iraqi occupation made the *diwaniyya* a space of resistance and campaigning; and foreign diplomats have learnt the *diwaniyya* etiquette. This is

⁷⁹ Interestingly in Slot's (2005: 1) introductory chapter, Sheikh Mubarak described himself as "just an Arab sitting on the edge of the desert"; this self-portrayal is telling as Mubarak was caught not only between the Ottoman Empire and the British, but also "between the desert and the sea".

what distinguishes Kuwait from its Gulf neighbours: an informal mode of public participation built on a family setting, imbued with a spirit of cohesiveness and a process of regular feedback. Such is the ‘DNA of Kuwaitis’ that takes a Kuwaiti like Abdulaziz Al-Sager, a former Speaker of the National Assembly, to set up *diwaniyyas* in London (Al-Shamlan 2013). The transnational connections are multiplied from the social capital accumulated through an ideational structure as simple as the *diwaniyya*. Thus far, the social-spatial connection has also been clear – that a smaller built environment akin to the *diwaniyya* does reflect the realities of its time. As Al-Nakib (2016: 89) insists, oil affluence might have removed the sense of need that created ‘social relatedness,’ particularly in the free-flowing, communal life of the port city, but it has also simultaneously opened up new avenues whereby people could more “easily conceive of their social relatedness in terms of their similarity rather than their need for each other”. Social relatedness negotiated in aspects of similarity, as the coming chapters will show, makes Kuwaiti identity stronger than ever, while inadvertently revealing new instances of differences.

3

The *Diwaniyya* in a Family of Families

At one point in the 1940s, my father Homoud Bourisly, and my uncle, Hamad Bourisly, used to take me with them to these evening *dewaniyahs* for a cup of coffee or tea and I would listen to them chatting about freight transport or pearl diving and trading.

Khaled H. Bourisly, *Shipmasters of Kuwait*

3.1 Prelude: Organising the Family

In the midst of our interview, Sheikh Muhammad Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of Kuwait, stood up in a youthful fervour, with wizened eyes twinkling as he made his way behind his office desk. His eyes continued to illuminate as he gesticulated with a ruler. Pointing at the two-metre long map framed on the wall, he then swished the ruler towards the window glass panels which overlooked the Kuwait City skyline. In an earnest tone, he explained how the map behind his desk, detailed and numbered, reflects Kuwait of 1952, separating the quarters nearest to the sea, with Jibla to the west, Sharq to the east, and Al-Wasat ('the middle') being the point of division where the Seif Palace is located. Brandishing the ruler excitedly, he continued to list the families of Jibla and Sharq areas, with the former quarter being home to the mercantile elite (the Al-Ghanim, Al-Sager, Al-Khorafie, Al-Bahar), and the latter boasting the *diwaniyyas* of the Al-Shamlan, Al-A'soussi, Al-Nusf and Al-Mulla families (to name a few), whose members were 'primarily sea captains'. A port city of old, as unravelled in the previous chapter, Kuwait followed an 'inner logic' based on trading and pearling:

Jibla, on the one hand, developed into the hub of the urban oligarchy [...] who controlled Kuwait's deep-sea carrying trade. Though as shipowners they were intrinsically dependent on the town's maritime identity as a port, these families [...] were traders whose businesses were closely connected to the other ports around the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Sharq's inhabitants, on the other hand, were more directly dependent on the sea for their livelihood. [...] The majority of the inhabitants of this larger quarter were directly engaged in seafaring, including *nowakhada*, shipbuilders, sailors, and pearl divers. In other words, whereas Jibla was the mercantile quarter, Sharq was the maritime quarter. (Al-Nakib 2016: 55)

Not only did the *diwaniyyas* along the seafront serve as observation decks for Kuwaiti families with stakes in maritime trade, but each family, bound to the sea by virtue of a specific

profession, still met in the *diwaniyyas* of their quarter for both social and economic reasons. The social contract, established between the ruling family and the Kuwaiti people, is a reflection of both equality and hierarchy by choice. In a cable provided by the Al-Ghannam family,⁸⁰ the social dynamics generated in a *diwaniyya* are explained as “a unique system in which the poor which is seated next to the rich, and conservative politics with modern opinions without ranks, except the aged individuals”; dialogues held in *diwaniyyas* are “characterised by liberty and equality”. The stories by *diwaniyya* owners confirm this intriguing blend of elements: the senior members of the Al-Mulla family, for instance, recounted during my visit that the current ruling sheikhs of the Al-Sabah used to spend their childhood in the Al-Mulla *diwaniyya* frolicking with their fathers and uncles. It is then of no surprise that the Al-Sabah sheikhs in their adulthood continue to uphold the tradition of visiting the people in their *diwaniyyas*. On Sunday evenings in particular, the familiar sight of escort vehicles with their blue and red flashing lights parked outside the *diwaniyyas* along Gulf Road (the reclaimed seafront), are a firm indication of a prominent Sheikh’s presence. The accessibility to the rulers is often repaid by the sheikhs’ proactive approach in visiting *diwaniyyas*; the tradition is a long one as Chapter Two has historicised. While the legendary Sheikh Mubarak the Great held his audience at the marketplace, the Emirs in the post-independence era would pay courtesy calls at the *diwaniyyas* en route to work (Al-Shamlan 2013, 2014). These *diwaniyyas* stretched from the Dasman Palace (the ruler’s residence) to the Seif Palace (the ruler’s office). In this manner, the core aspect of habitus, which stipulates the sustenance of a “system of circular relations which united structures and practices,” is reflective of the *diwaniyya*’s role in juggling the vertical and horizontal aspects of Kuwaiti society (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: 203). Rather than equating habitus with the physical structure of the *diwaniyya*, it would be more appropriate to understand habitus in the *diwaniyya* as patterns of conduct produced and reproduced over time – an ‘internalized, embodied disposition’ encouraged by all the echelons of society (see Reed-Danahay 2005: 46).

In the same interview with Sheikh Muhammad (2016), he calls the *diwaniyya* an ‘organising agent’ in a society where the rulers “have not seized power through the sword or [by] divine intervention”. His account of the *diwaniyya*’s intermediary role sheds further light on the family’s importance:

⁸⁰ A print copy of the cable was provided at the Ghannam *diwaniyya* when I visited during Ramadhan 2018. See Appendix for the full version.

Each society has to organise itself around some kind of symbol, and they chose Sabah the First, he was the elder, the wisest supposedly [...] and it follows from there that this is the responsibility of this family to provide justice, law, and order. [...] The rest, the organising agents, the society, are not the responsibility of the Al-Sabah. It's the responsibility of the merchant families, the religious families. So for that reason, from the outset, *diwaniyyas* were an integral part of the ruling structure of Kuwait. It was not something that just happened as a result of modernity, or the ability to have a *diwaniyya*. [...]

The Emir and his court dispenses justice [...] and we have, equally, the other courts of the merchants, organising the economic structure and economic life, and dispensing their economic progress. And you have the third type of courts, the religious, and they have to give their blessings. [...] For that reason, yes, you would see leaders pay regular visits to *diwaniyyas* as an indispensable part [...] of the ruling apparatus.

The above explanatory note is enlightening on several folds. Firstly, the division of labour in Kuwaiti society is imbued in the 'ruling apparatus'; from the founding of Kuwait town, the Al-Sabah's political predominance was balanced by the varying roles and responsibilities of his subjects – and these subjects were, and still are, grouped in families (See also Section 2.2). Secondly, even if the ruler-merchant equation was tipped with the Al-Sabah's acquisition of oil wealth, the merchant families still retain their monopoly over business, and the maintenance of this oligarchic status quo will be explored in greater detail (See Longva 2013: 129; Salamé 1994). Equally fascinating is the emergence of a new middle class as the financially empowered state devised a welfare system for its citizens, and how the ruling family and mercantile elite accommodate the rise to prominence of these business families. Thirdly, the social and political pre-eminence of the Al-Sabah ruling family is one of the 'first among equals'. At the highest social level, the Emir is also the father of his people, an affectionate term made known to Kuwaiti children (Abdulmoati 2003: 19-20). The British official Gallagher (1961) noted how Kuwait's administration demonstrated 'continuity with tradition' and that the Al-Sabah seemed "more set than ever on running Kuwait 'as a family'". Finally, the above statements must be supported by observations in the various family *diwaniyyas*. Minute details in *diwaniyyas* have proved to be revealing of: (a) each family's status and heritage; (b) how notions of hierarchy and equality play out at both the wider societal level, all the way down to the nuclear family; (c) the mediating and cohesive functions of the *diwaniyya*, again, between and within families.

The last chapter traced the *diwaniyya* in Kuwaiti historiography, showing how this interlinked space and practice has had a constant presence throughout different time periods.

An even more consistent theme is the family. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to build a definition of the *diwaniyya*, around which the overall research objective of this study is fulfilled – that is, the primacy of the *diwaniyya* as a social institution – and the family being the decisive element of this definition.

3.2 The Role of the *Diwaniyya* in Mechanising ‘Organic Solidarity’

From a wider purview of the family, the Durkheimian concept of solidarity is useful to ground the discussion on social unity. Durkheim (cited in Pope & Johnson: 681, see also Durkheim 1933: 105-109) postulates a mutually reinforcing set of relations between the individual and society, in particular, the individual’s conscience is dual in nature: it is ‘personal and distinct,’ but also, common to a group in its entirety. In his view, social bonds vary accordingly to the type of society and to the modes of solidarity; in other words, solidarity is a form of sociability that designates the relationship of the structure and functioning of society (which includes social organisation and the system of values) (Muller 1994: 78-79). To this end, Durkheim produces a dichotomy of solidarity-types: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity refers to small, segmentally differentiated social groupings, in which a strong collective conscience creates solidarity out of similarities between members, and where laws impose uniform beliefs and practices upon individuals (see Merton 1994: 18; Muller 1994: 79). Archaic or ‘primitive’ societies are used as indexes for mechanical solidarity: Durkheim (1933: 179) uses the example of tribal clans of the Hebrew people “simply juxtaposed so as to form a linear people,” where social life is made up of “exclusively common beliefs and common practices”. On the other hand, modern, urban societies, according to Durkheim (1933: 173), represent an advancement in the scale of social evolution, where social links which “result from likeness progressively slacken,” paving the way for a different form of social organisation – organic solidarity – what he calls the “principal bond of social aggregates of higher types”. Here the division of labour in organic solidarity is explained as:

Constituted, not by a repetition of similar, homogeneous segments, but by a system of different organs each of which has a special role, and which are themselves formed of differentiated parts. Not only are social elements not of the same nature, but they are not arranged in the same manner. They are not juxtaposed linearly as the rings of an earthworm, nor entwined one with another, but *co-ordinated and subordinated one to another around the same central organ* which exercises a moderating action over the rest of the organism. (Durkheim 1933: 181, emphasis added)

Associating the city with organic solidarity, Durkheim (1933: 182) argues that the ‘occupational milieu’ becomes the determinant of the social grouping, rather than the ‘natal milieu’ He specifically argues that the occupational environment “does not coincide with the territorial environment any more than it does with the familial environment,” indicating a rupture in kinship relations (Durkheim 189-190). The basis of solidarity in modern societies is thus inherently unstable since it is founded on “self-interested relations of exchange” over the ‘morality’ in mechanical solidarity (Pope & Johnson 1983: 683).

The logical, ensuing question then falls upon the application of the aforementioned concepts of solidarity on urban Kuwaiti society and the *diwaniyya*. At first glance, the hasty response would be to pick the ‘organic’ label, based on Kuwait’s historical trajectory (from the last chapter), and the conspicuous division of labour inherited from the pre-oil maritime commerce. The Kuwaiti academic, Dr Hesham Al-Awadhi (2013), calls the making of Kuwaiti society ‘a skeleton’ when asked about the ruling family’s selection of *diwaniyyas* to visit. Yet, empirical evidence has proved that it is not a simple case of picking one ideal-type. As mentioned earlier, the *diwaniyya* possesses the ability to produce an environment that equalises the playing field, if not dialogue platform, for its attendees, to the extent that one may speak to a sheikh or a foreign ambassador in the most candid of manners. The very presence of, and accessibility to, these prominent and public personalities, are testament to an underlying form of mechanical solidarity that subjects *diwaniyya* attendees to a common, sacred value – the freedom of speech.

There is, however, a paradox between the freedom of expression allowed in *diwaniyyas* and the outcomes it generates. While the intended outcome is to play host to a diverse audience, there is a tendency, over time, towards the congruence of views in the *diwaniyya*. As a result, the element of equality (in expression) that mechanical solidarity introduces, can also make way to segmentally differentiated social groupings. As Dr Hesham admits later when probed, the extravagance presented in the design and at times, the size of the *diwaniyya*, reflects the owner’s (or the family’s) status, attracting an audience of the corresponding status. As one critique of Durkheim’s organic solidarity states, the beliefs which define and integrate a given group may bring it into conflict with other groups, resulting in social alienation (Pope & Johnson 1983: 683). Complementarity in organic solidarity is called into question, and in Kuwait’s case, cohesion in ‘the family’ requires a critical eye, particularly with the recent assertion of tribal identities, and competing social groups eager to match the traditional status of the mercantile elite. Issues of gender and nationality are also drawn into the discussion. The

Kuwaiti historian Farah Al-Nakib (2016: 89) remarks in her book, *Kuwait Transformed*, that the advent of oil removed the ‘sense of need’ and replaced it with a ‘social relatedness’ in terms of similarity. This grand debate on solidarity, which encompasses inclusionary and exclusionary relations, will play out over the course of this chapter and the next.

Reframing the study of Kuwaiti society through the lenses of the smaller *diwaniyya* environment unveils the complexity of solidarity in social relations. Spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, those which make up the Lefebvrian conceptual triad highlighted in the Introduction of this study, uncover an ‘order’ of relations exemplified by behavioural patterns. As Turner (1985: 154-156) reaffirms, even the practical, mundane activities of members of sociocultural groups are ‘reflexive’ at the common sense level; what is important is not formal rules but the procedures by which members demonstrate that activities (such as *diwaniyya* visiting) are in accordance with the rule and therefore intelligible. These microsociological observations ultimately come full circle with the family as the main orchestrator. In order to provide greater perspective of these findings, this chapter will revisit relevant concepts detailed in Chapter One: Bourdieu’s capital and habitus, the Habermasian public sphere, and normative institutionalism.

3.3 Nuclear versus Extended Families: Change and Continuity

The rapid urbanisation in Kuwait that occurred as an execution of the 1952 Master Plan was documented by the Palestinian city planner Saba Shiber (1964: 75), who remarked the ‘mono-metropolization’ of Kuwait: unlike the balance found in the old city, “space, cars, villas, highways and large buildings replaced the intimate vista, the courtyard, the domain of man, the human scale”. Old Kuwait was characterised by houses that evolved organically out of the compulsions of hardship and the realities of maritime trade as Chapter Two has shown, whereas the move into the suburbs was a testament of a new way of life. The idea of *Al-Nahda* (the awakening) was the ideological construct driving the development process, wherein traditional architectural styles were abandoned in favour of ‘westernized’ modes of residential living (Al-Jassar 2009: 131; Al-Nakib 2013: 8, 2016: 132). Once again the spatial transformations matched the social changes in Kuwait. Self-sufficiency, and by extension, individuality, guided subsequent developmental changes. On a broader level, Kuwait adopted the concept of the neighbourhood-unit in planning, as described in the British official Reilly’s memorandum (1954, see also Shiber 1964: 219-224) on the development of Kuwait:

It was originally intended that 10,000 [houses] should be built over the first 5 years of the Development Programme. [...] Nine residential areas were planned each of about 1,000 houses with the exception of one small area to contain 500 houses. Each area was to contain its primary schools, secondary shopping centres, mosques, open spaces, etc.

So self-sustaining these neighbourhood units were thought out to be that local cooperatives ('co-ops') were set up, and elected boards of local residents ran these co-ops akin to the traditional role of the pre-oil *farij*, except that this provision of public services at the local level had now been formalised (see Al-Nakib 2016: 126 and Figure 3.1). Despite the change in their residential landscape, Kuwaitis continue to wrestle with the state for their 'right to the city,' and re-instil a sense of communal belonging. Abdurraman Khalid Al-Ghunaim (2017), the retired Minister of Communications, spoke about how he spearheads a 14-man executive committee selected from a pool of 150 extended Kuwaiti families that have their own *diwaniyyas*. According to him, this committee seeks out the general opinion of different Kuwaiti families, and, acting as an 'informal union,' informs the ruling family of public sentiment. Spatially, numerous big family *diwaniyyas* are still found in each neighbourhood unit, what Kuwaitis call the *diwaniyya al-rasmiya* (official *diwaniyya*). The 'official' nature of these *diwaniyyas* refers more to the fixed day of the week when the said *diwaniyya* is in session, a time when male members of the extended family are also expected; the nature of the gathering remains informal without a prior agenda, and visitors are free to drop in on the *diwaniyya*'s 'official' day. The newfound oil wealth redistributed among Kuwaiti families meant that *diwaniyyas* have since been more affordable, and, in terms of physical size and form, no longer need to be a mere annex to the house, but can assume the form of a standalone building (See Photograph 3.1). Abdallah Qabazard (2017), an architect by profession, explains this change in an interview:

Until now, some *diwaniyyas* are still annexes to the house. As time went by and some of the elders passed away, you have the heirs who take care [of them]. And if you split the ownership of that house with the annex, either they (the heirs) come to an agreement to keep it as it is, or to make the house as an annex [...]. The family agrees that they would buy a [piece of] land, where they know their friends are having *diwans*, for example in Faiha, you see the Faiha *diwans* are almost close to each other. [...] The rest of the family chip in and make it a centre – a *diwaniyya* – to the point where it is used for social events.

The evolving social functions of the *diwaniyya*, with the changing urban environment, shifted from the exigencies of maritime trade, to the inward preservation of the extended family.

Old Kuwait town, located between the sea and the hinterland, acted as a resting point for pilgrims on their way for the annual *hajj* in Saudi Arabia (Behbehani 2017). Rendering a service to the community also meant that the *diwaniyya* provided shelter to the poor and the homeless from the 1920s through till the mid-thirties, when Kuwait was experiencing an economic recession as the pearl trade declined (Al-Jassar 2014). While the courtyard house was at the heart of these self-help mechanisms, the new urban landscape comprising well-delineated neighbourhood units altered the former social fabric by means of geographical distancing. As a result, new-age standalone *diwaniyyas*, while still open to visitors, cater for social events ranging from marriages to funerals – revolving around the maintenance of family ties. The sheer size of these *diwaniyyas* means that some can possess a basement for banquets (see Photographs 3.2 and 3.3); Abdallah Qabazard (2017) remarks additionally how the Al-Refai *diwaniyya* has an embalming facility in their basement.

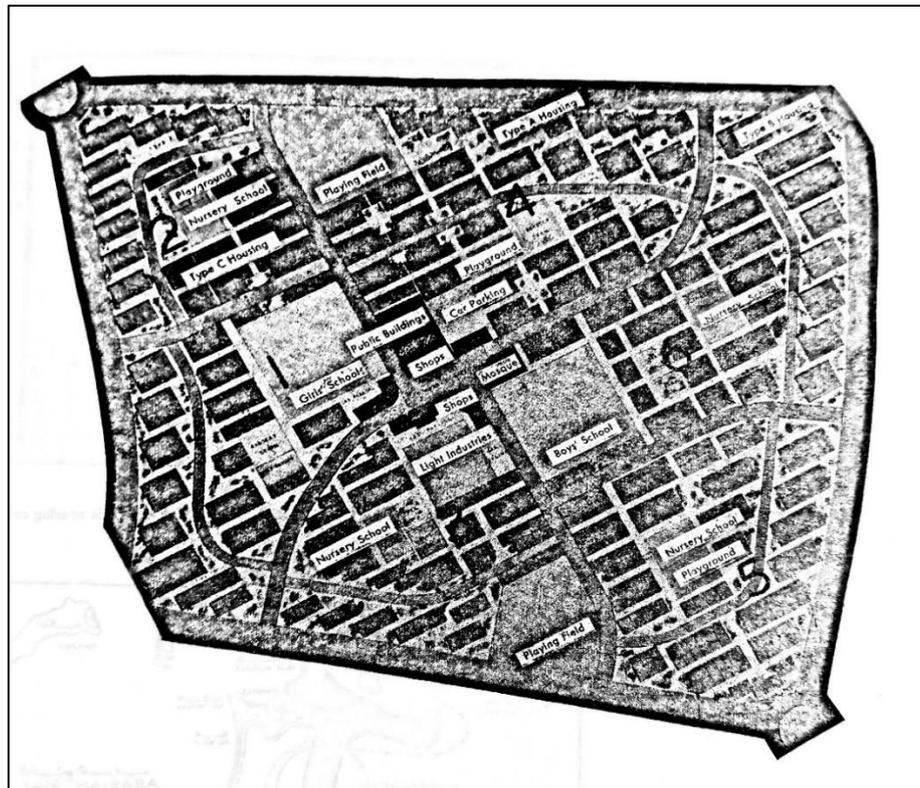


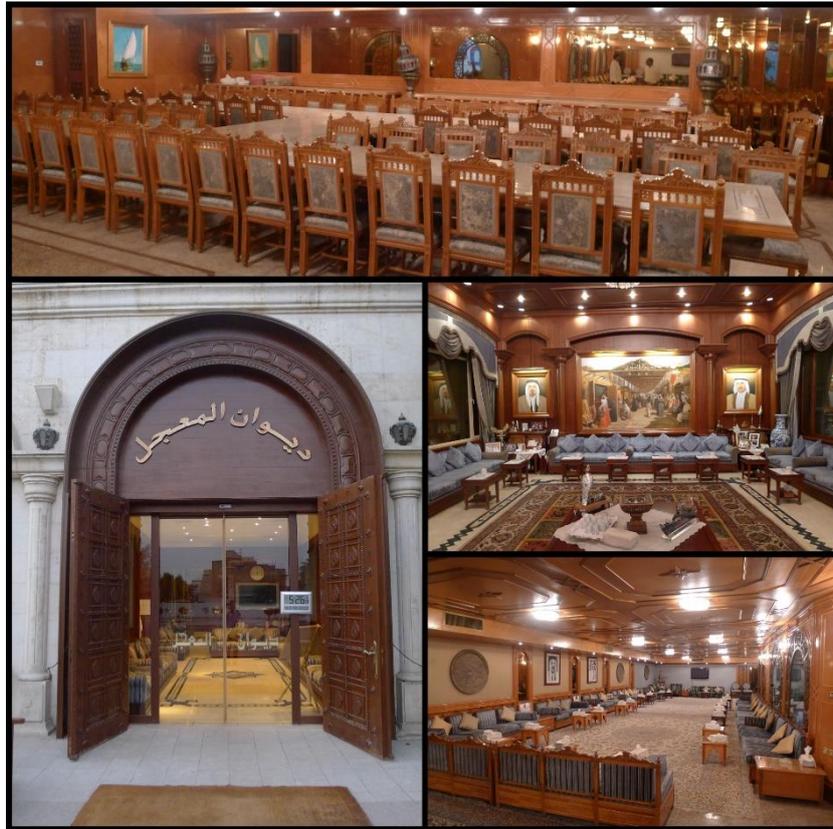
Figure 3.1 Kuwait's Area 'F,' one of the earliest neighbourhood-units planned (taken from Shiber 1964: 235)



Photograph 3.1 The Al-Roumi standalone *diwaniyya* located in Da'iya (Photographs taken by author on 28/05/2014)



Photograph 3.2 The Al-Misbah standalone *diwaniyya* in Shaab, with a basement designated for banquets (taken by author on 21/09/2016 and 29/03/2017)



Photograph 3.3 The Al-Mojil standalone *diwaniyya* in Faiha, with a separate banquet hall (taken by author on 04/10/2017)

The revamped residential landscape gave a fresh meaning to the Kuwaiti home; the nuclear family and the private villa became the socio-spatial norm. “A Disneyland of residential manifestations,” as described by Kuwaiti architect Huda Al-Bahar (1985: 63-65), the private villas became an embodiment of “affluence and status in society and each individual was compelled to state uniqueness in architecture”. Homes now “replaced occupation or trade as measures of social standing,” while the *diwaniyyas* indicate prestige through both its architecture and its audience (Al-Nakib 2016: 130; Al-Awadhi 2013; Sultan 2013; Al-Essa 2017). What is important to distinguish is that such social standing remains accorded to the extended family, as the hierarchy that characterised pre-oil organic solidarity becomes reorganised as new families gain prominence. From a nuclear family’s perspective, being able to afford a *diwaniyya* is equally a gauge of wealth and individualism. Al-Jassar (2008: 78-79), while echoing that the “identity and social position of the family is expressed through the physical aspect of the *diwaniyya*,” contends that the *diwaniyya*, unlike the courtyard house, was “never viewed as a backward environment”. Taking this argument further, Al-Nakib (2016:

133) points to how the emancipation of women⁸¹ was seen as a vital aspect of *Al-Nahda*, as men and women in the new suburbs began entertaining in their homes together. Female commentators have acknowledged that the closest equivalent of the *diwaniyya* is *chai dhahar* (afternoon tea), except that the latter lies within the preserve of the women; one of them went as far as saying that having her own space prevents ‘suffocation’ and allows for ‘personal time’ (Al-Souri 2013; Al-Barak 2017; Al-Refai 2017; Buhamad 2017).⁸² In all, the continued relevance of the *diwaniyya* follows three principal reasons: (1) to act as an indicator of affluence; (2) to maintain links with the extended family; (3) to continue the prescribed organic solidarity found in the division of gender roles in the home.

Spatially, the rise of the nuclear family meant the demise of the courtyard house. According to Rapoport (1969: 46), building a house “is a cultural phenomenon, its form and organization are greatly influenced by the cultural milieu to which it belongs”. Despite the fact that the pre-oil courtyard houses were deemed “in conflict with an accepted picture of the ‘ideal’” or the modern mode of living (Gardiner 1983: 39), there was equally a desire to hark back to the old, ‘romanticist,’ and ‘sentimentalist’ ways (see Shiber 1964: 223). In his thesis, Al-Jassar (2009: 143-144, see also Figure 3.2) describes the design and form of contemporary suburban houses in Kuwait:

The houses in the suburbs are built on a piece of land ranging between 400 and 1,000 square metres, with the house built in the middle of the land, surrounded by a garden. [...] The design of the house was reversed from being introverted in the courtyard house to extroverted in the modern one. Thus, at that time, a privacy gradation issue was created for a culture that clearly demarcates where the private part of the house begins and the public one ends. In later years we see more houses with windows that are conceived with screens or other visual privacy mechanisms, and the garden walls are built as high as two metres to increase privacy. [...]

Most contemporary houses in Kuwait consists of semiprivate areas, such as reception room, or salon, living room, dining room, and kitchen, as well as a detached *diwaniyya*. It is important to note that dining rooms were considered a new environmental setting in the modern homes during the 1950s in Kuwait. Historically the courtyard house did not include a dining room; the family usually

⁸¹ In the October 1975 issue of the National Geographic, it was noted that the veil was cast aside by women in Kuwait and Bahrain (Putman & Parks 1975: 529)

⁸² Al-Souri (2013), in an interview, differentiated the terms used by women for their gathering. ‘*Chai dhahar*’ for middle-aged women; *nadwat* if someone is giving a lecture; a group of female teenagers would call their gathering ‘*azima*’. In the simplest of terms, the gathering could also be called ‘*yama ‘a*’ – the literal translation of ‘gathering’ (Al-Nassar 2017).

ate in the courtyard or other living spaces, such as the bedrooms. And in cases where the non-relative men are invited for a meal, the *diwaniyya* is used as the dining room for men, while the courtyard is used as the dining room for women.

Evidently, the new suburban house prompted a change in lifestyles for Kuwaitis. The dining room, as described in the excerpt, discourages the gathering of multiple families for meals. The house in itself was not only a symbol of self-sufficiency, but it also represented social isolation and detachment considering its location in the suburbs. Privacy (as reflected in the above excerpt) remains a constant. On the other hand, the *diwaniyya* persisted in the contemporary setting, and its role in socialisation became even more important for the aforementioned three reasons. Al-Nakib (2016: 185), in one of her interviews with the locals, found that there was a reluctance to move into the suburbs in fear of “being separated from their neighbors and losing access to their existing social networks in their *farij*”. The *diwaniyya* thus fulfils the conditions of human agency and reflexivity stipulated by normative institutionalism: as a vital mediating space in new environment settings, it answers to the call for obligations and duties to the family.

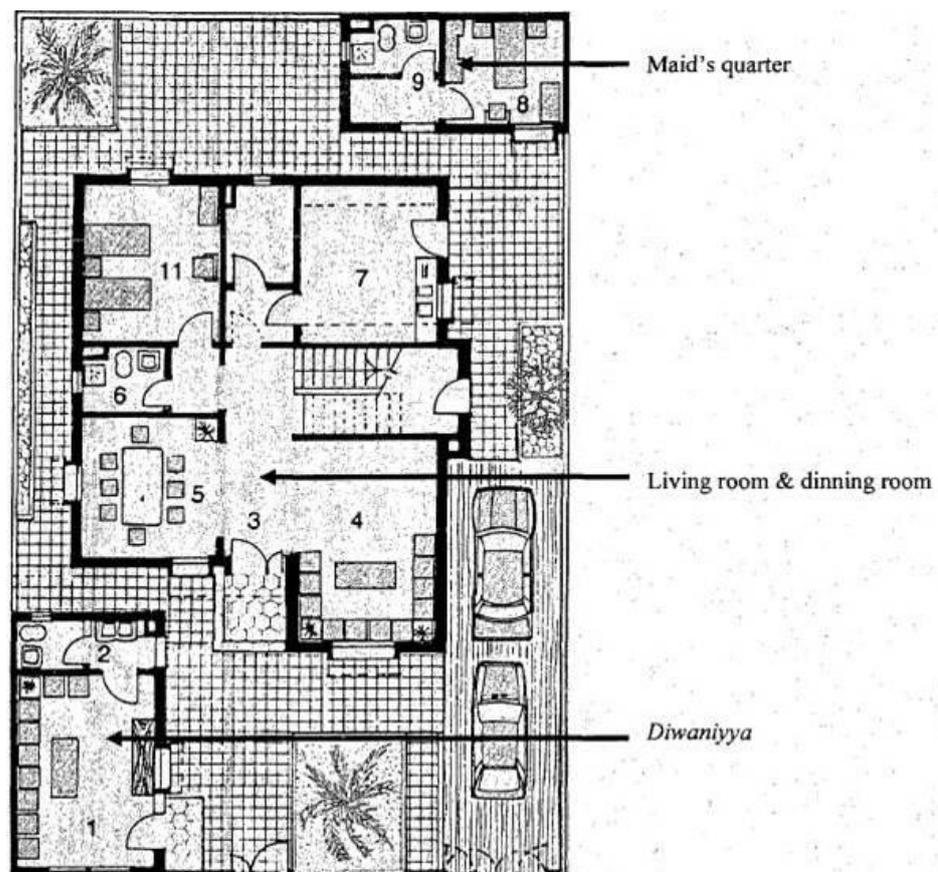


Figure 3.2 Floor plan of a modern Kuwaiti house (Source: National Housing Authority of Kuwait, and taken from Al-Jassar 2009: 146)

3.4 Transmitting Cultural Capital in the *Diwaniyya*

On the fifth day of Ramadhan in 2018, I hired a driver to facilitate my evening rounds from one *diwaniyya* to another. Ramadhan, the ninth and fasting month of the Islamic calendar, is when Muslims observe fasting from *fajr* prayer (morning twilight) to *maghreb* prayer (evening twilight). Ramadhan in Kuwait, compared to other Arab countries, has its own distinct customs and rituals, which renders *diwaniyya* decorum more conspicuous than at other times of the year. The *iftar* or *fatoor* meal marks the end of fasting on each day of Ramadhan, and brings the family together within the confines of the home, or, at times, in a restaurant outside. Ramadhan festivities begin after the family meal; *diwaniyyas* are open after *isha* prayer (the last prayer) or *at-tarawih* (voluntary night prayers) to receive well-wishers.⁸³ *Diwaniyya* visiting for the men becomes a nightly routine as they attempt to cover as much ground as possible, in order to congratulate as many different families as possible in their *diwaniyyas*. At the same time, on specific days of the week during Ramadhan, men are also expected to be present in their own family *diwaniyya* to receive guests alongside their male relatives. Trying my hand à la Kuwaiti, I ventured out to Fahaheel area beyond the Seventh Ring Road, in order to visit the Al-Dabbous *diwaniyya* which I was told had historical ties to the desert. The trip to Fahaheel did not go as planned, and, having trouble with finding the *diwaniyya*, I walked into a random *diwaniyya* to ask for directions, only to find out that I had landed in the Al-Adwani family domain. Invited to sit and have a coffee, the hosts not only provided directions, but also spoke to me at length about their grandfather, Mutlaq Fahad Al-Adwani, a renowned sea captain and astronomer.

The above episode during Ramadhan is revealing of what the *diwaniyya* entails on several folds. ‘Hospitality,’ a word that has been mentioned with great frequency by interviewees (men and women; locals and foreigners) when describing the *diwaniyya* custom, merely skims the surface of our discussion. At the heart of the *diwaniyya* practice lie the well-embedded tribal customs, passed down from one generation to the next, as Chapter Two has outlined from the tent to the courtyard house. The *diwaniyya* as a male preserve, is reflective of the symbolic and material flows in accordance to patrilineal descent, hence the typical, almost necessary, discussion about the host’s family history that ensues during *diwaniyya* visits. The anthropologist Donald Cole (1975: 24), who studied the Al-Murrah tribe of Saudi Arabia, explains this tribal custom of lineage, one that is similarly present in *diwaniyya* practice:

⁸³ A list of *diwaniyyas*, their locations and opening times are published in the newspaper each year before the Ramadhan season. I have attached a copy of one such list in the Appendix; this is obtained and translated from the Al-Qabas newspaper.

Above the level of the household is the lineage which includes all the people descended from a male ancestor who lived about five generations ago; a lineage averages about fifty households. From four to six lineages unite, according to the patterns of patrilineal descent, to form clans [or *fakhds*].

Lineage and family history represented in tangible and intangible forms in the *diwaniyya* all converge towards the hereditary transmission of cultural capital, which is equally reflective of the organic solidarity found in Kuwaiti society and the family. Explaining cultural capital as an asset or investment, Bourdieu (1986: 245) postulates that:

Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value.

In this manner, the notion of cultural capital associated with the *diwaniyya* manifests itself in three ways: (1) the marks left by acquiring cultural capital are “characteristic of a class,” or knowing one’s place in Kuwaiti society; (2) a sense of family heritage; and (3) bridging the generational gap as young Kuwaitis inherit the ‘know-how’ of being Kuwaiti when visiting *diwaniyyas*.

First, understanding one’s lineage, even if it means going as far as identifying a specific branch of the extended family, determines the amount of cultural capital a Kuwaiti (or his family) possesses. The lineage provides indications of not only the achievements of one’s forefathers, in political, economic, or social fields, but also the expectations of one’s current conduct. By extension, family *diwaniyyas*, their interior design, the background of their attendees, also provide a rather accurate assessment of the family’s capital. The descent of the family, a trajectory through which the social standing of a Kuwaiti family is continuously reproduced, “presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor” (Bourdieu 1986: 244). That time facilitates the transmission of cultural capital is most evident in Kuwaiti politics. Assiri and Al-Monoufi (1988: 48-50), whose study examined 75 cabinet-rank ministers who held office from 1962 to 1986, found that Kuwaiti polity rests in large part on the use of kinship; the power structure is dominated by the ruling Al-Sabah family, followed by a group of eight *asil* families (noble families, see also Section 2.5 and

Table 3.1 below). These eight families were identified as: Al-Saqr,⁸⁴ Al-Nusf, Al-Ghanim, Al-Hamad, Al-Mudhaf, Al-Khalid, Al-Khorafi, and Al-Marzouk. Some of the most influential family *diwaniyyas* have since been situated between the First and Third Ring Roads, notably in the Abdallah Al-Salem, Faiha and Nuzha neighbourhoods.

<i>Cabinet Composition by Family Background</i>									
		Al-Sabah Family		Asil Families		Other Families		Total	
		#	%	#	%	#	%		
All Ministers—75 (1962–1968)		18	24.0	34	45.3	23	30.7		
By Cabinet (date of installation)									
1.	17 January	1962	11	78.5	3	21.5	—	—	14
2.	28 January	1963	10	66.7	4	26.7	1	6.6	15
3.	6 December	1964	4	28.6	7	50	3	21.4	14
4.	3 January	1965	4	30.8	5	38.4	4	30.8	13
5.	4 December	1965	4	33.3	4	33.3	4	33.3	12
6.	4 February	1967	4	25.0	6	37.5	6	37.5	16
7.	2 February	1971	2	15.4	5	38.5	6	46.1	13
8.	9 February	1975	4	26.7	5	33.3	6	40.0	15
9.	6 September	1976	5	27.8	6	33.3	7	38.9	18
10.	16 February	1978	5	27.8	6	33.3	7	38.9	18
11.	4 March	1981	6	37.5	3	18.8	7	43.7	16
12.	3 March	1985	6	37.5	5	31.3	5	31.2	16
13.	13 July	1986	6	28.6	9	42.8	6	28.6	21

Table 3.1 Cabinet composition by family background (taken from Assiri and Al-Monoufi 1988: 49)

Further evidence suggests that making a foray into the political and business scenes rests on ascription, and this is especially true in cases where cultural capital, comprising political qualities, has been passed down hereditarily. The circulation of cultural capital is most palpable when we consider the family *diwaniyyas* along Gulf Road (what used to be the seafront) as case studies, namely: the Al-Mulla, Al-Roudhan, Al-A'soussi, Al-Shamlan, Al-Khalid, Al-Badr families. The location of these merchants' families *diwaniyyas* remain untouched (see Figure 3.3), and, as the last surviving courtyard houses (see Photographs 3.4 and 3.5), these traditional *diwaniyyas* stand out in a physical landscape that has been completely overhauled. According to Dr Ali Al-Shamlan (2013), the former Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed, angrily revoked the Kuwait Municipality's decision to replace these *diwaniyyas* with skyscrapers and saw the need to "protect [these] ancient artefacts". It is here

⁸⁴ The Al-Saqr family, whose *diwaniyya* held the meeting that led to the first advisory council in 1921, was mentioned in the last chapter and highlighted again in my interview with Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah.

that the role of cultural capital, in preserving Kuwaiti heritage and maintaining the social contract, becomes most conspicuous. The Al-Mulla family *diwaniyya* is home to secretaries to the Emir in the family line (see Section 2.6); the Al-A'soussi and Al-Shamlan produced some of Kuwait's finest sea captains in the era of pearl trade (the latter family line also boasts an esteemed historian Saif Marzooq Al-Shamlan,⁸⁵ alongside two cabinet ministers, and five members of parliament)⁸⁶; the Al-Badr family's ancestor, Yousef Al-Badr, was a horse trader and their *diwaniyya* had been used to convene the nobles and the Al-Sabah, notably on one occasion to decide on the leadership succession; the Al-Khalid family history⁸⁷ also has political affinity, producing three ministers and three members of parliament.

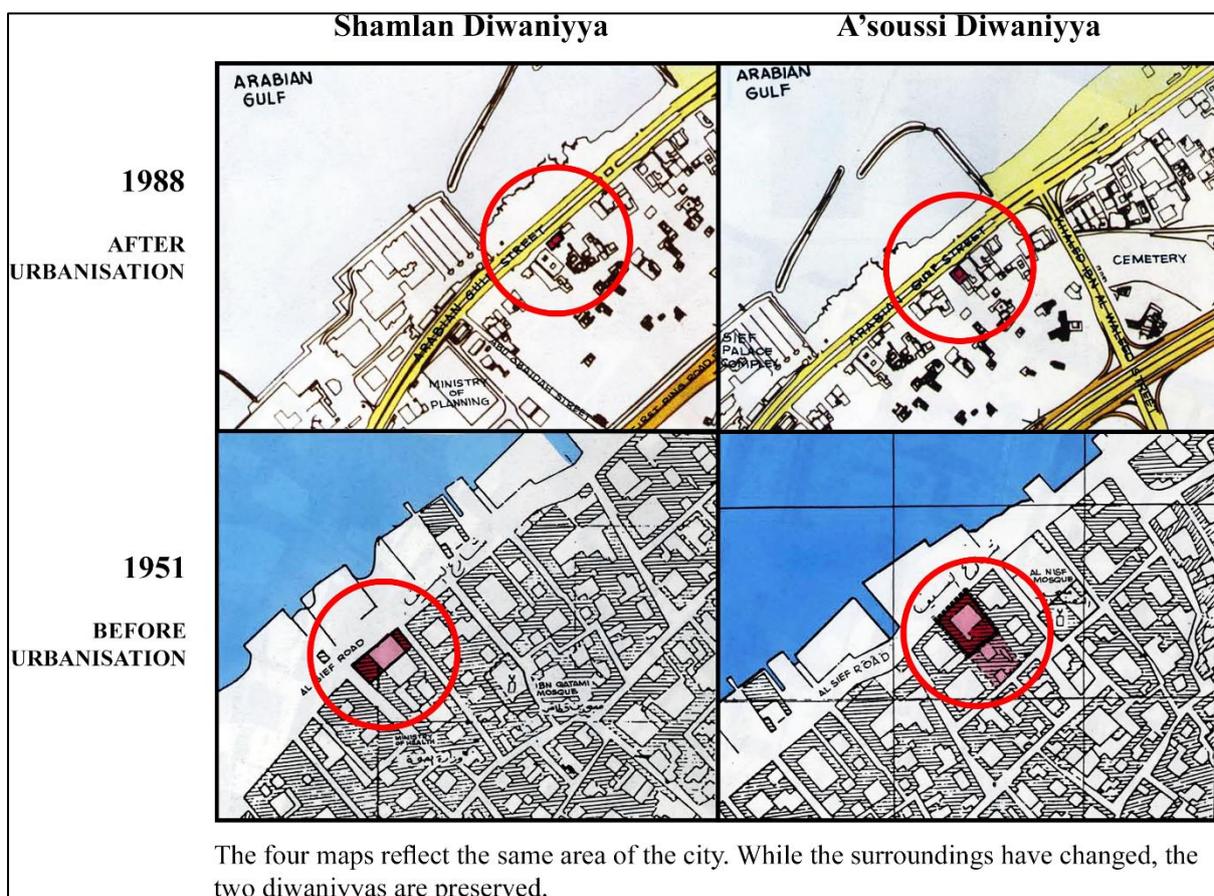


Figure 3.3 Two of the preserved traditional *diwaniyyas* along the Arabian Gulf Road (maps taken from Ali 1988, modified, and emphasis added)

⁸⁵ Saif Marzooq Al-Shamlan (2001) wrote a book entitled *Pearling in the Arabian Gulf*, translated from Arabic to English, which details the nitty-gritty of Kuwait's pearl-diving trade.

⁸⁶ The Al-Shamlan family's political history is taken into consideration with the Al-Roumi family's – both families fall under the same umbrella.

⁸⁷ In personal conversation, senior members of the Al-Khalid family explained how their preserved family *diwaniyya* used to act as an observation deck for watching ships. This historical *diwaniyya* opens everyday from 4-8pm, but the family has another *diwaniyya* in the Qadsiya area.



Photograph 3.4 The Al-Mulla *diwaniyya*, part of the preserved courtyard house (taken by author on 09/04/2017)



Photograph 3.5 The Al-Khalid family *diwaniyya* in a courtyard house setting (taken by author on 20/09/2017)

Worthy of mention is the Al-Roudhan *diwaniyya*, where distinguished public figures, past and present, meet in the afternoons to discuss social and political affairs of the country (see Photographs 3.6 and 3.7).⁸⁸ Incidentally, that *diwaniyya* was the former foreign minister Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah's next destination after our interview in his office. The Roudhan family's line of politicians spans over three generations, producing four ministers in the process.⁸⁹ This is a significant achievement, considering how the Al-Sabah ruling family alone accounts for 41 cabinet ministers since 1962, while the rest of the cabinet appointments are diffused across different families.⁹⁰ Yet, despite their historical and longstanding involvement in politics, the keen awareness of the existing social contract has always formed a large part of the Al-Sabah family's cultural capital. As Chapter Two has described, Kuwaiti rulers have adopted the customs of visiting various family *diwaniyyas*, and of holding audiences on a regular basis, both of which serve to assess public opinion. Such patterns of conduct are not confined to Al-Sabah family branches directly involved in the running of the country,⁹¹ but are also internalised by all members of the Al-Sabah bloodline, young and old. In an interview with Dr Shamlan Al-Essa (2017), the Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, he compared the *diwaniyya* to a polling station, then invited me to a *diwaniyya* in Shamiya hosted by his student, a young sheikh named Sheikh Hamad Jaber Ali Al-Sabah. When asked if the audience present was a young one, his reply, accompanying his incredulous look, was, "Young and old. He's a sheikh, everybody goes to him!" Ramadhan is the time of the year when the Al-Sabah sheikhs, both visit various families in their *diwaniyyas* to personally deliver congratulatory wishes, and receive the public in the *diwaniyyas* of their palaces⁹² – an enduring tradition inherited by successive generations (see Photographs 3.8 and 3.9). Thus understanding the transmission of cultural capital of each Kuwaiti family, through the

⁸⁸ Further underscoring the political importance of this *diwaniyya*: in October 2017, when arranging an interview with Abdurrahman Al-Ghunaim, the former Minister of Communications, I was instructed to meet him at the Al-Roudhan *diwaniyya* where he frequents weekly.

⁸⁹ The four ministers from the Al-Roudhan family are: Abdullah Mishary Al-Roudhan (former Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in the sixties); Nasser Abdullah Al-Roudhan (former Minister of State for Housing Affairs in the late eighties, and later Deputy Prime Minister in the nineties); and more recently, Roudhan Abdul Aziz Al-Roudhan (Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs in 2009); Khaled Nasser Al-Roudhan (Minister of State for Youth Affairs, 2017 to present).

⁹⁰ The up-to-date statistics provided in this paragraph that tracks the Kuwaiti cabinet's composition are found on Michael Herb's Kuwait Politics Database: <http://www.kuwaitpolitics.org>. In particular, <http://www.kuwaitpolitics.org/families.htm> provides a systematic table of the different families in Kuwait, consisting of: the number of members of parliament, the number of ministers, and the number of parliamentary candidates, that the family has produced since 1962.

⁹¹ The leadership of Kuwait has alternated between the Al-Salim and Al-Jaber of the Al-Sabah ruling family.

⁹² Each branch of the Al-Sabah family has its own palace: for instance, the Mishref Palace belongs to the descendants of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salim (the 2nd Emir of independent Kuwait), while the Shaab Palace is home to the descendants of the late Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah (the 4th Emir).

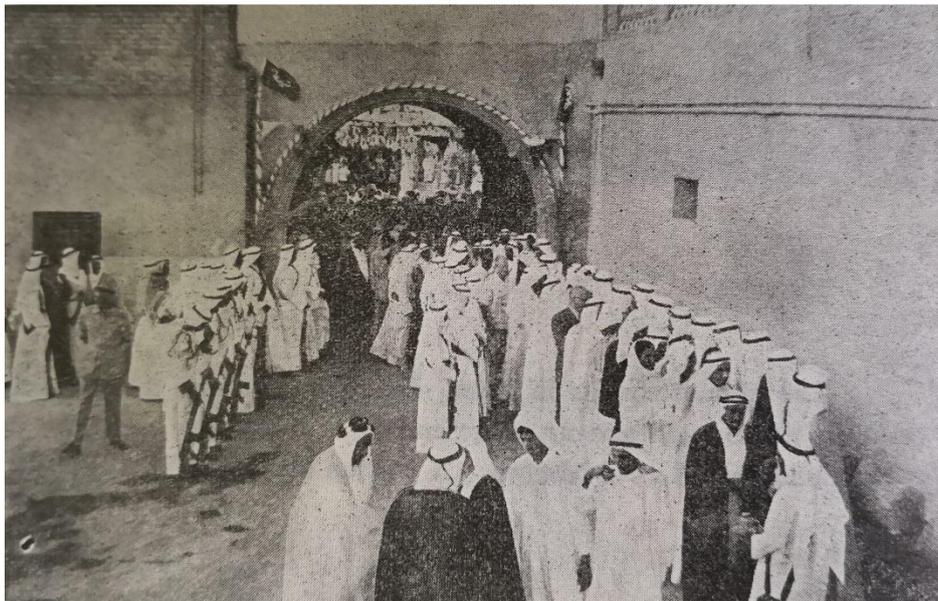
diwaniyya, is realisation of “the prestige of innate property” and “the merits of acquisition”: because the social conditions of its transmission are disguised as symbolic capital, one needs to ascertain the “material and symbolic for the possessors of distinction” – in this case the family (see Bourdieu 1986: 245).



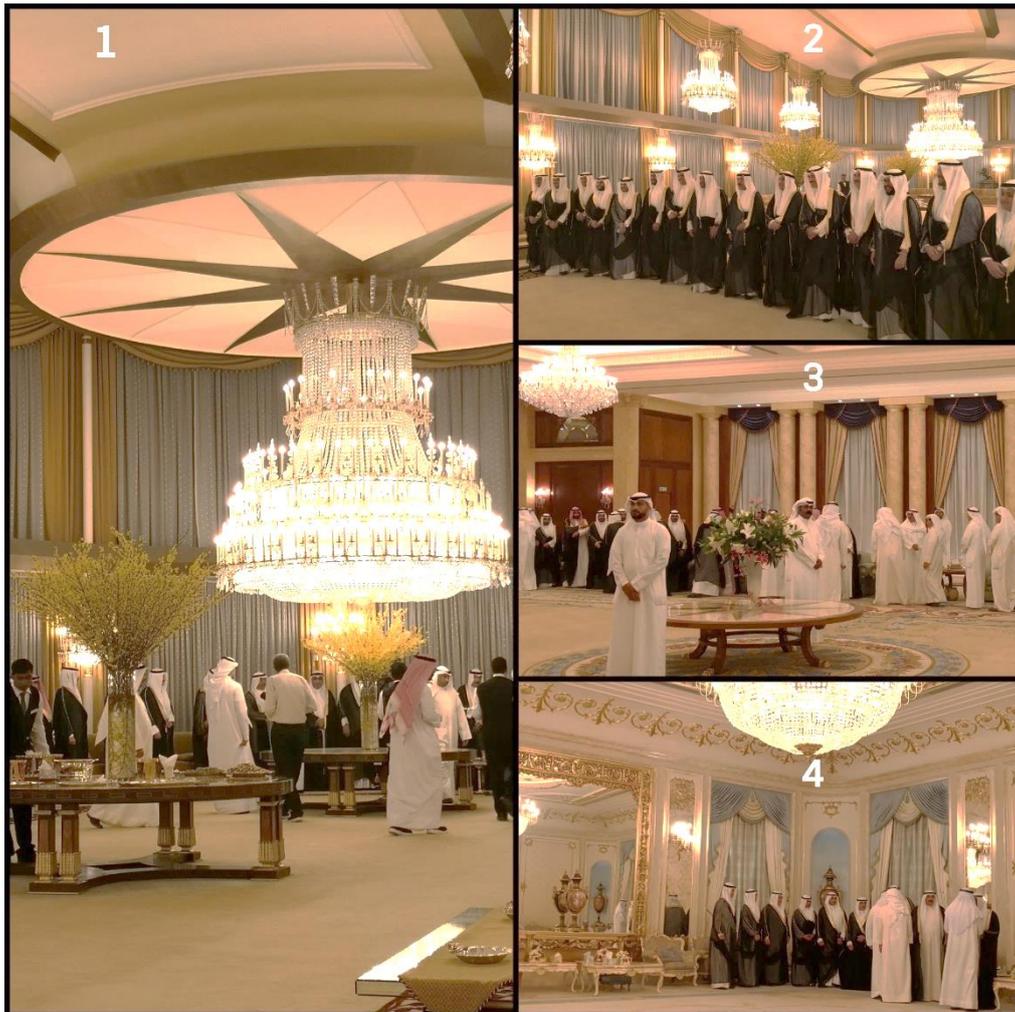
Photograph 3.6 The Al-Roudhan *diwaniyya* (taken by author on 05/06/2014)



Photograph 3.7 A female parliamentary candidate presents her ideas at the Al-Roudhan *diwaniyya* prior to the November 2016 parliamentary elections (Photo courtesy of Sami Abdulatif Al-Nusf)



Photograph 3.8 The public waiting in line to congratulate the Emir in the Seif Palace, during Ramadhan in the fifties (Shiber 1964: 128)

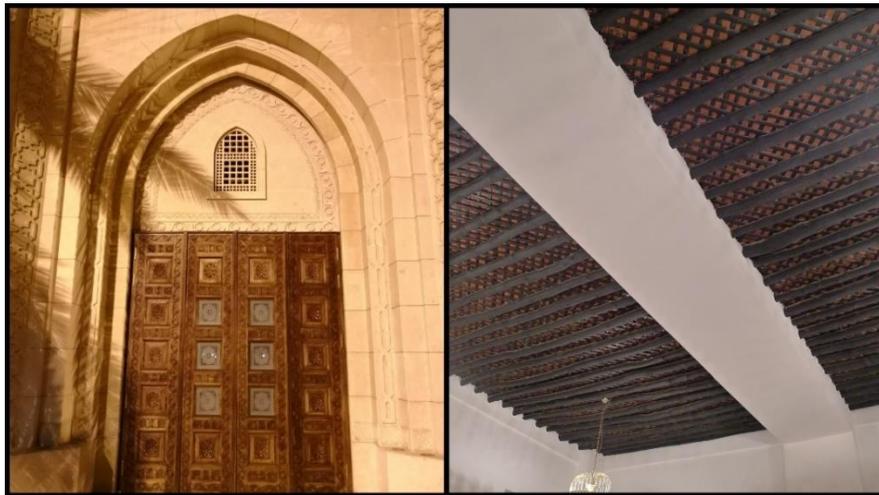


Photograph 3.9 Ramadhan 2018: the Al-Sabah sheikhs receive the public in the *diwans* of their palaces. Photos (1) and (2): Bneid Al Gar Palace (Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber); (3) Mishref Palace (the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salim); (4) Shaab Palace (the late Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah). (taken by author on 09/05/2018)

Second, the *diwaniyya*, as a space, presents a repository of family histories. So often these *diwaniyyas* are embellished with objects that serve as reminders of the family’s heritage, ranging from family trees to ancestral portraits (see Photograph 3.10). Bourdieu (1986: 246-247) describes this objectified cultural capital as “transmissible in its materiality,” which can be invested as a stake in “the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.)” and beyond them, “in the field of the social classes”. These tangible forms of nostalgia counter the loss of tradition, all of which are references to Kuwait’s rich heritage: for instance the main door of the Al-Nusf *diwaniyya* is taken from the family’s old, and demolished courtyard house along the seafront; the ceiling of the Al-Misbah *diwaniyya* is made from mangrove poles (*chandal*) imported from East Africa, adhering to the pre-oil architectural style (see Photograph 3.11).



Photograph 3.10 Heritage objects in *diwaniyyas* (top, taken by author on 16/02/2013; bottom, taken by author on 25/05/2014)



Photograph 3.11 The entrance to the Al-Nusf *diwaniyya* (left, taken by author on 17/05/2018); the *chandal* ceiling of the Al-Misbah *diwaniyya* (right, taken by author on 09/04/2017)

These cultural goods, which Bourdieu (19986: 247) calls “the product of historical action,” are testament to the persistence of tradition despite the erasure of the physical landscape. *Diwaniyyas* function to transmit both embodied and objectified cultural capital, facilitating the “customary mechanism ensuring the transmission from one generation to another of the culture inherited from the past” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: 10). The practice of *diwaniyya* can be reminiscent of pre-oil ways of life, as the Al-Kandari *diwaniyya*, whose historical profession was carrying water from the shore inland, hosted me for dinner on a

Wednesday where we sat on the floor and enjoyed the typical Kuwaiti dish, the *majboos*,⁹³ as they would have done in the past (see Photograph 3.12). Elsewhere, other *diwaniyyas* focus on the legacies of their fathers and grandfather, designing their *diwaniyyas* in ways that reflect their father's tastes and achievements, emitting a marked aura of social standing. The Qabazard *diwaniyya* is a case in point: the space is designed in remembrance of the late Mohammed Hussein Ali Qabazard, who took a liking to classical art pieces, and the decorative styles of Louis XVI and Louis XIV, which eventually turned the family *diwaniyya* into a lavishly Europeanised salon – an anomaly amongst *diwaniyyas* (Qabazard 2017) (see Photograph 3.13). Unlike the usual offerings of dates and coffee in *diwaniyyas*, the Qabazard *diwaniyya* caters for its guests: sorbet ice cream, lime juice and lentil soup (according to the recipe of Mohammed Qabazard's wife).



Photograph 3.12 A visit to the Al-Kandari *diwaniyya* in Bneid Al Gar, where I was presented with a memento indicating their family's history of water carriers (taken by author on 07/09/2016)

⁹³ The *majboos* is a rice dish with raisins and nuts, often accompanied by either roast chicken or lamb.



Photograph 3.13 The Qabazard *diwaniyya* in Mansouria (taken by author on 09/04/2017)

Finally, where cultural capital runs in the family domain of the *diwaniyya*, this interlinked space and practice is instructive of the ‘social making’ of a Kuwaiti (Al-Awadhi 2013). *Diwaniyya* etiquette may be second nature to Kuwaitis, but it is forged over a process of acculturation wherein fathers take their sons on *diwaniyya* visits, and where they are expected to listen more, and speak less. Consistent with the tribal seating plan found in Section 2.5, the implicit seating layout in a *diwaniyya* follows an order of seniority; the host and the oldest members are seated at the end of the room, while the remaining attendees are lined across the length of the room in descending order of age (the youngest are nearest to the door).⁹⁴ Kuwaiti males attending *diwaniyyas* are required to wear a floor length robe in white or in cream called the *dishdasha*, and a three-part headdress. Upon entering the *diwaniyya* an attendee would greet ‘*asalaam aalaikom*,’ make his way around the room shaking hands, and then take his seat while giving a quick wave to those present, saying ‘*masakallahbikhair*’

⁹⁴ Distinguished guests are usually invited to sit next to the host (and other senior family members).

(intending to be ‘good evening’), to which most will echo with the same words. As a display of affection, greetings may be accompanied by kisses on the forehead, or on the cheeks.⁹⁵ During Ramadhan, the congratulatory words by a visitor would be ‘*mubarak alaik al shahar,*’ and the reply would be ‘*alaina o alaik*’ (or ‘same to us and to you’). When the *diwaniyya* is in session, a guest will be offered coffee first, then dates, tea and a range of other snacks, and an indication that one has had enough coffee is to wiggle the cup before returning it to the server (see Photograph 3.14). When leaving the *diwaniyya* one would say ‘*femaniilaah*’ (‘may you be in God’s protection’) before exiting. What the *diwaniyya* creates, through the inculcation of such etiquette from early childhood, is a process associated with immersion in the particular sociocultural milieu of the family (Reed-Danahay 2005: 46; Tétreault 2003: 38). Young Kuwaiti males such as Mishal Jaber Al-Sabah (2013) have expressed the growing resemblance between the topics that young men talk about and those discussed by their fathers in *diwaniyyas*, as the boys grow older. A middle-aged man Muhammad Al-Nusf, in his standalone family *diwaniyya*, told me how the building contains more than one room; in order to reach the main *diwaniyya* one has to work his way up from the smaller, private room in the basement, which he calls the *mukhtasar*. Elham Al-Hamdan (2013), a middle-aged female Kuwaiti, in another instance, admitted that she could not single out “any man who doesn’t go the *diwaniyya* from this culture”. In this manner, the *diwaniyya* epitomises the bridge between generations, or what Falah Al-A’soussi (2014), the main responsible person for his family *diwaniyya*, calls, the “link between the past, the present, and the future”.

⁹⁵ The rule of thumb for greeting with kisses is: (1) a young man greets an elder (including senior family members) by kissing his forehead, shoulder (if the elder is lacking in height or if the kisser feels more comfortable this way); (2) cheek kissing with one’s immediate family; (3) cheek kissing with very close friends.



Photograph 3.14 The *diwaniyya* etiquette in force at the Shamlan *diwaniyya* (Photos courtesy of Hamed Al-Amiri, Kuwait News Agency)

3.5 The Circulation of Social Capital

On the 10th of April 2017, I attended the Behbehani family *diwaniyya* in the Nuzha neighbourhood unit, alongside Michael Holland, the Head of the Political Section at the British Embassy. The Behbehanis, a Shia family whose origins stem from Behbahan in Iran, settled in Kuwait as traders, and in the post-independence period became the main dealers for luxury automobile and watch brands (see Carter 1984: 31-33).⁹⁶ Despite being part of the Shia branch of Islam (unlike the Sunni majority), the Behbehanis remained part of the esteemed mercantile quarter along the seafront – Jibla.⁹⁷ On the same evening of my visit, the Taiwanese ambassador and his political secretary were introducing a businessman to senior members of the Behbehani family,⁹⁸ in an effort to close an investment deal. Field (1984: 293) calls such

⁹⁶ The province of Behbahan, as described by the British Political Resident Ross (1874: 5, reprinted in Archive Editions 1986), is the “portion of sea coast between the district of Kaab Arabs and Bushire districts [...with] the chief port of this district in Deelam”. Field (1984: 76), in his analysis of business families in the Gulf states, argues that the Persians are “much better integrated” than Indians overall; in Kuwait there were the Behbehanis who represented Volkswagen (at the time of his writing).

⁹⁷ See Appendix for the floorplan of the old Behbehani courtyard house, which has now become Beit Al-Sadu, a society concerned with preserving the traditional art of Bedouin weaving.

⁹⁸ I later met with the aforesaid businessman, Bruce Chou, for a private lunch, who turned out to be the director of the Taiwan Trade Centre in Kuwait. He was particularly outspoken about the role of the *diwaniyyas* in maintaining business relations in the country.

conduct of business in Arabia ‘the *majlis* style,’ which he insists that the parties have ‘nothing to hide’ and that the presence of spectators acts in a way as a ‘censor’ of business morals. While it is true to claim that “it’s not just what you know but who you know,” (Lin 2001: 41) the nature of transactional conduct in a family space akin to the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya* is a further step forward that includes informality, hospitality and reciprocity.

In the event where one’s inherited cultural capital is insufficient or inappropriate, tapping into another family’s accumulated cultural capital becomes the solution – in which case social capital is called into question (see Section 1.3). Simply put, social capital, which encompasses a “durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986: 249), ultimately falls under the aggregate of each Kuwaiti family’s cultural capital.⁹⁹ James Redman (2014: 68-81), whose doctoral thesis provides an intriguing insight into the role of institutionalised social capital in “facilitating access to the personalised bureaucracy” of Kuwait, also argues that “in a state system where the government and all of its appendages are at the epicenter of nearly every distributional allowance [...], social capital can scarcely be expected to exist either independently or far beyond administrative elements”. Redman’s case builds on how *diwaniyyas* interact with the country’s bureaucratic networks, running from ‘low politics’ to state-sanctioned activities (pp. 39-40):

It is not so much that the *diwaniyya* permit the avoidance of bureaucratic controls altogether, more accurately, these men’s parlors actually reinforce incorporation into the state’s official channels by mending its perceived limitations for aggrieved supplicants. [...] It is only by emphasizing the state’s day-to-day presence in the lives of Kuwait’s citizens that the value of the *diwaniyyat* is immediately recognizable for harnessing the social capital needed to make the welfare bureaucracy simultaneously navigable and flexible.

While Redman’s posited angle of the *diwaniyya* as a means of navigating the bureaucracy is a valid one, which he explains as disguising ‘existent power differentials,’ this view of social capital remains narrow on two accounts: (1) the *diwaniyya* as an institution has predated Kuwait’s state bureaucracy; (2) the malleability that allows the *diwaniyya* to mediate

⁹⁹ The word ‘*wastah*’ or social connections may be heard occasionally when describing transactions involving networking. Yet this word carries a negative connotation, and is often regarded as taking advantage of a situation to one’s gain, instead of the family-to-family reciprocity that this study intends to underscore. Cunningham et al. (1994: 29-31), when defining ‘*wastah*,’ prefer to denote the term as “mediation or intercession,” with which they associate the family as the “basis for obtaining benefits from the socio-political system”.

between state and society is precisely due to the very logic of organic solidarity that Kuwaiti society is built on. Such malleability echoes the words of Wajdi Al-Misbah (2016), a Kuwaiti male in his fifties:

The primal function and reason of the *diwaniyya* is the social aspect. People do socialise, what happens in *diwaniyyas* is socialising, but for what purpose – that may differ. Some people have goals and some people go there with agendas [...]: political agenda [...] or personal gains that people want, or need, so they socialise. [...] But if you remove all of this aside, what always remains is the social aspect.

Furthermore, when asked about the transactional use of *diwaniyyas*, the British Ambassador Matthew Lodge (2016, emphasis added) cautioned:

And it is fascinating to try and understanding how that (the *diwaniyya*) really impacts on decision-making in Kuwait, where the real substantive conversations take place [...]. What we really understand of the interrelationships between family and individuals and within families. And how that impacts on the work we are doing to strengthen and maintain the relationships [...].

There is a school of thought that is perhaps particularly prevalent in North America and the United Kingdom, that is ruthlessly business-focused and desperately transactional. That's not my own instinct of approach [in *diwaniyyas*], and I don't think across the range of our business, that it's the approach that works here. It is seen as being a bit vulgar, a bit impolite, a bit crass, a bit clumsy.

There is an interesting point though. If officials and ministers read this, they might be horrified to hear me say this. [...] Increasingly in the long run here, and the more you develop often through the *diwaniyyas*, particularly in Ramadhan, you develop *personal relationships* with some of these individuals. I think what we find ourselves doing, is that we submit the formal request, and then you go through WhatsApp to arrange [a meeting], and quite legitimate to go and find a minister who is too busy during the working day, but you get five minutes with him on the couch of his *diwaniyya* on a Monday or Tuesday.

The two aforementioned interview excerpts provide a qualification to the argument that *diwaniyyas* serve individuals who arrive with a targeted purpose, particularly in bypassing bureaucratic deadlocks. The *diwaniyya* practice helps in building 'personal relationships' by virtue of constant socialisation, which in Bourdieu's (1986: 249) words, is "not a natural given," rather, it is "the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites [...] mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits". As a result, the social connections

produced do not necessarily serve exploitative purposes as what, for instance, Perthes (1997: 181) observes in Syria as ‘deceptively egalitarian,’ or what Sa’eda and Sakijha (2002: 25) see as ‘benevolent guises’. Instead, cultivating relationships through these *diwaniyyas* facilitate, when the need arises, the search for the right solution through the interweaving family connections. Sheikh Mohammad (2016), the former foreign minister, sums up this mastery of family-to-family backgrounds:

If you go to the Al-Rawda (location) *diwaniyyas*, which is more of a middle-class, you see the more mundane, day-to-day concerns, and you see more concerns about education. And if you go further away, you see people, the Bedu, there's no Bedu in the classic sense, but you do see that their concerns to be more of national security [...] because the tribal spread tends to have its own information network.

It is undeniable that the networking in the *diwaniyya* leads to the opening of windows of opportunity, but often *diwaniyya* visits as patterns of conduct, are “objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing conscious aiming at ends” (Bourdieu 1990b: 53). The following vignettes from an interview with Charles Fee (2017), the Economic Officer at the US embassy in Kuwait, illustrate how life, if not professional, opportunities, can arise in a *diwaniyya*:

- (1) The people we meet at *diwaniyyas* tend to have some sort of interesting engagement whatever the topic is, political, economic, just sort of understanding the culture. It's an opportunity for us to mingle with people that we may not otherwise run into. I mean, I'll give you an example. I was invited to, along with our Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission, an event during Ramadhan for a family-run *diwaniyya*. They own several restaurants in town and it turned out that another member of the family who was at the event is the CEO of Kuwait Flour Mill. They make all the bread and almost all the flour - huge operations. I had been trying to find an excuse to meet someone from this organisation forever, and through randomly talking there I found out he was the CEO. So it makes it possible to do these spur-of-the-moment engagements.
- (2) We had been invited to the Al-Ghannams, not the Al-Ghanim who own the cars, they're separate families here, who hosted 35 people from the embassy. They wanted to have us over, sort of "hey, thanks for coming, meet the family" sort of thing. [...] There was a person in between the ambassador and I, and I started talking to this guy. We got to the subject of the stock market, he starts talking, and then he said something about he was calling the head of Goldman Sachs, saying, "We had a discussion. Oh, Lloyd Blankfein. Yeah I called him.

We were chatting. Warren Buffett was doing this deal and we wanted a piece of it too." Chatting and going back and forth, he never introduced himself, no one had made a big deal of it, but I realised that he was the head of the Sovereign Wealth Fund (or the Kuwait Investment Authority). And I was like, "Oh, here I am probably making an ass out of myself, making conversation with a guy who controls 600 billion dollars."

The two aforementioned excerpts are testament to how *diwaniyya* visits need not have ulterior motives, other than exemplifying Kuwaiti hospitality. These durable dispositions of visiting and receiving, produce an environment known as a habitus that are "collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (Bourdieu 1990b: 53). The socialising behaviour in *diwaniyyas* perpetuate existing opportunity structures, that, in turn result in "a system of circular relations which unite structures and practices" (Schwartz 2005: 203; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: 203).

A harder look at the two extracts raises further pertinent observations: social capital accumulated in *diwaniyyas* still rests on family foundations, which involves status creation and maintenance. Ramadhan for Kuwaitis, when diplomats are also seen out and about giving well-wishes, is the equivalent of Christmas in the West and Lunar New Year in the Far East. The inordinate number of cars and Kuwaitis visiting one another in their family *diwaniyyas* are, undoubtedly, a product of the socially instituted family (see Photograph 3.15). Here social capital is expressed through the 'alchemy of consecration' which is endlessly reproduced in and through the exchange of congratulatory wishes, and the mutual recognition of family membership, all of which form the greater Kuwaiti family (see Bourdieu 1986: 250). As wave after wave of visitors come and go in each *diwaniyya*, Ramadhan represents a high season for making introductions (particularly for diplomats) in *diwaniyyas* that are useful at a later date, and showing off visitor volumes and in other cases, the added capital from prominent visitors (sheikhs and diplomats alike). The *bisht*, a black cloak with gold linings meant for special occasions, is worn by the sheikhs and prominent merchants, or by the groom and his father during a wedding (see Photograph 3.16). It is a "traditional dress that symbolizes nobility, dignity and social status" (Fattahova 2014). Peter Lienhardt (1993: 38), an anthropologist who visited Kuwait in the fifties, found the local perception of sheikhs to be 'men of affairs,' suggesting an element of social distinction within the community. By extension, the attendance of sheikhs at one's *diwaniyya* proves to be a status booster for the family's social and cultural capitals. It is no wonder than the sheikhs, like foreign ambassadors, are often ushered into the far end of the *diwaniyya* to take their seat beside the host. The concept of field, referring to

contextual pressures, is telling of the competition for ‘symbolic capital’; visiting *diwaniyyas* and receiving guests are thus a form of ‘position taking’ in a social field that intensifies on particular occasions (Reed-Danahay 2005: 11-13). As the host one is conscious of who visits, and as the guest one is aware of being seen and fulfilling social obligations.¹⁰⁰



Photograph 3.15 The bustle in *diwaniyyas* during Ramadhan: the Al-Ghannam *diwaniyya* (left, taken by author on 21/05/2018); the Al-Shamlan *diwaniyya* (right, taken by author on 20/05/2018)



Photograph 3.16 Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (in his distinctive *bisht*), the Governor of the Capital Governorate, visits the Shamlan *diwaniyya* during Ramadhan (Photo courtesy of Hamed Al-Amiri, Kuwait News Agency)

¹⁰⁰ During Ramadhan in 2018, I visited the Gulf Road *diwaniyyas*, whose family members, upon learning that I was to deliver a talk at the British embassy, almost always asked to remind the new British ambassador to visit them. “After all,” as one of them explained, “the British Political Agency and their current embassy have always been located close to us.” In this manner, even foreign diplomats have a similar obligation to be seen visiting at *diwaniyyas*.

The use of the *diwaniyya* for social occasions such as weddings and funerals reaffirms the space as a primarily familial one where cultural and social capitals coexist. Farouq Sultan (2013), a seventy-three year old Kuwaiti male remarked how funerals are the “best time to network”. When a death occurs in the family, the *diwaniyya* usually expects a crowd to pay condolences.¹⁰¹ Upon the death of the tenth ruler Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, a British official named Jordan (1950) described how the ruler’s body was “borne on the shoulder of Kuwaiti subjects in accordance with local custom” and later members of the ruling family sat in their *diwaniyya* to receive members of the town. It is Kuwaiti custom that dinner will be provided in the *diwaniyya* for mourning male guests while the head of the household continues to accept condolences for three days (Freeth 1978: 10). On a joyous event such as the wedding, the groom and his father, dressed in their *bisht*, would stand for hours in their family *diwaniyya* receiving guests (usually with photographers), where the visitors would then proceed to another room to dine (see Photograph 3.17). It is then conceivable how these family occasions set the scene for the circulation of social capital.



Photograph 3.17 Scenes at a wedding *diwaniyya* of the Al-Essa family (taken by author on 11/04/2017)

¹⁰¹ During a funeral, one would normally linger for no more than twenty minutes, paying condolences by saying, ‘*atham allah ajrek*’ meaning ‘May God increase your good deeds.’ At a wedding, one would congratulate the groom and his father by saying ‘*mabrook*’ or congratulations.

Beyond the *diwaniyya*'s social functions entrenched in the family lie those of a public nature. Accompanying the social networks is a vast base of information that is transmitted from one *diwaniyya* to another, with the actors acting as vehicles for news. Captain Knox (1906), the British Political Agent, on his tour to the south of Kuwait, was invited to a *diwaniyya* tent of the “father of the Koweit pearl merchants,” Bishr bin Roomi, who needed information about the Ceylon pearl fisheries. Later in 1978, an officer in the Middle East Department of the Foreign Commonwealth Office, named Tatham, described Kuwait as having a “quality of business canniness” that distinguishes it from the other Gulf states, having met a great number of well-informed citizens during his visit. Interlocutors (Al-Sabah 2016, Behbehani 2017) have explained how *diwaniyyas* act as a filter or a sieve, where any information gets thrown back and forth in the room, corrected and refined, making the final version ‘the real thing’. Having assumed that the Al-Ghannam family is the same as the Al-Ghanim, I was promptly corrected in a *diwaniyya* that the Al-Ghannam is a younger family, while the Al-Ghanim, together with the Al-Saqr, Al-Qatami, and the Al-Ghunaim, are Al-Zayd of the tribe of ‘Anaiza (*asil* families, see Chapter Two; Carter 1984: 41-42). That Kuwaitis have the astuteness to navigate business, social and political dealings can be attributed to constructivist qualities: the constant interaction from within and with the outside world¹⁰² (due to the nature of pre-oil post trade) has produced an ideational structure in the form of the *diwaniyya* that is “produced, reproduced and altered by the discursive practices of agents [according to their interests]” (Copeland 2000: 190). In commercial terms, the merchant families, having become agents for companies whose products are imported into Kuwait, have a preference for running their business as a ‘family corporation’ (Field 1984: 118-120; Jamal 2009: 297; Al-Wazzan 2009, cited in Ohan 2010: 191-192). In a similar fashion, the *diwaniyya* as a family-based space, provides an accurate reflection of each family’s commercial status quo: in the late seventies, a senior manager of Ahmed Al-Ghanim and Sons confessed that another family-owned company (under the Behbehanis), also the Kuwaiti agent for Buick luxury cars, was making more than his own (see Field 1984: 298).

At the social level, on top of drawing from the social capital built upon inter-family connections, is an understanding of social integration, whether into the workforce or the community. The *diwaniyya* eases one’s access into an intricate web of hierarchical and horizontal networks, from as mundane a task as finding a suitor for one’s sister, to climbing

¹⁰² See FO 960/4/1038, where the British Political Agency in Abu Dhabi reported that Abdulla Al-Ghanim of the prominent Kuwaiti family was authorised by the Kuwait Government to offer Abu Dhabi and other Gulf states he visited Kuwait’s advice and assistance with their development, exemplifying how merchants continue to be held in high esteem and are widely travelled in the aftermath of the port era.

the professional ladder, as commentators have discerned. When visiting Failaka island in the fifties, Lienhardt (1993: 67) described how he had to visit the governor's *diwaniyya* in order to negotiate the details of his stay on the island. Elsewhere, Redman (2014: 74-75), in his interactions with Kuwaitis, found that certain young Kuwaitis, despite completing college in the United States, needed their father's exploits in the *diwaniyya* in order to find a job. In this manner, the overarching social structure of the *diwaniyya*, running along family lines, means that social capital is exercised in tandem with cultural capital. With the accession of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad in 1978, the British official Gallagher remarked:

The Sabah seem more set than ever on running Kuwait "as a family," as Jabir Al-Ahmad would put it. My guess is that the merchants (whose acquiescence is vital to such an arrangement) will not make waves.

The above statement still holds true today and is proof of the organic solidarity that defines social cohesion in Kuwait. Social capital is the firm grasp of inter-family ties, and equally a tolerance for the views of others – qualities that the *diwaniyya* promotes and inherits from the pre-oil past. That *diwaniyyas* of the Shia families (Behbehani, Qabazard) remain free to operate and welcome their Sunni counterparts are a mark of close bonds. As the Chairman of Mohammed Ameen Behbehani Trading Company (2017) emphasises, the inclusiveness of Kuwaiti society is reflected in the "successful partnerships between Sunni and Shia families," listing the Bisher and Al-Kazemi, Behbehani and Al-Mulla business arrangements, as examples.

3.6 The Decline of the 'Oligarchic Families'?

The founding of Kuwait in Chapter Two outlined the pre-eminence of the *asil* (noble) families that arrived alongside the Al-Sabah, later shaping the organic solidarity that governs the entirety of Kuwaiti society. The Al-Sabah had been and still form the core political pool, while the mercantile elite has been the driving commercial force. Yet, the fortuitous discovery of oil whose profits landed in the hands of the Al-Sabah overturned the traditional balance of power. The merchants rallied in opposition to the Al-Sabah's newfound power, resulting in the rise and fall of two councils until the establishment of the parliament in 1963, but this game of chess was far from straightforward:

The establishment of the [national] assembly was thus a sign to the families of a restoration of the balance of power that Mubarak had shattered. [...] The Sabahs used what looked like nationalization of the oil sector (public finances had in fact become the prerogative of the Sabahs) to neutralize the political ambitions of the founding families and set up an advanced welfare state, which won them the

loyalty of the Third Estate outside the oligarchic families. The game thus became triangular instead of binary, giving the Sabahs the necessary tools to set two very distinct social strata against each other: the co-founders defending their privileges against what they saw as the unjustifiable authoritarianism of the Sabahs, and the rest of the Kuwaitis (Shi'ites, Sunnis from non-Najdi origins, Bedouins who had given up the nomadic life) who dispute oligarchic practices even more than the Sabahs' authority. (Salamé 1994: 94)

The above excerpt underscores the new realities with which the ruling family had to grapple, and the Sabahs' response was pitting an amalgamation of new social groups against the traditional elite. This led to the general decline of the oligarchic mercantile elite,¹⁰³ but this change was anything but simplistic. These well-established merchant families, whose *diwaniyyas* in the old neighbourhoods were few in numbers, had indisputably been the most influential and had supplied the rulers with financial capital (Al-Kharafi 2003; Al-Kandari 2016; Alsharekh 2017).¹⁰⁴ The persistence of their *diwaniyyas* in the present urban landscape serves as a 'listening post' for the ruling family who continues to monitor their economic grievances (Crystal 1990: 77). The rise of new social groups, if not, interest groups since the advent of oil wealth, has seen the sway of these elite merchant families fluctuate over time. By extension, the socio-political importance of their *diwaniyyas* has become diffused geographically as a result of suburbanisation (see also Section 2.9), and relative to emergent families competing for the attention of those in power. This is evident from the mushrooming of *diwaniyyas* in the new neighbourhood districts, and members of the ruling family have become prudent and selective of the *diwaniyyas* to which they devote their attention.¹⁰⁵

Jill Crystal's (1990: 75) monumental study of ruler-merchant relationship in Kuwait and Qatar highlights the continued importance of the merchants, despite the flow of oil wealth into the Al-Sabahs' hands:

¹⁰³ A Kuwaiti colleague, who prefers to remain anonymous, related to me in personal conversation that the decline of merchant families is sometimes owed to ruptures in the family. In an effort at self-preservation of their *asil* status, elite families prefer to marry from within or with another *asil* family; outmarriage taboos may result in an internal conflict within the family, which can lead to the formation of *diwaniyyas* belonging to different branches of the family.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Kharafi (2003: 268-270) describes how these affluent merchant families had attached a bedroom to their *diwaniyyas* for distinguished guests, and, while some are open at specific times of the day, others played host to visitors from dawn to dusk, for instance, the Al-Falah and the Al-Roumi *diwaniyyas* which were also affectionately known as the "*Diwan* of the Five Prayers" because they were open throughout the day.

¹⁰⁵ The first British ambassador to independent Kuwait John Richmond (1961) remarked that "although the dispersal of the population in recent years from the old town to the suburbs has disrupted the system whereby the large families virtually controlled sectors of the town, they still have their clients, which is the nearest there is to an electoral machine".

Two mechanisms were crucial in preserving and augmenting the merchants' wealth in this period [from the fifties]. The first was direct support. Initially aid was *ad hoc*: the ruler helped individual merchants through preferential monopolies and dealerships and, in an historic reversal, personal loans. The second mechanism was the preservation of the private sector, or an important sliver of it. [...] Where merchants were happy to invest – trade, construction, services – the government not only stated out, it offered encouragement. [...] The ruler also made a quiet promise to keep Sabahs out of Kuwaiti business.

State policies were part and parcel of building a support base for the ruler, alongside other distributive policies that were directed at all Kuwaiti families, including areas of education, health, and employment (see Crystal 1990: 78-80). Higher education, once the preserve of the merchant families, was now accessible to even the poorest; the ratio of students per 1,000 of the population in 1956/7 was observed as “the highest so far achieved by any Arab state” (IBRD 1965: 146-147). In face of Arab nationalism and an Iraqi threat, then ruler Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem found it imperative to garner local support. Whereas the 1967 elections were noted by observers to have been rigged, by the next elections in 1971, the British official Goodison (1970) remarked no expected tampering of the ballot boxes, and that the Al-Sabah had ensured that “there is a considerable majority of yes-men in the Assembly”.¹⁰⁶ It is during this very time period that the opposition grew in prominence, consisting of ‘Arab nationalists, some of whom were the sons of merchant families and others of whom came from more modest backgrounds’ (Herb 2014: 88; Crystal 1990: 81-83). *Diwaniyyas* served both as an indication and a medium of opposition activity, as one British official Morris (1967) who, not only saw how merchants such as Yusuf Ibrahim Al-Ghanim, Abd Al-Aziz Al-Sagar, and Abd Al-Aziz Al-Husain, visited one another’s *diwaniyyas* frequently, but also wrote of a certain Yusuf Sayyid Hashim Al-Refai as “deliberately cultivating a wide circle of acquaintances” by sitting twice a week and spending his other evening visiting *diwaniyyas*.

The effects of the aforementioned state policies, in the long run, led to the formation of the intelligentsia, which according to Halpern (1963: 56), are those “with knowledge or awareness to see that a social and political revolution is in progress, [and] form the largest and

¹⁰⁶ See also FO 960/2/1013, where the British official Arthur (1967) called on the Kuwaiti ambassador to Cairo, Abdul Aziz Hussein, and the latter resented “a democratic system where elections were rigged as shamelessly as the last Kuwait elections [in 1967] were”. Abdul Aziz commented further that “the Sabah family would sooner or later have to share power with the people to a greater extent than at present, and it would pay them to look ahead to that time”.

politically most active component of the new middle class”. Tétreault (2011: 76-77) elaborates on the formation of the Kuwaiti middle class:

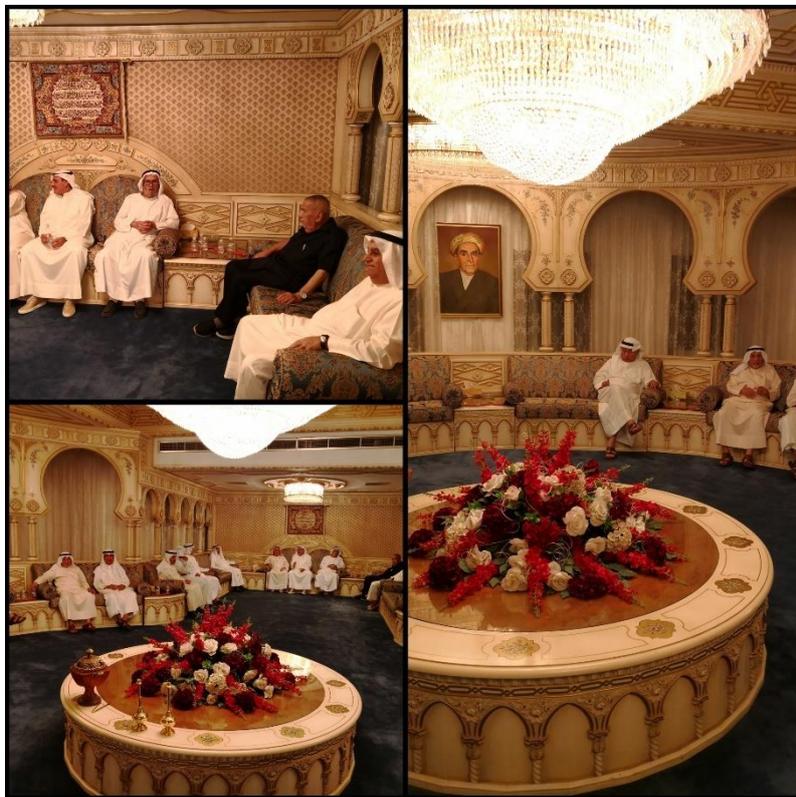
It was not an investing bourgeoisie like the merchant elite (although a few families did achieve that status), but rather a group of prosperous, if wage-dependent, families that resemble middle-class populations in developed countries, including in their aspirations, many monopolized by merchant-class citizens but others that were more broadly representative. Aided by the amir’s drastic redrawing of electoral constituencies prior to the 1981 election to reduce the political weight of urban-based groups like merchants and Arab nationalists, Kuwait’s “new men” ran for parliament after having cut political teeth competing for positions on the boards of local cooperatives.

This middle class, impelled by ideas and action, drove an environment of inclusive critical discussion. The Kuwaiti mercantile elite, like the aristocrats in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe, played “leading roles in the early bourgeois public sphere,” while the growing Kuwaiti middle class was comparable to the then bourgeois European society which “developed into the new sort of sociability of eighteenth-century salons” (Calhoun 1992: 7). Just before the 1990 Iraqi invasion, more than 50 voluntary associations, ranging from trade unions to civic clubs, were registered in Kuwait, allowing for the overlapping of formal associational groups and nonassociational groups (tribe, family and the *diwaniyya*) (Ghabra 1991: 200).¹⁰⁷ In this way the expansion of the public sphere (associational and nonassociational groups) encouraged the “practice of rational-critical discourse” which challenged state authority, spurred on by the “broadening of civil society to include middle-class citizens of all kinds” (Habermas 1991: 24-27; Calhoun 1992: 8-9; Tétreault 2011: 74). In the late eighties, former US ambassador Nathaniel Howell (1989) observes that “there is no longer any vehicle except the informal *diwaniya* system by which the families can demand an accounting from the Al-Sabah”. The next section will provide two case studies to illustrate how the *diwaniyya* as a social force regulates state authority.

More relevant to the discussion is how families outside the traditional oligarchic elite began to challenge the status quo. In a telegram to the British Political Resident in Bahrain, the political agency in Kuwait noted that various merchant families were competing against “the Gharaballi and Al-Ghanim clique, who have so far ‘landed’ all the lucrative Kuwaiti

¹⁰⁷ This phenomenon is in stark contrast to the Kuwait of yesteryear. The British Political Agent, Harold Dickson noted in 1939 that “there were no institutions for the young men in Kuwait of any kind,” and the nearest source of inspiration for public institutions was inspired from neighbouring Iraq and Syria (see MEC Archives, DN4/3, Dickson’s diary for the year 1939).

partnerships with the big contractors” (Pirie-Gordon 1952). As mentioned earlier, the influence of trading families was susceptible in an era of change; the types of capital (political or economic) accumulated were in constant flux.¹⁰⁸ While the Al-Ghanims went from large shipowners and traders to the fifth largest Arab merchant house (Crystal 1990: 77-78; Field 1984: 9), another family, the Al-Humaidis, went from managing royal finances to become wealthy modern contractors – effectively losing their former central position of power (Crystal 1990: 109-110). Following rapid urbanisation and the ensuing suburbanisation, the *diwaniyya* in the residential landscape provided a firm indication of each family’s history, affluence, and other symbolic capitals. The Al-Awadhi *diwaniyya* in Qadsiya, for instance, is a display of the family’s Persian roots, while their members have strong recent ties in diplomacy and in politics (see Photograph 3.18).¹⁰⁹



Photograph 3.18 The Al-Awadhi *diwaniyya* in Qadsiya (taken by author on 21/05/2018)

¹⁰⁸ In a US embassy cable (Howell 1989), membership in the aristocracy is said to be ‘far from static’. The cable also outlines the balance of different family groups that act as counterweights to one another: the Al-Sabah, the Sunni aristocracy, the Shia aristocracy (Qabazard, Behbehani, Al-Kazemi), and the Jenaat (considered the ‘nouveau riche’ which includes the Al-Mutawa, Al-Saleh, Al-Suri, Al-Sultan, Al-Issa, Al-Badr, Al-Musallem, Al-Naji, Al-Jassem, and the Al-Yassen families).

¹⁰⁹ When I visited the Al-Awadhi *diwaniyya* on 21 May 2018, I was immediately introduced to Abdurrahman Al-Awadhi, whom I was told was the longest serving non-royal minister in the cabinet (former Minister of Health). Other members present included former ambassadors, and I later spoke more intently with a young Abdullah A.H. Al-Awadhi who works in the office of the Speaker of the National Assembly. Carter (1984: 20-21) also notes their Iranian roots.

Tracking the business activity and political engagement of merchant families in Kuwait, Nosova's (2016) refreshing doctoral study reveals change in continuity. Arguing that access to politics allow merchants to shape economic policies and business-related legislation, she provides a list of the traditional Kuwaiti mercantile elite¹¹⁰ and their representation in the Kuwait Stock Exchange, but also shows how these old families are joined by newcomers from the middle class (Nosova 2016: 78-82; see also Kamrava et al. 2016 and Table 3.2).

¹¹⁰ This list is found on pp. 79-80 of her thesis, and her data is obtained from Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb's online archive: <http://www.khaldounalnaqeeb.com/en/index.jsp>

Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb's list of families that rose to business prominence from the middle class	Current representation in the Kuwait Stock Exchange (no. of positions)
Al-Barjas	1
Al-Bourisly	4
Al-Jad	2
Al-Jau'an	8
Al-Hasawi	3
Al-Dabbous	2
Al-Rasheed	1
Al-Shatti	2
Al-'Anjeri	Not represented
Al-'Ayyar	2
Al-Gharaballi	Not represented
Al-Ghannam	3
Al-Faris	7
Al-Farhan	3
Al-Fareeh	2
Al-Fallah	2
Al-Fadhala	1
Al-Mishari	1
Al-Mansour	3
Al-Munayyis	Not represented
Al-Musailim	Not represented
Al-Nafisi	10
Al-Hajiri	10
Al-Waqayan	4
Al-Sane'	3
Al-Tabtaba'i	1

Table 3.2 Al-Naqeeb's list of emergent families and their current ownership in the KSE (taken from Nosova 2016: 80-81, Original Sources: Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb's online archive and KSE website)

While the above data unveils the rise of new Kuwaiti families, it too offers an insight into how oil wealth, urbanisation, and the state administration are responsible for changing social realities that are mapped onto the network of family *diwaniyyas* across Kuwait. The Al-Dabbous family, once involved in desert trade, now boasts a politician in MP Essam Al-Dabbous; the Al-Ghannam family's ascendance distinguishes them from the families of the Al-Zayd umbrella (see Section 3.1); the aforementioned trajectories are all captured in the *diwaniyya* itself (both its physical appearance and its audience). Former US ambassador Edward Gnehm (1992, emphasis added) aptly qualifies the decline of the mercantile elite in a cable:

The core founding families of the Sunni merchant elite remain the old founding families: the Al-Bahar, Al-Nisif, Al-Sager, Al-Ghanim, Al-Abdelrazzaq, Al-Rashed, Al-Roumi, Al-Nouri, Al-Hamad, Al-Abdulahadi, Al-Abdulghafour and others who recall the distinct areas of the old walled city where their ancestors settled. However, status is *by no means static*. Other families [...] by virtue of their noble Arab stock, hard work, and business acumen, were readily integrated into the ranks of the mercantile elite. Among these families are the Al-Duaij, Al-Shaya, Al-Ghannam, Al-Khorafi, Al-Othman, Al-Gharabally, Al-Marzouk, Al-Wazzan (Sunni), Al-Fawzan, and Al-Babtain. Many of the grandest diwaniya halls of Kuwait today feature a portrait of their father or grandfather who worked as a deckhand, water seller in the souq, or ditchdigger before accumulating family fortune. [...]

The outcome of that election [for the Board of the Chamber of Commerce] illustrated the political inertia of merchant aristocrats. [...] In fact, the face off was more of a political primary with a choice *between the big-name Sunni merchants who have always controlled the Chamber of Commerce and a group of newcomers trying to unseat the traditionalists* by running a slate from the “ordinary families” including some Shia, Bedouin, and non-aristocratic businessmen. This Kuwaiti “rainbow coalition” failed unconvincingly in its attempt to unseat the elite families from their power base in the Chamber of Commerce.

3.7 Quarrels in the Family

Thus far, the home-based status of the *diwaniyya*, as a corollary of the organic family structure of Kuwaiti society, has equipped the space with both private and public qualities. Further, the interactional aspect within and between *diwaniyyas* lives up to the ideal of the public sphere which calls for social integration to be “based on communication rather than domination” (Calhoun 1992: 29). This is particularly vital when the mode of governance rests on the ruling family’s obligations to Kuwaiti families. The *diwaniyya*’s public facet is twofold: (1) a space where one seeks recognition and precedence (related to the family); (2) an associational space where “men act together in concert” and where power is derived from collective engagement and rational persuasion (Benhabib 1992: 78; Arendt 1972: 143). On point (1), the *diwaniyya* conforms to what Arendt (1958: 177) calls a ‘space of appearance’ where “action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere”. Just as the space of appearance is continually recreated by action, for the purpose of “discussing and deliberating about matters of public concern,” the *diwaniyya*’s malleability allows it to assume a public role; yet when these activities cease, the *diwaniyya* reverts to its functions of the family, making the public-political function “potentially there, but only

potentially, not necessarily and not forever” (D’Entreves 2018, Arendt 1958: 199). While the *diwaniyya* has been the main reception venue for festive occasions, the townspeople also had the option of visiting the ruler in his *diwaniyya*, as had been done in 1954 to protest against maladministration in city planning (Logan 1954; Granston 1961). On point (2), power, according to Arendt (1972: 151, emphasis added), “power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its *legitimacy from the initial getting together* rather than from any action that then may follow”. Benhabib (1992: 78, see also Arendt 1958: 179) further explains the public dimension added to a space that is *not* “in any topographical or institutional sense”:

But a private dining room in which people gather to hear a *samizdat* or in which dissidents meet with foreigners become public spaces; just as a field or a forest can also become public space if it is the object and location of an action in concert, of a demonstration to stop the construction of a highway or a military air base, for example. These diverse topographical locations become public spaces in that they become the sites of power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion.

In this manner, the *diwaniyya*’s public involvement goes beyond its use as primary sites for electoral campaigning and other political activity; they also act as important *pre-political* platforms that employ ‘speech and persuasion’ to provoke action. Allowing dissent outside of a pre-determined context, the “earmarking of particular *diwaniyya* meetings” can have socio-political implications, and in some cases, mass mobilisation (Tétreault 2000: 70). Musallam Al-Barrak, a former politician and a household name, is known for criticising government policies in his *diwaniyya*. In 2013 when the criminal court found him guilty of insulting the Emir, “thousands of supporters marched from Barrak’s guesthouse (*diwaniyya*) towards the central prison outside the town as a police helicopter watched from the sky” (Hagagy 2013). More recently after the November 2016 general elections, MP-elect Mohammad Al-Mutair received in his *diwaniyya* 21 other newly elected MPs, many of whom known to be part of the opposition, in order to discuss nominees for various parliamentary positions (Ibrahim & Al-Naqeeb 2016).

Social arbitration administered by the *diwaniyya* runs from settling a neighbourhood dispute to counterbalancing the ruling family’s stronghold in governance. Kuwait’s transformation into a modern state with its independence in 1961, overseen by Sheikh Abdallah Al-Salem (see also Section 2.8), was a consolidation of his power over his own family while embarking on a policy involving substantial decentralisation (Crystal 2016: 26-28). Sheikh

Abdallah's political imagination meant that participation in formal structures such as the National Assembly was accompanied by informal platforms built on popular tradition akin to the *diwaniyya* – a “balancing act between the traditional and the modern” (Davidson 2014). Two case studies situated in the 50s/60s and 80s/90s respectively serve to illustrate the impact of the *diwaniyya* in politics, owing to its social reach and its capacity for using speech to deliver action. First, the decades of the fifties and going into the sixties witnessed the growing power of the Al-Sabahs; in particular, Sheikh Fahad Al-Salim (Head of the Municipality and the Health Department) and Sheikh Abdallah Mubarak (Head of Security and the last living son of Mubarak the Great) piled domestic pressure on the Emir Sheikh Abdallah Al-Salem by expanding their respective clienteles.¹¹¹ The “tenacity of the townsmen” in their complaints, as the British official Logan (1954) noted, led to various formal and informal talks with the Emir who then had ‘stormy interviews’ with the two aforementioned sheikhs. As the Emir managed to curb maladministration by his relatives, he was faced with the shadow of nationalism and with it, an opposition comprising Kuwaitis and expatriate Arabs. Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib¹¹² (see Section 2.7) and Jasim Al-Qitami,¹¹³ leading opposition figures of their time, were especially active. The British official Graham (1967) wrote of the latter:

They (Jasim Al-Qitami and his friends) did not wish for violent change. They were however working very actively in the Diwaniyat and they reckoned that they now had 60 or 70 per cent support among the voters. Each of them had a programme and every night they visited two to three Diwaniyat, having sent their supporters ahead announce that they were coming, so that instead of the normal 20 or 30 people who might attend a Diwaniyah, they had audiences of 150-200.

The above episode early in post-independent Kuwait highlights the propensity for Kuwaiti citizens to react in an infringement of the social contract, wherein the *diwaniyya* serves as an important venue for redressing grievances and building a wider support base. Crucially, this instalment demonstrates how the public is able to keep Al-Sabah in check, setting a precedent for a more selective appointment of the cabinet. Crystal (1990: 110) notes that although there have been fewer Sabah ministers over time, they continue to dominate the

¹¹¹ A more elaborate account of this family crisis can be found in Chapter Four of Crystal (1990).

¹¹² The British Political Agent Bell (1955) observed how Dr Ahmad found that “it is only by exploiting the ideas and sympathies of the younger shaikhs that he can hope to make any immediate progress against the ruling family’s position”.

¹¹³ Jasim Al-Qitami was the first Kuwaiti graduate of a police academy and had been head of the police force until his resignation in 1956; later he made a pro-Nasser speech in 1959 (see Herb 2014: 88; Crystal 1990: 83). The second Emir of post-independent Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Salim, appointed Jasim as his under-secretary, who was also “given a free hand [...] in recruiting the best from Kuwait’s bureaucracy” (Bishara 2002: xii).

cabinet key positions “for longer periods of time,” notably: the prime minister post, interior, defence, foreign affairs, information, and finance. A more recent assessment of cabinet composition by the Kuwait Politics Database (2018) reveals that, besides the prime minister appointment, only the interior, defence and foreign affairs posts have been occupied in succession by the Al-Sabahs.

The second case study follows the period after the parliament had been unconstitutionally dissolved in 1986, sparking the ‘Monday *Diwaniyya*’ movement in December 1989. Opposition leaders held meetings on successive Monday nights in their *diwaniyyas*, starting with that of Jasim Al-Qitami, in order to call for the restoration of both the parliament and the constitution. The government’s reaction was one of wielding the stick: in the second meeting held at Mishari Al-Anjari’s *diwaniyya* in Nuzha neighbourhood district, riot police and police dogs were dispatched to block access into the *diwaniyya* (Tétreault 2000: 70; Al-Mubarak 2008). This was considered offensive to many Kuwaitis on the grounds that the government’s act involved an invasion of the private realm (the home) and unleashing animals that ritually unclean in Islam. Thereafter, then Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad invited five opposition leaders to his office on the 12th of December 1989, offering his apology for having forcefully closed the Al-Anjari *diwaniyya*, and reiterating the sanctity of the space. In the next couple of meetings there was no sign of the police, but the fifth meeting in Ahmad Al-Shuraian’s *diwaniyya* attracted the police, who used force on the attendees and established a perimeter to prevent the crowd from entering the *diwaniyya*. Two days later, Ahmad himself was arrested but other opposition figures arrived at the police station with their lawyers, eventually succeeding in having Ahmad released five hours after his arrest. What is striking during this *diwaniyya* movement is the increasing numbers of supporters who turned up at these *diwaniyyas*, reaching a high of 20,000 people at Abbas Munawer’s *diwaniyya* on the seventh occurrence. Yousef Al-Mubarak (2008: 139, see also Table 3.3 and Photograph 3.19), who attended all of the Monday *diwaniyyas*, described this movement as “a war of freedom”. He records the turn of events as follows:

	<i>Diwaniyya</i> , Area	Date	Time	Speakers	Number of Attendees	Remarks
1	Jasim Al-Qitami, Shamiya	04/12/1989	After 'Isha prayer	Jasim Al-Qitami, Ahmad Al-Sadoun	700	
2	Mishari Al-Anjari, Nuzha	11/12/1989	After 'Isha prayer	Ahmad Al-Sadoun	2,000-2,500	Access to the <i>diwaniyya</i> was blocked. Al-Sadoun expressed disapproval at the action taken by authorities who had brought German shepherds with them
3	Fatma mosque, Dahiyat Abdullah Al-Salem	18/12/1989	During 'Isha prayer		3,500	Silent protest
4	Muhammad Al-Marshad, Khaldiya	25/12/1989	After 'Isha prayer	Ahmad Al-Sadoun, Ahmad Bager, Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib, Mubarak Al-Duwaila	More than 5,000	
5	Ahmad Al-Shuraian, Jahra	08/01/1990	After 'Isha prayer	Ahmad Al-Sadoun	Between 5,000-7,000	The <i>diwaniyya's</i> access was sealed off. Some citizens present were beaten by the police
6	Faisal Al-Sanea, Kaifan	15/01/1990	After 'Isha prayer	Ahmad Al-Sadoun, Abdullah Al-Nafisi	9,000 and 250 women	Access to the <i>diwaniyya</i> was blocked by the police, so the talk was delivered across the road
7	Abbas Munawer, Farwaniya	22/01/1990	After 'Isha prayer	Ahmad Al-Sadoun	20,000	Access to the <i>diwaniyya</i> was blocked; a perimeter was set up by authorities. Force and tear gas were used

Table 3.3 Timeline of the Monday *Diwaniyyas* (Al-Mubarak 2008: 35, translated and simplified)



Photograph 3.19 Opposition figures delivering speeches in Muhammad Al-Marshad’s *diwaniyya*, Khaldiya (Al-Mubarak 2008: 412)

During times of political crises, the *diwaniyya*’s malleability allows for its politicisation, in this case it “virtually replaced the National Assembly” (Saeed-Subaihi 1989: 122). More than exhibiting its potential for mass mobilisation, the *diwaniyya* movement reflected a sense of public participation that persisted in the immediate period after the Iraqi occupation. During a meeting of exiles in Jeddah to discuss future plans after liberation, the opposition pledged to support the continuation of the Sabah as the ruling family, while the ruling family gave their word to restore the constitution of 1962 (Tétreault 2000: 85-86).¹¹⁴ The *diwaniyya* continued to be a vital bastion following Kuwait’s liberation, with palaces and government buildings destroyed during the invasion; then Crown Prince Sheikh Saad’s *diwaniyya* became a centre for administrative functions (Kifner 1991). Worthy of mention is the Al-Babtain *diwaniyya* which became the Emir’s temporary residence for 75 days upon his return to Kuwait. On the 4th of March 1991, his arrival was met with cheers and applause of the people who lined the streets from the airport to the *diwaniyya*, where he later delivered the first post-liberation

¹¹⁴ In personal conversation, Dr Ali Al-Shamlan, who was present at the Jeddah conference, recounted how the opposition figures Ahmad Al-Sadoun and Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib were insistent that the words, “a return to the 1962 constitution,” be penned down in black and white, in order to allay fears of the Al-Sabahs’ consolidation of power. This pledge by the Kuwait exile authorities, under pressure from opposition groups, was taken before “1,200 people to [fulfil] demands for greater democratization” (Miller 1991).

speech (Zaki 2011: 45-46). During his stay at the Al-Babtain *diwaniyya*, the Emir received foreign dignitaries and members of the public; the *diwaniyya* was also chosen as the venue for the formation of the new cabinet of ministers (see Photograph 3.20). A senior member of the Al-Babtain family, Khalid Al-Babtain (2017), underscored the Emir's 'social duty' to his people, and his choice of a *diwaniyya* as his temporary home indicates how Kuwaiti society has always been a 'family front'. The Al-Babtain *diwaniyya* is still located in Nuzha today, adorned with memorabilia of the late Emir's stay (calligraphy, poems, photos), and still runs every Monday evening (see Photograph 3.21).



Photograph 3.20 The Al-Babtain *diwaniyya*, temporary residence of the late Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad in the post-liberation period (Source: Zaki 2011)



Photograph 3.21 The Al-Babtain *Diwaniyya* today (taken by author on 07/10/2017)

3.8 Conclusion

Kenneth Stammerman (2000), the former US Economic Counsellor to Kuwait (1987-1989), offered the following advice during an interview:

They (the Kuwaitis) also had these *diwaniyas*, night meetings, where the families meet together, the men of the families, and that's where business gets conducted. Well, I and a political officer would go to these, we'd get invited, we'd go to these things. We got to know the Kuwaiti families. There are 15 major Kuwaiti families, I knew them all. Their genealogy is fascinating. Learn the genealogy, get to know who's kin to whom, learn the marriage connections and you'll know how Kuwait works, which is what we did.

Learning the genealogy of Kuwaiti families equates with assessing the amount of social and cultural capitals in the family's possession. The *diwaniyya* provides the habitus, or the apt environment, for the accumulation of capitals. On the one hand, social capital, what Bourdieu (1986, cited in Reed-Danahay 2005: 22) calls "the structure of the network, that is, the matrix of objective relations between the different stations". Patterns of regular conduct such as *diwaniyya* visiting are 'socially produced,' 'internalised,' and 'ritualised' to the point where they become a part of the subconscious (Bourdieu 1990b: 53). On the other hand, the habitus

also explains how Kuwaitis reproduce cultural capital across different generations, in both the material and objectified forms, and the set of dispositions that are passed down from father to son. The entire process of acculturation built into each *diwaniyya* visit is what defines Kuwaiti identity.

All of the above can only be ascertained because the *diwaniyya* is an overt entity that invites various groups and families to exchange ideas and negotiate differences. From a constructivist angle, this face-to-face mode of interaction is a catalyst for developing a collective definition of self – in this case what it means to be Kuwaiti. The regular visits to *diwaniyya* develops, what Wendt (1992: 397) describes, “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self”. The public quality of the *diwaniyya* lies in how the space is “where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly” (Arendt 1958: 198-199). This space of appearance, going beyond the recognition of different families and interest groups, is politicised “whenever men are together in the manner of speech and action,” as we have seen with numerous examples in this chapter. AlTerkait (2017: 3-4), whose doctoral thesis investigates the definition of democracy in the Kuwaiti constitution, finds that enshrined in Kuwait’s democratic system lies the Islamic tradition of Shura (consultation, negotiation, consent and consensus). She calls this ruling style a “kind of ‘joint governing’ [which] created bridges of communication and transparency, and established a political legacy, whereby people consult and share their concerns with their ruler”. It is the same interactional style that we witness in *diwaniyyas* across Kuwait today, between the attendees and families with high economic or political capitals, and even with the sheikhs.

In explaining the ‘king’s dilemma,’ Samuel Huntington (1968: 177-191) argues that the traditional monarchy tends to have second thoughts on using its power to promote reform, in fear of losing ground to new groups produced by modernisation. Kuwait found the solution to such a dilemma; the use of oil wealth allowed the rulers to maintain power¹¹⁵; the *diwaniyya* culture provided a platform for resolving disputes with new groups and emergent families. As the next chapter will show, the oligarchic elite are not the only ones affected by the trickle-down effect of Kuwait’s oil wealth; tribal entities have also surfaced to compete for capitals. The *diwaniyya*, reflecting all these newfound realities in urbanised Kuwait, also reveals instances of social exclusion and dislocation as a result. Yet, amidst these changing times, the

¹¹⁵ The British official Richmond (1982), in a country assessment report, noted that oil wealth has been used to “take the edge off political discontent” in Kuwait.

family structures still holds true in Kuwait, whereby the *diwaniyya* contributes to the ‘unique amalgam’ of two allegedly contradictory concepts; “Kuwait for the Kuwaitis” and the Al-Sabahs as the heads of this Kuwaiti family (Rabi 2000: 164).

From a wider theoretical point of view, the discussion on organic and mechanical solidarities is rendered much more complex. If pre-oil Kuwaiti society epitomises organic solidarity by occupation, then post-oil Kuwaiti society is an industrial society with a distinctive division of labour. As Gellner (1981: 90-92) observes, industrial society is occupationally mobile, with “a mass of mobile, atomised, highly specialised individuals” who have the capacity for arousing the fervour of broad masses. In Kuwait, while each family sheds its attachment to its pre-oil occupation, its members are responsible for accumulating capitals. These capitals, manifested in kinship networks, are then reconnected by the ‘organising agent’ – the *diwaniyya* – which regulates other families, including the Al-Sabahs, across Kuwaiti society. While the *diwaniyya* etiquette has provided insight into status differentiation, it also serves as a reminder of the interconnected bonds between families; a division of labour “filled by the common conscience” of Kuwait’s past; the family continues to be “the principal bond of social aggregates of higher types” (Durkheim 1933: 173). The struggle between the elite and the rest of Kuwaiti society has been far from diminished. When the ruling family violates the social contract, the *diwaniyya* is the ‘go-to’ place which operates outside the limits of the law. This ‘state of exception’ as coined by Agamben (2008: 10), presents “clear analogies to that of the right of resistance”. As Kuwaiti academic Dr Hesham Al-Awadhi (2013) reaffirms, the *diwaniyya* has enabled people to “make very powerful statements” that are equally covered in the press, which are then circulated and repeated as societal discourse among Kuwaitis.

Behind this sense of openness is the hospitality shown in Kuwaiti *diwaniyyas*, which is unique not only in the Gulf, but also in the Arab world.¹¹⁶ Career diplomats, who have had a spell in other Arab countries, are quick to identify these differences. Australian ambassador to Kuwait Warren Hauck (2017) shares his views:

When speaking to my colleagues in the UAE and Qatar and Saudi, I think I've talked to many more and been in many more Kuwaiti houses than they will ever have a chance in their respective countries. It's quite different in that regard. Obviously Ramadhan, I had Ramadhan in Indonesia, which is a very different

¹¹⁶ In personal conversation with the social anthropologist Dr Ahmed Al-Shahi who travels frequently to Qatar, he admitted that Qataris, like their Gulf counterparts, are nothing like Kuwait in terms of openness. Visits to the *majlis* of the ruling family, and of prominent public figures, are by invite only, reflecting a different “air of conversation”.

affair to Ramadhan here in Kuwait. There's nothing like a *diwaniyya* system over there. You might do *iftar* with other people and then you go home, whereas here that's when the day starts. When you have *iftar* everything kicks off after that. It's a very different, for me it's been a very different experience allowing me to meet more locals than I normally would.

The uniqueness of the '*diwaniyya* system' is also echoed by Ambassador Hauck's colleague, Eleanor Hale (2017), who, having spent time in Baghdad and Cairo, found that the *diwaniyya* allows outsiders to 'join the family' to celebrate social occasions. The family, as confirmed in this chapter, remains the backbone of Kuwaiti society and its *diwaniyyas*.

In an attempt to qualify the positive role of the *diwaniyya*, the next chapter sets its sights on the divisions in the same broad Kuwaiti 'family,' drawing attention to how the exclusionary dynamics, both within and revolving around the *diwaniyya*, relate to wider social alienation.

4

Contesting the *Diwaniyya*

I suspect we will see more of mixed *diwaniyyas*, especially with young people. The young people are mostly going to the West to get educated. Social media is bombarding them with information about the West. I'm not sure how long they're going to hold out and remain [...]. We're seeing change happening; it's happening quickly in Kuwait.

Lloyd Freeman (2017), Human Rights Officer, US Embassy to Kuwait

4.1 Prelude: Reinventing Space and Tradition

On a cool September night in Kuwait City, I sat in what was described as a 'meeting of liberals' at a café; some were slouching against the bench as they took a puff out of their *shishas* (water-pipes), while others gesticulated frantically in an attempt to articulate their thoughts. There was an interesting mix of professions, among them were academics, lawyers and engineers. "Look around you," one said in a booming voice, "our construction projects are incomplete." He was not wrong. Kuwait's urban development is haphazard to say the least; brown, sandy patches are an uncharacteristic part of the physical landscape even in the city, among other large-scale construction projects that have been left unfinished for some time. Abdo (1988: 296), who reviewed Kuwait's urban development until the eighties, argued for a need to improve the 'imageability' of the urban development, explaining how "there remains a relatively large number of dilapidated buildings scattered in various parts of the city". Unlike neighbouring Dubai which has indulged in spectacular architecture, Kuwait's topography is a mix of old, new, undeveloped and partially-developed. Mohammad Khalid Al-Jassar (2014), the Assistant Professor of Architecture at Kuwait University, reflects upon Kuwait's spatial changes:

The whole argument is about why we see certain places persist, while others actually disappear quickly. And it is because of the power. People never viewed it (the *diwaniyya*) as a negative space. The courtyard was viewed as a negative space, but not the *diwaniyya*. That's why it still maintains its location next to the street. The whole house shifted and shrank into the middle of the land, but the *diwaniyya* stayed as the connection. The connection between the public realm and the *diwaniyya* is still the same as in the past.

Al-Jassar's words echoes the awakening (*Al-Nahda*) in Chapter Three: the rise in the standard of living, for Kuwaitis, is translated into an upgrade of housing features; for the state the overhaul of the pre-oil landscape was required to demonstrate the country's progress and

affluence. The Arabian Gulf Road in Kuwait today, a road reclaimed from what used to be the shore, is a stark reminder of Kuwait's socio-spatial evolution. The road is now home to the mega Sharq Shopping Mall, several historical *diwaniyyas* which are still part of the old courtyard houses (belonging to the Al-Mulla, Al-A'soussi, Al-Shamlan, Al-Roudhan, Al-Badr families), the Sadu House,¹¹⁷ the Grand Mosque, and a host of cafés and restaurants. This odd mix of buildings replaced the tightly-knitted mud-houses of the pre-oil *farij*, leading to one commentator's remark that the *diwaniyya*'s has 'lost its spine' amidst a revamped urban fabric as the space no longer served the immediate neighbourhood community. Yet, with the invention of the automobile, *diwaniyya* visiting from suburb to suburb has been made easy. The more recent trend of new social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) not only increases the diffusion of ideas, but also transmit the details of *diwaniyya* sessions quickly. Such changing realities undoubtedly question the continued relevance of the *diwaniyya*.

Following Chapter Three's affirmation that the *diwaniyya* acts as an 'organising agent' for families, this chapter seeks to re-examine the adaptability of the *diwaniyya* as both a space and practice amid changing times. The *diwaniyya*'s strength lies in its 'public-ness'; despite suburbanisation the *diwaniyya* has been a binding force for families, but it also caters to different groups of people. This includes the younger generation with a different perspective of the *diwaniyya*, Kuwaitis with strong tribal affiliations, technologically savvy Kuwaitis, and women. By assessing the use of the *diwaniyya* by these aforementioned groups, this chapter inadvertently reveals lines of segregation and unconventional aspects that indicate a break from tradition. Revitalising the constructivist debate set out in Chapter One, ideational structures, a reflection of actors' interests and identities, are "produced, reproduced and altered by the discursive practices of agents" (Copeland 2000: 190). *Diwaniyyas*, renegotiated according to the terms of their owners, are a reflection of what one informant, Elham Hamdan (2013), calls the 'culture of the group'. While this group culture requires a rethink of 'proprietorship and entitlement' (Tétreault 2014, personal correspondence), it equally shows how Kuwaitis have been proactive in staking their claim on their urban landscape. One instance is the Cross-Cultural *Diwaniyya* project initiated by Faisal Al-Fuhaid, a Kuwaiti in his early twenties, who is also the co-founder of Equait, a youth organisation aiming to promote social equality. His pet project, the Cross Cultural *Diwaniyya*, is organised either on a monthly or fortnightly basis within the confines of an art gallery-cum-café known as Masaha 13, located within the Shuwaikh Industrial Estate which, being the trendy hotspot among Kuwaiti youth, comes to

¹¹⁷ See Appendix for the floorplan and history of the Sadu House.

life at dusk. According to Faisal (2016), the Cross-Cultural *Diwaniyya* aims to “bring people from different backgrounds together” in order to discuss a specific aspect of Kuwaiti society, for example, the quality of education (see Photograph 4.1). Such an initiative deviates from the conventional familial nature of the *diwaniyya*, rather, acts as a pure forum hosting a mixed audience (which Faisal admits was a difficulty that needed to be overcome initially), thus transgressing the social norms of what makes up a *diwaniyya*.



Photograph 4.1 The Cross Cultural *Diwaniyya* initiative (taken by author on 27/09/2017)

As the earlier chapters have elucidated, the physical features of the *diwaniyya* have followed changes in the urban environment, yet a lingering communal spirit is reflected in the *diwaniyya*'s continued practice. Similarly, an indication of evolving class dynamics spills over into Kuwaiti society, as Muhammad Al-Jassar (2014), the Assistant Professor of Architecture at Kuwait University, outlines:

The main difference spatially is that the *diwaniyya* prior to urbanisation was dictated by the structural system that was used, which is the length of the beam that they can provide for the room. The maximum length of the beam – which is the natural log – is usually 4 metres, but the maximum width of the room was 3 to 3.5 metres, and then the depth is about 5, 6 metres depending on the *diwaniyya* itself. [...] After modernisation, after 1952, there are a variety of physical *diwaniyyas*. [...] Historically the *diwaniyya* was attached to the house, [...] also historically associated with the specific job of the household owner, so not every house in the past had a *diwaniyya*. [...]

[Today] you can go from the regular small one which is usually catered to teenagers and younger adults, to the larger family *diwaniyyas* which can be a width of 8 metres, and sometimes 10 metres. Socially there are several factors. The first

factor with social that relates directly to the physical is that your social distance is usually 3 metres. Any social conversation takes place within 3 metres.

Two associated points arise from Al-Jassar's remarks. First, the physical design of the *diwaniyya* has changed in the post-urbanisation period and, with it, the type of conversation that is produced in the room; second, while the ownership of the *diwaniyya* in pre-oil Kuwait was a reflection of the family's social status by occupation, today the size of the *diwaniyya* determines one's prestige (as also seen from the last chapter). Not only does the *diwaniyya*'s size determine the level of intimacy between participants, but can also point to the type of audience it caters to.

In this manner, this chapter seeks to detail the different audiences that employ the *diwaniyya* in accordance to their own terms. In other words, re-examining the public sphere can reveal a series of 'publics,' who, negotiate the space of appearance (see Chapter Three) beyond the functions of the family. Calhoun (1992: 37) rejects the assumption that for any state there must only be one public, rather, it might be productive to think of the public sphere as "involving a field of discursive connections" or "clusters of relatively greater density of communication within the looser overall field". Further, Benhabib (1992: 79) argues:

But for moderns, public space is essentially porous; neither access to it nor its agenda of debate can be predefined by criteria of moral and political homogeneity. [...] The emancipation of workers made property relations into a public political issue; the emancipation of women has meant that the family and so-called private sphere became political issues [...]. Not only is it the "lost treasure" of revolutions that eventually all can partake in public life, but equally, when freedom emerges from action in concert, there can be no agenda to *predefine* the topic of public conversation.

The fact that the "topic of public conversation" is not predefined in a *diwaniyya* allows it to be shaped by its host and its users, further contesting the commonly-held belief that solely the family runs the *diwaniyya*. Further, newfound realities that challenge the embedded *diwaniyya* tradition, in particular the advent of new social media, deserve mention in this chapter.

4.2 Measuring Up to New Social Media

Murphy (2006: 1080), whose paper utilises the concept of agency to examine how modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) have stimulated political liberalisation in the Gulf region, eventually concludes that the impact of ICTs is "a creeping rather than revolutionary process". Her work echoes earlier writings on the role of new media in the

Muslim world, which find that the “horizontal proliferation of information undermines vertical lines of control” (Norton 1999: 21), leading to the expansion of the public sphere “in terms of opportunities for greater and territorially un-bordered access to information, and possibilities for interactive exchanges between both old and new constituencies” (Murphy 2006: 1066). In Kuwait, while the Ministry of Information was the major force behind the introduction of technology in the nineties due to an ‘educational compulsion’ (Murphy 2006: 1073-1074),¹¹⁸ it was society that took matters in its own hands through the increasing use of blogs across the 2000s. Al-Safat square’s pre-oil role as an urban commons was ‘virtually revived’ in the early 2000s when blogging became a mode popular expression; the blog aggregate website that served as a directory for other blogs in Kuwait was known as ‘Al-Safat,’ transforming the physical square into an ‘electronic agora’ that is accessible to all (Al-Nakib 2014a: 732).

Following the publication of Murphy’s piece, in the spring of 2006, the Orange Movement (also known as Nabiha 5 or “We Want It Five”) began with the idea of combatting corruption and redistricting, ultimately pushing through a bill that reduced Kuwait’s electoral districts from 25 to 5. Besides campaigning through the movement’s principal website, kuwait5.org, blogging was used to great effect:

Bloggers covered the movement’s activities and gatherings, writing about events and posting photos and video clips. Moreover, the bloggers urged their readers to participate in the movement. They announced upcoming events and connected protestors to each other online. In addition to promoting the movement, bloggers instructed Kuwaitis about their duties regarding the campaign. [...] Some bloggers formed the core of the movement or participated in the demonstrations. (Al-Bloshi & Alfahad 2009: 227)

Tétreault (2011: 74-83), who described Kuwait’s civil society as having “deep domestic roots and cosmopolitan branches reaching well beyond its formal borders,” found that public space and *diwaniyyas* also formed an integral part of the Orange Movement:

Text messages were forwarded to friends of friends, and about demonstrators wearing orange T-shirts and waving orange flags showed up in front of the Sayf Palace, startling ministers as they drove in to their meeting and again as they came out. “The prime minister waved to us,” one activist reported. “And we heard in *diwaniyyas* that they kept asking why was everyone wearing orange.” Press

¹¹⁸ The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990) marked a turning point in the openness of the media, as censorship prior to the invasion meant that “most Kuwaiti citizens were completely ignorant of the extent of the danger” (Tétreault 2000: 81). This changed in the post-invasion period, as international satellite stations became allowed across the region (Murphy 2006: 1070).

coverage and word of mouth ensured that news of the demonstration would spread, sparking another rally the following week where more than 500 people gathered.

What remains relevant to our discussion is that the advent of new social media does not offset the importance of physical, public space. Running against the dominant statist organisation of space, the geography of protest and demonstration requires a tangible face, beyond the non-confrontational facet typical of new social media. One interlocutor, Mohammad Ameen Behbehani (2017), mentions in an interview that opinions expressed in social media such as Twitter, are highly discouraged by the Emir, rather, *diwaniyyas* are the preferred mode of expression so that any misinformation can be corrected immediately. Such state intolerance proved to be true in 2013 when a youth activist was sentenced to five years in jail for insulting the Emir on Twitter, who is described as ‘immune and inviolable’ in the constitution (Hagagy 2013).

By 2014, a Forbes article listed Kuwait as the country with the highest per capita use on Twitter (Lipman 2014). As new forms of social media blur the boundaries between private and public spheres, Henry (1988) notes that this may not be such a new phenomenon in an Arab context after all, owing to the fact that access to information is informally distributed as much as it is formally structured. This means that private individuals can be more informed than public officials, and in Kuwait’s case, the *diwaniyya* has been shown to effectuate the circulation of information through the ties of the family. If anything, not only does social media help disseminate information about a given *diwaniyya* session, the *diwaniyya* is more of a safe haven for the freedom of expression compared to the likes of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Speaking at the University for Foreigners of Perugia, Kuwait’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Sabah (2011) remarked how Kuwait may be “one of the five leading countries in percentage of Facebook and Twitter users in the Arab world,”¹¹⁹ but reminded the audience that Kuwaitis are ‘traditionally modern’:

Having been a sea-faring society prior to the discovery of oil, our forefathers set sail on the rough seas to make a living by trading with other societies. [...] Consequently, their exposure to different people, cities and religions, instilled in them a strong sense of tolerance, which has been passed down from one generation to another. This sense of openness can be found even in our homes in what we call

¹¹⁹ In 2014, a Forbes article lists Kuwait as the country with the highest per capita use on Twitter. See Victor Lipman, “Top Twitter trends: What countries are most active? Who’s most popular?” *Forbes*, May 24, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2014/05/24/top-twitter-trends-what-countries-are-most-active-whos-most-popular/#d9b89666521>

the Diwaniya. It is at such gatherings that any stranger can freely walk in at a given sitting and mingle and discuss politics, business and religion – no topic is ever off the table. Prior to the establishment of our parliament as we know it today, these Diwaniyas essentially were mini-parliaments scattered all over Kuwait. [...] Our Diwaniyas were our Facebook and Twitter, long before these social networking sites came into existence.

As established in Chapter Two, the enduring role of the *diwaniyya* owes in large part to its malleability, and its ability to generate face-to-face interactions that keeps the Kuwaiti family structure intact. These ‘mini-parliaments’ relegate new social media platforms to the backseat, as the latter channels are used as a means to draw the crowd into the different *diwaniyyas*. It is not uncommon to find Instagram accounts named after various family *diwaniyyas*, with weekly posts listing public invitations and photos from the last sitting (see Figure 4.1). In other cases, these virtual spaces are used to draw viewers’ attention to bigger events held in *diwaniyyas*, ranging from weddings and funerals, to public lectures, reminiscent of the interview remarks by Yagoub Al-Kandari (2016) about the pre-oil educational role of *diwaniyyas*. One such character is Abdulaziz Jamsheer, whose uses his Instagram profile to extend public invitations to his *diwaniyya* in Rumaithiya, where sessions are often graced by a prominent guest speaker. Figure 4.2 shows a screenshot of a public invitation to his *diwaniyya* on 11 April 2017, where the former President of the Youth and Sports Authority, Faisal Al-Jasif, was due to speak.



Figure 4.1 Instagram accounts of various family *diwaniyyas* (Al-Shamlan, Al-Mulla, Al-Essa)



Figure 4.2 Screenshot of an Instagram invitation to Abdulaziz Jamsheer’s *diwaniyya*

As such, the built environment of the *diwaniyya* takes the form of a social theatre where one has to see and be seen, hear and be heard, and where actors can both physically and verbally “engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but

public relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor” (Habermas 1991: 27). Although new social media allows for anonymity and by extension, taps onto a wider base of people by radically reducing the “social and cultural distance [...] between producer and consumer” (Eickelman & Anderson 1999: 9), this means of communication does not situate itself within the social norms and boundaries of the average Kuwaiti. This means that, apart from its utility of reaching out, social media neither works within the family framework that binds Kuwaiti society together, nor engenders a process of acculturation that reproduces the cultural capital (social etiquette, dress code) that makes one a Kuwaiti. Interlocutors have often spoken about the ‘added value’ that the young inherit from the experiences of their elders by going to *diwaniyyas*, in a society where nationals ‘live by tradition’ (Al-A’soussi 2014; Al-Shamlan 2014). Other commentators take the argument further by highlighting the continued prominence of the *diwaniyya* despite the proliferation of new meeting spaces such as coffee shops, because the former is grounded in ‘historic sanctity’ and the maintenance of family status (Al-Nakib 2014; Al-Awadhi 2014).

The attractiveness of attending *diwaniyyas* also lies in the opportunity structures present, and as the Assistant Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, Dr Hamad Al-Bloushi (2016) explains, the melting pot of backgrounds might put one side-by-side with a member of the ruling family. All of the above insights reflect a general positive outlook on the *diwaniyya*, in spite of new social media creeping into daily life. There remains an acknowledgement that these alternative platforms can run ‘in parallel’ to the *diwaniyya*, as the Assistant-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Muhammad Saleh Al-A’soussi (2014) admits, even if a line must be drawn on the issues discussed. Change, however, remains real, as Lloyd Freeman (2016), the Human Rights Officer at the US Embassy, provides a third-person point of view, contending that social media has changed the ‘nature’ of *diwaniyyas*, because the latter are now “not quite as closed as it used to be” as one may find discussion points from the last sitting on social media the next day. Freeman specifically singles out the younger generation, whom he believes social media is “bombarding [...] with information about the West,” and concludes in scepticism that the young will struggle to hold out with the ‘conservative ways’ of their parents. This provides an apt entry point into our discussion on how young Kuwaitis have negotiated the cultural capital transmitted to them through the *diwaniyya* practice.

4.3 The Generational Gap

Approaching the topic on the youth, Murphy (2006: 1065) concedes that generational rifts in the cultural framework of what may be termed as traditional societies see information and communication technologies “challenging modes of organisation and socialisation”. A more recent article by Fulbright scholar Winder (2016) describes how technology disrupts tradition, giving the example of ‘virtual *diwaniyyas*’ in the form of WhatsApp groups, and adding that:

Young Kuwaitis now have the option to meet at a constantly expanding world of malls, coffee shops, shisha cafes, beach chalets, and other outlets. In some cases, the *diwaniyya* may be lost in the shuffle for the new generation of Kuwaiti men, who can instead meet at fashionable, co-ed destinations or smoke hookah far from the watchful eyes of their fathers and uncles. These college-aged men may only feel the need to visit the *diwaniyya* when absolutely necessary. There too may be a strong disconnect for the thousands of Kuwaitis who study in the West. Nevertheless, there are many that routinely visit their friends’ *diwaniyyas*, host their own, and sit with their families on the formal *diwaniyya* day.

The above excerpt indicates a generational wedge between young and old, and further testifies to the fact that spaces and places are not merely static arenas in which relationships between people transpire; rather they are both constituted by and constitutive of social relations, including those of age and generation (Vanderbeck & Worth 2015: 1-2). That the young are taking to the casual spaces also highlight a preference for an environment where the compliance of traditional etiquette is not necessary. The search for casual spaces is, however, not a new phenomenon, but one that is compelled by the drastic changes of the urban landscape. Dr Ali Al-Shamlan (2014), currently in his seventies, recounts his childhood and teenage years as revolving around the spacious courtyard, which he says that the current young generation know little about. For him, two unceasing practices preserved the *diwaniyya*’s role in society regardless of one’s age: (1) offering one’s condolences in *diwaniyyas*; (2) ‘sharing happiness’ on joyous occasions such as weddings and during Ramadhan in the confines of the *diwaniyya*. A notable point is how both practices relate back to the family, reaffirming Winder’s words on how, at the bare minimum, young Kuwaitis may “only feel the need to visit the *diwaniyyas* when absolutely necessary”. It is at such events where the young are bound by family obligations that materialises their presence in *diwaniyyas*.

Admittedly, the rise in entertainment value is characteristic of a space dominated by the young. Such an age identity has been reaffirmed time and again by various interlocutors. Muhammad Al-Zoubee (2014), a 25-year-old Kuwaiti male, attends a weekly *diwaniyya* with

friends and where activities range from playing video and card games, having spontaneous discussions, to having dinner in a group. Visiting 20-year-old Mishal Al-Sabah's *diwaniyya*, one instantly notices how distinctly different it is set up from the traditional *diwaniyyas*. Bearing more resemblance to a salon, his *diwaniyya* is lined with couches that one would typically find in a lounge. On the four walls are autographed football jerseys framed one after another, and a LCD television set which includes a video game console, and beside it the essential of every *diwaniyya* – the *dallah* (coffee pot). Explaining the differences in spatial design and conversational topics, Mishal (2013) uses his father's *diwaniyya* as a point of reference:

There are *diwaniyyas* like my father's where it is very political and formal in the attire you have to wear. And there are *diwaniyyas* like mine where we just come to relax. [...] Because everything comes by age. I know, once my friends and I start working, this *diwaniyya* is going to change a lot. As we grow up, our thinking changes. Our talk gets more political day by day. A few years ago, I used to know nothing about politics. Now every once in a while, we talk about politics and try to negotiate something, so it all comes by age. Younger people have more social *diwaniyyas*, older people have more political *diwaniyyas*.

It is evident from Mishal's words that the function and nature of young men's *diwaniyyas* differ vastly from those of their fathers' (see Photograph 4.2). For the young, there is less emphasis on formalities, a lack of rules and boundaries, unlike the "clearly marked boundaries and rules of access and egress" found in older men's *diwaniyyas* (Sommer 1969: 44, see also Photograph 4.3). The young men whom I have interviewed have often pointed to the casual conversations in their *diwaniyyas*, free from restrictions, unlike the older men's which they regard as being built on serious relationships. That is not to say that the seniors do not self-entertain in their *diwaniyyas*, as 24-year-old Muhamad Hussein Al-Shamlan (2013) remarks that older men do play cards and the carrom board game in their *diwaniyyas* where there is less exposure to technological devices.¹²⁰ Instead, it would be more plausible to highlight differences in lifestyles and preferences. The abundance of wealth, combined with the general changes in architecture from the seventies, serve to highlight the primacy of the capitalist economy and the consumerist society (Elsheshtawy 2010: 133-136). In a consumerist society akin to Kuwait's where the wealth extends to the young, the *diwaniyya* embodies prestige in its spatial design (Al-Roumi, personal communication 2014). Bourdieu (cited in Danahay 2005: 110)

¹²⁰ It is generally frowned upon for the young to use their mobile devices in the traditional *diwaniyyas*, as a mark of respect for their elders. I had also noticed the carrom board game in the Al-Misbah *diwaniyya* in Shaab.

himself writes how everyday choices are guided by ‘tastes and distastes’. The life experiences of the young, who, without the memory of pre-oil life, shape their distinctive tastes that set them apart from their fathers, resulting in *diwaniyyas* of a unique flavour.



Photograph 4.2 Mishal Jaber Al-Sabah’s *diwaniyya* (top row) and his father’s *diwaniyya* (bottom row) (taken by author on 15/04/2013)



Photograph 4.3 Visiting a young man’s *diwaniyya* (photos courtesy of Nasser Al-Abouh, Othman Al-Rashidi, 22/09/2017)

What remains important in the utility of the *diwaniyya* is its designation as a venting space for both young and old alike. Kuwaiti women have conceded the aforesaid point in

interviews, with one admitting that *diwaniyyas* “maintain connections between individuals in Kuwaiti culture” (Al-Nassar 2017), and another postgraduate student, Reem Al-Awadhi (2014), detailing its importance for socialisation:

I guess it’s like a men’s club without the alcohol and gambling. You can substitute alcohol with *chai* (tea) and cards. [...] So I think it’s a way for them to vent. Maybe have some time away from their wives, family, kids. [...] But the modern depiction of a *diwaniyya*, some youth ranging from 18 to 25 [years old], can just gather among themselves and call it a *diwaniyya*. I don’t think that is necessarily a *diwaniyya*. [...] That would just be a normal gathering that they call a *diwaniyya* because it goes on a regular basis, on a specific day or specific time. [...]

But the traditional depiction of the *diwaniyya* – I’m all for that. It’s a political outlet for creating buzz, creating positive reaction, also negation. It’s a double-edged platform. You can go either way with it, but I think it’s definitely a traditional, social platform for men to just discuss and vent.

As expressed above, at the core of the *diwaniyya*’s functions is its social dimension, yet dissociating the space from kinship ties remains difficult. The multiple *diwaniyyas* that are found in standalone buildings today, which allow for male gatherings catered to different age groups, are testament to the family as the *diwaniyya*’s nucleus.¹²¹ Henceforth, the ascension of young men into the main *diwaniyya* of the building is both, an indication of the importance of seniority (as was discussed in the earlier chapters), and a symbolic rite of passage that marks a transmission of cultural capital passed down from the older generation of the family. This ‘older generation’ is one familiar with the old Kuwaiti ways. The *diwaniyya* continues to preserve a ‘collective memory’ of the pre-oil past, what Corning and Schuman (2015: 1) define as “a memory shared by members of a group, with the memories helping to create and sustain the group, just as the group supports the continued existence of the memories”. The objectified cultural capital found in the *diwaniyya*, ranging from family trees to photographs, imbue past events with present meaning for young Kuwaitis.¹²² In so doing, the *diwaniyya* becomes vital not only as a gathering place for the family, but helps to restore “the mnemonic quality of historical knowledge, to bring it back to popular consciousness, and to reconnect it with the realm of lived experience” (Asmann 2001: 6823). This is the reason why, young Kuwaiti males

¹²¹ In one instance, Mishal Al-Sabah (2013) reveals that his father was relieved with his initiative of setting up a *diwaniyya* of his own, instead of having a separate gathering outside the confines of the house.

¹²² Muhammad Hussein Al-Shamlan (2013) highlights the importance of family *diwaniyyas* in providing flashbacks for the young: “this kind of *diwaniyya* would let me know how my great-grandfather used to live, how the life was back then. [...] It’s nice to have a knowledge of your history or your family history”.

who, despite accepting the differences between their *diwaniyyas* and their fathers', also acknowledge that they will follow their fathers' footsteps with time, attending their family's *diwaniyya* more regularly where "the younger generation would meet with the older generation" (Al-Zoubee 2013). The lack of resonance between generations could thus be said to be bridged by the family's main *diwaniyya* sitting.

4.4 Women: Included or Excluded?

The Kuwaiti sociologist Haya Al-Mughni (1990, 1993), whose seminal work has focused on women's position in contemporary Kuwaiti society and politics, proposes that upper-class women and their organisations have loyalties to their families and kin. Their actions in turn "reinforce rather than challenge female subordination" (Al-Mughni 1993: 13). Her overall argument cements this study's claim that the *diwaniyya* culture rests on wider family ties and obligations. In the Introduction of her book *Women in Kuwait*, she makes a specific reference to the impact of the *diwaniyya*:

Both the economy and the political system are usually run and controlled by groups of families, known collectively as *ashira*. In Kuwait, political decisions are still taken in *diwaniyas*, men's social gatherings adapted from the pre-oil era. The *diwaniya* is confined to male heads of families and other men from a similar background, forming a society which operates for its own collective benefit. It functions as a male institution in which family decisions are made, business is conducted and political issues are discussed. (Al-Mughni 1993: 14)

Juxtaposing the above influential role of *diwaniyya* with the undertakings of Kuwaiti women, Al-Mughni (1993: 14-15) finds that upper-class women engage in a similar network of public and semi-public activities that are "central to class organisation," which in turn leads to the sustenance of patriarchy.¹²³ As indicated in Chapter Two of this study, spaces for women have always been segregated from those for men since the time of the courtyard house and its female section (*harim*). The gender roles inscribed in space are more deeply embedded in 'status,' which Eickelman (1998: 186) delineates as both "the formal rights and obligations of a person," and "religious or normative prescriptions" that are difficult to transgress in public. Prior to *Al-Nahda* (social awakening) in the fifties and the ensuing female emancipation, the *diwaniyya* embodied a mechanism to spatially seclude women while empowering men, and socially

¹²³ Al-Mughni (1993:16) uses 'patriarchy' to refer to the institutionalised system of male dominance which finds its expression in the family and in the society at large. This section adopts a similar definition of 'patriarchy'.

devalued the birth of a daughter as only a newborn son would have been celebrated in the *diwaniyya* (Al-Mughni 1993: 42-45).¹²⁴

In today's private villas, the same seclusion occurs, albeit not as strict, as the *diwaniyya* is usually detached from the house with its own entrance. Women's gatherings, as female commentators have specified, are usually known as *chai al-dhahar* (afternoon tea), *nadwat* (lecture), *'azima* (gathering accompanied with a meal), or simply *yama 'a* (gathering) (Al-Souri 2013; Mandani 2014; Akasha, personal communication 2014; Al-Refai 2017). In one instance, when I had mentioned how a female parliamentary candidate holds her own *diwaniyya*, this suggestion was immediately repudiated by the female interviewee, in a strong reluctance to associate the term '*diwaniyya*' with women:

Ghadeer works with the International Democratic Forum, and they have sort of a mixed salon they can call a *diwaniyya*. It is not a *diwaniyya*. I gave a lecture there a few weeks ago, so maybe that's what she means. Or maybe she means her family *diwaniyya* that she made mixed. I attended two of her campaign rallies, and I never heard her speak about having a personal *diwaniyya*. (Alsharekh 2017)

Admittedly, the continued spatial division in the private realm of the family, alongside sustained social customs, implicitly and explicitly dissociates any connotation of female involvement in the *diwaniyya* space and practice. Male interviewees such as Muhammad Hussein Al-Shamlan (2013) believe that women's presence in *diwaniyyas* is an odd occurrence, in addition, others such as Muhammad Al-Zoubee (2013) see *diwaniyyas* as 'gentlemen's clubs'. That male and female interlocutors alike have accepted the *diwaniyya* to be a predominantly male domain speaks volumes: on the one hand, it may signal an example of harmonious living patterns between men and women (Geertz 1979: 336-338)¹²⁵; on the other hand, it reflects the continued strength of the masculine order as Bourdieu (2001: 9) puts it, in that it "dispenses with justification" through the "sexual division of labour" and "the structure of space".

The burgeoning oil economy in post-independent Kuwait from the sixties, however, did affect the labour market as much as it did alter the social and political order, including the role of women:

¹²⁴ Al-Mughni (1993: 42) also describes how the only part of the courtyard house which might have windows was the *diwaniyya*.

¹²⁵ A twenty-five year old female interviewee, Sumaiah Al-Souri (2013) expressed relief at such spatial segregation, explaining how this gives her own space away from her husband.

The rapidity of economic growth, unconstrained by formal planning, kept demand for foreign labor very high. In 1965, Kuwait's national census revealed that Kuwaitis had become a minority in their own country, making up only 47 percent of the population. [...] Recommendations from the first development plan, which covered the period from 1967-68 to 1971-72, [...] encouraged Kuwaiti women to enter the labor market to limit the influx of foreign workers; [...] and urged an increase in welfare benefits and social privileges for Kuwaitis to promote social harmony and political stability. (Tétreault & Al-Mughni 1995: 405)

As the state redrew socio-political boundaries along nationality lines, Kuwaiti women became an asset vis-à-vis a perceived threat in the non-national population. In addition, the spread of education contributed to the emancipation of Kuwaiti women, as much as it did breed a generation of 'progressive Kuwaiti men' who have been sufficiently well-educated to seek improvements in women's lives (Al-Mughni 1993: 49-53). As women entered the workforce in numbers, the policy of the state adopted the Islamic Family Law which puts "women under the protection of men,"; the issue of wearing the veil and headscarf among women even dominated the discussion in men's *diwaniyyas* for almost three years (Al-Mughni 1993: 55, 58-60). While the oppression of women continued despite improvements in their status, the proliferation of women's rights organisations from the seventies initiated a process of gradual socio-political reform.

The Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) laboured in requesting guaranteed political rights for all Kuwaiti women from 1973, following up with a protest against the bill's subsequent dismissal, which finally culminated in a nationwide campaign in 1981 by women's organisations to support the aforementioned cause (Shalaby 2015: 12). A new watershed found itself in the Iraqi Occupation when women assumed "greater than normal responsibility" for supplying the quotidian needs of their families, joining the military ranks, and advocating for Kuwait's liberation (Tétreault 2001: 211). In the post-liberation period, female Kuwaiti students who have completed tertiary education consistently outnumbered male students (according to statistics from 1993 to 2004); women's literacy rate in Kuwait soared from 72.6 per cent in 1990 to 81 per cent in the period 2000-04 (WCSS 2007). The 1999 parliamentary election finally saw women's suffrage enter the political mainframe, as the Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad issued a decree in May granting women to vote and run for office. Even if the bill was rejected in parliament, support by the ruler himself "gave the [women's rights] movement fresh hope" as liberal members and ministers began to take the initiative by allowing women to assume political positions (Al-Sabah 2013: 232-233). Then Minister of Higher Education,

Yousef Al-Ibrahim, allowed his undersecretary Dr Rasha Al-Sabah, also a member of the ruling family, to undertake duties from his ministerial portfolio. Dr Al-Sabah, herself a steadfast supporter of women's rights, is also famously known to have shattered gender stereotypes by holding her own *diwaniyya*. Kuwaiti women's arduous road towards political representation was eventually justified by the passing of the women's suffrage bill in 2006, a milestone that would be expected to redress gender inequality, and by extension improve women's access to *diwaniyyas*.

As Kuwaiti women began to stand for office, the question of their campaign methods began to surface, particularly because the *diwaniyya* has been a chiefly male-dominated space. Lindsey Stephenson (2011: 192-193) writes that for women, gathering in the *diwaniyya* does not equate to their participation, nor does it signify a sense of spontaneity in these discussions, as women "tend to meet for a predetermined purpose". Besides electoral campaigning in *diwaniyyas* (see Photograph 4.4), Stephenson also explains how women have been labelling their gatherings; only affluent women call their gatherings political or social *diwaniyyas*. Female interviewees (Al-Awadhi 2014; Mandani 2014; see also Tétreault 2011: 79-80) have also indicated that well-known Kuwaiti women such as the Minister of State Planning Rola Dashti, and a former MP Aseel Al-Awadhi, hold their own *diwaniyyas*. Yet the upper-class background of the aforesaid female figures have led writers to contend that class divisions "undercut the ability of women to unite as a group and ask for political rights" (Groeblicher 2012: 24). Further, Tétreault and Al-Mughni (1995: 410) contend that ending female seclusion serve the interests of the merchant class who intended "to change Kuwaiti social mores so that elite women of the merchant class could take over prestigious positions that might otherwise go to men from the emerging social class". It could also be argued that in the quest to improve women's rights, divisions in Kuwaiti society have been exacerbated. On the one hand, men hold differing views on the granting of women's rights, sometimes using religious beliefs as justification. In one instance, MP Ali Al-Rashid received a death threat over the telephone for opposing gender segregation in universities (Al-Sabah 2013: 84). On the other hand, women in government such as Nouria Al-Subeih and M'asouma Mubarak often have to grapple with sensitive religious issues in the presence of Islamist opposition; their choice on whether to appear veiled or unveiled have often been met with vociferous reaction (Tétreault 2011: 87). Female interviewees, while generally acknowledging the positive role of the *diwaniyya* in preserving tradition and family connections, also express uneasiness in its political role (Al-Refai 2017; Al-Barak 2017; Buhamad 2017; Al-Nassar 2014). In particular, the women's rights

activist and research Dr Alanoud Alsharekh (2017) was exceptionally outspoken about the *diwaniyya*, what she perceives as “a wasteful and ethically questionable practice”:

There is a system of checks and balances that formalises people’s access to policy-makers, [...] and bypassing these by going to the *diwaniyya* is an ethical problem. It contributes to corruption, and it also shouldn’t be accessible. [...] Also these *diwaniyyas* are boys’ clubs. There’s no female perspective there. You’re not getting public opinion there; you are getting patriarchal male-dominated opinions that contribute to the marginalisation of women, a kind of apartheid if you like. [...]

Besides, I think the *diwaniyya* culture contributes negatively to this idea of, to waste time to congregate, and to have a ‘silo effect’ mentality. So people are going to *diwaniyyas* where people have the same views as they do. [...] Or if they’re going to *diwaniyyas* for a specific reason, or to meet a specific person, or because this person is rich and important, then it is going to be an ‘echo chamber’.



Photograph 4.4 A Kuwaiti man displays a pamphlet as he attends the campaign *diwaniyya* of female candidate Dr Ghadeer Aseeri ahead of the November 2016 parliamentary elections (photo credit: AFP)¹²⁶

Yet, despite the general absence of women in *diwaniyyas* during non-election periods, the entry of women into politics and their use of *diwaniyyas* have normalised their interaction with the space and the institution. As Stephenson (2011: 198) puts it, because *diwaniyyas* were held to engage women during campaigns, women got used to going to formal *diwaniyyas*, so “the idea of hosting their own informal *diwaniyyas* naturally progressed out of that experience,” and was no longer taboo. One case study involves the political exploits of Dr Ghadeer Aseeri who had run for the November 2016 elections, and chosen to sustain her political momentum by continuing to visit *diwaniyyas* thereafter (see Photograph 4.5). In an interview with Dr

¹²⁶ See article on: <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/all-you-need-to-know-about-kuwait-parliament-elections-1.1934714>

Aseeri (2017), she recounts the difficulty of campaigning when she had initially excluded *diwaniyya* visits, and preferred instead to turn to television coverage and social media avenues. When she had finally decided on visiting *diwaniyyas*, she remarked how she was accepted not because of her gender, rather, she was regarded asexually as a parliamentary candidate. Her experience, in contrast to the disillusioned one as expressed by Dr Alsharekh earlier, found many positives:

But after the elections I have different perspectives, because the people who really stand by me, they are the men. And they changed my idea about the thinking that men will not accept women in political fields, and that they will not work in women's campaigns. Those were really rumours against men. [...] The *diwaniyya* is a really nice place [...]; it is a measure of how we think in our houses. You will find the topics that they talk in the house, and they bring it to the *diwaniyya* to discuss. [...] When I entered *diwaniyyas* they told me what was going on, and what they are expecting at the political level.

While Dr Aseeri's views testify to the need for male support when a Kuwaiti woman enters politics, they equally reflect a general absence of discrimination against a female parliamentary candidate. As she continues to hold her own *diwaniyyas* on Monday evenings within the space of her father's *diwaniyya*, the attendance of a mixed-gender audience, including intrigued foreign diplomats, reaffirms how those strict social mores from the pre-oil era have slowly, but surely, watered down (see Photograph 4.6). Yet, it is worth highlighting that interaction between genders remains a sensitive issue as I had observed how the men and women at Dr Aseeri's *diwaniyya* were subconsciously sat on each side of the room.



Photograph 4.5 Dr Ghadeer Asseri continues to visit *diwaniyyas* following the November 2016 elections (photos courtesy of Dr Aseeri)



Photograph 4.6 Visiting Dr Ghadeer Aseeri's *diwaniyya* in Mishref (photographs taken on 03/04/2017)

Finally, as Kuwaiti women, or more specifically upper-class women have gained access to the *diwaniyya* for political reasons, the average Kuwaiti woman is equally able in mobilising the resources and capital accumulated by the men of the family. Benefits accruing from the men's networking in *diwaniyyas* can end up accruing to the entire household. The dispositions of habitus through the *diwaniyya* results in "parallel styles of action" by men and women alike due to the emphasis on kinship; marriage strategies, for instance, are inseparable from those of

socialisation, expectation and values (Schwartz 1997: 108-109). Social capital acquired by Kuwaiti men can circulate within the family, and “produces mutual knowledge and recognition within the family” (Bourdieu 1986: 250). Thus, Kuwaiti women recognise the merits of the *diwaniyya*. Female interlocutors recount their indirect involvement with the *diwaniyyas*: one had beseeched her brother to find her a suitable husband through his connections in *diwaniyyas* (Al-Souri 2013); another recalled how her uncle had promised to enquire on job openings in *diwaniyyas* on her behalf (Buhamad 2017). Considering the significant weight placed on kinship in this study, women’s acceptance of men’s *diwaniyya* visits is reflective of the former’s role as the “repository of national identity,” which refers to women’s responsibilities to bear children and maintain kinship relations (Al-Mughni & Tétreault 2013: 208). The following interview excerpt reveals female input into the *diwaniyya*:

I remember my uncle’s wife. She’s practically the hidden soldier behind the arrangement [in the *diwaniyya*]. She would arrange all the food. There’s always a woman behind a great man I think, especially in the *diwaniyya* context. Also the decorating of the *diwaniyya*: she gets involved in it, and she changes it every two years. She’s not the face of the *diwaniyya*, but they (the women) do get involved in the background. [...] I personally think it’s interesting because you do see feminine touches in the *diwaniyya* with the colours, with the decoration.

As much as one can deduce that *diwaniyyas* offer ‘top-down’ support to women in the pre-political realm of *diwaniyyas* (Stephenson 2011: 183), the indirect role of women in tapping on *diwaniyya* networks have had substantive implications on the social level, demonstrating that women should be considered a ‘public’ engaged in the reproductive activities of the *diwaniyya*. As shown by the last interview snippet, women “become the accomplices of the process that tend to make the probable a reality” (Bourdieu 1990: 65), the ‘reality’ found in the social qualities of the *diwaniyya*.

4.5 ‘Tribal’ *Diwaniyyas*

Approaching the tribal dimension of *diwaniyyas* has been a fascinating eye-opener and is worthy of further research attention. As outlined in Chapter Two, the *diwaniyya* itself as a social construct and tradition owes itself to tribal customs of the past, which have gradually become lax over time. The historical backdrop notwithstanding, it is imperative to revisit the tribal theme from a contemporary standpoint, and attempt to fit the *diwaniyya* amidst these developments. When asked about the importance of *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait’s hinterland, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah (2017), a member of the ruling family, described them to be “not as

important as [those] in the city”. Citing the huge geographical dispersal of the tents across the tribal territory as the main reason for the *diwaniyya*’s diluted role, Sheikh Muhammad insists that there is less ‘organising imperative’ for the desert tribespeople, as there is for the city dwellers. While it has been shown that both desert and sea offer transnational links, it is too easy to be tempted into over-simple parallels across both geographical areas, hence the need to also re-examine the relationship between Kuwaitis of desert and city origins. Admittedly the usage of the term ‘tribal’ *diwaniyyas* is both contentious and complicated, therefore this section seeks to clarify the way ‘tribe’ is viewed in a *Kuwaiti context*, and by extension, how we may better grapple with the aforementioned term of ‘tribal’ *diwaniyya* both from political and social angles.

Conceptual ambiguities in explaining tribal identity are best explained by the anthropologist Eickelman (1998: 124-128) who, in his earlier work, lists four permutations: (1) the use of explicit ‘native’ ethnopolitical ideologies by the people themselves to explain their socio-political organisation; (2) concepts used by state authorities for administrative purposes; (3) implicit, practical notions held by people that are not elaborated into formal ideologies; and (4) anthropological concepts which seek to establish “a theoretical understanding of the cultural bases of social identity”.¹²⁷ For the purpose of this study, points (1) and (3) will be more relevant in clarifying the tribal connection to the *diwaniyya*; point (2) is less applicable to Kuwait except from an electoral standpoint; and point (4) – wading through anthropological theories – is a whole different project altogether.

Departing from point (1), the ‘native’ ideology used by Kuwaitis to express their identity suggests a recent retribalisation of self, in particular, when interests are at stake. In Eickelman’s (2016: 226-228) later work addressing the Gulf, he situates the tribes of the region in the ‘historical imagination,’ arguing that the representation of tribal societies as primarily pastoral and independent from their village and urban counterparts continues to pervade many ethnographic accounts, even if the situation was significantly more complicated in practice. This pastoral/sedentary dichotomy has often been invoked by Kuwaitis themselves, also explored by Kuwaiti academic Farah Al-Nakib (2014b; see also Longva 2006), who attributes the *hadar* (sedentary) versus *badu* (nomadic or Bedouin, and thus of tribal background) distinction to state-building strategies in the early oil years, mainly linked to citizenship and

¹²⁷ For a comprehensive review of anthropological notions of tribe, see Tapper (1983), in particular pp. 1-12, 42-75, and Fried (1975). Further, Khoury and Kostiner (1990) provides a useful overview of issues in tribal identity.

housing policies, culminating in a ‘deep-seated animosity’ in popular discourse between these two groups. During my visits to *diwaniyyas*, Kuwaitis have been eager to assert this sub-identity, frequently using notions of space and historical groupings to illustrate this dissimilarity. While the townspeople are generally associated with maritime activities and described as residents living ‘within the wall,’ those of Bedouin origin are linked with the tribe (*qabila*), the desert and nomadic activities.¹²⁸ The corollary social transformations in the post-oil era, together with spatial planning, are equally reflective of this social division. On the one hand, the townspeople, usually referring to the merchant families, are relocated within the boundaries of the First to Fourth Ring Roads as a result of the Land Acquisition Programme (LAP, see Chapter Two), and on the other, the Bedouins, grouped with the ‘lower-income Kuwaitis,’ are recipients of the government-house construction programme that built houses outside of the aforementioned ring roads, and further away from the city (IBRD 1965: 102-105; Beaugrand 2017: 493-495). Without access to LAP income, and having to settle in shanty settlements before the government housing project had begun, the designated areas for *badu* settlement were known as *Al-manatiq Al-khariyya* or ‘outlying areas,’ reinforcing the ‘perception of difference’ between *hadar* and *badu* (Al-Nakib 2014b: 16-21; Longva 2006: 176).¹²⁹ It thus becomes no surprise when urban legends about families of Bedouin origin are circulated: the areas beyond the Fourth Ring Road are regarded as dangerous except for going to one’s private chalet; in more extreme instances, I was also told of the *badu*’s less civil behaviour and to associate less with them. The jaundiced opinions of a young urbanite lawyer (cited in Redman 2014: 109) about Bedouin or ‘tribal’ *diwaniyyas* transpire the aforesaid sentiments:

The tribal shaykh *diwaniyya*, city Kuwaitis are against this. [Why?] The only purpose is to help tribesmen in exchange for [National Assembly] votes, not to help the larger Kuwaiti community. Tribal Bedouin *diwaniyya* would not assist *hadhar* Kuwaitis, not part of the tribe. But, a city Kuwaiti may go to a *diwaniyya* to get their lawful rights. The Bedouin *diwaniyya* helps tribesmen access goods

¹²⁸ The ability to claim a settled lineage in Kuwait since as long as there has been a ruling family, who has existed in the town of Kuwait bounded by its wall, has been described by Beaugrand (2018: 47) as a ‘sign of respectability’.

¹²⁹ The architect who documented Kuwait’s urbanisation project, Saba Shiber (1964: 227), contested the term ‘limited-income housing,’ arguing that the cost of one such house is “by no means a low-income house in Europe or even in the U.S.A.,” but only considered financially inexpensive compared to the villas that “cost ten times as much”. Government housing still comprise “750 square meter lots, surrounded by a boundary wall, with a car-port, two-bedrooms, two bathrooms and their supporting facilities” that includes sufficient space for a *diwaniyya*.

and services that they do not deserve, like elevate someone in a job who is not qualified.

Despite the similar function of both types of *diwaniyyas* in expediting, circumventing or securing benefits, the above viewpoint regards tribal transactions with disdain due to its ill-gotten advancements, or more specifically, to the state entitlements stemming from citizenship. A personal encounter with such prejudice against Bedouin *diwaniyyas* came on one instance when I had obtained a lift from a friend to a wedding *diwaniyya* in South Sabahiya, part of a district situated well beyond the ring roads, the Ahmadi oil wells and deep towards the desert. The wedding location led to my friend's logical deduction of my intention to attend a Bedouin wedding, and I was dissuaded in the car from observing this event, till my arrival at the large tent that housed this mega-event with guests coming from afar (see Photograph 4.7). As I alighted into the sea of white *dishdashas* which flashed back and forth from the tentage, I was again reminded to be careful. *Diwaniyyas*, to tribal and urbanite families alike, remain venues for major social occasions; the sole difference is in the location and the way rites are conducted. For instance, at an urbanite wedding the groom and his father receive guests at the family *diwaniyya*'s entrance (see Chapter Three), whereas in the *badu* wedding *diwaniyya*, the guest proceeds to the inner length of the tent, where the groom, his father, and prominent figures including tribal sheikhs are seated, to offer his congratulations.



Photograph 4.7 The wedding *diwaniyya* of Abdulmuhsin Aborgobh in South Sabahiya (taken by author on 05/10/2017)

The spatial design of the typical *diwaniyya* belonging to either group (*hadar* and *badu*) is vastly different. As we have seen in the earlier chapters, the *diwaniyyas* owned by *hadar* merchant families are lavishly decorated and generous in physical space, whereas the *badu* families of tribal origin are more modest and smaller in size. This does not, however, diminish the character of the latter group's *diwaniyyas*. An early account of *hadar-badu* relationship also describes the Bedouin's strong attachment to tribal customs:

While the nobility of town and desert have genuine respect for each other, the lower-class townsman despises all badawin, and is by them despised in return. Until a few years ago the true badawin considered his life of independence in the desert the only honourable existence for a tribesman who has pride in the traditions of his fathers. But there have always been many, even of the noble tribes, who have been driven by desperate poverty to seek work in the town. This is not considered dishonourable for a *sharif* badawin so long as he shuns certain types of work which are forbidden by custom. (Freeth 1956: 70)

The strict adherence to age-old tribal customs is reflective within the *diwaniyya* hosted by men of tribal origins; what is considered 'honourable' lies in the preservations of certain acts,¹³⁰ particularly with desert (and nomadic) activities on the brink of extinction. The *badu diwaniyya* prides itself in simplicity: men are sat on the carpeted floor of the room, at a distance that fosters intimate discussions (Photograph 4.8). Conversational topics, away from the daily and mundane exchanges, are centred on lineage, desert lifestyle, and battles reminiscent of the past – unsurprising considering the unique historical trajectory of the tribes. These topics often reveal the ethnopolitical ideology of tribal identity “formed through common patrilineal descent,” which has generally been explained by anthropologists through segmentary lineage theory (Eickelman 1998: 125).¹³¹ In one instance, members of the Aborgobh family, part of the Thuwi Ziad branch of the wider Otaibi tribe, showed me their family tree and explained that their clan is considered princely amongst others.¹³² Reiterating this form of social organisation, Hourani (1990: 304) suggests that tribes owe their solidarity not to kinship per se but a “myth of common ancestry,” although Tapper (1990: 66) provides further clarification that most tribes “ascribe[d] common descent to all those who, by whatever means [...] acquired rights in the

¹³⁰ In one instance, a visitor at the *diwaniyya* who identified himself as from the Shammari tribe tells me of the subtleties in a particular tribe's dress code, claiming that Shammaris have a unique way of wearing their headdress. The *agal*, a double cirlet of twisted black cord, is placed firmly on the head securing the cloth; and for Shammaris, the *agal* is tipped downwards to the right of the head.

¹³¹ For further reading on segmentary theory, see for example, Dresch (1984, 1988).

¹³² For a breakdown of the branches of the Otaibi tribe, see Appendix.

territory”. This emphasis on descent, as will be explained, is a “vehicle for the delineation of groups and the transmission of rights and duties” that can not only turn political in nature, but reflects a more complex set of loyalties (Crone 1993: 359).



Photograph 4.8 The Al-Rashid family *diwaniyya* in Sabah Al-Nasser area, part of the Al-Muraikhi clan and of the broader Mutari tribe (taken by author on 22/09/2016)

In the Kuwaiti context, the state is reinvented as a “nationality-based hierarchical society,” having passed from a “system of group-based allegiance to a sovereign, a sheikh, or a tribal chief” (Beaugrand 2018: 8). Explaining the tribal manifestation in modern-day politics, Tétreault (2011: 90-91) contends that:

Tribalism is Kuwait’s shadow government, an informal system that operates side by side with governance structures and procedures laid out in the constitution and the laws. Both are led by the chief tribe, the Al Sabah. Although tribalism is inherently exclusionary, the tribes have managed to organize an effective institution for rationalizing elections, something no other political force in Kuwait has accomplished. It is at least arguable that tribal representatives are the most coherent and consistent members of the parliamentary opposition and, perhaps, the least vulnerable to regime manipulation.¹³³

¹³³ A breakdown of tribal representation in parliament, after each election, can be found in Michael Herb’s political database: www.kuwaitpolitics.org. Further details on the tribal impact on the parliament is can be found in Chapters Six and Seven of Al-Fozaie’s (2016) thesis.

That the tribal allegiance to the Al-Sabah ruling family remains a persistent feature of Kuwaiti politics stems itself from longstanding tribal links since the time of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (see Chapter Two). In 1943 when the Political Agent Dickson went to inspect the water wells drilled by the Kuwait Oil Company, he was injured by two armed members of the Al-Rashaida tribe who intended to prevent external tribal members from approaching or drinking from the well (Dickson 1971: 166-168). When the incident was taken to Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the governor of the town and a member of the ruling family, the culprits were punished severely. With the growth of the state bureaucracy, tribesmen formed a loyal support base for the Al-Sabah as they were naturalised as Kuwaiti citizens until the early eighties; their integration into the Kuwaiti polity also depended on the closeness of the tribal sheikhs and the Al-Sabah (Beaugrand 2018: 23, 43-44; Oskay 2010: 53-54).

The affirmation of the aforementioned socio-political ties may be explained in two ways. First, as mentioned time and again in this study, the intermarriages between members of the Al-Sabah and prominent tribal families concretised bonds and alliances. As outlined in Chapter Two, tribes have elaborate genealogies which equally emphasise their *asl*, their nobility, and the purity of their blood (see Al-Rasheed 2003: 215). The great Sheikh Mubarak took one of his wives the daughter of the paramount sheikh of the Ajman, Daydan bin Huthlayn, and later married a daughter of the sheikh of the Mutair (from the princely Duwish clan), and this pattern of intermarriage was to be continued by his descendants (Beaugrand 2018: 54; Dickson 1949: 84). In a more recent report by British officials on Kuwait's leading personalities, the late Emir Sheikh Jabir Al-Ahmad was known to have married many times "for the sake of tribal ties" and has many sons by these different marriages (Richmond 1982). The ceremonial maintenance of these relationships continues to be exemplified by *diwaniyya* visits, and important tribal members of princely clans also take to the *diwaniyyas* of merchant families (see Photograph 4.9).

Second, tribes are local administration, in the main. Voting patterns indicate that tribesmen vote for parliamentary candidates who have been handpicked to represent their tribe – what has become 'normative trendsetters' (Gavrielides 1987: 166-170). Tribal primaries, despite being outlawed (and interlocutors have been reluctant to speak about them), continue to be held in *diwaniyyas* as elections become imminent, in order to facilitate the material demands of the tribes (Etheridge 2009; Tétreault 2000: 108-111). Tribesmen continue to be strategically placed in the security forces, whether the police force or the army, following their historical role as the *fidawiyya* (personal guards to the ruler). The moral 'authority' of the tribal

chiefs, besides retaining wider leadership, is found in his ability to deliver a ‘continuous flow’ of goods and followers to his other followers, thereby transcending his social role into a political one (Khoury & Kostiner 1990: 9; Tapper 1990: 54-55, see also Photograph 4.10).¹³⁴ As such, far from being passive entities, tribes not only retain the ideology of common lineage that coincides with Eickelman’s explanation of tribal identity, but also elicit responses to the demands of the statist framework in various elastic forms of group solidarity (Abdul-Jabar & Dawod 2003: 7-8).



Photograph 4.9 The young Sheikh Muhammad (in black robe) of the princely Al-Duwish tribal clan visits the merchant Al-Misbah *diwaniyya* (photo courtesy of Wajdi Al-Misbah)

¹³⁴ Following the 2012 parliamentary elections that saw tribal candidates win 21 seats in a 50-seat parliament, Okruhlik (2012) writes about the ‘tribal mentality’ which seeks “material incentives and patronage,” and the salience of tribal voters who can “take the law into their own hands and defend their tribal MPs, right or wrong”.



Photograph 4.10 Sheikh Mutlaq Aborgobh (in red headdress) of the princely Thuwi-Ziad clan (in the Otaibi tribe) entertains the Japanese Ambassador and other guests at his *diwaniyya* in Hadiya (photos courtesy of Abdallah Aborgobh)

Practical notions of tribe, the third analytical category listed by Eickelman (1998: 126), are those implicitly held by tribespeople as “a guide to everyday conduct in relations between larger social groups”. Such conduct, often played out in a distinct *diwaniyya* etiquette, better paints the picture of tribesmen as a type of ‘public’. Yet this categorisation must be exercised with prudence. As one commentator asserted, there are no *badu* in the true sense of the term – as nomads of the desert – in contemporary Kuwaiti society. When asked if he was a Bedouin, that particular commentator rephrased my statement, highlighting that his historical roots are Bedouin in nature, but even the *badu* have settled into an urbanised environment. Having shed the nomadic lifestyle, the *badu*, much like the urbanite mercantile families, are compelled to work within the statist framework, hence the retribalisation of self is as much a political phenomenon as it is a social one. Government sensitivity towards the *diwaniyya* gathering by MP Ahmed Al-Sharei’an in the outlying district of Jahra was particularly high during the Monday *diwaniyya* movement, owing to the area’s Bedouin majority and hence a ‘pro-government stronghold’ (Al-Mubarak: 2008: 89; Al-Nakib 2016: 142-143). Visiting the Al-Thunayyan *diwaniyya* in Jahra in 2018 confirmed my observations about the Bedouin’s *diwaniyya* code, consisting of recurring patterns of disposition and mannerisms that I had witnessed in previous visits to other *badu diwaniyyas* (see Photograph 4.11). Taking pride in tribal customs, the adherence to the social rule of seniority is stricter in a Bedouin *diwaniyya*,

where the youngest of the host family often serves the coffee to the guests present, as opposed to the servant in a merchant family *diwaniyya*. Bedouin *diwaniyyas* are also conscientious in the items that they serve: coffee and dates, once the staple desert diet, must be presented to guests before tea; whereas in the urbanite family *diwaniyya* such observance is looser. Greeting a senior in the Bedouin *diwaniyya* entails kissing him on the nose, unlike the kissing of the forehead or the shoulder in an urbanite *diwaniyya*. In this light, the Bedouin *diwaniyya* environment sustains a unique habitus that perpetuates a different conduct of kinship relations. Compounded by technological advances such as online forums¹³⁵ that indicate the “specifics of genealogical ties,” there is a “recalibration of what constitutes valued social and economic knowledge” in an age where nomadic lifestyle is obsolete (Eickelman 2016: 237).



Photograph 4.11 Visiting the Al-Thunayyan *Diwaniyya* in Jahra (photographs taken on 22/05/2018)

A final word has to be made about the difficulty in defining the tribal lexicon. As Cole (2003: 236-237) expounds the socioeconomic transformation of the *badu*, he also cites the change in socio-political relations between and among the kin-based groupings strongly

¹³⁵ One example is Kuwait-history.net, an online forum which has received a sizeable number of hits, and offers its users a closer look at one’s family tree. Maisel (2013) also explores the online discussion boards revolving around three representative tribes – Anazah, Shammar and Mutair – and their role in promoting noble pedigree.

associated with the Bedouin and the wider state systems within which they exist. Tribal confederations have always been fluid, such that they were not always dictated by the rules of segmentation, and the underlying bonds of kinship; instead, pragmatism and political action have always been motivated by economic necessity rather than idealised solidarity (Al-Rasheed 2003: 218). The transition towards statehood has signalled the clash of two modes of thought: (1) on identity and allegiance, the tribe gives primacy to kinship and patrilineal descent, whereas the state insists on the loyalty of all persons to a central authority; (2) where the tribe stresses personal, moral, and ascriptive factors in status, the state is impersonal and recognises contract, transaction and achievement (Tapper 1990: 68; Longva 2000: 192-193). Yet, as been shown thus far in this study, Kuwaiti society continues to function within both the statist and familial framework, a dual system which has eased the tribalisation of self on both social and political levels. The dialectic of change and continuity pervades the realities of both tribal and urbanite families, who, at the most basic of levels, remain grounded in kinship (see Weiner 2016).¹³⁶ The *diwaniyya*, as a tool to exhibit the ‘tribal-ness’ in newfound circumstances, is equally malleable in helping to maintain the networks and capitals circulating amidst this distinctive ‘public’. Ultimately, despite the exclusive historical narrative of the tribes, one still needs to be wary of the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal’. These terms may be reflective of a ‘distrust in anomalies,’ caused partly by the continual attempt to define precisely deviant groupings (when they have been shown to be just another kinship group) (Street 1975: 105). Stripping the tribes of their ‘atavistic image’ in socio-political rhetoric, and going beyond the tribal connotations of ‘truculence and exclusivity,’ we should instead try to understand the specific circumstances that invite communities to re-evaluate their identities (Rosen 2018).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the social groups that partake in the *diwaniyya* practice, at times customising this tradition to their needs. While an examination of the political and social representativeness of the *diwaniyya* is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that the *diwaniyya*’s audience is more complex than an indiscriminate mass of Kuwaiti men. Previous chapters have outlined the intricacies even among Kuwaiti men (whether by occupation or by an ascribed status), and the ties that bind within and between families. By discussing the various ‘publics’ this chapter also inadvertently discloses the exclusionary lines of Kuwaiti society, while exhibiting the *diwaniyya*’s adaptability in maintaining its relevance to different

¹³⁶ In an article on tribalism, Al-Qassemi (2012) insists that tribalism remains ‘a family affair’ that continues to undermine alternative social and political affiliations, such as secularism and liberalism.

groupings. This is the primary reason why the *diwaniyya* continues to exist alongside, if not outshine, new spaces for public discourse that include virtual spaces. When asked how social media compares to the *diwaniyya*, Kuwaiti academic Hesham Al-Awadhi (2017) cites the example of Instagram influencer Dana Al-Tuwarish, whose followers have reached two million and even the specific chocolate she eats becomes sold out in stores. Yet, as Al-Awadhi insists, the influence Dana has is banal compared to how the *diwaniyya* hones social skills and offers life opportunities to the youth.

On a broader level, the various social groupings remain bound by a dual framework: a close identification between the patriarchal family and the patriarchal state in an “interdependence between these two institutions” (Tétreault & Al-Mughni 1995: 407). For Kuwaiti women in particular, their subordination to patriarchal control remains a challenge despite the great strides made in redressing gender inequality. When deciphering masculine domination, Bourdieu (2001: 13) equally holds women responsible for their ‘acts of cognition,’ in other words women’s ‘acts of recognition’ which indicate submission. As for the tribal entities of Kuwait, there is a strong sense of pride in adhering to primordial customs insofar as practicable. Beyond social ways, drawing out tribal identities has often been a means to garner political support. One instance is the contention of the *bidun* or stateless people,¹³⁷ who, in accordance to official narrative, are ‘latecomers’ arriving in Kuwait after the completion of the process of nationality granting in 1965 (Beaugrand 2018: 2). As disenfranchised tribesmen, the *biduns*’ naturalisation has often been at the centre of vote manipulation.¹³⁸ It would be unsurprising to find that tribal primaries elect candidates based on their ability to facilitate the acquisition of citizenship under the banner of tribal solidarity.

Understandably, the *diwaniyya* practice remains uniquely Kuwaiti. It is a reflection of a broader sociological framework developed by Longva (1997: 145) known as ‘ethnocracy’. This term refers to a social pyramid analysing relationships between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis and concluded that Kuwaitis had become the dominant group in Kuwaiti society by virtue of their ethnicity. The regular *diwaniyya* practice found in the sphere of articulation connotes a scale of gendered identity in descending order, with Kuwaiti men at the top, followed by Kuwaiti women, then Arab men, Arab women, Asian men and lastly Asian women

¹³⁷ The *bidun* should not be confused with the Bedouin/*badu* (nomadic, desert-based tribesman in the classic sense of the word) mentioned in this study. The word ‘*bidun*’ means ‘without’ and in this case, refers to the Bedouin who is still without citizenship. That is to say, the *biduns* are a subset of the Bedouins, but not vice versa.

¹³⁸ See Weiner (2017) for a more recent account of the *bidun* issue.

(Longva 1997: 131). Non-nationals are an uncommon sight in *diwaniyyas*, with the exceptional cases of certain Arab businessmen, foreign diplomats, and researchers. The interest taken by foreign diplomats in the *diwaniyyas*, their interactions with the locals, and their cross-cultural experiences that overlap social and professional circles, will all be explored in the next chapter.

As such, the performative role of the *diwaniyya* is called into question in both social and political spheres. Just as criticism on the Habermasian public sphere has been made on his normative bourgeois definition, and his exclusion of competing public spheres, this study would similarly err by claiming that the *diwaniyya* practice is applicable to all Kuwaitis, or even to all Kuwaiti residents (see also Stephenson 2011: 186). *Diwaniyya* participation is as much a reflection of status as it is an effort to climb and navigate the social ladder.

An additional, and final remark has to be made about the aptness of mapping the Habermasian public sphere onto the *diwaniyya*, and more broadly, Kuwaiti society. The idea of a public sphere as discussed thus far operates by rendering the state accountable to citizenry, and invokes discursive interaction. Yet, this full utopian conception was never realised in practice, and certainly not in Kuwait's case. Fraser (1990: 59-60) summarises her critique on the Habermasian public sphere which is equally applicable here: a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is, admittedly, also deployed as a 'strategy of distinction'. Following revisionist historiography, she backs her argument up with the works of other authors who have shown how the elaboration of a distinctive culture of civil society and of an associated public sphere were similarly implicated in markers of 'distinction' in Bourdieu's sense. Taking her argument further, this process of distinction helps explain the exacerbation of sexism characteristics, the retribalisation of self, and the engagement of specific generational activities – all results of Kuwait's contextual development. The irony of such distinctions in the public sphere, however, in Fraser's words, "does not fatally compromise the discourse of publicity". Instead, it suggests that the relationship between publicity and status is "more complex than Habermas intimates" – certainly in the case of Kuwait where the *diwaniyya* rests on intertwined kinship relations.

5

Diwaniyya Diplomacy

So I used Ramadhan to do a lot of *diwaniyyas* and get to see a lot of people that I had not yet met through formal channels. Of course at that point I didn't yet know who I would have dealings with again and again, and it was just sort of a casual meeting as such, but the exposure that I got through those *diwaniyyas* was probably the most useful thing.

Interview with HE Warren Hauck (2017), Australian Ambassador to Kuwait

5.1 Prelude

In the last chapter the 'public-ness' of the *diwaniyya* was dissected to reveal a series of 'publics,' ranging from the young generation of Kuwaitis to those of strong tribal affiliation. The differentiated use of the *diwaniyya* by each of these groups, in addition to the nuances in mannerisms and etiquette, was further attributed to the changing socio-spatial realities experienced by Kuwait. This chapter introduces another 'public' whose regular presence at *diwaniyyas* deserves attention – foreign diplomats. Visits to *diwaniyyas* by foreign diplomats, now considered customary, indicate not only a willingness to engage with Kuwaiti citizens, but also inadvertently highlight the benefits of the *diwaniyya* as an indigenous diplomatic mechanism.

Previously, Chapter One outlined how the trajectory of diplomacy carries with it a 'Western history' (Neumann 2005: 72), characterised by increasing bureaucratisation and professionalisation. Diplomatic literature, as specified before, is also heavily imbued with the International Relations (IR) premise that states and inter-state relations shape the field of diplomacy. In this regard, Chapter One examined additionally the English School, notably the aspect of international society which posits the institutionalisation of shared interest and identity among states, shaping norms and rules that in turn influence the diplomatic canon (Buzan 2004: 7).

With an overview of diplomatic theory in mind, this chapter aims to widen the literature on diplomacy, and by extension, reconsider the commonly-held notions about public diplomacy. Indeed, a secondary objective is to demonstrate that the *diwaniyya* practice can still relate to IR, whether by choice or implication. Paul Sharp (2009: 106-107), who argues that one can "reasonably identify international systems according to conventional definitions of social systems," similarly affirms that "diplomatic systems are nearly always presented as sub-

systems of international or world systems, societies or communities”. The modern diplomatic system, for instance, is commonly derived from the modern state system. Presenting international history and societies in a manner where Europe “imposed itself and its world on the rest,” is misleading; on the contrary, international societies integrate and disintegrate, expand and contract, concentrate and diffuse (Sharp 2009: 121). It is in this regard that the empirical evidence on the *diwaniyya* seeks to enlighten – that there is no single, fixed international society. Rather, diplomatic traditions that deviate from the accustomed Europeanised trajectory exist.

Diwaniyya diplomacy, as a non-Western frame of reference, provides an alternative dimension that is worth exploring. Rooted in grassroots diplomacy and cultural tradition, the *diwaniyya* mediates not only between state and society, but also between Kuwaitis and the ruling family, and for this chapter’s purpose, between the foreign and the local. It is equally convincing to argue that the involvement of different actors at the *diwaniyya* alludes to the paradigmatic shift from ‘club’ to ‘network’ diplomacy, where non-state actors increasingly partake in domestic, national and international affairs. This chapter argues that the marginalisation of embedded social practices which play diplomacy-like roles, but sit outside formal institutions, should be rethought. The practice of diplomacy, often seen as the exclusive preserve of state representatives, goes beyond such a “narrow politico-strategic conception,” and remains equally carved by the *agency of individuals* (Barston 2013: 1-2, emphasis added), as this chapter will demonstrate with vignettes provided by foreign diplomats themselves.

Further, equating *diwaniyya* diplomacy with ‘public diplomacy,’ that is, a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its own nation’s ideals and policies, is far too simplistic (Tuch 1990: 3). While the visits by foreign diplomats to *diwaniyyas* exhibit various components of public diplomacy, these drop-ins of goodwill are far from the ‘strategic function’ of public diplomacy: grounded in top-down messaging strategies directed at image building that often runs counter to a listening-based approach to relational communication (Dutta 2015: 399). Instead, upon entering the *diwaniyya*, the foreign diplomat should be mentally prepared to engage in a two-way exertion of influence. Building on the evidence shown in the previous chapters, both parties in the *diwaniyya*, the foreign diplomat and the Kuwaiti, will be shown to benefit from such a culturally-rooted practice in the following ways: (1) the exchange of information through relationship-building; (2) enabling the foreign diplomat to navigate the family-based governance in Kuwait; (3) increasing both parties’ social capital that in turn present

opportunities in various aspects (business, social, political etc.). *Diwaniyya* diplomacy, running contrary to traditional diplomacy in numerous ways as will be examined, raises *not* the question of whether the practice itself is ‘good’. Rather, it questions how useful the practice is.

5.2 Complementing or Contrasting ‘Traditional Diplomacy’?

The impact of policy-making on the traditional mode of diplomacy, according to the acclaimed former British diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson (cited in Otte 2001b: 159), is exemplified by how the diplomat, being a civil servant, is submitted to an institutional hierarchy. The diplomat is expected to reported to the Head of Mission or the ambassador, who is held responsible to the Foreign Secretary, and to the ascending order of ranks that leads to the Cabinet, and finally to the Parliament which represents the will of the sovereign people. Working against the professionalised backdrop of the diplomatic field, this section will first outline the internationalised form of diplomacy and Kuwait’s admittance into such a system as a state, before comparing it with the *diwaniyya* practice. Looking through the ambassadorial lens, in particular, will allow us to ascertain the need to juggle both formal and informal diplomatic modes. *Diwaniyya* diplomacy, crucially, remains the missing jigsaw piece for the foreign diplomat to manoeuvre the Kuwaiti societal skeleton with ease.

In the second edition of Berridge's (2002: xiii) *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, he explains that the reason for overhauling the first edition was to make structural changes to the book, which had previously missed out on the importance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Berridge (2002: 7-9) further comments on the “distaste for both commerce and popular meddling in foreign policy” by most foreign ministries, and insists that:

In some small part no doubt because of the advance in the cohesiveness of the bureaucracy of diplomacy, the ministry of foreign affairs remains a very visible department of central government in almost all states. However, while its tasks bear a strong family resemblance in whatever national capital it is located, its influence over the content of policy varies rather more from one to another. In states with long-established MFAs and a constitutional mode of government, as in Britain and France, the ministry tends to remain highly influential. In others, however, it is much weaker. These include states with shorter diplomatic traditions and highly personalized and arbitrary political leadership as in much of the Third World.

What the above excerpt highlights is the undeniable connection between the foreign ministry, under which the diplomatic corps resides, and the government. The statist link is similarly

reflected in concepts of conflict resolution as ‘Track I diplomacy,’ which involves “official governmental or intergovernmental representatives, who may use good offices, mediation, and stick and carrots to seek or force an outcome, typically along the win-lose or ‘bargaining’ line” (Ramsbotham et al. 2012: 23-24). Sir Jeremy Greenstock (2013: 107-112), a retired British diplomat, writes that the overseas mission bear the responsibility for setting the national strategy where the heads of state are at the ‘apex of the power system,’ and, where diplomacy ends, technical intergovernmental interface begins. As a result, embassies enjoy a formal remit, while ambassadors in practice deal with the foreign ministry in order to maintain state-to-state relationship with the country of accreditation – a relationship that “often warrants reciprocal visits at the political level” (Malone 2013: 124-125, see also Berridge 2002: 118-119). The premises of the embassy, rendered inviolable by the application of extraterritoriality (referring to the state of exemption from the jurisdiction of local law), not only grants diplomatic immunity, but also accords official and political attributes to the space.

Linked invariably to the professionalisation of the field is the task of international negotiation. Nicolson’s (cited in Otte 2001b: 157, see also Berridge 2002: 115-119) view of negotiation was that it should be situated within an organised and ordered framework, based on “the element of representation – the essential necessity in any negotiator that he should be fully representative of his own sovereign at home”. An analyst in diplomatic negotiation himself, Meerts (1999: 79) reiterates that international negotiation is an “indispensable mechanism for states; that the need for interstate negotiations is growing tremendously [...] and in order to survive, [it] will have to develop as a negotiating specialism between the other specialisms”. The task of negotiation undoubtedly requires the diplomat to act in his or her official capacity, and under the auspices of his or her political masters. Incidentally, this specialised skill conforms to the ‘classical’ or traditional approach in International Relations that the development of diplomacy, along with international law and a balance of power, was essential to the emergence of the European states system (also reflected in Berridge’s earlier excerpt); the classicists adopt a narrow conception of diplomacy as an exchange of accredited envoys by states (Derian 1987: 2-3; Cooper et al. 2013: 4-5). All of the above diplomatic bureaucratisation and professionalisation can be fitted into the conceptual perimeters of ‘*club*’ *diplomacy*:

The club model reflects the traditional model of diplomatic practice. Diplomats restrict their interactions and deal solely with other members of an exclusive club, comprised of governmental officials, fellow diplomats, and, occasionally,

members of the business community. [...] The club model is a closed community of individuals who represent the interests of their respective groups. (Cooper et al. 2013: 22, emphasis added)

As the perfect embodiment of the ‘club’ model, the role of the ambassador has typically been associated with a high social standing, adhering to the procedural rules of diplomacy (known as protocol), and is often called upon in ceremonial activities (see Berridge 2002: 106-109; Barston 2013: 1-3).

Admittedly Kuwait’s induction into the international community, and by extension, its need for official diplomacy with states beyond Britain whose protection it was under since 1899, accompanied its independence in 1961. Faced with the threat of invasion by neighbouring Iraq, Kuwait’s status as a sovereign state came under mounting pressure. While Britain showed a willingness to come to the aid of its former protectorate, a more permanent, and indeed, more diplomatic solution was required. The Al-Sabah ruling family strategically decided to embark “upon a programme of internal reform and external recognition”: first, Kuwait’s admission to the Arab League opened the possibility of that organisation “assuming responsibility for defending the Shaikhdom”; second, Kuwait established the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) in an attempt “to use its wealth as an instrument of foreign policy” in the immediate Arab region; finally, Kuwait’s “bargaining position was strengthened” by its elections as a member of the United Nations on 14 May 1963 (Smith 1999: 123-129). Official diplomacy with regional and international partners grew out of Kuwait’s precarious position in the aforementioned crisis. Kuwait’s continued commitment to the bureaucracy of international diplomacy is visibly symbolised by the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1961, followed by the more recent Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute in 2008.

As a logical corollary to Kuwait’s adherence to international norms and diplomatic protocol, one would expect a routine ‘professional’ experience by foreign diplomats residing in Kuwait. However, the accounts provided by most foreign diplomats indicate otherwise. In an interview with the British Ambassador to Kuwait, Matthew Lodge (2016, emphasis added), he recounts a clash of expectations and realities:

I have been a career diplomat for about twenty years now, and as I have become more senior myself and engaged in some of the broader aspects – you would call them ‘High Level Discussions’ in capitals. [...] You would become quite familiar with the way, that, in addition to formal set-piece meetings and engagements, you

go and engage with your host country, with senior officials, politicians, parliamentarians, academics in their offices during the working day, and you may come across them occasionally at various, again somewhat set-piece social functions.

So that was very much, and I should add, my essential part in the building and nurturing of relationships, particularly on a *bilateral* basis, where we are talking about relationships between two sovereign countries. [...] That's a key part of what we do day by day [...] and I think it is fair to say that I arrived in Kuwait two years ago, very much expecting that to be the pattern and rhythm of that sort of engagement – that [bilateral] networking relationship – but actually in reality I found it *rather different*.

Understandably, the British Ambassador's career development in the foreign service has been marked by his ascent of the professional diplomatic hierarchy. The relationships forged through his career dealings have been 'bilateral' in nature, and in 'formal set-piece' meetings and engagements. When probed about the distinctiveness of his posting in Kuwait, he adds:

There was a couple of things, especially when talking to my predecessors in my preparations. One, I think it was a specific issue relating to the United Kingdom and Kuwait given our long historical connection, and that was a warning I suppose, a piece of friendly advice from my predecessors – that the spotlight and profile of the British Ambassador particularly would in all probability be significantly increased from that which I have experienced [...]

The other bit, which I think was given equally clearly but which I found harder to fully understand, was the impact of *social structures and traditions* in Kuwaiti society. [...] And of course people talk to me about the *diwaniyyas*, and they talked about Arab hospitality [...], and the family and tribal linkages within society between the ruling family and other major trading families. The structure of Kuwaiti society in fashion that is actually both *broad*, but also, and this might sound strange to say, but *in some aspects very hierarchical*, and *in other aspects quite flat*.

Needless to say, the realisation by the British Ambassador of the need to manage the considerable "spotlight and profile" which accompanies the longstanding Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship, sheds light on the methods of diplomatic communication.¹³⁹ Beyond the existing

¹³⁹ This 'spotlight' on the British Ambassador and his role in preserving the relations between Britain and Kuwait has traditionally been built on the ambassador's relationship with the ruling family and the merchant families. As explained throughout this study, prior to Kuwait's independence, the British political agency was situated near the seafront and sandwiched between the houses of the trading families. The Political Agent to Kuwait, in particular Harold Dickson (1929-36), frequently visited the *diwaniyyas* of Kuwaiti families residing

network of bilateral communications that he had listed, and even surpassing the revolutionary impact of telecommunications on diplomacy,¹⁴⁰ the ambassador found himself in unfamiliar territory, having to negotiate the “family and tribal linkages within [Kuwaiti] society”. Coming into contact with the *diwaniyya* tradition provided him with a more accurate examination of Kuwaiti society that is, in his words, both “hierarchical and [...] quite flat”. Judging by the horizontal flow of social capital alongside the vertical flow of the cultural capital in the *diwaniyya* etiquette, which have been emphasised over the course of this study, it is unsurprising that the *diwaniyya* culture signifies a break from conventional diplomatic protocol founded on a duality of bureaucratisation and professionalisation.

Specifically, the contrast between the official nature of diplomatic meetings and the familial character of *diwaniyya* sessions is helped by a greater elucidation in terms of space and the actors involved. First, the embassy and the meetings organised through the establishment generate political spaces that instil a sense of formality, which in Ambassador Lodge’s words, often create a “fairly sort of sanitised and careful lie”. Getting underneath the skin of the debate requires a more casual and informal atmosphere within the physical confines of the *diwaniyya*. According to the Political and Media Advisor at the British embassy in Kuwait, Ahmad Al-Alowaish (2016), *diwaniyyas* guarantee a “personal connection [...] where people can talk amongst themselves and discuss things as they see, and give their honest opinion in a way that they wouldn’t do in an official capacity”. Reiterating the need for personal friendship to overcome bureaucratic hurdles, the Indonesian Ambassador, Tatang Budie Razak (2017) revealed how he was shocked to learn of the difficulty in arranging official meetings with Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, often receiving an ‘impromptu answer’ rather than one in advance. Recalling the process through which he had to arrange a programme for his superior, the Vice Minister of Energy, Ambassador Tatang (2017, emphasis added) explains how connections on the informal *diwaniyya* platform expedites the organisation of official meetings:

The Vice Minister’s delegation came in the evening and only had half a day here, so of course, formally we will send a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but at the same time, I sent a letter directly to the Minister of Oil here. [...] Because I

near the shore, notably the Al-Mulla family (with a knack for nurturing a line of secretaries to the ruler) amongst others. During my visit in May 2018, at the height of the Ramadhan festivities, the Al-Shamlan family instructed me to remind the new British Ambassador Michael Davenport (after HE Matthew Lodge) to continue the tradition of visiting the ‘seafront *diwaniyyas*’ where Kuwaiti families were ‘expecting him’.

¹⁴⁰ For a more detailed explanation of the advance in telecommunications and its impact on diplomacy, see Chapter Six of Berridge (2002), and Snow (2009).

have a *personal relationship*, that is very effective. I asked them to please give me a written [answer], [...] and then my personal contact sent a letter to his Sheikh here. So I got the letter [...]. It is very effective. I have a personal relationship [...] because I met them previously [in *diwaniyyas*] so I requested, and they do also have some businesses in Indonesia.

It is clear from the Indonesian Ambassador's experience that while there is a need to observe diplomatic protocol, social brokerage in *diwaniyyas* has the capacity to facilitate and advance more formal agenda. In another interview with the Economic Officer at the US embassy, Charles Fee (2017), he explains how the nature of the conversation in a *diwaniyya* differs from those in his line of work:

When I'm at a meeting, number one it just tends to be more coordinated. I'm coming to speak to somebody, or I'm bringing a visitor for a specific purpose. [...] It's a challenge to have a casual, getting-to-know-you conversation. And that may not be the focus of the meeting, so if our ambassador has an agenda for the meeting. I'm not going to have a side conversation. [...] Whereas in a *diwaniyya* you can have two separate types of conversation. And another one, it's more social, more casual, the conversation tends to be pretty real. [...] When you're in a less formal setting, it's easier to open up because the clock's not ticking and it's not a diversion.

Conversations in *diwaniyyas*, as exemplified by Fee's comments, flow with spontaneity and informality, owing both to the familial location and the physical layout that encourage 'social' and 'casual' talk. Conceivably, as the renowned journalist Edward Murrow (cited in Armitage & Nye 2007: 50) argues, the 'last three feet' in the international communication chain remains the critical link in bridging personal contact – when one person talks and engages with another. The informality of the space engenders candidness in communication, to the extent that Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK, and the Deans of the Diplomatic Corps in London, Khaled Al-Duwaisan (2017) admits how, in his presentation to newly appointed diplomats bound for Kuwait, he lists the *diwaniyya* as one of the "six informal channels of diplomacy".

Second, having already established the *diwaniyya* as an 'organising agent' of Kuwaiti society by acting as a glue between and within families (see Chapter Three), the *diwaniyya* system represents an entry point for foreign diplomats to navigate the Kuwaiti social structure. As the British Ambassador Matthew Lodge specifies (in the earlier excerpt), Kuwait's peculiar governance in a family of families is both 'hierarchical' and 'flat'; foreign diplomats are required to strategically identify key actors or families outside the top echelon of the political 'food chain' (the Al-Sabah ruling family) who are prominent in other fields (business, energy,

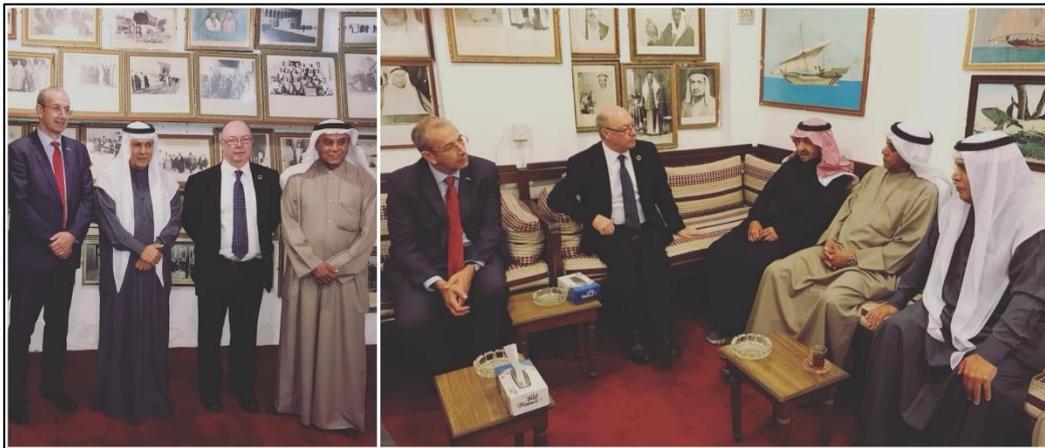
education, to name a few). By tapping on the *diwaniyya* apparatus, foreign diplomats also enhance their understanding of Kuwait so that “they can bring [it] to bear on the consideration of issues of interests of their country” (Fréchette 2013: xxxiii). Thus, the involvement of non-Track I actors at *diwaniyyas*, those who are typically outside of the ‘club’ diplomacy, require foreign diplomats to adopt a more open and holistic stance in their engagement. When asked how the *diwaniyya* deviates from official diplomacy, the British Ambassador Matthew Lodge (2016) explains:

I think it is about as different as it can be, frankly, because whilst within that relatively privileged strata of society where we’re engaging on a daily basis, as an aside, I would notice that the *diwaniyya* culture extends across the whole of Kuwaiti society. But we as foreign diplomats here in Dasman, downtown Kuwait City, even if we are proactive and engaged, I would argue that you only get to see, 10, 15, no more than 20 per cent of the overall activity that goes on. [...] We are sort of existing and operating in a pretty privileged circle, but [...] the combination of family structure, *diwaniyya* culture, small society, local media, both traditional and increasingly social media, all have the effect of pushing much of the business in influencing and shaping opinions outside that Track I business.

In essence, while the foreign diplomat abides by the rules of ‘traditional diplomacy,’ he/she realises that tracking public opinion through informal *diwaniyya* visits is imperative to support more formal channels. The theme of public diplomacy, with reference to the *diwaniyya*, will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Crucially, as Chapter Three has shown, the *diwaniyya*’s ability in levelling the status of its participants within the physical confines of the room, also brings foreign diplomats closer to the grassroots, and simultaneously, builds an intimate connection with the host family. This is the reason why the Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alistair Burt, took a trip to the Al-Shamlan family *diwaniyya* in December 2018, while taking time off his official duties in signing a formal agreement (the Joint Action Plan) with his Kuwaiti counterpart (see Photograph 5.1).¹⁴¹ Accompanied by the incumbent British Ambassador, Michael Davenport, the British minister Burt was later invited by senior members of the Al-Shamlan family to take a trip down memory lane in their *diwaniyya*, where black and white photographs filled every nook and cranny. As such, the *diwaniyya* practice, situated in a localised cultural context,

¹⁴¹ This is not the sole instance of a foreign official’s visit to the Kuwaiti *diwaniyyas*. In a more recent account, the Vice President of the German Parliament, Thomas Oppermann, visited the Al-Roudhan *diwaniyya* as part of his state visit on 22 March 2019. A video was made and uploaded on the German embassy’s Instagram account (germanyinkuwait).

challenges the widely held (and indeed, seen) understanding of diplomacy as a bureaucratized and professionalized craft. Where citizens are allowed to conduct their diplomacy in *diwaniyyas*, and where foreign diplomats ‘acclimatise’ to local customs in the same space, diplomacy as the preserve of state agents is now called into question. Instead, the conduct of diplomacy by states, as the seminal work of Hedley Bull (1977: 162) concedes, must also take into “other entities with standing in world politics”.



Photograph 5.1 The UK Minister of State for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, accompanied by UK Ambassador Michael Davenport, visit the Al-Shamlan *diwaniyya* (photographs courtesy of Al-Shamlan *Diwan* Instagram account – Shamlanii)

5.3 Multi-Track Diplomacy Rooted in a ‘Localised’ Cultural Tradition

Taking the ‘aristocrats’ to the ground, by means of *diwaniyya* visits, exposes traditional diplomacy to perspectives that are far from state-centric. Concurrently, the Kuwaiti citizen is also given a voice in the *diwaniyya*, and even if his input may not possess a binding effect, the sheer ability to participate has its benefits. These include having a placating effect on the disgruntled citizen, allowing for more informed decisions to be made by key stakeholders, and greater transparency among all parties. From a peacebuilding perspective, such diplomacy combines a ‘top-down’ approach with ‘bottom-up’ principles of indigenous legitimacy. Additionally, where the *diwaniyya* exists side-by-side with official platforms (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), local mores and international norms combine to result in a “hybridized peace that is in constant flux, as different actors and processes cooperate and compete on different issue agendas” (MacGinty 2015: 320). Yet, the concept of ‘liberal peace,’ recurring ever so often in the peacebuilding literature, tends to point war-torn societies in the direction of market liberalisation as a scheme of global convergence (Pugh 2005: 1). According to Duffield (2001: 11), the aim of liberal peace is to transform these dysfunctional societies into “cooperative, representative and, especially, stable entities”. The attainment of liberal

peace is taken to mean the “dominant form of internationally supporting peacemaking [...] that is supported by leading states, leading international organizations and international financial institutions” (MacGinty 2015: 316). As a result, the critique on the conventional wisdom of achieving liberal peace suggests that: (1) this framing allows Western intervention to “reproduce hierarchies of power due to the structural constraints of neo-liberal market relations”; (2) there is a “projection of Western ideals” in a context where they can be counter-productive (Chandler 2010: 140-142). As far as the *diwaniyya* is concerned as a non-Western frame of reference in diplomacy, it problematises the compliance towards liberal peace by introducing not only the determinant of human agency, but also the cultural purchase in the host society, as opposed to the blind commitment to international norms.

While MacGinty and Richmond (2013: 770) warn against romanticising ‘the local,’ they are also acutely aware that local contexts contain “power relations and hierarchies that favour some above others”. The observations made about local agency are extremely telling of the *diwaniyya*’s importance in diplomacy and sustaining peace:

Indeed, it is often much less ‘local’ than imagined, and is the product of *constant social negotiation* between localised and non-localised ideas, norms and practices. It can be transnational, transversal and be comprised of a geographically dispersed network.

We see local agency from two main perspectives. First, from that of practice: small-scale mobilisation for peace in practical terms, *in the context of everyday life and of the state*, but sometimes necessarily hidden from view, and often expressive of *informal critical or tactical capacity* rather than head-on public agency. [...] Second, we see local agency from a philosophical and theoretical perspective: in terms of the *social and historical struggles* which give rise to *legitimate institutions* in each context through larger-scale mobilisation, according to a complex local-international mix of identities, values and norms, and of cultural, political and economic practices. (MacGinty & Richmond 2013: 770, emphasis added)

The *diwaniyya* tradition in Kuwait, as a localised practice that produces and reproduces ‘constant social negotiation,’ resonates with the above excerpt on many levels. As the previous chapters have already detailed, *diwaniyyas* were used in the desert, at the seafront, before geographically dispersing across a newly urbanised landscape as an idea and a space. Its legitimacy stems originally from its use to maintain the contractual governance between the rulers and the ruled, and serving a communal function both in the pre- and post-oil eras. The

‘social and historical struggles’ experienced by Kuwait in its quest towards a modern state has also consolidated the *diwaniyya* as a salient feature of its politics and a social expression of ‘informal critical’ capacity, as various episodes have shown – notably the Monday *diwaniyya* movement.

As a diplomatic instrument, the *diwaniyya* has been so influential from the grassroots through the highest political ranks, that foreign diplomats have paid careful attention to the *diwaniyya* circuit. American diplomats have labelled the *diwaniyya* as “a defining element of Kuwaiti culture” in a cable (2005, revealed through Wikileaks) and specifically directed embassy officers towards this “important source of information, a place to make and maintain contacts, and an important venue for explaining U.S. foreign policy to a diverse audience”. Elsewhere, former US Ambassador François Dickman (2001: 111), who served in Kuwait from 1979 to 1983, states:

Impression of political attitudes were also gained by attending the diwanias, which are social gathering centers located in homes and attended by adult males. The diwaniya is an institution which is unique in the Arabian Peninsula and is especially well-developed in Kuwait. It is a place where issues are discussed informally and where the host, normally the eldest male in the family, often serves as a kind of arbiter. Each year, on the occasion of Id Al-Fitr (breaking of the Ramadan fast) and Id Al-Adha (the big feast), I was expected to make courtesy calls on the diwanias of at least a dozen or more leading families of Kuwait [...].

Indeed, the current US Ambassador Lawrence Silverman who asserts that the US-Kuwaiti relationship is ‘deeply-rooted,’ also indicates that he seizes the opportunity to join in the conversations at *diwaniyyas* (KUNA 2018).

The other major player in Kuwait is undeniably Britain, whose friendship with Kuwait has endured from the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty. Throughout this study, numerous examples of British officials’ accounts have narrated their encounters with the *diwaniyya*, to the extent that the entity’s culture of multi-directional engagement rubs off on the British agents. In 1958, as Arab nationalist fervour began to sweep through the Middle East to counter British influence, the British Commercial Officer at the Political Agency, John Aspden, met with Kuwaiti merchants and British businessmen alike to garner ‘bazaar opinion’ (Rothnie 1958).¹⁴² In the

¹⁴² In this telegram, the British official Rothnie also mentions his talks with Abdulaziz Al-Sager, the former Speaker of the National Assembly (1963-1965), describing Al-Sager’s views as “with moderation and authority”. The same Abdulaziz Al-Sager will go on to set up *diwaniyyas* in London to campaign against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in the early nineties (see also the conclusion in Chapter Two).

same year, when the local press accused the British of harbouring ‘pro-Zionist sympathies,’ the Political Agency invited thirty Kuwaiti merchants and notables to tea in order to clear the air (Halford 1958). The trend towards candid, informal talks initiated by the British is highly suggestive of the local influence comprising not only hospitality, but equally a sense of openness since the early days after the signing of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty.¹⁴³ As Britain’s representative of the highest order, it was the Political Agent who often had dealings with the ruler himself, and perhaps the greatest occupational hazard is overly-immersing himself in the local culture. ‘Localitis,’ or going native as literature on the practice of diplomacy calls it, “tends to grow in direction proportion to the resistance of the foreign ministry at home to the explanations of local behaviour offered by the embassy” (Berridge 2002: 110). Frequently called upon to show how Kuwaitis and indeed, the ruler himself, are reasonable interlocutors, the Political Agent Herbert Jakins (1951) writes:

I understand from Gethin that there was some misconception in the Eastern Department about my reference to “open majlis” [...]. As you know the Ruler, every morning, sits first in the Dasman palace and later at the town palace and members of the ruling family and leading merchants (and in the town palace anyone who cares to) comes in and sit down and engage in desultory conversation. Those who have private business they wish to bring to the Ruler’s notice go up to him and whisper it in this ear. This is called “open majlis”.

The ‘open majlis’ that allows for ‘desultory conversation,’ as the above excerpt outlines, is a glaring indication of the *diwaniyya*. The British officials, and other foreign diplomats, have been fixated as much on the unique social setting found in the habitus of the *diwaniyya*, as they have by the endless opportunities that socialisation in the *diwaniyya* brings.¹⁴⁴ In this light, the British embassy today continues to systematically understand the *diwaniyya* system. A ‘*Diwaniyya* Master List,’ in the form of a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet, divides *diwaniyyas* into different categories ranging from merchants and religious figures to the ruling family and MPs.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ As mentioned in Chapter Two, as early as the 1900s, the British officials who had visited Kuwait also received invitations to *diwaniyyas*.

¹⁴⁴ Among the foreign diplomats at the various embassies whom I had interviewed or met with, only one was oblivious to the existence of the *diwaniyya*.

¹⁴⁵ This list is not for public dissemination and was shown to the author during one of the interviews with British embassy personnel. Further, in the ensuing months after the British Ambassador Michael Davenport had presented his credentials (in September 2017) to the Kuwaiti government, I was invited by Michael Holland (Deputy Head of Mission) to the embassy to give a presentation to the new personnel on the importance of *diwaniyyas* as they began preparations for Ramadhan.

Perhaps the most defining example that reframes the *diwaniyya* practice, in connection to liberal peace and the importance of engaging actors outside of the Track I range, is the Iraqi occupation (and thereafter the liberation) of Kuwait. The Gulf War, as the event has been famously coined, was frequently examined from regional and international dimensions in scholarly writings. In Halliday's (1991: 224, see also Hassan 1999; Freedman & Karsh 1993) account, this conflict presents three key features: (1) it was the first significant conflict involving the armies of Arab states; (2) the inter-Arab division was compounded by the involvement of the entire Middle East and North Africa region, leading to implications on future peace processes; (3) US intervention in the war led to the introduction of extra-regional forces since the First World War.¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, the existing economic disparities in the Arab world as a cause for the war, the lack of democratic institutions in the region, and the scale of international conventional and nonconventional arms transfers, were the focus of a peacebuilding debate (Pamir 1992: 286). Where diplomatic negotiations were investigated, the roles of US President George Bush, his Secretary of State James Baker, and the United Nations as the primary platform for official discussions, were all thrust into the limelight (Crabb & Mulcahy 1995).¹⁴⁷ The national and sub-national levels, often associated with Kuwait's government-in-exile including its ruler Sheikh Jabir Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, was linked to intense campaigning outside of Kuwait, alongside the martyrdom and resistance of Kuwaitis who stayed inside Kuwait (see Chapter Two).

Yet, there remains an unmistakable paucity in the above literature on (1) the broken social contract prior to the Iraqi invasion, including the dissolution of the parliament in 1986 and heavy media censorship, and (2) how the localised practice of the *diwaniyya* was there every step of the way in order to restore public confidence in the Al-Sabah ruling family, to aid the local resistance, and to ease the transition towards a sustainable social contract in the post-liberation era. Describing this episode in Kuwait's history as 'regime failure,' Tétreault (2001: 77-82) articulates the perspective of most Kuwaitis that the government was "primarily responsible for the Iraqi takeover": the parliament was disallowed from interfering with oil

¹⁴⁶ So prevalent was scholarly thought on the global impact of Iraqi invasion that the concept of a 'new world order' was introduced into the lexicon of international politics, signifying (1) the end of an international order determined by two blocs (West and East); and (2) US hegemony on the rise (see Ismael & Ismael 1994; Falk 1991).

¹⁴⁷ The Geneva Peace Conference, held on January 9, 1991, was organised as a follow-up to the passing of UN Resolution 678, which authorised UN member states to employ any means necessary in order to guarantee the withdraw of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

policy,¹⁴⁸ and media censorship banned any mention of Iraqi troops amassing at the border, on the verge of invasion. While formal channels of state-society dialogue were stifled, the *diwaniyya* remained the only viable platform for reinstating an equilibrium between the two entities.

Piecing together material from the previous chapters, we notice a consistent trend of the ‘local agency,’ in MacGinty and Richmond’s aforementioned words, which gives rise to a ‘legitimate institution’ in the form of the *diwaniyya*. First, prior to the invasion the Monday *diwaniyya* movement embodied the socio-political struggle in the absence of a parliament that keeps the ruling family in check. Second, as interlocutors (Al-Kandari 2016; Al-Duwaisan 2017) have mentioned to me, *diwaniyyas* helped to organise the resistance against the Iraqis during the occupation, and some were even used to shelter the Al-Sabah family members. Kuwaitis abroad also mobilised by setting up *diwaniyyas* and campaigned for the liberation of their homeland (see Chapter Two). Third, and more vital to our discussion on post-war reconstruction, gatherings in *diwaniyyas*, while important in gathering public opinion that eventually influenced policymaking, were also crucial in guaranteeing a balance of power domestically that was acceptable to Kuwaitis themselves. While official channels of negotiation targeted bigger questions, then US Ambassador Edward Gnehm took to the *diwaniyyas* to understand public sentiment on the imposition of a no-fly zone over Southern Iraq (Al-Shamlan 2013). Meanwhile, at the first Popular Kuwaiti Congress that gathered 1,000 prominent Kuwaiti officials and citizens, and scrutinised by reporters worldwide, the Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah suggested that the country’s defunct parliament would be revived after ‘hard negotiations’ with members of the democracy movement (Ibrahim 1990). In personal conversation, Dr Ali Al-Shamlan (2018, research notes), the former Minister of Higher Education who was present at the aforementioned talks, voices the worries of the opposition who had insisted they needed from the Al-Sabah ruling family, in black and white, a clause guaranteeing “a return [to a political system] according to the 1962 constitution”. As this condition was agreed upon, and Kuwait was thereafter liberated, the ruler Sheikh Jaber was housed in the Al-Babtain family *diwaniyya* due to the destruction of his palace, while the Crown Prince Sheikh Saad’s *diwaniyya* was used to address the previous demands of his people:

Friends and members of the extended family gather to pass the evening sipping tea and bitter Arabic coffee, discussing the events of the day with the Crown Prince,

¹⁴⁸ This was in spite of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s “threatening reaction to Kuwait’s persistent overproduction of crude oil” (Tétreault 2001: 77).

Sheikh Saad Al-Sabah. It is hanging out evolved into a form of mass communication, political forum and lobbying. [...] Indeed the talks of the other *diwanis* is a meeting that Prince Saad is said to have held a few days ago with 40 important Kuwaitis, including representatives of major families and clans, to ask for their support. (Kifner 1991)

The lessons of the occupation, as Tétreault (2001: 97) describes, included one of ‘practical democracy’ where Kuwaitis devoted themselves to the restoration of their country. As criticisms mounted in *diwaniyas* demanding a measure of democracy, the ruler finally announced in June 1991 that elections would take place in October 1992.

The above episode in Kuwait’s history underscores the significant contribution of the *diwaniyya*, as a localised cultural practice, to sustainable peace. Predating the Iraqi occupation and even the formal recognition of Kuwait as a modern state, the *diwaniyya* has been a useful, informal avenue of communication alongside official, Track I modes. The input of non-state, or specifically sub-national actors, is indispensable considering the family structure of Kuwaiti governance. While we see elsewhere that an ‘Arab approach’ to conflict resolution is difficult to grasp (see for example, Yassine-Hamdan & Pearson 2014), the *diwaniyya* represents a multi-track dialogue approach that assembles actors from a myriad of families who are key to the running of the Kuwait. Track II diplomacy, which came to be known as ‘non-governmental peace management’ (Wehrenfennig 2008: 81), has not been sufficient in covering the “variety, scope, and depth of citizen involvement” and has thus been reframed by Diamond and McDonald (2013: 4-5, see also Figure 5.1) as ‘Multi-Track Diplomacy’ consisting of nine tracks: (1) government, or peacemaking through diplomacy; (2) nongovernmental/professional, or peacemaking through conflict resolution; (3) business, or peacemaking through commerce; (4) private citizen, or peacemaking through personal involvement; (5) research, training, and education, or peacemaking through learning; (6) activism, or peacemaking through advocacy; (7) religion, or peacemaking through faith in action; (8) funding, or peacemaking through providing resources; (9) communications and the media, or peacemaking through information.

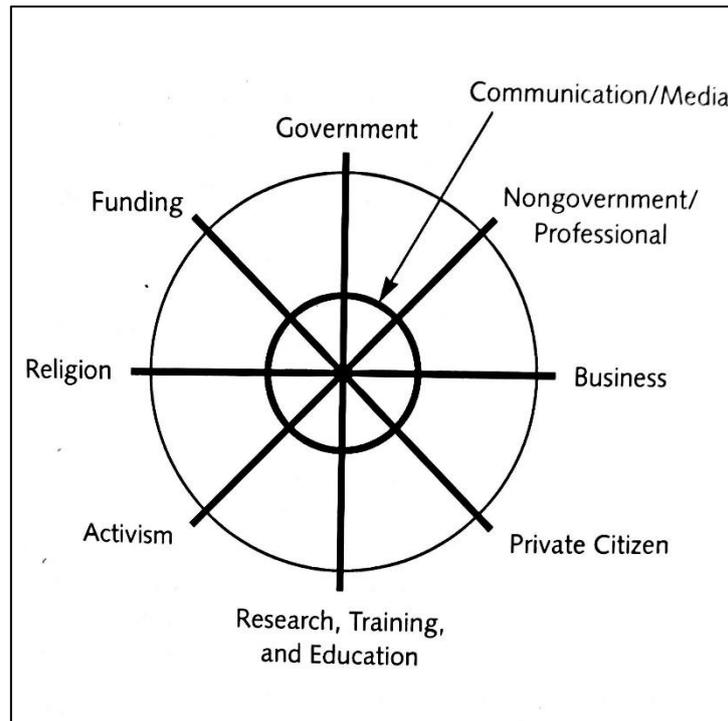


Figure 5.1 Constituents of Multi-Track Diplomacy (taken from Diamond & McDonald 2013: 15)

Arguably the *diwaniyya* covers the full spectrum of actors outlined by Multi-Track Diplomacy; under different circumstances, however, the range of actors participating in *diwaniyyas* may vary, but the fundamental ‘public-ness’ of the *diwaniyya* remains a constant. As Ramsbotham et al. (2012: 28) argue, the emphasis is on the “need to build constituencies and capacity within societies and to learn from domestic cultures how to manage conflicts in a sustained way over time”. Multi-Track Diplomacy focuses on how the ‘social system’ with relationship, coupled with self-consciousness at the “heart of the peacemaking system,” resonates altogether with the cultural and social capitals transmitted by the *diwaniyya* (Diamond & McDonald 2013: 7). The Multi-Track Diplomacy system adopts the definition of ‘positive peace’ which calls for the eradication of militarism and structural violence (that is, the effects of oppressive social systems) (Diamond & McDonald 2013: 12-13, see also Galtung 1971), echoing the *diwaniyya*’s peacebuilding and diplomatic roles that keeps Kuwait’s social fabric intact. Whether or not Kuwait is caught in conflict, and whether the *diwaniyya* conforms to legitimate peacemaking according to the ‘liberal peace’ perspective, it remains not only a highly important diplomatic tool that has cultural purchase in Kuwait, but also a formula that promotes sustainable peace.

5.4 Rethinking ‘Public Diplomacy’ in the *Diwaniyya*

Understanding the ‘public’ quality of the *diwaniyya* through the lens of diplomacy has thus far, in this study, been largely an inquiry into state-society relations, and how such a distinctive form of grassroots diplomacy informs policies at various levels of the state. Enter the foreign diplomats into the realm of the *diwaniyya*, and the types of interactions and interests become remarkably different. Making a case for ‘public diplomacy’ conducted in the *diwaniyya*, referring to “a form of influence over public opinion which would in turn have an impact upon the conduct of diplomacy,” then becomes highly relevant (Pamment 2014: 52, see also Chapter One). When a ‘foreign’ agenda is thrown into the mix of a local milieu, often the question is not only whether the skilled foreign practitioner is adaptable to a fresh environment, but also, in this case, whether the message intended for the local audience is ‘palatable’ (Kiehl 2009: 212-213). Just as ‘traditional diplomacy’ is challenged by sub-national groups, the literature on public diplomacy is being rethought to give more ‘public emphasis’ rather than being “a mere ancillary tactic that supports [...] traditional diplomacy efforts” (Snow 2009: 6-7):

Traditional diplomacy is government-to-government relations (G2G) and if one were to picture it, it would be a photo op of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sitting across the table from the foreign affairs minister in another nation state. Traditional *public* diplomacy has been about governments talking to global publics (G2P), and includes those efforts to inform, influence and engage those publics in support of national objective and foreign policies. More recently, public diplomacy involves the way in which both government *and* private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions (P2P).

Evidently, the *diwaniyya* circuit allows for a P2P type of public diplomacy where governments *and* individuals can influence public attitudes, but to claim that this bears a direct impact on another government’s foreign policy decisions should be approached with utmost caution. While an expanded conceptualisation of public diplomacy aids our understanding on how foreign diplomats shape public perceptions in *diwaniyyas*, it misses out on the cultural and familial overtones that engulf the *diwaniyya* setting, alongside the spontaneous conversational topics that make up its relaxed atmosphere. Owing equally to the multi-directional dialogue among a myriad of actors in the space, foreign diplomats have expressed frustration in locating the person they seek, or finding the information they require. The Indonesian Ambassador Tatang Budie Utama Razak (2017) laments:

I visited some *diwaniyyas* of course, and I'm very selective because this is part of our way to see someone. But mostly we could not find what we wanted, because in the *diwaniyya* sometimes there's a big family there and there are other people who also come.

In another instance, Eleanor Hale (2017), the Political and Economic Trade Officer at the Australian embassy in Kuwait, and her Ambassador Warren Hauck (2017) echo similar challenges in an interview:

Eleanor: There are a lot of competing comments coming out of them (the *diwaniyyas*), so essentially you can get anyone's personal view on something, but at the end of it, what they get out of that is often not very clear, and often very confusing. [...]

Amb Warren: As a diplomat what you want to do is to have a discussion and get views on certain issues, and then feed those back to Canberra. I would say I rarely get views in a *diwaniyya* that I would then think, "that's something I have to report back." It's more about just increasing my understanding of how Kuwait works, and who's connected to whom, and things like that. I wouldn't say it's a direct line of communication I use as such. You're sat in a room with a bunch of people, and as Eleanor said, you're going to get ten different views and a lot of banter.

While the above views suggest the dangers of the *diwaniyya* being a mere 'talk shop,' it is the same personal relationships forged at an informal, haphazard level that allows foreign diplomats to influence public opinion. A key ingredient of conducting public diplomacy, after all, is establishing credibility which comprises trustworthiness and goodwill; those seeking to project credibility through public diplomacy can then "adopt an audience-centered approach" (Gass & Seiter 2009: 158-162). Public diplomacy has conventionally been thought of as supplementing "traditional diplomatic efforts with more overt and continuous communications directed at citizens in other countries," particularly through modern satellite and internet technologies (Nelson & Izadi 2009: 334). Yet, the *diwaniyya* presents a diverse audience in a cultural context that has been produced and reproduced to the point of internalisation, and, even with 'competing comments' present, it provides a fertile ground for foreign diplomats to alter, or redress, public perceptions face-to-face.¹⁴⁹ The Australian Ambassador Warren Hauck (2017), further to his earlier comments, admits:

¹⁴⁹ Speaking off the record, one ambassador mentions how he attempted to change the 'fixed mindset' of Kuwaitis whose first (and perhaps, only) thought about his country was domestic workers.

[There is] not a lot of knowledge as to what Australia, or what it represents, or what business it can do [...]. So that's why I tend to spend a lot of the *diwaniyyas* doing what I would call 'soft diplomacy'. Selling Australia, selling "Australia is a top 20 country," we get the largest number of international students in the world, [...] we invented Wi-Fi, Google Maps, this sort of soft diplomacy stuff just increases and it becomes a personal way of doing it. Given the way Kuwaiti networks work [in *diwaniyyas*], it's the one or two stories that resonate around Kuwait half the time.

The 'soft diplomacy' employed by the Australian Ambassador in the *diwaniyya* environment also represents the expectations of a twenty-first century diplomat as a 'proactive initiator' and a 'modern orator' (Heine 2013: 66); only here the diplomat is asked to walk into the Kuwaiti equivalent of the agora and speak out.¹⁵⁰ In another interview with Rüdiger Zettel (2017), Deputy Head of Mission at the German embassy, recounts his *diwaniyya* visits on a "personal and social capacity," explaining how these visits end up with healthy dialogue about Germany's take on the refugee crisis in Europe, and with Zettel's constant promotion of the reliable German automobile brands.¹⁵¹ Public diplomacy conducted in *diwaniyyas* is therefore real and presents a feasible 'window' for diplomats who seek to 'market' their country. Perhaps these acts signify a respect of local customs, but its utility in delivering a 'credible' public diplomacy strategy can only be attained if the diplomat takes the initiative to visit *diwaniyyas*. Such an act "directly reflects the identity of the people it represents" (Cross 2013: 6), launching a feedback loop between the diplomat and the Kuwaiti in the *diwaniyya* environment where interaction is live and immediate.

In personal conversation, the First Secretary (Political) of the US embassy in Kuwait, Farid Mohammed (2017), underscores the usefulness of the *diwaniyya* on two accounts: (1) allowing for the transaction of business by one's government, or to deliver a specific message; (2) allowing the diplomat to play the role of an 'investigative journalist' albeit in a 'non-intrusive way'. On point (2), the British have certainly set a precedent in the past by monitoring the frequency of *diwaniyya* visits by dissenters, notably Jasim Al-Qitami (the former head of the police force), in order to gauge the escalation of conflict, if any (Graham 1967; Morris 1967, see also Chapter Three). More recently, a WikiLeaks cable reveals how American diplomats tapped on the *diwaniyya* circuit to understand Kuwaiti sentiment of a post-Saddam Iraq, and

¹⁵⁰ The Australian ambassador also went on-air with Radio Kuwait, speaking about Australia's relationship with Kuwait and briefly about *diwaniyyas* on 06 April 2017. The former British ambassador was also interviewed live on a television broadcast known as "Kuwait in Black and White" on 24 February 2016.

¹⁵¹ Zettel also comments on Kuwait as a middle-sized investor of German cars since the seventies.

were surprised to learn how, through these *diwaniyyas*, Kuwaitis knew that “a plan [was] being hatched in which the US manage military and security operations, while Britain manages civilian aspects of Iraq” (US Embassy Cable 2003)!

Tracking back to the aforementioned point (1), the transactional conduct in *diwaniyyas* by diplomats would be seen as running against the bureaucratic structure of diplomacy and, thus generally be frowned upon. The former British Ambassador Matthew Lodge (2016) explains the ‘cultural difference’ where public servants in the UK are bound to conduct business “without personal favour, without preferential treatment, lobbying or requests” which, in Western culture would be seen as inappropriate. Despite insisting that “there are clear limits” to what he can do, and that he respects the bureaucracy, the Ambassador concedes that the *diwaniyya* culture impacts the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship in a positive way “because it adds another dimension”. Providing a conducive environment for building personal relationships, the *diwaniyya* circuit introduces the foreign diplomat into a network of complex relationships that may be taboo to public servants who are required to be as impersonal as possible in the conduct of diplomatic business. To others, such as one Kuwaiti interlocutor, bypassing formal bureaucratic levels is ‘an ethical problem’ (Alsharekh 2017). While such an unconventional transactional approach becomes accepted as a form of ‘moral economy’ (see De Sardan 1999), it is more appropriate to acknowledge it as a reflection of Kuwait’s structural inequalities. The sustenance of such a system yields benefits to eligible users while excluding others (as Chapter Four has already shown); its advantages can also turn out to be unevenly distributed as some exploit it more than others. Nevertheless, it remains a point of entry for endless windows of opportunities, however big or small.

In terms of transmitting a specific message at *diwaniyyas* on behalf on one’s government, the nature of reception may be far from desirable, as the spontaneity of conversations can either diffuse the intended message, as previously indicated, or result in a more heated exchange of words. Judging by the trend to interpellate ministers in the Kuwaiti parliament,¹⁵² what is more commonly known as ‘grilling,’ the tendency to question dribbles down to the ground, in *diwaniyyas*, where the mood can turn belligerent. During my visit to the Al-Essa family *diwaniyya*, the Russian Ambassador was put on the hot seat by attendees

¹⁵² Herb (2016: 17) writes that in the 1985 elections, the opposition, for the first time in Kuwaiti history, won a majority of seats in the parliament and, in the process, “forced from office one member of a family closely related to the Al-Sabah, and set about the process of interpellating (or grilling) several other ministers”. This trend of interpellation is also reflected in the work of Tétreault (2001).

for the actions of his president – Vladimir Putin – who supports the Assad regime in Syria.¹⁵³ On another occasion when I shadowed the British diplomat, Michael Holland, to the Behbehani *diwaniyya*, a discussion surfaced concerning Fahad Al-Rajaan, the former head of Kuwait’s social security fund, who was apprehended by British authorities for the embezzlement of public funds. Questions by the Kuwaitis present about Fahad’s arrest were directed at the British diplomat, who was visibly displeased by the mention of this incident, but explained how Interpol had already made his crimes known to governments.¹⁵⁴ These anecdotes show that while the foreign diplomat benefits from a sense of public opinion in *diwaniyyas*, being spared from public queries in the space remains unavoidable. Far from being a vehicle for public diplomacy where the projection of one’s message is unidirectional, the *diwaniyya* ensures a two-way communication where the foreign diplomat influences and is influenced. Additionally, such a direct communicative practice between the Kuwaiti and the foreign agent is far from novel: since the time of pearling the Kuwaiti citizen has been well-informed of global and regional events; the *diwaniyya*, playing hosts to foreign guests till today guarantees the continued exchange of information that benefits the Kuwaiti citizen.

Yet, adopting a deliberate approach on softer grounds, such as in cultural or educational terms, counts for a more viable means of sending out messages at *diwaniyyas*. An effective cultural initiative need not be constrained by ‘traditional parameters,’ rather, it provides context for official actions and help to humanise (Goff 2013: 420-421). Berger (2008: 3-4) clarifies the difference between public and cultural diplomacy despite their overlaps, arguing that cultural diplomacy is “not meant to be the promotion of a national culture,” rather, it emphasises on ‘mutual recognition’. In the notes kept by the British political agency (1952), a list of Kuwaitis and their current or future courses of study in Britain was recorded. Subsequently in the same year, the British Political Agent Pelly (1952) proposes the establishment of a British Council institute in writing:

The importance of our influencing education in the Gulf, and particularly in Kuwait, is so great that the chance that a good British Council man might be to do so is worth taking [...]. An institute such as the Council has in other countries, offering English classes in the evenings, library facilities (for both England and Kuwaiti readers), documentary cinema shows would bridge the gap between the

¹⁵³ This visit is recorded in the 11 April 2017 entry of my field journal.

¹⁵⁴ This *diwaniyya* visit, as recorded in the 10 April 2017 entry of my field journal, also details how Michael Holland later reveals that he is also responsible for the extradition of criminals, and is therefore unabashed about those who transgress the law.

average Kuwaiti and the British. [...] A British Council institute should [also] tend to make them (young Kuwaiti men) sympathetic with the British point of view and to counter the influences which now make them hostile to it.

Benefits accrued from cultural diplomacy are thus intangible and requires reciprocity. In another instance, the US embassy, through their Cultural Attaché, Zennia Paganini, collaborated with Faisal Al-Fuhaid, the founder of the Cross Cultural *Diwaniyya* project (see Chapter Four). Hosting a special *diwaniyya* session entitled “The Benefits of Cultural Exchange,” the sitting was a visible attempt at cultural diplomacy in the guise of educational exchanges.¹⁵⁵ As opinions were exchanged and queries put forth, a leaflet, inviting applications to study in the US, was circulated among the participants (see Figure 5.2). Similar to the last excerpt by the British affirming that educational exchanges bridge the gap between the host country and the country of accreditation, US involvement in the aforesaid *diwaniyya* is also a case where educational exchanges, however apolitical that it may be presented, “inescapably operate within the broader political environment of international affairs” (Scott-Smith 2009: 50). Crucially, this section has shown that public diplomacy in the *diwaniyya*, comprising also cross-cultural enterprise, is nowhere near straightforward due to the unpredictability of human interaction. The influence of foreign diplomats in *diwaniyyas* remains relatable to the analogy of planting a seed – it may yield no fruit whatsoever but it continues growing – because the sheer opportunities present provide sufficient justification to do so.

¹⁵⁵ I attended this *diwaniyya* session on 27 September 2017.

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Figure 5.2 Leaflet of a US study exchange initiative, distributed in a *diwaniyya* (obtained by author)

5.5 Foreign Diplomats in the *Diwaniyya* ‘Theatre’

Perhaps the simplest way of understanding diplomacy in the *diwaniyya* is to view foreign diplomats as social individuals, as much as they are state representatives. Previously in Chapter One, it was suggested that the diplomat is required to “juggle three scripts of self against one another” (Neumann 2005: 72). In unfamiliar territory with a particular cultural code, akin to the *diwaniyya*, the contextual exigency obliges the diplomat to produce another script of self. Diplomatic communication, in Raymond Cohen (1981: 39-40) words, consists of the ‘body language’ and the social rituals that build a cordial atmosphere for the message conveyed to be sympathetically received. One instance of this in *diwaniyyas* is where foreign diplomats are

expected to call on the head of the family, and remain patient while the host recounts their family history (usually maritime-associated). In Cohen's (1987: 103) later work entitled *Theatre of Power*, he places emphasis on the personal encounter in the 'theatre' where the handshake, embrace, and displays of inconvenience¹⁵⁶ carry weight; according to him, physical 'touch and proximity' are particularly important in certain cultures. For the diplomats, an act as simple as making time beyond one's official schedule to visit *diwaniyyas* is a display of inconvenience in itself. Often as a gesture of goodwill, the foreign diplomat will be asked to sit next to the host in the *diwaniyya*, surrounded by senior members of the family. While the time and attention accorded to the dialogue between the diplomat and the host may not always be an indicator of successful diplomatic exchange (see, for example, Johnson 1974: 74), this, including other non-verbal acts, are representative of the sheer hospitality by the family. In Cohen's (1987: 90-91, see also Berridge 2002: 101) words, the receptivity, in the guise of body language, establishes the desired tone at 'threshold moments' in a relationship. In a lively interview with the Second Counsellor at the French embassy in Kuwait, Véronique Bertrand-Galli (2018), she calls the *diwaniyya* a 'social theatre' where one is seen and heard, and offers the opportunity for 'marketing' one's country. In one anecdote she expresses her discomfort when having to deputise for her ambassador in paying condolences at a *diwaniyya*: as a female she felt the need to be invited, and she issues the same advice to her newly appointed female ambassador. This 'invitation' represents a non-verbal cue of acceptance, and a similar respect of the cultural code in *diwaniyyas*. Another female diplomat from the Australian embassy, Eleanor Hale (2017), reflects upon her *diwaniyya* visit:

I've only been to one *diwaniyya* so we can take further about this, but as a female junior diplomat, it's pretty limited. You obviously don't have the inroads of being ambassador or chargé and my one experience came through a meeting with a high-level former foreign minister who travelled to Australia to speak at our invitation, at one of the universities. Very open-minded [guy] obviously, and he asked me if I've ever been to one, and I said "no". He said, "you must come to ours next week."

The experiences of female diplomats at *diwaniyyas* highlight how they are seen more as the 'asexual representative' of their state, rather than as women per se (see Photograph 5.2).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ This refers to going out of one's way for the other person.

¹⁵⁷ The former British Ambassador Matthew Lodge (2016) states that during Ramadhan, it is "doubly rewarding and invigorating" to see how leading female members of Kuwaiti society hosting their *diwaniyyas* for ladies, while others have mixed gatherings, reflecting Kuwait's greater openness compared to other Gulf states, in terms of gender equality.

Charles Fee (2017), the Economic Officer at the US embassy, also maintains that there is ‘little pushback’ for female officers to visit *diwaniyyas*.



Photograph 5.2 The Canadian Ambassador Martine Moreau making her rounds in *diwaniyyas* (Source: Martine Moreau Twitter account)

The prestige of the ambassador also represents a status-boosting mechanism that enhances the public image of the Kuwaiti host. While the ambassador fulfils his/her ceremonial duties by going on a public tour of *diwaniyyas*, the Kuwaiti family or individual whose *diwaniyya* is graced by the ambassador accrues a significant piece of social capital (see Photograph 5.3). Regular ambassadorial presence is more essential for the big merchant families who require continuous affirmation of their established status in society.¹⁵⁸ One account recognises the significant presence of the US Ambassador by his subordinate officer:

He’s recognised being a power player in this country. Every couch has its seat taken, he’s going to be sitting in a position of honour right next to the *diwaniyya* chairman guy. The conversation often becomes very one-way; there’s sort of a whole corps of people asking questions. (Fee 2017)

In this manner, the *diwaniyya* ‘theatre’ provides social cues for local and foreign diplomats alike, and the latter group equally acknowledge the meanings behind the verbal and non-verbal

¹⁵⁸ As a guideline, the *diwaniyyas* situated between the First and Third Ring Roads, in particular the Abdallah Al-Salem, Faiha and Nuzha neighbourhoods, are run by influential Kuwaiti families. Elsewhere, the historical and untouched *diwaniyyas* on Gulf Road, namely Al-Mulla, Al-Roudhan, Al-Shamlan, Al-A’soussi and Al-Badr are frequently visited by not only ambassadors and foreign officials, but also by members of the ruling family.

acts. “Since all actors know (or quickly learn) that all public acts [...] may be considered significant,” as Cohen (1987: 20) argues, “the assumption tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy”. Jönsson and Hall (2003: 199) argue that the code and conventions of traditional diplomatic culture “do not necessarily take precedence over the code and conventions of national cultures”. Certainly the opportunities present in the informal ‘theatre’ of the *diwaniyya* indicate a break from more formal engagements such as summitry. The fact that a foreign ambassador, intentionally placed together with senior and equally high-positioned family members in a *diwaniyya*, immersed in a dialogue that is “often quite deliberate, and it is often the final say,” underscores how informality can breed formal decisions (Hale 2017).



Photograph 5.3 The Italian and Lebanese ambassadors attend the inauguration of Meshal Al-Shatti’s *diwaniyya* (Source: Kuwait Times, 26/01/2016)

Costas Constantinou (1996: 97), whose work provide similar views on diplomacy as a ‘theatre,’ argues that theatrics constitute not only a ceremonial presence, but “a protocol, a first-glue role that recognizes the dramatic aspect as an effective part of the *techne* of diplomacy”. Barston (2013: 2, see Chapter One), who lists the six broad areas of the state’s diplomatic functions comprising the ceremonial aspect, fails to identify how the diplomat, embodying the state, has prearranged roles in a diplomatic play that impacts power relations. It is the “bestowal of particular identities on the participants” that makes diplomacy in the *diwaniyya*, for this study’s purpose, useful to understand (Constantinou 1996: 109). The manipulation of the diplomatic presence is, on the one hand, a reflection of the individual diplomat’s status (ambassador versus regular officer); and on the other, it demonstrates both the nature and the depth of the overseas mission’s bilateral relations with Kuwait. Ramadhan provides the most obvious context of competing diplomatic presences. It is customary for foreign ambassadors to deliver congratulatory wishes to the ruler and members of the ruling Al-Sabah family in their palaces during Ramadhan, whereas it is equally, if not, more important, to make their presence

felt in the family *diwaniyyas*.¹⁵⁹ Presenting credentials to the public is as much a necessity for the diplomat as it is to present them to the ruler and his government (Al-Bloushi 2016). The former British Ambassador Matthew Lodge (2016) describes his Ramadhan experience as an inclusive one that does not discriminate guests, and calls it a “wonderful touring caravan of everybody going from *diwaniyya* to *diwaniyya*”. Ramadhan also presents the opportunities for the diplomat to make introductions.

Beyond the ceremonial presence, however, competing bilateral relations shines through each mission’s attendance at *diwaniyyas*. The US embassy in Kuwait, through their former Ambassador Douglas Siliman, launched a 100-*diwaniyyas* initiative during Ramadhan in 2016, sending embassy personnel in teams to cover a hundred *diwaniyyas* across the country (see Photograph 5.4). Their efforts were also captured on social media on both the embassy’s and the ambassador’s Twitter and Instagram accounts.¹⁶⁰ On the British front, their Head of Political Section, Michael Holland (2016, see also Photograph 5.5), describes their own Ramadhan planning:

During Ramadhan the first two weeks are basically an opportunity for Kuwaitis to be out and seen, to be seen to host – very hospitable. So in these first weeks, very intense, we might go anywhere between three and ten *diwaniyyas* each night [...]. Just to show you here (flips through a list) we have all the contacts for literally every *diwaniyya* that we have been to. Now this is a massive undertaking. We have an officer who pretty much devotes themselves to this. [...] We might meet every morning at the embassy and discuss the current day’s and tomorrow’s *diwaniyyas* [to visit], and then we will allocate so we will know who [is going] and we will try to prioritise.

Such a ‘massive undertaking’ in investing manpower to go on a public diplomacy offensive at *diwaniyyas* is not for every embassy. Michael Holland, in the same interview, later says in a matter-of-factly tone, “We’ve been here the longest, we are here for the long term; we are not just here just for some short-term financial game”. The British and American missions in Kuwait are arguably the largest and most influential ones; their activities and engagement at *diwaniyyas* are a reflection of their respective bilateral relations with Kuwait.¹⁶¹ Comparatively,

¹⁵⁹ Embassies may also hold a *ghabga*, which is a dinner or supper held between *iftar* (meal after fasting) and *suhoor* (meal before resuming fasting in the morning) during Ramadhan. This is otherwise an event hosted by friends or family.

¹⁶⁰ On Instagram this initiative is found by searching #100diwaniyyas.

¹⁶¹ Additionally, it is worth noting that when I first sent out emails to embassies requesting for research interviews, the US and UK embassies have been the most responsive. On political, economic, cultural, and security fronts, these two countries have had the largest and perhaps, the most extensive, impact on Kuwait. US

the French embassy selects ‘ten VVIP’¹⁶² family *diwaniyyas* and prioritising political ones in order to preserve bilateral relations (Bertrand-Galli 2018). The Australian Ambassador Warren Hauck (2017) attempts to cover four to five *diwaniyyas* each evening during Ramadhan, lamenting that if he had his own police escort as does the US Ambassador, then he would have covered more ground.¹⁶³ Although a quantification of the number of *diwaniyyas* covered by each embassy may not be the ideal indicator of diplomatic influence, every visit to a different *diwaniyya* ‘theatre’ accumulates social capital that is transmitted back to the wider ‘theatre of power,’ where not only the diplomat has greater personal sway, but also the country to which he/she renders services.



Photograph 5.4 The 100-Diwaniyyas initiative by the US embassy during Ramadhan 2016 (Source: US Embassy Kuwait’s Instagram account, usembassyq8)

collaboration with Kuwait arrived later than the British. For a more detailed understanding of their respective foreign policies in Kuwait, and specifically how the power vacuum was gradually filled by US involvement, see Chapter Three of von Bismarck (2013).

¹⁶² VVIP refers to very very important persons.

¹⁶³ The Australian embassy in Kuwait has about fourteen staff (four diplomats, one trade commissioner, and nine local staff), in comparison to the British embassy with about forty staff in total.



Photograph 5.5 UK embassy staff doing their *diwaniyya* rounds during Ramadhan 2017 (photos courtesy of Michael Holland)

5.6 From ‘Club’ to ‘Network’ Diplomacy

Hitherto in this chapter, the hallmark of the *diwaniyya* practice is identified in its cultural facet, its informality, and the communication flows that it produces – all of which run against the intricacies of traditional diplomacy. Taking a step back to understand the interactional dynamics in *diwaniyyas*, and unpicking the cultural element from the space, the flow of social capital from public servants to private individuals bears an uncanny resemblance to the wider trends in an interconnected world. The ‘club’ model of diplomacy, as previously mentioned, a proponent of traditional diplomatic practice and “dominated by hierarchy and strict gatekeepers,” must now “take into account a host of important actors and interest groups” (Cooper et al. 2013: 23-24). The rise of ‘network’ diplomacy, owing to the ‘democratization of information’, has resulted in “a push towards greater accountability and transparency for government officials, including diplomats” (Cooper et al. 2013: 23). Heine (2013: 54-59, 2006), a strong advocate of the ‘network model’ of diplomacy, attributes the transition from ‘club’ to ‘network’ diplomacy to the effects of globalisation, that is, “the sustained increase in trans-border flows of goods, services, capital, images, and data”. Taking his explanation further, Heine argues that globalisation has opened the ‘black box’ of the nation state, giving “a further

impetus to transnational relations”; the result is a change from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ where the latter relies less on hierarchy than on “coordination of a relatively flat network of a vast array of actors” (see Table 5.1).¹⁶⁴

	Number of players	Structure	Form	Transparency	Main Purpose
Club Diplomacy	Few	Hierarchical	Mostly written	Low	Sign Agreements
Network Diplomacy	Many	Flatter	Written and oral	High	Increase bilateral flows

Table 5.1 Club versus Network Diplomacy (Heine 2006: 5)

What the shift from ‘club’ and ‘network’ diplomacy entails is the need for more versatile diplomats who are proactive, analytical and willing to engage. ‘Network’ diplomacy demands an effective communicator, and involves simple exercises such as Tweeting, but in the Kuwaiti context, ‘network’ diplomacy constitutes the act of visiting the *diwaniyya*, showing respect to a foreign culture and history, and entering into face-to-face conversation with multiple publics. The *diwaniyya* circuit also demands the diplomat to understand hierarchy in equality, or as Chapter Three posits, ‘organic’ in ‘mechanical’ solidarity.

When re-examining the public sphere, Castells (2008: 88) notes that there is a stalemate in the intergovernmental decision-making processes because the cultural of cooperation is lacking; in particular there is a “domination of the personal/political/social interests in service of each nation-state”. While Castells proposes the solution of a ‘global civil society,’ or the “organised expression of the values and interests of society,” elsewhere Hochstetler (2013: 177-181) delves into the role of civil society, what she calls “a sphere of social life that is analytically distinct from the state and market spheres”. She later underscores how civil society actors “bring issues to the global agenda from their lived experiences,” as a result of their ‘formal expertise’. Yet, civil society in the Kuwaiti sense, and crucial to the diplomat’s eye, goes beyond mere actors or associational groups. They include kinship groupings that have complex ties with the state, which is presided by the dominant kinship group, the Al-Sabah. In this light, the perspectives of society that sub-national actors bring to the table, require a more

¹⁶⁴ The effects of globalisation on the relationships between actors have also been explored by other writers. The general trend is a move from ‘traditional structures’ such as the nation-state, towards regional actors and civil society, giving way to ‘global governance’ as an alternative or supplement to the inter-state system (see, for example, Chapter Five of Ritzer & Dean 2015). Elsewhere Keohane and Nye (2000) shifts the focus onto ‘globalism,’ referring to networks of interdependence at multicontinental distances. They argue for the ‘thickening of globalism’ which gives to three changes not just in degree but in kind: increased density of networks, increased ‘institutional velocity,’ and increased transnational participation.

acute understanding of the networks that include *both social and cultural capitals*. At the very least, ‘network’ diplomacy in the Kuwaiti context necessitates “significant elements of continuity alongside major elements of adaptation and innovation” (Cooper et al. 2013: 25).

5.7 Conclusion

As set out in Chapter One, the professionalisation of diplomacy and the institutionalisation of its management have their origins in a European context. Hamilton and Langhorne (2011: 116) writes that, in Africa and Asia, the European powers had to “reckon with political structures and values which could not easily be reconciled with a system based upon the equality of sovereign states and clearly defined territorial borders”. Even in the diplomatic theory of international relations, the concept of ‘international society’ disregards units of analysis below the national level, where institutions are concerned (see Chapter One). As far as the resistance against the inter-state network of diplomacy goes, Kuwait is another case in point. Its historical trajectory has, however, forced it to adopt a hybrid brand of statist and localised diplomacy. As MacGinty and Richmond (2013: 770) argue, the local is “not necessarily exclusive of the national and international,” rather, the local effectively allows for the reconstruction of emancipation, via the everyday, in an empathetic frame (solidarity), in which subjects have agency (meaning we are all subjects)”.

This chapter has, while focusing on the *diwaniyya* as a unique diplomatic practice, equally encouraged practitioners to look beyond the bureaucratisation and professionalisation found in conventional diplomatic canon. The various observations and vignettes of embassy life in Kuwait puts forth a compelling case for indigenous diplomatic practices that have implications on decision-making and policy-making processes. The peculiarity of the Kuwaiti case lies in the structure and organisation of its society, where families are arranged in ‘organic solidarity’ (as set out in Chapter Three), and the foreign eye may be oblivious to such social stratification. Fortunately, the *diwaniyya* remains a vital, and informal, means of navigating the complex interplay of familial relationships. For the foreign diplomat, it may represent the equivalent of a ‘live textbook’ to understanding how social and cultural capitals are assigned. One could posit that the *diwaniyya* ‘decrypts’ information that fellow diplomats from other embassies cannot. This ‘decrypted information’ in turn allows for the designation of importance (to each family) in accordance to national interest.

While the conduct of public diplomacy is possible in *diwaniyyas*, interactions in the *diwaniyya* transcend an image-centered form of public diplomacy based on a one-way mass

communication. Perhaps *diwaniyya* diplomacy is closer to the recently coined ‘new public diplomacy’ characterised by ‘dialogue’ and ‘engagement’ (Melissen 2005; Pamment 2013), but it is clear from this study that the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya* has been in practice well before such a conceptual discovery. Even if the statuses of the participants are asymmetrical, the *diwaniyya* produces a healthy, symmetrical form of dialogue between any two attendees. As many foreign diplomats have admitted in the interviews, Kuwait grants more civil liberties than any of its regional neighbours: in one instance, Kuwaiti people are said to be “not quite as insular as their Gulf brothers” (Fee 2017); another claims that the most surprising thing about Kuwait is how “most people do not realise the democratic institutions that exist” (Freeman 2016); others regard Kuwaiti hospitality in *diwaniyyas* as sincere, compared to elsewhere in the Gulf, because an invitation to the *diwaniyya* equates an invitation to the house (Hauck 2017; Hale 2017).

Arguably, the *diwaniyya* practice adds value to the diplomatic canon in terms of diversity. To claim that it is an anomaly, however, needs to be nuanced by the changes in the diplomatic field that enables it to cope with the exigencies of an interconnected world. As Cooper et al. (2013: 23) argue, the twenty-first century diplomat must “manage the complex relationship of the club while also tending this ever-expanding network”. From a constructivist perspective where identity is ‘socially constructed,’ the act of engaging in public diplomacy influences publics, and, unveils “how a society views itself” (Cross 2013: 6). Further, it turns the ‘conductor’ into the ‘conducted’. The foreign diplomats, in their attempt to conduct diplomacy in the *diwaniyya*, are simultaneously processing this novel diplomatic method in which they are immersed, and reshaping their own worldviews.

Conclusion

As a local mechanism for diplomacy, the *diwaniyyas* are basically a form of mass participation in democracy, in politics, in social affairs, in the affairs of the state. I have heard people talk about Kuwait of being “good geology, bad geography”. It has very good natural resources, but it’s really in a chaotic and difficult region. [...] If you go far back enough [in Kuwait’s history], you have Persian influence, Iraqi influence, you have Saudi. So you also have all of these different things that are reflected in the audience within the *diwaniyya*. It really is a melting pot of ideas and politics and influences.

Interview with Michael Holland (2016),
Head of Political Section, British embassy in Kuwait

Who Decides the Level of Urbanism?

Upon delivering a presentation to the staff at the British embassy in Kuwait, I was asked how the loss of urbanism is mitigated in Kuwait today. My immediate answer was that the *diwaniyya* embodies a communal resistance to the isolating, and indifferent, pull of urbanisation. As explained in this study, notably in Chapters Two and Three, suburbanisation as the main proponent of Kuwait’s urbanising phase was a state project. Expanding inland and relocating Kuwaiti families into specific residential areas were intended not only to upgrade housing forms and lifestyle, but also to systematically, on the state’s part, watch over its citizens. Yet, Kuwait’s rapid urbanisation is moderate in comparison to its regional neighbours; owing to the damages caused by the Iraqi occupation, the rapidity of the process is diffused across the last five decades. Bearing witness to much more than Kuwait’s urbanisation episode, the *diwaniyya* has experienced changes in form, and, these same physical changes reflect upon its society’s metamorphosis. Kuwaiti historian Farah Al-Nakib (2014) provides two of these socio-spatial observations: (1) first, the distribution of oil wealth meant that the *diwaniyya* no longer falls under the purview of the elites but became “diffused among members of the population”; (2) second, suburbanisation took the *diwaniyya* idea “out of the city centre” and into the suburbs that are “constructed on the base of social background”. In this manner, the *diwaniyya* is also telling of the cohesion-division binary that Chapters Three and Four of this study have already detailed.

As Lefebvre (1996: 158, see also Al-Nakib 2016: 200) argues, the restoration of one’s ‘right to the city’ is about a “transformed and renewed right to urban life,” which is found in the concomitance of (1) everyday functions and activities (private, social, and political), and

(2) the spontaneity of chance encounters with the unexpected. The *diwaniyya*'s malleability encapsulates all of the above. It is, at once, an everyday space that invites public participation and, on a seasonable basis, manifests its political overtones openly during the electoral period and in times of crisis. The *diwaniyya*'s 'public-ness' harnesses the qualities of various ideal-types of public space that were set out in the Introduction, combining the square (collective belonging), the café (social exchange), the street (informal encounter) in a unique blend, allowing its users to stake an unmistakable claim on urban life.

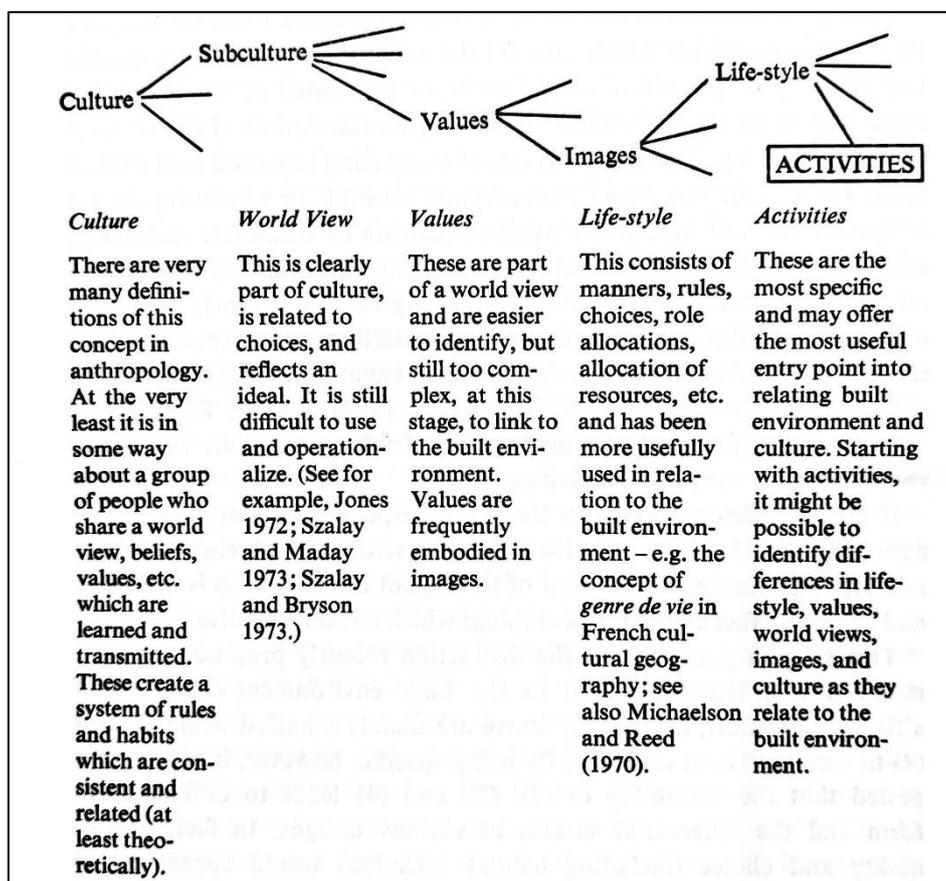
The more pertinent question then arises: *who* should exercise this 'right to the city' and to 'urban life'? At first glance, it may seem logical to deduce that the 'urban commons' should be decided by the community itself. Harvey (2012: 70-71) makes an interesting proposition, suggesting that "some sort of enclosure is often the best way to preserve certain kinds of valued commons". His argument against the often-maligned 'enclosure,' referring to state intervention, is justified by the need for protection. In other words, a citizen's 'right to the city' needs to be regulated by state authority, because it is dangerous to "presume that the best way to preserve one sort of common is to deny another". Specifically contextualising the *diwaniyya* in Harvey's line of reasoning, we notice throughout this study that the Kuwaiti state, run by the Al-Sabah ruling family, not only endorses, preserves and protects the *diwaniyya* space, but also partakes in the *diwaniyya* practice. The approval by both state *and* society in guaranteeing the *diwaniyya*'s status as a form of 'urban commons' therefore highlights a more important point: the solution to urbanism lies in mediating between government institutions and other centralised entities on the one hand and the individual city user on the other (see also Al-Nakib 2016: 218-220). The same premise positing the *diwaniyya* as an intermediary in both social and spatial relations has thus been a recurring, and indeed, justified theme throughout this study.

Smaller Built Environments: Out of Sight or Out of Mind?

Bouzarovski (2016: 9-12), prior to examining the residential domain of former Eastern European Bloc countries, discusses the concepts of 'flexibility,' 'adaptive capacity' and 'resilience' in the context of urban spatial, social and political transformations. In an engaging theoretical review of the literature on 'flexibility,' Bouzarovski singles out Sennett's (1998) work on 'capitalist development' which stresses that the "pursuit of flexibility has now produced new structures of power and authority, rather than creating conditions for personal freedom" (p. 9). 'Resilience,' according to Bouzarovski, has assumed a 'normative character' in decision-making organisations, and it becomes 'disconcerting' to see how rarely it is discussed within the context of changes in "the social and built fabric of the city" (pp. 10-11).

In the same vein, this study has constantly emphasised on the ‘malleability’ of the Kuwaiti *diwaniyya*, and showed how structures of ‘power’ and ‘authority’ exist in two ways: (1) from within the *diwaniyya* when it is in session; and (2) when, viewed as a microcosm of society, reflecting wider social dynamics, particularly when juxtaposing one social group with another. As this study has shown, each temporal change to Kuwait, in the underlying political, economic and social contexts, exerts pressures on the *relevance* of the existing built environment. The *diwaniyya*, however, has emerged ‘resilient,’ ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptive’ in addressing the needs of various communities, whether in terms of overall governance, or catering for specific groups such as the young Kuwaiti men and those of tribal affiliations.

If ‘resilience’ were a process that highlights more than a built environment’s relevance, then, as Bouzarovski (2016: 11) suggests, more studies involving ‘micro-scale perspectives’ and ‘integrated epistemologies’ are needed. In an earlier contribution, Rapoport (1976: 24-27) attempted to appropriate ‘culture’ into man-environment studies, building a hypothetical schema as a result:



Aspects of culture and their relation to the built environment (Rapoport 1976: 25)

The above schema requires a closer look at the activities within the built environment itself to build a case for cultural influence. Beyond these activities, however, the cognitive aspect, or more precisely, some form of behavioural conditioning, needs to be observed. This provides a point of entry for ‘habitus’ and its condition of internalised dispositions, as outlined in Chapter One. Not only do patterns of regular *diwaniyya* visits reaffirm the space’s continued relevance, but the consistent interactions within the space allude to the formation of a ‘cultural’ practice. The seating layout in the *diwaniyya*, the varied mannerisms and body language towards a specific guest (ambassador, sheikh, notable, researcher), the gravity of the dialogue; all of these indicate the Lefebvrian ‘order’ of space (see Introduction).

Space draws reference to ‘relations of production,’ and echoes what was previously said about structures of ‘power’ and ‘authority’. A more sociological view of space examines individual actors “acting to meet a wide range of expectations, under different social constraints, for purposes of social integration” (Shulman 2017: 55). As a result of social cues provided by space, the *diwaniyya* forces the insider (Kuwaiti) to act accordingly to integrate, and, also the outsider (foreigner) to comply with the same social rules. This is why diplomats themselves see the *diwaniyya* equally as a ‘theatre’ (Lodge 2016; Bertrand-Galli 2018). It is of no coincidence that what is being said about the *diwaniyya* corresponds to the dramaturgical lexicon coined by Goffman (1959), drawing attention to implicit meanings and signals found in face-to-face communication within a given space. In Goffman’s later work entitled *Behavior in Public Places*, he elaborates on these aspects of socialisation:

In every society these communication possibilities are institutionalized. While many usable events may be neglected, at least some are likely to be regularized and accorded a common meaning. Half-aware that a certain aspect of his activity is available for all present to perceive, the individual tends to modify this activity, employing it with its public character in mind. Sometimes, in fact, he may employ these signs [dress, bearing, movement and position, sound level, physical gestures such as waving or saluting, facial decorations, and broad emotional expression] solely because they can be witnessed. (Goffman 1966: 33)

Goffman’s above excerpt provides a timely reminder of why micro-environments make worthwhile contributions. Not only are these spaces fertile ground for human interaction (something that social media is void of), they highlight, and acutely so, qualitative aspects that include needs, interests and values. Micro-scale studies have provided undisputable insights. Weir’s (1985: 125-126) work on the practice *qat* chewing in Yemen reveals that *qat* parties are major forums for more formal political activity, where political leaders and legal experts

receive supplicants and pronounce judgments. Elsewhere, in a rural Punjabi village in Pakistan, the household enterprise known as a *dég* may seem like a ritual to thank God and invite guests to dine from cauldrons of rice, but are actually indications of ‘status hierarchy’ as high-status guests are never asked to sit on the ground while dining (Lyon 2004: 146-148). Shifting into the recent context of Gulf cities, migrant labour camps have become focal points of studies as attention is diverted away from the spectacular architecture of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha (see Nagy 2006; Kamrava & Barbar 2012; Vora 2013). In this respect, the *diwaniyya* is one of the many anomalies in an expanding domain of micro-scale studies that will have implications in fields of governance, politics, and peacebuilding. In cultures that deviate from the Eurocentric reach, it is more important to squint harder so that these small ‘social spaces’ do not escape our sight and mind.

The Qualitative ‘Face’ of the *Diwaniyya*

In a recent quantitative study, Al-Kandari (2016) measures the relationship between the *diwaniyya* and ‘social national identity,’ by conducting surveys with components ranging from national heritage, cultural homogeneity, belief system, and consumer ethnocentrism. His statistical findings indicate that: (1) significant differences between the types of *diwaniyya* exist if members “came from different or similar origin roots” (p. 15); (2) *diwaniyya* members “of mixed faiths and roots have a higher mean of level of education and socioeconomic status” (p. 16); (3) and establishing a conclusion that “more interaction between different cultural groups” leads to greater ‘social national identity’ (p. 20). While these statistics provide useful indications on the regularity of *diwaniyya* visits, the spectrum of *diwaniyya* types, and the faith-roots-status correlation, they merely scratch the surface of deeper concerns. Neither does a quantitative study examine the socialisation within a *diwaniyya* and across *diwaniyyas*, nor does it adequately explain why differences that hinder a cohesive ‘identity’ exist in the first place.

The reasons behind this study’s multi-faceted approach (as set out in Chapter One) then become apparent, found in ‘embeddedness’ and ‘generativity’ (see also Medvetz & Sallaz 2018: 10-16). First, qualitative concepts show not only a concern with “embedding themselves with past theories so as to correct errors and false assumptions inherited from the past” (Medvetz & Sallaz 2018: 10), but also with a reassessment of history in order to identify either seasonal, ritualistic or regular patterns. One instance is the ‘tribal’ *diwaniyya*: in the pre-oil period it was a mobile entity disconnected from Kuwait port town, but the exigencies of the modern state and the benefits of naturalisation accompanied an ‘urbanisation’ of Bedouin lifestyle. ‘Tribal’

diwaniyyas may now be similar in form with those of the urbanites, but their purpose and human interactions differ. That does not, however, justify the Bedouins' pariah status, rather, their historical trajectory differed from those bound by the city wall, and should be seen as victims of circumstances, even if they are commonly regarded as 'bogeymen'.

Second, the 'generativity' of qualitative concepts are "meticulously calibrated to the goal of fostering empirical research, as opposed to referring to classes of objects [...] in the most straightforward sense" (Medvet & Sallaz 2018: 12). Habitus, a central concept to this study, has been more than an explanatory device; through the ethnographic observations conducted in *diwaniyyas*, habitus avoids a simple typology of *diwaniyyas*. Rather, it makes explicit the perceptions, judgments, and actions of individual *diwaniyya* users and groups. The varying interests of *diwaniyya* attendees play out in different ways: an individual seeking job opportunities, a diplomat making a ceremonial presence, a senior member of the merchant family – each enters the *diwaniyya* with different short- and long-term objectives. Put differently, a qualitative concept akin to habitus acts as an organising principle for social research, supplying a bundle of questions:

How does the agent under investigation cognitively carve up the world? What are her criteria for evaluation and judgment? What are her spontaneous, practical reflexes? And, crucially, how and in what institutional contexts did these dispositions form? (Medvetz & Sallaz: 13-14)

Having asked the above questions specific to the *diwaniyya* in this study, we then reinvoke the concepts of institution, field and habitus (see Section 1.4). From an idea situated in Islamic history, the *diwaniyya* starts off as a simple idea that is taken into both desert and port contexts. It is at this stage of Kuwait's development where the institutionalisation of an idea takes place: *diwaniyyas* were used to address communal need in the *farij*; the ruler's inclination to tame his autocratic hold by conducting a regular public *majlis* in the bazaar further encouraged a sense of openness in governance. Where commercial activities are concerned, the *diwaniyya* acted as the 'satellite' of information. The above temporal phase confirmed the *diwaniyya*'s status as a social institution taking shape from a mere idea.

The beginnings of the *diwaniyya*'s institutional status were further reinforced as Kuwait entered a new stage. Acquiring statehood and being endowed with oil wealth, drastic changes to the physical landscape and lifestyles saw the *diwaniyya* as the answer to an endangered communal lifestyle. As elections were being held, its seasonal status as a political institution was established. As a practice, it qualifies as a habitus for the nuclear and extended families,

and served as an internalised custom from the paramount Al-Sabah family to the average Kuwaiti family. Where ‘fields’ are concerned, the differentiated use of the *diwaniyya* highlights not only social cleavages, but also ‘hierarchical relations’ as those having “dominating positions in their respective fields,” whether political, economic or academic, “orient themselves towards in the direction of final positions close to their positions of departure (i.e. their parents’ positions)” (see Hjellbrekke & Prieur 2018: 81). These hierarchical relations explain why people can be in positions of authority in one field, but express complicity in another. A young Kuwaiti man would speak only when spoken to in his family’s *diwaniyya*, but in his own, he is as free as a lark. Similarly, a prominent merchant family maintains its social status by hosting a continuous flow of visitors at its weekly *diwaniyya*, but is humbled in the presence of an Al-Sabah Sheikh. Finally, as ‘counter-spaces’ the *diwaniyyas* attained a whole new level in times of crisis: they assumed multiple responsibilities in the Monday *Diwaniyya* movement and during the Iraqi Occupation; the ‘field’ of urgency expands the *diwaniyya*’s social role as a means of preserving the social contract between the rulers and the ruled. So far has the *diwaniyya* idea come that as ‘field,’ ‘institution,’ or ‘habitus,’ it has been recognised domestically, regionally and, to a small degree, globally, as a result of the campaigning for Kuwait’s liberation in the early nineties.

Bringing the Family into the Public Sphere

In my last field trip to Kuwait, one of my key informants remarked, “You have now spoken to all the important people in the *diwaniyya* circle; you have all that you need.” This statement needs a qualification. He was referring to the ‘important people’ within the urbanite *diwaniyya* circuit. The adjective ‘important’ in itself remains subjective, requiring further clarification and contextualisation. Being ‘important’ is relative to one’s immediate social circle, and being ‘important’ across various social circles increases one’s standing. As this study has emphasised, the family’s needs and the overall family structure of Kuwait are key reasons for the *diwaniyya*’s existence, without which its functions as an ‘organising agent’ become meaningless. Herb’s (1999: 33) work entitled *All in the Family* discusses the resilience of dynastic monarchies:

The men who hold the top posts in the Gulf monarchies are embedded in two parallel hierarchies of authority: the visible and familiar hierarchy of the state and the less obvious hierarchy of the ruling family. The two hierarchies overlap in those members of the dynasties who hold office in the government, yet the family

hierarchy is by no means limited to office holders, but instead includes all males who belong to the ruling clan.

What Herb's excerpt outlines is crucial to our quest for a definition of the *diwaniyya*. First, while his remarks on the overlap between the hierarchy of the state and that of the ruling family are generally correct, the case of Kuwait has witnessed a retreat by the Al-Sabah ruling family in assuming key cabinet positions, with the exceptions of the interior, defence and foreign affairs posts (see Section 3.7). Chapter Three of this study also indicated how members from traditionally powerful merchant families, and, more recently from emergent families, hold key positions in the Kuwaiti government. This underscores a concessionary attitude by the Al-Sababs towards power-sharing. Further, Herb's argument of 'parallel hierarchies' also suggests expansionist ambitions on the ruling families' part. This brings us to the second point – a reminder of Kuwait's social contract. As far as 'organic' solidarity goes, if the Al-Sababs constitute the 'heart' of the Kuwaiti 'body,' then there are other families who represent the vital organs that are essential in the running of the same 'body'. What the 'heart' does, the other 'organs' receive notice of its decisions.

Where, then, do we locate the *diwaniyya*, as an 'organising agent' of the Kuwaiti family? If the family is a core component of Kuwaiti society and governance, then it is equally applicable in the other Gulf monarchies. An extra ingredient is required to characterise the social contract. In my interview with Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah (2016, emphasis added), a prominent member of the ruling family and the former Deputy Prime Minister, he insists:

The *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait, it's not like your regular *majlis* (council) in other countries where it's confined to families. I think you have noticed that the *diwaniyya* is an open house. You just walk in and nobody will ask you, "Hey, what are you doing here?" [...] In other societies, where they have the *majlis* in the Gulf, no, it's very restricted. It's not an open house. Here people are coming in and out [...] so you don't have to show your 'party invitation' so to speak. And this is where it reflects [...] an *open culture*. As a matter of fact, now we are becoming closer than what it was 70 years ago when there was no oil. Just people on ships going back and forth, so when a foreigner comes [...] everyone embraces him. So in that sense, the culture, the economic reality has shaped our organising agent, *diwaniyyas*.

The 'open culture' mentioned by Sheikh Muhammad is not only Kuwait's exposure to the outside world, but also locally as an 'open house'. The *diwaniyya* is an 'organising agent' for information outside of Kuwait, as much as it is for the families in Kuwait. The sense of

openness lies in the *diwaniyya*'s 'public-ness'; not a mutually exclusive public sphere, but one that *encompasses* the family structure of Kuwaiti society. This is Kuwait's distinctiveness from its regional neighbours who draw the line between the private and public spheres.

The stacked Venn diagram below captures how the *diwaniyya* organises the family within the Kuwaiti public sphere. The innermost circle representing the nuclear Kuwaiti family is bound by obligations to the extended family; these family duties are fulfilled by regular visits to one's family *diwaniyya*. Cultural capital is transmitted between the extended family and one's immediate nuclear family, amassing knowledge about one's family heritage and societal standing. The extended family then interacts with other Kuwaiti families in a transmission of social capital that cultivates an understanding of the Kuwaiti 'body'; these networks facilitated by the *diwaniyya* are then manifested tangibly in other aspects (political, economic). Where the wider public sphere is concerned, this means that in spite of one's social and cultural capitals, the *diwaniyya* facilitates discussion among equals, what Chapter Three had previously described as 'mechanising organic solidarity'. In this manner, the *diwaniyya* exemplifies the following quality of the Habermasian public sphere:

When Habermas says that public-sphere discourse, "far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether," he does not mean that participants in public-sphere debate either did not know or pretended not to know each other's status (36). He means that social status was *no longer (as it had been) the very precondition* for participating in debate and that the validity of an argument, like the assumption of merit, was not seen (as it had been) to be predicated on status. In its formation, the public-sphere ideal of inclusiveness is not the ideology of a self-conscious class strategically concerned to universalize its own interest. It is the discovery *in a society stratified by status that the idea of the public interest (or the national interest, or the commonwealth) has meaning only if it is premised on the conviction that interests are multiple* and that no single interest – not even that of the monarch – is universal or absolute. (McKeon 2004: 275, emphasis added)

The *diwaniyya*, straddling both public and private domains, encourages participation in debate without judging the arguments based on one's status. It recognises that 'interests are multiple' and that *diwaniyya* attendees have diverse reasons for visiting. Bourdieu's work on the French education system argues how education produces a social hierarchy that "conflicts with the value of a 'truly democratic' system that would enable all students to have access skills leading to school success" (Reed-Danahay 2005: 47). While a similar hierarchy is present in Kuwait, where social classes act in attempts of self-preservation, the manipulation of social and cultural

capitals through the *diwaniyyas* also allows for any family (besides the Al-Sabahs) to climb the social ladder. In electoral periods, even an individual uses the *diwaniyyas* to his/her advantage.

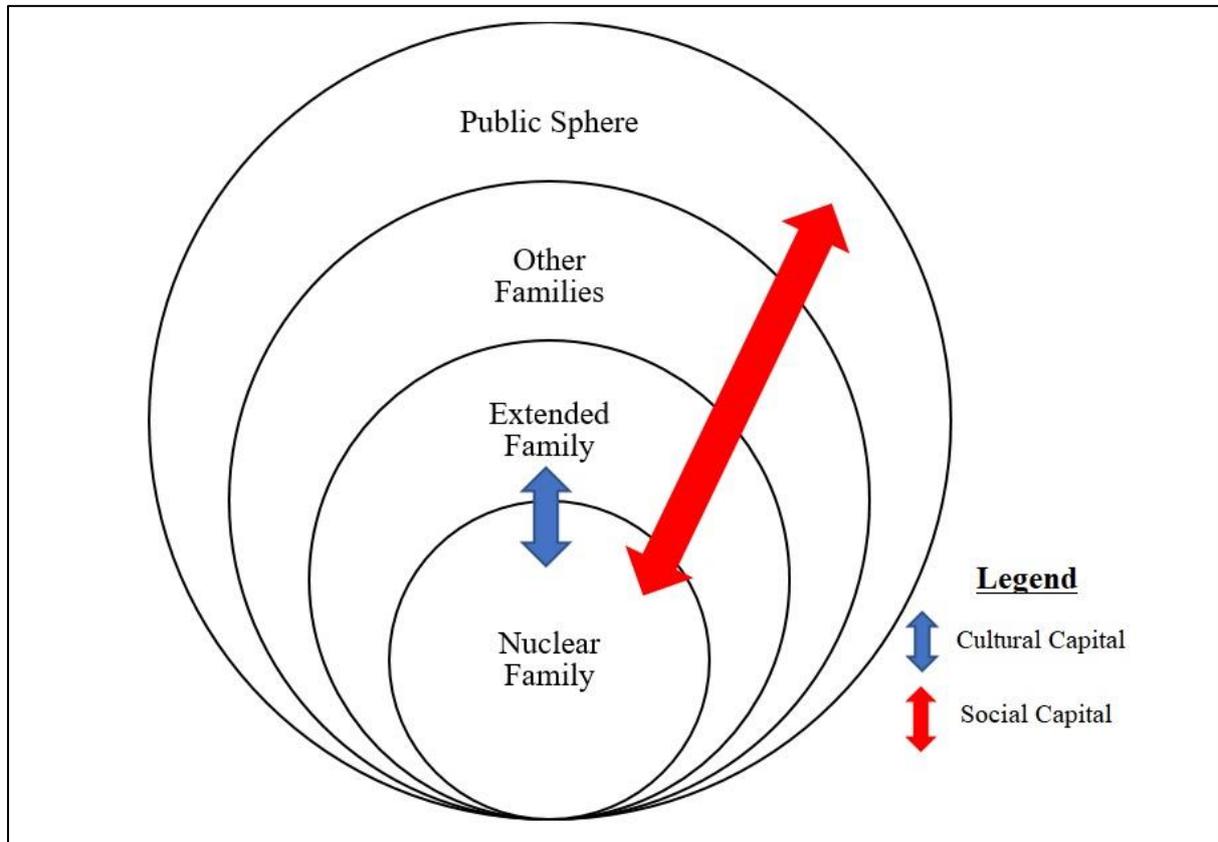


Diagram of how the *diwaniyya* brings the family into the public sphere

Certainly, the *diwaniyya* adds a layer of transparency between the family and the public. When British social anthropologist Peter Lienhardt (1954, reprinted in 2017) visited Kuwait in the fifties and ended up in a shopkeeper's *diwaniyya*, he found out that a sheikh that he had been due to visit was out of the country. In my last visit to Kuwait, as I sat in the Al-Nusf *diwaniyya*, the question over Kuwait's leadership succession was being discussed. Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, son of the current ruler and the Minister of Defence, emerged as the crowd's favourite candidate as everyone debated on the success of his policies. These lively discussions undeniably exceed expectations where authoritarian regimes are concerned, but are they truly publicly conducted? A large part of Kuwaiti women, for instance, may not be kept in the loop of such 'public' information. When asked to provide five adjectives to describe the *diwaniyya*, words such as 'patriarchal' and 'sexist' tend to surface, even if the same women agree that the *diwaniyya* practice is a historical 'tradition' that shows Kuwaiti 'hospitality'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ The adjectives that receive the highest hits in this free-listing method include 'networking,' 'tradition' and 'hospitable'. Words such as 'exclusive,' 'patriarchal' and 'sexist,' in particular, tend to be mentioned by female interviewees.

Previously, Chapter Four demonstrated that Kuwaiti women are able to derive benefits indirectly through the *diwaniyya*, and in one interview Farah Al-Nakib (2014), as a Kuwaiti woman and historian, admits that it is more of ‘a custom’ that *diwaniyyas* exclude women.¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the representativeness of *diwaniyyas* and how ‘public’ they actually are, merit further thought.

Taking *Diwaniyya* Diplomacy Forward

As early as the times of the Romans, ‘informal diplomacy’ had been conducted. Ito (2015: 1) writes that the Roman Empire made contact with foreign states and individuals through channels that were not constrained by the factors in the official sphere such as ‘legality, publicity and legitimacy’. Further, Ito’s (2015: 4-5) finds that such ‘informal diplomacy’ transcend boundaries of *clientela* (patron-client relationships) and *amicitia* (friendship). Quite simply, ‘informal diplomacy’ embraces all the activities that sit outside of official channels. As this study has shown, the *diwaniyya*, as an interlinked space and practice, has similarly been free from the shackles of ‘legality’ (half-sitting in the family realm), ‘publicity’ (not a propaganda mechanism), and ‘legitimacy’¹⁶⁷ (its inviolable status is both historical and cultural). As an effective diplomatic mechanism starting from the grassroots, the *diwaniyya* focuses on neither *clientela* nor *amicitia* per se; in the long run, visits into the *diwaniyya* habitus are done “without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends” (see Bourdieu 1984: 170). The relationships forged, the capitals accumulated, in and through the *diwaniyya*, may be converted at any stage.

What qualifies as ‘informal’ is arguably in direct reference to what is ‘formal’ or ‘official’ of its time. In the last chapter, I have remarked on Kuwait’s adoption of a hybrid diplomatic style, juggling between a professionalised, if not, universalised mode of diplomacy (what was termed as ‘traditional’ and ‘Europeanised’), and *diwaniyya* diplomacy. In this manner, the *diwaniyya* extracts the ‘aristocratic’ element found in ‘club’ diplomacy, introduces actors from a myriad of backgrounds, and dilutes official relationships into casual ones that form the basis of ‘network’ and ‘multitrack’ diplomacies. Cultural specificities notwithstanding, the public face of the *diwaniyya* builds a ‘private’ layer of diplomacy that does *not* represent the face of the state. *Diwaniyya* diplomacy, a subset of informal diplomatic

¹⁶⁶ Al-Nakib also mentions that when conducting her research interviews in *diwaniyyas*, “the men were never made to feel uncomfortable or out of place” and that “they were always welcoming”.

¹⁶⁷ Kamrava (1998 :75), who calls the Gulf monarchies ‘sultanistic regimes,’ argues that “historical tradition is a tangible, important source of legitimacy” for these regimes.

modes, not only alters what we understand of ‘traditional’ and ‘public’ diplomacy, but also makes “changes in relationships so that they may be brought to a point where development can occur” (Evangelista 1999: 231, cited in Scott-Smith 2015: 24). Again, while official modes tend to ‘cut to the chase,’ the *diwaniyya* practice envisages the building of more sustainable relationships, where the informal can, at some point, translate into the formal. US Ambassador Edward Gnehm’s decision to ‘hit the *diwaniyyas*’ in order to gather public views about an Iraqi ‘no-fly’ zone, mentioned in Chapter Two, is a result of his regular appearances at *diwaniyyas* during his term in Kuwait. The *diwaniyya* serves as a cultural broker for foreign diplomats seeking to make sense of Kuwait; it unveils the multi-directional flow of social and cultural capitals. The next step, for the foreign diplomat, is then to prioritise these individuals and families in order of importance to his/her government’s interests. Due to the haphazard fashion of *diwaniyya* visits by foreign diplomats (barring Ramadhan season), a more concerted study on the transition from *diwaniyya* diplomacy to foreign policy decisions is worthwhile, just as this thesis has uncovered the ways in which grassroots diplomacy in *diwaniyyas* affect domestic governance.

Corollary questions then surface on whether *diwaniyya* diplomacy contributes to Kuwait’s foreign policy, and how. In the events leading to Kuwait’s liberation from Iraqi occupation (discussed chiefly in Chapter Two), the *diwaniyya* was seen to have made its mark on the regional and international domains. If Kuwait’s assurance to the coalition forces (led by the US) of the return of its parliament added credibility to its liberation campaign, then the *diwaniyya* practice would have added further cogency on public participation in the country. Norton’s (1999: 26) remarks about the need to differentiate the project of ‘liberalism’ from the project of ‘democracy’ is vital in the contemporary Muslim world:

It is a bit naïve to expect that authoritarian government will be routinely challenged by groups of citizens who lack effective legal frameworks to resist, to protest, or to demonstrate. Moreover, civil society is not locked into a zero-sum game with the state. A more differentiated view of state-society relations is necessary, one that recognizes the opportunities for a dialogue at arm’s length with a powerful state.

If Kuwait’s parliament were a show of ‘democratic’ structures, and its elections as ‘democratic’ procedures, then the *diwaniyya* would potentially enhance Kuwait’s international image as a ‘liberal’ state willing to engage with its own citizens. Yet, knowledge of such a diplomatic practice would first have to be diffused outside of Kuwait’s borders, since it is “based on

particularism or relativism [that] will be hard to accepted and shared by other society until it is first upgraded and transformed into common knowledge” (Changhe 2013: 549).

Thus, an inquiry into how Kuwait’s ‘liberal’ character propels the country forward as a viable intermediary between states should be launched. Indeed, in light of the recent Gulf crisis, Kuwait has been called upon to act as a neutral party between Qatar (and Oman) on one side, and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain on the other. In a public lecture delivered at Durham University, Kuwait’s former Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Muhammad Al-Sabah (2018) explains how Kuwait’s interest in mediation is driven by its status as a “small country that realises existential threat,” in a region where there is ‘no committed superpower’ to prevent a repeat of the Iraqi episode. Kuwait’s status, according to Sheikh Muhammad, lies in an appropriation of its resources. For instance, by pledging \$2 billion to the reconstruction of post-Daesh Iraq; the Iraqi warring factions also accept Kuwait as an ‘honest broker’.¹⁶⁸ A similar ‘status seeking’ journey by Norway has led to its worldwide recognition as a distinctive ‘peace nation,’ having “assiduously carved out roles for Norway as facilitator, interlocutor, mediator, and global institution-support” (see Wohlforth 2015: 146-148). Can Kuwait do the same, and can *diwaniyya* diplomacy ‘punch above its weight’ in both regional and international fields?¹⁶⁹ While this question remains unanswered, one thing remains certain about *diwaniyya* diplomacy: Kuwait, with its age-old *diwaniyya* practice, has long outgrown Herb’s (1999: 267) comment on the ‘gradualist road to liberalism’ adopted by Middle Eastern monarchies.

¹⁶⁸ The literature on Kuwait’s foreign policy remains underwhelming. Where it is discussed, it falls under the banner of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. Some attention, however, has been drawn to its efforts in mediation. See Assiri’s (1990: 48-50) work which covers up till the late eighties, and more recently, Naser’s (2017) article that investigates Kuwait’s regional contribution via economic development assistance.

¹⁶⁹ Former US President Barack Obama used the phrase to describe Nordic countries, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/14/world/europe/obama-warms-to-nordic-heads-of-state.html>

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¹⁷⁰ The exact file numbers of the India Office archival documents used in this study have already been listed down in footnotes in the relevant chapters. In addition, a wide range of content from the British Library's collections have been digitised in a joint initiative with the Qatar Foundation and the Qatar National Library. As such, some of the relevant IOR documents can already be found on the Qatar Digital Library's online catalogue: <http://www.qdl.qa/en>. Where the document has been digitised, the link has been included in the footnotes of this study.

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Lectures

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Al-Ghannam Cable



ABDULAZIZ AHMAD AL-GHANNAM & BROS. CO. W.L.L.

Tel. : (965) 24819114
Fax : (965) 24844351 / 24838743

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13020 Safat - Kuwait

Cable: GHANNAM - Kuwait

DIWANIYAS

Diwaniyas are as old as the Kuwaiti people themselves. They were developed according to people's circumstances. Diwaniyas started as a meeting place and were not as spread as today for various reasons mainly the economic circumstances. Each suburb used to have one Diwaniya mostly connected with the family which was well off enough to keep it. In the past, a Diwaniya was a guesthouse but now only few of them are due to the existence of hotels. Diwaniyas developed to be a place where disputes were settled; the suburb families met and the news exchanged. Then they gained more importance and became a vehicle by which news were announced and opinions expressed. Diwaniyas became so important that the Amir would visit some of them in certain occasions and is visited by their respective owners. Such tradition was kept up for years by several Amirs of Kuwait.

With the wealth in the sixties, Diwaniyas developed more and increased in number and importance. They moved from their old locations to new ones except for a few of them. For example, the number of Diwaniyas, which did not first exceed twenty, has now become thousands. People even competed in their development and decoration. Though the old Diwaniyas are still open to receive people daily, most Diwaniyas have selected a certain day and a certain time to receive visitors who are also received in occasions like Eids, Ramadhan, marriage and condolence offering events.

Diwaniyas' importance:

Diwaniyas are an establishment governed by traditions and customs. It is the oldest establishment system in Kuwait, gaining its importance from being an informative, political, social and entertainment system as well as an effective forum even in the most difficult circumstances Kuwait has been through. This fact has clearly formed during the occupation in 1990 when Diwaniyas played a special role as a means of communication, information, service and operation center to fight the occupiers and their terrorism. In addition, the Diwaniyas system is not built on a partisan or ethnic basis. It is a unique system in which the poor is seated next to the rich, and conservative politics with modern opinions without ranks, except for the aged individuals. Dialogues held in Diwaniyas are characterized by liberty and equality.

The Diwaniyas' importance increases when they are multi-activities, open for general discussions. Some Diwaniyas are more important than others according to the level of their topic of discussions.



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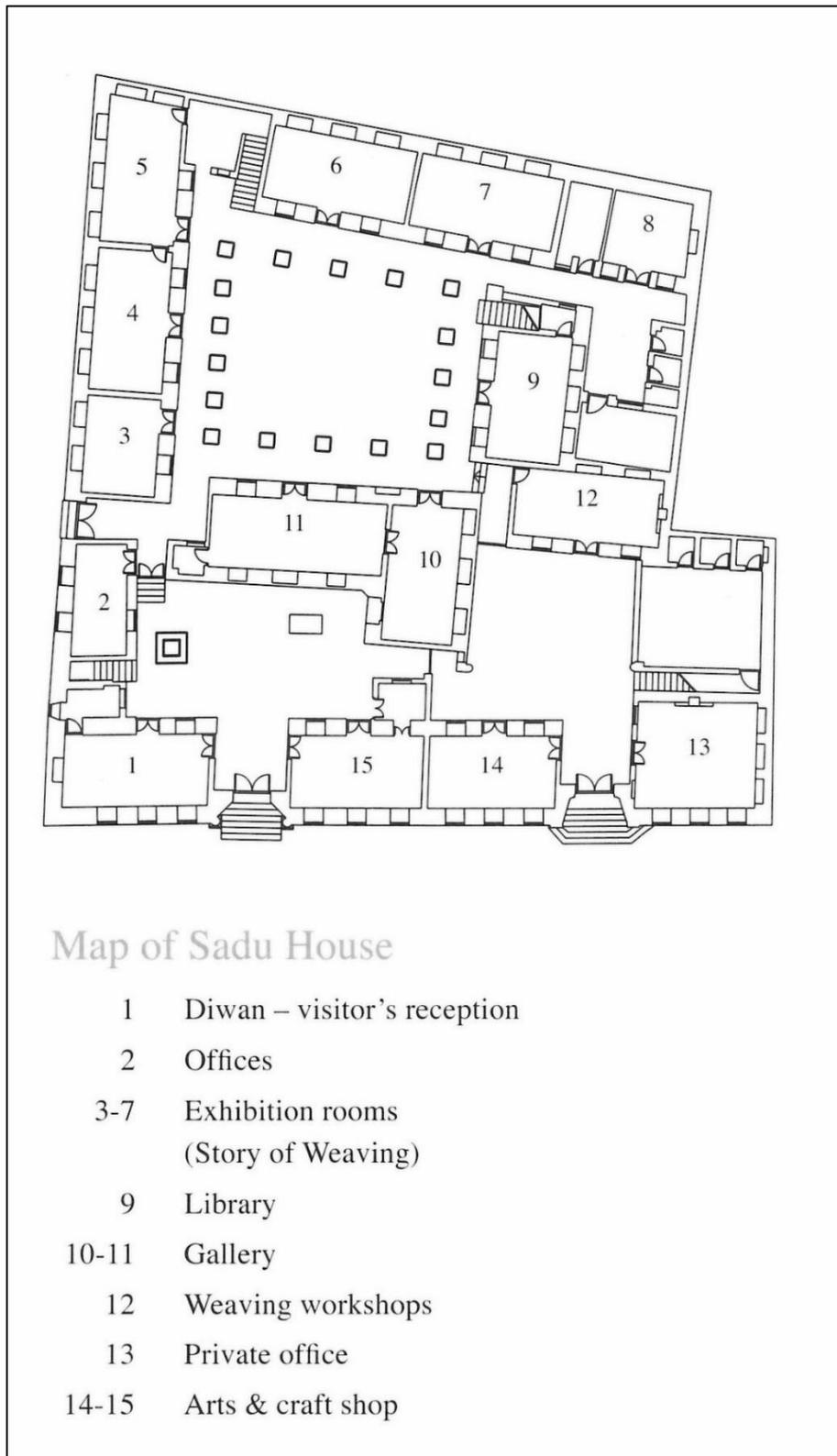
13020 Safat - Kuwait

Cable: GHANNAM - Kuwait

Diwanias has a great role in the interconnections between Kuwaitis as compliments play a great role in settling differences . Therefore, not at any occasion throughout the history of Kuwait did any extremist, political, ethnic or religious ideas appear because talking any such ideas out in open discussions in Diwanias would correct the course of such ideas, amend any potential extremism and ideas. Further, among Kuwaitis rarely dispute happens to each other due to the visits system which breaks the ice between them, helping to exchange conversations in weddings and condolence offering. These Diwanias play a great role in connecting people together. There is also a growing feeling that exchanging visits to and keeping Diwanias is one of the most important social activities. Any individual, of any high rank, cannot be socially accepted if he takes a negative stance from Diwanias. Whoever wanted to play a significant political or social role has to visit Diwanias regularly and take the conclusions of their discussions seriously as they give a true impression of the real public opinion. Further, they help for and make such opinion. We therefore, think that the official establishments are keen to survey the Diwanias and their discussions especially those widely visited by various class of people.

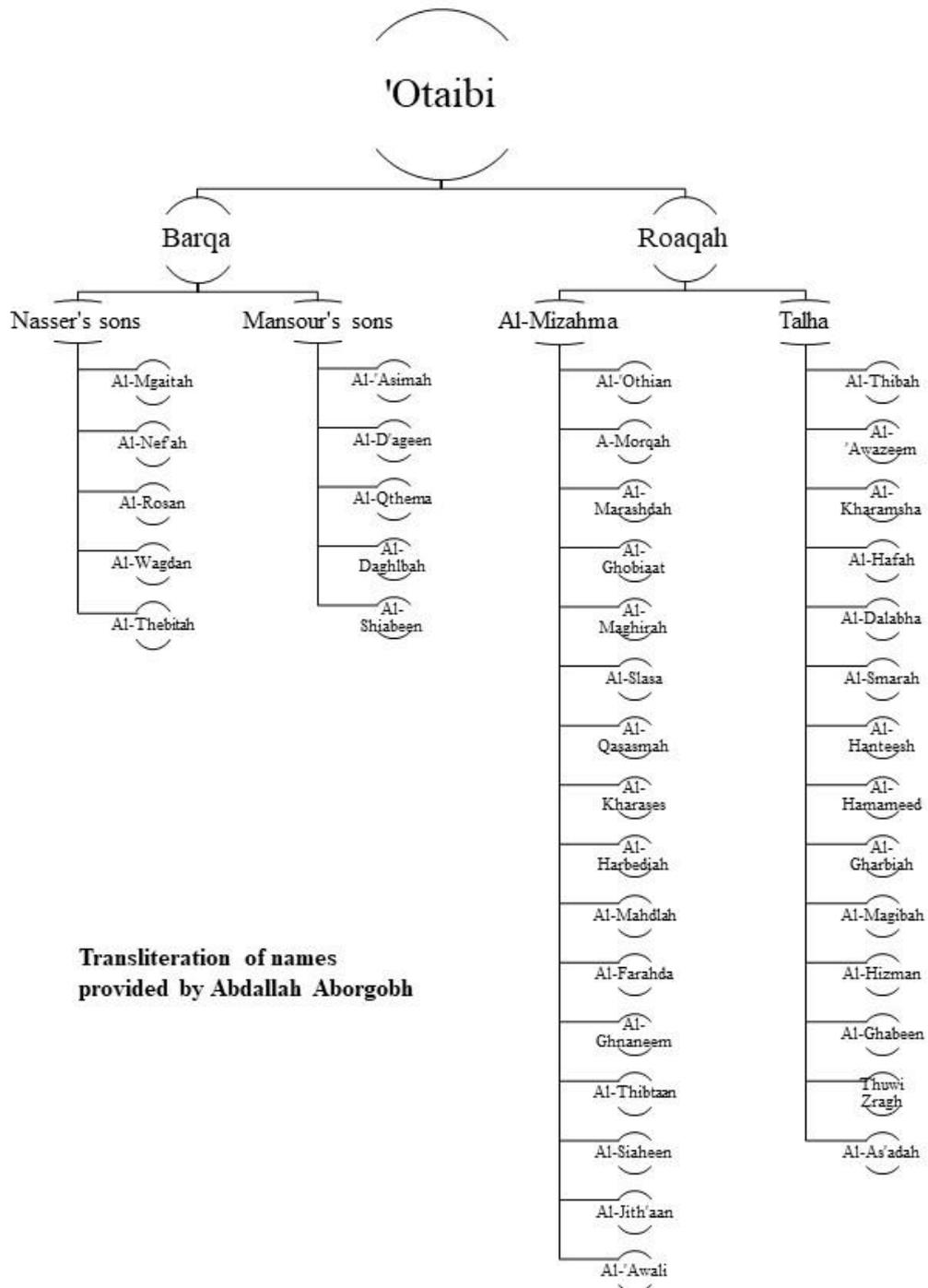
Source: Al-Ghannam Diwaniyya (obtained during a Ramadhan congratulatory visit)

Appendix 2: Floorplan of the old Behbehani courtyard house (now Beit Al-Sadu, or Sadu House)



Source: Beit Al-Sadu leaflet

Appendix 3: The 'Otaibi Tribe, Its Clans and Sub-Clans



Appendix 4: *Diwaniyya* List for Ramadhan 2018

NO.	NOTES	ADDRESS	RECEPTION DATE(S)	FAMILY DIWANIYYA
1	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Bid'a, Al-Ta'awen Street	First 3 days and every Wednesday	Diwan Al-Fahed
2	After Isha prayer	Al-Dahyat, Block 3, Abdulatif Suleiman Al-Othman Street	Every Wednesday	Diwan Al-Jou'an
3		Al-Dahyat, Block 2, Hamoud Al-Nisf Street, Building 29	Every Sunday	'Abdarahman 'Abd 'Aziz Al-Mudahakah
4		Al-Dahyat, Block 1, Sana'a Street, Building 31	Daily from the second day of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Ghannam
5		Shuwaikh, Block 3, Nasser Al-Kharafi Street	Daily and the official day is on Tuesdays	Diwan Al-Qana'at
6	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Nuzha, Block 2, Damascus Street, Behind the fire station	Fifth to sixth days of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Diwan 'Abd 'Aziz Sa'ud Al-Babtain
7	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Dahyat, Block 3, Abdulwahab Al-Faris Street, Building 20	From the first day of Ramadhan to Sunday, and every Sunday after	Diwan Al-Hashem
8	After Isha Prayer	Al-Dahyat, Block 3, Ahmad Al-Ghanim Street 33, Building 7, Opposite Al-Nuzha	21-23 May and every Wednesday	Diwan Bahmin
9	After Isha prayer	Al-Dahyat, Block 3, Ahmad Al-Ghanim Street, Avenue 3, Building 10	Every Wednesday	Diwan of the late 'Aisa Ahmad Al-'Ajil
10	After Isha prayer	Al-Dahyat, Block 1, Nisf Al-Yousef Street, Building No. 43	First Sunday of the Ramadhan month	Diwan Bourisly
11	After Isha prayer	Kaifan, Block 3, Street 30, Building 19	Fourth to sixth day of Ramadhan, and every Sunday after	Diwan of the late Abd'Aziz Al-Zaham
12	After Isha prayer	Al-'Adaliya, Block 2	First Monday of Ramadhan, and continues for three days, and every Monday after.	Diwan Al-Mylam
13	After Isha prayer	Al-'Adaliya, Block 2	First Monday of Ramadhan, and continues for three days, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Sheikh Yousef bin 'Essa
14	After Tarawih prayers	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem	Daily	Diwan Badr and Nasser Muhammad Al-Sayer

15	After Isha prayer	Al-Shuwaikh	Wednesday, 23 May, and every Wednesday after	Diwan of the late Faisal Sa'ud Al-Zibn
16	After Tarawih prayers	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem, Block 1, Ahmad Al-Hindi Street, Building 29	Every Tuesday	Diwan of the late Al-Sheikh 'Abdurrahman Al-Faris
17	After Isha prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem	Fourth to sixth day of Ramadhan, and every Sunday after	Diwan Al-Falij
18	After Tarawih prayers	South Shuwaikh	Second day of Ramadhan and continues for five days	Diwan of the sons of the late Khalid Saleh Al-Ghunaim
19	After Tarawih prayers	Al-'Adaliya	Fourth day of Ramadhan, and continues for 5 days, and every Monday after	Diwan Abd 'Aziz 'Abdamuhsin Al-Rashid
20	After Tarawih prayers	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem, Block 3, Ahmad Al-Ghanim Street, Building 10	Fourth to sixth day of Ramadhan, and every Tuesday after	Diwan Al-Hajeri
21	After Tarawih prayers	Mansouria, Block 2, Street 26, Building 20	Every Sunday	Diwaniyya Al-Refa'i
22	From 9 to 11pm	Al-Surra, Block 4, Street 2, Building 21	Every Monday	Diwaniyya of the family of Abdulhamid Ali Al-Qatan
23	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Yarmouk, Block 1, Saleh Al-Abdali Street 1, Building 35	Every Tuesday	Diwan Al-Fawzan
24	After Isha prayer	Ishbiliya, Block 3, Street 308, Building 5	Every Sunday	Abdulahdi Nafal Al-'Ajami
25		Al-Omariya, Block 4, Street 3, Building 1	Daily	Diwan Dr 'Obaid Al-'Otaibi
26	After Isha prayers	Al-Yarmouk, Block 1, Saleh Al-Abdali Street 1, Avenue 1, Building 6	Every Sunday	Diwan of the sons of Saleh Al-'Abdali
27	After Isha prayer	Kaifan, behind Kuwait Sports Club	Every Sunday	Diwaniyya Al-Munis
28	After Tarawih prayers	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem	Sundays to Tuesdays	Diwan Jasem Al-Burjis
29	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Shamiya, Block 10, Street 19, Building 1	Daily	Diwan Al-Humaidan
30	After Isha prayer	Al-Dasma, Block 1, Al-Radaan Street	20-21 May, and every Sunday after	Diwaniyya Dar M'arafie
31	After Isha prayer	Al-Shaab, Block 5, Street 57, Building 5	Every Sunday	Diwaniyya Al-Aradi
32	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Qadisya, Block 9, Building 10, Hiteen Street	Fourth to sixth day of Ramadhan and every Sunday after	Diwaniyya Al-'Awadhi
33		Al-Fahaheel, Al-Saheli Road	From the first day of Ramadhan, and	Diwan Al-Dabbous

			continues for five days, and every Monday after	
34	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Khaldiya, Jasem Muhammad Al-Barjis Street	Daily	Sons of the late Jasem Muhammad Al-Barjis
35	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Rawda, Block 3, Street 38, Building 32	Daily	Diwan Ahmad Tareq Al-Khamis
36	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Faiha, Block 7, Street 7, Building 12, opposite the mosque	Every Monday	Diwan of the sons of Abduhrahman Al-Hussin
37	After Iftar (breaking fast)	Al-Riqqa, Block 6, Street 30, Building 323	First three days of Ramadhan and every Saturday	Diwan Farhan Meshai Al-Shammari
38	After Isha prayer	Al-Rawda, Block 4, Street 43, Building 17	Every Monday	Diwan Al-Yassin
39	After Iftar (breaking fast)	Al-Sulaibikhat, Block 2, Street 104, Building 15	Daily	Diwan Abdallah Falah Al-Shammari
40	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Rawda, Block 5, Ahmad Al-Sub'aie Street	Daily	Diwan Al-Majid
41	After Isha prayer	Al-Rumaithiya, Block 3, Nasser Al-Mubarak Street	22 May and every Tuesday	Diwan Al-Mudhahi
42	After Tarawih prayers	Ishbiliya, Block 1, Street 132, Building 7	Every Tuesday	Diwan Fahed 'Ali Al-Sh'ala and his brothers
43	After 'Isha prayer	Al-Nuzha, Block 1, Street 18, Building 6	21 May and every Monday after	Diwaniyya Dr Mustafa Behbehani
44	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Rawda, Block 3, Street 34, Building 20	Sixth day of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Homoud
45	After Isha prayer	Al-Sabahiya, Block 2	Every Wednesday	Diwan Al-Juhaim
46	After Isha prayer	Al-Khaldiya, Block 1	Every Wednesday	Khalid Fahed Al-Khalifa
47	After Isha prayer	Al-Shamiya	Every Tuesday	Dr Badr Khalid Al-Khalifa
48	After Isha prayer	Al-Shamiya	Daily	Diwan of the late Abdallah Zakria Al-Ansari
49	After Isha prayer	Ishbiliya, Block 1, Street 105, Building 578	Every Friday	Diwan Al-Jamran
50	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Mansouria, Block 1, Jasem Al-Wazzan Street, Building 1	First and second Sundays of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Naqi
51	After Isha prayer	Mishref, Block 2, Route 51, opposite the pedestrian bridge	Every Wednesday	Diwan Al-Ibrahim
52	After Isha prayer	Al-Rawda, opposite Damascus Street	Every Monday	Diwan Al-Abdeljaleel
53			Every Tuesday	Diwan Said Al-Tamimi
54	After Tarawih Prayer	Gharnata	First Saturday of Ramadhan	Diwan Bander Saad Al-Lafi

55	After Isha Prayer	Gharnata, Block 2, Street 1, Building 223	First Thursday of Ramadhan	Diwaniyya Dr Khalid Hussein Al-'Anzi
56	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Faiha, Block 9	First Tuesday of Ramadhan	Diwaniyya Yousef Muhammad Al-Jeraywi
57	After Isha prayer	Al-'Adaliya, Block 2, Abdallah Al-Nouri Street, Building 23	21-23 May and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Nouri
58	No info	Keifan, Block 3, Yousif Abdulaziz Al-Fulaij Street, Building 27	Every Wednesday	Diwan Abdul Aziz Al-Osaimi
59			Fourth to sixth day of Ramadhan, and every Sunday after	Diwaniyya of the late 'Abd-'Aziz Al-Zahim
60	After Tarawih prayers	Al-Nuzha, Block 2, Damascus Street, Behind the fire station	Fifth to sixth day of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Babtain
61		Al-Nuzha area	Sixth to seventh day of Ramadhan, and every Tuesday after	Diwan of Sheikh Ali Al-Jassar
62	After Tarawih prayer	Al-'Adaliya, Block 3, Al-A'soussi Street, Building 355	Every Tuesday	Diwan Al-Mudlaj
63	After Isha Prayer		Daily	Diwan Al-Ustath
64	After Isha Prayer	Rumaytheya, Block 11, Mua'ath bin Jabal Street	Daily	Diwan Al-Matrouk
65	After Isha Prayer	Nuzha, Abdulrahman Al-Faris Street, Building 36.	First Sunday and Monday, and every Sunday after	Diwan Khalid Nasser Al-Saleh
66		Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim, block 1, Street 17, Building 4	First and second Sundays of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Furaih
67	After Tarawih prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem, Block 1, Nisf Al-Yousef Street, Building 38	21-22 May, and every Tuesday after	Diwan Nasser 'Abdulmuhsin Al-Said
68	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Yarmouk, block 3, Avenue 18, Street 2, building 1	Fifth and sixth day of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Dayel
69		Al-Da'iyia, Block 3, Street 40, Building 25	First Sunday of Ramadhan	Diwaniyya of Walid Behbehani and his brothers
70	After Isha prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim	Every Monday	Diwan of the late Shaker Al-Khathemi
71		Old Jahra, Block 2, Mubarak al-Ayar Street, Building 27	Every Monday	Diwan Faisal Abdallah Al-Lafi
72		Al-Qadisiya, Second ring road, opposite Al-Arabi Sports Club.	19-20 May, and every Sunday after. From 9:00pm-12:00am	Diwan Al-Musa

73	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Da'iyah, Block 4, Street 18, Hamza Street, Building 27, opposite Cairo Street	Daily till the fifteenth day of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Omar
74	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Da'iyah, Block 1, Street 18, Building 2, opposite Cairo Street	Every Sunday	Diwan Al-Amayer
75	After Isha prayer	Al-Surra, Block 5, Street 3, Building 2, opposite to Al-Roudha, Fourth ring road.	Daily	Diwaniyya of Mishari Abdallah Al-Dakheel
76	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Khaldiya, Block 3, Al-Zabadani Street, Building 24	Every Wednesday	Diwan Al-Jalal
77	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Rabya, Block 1, Street 33, Building 5.	Daily	Diwan of the sons of Nayef Mish'al Al-Zamil Al-Dihani
78	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Faiha, Block 7, on the Third ring road.	Every Monday	Diwan Al-Muhimid
79		Al-Mansouriya, Block 2, Street 21, Building 16.	First and second Wednesdays of Ramadhan	Diwan the sons of the late J'afir Jasim 'Abdulrahim
80	After Isha prayer	Rumaithiya, Block 3, Street 33, Building 26	Every Monday	Diwan of Dr Hamed Al-Refa'i
81	After 'Isha prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem, Block 3	Daily	Diwan Abdulatif Suleiman Al-Othman
82	After Isha prayer	Keifan, Block 2, Street 25, House 2.	20-23 May, and every Sunday after	Diwan bin Zaid
83	After Tarawih prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim	Fifth day of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Diwan Azam Abdul-Aziz Al-Fulaij and his brothers
84	After 'Isha prayer	Al-Dasma, Block 4, Istiqlal Street, Building 1	Daily	Diwan Marafie
85		Al-Qasir, Block 2, Street 6, Building 16	Every Tuesday	Diwaniyya of Al-'Asafour Al-Shammari
86		Al-Fintas, Block 4, Street 17, House 12	Every Monday	Diwaniyya Alqabandi
87	After Tarawih prayer	Keifan, Block 2, Saleh Al-Nemash Street, Building 4 .	Fourth and Fifth days of Ramadhan, and every Sunday after	Diwan Al-Nemash
88	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Sh'aab, Block 4, Street 40, House 26	First and second Mondays of Ramadhan	Diwan Dar Al-Othman
89	After Isha prayer		First 5 days of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Kathemi
90	After Tarawih prayer	Keifan	First day of Ramadhan and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Sane'a

91	After Isha prayer	Keifan, Block 3, Street 33, Building 9	Second day of Ramadhan	Abdullah Abdulmuhsin Al-Shayji
92	Repeated in no 83. Please delete	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim	Fifth day of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Azam 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Falij and his brothers
93	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Khaldiya, Block 3, Oras Street	Every Saturday	Diwan Khamees Al-Saeid
94	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Shamiya, Block 1, Street 10, Building 3	From the first day of Ramadhan until 21 May, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Gharabally
95		Qurtuba, Block 1, opposite the Co-operative Society	Fourth and fifth days of Ramadhan, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Fawzan
96	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Yarmouk, block 4, Ahmad Yousif Al-Thajib Street	Every Sunday	Munahi 'Ali Al-Mutairi
97	After 'Isha prayer	Al-Nuzha, Block 1, Abdulrahman Al-Faris Street, Building 25	Every Monday	Diwaniyya Isma'il Dashti
98	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Faiha, Block 3, Street 38, Building 4.	Fourth day of Ramadhan, and continues for a week, and every Sunday after.	Diwaniyya Al-Thuwayni
99	After Tarawih prayer	Al-Dasma, Block 1, Balqees Street, Building 2.	First week of Ramadhan, and continues for a week, and every Monday after	Diwan Al-Humaida
100		Al-Rawda, Block 4	Every Tuesday	Diwan Al-Amer
101		Block 1, Street 141, Building 257.	Daily	Diwaniyya of Ibn Mara'i
102	After Tarawih prayer	Ishbilya, Block 3, Street 315, Building 7.	Daily	Diwaniyya of the late Suroor Jaber Al-Bughaili
103		Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim, Block 1, Street 17, Building 4	First and second Sundays of Ramadhan	Diwan Al-Furaih
104	After Tarawih prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salim	Every Sunday and Tuesday	Badr Jasim Al-Barjas
105	After Tarawih prayer	Dahyat Abdallah Al-Salem, Block 3, Abdallah Al-Fares Street, Building 20	16-20 May and every Sunday after	Diwan Al-Dughayshim

Source: Al-Qabas newspaper, translation by author